

JEWES OF KERALA AND THE TRADING WORLD OF THE INDIAN OCEAN, 1000-1750 A.D.

*Thesis submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in fulfillment of the requirements for
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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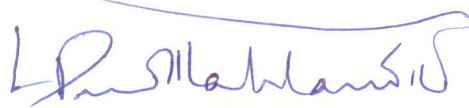
DECLARATION

I, SWETA SINGH, hereby declare that the thesis titled "*Jews of Kerala and the Trading World of the Indian Ocean, 1000-1750 A.D.*" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my original work. The thesis has not been previously submitted in part or full for the award of any degree of this university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.




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*Dedicated to my father and mother
who have outgrown and outdone their very selves
in keeping unwavering faith
in my abilities
without ever having said much*

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Finally, I bear entire responsibility for any shortcomings in this thesis.

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Chapter I

Introduction

“Historians, whose business is to remember what others forget”

Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*

The Jews of Kerala were a unique trading group in the Indian Ocean 10th century onwards, who had a momentous impact on the trading networks in Eurasia and were inalienable when it came to the movement of commodities between Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean among the Jewish diaspora. As far as the movement of Jews to Malabar and their settlement is concerned, it seems that a set of migration happened before 10th century as well. Evidence of copper plates mentioning Jewish presence is one major source to substantiate such an assumption. The following work shall make an attempt to trace the history of Jewish mercantile community in Kerala from mid-tenth century, as this was the time when a substantially large group of Egyptian Jews from Fatimid started trading with India under large commercial projects, which majorly had to do with the spice trade of coastal India.¹ Progressing a little ahead on the course of maritime history, from 11th century onwards, Jews started settling down on the western coast of India, particularly in Kerala, which could be considered as an ideal place given the position that it enjoyed in the trading route, and the availability of the prized commodities that formed the bulk of mercantile transshipments.

The Jews of Kerala were uniquely poised to further their trade through the Red sea and the Mediterranean Sea even during the troubled days of Crusades, as they had a very close connection with Fatimid Jews, Jewish diaspora as well as the Arab enclaves of the

¹Bernard Lewis, “The Fatimids and Route to India” *Revue de la Faculté des sciences économiques de l’ université 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 India and far eastern trade. See S. D. Goitein and MardechaiAkiva Friedman, *India Trader of the Middle Ages*, Brill, Leiden, 2008, pp. 21-22.

Mediterranean. Mercantile partnerships flourished beyond religious differences as Jews and Arab merchants cooperated with each other. Even when the European crusaders turned to Muslims and Jews till 14th Century, the bond between the Jews and Muslims was strong enough to evade the crusaders and further their trade. However, this bond made a radical shift when the Europeans started trading in the Indian Ocean, and it became inevitable for Jews to look into their trading partnerships, given the changed battleground, which meant reorienting their trade strategies keeping the European resurgence in mind. Europeans affected the Jewish trade adversely as they monopolized, and ultimately they turned out to be the masters, who could trade in the Indian Ocean owing to their military capability. This led Jews to innovate with respect to the new roles that they were compelled to take up in the emerging circumstances of anti-Jewish policies of the Portuguese, and later the pro-Jewish attitude of the Dutch who succeeded the Portuguese. While the Jewish-Portuguese relationship has mostly been studied from the perspective of commercial exchanges, this work shall also attempt to bring out the most unfortunate changes that happened during this time in the Jewish community. The tussle between the newly arrived Jews from Europe, and the already settled Jews in Kerala, would be studied not only to understand the social perspective of the community but also the impact it had overall on the economy. Meanwhile, the commercial journey of Jewish merchants, because of the support and patronage from the local rulers and local people of Malabar, shall also be pondered upon.

The study shall also analyse the mechanisms through which the Jewish merchants made themselves acceptable to their commercial collaborators, political patrons and the religious rivals, and survived in the process of creating a mercantile space for themselves in the trading world of the Indian Ocean. The arrival of the Dutch was yet another major event in the history of Jewish community, as unlike Portuguese, this period was relatively free from oddities. Along with the narration of a happy period for those Jews, who had mainly come from Europe, the study would also show various shades of grey, in the context of Malabar Jews, who were being discriminated upon both in the economy as well as the society. One of the major purposes of this study is to analyse historical events from both economic and social viewpoints, as they tend to intersect each other. How economic needs defined the social behaviour of the entire community and others around it over time is the approach followed for this study. Additionally, how the journey that started in the background of commercial benefit led to some of the major socio-cultural adaptations and eliminations, shall also be highlighted. All of the changes that occurred

in the Jewish society in due course of time shaped the discourse of the unique Jewish identity in the multicultural set up of Malabar.

1.1 Purpose of Study

The central purpose of this study is to look into the mercantile strategies developed by Jewish merchants operating in the trade route between Mediterranean to Malabar or Red Sea to the Indian Ocean. This study will also try to establish a link between Cairo and Cochin, the two nodal points of trade in the Mediterranean and Malabar respectively. This has been done by examining the ways and processes by which Jews developed a trading network in the Indian Ocean on a 'longue duree' 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.

In order to understand the discourse of Jewish diaspora on the western coast of India, it is inevitably important to trace their commercial journey from Mediterranean, since that is where the journey began from. The reason behind taking such a long time period is to look into the entire functioning of Jewish Diaspora over different time periods in history. Such vast time zones allow us to analyse the changes that occurred within the community, and compare the gradual evolution from one time period to another. The starting point of the study is 1000 AD tentatively, 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 study ends by 1750, when the Jewish traders acting till then as company merchants of the Dutch, started becoming bankrupt one by one and the Jewish commerce dwindled because of the changing socio-economic developments on the west coast of India. Geographically, the study centres on the principal Jewish enclaves of Kerala, which was known as Malabar during this period. Nevertheless, this study shall end by going beyond the time frame, and incorporating the overall social developments that occurred within the Jewish community of Kerala. In the end, modern discourse of Jewishness and identity building will be included, which will add to the personal perspective of the Jewish community about their own history.

1.2 Situating the Historiography

The past of the Jews of Kerala is represented in vast and chaotic bits of historical evidence meshed with the conflicting legends and myths. Evidence of the oldest strata of Jewish trade is found in the biblical, religious and mythical texts, where Jews appear as a commercial and cultural bridge between India and West Asia. Consequently, Sanskrit and Tamil words found their way into the Biblical Hebrew language. According to the ancient Jewish historian, Josephus, thoughts of Indian philosophy encouraged the martyrs at Masada; and read of India in the book of Esther as well as in the Talmud.²

For studying the Jewish community of Malabar in the modern period, scholars go for personal interviews, private documents, diaries etc. The method of documentation using oral history has also been used. It was during pre-colonial India that Jewish merchants played a decisive role in the Indian Ocean trade, and yet we know very little about this formative period. As far as the study of Jewish history is concerned, one finds a gap in the literature of medieval period 12th Century onwards. The *Cairo Geniza*³ documents, though give us valuable information on trade between Mediterranean and Indian Ocean, they are available only for an approximate period between 10th and 13th Centuries. Continuous documents for historical study of the Jewish community from 13th to 15th Centuries are relatively absent. This gap is often filled in by the use of the Jewish folk songs and travel accounts.

The literature available for this topic can be categorised into five major sections on the basis of the genre they belonged to. *Geniza* sources, travellers' account, European sources belonging to the Portuguese and Dutch companies, archaeological sources, and finally, oral history methods and sources. The *Geniza* sources belonged to the period between 11th-13th centuries. However, the traveller accounts are available throughout, from 10th century onwards till the end of the time period of this study. Arrival of the Portuguese, and then the Dutch, left us with vital official and commercial documents which belonged to the periods of 16th - mid 18th

² Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The last Jews of Cochín: Jewish Identity in Hindu India*, University of South Carolina, 1993, pp. 22-23. Josephus, *The Work of Josephus, with a Life Written by himself*. Standard edition. Translated William Whiston. New York: A.C. Armstrong, 1888. 3:334-42

³ *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.

century. The physical sources such as copper plates, synagogues and tombstones are other sources for unearthing the past of the Jewish community of Kerala. The last section of this thesis relies on the documents that fall under the category of oral historical tradition. Though these sources were written during modern period, which is 19th century onwards, these sources contain the discourse of Jewish community's past with a mixture of superficial elements.

A significant portion of historiographical tradition revolves around the *Cairo Geniza* documents, which forms one major segment of the primary sources for this study. *Cairo Geniza* documents are the major source for this study as the social and economic history of middle class Jews is revealed in various letters preserved in *Cairo Geniza*. Goitein, in the introduction of his book, *A Mediterranean Society*, mentions the difficulties that he faced while searching for documents related to Indian trade in the heap of all the *Geniza* documents. Goitein has divided these documents under three subheadings- drafts, court records and documents handed over to the people concerned. He writes, "Almost every conceivable humane relationship is represented in these records, and they often read like local news read by a gifted reporter"⁴ 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*' speaks of the Jews who lived in the Islamic countries of the Mediterranean, which at the beginning of the *Geniza* 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 Jewish middle class in the Mediterranean, the political scenario which in turn favoured the culture of maritime trade, the various segments of merchants, brokers, modes of their partnership, business practices, banking, finance, commodity price, trade routes, governmental control of trade etc.⁵

Moreover, there are legal deeds and marriage records as well, which have been found in store houses. Along with the documents related to marriage, there are documents on divorce as well, attached with the elaborated information upon the list of items given to the bride which can

⁴ S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, Vol. 1, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1967, p. 10

⁵ S.D.Goitein titled *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*

be very useful in terms of unfolding both economic and social history of that age. Deeds of manumission of slaves are a part of *Geniza* world. But the document which dominates over, are the business letters which are a major source for this study. The business letters were full of personal details, as during those times, the trade was based on tenets of mutual trust. Thus, one can easily find personal and private matters in between these business correspondences.

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*, 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 *Geniza* documents concerned with the Indian Ocean trade and Jewish traders, their background and families. In this work, he examines *Geniza* 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 correspondences 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 Indian 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, however, these people could be considered as the representatives of the whole diasporic set up active along the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.⁶

Most of the Indian traders, whose papers were preserved in *Geniza*, were usually active along the western coast of India. Abraham Ben Yiju, who spent most of his seventeen years in the East on the Malabar Coast of Southwest India, is spoken of as having been in *bilad al-Hind* or in al-Hind.⁷ In some texts, it is clear that the writer intended designating a geographical area

⁶ S. D. Goitein & Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza*, Leiden, 2008

⁷ In the medieval Arabic texts the geographical extension for the Indian sub-continent used, includes the entire region from Makran (which straddles modern Iran and Pakistan), in the West, to the Indonesian Archipelago and

that expanded beyond India to the east. These *Geniza* documents also reveal the crucial role of Yemen in the context of India trade. Moreover, the Jewish merchants from Egypt often mixed the boundaries of Yemen and Hind by calling it, *diyar al-Yamanwal-Hind* (the land of Yemen and Hind).⁸ The merchants sailing towards Indian Ocean sometimes also refer to it as *al-bahr al-kabir*, 'the great sea'.⁹

Most of the *Geniza* papers related to the India trade are letters, many of which were sent from Aden or another town in southern Arabia, from a Red Sea port or from India to the capital of Egypt (or to Old Cairo-Fustat) or vice versa. Among others, the most interesting one went from Aden to India or vice versa, or even from one place in India to another. Due to the precariousness of communication, letters were usually sent in duplicate or even triplicate in two or three different ships, and many statements referring to this custom are found in the *Geniza* paper.¹⁰ These business letters invariably open with polite and often very dignified phrases, which occupy between four to sixteen sentences; depending on the circumstances, five to eight sentences being the average. The social strata and relation between two respective correspondents could be easily interpreted through the writing of these letters. The first part of the main body of the letter acknowledges the arrival of goods, letters or messengers sent by the addressee, or announces their loss through shipwreck or attack by pirates. The letter then describes the actions taken with respect to the addressee's orders. In the second part, the writer would deal with his own shipments. Personal or communal affairs would also be referred to, as a rule briefly, but sometimes at great length. Moreover, not only goods of trade but presents given by one merchant to another as a token of respect was also mentioned in these letters often. The letters exchanged between Aden to Malabar Coast often followed this pattern. It is believed that attachment of gifts to commercial shipments was a custom taken over from the Indian merchants and every letter was concluded with the greeting referred to the business agents and their households in India.¹¹

mainland Southeast Asia, in the East and in reference to the larger area the term *bilad al-Hind* or *diyar al-Hind* (the land of Hind) are often used.

⁸*Lawsuits of Jekutheil al-Hakim vs. Joseph Lebdi, Seventh Session of the Rabbinical Court of Fustat*, Fustat, June 14, 1098 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 196

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 6

¹⁰ Goitein has mentioned this practice in his book *Mediterranean Society* at length.

¹¹ *Letters from Kalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yiju*, Dabhattan, India, 1138. in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 594-605

Items of private correspondence of the Indian merchants have also found their way into *Geniza*. The merchants were in the habit of sending presents and other household goods for their families and relatives. Apart from the family, they also used to send religious donations along with the cargos. The presents were of different kinds, such as oriental spices, costly textiles etc. As far as other information related to personal life of the merchants are concerned, it is not visible, as they normally did not take their wives while travelling to the countries of the Indian Ocean. The separation of merchants from their families and wives for such a long period of time resulted into distress which reflects in the *Geniza* letters as well. Though the family letters are valuable sources of information for social history of that period, less attention has been paid to it, as this sort of documents is rare to get.

Another large group of *Geniza* documents is concerned with Indian trade which comprises of legal papers of correspondence. Merchants embarking on long journey did business not only for themselves but also for others. There were several investors for one cargo, thus, the documents related to *commenda* or partnership is of immense value. Whenever merchants used to return from their trip back home or came from India to Aden, they used to appear before Rabbinical or Muslim court and submit their statement about their dealings in the interest of their partners. In turn, their partners used to then write out a release confirming their complete satisfaction from the transaction carried out. There were some cases of distress, conflict and forgery as well that happened during these transactions. Those were also noted down, and to sort out such issues, rabbinical courts were consulted.¹²

Travelogues have worked as a lifeline for this study, since the disruption of sources at any point of time was covered by the information gathered from them. The references to the Jews in India broadly, and Kerala specifically, are found as early as the beginning of the 9th century in various writings of travellers. These travelogues are of immense help in tracing the Jewish community's history for a period when no other sources are available. The sudden termination of *Geniza* sources from mid 13th century creates a void in the Jewish community's history at Malabar. This gap has been filled by the keen writings of the voyagers who travelled to the Western coast of India during these periods. In around 916 C.E., Arab geographer Abu Said

¹² For example *Lawsuit of Jekuthiel al-Hakim vs. Joseph B. David Lebdi*, contains information regarding the sessions of the Rabbinical court of Fustat in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Age*, pp.167-209

al-Hassan mentioned of Jewish communities in India and Ceylon, quite near to Shingly. Ceylon was known to him as Sarandib.¹³ He wrote: “There is a numerous colony of Jews in Sarandip, and people of other religions.” During the same century, Ibn Wahab of Bassora mentioned Jews in Cranganore specifically.¹⁴ But it was the 11th century scholar, al-Beruni, who has provided us with the most extensive description of Jews. But he does not mention the Jews of Kerala. He basically talks about Jews present in Kashmir as he was more familiar with northern India rather than south India. He writes: “*In former times they used to allow one or two foreigners to enter their country, particularly Jews, but at present they do not allow any Hindu whom they do not know personally to enter, much less other people*”.¹⁵

Modern time scholar Nathan Katz links it with the concept of lost tribes. According to him, many Kashmiris, like many other peoples, claim to be one of the lost tribes, so this affinity might have led them to prefer Jewish traders over those from other nations.¹⁶ The 12th century Muslim geographer al-Idrisi left an account of the places in India where Jews settled, including Malabar. He also described a very influential Jewish community in Ceylon.¹⁷ During the same century, Dimashqi (1320 CE.) mentioned that Jews were a majority in Cyngilin, or better known as Shingly. Another traveller named Abulfeda (1330 CE.) also mentioned the ancient Jewish settlement at Shingly.¹⁸ A medieval Muslim geographer, Ibn Battuta (1325-1354) is an invaluable source. He also confirms the presence of Jews in the Malabar region.¹⁹ Marco Polo of Venice, who made his journey during the second half of the 13th century also mentions about the Jewish presence in Malabar.²⁰ The medieval traveller, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the Malabar Coast around 1167, also came to Quilon, which he referred to as Khulam by Benjamin. Although Benjamin visited Quilon, his remarks about the Jewish community were not

¹³A.C. Burnell, “On Some Pahlavi Inscription in South India.”*The Indian Antiquary: A Journal of Oriental Research*, Vol. III, Bombay, 1874, p. 316

¹⁴Louis Rabinowitz, Far East Mission, Johannesburg, 1957, p.97

¹⁵Edward C. Sachau, *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A. D. 1030* (trans.), Vol. I, Kegan Paul, London, 1910, p.206

¹⁶Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India*, The University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1993, p.36

¹⁷A. Asher, Translation and ed., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, Vol. II, Hameseth Publishing Co., New York, 1965, p.188

¹⁸Barbara C. Johnson, “Shingly or Jewish Cranganore in the Tradition of the Cochin Jews of India”, *Masters's thesis*, Smith College, 1975, p.22

¹⁹P. M. Jussay, “The Songs of Everayi,” in *Jews in India*, ed. Timberg, Vikas, New Delhi, 1986, p.151

²⁰Henry Yule and Henry Cordier (ed.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol.II, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998, p.301

confined to South India only. Rather, he made an overall comment on the Indian Jewish community.²¹ The advent of Portuguese on the Malabar Coast also accelerated the number of European travellers to India, who produced some interesting writings, which contain the mention of Jews as well. Writing of Duarte Barbosa contains a mention of the Jewish merchants active on the Western coast of India.²²

From the writing of Francis Xavier, we come to know about the consequences that Jews in India had to face due to the anti-Jewish policies of the Portuguese.²³ Jan Huyghen van Linschoten from Netherlands²⁴ and French traveller Francois Pyrard, who visited Malabar during seventeenth century writes about the influential role of the Jewish merchant community in Cochin, one of the famous trading towns of Southern India.²⁵ During the Dutch trade, influence on some major trading centres of Malabar, and writings on Jewish community also increased in the background of liberal attitude of the Dutch, unlike Portuguese. Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva's writing is one such example who wrote a piece on Jewish community of Kerala in 1686, where he gives all minute details about the Jewish Community beginning from the list of wealthy merchants and of their family. He mentions about the social division between *Paradesi*/White and Malabari/Black Jews.²⁶

Edward Ives also mentions the influential position of the Jewish merchants in Cochin who visited the city in 1757.²⁷ Description of another Dutch traveller, Johan Splinter Stavorinus,

²¹ 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.

²²Barbosa, Duarte, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the sixteenth century*, ed. H. E. J. Stanley, London, Hakluyt Society, 1866, p.15.

²³ George Schurhammer, S. J., *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, vol. II, India (1541-1545), translated by M. Joseph Costelloe, S. J. by The Jesuit Historical Institute, Italy, 1977, p. 240

²⁴John Huyghen Van Linschoten, *Voyage of JhonHuyghen Van Linschoten to the East Indies*, from the old English translation of 1598.vol 2.London, 1885.

²⁵ Francois Laval Pyrard, *The Voyages of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, tr. Albert Gray, London, CambridgeUniversity Press, 1888, pp.429-35.

²⁶MossehPereyra de Paiva, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, Lisboa, 1923, p.8

²⁷ Edward Ives, *A Voyage from England to India, in the Year MDCCLIV: And an Historical Narrative of the Operations of the Squadron and Army in India, Under the Command of Vice-Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive, in the Years 1755, 1756, 1757, Including the Correspondence between the Admiral and Nabob SerajehDowlab, Edward and Charles Dilly, MDCCLXXIII, London, P.193. Online Source: https://books.google.co.in/books?id=5pdkLC95UfsC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false*

is also very informative. He visited Cochin in 1775.²⁸ Next in this row is the narrative from the traveller Rev. Joseph Wolff who reached Cochin in 1833.²⁹

The next genre is accounts produced during and by the Portuguese and the Dutch officials during the respective times of their influence on the western coast of India. The narrative of Vasco da Gama, who was the pioneer sailor to the Western coast of India, is a mine of information. His writing is best to understand the intention and nature of the Portuguese mercantilism on the western coast of India. He also writes about his interaction with the Jewish people when he reached Malabar.³⁰ Documents related to the grants given by the Portuguese to the king of Cochin inform us regarding the economic-political developments of that time.³¹ Moreover, the diaries of merchants were a valuable source of information. Diary of Girolamo Priuli has information on the growing monopoly of the Portuguese in the maritime trade.³² A very valuable source of information lies in the documents of inquisitions kept in the archives of Lisbon and Goa. The trial of New Christian merchants, unfolds the unsaid history of economic struggle and rivalry in the name of religion.³³

The Dutch period also provides valuable documents on the Jewish community of Kerala, mostly written by the officials of the company. The records of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) are of immense importance in this regard, which give first-hand information regarding the direct involvement of the Jewish merchants within the company. The elaborate political history of the Dutch in Malabar has been published on the basis of the information provided by the Dutch official during their period of stay in India. These documents in Dutch language were translated by A. Galletti, A. J. Van Der Burg and Rav. P. Groot and published under the title, *The Dutch in Malabar*.³⁴ *Letters from Malabar* by Jacob Canter Visscher and Major Heber Druryform

²⁸ John Splinter Stavorinus, *Voyages to the East-Indies* in Dutch, translated in English by Samuel Hull Wilcocke, Vol. III, University of California, London, 1798, pp. 226-27

²⁹ Rev. Joseph Wolff, *Researches and Missionary Labours among the Jewish, Mohammedans, and other Sects*, Macintosh, London, M DCCC XXXV (1835), pp. 478-479

³⁰ Gaspar Correia, Henry E.J. Stanley, *The Three Voyages of Vasco Da Gama and His Viceroyalty from Lendas da India of Gaspar Correia*, p.58

³¹ Documents related to these grants by Portuguese to the Cochin authority is preserved in , Antonio de Silva Rego, *Documentacao Ultramarina Portuguesa*, vol. III, Lisbon, 1963, p.310

³² Extract from Girolamo Priuli's diary are printed in English in the *Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India*, ed. Greenlee, 1938

³³ AN/TT, *Inquisicao de Lisboa*

³⁴ A. Galletti, A. J. Van Der Burg, P. Groot, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras Government Press, Madras, 1911

is another collection of such official documents by the Dutch official, which throws immense light on the ongoing political and economic activities of the Dutch East India Company in Malabar. While stating the journey of Dutch East India Company in Malabar, these documents happen to record the role and importance of Jewish merchants as well who played crucial part in the ongoing process of trade. All of these documents seem to mention the role of Paradesi Jews in Dutch trade and their superiority over the *Malabari* Jews.³⁵ The documents related to famous Jewish merchant families like Rahabi and Rotenburg can be found in the archives of Kerala with the section named Malabar in Colonial Archives.³⁶

Literature based on the archaeological or physical evidences are vital for this study. Copper plates, synagogues, and tombstones are important evidences to go deeper in the history of the Jewish community of Kerala. The copper plates and inscriptions related to the Jewish community of Kerala during early medieval and medieval periods were translated and published by K. V. Subrahmanyam, under the title, *Travancore Archaeological Series*³⁷, and they gave rise to a series of historical literature on the Jews of Kerala. The Jewish plates were given in the year 1000 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. David G. Mandelbaum has analyzed these pieces of epigraphical information for highlighting the Jewish way of life in Cochin.³⁸ 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 deal more like local elements while retaining their own identity. M.G.S. Narayanan has studied the same Jewish copper plates for highlighting the nature of cultural symbiosis that evolved in Kerala by eleventh century and emphasized on the role played by the Jews in creating a mosaic society in Malabar.³⁹

The above mentioned sources are mostly primary sources, out of which historians created a variety of narratives about the Jews in India. Coming to the historiography, several modern day scholars have also produced significant works on some major themes such as the Mediterranean

³⁵ Jacob Canter Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, Adelphi Press, Madras, 1862

³⁶ *Malabar in the Colonial Archives* (K. A.), 1736-1773

³⁷ K. V. Subrahmanyam, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Trivandrum, 1921

³⁸ David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin" *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 1: 4, Oct., 1939, pp. 423-460

³⁹ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Kerala, Trivandrum, 1972

trade and society, Indian Ocean trade, political history of Malabar, economic and political history of Portuguese and Dutch East India Company, socio-cultural history of the Jewish community of Kerala, and identity discourse for the Jewish community in the multicultural dimension of Kerala. Starting with the role of Jewish merchants in the commercial endeavours of the Mediterranean trade, and their further development in the overall maritime space, has been addressed in the writings of Sarah Arenson, who wrote on Jewish seafaring during medieval times,⁴⁰ S. Yevini⁴¹, R. R. Stieglitz⁴², Nadav Kashtan⁴³, J. Modrzejewski⁴⁴, H. B. Dewing⁴⁵, N. Gross⁴⁶, J. Starr⁴⁷, J. Prawer⁴⁸, Bernard Lewis⁴⁹, L. S. Lopez⁵⁰, L. Rabinowitz⁵¹, Ernest James Worman⁵², Jacob Mann⁵³, Maristella Botticini & Zvi Eckstein⁵⁴ and Arbel.⁵⁵

Among the scholars who gave valuable contribution on the theme of Indian Ocean trade and society, name of Sanjay Subrahmanyam⁵⁶, G.F. Hourani⁵⁷, G.R. Tibbetts⁵⁸, Bouchon, Genevieve, Denys Lombard⁵⁹, K.N. Chaudhuri⁶⁰, Asin Das Gupta, M. N. Pearson⁶¹, Roxani

⁴⁰ Sarah Arenson, "Medieval Jewish seafaring between East and West", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 15:1, 2000, p. 34

⁴¹ S. Yevini, "Did the Kingdoms of the Israel Have a Maritime Policy?" *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 50, 1960, pp.193-228

⁴² R.R. Stieglitz, "The Jews and the Sea in the First Temple Period", in *Coast and Sea*, Tel Aviv, 1978, pp.107-11

⁴³ Nadav Kashtan, *Seafaring and Jews*, 2001, p.18

⁴⁴ Meleze- Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt from Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian*, Philadelphia, 1995, pp.8-10

⁴⁵ Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, 8.5, 8.41, 10.24-6, in Loeb Classical Library, trans. H.B. Dewing, London, 1919, Vol.5

⁴⁶ N. Gross; ed., *Economic History of the Jews*, Jerusalem, 1975, pp.147-72

⁴⁷ J. Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire:641-1204*, Athens, 1939

⁴⁸ J. Prawer, *A History of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, 1963

⁴⁹ Bernard Lewis, *The Fatimids and Route to India*, Istanbul, 1949

⁵⁰ R.S. Lopez and I.W. Raymond, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World*, New York

⁵¹ L. Rabinowitz, *Jewish Merchant Adventurers: A Study of the Radanites*, London, 1948

⁵² Ernest James Worman, "Notes on the Jews in Fustat from Cambridge Genizah Documents", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol.18:1, 1905

⁵³ Jacob Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, vol. 1, Humphrey Milford, 1920

⁵⁴ Maristella Botticini & Zvi Eckstein, "From Farmers to Merchants, Conversions and Diaspora: Human Capita and India History", *Journal of the European Economic Association* September 2007

⁵⁵ Arbel, *Trading Nations: Jews and venetians in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean*, Leiden, 1995

⁵⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Of Imarat and Tijarat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 to 1750", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37:4, 1995

⁵⁷ G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean during the Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Beirut, 1951

⁵⁸ G.R. Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese*, London, 1971

⁵⁹ Genevieve and Denys Lombard, "India and the Indian Ocean in the Fourteenth Century", in Asin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson, Edited., *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1987

⁶⁰ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*, pp.40-44

⁶¹ Asin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson, Edited., *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1987 & Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, London, 2006

Eleni Margariti⁶² are prominent. Their works along with the general information on the Indian Ocean's trading patterns also highlight the role of the peddling merchants, who eventually played crucial role in such trans-oceanic networks of trade. The engagement of merchant communities within the diasporic trade zone has been the theme of scholars like Sanjay Subrahmanyam, who looked at commercial activities within the framework of state mercantilism particularly in his work, *"Of Imarat and Tijarat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 to 1750."*⁶³ 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. Ranabir Chakravarti has highlighted the vital role played by the ship owning merchants (*Nakhuda*) who belonged to various religious communities and worked together in order to maximise benefits.⁶⁴

In order to place and understand the Jewish community of Kerala in the socio-political scenario of Malabar, it is very important to know the history of Kerala itself. The major works on the polity, society, culture and economy of Malabar or Southern India during ancient and medieval period have been authored by K. P. Padmanabha Menon⁶⁵, K. V. Krishna Ayyar⁶⁶, Meera Abraham⁶⁷, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri⁶⁸, P. M. Jussay⁶⁹, Francis Day⁷⁰, Pius Malekandathil.⁷¹

The arrival of European merchants and their interaction with Jewish traders already present on the Malabar Coast have been the thrust area of another historiographical layer. The advent of Portuguese in the Indian Ocean trade brought many changes to the maritime trading world. Aggression and monopoly were some major characteristics of the Portuguese trade. This

⁶²Roxani Eleni Margariti, "Mercantile Networks, Port Cities, and "Pirate" States: Conflict and Competition in the Indian Ocean World of Trade before the Sixteenth Century" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 51:4, 2008

⁶³ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Of Imarat and Tijarat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 to 1750" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 Oct., 1995, pp. 750-780.

⁶⁴Ranabir Chakravarti, "Nakhudas and Nauvittakas: Ship-Owning Merchants in the West Coast of India (C. AD 1000-1500)", *Journal of the Economics and Social History of the Orient*. Vol.43, no.1, 2000,

⁶⁵K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol. I

⁶⁶ K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorin of Calicut: From the Earliest Times Down to A.D. 1806*, University of Calicut, Calicut, 1938

⁶⁷Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, New Delhi, 1988

⁶⁸K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijaynaga*, Oxford University Press, 1968

⁶⁹P.M.Jussay, *The Jews in Kerala*, Kochi, 2003

⁷⁰ Francis Day, *The Land of The Permauls or Cochin Its Past and Present*, Madras, 1863

⁷¹ Pius Malekandathil, "Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800", *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, 2, 2007

theme has been extensively covered by K.S. Mathew in his numerous scholarly works.⁷² Pius Malekandathil has also worked vastly on this theme and analyzed the roles and networks of trade formulated by Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and Malabar.⁷³ Pius Malekandathil in “*The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce, 800-1800 A.D.*” looks at larger and long-term trading activities of the Jews in the Indian Ocean, and highlights the way by which they carried out their businesses through the diasporic enclaves even during the days of European commercial expansion.⁷⁴ H. P. Salomon & I. S. D. Sassoon have shown the vulnerable position of the New Christian merchants who were forced to leave their native places in Europe (Portugal and Spain) in the background of inquisition.⁷⁵ However, the work of A. R. Disney, along with mentioning the unfortunate incidents of inquisition, shows the active participation and influential role of the New Christian merchants in the commercial affair of the Portuguese, both in Portugal and India.⁷⁶

Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim has done a landmark work in finding out the sources for 16th and 17th century and used new analytical models in research. His research since 1990, deals extensively into the archives of Portugal, India, Israel, France and England. Consequently, He has authored many articles in Portuguese. He has studied Portuguese inquisition documents and provided insights that were not known before. He has shown how the Portuguese ‘New Christians’, living in Cochim da Baixo were able to forge economic and social ties with Jews in Cochim da Cima (Mattancheri) and Parur. His work also uncovers the political

⁷²K.S.Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1983 &K.S.Mathew and Afzal Ahmad, *Emergence of Cochin in the Pre-Industrial Era: A Study of Portuguese Cochin*, Pondicherry

⁷³ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India: 1500-1663*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2001 & Pius Malekandathil, “The Portuguese *Casados* and the Intra-Asian Trade: 1500-1663”, in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Millenium (61st) Session, Kolkata: Indian History Congress Publications, 2001

⁷⁴ 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.

⁷⁵ H. P. Salomon & I. S. D. Sassoon, *The Marrano Factory: The Portuguese Inquisition and its New Christians 1536-1765*, Brill, Leiden, 2001, p. XV , originally published in Portuguese by Antonio Jose Saraiva as *Inquisicao e Christaos-Novos*, Inova, Lisbon, 1969

⁷⁶ A. R. Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire: Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2010

play in the 16th and 17th century concerning pepper trade and the three-way political tussle between Kochi Raja, the Zamorin of Calicut, and the Portuguese.⁷⁷

Alongwith Portuguese sources, the Dutch sources are equally important to know about the situation of Jewish merchants on the coast of India. The works of P. C. Alexander⁷⁸ and K. M. Panikkar⁷⁹ contain the political and commercial journey of the Dutch East India Company on the Western coast of India chronologically. Under the Dutch, Fischel writes, “Cochin became one of the most prosperous ports on the Malabar Coast. Fischel’s work also sheds light on the influence of Rotenburgs, the famous Paradesi Jewish merchant family of Cochin in the Jewish-Dutch trade network.⁸⁰ Ashim Das Gupta’s *Asia in Malabar Trade* mentions the famous Paradesi Jews merchant family of Cochin, Rahabis.⁸¹ The scholar named Brian Weinstein has added to our knowledge of Kerala Jews and European colonial commerce through his original research work based on the source materials of the Dutch colonial archives. He looks into the role of Jewish merchants during the times of Dutch colonialism, in particular the Rahabi family (Jewish merchant family that rose to prominence and prosperity during Dutch period), which presents new material to supplement the existing sources.⁸²

Another layer of historiographical tradition revolves around the socio-cultural history of the Jewish community of Kerala, which mostly engages the modern discourse on identity building and social division within the community in the background of ancient legacies. The most important amongst them is *History of Kerala* by K. P. Padmanabha Menon,⁸³ 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

⁷⁷ Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, *Judeus e Christos-Novos de Cochin: Historia e Memoria (1500-1662)*, Braga, AppacdmDistrit de Braga, 2003. More work by Tavim, “Jcome de Olivares, New Christian and Merchant of Cochin,” *Santa Barbara Portuguese Studies II*: 1995, pp. 94-134

⁷⁸ P. C. Alexander, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Annamalai University, 1946

⁷⁹ K. M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the dutch*, D. B. Taraporevala Sons and Co., Bombay, 1806

⁸⁰ Walter J. Fischel, “The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century”, *StudiaRosenthaliana*, Vol. I:2, July 1967

⁸¹ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967

⁸² Brian Weinstein, “Jewish Pepper Traders of the Malabar Coast: the Rahabis,” *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 5 (2002)

⁸³ K. P. PadmanabhaMenon, *History of Kerala*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1983.

aspects of conflicts and tensions that came up among them over a period of time. This issue of social division and conflict between the 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.”⁸⁴ He analyzes the various groups of Jews on the basis of socio-economic processes within which they got socially differentiated. S. S. Koder, in his work particularizes the socio-cultural information regarding the Cochin Jewish community.⁸⁵ Koder also narrates the political connection and influences of the Rahabi (Paradesi Jews) merchants with the King of Cochin.⁸⁶ Walter J. Fischel tries to discover the distant past of the Cochin Jewish community within the Portuguese, Dutch and English sources.⁸⁷ He even highlights the cultural and religious freedoms enjoyed by the Jewish community under the suzerainty of the Dutch.⁸⁸ 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 out of oblivion. Despite that, he argues that it was a phase of conflict between the two because of their clash of commercial interests.⁸⁹

The writings of Nathan Katz have been path breaking in terms of analysing the discourse of identity building for the Cochin Jewish community of India. He has written extensively on this issue. *Who are the Jews of India?*⁹⁰ And *The Last Jews of India*⁹¹ are some major works in which he tries to analyse the process of separate identity formed by the Cochin Jews within the multi-community set up of Kerala. He argues how the Jewish community has been able to maintain their Jewishness in spite of the adaptations that they made according to the host society. Inclusion of class division within the Jewish community of Kerala was a major adaptation from the Indian society. This topic has been dealt with by Nathan Katz in some of his works such as

⁸⁴J.B.Segal, “White and Black Jews at Cochin”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2, 1983, pp. 228-252.

⁸⁵ S. S. Koder, *A Hebrew Letter of 1768*, pp. 1-6 online source: <http://dutchinkerala.com/rb/035.pdf>

⁸⁶ S. S. Koder, “Kerala and her Jews”, paper read before the Kerala History Association in 1965.

⁸⁷ Walter J. Fischel, “The Exploration of the Jewish Antiquities of Cochin on the Malabar Coast” *Journal of the American Indian Society*, Vol. 87:3, pp. 230-48

⁸⁸ Walter J. Fischel, 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. 39-42, 53-55

⁸⁹ 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.

⁹⁰ Nathan Katz, *Who are the Jews of India?*, University of California Press, London, 2000

⁹¹Nathan Katz and Ellen Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin*, Columbia, The University of South Carolina Press, 1993

“*Jewish Apartheid and a Jewish Gandhi.*”⁹² The social division amongst the community was mainly based on the concept of purity taken from the Brahmanical notion of the Hindu socio-religious structures. This has been dealt with in depth in his work, “*The Ritual Enactments of the Cochin Jews: The Powers of Purity and Nobility*”⁹³ and “*Asceticism and Caste in the Passover observances of the Cochin Jews Life.*”⁹⁴ Moreover, the similarities and dissimilarities in the socio-religious-cultural life of the Cochin Jews vs Jews settled in Israel has been reasoned in the PhD. thesis of Barbara C. Johnson, titled “*Our Community in Two Worlds: The Cochin Paradesi Jews in India and Israel.*”⁹⁵ The study of other religious communities such as Christians and Muslims are also very important in order to understand the adaptations and aloofness the Jewish community maintained throughout these years. Montague Rhodes⁹⁶, P. J. Thomas⁹⁷ and S. G. Pothan⁹⁸ have worked on the Christians of Kerala. Information on the Muslim settlers in Kerala is available in the work of M. J. Rowlandson, *Toufut-ul-mujahideen: An Historical Work in the Arabian Languages.*⁹⁹ However Shalva Weil, in her work, “Symmetry between Christians and Jews in India”, very beautifully compares the socio-cultural customs followed by the respective communities.¹⁰⁰

Apart from these traditional historical sources, there are a few other sources as well which are helpful in creating an understanding regarding the past of the Jewish merchants on the Western coast of India. Since centuries, Cochin Jewish women still sing the Jewish songs both in Malayalam as well as Hebrew. The ties with the homeland of Cochin has not got forgotten even after their migration to Israel. The hints of the life at Cochin is still visible in the musical

⁹² Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, “Jewish Apartheid and a Jewish Gandhi”, *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 50:3/4, 1988

⁹³ Nathan Katz, “The Ritual Enactments of the Cochin Jews: The Powers of Purity and Nobility.” *Journal of Ritual Studies*, vol 4:2; 1990, pp. 189-225

⁹⁴ Nathan Katz, *Asceticism and Caste in the Passover observances of the Cochin Jews Life*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*

⁹⁵ Barbara C. Johnson, “Our Community in Two Worlds: The Cochin Paradesi Jews in India and Israel”, *Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation*, University of Massachusetts, 1985

⁹⁶ Montague Rhodes, trans. “The Acts of Thomas” In *the Apocryphal New Testament. Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1924

⁹⁷ P. J. Thomas, “The South Indian Tradition of the Apostle Thomas”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1924

⁹⁸ S. G. Pothan, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, Bombay, 1963

⁹⁹ M. J. Rowlandson, trans. *Toufut-ul-mujahideen: An Historical Work in the Arabian Languages*, by Zain al-Din (Zeen-ul-Deen), Oriental Translation Fund, 1833

¹⁰⁰ Shalva Weil, “Symmetry between Christians and Jews in India: The Cnanite Christians and the Cochin Jews of Kerala,” in *Jews in India*, ed. by Thomas A. Timberg, New Delhi, 1986

repertoire of women. Kerala Jews happen to be very different from the Halakhically observant communities, and the women still sing malyali songs even without the accompaniment of instrument. The folk songs of Cochin still find a way in the Traditional Hebrew songs. Usually women of the house perform with the songs in mixed gatherings where men stand to watch with respect. The fairly large repertoire of music is passed from one generation to another in handwritten notebooks. Some of these songs contain detail of a royal wedding procession, in which gold clad brides with colourful hairs accompany a royal ancestor, who has arrived from Jerusalem in a wooden ship and who is given a grand welcome by the kings and offered royal feast and grants for building synagogues. Songs preserved since 1970s can be found in the Jewish Music Research Center at the Hebrew University. Scholars and researchers in this field have published many works of translations and articles by going through these compact set of musical recordings.¹⁰¹ Johana Spector argues that the Cochin Jewish folk songs or famously called Shingly tunes have Yemenite influence¹⁰² and also the major part of the Jewish prayer songs is Sephardic in nature. Thus, he debates that the migration of Jews from Spain has led to such mixture in culture through the way of music.¹⁰³ The analysis of the existing historiography shows that there is a lacunae as far as the study on the long-term trading activities of the Jews of Kerala in the Indian Ocean is concerned, and in order to fill in this vacuum, this theme has been taken. The study would analyse the mechanisms by which the Jewish merchants made themselves acceptable to their commercial collaborators, political patrons and religious rivals and survived in the process of creating a commercial world for themselves, followed by their socio-economic adjustment and adaptations in the ways of their trading ventures. This work would try to look into the socio-economic factors responsible for the settlement of Jewish merchants coming from the Mediterranean countries in the various parts of coastal western India.

