

**CREATING A TRADING WORLD OUT OF DIASPORA:
A STUDY ON THE INDIAN OCEAN TRADE OF THE
JEWISH MERCHANTS AND THEIR RESPONSE TO
EUROPEAN COMMERCIAL EXPANSION, 1000-1750 AD**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Declaration

I declare that the dissertation entitled, “**Creating a Trading World out of Diaspora: A Study on the Indian Ocean Trade of the Jewish Merchants and their Response to European Commercial Expansion, 1000-1750 AD**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy from Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Jews, who developed an intricate network of trade cutting across their diasporic settlements in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, formed a significant mercantile segment involved in the transshipment of commodities between the markets scattered around these two water spaces. Right from 9th century onwards, when the Fatimids then ruling in Egypt wanted to develop trade route towards India, the Jewish traders began to move to India in considerable numbers as a part of the larger Fatimid commercial project for the purpose of conducting trade.¹ Ever since then, the Jews entered on a big scale into the Indian Ocean and established trading diasporas on the rim of this maritime space and began to actively involve in the commodity movements from Asia to the Mediterranean. Because of their close connections with the Fatimids of Egypt on the one hand and the Jewish diaspora as well as Arab enclaves of the Mediterranean on the other hand, the Jews could easily conduct their business through the Red sea and the Mediterranean even during the troubled days of Crusades. When the crusading forces of Europe turned against the Muslims and the Jews till 14th century, these two mercantile groups joined hands together to conduct their business evading the forces of crusades. However the

¹ Bernard Lewis, "The Fatimids and Route to India" *Revue de la Faculte' aes sciences economiques de l' universite' d'Istanbul*, 11 (1940-50) pp. 50-54. Bernard Lewis tries to show that the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt endeavoured to take the India trade out of the hands of their Iraqi rivals, the Abassid caliph of Baghdad and with the help of Jews , commodities through the trade route to India was frequently traffiqued. However others argue for other reasons, as well, for the sudden entry of the Jews into Indian Ocean trade. To them, by mid 9th and 10th centuries North Africa had become so rich that inevitably it sought expansion and found an outlet for its surplus in the Indian and far eastern trade. See S. D. Goitein and Mardechai Akiva Friedman, *India Trader of the Middle Ages*; Brill, Leiden, 2008, pp. 21-22.

character of East –West trade of the Jews underwent a radical shift with the European commercial expansion into the Indian Ocean, which necessitated the Jews to reorient their trade on the basis of new exigencies and circumstances. The entry of the Europeans with monopoly claims on Indian Ocean trade seriously affected the commerce of the Jews, who were compelled to define and redefine new commercial roles for themselves against the background of the changing mercantile scenario under the anti-Jewish policies of the Portuguese and the Jewish -friendly agenda of the Dutch.

The central purpose of my study is to find the ways and processes by which the Jews developed a trading network in the Indian Ocean on a long term basis and conducted business with the Mediterranean, despite the troubled days of crusades and the rigorous European patrolling in the age of commercial expansion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The study also analyzes the mechanisms by which the Jewish merchants made themselves acceptable before their commercial collaborators, political patrons and religious rivals and survived in the process of creating a commercial world for themselves. The nuanced type of relationship that the Portuguese developed with the Jews as a part of their religious and commercial policies and the complexities connected with the incorporation of the Jews by the Dutch for their commercial enterprise will also be examined in an attempt to analyze the nature of the trading world of the Jews in the early modern period.

The starting point of the study is tentatively 1000 AD, when the Jews emerged as a leading mercantile segment of the Indian Ocean, thanks to their participation in the Fatimid commercial activities from Egypt. The terminal point of my study is 1750, when the Jewish traders acting till then as company merchants of the Dutch started

becoming bankrupt one by one and Jewish commerce dwindled, because of the changing socio-economic developments of the west coast of India. Geographically the study focuses on the various principal coastal enclaves of India, which had sizeable Jewish settlements during this period.

1.1 Situating the Historiography

The present work strives to situate itself at the crossroads of the historical trajectories of Jewish studies in the Indian Ocean. The scholarly literature on the Jewish trade in the Asian waters is quite illustrious. Historians have subjected various aspects of Jewish commerce in the Indian Ocean to a close and detailed enquiry.

A significant layer of historiographical tradition revolves around the Cairo Genizza documents, which form one major segment of primary sources for this study. The six-volume work of S.D.Goitein titled *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*² speaks of the Jews who lived in the Islamic countries of the Mediterranean, which at the beginning of the Genizza period included most of Spain and Sicily. These six volumes try to construct the socio-economic history of Jewish community both in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The first volume titled *Economic Foundations* and published in 1967, highlights the liberal atmosphere for the free trade of the middle class in the Mediterranean, the political scenario which in turn favored the culture of maritime trade, the various segments of merchants, brokers, modes of their partnership,

² S.D.Goitein titled *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*. Cairo Geniza is a collection of some 300,000 Jewish manuscript fragments that were found in the Geniza or store room of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat or Old Cairo, Egypt. Many of these documents were written in the Aramaic language using the Hebrew alphabet, as the Jewish considered Hebrew to be the language of God, and the Hebrew script to be the literal writing of God, the texts could not be destroyed even long after they had served their purpose.

business practices, banking, finance, commodity price, trade routes, governmental control of trade etc.

Apart from the above mentioned six volumes of *Mediterranean Society*, Goitein's significant work on the Jewish trade of Indian Ocean regions is *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza*³, which is in fact a joint work of Goitein and Friedman. This book published in 2008 is also known as 'India Book' and is a collection of Genizza documents concerned with the Indian Ocean trade and Jewish traders, their background and families. In this work he examines such Genizza documents like the ones related to the Jewish traders in India including Joseph B. David Lebdi (prominent merchant from Tripoli, who had been regarded as a pioneer in the commerce with India) and his family. These are the documents of lawsuits related to Lebdi, held in the Rabbinical Court of Fustat. This book also incorporates the other private and commercial correspondence between Lebdi and his business partners and family members. The documents related to Madmun B. Hasan-Japheth, prince of Yemenite Jewry and his family flash light upon the business activities of the Jews in India, particularly those of Abraham Ben Yiju, who took active part in India trade by setting up his own bronze factory at Mangalore. The *India Book* throws immense light on the socio-economic history of Jewish community, then active between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Although constructing Jewish history on the basis of few documents attached to some specific personalities would seem unfair. But these people could be considered as the representative of the whole diasporic set up active along the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.

³ S.D. Goitein, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza*, Leiden, 2008.

Another layer of historiographical tradition evolved out of the local sources available on Jewish activities in Kerala. The copper plates and inscriptions related to Jewish community of Kerala during early medieval and medieval period translated and published by K. V. Subrahmanyam, under the title *Travancore Archaeological Series*⁴ gave rise to a series of historical literature on the Jews of Kerala. The Jewish plates were given in the year 1020 by the local ruler Bhaskira Ravivarman to one Joseph Rabban. By the terms of the grant Joseph Rabban received the principality of Anjuvannam and all its revenue. In addition, certain noble rights were bestowed on Joseph Rabban and all his posterity. They included the right to ride an elephant, to be carried in a litter, to have a state umbrella, to be preceded by drums and trumpets, to call out so that lower castes might withdraw from the streets at his approach. It is also specified that the recipient shall not have to pay taxes and shall enjoy all the benefits of the ruler's administration.

David G. Mandelbaum has analyzed these pieces of epigraphical information for highlighting the Jewish way of life in Cochin.⁵ He argues that these Jews had been comparatively isolated from the main body of Jewry and had long been influenced by the customs of surrounding Hindu cultures, which made them a lot of local elements while retaining their own identity. M.G.S. Narayanan has studied the same Jewish copper plate for highlighting the nature of cultural symbiosis that evolved in Kerala by eleventh century and emphasises on the role played by the Jews in creating a mosaic society in Malabar.⁶

⁴ K. V. Subrahmanyam, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Trivandrum, 1921.

⁵ David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin" *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 1: 4, Oct., 1939, pp. 423-460.

⁶ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis*, Kerala, Trivandrum, 1972.

Studying of the Portuguese and Dutch sources, besides ethnohistorical analysis led to the production of a wide variety of historical literature on the Jews of Kerala. The most important one among them is *History of Kerala* by K. P. Padmanabha Menon,⁷ who elaborated on the history and life of Jews of early modern Kerala on the basis of the letters of Cantor Visscher. He dwells upon the social differentiation that arose within this community into black Jews (or the earliest Jewish settlers in Malabar) and White Jews (or the *paradesi* Jews who reached Malabar following the Arab commercial expansion of ninth century) and highlights aspects of conflicts and tensions that came up among them over a period of time. This issue of social division and conflicts between these two groups is analyzed from a different angle by J.B.Segal in his article "White and Black Jews at Cochin: the Story of a Controversy"⁸. He analyzes the various groups of Jews on the basis of socio-economic processes, within which they got socially differentiated.

A considerable amount of historical literature on Jews of India, particularly the pieces produced by Western scholars, focuses on the social aspects of the Jews of Kerala. To this category can be added the work of William Crooke titled *Things Indian*, published in 1906.⁹ It gives a social analysis of the Jews of Cochin, who according to him lived and operated as two classes: the Black and the White Jews. He also speaks of the distinction that the white Jews upheld by resorting to a separate dress tradition with the men wearing a rich-coloured, long tunic, a waistcoat buttoned up to the neck, full white trousers and a skull-cap in daily life, but a turban when they go to a

⁷ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, New Delhi, 1983.

⁸ J.B.Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2, 1983, pp. 228-252.

⁹ William Crooke, *Things Indian: Being Discursive Notes on Various Subjects Connected with India*, London, 1906.

synagogue. On the other hand the Black Jews used to dress more or less like the native Muslims around them.

Social life of the Jews of Kerala and their response to European commercial activities formed the focus of several other historians for a long span of time. Francis Day,¹⁰ who wrote *The Land of Perumals*, starts analyzing the Jewish activities of Cochin against its socio-economic context and highlights the nature of conflicts that broke out between the Portuguese and the Jews who were forced to quit Cranagnore and move out, though they were later taken into protection by the king of Cochin in 1565. He also examines the contexts within which a collaborative relationship that evolved between the Jews and the Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹¹

The works of Walter J. Fischel titled “The Exploration of the Jewish Antiquities of Cochin on the Malabar Coast”¹² and Pius Malekandathil “The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce, 800-1800 A.D.”¹³ Look at the larger and long-term trading activities of the Jews in the Indian Ocean and highlights the way by which they carried out their business through the diasporic enclaves even during the days of European commercial expansion. In another work of Walter J. Fischel titled “Cochin in Jewish History: Prolegomena to a History of the Jews in India”, he argues that the phase of anonymity of the Jewish communities got over after the coming of Portuguese in India and that the unknown places of Jewish settlements were brought

¹⁰ Francis Day, *The Land of Perumals*, Madras, 1863.

¹¹ Ibid. pp.350-53.

¹² Walter J. Fischel, “The Exploration of the Jewish Antiquities of Cochin on the Malabar Coast”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol 87, 3(July-Sept 1967), pp. 230-248.

¹³ Pius Malekandathil, ‘The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce, 800-1800 A.D.’ in *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, Vol 9, (2007) pp. 7-31; see also Pius Malekandathil, “Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on The Merchant Group of Kerala and the Channels of Their Trade, 1000-1800”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, (2007) pp. 259-286.

out of oblivion. Despite that he argues that it was a phase of conflict between the two, because of their clash of commercial interests.¹⁴

The engagement of merchant communities within the diasporic trade zone has been the theme of study for some scholars like Sanjay Subrahmanyam, who looked at commercial activities within the frame work of state mercantilism particularly in his work “Of Imarat and Tijarat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 to1750.”¹⁵ The way the state power banked upon various diasporic mercantile segments of Asia for asserting its position in the power processes has been the theme of his analysis.

The analysis of the existing historiography shows that there is a lacuna as far as the study on the long-term trading activities of the Jews in the Indian Ocean is concerned and in order to fill in this vacuum I have taken up this theme of Jewish trade in Asian waters in the age of crusades and European commercial expansion and its impact on Indian economy and society.

1.2 Design of Study

The structure of the work revolves around a number of questions that struck the present researcher and shape its different chapters accordingly.

¹⁴ Walter J. Fischel, “Cochin in Jewish History: Prolegomena to a History of the Jews in India”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. 30 (1962), pp. 37-59.

¹⁵ Sanjay Subrahmnayam, “Of Imarat and Tijarat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 to1750” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 Oct., 1995, pp. 750-780.

The first chapter, being introduction, raises the research questions and sets it within the existing historiography, highlighting the broader debates in the preceding historiography on the theme.

Chapter two titled *From Mediterranean to Indian Ocean: Expansion of Jewish Mercantile Diaspora* proposes to set the tone of the rest of the work by providing firstly, a background of the Jewish mercantile expansion in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean and secondly the major centres of their trade in India. The query revolves around the question as to how and why the Jewish did decide to move towards Indian Ocean especially western Coast. The myth of India's marvels, from natural wonders and great wealth to the ethical values, mysterious knowledge, and superior spirituality of its sages, is mentioned in passing in many medieval Jewish texts. There was a general impression among the Jews that anyone who goes to India would become rich.¹⁶

The invasion of the Seljuks in 1070s, the occupation of the then-Muslim controlled Sicily by the Normans and the conquest of Syria and Palestine by the crusaders brought about radical changes in economic conditions and the way in which commerce was conducted, which ultimately facilitated the emergence of Jews of the Mediterranean as a significant mercantile group. These changes are well reflected in the letters of Jewish merchants of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In the changed situation Fustat (today's Cairo), founded by Amr Ibn al-'as and the prime base of the Fatimids became a major centre of Jewish traders involved in the commerce of Indian Ocean. In fact the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in July, 969, marks the beginning of the classical Genizza period. After its conquest by Shi'ite Fatimids, which was in rivalry

¹⁶ Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. S. Rosenblatt, New Haven, 1967, p. 26.

with the Abbasid caliphs, Egypt became the centre of a vast and powerful kingdom, which, at the end of the tenth century, included almost all of North Africa, Syria, and Palestine. The union of all these countries brought a period of prosperity in industry and commerce from which the Jews spread across these regions also benefited. The tolerant attitude adopted by the Fatimids toward non-Muslim communities and the permission given for the construction and repair of non-Muslim houses of prayer including that of Jews etc., helped the Jews to establish themselves at Fustat and expand into the Indian Ocean, for their commerce, for which they got liberal support from the Fatimids.

The **third chapter** titled *The Jewish Settlements on the Western Coast of India and Circuits of Trans-oceanic Trade* proposes to look at the nature of diasporic settlement of Jews along the west coast of India and examine the type of changes that the Jews brought to the ongoing patterns of maritime trade. Malabar, which happened to be the heartland of spice production at this point of time, attracted a considerable number of Jewish merchants to its vast shore, where they set up a chain of their mercantile enclaves. Though Jews were then trading almost all over coastal Malabar, Madai, Pantalayani Kollam, Palayur, Pulloot, Cranganore (Shingly), Mala, Chennamangalam, Parur, Cochin and Quilon (Kurakkeni Kollam) evolved as their principal settlements, where they had their own synagogues or other commercial platforms for interaction.

The Jewish traders began to increasingly enter into some form of tacit or explicit agreements with various rulers of the rim of Indian Ocean for protection in return for supplying cargo and rendering of various forms of service to the state. The resource-mobilizing ability of the Jews was the main reason why the local rulers increasingly banked upon them, particularly to meet their emergency situations and war-expenses, which ultimately led to the evolution of a strong rapport between the local

rulers and the Jewish mercantile groups in the Indian Ocean. Against the background of incessant conflicts between the Cheras and the Cholas, the Jewish traders came forward in the first quarter of 11th century to strengthen the hands of the Chera ruler by donating men and materials liberally to him. In fact this help from the Jews came immediately after the defeat of Chera naval power at Vizhinjam and the loss of Quilon to the forces of Raja Raja Chola(985-1014). In the war council that was convened in 1000 C.E., Joseph Rabban the head of the Jewish merchant guild of *Anjuvannam* of Muyirikode (Cranganore) placed at the disposal of the Chera ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varman his ships, men and materials for the conduct of the war with the Cholas. An enormous amount of Jewish mercantile wealth seems to have been mobilized by Joseph Rabban for meeting the expenses incurred by the Chera ruler in the war.¹⁷

Similarly Madmun, a Jewish merchant, who served as representative of merchants in Aden in the fourth and fifth decade of the twelfth century and was recognized as the official head of the Yemenite Jewry. Madmun had also made agreements with the various rulers who controlled the sea route between Egypt, Arabia, Africa and India.¹⁸ (Abraham Ben Yiju, a Tunisian Jewish merchant who had interconnecting links with Jewish and non-Jewish merchants- Hindus, Muslims and Christian- from North Africa to India, set up a bronze factory at Mangalore, probably with the help of ruling and the local authorities.¹⁹

The Jewish merchants of Quilon had organized themselves into a merchant guild called *Anjuvannam*, for the purpose of safeguarding their commercial interests and

¹⁷ Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1970; M.G.S.Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1972, p.82.

¹⁸ S.D. Goitein, *India Book*, p.38.

¹⁹ Ibid. pp.57-60.

facilitating the processes of procurement and distribution of commodities. The first reference to *Anjuvannam* in Quilon is in the *Tharisapally* copper plate given to Mar Sapor in 849 C.E.²⁰ By this time the Jewish merchant guild of Quilon had assumed the power of *karalar* (almost equivalent to custodian) of the city, as is mentioned in *Tharisapally* copper plate.²¹

The long chain of Jewish diasporic settlements along the west coast of India were linked with eastern Mediterranean by the extensive commercial network stretching up to Aden and Red Sea and the frequent commodity movements through these channels. Mahruz b.Jacob, who was a ship-owning Jewish merchant (*nakhoda*), conducting trade with the ports of Konkan, Malabar and Egypt, was a representative of this segment of Jews. In his letter of c.1145 C.E., Mahruz b.Jacob refers to Kanbayat (Cambay), Broach, Thana, Mangalore, Malibarath (Koulam Mali), Kayakannur (Lower Kannur) as the other important centres of Jewish trade on the western seaboard.²²

After the emergence of Cochin as a port and a significant centre of trade during the mid 14th century following the geo-physical changes that occurred as a result of the flood in Periyar River in 1341, we find the Jews migrating to the newly formed port of Cochin. The tradition among the *Paradesi* Jews says that their synagogue in Cochin was erected in 1345, which later came to be called the Kochangadi

²⁰ T.A. Gopinath Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vol.II, Madras , 1916, pp. 66-75.

²¹ *Ibid.* pp.68, 71.

²² S.D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, Princeton, 1972, p. 62.

synagogue.²³ This is suggestive of the fact that the *Paradesi* Jews must have migrated from Cranganore and other parts of Kerala to Cochin immediately after the emergence of Cochin in 1341. Cantor Visscher refers to the migration of white Jews from Cranganore to Cochin, which began in 1471 and says that they settled down for a period of fifty years in a place called *Sinhora Savod'e* (*Senhora Soude*, a place-name later given by the Portuguese and presently known as Saudi) about half a league (almost two kilometers) away from Cochin.²⁴ They flourished and expanded as an important mercantile segment under the patronage of king of Cochin. In this chapter an attempt will be made to uncover the areas of collaboration between the state along with the local authorities and Jewish community that in turn enabled them to survive and conduct trade, despite oddities they encountered at different junctures of their commercial activities.

The **fourth chapter** titled *Changing Roles in the Age of European Commercial Expansion* dwells upon the challenges that the process of European expansion posed before the Jews and the way they re-defined their commercial activities in the processes of giving responses to European challenges. This chapter is divided into two parts: the first part looks into the phases of conflict that the Jews had with the Portuguese because of their religious –cum- commercial policies. Ever since 1496, when the Portuguese crown asked all Jews of Portugal either to leave the kingdom or to get converted to Christianity, the official policy of the Portuguese was marked by anti-Semitism. Though in the initial phase of Portuguese expansion, when the very

²³ For details about this tradition, see S.S.Koder, "Saga of the Jews of Cochin", in *Jews in India*, ed. by Thomas A. Timberg, 1986, pp.138-140. The date of construction of this synagogue (1345) is said to have been engraved on a stone.

²⁴ See Visscher's Letters from Malabar, in K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.II, New Delhi, 1982, pp.51, 517. Writing in 1723, Visscher says that the Jews had lived in *Senhora Soude* for fifty years and then moved over to Cochin where they remained for 202 years, a fact which enables historian to trace the date of Jewish migration from Cranganore to 1471.

existence of the Lusitanian rule depended very much upon indigenous co-operation, the native Jews of Kerala were allowed to operate as intermediaries for the Portuguese commerce, the Portuguese soon became notorious because of their anti-Jewish approaches and frequent targeting of the Jews, particularly with the establishment of Inquisition in Cochin in 1557. When several new Christians or those who got converted to Christianity from Judaism and Jewish traders were brought under Inquisition and taken to Lisbon for further punishments, the king of Cochin came to their rescue and took the Jews under his protection by allowing the Jews to settle down near his palace in 1565. This led to the cementing of a long-standing rapport between the king of Cochin and the Jews of Kerala, making the former take counselors, ministers and trading partners out of the Jews. Under the influence of Jewish counselors, the king of Cochin even thought of ousting the Portuguese and seeking alliance with the Dutch for conducting his commerce. In fact the Jews were using such occasions to transfer their conflicts with the Portuguese to the political domains as to make mileage for themselves.

Meanwhile the Jewish merchants found patrons for their trade in the Ottomans. Ottoman tolerance became juxtaposed with Christian persecution. The Jews, who got protection and support from the Ottomans, helped to enrich their new host society as merchants, civil servants and artisans. The Ottoman Empire facilitated an environment, where inter-religious groups coexisted in the name of commercial activities and the Jews, who suffered under the Portuguese, were the greatest beneficiaries out of this development²⁵.

²⁵Jonathan Ray, "Iberian Jewry Between west And East: Jewish Settlement In The sixteenth Century Mediterranean" *Mediterranean Studies*, Vol 18(2009) pp.44-65.

The second part of this chapter looks into the participatory roles of the Jewish traders in the Dutch commercial capitalistic ventures. This is done by analyzing the nature of the interaction of the Jewish community of the Indian Ocean, in general and Kerala in particular with the Dutch. Jews formed one of the most important merchant communities from whom the Dutch East India Company drew company merchants for procuring cargo. Ezechiel Rahabi, a descendant of the Syrian Jew who settled down in Cochin in 1646, was made the first merchant of the VOC in the mid-eighteenth century. Isaac Surgun was the principal Jewish trader of Calicut in the eighteenth century.²⁶

Adrian Moens while referring to Ezechiel Rahabi of Cochin says that he had an honest and upright character with great influence over the native princes and the notables of their kingdoms.²⁷ These Jewish traders had an enormous amount of wealth upon which the Company and the local rulers heavily banked in times of emergency. Ezechiel Rahabi had once lent the VOC an amount of Rs. 90,000 when the Dutch were in dire need, while Isaac Surgun was made to pay an amount of Rs. 40, 000 to Tipu Sultan in 1788.²⁸ Samuel Abraham, the three sons of Ezechiel Rahabi-Elias, Moses and David- were the other prominent Jewish merchants of Cochin.²⁹ In fact these Jewish merchants rose to prominence because of their ability to mobilize larger resources and participate in the greater commercial transactions facilitated by the increasing movement of commodities by the Dutch East India Company. However by 1750 most of the Jewish traders along the west coast of India began to get bankrupt

²⁶ Ibid. pp. 104-5, 111-3, 115, 122; Hugo s' Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala, 1663-1701*, 's Gravenhage, 1976, p.XXX.

²⁷ A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras, 1912, pp.222-3.

²⁸ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, pp.106-7

²⁹ Walter Fischel, "From Cochin to New York: Samuel Abraham, the Jewish Merchant of the Eighteenth Century" in the *Jubilee Volume of Prof. Harry Wolfson*, New York, 1963; Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.118.

against the background of the emergence of new merchant groups from Syrian Christians in Kerala (particularly in Trichur and Travancore), Parsis and Gouda Saraswat Brahmins along in the trading centres of Konkan.

The conclusion will be a summing up of the major findings of the research.

1.3 Methodology and Source Materials

The study is basically deductive and analytical. The historical information gathered from a variety of primary sources is corroborated with the help of visual and literary evidences, travel accounts and Genizza papers. In fact the Genizza papers, edited and published by S.D. Goitein and the Jewish copper plates of Kerala form the major source material for my work. The Portuguese and Dutch accounts for the activities of the Jews of India are used for studying the nature of relationship that they had with the European monopoly traders. The various Jewish synagogues (like that of Cochin, Mala, Chennamangalam and Parur), the Jewish tomb-stones, Jewish folk-songs etc will be analyzed as to substantiate my argument. The works and documents, both original and Xerox copies, preserved in the libraries of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, National Archives of India, New Delhi, library of Vidya Jyoti , New Delhi, besides the personal collection of Prof. Pius Malekandathil , are of immense help for undertaking this research study.

Chapter II

From Mediterranean to Indian Ocean: Expansion of Jewish Mercantile Diasporas

For a very long period Egypt in general and Alexandria in particular happened to be the home for a large number of Jews involved in the trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The geo-physical location of Egypt as the bridge between the commercial world around these two water spaces and the closeness to their original homeland made the Jews flock to this region and take part in its economic processes in a much intense way. The Shi'ite Fatimids, brought the whole of North Africa, Syria, and Palestine under their spheres of influence, stimulating industry and commerce over there in an unprecedented way from which the Jews spread across these regions benefited immensely. The liberal and tolerant attitude shown by the Fatimids towards non-Muslim communities and the permission given for the construction and repair of non-Muslim houses of prayer including those of the Jews etc., attracted the Jews to establish themselves at Fustat and expand into the Indian Ocean, for their commerce. The commercial skills and expertise of the Jews were banked upon by the Fatimids to expand their trade networks.

2.1 Fustat as the Centre of Jewish Commercial Convergence

The presence of a large population of Jewish people can be traced in Egypt during the 10th century, which is starting period of this study. However their historical stories go back to much earlier time period. The earliest reference to the Jews in Fustat, so far known, is a document of the year 750 C. E. But very little indeed do we know of the

life of the important Egyptian Jewry for the three centuries succeeding this document. The Jews no doubt were treated in the same manner as the other non-Muslim inhabitants, the people of the tribute (*ahl al-dhimmd*). Only a few stray details concerning the details of the Jews prior to 10th century could be gathered. When Alexandria surrendered to Amribn al-'Asi in 641, one of the conditions of the capitulation was that the Jews (who doubtless helped to furnish the tribute-money) should be allowed to remain in the city. Their number is reported to have been 40,000, while 70,000 fled before the occupation. The Jews in Egypt used to be distinguished in this period by a different dress.³⁰

The commercial activities and position of the Jews in Fatimid domains got strengthened because of the rapport that developed between Fatimid Caliph al-Mo'izz whose forces under Jauhar captured Egypt in 969, and the Jew Paltiel whom he appointed as his Wezir. The Ahima'as Chronicle says that it Paltiel, who organized the occupation of the country for al- Mo'izz and who remained the trusted Wezir of this ruler as well as of his son al-'Azlz.³¹ If the identification of Paltiel with Jauhar be correct, then the Jews must have reaped great advantages from the change of rule in Egypt. Some Muhammedan lawyers permitted the employment of non-Muslims to the post of a subordinate Wezir. A contemporary poet in Egypt alludes to this in the following verses, which testify to the keenness and enterprise of the Jews: "The Jews of our times reached the goal of their desire and came to rule. Theirs is the dignity, theirs the money! Councillors of the state and princes are made from them. O people

³⁰ Jacob Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, vol. 1, Humphrey Milford, 1920, p. 13.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 16.

of Egypt! I give you advice: Become Jews, for Heaven has become India".³² The renegade Jew, Jacob ibn Killis, a native of Baghdad, occupied a very high position in the state. In 942 he accompanied his father to Ramlah, where he stayed for some time and became a commercial agent. Unsuccessful in this capacity, he went to Fustat, where the ruler Kafur noticed his abilities and retained his services. After his conversion to Islam in 966 he became a high official.³³ In Fatimid Egypt traders from Jewish background used to get acceptability and recognition from their political masters, which they either individually or collectively converted as social capital for the purpose of promoting their commercial interests or for extending networks of Jewish trade.

During the period from 969 to 1250 AD., the whole Mediterranean was barely ruled by a single power, which gave the Jews sufficient time to consolidate their trade with the support of the house in power. Apart from few exceptions, the Mediterranean region experienced short lived governances. Goitein found this period relatively tolerant and free for trading activities where various mercantile groups from different parts of the Mediterranean were interacting comfortably. The state was also providing a great amount of liberal atmosphere. The entire eleventh and major part of twelfth centuries were known for the liberal attitude with which the Fatimids promoted the trade of the non-Muslims including the Jews.³⁴ This was a time when a major part of the Mediterranean region was thrown into chaos, recurring wars and suspicion against the background of Crusades. However the Fatimids won the confidence of trading groups including Jews to rally around their commercial centres, providing the Jews

³² Ibid.p.17.

³³ Ibid. pp.16-17.

³⁴ S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society: The India Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo India*, Vol. 1, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, p. 29.

safety and security against the background of anti-Semitism of the Crusaders. Moreover the less interfering nature of Fatimid government in matter of trade and facilities like reasonable custom tariffs, created a commerce friendly atmosphere.³⁵

The composition of Fatimid government used to exhibit the cosmopolitan nature of state. Jews along with Christians were taking part in the government. As we had seen earlier, Yakub ibn Killis, a Jew from Iraq held an important post of Vizier, and he played a vital role in the creation of the internal administration of the new empire. Earlier he was the representative of merchants in Palestine as well. Thus Ibn Killis was often viewed as the example of liberal spirit of the Fatimid period.³⁶ It also manifests the desire of the Fatimids to keep the trading group of the Jews in good humour for the purpose of facilitating the wheels of commerce to move smoothly.

The eleventh century, however witnessed a complete translocation of the routes of Mediterranean trade. The shifting of the seat of Fatimid government from Tunisia to Egypt was in itself was a vital change and eventually Egypt took the place of Tunisia in the international trade. Egypt slowly emerged as the hub of trade happening between Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. The less interfering nature of the Fatimid government in matters of trade and the private ventures of their subjects and facility of reasonable custom tariffs, created a commerce friendly atmosphere in Egypt.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid. p. 5.

³⁶ Ibid. pp. 33-34.

³⁷ Ibid. p.33.

However that does not mean that the Jews had a pleasant atmosphere of trade throughout the Fatimid reign. There were several instances of sufferings and oddities, which the Jews had to go through, because of being a minority community in an Islamic land. Al-Hakim (996-1021), the sixth Fatimid Caliph also known as mad Caliph, is said to have persecuted the Jews and Christians during his rule. Moreover, the Muslim community that formed a majority group in Egypt used to hate the Jews involved in Indian trade, because of the inordinate wealth that they used to accumulate by way of their trade. There were many incidents recorded in courts regarding the complaints against the Jews involved in Indian trade.³⁸ Sometimes Jews also had to face violence and threat from their commercial competitors and religious opponents, the principal among them being the Muslim counterparts. In this process the Jews were forced to carry certain objects or attach some symbol in order to distinguish their self from the Muslims. The Jews had to wear bells, or in the street display a wooden image of a calf in Egypt, to indicate their separate identity.³⁹ Although there are enough evidences which prove the demolition of churches, some confusion still exists regarding the destruction of synagogues during that period of time. It has been found that around 1012, the Jews assembled at Fustat (Egypt) synagogue on Shevat 5th to celebrate their deliverance.⁴⁰

The large scale dispersal of Jews to India in the eleventh century is to be viewed against the background of the persecution of al-Hakim, who even demolished the synagogue in Fustat. A letter from Elhanan b. Shemarya to Jerusalem contains information regarding this. He informs about the dangers occurred on the way of his

³⁸ Jacob, Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, p.p. 30-34.

³⁹ Ibid. 34.

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp.30-34.

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travel and the oddities he encountered on the way of his caravan. Moreover he adds that the sea fearing was also not safe and very soon the persecution began and the synagogues were also targeted. Elhanan further states that many Jews became apostates and adopted Islam. But on the other hand there were brave Jews who staunchly kept to their faith, and many of them preferred exile. But all these grievances were not sustainable, as towards the end of his reign al-Hakim became tolerant. In 408 A. H. Jews and Christians were granted liberty of conscience. In 1020 all those who adopted Islam were allowed to return to their former religion. In seven days 6,000 renegade Christians abjured their adopted faith. No doubt the Jews must have acted similarly. After that the Jews were also allowed to rebuild their prayer houses.⁴¹ However the incident made many Jewish merchants of Fustat moved to safer places in India to continue with their trading activities without forsaking their faith. The India papers reflect that the Jewish congregation kept up its organization, though under difficulties. Even the Genizza documents refer to the existence of courts belonging to the Jewish community at Fustat for handling matters related to India trade.⁴² There were cases when the Jewish traders also approached the local Islamic authorities for the redressal of grievances.⁴³

The frequent reference to Jews involved in commercial activities with the Indian Ocean regions and the Mediterranean are found in the Genizza papers. Even during the age of Crusades they maintained in the Mediterranean their extensive trade networks. The method adopted by them to trade during the troubled times mainly depended upon the mutual trust and friendship. The diplomatic marriages were

⁴¹ Ibid. pp.34-36.

⁴² Ibid. p.36.

⁴³ Ibid. p.38.

another mode of entering into foreign markets. There were several examples of these kinds of marriages, happening between various Jewish families, along the vast area of the Mediterranean.⁴⁴

One may wonder whether the political boundaries affected the course of trade in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. Though the Genizza records talk hardly regarding the limitations posed by the ruling governments of Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, there are few letters which say that, there were no such limitations on travelling from one region to another. According to Goitein rather the period was free from the rigidity of political boundaries. In spite of the clash between Fatimid Egypt and Sunnite Tunisia there was constant flow of merchants between these two countries and travel to various regions of the Indian Ocean. Moreover the Tunisian merchants were provided with some special privileges, such as free access to the most remote places of both lower and Upper Egypt, where they could inspect and buy the local products.⁴⁵

Unlike the other Islamic population the Jews linked with Cairo Genizza were more educated which gave them an edge over others. The newly developed urban areas under the Abbasid Caliph in eighth and ninth centuries gave rise to urban skilled occupations. The newly educated Jews took full advantage of this opportunity as they were the most educated community at that point of time.⁴⁶ Judaism as a religion gives much weightage to education.⁴⁷ The creation of worldwide Jewish Diaspora has been

⁴⁴ S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, p.48.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 59-60.

⁴⁶ Maristella Botticini & Zvi Eckstein, "From Farmers to Merchants, Conversions and Diaspora: Human Capital and India History", *Journal of the European Economic Association* September 2007, 5(5), pp. 885-926; pp. 887-888.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*. p. 894.

also connected with their literacy and mastery in skilled labour. The Jewish craftsmen, traders, and moneylenders got scattered around the places where they could get into high skill occupations.⁴⁸

The growth of new cities, towns, and administrative centres in the Muslim world vastly increased the demand for skilled occupations. The literate Jewish rural population in Iraq and later in all Muslim lands moved to urban centers, abandoned agriculture, and became engaged in a wide range of occupations: crafts, trade, money lending, tax collecting, and the medical profession. This occupational transition took about 150 years and, by 900, almost all Jews in Iraq, Persia, Syria, and Egypt were engaged in urban occupations. In these cities, the Jews became so large that roughly 80% of world Jewry lived in hundreds of cities and towns in eighth-century Iraq and Persia, with Baghdad hosting a large Jewish community of about 200,000 people. Because Jews, Christians (as numerous as the Jews), and other non-Muslim minorities could engage in any occupation in the Abbasid empire, the distinctive characteristic of the Jews, their endogenously determined higher literacy and education, gave them a comparative advantage to switch to the better-paid occupations in the new cities. Most non-Jews remained farmers. This occupational selection into the urban skilled occupations remained the distinguishing characteristic of the Jewish people thereafter.⁴⁹

After ninth century also the education was promoted among the Jews of Cairo. The records of Cairo clearly indicate the importance of education within the Jewish community involved in Indian trade. Goitein in his *Mediterranean Society* Vol. II has

⁴⁸Ibid. p. 890.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 909

talked about the universality of primary education within the Jews living in the Muslim world.⁵⁰ The culture of literacy and education eventually made the Jews to evolve in the Mediterranean as a mercantile community with a separate identity. In fact their literacy level helped them to survive as a minority community. Further the literacy factor attached to them also gave them a privileged position over others. They made a difference in areas and markets handled by the illiterate people and even in the literate world, the Jews brought new perspectives for recording transactions. The huge participation of Jews in trade must have been accompanied by their education in various fields. It is often viewed that education made their mobility easier and helped them in getting connected with their partners and collaborators through their correspondences.⁵¹

Within the Muslim Empire, the Jews voluntarily and freely moved from Iraq and Persia to Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Palestine, Anatolia, Egypt, and North Africa. When the Muslim rulers overtook southern Spain by establishing the Cordoba caliphate from 711 to 1236, a fairly large number of Jews settled there. In 756, Cordoba was the largest European city, with a population of about 100,000. About two centuries later it had a total population of about half a million people, housed 70 libraries and 80,000 shops, and was a wealthy commercial hub for the various commodity streams moving to Constantinople, Alexandria, Baghdad, Damascus and all the way to India. The Jews who settled in Muslim Spain specialized in a large set

⁵⁰ S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society: The India Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo India*, Vol. 1, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967

⁵¹ Maristella Botticini & Zvi Eckstein, "From Farmers to Merchants, Conversions and Diaspora: Human Capital and India History", p. 915.

of crafts and skilled occupations, held a dominant role in local trade, and eventually gained almost a monopoly in international trade.⁵²

Although the Jews were scattered both in East and West, about 80% of the world Jewry was under Muslim rule in West Asia.⁵³ Moreover the freedom which the Jews enjoyed in the Islamic countries during medieval period was lacked in the western world as over there, their actions and behaviour, including economic, were regulated and conditioned by the anti-Semitic perceptions of the kings, Bishops and feudal lords.⁵⁴ Life for the Jews in Europe during the period of Crusades and other types of calamities became unbearable, as they were the first target of every attack that used to break out frequently in times of every calamity. The Jews shared a respectable position in the Egypt during medieval period which has been greatly reflected in India sources. The correspondence reveals that there existed cordial relation between the rulers and merchants. When Az -Zahir , the son of al-Hakim, became the next ruler of Egypt in 1021, he tried to put an end to the phase of hostility that existed with the Jews during the reign of his father and he consequently tried to reorganise the socio-economic structure. Along with this he also abolished all obnoxious restrictions imposed on the minorities during his father's period.⁵⁵

In fact Az -Zahir banked upon the wealth of the Jewish merchants of Egypt for expanding his power domains. Two Jewish merchants, who supported Az-Zahir in Cairo, were Abu Sa'ad Ibrahim and his brother Abu Nasr Harun, the sons of Sahl of Tustar (modern Shuster in Persia). The former was a dealer in very rare and precious things and made long journeys to acquire them. The latter was a banker with whom

⁵² Ibid. p.915.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 919.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 921.

⁵⁵ Jacob Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, p.76.

people deposited their savings. The Caliph Az-Zahir used to be a frequent customer of Abu Sa'ad. Abu Sa'ad was so influential that he often interred in conflicts with the Wezir. A Jew by name Abu Mansur was made Wezir on the recommendation of Abu Sa'ad. This shows the nature of rapport that developed between the rulers of Egypt and the Jewish traders involved in Indian Ocean and Mediterranean trade.⁵⁶

The free movement of people within the Mediterranean led to the development a free trading society. Rather than territorial the application of law was personal and the community courts mattered more. The Jewish community in diaspora had their own courts in various Mediterranean countries.⁵⁷ The Jews had a head of community as well, named *Nazid*, in the Fatimid Empire.⁵⁸ The *Nazid* occupied an influential position within the Jewish community and had the responsibility to sort out disputes among its coreligionists.⁵⁹

The feeling of one community was very strong among the Jews involved in trade in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. In case of kidnapping of any Jew by the pirates, the whole community used to share the responsibility and 'duty of freeing captives'. In Egypt it was in the capital, Cairo-Fustat that the Jews involved in Indian and Mediterranean trade converged in an intense way and concentrated way. The homogeneity of religion was above the territorial bounds of the Jews of Egypt and they had full sympathy for their co-religionists residing in Byzantine.⁶⁰ Religion was a very strong tie through which Jews were connected with the members of their

⁵⁶ Ibid. pp. 76-79.

⁵⁷ S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, p. 66.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.69.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.84.

⁶⁰ Jacob Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, pp.88-93.

community throughout the Mediterranean and later in the Indian Ocean. The frequent reference to religious gatherings, such as Sabbath and congregations is seen in Genizza documents.⁶¹ The uniqueness of being a community residing in some foreign and different land was also reflected in the nature of architecture of their houses. It was made to be different from the houses of the Muslim population. The dressing also differed from the others which included gorgeous colours and fabrics.⁶²

2.2 Rapport with the Muslim Traders

During the eleventh century the Mediterranean trade was mainly in the hands of Islamic merchants. The evolving pattern of trade comprised some form of partnership in which both the Jews and the Muslim traders cooperated for the movement of commodities between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Those Jews who could speak Arabic had the golden opportunity to take share in the trading activities along with the indigenous people.⁶³ The state was very much eager to promote the commerce as it brought them huge amount of taxes. The religious orthodoxy ran along with the relaxation in the other fields. The Genizza documents highlight that the greed of profit let the orthodox Ayyubids include more number of Jews within their administration. The Jews in West Asia and Egypt had to face less discrimination than in India. This was mainly because of the trading partnerships that evolved between the Jews and the Muslims in the Mediterranean during the age of Crusades and Jews formed a major commercial segment that connected the Muslim world with the Christian Europe, even though they were often targeted in Europe for reasons of their

⁶¹ Ibid. p.102.

⁶² S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, pp. 71-72.

⁶³ Ibid. p.149.

religion. Because of their linkages with larger world of commerce the Jews used to excel in their trade. There were few sectors of commerce in which the Jews played prominent role, such as textile, dyeing, metal and pharmaceutical products.⁶⁴ The Muslims also used to lend loans to their Jewish partners and vice-versa,⁶⁵ so that the wheels of their commerce might move smoothly even in times of financial crisis.

The Genizza sources reveal much about the socio-economic modes and ways of interaction pursued by the Jewish artisans and merchants within the Mediterranean. The commercial cooperation and partnership formed the main pattern of the international trade during middle ages. The cooperation again could be divided into informal and formal types.⁶⁶ Partnership was one of the most common means of conducting trade. However along with partnership the long distance trade was very much depended upon the tenet of trust.⁶⁷ The economic laws were also there to make the things smoother. The contracts made by the merchants and artisans were very much guided by these economic laws.⁶⁸ Scholars agree that medieval Jewish legal writers responded to “the needs of the times” in making their legal rulings, carefully choosing the legal sources and precedents upon which they relied, re-reading or even rejecting those sources in light of their quotidian reality. Further engagement with Islam not only brought the necessary social changes but also influenced their perspectives regarding economic growth. In this process the law structure of Jewish community also got affected. Actually pluralistic environment in which they lived made the Jewish community access both Islamic and Jewish courts. Very often the

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp. 72-73.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 85.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 165.

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 82-88.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 96.

Jews were inclined towards Jewish norms, which in fact emerged from the classical compendia of Jewish law. The legal norms and commercial practices ran together and shared deep connection with each other. In fact the legal norms could be considered as the mediator in perusal of economic agreements. The Jewish legal norms influenced commercial practices without completely determining or defining them.⁶⁹

Besides the traditional economic norms which they banked upon in order to justify some other activities which could not be merging in the frame of traditional one, merchants also used to go by some norms of local subgroup.⁷⁰ The detail that Udovitch gathered from that “record of commercial practice” led him to conclude that most commercial cooperation was conducted on the basis of ties that had no specific shape or content but instead relied on quid pro quo transactions that were fulfilled by associates relying on mutual trust built over the course of longstanding relationships.⁷¹ Unlike Udovitch, Greif came up with a new concept of ‘punishment mechanism’ which worked within the merchants. The system suggested by Greif was multilateral and community centric. The whole community of traders used to resolve any dispute together, in which agent played an important role. This pattern of punishment structure leads to the discouragement of cheating among the merchants.⁷²

⁶⁹ Phillip. I. Ackerman- Lieberman, “Commercial Forms and Legal Norms in the India Community of Medieval Egypt”, *Law and History Review*, Vol. 30 (4), November 2012, pp. 1007-1011.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.1012.