¹⁰¹ See Daniel, Ruby, and Barbara C. Johnson. *Ruby of Cochin: An Indian Jewish Woman Remembers*. Philadelphia, 1995 and Idem, "Till the Women Finish Singing": An Historical Overview of Cochin Jewish Women's Malayalam Songs." *The Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 4 (2001): 7–22. And P. M. Jussay, "The Song of Evarayi." In *Jews of India*, edited by Thomas Timberg, pp.145–160. New Delhi, 1986. And I. A. Simon, the songs of the Jews of cochin and Their Historical Significance", Bulletin of the Rama Varma Research Institute, vol. 13, 1947

¹⁰²Johanna Spector, "Yemenite and Babylonian Elements in the Musical Heritage of the Jews of Cochin, India", *American Society for Jewish Music*, vol. 7:1; 1986

¹⁰³Johanna Spector, "Jewish Songs from Cochin India: With Special Reference to the Cantillation and Shingli Tunes", *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. IV, Jerusalem, 1973 & Johanna Spector, "Shingli Tune of the Cochin Jews", *Asian Music (Indian Music Issue)*, vol. 3:2; 1972

1.3 Design of Study:

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

The *second* chapter under the title, '*From Mediterranean to Coastal Western India: Early Contacts of Jewish Merchants in India*', proposes to look into the historical understanding of the Jewish mercantile activities along the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trade route. The study would be based considerably upon the *Geniza* sources. The mechanism and method of initial Jewish trade would be discussed at length. The movement of Jewish traders towards the Indian Ocean trading world, specifically to Malabar region, would be yet another major highlight of this chapter. An analysis of the *Geniza* letters makes one trace the mercantile activities of the Jewish merchants within the larger Indian Ocean maritime trade. As far as the movement of Jewish merchants towards India is concerned, the possibility of increasing trade in the Indian Ocean inspired many to move towards countries in the Indian Ocean. 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 *Geniza* sources confer that from tenth century onwards, the Jewish merchants became increasingly visible on the Western coast of India.

The *third* chapter named '*Networks of Early Trade of the Jewish Merchants*' examines the letters and documents of the Jewish merchants involved in the trade ventures along the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trading zones and highlights the networks of trade developed by them as indicated in the *Geniza* sources. The letters and documents related to these Jewish merchants would help in tracing their ongoing commercial activities specifically and their interaction and equation with the other commercial partners in that period of time. Correspondence related to these merchants would also help in re-tracing the networks through which this trade was getting conducted. 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. This chapter will show the eventual process of Jews becoming an acceptable

social group for the ruler and their role in bringing various types of merchandise and bullions that the kingdom needed.

The *fourth* chapter named '*Response of the Jewish Merchants to the Portuguese Commercial Expansion*' looks into the multiple modes of responses that the Jews gave to the challenges raised by the commercial and religious policies of the Portuguese. The arrival of Portuguese on the Western coast of India brought many changes in the ongoing commercial activities of the place, besides re-orienting the direction of the trade. The already settled Jewish merchants also got affected in various ways by this sudden change. This chapter incorporates both aspects of collaboration and conflict, between the Malabar Jews and the Portuguese. The changes and adaptations that occurred in the life of Malabar Jewish merchants after the arrival of Portuguese, is the main theme of this chapter. The arrival of the New Christians during the 16th century brought changes in socio-economic life of the Jews of Cochin. Whereas on one hand the commercial opportunity got enhanced, on the other, religious persecutions made their life difficult.

The Jews living in the native Cochin (Mattancherry) and being supported by the local native rulers ably took advantages from the commercially fertile city of Cochin (Santa Cruz), which got developed under the umbrella of Portuguese commerce. However, the anti-Semitic policies of Portugal and Spain, where the crown 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. These migrants led to swelling up of Jewish settlements on the West coast of India. The Jews who got converted to Christianity at that time were named *Cristãosnovos* or New Christians. There have often been speculations regarding the relationship between the New Christians and the Native Jews. The growing wealth of these merchants made them an enemy of Portuguese *casado* traders. Almost all the new Christians who had been doing business in the city of Cochin were imprisoned and taken to the Inquisition Court set up for conducting their trial in 1557. The long trial in fact shattered the merchants completely, drained all their wealth including money which was confiscated by the Portuguese. This chapter will look into the Jews-Portuguese collaboration and conflict in the background of ongoing financial developments. More than religion, it was the commercial

rivalry between the Portuguese *casado* traders and the New Christian merchants that made the Portuguese target New Christians.

The *fifth* chapter titled *The Era of Transition: The Dutch and the Changing Socio-Economic Milieu of the Jews of Kerala* dwells upon the growing engagements between Jewish merchants and the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Though the Jews had to suffer various trade related confinements from the Portuguese, the Dutch provided the Jews with a lot of commercial opportunities to come up and expand through the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean. Moreover, there was a hope that was developing within the Jewish merchants of Cochin, that under the Dutch, they would enjoy civil and religious freedom. The Jews were often seen performing the role of mediator between merchants and ruling authorities. Thus, the chapter proposes to trace the commercial activities and influence of the Jewish merchants in organizing and conducting the trade for the Dutch. The chapter also proposes to look into the role of Jewish merchants as negotiators for the Dutch and other merchants and also probes the diverse mechanism that they developed for their own survival in the background of adverse situations.

Sixth chapter titled '*Changing Social Fabric of the Jewish Merchants*' deals with the changing nature of the social composition of the Jews of Kerala against the background of changing relationship with European commercial companies. This chapter would also look into how the Jews, who initially came for the sole purpose of trade and commerce, slowly evolved into a diaspora community. The major discussion here is to link the economic journey of the Jewish merchants with their social adjustment and settlement along the Malabar Coast between 12th and 17th Centuries. The oral traditions and local elements like folk songs (songs of the Jewish community written in Malayalam and Hebrew language) throw light on this social transition. This chapter also tries to uncover the elements of adaptation and changes brought within the social structure of Jews, since their arrival on the Western coast of India. The reasons and need behind the construction of myths and their glorious past with respect to their origin will also be studied in this chapter. The motives behind construction of stories and legends projecting and emphasizing certain segments of Jewish community to the extent of giving some Jewish families sizeable clout and power in the eulogized stories will be analysed as to see the way how social engineering was resorted to, in the process of creating stories of social domination of the white Jews over the Black Jews. In their legends, Malabar Jews have developed an identity that

reflects and generates their high social status. Creating an identity was a reciprocal process, involving their neighbours as well as themselves. To fit into the highly stratified Indian society, Jews obviously needed to have their status confirmed by the local high status groups. For them, history became a matter of pride, as they kept on linking themselves with sacred places, ancient Israel and their local ancestral home, Cranganore or Shingly. This section will also narrate the parallel process of adaptation and aloofness maintained by the Jewish community very delicately. Moreover, the ignorance of the role of slaves and native people in the flourishing of Diaspora over time have also been highlighted in this chapter.

Seventh chapter, being the conclusion of this thesis, would incorporate the major findings of the research work.

1.4 Methodology and Source Materials

The study is largely analytical. The historical information gathered from a variety of primary sources was corroborated with the help of visual and literary evidences, travel accounts and *Geniza* papers. In fact, the *Geniza* papers, edited and published by S.D. Goitein and the Jewish copper plates of Kerala form one segment of the major source materials for this work. The Portuguese accounts for the activities of the Jews of India are used for studying the nature of relationship that they had with the European monopolistic traders. The various Jewish synagogues (like that of Cochin, Mala, Chennamangalam and Parur), the Jewish tombstones, Jewish folk-songs and so on are analyzed to substantiate arguments. The works and documents, both original and photocopies, are 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, State Archive of Cochin, Kerala. Besides, the personal collection of Prof. Pius Malekandathil has been of immense help for undertaking this research study. Apart from using written materials, the work shall also try to incorporate interviews of the people from the Malabar Jewish community who are still holding up the flag for the community. The stories related to the origin of the Malabar Jewish community, based on the local and popular legends and not considered to be a historical source, would be consulted and used as corroborative sources.

Chapter II

From Mediterranean to Western Coastal India: Early Phase of Jewish Contacts in India

The journey of Jewish merchants' community along Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trade route led to a significant development in the history of Jewish Diaspora in India. During eleventh century, merchants from Mediterranean countries like Sicily, North Africa, Egypt, Palestine-Syria did not take much interest in India Trade.¹ The processes of exploration of trade ventures towards India by the Jewish merchants began from twelfth century onwards. The vast amount of *Geniza* documents dealing in Indian trade available between the periods of 1160-1240 is a proof of the same.² There was well-established trade network of Jewish merchants who were operating within the Mediterranean zone during the middle ages. Journey of these Jewish merchants from Mediterranean to Western coast of India should be seen in the background of their activities back in Mediterranean. Thus, in order to trace this history of trade movement and the nature of continuity and changes, it is important to first get informed about the trading mechanisms followed by Jewish merchants in the Mediterranean space.

2.1 Historical Background

An early observation led to believe that Judaism was more ambivalent in terms of its approach to maritime affairs.³ The Hellenization, and later Romanization of Palestine, and the special role of the coastal cities provided Jews with new prospects and a heightened realization of possibilities of the sea.⁴ The middle of 2nd century B.C.E marks an exciting phase in the history of Jews, which is well documented in the Maccabean Era. The leaders of the Maccabean Era had

¹S. D. Goitein, and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza ('India Book')*, Brill, Leiden, 2008, p. XXV

²Most of the *Geniza* documents related to India trade are letters exchanged between Jewish merchants, sent from Aden or another southern Arabia, from a Red Sea port, or from India to Fustat or vice versa. This collection consists of commercial, legal, public, private documents, for more information see Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*

³ D. Mendels, "Hellenistic Writers of the Second Century B.C. on the Hiram-Solomon Relationship", in *Phoenicia and the East Mediterranean*, 5, Leuven, 1987, pp.429-41

⁴Nadav Kashtan, (ed.) *Seafaring and Jews*, Frank Cass, London, 2001, p.18

understood that their survival as a state, under Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule, could be best ascertained by 'opening' the coast to the Mediterranean, and development of their shipping and trade. However, Alexandria is the only place where there was a significant port, and a sizeable Jewish population was involved in maritime activities. The involvement of Alexandrian Jews as ship owners and trading agents in the maritime trade led to direct conflict with the Greeks. Their influence and exceptional size of their vessels was formidable and they concentrated mostly in the Delta quarter near the sea.⁵

In the early 6th century, Jewish settlements were quite prevalent in the Mediterranean port city.⁶ The Jews were mostly centred around ports in Naples much like the Mediterranean. They were involved in tanning hides, dyeing textile and manufacturing of glass⁷, which favoured this location from the maritime commerce point of view. In Alexandria and Caesarea Maritima, there were important Jewish shipping circles in late Roman and early Byzantine times.⁸ The Golden Horn in Constantinople houses one of the most important emporia in the world, a 'Jewish landing' (*Skala Judaeorum*).⁹ It is noteworthy that a few centuries later, western sources on the first crusade (end of the eleventh century) highlighted the part that Jews played in the defence of Muslim Haifa, an important ship building centre.¹⁰

Jews have found a mention by the traveller Benjamin of Tudela, some decades later, as one of the most prominent communities in all the port towns that he had visited.¹¹ Henri Pirenne, describing his theory of the collapse of the Mediterranean commercial system following the conquests of Islam, talks about how Jews acted as mediators between the two newly created worlds and their significance from an economic standpoint in the dark ages of nascent feudal Europe. Even during the time of Byzantine Empire, the Jewish population was widely involved in international trade and most lucrative businesses in such items as silk and slave trades.¹² Jews were getting more affluent with their trade from Sassanid Empire and India, and this happened to

⁵ J. Meleze-Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt from Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian*, Philadelphia, 1995, pp.8-10.

⁶ Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, 8.5, 8.41, 10.24-6, in Loeb Classical Library, trans. H.B. Dewing, London, 1919, Vol.5.

⁷ N. Gross; ed., *Economic History of the Jews*, Jerusalem, 1975, pp.147-72.

⁸ Baron, *Social and Religious History*, Vol.2, II p.249; L.I. Levine, *Caesarea under Roman Rule* Leiden, 1975, pp.56-7.

⁹ J. Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire:641-1204*, Athens, 1939, p.33

¹⁰ J. Prawer, *A History of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, 1963, pp.169-70

¹¹ M.N. Adler (ed.), *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, London, 1907, p.20.

¹² J. Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641-1204*, Athens, 1939, p.31

be one of the major concerns of Theophylactos Simocatta as seen from his complaint in the middle of the Sixth Century.¹³

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 manner.¹⁴ 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 benefitted 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.¹⁵

There are significant references to the seafaring in middle ages in the 9th century. There are mentions of the king in the *Life of Charlemagne* (who had not yet got the throne), reaching near Narbonne, where they noticed a few foreign ships. According to some, they were British, for some it was Arabs, and others thought them to be Jews. Only the discerning king could recognise these ships as Norman raiding vessels.¹⁶ This story paints a very different picture of the Jewish ships of that time, but the same Charlemagne selected Jews to participate in one of his most diplomatic missions.¹⁷ One of such missions was to the caliph Harun al-Rashid in Baghdad which aimed at creating an alliance against two common enemies- the Byzantine emperor and

¹³Theophylactos Simocatta, *Historiae* 5. 7.5-10; trans. M. Whitby, Oxford, 1986, pp.141-2

¹⁴Dionisius A. Agius, *Ship that Sailed the Red Sea in Medieval and Early Modern Islam: Perception and Reception*, p. 86 not dated

¹⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Fatimids and Route to India*, Istanbul, 1949, in this work Lewis explains how Fatimids managed to get the control of the India route from the hands of Abbasids of Baghdad and Goitein in his two works *A Mediterranean Society* & *India Book* connects it to the opportunity grabbed by the Jews for their commercial ventures who were leaving under the Fatimid rule.

¹⁶Monachi Sangallensis, *Gesta Karoli* 2.14, in *MGH, SS* Vol. 2, ed. G.H. Pertz, Hannover, 1829, p.757.

¹⁷*Annales Regni Francorum* ed. F. Kurze, Hannover, 1895, pp.801-2; J. Aronius, *Regestenzur Geschichte der Juden in Frankischen und deutschen Reiche bis zum Jahre 1273*, Berlin, 1887-1902, pp.25, 27.

the Ummayyad ruler of Spain. Linguistic ability and experience through commercial contacts were two main reasons why he had chosen Jews for this.

There are four prime routes mentioned for interactions between Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, of which two were described to be exclusively maritime. They first crossed the Mediterranean to Egypt, and continued through the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean. The second followed the northern Mediterranean shore to Syria, continuing through the Persian Gulf to India and the East. It is well established that the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean were two different worlds as far as ships and shipping were concerned.¹⁸ Very likely, Jews could have owned ships across both the spheres. As merchants, the Jews used to deal in the trade of economically high value goods, mostly luxury such as spices and slaves, with limited international trade, and hence lesser number of ships was required to carry. Even when international trade grew to accommodate all other items except luxury, longer, direct seafaring routes were more prevalent than short distance trade.¹⁹

The first of maritime code to be documented appeared in the 9th century C.E., which was also the era when the Rhodian sea law was composed. The code was built on the previously adopted codes and also formed the bedrock of all the maritime laws that were framed.²⁰ The ships' crew was not only considered to be cooperative in spirit, working closely with the captain, but also the owner and chief operator. This spirit reflects in the subsequent mutual insurances that were made for this arrangement.²¹ In the excavations off the South-Western Turkish coast for the Yassi Ada shipwreck of the Seventh Century CE, Georgios Naukleros's name was inscribed on a steelyard was found amongst the ship's cargo. This was the embodiment of such a personality.²² The Jews frequently held such positions. Already in the Mishnah (completed in 200 CE), there are allusions to *minhaghasapanim*, the norms at the sea or of the seafaring community, and it is quite apt that it was formulated on similar lines of mutual insurance

¹⁸ G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Princeton, 1951, pp.87-114

¹⁹ This is the message of IbnKhordadbeh's account, which is confirmed also for a later period, see Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, Vol.1, pp.211-13, 318-19

²⁰ W. Ashburner, *The Rhodian Sea-Law*, Oxford, 1909

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.151-2

²² G.F. Bass and F.H. van Doorninck, *Yassi Ada: A Seventh-Century Byzantine Shipwreck*, College Station, TX, 1982

principle.²³ Right from the Talmud times till the Maimonides (twelfth century CE) and beyond, Jews had laws for the seafaring community and operated in forms of professional guilds. When Maimonides made references to 'the custom of the mariners,' it was probably the oldest law prevailing for the sea.²⁴ In a *responsum*, he compared the journey of deep rivers (the Nile, the Euphrates) to the travel of the Mediterranean with regard to observing the Sabbath laws, and declared it permissible.²⁵ A discussion happened, but only to make a clear ruling that travelling on the high seas was routine and did not pose any problem.²⁶

2.2 Mediterranean Rulers and Jewish Merchants: Era of Mutual Commercial Benefits

During the period from 969 to 1250 AD., the whole Mediterranean was barely ruled by a single power, the Fatimids, 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 governance. 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 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.²⁷

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 various aspects of the Jews prior to 10th century could be gathered. When Alexandria surrendered to Amr ibn 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.²⁸ The presence of a large population of Jewish

²³Eilon, *Jewish Law*, Vol.1, pp.560, 610, 756; D. Sperber, *NauticaTalmudica*, Leiden, 1986, pp.101-2; Patai, *Jewish Seafaring*, p.91.

²⁴Shlomo ben Aderet, *The Innovations*, second half of the thirteenth century, Vol.4, p.185 Jerusalem, 1901

²⁵ See Gil, 'Radhanite Merchants', pp.455-6, S. D. Goitein, *Mediterranean Society: Economic Foundation*, Vol.1, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, p.299

²⁶Gil, 'Radhanite Merchants', p. 457

²⁷S.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.

²⁸Ernest James Worman, "Notes on the Jews in Fustat from Cambridge Genizah Documents", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol.18:1, 1905, p.4

people can be traced in Egypt during the 10th century, which is the starting period of this study. However, their historical stories go back to much earlier. The earliest reference of the Jews in Fustat, so far known, is in a document of the year 750 C. E.²⁹ But very little indeed do we know of the life of the important Egyptian Jews for the three centuries succeeding this document.

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 Vizier. The Ahima's Chronicle says that it was Paltiel, who organized the occupation of the country for al-Mo'izz and who remained as the trusted Vizier of this ruler as well as of his son al-'Aziz.³⁰ 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 Muslim lawyers permitted the employment of non-Muslims to the post of subordinate Vizier. 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 of Egypt! I give you advice: Become Jews, for Heaven has become India".³¹

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.³² In Fatimid, Egyptian 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.

²⁹ Ernest James Worman, Notes on the Jews in Fustat from Cambridge Genizha Documents, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 18:1, 1905, p. 3

³⁰ ElinoarBareket, "The Head of the Jews (rais al yahud) in Fatimid Egypt: A Revaluation", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 67:4, University of London, 2004, p. 195 & Jacob Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, vol. 1, Humphrey Milford, 1920p. 16

³¹ Jacob Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, vol. 1, Humphrey Milford, 1920, p. 17

³² Ibid. pp.16-17.

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 with safety and security against anti-Semitism of the Crusaders. Moreover, the less interfering nature of Fatimid government in matters of trade and facilities like reasonable custom tariffs, created a commerce-friendly atmosphere.³³

The composition of Fatimid government used to exhibit cosmopolitan nature of the 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 an example of liberal spirit of the Fatimid period.³⁴ 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 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 commerce friendly atmosphere in Egypt.³⁵

One may wonder whether the political boundaries affected the course of trade in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. Though the *Geniza* 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

³³ Ibid. p. 5.

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 33-34.

³⁵ The bulk of documents related to trade transactions, found at *CairoGeniza*, between eleventh to thirteenth century are direct evidence for the smooth trade transactions .for details see S. D. Goiteinand Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*

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 local products.³⁶

Although the Jews were scattered both in East and West, about 80% of the world Jewry was under Muslim rule in West Asia.³⁷ The freedom which the Jews enjoyed in the Islamic countries during medieval period was lagging 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.³⁸ 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 Egypt during medieval period which has been greatly reflected in Jewish historical sources. The correspondence reveals that a cordial relation existed between the rulers and merchants. When Az-Zahir, the son of al-Hakim, became the 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 re-organize the socio-economic structure. Along with this, he also abolished all obnoxious restrictions imposed on the minorities during his father's period.³⁹

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 rare and precious goods and made long journeys to acquire them. The latter was a banker with whom 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 entered in conflicts with the Vizier. A Jew by name Abu Mansur was made Vizier on the

³⁶S. D. Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, vol.1, pp. 59-60

³⁷Maristella Botticini & Zvi Eckstein, "From Farmers to Merchants, Conversions and Diaspora: Human Capital and India History", p. 919.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 921.

³⁹ Jacob Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, p.76.

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.⁴⁰

Jews moved without constraints within the Muslim empires from Iraq and Persia to Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Palestine, Anatolia, Egypt, and North Africa. Jews settled in large numbers between 711 A.D. to 1236 A.D. when the Muslim rulers overtook southern Spain and established the Cordoba caliphate. During 756 A.D., Cordoba was the biggest city of Europe with a population of about 100,000. Its population increased to 5 lacs in two centuries, contained 70 libraries and 80,000 shops, in addition to being the commercial hub of trade for goods moving to Constantinople, Alexandria, Baghdad, Damascus and India. Under the Muslim rule in Spain, Jews held coveted positions and were involved in a lot of skilled professions, which were crucial to the trade at the local level, only to gain a monopolistic situation in coming times in international trade.⁴¹

2.3 Jewish Merchants and their Specific Characteristics: Education and Unity

Unlike other non-Muslims, the Jews linked with Cairo *Geniza* 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. Judaism as a religion gave much weightage to education.⁴² The creation of worldwide Jewish diaspora has been 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.⁴³

The Muslim world offered new avenues of growth to the Jews as new cities, towns and administrative spaces emerged, making way for the creation of skilled jobs. The literate Jewish population in the villages in Iraq and other Muslim lands, moved to urban centres and got

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 76-79.

⁴¹ Maristella Botticini & Zvi Eckstein, "From Farmers to Merchants, Conversions and Diaspora: Human Capital and India History", p.915.

⁴² Ibid, pp. 887-888p. & p.894. for more information on education among Jews community see S.D. Goitein, *The Community in A Mediterranean Society: The India Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. II, London, 1978

⁴³ Maristella Botticini & Zvi Eckstein, "From Farmers to Merchants", p. 890

involved in modern occupations like crafts, trade, money lending, tax collection and medical professions. Agriculture was abandoned. It took about 150 years for complete occupational transition and by 900 A.D., almost all of the Jewish population in Iraq, Persia, Syria and Egypt had got engaged in urban professions. Almost 80% of the Jewish population lived in 8th century Iraq and Persia, with Baghdad having a large Jewish population of about 2 lacs. Since Abbasid Empire allowed anybody to engage in any occupation, regardless of religion and ethnicity, the literacy levels of the Jews gave them a distinct advantage above the non-Jews. Most non-Jews remained farmers. This trend of Jews occupying skilled urban professions remained the most distinctive characteristic thereafter.⁴⁴

After Ninth Century also, education was promoted amongst 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 talked about the universality of primary education within the Jews living in the Muslim world.⁴⁵ The culture of literacy and education eventually made Jews evolve in the Mediterranean as a mercantile community with a separate identity. In fact, their literacy level helped them 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 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.⁴⁶

The feeling of being 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 the captives'. In Egypt, it was in the capital Cairo-Fustat that the Jews involved in Indian and Mediterranean trade used to converge in an intense 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

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 909

⁴⁵S.D.Goitein, *The Community in A Mediterranean Society: The India Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo India*, Vol. II

⁴⁶MaristellaBotticini & ZviEcksteinp, "From Farmers to Merchants, Conversions and Diaspora: Human Capital and India History", p. 915

residing in Byzantine.⁴⁷ Religion was a very strong bond through which Jews were connected with the members of their community throughout the Mediterranean, and later, in the Indian Ocean. Frequent reference to religious gatherings, such as Sabbath and congregations is seen in *Geniza* documents. 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. Their dressing also differed from others which included gorgeous colours and fabrics.⁴⁸ In this context, the policy of inheritance deserves a mention while discussing the legalities of Jewish trading on the high seas. In case of a death, the property of the Jew concerned was handed over to the Jewish community and its heads wherever the ship used to land, all got concluded through a series of intercommunity arrangements.⁴⁹

The inter-community network among Jewish merchants can be seen in the arrangement of personal courts made for the Jewish people specifically. However the free movement of people within the Mediterranean led to the development of a free trading society. Rather than territorial, the application of law was personal, and community courts mattered more. The Jewish community in diaspora had their own courts in various Mediterranean countries.⁵⁰ The Jews had a head of the community as well, named *Nazid*, in the Fatimid Empire.⁵¹ The *Nazid* occupied an influential position within the Jewish community and had the responsibility to sort out disputes among its coreligionists.⁵²

2.4 Beginning of a New Journey in the Background of Agony

The commercial journey of the Jewish merchants got assistance of the Mediterranean rulers for mutual profits. That does not imply that this journey was a bed of roses and did not see any kind of confrontation and impediment. There were several instances of sufferings and oddities, which

⁴⁷ There are numerous *Geniza* documents which show that how the Jewish community was closely connected and concerned for each other wellness. *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Safe Conduct and Assistance for Brother*, Aden, 1145; *Letter from Mahruz to Abu Zikri Kohen with Urgent Warning*, Fustat, March 3, 1135; *Letter to a merchant away in the far East, whose interests were Protected by the 'Nazid David'*, Aden, 1180; *Shipwrecked Merchants, Whose Estates Were Cared for by Madmun I and His Successors* in S.D. Goitein & M.A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 359,487,503,524

⁴⁸ S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁹ *A testimony in which Joseph Lebdi renounced claims to Farah's (a merchant who got murdered in Aydhah) assets*, see S.D. Goitein & M.A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 250

⁵⁰ S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, vol. I, p. 66.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.69.

⁵² *Ibid.* p.84.

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.⁵³ 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 complaints against Jews involved in Indian trade.⁵⁴

By the eleventh century, Jews were still an important factor in international commerce but were no longer owners and operators of ships. Many spheres of commerce were out of their reach, and they had many competitors, mainly among the rising Italian sea powers.⁵⁵ During the end of 9th century, the descriptions reflect the decline in the dominance of international East-West maritime trade. The *Geniza* documents attribute this to several factors. W.Heyd argued that until 10th to 11th centuries, Jews had been an integral part of the international maritime trade that happened in the Mediterranean but they were ousted by the Italians. This theory has found no major oppositions. Many scholars also hint at the restrictions which got created due to the competition from other trading factions.⁵⁶

The ships were mostly owned by the governing class- emirs, sheikhs, qadis, and even their consorts. Although, this has a degree of assumption, for middle-class citizens, and especially Jews, there was a devastating competition.⁵⁷ The Jewish trade declined with the attack of the Muslims on the northern shores of the Mediterranean. This became very high in the first half of tenth century but in the second half, Byzantium, the Fatimid empire, and the West, and northern Italy rose to prominence, establishing a new world order. From this time onwards, the competition in shipping increased, and shipping no longer was limited to luxury items. Even smaller items were cargoed, thereby reducing the profit margin from the trade, making the Jews less competitive. Shipping was subject to various socio-economic and military political changes.

⁵³Ernest James Worman, "Notes on the Jews in Fustat from Cambridge Genizah Documents", p.4

⁵⁴Jacob Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, vol. 1, Humphrey Milford, 1920, p.p. 30-34.

⁵⁵Arbel, *Trading Nations: Jews and venetians in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean*, Leiden, 1995, pp. 174-5

⁵⁶ Sarah Arenson, "Medieval Jewish seafaring between East and West", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, vol. 15, 2008, p.39

⁵⁷ Both Goitein and Ashtor discuss the decline in Jewish shipping in this period, taking for granted a different situation at an earlier date. Arbel dismisses the references to Jewish shipowners prior to the early modern period as of marginal significance, arguing that social, political, religious and economic factors combined to exclude Jews from this occupation.

Now owning a ship was no longer a sign of wealth but a sign of decline. Events like the Holy Crusade, where Christianity and Islam went to war, brought piracy and corsair.⁵⁸ Times were difficult and the control over sea often led to naval clashes and guerrilla warfare. Many commoners lost their lives and Jews at this time got involved in ransoming captives. This was prevalent both in the eastern Mediterranean, between Byzantium and the Muslims, and in the West.⁵⁹ S.D. Goitein contends that Jews used to strictly follow the rules of Sabbath,⁶⁰ because of which there were lesser ships, and which led to further decline in the maritime commerce.

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 themselves 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.⁶¹ Although, there are enough evidences that proved 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 A.D., the Jews assembled at Fustat (Egypt) synagogue on Shevat 5th to celebrate their deliverance.⁶²

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 that occurred on the way of his travel and the oddities he encountered on the way of his caravan. He adds that seafaring 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.D., Jews and Christians were granted liberty of conscience. In 1020 A.D., all those who adopted Islam were allowed to return

⁵⁸Tolkowsky, *They Took the Sea*, p.88; E. Ashtor, "The Jews in the Mediterranean Trade in the 15th Century", in *The Jews*, Vol.7, p.83; Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, Vol.1, pp.328-32

⁵⁹ E. Bashan, 'Captivity and Ransom in Jewish Mediterranean Society' ;Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 1971 [in Hebrew with English summary]; F. Baer, *Die Judenim Chrislichen Spanien*, Vol. I, Berlin, 1929, pp.7-8, No.13

⁶⁰ S.D. Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, Vol.1, pp.309-11

⁶¹ Ibid. p.34

⁶² Ibid. pp.30-34

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.⁶³

However, the incident made many Jewish merchants of Fustat move 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 *Geniza* documents refer to the existence of courts belonging to the Jewish community at Fustat for handling matters related to India trade.⁶⁴ There were cases when the Jewish traders also approached the local Islamic authorities for the redressal of grievances.⁶⁵ Despite the clash between Fatimid Egypt and Sunnite Tunisia, there was a constant flow of merchants between these two countries and travel to various regions of the Indian Ocean continued.⁶⁶

2.5 Deteriorations in the Mediterranean Zone and Gradual Rise within Indian Ocean

“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 countries of Indian Ocean.⁶⁷ 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 stretch their commercial activities towards Indian Ocean.⁶⁸ It has also been noted that since the earlier period, the western states had been trying to trade directly with the East via Egypt and Red Sea.⁶⁹ Although the concrete information regarding Jewish engagement with the countries of Indian Ocean during middle Ages are found in the documents of Cairo *Geniza*, 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,

⁶³S.D.Goitein’s, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*. vol.I,pp.21-22

⁶⁴ Lawsuit of Jekuthiel al-Hakim vs. Joseph Lebdi, two Jews merchants involved in trade route between Mediterranean to Malabar, are such documents which proof the existence of the courts belonging to the Jewish community. See. 167-197

⁶⁵ S.D. Goiteinand Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 12

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 59-60

⁶⁷S. D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.3-4.

⁶⁸Goitein, S.D., *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*. p.149.

⁶⁹ George FadlHourani, *Arab Seafaring- In The Indian Ocen In Ancient And Early Medieval Times*, Princeton New Jersey, 1951, p.52.

is mentioned in passing in many medieval Jewish texts. By this time, there was a general impression among the Jews that anyone who goes to India would become rich.⁷⁰

The involvement of Jews with the captive ransoming came with its share of benefits. They were allowed privileges and a free passage between the two worlds. This was a time when maritime trade for the Jews in the Mediterranean was shrinking but the one in the Indian Ocean was on the rise. The Jews of the Byzantine Empire also traded with the last of Sassanids. In the last century, before Islam rose to prominence, an autonomous Jewish trading station grew in Jotabe in the Red Sea. There was a rule in Yemen, which is a prominent emporium in East-West trading system.⁷¹ Very soon after the Muslim conquests, by the 1000 A.D., Jews were accorded special privileges by the ruler of Mahodayapuram on the Malabar coast.⁷² An important Jewish community developed there, trading with Arabia, East Africa, and Egypt.

Geniza documents provide accounts of the flourishing trade in the Indian Ocean, with the Jews owning ships and being captains in many of the other ships. In one of the instances, a Jew offered his ship to a shipwrecked stranger, suggesting that they were so much in dislike of the ships being owned by the Gentiles.⁷³ Jews held positions of pride within the society in form of big business owners, public figures and the controllers of manufacturing and commerce. Madhmun ben Yefet, a Jew, held the position of *wakil* in Aden as well as harbour-master around 1170 A.D.⁷⁴ Further, the conquest of Islam made the position of Jews more prominent in the international maritime trade. They attained the zenith of their success in 9th century in the matters of international seafaring and commerce over East-West trade. This sort of emergence was never seen before. Their influence decreased only when the Byzantine and the Muslim rule began to fade away during the late and middle ages. This was a time when the Jews shifted to trading in the Indian Ocean as a new lucrative destination.

⁷⁰ Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. S. Rosenblatt, New Haven, 1967, p. 26.

⁷¹ *Social and Religious History*, Vol.3, pp.66-70; A. Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* London, 1971, pp.30-33, 43-7, with bibliography.

⁷² K. V. Subrahmanyam, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Trivandrum, 1921

⁷³ S. D. Goitein, and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 121-32 & S.D. Goitein, *The Yemenites: History, Society, Spiritual Life*, Jerusalem, 1983

⁷⁴ *Letter of Thanks from Halfon b. Manasseh to Abraham b. Bundar* in S. D. Goitein, and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 306, *Yemenites*, pp.38-9, 84-5; idem, *Letters*, pp. 177-8

The link between Mediterranean, particularly between the Jews of Israel and India, has often been established by some other sources as well. The historical legends of Cochin Jews talk a lot about the pre-historical commercial links between South and West Asia, about shipping and commerce in the ancient world, about the impact of travels of Alexander of Macedonia to India, and the exchanges of ambassadors between Greek and Indian kings. One may get details of this by a review of Biblical and Talmudic literature, as well as Buddhist texts and epic poems written in old Tamil, and also from a careful analysis of Josephus and Philo. The data from pre-history clearly indicate that commerce flourished between South Asia and West Asia, including at the city of Abraham, Ur. They provide a background for Biblical, Indian, and Greek literature, which indicates more interaction between India and the Jews in remote past.⁷⁵

The importance of Jewish trade in India can be gathered from the fact that ruling authorities were very 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 towards 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, Fatimid were nowhere behind cashing this opportunity, and hence encouraged the commercial expansion towards the Indian Ocean.⁷⁶

However, in *Geniza* 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, have 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 *Geniza* 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

⁷⁵ Nathan Katz, “From Legend to History: India and Israel in the Ancient World Shofar”, Vol. 17, No. 3, *Special Issue: Judaism and Asian Religions* (SPRING 1999), Purdue University Press, pp.11-12

⁷⁶ Goitein, S.D and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.21-22.

most part of the time. Most of the Jewish traders, whose commercial papers were preserved in the Cairo *Geniza*, were usually active along the Western coast of India.⁷⁷

2.6 Nature of Jewish Merchants Settlements on the Western Coast of India

The nature of Jewish settlements and their changing character over the years has been a puzzling issue. While the ancient indigenous sources, particularly the copper plates from Kerala⁷⁸, indicate a permanent Jewish presence on the West coast of India, the *Geniza* sources hardly refer 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.⁷⁹ For example, Abraham ben Yiju, one of the most famous personalities of India trade, and often mentioned in *Geniza* 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.⁸⁰ However, the gap of sources remains a hurdle in the way of knowing the history of Jewish settlements in India for pre-modern period. It should be specially mentioned here that the Cairo India documents contain the name of twenty places situated on the West coast of India.⁸¹ 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.

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

⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 5-6.

⁷⁸ T. A GopinathaRao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, pp.66-75.

⁷⁹ S.D. Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, p. 29.

⁸⁰ S. D. Goitein, and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 69-72. The letters he wrote from India cover the period between 1132 to 1149 and on September 11, 1149 he wrote a letter to his brother back in Aden informing him that he has finally left India with a good sum of money and also showed his desire to settle back to their home land which was al-Mahdiyya, Tunisia.

⁸¹ Ibid. p.24.

First Century C.E. and settled on the Malabar Coast of India.⁸² 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*) alongwith Manigramam merchant guild, which has often been viewed as a Christian merchant guild.⁸³

The trade route from Quilon to Mediterranean was widely used by the Jewish merchants since 9th century. This trade route was used for the export of pepper, ginger, brazil wood and cardamom from different ports of Kerala.⁸⁴ As the commercial engagements of the Jews with Quilon accelerated, they organized themselves within a group or came under a merchant guild named *Anjuvannam*. The introvert nature of Jewish community, and the tendency of operating within their own communal organization, must have led to the formation of such trading guild. As 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.⁸⁵

Going back to *Anjuvannam*, scholars have provided various interpretations regarding the *Anjuvannam*. Its identity 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 comprised of foreigners. The members of *Anjuvannam* had been speculated to be Arab Jews or Arab Muslims, Christians or Persians, 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 merchants' group which was semi-independent in nature.⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷

⁸² William Crooke, *Things India: Being Discursive Notes On Various Subjects Connected With India*, p. 292.

⁸³ GopinathRao, Travancore Archaeological Series, p.68, 71.

⁸⁴ S.D.Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, Princeton, pp. 70.

⁸⁵ For details on the Tharisapally copper plate see T. A GopinathaRao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, pp.66-75.

⁸⁶ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, New Delhi, 1988, pp.24-25.

⁸⁷ M.G.S.Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, 1996, p.155.

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 distance travels between Persian Gulf and coastal China. Later on, the Jewish merchants also got attracted towards this newly emerging port. The medieval traveller, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the Malabar Coast around 1167, also came to Quilon, which he referred to as Khulam by the Benjamin.⁸⁸

Quilon had different names in various sources, such as Kurakkeni Kollam in Malayalam,⁸⁹ Koulam Mali in *Geniza* papers⁹⁰ and in the Persian sources as well.⁹¹ 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 Jews, in comparison to the typical Jews living elsewhere.⁹² 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.⁹³

2.7 Jewish Mercantile Community and Chera Rulers: Phase of Collaborations and Opportunities

The Jews of Muiyirikodode (near Cranganore) in Kerala happened to be one of the wealthiest 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 Muiyirikode, gave money and vessels to the king Bhaskara Ravi Varma, the Chera ruler (962-1020), for countering

⁸⁸ 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

⁸⁹ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", pp.7-8.

⁹⁰ S.D.Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, Princeton, p.64.

⁹¹ For other Arab sources on Quilon see George FadlHourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Princeton, pp.70-74.

⁹² David, G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of life in Cochin", p. 426.

⁹³ M.G.S.Narayanan, *The Perumals of Kerala*, p.32.

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.⁹⁴ These copper plates are engraved in archaic and obsolete Vatteluttu script. These plates have been preserved by the Jewish community of Cochin as their historical legacy, which they often cherish. The *paradesi* synagogue of the white Jews in Cochin is the place where these plates have now been preserved.⁹⁵ 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 scepter 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 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! "*⁹⁶

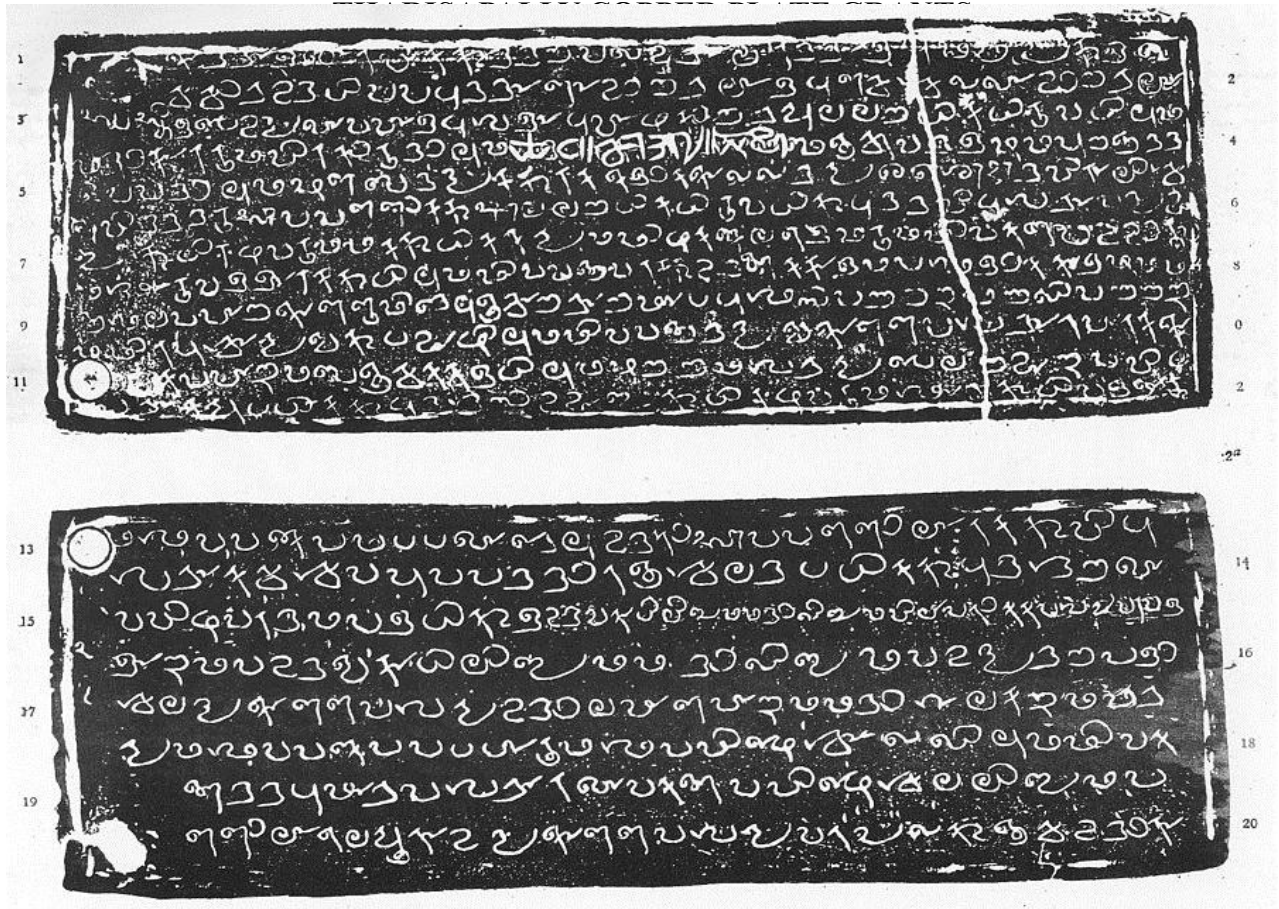
The above information in the copper plates, not only refers to the presence of Jews on the Malabar Coast of India, but also signifies their privileged status. According to the tradition, the Chera ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varman (962-1020) bestowed commercial privileges to his favourite Jewish merchant, Joseph Rabban, who was given copper plates enshrining these privileges in the year 1000. Those plates provided him and 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

⁹⁴ Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian ocean Commerce", pp.9-10

⁹⁵ Walter, J. Fischel, "The Exploration of Jewish Antiquity of Cochin on The Malabar Coast", pp. 230-23

⁹⁶ Published by E. Hultzsch in *EpigraphiaIndica*, Calcutta, 1894, Vol. 3, p. 69.

the native people. The special favour to the Jews must be on the anvil of bringing benefits to the state which motivated the ruler to do so.⁹⁷ The Jews had then been contributing to the economic development of the Chera state.