⁷¹ Abraham L. Udovitch, “Formalism and Informalism in the Social and Economic Institutions of the Medieval Islamic World,” in *Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam*, ed. Amin Banani, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977, p.64.

⁷² Avner Greif, “Reputation and Coalitions in Medieval Trade: Evidence on the Maghribi Traders,” *Journal of Economic History* vol.49, 1989. p.868.

Although the Jews preferred their community courts and the community norms⁷³ of the Rabbanite legal system, the flexibility and opportunistic approach towards the implementation of these laws began to dominate in a big way in the diasporic settlements. Goitein has stated that there were several of examples where settlements had been done out of court or before Muslim notaries.⁷⁴ It could be said that the merchant's adaptation of economic norms were mainly guided by their convenience of trading activities. Both *Commenda*⁷⁵ and *Isqa*⁷⁶ had been resorted by the Jewish community in solving their economic problems and matters at times. In *Isqa* it required no cash outlay on the part of the agent and widely-available credit might also have made it possible for agents participating in 'isqa agreements to cover their losses.⁷⁷ On the other hand the *commenda* system has been considered as suitable for long-distance trade due to its flexibility.⁷⁸

The proceedings of Rabbinical courts found in the Genizza documents highlight that Jewish traders had a tight knit social and religious organization in which they lived and operated, even though they maintained partnerships with Muslim traders during this period. They were governed by their community based customs. The disputes occurred both at home and abroad were solved by their own court system.⁷⁹ The lawsuits of Rabbinical court of Fustat, related to Tunisian merchant Joseph B. David

⁷³ India literature which argued that "coalitions of merchants turned to local subgroup norms to define their own behaviour, which was then monitored outside the formal legal system", mentioned in "Commercial Forms and Legal Norms in the India Community of Medieval Egypt" by Phillip. I. Ackerman- Lieberman, *Law and History Review*, Vol. 30 : 4, November 2012, p.1015.

⁷⁴ S.D Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, p.179.

⁷⁵ Islamic economic norm for partnership.

⁷⁶ Laws of Agency and Partnership closely follow Talmudic models that are maintained with little variance in the Geonic codes and monographs that were composed and disseminated in the intervening centuries

⁷⁷ A.L. Udovitch, "Credit as a Means of Investment in Medieval Islamic Trade," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87, 1967, pp. 260–64.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.196.

⁷⁹ Goitein, S.D and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Document from the Cairo Geniza (India Book)*, pp. 28-32.

Lebdi, active in India trade highlights that even on the foreign land the disputes were resolved by the courts situated in Egypt, which in fact was the merchant's place of belonging.⁸⁰ Goitein has highlighted that the India traders preferred to conduct commercial activities along the denominational lines.⁸¹ Homogeneity of faith must be a strong factor behind the union of trading communities of Jewish merchants along the both Mediterranean and India Ocean.

There were few professions in which Jewish had specialization and expertise. The textile industry was dominated by the Jewish community. They were also handling the silk work and dyeing industry very properly. The production of glass and metal work was another area of Jewish dominance.⁸² As far as the Jewish movement towards Indian Ocean is concerned, search of a new commercial zone could be a strong reason. The rising dominance of Europeans along the Mediterranean trading zone, particularly with the emergence of long-distance trade in Europe, made the Jewish middle class to stretch their commercial activities towards Indian Ocean.⁸³ It has also been noted that since from the earlier period the western states had been trying to trade directly with the East via Egypt and Red Sea.⁸⁴ Although the concrete information regarding Jewish engagement with the countries of Indian Ocean during middle Ages are found in the documents of Cairo India, few earlier Jewish texts also refer to India. The myth of India's marvels, from natural wonders and great wealth to the land of ethical values, mysterious knowledge, and superior spirituality of its sages, is mentioned in passing in many medieval Jewish texts. By this time there was a

⁸⁰ Ibid. pp. 167-219.

⁸¹ Ibid. p.25.

⁸² Goitein, S.D., *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, p.100.

⁸³ Ibid. p.149.

⁸⁴ George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring- In The Indian Ocen In Ancient And Early Medieval Times*, Princeton New Jersey, 1951, p.52.

general impression among the Jews that anyone who goes to India would become rich.⁸⁵

2.3 Move towards India Trade

“India trade” as termed by Goitein was the back bone of international economy of that era. The possibility of increasing trade in the Indian Ocean inspired many to move towards the countries of Indian Ocean. But unfortunately the transaction between the two major trade spaces of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean has been remaining in dark due to unavailability of required sources. Still the Cairo documents are very much helpful in filling those gaps.⁸⁶ The importance of Jewish trade in India can be gathered from the fact that ruling authorities were very much interested in developing the trade route towards Indian Ocean. Even the controlling of India trade became a matter of contestation with the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad and Iraqis. The availability of Indian Ocean trade route as a channel for entering new markets was another reason of attraction towards it. It is said that the commercial development of North Africa led it towards the search of new market places for her surplus consumption. In course of doing so, India and far eastern trade provided a huge opportunity to the West Asian merchants. Thus the Fatimid were also nowhere behind cashing this opportunity and hence encouraged the commercial expansion towards the Indian Ocean.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. S. Rosenblatt, New Haven, 1967, p. 26.

⁸⁶ Goitein, S.D and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Document from the Cairo Geniza (India Book)*, pp.3-4.

⁸⁷ Ibid. pp.21-22.

However in Genizza papers, the term “India trade” has been used in a broader sense, as the geographical understanding of medieval era differs from modern age. So the activities between Red Sea in the West to the shores of Sumatra, Indonesia in the East, has been considered under the name of ‘India Trade’. Goitein’s definition of ‘India Trade’ has been inspired by the three terms used for Indian Ocean in the Genizza sources. *Al Hind, bilad al- Hind, and diyar al- Hind* are the three terms which have been frequently used in the both medieval Arabic sources and Jewish papers. When it comes to Indian Ocean and trade with India, the west coast of India was the geography with which the Jewish merchants were commercially linked for most part of the time. Most of the Jewish traders, whose commercial papers were preserved in the Cairo Genizza, were usually active along the western coast of India.⁸⁸ It should be here specially mentioned that the Cairo India documents contain the name of twenty places situated on the west coast of India.⁸⁹

In spite of the fact that details of commodity exchange do not form the focal point of this study, at least a rough idea regarding the goods traded between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean is inevitable. The continuation and changes adopted by the Jewish merchants from Mediterranean to India and vice versa is another important matter of fact. The matter of import-export balance with India needs much deeper study.⁹⁰ Genizza documents speak of the nature of commodities exchanged between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. Goitein in his book *India Traders of the Middle Ages* has provided few of such lists which he has formed on the basis of

⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 5-6.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p.24.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p.21.

Genizza documents related to India trade. About seventy-seven articles were exported from India to the Mediterranean.⁹¹

Major Items of Trade from India to the Mediterranean World

A. Spices, aromatics, dyeing, varnishing plants and medical herbs	36 items
B. Iron and Steel (a chief commodity)	6 varieties
C. Brass and Bronze vessels	12 items
D. Indian silk and other textiles made mainly of cotton	8 items (only)
E. Pearls, beads, cowries shells and ambergris	4 items
F. Shoes and other leatherwork	2 items
G. India porcelain, Yemenite stone pots and African ivory	3 items
H. Tropical fruits, such as coconuts	5 items
I. Timber	<u>1 item</u>
Total	77 items

In the above mentioned list, items coming under group A are in majority. If going back to the Mediterranean trade, the Jewish community acquired the expertise in the field of perfumer, druggist, apothecary and dyer, which reflected in the Genizza documents clearly. After group A, which includes spices and medicinal plants, stand articles of group C, which is Brass and Bronze vessels as the second in the list. Moreover it has been mentioned in the Genizza papers that the South western India had bronze and brass industry. In order to run brass and bronze industry successfully,

⁹¹ Ibid. pp.15-16.

the raw materials required for it was imported from the countries of the Mediterranean.⁹² This business was so well flourished that not only the Jewish merchants but also the Indians also invested in it. There was a Jewish merchant named Abraham Ben Yiju, from Tunisia, who was active along the Mediterranean and India maritime trade route and who owned a bronze ware factory at Manjarur (modern Mangalore) situated on the west coast of India.⁹³ It seems that the finished bronze and brass products from Abraham Yiju's factory were taken to the Mediterranean.

Textile could be considered as the next important article, which was traded along the Mediterranean-Indian maritime trade network. Although the stories of textile trade reflected in Genizza sources are not very much clear, it would not be wrong to assume that the Indian textiles must have attracted the attention of the Jewish merchants. It has been seen that the textiles, Indian muslin (Indian red silk), called *lanis* which has been referred in the Genizza sources quite often, are mostly used as a gift items by the Jewish traders. At the same time the frequency of Indian cotton fabric mentioned in Genizza papers is also doubtful as it has been considered of secondary importance. The space occupying nature of textiles might have demeaned its importance as a primary article of trade.⁹⁴ But again the costly textiles were traded by the Jewish merchants. The correspondence attached to Joseph b. David Lebdi clarifies that, he was very much indulged in the trade of costly textiles. He did purchasing of a good amount of textiles in Nahrwara, India, for the Bundar firm in India, and sold it in the

⁹² Ibid. p.16.

⁹³ Ibid. pp.52-55.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p.17.

Red Sea port of Dahlak. The textile trade was followed by his son Abu i- Barakat as well.⁹⁵

Again Goitein has also provided the list of goods imported to the countries of Indian Ocean from the ports of Red sea via India:⁹⁶

Major Items of Import to the Countries of Indian Ocean

A. Textile and clothing	36 items
B. Vessels and ornaments of silver, brass, glass and other materials	23 items
C. Household goods, such as carpets, mats, tables, frying pans, etc.	7 items
D. Chemicals, medicaments, soap, paper, books	19 items
E. Metals and other raw materials for the copper industry	7 items
F. Corals (a staple article of great importance)	1 item
G. Foodstuffs, (cheese, sugar, raisins, olive oil) and linseed oil for lamps	<u>10 items</u>
Total	103 items

The conclusion provided by Goitein on the basis of these two lists of commodities is very interesting. He rejects the notion that India and the East mostly sent agricultural produce and raw materials, while West Asia exported mostly industrial products and consumer goods. His rejection is based upon the fact that the industrial and consumer goods sent to India were of the greatest variety, but their value amounted to a comparatively smaller sum. Another thing which has been highlighted is that, it was the West Asian merchants and their families, who were using these goods, not the

⁹⁵ Ibid. pp.32-33.

⁹⁶ Ibid. pp.17-18.

local people.⁹⁷ The fact that, industrial and consumer goods were mainly used by the families of West Asian merchants, points out to the presence of merchants' families in India. They must be present in a considerable number in different places of India. This is inferred on the basis of the goods that were in need in India, as testified by the documents of Cairo. Although it does not clarify the pattern of permanent settlement, the temporary presence of merchants' families from Mediterranean to India could be accepted.

While connecting the maritime trade relations, stretching from Mediterranean to Indian Ocean, the role of India as a mediating link between these two maritime spaces emerges quite often. The trade route between Mediterranean to Indian Ocean was quite vulnerable, as there were many cases of piracy recorded on this route.⁹⁸ India serving as the junctional point of trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean trade was often referred to in the Genizza papers and was viewed as the heart of the commercial activities between the Red Sea ports and the East. The conscious efforts of the Fatimid rulers towards the development of sea route towards India remained the same, as was in the case of the Mediterranean region. That is why the Fatimid emphasized the commercial developments leading to trade with India. Ayyubids of Egypt also followed the footsteps of the Fatimids in this matter. From the tenth century onwards the Jewish merchants from Egypt were quite visible in the various ports of India. Even the Jewish merchants served as the representatives of the Indian merchants.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ibid. p.18.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p.23.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p.37.

Madmun b. Hasan-Japheth, was the representative of the Indian merchants and along with that position, he was also the head of the Jewish community in Yemen. The Jewish merchants, who were active along the Mediterranean- India trade route, were in frequent touch with the representatives of Indian merchants. The correspondence between the Jewish merchant Joseph Lebdi, from Tripoli and Hasan b. Bunder, representative of the Indian merchants, flashes light upon the type of commercial activities pursued by the Jews in India.¹⁰⁰ In the meantime the Rabbinical court of India, acted as the subordinate institution of the Jews in Egyptian capital.¹⁰¹

2.4 Mode of Trade

As far as the mechanism of trade is concerned the Jews conducted trade in the Indian Ocean as they did in the Mediterranean. Being a minority group, they made conscious efforts to keep themselves united and mutually linked. The private correspondence among the Jewish merchants and their families are proofs of their close knit type of community structure. The commercial letters also refer to their tendency of being within the community. The Cairo Genizza source materials contain the letters and other documents of partnership, which show that the Jews preferred to enter into a business partnership either with their own blood relations or members of their own community. The partnerships were made out between father-son, cousins, uncle-nephew, brothers etc. Joseph b. David Lebdi, Madmun b. Hasan-Japheth, Joseph b. Abraham Bundar, khalaf b. Issac b. Bundar, Mahruz b. Jacob, Abraham Ben Yiju, count among the few Jewish merchants who were active along the Mediterranean-India trade route for forging the ties of commercial partnerships. The correspondences

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. pp. 24-29.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p.40.

of the above mentioned Jewish merchants highlight that they continued to trade on the denominational lines.¹⁰²

As far as the commerce is concerned, in order to make transactions smoother within the foreign land, the merchants used to have representatives. The post of *representative of merchants*¹⁰³ was vested with so many responsibilities. The foreign merchants were represented by these representatives. Along with the representation of merchants in the local lawsuits, they were also responsible for the supervision of the sale and purchase of goods for overseas traders, take care of custom payments, storage of goods of clients in a large warehouse which also served as a clearing house for transactions and post office. Moreover the representative of merchant also served as the banker for those foreign merchants. Generally the post of representative of merchants was bestowed on the head of the Jewish community. Japheth b. Bundar was holding both post of representative of Indian merchants and head of the Jewish community. Afterwards his son Madmun, who was central figure in the Genizza sources related to India trade, became the representative of merchants in India in fourth and fifth decades of the twelfth century. After him the post of *Nagid* (head of the Jewish community) passed on to his eldest son Halfon who was active along the Malabar coast of India.¹⁰⁴

The community centric attitude and denominational behaviour had been vital components in the shaping of partnerships within the Jewish diasporic settlements in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Alike on the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean trade also saw the close community structured commercial transactions. The partnership among the members of Jewish families has been mentioned above. The

¹⁰² Ibid. p.25.

¹⁰³ *Representative of merchants within the Jewish community* was known by the name of *Nagid* who was considered to be very important personality for commercial dealings.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. pp.37-42.

feeling of community was very much strong within the Jewish merchants.¹⁰⁵ The communal values dominated the commercial activities as well. Whether the Mediterranean or Indian Ocean, the Jews merchants kept working as a community and supported each other beyond the barriers of territory and country. Madmun B. Hasan Japheth¹⁰⁶ used to safeguard the interests of Jewish traders. Abraham Ben Yiju, the Jewish merchant from Tunisia, who set up bronze factory in Mangalore and active in India trade route, was supported by the Adenese merchant Madmun B. Hasan Japheth, while he was facing some problem in going back to India. Thus the business ties of Jewish traders were bounded to their affinity of homogenous religiosity. This unity used to get reflected in their judicial approaches, as well. The Jewish merchants and craftsmen who operated in twenty different ports of India and Ceylon were under the jurisdiction of the rabbinical court of India.¹⁰⁷

As we have seen earlier Fustat or Old Cairo was one of the major centres of Jewish commercial activities during the Middle Ages. A fully fledged Jewish mercantile community then flourished within the Egyptian empire, just like the Armenians constituted the “trading diaspora” which comprised both the merchants of the homeland, and other Armenian communities situated at the different parts of the globe.¹⁰⁸ The head of the Diaspora community used to pay homage to their higher authority in Egypt. Along with this the well-to-do Jewish merchants involved in Indian trade also

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p.25.

¹⁰⁶ Madmun B. Hasan Japheth was a Jewish merchant who acted as the representative of merchants in Aden during eleventh century. He was one of the most famous traders mentioned in the Genizza documents, collected in the *India Book*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. pp.39-40.

¹⁰⁸ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, UK, p.105.

used to send money and other precious goods such as spices and textiles to the *Gaon* and members of the Rabbinical court in Cairo.¹⁰⁹

The exact dating of the entry of Jewish merchants in a big way on the west coast of India following the multi-layered processes in the Mediterranean is a difficult task; but depending upon the Indian sources, it could be said that from the tenth century onwards they became increasingly visible. Firstly they might have been attracted towards the hub of Indian textile, Gujarat, situated on the west coast of India. The business letters of Joseph B. David Lebdi, a Jewish merchant from Tripoli and one of the pioneers in the commerce with India, reached Nahrwara in the Gujarat around beginning of eleventh century.¹¹⁰ But again if we go back to the ancient period there are few sources which refer to the presence of Jewish community even before the tenth century.¹¹¹

The foregoing discussions revolved around the historical processes that made the Jews involved in the trade of the Mediterranean to get converged in Fustat, the Fatimid capital and their eventual move towards the Indian Ocean. The methods and mechanisms of maritime commerce applied by the Jewish merchants in the Mediterranean were also continued in the Indian Ocean trade. The close knit community structure helped them in setting up their own individual identity within both the water spaces. The joint commercial operations that the Jews and Muslims carried out during the period of Crusades facilitated some sort of rapport to evolve in their trade for some time in the Indian Ocean. Even though the vast commercial

¹⁰⁹ Goitein, S.D and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Document from the Cairo Geniza*, pp.40-43.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 28-29.

¹¹¹ For details on the copper plate see, T. A.Gopinath Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.2, Madras, 1916, pp. 66-75.

opportunities led the Jews towards the Indian Ocean trade zones, they were in close contacts with their places of origin in the Mediterranean countries. The Genizza records suggest that till the twelfth century, majority of Jewish merchants did not settle permanently on the coasts of India Ocean. Most of the traders sailing between Mediterranean to India preferred to go back to their countries of origin. However a small segment had already started settling down along coastal western India, either as collection agents or trading agents or representatives of bigger business houses, which led to the emergence of nuclei for Jewish Diasporas in India.

Chapter III

The Jewish Settlements on the West Coast of India and Circuits of Trans-Oceanic Trade

The west coast of India has for long been one of the most favourite trade destinations for the foreign merchants from the Mediterranean and the Jews formed one of the many merchant classes who chose to make money out of the trade circuits converging over there. As we had seen earlier in the second chapter there was less number of permanent settlements of the Jews in India till thirteenth century and the Geniza documents overwhelmingly indicate the tendency of the Jews to move back to their native land after having done their business along the west coast of India, particularly for the period from eleventh to thirteenth centuries. In this chapter an attempt is made to look into the various Jewish enclaves formed along the west coast of India during the later centuries. In global context the Jewish Diaspora has been approached by the scholars in various ways. One of the famous terms used for the Jewish Diaspora is *galut*,¹¹² which reflects the notion of forceful exile from an ancient homeland, subjugation, and an incessant effort for getting back. Moreover the commonality of religion and culture acted as the gluing factor attaching the Diaspora communities to

¹¹² The Hebrew term *galut* expresses the Jewish conception of the condition and feelings of a nation uprooted from its homeland and subject to alien rule. The term is essentially applied to the history and the historical consciousness of the Jewish people from the destruction of the Second Temple to the creation of the State of Israel. The residence of a great number of members of a nation, even the majority, outside their homeland is not definable as *galut* so long as the homeland remains in that nation's possession. For more details see Baer, F. Yitzhak, *Galut*, Vol II, Schocken Books, USA, 1947 and Eisen, Arnold, M., *Galut: Modern Jewish Reflection on homelessness and homecoming*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986.

the Jewish community. On the other hand Ruth Wisse has argued that “Jews have always constituted a nation” engaged in “political interaction with other nations.”¹¹³ At the same time the Jews had been working as economic and cultural intercessors between the societies.¹¹⁴

The nature of Jewish settlements and their changing character over years has been a puzzling issue. While the ancient indigenous sources, particularly the *copper plates* from Kerala¹¹⁵, indicate the permanent Jewish presence on the west coast of India, the Genizza sources hardly refers to any such fact. The public and private correspondences of Jewish merchants active along the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean trade routes reflect their tendency of going back to their homeland rather than settling down.¹¹⁶ For example Abraham ben Yiju, one of the most famous personalities of India trade and often mentioned in Genizza records, did not settle down permanently in India despite having a bronze factory at Manjarur (modern Mangalore). He went back to his homeland Tunisia after finishing his trading ventures. However the gap of sources remains a hurdle in way of knowing the history of Jewish settlements in India for pre-modern period. However this chapter, on the basis of archaeological, epigraphic, and written sources (Genizza materials) would try to unfold the journey and presence of Jewish merchants on the West Coast of India.

¹¹³ Ruth Wisse, *Jews and Power*, New York, 2007.

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Ray, “New Approaches to the Jewish Diaspora: The Sephardim as a Sub-Ethnic Group”, *Jewish Social Studies, New Series*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (Fall, 2008), pp.10-31, URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40207032>, pp.13-15.

¹¹⁵ T. A Gopinatha Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, pp.66-75.

¹¹⁶ S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, p. 29.

3.1 Early Settlers

The Jewish traders operating from Mediterranean to Indian Ocean formed an influential mercantile group all along the west coast of India. The history of Jewish presence on the west coast of India goes back to a very remote past. According to the local tradition the Jews first landed in India in the sixth century B.C., following the scattering of Jews with Babylonian conquest and captivity. It is also generally believed that the first batch of Jews had come before first century A.D. and settled on the Malabar Coast of India.¹¹⁷ The best sources that confirm this information is the 9th century *Tharisapally* copper plates, where we find Hebrew signatures on a grant-deed conferred on the church of Tharisa of Quilon. Moreover *Anjuvannam*, which has been considered by most historians as a merchant guild of the Jews in Kerala, was given the responsibility of taking care of the church as its guardian (*karalar*) along with Manigramam merchant guild, which has often been viewed as a Christian merchant guild.¹¹⁸

The trade route from Quilon to Mediterranean was widely used by the Jewish merchants since from 9th century. This trade route was used for the export of pepper, ginger, brazil wood and cardamom from the different ports of Kerala.¹¹⁹ As the commercial engagements of the Jews with Quilon accelerated, they got themselves organized within a group or could be said a merchant guild named *Anjuvannam*. The introvert nature of Jewish community and the tendency of operating within their own communal organization must have led towards the formation of such trading guild. As

¹¹⁷ William Crooke, *Things India: Being Discursive Notes On Various Subjects Connected With India*, p. 292.

¹¹⁸ Gopinath Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, p.68, 71.

¹¹⁹ S.D.Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, Princeton, pp. 70.

we have already seen the *Tharisapally* copper plate given to Mar Sapor in 849 C.E. by Ayyanadikal Thiruvadikal, has referred to *Anjuvannam* at first. This copper plate states that, *Anjuvannam*, *Manigramam* and *Arunnoottuvar* were entrusted with the right to protect and safeguard the church of Tharisa set up by Mar Sapor in Quilon and the various privileges granted to it.¹²⁰

Going back to *Anjuvannam*, scholars have provided various interpretations regarding the *Anjuvannam*. The identity of *Anjuvannam* has remained a controversial issue. Most of the scholars have considered it as a trading association of Tamil and Kannada region. Again the controversy is also around the question whether this group was of local merchants or foreign. The members of *Anjuvannam*, had been speculated to be Arab Jews, or Arab Muslim, Christian or Persian or a mixed group. Gopinath Rao and D. C. Sircar hold that *Anjuvannam* was an indigenous organization, which included five sub-castes. On the other hand V. Venkayya had stated that *Anjuvannam*, was a merchant's group of semi-independent in nature.¹²¹ Moreover on the basis of *Tharisapally* copper plate given to Mar Sapor in 849 C.E, M.G.S. Narayanan has said that, *Anjuvannam* was a Jewish merchant guild.¹²²

Quilon, one of the famous ports of Indian Ocean, attracted attention of a wide variety of merchants including the Jews. The unique geographical position of Quilon and the rhythm of monsoon that made vessels converge at secure places in times of adverse weather made it evolve as an important halting place for the Arab *dhow*s in their long

¹²⁰ For details on the Tharisapally copper plate see T. A Gopinatha Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, pp.66-75.

¹²¹ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, New Delhi, 1988, pp.24-25.

¹²² M.G.S.Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, 1996, p.155.

distance travels between Persian Gulf and coastal China. Later on the Jewish merchants also got attracted towards this newly emerging port. The medieval traveler Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the Malabar Coast around 1167, also came to Quilon, which he referred to as Khulam by the Benjamin.¹²³

Quilon had different names in the various sources, such as Kurakkeni Kollam in Malayalam¹²⁴ Koulam Mali in Geniza papers¹²⁵ and in the Persian sources as well.¹²⁶ Although Benjamin visited Quilon, his remarks about Jewish community were not confined to south India only. Rather he did an overall comment on the Indian Jewish community. He found huge difference in the application of practices of Judaism by the Indian Jewish in comparison to the typical Jews living elsewhere.¹²⁷

With the view of attracting more foreign merchants to Quilon the kings used to confer several commercial privileges on the mercantile communities as was done by Ayyanadikal Thiruvadikal, a feudatory of the Chera ruler Sthanu Ravi Varma to Christian merchants of the city and their church. The trade surplus from Quilon enabled the Chera rulers to continue their prolonged conflicts and wars with the Pandya rulers in south India.¹²⁸

¹²³ Rabbi Benjamin in M. N. Adler's (translated), *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, New York, p.92, where Khulam is identified with Quilon at the southern end of the coast of Malabar

¹²⁴ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", pp.7-8.

¹²⁵ S.D.Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, Princeton, p.64.

¹²⁶ For other Arab sources on Quilon see George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Princeton, pp.70-74.

¹²⁷ David, G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of life in Cochim", p. 426.

¹²⁸ M.G.S.Narayanan, *The Perumals of Kerala*, p.32.

3.2 Jews of Muyirikode and their Role in the Political Processes of the Cheras

However the Jews of Muyirikodode (near Cranganore) in Kerala happened to be one of the most moneyed mercantile groups that sustained the prolonged conflicts that the Cheras had with the Cholas in the eleventh century. Joseph Rabban the head of the Jewish community of Muyirikode gave money and vessels to the king Bhaskara Ravi Varma, the Chera ruler (962-1020), for countering the attacks of the Cholas in 1000. In return the pleased ruler extended various privileges to the Jewish community of Cranganore, which he got enshrined on copper plates.¹²⁹ These copper plates are engraved in ancient Tamil language and written in the archaic and obsolete Vatteluttu script. These plates have been preserved by the Jewish community of Cochin as their historical legacy, which they often cherished. The *paradesi* synagogue of the white Jews in Cochin is the place where these plates have now been preserved.¹³⁰ The text of this inscription, according to the generally accepted version reads as follows:

"Hail! Prosperity! (The following) gift was made by him who had assumed the title "King of Kings," His Majesty the king, the glorious Bhaskara Ravivarman, in the time during which (he) was wielding the sceptre and ruling over many hundred-thousands of places, in the thirty-sixth year after the second year, on the day on which (he) was pleased to stay at Muyirik-kodu:-

We have given to Issuppu Irappan (the village of) Anjuvannam, together with the seventy-two proprietary rights, the tolls on female elephants and (other) riding-animals, the revenue of Anjuvannam, a lamp in day-time, a cloth spread (in front to

¹²⁹ Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian ocean Commerce", pp.9-10.

¹³⁰ Walter, J. Fischel, "The Exploration of Jewish Antiquity of Cochin on The Malabar Coast", pp. 230-23.

walk on), a palanquin, a parasol, a Vaduga (i. e., Telugu) drum, a large trumpet, a gateway, an arch, a canopy (in the shape) of an arch, a garland, and so forth.

We have remitted tolls and the tax on balances. Moreover, we have granted, with (these) copper leaves, that he need not pay (the dues) which the (other) inhabitants of the city pay to the royal palace, and that (he) may enjoy (the benefits) which (they) enjoy.

To Issuppu Irappan of Anjuvannam, to the male children and to the female children born of him, to his nephews, and to the sons-in-law who have married (his) daughters, (we have given) Anjuvannam (as) a hereditary estate for as long as the world and the moon shall exist. Hail! "¹³¹

The above information in the copper plates, not only refers to the presence of Jews on the Malabar Coast of India, but also signifies their privileged status. According to the tradition, the Chera ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varman (962-1020) bestowed commercial privileges to his favourite Jewish merchant, Joseph Rabban, who was given copper plates enshrining these privileges in the year 1000. Those plates provided him and to the whole community, the right to ride an elephant, to be carried in a litter, to have a state umbrella, to be preceded by drums and trumpets, to call out so that lower castes might withdraw from the streets at his approach. Along with the exemption from taxes, the Jews were also entitled to enjoy the benefits of the ruler's administration just like the native people. The special favour to the Jews must be bringing benefits to the state which motivated the ruler to do so.¹³² The Jews had then been contributing to the economic development of the Chera state.

¹³¹ Published by E. Hultzsch in *Epigraphia Indica*, Calcutta, 1894, Vol. 3, p. 69

¹³² David, G. Mandelbaum, "the Jewish way of life in Cochin", pp.425-426.

These developments and the emergence of Quilon as a commercial enter port provided immense opportunities for the Jews involved in the commerce between India and the Mediterranean to intensify their business with coastal Kerala and settle down in its prospective commercial centres. We find a lot of Jews referring to various mercantile enclaves along the west coast of India. Mahruz b. Jacob, a ship-owner (*nakhuda*) and Indian Ocean merchant, whose ships were sailed on the Aden-Mangalore (Manjarur) route,¹³³ has referred to Malibarath (Koulam Mali or Quilon) as an important centre of trade for Jewish merchants.¹³⁴ Benjamin of Tudela (c. 1170 C.E.), medieval traveler, has stated about the intelligence of Jewish merchants involved in linking the Quilon and Red Sea trade route and further their movement towards the Venice.¹³⁵

The port of Quilon basically served as the junctional point between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean during the early centuries of medieval period. During the fourteenth century onwards, Quilon was so much dominated by the Jewish merchants that the al-Karimi merchants restricted their commerce to northern parts of Malabar.¹³⁶ The vibrant commercial activities of the Jewish merchants at Quilon had been noted down by few travelers, such as, Marco Polo¹³⁷. Moreover Ibn Battuta, the medieval traveler from Morocco, had come across some Jews at Quilon. He states that the though the

¹³³ S. D. Goitein, and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 48-49.

¹³⁴ Pius Malaekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.9.

¹³⁵ M.N.Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, London, 1907, pp.63-64.

¹³⁶ Pius Malaekandathil, "Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800", in *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, 2, 2007, p. 266.

¹³⁷ Henry Yule and Henry Cordier (ed.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol.II, New Delhi, pp.375-376 and John Monte Karvino (Henry Yule and Henry Cordier(ed.)), *Cathay and Way Thither*, vol.III, New Delhi, p.63.

Jews were living under the governor from their own community, they had to pay toll tax to the ruler of Quilon.¹³⁸

It should be here stated that though Quilon was a major hub of their activities in Kerala, there were Jewish enclaves of sizeable nature in Madai, Pantalayani Kollam, Palayur, Pulloot, Cranganore (Shingly), Mala, Chennamangalam, Parur, Cochin and Quilon(Kurakkeni Kollam).¹³⁹ The Jewish distribution to these places seems to have happened from the Mediterranean, particularly against background of Jewish scattering that began with the multiple socio-economic impetus and initiatives extended to them by the Fatimids and the Ayyubids.¹⁴⁰

3.3 New Situations and the Evolving Social Differences

The social division among the Jewish community residing in the Indian continent reflects the characteristic of their Diaspora. This division also points towards the consciousness of the Jews regarding their origin and identity. The arrival of Jewish in India and their interaction with the local population must have led towards the mixing within the Jewish community. There were instances of Jewish merchants buying Indian slave girls. The famous Genizza merchant Abraham Ben Yiju, active in Indian Ocean trade, and who spent few years in Manjarur (modern Mangalore), bought and liberated an Indian slave girl. The manumission of the Indian slave girl by Yiju has been looked from various perspectives. The intermediate status of the slave girl has been highlighted under which she was neither completely gentile nor completely Jew.

¹³⁸ H. A. R. Gibb, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, tr. and ed. London, p. 238.

¹³⁹ Pius, Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce' p.7.

¹⁴⁰ S. D. Goitein, *India trade*, pp. 21-22.

The matrimonial engagement between the Jewish merchant and the slave girl is another assumption. The girl had been also given a Jewish name, 'Berakha'.¹⁴¹ Thus the commercial ventures created the opportunity for the mingling of the Jews and Indian race. The genealogy of the Jewish merchant Abraham Ben Yiju, contains the name of the Indian slave girl, Ashu or later given the name Berakha.¹⁴² It might be assumed that this mixture was an initial step towards the formation of the Jewish Diaspora in terrains bordering the Indian Ocean.

There is a *responsum*, written by the rabbi of Cairo David ben Soloman ibn Zimra, around 1520. The *responsum* contains that, there were nine hundred Jewish families in Cochin at that time, among which only hundred were original and genuine, while rest of the Jews were born from slaves or by the union between Jewish merchants and native women, or were converts.¹⁴³ The white Jews considered themselves superior over the black, native Jews and refused matrimonial engagements with them, as well.¹⁴⁴ But on the other hand all type of gentiles who somehow got converted to the Judaic religion, intermarried among themselves, and thus formed a noticeable community in India. This flourishing community of Jews were economically sound and also shared healthy relationship with the royal authorities. However the intermarriages between *meyuhasin* (Jews of attested Jews pedigree) and non-*meyuhasin* has been remained a controversial issue; there is some instance which

¹⁴¹ Ibid. pp.55-57.

¹⁴² Ibid. p.89.

¹⁴³ David, G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of life in Cochin", p. 431 and J. B. Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin", the Story of a Controversy" p.230.

¹⁴⁴ Crooke William, *Things India: Being Discursive Notes On Various Subjects Connected With India*, p.292.

advocates that the intermarriage between *meyuhasin* and non-*meyuhasin* was allowed in terms of few rituals prescribed by the Rabbi (the religious authority of Cairo).¹⁴⁵

There was a strong tie and mechanism of exchange that existed between the Jews settled on the west coast of India and their higher authority in Egypt. The chief Rabbi of Cairo was consulted on the internal matters of conversion, disputes within the community, intermarriage, slaves etc. Letters had been sent by the Jews of Cochin to the chief Rabbi of Cairo, David b. Abi Simra and his successor, Rabbi Jacob Castro for their advices.¹⁴⁶ This exchange of letter also refers to the nature of Jewish community to relying upon their nodal point in order to maintain their communal integrity. Majority of the Jews in Cochin were said to have been the offspring of the male or female slaves.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile the trading patterns on the west coast of India got changed. From the 10th century onwards the commercial engagements between west coast of India and Egypt got augmented. During this period iron and steel emerged as the major items of trade, exchanged along the trade route that ran through the Mediterranean and the west coast of south India. Apart from this, Indian cotton textiles and silk, pearls, beads, cowries, ambergris, brass, and bronze vessels, Chinese porcelain, African ivory, coconuts, timber, spices, dyes, medicines, aromatics, and leather products were the major items which were imported by the Jewish merchants from India.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ J. B. Segal, "White and black Jewish", p.231.

¹⁴⁶ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History: Prolegomena to a History of the Jews in India", p.40.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.40.

¹⁴⁸ S. D. Gotein, "Letters and Documents on the India Trade in Medieval Times", p.196.

3.4 Forging of Commercial Ties

While talking about the mechanism of commerce applied and adopted by the Jewish merchants in the Indian Ocean, the close community behaviour remains at the core. Even in the foreign land they preferred to maintain the communal character. The correspondence of traders involved in India trade, used to carry forward the idea of exchange marriage among their own community. Abu Zikri's two sisters were married to the Mahruz and Madmun. All of the three merchants mentioned above were active along the Indian Ocean trade route, whose commercial bond was reinforced by matrimonial connections.¹⁴⁹

The system of mutual aid was popular among the Jewish merchants involved in India trade. The cooperation among the members of their own community was one of the biggest assets of the Jewish trade. The correspondence of the Jewish merchants of Aden reveals that the dealings of exchange in India were mainly done within the members of the Jewish community. Homogeneity of religion among the trading community also led towards favouring each other. Joseph b. Abraham writes from Aden to Abraham Ben Yiju in India:

*"With the proceeds purchase for me a small quantity of iron, if available, and cardamom, and if you can- a little borax or whatever you consider proper. For one who is present sees by one who is absent."*¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ S. D. Goitein, *India Trade*, p.49

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.61

Trade transactions through partnership were very much popular among the Jewish merchants of India. Partnership again depended on the nature of the trade and the long distance transactions were carried out by the partnership in comparison to the shorter distance. Obviously in order to decrease the amount and chances of risk the partnership was a good option for the traders involved in long distance trade. Also there were cases when the merchants restricted themselves from entering into partnership. The greed of acquiring more profit could be the reason behind this. There could be another possibility that the merchants wanted to grow up individually. There is a letter sent by Adenese merchant Joseph b. Abraham to famous India trader Ben Yiju, which contains his objection regarding being into partnership:

*"Please do not send me anything, neither betel nuts, nor any other goods you acquire for me with anyone, with anyone, but specify what belongs to each person and (for) every item purchased. This is the greatest favour you can do for me."*¹⁵¹

3.5 Jewish Mercantile Wealth and Power

As far as the skills and mechanism of Jewish commerce in India is concerned, alike the Mediterranean, they continued to be in the good books of the ruling authorities. Thus like Mediterranean the Jewish merchants were successful in gaining the support of the rulers on the west coast of India. The Indian ruling class must have equally been interested in providing space to these newly emerging commercial ventures in lieu of returned benefits. For example the Kakatiyas of Warangal benefited very much from the taxes and duties that came out of ports. The same could be said regarding the Chola and Pandya kings.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 62.

¹⁵² Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, p.154.

The Jewish merchants played a decisive role in the political and economic development of the Chera kingdom, particularly at a time when their frequent clashes among the three big kingdoms of the Chera, Chola and Pandya in the south.¹⁵³ As we have seen earlier during the period of the conflicts between the Chola and Chera rulers, the Jewish merchants supported the latter one. The Chera rulers and their feudatories tried their best to seek support of the Jewish merchants and their merchant guild *Anjuvannam* operative on the west coast of India at that point of time. While the Cholas were trying to link the trade routes of south India with the flourishing Chinese maritime commerce, the Cheras concentrated on the ports of West Asia, for realizing which they banked upon the commercial expertise and experience of the Jews. With this intent the local rulers started giving privileges to the Jews and Jewish merchant guild the *Anjuvannam*.¹⁵⁴

The expansion of the commercial interests of the Cheras towards the West Asian maritime zone coincided with the Jewish interest merging between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. So the victory of Chera over Chola ruler was necessary for the benefits of the Jewish merchants operating along Mediterranean- Indian ocean network. It was against this background that during 1000 C.E., Joseph Rabban the head of the Jewish supported the Chera ruler in his wars with the Cholas and extended support of men and material to him, besides vessels needed for the enterprise Joseph Rabban, the head of Jewish merchant guild (*Anjuvannam*) of Cranganore, took

¹⁵³ Ibid, pp. 51-62.

¹⁵⁴ K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, New Delhi, pp.181-82.

personal interest in mobilising the Jewish resources to help the Chera kingdom on such an occasion of political exigency.¹⁵⁵

The constant support of the Jewish merchants helped the Cheras to emerge quite strongly over the Cholas. The confirmation of privileges to the Jewish community was the immediate action taken by the then Chera ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varma (962-1020).¹⁵⁶ The granted privileges were used by the Jewish community to make their position strong upon a foreign land. Thus they emerged as a more united mercantile community, which was earlier scattered all around the southern coast of India, particularly Kerala). The closeness with the royal authority (Chera Rulers) helped the Jews not only grow and get scattered within Chera kingdom i.e. Kerala, but also in Cambay, Broach, Thana, Mangalore, Fandarayna (Pantalayani Kollam near Koyilandy) and Madai (in north Kerala). The oral tradition of Madai, regarding Jewish people, itself is the proof of their presence. Moreover *juthakulam* (pond of the Jews), from where the Jews used to draw water, has still been preserved in this as a storehouse of the memories of Jewish people active at Madai during the beginning of the Medieval.¹⁵⁷

Mangalore was another favourite destination for the Jews. The vast number of letters belonging to Abraham ben Yiju, which he had written from Mangalore, is enough to prove Jewish influence over the place. Yiju was not only active along Mediterranean-

¹⁵⁵ M.G.S.Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Trivandrum, p.82.

¹⁵⁶ For details on the privileges and the copper plate on which the privileges were inscribed see K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.II, New Delhi, pp. 507-514; See also M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbioses in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1972, pp.29-30;35-37; Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History* Kottayam, 1970; M.G.S.Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, p.82.

¹⁵⁷ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce" p.10.

India trade route, but also spent few years of his life at Mangalore and managed to own a Bronze factory as well.¹⁵⁸

3.6 Ties of Cooperation in the World of Trade

The dynamics of Jewish maritime trade was very much laid within their dependency and trust upon the members of their own religion and community. In spite of having social conflicts, between black Jews (or the earliest Jewish settlers in Malabar) and White Jews (or the *paradesi* Jews who reached Malabar following the Arab commercial expansion of tenth –eleventh centuries),¹⁵⁹ the period also saw a sort of collaboration developing among them. It has been mentioned earlier that the native Jews of Malabar Coast were enjoying some special privileges from the local rulers and chieftains. They made full use of these grants and mobilized enough resources for commercial benefits.¹⁶⁰

Pepper formed an important commodity for the Mediterranean- Malabar trade of the Jews. Malabar Coast was a major producer of pepper during that period.¹⁶¹ Through the diasporic networks of the Jewish merchants, pepper was collected from Kerala and despatched to the Mediterranean. A huge amount of pepper was being transported by individual Jewish merchants during the eleventh-twelfth centuries.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ S. D. Goitein, *India Trade*, p.52.

¹⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion on the Black and white Jews of Cochin see “Vischer’s Letters from Malabar”, in K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.II, New Delhi,1983, pp.52; 523-527 ; P.M.Jussay, “The Jews in Kerala” in *St. Thomas Christians and Nambudiris, Jews and Sangam Literature: A Historical Appraisal*, p.133; J.B.Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin*, London, 1993, pp.24-30 ; J.B.Segal, “White and Black Jews at Cochin, The Story of a Controversy”, pp.228-252.

¹⁶⁰ Pius Malekandathil, “The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese (1498-1663)”, in *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, pp. 240-41.

¹⁶¹ S.D.Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, p. 67.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* pp. 64-65.

The attraction of Jewish merchants towards Kerala for pepper was due to its cheaper price in its marts in comparison to the other trade centres. The Genizza papers speak of individual traders like Joseph Lebdi, who purchased fifty sacks of pepper from Kerala.¹⁶³ While pepper was sold on the price of 135 dinars per sack in Cairo¹⁶⁴, 130 dinars in Maghreb¹⁶⁵, he purchased, it on the price of five *dinars* per sack from Kerala, in 1097¹⁶⁶. Pepper was one of the most important items of export from India. The trade transactions of eleventh and twelfth centuries, mentioned in Genizza records, show that the Jewish merchants trading with south India used to make payment in gold. It was done in order to counterbalance the balance of trade.¹⁶⁷ During the period of eleventh to fourteenth centuries the western coast of the Indian peninsula experienced huge amount of gold flow. The share of pepper export was largest in stimulating this gold flow. However the use and distribution of gold during that period of time has remained a less studied theme.¹⁶⁸

The connection of the Jewish merchants with the royal authority always helped them to bolster their social and economic position in the diasporic enclaves. The polity of early medieval period and the later era as well, was somehow related to the economic development of this period. The good connectivity that the native Jews had with the spice growing hinterland often provided them with the opportunity to work as commercial intermediaries for the local authorities and larger merchants coming from the Mediterranean. Banks of river Chalakudy and river Periyar experienced some considerable number of Jewish settlements during this period in their move towards

¹⁶³ Ibid. p. 180.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p.118.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. p.122.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p.180.

¹⁶⁷ S. D. Gotein, "Letters and Documents on the India Trade in Medieval Times", p.198.