Source: T. A Gopinatha Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. II

⁹⁷ David, G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish way of life in Cochin", pp.425-26.



COPPER PLATES OF 1069 C.E.

Source: E. Hultzsch in *Epigraphia Indica*, Calcutta, 1894, Vol. 3

These developments and the emergence of Quilon as entreport 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 sailed on the Aden-Mangalore (Manjarur) route,⁹⁸ has referred to Malibarath (Koulam Mali or Quilon) as an important centre of trade for Jewish merchants.⁹⁹ Benjamin of Tudela (c. 1170 C.E.), medieval traveller, has stated about the intelligence of Jewish merchants involved in linking the Quilon and Red Sea trade route and further their commodity-movements towards Venice.¹⁰⁰

The port of Quilon basically served as the junction between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean during the early centuries of medieval period. During Fourteenth Century onwards, Quilon was so dominated by the Jewish merchants that the al-Karimi merchants restricted their commerce to northern parts of Malabar.¹⁰¹ The vibrant commercial activities of the Jewish merchants at Quilon had been noted down by few travellers such as Marco Polo¹⁰². Even Ibn Battuta, the medieval traveller from Morocco, had come across some Jews at Quilon. He states that though the Jews were living under the Governor from their own community, they had to pay toll tax to the ruler of Quilon.¹⁰³

It should be stated here 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).¹⁰⁴ The Jewish distribution to these places seems to have happened from the

⁹⁸ *Letters from Mahruz to Abu Zikri Kohen*, Broach, Mangalore, India, 1145 in S. D. Goitein, and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 473-79

⁹⁹ Pius Malaekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.9.

¹⁰⁰ M.N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, London, 1907, pp.63-64.

¹⁰¹ Pius Malekandathil, "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.

¹⁰² 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.

¹⁰³ H. A. R. Gibb, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, tr. and ed. London, p. 238.

¹⁰⁴ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce" p.7.

Mediterranean, particularly against the backdrop of Jews scattering, that began with multiple socio-economic impetus and initiatives extended to them by the Fatimids and the Ayyubids.¹⁰⁵

2.8 Inclusion of Jewish Merchants in the Polity and Economy of Malabar

The collaboration between rulers and merchants has always been a beneficial arrangement for both the parties. The privileges provided to the Jewish mercantile community by the political patrons of Malabar, made for a smoother trade. As far as skills and mechanism of Jewish commerce in India were concerned, akin to 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 return benefits. For example the Kakatiyas of Warangal benefited much from the taxes and duties that came out of the ports. The same could be said regarding the Chola and Pandya kings.¹⁰⁶

The Jewish merchants played a decisive role in the political and economic development of the Chera kingdom, particularly at a time when there were frequent clashes among the three big kingdoms of the Chera, Chola and Pandya in the South.¹⁰⁷ 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 trade with 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 the Jewish merchant guild, the *Anjuvannam*.¹⁰⁸

The expansion of commercial interests of the Cheras towards the West Asian maritime zone coincided with the Jewish interest merging between the Indian Ocean and the

¹⁰⁵S. D. Goitein and Friedman, *India trade*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁶ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, p.154.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 51-62.

¹⁰⁸ K.A.NilakantaSastri, *A History of South India*, New Delhi, pp.181-82.

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 guild, 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 personal interest in mobilising the Jewish resources to help the Chera kingdom on such an occasion of political exigency.¹⁰⁹

The constant support of 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).¹¹⁰ The granted privileges were used by the Jewish community to make their position stronger 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 to not only grow and spread 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 a 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 Second millennium CE¹¹¹

The different groups of Jewish migrants were welcomed by the king of Cochin heartily, who by early Fifteenth century had localized his power base near the harbour.¹¹² This reception of Jewish merchants by the king of Cochin was mainly guided by 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

¹⁰⁹M.G.S.Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Trivandrum, p.82.

¹¹⁰ For details on the privileges and the copper plate on which the privileges were inscribed see K.P.PadmanabhaMenon, *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; ElamkulamKunjanPillai, *Studies in Kerala History*Kottayam, 1970; M.G.S.Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis inKerala* , p.82.

¹¹¹ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce" p.10.

¹¹² David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.428.

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.¹¹³

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.¹¹⁴ The Jewish town of Cochin was 1/3 mile in length and situated nearby the palace of the local ruler, the wall of which divided his residence from the Jewish synagogue. There was a market place as well, which was attached to the southern half of the town. The houses were mostly two storied, having tiled pent roof. While talking about permanent settlements, religious structures become very important. The city also had three synagogues. Among those, two were major synagogues, situated at the northern and southern extremities of the town. Those synagogues were used according to the social division among the Jewish community.¹¹⁵

Because of the huge population of Jews in the kingdom of Cochin, the ruler of Cochin was called king of Jews.¹¹⁶ 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 of Cochin.¹¹⁷ 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.

Moreover, early contact of Jewish merchants in India can be best understood from the writings of the travellers who visited Malabar between the periods of 11th-14th centuries. Around 916 C.E., Arab geographer Abu Said al-Hassan mentioned Jewish communities in India and Ceylon, quite near to Shingly. Ceylon was known to him as Sarandib.¹¹⁸ He wrote: "there is a numerous colony of Jews in Sarandip, and people of other religions." During the same century,

¹¹³ Ibid. p.429.

¹¹⁴ Francis Day, *Land of Perumals*, Madras, 1863, p.134.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. pp.336-38.

¹¹⁶ David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of life in Cochin", p.430.

¹¹⁷ For more information on Synagogues, visit the official website of Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala : (ISJM) *The International Survey of Jewish Monuments* also see Jay A. Waronker. Interview of Kerala office of the Department of Archeology staff, Trivandrum Kerala, 2005.

¹¹⁸ Burnell, "On Some Pahlavi Inscription in South India." *The Indian Antiquary* , p. 316

Ibn Wahab of Bassora mentioned Jews in Cranganore specifically.¹¹⁹ But it was 11th century scholar, al-Beruni, who has provided us with the most extensive description on Jews. But he does not mention the Jews of Kerala. He basically talks about Jews present in Kashmir as he was more familiar with North India rather than South India. He writes:

*'In former times they used to allow one or two foreigners to enter their country, particularly Jews, but at present they do not allow any Hindu whom they do not know personally to enter, much less other people'.*¹²⁰

The 12th century Muslim geographer, Al-Idrisi, left an account of the places in India where Jews settled, including Malabar.¹²¹ He also described a very influential Jewish community in Ceylon. He writes: *"The king of this island has sixteen ministers, of whom one quarter is native to the nation, a quarter is Christian, a quarter is Muslims and a quarter Jews"*.¹²² During the same century, Dimashqi (1320 CE.) mentioned that Jews were the majority in Cyngilin, or better known as Shingly. Another traveller named Abulfeda (1330 CE.) also mentioned the ancient Jewish settlement at Shingly.¹²³

Another medieval Muslim geographer, Ibn Battuta (1325-1354) is an invaluable source, who also confirms the presence of Jews in the Malabar region. He writes:

"On the fifth day of our journey (from Calicut to Kawlam, probably today's Qulion- a trip which is accurately described as taking ten days via the backwater route) we came to Kunja which is on the top of a hill there; it is inhabited by Jews, who have one of their own member as their governor, and pay a poll tax to the sultan of Kawlam."

Kunja Kari has been identified as Chendamangalam situated near Cranganore.¹²⁴

In the queue of traveller's accounts, there are a few more written by some European travellers. During the middle ages, one of the greatest European travellers was Marco Polo of

¹¹⁹ Rabinowitz, Far East Mission, p.97

¹²⁰ Sachau, Translation, *Alberuni's India*, p. 1:206

¹²¹ Sterbach, "India as Described by Medieval European Travellers," p. 10

¹²² Asher, Translation and ed., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, p.188

¹²³ Johnson, "Shingly or Jewish Cranganore", p.22

¹²⁴ P.M. Jussay, "The Songs of Everayi," p.151

Venice, who made his journey during the second half of the 13th century. He mentions about the Jewish presence in Malabar. He writes:

*“upon leaving Malabar (by which he meant coastal part of Tamilnadu) and proceeding five hundred miles towards the south-west, you arrive at the kingdom of Koulam (Quilon). It is the residence of many Christians and Jews, who retain their proper language. The king is not a tributary to any other.”*¹²⁵

While talking about medieval Jewish travellers who left us valuable source materials which help us in knowing the Jewish history, the name of Benjamin of Tudela is very vital. The medieval traveller, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the Malabar Coast around 1167, also came to Quilon, which he referred to as Khulam. 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 Jews in comparison to the typical Jews living elsewhere. He even discussed the cultivation of pepper as well as cinnamon, ginger and many other kinds of spices. Further he describes Jews in the 12th century Malabar:

*“All the cities and countries inhabited by these people contain only about one hundred Jews, who are black in colour as the other inhabitants. The Jews are good men, observers of the law and possess the Pentateuch, the Prophets and some little knowledge of the Thalmud and its decision.”*¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Marco Polo, *The Travels of Ser Marco Polo*, p.301

¹²⁶ 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.



A MAP OF MARCO POLO'S VOYAGES & TRAVELS IN THE 13TH CENTURY THROUGH A GREAT PART OF ASIA, ALL TARTARY, THE EAST INDIA ISLANDS & PART OF AFRICA

Source: <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/31225/a-map-of-marco-polos-voyages-travels-in-the-13th-century-trhough-a-great-part-of-asia-all-tartary-the-east-india-islands-part-of-africa-bowen>

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.¹²⁷ India serving as the junction of trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean trade was often referred to in the *Geniza* papers and was viewed as the heart of 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 Tenth century onwards, the Jewish merchants from Egypt were quite visible in various ports of India. Even the Jewish merchants served as the representatives of the Indian merchants.¹²⁸

Madmun B. Hasan-Japheth, was the representative of the Indian merchants, and alongwith that position, he was also the head of the Jewish community in Yemen. Jewish merchants, who were active along the Mediterranean-India trade route, were in frequent touch with the representatives of Indian merchants. Correspondence between the Jewish merchant Joseph Lebdi from Tripoli and Hasan b. Bunder, representative of the Indian merchants, sheds light upon the type of commercial activities pursued by the Jews in India.¹²⁹

2.9. Conclusion

The foregoing discussions highlight the historical processes that got Jews involved in the Mediterranean trade and shows how they converged in Fustat, the Fatimid capital, and how they eventually moved towards the Indian Ocean. Even though the vast commercial opportunities led Jews to the Indian Ocean trade zones, they were in close contact with their places of origin in the Mediterranean countries. The *Geniza* records suggest that till the end of Eleventh and beginning of Twelfth Centuries, majority of Jewish merchants did not settle permanently on the coasts of India. For conducting their business smoothly, they used to ensure the support of royal authority in their favour, in return for which, they also used to extend economic support to the rulers and

¹²⁷ S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 23, 370

¹²⁸ Ibid. p.37.

¹²⁹ Ibid. pp. 24-29.

liberally contribute 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 strengthen their base, both economically and socially. The strategies to extend commercial networks and mobilize the resources were very much similar here, as in the Mediterranean. Most of the traders sailing from Mediterranean to India preferred to go back to their countries of origin. However, a small segment had already started settling down along Western coastal India, either as collection agents or trading agents or representatives of bigger business houses, which led to the emergence of nucleus for Jewish Diasporas in India. The Jewish merchants who came to Malabar coast for trade spread out all along the Malabar region, with Madai, Pantalayani Kollam, Palayur, Pulloot, Cranganore (Shingly), Mala, Chennamangalam, Parur, Cochin and Quilon (Kurakkeni Kollam) emerging as major centres of Jewish concentration.

Chapter III

Networks of Early Trade of the Jewish Merchants

As the previous chapter has given a background about the Jewish diaspora in the Indian subcontinent in general and western coast specifically, this chapter will look into how Jews established trade networks in different parts by unfolding the various means and modes of Jewish trade. In order to describe the interrelated trade networks in which communities were socially interdependent and spatially dispersed, Abner Cohen, coined the word, 'trade diaspora'.¹ During the early Islamic Caliphate period, Jews began to develop trade diaspora. While doing so, they were in constant touch with their home land, particularly West Asia and Egypt. Andre Wink has described the period between eighth to thirteenth centuries as the era of flourish for the Jewish trade in India.² The period from 750 C.E onwards has been described by many scholars as the culmination of an Islamic world economy in the Indian Ocean.³ Though this view has been contested by Sanjay Subramanyam saying that it was not a monolithic affair, and that it was a rather complex scenario including various groups and communities, such as Gujarati Vaniyas, Tamil and Telegu Chettis, Syrian Christians and Jews.⁴

3.1 Early Networks: Muslim Rulers and Jewish Merchants

Since the early centuries of Islamic history, Jewish community was participating in the trade ventures with North Africa, Egypt, Persia, Khorasan and India, as far as Malabar. On the eve of Muslim conquests, however, the Jews of Iraq and Babylonia appear to be in large numbers and they were second in number only to the Nestorian Christians.⁵ Babylonian Jews became particularly resurgent during the 8th and 9th centuries, when Baghdad became the Islamic capital

¹ Abner Cohen, "Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diaspora," in Claude Meillassoux (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Tenth International African Seminar at Fourah Bay College*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1971, p. 267

² Andre Wink, "Jews Diaspora in India: Eighth to thirteenth centuries", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 24:4, 1987, p.351

³ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. I of *Early Medi-eval India and the Expansion of Islam, Seventh to Eleventh Centuries*. Delhi,, 1990

⁴ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Of Imarat and Tijarat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400to 1750", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37:4, 1995, pp. 754-755

⁵ Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquest*, Princeton, 1981, p.169

and trade flourished. Their dominance in terms of cultural, religious and judicial matters got well established over the rest of Jews. The Gaonic traditions of the Jews kept their international economic supremacy well put till the invasion of Mongols in the 13th century.⁶ Gaons or heads of Babylonian Yeshivas, were the highest authority in the Jewish community, which was a culmination of the center of scholarship, high court and parliament, all put into one. Two such Gaons held seat at Baghdad, capital of the Caliphate. The influence of the Gaonate of Babylonia further increased when Jews of Palestine, Syria, Egypt and North Africa, all came under the political rule of Iraq and Iran.⁷

The eastern Jews started migrating towards west when the Fatimid anti-caliphate in Cairo got established during the 10th century. The distinction between the eastern and western Jews started decreasing. Towns now had two groups of Jews: one Palestinian and the other Babylonian. From that time onwards, there were only two congregations in many towns, one Babylonian and one Palestinian. It was thus only apt that the judicial and administrative authority of Babylonian Gaonate got extended to the eastern Jews as well.⁸

The arrival of Islam and the creation of Islamic states, all brought a new phase of development in the Jewish history. Although the period before and after Arab rule are not well covered, the Muslim rule was a period of prosperity for Jews. During the Arab rule, a lot of Jews embraced Islam and found positions within the state and army, while there were others who did not get converted to Islam. These Jews were given a safe legal status of ‘Zimmis’ across the expanse of Arab towns and cities. There were initial disadvantages that Zimmis faced but due to their solidarity and deep-rooted connections with the Jewish heritage, they drew patronage and favours within the community, enabling them to take positions within finance, banking, trade and other new fields. Due to a tolerant Muslim caliphate, a symbiotic Judaeo-Islamic relationship got established. This positive relationship has been well covered in Arabic and Persian texts, next only to Hebrew.⁹

⁶ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. I, Boston, 2002, p. 87, W.J.Fischel, *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Medieval Islam*, London, 1968, pp.30-32 & S.D.Goitein, *The Mediterranean Society*, 4 Vols, pp.3,5-6, 16-17

⁷Ibid. p. 352

⁸ Andre Wink, *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam: 7th to 11th centuries*, Leiden, 2002, p.87

⁹ Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: their Contacts through the Ages*, New York, 1974, p. 115;20, also see B.Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, London, 1981

Ninth century, the period of Abbasid Caliphate, saw the rise of both Jews and India Trade, which eventually became the backbone of the international economy.¹⁰ During this period, Baghdad was under the rule of Abbasid Caliph, with whose initiative the place developed many banking and financial institutions. The growing importance of Babylonian Jewry in the similar period let the Jewish merchants take part in these state crafted finance establishments. Jewish merchants not only participated but also played a very active role in the growth of these institutions.¹¹ The influence and standing of the Jewish merchants involved in these financial institutions reflect in the fact that they were one of the major sources of fund for the government itself. During the early phase of the tenth century, the control of Abbasid money market fell into the hands of the Jews. These merchant cum bankers also used to provide funds to other merchants, which included both Jews and Muslims. The same bankers also operated as traders or financiers of other Jewish and Muslim traders. The famous Jewish Radhaniya traders whose trade network extended from Western Europe to West Asia till Sind, Hind and China, were also getting funds from these Jewish financiers who were situated in Baghdad.¹²

The influence of Jews was gradually increasing in Egypt as well, both in the sector of economics and administration. The Fatimid conquest over the place was another booming factor for both trade and Jews.¹³ By the tenth century, Fatimid took over important parts of the India trade from their rivals in Iraq. This resulted in the migration of Jews to Fustat (Cairo) in large numbers. The fall of Baghdad and the Abbasids along with the beginning of the crusades during the late tenth century were the major factors behind the redirection of the India trade to Egypt. Jewish trading stations linked to Egypt and the Red Sea termini, can be located in over twenty different places on the west coast of India to the south of Broach, and further in Indonesia.¹⁴ And in Egypt too, the Jews sometimes attained high positions at court. But they were no longer as dominant as they had been in Baghdad, and the India trade of the tenth to twelfth centuries which

¹⁰ S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.3

¹¹ W.J.Fischel, *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Medieval Islam*, London, 1968, pp. 3-7

¹² L. Rabinowitz, *Jewish Merchants Adventurers: The Study of the Radanites*, London, 1948 & M.J. De Goeje ed., *Kitab al-Masalik wa'l-Mamalik of Ibn Khordadbeh*, Leiden, 1889, pp. 153-154

¹³ 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, pp. 33-34

¹⁴ S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.24

is described in the *Cairo Geniza* documents was being carried out and financed to a far greater extent by Muslims based in the Mediterranean area.¹⁵

Still Fustat continued to be one of the major centers of the Jewish mercantile and financial activity. Egyptian Muslims and Egyptian Jewry emerged as the new intermediary between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean. In the twelfth century, when naval supremacy in the Mediterranean shifted from the Muslim south to the Christian North, the Jewish reaction was like that of the Muslims, to turn more exclusively to India trade. So, the eastward movement instead of Baghdad, took them to India via upper Egypt and the Red Sea. Finally, it was in these same centuries that Baghdad lost control of the overland trade route via Khorasan to India, Central Asia and China. On the other hand, fall of the Eastern Caliphate, caused the movement of Jewish merchants towards Eastern frontiers of Islam in large numbers. Here the newly risen dynasties in Persia, namely, Samanids and Ghaznavids, took great interest in realigning the trade routes. The Jewish merchants seized upon the new opportunities in the east as they did in the west.¹⁶

Though the experience of Jewish merchants was not always favorable, as the anti-Jew propaganda grew under the Fatimid's successors, the Ayyubids and Almohids, reaching a climax in the thirteenth century when the Mediterranean unity had been lost completely, and the Mamluks of Egypt imposed discriminatory laws which further deteriorated the position of the Jews.¹⁷

3.2 Jews and the Maritime Network of the Indian Ocean

Before looking into the positioning and performance of Jewish merchants within the Indian Ocean, it is important to understand the maritime networks of the Indian Ocean itself. Indian Ocean is uniquely placed to act as a bridge between the communities spread all over the world. To the west, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf waters extend till the east coast of Africa whereas to the east lies the Bay of Bengal waters (excluding the Java and the China sea), which extend up till Antarctica in the south. The Jewish merchants sailed from Tunisia, Levant and Egypt to the

¹⁵ Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, Vol. I, pp.. 229-230

¹⁶ Andre Wink, "The Jewish Diaspora in India: eighth to Thirteenth Centuries" *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 24:4 , New Delhi, 1987, p.335.

¹⁷ Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, Vol. I, pp. 29-36, 39-41

coastal region of western part of the India, keeping Aden as the mediating point in between these two zones. Thus the trade network running through Red Sea insured the constant flow of people and commodity movement between Mediterranean and western part of the Indian Ocean. An additional advantageous factor to this was the rise of Islam, and its pro-trade inclination which helped in the florescence of Indian Ocean commerce.¹⁸

The account of Pliny testifies the fact that the Western coast of India was popular among the merchants and sailors of West Asia even since the second half of the first century CE.¹⁹ There are plenty of Persian and Arabic sources which contain the names of various places present in the Indian subcontinent. The term used for the Indian Ocean was, *al bahar al Hindi*, sea of Gujarat has been refereed as *bahar Larvi*, while *bahar Harkal* was the term for Bangladesh.²⁰ The frequent references to these places point out to the fact that Arabs were exposed to the world of Indian Ocean and the other places attached to it.

One of the most determining factors in relation to the maritime trade is monsoon winds which used to determine the movement and sailing of ships, respectively. The alternative south-western (June to September) and the north-eastern monsoon (October to January) winds were the major factor behind the routing of the ships along the Indian Ocean, as there were no steam engines invented till that time.²¹ Due to these monsoon winds, it was impossible for any sailor coming from Siraf, Kish, and Hormuz (in the Persian Gulf) and al Fustat (old Cairo) in Egypt, to complete a round trip within the same year to the East Asia and China. This geographical circumstance proved very beneficial for the coastal areas attached to the Indian Ocean, as in order to escape the danger and risk, the sailors were bound to have a stopover at some place. This is how the network of export-import flourished at these western Indian ports, where these sailing merchants used to take halt.²²

¹⁸ G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean during the Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Beirut, 1951

¹⁹ Pliny, *Naturalist Historia* (VI.XXI.56), trans. J. Rackham, London, 1942, p.381

²⁰ B.N. Mukherjee, "The Original Territory of Harikela", *Bangladesh Lalitkala*, Vol.I, 1975, pp. 115-19

²¹ Ibn Majid, trans. G.R. Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese*, London, 1971, pp.34-36

²² Bouchon, Genevieve and Denys Lombard, "India and the Indian Ocean in the Fourteenth Century", in Asin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson, Edited., *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1987, pp. 46-70

Siraf, Kish, and Hormuz (in the Persian Gulf) and al Fustat (old Cairo) in Egypt were the places at the western tip of the Indian Ocean with which the trade was happening. It was impossible for any ship from these areas to complete a round trip between the western and eastern terminus (stretching up to East Asia and China) in a single year because of the alternation of the monsoon winds. Thus, it became a default situation for the trading ships to have a stopover at some nearby port. This geographical feature put Indian sea ports at a very advantageous situation by providing the platform for export and import.²³

However, detailed information about the networks of Jewish trade is given in the *Geniza* sources. Most of the *Geniza* letters speak of commodity movements via Aden or another town in southern Arabia, or from a Red Sea port or from India to the capital of Egypt (Old Cairo or Fustat) or vice versa or even from one place in India to another.²⁴ Old Cairo served as a terminus both for the Mediterranean and the India trade as it had been noted that the exchange of letters among Jewish merchants used to happen from Aden to Sicily or from Dahlak on the southern tip of the Red Sea to Tripoli, Libya, or from Alexandria to India.²⁵

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 centers of Jewish trade on the western seaboard.²⁶

Moreover, for the Jewish merchants operating in the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trading zone, Quilon emerged as their major destination in long distance trade. In the background of emergence of a new trade route linking Abbassid Persia (750-1258 C.E.) and T'ang China, the

²³ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*, pp.40-44

²⁴ The business letters of Jewish merchants preserved in Geniza contains such instances of mobility see Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle*, p. 37. For more information see the business letters sent by Madmun B. Hasan to India in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle*, pp. 311-389

²⁵ Goitein, *India Traders of the Middle*, p.9

²⁶ S.D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, p. 62

emerging glory of Quilon attracted many Jewish merchants.²⁷ The commodity movement from Quilon to the ports of Mediterranean was via Aden, al-Qus, Fustat/Cairo and Alexandria.²⁸ The *Geniza* letters testify to fact that through this, huge amount of pepper and other goods were exported from western coast of India to the Mediterranean countries.²⁹

Allan b. Hussun (1116-1117 C.E.), a Jewish merchant traveling from Aden to Malabar, has highlighted the growing importance of the port of Quilon.³⁰ Benjamin of Tudela (c. 1170 C.E.), a medieval traveler, speaks very highly of the intelligence of Jewish merchants who were able to link Quilon and Red Sea trade route and advance towards Venice.³¹ In the early medieval centuries, Quilon acted as the junction between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. By 14th Century, Jews had taken complete control of the trade in Quilon, to an extent that al-Karimi merchants restricted their commerce to northern parts of Malabar.³² Marco Polo, the traveler, had noticed the Jewish dominance in trade and commercial activities at Quilon.³³ Even Ibn Battuta, the medieval traveler from Morocco, has spoken about the Jews at Quilon. He has written that although Jews were living under the governor from their own community, they had to pay toll tax to the ruler of Quilon.³⁴

Jewish merchants were also active along the trade ventures between Kanara coast and Gujarat coast. Broach, Mangalapuram (Mangrol in the Kathiawad coast), Diu, Somnath and Ghogha, were among a few famous ports of this sea board. One of the earliest mentions of Diu is available in the twelfth century Jewish business letter, which speaks of a voyage from al Manjrur (Mangalore) to al Divi (Diu) in Gujarat from where the ship sailed to Aden. Thus Diu was

²⁷ Hourani, *Arab Sea Fearing in the Indian Ocean*, pp.70-74

²⁸ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese(1498-1663),"pp.240-41 also see Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, pp. 175-229

²⁹ *Account by Abraham Ben Yiju of Indian Products Sold for Another Merchants*, Aden, 1141-44. in S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Book*, pp. 672-74 & S.D.Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, pp. 70,118,190,214-16,262

³⁰ S.D. Goitein, "Portrait of a Medieval India Trader: Three Letters from the Cairo Geniza," *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol.50:3, London, 1987, p.457-60

³¹ M.N.Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* , London, 1907, pp.63-64

³² Pius Malekandathil, " Winds of Change and Links of Continuity" p. 266 & Pius, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels," p.9

³³ Henry Yule and Henry Cordier (ed.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, p.63

³⁴ H. A. R. Gibb, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, tr. and ed. p. 238

connected to both Kanara coast and port of Aden.³⁵ Konkan was another very famous port, which has been frequently mentioned by the Arab travelers as Kunkan, Kamkam and Makamkam. Konkan was positioned to the south of the Gujarat coast.³⁶ Accounts by the Arab travelers give description of the port of Sanjan/Sindan, known to the locals as Samyana. This port was situated at the northern frontier of Konkan and its linkage with the Persian Gulf helped her in fetching some trade benefits. Another port which has been frequently mentioned in the *Geniza* documents was Thana, located to the south of Samyana. The correspondence between the two Jewish merchants, Mahruz and Kohen around 1145, informs us about the voyage taken by the merchant from al Manjrur (Mangalore) to Barus (Broach) via Thana.³⁷ The documents related to Abraham ben Yiju, one of the vital personalities of the India trade, tell us that, he operated his business with the Mediterranean regions for consecutive seventeen years (1132-49) from this very port. Thus, the period saw the web of maritime trade network covering different parts of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. During the *Geniza* Period, to the south of Goa, the most important port in the Kanara coast was al Manjrur, frequently mentioned in the business letters addressed to Abraham ben Yiju, a prominent merchant of the India trade, who belonged to Tunisia and lived on this very port town for around seventeen years (1132-49).³⁸

3.3 Contextualization of Nakhuda Traders within the Jewish Mercantile World

The trade networks and ports mentioned above experienced the existence of various categories of merchants. *Nakhuda*, a term used for ship-owning merchants was one of the major figures within the world of shipping and trading in the Indian Ocean. These merchants have often been referred to in the business letters of the Jewish merchants. The term *Nakhuda*, simply means ship-owner, who performed a vital role and became a crucial character of the Indian Ocean trade during the

³⁵ S.D. Goitein, "From Aden to India", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, XXI & also see "Visiting Faraway Ports: India's Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, ca. 800-1500 CE" by Ranabir Chakravarti, in *Rethinking A Millennium*, p. 255

³⁶ Radhika Seshan, *Medieval India, Problems and Possibilities: Essays in honour of professor A.R. Kulkarni*, Michigan, 2006, p. 158, for more information also see S.M.H. Nainar, *Arab Geographer's Knowledge of Sothern India*, Madras 1942.

³⁷ *Letter from Mahruz to Abu Zikri Kohen*, Broach, Mangalore, India, 1145 in S. D. Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 473

³⁸ *Accounts of Abraham Ben Yiju's Workshop for Bronze Vessels*, India (apparently 1132-39, 1145-49) in S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.644 also see Amitabh Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, for a fascinating life story of Abraham ben Yiju.

Middle Ages. Various sources provide different meanings attached to this word. Apart from the ship-owner, the word has also been used for the captain of ship or pilot.

Nakhuda is a Persian word which literally means 'captain or ship-owner'. This word is made out of the mixture of two words *Nau* and *Khuda*, which means ship and God respectively. Some text also uses the term *nawakhidh* to denote ship-owning merchants.³⁹ The term used for *Nakhuda* in the Arabic texts are 'capitaine de navire' (captain) or 'patron de La barque (ship-owner) or Reeder (pilot). As has been pointed out, *Nakhuda* was not always a ship-owning merchant, he was also entrusted with other tasks. In a 16th century document by Abu I-Fadl, the term used for the *Nakhuda* is *Nakhuda-khashab*, (*Kashab* means wood). which means he supplies the passengers with firewood and straw and assists in shipping and unloading the cargo.⁴⁰

Thus, there has been divergent views and interpretation regarding this very word *Nakhuda*. While talking about ship-owners and captains, the analysis of *Geniza* documents holds a very important position, as the writers were engaged in Indian Ocean trade and sailed the seas personally either as ship-owner, captain or simple merchants. In the collection of Goitein's *India Book*, there are at least seventy-five instances of *Nakhuda* in the *Geniza* documents. Unlike Indian Ocean, writings related to Mediterranean shipping do not use the word *Nakhudas*. Even in the few cases where Egyptian Jews were called *Nakhuda*, it was due to their presumed activity in the Indian Ocean.⁴¹

Individual ship-owners mentioned in *Geniza* documents were very rich and influential. Madmun B. Hasan-Japheth, the prince of Yemenite Jewry was one of them. He is called *nakhuda* only once, probably because of his being better known for his communal and other commercial activities. He was also the representative of merchants at the port of Aden. He was in joint ownership of a ship named al-Mubarak, the blessed, with the governor of Aden, Bilal b. Jarir.⁴² He wrote about a ship ordered by him for carrying commodities and passengers from Aden to Sri

³⁹ *Letters from Sa id b. Marhab to Hillel b. Nahman re his Son in Laws Drowning*, Aden, 1156 in S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.122 & Ranabir Chakravarti, "Nakhudas and Nauvittakas: Ship-owning Merchants in the West Coast of India (C. AD 1000-1500)", *Journal of the Economics and Social History of the Orient*. Vol.43, no.1, 2000, P.37

⁴⁰ S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.122

⁴¹ S.D. Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, Vol.1, P.479

⁴² S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.143

Lanka, covering a distance of 2100 miles.⁴³ This ship was very regular in its operation between the periods of 1132 to 1149. In a letter of 1141, Nahray b. Allan, another very prominent 'India trader', mentions the ship of the elder Madmun in which he sent his goods.⁴⁴

While talking about the famous personalities of India trade, the name of Tunisian Jewish merchant Abraham ben Yiju cannot be missed, who spent almost seventeen years (1132-1149) of his life in Manjrur, now called Mangalore, situated on the western seaboard of India.⁴⁵ The date of his departure from India is not certain, the documents referring to him, end mentioning him suddenly in 1149. One of those letters which confirm his presence at Manjrur till 1149, was a letter written by Yiju himself to his younger brother, who was in Egypt. Through the letter, Yiju wanted to inform his brother about the gifts which he had sent for him in Madmun's ship. The letter was written by Yiju during his way back to home from Aden. It has been assumed that while sending gifts to his brother, he was still at Mangalore.⁴⁶

The letter mentioned above also testifies the fact that Madmun was a very active *Nakhuda* merchant during the periods between 1130-1150, whose ships regularly ran between Malabar-Aden and Aden –Sri Lanka trade routes. While talking about the ship-owning, one must also wonder about the ship-building affairs. Though, the *Geniza* documents do not refer to any such facts directly, some letters by the Jewish merchants give some hints for sure.⁴⁷ Though, the number of ships owned by Madmun is yet to be discovered, his interest in ship building business has been expressed in a letter which he wrote to Abraham ben Yiju. This letter shows his desire to set up a shipping business in order to make better ships for the trading voyages. However, the amount of money needed for this business was impossible to be invested by a single merchant, hence, Madmun wanted to seek partnership from his fellow merchants.⁴⁸ Thus, the will of a rich and experienced merchant in entering a partnership for the shipping business, reflects his idea of

⁴³ S.D.Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 1973, p.183

⁴⁴ S.D.Goitein, "From Aden to India: Specimens of Correspondence of India Traders of the Twelfth Century", *Journal of the Economics and Social History of the Orient*, 1980, p.53

⁴⁵ *Accounts of Abraham Ben Yiju's Workshop for Bronze Vessels*, India (apparently 1132-39, 1145-49) in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.644 also see Amitabh Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, for a fascinating life story of Abraham ben Yiju

⁴⁶ *Letters from Abraham ben Yiju to his Brother and sisters after his Safe Return from India*, Aden, 1149. In S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.679

⁴⁷ *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abu Zikri Kohen, Aden, 1130* in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 371

⁴⁸ Ranabir Chakravarti, "Nakhudas and Nauvittakas", pp.44-45

making more money out of the new business. Moreover, this also shows an insight of experienced merchants like Madmun, who wanted advancement in the field of shipping by making better ships, which would have been more efficient for the long and risky voyages. The mentality of sharing investment among more merchants must have been devised from the idea of sharing risk related to the maritime commerce.⁴⁹

In the row of discussing documents related to ship-owners and shipping, we must talk about the letter written by Khalaf b. Issac b, Bundar, who was a close ally of Madmun at Aden and also happened to be his cousin. This letter by Khalaf was written to Abraham ben Yiju, in 1139, at Mangalore, and reads:

“I (Khalaf) took notice, my master (referring to Yiju), of ours announcement of the sending of refurbished has arrived iron in the boat of the nakhuda (ship-owner) Ibn Abi ‘IKata’ib. The shipment has arrived and I received from him two bahars and one-third, as you noted. There is another letter in this sequence which says ‘Khalaf collected some small items from the nakhuda Joseph/Yusuf, who travelled from Dahbattan, on the Malabar Coast, in the ship of Ibn al-Muqaddam.’”⁵⁰

The letters mentioned above depict that the merchants who owned the ships also used to sail on it for the purpose of trade in spite of all the odds and dangers attached to the sea. This letter informs us about a new terminology *Pattanasvami*, used for the lord of the port or representative of the merchants in a port. *Pattanasvami* is a Sanskrit word which appeared in several texts of early medieval south India. These *Pattanasvamis* were the influential Hindu merchants acting within the Indian Ocean trade network along with the other group of merchants. Thus the word found its place in Arab writings with a slight modification and called *Fatanswami*. Coming back to the letter, it continues to inform that there were two ships under one *Fatanswami*, one was small, and the other was big. The smaller ship loaded with pepper reached the port of Aden safely, whereas the bigger ship, due to the shipwreck lost all the pepper on it. Though all the pepper got lost due to the shipwreck, some portion of iron could be saved by hiring some paid professional divers who were present on the port of Aden.⁵¹ The presence of

⁴⁹ S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.62

⁵⁰ Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* , Princeton, 1973, pp.185-92

⁵¹ *Letters from Kalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yiju, Dahbattan*, India. Aden, after 1138, in S.D Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 599-607 also see A. Appadurai, *Economic Conditions in Southern India 100-1500*, vol. II, University of Madras, Madras, 1936

professional and paid divers on the port of Aden says this loud that shipwreck was a very common phenomenon in the maritime trade during that period.

Another term which has been encountered from these documents was *Fadiyar*, which was supposedly a designation like *Fatanswami* and who belonged to Indian ship-owning community. The letter mentions that this ship of *Fadiyar* under the command of a Muslim merchant Ahmad was on a return trip to Malabar from Aden, in which Khalaf had sent some gifts for Yiju.⁵² Thus the letter clearly indicates the role of Hindu merchants in the maritime trade network of the Indian Ocean and their further cooperative engagement with the other Muslim and Jewish merchants.

Ramisht⁵³ was another ship-owning merchant who has often been stated in the business letters of the Jewish merchants related to India trade. Ramisht used to operate from the port of Siraf, situated in the Persian Gulf. The commercial venture of this *Nakhuda* merchant from Siraf was spread from the western coast of India to the ports along the Red Sea, via Aden.⁵⁴

Abraham ben Yiju received a clear description of Aden's invasion by the King of Kish through a Jewish letter in the twelfth century. Kish was then a famous port in the Persian Gulf. As soon as the invasion subsided, two ships with merchantmen arrived from the Persian port of Siraf to Aden. The ships belonged to Ramisht. Although, he lost two other ships completely, the loss was not all that great for the Sirafi *Nakhuda*, Ramisht.⁵⁵ All of this information was given to Yiju through the letter.