¹⁶⁸ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, p.155.

the hinterland, as it provided transporting facility for the goods transacted. Moreover the construction of the Synagogues of Mala on the banks of river Chalakudy and Chennamangalam on the banks of Periyar attest to the Jewish existence and influence over these places.¹⁶⁹

With the disintegration of central power in Kerala and the formation of smaller principalities in the twelfth century we find the Jews moving more and more into interior parts of Kerala and its various commercially prospective centres in their attempts to widen the boundaries of their commerce. While small political structures like *svarūpams*, *nātuvālis*, *dēsavālis*, *kaimals*, *karthas* etc. emerged after the fall of Cheras (the Kulasekharas)¹⁷⁰ in the interior of Kerala, new political centres started appearing in the coastal region, with more maritime orientation. Against this background Calicut emerged as an important maritime centre attracting a wide variety of merchants from different nationalities and ethnicities. Calicut was made the royal residence by the chief of the Nediyrappu *Svarupam*, who was popularly known as Zamorin (the Lord of the Ocean)¹⁷¹

Although Calicut was dominated by the Al-Karimi merchants during middle of thirteenth century¹⁷², Jewish merchants also started moving over there from the different parts of their settlements (Quilon, Cranganore, Cochin). The presence of Jews in Calicut from a distant past is attested to by the oral tradition of *juthakulam* (pond of the Jews) located in the vicinity of the city.¹⁷³ The Jewish community dispersing to the newly emerged trade centres preferred to settle down near to the

¹⁶⁹ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.12.

¹⁷⁰ M.G.S.Narayanan, *Foundations of South Indian Society and Culture*, Delhi, 1994, p.22.

¹⁷¹ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p. 11.

¹⁷² Walter J.Fischel, "The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt", Leiden, p. 165.

¹⁷³ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p. 12.

politically sound areas. This mingling of political power and merchants facilitated their process of mobilising resources. The Jewish merchants did the intermediary work for the ruling class by mobilising resources between the spice growing hinterlands and main port centres.

One can tentatively an economic and commercial reason for Jews for identifying certain geographies as their enclaves and bases of operations. As we had seen earlier the banks of river Chalakudy and river Periyar, through which commodities were carried from the productive hinterlands and maritime port centres, were commercially strategic and hence the Jews developed their habitats over there. P. M. Jussay, the famous Jewish historian of Kerala opines that the Jewish community of Chennamangalam, had the concept of self rule.¹⁷⁴ Alike the other places of Jewish settlement this area also had the Synagogues, which acted as a cultural institution that bound the Jews engaged in trade together.

Pulloot, Parur and Chennamangalam are the few places situated on the banks of these two river systems that entertained Jewish population. Though the Synagogue was erected at Chennamangalam, in 1612, a Jewish tomb stone dated 1268 had been obtained from Chennamangalam, which is indicative of its antiquity. The tomb-stone belongs to a Jewish woman named Sarah and has been inscribed in Hebrew and is counted among one of the oldest texts in the language.¹⁷⁵ It is believed that the Jews must have migrated to Chennamangalam from Cranganore around thirteenth century. This and the other synagogues at Parur and Mala, which are still in existence, speak

¹⁷⁴ P.M. Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala" Calicut, 2005, p. 129.

¹⁷⁵ G. Mandelbaum, "The Jews Way of Life in Cochin", p.426.

up the story of Jewish presence in this region.¹⁷⁶ The folk songs related to Jewish community of Kerala has given birth to certain assumptions. In fact the songs also highlight the various privileges given to the Jews by the local chieftains. Paliath Achan, the Nair chieftain of Chennamangalam, bestowed upon the Jews “gifts and books to all those who come, and titles to foreigners”.¹⁷⁷

While talking about Jewish settlements on the west coast of India, the name of Cochin comes prominent.¹⁷⁸ Cochin experienced the presence of a notable number of Jews after the fourteenth century. The dramatic emergence of Cochin, due to geographical changes in 1341,¹⁷⁹ could be considered as an important event in the history of Jewish community of south India. While on the one hand the flood in the Periyar River silted up the earlier Jewish settlement area, Cranganore, on the other hand, it gave birth to a new harbour of Cochin. (*Kochu Azhi* or small estuary)¹⁸⁰

Since the emergence of the new port of Cochin, it started attracting various merchant communities with her goods such as, pepper, spices and other tropical south Indian products. Cochin which experienced large inflow of foreign Jews from various nationalities also experienced ethnic differentiation among its Jewish community in a

¹⁷⁶ P.M. Jussay, *The Jews in Kerala*, p. 129.

¹⁷⁷ Shalva Weil and Jay Waronker, *The Chendamangalam Synagogue: A Jewish Community in a Kerala Village*, Kochi, 2006.

¹⁷⁸ Walter J. Fischel, “Cochin in Jewish history”, p. 38.

¹⁷⁹ W.W.Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol.IV, London, 1885, p. 11; K.Rama Varma Raja, “The Cochin Harbour and the Puthu Vaippu Era”, in *The Bulletin of the Rama Varma Research Institute*, Cochin, 1933, No.2, pp. 49-51.

¹⁸⁰ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, “The Fort of Cochin”, Cochin, 1966, p.60; K.Rama Varma Raja, “The Cochin Harbour and the Puthu Vaipu Era”, in *The Bulletin of the Rama Varma Research Institute*, No.2, Cochin, 1933, pp.49-51; W.W.Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol.IV, London, 1885, p.11.

much intense way. This happened mostly because of the fact the older Jewish groups started assimilating more and more local customs and practices while the newly entering foreign Jews maintained their ethnic and cultural individuality in a big way leading to some sort of exclusivism. Consequently like the Indian caste system, the Jewish community of Cochin was also divided into social hierarchy with the foreigners being kept at the top of the ladder. Moreover they had their own codices and lawsuits.¹⁸¹

The early Jewish settlers of Cochin seem to have been the migrants from Cranganore to Cochin during fourteenth century following the geo-physical changes in river Periyar in 1341. It is believed that the erection of Kochangadi synagogue at Cochin happened in 1345¹⁸², which is a strong indication of Jewish settlement at Cochin. Moreover Visscher, has provided another explanation regarding the migration of white Jewish to Cochin. According to him before the settling at Cochin, the Jewish population landed at *Sinhora Savod'e* (*Senhora Soude*, a place-name later given by the Portuguese and presently known as Saudi). After spending fifty years over this place, two kilometres away from Cochin, Jews permanently settled at Cochin during the period of 1521-1523.¹⁸³

The different groups of Jewish migrants were welcomed by the king of Cochin heartily, who by this point of time had localized his power base near the harbour.¹⁸⁴

This receiving of Jewish merchants by the king of Cochin was mainly guided by

¹⁸¹ David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of life in Cochin", pp. 423-24.

¹⁸² Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", pp. 12-13 and also see S.S.Koder, "Saga of the Jews of Cochin", pp. 138-40.

¹⁸³ Visscher's Letters from Malabar, in K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.II, New Delhi, 1982, pp.51, 517.

¹⁸⁴ David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.428.

economic motives. Due to the support and patronage of the ruler the migrant Jews were able to set up a market, called Kochangadi (small bazaar). The Jews eventually became an acceptable social group for the ruler because of their role in bringing various types of merchandise and bullions that the kingdom needed. Both the rulers of Cochin and Calicut had Jews in their army.¹⁸⁵

Cochin eventually became the core settlement of the Jews on the west coast of India. There used to be proper 'Jews town' in the native city of Cochin. According to the census of 1857 there were about 1790 Jews in the whole kingdom of Cochin.¹⁸⁶ The Jewish town of Cochin was 1/3 mile in length and situated near by the palace of the local ruler, the wall of which divides his residence from the Jewish synagogue. There was a market place also attached to the southern half of the town. The houses were mostly of two storied height, having tiled pent roof. While talking about the permanent settlement the religious structure became very important. The city also had the three synagogues. Among those two were major synagogues, situated at the northern and southern extremities of the town. These synagogues were used according to the social division among the Jewish community.¹⁸⁷

Because of the huge population of Jews in the kingdom of Cochin, the ruler of Cochin was called king of Jews.¹⁸⁸ As we had seen earlier, the first Jewish synagogue of Cochin was built in 1344 and another one was erected in 1489. The Thekkumbhagam synagogue, erected in 1489, exists even today and is used by the few remaining Jews

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. p.429.

¹⁸⁶ Francis Day, *Land of Perumals*, Madras, 1863, p.134.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. pp.336-38.

¹⁸⁸ David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of life in Cochin", p.430.

of Cochin.¹⁸⁹ As far as the physical structures related to the Jews at Cochin are concerned, both the Synagogues and tombstones remain very helpful in uncovering the Jewish history in India in general and Kerala in particular.¹⁹⁰

3.7 Borrowing from Local Cultural Milieu

The influence of local culture upon the Jewish community residing in Cochin is another interesting element of this diasporic settlement. While retaining the connection of the Jewish community of Cochin with their ancestral land and its linkage with Egypt has been emphasized, there was cultural assimilation happening almost in parallel manner. By this time the Jews were increasingly influenced by various elements of local culture. The impact of indigenous culture upon the Jewish community in Kerala led towards their eventual isolation from the main body of Jewry. Eventually the Kerala Jews with social division among them, which cropped up following the adoption of the Hindu social and cultural elements, began to get increasingly compartmentalized into a Jewry with remarkable difference.¹⁹¹

In general, the Jewish community of India could be divided into three major classes. White Jews, black Jews and brown Jews. The white Jews stood superior in the hierarchal order of Jewish social structure. They were considered as the most pure and unmixed race of the Jews in India. Their skin colour is fair than the brown and black Jews. The brown and black Jewish segments come after white Jewish in hierarchy

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p.428.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 426.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. pp. 423-24.

respectively¹⁹² and they look almost like the local population.¹⁹³ While the regular life of the Cochin Jews was conducted on the basis of *Shulhan Arukh*, the orthodox codex, the language used by them was local Malayalam, belonging to the family of Dravidian languages. Alongside Hebrew was also taught to the children of Jewish community. The religious practices were very much similar like the orthodox Jews, but at the same time socio-cultural assimilation was also occurring in some of their cultural practices.¹⁹⁴

The vibrancy of the Jewish community in Cochin during the period of 15th-16th centuries has been noted down by many of the travellers, who visited Cochin then. French traveller Francois Pyrard de Laval was in Malabar between the periods of 1601 to 1611. John Nieuhof (1622), The Dutch traveller, Philip Baldaeus (1640) and Van Cardin (around 1644), and Tavernier had given detailed account of the mercantile activities of the Jews at Cochin and their Synagogues.¹⁹⁵

Linschoten has flashed enough light upon the Jewish community of Cochin. The social distinction among the white, black and brown has been well described in his account. In order to differentiate themselves from the other Jewish sections, the white Jews used to wear a rich coloured long tunic, waistcoat buttoned up to the neck, and full white trouser. They wore a skull cap in daily use and turban while going to synagogue. On the other hand the dressing of the black Jews was very similar to the native Muhammadans.

¹⁹²J. B. Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin", pp. 237, 244-46.

¹⁹³ Ibid. p.242.

¹⁹⁴ David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of life in Cochin", p.424.

¹⁹⁵ J. B. Tavernier, *Travels in India*, London, 1684, see also *Travels*, ed. V. Ball, London, 1889, vol. 2, p. 183.

Linschoten says:

“The Jewes have built very fair stone houses, and are rich merchants, and of the King of Cochin nearest Counsellors; there they have their Synagogue with their hebrue Bible, and Moses Lawe, which I have had in my hand; they are most white of colour, like men of Europa, and have many faire women. There are many of them that came out of the country of Palestina and Jerusalem thether, and speake all over the Exchange good Spanish; they observe the Saboth, and other iudicall ceremonies, and hope for the Messias to come.”¹⁹⁶

The Jewish presence in medieval India was also recorded in the Persian text of contemporary period. Along with the various religious groups Jews were also invited to the court of Akbar in Ibadat-Khana for religious discussion. The Persian sources of Akbar’s period also refer to the existence of Jewish place of worship, Synagogue. There was a tolerant decree by Akbar, of 1594: “If any of the infidels choose to build a church, or a synagogue, or an idol temple, or a Parsee tower of silence, no one is to hinder him.”¹⁹⁷

Thus the chapter provides a glimpse into the nature of Jewish settlements on the West coast of India in general and Malabar Coast in particular. An Attempt has been made to link the Jewish commercial activities in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean with their enclaves located on the west coast of India. By cleverly using their trading skill and intelligence a wide network of maritime commerce stretching from Mediterranean to Malabar Coast of India was established by them for commodity movements. For the purpose of conducting their business smoothly they used to ensure the support of royal authority in their favour, in return to which they also used

¹⁹⁶ William Crooke, *Things India*, pp. 292-93.

¹⁹⁷ Walter J. Fischel, “Jews and Judaism at the Court of the Moghul Emperors in Medieval India”, pp. 146-47.

to strengthen the hands of the rulers by liberally contributing fighting men, materials and vessels in times of oddities and emergencies. The support that the early Jews extended to the Chera rulers and later to the king of Cochin helped the Jewish community to strengthen their base both, economically and socially. The strategies to extend commercial networks and mobilize the resources were very much similar as in Mediterranean and very often it consisted in partnerships, matrimonial engagements and family networking.

The Jewish merchants who came to Malabar coast for trade got scattered all along the Malabar region, with Madai, Pantalayani Kollam, Palayur, Pulloot, Cranganore (Shingly), Mala, Chennamangalam, Parur, Cochin and Quilon (Kurakkeni Kollam) as major centres of Jewish concentration. Although the Jews from the Mediterranean traded with the Jewish merchants of these enclaves and the merchants of other community of India as well, preference was given to the members of their own religion. Even on the foreign land (Malabar), they entered into partnership with the people of same religion. Though there was the social division between the *Pardeshi* Jews (newly arrived foreign Jews) and Black Jews (native Jews or old settlers), commercial engagements between the two formed another side of their relationships. *Paradesi* and the black Jews were active along the major port towns and inner hinterland areas respectively. The interaction of both groups made the trade smoother and beneficial for them. Along with the rapport that existed between the two groups of Jewry there was an equal amount of interaction with the people around them, particularly the non-Jews. This led to a process of social and cultural assimilation to happen among them almost in parallel terms and intensity as had been in the domain of trade.

Chapter IV

Changing Roles in the Age of European Commercial Expansion

The arrival of European mercantile powers along the west coast of India brought changes to the existing direction and patterns of maritime commerce which in turn affected the business and fate of native merchants. The Jewish merchants, who were scattered all along the Malabar Coast, too were affected by this sudden change that happened with the entry of the Europeans. Being a merchant community, the Jews were always ready to grab the new commercial opportunities that came to them from any side. The already settled Jewish mercantile community on the Malabar Coast made best use of their knowledge in native language and native trade, which in turn made them evolve as the favourite commercial partners for most of the Europeans, particularly the Dutch. Portuguese were the first among the Europeans to arrive Malabar for trade; however their relationship with the Jews was of a fluctuating nature, with a small layer of collaborators in the initial phase, which was followed by a long phase of intense conflicts for more than a century. The Jews adapted themselves to changing scenario as to conduct their business uninterruptedly through alternative and parallel channels depending on exigencies. This chapter attempts to analyze the changing roles of the Jews during the age of the commercial expansion of the Europeans and the redefinition that the Jews made for themselves on the basis of the impact of the same.

As the chapter is set to deal with the Portuguese and Dutch commercial ventures, it will be divided into two major parts, with the first section dealing with the changes during hectic days of Portuguese trade, and the second part would peep into the response of the Jews to the Dutch East India Company's trade on the west coast of India. This chapter also will look into Jewish ways of survival during adverse conditions occurred out of European commercial expansion, and their trading strategies to grab more trading opportunities and thus more wealth. This is followed by an analysis of the socio-economic status that the Malabar Jews wielded in the changing scenario.

Part I

4.1 The Phase of Collaboration between the Portuguese and the Jews

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to come to the shores of western India, which once happened to be the core area of Jewish trade. The Portuguese opened up a new sea route to India via Cape of Good Hope. The strong hold and control of the Egyptian rulers on the trade routes between the Europe and Asia restricted the Portuguese from acquiring direct advantages of their entry into the Indian Ocean, because the traditional merchants with the support of Egyptian rulers and their counterparts in India still managed to conduct trade through parallel channels. As early as fifteenth century, the idea of finding an ocean route to India had become an obsession for the Portuguese under Henry the Navigator (1394-1460), who was keen to find a way to circumvent the Muslim dominated areas of the eastern Mediterranean and all the routes that connected India to Europe.¹⁹⁸ However the quest for finding a new trade route to India ended with arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut in 1498.

¹⁹⁸ R. P. Anand, *Origin and the Development of the Law of the Sea*, The Hague, pp.42-43.

Vasco da Gama set sail from Lisbon in the summer of 1497, and after rounding the Cape of Good Hope, arrived on May 20, 1498 at Calicut in Malabar.¹⁹⁹ On reaching Malabar, he gathered a bulk of commercial information about its markets, commodities and their price much more than what the early Mediterranean merchants used to do and that too within three months of staying in Kerala.²⁰⁰ The city of Calicut, which Da Gama set as his destination of his travel in India, had a considerable number of Jews conducting trade with the Mediterranean regions through Egypt. A Tunisian Jew on being surprised at the sight of Vasco da Gama in such a land like India, asked the motive and purpose for his travel, to which the latter answered: 'in search of spices and Christians.'²⁰¹

It seems that the initial struggle of Portuguese merchants on the Malabar Coast was eased with the help of Jewish merchants who were well informed with the methods of trade in Malabar. On reaching Calicut Vasco da Gama took a Jew from Anjedive as his close companion and later Da Gama made him get converted to Christianity and gave him the name 'Gaspar da Gama'.²⁰² When the Portuguese found it difficult to conduct trade in Calicut because of its hostile environments, it was with the help of Gaspar da Gama that they first moved to Cochin.²⁰³ The initial phase of Portuguese trade at Cochin pretty much depended upon the support of local Jewish merchants. When Vasco da Gama came to Malabar for the second time, Gaspar was again there to assist him with all possible support. Later on in 1505 when Francisco de Almeida

¹⁹⁹ A. V. Williams Jackson, *History of India*, Volume 9 – Historic Accounts of India by Foreign Travellers Classic, Oriental, and Occidental Collected and Arranged by A. V. Williams Jackson 1907, p. 205.

²⁰⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Birth-pangs of Portuguese Asia: Revisiting the fateful 'long decade' 1498–1509", p. 264.

²⁰¹ Francis Day, *The Land of The Permauls*, p.74.

²⁰² 'Gaspar da Gama' was a Jew who accompanied the Portuguese merchant Vasco da Gama during his arrival at Anjedive Island, situated on the West Coast of India in 1498. Gaspar da Gama, popularly known as Gaspar da Indias, subsequently played an important part in Portuguese affairs.

²⁰³ Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', p.13.

reached Cochin as the viceroy, Gaspar da Gama maintained good relationship with him by extending all possible support. The knowledge of both local commerce and language made the Jews efficient enough to guide the European merchants.²⁰⁴

Gaspar da Gama, popularly known as Gaspar da India played the intermediary role for the newly arrived Portuguese and his knowledge in local language enabled him to work as the interpreter for them. At the same time the task of commissary of the fleet and Portuguese agent for pepper and spices were also performed by him. The high status of Gaspar is evident from the fact that he did direct correspondence with king Manuel of Portugal. Among the number of letters exchanged between Gaspar and the king, dated from Cochin between 1505 to 1507, only three had survived. He had travelled as far as Malacca and it was from him that the Portuguese received the information which allowed Albuquerque to extend his conquests to South East Asia and the Far East.²⁰⁵

It is believed that the settlement of Jews of Cochin was the result of the devastation of Cranganore, supposed to be the original home of the Malabar Jews. A letter sent by the Jewish community of Cochin to the rabbinical authority in Egypt, contains that there were 100 Jewish households present in Cochin during the beginning of the sixteenth century. Some other sources also refer to the continuous existence of Jews in Cochin, such as Yemenite Jew Secharia ibn Sa'adia, who visited coast of Malabar in

²⁰⁴ Ibid. pp.13-14.

²⁰⁵ David, G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", pp. 428-429.

sixteenth century came to meet many Jews at Cochin during his three months of staying.²⁰⁶

During the period, when Vasco da Gama reached Calicut, it was ruled by the *Zamorin*, a very tolerant monarch who used to give equal opportunities for the traders from all religious backgrounds. The flourishing spice trade of Calicut and the liberal attitude of the ruler, attracted lots of merchants from the foreign countries including the Jews.²⁰⁷ The Jewish presence at Calicut has been well established through the oral tradition woven around the *juthakulam* (pond of the Jews) of Calicut²⁰⁸, which is further attested to by the frequent references in the Genizza records about the regular movement of the Jewish merchants from the Mediterranean countries to the west coast of India.²⁰⁹

In this process the size of Jewish population swelled up in many enclaves and during the centuries of intense activities of the Portuguese, the Jews did not disappear; on the other hand they re-modified the nature of their activities and settlements. Once flourishing community cannot be vanished all of a sudden, they must be present there even after thirteenth century, despite Portuguese entry.

The Jews settlement of Cranganore, which was one of the oldest settlements of the Jews, faced attacks not only from the Portuguese but the other groups as well, such as the Muslim merchants. In 1504 the soldiers of Suarez De Mendes looted Muslim and Jewish shops and settlements in Cranganore. With the intension of revenge, the Muslim traders invaded the city after the gap of twenty years, in which again along

²⁰⁶ Walter J. Fishel, "Cochin in Jews Hisrory", pp.39-40.

²⁰⁷ Francis Day, *The Land of The Permauls or Cochin Its Past and Present*, Madras, 1863, p.73.

²⁰⁸ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.12

²⁰⁹ See, S. D. Goitein, and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Book*, Leiden & Boston, 2008.

with the Christians, the Jews were also targeted. Along with the religious intolerance, the matter was attached to the trade benefits as well. The pepper trade was the core aspect of this rivalry. The Muslim traders used to adulterate pepper. In order to stop this act by the Muslim merchants, few Jews and Christians were allotted specially for the task of finding out those tricks and punish the offenders.²¹⁰ In the Muslim attack of Cranganore in 1524, the Jews were specially targeted along with the St.Thomas Christians and the Jews fled en block to Cochin to escape from the Muslim wrath.

In 1516 Duarte Barbosa states that, along with the Muslims and Gentiles, Jewish merchants were also active in the kingdom of Cranganore.²¹¹ The internal dissonance among the Jewish community was also another factor that led to the decline of Jewish community at Cranganore. This internal dispute was aggravated by the arrival of the Portuguese and the consequent fractions that appeared in the community.²¹²

The shift of Jewish merchants from Cranganore to Cochin coincided with the multiple commercial opportunities that appeared in that city thanks to intensification of Portuguese commerce over there. Most of the Jews got settled at Mattancherry, the native part of the city of Cochin. On the other hand the main city of Cochin popularly known as the Santa Cruz of Cochin was getting developed under the umbrella of Portuguese commerce.²¹³ The Jewish merchants living in the native Cochin (Mattancherry) and being supported by the local native rulers, ably took enabled advantages from the commercially fertile city of Cochin (Santa Cruz), developed

²¹⁰ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol I, Asian Educational Services, Madras, 1887, p 312,325.

²¹¹ Duarte Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the Sixteenth century*, p.15.

²¹² J.B.Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin" p. 229.

²¹³ T K.S.Mathew and Afzal Ahmad, *Emergence of Cochin in the Pre-Industrial Era: A Study of Portuguese Cochin*, Pondicherry, pp.1-3.

under the umbrella of Portuguese commerce .²¹⁴ Though most of the Jewish merchants lived in the native part of the city of Cochin, the commercial vibrancy stimulated by Portuguese trade enabled the Jewish merchants carve out their own trading network as well, along the Euro-Asian maritime trade zones.²¹⁵

4.2 Migration of Jews and New Christian from Europe and Phases of Conflicts

Meanwhile we find mass exodus of Jews from Iberian Peninsula to Cochin and Goa happening from Europe. The anti-Semitic policies of Portugal and Spain , where the crowns either wanted the Jews to get converted to Christianity or move to other countries, made many Jews of Iberian peninsula move towards Cochin and Goa, where relatively liberal atmosphere prevailed. The Castiel family of the Jews was said to have reached Cochin in 1512 as a part of Jewish migration from Spain.²¹⁶ These migrants led to the swelling up of the Jewish settlements on the west coast of India. Though there was a Portuguese enclave in Cochin, earmarked by the Portuguese fort at Cochin erected in 1503, these migrant Jews mingled freely with the Portuguese *casados* and the local Jews residing in Mattancherry. Meanwhile Cochin, which remained the seat of Viceroy and capital of *Estado da India* till it was shifted to Goa in 1530²¹⁷, was the principal destination for the Iberian Jews moving to India

²¹⁴ K.S.Mathew and Afzal Ahmad, *Emergence of Cochin in the Pre-Industrial Era: A Study of Portuguese Cochin*, Pondicherry, pp.1-3.

²¹⁵ Pius Malekandathil, Malekandathil, Pius, "The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese (1498-1663)", pp. 240-50.

²¹⁶ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.14.

²¹⁷ J.B.Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin" p. 230.

By 1530s the Portuguese crown intensified the control over Jews, by resorting to the institution of Inquisition in Portugal. Fearing the consequences of the establishment of Inquisition, many Jews started migrating to Cochin. Because of the religious intolerance of Portuguese, Jews were only left with the option of conversion into Christianity in order to survive within the country and its colonies. The Jews who got converted to Christianity at that time were named *Cristãos novos* or New Christians.

The religious policy of the crown of Portugal, affected the economic decisions as well, as it was based on orthodox and non tolerant Christian ideas. The zeal to bring more communities under the umbrella of Christianity became a bone of contention between the Portuguese and the Jews in India. Moreover the anti- Jews movement which started in Portugal around 1530 caused the migration of Jews from Portugal to the southern shore of India and Cochin in particular.²¹⁸

In course of time the Jews who fled from Portugal to Cochin, after forceful conversion to Christianity and labeled as new Christians, started to develop commercial partnerships with the Jews of Mattancherry. The commonality of religious sentiments along with the shared commercial opportunities brought both the new Christians and the native Jews together. This eventually led to the emergence of a new trade network with the coloration of both within the commercial milieu created by Portuguese intervention. Pius Malekandathil, has referred to some new Christians who became prosperous during this period of time thanks to the participation in the new trade network. Jacome de Olivares, Manuel Rodrigues, Leonor Caldeira, Simão Nunes, were the famous new Christian merchants from Portugal, who set up their

²¹⁸ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India*, p.166.

commercial establishments in Portuguese Cochin during middle of the sixteenth century. While talking about the Jewish merchants, who conducted business in Cochin, the name of Moises Real has been often referred to as the greatest known merchant of India. He was operating from two centers of Portuguese Cochin *Rua Direita* and the *Casa do Vigario*, respectively.²¹⁹

Meanwhile commercial partnership emerged between the new Christians and the native Jews of Cochin. The Jewish merchants of Mattancherry used their links with West Asia to facilitate the commodity movements in partnership with the new Christians of Portuguese Cochin. The connections of the Jewish merchants of Mattancherry with the local ruling authorities must have been used in order to make the transactions smoother and long-standing. The collective approach of Jewish community of Cochin and the new Christian settlers of the Portuguese city of Cochin was also guided by the commonality of religious sentiments. The forceful conversion of Portuguese Jews to Christianity was never accepted by the Jews happily. Thus when they came in contact with their co- religionist Jews in Cochin, along with commerce they also started sharing religious sentiments and reviving religious practices. The new Christians started going for the religious ceremonies of the native Jews of Cochin. But they did so by hiding it from the officials of Portuguese Cochin and in a secretive way. Some of the new Christians of the Portuguese city of Cochin like Jacome de Olivares donated money for the construction of Kaduvumbhagam synagogue, established during the period between 1539 and 1550. While some others participated in the Purim festival of the Jews of Mattancherry, as a result of the close partnerships and sharing with the Jews of Mattancherry, the judaizing tendencies and

²¹⁹ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.15.

revival of old Judaic religion got intensified among the new Christians and eventually conflict between the Portuguese and the new Christians started cropping up at Cochin.²²⁰

Along with the commercial collaboration, the clash between Portuguese and Jews was running parallel. The crown of Portugal was very much anxious about the spread of Christianity in the different parts of the globe. The first Jesuit missionary to India under St. Francis Xavier, in his letter to the king of Portugal in 1545, expressed his worries regarding the spread of Judaism in India and further asked for the establishment of the Holy Office to check the growing Jewish practices fast spreading in India. As mentioned earlier, the Portuguese came to India in search of both spice and Christians.²²¹ The Holy Office of the Inquisition came into existence in Goa in 1560, with the target of converting Jews who were settled around the coastal areas, to Christianity. In order to escape this religious intolerance Jews fled to Cochin, whose tolerant king provided them protection throughout the period. The liberal attitude of the ruler of Cochin encouraged the Jews to settle there in huge number. It is said that, due to the large population of Jews in Cochin, the ruler was called the 'king of the Jews'.²²²

Against the context of conflicts between the two, denigrating remarks about blessed Sacrament appeared in the church of St.Dominicans in the offertory box and on the Monstrance on which Holy Eucharist was exposed on the feast day of Holy Eucharist.

²²⁰ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", P.16 and P.M.Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala" in *St. Thomas Christians and Nambudiris, Jews and Sangam Literature: A Historical Appraisal*, p. 135.

²²¹ Francis Day, *The Land of The Permauls*, p.74.

²²² David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p. 430.

The suspicion naturally fell upon the new Christians, who were increasingly under the judaizing influence of the Jews of Mattancherry for several years. One by one the new Christians were hunted after and arrested as to find who the actual culprit was. Almost all the new Christians who business establishments in the city of Cochin were imprisoned and an Inquisition court was set up for conducting their trial in 1557.²²³ The Inquisition court consisted of the Dominican bishop of Cochin and representatives from the religious orders of the city. The Inquisition proceedings went into the details of the attempts that the New Christians made to revive Judaism among them. Out of the twenty new Christians of Cochin, a few such as Jacome de Olivares, Manuel, Maria Rodrigues, Luis Rodrigues, Leonor Caldeira, her son Simão Nunes and daughter Clara Caldeira etc, were found to have aberrations in their faith and discarded Christianity. They were taken to Goa and finally to the Inquisition of Lisbon for final trial. The long trial in fact shattered the merchants completely as all their wealth including money was confiscated by the Portuguese. These new Christian merchants were the most active trading group in Cochin during that period of time.²²⁴ More than religion, the matter stemmed out of commercial rivalry between the Portuguese *casado* traders and New Christian merchants and differences in religious practices were identified for easy targeting of this community and their smooth decimation. The economic background of that period suggests that the quest of

²²³ Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "From Setubal to the Sublime Porte: The Wanderings of Jacome de Olivares, New Christian and Merchant of Cochin, 1540-1571", in *Santa Barbara Portuguese Studies* ed. by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Kenneth McPherson, vol.II, California, 1995, pp.97-98.

²²⁴ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.17.

fetching more wealth from the growing economy of Cochin inspired the Portuguese to take actions against the new Christians.²²⁵

The conflicts that developed between the Portuguese and the new Christians in the Portuguese city of Cochin obviously had their impact on the commercial activities of the native Jews in Mattancherry, whose cargo for hinterland trade of Kerala was obtained from the new Christians. While the new Christians were arrested and deported to Portugal one by one for trial in the Lisbon Inquisition, the Jews in Mattancherry were taken into safe custody and protection by the king of Cochin, by making them settle down close to his palace in 1565.²²⁶ The timely intervention of the king of Cochin to take the frightened Jews under his protection led to a long-standing rapport between the two in the years to come. Meanwhile the Portuguese tried to harass the Jews even by burning their synagogues.²²⁷ The local ruler of Mattancherry gave his support not only to these Jewish merchants but also to those who fled from Cranganore to his kingdom during 1565. The ruler not only provided shelter to these Jewish merchants, but also permitted them to reside along the royal palace.²²⁸

The rulers of early modern period needed wealth for asserting their position against the background of European commercial expansion and the Jewish merchants who used to strengthen the rulers with their trade surplus were held in high position by Indian rulers, including the king of Cochin. That was the reason why the ruler of Cochin, despite inviting the wrath of the Portuguese came forward to stand by the

²²⁵Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", P.17 also see Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "From Setubal to the Sublime Porte: The Wanderings of Jacome de Olivares, New Christian and Merchant of Cochin(1540-1571)", in *Santa Barbara Portuguese Studies* ed.by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Kenneth McPherson, p.98.

²²⁶ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.II, New Delhi: AES, 1983, p.519.

²²⁷ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p. 41.

²²⁸ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.II, New Delhi, p.519.

Jews and take them under his protectorate. Against the background of commercial protectorates, the Jews not only enjoyed high administrative positions in the court of Malabar kings, but also remained part of their armies. It is said that, two major rivals of the Malabar Coast, the Zamorin of Calicut and the king of Cochin each had a brigade of Jewish soldiers in their forces. In 1550, the allied Portuguese and Cochin armies fought against the king of Vadakkenkur, who was supported by Zamorin. Both the warring groups had Jewish soldiers. However the Jews in the army of Cochin refused to fight because "they did not offer battle on Saturday."²²⁹ The religious sentiments of the Jews were given respect by the kings and the king avoided fights on the Saturday, the holy day for Jews, who were counted among best warriors.²³⁰ During the days of conflicts with the Portuguese, the Jews were taken into protection by the native rulers, who converted some of them into a part of fighting force.

4.3 Phase of Compromises

The hostile attitude that the Portuguese developed against the new Christians and Jews from 1540s till 1560s could not be pursued any further after 1570s and 1580s because of the compulsions the exigencies that the Portuguese experienced for reasons of financial crisis and shortage of fund for conducting trade in the East. Because of financial troubles, the Portuguese handed over Indo-European trade to the Italian and German mercantile syndicate in 1570s. The Portuguese were compelled to accommodate as many indigenous merchants as possible, including the Jews and the new Christians to ensure flow of revenue for sustaining their colonial edifice. As a

²²⁹ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p. 40.

²³⁰ David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.429.

result new Christians from Lisbon began to take up the Indo-European trade of the Portuguese when the Italians and the Germans winded up their contracts. A new Christian mercantile syndicate led by Pero Rodrigues, Fernao Ximenes, Joao Monteiro, Henrique Dias, Andre Ximenes, Heitor Mendes de Brito, Luis Gomes Furtado and Jorge Rodrigues Solis took up the Indo- European trade of the Portuguese from 1592 till 1598.²³¹ With this change in the commercial policy of the Portuguese, we find a lot of Jews and new Christians flowing to Cochin and Goa as trade agents and partners of these new Christian merchants of Lisbon. Duarte Solis was one among them, who came to Cochin by mid 1580s.²³² As far as the private trade networks were concerned, Castiel family at Cochin began to emerge as an important Jewish mercantile family in the city during the period from 1570-1670. The growing wealth of Castiel family was often linked with their participation in the trading opportunities opened up by the Europeans during this period.²³³

Jan Huyghen van Linschoten observed this change in the Jewish presence in Cochin in 1590s. AS the secretary of the Arch-bishop of Goa for some time, his information is highly valuable to understand the nature of the Jewish community of Cochin. He says that some of them could even converse in Spanish language.²³⁴ The French traveler Francois Pyrard, who visited Malabar during 1601-1611, not only talks about the presence of Jews community but also stated about their richness.²³⁵

²³¹ Pius Malekandathil, *Jews of Kerala*, p.18.

²³² *Ibid.* p.18.

²³³ *Ibid.* p.14.

²³⁴ See *The Voyage of John Huyghen Van Linshoten to the East Indies*, Vol. 1, p. 285.

²³⁵ Francois Pyrard Laval, *The Voyages of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, pp.429-35.

Meanwhile with the flow of many white Jews from Europe, the distinction between the black and white Jews got intensified. The long back settlement of Jewish community on the west coast of India had caused a categorization to evolve that would put the old Jewish traders, who were relatively black by that time, under indigenous merchant groups. The Black Jews were just like the native south Indian people surrounding them.²³⁶ The famous traveler from Portugal, Barbosa has described Jews as the “natives of the country”.²³⁷ Their settlements both on the main port land areas and interior hinterlands enabled them in forming such a network through which they pulled their resources easily. This resource mobilizing ability made them play the role of intermediaries for the European merchants. Among these Europeans, the Portuguese were the first to be assisted by the ‘black’ Jewish community. These Jewish merchants of Cochin provided regular supply of spices to the Portuguese vessels that plied to Lisbon.²³⁸ Along with the emergence of native Jewish merchants in the liberal atmosphere of trade, the *Paradesi Jews* or white Jews also seems to be flourishing during the end of sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. The support of the ruling authorities and liberal commercial atmosphere thrown open by crown in mid 1570s remained a vital key for the Jewish merchants to survive and prosper by this point of time.

The English traveller Alexander Hamilton (1707) has observed his work, “*New Account of the East Indies*”, about the Jews of Cranganore. According to him Cranganore was the Republic of Jews, with the total population of around 30,000

²³⁶ William Crooke, *Things India*, London, p.292.

²³⁷ Duarte Barbosa, A description of the coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the sixteenth century, p.156.

²³⁸ Pius, Malekandathil, “The Jews of Kerala and The Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce”, p.14.

families, which got reduced to 4,000 by that time.²³⁹ Jacob Canter Visscher, the Dutch captain on the Malabar coast (1717-1723) was very much interested in the history of Jews of Cochin and hence devoted an entire chapter for Jews under the title 'On the Jews, Black and White' in his work "Letters from Malabar". Visscher talks about the social division among the Jews of Cochin and also inform us that while Cochin had almost 2000 black Jews, the number of white Jews was very less.²⁴⁰

Pius, Malekandathil has observed that most of the synagogues in Kerala were built and rebuilt during the time of the commercial activities of the Portuguese.²⁴¹ However, the erection of synagogues at this point of time happened on the basis of social division among the Jews. The first Jewish synagogues built at Cochin in 1344, and later in 1489 were for the so-called black Jews before the actual segregation did happen²⁴², while the synagogue erected at Cochin around 1568 was for the White Jews or *Paradesi* Jews white Jews who claim to be most pure and of unmixed blood of mainland Jews.²⁴³

In the midst of these developments the social distinction among the Jewish community got intensified and the divisions evolved almost into three segments:

²³⁹ Walter J. Fischel, "The Exploration of the Jewish Antiquities of Cochin on the Malabar Coast", p.234. for more details see A. Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies, Edinburgh*, 1727, 2 vols., Reprint London, 1744; 2nd ed. by William Foster with introduction and notes, London, 1930, 2 Vols.
²⁴⁰ J. C. Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, printed in Dutch, and translated into English by Major Heber Drury, Madras, 1862, pp.114-17.

²⁴¹ Pius, Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", see foot note number, 62.

²⁴² David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p. 428.

²⁴³ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Asian Educational Services, Madras, 1887, p.334.

White Jews (*Paradesi Jews*),²⁴⁴ Brown Jews and Black Jews, the white Jews had been kept on the higher position on the social ladder in comparison to the rest two.²⁴⁵

The king of Cochin besides promoting the interests of black Jews supported very specially the *Paradesi Jews*, because of the immense wealth that they used to bring. This in turn made him emerge as one of the highest tax collecting king in Malabar region during that period of time. He used to collect around 60,000 to 80,000 *pardaos* per year, through the medium of customs duty. The period also saw close collaboration between *paradesi Jews* and king of Cochin at its peak. The important post like councillor has been bestowed on the *paradesi Jews* by the king of Cochin within his administration. *Paradesi Jews* like David Levi and Samuel Castiel were among the closest personalities to the King of Cochin upon whose advice the king was relying upon during the early decades of seventeenth century.²⁴⁶ As the Portuguese were also operating along the similar trade zone in which both the king of Cochin and the *Paradesi Jews* were flourishing, the equation developing between the king of Cochin and *paradesi Jews* must have bothered the Portuguese merchants of Cochin. Van Cardin, during the mid of seventeenth century has referred to the presence of Jews in the city of Cochin and their conflict with the Portuguese, who also attacked the Jews synagogues on the basis of religious allegations against the Jewish community of Cochin.²⁴⁷

The period of liberalization provided full opportunity to the both new Christians of Portugal²⁴⁸ and the Jews merchants of Cochin to come together and interact within

²⁴⁴ J.B.Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin" p. 234.

²⁴⁵ David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.424.

²⁴⁶ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.19.

²⁴⁷ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p.41.

²⁴⁸ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India*, pp.411-12.

the larger Portuguese commercial set ups, build up networks in Cochin, from which they were able to expand to larger market systems of the Indian Ocean and conduct business through diasporic channels. Due to the liberal attitude of the Portuguese mercantile policy, many new Christian merchants came forward to take part in the spice contract trade of Cochin, which was earlier dominated by and restricted to the crown or German-Italian syndicates. The entry of new Christians within the commercial territory of Portuguese gave a chance to the native Jewish merchants, as well to join hands with them in the spice trade of Cochin. Against this background they accumulated a considerable chunk of wealth which made them emerge as assertive merchant groups in Cochin, where they served in the council of local ruler, participating in the decision taking process of this mercantile ruler.

Part II

4.4 The Dutch and the Changing Contours of Jewish Trade

The Early Phase

The Dutch who expanded initially from South East Asia to the shores of India wanted to find a base on the west coast of India with the help of Jewish merchants. As early as 1618, when the Dutch visited Cochin at the request of the local ruler, developments towards the forging of ties with the Jews of Mattancherry had begun.²⁴⁹ It seems that David Levi, a member of the Jewish family of Levi, with which the Dutch developed a long-standing bond in the entire seventeenth century, was made a *mudaliar* by king of Cochin in 1619 under the influence of the Dutch negotiations of 1618. In the

²⁴⁹ Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.19.

changed situation more and more Jews got political assignments in the court of king of Cochin and in 1620s Samuel Castiel was appointed by native ruler as his principal councillor and interpreter.²⁵⁰

Thus even before the departure of the Portuguese from the west coast of India in general and Malabar in particular , the Jews, particularly the *paradesi* Jews had managed to forge ties with the Dutch and use this linkage for political mileage and get into the decision-taking machineries of king of Cochin. In this process though the king of Cochin maintained a pro-Portuguese stand in a subdued way, the Jews became more assertive and managed to carve out commercial space needed for commodity movements through diasporic channels in a relatively big way.

Van Cardin mentions in 1644 that along with the Gentiles and Moors, Jews also formed an important part of the Cochin's population. He also highlights the conflict among these communities with the Portuguese and the assault against Jews particularly the destruction of their synagogues. The Jews had to suffer various trade related confinements from the Portuguese. Moreover the Portuguese also levied some arbitrary taxes and trade restrictions on the Jews in Malabar. But the constant support of the king of Cochin let them survive even within the hostile situations created by the Portuguese.²⁵¹

The Dutch provided the Jews an opportunity to camp up with them against the Portuguese haughtiness. The situation was also favouring Dutch on the Malabar region, as the internal dissension among the local chieftains made their entry easier. One of the deposed rulers of Cochin asked the Dutch for help in gaining his lost

²⁵⁰ Ibid. p.19.

²⁵¹ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p.41.

power. The Dutch grabbed the opportunity immediately and under the command of Van Goens, the Dutch managed to capture the city of Cochin. Before the Dutch besieged the Portuguese fort in 1663, they had to hold back for a while. But with the help of all possible assistance provided by the Jews, they succeeded. It is believed that the Jewish support to Dutch was a counter reaction against the Portuguese arbitrariness and haughtiness and there was a hope within the Jewish community of Cochin that under Dutch they would enjoy civil and religious freedom.²⁵²

The period from 1663 to 1795, when Dutch extended their rule over coastal enclaves the Jewish merchants got a fair chance to flourish. The port of Cochin became the most prosperous and busy port on the Malabar Coast during that time. The growing commerce of Dutch in Malabar helped the Jews to develop economically and branch out commercially to newer markets. Further the economic prosperity was followed by the religious and cultural freedom of expression. Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva, who led a delegation on behalf of the Amsterdam Portuguese Jewish Community in 1686, gives detailed information about the state of affairs of the Jews of Cochin, to visit whom the delegation reached Cochin on 21st November, 1686. The account is later written under the title "*Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim, Mandadas por Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva*", where he pens down his personal experience of what he saw among the Jews of Cochin. It includes data related to the social, economic and religious life of the Jews residing in Cochin during the seventeenth century.²⁵³ It also highlights the change that began to permeate into the Jewish community with protectorate that the Dutch extended to it on their occupation of Malabar Coast.