The incident of wreckage of ships and the loss that Ramisht faced has again been covered in a letter addressed to Abraham ben Yiju from Joseph B. Abraham during the late 1130's in Mangalore. Abraham ben Yiju too had lost some of his goods in the wreckage of the two ships

⁵² *Letters from Kalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yiju, Dahbattan, India*. Aden, after 1138, in S.D Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 504-05

⁵³ Letters from Mdmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju, Aden, 1134 in-S.D Goitein and Friedman, *India Book*, pp.353-355

⁵⁴ S.M. Stern, "Remisht of Siraf", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of the Great Britain and Ireland*, 1967, pp. 10-15 add india book reference & II, 26, Letters from Mdmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju, Aden, 1134 in S.D Goitein and Friedman, *India Book*, pp.353-355

⁵⁵ S.D. Goitein, "Two Eye Witness Accounts of the Invasion of Aden by the Ruler of Kish(Qays)", *Bulletin of the School of Asian and African Studies*, 1953, pp. 247-57 & II, 16-19, *Letters from Mdmun b. Hasan to Abraham ben Yiju & II, 21-24:D, Letter from Mdmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Four Fragments of Three Copies*, Aden, 1135, in S.D Goitein and Friedman, *India Book* PP. 337-342

because of which Joseph b. Abraham solaced him: “Do not ask me, my master, how much I was affected by the loss of the belongings to you”.⁵⁶

Yet another letter addressed to Abraham ben Yiju by Madmun b. Hasan states that he had also sent his consignment of a bag of copper containing 23 pieces, on the ship of Ramisht *Nakhuda*. This ship was on its course from Aden to Malabar, but whether this ship was on this particular route or it used to take the course between Mangalore and Siraf, is not very clear. Amidst all of this, a point which is undoubtedly established is the fact that he was very wealthy and he owned a large number of vessels that operated between the two leading sea routes of the western Indian Ocean (i.e. the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea) and also the Malabar coasts.⁵⁷

The letter to Abraham Yiju, which mentions the consignment of bag of copper in the Ramisht’s ship also mentions two other ship owners. One of the owners was named Al-Muqaddam and the other was named Nambiyar. *Nakhuda* Al-Muqaddam has been described even earlier as a ship owner and *Nakhuda* Joseph from Dahbattan or Valarapattnam (in Malabar) had travelled in his ship to Aden. This letter also mentions the fact that *Nakhuda* Al-Muqaddam’s ship was on its way from Aden to al Manjur.⁵⁸ The other ship owner who has been mentioned in the letter, apart from Ramisht and *Nakhuda* Al Muqaddam is Nambiyar, who is undoubtedly an Indian who had a ship and was involved in Trade with *Fatanswami* and *Fadiyar*. Nambiyar happens to be the third Indian ship owning merchant who has been mentioned in the letter correspondence between ben Yiju and Madmun.⁵⁹

Abu ‘Abd Allah son of a *nakhuda*, is yet another merchant who had been talked about and who had traded with Abraham ben Yiju. Abu was said to have been staying with Ben Yiju around 1146. Once Abraham Yiju assigned him to get an order of iron from a Banyan supplier in India and deliver it to Madmun in Aden. Abu travelled in his father’s ship and delivered the consignment but Madmun is said to have complained to Yiju about the lesser quantity of goods

⁵⁶ S.D.Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 1973, p.193

⁵⁷ Letter from Mdmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Four Fragments of Three Copies, Aden, 1133-40 & *Letter from Mdmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Two Fragments*, Aden, 1134 in S.D Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 319-36, 352-55

⁵⁸ *Letter from Mdmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Safe Conduct and Assistance for Brother*, Aden, 1145, *Letters from Khalaf b. Issac to Abraham Ben Yiju, Dahbattan*, India and Aden, after 1138 in S.D Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 359-65, 594-96 & S.D. Goitein, “From Aden to India”, 1980, p.62

⁵⁹ Ranabir Chakravarti, “Nakhudas and Nauvittakas”, p.48

delivered, to which Abu explained that the same quantity was given by the Indian supplier. Nevertheless, Madmun held Abu liable for the payment of the balance. Abu is then said to have died in the Sultan's ship during one of the journeys when the ship sank. Abu 'I-Faraj was another trader, who Ben Yiju dealt with for mercantile shipments from India to Yemen. He was believed either to be an Arab or a Jew.⁶⁰

Another *Nakhuda* named Abu Zikri Ibn al-Shami has been written about once. He was carrying a small ship with consignment of goods from Yemen to India. This consignment belonged to Madmun b. Japheth and was sent via Aydhab to Fustat. Abu Zikri had got killed in this travel when the ship traveling to India capsized midway. Madmun had also sent goods to Ben Yiju with Ahmad b. Bakhtiyar, son of the *rubban* (captain) Bakhtiyar.⁶¹ Goitein observed that eventually Ahmad had risen economically and socially. Such instances have been mentioned in the *Geniza* papers in context of India trade, where an upward social and economic movement has happened. The father might have served as commander of a ship and son became a *nakhuda*.⁶² Ben Yiju sent merchandise to another person named Rayhan from India to Aden, to be delivered to Madmun and Joseph. Goitein mentions it as the name of a slave or freed man.⁶³

Along with Arab, Persian, Yemenite, Adenese, the Geniza documents also talk about some Indian *nakhudas*, ship-owners active during that period. Tinbu was one of such ship-owning merchants, who has been mentioned in a Jewish business letter of 1145, written by Mahruz, b Jacob to his brother-in-law, Judah b. Joseph ha-Kohen. Mahruz sent letters from Mangalore to Thana, further north on the western coast of India, to this Indian *nakhuda* and requested him to give money to Mahruz's brother-in-law Abu Zikri Kohen, whose ship had been attacked by pirates. Mahruz then wrote to Abu Zikri:

*"If, my lord, you need any gold, please take it on my account from the nakhuda Tinbu, for he is staying in Thana, and between him and me are bonds of inseparable friendship and brotherhood."*⁶⁴

⁶⁰ *Letter from Mdmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Four Fragments of Three Copies*, Aden, 1133-40, *Fragment of Detailed Accounts Written by Abraham Ben Yiju, India*, 1132-39, 1145-49 in S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages* pp. 319-325, 658-60

⁶¹ *Account of a Merchant in India Written by Abraham Ben Yiju*, Yemen, 1140-43& S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 675-78

⁶² S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 150-53

⁶³ S.D. Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, vol.I, p.47

⁶⁴ *Letters from Mahruz to Abu Zikri Kohen, Broach*, Mangalore, India, 1145, in S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 473-75

Kanbaya also called Cambay was a very famous port during the early medieval times in Gujarat. Mahruz had requested his brother-in-law to start his return journey as soon as possible from Kanbaya, i.e. Cambay, to Mangalore. Mangalore was a famous port, which was located to the north of Broach, during the early medieval and medieval Gujarat. The letter reads:

*“The boats start presently from your place, from Kambayat and from Thana; please set out immediately so that you reach Mangalore with vessels which God willing will soon reach Malibarat, Kayakannur and Mangalore.”*⁶⁵

Tinbu was apparently the owner of a ship and hailed from Mangalore. His shipping business extended from Manjrur to Thana along the Konkan littorals. He was a Hindu. A letter from Mahruj to Judah B. Jacob Tinbu, who was headed for Thana, addressed him as the epithet *Nakhuda*, even after the fact that he was a non-Muslim. The greater fact to look at is the close bond of trust between Mahruj and Tinbu.⁶⁶ Here to the western Indian Ocean, the literate ship owners used *Nakhuda* and *nauvittaka* synonymously.

Thus all these documents and facts related to *nakhudas*, in the context of India trade, along with reflecting the trade networks lying between Egypt-Aden-Yemen-Malabar, also show the diverse groups involved in it. It also displays the dependence of merchants on some third party or agent kind of entity, who helped them in managing their business abroad where they could not go personally. Further, this comprises breach of trust and betrayal both together. This cooperative work irrespective of religion, community and space, also insured a constant flow of information which was inevitable to insure a smooth running of this mercantile structure.

The system was even complex and interrelated, as there was a group of merchants who if not owning the whole ship, used to hire a small place on the ship for trade. This place on the vessel was technically called *bilji* and had repeatedly appeared on the *Geniza* texts. It was kind of a place, where the travelers could keep their wares, sleep and also cook. Nahray b. Allan, a very famous Jewish merchant and an active participant in the India trade, wrote a letter in 1141. The letter was written during his departure from the Red Sea port of Aydhab to Aden, in which he expresses his happiness of occupying a *bilji* on the ship of al-Dibaji.⁶⁷ Al-Dibaji was a merchant who used to deal in brocades, and who amassed a lot of wealth being into this very

⁶⁵ *Letters from Mahruz to Abu Zikri Kohen, Broach, Mangalore, India, 1145*, in S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 473-77

⁶⁶ S.D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 1973, p.64

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.198

profession, which in turn even raised him up to the position of a ship-owner in the Red Sea trade zone. Even though he became rich and owned ship, it did not let him leave his previous profession of dealing into brocades.⁶⁸ Thus, these ship owning merchants formed a very vital part of this ongoing network of trade, who along with the collaboration of non-ship owning merchants established a culture of harmony and balance.

3.4 Non-Denominational Networks of Trade: Rulers and Non-Jewish Merchants

Though the Jewish merchants were known for their strict community behavior, when it came to the commercial benefits, they did not restrict themselves from building relationship with people from other religious backgrounds. Nevertheless, Jewish merchants' collaboration with the local rulers of Malabar was a must for the purpose of their economic rise and peaceful living. Thus, the network of trade of the Jewish merchants got operational with the collaboration of the rulers. The Jew merchants played a decisive role in the political and economic development of the Chera kingdom, particularly at a time when clashes among the three big kingdoms of the Chera, Chola and Pandya in the south were frequent.⁶⁹ 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 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 the Jewish merchant guild, the *Anjuvannam*.⁷⁰

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 Geniza letters refer to the active movement and visibility of Jewish merchants along the west coast of India, as is evidenced by the trade and manufacturing activities related to the bronze factory of the Jewish merchant Abraham b. Yiju at Manjarur (Mangalore), who originally belonged to al-Mahdiyya, Tunisia.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ranabir Chakravarti, "Nakhudas and Nauvittakas", p.49

⁶⁹ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, pp.51-62

⁷⁰ K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, New Delhi, pp.181-82

⁷¹ *Abraham Ben Yiju's Inventory of Baggage for journey from India to the West*, India (Probable 1140 or 1149) in *India Traders of the Middle Age*, p.661

The backing of Chera rulers made the commercial tasks easier for the Jews in terms of commodity exchange. Through their diasporic networks, Jews used to collect pepper from Kerala and dispatch to the Mediterranean. Thus, a huge amount of pepper was being transported even by the individual Jewish merchants during the eleventh-twelfth centuries. Joseph Lebdi purchased fifty sacks of pepper from Kerala at a price of five *dinars* per sack.⁷² The change in political authority after the fall of the Cheras in 1206, and decline of Quilon in the background of the fall of Baghdad in 1258 was a setback for Jewish merchants, who were eventually displaced from old trading centers and were thus compelled to move to new commercial pastures of Kerala. Many Jewish merchants had settled on the banks of river Chalakudy and river Periyar, through which commodities were carried from the productive hinterlands and maritime port centres.⁷³

The trade networks were always changing owing to the prevailing conditions during the time. Because of which, Some of the Jews moved to Cochin, a new center of trade, which emerged due to the flood in river Periyar.⁷⁴ All these incoming groups of Jewish merchants were received with open arms by the King of Cochin, who had made his base very strong at the port.⁷⁵ It was the support of the king by virtue of which the Jews set up their own market, called Kochangadi (small bazaar). By the passage of time, Jews mingled with the local populace socially as well because their role had become instrumental in the local trade and bullions that the kingdom needed. Later, a synagogue was also constructed in Kochangadi.⁷⁶ Both the rulers of Cochin and Calicut had Jews in their army.⁷⁷

Along with the rulers, Jewish merchants also maintained good relationship with the non-Jewish merchants operating along the same trade zone. Madmun, who held influential posts in the Jewish merchant community of Aden and Yemen, had close commercial relations with Bilal b. Jarir, the Muslim governor of Aden. Both of these merchants made most of their associations

⁷² S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, p.180

⁷³ 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.11-12

⁷⁴ W.W.Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. IV , p. 11; K.Rama Varma Raja, "The Cochin Harbour and the Puthu Vaippu Era", pp. 49-51

⁷⁵ David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.428

⁷⁶ This synagogue is said to have been in use till 1789. See for details P.M.Jussay, *The Jews in Kerala*, p.131 Later the Kochangadi synagogue was demolished because of its dilapidated condition.

⁷⁷ P.M.Jussay, *The Jews in Kerala* p.429

and even came into a partnership for business endeavors in Egypt and Ceylon⁷⁸. Nevertheless, these commercial associations also led to some personal favours, as when Ben Yiju was having trouble in returning from Aden to Malabar, he was assured by his co-religionist Madmun that Bilal had promised for his safety.⁷⁹ *Geniza* letters highlight the engagement and bonding of the Jewish merchants with the merchants from other religious background such as Hindu, Muslim and Christians.⁸⁰

The ship that went for commercial voyages had mixture of people in it, irrespective of religion and community. In that context, an example can be cited where a ship was under the command of a Muslim merchant named Muhammad. Interestingly this ship belonged to a Hindu merchant and it contained goods of various merchants inclusive of Madmun, one of the famous figures mentioned in the *Geniza* documents.⁸¹ In an account of Ben Yiju's expenses and income related to his bronze factory, a Muslim merchant, Sheikh Maymun, is mentioned, who had been delegated to deliver a bag containing copper at Manjarur.⁸² The international connection of Jewish merchant Joseph Lebdi is identified from the fact that he was once found carrying vast quantity of merchandises for Muslim traders, both Indian and Egyptian.⁸³ Along with carrying goods in their ships, the Jewish merchants often entered into commercial partnerships with the Muslim merchants. Joseph Lebdi conducted a partnership for a commercial trip from India to Fustat with two Muslim merchants, Farah and Abu Nasr.⁸⁴ In addition to this list, Abu Mhm, a Muslim merchant from Aleppo, carried merchandise on his ship that belonged to a Jew and another Muslim merchant. Ibn al- Muqaddam, Ibn Salmun, Al-Sharif, Ali al-Dibaji are some other non-Jews probably Muslim merchants, who were involved in the various trade transactions with the Jewish traders between 10th -13th centuries.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abu Zikri Kohen*, Aden, 1130 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 371

⁷⁹ *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Safe Conduct and Assistance for Brother*, Aden, 1145 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 359-60

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 25

⁸¹ *Ibid.* pp. 24, 126

⁸² *Memorandum from Joseph b. Abraham to Araham Ben Yiju*, Aden, 1134-37, Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 564

⁸³ *Text of Oath with Inventory of Joseph Lebdi's Assets*, Fustat, early twelfth century, Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 226-27

⁸⁴ *Session of the Rabbinical Court of Fustat: al- Wuhsha vs. Joseph Lebdi*, Fustat, June 30, 1104 in Goitein, *India Book*, p. 241

⁸⁵ Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 146-49

Along with Muslims, Jews had commercial associations with the Hindu merchants and their trading guilds as well.⁸⁶ Jews maintained cordial connection with the chief of the Hindu merchant guild named *Fatan Swami*, whose ship used to sail on the Fandarayna, India and Aden trade route.⁸⁷ Nmby Rwy, probably a Malayalee merchant, used to carry goods in his ships for big Jewish merchants like Madmun and Ben Yiju.⁸⁸ Tinbu was another Hindu ship-owning merchant from Mangalore. He operated along Manjrur-Thana trade network. His trade bonds with the eminent Jewish merchant Mahruj was such that he not only carried merchandises in his ships for Mahruj but also provided financial assistance during the time of urgent need.⁸⁹

While talking about Jewish merchants' association with non-Jews, the journey of Abraham ben Yiju in Mangalore should be studied in detail. Yiju's association with his favorite slave trade agent who also hailed from Mangalore has already been discussed. Yiju seemed to involve with some other people as well from that region. One among such was Kardar, an agent and middleman, who helped traders in the buying of spices and other commodities. However, the trade relationship between Kardar and Yiju was not that smooth as there were cases where Kardar defaulted while delivering consignments. Nevertheless, Yiju seemed to share a different bonding with Kadar which was beyond business interest. Ben Yiju used to give him advance even though he was not that reliable. The cause behind such favour was probably because Kardar has been speculated to be the brother of Yiju's slave turned wife Ashu (Barakha), which automatically makes him the brother in law of Yiju.⁹⁰ Therefore, Ben Yiju's business interest brought him into contact with a large number of agents and retailers, and those relationships seemed to have often overlapped with each other's interests. Nevertheless, the process of network building for the purpose of trade involved both economic and social traits. These bonds between Jews and the merchants from other religious background also tells a story of a time when brotherhood was a menace of both growth and survival.

⁸⁶ Ibid. pp. 146-48

⁸⁷ *Letters from Khalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yiju*, Dahabattan, India, Aden, after 1138 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 594-99

⁸⁸ *Letter from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Four Fragments of Two Copies*, Aden, 1133-40 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 319-24

⁸⁹ *Letters from Mahruz to Abu Zikri Kohen*, Mangalore, India, 1145, in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 473-75

⁹⁰ Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, Ravi Dayal Publisher, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 275-78

3.5 Denominational Networks of Trade

The private correspondence among the Jewish merchants and their families are proofs of their close-knit community structure. Being a minority group, they made conscious efforts to keep themselves united and mutually linked. The commercial letters also refer to this tendency of theirs existing within the community. The Cairo *Geniza* source materials contain the letters and other documents of partnership, which show that the Jews preferred to enter into a business partnership⁹¹ either with their own blood relations or members of their own community. The partnerships were made 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 of the above mentioned Jewish merchants highlight that they continued to trade on the denominational lines.⁹²

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. Similarly, on the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean trade also saw close community structured commercial transactions. The partnership among the members of Jewish families has been mentioned above. The feeling of community was very much strong within the Jewish merchants.⁹³ The communal values dominated the commercial activities as well. Whether the Mediterranean or Indian Ocean, the Jewish merchants kept working as a community and supported each other beyond the barriers of territory and country. Madmun B. Hasan Japheth⁹⁴ 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 bound to their affinity of

⁹¹ *Contract of a Commenda-Partnership*, Fustat, late eleventh early twelfth century, and Deed of Partnership in the Late Abu I-Barakat II's Sugar Factory, Fustat, 1239 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.251, 277

⁹² *Ibid.* p.25

⁹³ *Ibid.* p.25

⁹⁴ 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 *Geniza* documents, collected in the *India Book*.

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.⁹⁵

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 home land and other Armenian communities situated at the different parts of the globe.⁹⁶ 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 used to send money and other precious goods such as spices and textiles to the *Gaon* and members of the Rabbinical court in Cairo.⁹⁷

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 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.⁹⁸ This exchange of letter also refers to the nature of Jewish community in relying upon their nodal point in order to maintain their communal integrity. Majority of the Jews in Cochin were argued by some to have been the offspring of the male or female slaves.⁹⁹ Thus, there was an interrelation between these socio-economic exchanges which helped the community to get integrated.

The reliability of this inter community trade network was well sustained through the matrimonial bonds within the community itself. The close community behavior remained at the core of Jewish social and economic behavior. The correspondence of traders involved in India trade, used to carry the idea of exchange marriages among their own community forward. Abu

⁹⁵ *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Safe Conduct and Assistance for Brother, Aden, 1145* in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.359-60

⁹⁶ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, UK, p.105.

⁹⁷ S.D.Goitein, and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Document from the Cairo Geniza*, pp.40-43.

⁹⁸ Walter J. Fischel, “Cochin in Jewish History: Prolegomena to a History of the Jews in India”, p.40.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.40.

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 routes, whose commercial bond was reinforced by matrimonial connections.¹⁰⁰

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 to favoring 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."*¹⁰¹

3.6 Jewish Mercantile and Slave Agents

While discussing about the early networks of trade, the assistance provided by the slaves and servants to their merchant masters was incredible. *Geniza* economy was heavily dependent on its male slaves and servants due to the prevalence of factories and various kinds of trades. Slaves were ordered from overseas and they travelled from one place to another to provide services.¹⁰² The usefulness of these slaves raised them to the position of a son. Slaves used to be the most trusted ones for their masters as they performed all sorts of tasks. A slave, along with being a trade agent, also accompanied his master to the long sea voyages. These servants, along with providing their services, also extended their emotional support. One such letter written by a merchant in 1104 C.E. from Acre describes such bond between master and his servant. The letter reads:

"I arrived in Palastine before Acre was taken and thus witnessed the vicissitudes of siege. We constantly faced danger of death, for we were near to them (the Crusaders) day and night, hearing their talk and they heard ours.... Mubarak (the slave) sends you his regards. I have no other help besides him. He saved me 10 dirhems a

¹⁰⁰ S. D. Goitein, *India Book*, p.49 for more details see. II, 58, *Memorandum from Abu Zikri Kohen to Mahruz, Alexandria*, 1136-49 & II, 59, *Letters from Mahruz to Abu Zikri Kohen with Urgent Warning, Fustat*, 1135 in S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Book*, pp. 485-88

¹⁰¹ *Letters from Joseph b. Abraham to Abraham Ben Yiju re Undependable Merchant*, Aden, 1136-39 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Book*, pp. 573-75

¹⁰² *Letters from Mahruz to Sulayman b. Zikri Kohen before Sailing Back to India*, Aden, 1137-47, Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.480-81

month-may God keep him. He is the groom, he takes care of the bedding, he is the cook, he does the washing and he looks after my wardrobe."¹⁰³

Not only sober, but also the bad behavior of some slaves, were tackled tolerantly by their lovable masters. When a slave named Safi, who also happened to be the head of the slaves of Jewish academy in Old Cairo, insulted a notable merchant and got punishment for the same, he was rescued by his master.¹⁰⁴ Bama, the favorite slave agent of Yiju, also used to show tantrums when they were in Aden as his personal trade agent.¹⁰⁵ But his actions were tolerated even by the big merchants because of the son-like bond he shared with his master. While writing to Yiju, Khalaf b. Issac, one of the prominent Jewish merchants of that time, along with sending greetings to his sons also extends his wishes to Bama. He even referred to Bama as 'Sheikh' and brother, which points out to the high status of this slave-agent.¹⁰⁶

Bama and Yiju shared a special relationship for a master and a slave and it reveals interesting perspectives on the trade networks. Bama's social standing is evident in the letters sent to Yiju, in which even Bama is treated like a noble merchant. From the very beginning, Bama used to assist Yiju in trade. Yiju had sent Bama as his personal representative for selling his mercantile to Aden. Bama was there in India for as long as Yiju was there and even accompanied him back to Egypt in early 1150s.¹⁰⁷

The mercantile activity of Bama in Aden can be seen from the fact that he even rented an apartment there and used to get sufficient amount of money for his living. Bama seemed to look after the import-export of pepper on behalf of Ben Yiju.¹⁰⁸ The personal and emotional bond which Yiju shared with Bama stood in the background of the support Yiju must be getting from him. The knowledge of Bama regarding the market and economy of Malabar was vital for Yiju's financial ambitions. This bond was just not about a master and slave but it was more about a

¹⁰³ Elkan N. Adler Collection, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York. 2727 (Acre) in *A Mediterranean Society*, Vol I, p. 132

¹⁰⁴ *S.D. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society*, Vol I, p. 133

¹⁰⁵ *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Four Fragments of Three Copies*, Aden, 1135 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.341

¹⁰⁶ *Letters from Khalaf b. Issac to Abraham Ben Yiju, Manly about Shipwrecked Goods*, Aden, 1146 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Age*, pp. 614-20

¹⁰⁷ *List of Ben Yiju's Deposits and Expenditures after Arriving in the Egyptian Capital, Fustat, 1152* in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 735

¹⁰⁸ *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Four Fragments from the Three Copies*, Aden, 1135 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages* ,pp. 341-42

local person with the indigenous knowledge and a merchant who arrived on the foreign land. A document containing the list of Ben Yiju's deposits and expenditure after arriving in the Egyptian capital also has the mention of a pair of shoes Yiju bought for Bama.¹⁰⁹ These small incidences are enough to assume the importance and stature of Bama not only in the commercial journey of Yiju but in the trade network overall.

Apart from Bama, Yiju was also in touch with some other slave-agents to get his work done. One amongst them was Rayhan who provided his service along the Aden-Mediterranean trade route.¹¹⁰ Jawahar was another slave agent mentioned in *Geniza* documents who was active along the Malabar-Aden trade route. Along with maintaining and selling merchandise, he was also the captain on ships. His name allows us to assume that he was an Arabic ghulam.¹¹¹ Bakhtiyar was another famous slave-agent who appeared during this period.¹¹² The ghulams, along with serving their masters, were also allowed to run their personal businesses. There have been instances when master-slave duo were involved in business partnerships. Durri,¹¹³ Safi,¹¹⁴ Tahir¹¹⁵ and Jurj¹¹⁶ are examples of a few ghulams who had their personal business ventures in the Mediterranean region and thus acquired the status of affluent merchants. The famous bronze ware factory of Abraham Ben Yiju had workers, who were slaves, some of them were even Jews that migrated from Yemen.¹¹⁷

Thus, the Jewish merchants both in Mediterranean and Malabar relied on the service of slaves and servants. Slaves were considered as a property that people used to sell or re-sell according to their needs and convenience.¹¹⁸ However, *Geniza* documents related to Indian Ocean trade did not present any instance of a master selling his own slave to someone else. Since it was not an age of advanced technology without an avenue for instant communication, the bond

¹⁰⁹ *List of Ben Yiju's Deposits and Expenditures after Arriving in the Egyptian Capital, Fustat, 1152* in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 735

¹¹⁰ *Letters from Joseph . Abraham to Abraham Ben Yiju, Malabar Coast, India, 1137-40* in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*

¹¹¹ *Letters from Khalaf b. Issac to Abraham Ben Yiju, Dahabattan, India, Aden, 1138* in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 598

¹¹² *Ibid.* p.603

¹¹³ *S.D.Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, Vol I, p. 78*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 133

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 133.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* Vol. I, , p. 133.

¹¹⁷ Goitein & Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.58

¹¹⁸ *S.D.Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, Vol III, , p. 331*

of trust between master-servant was imperative. Religion of the slaves did not make any difference. Unlike the maidservants getting converted to their masters' religious affiliation, male servants practiced their own faith. For masters, loyalty and dedication was important.

3.7 Nature of Commodity flow and the Networks of Mobility

Commodity flow within the network of trade defines the other aspect of the mercantile set up. It becomes inevitable to discuss the qualitative and quantitative nature of commodity along the Red Sea-Indian Ocean trade zone, in which Jewish merchants were actively involved. The continuity factor and changes adopted by the Jewish merchants from Mediterranean to India and vice versa is another important fact. The matter of import-export balance with India needs much deeper study.¹¹⁹ *Geniza* 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 a few of such lists which he has formed on the basis of *Geniza* documents related to India trade. About seventy-seven articles were exported from India to the Mediterranean.¹²⁰

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	1 item
Total	77 items

In the above-mentioned list, items coming under group A were in majority. Going back to the Mediterranean trade, the Jewish community acquired the expertise in the field of being a

¹¹⁹ Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.21.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* pp.15-16.

perfumer, druggist, apothecary and dyer, which reflected in the *Geniza* documents clearly. After group A, which includes spices and medicinal plants, stand articles of group C, which are Brass and Bronze vessels as the second in the list. Moreover, it has been mentioned in the *Geniza* papers that the South western India had bronze and brass industry. In order to run brass and bronze industry successfully, the raw materials required for it was imported from the countries of the Mediterranean.¹²¹ This business flourished and so did the Jewish merchants and the Indians 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.¹²² 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 *Geniza* 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 have been referred to in the *Geniza* sources quite often, are mostly used as a gift items by the Jewish traders.¹²³ At the same time, the frequency of Indian cotton fabric mentioned in *Geniza* 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.¹²⁴ But again the costly textile items 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 purchased of a good amount of textiles in Nahrwara, India, for the Bundar firm in India, and sold it in the Red Sea port of Dahlak. The textile trade was followed by his son Abu i- Barakat as well.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ibid. p.16.

¹²² Ibid. pp.52-55.

¹²³ II, 13-15, *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Three Fragments of Two Copies*, Aden, 1130 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 311-17

¹²⁴ Ibid. p.17.

¹²⁵ Session of the Rabbinical Court of Fustat, *Fustat, 1097 & Third Session of the Rabbinical Court of Fustat*, Fustat, 1098 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 167-69, 184-85

Again Goitein has also provided the list of goods imported to the countries of Indian Ocean from the ports of Red sea via India:¹²⁶

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	10 items
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 local people.¹²⁷

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. 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.

¹²⁶Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.17-18

¹²⁷ Ibid. p.18.

M. Jussay, the famous Jewish historian of Kerala opines that the Jewish community of Chennamangalam, had the concept of self-rule.¹²⁸

Thus, the trading patterns on the west coast of India got changed. From 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.¹²⁹ 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.¹³⁰

Pepper formed an important commodity for the Mediterranean- Malabar trade of the Jews. Malabar Coast was a major producer of pepper during that period.¹³¹ 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.¹³² 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 *Geniza* papers speak of individual traders like Joseph Lebdi, who purchased fifty sacks of pepper from Kerala.¹³³ While pepper was sold on the price of 135 dinars per sack in Cairo¹³⁴, 130 dinars in Maghreb¹³⁵, he purchased, it on the price of five *dinars* per sack from Kerala, in 1097¹³⁶.

Pepper was one of the most important items of export from India. The trade transactions of eleventh and twelfth centuries, mentioned in Geniza records, show that the Jewish merchants trading with south

¹²⁸ P.M. Jussay, *The Jews in Kerala*, Calicut, 2005, p. 129

¹²⁹ S. D. Gotein, "Letters and Documents on the India Trade in Medieval Times", p.196.

¹³⁰ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese (1498-1663)", in *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, pp. 240-41.

¹³¹ S.D.Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, p. 67.

¹³² Ibid. pp. 64-65.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 180.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p.118.

¹³⁵ Ibid. p.122.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p.180.

India used to make payment in gold. It was done in order to counterbalance the balance of trade.¹³⁷ 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 has remained a less studied theme.¹³⁸

3.8 Tools and Mechanisms for Trade Networks

While discussing the various networks of trade which kept the Jewish mercantile community going along Mediterranean-India Ocean maritime space, one cannot miss the various institutions which catered to these causes. One such arrangement was the office of representative of merchants (*Nagid*). The post of representative of merchants¹³⁹ 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 the 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 the post of the representative of Indian merchants and the head of the Jewish community. Afterwards his son Madmun, who was a central figure in the Geniza 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.¹⁴⁰

The Jewish network of trade was very well organised and well-coordinated. The Jewish merchants operating along Mediterranean-Indian Ocean network used to maintain records of all trade happenings. They used to maintain a list, inclusive of type and amount of items traded,

¹³⁷ S. D. Goitein, "Letters and Documents on the India Trade in Medieval Times", p.198.

¹³⁸ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, p.155.

¹³⁹ *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.

¹⁴⁰ *Letters of Thnaks from Halfon b. Manasseh to Abraham b. Bundar, Fustat*, early twelfth century in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.306-8

details of merchants on the ship and owner of the ship as well.¹⁴¹ Even after the shipwreck, the merchants were in a position to claim and negotiate regarding the goods on the ship that got wrecked. Since on the long voyages, the partnerships were often done among few merchants, the loss was also distributed among the partner merchants. The courts of lawsuits used to look after the fair trail regarding these issues.¹⁴²

Moreover, there used to be designated trustees for almost each ship and properties of individuals. In case of any miss happening, the proposed person was entitled to claim such properties.¹⁴³ The person who was appointed as trustee and made responsible for the collection of all debts or left goods survived after shipwreck was in high demand. It almost became like a profession as the incident of shipwreck, sudden attacks, and piracy were very common during those times. Appointment of trustee was a big affair in which members of merchant community, experienced merchants and courts were involved and consulted.¹⁴⁴

In this on-going process of balancing and coordination among the Jewish merchants, the role of rabbinical courts has been exemplary. This court gave jurisdiction on all kinds of disputes occurring within the community in which conflicts related to trade were also included. The sessions of Rabbinical court related to Joseph B. Lebdi and his family provides with vital information regarding the various aspects of trade and conflicts. Moreover, these records establish the importance of these courts for the smooth conduct of trade during 12th-13th centuries.¹⁴⁵ Thus, this court did not only provided jurisdictions and sorted disputes among the Jewish merchants but also provided a link for connectivity.

Freight charges and custom duties were two important elements which helped in the movement of traders from one coast to another. There are numerous *Geniza* letters which contain information regarding the freight charges paid by the merchants on their sea voyages. While

¹⁴¹ *Memorandum from Joseph b. Abraham to Ishaq Nafusi*, Aden, 1130's and *Letter from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju*, Aden, 1133 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 413-18, 328-24

¹⁴² *Letters from Khalaf b. Issac to Abraham Ben Yiju, mainly about Shipwrecked Goods*, Aden, 1146 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 614-21

¹⁴³ *Letters from Rabbinical Court of Fustat to Madmun b. Hasan re Estate of Ibn Jumayhir*, Fustat, 1146 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 524-29

¹⁴⁴ *Letters from the Rabbinical Court of Fustat to Madmun b. Hasan re Estate of Ibn Jumayhir: Madmun's Letter and Testimony of Eyewitness Jewish Traders*, Fustat, 1146 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Age*, pp. 528-29

¹⁴⁵ *Sessions of the Rabbinical Court of Fustat*, Fustat, 1097-1098 in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 167-97

maintaining the list of purchases and expenses, freight charges for important items would be mentioned specifically. In one such list, freight charges have been mentioned separately for pepper and lead, two most important articles of trade during that time.¹⁴⁶ The system of trade was quite well organised, as all merchandise carried in a ship was registered, and after the arrival of the ship, the captain received a set fee for the manifest. There used to be a certain amount for each product as the registration fee, which merchants had to pay while sending items on the ships going for commercial voyage.¹⁴⁷

In the age where technology was not invented, it must have been very difficult to convey messages from one place to another. However, people of that age figured out their ways to send out their messages through the medium of hiring private courier services. An urgent warning was sent by Mahruz, Fustat to Abu Zikri who was in Alexandria through a courier person who has been termed *najjab*.¹⁴⁸ These people providing courier services must have been needed, who used to circulate information along the trade networks.

3.9 Conclusion

Examination of the letters and documents of the Jewish merchants involved in the trade ventures along the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trading zones eventually reveals the nature of trade networks used by the Jewish merchants. The letters and documents hold a unique position, as they are directly penned by the very merchants involved in the trade. Not only Jewish, but their other trading partners belonging to various other groups, religion and space also found their place in these immortal historical sources. Jews cleverly used their trading skills and intelligence to form a wide network of maritime commerce, stretching from Mediterranean to Malabar Coast of India, for the movement of various goods and commodities. As argued by some scholars, the Indian Ocean became a much frequented maritime zone, even before the arrival of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. The Jewish traders played a very constructive and voluminous role in this process. Unlike post fifteenth century, maritime world between the

¹⁴⁶ *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju: Four Fragments of Two Copies, Aden, 1133-40* in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 319-22

¹⁴⁷ The term used for this registration fee in the Geniza letters was *shatmi*. See *Statements by Two Yemenite Merchants about Consignments Shipped by Ben Yiju and Mostly Lost, India, probably 1145* in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 653-54

¹⁴⁸ *Letters from Mahruj to Abu Zikri Kohen with Urgent Warning, Fustat, March 3, 1135*, Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.487-88

period from tenth to thirteenth centuries was peaceful and operated with the collaboration of various group of merchants belonging to different religions. Along with inter community associations, the intra community engagement also evolved successfully.

The strategies to extend commercial networks and mobilize the resources were very much similar to the Mediterranean and very often, it consisted of partnerships, matrimonial engagements and family networking. Along with all the smoothness, there are some unanswered questions and queries as well. The *Geniza* documents hardly talk about the competition and rivalry among the traders.¹⁴⁹ It also restricts itself from saying anything about the corruption within the ongoing network of commerce, though it talks about the instances of forgery at places. There can be an assumption, that Jewish traders refrained themselves from mentioning any such event in order to maintain the smooth working of the trade network. As mentioned above, trust was the major pillar of this mercantile set up. Lack of advanced technology and resources made traders heavily dependent on each other to tap into the unexplored prospects across the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean for pursuing their trans-oceanic trade.

¹⁴⁹ Ranabir Chakravarti, *Nakhudas and Nauvittakas*, p.60

Chapter IV

Response of the Jewish Merchants to the Portuguese Commercial Expansion

The Jews who expanded to the various trading centres of South India between 10th and 15th century had evolved as a significant mercantile community in the Indian Ocean. Though they could not conduct long-distance trade between 13th and 15th century in the way they used to do in the earlier centuries of this millennium, they managed to get adapted to the mercantile requirements of the land and conduct the local trade by way of their connectivity with the rich pepper hinterland. The entry of the Portuguese in India with their commercial and political agenda disrupted the trading lines of traditional merchants of the land including the Jews. The Portuguese though initially depended on Jews in a limited way for procuring cargo for their Lisbon-bound vessels, eventually kept them away from their commercial zones because of their transplantation of Luso-Jewish conflicts from the mother country to their Asian trading enclaves. However the Jewish merchants being patronized by the local rulers managed to overcome the Portuguese attacks, survive against odd situations and conduct trade by developing alternative channels for commodity movements.

4.1 Before Arrival of the Portuguese: Jews in the Post -Geniza Period

Before going into the details of the arrival of Portuguese and further their trading relations with Jewish merchant community, which starts from 15th century onwards, it is very important to talk about the way how the Jews fared during the period between 13th and 15th century. The previous chapters present the history of Jewish merchants till 13th century on the basis of Geniza documents and this chapter deals with the Jewish merchants' involvement with the Portuguese from 16th century onwards. Thus, the period between 13th and 15th century remains uncovered. Though there should have been an entire chapter devoted to this period, the lack of ample amount of source materials restricts the chances for an elaborate discussion. One has to really struggle to construct the history of this community between this period because of lack of sources, which is equally a vital time period for the purpose of linearity in their historical accounts.

However, the various accounts from the early part of the sixteenth century only confirm the existence of Jewish community at the time of the Portuguese arrival. One such traveler was Balthazar Sprenger, who came to Cochin along with the fleet of Francisco d'Almeida in October 1505.¹ During his short stay of two months at Cochin, he mentioned about the already settled Jewish community living there.

While talking about the medieval travelers who left us with valuable sources that help us in knowing the Jewish history, the name of Benjamin of Tudela is very vital. He visited the Malabar Coast around 1167, came to Quilon, which he referred to as Khulam, and had also stated about the intelligence of Jewish merchants who were involved in linking the trade of Quilon with the Red Sea route and their further dispatch of commodities towards Venice. Although Benjamin visited Quilon, his remarks about Jewish community were not confined only to south India. He made an overall comment on the Indian Jewish community. He found huge difference in the application of practices of Judaism by the Indian Jews in comparison with the typical Jews living elsewhere. He even discussed the cultivation of pepper, as well as cinnamon, ginger and many other kind of spices in Malabar. He further describes about the Jews in the 12th century Malabar in the following words: “All the cities and countries inhabited by these people contain only about one hundred Jews, who are black in colour much as the other inhabitants. Jews are good men, observers of the law and possess the Pentateuch, the Prophets and a little knowledge of the Thalmud and its decision.”²

The 12th century Muslim geographer al-Idrisi left an account of the places in India where Jews settled, including Malabar.³ He also speaks of a very influential Jewish community in Ceylon. He writes: “The king of this island has sixteen ministers, of whom, one quarter are native to the nation, a quarter are Christians, a quarter are Muslims and a quarter Jews”.⁴ During the same century, Dimashqi (1320 CE.) mentioned that Jews were the majority in Cyngilin or better known as Shingly. Another traveller named Abulfeda (1330 CE.) also mentions about the

¹ 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, P. 39.

² 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.

³ Ludwik Sterbach, *India as Described by Medieval European Travellers: Jewish Dwelling Places*, 1946, p. 10.

⁴ A. Asher(Trans- and ed.), *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, Vol. II, New York, 1965, p.188.

ancient Jewish settlement at Shingly.⁵ Another medieval Muslim geographer, Ibn Battuta (1325-1354) is an invaluable source, who also confirmed the presence of Jews in the Malabar region. He wrote:

*“On the fifth day of our journey (from Calicut to Kawlam, a trip which is accurately described as taking ten days via the backwater route) we came to Kunja, which is on the top of a hill; it is inhabited by Jews, who have one of their own member as their governor, and pay a poll tax to the sultan of Kawlam. Kunja Kari has been identified as Chendamangalam situated near Cranganore.”*⁶

During the middle ages, the greatest Venetian traveler, Marco Polo, who made his journey during the second half of the 13th century speaks about the presence of Jews in Malabar. He wrote:

*“upon leaving Ma’abar (by which he meant few parts of Tamilnadu) and proceeding five hundred miles towards the south-west, you arrive at the kingdom of Koulam (Quilon). It is the residence of many Christians and Jews, who retain their proper language. The king is not a tributary to any other.”*⁷

Monte Corvino, a traveler from Italy who came to India in the late thirteenth century also attest to the presence and activity of Jews along the area.⁸

4.2 The Gap in the Jewish History: Some Physical Evidences

Apart from these travelogues, the physical structures available also speak about the history of the Malabar Jewish community. Whether it be the copper plates or the Synagogues or some tomb stones, these prove the presence of the Jewish community in Malabar, for the period from 13th century onwards. While the ancient indigenous sources, particularly the *copper plates* from Kerala,⁸ indicate the permanent Jewish presence on the west coast of India, the *Geniza* sources⁹ hardly refer 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.¹⁰ For example, Abraham ben Yiju, one of the most

⁵ Barbara Johnson Hudson, *Shingli or Jewish Cranganore in the Tradition of the Cochin Jews of India*, Cochin, 1975, p.22.

⁶ Batuta, Ibn, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, trans. and ed. H. A. R. Gibb, London, 1929, p.238.

⁷ Henry Yule and Henry Cordier (ed.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol.II, New Delhi, pp.375-376.

⁸ John Monte Karvino (Henry Yule and Henry Cordier(ed.)), *Cathay and Way Thither*, vol.III, New Delhi, p.63.

famous personalities of Indian trade and often mentioned in *Geniza* 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.¹¹ Most initial and striking example of the physical evidence available for the study of Malabar Jewish community is the *Tharisapally* Copper Plate grants from 849 C.E.⁹ and the Copper Plates of 1069 C.E.¹⁰ These plates have been preserved by the Jewish community of Cochin as their historical legacy which they often cherish. Both of these plates were granted during the earlier period, for which there is no scarcity of sources.

The greatest physical structure and archaeological sources available for the study of Jewish community's history on the Malabar region is their prayer house known as "Synagogues". The presence of religious structures is a symbol of harmony. The construction of Synagogues from 13th century onwards is a reflection of the harmonious nature of Malabar society and the rapport of the Jewish community with other residents. The period in which these Synagogues had been constructed was not completely comfortable for the Malabar Jews, as it coincided with the arrival of the Portuguese who also brought them difficulties along with opportunities. Although, during Portuguese period (1498-1663), the Jewish community of Malabar faced anti-Semitic activities,¹¹ it was during this period only that they built most of their beautiful Synagogues.

On one hand, the documents of Inquisition speak of the past of destruction, on another hand, the construction of Jewish Prayer houses reveal a completely different story. The Jewish community of Malabar had seven Synagogues- one in the State of Travancore, two in Cochin, two in Ernakulam, and one each in Parur, Chennamangalam and Mala. At present, only one of them is in use, two are empty in Ernakulam and rest of them are in ruins.¹² Soon after the flood in Periyar in 1341,¹³ Jews migrated from Cranganore to Cochangadi, a village near Cochin.¹⁴ It is

⁹ F. C. Burkitt, "Hebrew Signatures on the Copper-Plate" *Kerala Society Papers*, 6:1930, p.323.

¹⁰ E. Hultzsch in *Epigraphia Indica*, Calcutta, 1894, Vol. 3, p. 69.

¹¹ Joan G. Roland, "The Jews of India: Communal Survival or the End of a Sojourn?", *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 42: 1, 1980, pp.76-77 & documents of inquisition of Goa and Lisbon.

¹² Edna Fernandes, *The last Jews of Kerala*, Portobello Books, London, 2008, p.144 and Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, "The Last Jews of India and Burma" *Jerusalem Letter*, 101:1958.