²⁵² A. Galletti., et al., *The Dutch in Malabar, Madras*, p.197 and David, G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.432.

²⁵³ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.42-43.

The Dutch sources suggests that the Jews merchants were involved in the import and export of various types of commodities such as, pepper, timber, amber, rice, cotton materials etc, whose movements intersected at some points with the Dutch trajectories of trade. Apart from this, they were also serving as the shipbuilders, gunpowder manufacturers, landowners, coconut planters, real estate agents and jewellers. The immense wealth and respect which they gained during the Dutch rule in Malabar enabled them to have their own personal ships which sailed along the Indian Ocean, particularly to the ports of Bengal and the Persian Gulf.²⁵⁴

Malabar, which served as the major producer of pepper for Europe till the end of sixteenth century,²⁵⁵ had a large number of Jewish merchants conducting business in spices. With the gradual decline of the *Estado da India* in the spice trade of Malabar²⁵⁶ the Dutch managed to create space for commercial operation in spices with Europe articularly taking advantage of the increased pepper production in Kerala with the help of the Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁵⁷

4.5 Emergence of Jews as the Company merchants of VOC

The flexible and liberal attitude of the Dutch led to the rise of Jewish merchants as their collaborators and later company merchants of VOC. These Jewish merchants later on rose to prominence in the commercial scenario of the Indian Ocean. Ezekiel Rahabi (1694-1771), member of the White Jewish community, was one of the most

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p.44.

²⁵⁵ John Bastin, "The Changing Balance of the Southeast Asian Pepper Trade", in M. N. Pearson (ed.), *Spices in the Indian Ocean World*, Variorum, pp.283-316 at 290.

²⁵⁶ A. R. Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire: Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Harvard University Press, Harvard University, 1978. *

²⁵⁷ Pius Malekandathil, "The Mercantile Networks and the International Trade of Cochin 1500-1663", Leiden/Wassenaar.

popular company merchant of the Dutch East India Company. Rahabi played an important role in the politics and commerce of Malabar region during that period. According to Adrian Moens the honest character of Rahabi made him popular with the royal houses of Kerala and he was only to bear the title of Company's merchant. It must also be acknowledged that this Ezechiel was often and in various circumstances of service to the Company²⁵⁸ Rahabi was named after his grandfather Ezekiel Rahabi , who migrated to Cochin, in the year 1646. Again in 1664, Rahabi's father, David Rahabi came to Cochin and settled down. Rahabi family from the very beginning engaged in the trading activities and also acquired good position in the both Dutch East India Company and the kingdom of Cochin. The intimacy with the company and the king brought to the Rahabi family huge wealth. David Rahabi was said to have been the wealthiest merchant of Cochin by that time with more than 20,000 *pezos*. Following the footsteps of his father, Ezekiel Rahabi also entered into the service of Dutch East India Company and at the same time maintained closeness to the king of Cochin as well.²⁵⁹

Ezekiel Rahabi played a decisive role in the commercial expansion of the Dutch East India Company on the Malabar Coast. Rahabi by providing both economic and diplomatic assistance to the Dutch made their way easy towards the markets of the Malabar region. In order to initiate the economic endeavour, knowledge of political scenario of Malabar was very important. The diverse nature of the polity of Malabar made it mandatory for the Dutch to take help of some people who were already aware of the situation. Rahabi did the task for them, as he had a reputed position in the eyes of the ruling class. One of the major reasons of Dutch temptation for Malabar was its

²⁵⁸ A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras, 1912, pp.222-23.

²⁵⁹ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p.46.

importance as the highest pepper producing region in the Indian Ocean. Territorial disintegration and conflict among the local rulers of Malabar region made the situation difficult for the Dutch to cooperate with them. For the negotiation with the rulers of Cochin, Calicut, Travancore, Kolathiri, who ruled over the major pepper producing areas of Malabar, the Dutch needed mediators with the familiarity of local language and polity. Rahabi was entrusted with the task of negotiation with the rulers of the above mentioned parts of Malabar, for spice trade. He also owned a house at Mattanchery next to the palace of the ruler of Cochin. Moreover his residence at Mattanchery was often used as the meeting place for merchants and kings, which clearly indicates his importance during the period.²⁶⁰

The extraordinary role played by Rahabi has been often mentioned in the Dutch sources. Rahabi also used to look after the affairs of company, for instance in the absence of Dutch Commander G. Weyerman; he was among the five members who were appointed to handle the functions of the Dutch company at Cochin. Joseph Wolff, who visited Cochin in 1835, has stated that Ezechiel Rahabi held the office of Ambassador, under the kings of Cochin.²⁶¹ Further he praises him as the great merchant of the eighteenth century who did not hesitate to buy the whole cargoes of food products.²⁶² Thus Rahabi performed both commercial and diplomatic activities efficiently. Among all this his individual personality as merchant never vanished.

Issac Surgun was another wealthy and influential Jewish merchant, who set up business in Calicut during the eighteenth century. Issac like Rahabi had been in good relationship with the local rulers. Rahabi and Issac, became so prosperous that both

²⁶⁰ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.46-48.

²⁶¹ Ibid. p.50.

²⁶² Ibid. pp.49-50.

the local rulers and Dutch Company had to often depend on them. The sources confer that the Dutch company (VOC) borrowed a total sum of 90, 000 from Ezechiel Rahabi during the period of financial troubles. Issac Surgun did pay the amount of 40,000 to Tipu Sultan in 1788.²⁶³ Thus by taking advantages of the trade atmosphere, created by the Dutch East India Company, the Jews merchants rose to prominence. Elias, Moses and David, sons of Ezechiel Rahab, famous white Jewish merchants of the seventeenth century, were also counted among these successful merchants of Cochin.²⁶⁴

These developments and the prosperity of city of Cochin under Dutch must have benefited the Cochin Jews in general. Along with the commercial benefits, Jews were enjoying cultural and religious freedom as well, which was lacking under the domination of the Portuguese.²⁶⁵ Moreover with the arrival of the Dutch in the commercial scenario, the merchants operating in the trading zone of Malabar including the Jews got greater opportunities to augment their wealth by participatory trade,²⁶⁶ which made Cochin to still remain as the centre of commercial activities on coastal western India.²⁶⁷

Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch provided the freedom of religion to the Jews which made it easy to capture the minds of the already harassed Jews community on the religious grounds. The liberal attitude of the Dutch attracted the Jewish merchants. At the same time the Dutch also realized the importance of cultural brokerage in Malabar

²⁶³ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, Cambridge, 1967, pp.106-7.

²⁶⁴ Walter Fischel, "From Cochin to New York: Samuel Abraham, the Jewish Merchant of the Eighteenth Century"; Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.118.

²⁶⁵ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.39-42.

²⁶⁶ Binu John, Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea: The Ali Rajas of Cannanore and the Political Economy of Malabar 1663-1723*, Leiden, p.92.

²⁶⁷ for more details see, Hugo s' Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin, 1663-1720: Chiefs and the Dutch East India Company*, New Delhi, 2000.

region. The unfamiliarity with the local language, polity and commerce forced them to hire intermediaries, on which company was depended to deal with the local masses.²⁶⁸ Moreover the infant Dutch mercantile company in Malabar brought them closer to the well settled Jews merchant community of that region who were generally counted among the native people of Malabar. Like the initial growth of Portuguese in Malabar was supplemented by the Jews, the Dutch also got the support of the Jews merchants. The knowledge of the native principles related to trade and commerce, again allowed them to work as the commercial intermediaries. Moreover the closeness to the royal authority of Malabar especially the ruler of Cochin made them preferable candidate for the mediatorship for the Dutch.²⁶⁹

The seventeenth century was the beginning of a new era for the both the Dutch and the Jewish merchants of Malabar who joined hands with the former in the background of mutual commercial benefits. The period was followed by the emergence few powerful Jewish personalities, as merchants at the service of the Dutch East India Company in India during its 130 year long supremacy.²⁷⁰

Perron du Anquetil, who visited Cochin between the period of 1757-1759, saw a very flourishing Jewish community in the city, whose prosperity he links with the Dutch. He refers to the Jewish town of Mattanchery, few miles south of the erstwhile Portuguese city of Cochin. Moreover he also met Elikh (Elias Rahabi), son of the

²⁶⁸ Binu John, Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea: The Ali Rajas of Cannanore and the Political Economy*, p.100.

²⁶⁹ G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.433.

²⁷⁰ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.43-44.

famous white Jewish merchant Ezekiel Rahabi, who worked as the agent of the Dutch East India Company.²⁷¹

4.6 Dwindling Fortunes

The period after 1750s witnessed a phase of dwindling in the trade of the Jews. The main reason was that the flourishing pepper trade of Dutch East India Company at Malabar felt a severe jerk when Marthanda Varma, king of Travancore, annexed most of the spice producing enclaves like Quilon, Kayamkulam Thekkenkur, Vadakkumkur, Porcad to his kingdom between the period of 1742-1752. This new political development interrupted the flow of spices and other goods from these regions to the port of Cochin, which in turn affected the Dutch commerce and the trade of their allies including the Jews²⁷² Moreover the problems of Dutch East India Company increased more when the pepper trade was totally monopolized by the state of Travancore around 1743.²⁷³

The check and control over the spice trade by the state of Travancore demoralized the commercial activities of both Dutch East India Company and the Jewish merchants involved in it, along the Cochin region. Moreover the dry behavior of the Rajah was another disheartening factor for the Dutch merchants. This new development was followed by the shifting of the centre of power by Saktan Thampuram from Cochin to Trichur, 80 kilometres away from the main land of Cochin. This new political development posed an adverse impact upon the Dutch and the Jewish trade whereas

²⁷¹ Walter J. Fischel, "Exploration of the Jewish Antiquities of Cochin", p.236.

²⁷² V.Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol.I, Trivandrum, 1906, p.343-51; Shangoonny Menon, *History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*, New Delhi, 1878, pp.135-55 A Sreedhara Menon(ed.), *District Gazetteer of Trivandrum*, Trivandrum, 1962, p.11

²⁷³ Aswathi Thirunal, *Thulasigarland*, Trivandrum, 1998, p.93.

the St. Thomas Christians were ready to take advantage of this, by settling themselves in these developing hinterland areas. Koratty, Kunnamkulam, Chalakudy and Irinjalakuda were the major hinterlands where the St. Thomas Christians got settled and new markets established on the encouragement of Saktan Thampuran. This was an indication towards the coming of a new rival group, English, in the scene of Malabar commerce, who eventually networked with these trading centres for commodity procurement with the help of Saktan Thampuran²⁷⁴

These new developments led to the decline of commerce of the Dutch and their allies including the Jews in the Malabar region and Cochin, which was the major place of Jewish commercial activities, was hit hard in these developments. The downfall of the Dutch also affected the Jewish merchant community in a big way, whose prosperity in fact depended upon their participation in the Dutch trade with Malabar. The situation became worst, when the famous Rahabi family, the white Jewish merchants of Cochin, also started declining. Unlike the Ezechiel Rahabi, his sons, David, Elias and Moses could not perform well in the field of commerce. By the end of the eighteenth century, Rahabi family of Cochin went bankrupt²⁷⁵

The decline of Dutch East India Company at Cochin and Malabar was followed by the establishment of English trade in the region. The commercial journey of the English, which got started from the Surat, after passing Bengal and Bombay, reached the southern shores of India. English emerged as the victor by replacing their trading rivals the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French consecutively. Finally after a

²⁷⁴ C. Achyuta Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, Trivandrum, 1996, pp.174-78.

²⁷⁵ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, pp.107, 127.

prolonged struggle Cochin fell into the control of English in 1814.²⁷⁶ Though the Jews tried to make advantage of the changed situation, they could not come up to the level of economic and commercial prosperity that they used to have in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The foregoing discussion shows the way how the Jews of west coast of India got adapted to the changing situations of the region posed by the challenges of the commercial expansion of the Europeans. The Jews were inevitable for the Portuguese to procure cargo from the hinterland and get linked with the coastal markets in the early phase of their trading activities, because of their familiarity in local language and trade practices. However this phase of collaboration was followed by a phase of conflicts when the new Christian migrants from Portugal under the influence of the Jews of Mattancherry got judaized and reverted to Judaic practices. The commercial rivalry between the new Christian migrants and the *casado* traders accelerated the intensity of the conflicts leading to the erasure of new Christians from Cochin at least temporarily. However the inability of the crown to conduct Indo-European trade with royal capital became evident, the king of Portuguese allowed the new Christians of Portugal to come forward for conducting this trade, which in turn revived Jewish commercial activities in Cochin. The protectorate that the Jews of Mattancherry enjoyed under the local ruler emboldened the Jews commercially for developing their own channels of trade, which the local ruler also used for commodity movements and profit accumulation.

²⁷⁶ C. A. Lawson, *British and Native Cochin*, Asian Educational Services, London, 1861, p.p.14-16

The emboldened Jews and the local ruler also developed a network of commerce, followed by a political rapport between them, which was cemented by the arrival of Dutch embassies to the court of king of Cochin. The *paradesi* Jews made these opportunities for asserting their position not only in the commercial domain but also in domains of power by being councilors of the ruler. Ezechiel Rahabi and many other *paradesi* Jews emerged as the company merchants of VOC. The shelter by the Dutch, the king of Cochin and local chieftains of Malabar worked as a shield for them during the periods of adversities. The support of the ruling authority not only provided them economic prosperity but also enhanced their social status. Further closeness with the rulers of Malabar made them the preferable candidates for the European companies for the task of mediators with the local groups.

In the midst of these developments the Jews were defining and re-defining their roles as merchants in the Indian Ocean, and were evolving out of petty traders to “a bourgeoisie group” that sustained the edifice of Dutch commercial capitalism on the west coast of India. However the Jews who operated as company merchants of VOC could not continue for long as bourgeoisie groups, because of the political restructuring that Travancore did under Marthanda Varma, who brought most of the spice producing hinterland of Cochin as part of Travancore by his northward expansion from 1742 till 1752 and the consequent re-routing of cargo from these places to the port of Alleppey established by the Travancoreans in 1763. The shifting of royal power from Cochin to Trichur by Saktan Thampuran and the creation of new markets around the new power centre with a maritime outlet in the vicinity connected with the English trade further drained the flow of cargo to Cochin, which further

adversely affected the commercial fortunes of the Jews in Cochin, out of which they did not completely recover in the succeeding century.

Chapter V

Conclusion

The above discussion shows the nature of transformation that the mercantile group of the Jews underwent over years thanks to their participation in the commercial activities carried out from different fronts, starting from the 'bridging commerce' of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean in the first part of medieval period to the early colonial trade of the Portuguese and the Dutch during the period between the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Their participation in the variegated forms of trade necessitated a continuous process of definition and re-definition to their commercial identity and mode of operations, which in turn caused different layers of Jewish responses to evolve for the commercial and religious challenges they faced. It has been an interesting job to trace the trails of the process of this evolution

1. The Jewish maritime commerce which ran between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean had the Fatimid Egypt as their junctional point. The close rapport that the Jews developed with the Fatimids during the age of Crusades enabled the former to conduct trade even during the troubled days of Crusades in the Mediterranean. Later their expansion into the Indian Ocean from Fustat was also supported by the Fatimids, which helped them to get connected with the west coast of India.
2. While the Jews formed a wide network throughout the whole space of the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean, the individual nature of the Jews as a trading

community provided them an edge over other communities residing anywhere on the globe. Again their religion often put them into trouble and let them suffer from the orthodox segments of other belief systems. However, they managed to overcome the troubles by making themselves acceptable to the local rulers and for reasons of their trade skills. The acceptance of Jewish community by the local rulers was for reasons of the economic benefits which the concerned rulers used to get from the Jews. The foregoing discussion shows the mechanism resorted to by the Jewish community for commodity movements between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean against the backdrop of the political support they enjoyed in various terrains of commerce. The mechanism and approaches applied by the Jewish merchants within the Mediterranean regions was carried forward to their commercial engagement in the Indian Ocean as well. The tolerant attitude that the Fatimids maintained towards non-Muslims helped the Jews to make maximum advantage of the situation and expand to the shores of western India.²⁷⁷ The non-insistence of the Fatimids on the observance of the decrees of discrimination, such as the wearing of a distinctive sign on the garments, their permission to construct repair of non-Muslim houses of prayer, and accord of financial support to the academies in Palestine etc., made the Jews focus their commercial activities around Fustat while bridging the economies of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean through their trading networks.²⁷⁸

3. Egypt did not provide liberal atmosphere to the Jews before eleventh century; however after 1000 AD the attitude changed considerably, which was

²⁷⁷ S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, Vol. 1, p. 29.

²⁷⁸ Jacob, Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, vol. 1, pp. 34-36.

determined mainly by the increasing volume of maritime trade surplus that the Jews brought to the coffers of the Fatimid state. The Jews who resided in Egypt during eleventh century made use of this commercial opportunity to expand trade to the Indian Ocean. During the tolerant rule of Az-Zahir, some Jews even rose to prominent positions in Cairo.²⁷⁹ Moreover Jews as a literate community kept their position higher in the eyes of rulers. They were preferred over the other people, as education made them suitable candidate for handling all the matters related to trade.²⁸⁰ Even the Jews were allowed to have a separate Jewry within the various Mediterranean countries.²⁸¹ They also had a head of community, named *Nazid*, in the Fatimid Empire who was responsible for maintaining order among the community members.²⁸² This tempo of co-operation between the state and the Jewish merchants was later carried to the Indian Ocean regions for the purpose of survival and conducting business when faced with oddities. In Kerala Joseph Rabban, the head of the Jewish community of Muyirikode maintained the same type of relationship with the Chera ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varma and offered money, men and vessels to him when the Chera kingdom was attacked by the rival south Indian ruler.

4. The Jewish merchants, who reached Kerala during the early medieval period used get themselves organized into guilds, particularly *Anjuvannam*, as is referred to in the *copper plates* of Tharisappally (849 AD)²⁸³. It seems that

²⁷⁹ Jacob, Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, vol. 1, pp. 76-79.

²⁸⁰ Maristella Botticini & Zvi Ecksteinp, "From Farmers to Merchants, Conversions and Diaspora" p.909.

²⁸¹ Ibid, p.919

²⁸² S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, p. 69, 84.

²⁸³ T. A Gopinatha Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vol.II, pp.66-75.

there eventually evolved a commercial rapport between the local Jews operating through the merchant guild of *Anjuvannam* and the Egyptian Jews coming to coastal western India for commodity movement to the Mediterranean. This commercial rapport eventually seems to have linked the old Jews of coastal western India with the Jewish authorities in Cairo and helped the former to maintain the religious traditions that evolved in Cairo.

5. Though the Genizza documents suggest that permanent settlement of Jews from Egypt happened much later than tenth century, the indigenous sources like the Tharisappally copper plate of 849 and the Bhaskara Ravi Varma copper plate of 1000 AD attest to their presence in Kerala even before the permanent settlement of Jews from Cairo. The letters of Genizza merchants involved in the Indian trade often show their desire to get back to their place of origin after the accomplishment of commercial affairs. This shows that Cairo Genizza gives only a partial picture of Jewish history in India and that for getting a comprehensive picture, the local sources are to be analyzed against the information from Genizza documents, which further shows that there was a layer of Jewish traders in Kerala prior to the entry of the Mediterranean Jews from Fatimid Egypt and that the new development helped the old Jews of Kerala to get connected with the wider network of Jewish Diaspora existing then in the Mediterranean.
6. Even though the Jewish merchants were in contact with the other Indian or Muslim merchant groups, the trading partnerships were forged mainly among the members of the same religion. The commonality of religion brought them together giving them the trust needed for an enterprise that stretches into

protracted range of space and time, where risks of different nature were involved. The communal integrity was strengthened by keeping themselves attached to their nodal centre situated in Egypt,²⁸⁴ from where most of the Jews came down to Malabar. . Being a minority group the Jews developed commercial partnerships as a mechanism to survive and get into wider market systems with less investment and risk. Partnerships made commercial transactions smoother and reduced the risk-level of the small Jewish traders, who used to invest their life-long saving for every venture. The homogeneity of religion and culture made the Jews enter into commercial partnerships operating along the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean channels. The Genizsa sources related to Indian Ocean trade often talks about partnerships among the Jewish merchants involved in the trade of India. Along with the partnerships, the Jews also used to operate on an individual basis with the intention of making more profit. However, in the midst of partnerships too, the Jewish merchants made it a point to get connected with their base in Cairo, as is evidenced by the reference in the Genizsa papers to the frequent exchange of letters between higher authorities in Egypt and the Jews residing in Malabar.²⁸⁵

7. On the west coast of India, Madai, Pantalayani Kollam, Palayur, Pulloot, Cranganore (Shingly), Mala, Chennamangalam, Parur, Cochin and Quilon(Kurakkeni Kollam) were the major centres of Jewish settlement.²⁸⁶ Among all these, Cochin had the largest number of Jewish population, due to its strategic position as a maritime port city. The place also had a prosperous

²⁸⁴ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History" p.40.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 40.

²⁸⁶ Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', p.7.

Jewish town near the palace of the king of Cochin, who took them under his protectorate, when challenged and persecuted by the Portuguese in the mid-sixteenth century²⁸⁷ Most of the secondary Jewish settlements were located on the banks of river Chalakudy and river Periyar or along some water systems, through which commodities were taken from the hinterland to the sea ports.²⁸⁸

8. The Jews who expanded along the coastal western India and conducted business over there developed a network of trade connecting India with Aden and then with Egypt and finally with the Mediterranean. Commodities that were in high demand then in India like copper, paper etc were imported to India through the Jewish channels, while pepper was taken on a big scale to the Mediterranean by them. Some of them even started new types of crafts-work in India, like Abraham ben Yiju, who set up a bronze factory in Mangalore and imported copper from the Mediterranean for the said purpose. Through them the tradition of bronze manufacturing and paper making got disseminated among the locals and we find many professional groups like bronze-smiths, copper-smiths and manufacturers of copper and bronze utensils emerging from among the locals in most of the leading trade centres of Malabar.

9. Though the word Diaspora would be little heavier for the Jewish settlements on the west coast of India, a glimpse of it attests to it in a big way cannot be denied. The physicality of the city of Cochin with large number of Jewish population during the medieval period, speaks of the story of Jewish Diasporic settlement over there. According to the census of 1857 there were 1790 Jews

²⁸⁷ Fransis Dey, *Land of Permaouls*, pp. 336-38.