¹³ 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.

said that during this time, Joseh Azhar built Cochin's first Synagogue in 1344-45 C.E.¹⁵ Cochin was exactly half way between Calicut and Quilon. The name Kunji Karl could have been most possibly derived from the Indian name Konchi Ghari (the town of Konchi). Locally this name still finds its mention in the old part of town still called as Cochangadi, and the historic synagogue of Cochin was known as the Cochangadi Synagogue. Soon after the Synagogue was built in 1344-45, The Jews started settling around it but the main population only came later. The synagogues present today are of a different time zone and belong to the 16th century.¹⁶

There were two other major Synagogues in Cochin, popularly known as the Riverside or Kadavumbhagam and Thekumbhagam Synagogues. The Kadavumbhagam Synagogue, which was built in 1639 C.E.,¹⁷ is located on the river side of the Maharaja's palace and hundred meters farther south. This Synagogue was demolished in 1970 and is being used as a warehouse now.¹⁸ The Thekumbhagam Synagogue built in 1647 C.E. is situated hundred meters south along the Synagogue lane. The Thekumbhagam Synagogue was demolished in 1970. It was constructed in 1586 C.E.¹⁹

Most famous in this row is *paradesi*²⁰ Synagogue of Cochin, built in 1568 C.E. This structure was built with the joint effort of Eliahu Samuel Kastiel (representative of foreign Jewish merchants), David Balilia, Joseph Levi (representative of foreign Jewish merchants), and Epharim Saala. It is located on the northern end of the Jewish town adjoining the grounds of the Rajah of Cochin. This is the only functioning Synagogue of Cochin, attracting tourists for its magnificent architecture.²¹ The Parur Synagogue which was also abandoned for many years was constructed during seventeenth century. This Synagogue was restored by the Kerala Government under a project started in 2010. One of the architects named, Jay Waronker working with this project highlights very interesting facts regarding this Synagogue. The Parur Synagogue,

¹⁴ Gilbert Kusher, *Immigrants from India in Israel*, Amazon Press, Tucson, 1972, p. 12.

¹⁵ S.S.Koder, "Saga of the Jews of Cochin", in *Jews in India*, ed.by Thomas A.Timberg, 1986, pp.138-140.

¹⁶ David G. Mandelbaum, "Social stratification among the Jews of Cochin in India and in Israel," in Thomas A. Timberg (ed.), *Jews in India*, Shahiabad, 1986, p. 67

¹⁷ K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol. II, 1929, p. 528

¹⁸ Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India*, P.63

¹⁹ K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol. II, 1929, p. 528

²⁰ In order to escape the persecution, The Jews who got immigrated to Malabar from Spain and Portugal during fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are generally called *Paradesi*. They are also referred to as "White Jews" due to their skin color and consider their self-superior than the native, Malabar Jews

²¹ Shalva Weil, " In an Ancient Land Revisited: Trade and Synagogues in South India", *Asian Jews Life*, Winter 2010-2011, p.36 & S. Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, Kottayam, 1967, p. 290

considered to be a single building, has many structural elements whose design place their period of construction to an earlier time than the rest of the building, times as old as the twelfth century.²² Another Synagogue which needs proper attention in order to reach up to Jewish history is the Chennamanagalam, which was built in 1614. This Synagogue was built during the troubled days of Jewish community as the Portuguese inquisition had started by that time. According to popular stories, the town of Chennamanagalam was designed on the tolerant religious ideology as there are four houses of prayer: for Hindus, Jews, Christians and Muslims respectively. The town has temple, mosque, church and synagogue within the area of one kilometer from each other.²³ The study of this place lets modern scholars assert that the temple is the oldest building whereas the mosque is a recent one. The church was constructed by the Portuguese, probably rebuilt by the Dutch. As far as the date for the Synagogue building is concerned, it was built in 1614 C.E., for the first time and reconstructed a few times later on. Soon after the death of the last member of Jewish community of Chennamangalam, with the order of State of Kerala office of the Indian Department of Archaeology, under the supervision of Dr. V. Manmadha Nair and his staff, skilled restoration professionals and area craftsmen, the prayer house was restored.²⁴ The date regarding the construction of this synagogue varies in different sources, as the Archeologists from Government of Kerala, involved in the project for the restoration of this synagogue hold the view that it was built in 1565 and again repaired in 1621.²⁵

Thus, the synagogues are one of those physical evidences which speak about the history of the Jewish community. Synagogues have also been considered as one of the major components of the urban set up. Time and place of these synagogues confer their presence within some specific period and also the area of their influence and existence. The architecture of these buildings denotes their art and culture along with their mingling with other socio cultural groups. The construction of these synagogues mostly happened between the period from 14th to 17th centuries, which tells the story of prosperity and influence along the Malabar

²² Ibid, p.37 & Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala also contains information regarding the restoration and construction of Synagogues, for more details also visit the sight of (ISJM) The International Survey of Jewish Monuments.

²³ P.M.Jussay, "The Jews in Kerala", p.129

²⁴ Jay A. Waronker, "The Chennamanagalam Synagogue: the Jewish Community in a Village in Kerala." Cochin Brochure, pp. 1-12, online source: <http://chensyn.com/brochure/CochinBrochure.pdf>

²⁵ Jay A. Waronker. Interview of Kerala office of the Department of Archeology staff, Trivandrum Kerala, 2005

region. In the list of physical evidences, there is another archaeological source which is of immense value.



PARADESI SYNAGOGUE

Source: Online source; <http://cochinsyn.com/page-paradesi.html>

The tombstone of Sara dated 1269 C.E. is situated outside the Chennamangalam Synagogue. According to popular belief, this tomb was earlier located at Shingly. When the internal struggle broke out amongst the Jewish community on the matter of succession of the line of Joseph Rabban, many Jews fled to places like Parur, Mala, Mattancheri and Chennamangalam etc.²⁶ During that time, the grave of Sarah, who is supposed to be the member of the above mentioned community, displaced from Shingly, was brought to Chennamangalam. This tombstone belongs to a Jewish woman named Sarah, which has been inscribed in Hebrew and is counted amongst one of the oldest texts in the language. It has been marked as the grave of Sarah, daughter of Israel. Unlike the other Jewish tombstones, this one has a quotation from Deuteronomy 32.4. The letters inscribed on the tombstone is clearly visible and the Hebrew used is the classic one.²⁷



TOMB STONE

Sarah Ben Israel dated 1269 C.E.

²⁶ Lotika Vardarajan, "Cochin and the Jews", Fifth International Seminar on Indo-Portuguese History, Cochin, 1989, p. 6

²⁷ *Annual Report of the Archeological Department of Cochin State for the Year 1103 M. E. Ernakulam*, 1929

Thus, the above mentioned physical evidences serve the purpose of filling the gap between 13th and 14th century, that occurred in the history of Malabar Jewish community due to the destruction of sources. Therefore, these material sources help us in creating a bridge between the post Geniza and pre Portuguese period, and even after that time span, these sources help to decipher the history of Jews in that region.

4.3 Trade Networks of Indian Ocean and Malabar before the Arrival of the Portuguese

The arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean for trade was no doubt a major event for that century as it affected all the stake holders operating in that trading zone. Before getting into the effects and changes brought by the Portuguese in the world of maritime trade, it is important to understand the nature of trade before their arrival, in order to understand the changes in a better way. The Euro centric approach for the study of pre-Portuguese era has marginalized the efforts of various communities and groups engaged in it. Though, afterwards many scholars came up with their studies to unfold the history of that period with an unbiased approach, the paucity of sources makes it difficult to recreate the history of that period, particularly about the constant flow of merchants, commodity and ideas. Bouchon and Lombard were two of those pioneers who made an extensive study on the pre 15th century developments in the Indian Ocean and Malabar.²⁸

Various changes occurred in the realm of Indian Ocean trade during the period between tenth to fifteenth centuries. In the chapters before, it has already been mentioned how the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate gave rise to the Fatimids in Egypt, who in order to develop the trade routes to India shifted the routes to Aden and Fustat. Moreover, the commercial importance of Alexandria rose up due to the power shift of Fatimids from Tunisia to Old Cairo. Further, Alexandria acquired the role of a terminus for the long distant trade ventures across the continents.²⁹ Jews were among one of those merchant communities, who took decent advantages of these changes in the field of trans-oceanic trade. *Geniza* documents often refer to Madmun ben Hasan and Abraham ben Yiju, who were active participants in the Indian trade. As far as the role of individual merchants has been concerned, Ranabir Chakrabarti's studies throw ample

²⁸ Bouchon, Genevieve and Denys Lombard, "India and the Indian Ocean in the Fourteenth Century" Ashin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson, eds., *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800*, Oxford University Press, 1987,

²⁹ Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, vol. I, 1967, pp. 29-42

light on it through his discussion on *nakhuda* and *nauvitaka* in Arabic/Persian and Indian sources respectively, which means ship-owning merchants³⁰ in the pre-Portuguese era. He refers to these *Geniza* documents as containing valuable information regarding these ship-owning merchants who held key positions along this Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trade network.³¹ Madmun shared a good relationship with the Muslim Governor of Aden named Bilal b. Jarir, which in turn provided him with trade benefits and vice versa.³² With passage of time, these merchants became so strong that they were in a position to even buy and bargain their safety from the political rulers against the pirates.³³

A close examination of these documents points out the fact that in spite of being rich or influential, these merchants worked in cooperation with each other, irrespective of community or religious differences. A letter by Khalaf b. Issac to Ben Yiju, probably dated 1139 is informative in this regard. According to this letter it seems that Khalaf b. Issac is requesting Ben Yiju to hire some place in a ship as he wanted to send some goods to him. He also adds that the ship which Yiju hires should be of a trustworthy merchant.³⁴ This bond was not restricted to own community or religion, as a letter addressed to Madmun b. Japheth states that Muslim *nakhuda* were more concerned about the safety of the Jewish merchants than the Jews themselves.³⁵ Thus mutual cooperation, trust and inter and intra community bonding was at the background of smooth functioning of this trade network.

The pre-Portuguese period had organizations which used to deal with legal grievances and conflicts among the merchants. The rabbinical courts and legal disputes related to this are available in *Geniza* papers.³⁶ Thus, facts presented so far depict the picture of Indian Ocean as a space of peaceful venture in which people from various strata whether it be merchants or rulers, were in harmonious association with each other and the bond of mutual trust was at the core.

³⁰ Ranabir Chakravarti, "Nakhudas and Nauvittakas: Ship-Owning Merchants in the West Coast of India (C. AD 1000-1500)", *Journal of the Economics and Social History of the Orient*. Vol.43, no.1, 2000, pp. 37-38

³¹ The vast work of Goitein regarding these merchants can be found in his books based on the *Geniza* documents which also provides the translation for these documents as well. For more information see his books, *Mediterranean Society* and *Indian Book* and *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*

³² *Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abu Zikri Kohan* in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, 2008, p.371

³³ K.N.Choudhary, *Trade and Civilization*, pp.59-60

³⁴ Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.139

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.140

³⁶ Lawsuit of Jekuthiel al-Hakim vs. Joseph Lebdi has been recorded under various sessions of the Rabbinical Court of Fustat, also see Lawsuits of Ibn Sughmar vs. Joseph Lebdi, in Goitein, *India Trade*, pp. 167-197, 213-219

Though, most of the scholars prefer to establish the pre-Portuguese period of the Indian Ocean as the time of peace and cooperation, the facts regarding rivalry, conflict, confiscation, war and piracy have been given less attention.³⁷

The period recorded instances of deep violence along the port cities for the cause of custom and trade benefits. Kish in the Persian Gulf and Dhalak in the Red Sea, two famous port cities, were indulged in rivalry with each other. Ibn al-Balkhi, a Persian author of the Seldjuk period states in his writing *Farsnama* that rulers of Kish and Dhalak took the best advantage of the strategic positioning of their ports in the maritime sphere of Indian trade. By using their naval power and bribing some governors of Siraf, Amir of Kish managed to divert the routes of ship from Siraf to Kish.³⁸ The rulers of Kish even encouraged the highway robbery in order to turn the situation in their favor.³⁹ The *Geniza* documents also refer to such incidents of blockade at the harbor entrance of Aden. These letters also talk about the lifting of this blockade only when the *nakhuda* Ramisht (private ship-owning merchants) of Aden arrived there.⁴⁰ The blockade might not have been done with the intension of capturing the whole port as a letter of Madmun b. Japheth shows that there were only 15 ships with total 700 men who were involved in this attack. Keeping this point in mind, Goitein argues that the motive behind such sieging would have been because of the claim over the maritime custom profits.⁴¹

Dhalak was another very busy port of that time which almost acted as a junction between Red Sea and Indian Ocean. Like the rulers of Kish, ruler of Dhalak also used non-peaceful means in order to fetch more profit. Cairene merchant Samuel b. Abraham b. al-Majjani, who was sailing in a boat from Dhalak to Aden, was attacked by the ruler of Dhalak. The problem of smuggling and bribing was also very common to Dhalak.⁴² Moreover, Dhalak had often been

³⁷ Roxani Eleni Margariti, "Mercantile Networks, Port Cities, and "Pirate" States: Conflict and Competition in the Indian Ocean World of Trade before the Sixteenth Century" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 51:4, 2008, p. 571

³⁸ C.E. Bosworth, Ibn al-Balkhi, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Brill: online source, 2017

³⁹ Ibn al-Mujawir's *Tarikh al-Mustabasir* translation available by G. Rex Smith, *A Traveler in the Thirteenth-Century Arabia: Ibn al-Mujawir's Tarikh al-Mustabasir*, Oxford, Ashgate for the Hakluyt society, 2008

⁴⁰ S. D. Goitein "Two Eyewitness Reports on an Expedition of the King of Kish (Qais) against Aden", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 16:2, 1954, pp. 255-256

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.253

⁴² Roxani Eleni Margariti, *Aden and the Indian Ocean Trade: 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port*. University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. for information on Bribing see Goitein, *India Book*, p. pp.190-1

referred to in the Geniza documents for its involvement in piracy. Therefore, Goitein named the rulers of Dhalak “a dangerous pirate”.⁴³

The rise of Karimi merchants in these maritime spheres during the thirteenth century was yet another major event. These Karimi merchants created a strong inter community and inter family network of trade. Al-Sakhawi, Al- Aziz, Al- Habbi, Al- Din and Al- Mahalli were amongst most influential families of Karimi merchants. These merchants even constructed lavish religious structures and houses on the banks of Nile River.⁴⁴ Therefore, the response of various rulers involved in the trans-oceanic trade to their rise, becomes a matter of discussion. Sale of ships to Karimi merchants was totally banned in Yemen, in order to avoid any sort of competition from these merchant groups and also to ensure the security of Yemen. The rulers did not want to make these merchant guilds so strong that they might join hands with their opponents against them.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Karimi merchants had trade contacts with the Jewish merchant community being active along the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trade line.⁴⁶ Despite all of this, Karimi merchants occupied a very strong position in the trade network of that period, and their downfall coincided with the downfall of the overall Egyptian economy in the beginning of the fifteenth century.⁴⁷

As far as the trade at Malabar Coast before the arrival of Portuguese was concerned, Malabar had been an attraction for the traders and sailors since a long time. The oriental products available at the various ports and hinterlands of Malabar used to get exported to both western and eastern parts of the globe. Malabar had a rich trade history with China from the very beginning, which reached at its peak during the Sung dynasty in the twelfth century.⁴⁸ Merchants from Mecca, Egypt, Tunisia, Persia, Arab, Turkey, and Ceylon used to come to visit the ports of Malabar regularly for the purpose of trade. While talking about the trade relations of Malabar with the foreign merchants, the role of above mentioned al-Karimi merchants should not be missed. Cairo

⁴³ S. D. Goitein, "Portrait of a Medieval India Trader", p.458

⁴⁴ E. Ashtor, "The Karimi Merchants", p. 45

⁴⁵ Roxani Eleni Margariti, "Mercantile Networks, Port Cities, and "Pirate" States", p. 571

⁴⁶ Jacob Maan, "The Jews in Egypt and Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs II", pp. 246-47

⁴⁷ E. Ashtor, "The Karimi Merchants", pp. 54-55

⁴⁸ For more details on Malabar-China trade connections see W.W. Rockhill, "Notes on the Relation and Trade of China with the Eastern Archipelago and the Coast of the Indian Ocean during the Fourteenth Century", in *T'oung Pao*, vol. XV, Leiden, 1914

Geniza documents refer to a group of merchants from Cairo who were in trade relations with Malabar and mainly with Calicut.⁴⁹

Due to the substantial influence of Karimi merchants between twelfth to fifteenth centuries in the spice trade, it becomes very easy to assume that these merchants from Cairo were al-Karimi only.⁵⁰ Along with the merchants from other regions such as Gujarat⁵¹, the native merchants like Moors,⁵² Chetis,⁵³ Nairs⁵⁴ were an active participant in the ongoing trade ventures before the Portuguese came. Jewish merchants were also taking active part in this ongoing trade ventures of Malabar, either as a foreigner or native. Quilon, one of the famous ports of medieval Malabar experienced an active participation from the Jewish merchants along the Quilon and Red Sea trade route.⁵⁵ Jewish merchants even gave tough competition to the al-Karimi merchants in Quilon and forced them to restrict their trade in the northern parts of Malabar.⁵⁶ Ibn Batuta⁵⁷ and Marco Polo,⁵⁸ two eminent travelers from late twelfth century also refer to the commercial activities of the Jewish merchants at Quilon.

⁴⁹ S.D. Goitein, "New Light on the Beginning of the Karim Merchants" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. I, P. 181

⁵⁰ W.J. Fischel, "The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol.I:2, Leiden, 1958, pp. 162-63

⁵¹ Barbosa talks about the settlement of merchants from Gujarat at Cannanore, Cochin and Calicut in Durant Barbosa, *The Book of Durant Barbosa: An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and their Inhabitants*, trans. by Mansel Longworth Dames, vol II, London, 1921, P. 73

⁵² Ludovico di Varthema, *Travels of Ludovico di Varthema*, London, 1863, p. 151

⁵³ Montalbodo, *Paesi Novamente ritrovati & Novo Mondo da Alberico Vesputio Florentino intitulado*, Princeton, 1916, p.93

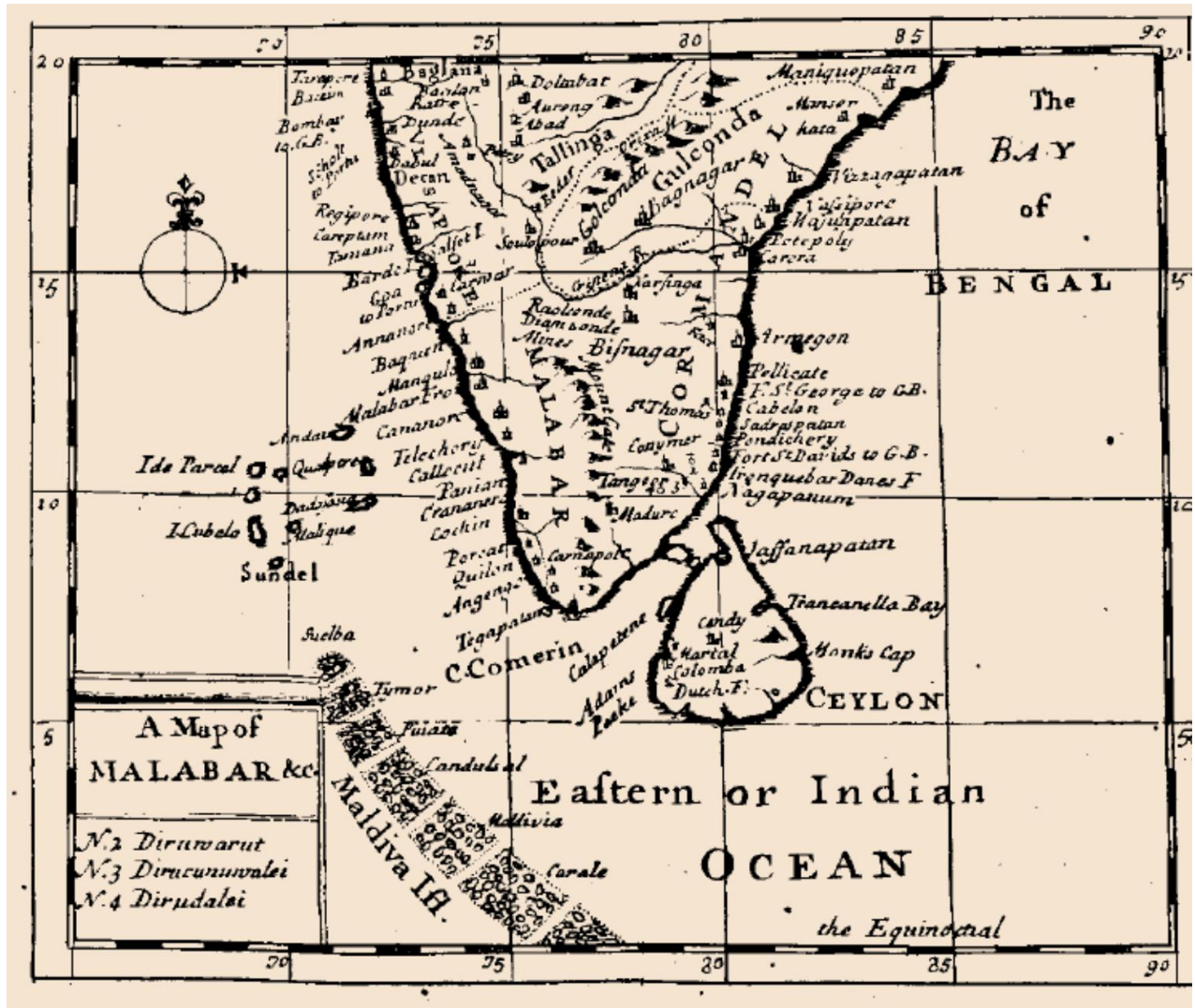
⁵⁴ Tome Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, vol. I, London, 1944, p.82

⁵⁵ M.N.Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, London, 1907, pp.63-64

⁵⁶ Pius Malekandathil, "Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800", *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, 2, 2007, p. 266
Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade: 1740-1800*, Cambridge, 1967, pp. 5, 19; B.J. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, vol.1, The Hague, 1955, pp. 7ff; Pius Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India*, p. 9; For details about the Al-Karimi merchants in India see Eliyahu Ashtor, "The Venetian Supremacy in Levantine Trade: Monopoly of Pre-colonialism", in *Journal of European Economic History*, Rome, 1974,III, p. 27; Walter J.Fischel, "The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt", in the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Leiden, 1958, I,p. 165; Pius Malekandathil, "From Merchant Capitalists to Corsairs: The Role of Muslim Merchants in Portuguese Maritime Trade of the Portuguese" in *Portuguese Studies Review*, 2004,12(1),pp. 77-80

⁵⁷ H. A. R. Gibb, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, tr. and ed. London, p. 238

⁵⁸ Henry Yule and Henry Cordier (ed.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol.II, New Delhi, pp.375-76



Source: F. Tho. Phillips (TR) An account of the Religion, Manners, and Learning of people of Malabar, 1717

When it comes to the structure and functioning of trade, it seems, it was quite cosmopolitan in nature. The facts mentioned above clearly show the presence of various groups of merchants who were participating in the trade in Malabar on an equal footing. Despite having an obvious phenomenon of competition among the merchants, the concept of monopoly was still not eminent. Merchants belonged to all categories and all communities and they were free to possess their warehouses and factories on the Malabar coast.⁵⁹ The ruling authorities at Malabar were equally cooperative to these merchants. The ruler of Calicut, famously known as Zamorin, prearranged some agents for the assistance of merchants coming from the outside land. Rulers rarely interfered and allowed merchants to adhere to their own norms and regulations in the matters of disputes, except for a few.⁶⁰

The use of power and notion of rivalry was not an alien concept for the rulers and merchants involved in Indian Ocean trade. Though these conflicts never led to any sort of monopoly over the routes or commodities, it occurred due to the greed for more profit. Nonetheless, the maritime scene before the arrival of Portuguese was quite balanced and calm. The instances of conflict never got exaggerated due to dependence on one another. Moreover, power was well distributed between various stakeholders for example, say rulers and merchants. Thus, this peaceful nature of pre-Portuguese period of the Indian Ocean should be attributed to the compulsion or need of that time rather than the philosophy of trade for that period. As far as the nature of trade in the pre-Portuguese period of Malabar is concerned, it presented a cooperative arrangement from all the participants. The cosmopolitan nature of Malabar was the force behind such an interconnected network of trade. Unlike Portuguese, the quest for benefit did not let the rulers or merchants use the model of monopoly.

4.4 Malabar and the Advent of the Portuguese

During the arrival of the Portuguese, the nature of the polity of Malabar was non-homogenous, as it was divided into smaller power pockets. The northern India was divided in different regions held under the control of Afghan chiefs, whereas the western part of India was under the control of Rajput chieftains. While Gujarat was under Muhammed I, Bahmani kingdom was divided into Ahmednagar, Berar, Bijapur, Golconda and Bidar. The Lodi rulers were governing the central

⁵⁹ Tome Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, vol. I, London, 1944, p.78

⁶⁰ Durant Barbosa, *The Book of Durant Barbosa*, vol. II, pp.76-77

parts of India from Delhi.⁶¹ Now coming back to the polity of Malabar region, like rest of the continent, it was also being governed by various rulers during the arrival of the Portuguese. However, till 1122 C.E. it was united under Chera dynasty with its epicenter at Mahodayapuram.⁶²

As discussed in the chapter above, even before the arrival of Portuguese Malabar had a full-fledged system of trade with its multiple ports. Cannanore was a very significant port situated at a strategic position. It is assessed that this single port entertained two hundred ships every year. The major items exported from this port were ginger, pepper, cardamoms, myrabolans, canafistula, zerumba and zedoary.⁶³ Calicut was another very famous port at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, ruled by the most influential king of Malabar, popularly called Zamorin or Kunnalakonadiri.⁶⁴ The strategic position of Calicut on the west coast of India along with its stable and strong political status made it the place of attraction for all the merchant groups, whether foreigner or indigenous. It engrossed merchants from, Persia, Turkey, Syria, Cambay, Ormuz, Pegu, Ceylon, Mecca, Coromandal and Gujarat etc.⁶⁵

Cranganore or Kodungallor is next in the row of these eminent port towns, which was located on the sanctuary of the river Periyar. The presence of Jews at this port goes back to the first century onwards which also gives us a fair reason to believe in the fact that, this port had trade links with the Mediterranean trade zones, from where Jew merchants came.⁶⁶ Unfortunately due to some geophysical changes, this port got silted. However, destruction of this port gave rise to the port of Cochin. Nevertheless, replacement of Cranganore with Cochin was beneficial for the trade in general.

By the time Vasco da Gama reached Cochin in 1498, this place had already become the hub of pepper production and exportation.⁶⁷ King of Cochin was subordinate to the ruler of

⁶¹ Joao de Barros, *Decadas da Asia, Decada I, Part II*, Lisbon, 1973, p.180

⁶² K.S.Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1983, p.2

⁶³ Durant Barbosa, *The Book of Durant Barbosa*, vol. II, p.83

⁶⁴ Joao de Barros, *Decadas da Asia, Decada I, Part I*, p.447

⁶⁵ Ludovico di Varthema, *Travels of Ludovico di Varthema*, p.151

⁶⁶ Gilbert Kusher, *Immigrants from India in Israel*, Amazon Press, Tucson, 1972, p. 12

⁶⁷ K.S. Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India*, p.5

Calicut; but from 1500 onwards he used to get endowments from the Portuguese factories.⁶⁸ Quilon was another vital port which held a vital position in the spice trade. It was an independent port under the suzerainty of the King of Quilon.⁶⁹ All these regions were in conflict with each other whether directly or indirectly for the purpose of making more profits from the ongoing trade ventures. These conflicts were often backed by foreign traders who ultimately were working for their own benefit. Such was the bond of Arab merchants and King of Calicut that Zamorin came into action to curb the power of the King of Cochin, which was developing rapidly. At the end of the fifteenth century, just before the arrival of Portuguese, a war broke out between Cochin and Calicut, in which Zamorin emerged victorious. As for the effect of the war, Zamorin was successful in re-directing the commodity movement from Cochin to Calicut.⁷⁰ Along with this an agreement was also signed, according to which the St. Thomas Christian community, who were very eminent traders of that time were ousted from Cochin.⁷¹

Thus, it is clear from the above-mentioned facts, that the kingdom of Malabar was divided into many small regions. It would not be wrong if the polity of the Malabar is considered to be a feudal arrangement. The quest of trade benefits was at the core of all events, which led to the partnership of state and merchants. The equation between Zamorin and Arab traders was the result of this intention only as by the end of the fifteenth century, Arab traders managed to monopolize the Indian Ocean trade.⁷² However, the leading mercantile position of the port of Calicut empowered the Zamorin to be in a powerful position who could claim his dominance over the other smaller regions. Thus, it was a task for the newly arrived Portuguese either to be in good books of Zamorin or to overthrow his power and the power of his allies, in order to make a smooth and fruitful trading venture along the Malabar coast. Moreover, the fragmented polity and friction among indigenous group must have provided Portuguese a framework in which they could also place themselves by manipulation. Nevertheless, the politics and economics based on the standard of groupism in Malabar was picked very well by the Portuguese.

⁶⁸ Documents related to these grants by Portuguese to the Cochin authority is preserved in , Antonio de Silva Rego, *Documentacao Ultramarina Portuguesa*, vol. III, Lisbon, 1963, p,310

⁶⁹ Tome Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, p.80

⁷⁰ K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorin of Calicut*, p.131

⁷¹ K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol. I, P.167

⁷² Henry E.J. Stanley, ed. *The Three Voyages of Vasco da Gama and his Viceroyalty from Lendas da India of Gaspar Correia*, New York, 1869, pp.154-6, 358-60

4.5 Beginning of a New Era: Portuguese, Jews and the Indian Ocean Trade

Politics, violence, conflict, war and monopoly were the major characteristics of Portuguese model of trade in the Indian Ocean and Malabar. Though the earlier periods were not completely unknown of these notions, these were not used as a regular means of conducting business. Portuguese are credited for the introduction of violence and politics in the Maritime zones unlike the prior period.⁷³ As mentioned in the chapter above, Muslim merchants were doing very good in the trade routes that spread from Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, thus, the prime goal of the Portuguese was to eliminate these active merchants from the maritime scene. Economics was at the core of this mentality, but Portuguese wanted to translate the enmity against Muslims traders as the clash of two different religions, Christianity and Islam.⁷⁴

The fear brought by Portuguese in the maritime world has been captured well in a letter by a Venetian diarist in 1501:

*“On the 9th of this month, letters came from Lisbon from the 1st of August. And through letters from Genoa and Lyons and other parts, it is learned that the caravels were expected, loaded with the spices are in Portugal.”*⁷⁵

Thus, earlier the spices used to reach Venice from Calicut, Cochin and other places in India via Alexandria. But now due to the exploration of this direct route to India and growing influence of the King of Portugal, ships were getting controlled in Portugal.⁷⁶ An incident of violence has been mentioned in the Arab chronicles of Hadramaut in the period of 1502-3, in which mention is made about the Portuguese who not only captured seven vessels but also killed people on it and made some captives as well.⁷⁷ 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 including Jews.

⁷³ Michel Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, London, 2006, p.106,114 also see Michael Pearson, “Piracy in Asian Waters: Problems of Definition”, in John Kleinen & Manon Osseweijer, eds. *Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia: Historical and contemporary Perspective*, Singapore, 2010, pp. 15-28

⁷⁴ Henry E.J. Stanley, *The Three Voyages of Vasco Da Gama and His Viceroyalty from Lendas da India of Gaspar Correia*, ed. Stanley, New York, 1869, pp. 113-14

⁷⁵ Extract from Girolamo Priuli’s diary are printed in English in the *Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India*, ed. Greenlee, 1938

⁷⁶ Extract from Girolamo Priuli’s diary are printed in English in the *Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India*, ed. Greenlee, 1938

⁷⁷ R.B. Serjeant, *The Portuguese off the South Arabian Coast*, Oxford, 1963, p.43

The Jewish merchants, who were scattered all along the Malabar Coast, were also 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 favorite commercial partners for most of the Europeans.⁷⁸

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 uninterrupted through alternative and parallel channels depending on exigencies. This section of the chapter will 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 because of the impact of the same. By providing a general background of the pre-Portuguese and post Portuguese era in the Indian Ocean and Malabar, now the focus will precisely be on the role of the Jewish merchants in the trade ventures of the Portuguese during the given period of time. It will be also very interesting to see the Jewish ways of survival during adverse conditions that 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.

4.6 Early Phase of Portuguese-Jewish Interactions: Period of Mutual Assistance

The initial interaction between the Portuguese and the Jews can be seen in the light of mutual benefit and need. The earlier paragraphs have established the growing aspiration of the Portuguese to fetch maximum benefit out of the ongoing Malabar trade. Despite their belief in the notion of monopoly trade, the initial phase of Portuguese at Malabar was spent securing support from the already established players of trade. Jews were one amongst them, who were no doubt active in the trade ventures along the Mediterranean-Indian ocean trade routes since a long

⁷⁸ Visscher's Letters from Malabar, in K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *A History of Kerala*, vol.II, Ernakulam, 1929 , pp.51;517

time.⁷⁹ Jewish merchants' trade ventures were very much guided and influenced by the activities happening along the various trade zones in the Mediterranean regions such as Cairo and Alexandria.⁸⁰ In order to take over this existing network of trade, Portuguese started their search for a different trade route via Cape of Good Hope, which could connect them directly to the Indian Ocean. 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.⁸¹

Finally the sail of Vasco da Gama which started from Lisbon on 9 July, 1497,⁸² ended at Calicut, Malabar on May 20, 1498.⁸³ Vasco da Gama, after his arrival on the western coast of India, collected all basic information regarding the existing trade and markets just within a short time period of three months.⁸⁴ Portuguese first encountered Jews at Calicut as the city already had a Jewish community who were very active in the trade that was spread along the Mediterranean-Indian ocean zone. It is believed that immediately after his arrival, Vasco da Gama came across a Jew of Tunisian origin. While having conversation with him, da Gama made his intentions clear regarding his long journey to India- trade and religion. He told him that he has come, 'in search of spices and Christians'.⁸⁵ The presence of Jewish community on the western coast of India can be confirmed from the various writings of the Portuguese officials and

⁷⁹ The famous *Geniza* documents and travelogues belonging to the pre Portuguese period establish the eminent role played by the Jewish merchants in the field of trade and commerce.

⁸⁰ Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, vol. I, 1967, pp. 29-42

⁸¹ R. P. Anand, *Origin and the Development of the Law of the Sea*, The Hague, pp.42-43.

⁸² There are multiple opinions regarding the date of the departure of Vasco da Gama. According to Roteiro Gama started his journey on 8 July, Saturday, from Restello. Gernot Gietz, *Vasco da Gama, Die Entdeckung des Seewegs nach Indien: Ein Augenzeugenbericht 1497-1499*, Tübingen, 1980, p.35, March 25, is the given by Gaspar Correia, Henry E.J. Stanley, *The Three Voyages of Vasco Da Gama and His Viceroyalty from Lendas da India of Gaspar Correia*, p.58. According to Barros the date is 8 July in his book *Joao de Barros, Decada*, parte I, p. 277. Duarte Pacheco writes 8 June, Duarte Pacheco, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, translated and edited by H.T. Kimble, Nendeln, 1967, p.166. Though among all 9 July has been accepted by most of the scholars.

⁸³ Like the date of departure, the date of arrival has got many opinions. Castanheda gives May 22. Fernao Lopes de Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India pelos Portugueses*, liv. Vi, cap.72, Coimbra, 1924, p. 72. Barros gives May 20, Joao de Barros, *Decada I*, para I, p. 328. May 20 has been accepted by the modern scholars, see. 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.

⁸⁴ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Birth-pangs of Portuguese Asia: Revisiting the fateful 'long decade' 1498–1509", p. 264.

⁸⁵ These words of Vasco da Gama has been recorded in a letter while he was expressing his feelings to a Arab merchant in Gernot Gietz, *Vasco da Gama, die Entdeckung des Seewegs nach Indien: ein Augenzeugenbericht 1497-1499*, Tübingen, 1980, p. 79 & Francis Day, *The Land of The Permauls*, p.74.

the Jesuits missionaries who frequently came to Malabar after sixteenth century for the purpose of trade and spread of Christianity.⁸⁶ The already settled Jewish merchant community at various places of the western shore of India helped the Portuguese in making some space in the field of commerce. During this initial phase, Jews seemed to help the Portuguese using their knowledge in the existing patterns of trade at Malabar. Jews played the role of intermediaries and negotiators for the Portuguese, which was a very popular culture in India for carrying out trade.⁸⁷ After reaching Calicut, Vasco da Gama got assistance from a Jew of Anjedive, who is popularly called 'Gaspar da Gama' after his conversion to Christianity.⁸⁸ It was with the help of Gaspar da Gama only that Portuguese could enter the trading world of Cochin, since the trading environment at Calicut was very hostile to them in 1500.⁸⁹

When Portuguese came to India, initially their trade was very much dependent on the support from the local Jewish Merchants. In his 2nd visit, Gaspar supported him again with all the assistance that he could give. When Francisco de Almeida reached Cochin as the Viceroy in 1505, Gaspar da Gama offered full support and maintained a good relationship. European merchants needed Jews to get into the local commerce and cross the local language barrier.⁹⁰

Gaspar da Gama rose in ranks because of his relationship with the Portuguese. He was also popularly known as Gaspar da India and he was readily given the task of being the intermediary or the interpreter, as he had the knowledge of the local language. He was also chosen to be the commissary of the fleet and also be the Portuguese agent for pepper and spices. Gaspar had attained such a status that he had direct correspondence with the King Manuel of Portugal. There were a number of letters that were exchanged between Gaspar and the king from Cochin, dating between 1505 to 1507, but only three survived. Gaspar had travelled till Malacca

⁸⁶ J. Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. III, Rome, 1956, p.435

⁸⁷ M.N. Pearson, "Brokers in Western Indian Port Cities: Their Role in Servicing Foreign Merchants", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 22:3, 1988, p.455

⁸⁸ '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. More information on Gaspar da Gama can be extracted from; *Diario da Viagem de Vasco da Gama*, ed, by Franz Hummerlich, Porto, vol. II, 1945, PP. 242-306

⁸⁹ Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', p.18. also see *Diario da Viagem de Vasco da Gama*, vol.II, Porto, 1945, pp.242;268

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* pp.13-14.

and basing on this knowledge and information that Albuquerque extended his conquests to the South East Asia and the Far East.⁹¹

The most common belief that persists is that Jews of Cochin settled at Cochin after their original home at Cranganore was destroyed. A letter sent by the Jewish community of Cochin to the rabbinical authority in Egypt, gives an account of the Jewish households numbering 100 that were present at Cochin during the beginning of 16th 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 sixteenth century and came to meet many Jews at Cochin during his three months of stay.⁹²

When Vasco Da Gama reached Calicut, it was ruled by a very liberal and tolerant monarch, Zamorin, who used to give equal opportunities to traders from various religions. A lot of merchants including Jews came to Calicut for trade because of this harmonious atmosphere.⁹³ Jewish existence at Calicut has many proofs including the oral tradition woven around the *juthakulam* (pond of the Jews) of Calicut⁹⁴. Jewish presence is also referenced by many *Geniza* documents, which talk about the movement of Jews from the Mediterranean countries moving to the west coast of India.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Sylvain Levi, *Memorial Sylvain Levi*, Paris, 1935, pp. 366-68 also see work of David, G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", pp. 428-429.

⁹² Walter J. Fishel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.39-40.

⁹³ Francis Day, *The Land of The Perumals or Cochin Its Past and Present*, Madras, 1863, p.73.

⁹⁴ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", pp. 7, 13 This popular pond which is believed to belong to the Jewish community is still present in Madai

⁹⁵ See, S. D. Goitein, and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, 2008

Cochin was fast emerging as one of the best ports for trading. Jews were an inalienable part in the trade in Asia. Like other places, even Cochin was famous for its spices and Jews were among the groups that delivered large quantities to the Portuguese merchandise.⁹⁶ Finding of the cape route and the increasing trade with Atlantic ports helped both Cochin and Jews to flourish. The opportunity here was growing and it attracted the Jews from Spain as well, who were already suffering and being expelled by the Crown in 1512.⁹⁷

The opportunities for the Jewish merchants from Spain further increased because of the departure of *paradesi* Muslim merchants from Calicut. This departure was initiated by Zamorin in 1513 because of the growing influence of the Portuguese in the region following a peace treaty with Zamorin, even after the fact that in the earlier times the alliance between the king of Calicut and Muslims was very strong.⁹⁸ This situation provided a good opportunity to the newly arrived Jewish merchants from Spain. This was also a time which saw the surge in the number of private merchants. Parallel to the trade sponsored by the Portuguese crown, there were a lot of private Portuguese merchants (*Casados*)⁹⁹ and non-Portuguese merchants (indigenous and foreigners). Such an evolution in the trade scenario led to alliance between these new private merchants and the native or Jewish merchants.

Portuguese were getting tired of the flourishing private trade and hence to make their situation better, they targeted Marakkar Muslim merchants who then fled from Cochin to Calicut, under the protection of Zamorin. Zamorin also made use of the situation and attacked Cranganore, on the pretext of rivalry with Cochin, who was one of a supporter of both Portuguese and Cochin. In the Muslim attack of Cranganore in 1524, 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

⁹⁶ Antonio Bulhao de Pato, *Cartas*, tom.I, p.330

⁹⁷ Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva, *Noticias dos Judeos de Cochim*, Lisboa, 1923, p.8

⁹⁸ Pius Malekandathil, "From Merchant Capitalists to Corsairs", pp.82-3 & "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.14

⁹⁹ *casados* were the married Portuguese citizens living in India. For details on the *casados* see Pius Malekandathil, "The Portuguese *Casados* and the Intra-Asian Trade: 1500-1663", in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Millenium (61st) Session, Kolkata: Indian History Congress Publications, 2001, pp.380-90; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Cochin in Decline, 1600-1650: Myth and Manipulation in the Estado da India", in *Portuguese Asia: Aspects in History and Economic History (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)*, ed.by Roderich Ptak, Stuttgart, 1987, pp.59-85

Gentiles, Jewish merchants were also active in the kingdom of Cranganore.¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹

Cranganore, which housed one of the oldest settlements of the Jews, was the centre of attack from almost all groups, not just the Portuguese but the other groups like the Muslim merchants. In 1504, the soldiers of Suarez De Mendes looted Muslim and Jewish shops and settlements in Cranganore. Muslim traders invaded the city after a gap of twenty years to revenge the loot in which along with the Christians, the Jews were also targeted. Such attacks were more for the loss of economic gain than religious intolerance. Spice trade particularly pepper was the bone of contention. The Muslim traders used to adulterate pepper. To stop this act by the Muslim merchants, few Jews and Christians were allotted specially the task of finding out those tricks and punish the offenders.¹⁰² The support from the Jews proved very beneficial to the Portuguese, when they were trying to make inroads into the trade ventures on Malabar.

In the early phase, the Portuguese had a high dependence on the native merchants including Jews. The shift of Jewish merchants from Cranganore to Cochin coincided with the growth in the commercial activity because of growth in Portuguese commerce. Most of the Jews 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 developing under the umbrella of Portuguese commerce.¹⁰³ Jewish merchants, now restricted to Mattancherry, started to make commercial inroads into Santa Cruz, the commercial hub of the Portuguese commerce.¹⁰⁴ Though Jews lived in the native part, they established their own trading network, along the Euro-Asian maritime trade zones.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Duarte Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the Sixteenth century*, p.15.

¹⁰¹ J.B.Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin" p. 229.

¹⁰² William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol I, Asian Educational Services, Madras, 1887, p 312,325.

¹⁰³ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India: 1500-1663*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2001, p.37

¹⁰⁴ K.S.Mathew and Afzal Ahmad, *Emergence of Cochin in the Pre-Industrial Era: A Study of Portuguese Cochin*, Pondicherry, pp.1-3.

¹⁰⁵ Pius Malekandathil, , "The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese (1498-1663)," pp. 240-50.

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-formulated and re-modified the nature of their activities and settlements. A flourishing community of yesteryears could not have vanished all of a sudden, as they were present there even after fifteenth century, despite Portuguese entry. The presence of Jews in a good number is testified by the presence of the Synagogue and tomb stone.¹⁰⁶ Though, the initial Portuguese-Jewish engagement created opportunities for the Cochin Jews, it was not free from some bitter experiences. Thus, this cooperative behavior of Jews towards Portuguese was driven out of need and compulsion.

4.7 Migration and Making of New Networks of Trade and Faith between New Christians and Jews of Kerala

Meanwhile, we find mass exodus of Jews from Iberian Peninsula to Cochin and Goa from Europe. In 1497, around 70,000 Jews living in Portugal were forced to convert to Christianity, and further these converted Jews were termed *Cristaos novos* or New Christians. Even after conversion, these new converts were always under suspicion and vigilance. The derogatory term that became popular for the New Christians was “Marrano”, which was used by the Christian population to demean these new converts. Even the word Jew was also used in an offensive manner.¹⁰⁷ The anti-Semitic policies of Portugal and Spain, where the crown either wanted the Jews to convert to Christianity or move to other countries. Many Jews of Iberian Peninsula moved towards Cochin and Goa, where relatively liberal atmosphere prevailed.¹⁰⁸

The Castiel family of the Jews was said to have reached Cochin in 1512 as a part of Jewish migration from Spain. While making a list of famous Jewish merchants of Cochin, Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva mentions Castiel family specifically.¹⁰⁹ Castiel family played a significant role in the political and economic environment of Cochin between 1570 to 1670. Their stature even challenged and threatened the Portuguese control in the Malabar region. This

¹⁰⁶ Sweta Singh, “Reflection of Malabar Jews History in the Archaeological Sources: A Study of Copper Plates, Synagogues and Monuments”, *Social Sciences International Research Journal*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2017

¹⁰⁷ H. P. Salomon & I. S. D. Sassoon, *The Marrano Factory: The Portuguese Inquisition and its New Christians 1536-1765*, Brill, Leiden, 2001, p. XV, originally published in Portuguese by Antonio Jose Saraiva as *Inquisicao e Christaos-Novos*, Inova, Lisbon, 1969.

¹⁰⁸ H. P. Salomon & I. S. D. Sassoon, *The Marrano Factory*, p. 347

¹⁰⁹ Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, Lisboa, 1923, p.8

particular family seemed to rise to prominence and influence by taking advantage of the available trade opportunities. However, there was a gap while tracing the history of Castiel family between the periods of 1512-1570. During this time period, the family seemed to make their base strong by participating in the private trade networks of Malabar. This network of private trade was running along Malabar with the mutual cooperation of the Portuguese *Casados*¹¹⁰ and the other local merchants. Castiel family must have taken an active part in this ongoing private trade, which led to their popularity in the later period of time.¹¹¹

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 1530¹¹², was the principal destination for the Iberian Jews moving to India.

By 1530s, the Portuguese crown intensified the control over Jews, by resorting to the institution of Inquisition in Portugal.¹¹³ Fearing consequences of the establishment of Inquisition, many Jews started migrating to Cochin. Because of the religious intolerance of the Portuguese, Jews were left with the only option of conversion into Christianity in order to survive within the country and its colonies. Along with Portugal, the vigilant nature of Portuguese towards Jews continued in India as well. They kept officers to look into the matters of conversion of pagans and slaves into religions other than Christianity. And of course, there was always an economic angle attached to such notions. Portuguese also imposed extra taxes on the non-believers.¹¹⁴

The policies made by the Crown in Portugal affected the economic state of affairs in India as well. The Crown's policy was based on an orthodox and non-tolerant Christian view of

¹¹⁰ Pius Malekandathil, "The Portuguese *Casados* and the Intra-Asian Trade: 1500-1663", in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Millenium (61st) Session, Kolkata: Indian History Congress Publications, 2001, pp.380-90; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Cochin in Decline, 1600-1650: Myth and Manipulation in the Estado da India", in *Portuguese Asia: Aspects in History and Economic History(Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)*, ed.by Roderich Ptak, Stuttgart, 1987, pp.59-85

¹¹¹ Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala", p.26

¹¹² J. B. Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin" p. 230.

¹¹³ H. P. Salomon & I. S. D. Sassoon, *The Marrano Factory*, pp. 19-42

¹¹⁴ George Schurhammer, S. J., *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, vol. II, India (1541-1545), translated by M. Joseph Costelloe, S. J. by The Jesuit Historical Institute, Italy, 1977, p. 240

the world. The efforts to bring more and more communities into Christianity, became a sore point between the Portuguese and the Jews. Moreover, the anti-Semitic movement which started in Portugal around 1530, caused the migration of Jews from Portugal to the southern shore of India and Cochin in particular.¹¹⁵ The financial opportunities were used very intelligently by the native Jews and the New Christian merchants in their favor.¹¹⁶

The Jews who were forced to flee from Portugal due to forceful conversion to Christianity, also known as New Christians started developing commercial partnerships with the Jews of Mattancherry. This mutual collaboration between the Jews was a result of common religious sentiments as well as commercial benefits, which was very necessary to flourish under the Portuguese intervention.¹¹⁷ Jacome de Olivares was known to be a very eminent New Christian among those that came. He was born at Setubal in Portugal, his mother was a New Christian and father was an old Christian. The reason of his influence were more than one. He used to conduct trade all along the Indian Ocean, from Hurmuz to Melaka. He had also lived in Melaka for a good time, where he used to be visited by his family. Melaka was a hot destination for trade during that time and attracted a lot of Portuguese merchants who were trading in Malabar. Jacome also operated in textiles, which were found in Gujarat. Now, Gujarati textile was in great demand at Melaka. He used to conduct trade from *Rua Direita*, which was in the city of Portuguese Cochin and used to sell pitch and porcelain.¹¹⁸ His religious affiliation worked well for him in connecting with other Jews operating in the same trade route. The trial and Inquisition documents reveal that there used to be close connections between New Christians and Jewish merchants. Documents reveal that Olivares traded with Jewish merchants of both Cochin and Melaka.¹¹⁹

Olivares also had a cordial connection with another Jew of Mattancherry called Isaac, the Red. Isaac was originally from Setubal but he had a shop in both Mattancherry and Portuguese Cochin. He used to take commodities from Olivares to the Portuguese city in Cochin. Being a

¹¹⁵ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India*, p.166.

¹¹⁶ A letter sent by Dinis de Azevedo to king Dom John III in 1540, contains this information. See AN/TT, Corpo Cronologico, I, Maço 66, doc.96

¹¹⁷ Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, “ From Setubal to the Sublime Porte”, p. 9

¹¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 106-07

¹¹⁹ Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, “ From Setubal to the Sublime Porte”, p. 110

native of Mattancherry, it was easy for him to trade on an intercity basis. Apart from the commercial ties between the two, both also used to discuss their faith secretly.¹²⁰

Issac do Cairo was another Jewish merchant from Mattancherry, who used to supply merchandise to the New Christian Merchants at Cochin. He had good commercial links in the west Asia trade route.¹²¹ Manuel Rodrigues, an another New Christian merchant active in the town of Cochin even owned a business house in order to sell his merchandise.¹²² The trade was not limited to men, even New Christian Women had taken advantage of the existing commercial opportunity and had established their own businesses. Leonor Caldeira and her daughter Clara were two business-women conducting trade in the city of Cochin.¹²³ Later the business was taken forward as per family tradition by Leonor's son Simao Nunes, who had his business setup in *Rua Direita*.¹²⁴ Even Simao used to trade with the native Jews of Cochin much like the other New Christian merchants. Evidence of this is found in inquisition documents, which had mentioned him trading with Moises Real, the great merchant from Cochin.¹²⁵

Among all the New Christian merchants, the two most eminent traders were Jacome de Olivares, and Manuel Rodrigues,¹²⁶ as they had their businesses along the new trade route. In the middle of 16th century, Leonor Caldeira, Simão Nunes, were some famous new Christian merchants from Portugal, and had their businesses set up in the Portuguese city of Cochin. Moises Real had often been termed as the biggest merchant of India who had his trade set up in Cochin. He used to operate from two centers of Portuguese Cochin *Rua Direita* and the *Casa do Vigario*, respectively.¹²⁷

While all this was taking place, commercial ties between Cochin Jews and Portuguese New Christians started developing. Jewish merchants of Mattancherry used their west Asia links

¹²⁰ Ibid, pp. 98-99

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 109

¹²² Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of the India Ocean Commerce", p. 18

¹²³ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of the India: 1500-1663*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 110-11

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 111

¹²⁵ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of the India*, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 111-12 & Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of the India Ocean Commerce", p. 18

¹²⁶ For Jacome de Olivares see Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "From Setubal to the Sublime Porte", pp. 98-101 & for information on Manuel Rodrigues see Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of the India*, p. 111 and Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of the India Ocean Commerce," p. 22

¹²⁷ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.15.

and also the support of local rulers of Mattancherry to facilitate trade and commodity movements in ties with the Portuguese new Christians at Portuguese Cochin. This commercial transaction was also a result of the underlying religious sentiment as the new Christians were not happy with the forced conversion. This led to continued cooperation and sharing of religious practices between the two Jewish groups.¹²⁸

The new Christians used to secretly be a part of the Jewish ceremonies with the native Jews of Cochin, but this was used to be done in hiding from the Portuguese officials. 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 1550.¹²⁹ Some of the new Christians took part in the Purim festival of the Jews of Mattancherry, because of the close ties with the Jews of Cochin. The old Judaizing traditions and revival of Judaic rituals intensified and ultimately, it led to conflicts between the Portuguese and the New Christians at Cochin.¹³⁰

4.8 The Phase of Distress: Cochin, New Christians and Jews Merchants

The Crown at Portugal was very concerned about the spread of Christianity in the world and parallelly the clash between Portuguese and the Jews was intensifying.¹³¹ In 1545, St. Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit missionary to India, wrote to the king expressing his concern for the fast spread of Judaism in India and requested to open a holy office in India to put a check on the growing Jewish practices. As mentioned earlier, the Portuguese came to India not only for reasons of trade but also to spread Christianity.¹³²

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

¹²⁸ The documents of inquisition contains the accusations on the New Christian merchants of participating in the Jewish religious affairs see Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "From Setubal to the Sublime Porte", p. 113

¹²⁹ Private collection of S.H. Halegua, A.I. Simon, *Extracts from Historical Chronology of the Paradesi or White Jews of Cochin*, 1940 & David Mandelbaum, *The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin*, pp. 430-33

¹³⁰ 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.

¹³¹ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India*, p. 174, for more information on the growing orthodox religious policies in Portugal between 1521-1557 see Joaquim Verissimo Serrao, *Historia de Portugal*, vol. III, pp. 50-58; 260-62

¹³² Francis Day, *The Land of The Permauls*, p.74.

on which Holy Eucharist was exposed on the feast day of Holy Eucharist. The New Christians were naturally the objects of suspicion as they had come under the Judaizing influence of the Jews of Cochin. One after the another, all the new Christians were hunted and arrested to find out the real culprit. Almost all the new Christians got arrested, their businesses disrupted, and an Inquisition court was set up to try them in 1557.¹³³

These Inquisition court was headed by the religious orders of the city and the Dominican Bishops. The proceedings looked into the attempt made by the new Christians to adopt Judaism and practice Judaic rituals. Of the 20 New Christians, 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.¹³⁴ 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.¹³⁵

The trial documents related to Jacome de Olivares and his wife Maria Nunes, shows how rich these new Christians were. This couple had many slaves for their household work from divergent group, which included Black and Malayali.¹³⁶ More than the religion, economy was playing at large because the Portuguese *casado* traders had rivalry from these merchants and this was an easy way to target them and take control of their trade at Cochin. Religious differences just came handy in furtherance of such vested interests and the confiscation of the property of these new merchants became easy.¹³⁷

Portuguese did their best to limit the socio-economic status of these New Christian merchants in the name of faith, which was not only restricted to the merchants of Cochin but

¹³³ See also 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

¹³⁴ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p. 24

¹³⁵ Ibid, p.24.

¹³⁶ Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "From Setubal to the Sublime Porte," pp. 110-11

¹³⁷ Pius 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.

included other trading places where these merchants were active or had links. In this arrangement, another Office of Inquisition came into existence in Goa in 1560, with the target of interrogating New Christian merchants settled around the coastal areas, with regard to matters of Christianity.¹³⁸ 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’.¹³⁹

4.9 Jewish Merchants and the King of Cochin: A Narrative of Mutual Benefits

The survival of Jewish community on the land of Malabar was highly dependent upon the kind of bonding they shared with the local rulers. In the latter part of 15th century, a whole lot of black Jews migrated to Cochin from Cranganore and other parts of Kerala.¹⁴⁰ The King of Cochin was eager to take Jews in as he was in need to develop his port. He undertook all the incoming Jews under his special patronage and gave special privileges which they enjoyed all through the years to come. It was during this time that Thekkumbhagam synagogue was built in 1489 in Cochin¹⁴¹ and is suggestive of having come into existence for the Jews. Most of the Jewish traders from port of Quilon and from Cranganore moved to these new centers of power, stationing themselves close to the local rulers and winning their trust to act as commercial intermediaries between the spice producing centers in the far off areas to the ports along the coastal areas.¹⁴²

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

¹³⁸ The documents related to the inquisition of New Christian merchant Jacom de Olivares and his family in Goa will flash light on this matter. 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),” pp. 103-4, 110-12

¹³⁹ David Mandelbaum, “The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin”, p. 430

¹⁴⁰ This is deduced from the fact that in the first decade of the sixteenth century, we find the Jews of Cochin getting themselves involved in the commerce of pepper. See Antonio Bulhão de Pato, *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque seguidas de documentos que as elucidam*, tom.I, Lisboa, 1884, p.330

¹⁴¹ David Mandelbaum, “The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin”, pp.428;441; P.M.Jussay, “The Jews in Kerala”, p.135

¹⁴² Pius Malekandathil, “Jews of Kerala”, p. 12

by the king of Cochin, by making them settle down close to his palace in 1565.¹⁴³ 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.¹⁴⁴ 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.¹⁴⁵

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 Jews and take them under his protectorate.¹⁴⁶ 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. Jews even served in the army of Zamorin, King of Calicut, that proceeded against the Portuguese in 1542. Both *paradesi* and native Jews had been considered to be great warriors.¹⁴⁷ Further 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."¹⁴⁸ 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.¹⁴⁹ 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.

¹⁴³ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.II, New Delhi: AES, 1983, p.519.

¹⁴⁴ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p. 41.

¹⁴⁵ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.II, New Delhi, p.519.

¹⁴⁶ David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", pp.428;441

¹⁴⁷ Gaspar Correa as quoted by George Schurhammer, Francis, *Xavier: His Life, His Times*, vol. II

¹⁴⁸ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p. 40

¹⁴⁹ David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.429

4.10 The Institution of Inquisition: Religion Verses Commerce

The role of New Christians in the expansion of the Portuguese trade endeavors is indisputable. Even religion could not stop them from collaborating with the Portuguese on an equal footing in commercial affairs. Presence of New Christians in the company board of the Portuguese for looking after trade affairs in India was no matter of surprise.¹⁵⁰ While going into the functioning and composition of this company board, it had six directors, all of them had to be Portuguese nationals. However, the president of the board was to be nominated by the crown. Others were nominated on the basis of the number of shares they owned. Among these six members, three were New Christian merchants with sizable merchant capital. Antonio Gome da Mata, one of the members in the company board was son of a very wealthy and influential New Christian merchant Luis Gomes de Elvas Coronel.¹⁵¹ Francisco Dias Mendes de Brito and Diogo Rodrigues de Lisboa, were two other New Christians within the board. Richness of the Brito family could be gathered from the fact that they even used to lend money to the Kings of Portugal at the time of need. Francisco Dias Mendes de Brito's commercial involvement in India was seen for a long period between 1586-1601.¹⁵² Diogo Rodrigues de Lisboa, also belonged to a family which often financed the commercial company of the Portuguese and the King. He also owned ships and played a very active role in the pepper trade of India.¹⁵³ Manuel Rodrigues de Elvas was another New Christian merchant who was appointed to the company board as director.¹⁵⁴

While these new Christians were needed by the crown due to their capital holding capability, they were at the same time denied position or power in case of an economic rivalry. Involvement of New Christians merchants in the trade of Lisbon and India was disliked by many other Portuguese merchants. In order to remove competition, the question of religion was highlighted by Christian merchants against New Christians, accusing them of practicing Judaism and running a parallel group of Jewish merchants. New Christian merchants were held responsible for the loss Portuguese were going through in the Indian trade. They were accused of

¹⁵⁰ A. R. Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire: Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 86-88

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 89

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 90

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 91

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. pp. 91-92

promoting their own self-interests with the help of other Jewish merchants.¹⁵⁵ All the above mentioned New Christian merchants were booked for practicing Judaism. Two very famous New Christian merchants, Francisco Dias Mendes de Brito and Diogo Mendes de Brito were arrested for the reasons of Judaizing in 1630.¹⁵⁶ Diogo Rodrigues de Lisboa was also arrested on the charge of Judaizing by the Lisbon Inquisition in January 1632.¹⁵⁷ The punishment for the convicted New Christians for the crime of Judaizing was enforced with the intention of curtailing their financial movement. Overseas travelling and selling of merchandise was banned for the New Christians periodically. The time fixed for these bans were chosen conveniently, as one such ban was announced just before the formation of a commercial company for India trade in 1619.¹⁵⁸

The high status of these New Christian merchants was always a source of problems for the Portuguese. However, they used them for their selfish need. Portuguese were never comfortable with the fact that the new Christians became richer than them. So, the religion and the institution of Inquisition proved to be their best weapon in this regard, which was seen being used by the Portuguese many times according to the need. The use of Inquisition was more of an economic move than the religious.¹⁵⁹ Inquisition was seen to be done mostly when Portuguese felt the need of removing New Christians from their way, as they considered them to be their serious competitor.

4.11 The Changing Parameters of Portuguese-Jewish Interactions

The hostilities against the new Christians by the Portuguese from 1540s till 1560s could not continue longer than 1570s and 1580s because they faced a lot of financial crises and shortage of funds in the Indian trade. Because of financial troubles, the Portuguese handed over Indo-European trade to the Italian and German mercantile syndicate in 1570s.¹⁶⁰ Unwillingly the Portuguese had to accommodate as many indigenous merchants as possible, including the Jews and the new Christians so that their revenue for sustaining their colonial edifice kept coming.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 93

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 90

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 90

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 93

¹⁵⁹ When a New Christian was proved to be guilty of Judaizing, his or her assets were confiscated not to the inquisition office, but to the company. For detailed

¹⁶⁰ Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala", pp. 19-20

Consequently, new Christians from Lisbon began to take up the Indo-European trade of the Portuguese when the Italians and the Germans wended up their contracts. This led to the formation of a new group by the New Christians led by Pero Rodrigues, Fernão Ximenes, Joao Monteiro, Henrique Dias, Andre Ximenes, Heitor Mendes de Brito, Luis Gomes Furtado and Jorge Rodrigues Solis. This syndicate looked after the Indo- European trade of the Portuguese from 1592 till 1598.¹⁶¹ With change in the commercial policy of the Portuguese, a lot of Jews and new Christians started travelling to Cochin and Goa as trade agents and partners of these new Christian merchants of Lisbon. Duarte Solis, a trade agent came to Cochin by mid 1580s.¹⁶² This period also saw the emergence of private traders like the Castiel family during 1570-1670. Castiel family was often linked to the participation in the trading opportunities now let open by the Europeans and their wealth grew substantially.¹⁶³

Jan Huyghen van Linschoten had mentioned this change in the Jewish presence at 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 mentioned that some Jews could even talk in Spanish language.¹⁶⁴ The French traveler Francois Pyrard, who visited Malabar during 1601-1611, not only talks about the presence of Jewish community but also mentions their riches.¹⁶⁵

Now many white Jews also started coming to India from Europe. This led to an increased rivalry and distinction between the black and white Jews. Due to the long history of settlement of black Jews on the west coast of India, they started getting categorized largely as indigenous merchant groups. The black Jews were just like the native south Indian people surrounding them.¹⁶⁶ The famous traveler from Portugal, Barbosa had described black Jews as the “natives of the country”.¹⁶⁷ Black Jews had their settlements both on the main port land areas as well as the

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p. 18.

¹⁶² Ibid. p.18.

¹⁶³ J. B. Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin*, p. 49

¹⁶⁴ See *The Voyage of John Huyghen Van Linshoten to the East Indies*, Vol. 1, p. 285.

¹⁶⁵ Francois Pyrard Laval, *The Voyages of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, pp.429-35.

¹⁶⁶ William Crooke, *Things India*, London, p.292.

¹⁶⁷ Duarte Barbosa, *A description of the coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the sixteenth century*, p.156.

interior hinterlands, which enabled them in forming a network through which they were able to arrange resources easily.

The ability to mobilize resources was a huge advantage when it came to playing the role of intermediaries for European merchants. Among these European merchants, Portuguese were the first to be assisted by the black Jews. These Jewish merchants used to regularly supply spices to the Portuguese vessels that sailed to Lisbon.¹⁶⁸ The atmosphere at this time was liberal and good for trade, which saw both the native as well as *Paradesi Jews* or white Jews prosper during the end of 16th and beginning of 17th centuries. Thus, the patronage of the ruling authorities and liberal commercial atmosphere thrown open by crown in mid 1570s led to the survival and prosperity of the Jewish merchants.

Alexander Hamilton, the English traveler has covered a lot about the Jews of Cranganore in his book *New Account of East Indies*. He further describes Cranganore to be the republic of Jews as this had a population of 30,000 families at one time, which got reduced to mere 4000 by his time.¹⁶⁹ Jacob Canter Visscher, the Dutch chaplain 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 has also spoken about the social division and presence of both white and black Jews in Cochin, however, the white Jews were less in number, as black Jews numbered around 2000.¹⁷⁰

It has been seen that most of the synagogues in Kerala came up and were even rebuilt during the time of Portuguese control over the trade.¹⁷¹ However, building of synagogues had started to take social hierarchies in consideration. The first Jewish synagogues built at Cochin in 1344, and later in 1489 were for the so-called black Jews,¹⁷² but then the segregation happened and the divide extended even to Synagogues. The synagogue built at Cochin around 1568 was

¹⁶⁸ Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and The Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.14.

¹⁶⁹ 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, 2 Vols., London, 1930,

¹⁷⁰ J. C. Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, printed in Dutch, and translated into English by Major Heber Drury, Madras, 1862, pp.114-17.

¹⁷¹ For information on Synagogues see Shalva Weil, "In an Ancient Land Revisited: Trade and Synagogues in South India", *Asian Jews Life*, Winter 2010-2011 more information is also available on official site of Kerala tourism: <https://www.keralatourism.org/search/?q=cochin+synagogue+>

¹⁷² David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p. 428.

for the White Jews or *Paradesi* Jews, who claimed to be the purest and of unmixed blood of mainland Jews.¹⁷³

4.12 Social Division and the Related Economy

A direct consequence of the arrival of Portuguese in Malabar could be attributed to the introduction of class division among the Jewish community. Amidst these developments, the social division among the Jews only grew and took the shape of three distinct categories: White Jews (*Paradesi Jews*),¹⁷⁴ Brown Jews and Black Jews. The white Jews enjoyed a higher place on the social ladder as compared to the other two.¹⁷⁵ The king of Cochin promoted the interests of black Jews, but simultaneously also favoured the *Paradesi Jews*, because they used to bring great wealth. The tax collected from the *Paradesi* Jews in turn led him to emerge as the highest tax collecting king in Malabar region during that period. He used to collect around 60,000 to 80,000 *pardaos* per year, through customs duty. This period also saw a very close tie between the *paradesi Jews* and king of Cochin. All the coveted posts within administration like councillor had been given to the *paradesi Jews* by the king of Cochin. *Paradesi* Jews like David Levi and Samuel Castiel were among the closest personalities to the King of Cochin upon whose advice the king placed a great trust during the early decades of seventeenth century.¹⁷⁶

Since the Portuguese were also operating in the same trading territory, the growing ties between the King of Cochin and the *Paradesi* Jews had become a reason of worry for the Portuguese merchants of Cochin. During the mid of seventeenth century, Van Cardin has referred to the presence of Jews in the city of Cochin and their growing conflict with the Portuguese, which also led to the attack on Jewish synagogues based on religious differences against the Jewish community of Cochin.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Asian Educational Services, Madras, 1887, p.334.

¹⁷⁴ J.B.Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin" p. 234.

¹⁷⁵ David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.424.

¹⁷⁶ T.I.Poonen *A Survey of the Rise of the Dutch Power in Malabar(1603-1670)*, Trichinapoly, 1949, p.52 & Pius, Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p. 28

¹⁷⁷ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p.41.

4:13 Conclusion

The period of liberalization provided full opportunity to both the new Christians of Portugal¹⁷⁸ and the Jewish merchants of Malabar, specifically enabling them at Cochin to come together and interact within the larger Portuguese commercial networks, from which they were able to expand to larger market systems of the Indian Ocean and conduct business through their diasporic channels. Since the Crown or the German-Italian syndicates had left their trade ventures or had become minimalistic, the liberal Portuguese mercantile policy saw many new Christians stepping up to participate in the spice trade. After the entry of new Christians, even the native Jews got a chance to enter the commercial territory of spice in a considerable way. Such a scenario allowed Jews to accumulate lots of wealth, which made them a dominant merchant group in Cochin and they also held important positions in administration like the council of local ruler and participate in the decision-making process with the rulers. But, the crown of Portugal followed dual and diplomatic attitude in terms of dealing with the Jewish merchants and the New Christian merchants. The liberal and aggressive attitude of the Portuguese was in accordance with the changing political and economic scenario of Malabar.

As far as the engagement with the Jewish or the so called New Christians or old Jews are concerned, it always was to stand in the background of financial opportunities. It was the great financial skill of the Jewish merchants both in Portugal and Malabar, which made them important for the Portuguese. Portuguese used Jews according to their convenience and used religion for financial gains periodically. The tool of Inquisition was vital to their economic policy. As far as Jews were concerned, they acted according to the demand of the time and situation. They tried their best to take Portuguese into confidence along with a parallel effort to form trade networks with their co-religionists and the rulers of Malabar. Although, the Portuguese-Jewish interaction was limited to commercial rivalry and mutual benefits only, establishment of Jewish religious structures during the Portuguese era gives a new perspective to this relationship. New Christian-Paradesi Jewish network of trade proved fruitful to both. But it also bought distress for the New Christians, who were murdered, and their properties confiscated alleging them of Judaizing. This discussion does not address the role and importance of the native Jewish community of Malabar, infamously called black Jews. The sources only mention

¹⁷⁸ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India*, pp.411-12.

the *paradesi* Jewish community. Though the Portuguese hated Jews overall, they seemed to hate black skinned Jews even more. The social division within the Jewish community can be attributed to the Portuguese period and its aftermath.

This chapter is based on the travelogues and documents available from the Portuguese sources like documents of Inquisition. There is hardly any historical source available, which tells the history of Jews from their side. The periods between tenth to thirteenth centuries fortunately had Geniza documents directly from the pens of Jew merchants involved in Indian trade. The period after the thirteenth century lacks such sources, which should be a matter of inquiry. Both the native and *paradesi* Jews preferred not to keep or write their contemporary history. The Jews at influential position maintained low profile in order to avoid any further distress, as they just wanted to focus on trade only. They might have done this as a part of their survival strategy; still a deep research is needed to find out the history of Jews from their own perspective, so that an all-round perspective of the Jewish history is formulated

Chapter V

The Era of Transition: The Dutch and the Changing Socio-Economic Milieu of the Jews of Kerala

5.1 Malabar on the eve of Dutch Arrival

While tracing the history of Dutch and Jews in Malabar, it becomes inevitable to know the general scenario of the place when Dutch arrived on the Western coast of India. During the time, Malabar was ruled by forty-six chieftains. Rajah of Travancore and Cochin, Zamorin of Calicut and Rajah of Chirakkal were the prominent ruling powers.¹ Travancore was slowly emerging as the most powerful state amongst all. Even the influence of Portuguese did not seem to affect Travancore. The major political event during the Dutch presence in Travancore had been the assimilation of all small principalities within the state of Travancore. However, Cochin and Calicut still continued to be the major power holders during the time when Dutch arrived on the Malabar.²

Being the first to arrive, Portuguese had to face more difficulties in terms of commercial and other forms of acceptance. By the time the Dutch came, the polity and commerce of Malabar had got quite structured.³ From the days since the arrival of the Portuguese, Cochin had emerged as a major trading centre as well. Interestingly, Cochin was home to a lot of Jews active in trade with European companies.⁴ Dutch followed the already established administrative system by the Portuguese. The local chieftains were quite comfortable with the Dutch as they were not the first amongst Europeans, to which as a continuity factor, worked in favour of the Dutch.⁵

¹ P. C. Alexander, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Annamalai University, 1946, pp. 3-4

² Ibid. pp. 4-7

³ K.M.Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, p.6 & P. C. Alexander, *The Dutch in Malabar*, p. 5

⁴ L. Sternbech, "India as Described by Medieval European Travellers," *Bharatiya Vidya*, Vol. 7, 1946, pp. 10-28, Duarte Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the sixteenth century*, London, 1866, p. 15; Pyrard Francois Laval, *The Voyages of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, trans. by Albert Gray, London, 1888, pp. 429-35; John van Huyghen Linschoten, *Voyage of John Huyghen Van Linschoten to the East Indies*, from the old English translation of 1598, vol 2, London, 1885, p. 285J. Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, Rome 1956, Vol. 3, p. 435

⁵ K.M.Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, p.7

5.2 Initial phase of the Dutch Endeavours in Malabar

The Journey of a Dutchman named Linschoten towards East in 1583, amplified the curiosity and interest of the Dutch in the commercial ventures of India. He further published a book in 1592 based on his journey, which had immense information on the sea routes towards India along with other Eastern countries.⁶



THE 1596 VAN LINSCHOTEN MAP OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

Source: <https://auction.catawiki.com/kavels/15461925-indian-ocean-jan-huygen-van-linschoten-deliniatur-in-hac-tabula-1596>

⁶John van HuyghenLinschoten, *Voyage of John Huyghen Van Linschoten to the East Indies*, from the old English translation of 1598.vol 2. London, 1885, p. 285

In order to explore trading opportunities and raise their influence, a united company formed by the Dutch, sent an expedition of 13 ships to India under the supervision of Van der Hagen. The major intention of this voyage lied in their interest on the Western coast of India, as the voyagers had got special instructions by the company to visit the western coast. Immediately after its arrival on the Western coast of India, Van der Hagen, signed a treaty with Zamorin of Calicut on 11th November 1604. This Dutch-Zamorin alliance was made to pull down the power and position of the Portuguese who were trying to establish their monopoly over the local rulers. The above-mentioned treaty between Dutch and the King of Calicut, gave Dutch the right to trade along the region and establish a fort as well.⁷

Before devoting themselves to Malabar trade ventures, Dutch made their stronghold at Ceylon and Java. The strong footing of Dutch at Ceylon helped them in their movement towards Malabar. The constant efforts of the Dutch to enter the economic sphere of Cochin specifically, and Malabar broadly, coincided with the turmoil that occurred in the polity of Cochin in 1658. Portuguese took active part in the war of succession of Cochin. However, in order to look for some relief, the side which was not supported by the Portuguese turned towards Dutch for help. The Dutch were waiting for such an opportunity for long. They extended their support to the expelled king of Cochin against the Portuguese. Thus, along with the support of Zamorin, Dutch were successful in defeating the Portuguese in 1663. This win of Dutch was a major event in the history of Malabar, because thereafter, the Dutch started exerting their political and economic authority over Malabar through Cochin.⁸ The mistakes made by the Portuguese served as a major learning lesson for the Dutch, and they had already got their list of things that they should not unnecessarily get involved in.

⁷ A. Gelletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras Government Press, Madras, p.6 & India Office Record, Dutch Treaties etc. Vol. 1, p. 131

⁸ K.M.Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp. 5-6



Source: K. M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, Bombay, 1931

5.3 The Change in Economic and Political Scenario: Portuguese versus the Dutch

The initial problem of the Dutch lay in their effort to curtail the influence of the Portuguese, who had already settled down in Malabar. Zamorin-Dutch alliance, made in 1604, proved fruitful for the Dutch to establish themselves in the already flourishing trade setup of Malabar. The aggressive trade policies of the Portuguese were anyway disliked by the rulers of Malabar.⁹ The entry of new trading companies from Europe gave them a hope to overpower the Portuguese. The relatively non-aggressive nature of the Dutch also helped the Jewish community of Malabar to get connected with them, and open them to the western world from which they had been excluded for centuries.¹⁰ As rightly pointed out by Walter J. Fischel, the silence over copper plates as major historical evidence regarding the presence of Malabari Jewish community, lay in the aggressive attitude of the Portuguese towards the Jewish community.¹¹ All travellers from Portugal during this time chose not to write about these copper plates. The effort must have been intentional to ignore or hide the long-time lineage of already established Malabari Jews in comparison to the newly arrived *Paradesi* Jews.¹²

The work of western scholars and their collaboration with the Dutch officials for translating Jewish texts and copper plates must also be seen in the background of their commercial engagement. For seeing the difference in the attitude and approach of the Dutch and the Portuguese, one can look at their dealing with the politics of Malabar and its rulers. While the Portuguese from the very beginning started interfering in the internal affairs of the local rulers,¹³ the Dutch kept themselves away from it as much as possible. While discussing the changes that occurred during the time of the Dutch in contrast to the Portuguese, the emerging influence of

⁹ Portuguese trade policy is a well-researched topic see K.M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese: Being a History of the Relations of the Portuguese with Malabar from 1500-1663* Bombay, 1929, pp. 62-92, Frederick Charles Danvers, *The Portuguese in Indi: Being a History of their Rise and Decline of their Eastern Empire*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 82-9; Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India: 1500-1663*, Delhi, 2001, pp. 110-31. K.S.Mathew, "Trade in the Indian Ocean and the Portuguese System of Cartazes" in *the first Portuguese Colonial Empire*, K. S. Mathew, Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 29-78

¹⁰ Number of letters were exchanged between Jewish merchants of Cochin and the Dutch officials at Amsterdam which opened up a new world for the Jews at Malabar. see MossehPereyra de Paiva, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, Lisboa, 1923

¹¹ Walter J. Fischel, "The Exploration of the Jewish Antiquities of Cochin on the Malabar Coast", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 87, 1967", p.233.

¹² *Ibid*, p.232 .

¹³ K. S. Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 48-56

the English and the French cannot be ignored.¹⁴ The major difference among the Portuguese and the Dutch was in their approach of dealing with the local ruling authorities all over Malabar. Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch did not claim political powers aggressively, as their main concern was commerce.

But it was very difficult to separate politics from economy as both were interrelated and complimentary to each other. It is not that the Dutch did not try to gain political influence for acquiring more profit in commerce, but they used it more like a soft power.¹⁵ The Dutch worked insightfully when it came to establishing diplomatic relationship with local rulers. They did not even ignore small principalities like Purakkad and Madathumkur, the satellite regions for pepper production. After entering into alliance with Zamorin in 1662 and Rajah of Travancore in the same year, treaty with the Rajah of Purakkad was signed in 1664.¹⁶ Next in row was Madathumkur, an important centre of pepper, situated between Quilon and Kayamkulam.¹⁷ The Dutch entered into alliance with many local rulers of Malabar in which they chose to be non-aggressive unlike their European counterpart- the Portuguese. Another treaty was signed between the Dutch and the Queen of Quilon on 2nd March 1664. This treaty was followed by the establishment of a Dutch fort at Quilon in July 1665.¹⁸

The Portuguese, who were the pioneers among the European traders in Malabar, had already set a pattern of relationship between local rulers and the Europeans. The political space created by the Portuguese for the European merchants was an added advantage for the Dutch.¹⁹ Despite this, the vassal-like role given to many rulers was not exploited by the Dutch, as political monopoly was never the major concern for the Dutch. They focused more on acquiring supremacy over the pepper trade.²⁰

¹⁴ K.M.Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp. 8-11

¹⁵ They have claimed themselves to be different than Portuguese see the letter of Nieuhoff, Nieuhof Johannes, *Mr. John Nieuhoff's Remarkable Voyages & Travells into ye best provinces of ye West and East Indies*, Cornel University Library, New York, 1703, pp. 226-227

¹⁶ K. M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp. 10-11

¹⁷ Nieuhof, *Mr. John Nieuhoff's Remarkable Voyages*, p.224 and Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, p. 12

¹⁸ Nieuhof, *Mr. John Nieuhoff's Remarkable Voyages* p.263 and Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp. 14-15

¹⁹ Indian Office Record. Dutch Records Vol. II. in Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, p. 8

²⁰ Letter of the Van Goens to the Governor-General dated July 6th 1658 contains the efforts made by the Dutch to control the transport of pepper in Malabar in K.M.Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp. 9-10

5.4 Initial Interaction between the Dutch and the Jews

The initial interaction of the Dutch with the Jews revolved on the common ground of their anti-Portuguese sentiment. Expulsion of a large number of Jews from Portugal and Spain during Sixteenth century made them closer to the Dutch who had been considered as philosemitic nation as said by Pius Malekandathil.²¹ The end of crown trade coupled with the commercial network established by New Christians provided a liberal environment for the Jewish trading community, which otherwise had always been subject to the inquisitorial proceedings. Later, even though the private dimension of Indo-European commerce ended, and the crown-trade resumed in 1598, Jews kept on playing a crucial role in the economic spheres of Cochin. François Pyrard de Laval had seen many rich Jew merchants in Cochin in the first decade of the 17th Century.²²

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.²³ Alongwith closeness with the Dutch, these *Paradesi* Jewish merchants got full support from the King of Cochin. This relationship grew in the background of mutual trade benefits. The efforts of the newly arrived *Paradesi* Jews to carve out a niche for themselves in the field of commerce was initiated through social discrimination against the native Malabari Jews whom they considered as their competitors.²⁴

This was the time when *Paradesi* Jews were preferred by the Rajah of Cochin for various political and financial tasks. It seems that David Levi, a member of the Jewish family of Levi, with the help of whom the Dutch developed a long-standing bond in the Seventeenth century, was made a *mudaliar* by King of Cochin in 1619 under the influence of the Dutch negotiations

²¹ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Trading World of Indian Ocean Commerce", p. 22

²² François Pyrard Laval, *The Voyages of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, tran.by Albert Gray, London, 1887,pp.429-435

²³ Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.19.

²⁴ Various documents on social division are available only after the arrival these *Paradesi* merchants, earlier there were no such documents. This was a planned conspiracy and the country like India who believes in caste system complimented this idea. First among such documents is writing of MossehPereyra de Paiva, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim.*, Lisbon, 1923, pp. 3-8; A. Galletti., *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras, 1911, pp. 193-98; Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, Ernakulam, 1929, p. 116.

of 1618.²⁵ In the changed situation, more and more Jews got political assignments in the court of king of Cochin, and in 1620s, Samuel Castiel was appointed by the native ruler as his principal councillor and interpreter. The king of Cochin highly depended on Samuel's assistance. His keen insight regarding trade opportunities outside India inspired the king to exchange dialogues and ambassadors with the rulers of Aceh, Iskandar Muda in 1627.²⁶ The increased favour of Rajah towards these Paradesi Jews was also a result of the kind of bonding these merchants shared with the Dutch. The prospect of trade around neighbouring countries attracted all. With the help of Samuel Castiel, the King of Cochin, managed to take control of the Island of Bendure in 1629.²⁷ The parallel adventure of commerce and polity turned up very fruitful for the King of Cochin, in which the Jewish merchants seemed to play a vital role.