²⁸⁸ Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', p.12.

in the whole kingdom of Cochin. Moreover the presence of the physical structures like tomb stones and synagogues better reflect the story of Jewish Diaspora. There had been three to four Synagogues in the city of Cochin, one was built in 1344 and another in 1489.²⁸⁹ May be the Jewish settlements could not fill the typical criteria of Diaspora; it was a diasporic settlement with its own unique features. The native Jews were well versed in both local language Malayalam and Jewish language Hebrew.²⁹⁰ Moreover the social division among the Jewish community on the basis of colour was the biggest social change experienced by this community in the Indian sub continent.

10. The Jewish community along the west coast of India underwent a radical transformation with the arrival of the Portuguese and the responses that the Jews gave to the Portuguese. The Portuguese were the first to reach on the western coast of India from Europe in the sixteenth century. In the initial stage, the Portuguese got a lot of support from the Jewish merchant community for procuring cargo from the hinterland and for selling the goods that the Portuguese brought from Europe. Because of their knowledge in native language and trading practices, the Europeans were compelled to bank upon them and use them as mediators and negotiators for their trade. Their knowledge of local language was the biggest asset that made them emerge as

²⁸⁹ David G. Maldebaum, "The Jewish way of life in Cochin", p.428.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p.424.

interpreters and mediators.²⁹¹ Some of the foreign Jewish merchants like the ones from the Castiel family rose to prominence not only in matters related to trade alone but also in the political matters of the kingdom of Cochin during the periods between 1570 to 1670, thanks to their participation in the private trade of the Portuguese.²⁹²

11. From 1530s onwards there was a flow of Iberian Jews and new Christians to Cochin because of the fear of establishment of Inquisition in Lisbon. Simultaneously the oppression of the Portuguese forced the Jews to migrate to Mattancherry, the native part of the city of Cochin, whose king was liberal and tolerant.²⁹³ The forcefully converted Jews in Portugal, popularly known as New Christians and who fled to the Portuguese city of Cochin from 1530s, started collaborating with the Jews of Mattancherry and formed an intricate network of trade. While the Jews merchants of Mattancherry facilitated the New Christian merchants in many ways by using their links of the native place and west Asia,²⁹⁴ the new Christians must have helped the native Jews by using their links back in Portugal for commodity movements.

12. A large number of new Christians from Portugal on reaching Cochin started entering the trading activities emanating from the city and often with the help of Jews living in Mattancherry, from where they conducted trade jointly, against which background these new Christians eventually started reviving

²⁹¹ Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', pp.13-14.

²⁹² Ibid. p.14.

²⁹³ David Mandelbaum, 'The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin', p.430.

²⁹⁴ Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', pp.15-16.

their Judaic practices and customs including the celebration of Purim fest. The *casado* traders of Cochin who found commercial competitors in the new Christians started accusing the latter of deviation from Christian faith and of reverting to Judaism. The step taken by the Portuguese in the name of religion in reality appeared to have been instigated by the commercial rivalry that existed between the Portuguese *casado* traders and the new Christian merchants.

13. This was a period of intense conflict between the Portuguese and the Semitic segments of Cochin, including the Jews and the new Christians, who were identified as enemies of faith. Accusing them of reverting to Judaic practices, the Portuguese got the new Christians arrested and tried in the court of Inquisition of Cochin, Goa and Lisbon, where most of them finally ended up their lives. When the new Christians were targeted by the Portuguese, the king of Cochin took the Jews of Mattancherry under his protectorate and made them stay close to his palace. Thus the phase of conflict between the Portuguese and the Semitic segments of Cochin brought the Jews closer to king of Cochin, in whom they found a political 'Messiah' in the age of oddities and troubles. This eventually helped to evolve a political and commercial rapport between the two, with the king of Cochin encouraging later the Jews to take his cargo to the ports of Persian Gulf for trade and in return for it the king of Cochin absorbed the leading Jews eventually as his ministers and councilors. Thus the phase of conflict with the Portuguese helped to re-define the political and commercial character of the Jews of Mattancherry from mid-sixteenth century onwards. Meanwhile the Jews who were living then at native Cochin (Mattancherry) made full use of the

commercial opportunities opened up by the Portuguese in the newly developed city of Santa Cruz, situated near Mattancherry.²⁹⁵ These opportunities were used by the Jews merchants to strengthen their trade network stretching along the Euro-Asian water spaces.

14. The Jewish trading network stretching from Mediterranean to Malabar on a larger scale and within the hinterland areas of Malabar on a smaller scale made them evolve as a mercantile community that any trading group with long-term plans and long-distance connections would love to accommodate. There were some views that there could have been a possibility of matrimonial engagements between the Portuguese and the Jews in order to enhance the commerce along the Malabar region and that the Portuguese officials encouraged the inter religious marriages in the changed situation.²⁹⁶ As the preference was given to the white skins, the white Jewish women would have been approached by the Portuguese. However the absence of any proper documentation regarding this hypothesis leaves us only with such assumptions.

15. With the increasing patronage that the king of Cochin extended to the foreign Jews against the background of their conflicts with the Portuguese, the social division between the white Jews and the black Jews got intensified. The economic benefits that the *paradesi* Jews accrued by way of their participation in the trade of Cochin from 1600 onwards gave them upper hand in the social

²⁹⁵ Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', p.16

²⁹⁶ Adriaan Moens in A. Galletti, A. J. Van der Burg and P. Groot, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Selections from the records of the Madras Government: Dutch records, No. 13, 1911, p.16.

conflicts existing between the white (foreign) and black (native) Jews.²⁹⁷ Though they belonged to the same religious background, the *Paradesi* Jewish merchants pulled resources from the Mediterranean; on the other hand the Jews of Malabar had only limited resources with them. Though earlier pepper trade of Malabar depended very much upon the collaboration between the *Paradesi* and native Jews merchants, in which situation the Jews of Malabar procured cargo from the hinterland of Malabar for the trade of the *Paradesi* or white Jews merchants, now in the changed situation the White Jews managed to mobilize their own resources with the patronage of king of Cochin for conducting their own long-distance trade, in which the king of Cochin was also a mercantile partner.²⁹⁸

16. These developments made the local rulers give preference to the *Paradesi* Jews over the native Jews. The king of Cochin even bestowed some important administrative posts like councillorship or *mudaliars* to these *Paradesi* Jews from the Levi and Castiel families²⁹⁹ consequently the relative domination of White Jews over 'black Jews' eventually emerged as social phenomenon of the Jewish enclave of Cochin.

17. The *Paradesi* Jews were instrumental in facilitating negotiations between the king of Cochin and the Dutch in 1618 even for ousting the Portuguese and the handing over Cochin's trade to the Dutch. Following these negotiations the king of Cochin appointed the Dutch-friendly *paradesi* Jews from the Levi and Castiel families as his councillors, showing a pro-Dutch policy evolving

²⁹⁷ For more details on social division among Jews see, J. B. Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin"

²⁹⁸ Pius, Malekandathil. "The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese (1498-1663)," pp. 240-41.

²⁹⁹ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.19.

among the Jews of Cochin and the local ruler even before the ousting of the Portuguese by the Dutch in 1663.

18. The divisions of white, black and brown Jews seem to be inspired by the rigid caste system of Indian social structure. Moreover the 'native' Jews who were treated as inferiors in the social strata of Jewish community by the white Jews (unmixed race) were very much like the native population of Malabar. A good many of the 'native' Jews seems to have been converted native people, who because of their likeness with the local population considered as the local Malabarian by the foreigners or visitors.

19. The Jews in general and the *paradesi* Jews in particular benefited immensely out of their participation in the commerce of the Dutch East India Company.³⁰⁰ The Jews helped the Dutch far more than the Portuguese as the former gave them religious freedom, which they loved enjoying. The expertise of the Jews in local trade and native language made them dear to the Dutch for everything related to their commerce. Moreover the intimate relation of the Jews with the rulers was another additional factor. The Jews became a bridge between the rulers and the Dutch. The Jewish diplomatic skills and closeness to rulers were successfully utilized by the Dutch for getting into the trading world of Malabar.³⁰¹ All these in return brought the Jews prosperity in an unprecedented way.

³⁰⁰ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p.44.

³⁰¹ G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.433.

20. Many *paradesi* Jews like Ezechiel Rahabi (1694-1771) evolved as leading Company merchants³⁰², who also held the office of Ambassador under the king of Cochin.³⁰³ Ezechiel Rahabi's father also served the Dutch East India Company and maintained good relationship with the king of Cochin as well. The Rahabis were among the most prosperous families at that time.³⁰⁴ But their success should be attributed to their ability in balancing between the local rulers of Malabar and the Company. Issac Surgun³⁰⁵ was another famous and influential Jews merchant from Calicut who emerged as a significant merchant of the company by being acceptable to the VOC officials and local power houses.

21. The economic rapport that the *paradesi* developed with the Dutch enabled them to fetch religious freedom that they craved for. The Semitic-friendly Dutch allowed the freedom of worship to the Jews that they were deprived of during the days of the Portuguese. Against this background, we find the expansion of Jewish trade networks into the hinterland of Malabar for procuring cargo needed for the trade of the *paradesi* Jews and the Dutch.

22. The fate of the Jews in Kerala changed with the commercial reorientation started with the Travancorean conquest of the hinterland of Cochin like Thekkenkur, Vadakkenkur, Porcad, Angamaly, Parur etc., and its eventual conversion into the hinterland for the newly emerging Travancorean port of

³⁰² Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, pp.222-23.

³⁰³ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.49-50.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. p.46.

³⁰⁵ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, pp.106-7.

Alleppey. Spices that used to flow to Cochin got diverted to Alleppey, causing severe blow to the trade of the Jews of Cochin. Meanwhile the policy of the state of Travancore to monopolize the spice trade was another severe blow for both Jewish and Dutch.³⁰⁶ The white Jewish merchant family, Rahabi, which became prosperous during the good days of Dutch East India Company, got fallen to poverty following these developments in the end of the eighteenth century.³⁰⁷ The shifting of capital of Cochin's royal power from Cochin to Trichur during the time of Saktan Thampuran and the consequent founding of satellite markets around it for stimulating trade around Trichur , which finally merged with the commerce of the English again drained the resources of Cochin , causing severe damage to the trade of the Jews of Cochin.

In general the Jews went on adapting themselves to the changing contours of commercial scenario of Malabar and survived to do their business against all oddities. They went on defining their roles and affiliations in the chnaging situations often on the basis of exigencies and at times on the basis of survival instincts , and frequently on their ability to give responses to the challenges posed before them, which gave a distinct character and identity to the Jewish enclaves of coastal western India.

³⁰⁶ Aswathi Thirunal, *Thulasigarland*, Trivandrum, p.93.

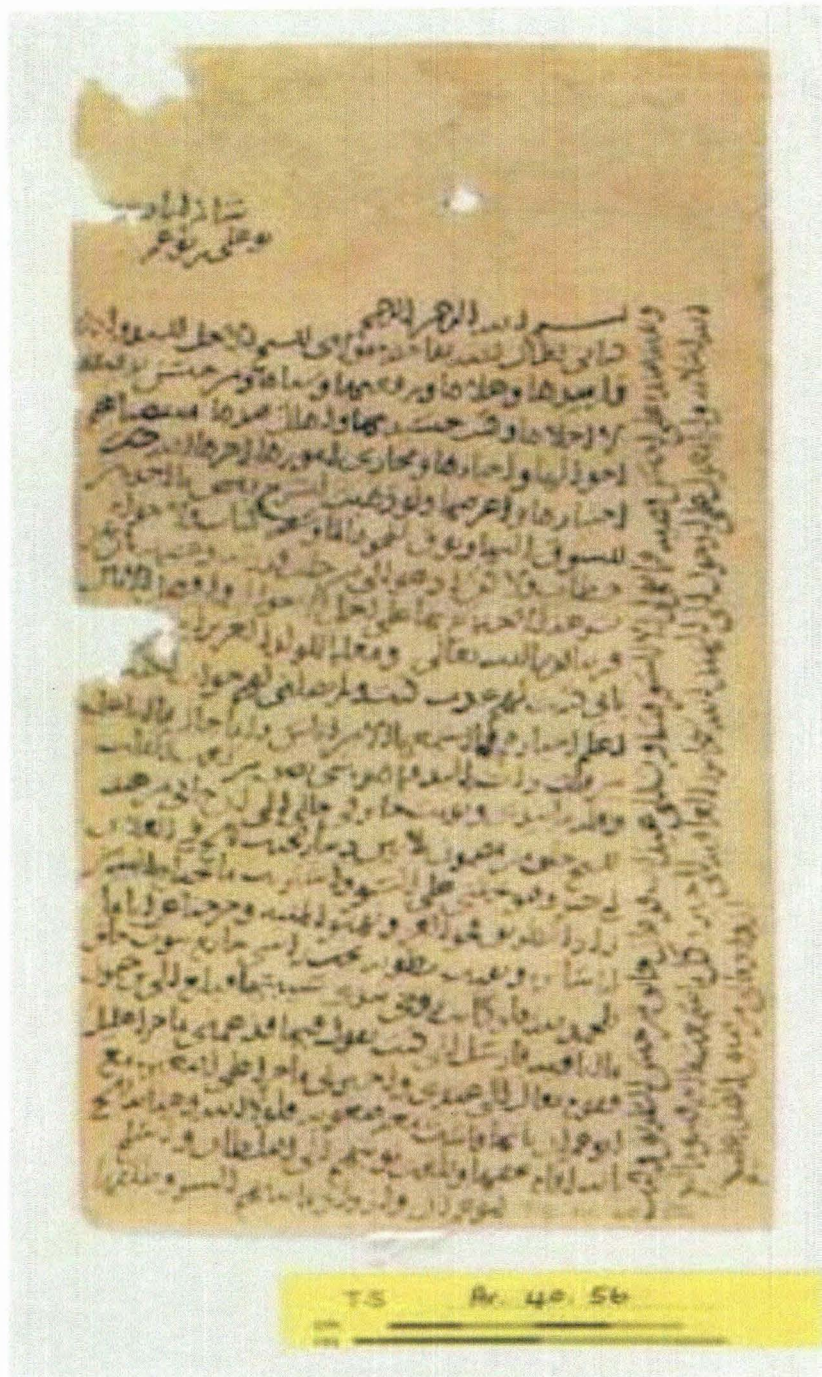
³⁰⁷ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, pp.107,127.



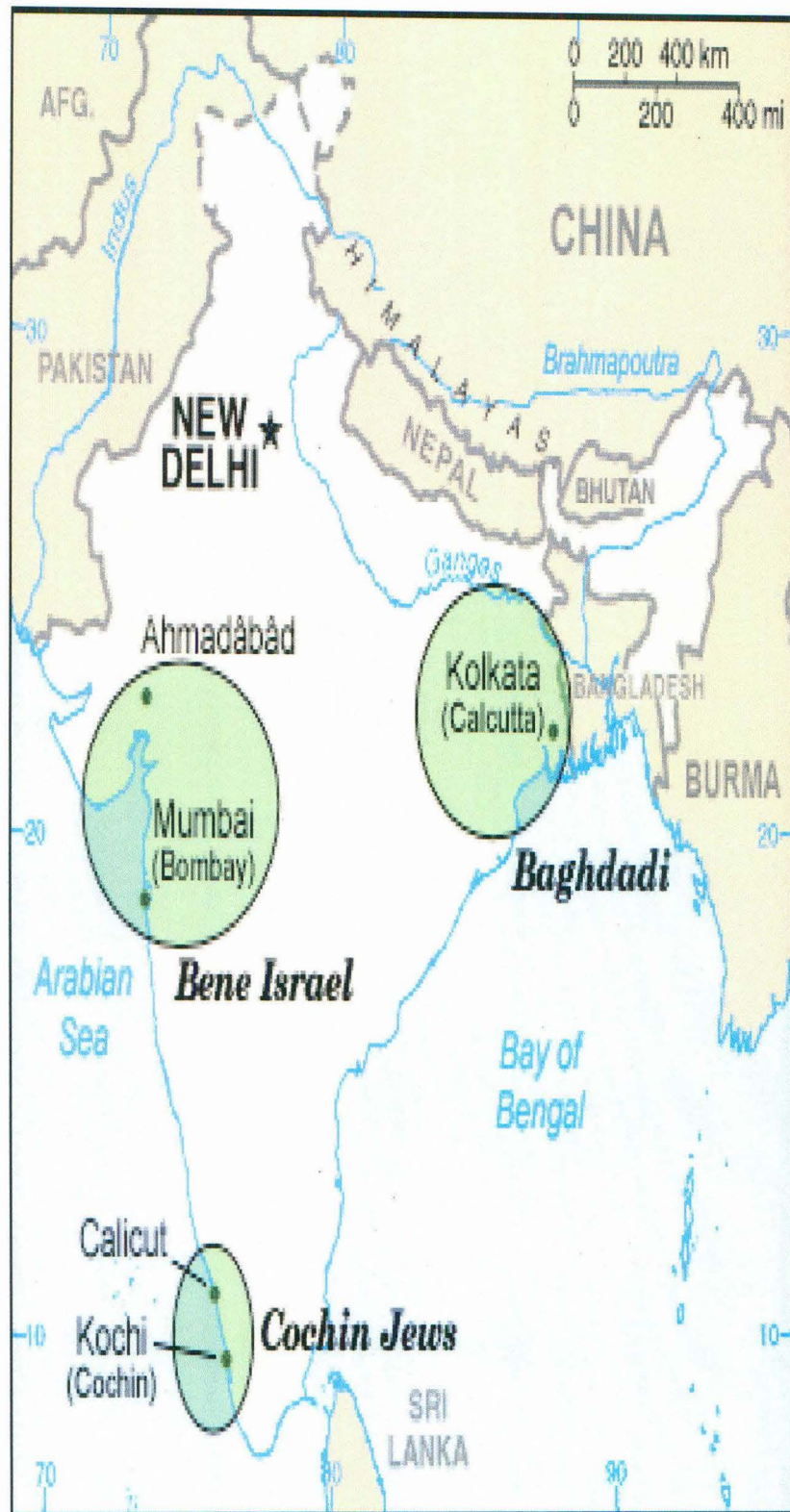
1. Abū Zayd about to Board an Indian Ocean Ship. 13th Century al-Hariri MS. St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences MS S23. With permission of the Institute.



5. I. 14. TS 28.22. Letter from Joseph Lebdi to Hasan b. Bundar.



10. II. 64, TS Arabic 40, f. 56. Letter from Abū 'Alī b. Bū 'Umar to his Family before Travel to India.

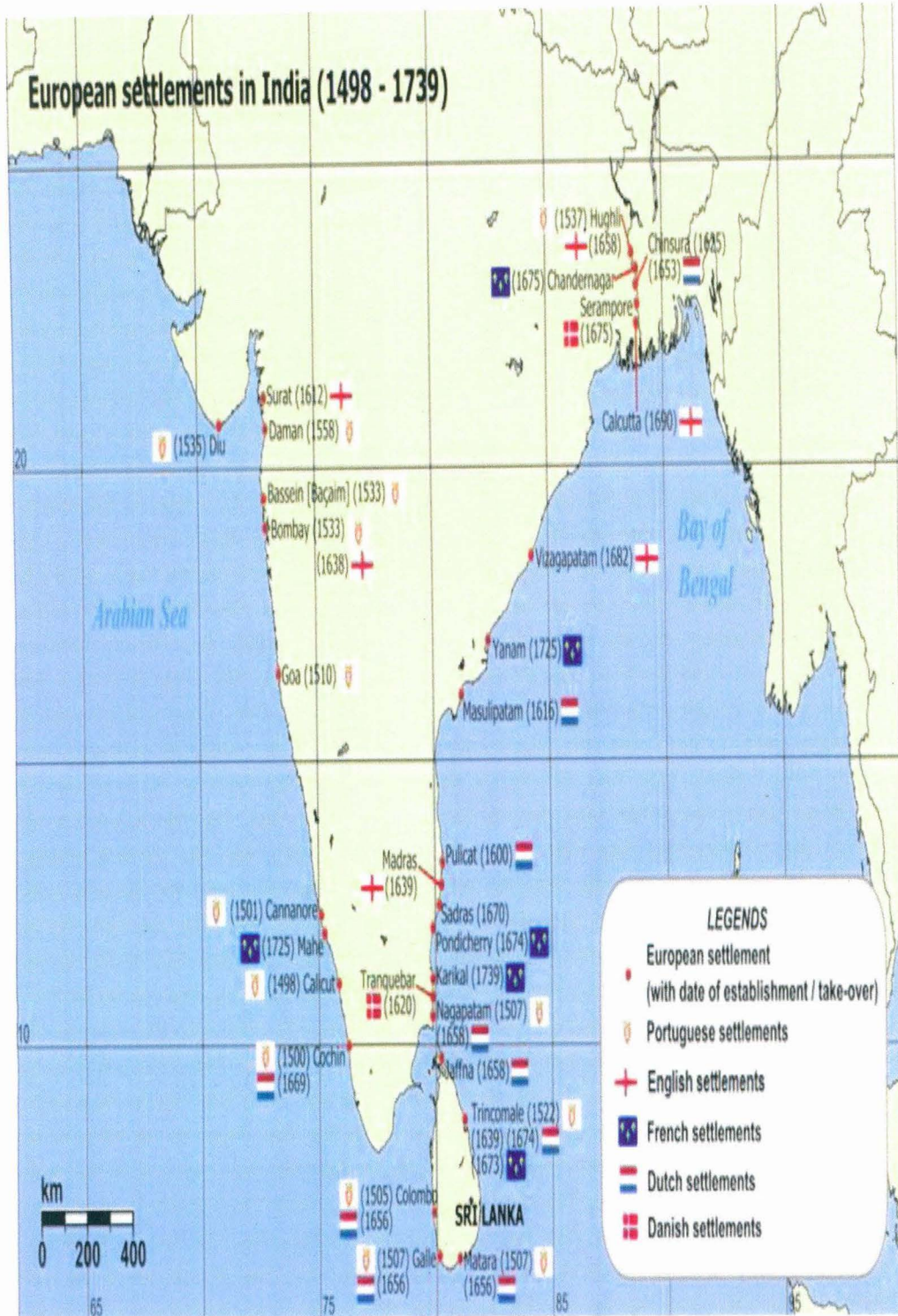






Mediterranean trade routes. (Map prepared by the Cartography Laboratory, Department of Geography, University of Minnesota. Adapted from Frederic C. Lane, *Venice, A Maritime Republic*.)

European settlements in India (1498 - 1739)



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