Further, 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-making machineries of the king of Cochin.²⁸ Van Cardin mentions in 1644 that along with the Gentiles and Muslims, 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 put 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.²⁹

The assistance of Jews to the King of Cochin was one of the factors that indirectly triggered the slow demise of the Portuguese. The King of Cochin used his power and destroyed a few religious structures made by the Portuguese. Portuguese were struggling to save their position in Cochin during the mid of Seventeenth Century. Meanwhile, they took out their frustration on the Jewish community of Cochin who were in support of the King of Cochin. In

²⁵ HAG, Livro das Pazes, No.1, fol.34; J.H. da Cunha Rivara(ed.), *O Chronista de Tissuary*, vol.IV, No.39, 1869, p.47 in Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.22

²⁶ 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. Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Kenneth McPherson, vol.II, California, 1995, p.120

²⁷ Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.23

²⁸ A. Galletti., et al., *The Dutch in Malabar*, pp. 197-98

²⁹Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p.41.

between all this, Samuel, who was performing the role of councillor and interpreter for the king of Cochin, became the central target for the Portuguese. Samuel had to ultimately pay for his closeness to the Rajah of Cochin when he was killed by the Portuguese in 1643.³⁰ The murder of Samuel by the Portuguese points out to the fact that they perceived Jews to be the perpetrators of anti-Portuguese emotions and even filling this into the king of Cochin.³¹

Further, the Dutch provided the Jews with an opportunity to camp up with them against the Portuguese haughtiness. The situation also favoured the Dutch on the Malabar region, as the internal dissention among the local chieftains made their entry easier.³² One of the deposed rulers of Cochin asked the Dutch for help in gaining his lost 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.³³ However, with all possible assistance provided by the Jews, they succeeded. It is believed that the Jewish support to Dutch was a counter reaction to the Portuguese arbitrariness and haughtiness, and there was a hope within the Jewish community of Cochin that under the Dutch, they would enjoy civil and religious freedoms.³⁴

The period from 1663 to 1795 when the 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.³⁵ The growing commerce of the 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. The delegation reached Cochin on 21st November, 1686. The account is later written under the title '*Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim, MandadasporMosseh Pereyra de Paiva*', where he pens down his personal experience of what he saw among the Jews

³⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Cochin in Decline, 1600-1650: Myth and Manipulation in the Estado da India", in *Portuguese Asia: Aspects in History and Economic History (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)*, ed. by Roderich Ptak, Stuttgart, 1987, p.82

³¹ Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.23

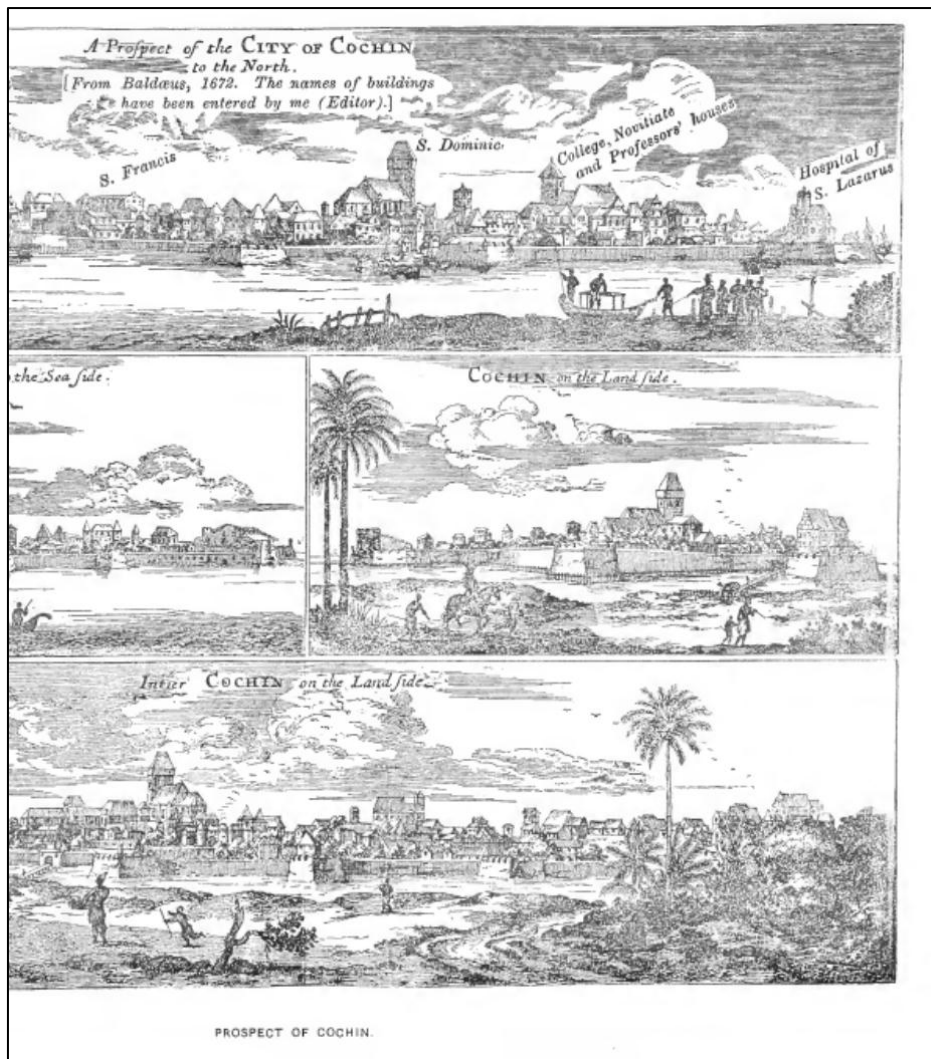
³² P. C. Alexander, *The Dutch In Malabar*, 1946, p. 13

³³ Ibid. pp. 17-23 (detailed account of Dutch occupation of Cochin)

³⁴ A. Galletti., et al., *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras, p.197

³⁵ Jacob Canter Vissscher, *Letters from Malabar*, Adelphi Press, Madras, 1862, pp.18-21

of Cochin. It includes data related to the social, economic and religious life of the Jews residing in Cochin during the seventeenth century.³⁶ It also highlights the change that began to permeate into the Jewish community under the protectorate that the Dutch extended to it on their occupation of Malabar Coast.



Source: A. Galleti, *The Dutch in Malabar, Madras, 1911*

³⁶Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.42-43.

The Dutch sources suggest that the Jewish merchants were involved in the import and export of various types of commodities such as pepper, timber, amber, rice, cotton materials and so on whose movements intersected at some points with the Dutch trajectories of trade. Apart from this, they were also serving as 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.³⁷

Malabar, which served as the major producer of pepper for Europe till the end of sixteenth century,³⁸ 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 Malabar,³⁹ the Dutch managed to create space for commercial operation in spices with Europe particularly, taking advantage of the increased pepper production in Kerala with the help of Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴⁰

5.5 Eminent Business Families of Cochin Jewish Community under VOC since the Late Seventeenth Century

5.5.1. Rahabi Family

The function and mechanism of trade adopted by the Dutch in Malabar has been explained above. The difference in the attitudes of the Dutch and the Portuguese was visible in the sense that it gave opportunities to other stakeholders of Malabar trade as well. Few Jewish merchants were among those stakeholders who rose to a position of prominence by taking advantage of this liberal attitude of the Dutch. The Dutch-Jewish engagement was not only about involvement of the whole community, but it also materialized on some individual levels. Among these individual merchants, role of a prominent mercantile family, Rahabi was crucial. Thus the flexible and liberal attitude of the Dutch led to the rise of Jewish merchants as their collaborators. and later,

³⁷Ibid. p.44.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ A. R. Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire: Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Harvard University Press, Harvard University, 1978.

⁴⁰Pius Malekandathil, "The Mercantile Networks and the International Trade of Cochin 1500-1663", Leiden/Wassenaar.

company merchants of VOC. These Jewish merchants later on rose to prominence in the commercial scenario of the Indian Ocean. Ezekiel Rahabi II (1694-1771), member of the White Jewish community, was one of the most popular company merchants of the Dutch East India Company.⁴¹ Rahabi played an important role in the politics and commerce of Malabar region during that period. While tracing the roots of this famous Jewish merchant, we come to know that he belonged to the place named Rahaba, situated on the banks of the Euphrates. Rahaba had a community of Jewish people with a population of almost two thousand, as seen by the famous traveller Benjamin of Tudela during the twelfth century.⁴²

Ezekiel Rahabi I, for the purpose of trade, first moved to Aleppo and then finally relocated to the western coast of India. Emerging trade opportunities at Cochin attracted him enough to settle down at this flourishing port town. Ezekiel Rahabi I, came alone to Cochin, for exploring the ongoing trade opportunities. Ezekiel Rahabi's trade activities were not only limited to Malabar, but had commercial transactions with the merchants abroad as well. One such letter of trade transaction between Rahabi and Rabbi Thubia Boaz of Amsterdam is useful in this context. The exchange of these letters was not restricted to the trade transaction only, since it also contained socio-cultural information regarding the Cochin Jewish community.⁴³ Through trade, the long isolation of the Cochin Jewish community from the outer world was getting bridged.

His only son, David Rahabi, followed into the footsteps of his father and reached Cochin to carry forward his father's commercial legacy in 1664. David Rahabi played a crucial role in the polity as well. He was a part of the dispute that occurred over the agreement of the throne of Cochin in 1690. The dispute erupted between Perumapadappu family and Vettathu family, after which the former came up to David for help. David, with the cooperation of the Dutch, who he was in good terms with, retained the heir's claim from the Perumapadappu family to the throne

⁴¹ A. Galletti, A. J. Van Der Burg, P. Groot, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras Government Press, Madras, 1911, p. 197

⁴² Fischel, *Cochin in Jewish History*, p.9 & Rabbi Benjamin in M. N. Adler's (translated), *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, New York, p.92, 140

⁴³ S. S. Koder, *A Hebrew Letter of 1768*, pp. 1-6 online source: <http://dutchinkerala.com/rb/035.pdf>

of Cochin. For this act, David was highly appreciated and given a privileged place in the imperial household.⁴⁴

David Rahabi married into a family of white Jewish community, who had migrated to Cochin from Germany during the seventeenth century. Apart from the class conscious attitude and rigid social behaviour,⁴⁵ these matrimonial alliances must have happened in the background of creating strong trading networks. As far as the wealth and position of David Rahabi is concerned, he has been mentioned in the famous writings of Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva, who visited Cochin in 1686. According to Paiva, who got chance to meet David personally, said that he was the wealthiest merchant of Cochin at that time with a total wealth of more than 20,000 *pezos*.⁴⁶ After the death of his first wife, David Rahabi married another woman from the very famous white Jewish community of Cochin. The child born out of this marriage was Ezekeil Rahabi II, named after his famous grandfather, who emerged as a very successful entrepreneur.⁴⁷ The tombstone of David Rahabi can still be seen in the courtyard of the Paradesi synagogue of Cochin.⁴⁸

Following the footsteps of his father, Ezekeil Rahabi II also entered into the service of the Dutch East India Company, and at the same time, maintained closeness with the King of Cochin as well.⁴⁹ Ezekeil 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.⁵⁰ Rahabi performed this task for

⁴⁴ S. S. Koder, "Kerala and her Jews", paper read before the Kerala History Association in 1965.

⁴⁵ The white Jews refrain from marrying Jews from the black or native Jewish community, mentioned in the "Letters from Malabar by Jacob Canter Visscher, Adelphi Press, Madras, 1862.pp.114-117

⁴⁶ Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, Lisboa, 1923, p.7

⁴⁷ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p.46.

⁴⁸ The tombstone of David Rahabi can be still seen present there in the courtyard of the Paradesi synagogue of Cochin, where no one is allowed to enter without the permission of the care taker.

⁴⁹ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p.46.

⁵⁰ For general information on the polity of Malabar during Dutch see W. Longan, *Manual of the Malabar District*, Madras, 1887, 1906, 2 Vols; F. Dey, *The Land of the Perumals*, Madras, 1863; K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Ernakulam, 1924, 4 Vols; T. I. Poonen, *A Survey of the Rise of the Dutch Power in Malabar (1603-1678)*, Travancore, 1948; P. K. S. Raja, *Medieval Kerala*, Annamalainagar, 1953; K. M. Panikkar, *A History of Kerala*

the Dutch, as he had earned a reputed position in the eyes of the ruling class. One of the major reasons of the Dutch temptation for Malabar was its importance as the highest pepper producing region in the Indian Ocean.⁵¹

Territorial disintegration and the conflict amongst local rulers of Malabar region made the situation difficult for the Dutch to handle. For conducting negotiations with the rulers of Cochin, Calicut, Travancore and 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 negotiating 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.⁵²

The extraordinary role played by Rahabi has often been mentioned in the Dutch sources. Rahabi also used to look after the affairs of the 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, had stated that Ezekiel Rahabi held the office of Ambassador, under the kings of Cochin.⁵³ Moreover, his growth as an individual merchant reflected very well from the fact that he even owned personal ships for trading purposes.⁵⁴ Thus, Rahabi performed both commercial and diplomatic activities efficiently. Amongst all this, his individual personality as a merchant never vanished.

According to Adrian Moens, the honest character of Rahabi made him popular with the royal houses of Kerala, and he was the only one to bear the title of Company's merchant. It must also be acknowledged that Ezekiel was, often and in various circumstances, of service to the Company.⁵⁵ Rahabi family, from the very beginning, was engaged in the trading activities and

(1498-1801), Annamalainagar, 1960, A. Galletti, A. J. Van der Burg, and O. Groot, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras, 1911

⁵¹ Jacob Canter Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, Adelphi Press, Madras, 1862. pp. 153-57

⁵² A. Galletti, A. J. Van Der Burg, P. Groot, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras Government Press, Madras, 1911, pp. 197-98; Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.46-48.

⁵³ Rev. Joseph Wolff, *Researches and Missionary Labours among the Jewish, Mohammedans, and other Sects*, Macintosh, London, M DCCC XXXV (1835), pp. 478

⁵⁴ Walter J. Fischel, "The Indian Archives: A Sources for the History of the Jews of Asia (From the Sixteenth Century on)", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 57, 1967, p. 199

⁵⁵ A. Galletti, A. J. Van Der Burg, P. Groot, pp.222-23.

acquired good positions in both the Dutch East India Company and the kingdom of Cochin. The intimacy with the company and the king brought to the Rahabi family huge wealth.⁵⁶

The passion of Rahabi as a businessman made him popular and visible to all the travellers who visited Cochin during the mid-eighteenth century. In the list of travellers who noticed Rahabi on their visit to Cochin in 1757 was Edward Ives. He described Cochin as a settlement of the Dutch, from where they ensured supply of pepper. Then he describes the Jewish community present there, and regarding their displacement, he writes a traditionally known fact that, they migrated after the final destruction of the temple. However, he mentions Ezekiel Rahabi specifically in his account saying:

*“One Ezekiel a Rabbi is now living at Cochin, a man of consequence, and his word is held in high estimation, he is a lover of science, and understand astronomy.”*⁵⁷

The words used by Edward Ives, for Ezekiel Rahabi, are clear indications of his prominent position in the commercial structure of Cochin and his individual status as a merchant as well. The aura of Ezekiel was so huge that, even after his death, he was remembered. Description of Johan Splinter Stavorinus is one such evidence. This Dutch traveller reached Cochin in 1775. He states that the Jewish community suffered in the background of Portuguese-Dutch rivalry. However, their support to the Dutch proved fruitful, once the Dutch became the masters of Cochin in 1663 and grew up as a merchant community, who were engaged in all sorts of small as well as big trading assignments. While mentioning about Jews in general, he writes about Ezekiel Rahabi precisely, who died sometimes back before his arrival to Cochin. He wrote:

*“Some of the Jewish merchants of Cochin are not shy of purchasing entire cargoes of goods. One of them called Ezekiel who died some years ago, had drawn most of the Cochin trade into his own hands; he left three sons, who are still alive, and who are among the most opulent and principal merchants of the place.”*⁵⁸

⁵⁶ A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, pp. 198-99

⁵⁷ Edward Ives, *A Voyage from England to India, in the Year MDCCLIV: And an Historical Narrative of the Operations of the Squadron and Army in India, Under the Command of Vice-Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive, in the Years 1755, 1756, 1757, Including the Correspondence between the Admiral and Nabob Serajeh Dowlab, Edward and Charles Dilly, MDCCLXXIII*, London, P.193. Online Source: https://books.google.co.in/books?id=5pdkLC95UfsC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁵⁸ John Splinter Stavorinus, *Voyages to the East-Indies* in Dutch, translated in English by Samuel Hull Wilcocke, Vol. III, University of California, London, 1798, pp. 226-27

Next in this row is the account from the mid 19th century traveller Rev. Joseph Wolff who visited Cochin in 1833. Like others, he also wrote about Dutch-Jew relationship in the context of the great service provided by Ezekiel to the Dutch. He refers to a document issued in the honour of Ezekiel by the Dutch in 1750. The letter reads:

*“It certifies that a Mr. Ezekiel Rabbi, a member of the Jewish nation, a merchant employed by the trading company by whom the certificate is given, being invested with the honourable office of Ambassador under the Kings of Cochin, has proved himself to the honourable company, by his efficient, faithful, laborious, and good services under various circumstances, to be a man of integrity. Dated Kolombo, 28th November 1750.”*⁵⁹

The stature and influence of Rahabi family, especially Ezekiel II, was so big that a traveller to Cochin hardly missed mentioning him in their writings. The association between the Dutch and these Jewish merchants is also very clear from these writings.

Nevertheless, the business interest of Ezekiel was not limited to the western coast of India only. He tried to make the most out of the prevailing conditions. Closeness with both the Dutch and Rajah of Cochin turned into his favour very well. Along with this, he had a very good bonding with other Jewish merchants operating along the similar trade networks. He shared one such bond with his co-religionist merchant Samson Simon Rotenburg, a German Jew settled in Cochin. Together they tried to explore trade opportunities in Mocha using their links with the Jewish community settled there. Rahabi, using his connections with the Dutch, got the permission to send Samson to Mocha on a religious assignment of assisting Jewish community of Mocha for their need regarding a Synagogue in 1736.⁶⁰

But the trip did not go that well as Samson was booked in a charge of carrying hidden business assignment at Mocha without the permission of the Dutch. Since the period was of exploring trading opportunities for one’s own self, Dutch also had business interest in granting permission to Samson for his visit to Mocha. However, they did not show their intentions openly. When Dutch officials came to know about this incident, they became furious. A committee was formed for investigation into this matter. Rahabi and Samson, apart from belonging to the white Jewish community, were related by maternal relation as well. Therefore, Rahabi played a major

⁵⁹ Rev. Joseph Wolff, *Researches and Missionary Labours among the Jewish, Mohammedans, and other Sects*, Macintosh, London, M DCCC XXXV (1835), pp. 478-479

⁶⁰ Walter J. Fischel, “The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century”, *Studia Rosenthaliana*, Vol. I:2, July 1967, p.34

role into this investigation, and because he was a trusted member of the Dutch, his prominent position as an individual merchant did not lead to any bias against Samson. Due to the fair trial, he could come clear out of this blame.⁶¹

This isolated incident shows high status of Rahabi, against whom even the Dutch would not behave abruptly. The strong financial status of Rahabi made him a lifeline for the company which they could avail at the time of distress. The incident of Ezekiel Rahabi providing a loan of 90,000 to the Dutch in a time of high need confirms such association.⁶² The mutual trading space and interest, shared by the Dutch and Jewish merchants, was also a mechanism of survival for the latter. Moreover, the bonding and cooperation among Jewish merchants among themselves was worked parallelly. The reason behind Ezekiel sending Samson to Mocha for a religious assistance might be a cover used for the exploration of new trading opportunities.

However, during interrogation, Ezekiel revealed another reason that he had been approached by a Dutch official of Mocha to mobilise Jewish people present there, for further trade benefits of the company.⁶³ Even after all this, Ezekiel was still in contact with the people of his community present there. A letter exchanged between him and the head of the Jewish community of Mocha in 1750, is a proof of that.⁶⁴ However, with few ups and downs, Ezekiel's achievements lay in the fact that he acted smoothly for not only Dutch and Rajah of Cochin, but also his own self, even during the period (1723-1771) of economic and political volatility in Malabar.⁶⁵

Perron du Anquetil, who visited Cochin in 1758, saw a very flourishing Jewish community in the city, who as per Perron, was prosperous because of their links to the Dutch. He refers to the Jewish town of Mattanchery, few miles south of the erstwhile Portuguese city of Cochin. Moreover, with the assistance of the secretary of the Dutch company, he was able to meet Elikh (Elias Rahabi), son of the famous white Jewish merchant Ezekiel Rahabi, who

⁶¹ Walter J. Fischel, "The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century", p.35

⁶² Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, pp.106-07

⁶³ Walter J. Fischel, "The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century", p. 36

⁶⁴ This letter was preserved in a manuscript by S. S. Koder mentioned in Walter J. Fischel, "The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century", p. 38. See also D. S. Sassoon, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscript*, Ohel David, London, Vol. I, 1932, p. 203, No. 134

⁶⁵ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p. 49

worked as the agent of the Dutch East India Company.⁶⁶ Perron was introduced to then Mudaliar of the Jewish community by the very Elias Rahabi. He also met the then Dutch commander, Van Resandt, with whom he even discussed his research interests. Apart from Elias, Moses and David were two other sons of Ezechiel Rahabi, and were among the famous white Jewish merchants of the seventeenth century.⁶⁷

5.5.2 Rotenburg Family

As discussed above, emerging trading opportunities on the western coast of India attracted Jewish merchants from the different parts of the globe. Germany was no different in that sense. A few Jewish merchants migrated from there as well, for cashing these new trade opportunities. Association of European Jewish merchants with India, during the period of European expansion led to the formation of a whole new kind of trade network. One such network was formed by the Jewish merchants of German Ashkenazic origin during the time when the Dutch were in prominence in the Malabar region. These German Jews had been considered to be the permanent residents of Cochin White Jewish community.⁶⁸ Mosseh Pereyra de Pavia in his *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, mentioned the name of merchants from Rotenburg family, who were originally the native of Germany.⁶⁹

Samson Simon Rotenburg was one of the prominent merchants during the 18th century who was involved in trade transactions with the Dutch and other Jewish merchants. He had also been referred to as the nephew of a very famous white Jew merchant, Ezekiel Rahabi II. Since the father of Ezekiel Rahabi II, David Rahabi, married a German Jew, they were connected by same maternal relation.⁷⁰ The familial ties and the mutual interest between these two merchants had led to a strong bond. The huge persona of Rahabi in the field of commerce, and his bonding with the Dutch, did not only benefit him but others as well, who were attached to him. In this

⁶⁶ Walter J. Fischel, "Exploration of the Jewish Antiquities of Cochin", p.236.

⁶⁷ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.118

⁶⁸ Walter J. Fischel, "The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century", *Studia Rosenthaliana*, Vol. I:2, July 1967, p.33

⁶⁹ Mosseh Pereyra de Paivã, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, pp. 13-14

⁷⁰ Walter J. Fischel, "The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century", p.34

context we are talking about Samson Simon Rotenburg, who was sent to Mocha for arranging required stuff for the Synagogue present there in January 1736.⁷¹

For this trip, Rahabi took special permission from Dutch officials of Cochin on his good will. This trip of Rotenburg did not go well though, as even before he returned to Cochin from his journey, he was accused by some Dutch officials back in Mocha, of carrying on illegal trade without informing the Dutch. The Dutch authority of India formed a secret investigation team in September 1736 under the leadership of fiscal officer of the company, Coryn Stevens, to look into the matter. The wealth and belongings of Rotenburg worth around 5000 imperial crown was confiscated immediately.⁷² The personal interest of the Dutch in the trade of Mocha did not let them take this matter lightly, since their major intention behind the approval of such trip was to explore and expand their business network between Malabar and Mocha.⁷³

Regarding this inquiry, Rahabi was also summoned and questioned by the Dutch, as this trip of Rotenburg was permitted on his merit. Rahabi denied all kinds of charges against Rotenburg and rather showed his faith in him. However, the result of this investigation was in the favour of Rotenburg, who got caught in this conspiracy by a Dutch official back in Mocha for his own financial interests.⁷⁴ Once he got a clean chit from the Dutch authorities in India, he continued his commercial activities, and held a very important position in the trading world of Indian Ocean trade and Malabar. He seemed to share a very close relationship with the Dutch operating in Malabar, and was entrusted with various kinds of crucial jobs such as “commissioner for the delivery of all kinds of eatables for the troops”. He was also responsible for the procurement of foodstuff for the Dutch military forces. His movement was not restricted to Cochin only. He was sent to Tellicherry, Cannanore and Quilon for various tasks. His aura can be gathered from the fact that not only did he own ships but also sold them to the Dutch company.⁷⁵

The legacy of trade established by Samson Simon Rotenburg, was carried forward by his son, Joseph Rotenburg, who was a renowned Jewish merchant of Cochin between the period of

⁷¹ *Malabar in the Colonial Archives* (K. A.), 1736

⁷² K. A., 1736, 1738

⁷³ Walter J. Fischel, “The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century”, p.35

⁷⁴ K. A., 1740, 1743

⁷⁵ K.A., 1749-1750

1763-1772. The products he traded in were sugar, lead, pepper etc. His strong connection with the Rajah of Cochin and eminent position as a trader is evident from the fact that he owned three islands on lease basis which had to be renewed annually.⁷⁶ However, the hey days of this famous merchant ended when he entered into a dispute with the Rajah of Cochin for reasons which have not been mentioned in the sources. What we know is that he had to leave Cochin due to these compelling circumstances. He even tried to keep himself safe by taking help of Zamorin, the ruler of Calicut, in the background of Cochin-Calicut rivalry. But unfortunately, he was caught by the Rajah of Cochin and imprisoned.⁷⁷

But the incident was not as simple as it looked. The imprisonment of this white Jew merchant became a matter of contestation between Rajah and the Dutch, who claimed their authority over the non-native people in the matter of jurisdiction. While going into the authority of the Dutch over Cochin after they ousted Portuguese, it was clearly mentioned in the treaty made between king of Cochin and the Dutch in 1663, that native Christians and other foreign migrants would come under the legal jurisdiction of the Dutch.⁷⁸ The Dutch continued with the same pattern of jurisdiction applied during the time of the Portuguese. Whereas the status of Christians was clearly mentioned, Jews were not included in this list. The Jews of Cochin had enjoyed the shelter and support of the Rajah of Cochin when they were facing trouble during the time of Portuguese dominance. Since Jews were under the jurisdiction of Rajah of Cochin informally, they must not have included them in this list. As Fischel has concluded that Jews did not want to expose themselves to any kind of vulnerable situation either on the part of Rajah or the Dutch, they choose a middle way to be in.⁷⁹ But the growing trade opportunities at Cochin changed the relationship dynamics among various stakeholders of Malabar trade, and the newly arrived white Jews were no different from them. The trade network between the Rahabi and Rotenburg family of white Jewish community gave fruitful results to the Dutch. Nevertheless, these two families also made maximum out of their collaboration with the Dutch.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ K A., 1763-1773, *Press list of Ancient Dutch Records*, p. 90, no. 849, *Legal Records 1768-1778*, Documents No. 537-546; 563, 565, 580

⁷⁷ K A., 1763-1773 also see Walter J. Fischel, "The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century", p.39.

⁷⁸ *Selection from the records of Fort St. George*, Madras, 1915 ; A. Galletti, A. J. Van Der Burg, P. Groot, *The Dutch in Malabar*, p.14

⁷⁹ Walter J. Fischel, "The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century", p.40

⁸⁰ For Rahabi family see K. A., 1736-1750 & for Rotenburg family see K A., 1763-1773

This bond of mutual interest must be the trigger behind Dutch interference in the matter of punishment given to Joseph Rotenburg by the Rajah of Cochin. The claim over jurisdiction was done in the background of economic benefits which were being mobilised through the merchants of Jewish community. At the same time, the Rajah of Cochin also did not want to lose his control over the influential Jewish merchants under his territory. This confusing status regarding the jurisdictional position of white Jews has been mentioned by the Dutch official Visscher in 1723.⁸¹ Finally, after negotiation between the Dutch and the Rajah of Cochin, the Dutch were successful in taking the charge of Joseph Rotenburg in their hands. Joseph was freed of all the charges pressed on him due to the efforts made by the Dutch.⁸² The above mentioned episode of Joseph Rotenburg points out to a very interesting triangle which was operational in the commercial arena of Malabar. On one hand, the newly arrived white Jewish merchants were getting well with the liberal Dutch officials; on the other hand, they also maintained their allegiance to the local rulers. The equation between the Dutch and the ruler was also under transition due to various unforeseen circumstances. As long as financial interest of all these parties involved were getting satisfied, they lived peacefully with each other. However, instances of discomfort also occurred in the background of securing maximum monetary control and profit. The role of Jewish merchants became very crucial by this time since, neither rulers nor the Dutch, seemed to lose hold of them.

5.6 Individual Jewish Merchants

The seventeenth century was the beginning of a new era for both the Dutch and the Jewish merchants of Malabar, who joined hands with the former in background of mutual commercial benefits. The period was followed by the emergence of a few powerful Jewish personalities as merchants in the service of the Dutch East India Company in India during its 130 years long supremacy.⁸³ Apart from famous families whose generations were involved in the trade, there were some individual merchants as well who were performing well.

However, no merchant could match the fame of Ezekiel Rahabi II. Issac Surgun was another wealthy and influential Jewish merchant, who set up his business in Calicut during the

⁸¹ J. C. Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, translated into English by Major Heber Drury, Madras, 1862, Letter 18, p. 415

⁸² Walter J. Fischel, "The Rotenburg in Dutch Cochin of the Eighteenth Century", p.41

⁸³ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.43-44.

eighteenth century. He belonged to the camp of Jewish merchants, who owned their personal ships.⁸⁴ Issac, like Rahabi family, had been in good relationship with the local rulers. Alongwith his association to the rulers, he shared a very intimate relationship with the Dutch Company. Due to this relation and his personal abilities, he even served as an interpreter and spokesperson for the Dutch during the Anglo-Mysore and Dutch-Mysore wars.⁸⁵ Issac rose to such prominence and prosperity, that the local rulers had to often depend on him. The sources confer that Issac Surgun paid an amount of 40,000 to Tipu Sultan during the period of financial troubles in 1788.⁸⁶ Thus, by taking advantages of the trade atmosphere, created by the Dutch East India Company, the Jewish merchants rose to prominence.

Elias, Moses and David, sons of Ezekiel Rahabi, famous white Jewish merchants of the seventeenth century, were all contemporaries of Issac Surgun.⁸⁷ Due to the non-availability of sources, we do not have details of many other Jewish players who were an integral part of this trade network. Ephraim Cohen and J. G. Febos were few others among such Jewish Merchants who owned ships, but unfortunately, we do not have much detail about them.⁸⁸ In the row of Jewish ship-owners, the name of Moses Tobias is very prominent, who was active along the Indian Ocean trade network. Although he was a native of Cochin, Surat, one of the crucial ports of Gujarat, was his base, where he lived as well. He also performed the role of director for the Portuguese at Surat.⁸⁹ Traces of these eminent Jewish merchants have sometimes been available in physical forms as well, like the tombstones of Jacques de Paiva dated 1687,⁹⁰ Issac Abendano Sardo dated 1709, Abraham Solomons dated 1745 and Salmon Franco dated 1763, who belonged to some of the famous Jewish merchants of that time.⁹¹ These Jewish merchants, making use of their abilities, served at various levels such as interpreter, negotiator, shipowners, trading agents and so on.

⁸⁴ Walter J. Fischel, "The Indian Archives", p. 199

⁸⁵ Walter J. Fischel, "The Indian Archives", p.202

⁸⁶ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, Cambridge, 1967, pp.106-7.

⁸⁷ Walter Fischel, "From Cochin to New York: Samuel Abraham, the Jewish Merchant of the Eighteenth Century", p.??; Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.118

⁸⁸ Walter J. Fischel, "The Indian Archives", p. 199

⁸⁹ Walter J. Fischel, "Leading Jews in the Service of Portuguese India: 1. Coge Abraham ; Moses Tobias of Surat", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 46, 1956, pp. 37-57

⁹⁰ J. J. Cotton, *List Of Inscriptions on Tombs or Monuments in Madras*, Madras, 1905, p.123

⁹¹ Walter J. Fischel, "The Indian Archives", p. 206 & for more information on Jewish Tombstones consult H. D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, 1640-1800, Indian Record Series, 3 Vols, London, 1913 & H. G. Reissner, *In the Jewish Advocate*, Bombay, June, 1934

5.7 Socio-Cultural Aspects of the Dutch-Jewish Interactions

The Dutch-Jewish interaction in the field of commerce resulted in the development of trade networks, which turned beneficial for both the parties. Development and prosperity of city of Cochin under the Dutch benefitted the Cochin Jews in general. However, these encounters were not limited only to the economy. With arrival of the Dutch in the commercial scene of Malabar, the merchants operating in the trading zone of Malabar, including the Jews, got greater opportunities to augment their wealth by participatory trade,⁹² which made Cochin the centre of commercial activities on western coastal India.⁹³ The liberal behaviour of the Dutch and peaceful environment let the Jewish community of Cochin follow their passion for religion and culture as well. Along with commercial benefits, the Jews were also enjoying cultural and religious freedoms which was lacking under the domination of the Portuguese.⁹⁴ Freedom of religion under the Dutch can be traced from the fact that once Ezekiel Rahabi II, the most famous merchant of the Jewish community was even allowed to skip a diplomatic meeting scheduled with the King of Travancore in 1743, due to some of his religious engagements. He was involved in the construction of synagogues as well.⁹⁵ One such synagogue was made by him at Cranganore in 1756. The restoration of the synagogue at Cochin and placement of a clock at its tower are some of his tasks.⁹⁶ He also beautified the floors of the synagogue with blue and white tiles which he ordered from China, along with fancy hanging silver lamps during the period of 1762.⁹⁷

The use of Hebrew language in the documents of official exchanges was another trend started by Rahabi during the period of Dutch. Within their own community, Jewish merchants preferred to exchange letters in Hebrew language. Ezekiel Rahabi and Issac Surgun exchanged letters among themselves written in Hebrew.⁹⁸ Hebrew had served as a sentimental link among

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

⁹³for more details see, Hugo s' Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin, 1663-1720: Chiefs and the Dutch East India Company*, New Delhi, 2000.

⁹⁴ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.39-42.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 53

⁹⁶ This clock on the top of the Cochin Synagogue with Hebrew, Roman and numerals dial on it is still a centre of attraction for the visitors.

⁹⁷ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p. 54, It has also been described by the Adrian Moens in his writing.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 54

the Jewish diaspora scattered over the globe. Not only within the community, but even with the Dutch officials, the use of Hebrew was initiated by these merchants. Ezekiel Rahabi made best use of his connections with the Dutch company in order to uplift and promote the cause of Hebrew, by purchasing books in Hebrew from Holland.⁹⁹ Thus, the personality of Rahabi was not limited to trade affairs only, but he also enriched the culture of Cochin white Jewish community through his interest in books.

The interest of white Jews in their culture was a part of their unique identity building process through which they wished to push themselves up in the social ladder. Apart from the religious and cultural books on Judaism, they showed their interest in the old historical documents related to Jews on Malabar as well. Most important in this row were the very famous copper plates, which are considered to be the pride of the Jewish community of Malabar. In order to establish their supremacy over native Jews, the claim over these copper plates was most important. It was only after the arrival of Europeans that the outside world came to know about these copper plates.¹⁰⁰ Both Dutch and *Paradesi* Jews translated these plates in Dutch and Malayalam languages. According to the old tradition of being in the possession of the head of the Jewish community, Ezekiel Rahabi took its possession in 1741. And further, with the mutual collaboration and interest of Dutch officer, Adrian Moens and Rahabi, undertook the task of translation of these plates in Malayalam, the local language of Malabar. It was further translated into Dutch language.¹⁰¹ *Paradesi* Jews claimed that Joseph Rabban, the head of the Jewish community who was bestowed with these copper plates, was a white Jew.¹⁰² All the Jews from Europe who migrated to Cochin for the purpose of trade wrote about the age old legacy of their community (White Jews). Samuel Abraham, a White Jew and native of Poland settled in Cochin, did the same and wrote that the royal grant of Cranganore was assigned to his ancestors.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 55

¹⁰⁰ MossehPereyra de Paivã, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, J. B. Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin", p. 236

¹⁰¹ Galletti, *Letters from Malabar*, pp. 195-98

¹⁰² For more information on copper plate see K. V. Subrahmanyam, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Trivandrum, 1921 & T. A. GopinathaRao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, pp.66-75, 68, 71 & E. Hultzsch in *EpigraphiaIndica*, Calcutta, 1894, Vol. 3, p. 69

¹⁰³ G. A. Kohut, "Correspondence between the Jews of Malabar and New York, a Century Ago", *Semitic Studies in Memory of Alexander Kohut*, Berlin, 1847, pp. 420-434

Moens's bias for the *Paradesi* Jews can be seen in the very first sentence of his writing where he states that the Jews at Malabar are of foreign breed, and the most ancient one.¹⁰⁴ Moens had often specified inferior and specious arguments about the Malabari Jews.¹⁰⁵ He once said that Malabari Jews are not trustworthy and they should not be permitted to travel northwards without proper enquiry, since he suspected them to be close to their rival Hyder Ali in 1766.¹⁰⁶ Most of the accounts which belonged to the Dutch period were very keen to set an economically inferior status of the native Jews in comparison to the *paradesi* Jews.¹⁰⁷ Some accounts emphasised a lot on the notion of native Jews being the descendants of slaves and servants.¹⁰⁸ The socio-cultural differences, prohibition on the matrimonial engagements between Malabari and *paradesi* Jews, different food habits among them were also mentioned.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the economic status of Malabari Jews was pulled down through establishment of their low social status. The constant interaction between Rahabi and various scholars back in Holland and Hague, come up with some glorifying facts about the *paradesi* Jews. One such interaction between Tobias Boaz, a Jewish banker from Hague and Ezekiel Rahabi, was to point towards the high status of the *paradesi* Jews over the native Jews.¹¹⁰

While talking about the antiquity and identity of the Jewish on Malabar, the native Malabari Jews have been ignored. This process of keeping the Malabari Jews out of all the discussions seems to be thoughtful and a well-planned act conducted in the background of mutual trade interests shared by both the Dutch and the newly arrived *paradesi* Jews. The writings on Jews available from 17th century onwards are a proof of such planning, as these documents started stating the superior status of the *Paradesi* Jews above the native Jews. The ancient lineage of the Malabari Jews was discarded using the theory of mixed blood, and colour of the skin.¹¹¹ While writing about Malabar and its people, Jacobus Canter Visscher referred to

¹⁰⁴ A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, p. 192

¹⁰⁵ A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, p. 198

¹⁰⁶ F. Dey, *The Land of the Permauls or Cochim: its Past and its Present*, 1863, pp. 145

¹⁰⁷ A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, pp. 123, 198

¹⁰⁸ MossehPereyra de Pavia, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, p.7

¹⁰⁹ Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, p.116 & Moens in Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, p. 197

¹¹⁰ The letter which Rahabi wrote in the response to the questions of Tobias Boaz was in Hebrew later translated in English see S. S. Koder, "A Hebrew Letter of 1768" *Journal of the Rama Verma Archaeological Society*, Vol. 15, 1949, pp. 1-6

¹¹¹ Sweta Singh, "The Unique Case of Master-Servant Relationship among Jews from Mediterranean to Malabar: 1000-1300 C.E", paper presented at the International Conference on 'Domestic Servants in Colonial South Asia' supported by European Research Council, Humboldt University, Berlin, 11th-13th April, 2018. (Unpublished)

Jews who were present in the province of Rajah of Cochin. Moreover, the high status of the White Jews has been spoken of by Visscher. The fashion in which author writes, indicates the fact that while writing his account, he did not care to speak to Malabari Jews.¹¹²

An account of Malabari or native Jews seems to be missing. This discrimination against Malabari or so called Black Jews was done majorly by the Dutch. This can be countered by the very writing of Visscher, where he writes about the rights and privileges of the inhabitants of Cochin. According to his writing, on special occasions, everyone was allowed to use drums and wind instruments with the permission of Rajah, irrespective of their religion and class.¹¹³ Rajah did not seem to discriminate between the so called Black and White Jews when it came to religious and cultural practices.

5.8 The fall of Dutch and the golden Jewish period

The Collapse of Dutch East India Company started with the rise of Marthanda Varma in the polity of Malabar during 18th century. In the course of achieving suzerainty over whole of Travancore extending upto central Kerala, Marthanda Varma was bound to clash with the Dutch who were playing a major role in the economy and polity of the place. The first blow to the Dutch dream of ruling over Malabar was crushed with their defeat in the War of Colachel on 10th August 1741.¹¹⁴ However, the Dutch did not lose their hope completely and supported the ruler of Kayamkulam against Marthanda Varma. But, Marthanda Varma got the support of the English and the French in the background of anti-Dutch feelings. The end result of this clash was a treaty through which the ruler of Kayamukulam accepted to become a tributary of Travancore. After Kayamkulam, ruler of Purakkad, one of the allies of Dutch also came under the control of Marthanda Varma.¹¹⁵

This political campaign of Marthanda Varma seriously shook the existence of Dutch in Malabar. The loss at the battle field was impacting their networks of trade gravely. During these days, Dutch-Jewish collaboration was still working. Ezekiel Rahabi, the Jewish merchant and the then representative of the Dutch company, started the negotiation for peace

¹¹² Jacob Canter Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, 1862, pp. 114-117

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 76

¹¹⁴ Paanikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, p. 69

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 73-75

with Marthanda Varma. However, nothing favourable came out of this meeting, as the Dutch were not ready to leave their political powers, and Marthanda Varma had no intention to part with political powers except allowing them to be traders in the region. Further blow was the taking over of major allied states like Cochin, Quilon, Marta, Kayamkulam and Purakkad under the state of Travancore. Later in 1753, the Dutch also signed a treaty with Travancore which reduced their power further. Nevertheless, the Dutch were prudent in securing their hold over the purchase of pepper.¹¹⁶ Although the Dutch could secure the trade of pepper, they had upset most of their earlier allies because of their treaty with Travancore. A document very clearly shows the blatant anger of Rajah of Cochin, where he blames the Dutch to enter into the treaty for securing their own mere benefits.¹¹⁷

The period after 1750s witnessed a phase of dwindling trade for the Jews. The main reason was that the flourishing pepper trade of the Dutch East India Company in Malabar felt a severe jerk when Marthanda Varma, King of Travancore, annexed most of the spice producing enclaves like Quilon, Kayamkulam, Thekkenkur, Vadakkumkur, 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 Jews.¹¹⁸ The problems of Dutch East India Company increased more when the pepper trade was totally monopolized by the state of Travancore around 1743, after the conquest of these terrains, and other petty chiefs.¹¹⁹ The check and control over the spice trade by the state of Travancore demoralized the commercial activities of both the Dutch East India Company and the Jewish merchants involved in it along the Cochin region. The dry behaviour of the Rajah was another disheartening factor for the Dutch merchants.¹²⁰

This new development was followed by the shift in the centre of power by Saktan Thampuran from Cochin to Trichur, eighty kilometres away from the main land of Cochin. This new political development posed an adverse impact upon the Dutch and the Jewish trade,

¹¹⁶Paanikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp. 76-78

¹¹⁷*Cochin State Manual*, Madras Government Press, Ernakulam, pp. 108-09

¹¹⁸V.NagamAiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol.I, Trivandrum, 1906, p.343-51; ShangoonnyMenon, *History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*, New Delhi, 1878, pp.135-55 A SreedharaMenon(ed.), *District Gazetteer of Trivandrum*, Trivandrum,1962, p.11

¹¹⁹AswathiThirunal, *Thulasigarland*, Trivandrum, 1998, p.93.

¹²⁰Paanikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp. 79-80

whereas 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 St. Thomas Christians got settled and new markets established on the encouragement of Saktan Thampuran. This was an indication of a new rival group, the English, in the scene of Malabar commerce, who eventually networked with these trading centres for commodity procurement with the help of Saktan Thampuran.¹²¹

The Mysore wave came around in 1762, which completely shattered the long-lived hegemony of the Nayyars from Malabar.¹²² The Dutch could not save themselves from this upcoming wave of Hyder Ali. Although the Dutch tried their best to mobilize political support from old allies, nothing worked in the background of the new political-economic dimensions forming due to the presence of English East India Company.¹²³ The Dutch tried their best to control the selling of pepper to the English by mobilizing the local rulers, but it could not happen.¹²⁴

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, and 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 worse when the famous Rahabi family, the white Jewish merchants of Cochin, also started going downhill. Unlike Ezekiel 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 bankrupt¹²⁵

The decline of the 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

¹²¹C. Achyuta Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, Trivandrum, 1996, pp.174-78.

¹²² Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. I, 1887, Preface III & IV

¹²³ Paanikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp. 102-08

¹²⁴ Letter Amsterdam, August 25th 1669 in Paanikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, p. 119 & Bal Krishna, *Commercial Relations*, p. 147 for more information see VOC 1373, Report from Commander Marten Huijisman and the Council of Cochin to Heren XVII, 22ND December 1682, fo. 344r

¹²⁵ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, pp.107, 127.

started from Surat, after passing through 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 prolonged struggle, Cochin fell into the control of English in 1814. Though the Jews tried to take 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.

Nevertheless, the Jews were defining and re-defining their roles as merchants in the Indian Ocean, and were evolving out from petty traders to 'a bourgeoisie group' that sustained the edifice of Dutch commercial capitalism on the west coast of India. 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 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.

5.9 Conclusion

The foregoing discussion shows the way how the Jews of West coast of India adapted to the changing situations of the region posed by the challenges of the commercial expansion of the Europeans. 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. Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch provided freedom of religion to the Jews which made it easy to capture the minds of the already harassed Jewish community on 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 region. The unfamiliarity with the local language, polity and commerce forced them to hire intermediaries, on which

company was dependent to deal with the local masses.¹²⁶ The knowledge of the native principles related to trade and commerce, again allowed them to work as 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.¹²⁷

The *paradesi* Jews made use of these opportunities for asserting their position not only in the commercial domain but also in positions of power by being the councillors of the ruler. Ezekiel 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. Meanwhile, the *paradesi* Jews, because of their closeness to power centre, and with their representatives acting as *mudaliars*, carved out sizeable power and prestige-implying position in the Jewish community of Cochin, a development which intensified the process of social stratification within the Jewish community by keeping the white Jews at the top and the black Jews at the bottom. Thus, by balancing themselves well between rulers and the Dutch, *paradesi* Jewish community successfully carved out a privileged space for themselves over the so called Black or Malabari Jews. Alongside, inter-community trade networks were also in full swing, and this collaboration among Jewish merchants was not only limited to India but also worked on foreign lands.

The *Paradesi* Jewish community eventually claimed themselves to be superior. No document talks about the native Malabari Jews. Adding to this, the travellers' account from 17th century onwards had started stating the petty status of the Malabari Jews. However, the bonding between the Dutch and White Jew merchants was simply done in the background of economic benefits. They chose the socio-cultural path to reconstruct the history of the Jewish community from the perspective of White Jews only. Both the Dutch and the white Jews, having hailed from Europe, helped each other in creating the social and economic separation of Malabari Jews. The attempt of retranslating copper plates in Dutch is a serious example of the same.

¹²⁶Binu John, Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea: The Ali Rajas of Cannanore and the Political Economy*, p.100.

¹²⁷G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.433.

Meanwhile, the presence of the Dutch in the Indian waters in the initial decades of the seventeenth century emboldened the Jews of Cochin to get linked with the anti-Portuguese forces operating in the Indian Ocean trade. The difference among native and *paradesi* Jews became dominantly visible during this period. The social gap was under construction since Jews from European countries arrived in India. Alongwith the collaboration of Dutch, the *paradesi* Jews only widened this gap further in a sophisticated manner.

Chapter VI

Changing Social Fabric of the Jewish Mercantile World

What is documented in history through public memory sites such as memorials, museums, monuments, films and public speeches as the memory of the individuals and societies is often considered contended. This is because these memory structures are often influenced by the ideology and power which prevailed during that time, affecting the way in which these collective memories of the past were perceived, preserved or lost. This also affects the way in which issues of contemporary ethnicity, class, gender and religion are perceived. The very subject of Oral history deals in how memory affects the impressions of the past. Where traditional history is largely governed by the ones in power, Oral history brings an alternative source for the story of the 'people without history'. A memory cannot be created beyond the framework of the society which the people belonged to and it would be related to their experiences. Recollections at one level are always the time signatures of the moment they happened. Public memories hence present a picture of how individual perspectives have come together to form a collective memory, which focuses on the larger cultural meanings of oral history narratives, and are the products of social change.

6.1 Entry of the Portuguese and the Consequent Social Impacts upon the Jews

The arrival of the Portuguese and the Dutch in Malabar and its impact upon the Jews have been examined from the economic perspectives so far. However, there were some significant social changes as well which were attached to the entry of European powers in Malabar. Though the entry of Portuguese in Malabar led to the suffering of the Jewish community against the background of Inquisition,¹ the period of Portuguese dominance (1498-1663) saw Jews developing their Synagogues. The *paradesi* synagogue of Cochin, which is the most famous structure related to the Jewish community, was built in 1568, which coincided with the period of

¹ Joan G. Roland, "The Jews of India: Communal Survival or the End of a Sojourn?", *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 42: 1, 1980, pp.76-77 & documents of inquisition of Goa and Lisbon

heightened tensions that the Jews had with the Portuguese.²Chennamanagalam synagogue was built in 1614, during the troubled days of Jewish community as the Portuguese Inquisition had already started by that time. The presence of Portuguese could not interrupt the social harmony of the place as there were four different houses of prayer in the town for Hindus, Jews, Christians and Muslims respectively, each having their own.³

Intimacy between New Christians and Jewish merchants during the time of Portuguese trade was another development in the social sphere of the Jewish community of Malabar. Because of this closeness, for several years, the new Christians were suspected of being under the Judaizing influence of the Jews of Mattancherry. Gradually, each one of them was tracked one after the other and arrested to find who the actual culprit was. Mammoth was the scale of scrutiny that the entire bunch of the new Christians, who had their business establishment in Cochin, were subjected to and they were arrested, and an Inquisition court was set up to put them to trial in the year of 1557.⁴The Inquisition proceedings went into the details of the attempts that the New Christians made to revive Judaism among them. One of the new Christian merchants of Cochin was Jacome de Olivares, who was booked for such charges of having forsaken Christianity. Documents related to Jacome de Olivares and his wife verify their high status in the society. His trading circuits were stretched all along the Indian ocean running from Hurmuz to Melaka. He even stayed in Melaka for a good period of time. He was a rich merchant which reflects in his standard of living, as they had many servants at their home. These servants belonged to various ethnic identities, such as Black and Malayali.⁵ This not only shows their social status but also the composition of the society in which money enabled them to even keep an indigenous (Malayali) servant. Thus, money was the reason behind not only the financial growth but also the social status. Because of his good socio-economic status, he was in a cordial relationship with some other Jewish merchants of Cochin. Olivares had commercial engagements with Jewish merchant Issac, the Red, who was from Mattancherry. Being a native of that place, it

²Shalva Weil, “ In an Ancient Land Revisited: Trade and Synagogues in South India”, *Asian Jews Life*, Winter 2010-2011, p.36

³Jay A. Waronker, “The Chennamanagalam Synagogue: the Jewish Community in a Village in Kerala.” Cochin Brochure

⁴Jose 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.

⁵ Ibid. p. 110

was easy for him to indulge in inter-city trade as well. Apart from the commercial ties, they also used to share the matters of their faith secretly.⁶

The new Christians were always targeted by the Portuguese, who tried to limit their socio-economic influence, to an extent of obliterating them. Often the new Christians were held for reasons of not being devout and they would be arrested at the Inquisition centers. This phenomenon was not just prevalent at Cochinalone but also at all other places where the Cochin Jews had contacts. In this context, a new Inquisition office was set up in Goa in 1560, with the aim of targeting all the new Christians settled in the coastal areas and ensure a total conversion to orthodox Christianity.⁷ The excesses made became so high that it led to an exodus of Jews from Cochin, whose tolerant King had provided them with shelter during all these times. The only refuge for Jews was in the vicinity of the King's palace, where they settled in large numbers. The king's patronage also earned him a name of the 'king of the Jews'.⁸

Thus, due to the Portuguese tyrant behavior, Jews managed to get support of the Rajah of Cochin, which eventually evolved as a mechanism of immunity and social for the community. The shelter and the support provided by the king of Cochin was one of the major reasons behind the social acceptance of Jews at Cochin.⁹ This social acceptance of Jews was not only restricted to Malabar, as the Mughals who ruled major parts of India from sixteenth century onwards, also recognized Jews as a significant socio-religious community. During the time of Mughal emperor Akbar, Jews participated in various religious discussions organized by the state, along with all other religious groups.¹⁰ Not only did Jews take part in the religious and philosophical disputes during the time of the Mughal emperor Akbar, but also managed to get their presence visibly

⁶ Ibid, pp. 98-99

⁷ The documents related to the inquisition of New Christian merchant Jacom de Olivares and his family in Goa will flash light on this matter. Jose Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "From Setubal to the Sublime Porte," pp. 110-12

⁸ David Mandelbaun, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p. 430

⁹ Israel S. Rose, "Cross Cultural Dynamics in Musical Traditions: the Music of the Jews of Cochin," *American Society for Jewish Music*, vol. 2:1; p. 52

¹⁰ Abul Fazl, *The Akbar Nama*, trans. by H. Beveridge, vol.3; Calcutta, 1939, p. 365 & A. Monserrate, *Mongolicae Legationis Commentarius*, 1582, ed. by H. Hosten, Calcutta, 1914, trans. into English by J.S. Hoyland, Oxford, 1922, p. 37, 132, 136-38, 187. For more information also see *The Dabistan*, or *School of Manners*, trans. by David Shea and Anthony Troyer, 3 vols. Paris, 1843

appreciated and Synagogues mentioned in some of the royal decrees and contemporary travelogues.¹¹

6.2 Arrival of *Paradesi* Jews and the Dutch Company: Beginning of a New Era for the Community

In the course of the commercial collaboration that *paradesi* Jews developed with the Portuguese, the Dutch, the local rulers and the Malabari Jews, there evolved a sense of social stratification among the Jews of Cochin, even though the origin of the concept of social division, was not the characteristic of Judaism. The emergence of this non egalitarian aspect in the Jewish society can be seen through two major concepts, one was in the context of untouchability and another was in the sense of dominance. Many scholars have seen this division as an internal affair of the community rather than external.¹² Such a division first occurred between the older Malabari group, often called “black Jews,” who live in Ernakulam, Alwaye (Aluva) and Parur (Paravur) today, and the relatively new Jews who arrived from Syria, Turkey and elsewhere, soon after the expulsions from Spain and Portugal. They were the *paradesis*, commonly known as “white Jews” who lived in Mattanchery and fort Cochin. These two groups had practices which were very different from each other. The groups would marry within their own group and their religious practices differed from one another.¹³ Although there is no firm date of when this differentiating pattern was first seen, it perhaps began in the first half of 16th century, which marks the arrival of the *paradesi* Jews.

The Malabari and *paradesi* Jews had disparate practices and even a *minyān*¹⁴ would not account for mixing within the groups. They did not eat the meat slaughtered by the other group. Several divisions happened within the Jewish community. Within the Malabari group, the smaller *meyuhasim* (those with *yihus*, attestable descent from ancient Israel and Cranganore the ancient home of all the Cochin Jews) imposed restrictions on the larger sub-division; the *urumakars* (freed slaves and proselytes). Similarly the *paradesimeyuhasim* considered

¹¹ H. Blochman, “Badaoni and his Work”, *Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 38, 1869, pp.135-45 also see the references in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol.2, P. 717 & W. Foster, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India*, London, 1926, p. 275

¹² David Mandelbaum, “The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin”, *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 1: 4, Oct., 1939, pp. 459-60

¹³ J. B. Segal, “White and Black Jews at Cochin”, the Story of a Controversy” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2, 1983,” p. 243

¹⁴ It is a custom in Judaism in which ten Jewish adults were required for certain religious obligation, mostly it was related to the prayer services during public prayer

themselves superior to *meshuhrarim* (manumitted slaves) and would not get married to the *meshuhrarim*.¹⁵ They did not even offer them proper seats or active roles in the synagogue. But in spite of these differences, there was no apparent taboo for eating or drinking on the same table together among the Jews and the social interaction and close personal friendships prevailed.¹⁶

Though there is no such fixed period which can be attributed to the beginning of this evil social norm, the documents of a Jewish traveler Zechariah ben Se'adyah clearly mention this social division. During his visit to Cochin in 1570, Zechariah found both *paradesi* and Malabari Jews.¹⁷ The social division among the *paradesi* Jews and native Jews arose in the wake of financial stability of the Malabari Jews, who were already settled in the area. Having been there in Malabar since a long time gave them the opportunity to develop an intricate trade network both in the ocean and on land,¹⁸ which the newcomer *paradesi* Jews were yet to explore for themselves. The economic achievements were the key to position oneself high in the society as well. The growing trading opportunities were another reason for the both *paradesi* and native Jews to get attracted to the city in general. The Malabari Jews were already involved in the immense spice trade happening along the intra-Asia trading network.¹⁹

It was but obvious for the *paradesi* Jews to get attracted by these mounting trading opportunities at Cochin and they also wanted to be a part of it. A document from Mosseh Pereyra de Pavia, testifies to the arrival of the first Spanish Jews at Cochin in 1512. 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. Later the delegation itself reached Cochin on 21st November, 1686 for a visit. 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. The arrival of *paradesi*

¹⁵ Jacob Canter Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, p. 116; A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, p. 197; Mosseh Pereyra de Pavia, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim* Lisbon, 1923, p.7, David Mandelbaum, "Social Stratification Among the Jews of Cochin in India and Israel" in *Jews in India*, ed. Thomas A. Timberg, New York", p. 177

¹⁶ Nathan Katz, *Who are the Jews of India?*, University of California Press, London, 2000, p. 68

¹⁷ David Maldenboun, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.430

¹⁸ Copper Plates, Geniza letters and numerous travelogues prior to 15th century substantiate the well established nature of the Malabari Jews in ongoing trade network of Malabar.

¹⁹ Pius Malekandathil, "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce, 800-1800 C. E." in *The Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, Vol. 9, 2007, p. 15

Jews from Spain also coincided with the fact that they were already suffering from the expulsion by the crown in 1512.²⁰ More in this queue was the settlement of *paradesi* Jews or white Jews at Cochin near Senhora Savode in 1531.²¹ Whereas some *paradesi* Jews came from Cranganore in 1524, some reached Cochin due to the immigration process in 1565. Initially, the financial status of these newly arrived Jews at Cochin was not good.²²

As far as the social division among the Jewish community is concerned, it was definitely not based on the material disparity among the various sections.²³ If that had been the case, the so called black Jews also famous as Malabari Jews would have acquired a high position among the Jewish society rather than being discriminated by their new co-religionists, who were fair in color. However, the seeds of this division were sown up with the insight of getting financial gains only by the *paradesi* Jews. There are some documents available from that period which highlight this matter of discrimination against the Black Jews (Malabari Jews) by the White Jews (*paradesi* Jews) and the rift in the society between these two sections. This discriminative behavior got introduced in the Jewish society of Malabar by the immigrants from Europe and Middle East. In an appeal written by a Malabari Jew from Cochin to David ben Solomon ibn abiZimra at Cairo in 1520, reads:

“An enquiry has been made from India in the island of Cochin where there are about nine hundred heads of households. Of these one hundreds are Jews by origin and of (Jewish) stock, and they are meyuhasin (Jews of attested Jewish pedigree); the rest are descendants of male and female slaves, and they are rich and devout and charitable. The meyuhasin do not intermarry with them and call them slaves. A group are (descendants of) Jewish traders who came there from the land of Turkey and from the land of Aden and from Germany and from Caucasia, and they bought female slaves and begot from them sons and daughters and emancipated them because they had borne them (children) or because they were satisfied with them and their services; they emancipated them in their land with the status of Jews. Another group did not emancipate them, but when they went away (the slaves) fled; the master, in order not to be delayed from his journey, had paid no heed, and left him and gone- after the master had gone, (the slave) remained with the status of Jew with the others and there is no-one who would object to it, and he remained on his own. Another group were the slaves of the fathers of meyuhasin Jews. A group was immersed (in ritual bath) for the sake of slavery, and a group for the sake of emancipation; because their heirs were minor or

²⁰Mosseh Pereyra de Pavia, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim* p.8

²¹Jacobus Canter Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, written in 1723, trans. H. Drury, 1862, p.115

²²Walter 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, 1062”, p. 37

²³J.B. Segal, “White and Black Jews at Cochin”, the Story of a Controversy” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2, 1983”, p. 230

because they had no heir, their male and female slaves remain free on their own. A group emancipated them deliberately. A group who had been complete gentiles and had become slaves were mingled among these, and a group who had become gerim (proselytes) were mingled among them. A group consisted of female slaves who had left their masters as according to the Laws of the country, whoever bore a son or daughter to her master shall was to be freed. All sections of these gentiles have intermarried among themselves and have held to the religion in Israel; they have become a large community who observe the Torah and are rich and intimate with royalty and the princes. They are the root of the negotiations between trades and (attested) meyuhasim Jews. The (latter) on the contrary are a minority and poor, but they call others the offspring of slaves out of jealousy and hatred. There is no-one who can prove that they are slaves. But apparently not a single one of them was given a document of emancipation because (people) were not expert at this and they did not know how to explain the matter.

Now let the teacher indicate whether it is permissible for the meyuhasin to interfere with them, whether they have the rights of slaves or gerim (proselytes) –if they are slaves, whether they have a remedy or not, and if it is proper to rebuke those who call them slaves or not. Please write about everything at length because there are no learned people here who can deduce one matter from another.”²⁴

The above mentioned text gives a deep insight into the various aspects of social division among the Jewish society in India and other problems attached to it. These questions were repeated very often and the sufferers (black Jews) were looking forward to some solutions from their religious heads in Cairo. Rabbi Jacob de Castro, the successor of Radbaz who was in Cairo around 1610, provided some reply to these questions. Rabbi Jacob denied any kind of discriminative behavior among the Jewish community and thus allowed the intergroup marriages between *meyuhasim* and non-*meyuhasim*. He also attached that while marriage between these two groups take place the non-*meyuhasim* has to go through some immersion rituals, known as *tebilah*.²⁵

The above discussed document gives a very transparent picture of the nature of the social division prevailing among the Jewish community in Malabar. The social division was initiated by the newly arrived Jews who were often called *paradesi* Jews due to their foreign status. As is evident from the letter above, there was an economic disparity between Malabari Jews and *paradesi* Jews. In order to fill this economic gap, the *paradesi* Jews very tactfully chose the path of social and cultural assertions. The *paradesi* Jews used their social status and color of the skin to overpower the social status of the Malabari Jews in that place. They defined a social hierarchy

²⁴ J.B. Segal, “White and Black Jews of Cochin,” pp. 230-31

²⁵ Ibid. p. 231

at the top for themselves by branding the Malabari Jews as the mixed race and descendants of the slaves. Later on, taking this idea forward, they also introduced the concept of purity within the Jewish social structure.²⁶ They managed to create this social hierarchy by practicing some discriminative customs and social behaviors against the Malabari Jews.²⁷

While doing so, they adapted the discriminative and hierarchical social order prevailing within the Hindu socio-religious structure. Discriminative behavior inside the synagogue, not marrying Malabari Jews, and eating prohibitions were a few among those adopted social norms from the Hindus.²⁸ It can be simply said that analogically they made themselves Brahmins and thus treated Malabari Jews as the so called lower caste. The rise of *paradesi* Jews as a superior social group among the Jewish community helped them fetch the support of both Europeans and local rulers of Malabar and eventually they started enjoying the privileged position.²⁹ The situation of *paradesi* Jews also improved in the sector of trade and commerce. One of the major reasons behind this economic escalation was the support of the Portuguese who were quite active in the Indian ocean trade at that time. The growing influence of Portuguese in the trade affairs of Malabar was the major reason behind the weakening of the alliance between Muslim merchants and the King of Calicut in 1513.³⁰ The vacuum created by the decline of this alliance was well enchased by the newly arrived Jew merchants from Spain. The Castielfamily, who in the later years became one of the wealthy and influential merchants of Malabar, migrated to Cochin from Spain in 1512.³¹ These *paradesi* Jewish merchants were also in touch with the Portuguese *casados* in order to maximize their trading opportunities.

The matter of social distinction among Jews and the role of color attained a new level with the arrival of the Portuguese in Malabar. As has been mentioned, the color was being used by the *paradesi* Jews to their favor, in order to enhance their position within the Jewish society and Malabar's social structure. This preference of one over another on the basis of the color of

²⁶ Nathan Katz, "The Ritual Enactments of the Cochin Jews: The Powers of Purity and Nobility." *Journal of Ritual Studies*, vol 4:2; 1990, pp. 189-225

²⁷ A. De Costa, "The White and Black Jews of Malabar", *India Church Quarterly Review*, 1895, pp. 110-14

²⁸ H.H. Smythe and T. Gershuny, "Jewish Caste of Cochin, India," *Sociology and Social Research*, vol. 41:2; 1956, 108-11

²⁹ Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, "Jewish Apartheid and a Jewish Gandhi", *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 50:3/4, 1988, p. 162

³⁰ Pius Malekandathil, "From Merchant Capitalists to Corsairs", pp.82-3 & "The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce", p.14

³¹ Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, p.8

the skin was followed by the Portuguese as well. However, Albuquerque encouraged the interracial marriages among the Portuguese and Indian women in order to strengthen their social base in India,³² the fair skin remained to be their preference in such matrimonial alliances.³³ Pyrard de Laval, has rightly caught this idea of fondness for white skin in his writing:

*“The most esteemed are those who have come from Portugal and are called ‘Portuguese of Portugal’, next are those born in India of Portuguese father and mother and called Castici....; the least esteemed are the off spring of a Portuguese and an Indian parent, called Metices, that is Metifs, or mixed. Those born of a Portuguese father and a caffre, or African negro mother, called Mulastres and are held in like consideration with the Metifs.”*³⁴

Paradesi Jews like the Portuguese followed the norms of discrimination and thus looked down upon the Malabari Jews, who were born out of the mixture of Jews and Indians and happened to be dark in color. As far as the marriages were concerned, the *paradesi* Jews refrained from marrying Malabari Jews. There is a fictional instance written by Yemenite traveler, Zechariah ben Sa’adya al-Dahri, which broadens our understanding regarding this issue. According to Zechariah, Abner, a young white Jew got married to a dark skinned Jew Dinah. He adds further that due to her dark skin the groom had later called the wedding off after marriage. The notable fact about this wedding was a handsome amount of 300 *florins*, which the groom received as dowry. Thus the financial status of the bride happens to be the major reason behind this wedding.³⁵ Van Linschoten, who visited Cochin in 1583-84, talks about the Spanish speaking Jewish merchants, who were rich and had cordial relationship with the King of Cochin.³⁶ Similarly Van Caerden and Pyrard, two seventeenth century travelers also encountered many Spanish speaking Jews at Cochin.³⁷

The resemblances in socio-cultural aspects must have been the reason behind the Portuguese support to the *paradesi* Jews. Common language and knowledge of European mode of commerce worked in the favor of *paradesi* Jews. These factors led to Europeans preferring

³² A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras (Selection from the Records of the Dutch Government: Dutch Records, No. 13), 1911, p. 16

³³ Laval Pyrard Francois, *The Voyages of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, trans. by Albert Gray, London, 1888, p. 38

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.121

³⁵ J.B. Segal, “White and Black Jews of Cochin,” p. 233

³⁶ Van Linschoten, *Voyage of John Huyghen Van Linschoten to the East Indies*, from the old English translation of 1598.vol 2. London, 1885, pp. 70, 285

³⁷ Laval Pyrard Francois, *The Voyages of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies*, London, 1888, p.435

paradesi merchants over the native ones.³⁸ Portuguese were not the only Europeans to show their preference for the white skinned *paradesi* Jews, even the Dutch did the same. Immediately after defeating Portuguese, as soon as the Dutch gained authority, they helped *paradesi* Jews to rebuild their synagogue at Cochin which was wrecked by the Portuguese in 1663. Moreover, the Dutch also founded the office of *mudeliyar* for the white Jews. The civil and criminal jurisdiction over the white Jews was under the control of *mudeliyar*.³⁹

Moses Pereira de Paiva, was made the head of the congregation of the White Jews, which went to Amsterdam. He was also entrusted with the task of giving a report on the condition of white Jews to the Dutch authorities back in Netherland. The report published by De Paiva in 1687, includes name and place of origin of twenty five Jews, among which only two belonged to the Malabari Jews, and the rest twenty three were the names of the Jews from the *paradesi* community.⁴⁰ In this report, Paiva also praises White Jews for being great merchants. The notion of discrimination towards the Malabari Jews also reflects in this report, when he says that the white Jews did not engage in the matrimonial alliance with the Malabari Jews and also did not eat or celebrate festivals together. The richness of white Jews has also been noticed by Visscher, a Protestant chaplain in Cochin. He says that the white Jews were richer and more powerful than the black Jews. He also opined that the Malabari Jews were the descendants of the slaves.⁴¹

Moreover, the close connections of the white Jews with the Dutch company have been also observed by Adrian Moens.⁴² 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 the king of Cochin in 1619 under the influence of the Dutch negotiations of 1618. In the changed situation, more and more Jews got political assignments in the court of king of Cochin and in 1620s Samuel Castiel was appointed by the native ruler as his principal councilor

³⁸ Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, "Jewish Apartheid and a Jewish Gandhi," *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 50:3/4, 1988", 1988, p. 154

³⁹ C.V. Subrahmanya Aiyar, "The Jews of Cochin," *Malabar Quarterly Review*, vol.I, 1902, P.130

⁴⁰ Mosseh Pereyra de Pavia, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, 1687, ed. M. Bensabat, Amzalak, 1923 and also see David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin," p.434

⁴¹ J.C. Visscher, "Letters from Malabar" in K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol. II, New Delhi, 1982, pp.50-57

⁴² Adrian 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

and interpreter.⁴³ Under Dutch, the white Jewish merchants 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 popular company merchants 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 the only one to bear the title of Company's merchant. It must also be acknowledged that this Ezechiel was often in the most dedicated service to the Company.⁴⁴

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 a meeting place for merchants and kings, which clearly indicates his importance during the period.⁴⁵ Issac Surgun was another wealthy and influential white Jewish merchant, who set up business in Calicut during the eighteenth century. Issac, like Rahabi had been in a good relationship with the local rulers. Rahabi and Issac became so prosperous that both the local rulers and Dutch Company had to often depend on them.⁴⁶

The financial growth of *paradesi* Jews gave them a chance to even degrade the overall position of the Malabari Jews in the society. The *paradesi* Jews started claiming the past heritage of the Jewish community by taking advantage of their commercial strength.⁴⁷ Perron du Anquetil, who visited Cochin between the periods of 1757-1759, met Elikh (Elias Rahabi), son of the famous white Jewish merchant Ezekiel Rahabi, who worked as the agent of the Dutch East India Company.⁴⁸

The example given above of the rich and leading merchants proves that the social status, which *paradesi* Jews started claiming since their arrival, worked well in their favor and fetched

⁴³ Pius Malekandathil, "Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce," p.19

⁴⁴ A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras, 1912, pp.222-23

⁴⁵ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p. 50

⁴⁶ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, Cambridge, 1967, pp.106-7

⁴⁷ Barbara C. Johnson, "Our Community in Two Worlds: The Cochin Paradesi Jews in India and Israel", *Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation*, University of Massachusetts, 1985, pp. 109-10

⁴⁸ 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, p. 46, & "The Exploration of the Jewish Antiquities of Cochin on the Malabar Coast", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*," Vol. 87, 1967p.236

them financial gains as well. The documents before 15th century prior to the arrival of *paradesi* Jews, refer to the Malabari Jewish merchants and their socio-political and economic position in Malabar. The travelers who came to Malabar before this period mentioned Jews either as native looking people or called them black Jews because of the colour of their skin. Rabbi Benjamin Tudela, who visited Malabar during twelfth century, mentioned Jews as black skinned people, just like the natives.⁴⁹

Marco Polo, a thirteenth century traveler also mentions Jews of Malabar in his writing without any special reference to the social division.⁵⁰ Moreover Ibn Battuta, the medieval traveler from Morocco, who visited Malabar in 1324, had come across some Jews at Quilon. He states that

*“we came to Kunja-Kari which is on the top of the hill there; it is inhabited by Jews, who have one of their own members as governor, and pay toll tax to the ruler of Quilon.”*⁵¹

This statement clearly shows that the Jews at that time were in good socio-economic position. Furthermore, Battuta, in his writings, did not refer to white Jews or any such social stratification.

The situation changed after the arrival of Jews from Portugal, Spain and some other places. In order to upgrade their financial position, these foreign Jews in Malabar needed to replace the already established Malabari Jewish merchants. In doing so, they played the racial card and positioned themselves above in the hierarchy of social order. They gained the support of both the local rulers and the European players around the area. In this context, the support of the Dutch proved very vital to the newly arrived Jews from Europe. Along with economic benefits, Jewish community also got an upward movement in the society and further, their cultural legacy was also established. During the Dutch period, with the initiative of the famous white Jewish merchant Ezekiel Rahabi II, the cultural development of the Jewish community was at its peak. Along with promoting the Hebrew language, he also decorated the synagogues in a fanciful way.⁵² This Dutch-White Jewish collaboration leads to the fabrication of a notion of glorious

⁴⁹ Rabbi Benjamin in M. N. Adler's (translated), *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, New York, p.92, 140

⁵⁰ Henry Yule and Henry Cordier (ed.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol.II, New Delhi, pp.375-376

⁵¹ H. A. R. Gibb, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, tr. and ed. London, p. 238

⁵² Walter J. Fischel, “Cochin in Jewish History”, pp. 54-55

past for the *Paradesi* Jews, which was conveniently used to exercise their superiority over the native Jews. Dutch showed their active interest in the past of the Jewish community, for which they initiated the task of translating famous copper plates.⁵³ These translations were done in the context of hijacking the legacy of Malabari Jews and establishing white Jews' claim and supremacy over it. This phenomenon was brought into practice by yet another white Jew, Samuel Abraham, who was a native of Poland. He settled down in Cochin and wrote that the royal grant of Cranganore was given to his descendants.⁵⁴ Coupled with the writings by the Dutch officials, it was all set to prove to the world that the White Jews were the oldest of Jews in Malabar and the purest breed of all the Jews present there.⁵⁵ Some of the descriptions did mention native Jews but they were to the extent of equating them to most decent of slaves and servants.⁵⁶

Thus, the accounts of the visitors who came to Malabar from 16th century onwards, mostly talk about the *paradesi*/white Jews and the social division within the Jewish society. *Paradesi* Jews, who held an extraordinary socio-financial status by this time managed to become the topic of attention. Zechariah ben Seadyah, a Jewish traveler who came to Cochin in 1570, was the first to mention about such social division as he encountered both Sephardic and black Jewish community at Calicut.⁵⁷

Van Linschoten, a sixteenth century Dutch traveller threw enough light upon the social distinction among the white, black and brown Jews 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 Muslims.

⁵³ Galletti, Letters from Malabar, pp. 195-98

⁵⁴ G. A Kohut, "Correspondence between the Jews of Malabar and New York, a Century Ago", *Semitic Studies in Memory of Alexander Kohut*, Berlin, 1847, pp. 420-434

⁵⁵ A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, p. 192

⁵⁶ Mosseh Pereyra de Pavia, *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, p.7

⁵⁷ D. S. Sassoon, *Ohel David: Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts*, vol.II, London, 1932, p. 1026 in Michael G. Wechsler, *The Book of Conviviality in Exile*, Leiden, 2015

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.”*⁵⁸

The Dutch sea captain published a report regarding Malabar Jews in 1687, which contains rich information regarding Jewish social history. De Paiva’s comment reads:

*“All these people are very well disposed and of a gentile character, very prominent Jews, bahaleTorah, and not less famous merchants. The colour is brown, caused no doubt by the climate, for they are entirely separated from the Malabari (Jews) of rank because it is a great disgrace to intermarry with them. They do not eat of what the Malabari Jews kill, nor do they celebrate minyan in their company. They allege that the Malabaries are the sons of slaves and are mixed with guerim, kenahanitas (?), and Ismaelim. But in all things the two observe the same rites and ceremonies.”*⁵⁹

Further in this row is a letter written by Protestant chaplain, Jacob Canter Visscher, in 1723. In this letter, Visscher clearly mentions that both social and financial status of the white Jews was better than the black Jews in Cochin. Further he adds that except for the rare cases, both communities did not even share matrimonial bonds. Even the synagogue rituals were discriminative in nature.⁶⁰ Above mentioned facts clearly indicate the growing influence of white Jews over the Malabari Jews in the local society and economy. Thus, in this process of the image building of the Malabari Jews, Dutch played a vital role.

6.3 Aspects of Exchange and Adaptations: Diaspora Community and the Host Society

The most significant and drastic adaptation among the Jewish community of Malabar in India was the inclusion of caste system in their society. As discussed earlier, the arrival of Sephardic Jews brought many changes in the already settled Jews over the place, both in terms of the commerce and the society. The discrimination started by these *paradesi* Jews on the basis of the

⁵⁸ See *The Voyage of John Huyghen Van Linshoten to the East Indies*, Vol. 1, p. 285

⁵⁹ David, G. Mandelbaum, “The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin”, p. 434

⁶⁰ Visscher’s Letters from Malabar, in K.P.Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.II, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 50-57

skin color impacted the society in various ways. However, this behavioral change in the Jewish society was not only due to the *paradesi* Jews, it was also inspired by the attitude of the host society, which was caste oriented.⁶¹ The idea of creating a separate and unique identity in terms of positioning themselves along with the other communities led to the inclusion of this social behavior among the Jews as well.

In proliferation into specific ethnic group marriages, Jews emulated Hindu traditions much like the Indian caste. Each caste was subdivided into further sub divisions, and marriage was permitted only within those sub castes. The maintenance of this caste behaviour among Jews clearly reflects on their dietary restrictions and endogamy. The observance of *kashruth* distinguishes them from other meat-eating groups, which make them the so-called low caste. Even now, if one goes to the Jew town in Cochin, one can encounter their strict observance of eating only a specific type of meat. Even though there is handful of Jews left in the city they abide by this rule very strictly.⁶²

The Malabari Jews included many Hindu rituals and practices into their religious practices but always ensured that these do not contradict with the Jewish legal or ethical principles. This pattern of assimilation of a new culture into the Jewish culture has been similar in nature and has been common to Jews across the world, whether in Baghdad, Kai-feng or Berlin. As has also been covered before, the major borrowings from the Hindu culture are: their division into four sub castes; the ritual use of Hebrew, paralleling Hindu use of Sanskrit and Malayalam, dietary restrictions of *kashruth*, removing footwear in the synagogue etc.⁶³ Perhaps the most distinctive festival of Cochin Jews is *Simhat Torah*, the rejoicing in the Torah which concludes the autumn cycle of holy days. The practice of observing the rituals in Cochin are very unique in so many ways. The construction of a temporary structure on which the *Sifrei Torah* are displayed is one of such instances where it is believed that it was done to resemble the Hindu carts on which the deity generally rests during the temple festivals of Kerala. Another such instance was the gaudy procession during the afternoon prayers (*minhah*) which even undermine the significance of *Torah* procession conducted once a year. This could have become possible

⁶¹ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: the Caste System and its Implications*, London, 1973, p.191

⁶² *Kshruth* is a set of Jewish religious dietary laws.

⁶³ For more information on caste system of India refer to Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999

because the atmosphere in Kerala was quite tolerant unlike other places where Jews would be scared to carry their *Sifrei Torah* outside the synagogue building.⁶⁴

Practices like these show clear resemblances in culture and assimilation of the cultures of the native land. Practices such as dietary codes, a sacred language, and endogamy are coincidences between Jewish and Hindu values. There are others that are very specific in nature. In some cases, borrowings happened from the highest Kerala Brahmin caste called Nambudiris. Even the town planning shows a great deal of resemblance. The Jew towns of Kerala such as Mattancheri, Parur, Mala or Chennamangalam, emulate the structural style of Brahmin towns. In each case, a Jew/Brahmin street leads to the town's synagogue or temple. Also, the Jews and Brahmins preferred to live close to their worship sites and many houses would connect to each other on the second story.⁶⁵ While talking about similarities in the culture, Jews shared some similar marital notions, which were famous in the Nayyar families as well. In Judaism, both cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriages are allowed, which happens to be a common practice among Nayyars as well. However, the Jewish women wearing tiger's claw fixed in gold as a mascot, seem to be influenced by the Nayyar women.⁶⁶

However, the separate identity created by Jews in Malabar was based on two basic principles- strict dietary regulations and emphasis on purity. The ways of the observance of Jewish festival of Passover is the best approach to know the society very closely. The dietary laws and strong emphasis on purity during the time of Passover was very much influenced by the practices in Hindu society specifically brahmins. These rules were unique to the Jews residing in Malabar only, as originally, Judaism did not pose such restrictions.⁶⁷

Nathan Katz talks about three kinds of host societies and circumstances in which Jews have lived so far over the globe. First one is hostile, second one is friendly but assimilating and the third one is friendly and not assimilating. India falls under the third category as Jews here were provided with space and opportunity to be themselves without asking for any such

⁶⁴Nathan Katz, *Asceticism and Caste in the Passover observances of the Cochin Jews Life*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, pp. 69-70

⁶⁵ A. B. Salem, *Eternal Light of Jew Town Synagogue*, Ernakulam, 1929, p.32

⁶⁶ Barbara Johnson, "Our Community in the Two Worlds: The Cochin Paradesi Jews in India and Israel", PhD. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1985, pp. 427, 171

⁶⁷ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, Chicago and London, 1973, p. 56, 139 also see Nathan Katz, "The Ritual Enactments of the Cochin Jews" 1990, pp. 189-225

integration. The adaptations that occurred within the Jewish community over time were a natural process of change which materializes in any diaspora community. Whatever changes the Jewish community of Malabar went through was not forceful.⁶⁸

However, as far as the Jewish approach is concerned, they themselves were willing to acclimatize to the host society in order to make their position strong, long lasting and smooth. Jews used to paint their houses immediately after their annual festival Purim, which is a very common practice among Hindus, as they also get their house painted before some major festivals like Diwali and Holi. This practice was not prevalent among the Jews of other places over the globe. The food and wine prepared for their festival were to be examined carefully, which strictly prohibited the touch of any non-Jewish person.⁶⁹ They tried their best to maintain their Jewishness while adapting to the aspects of Hinduism.

The constant use of Hebrew for various purpose, expressed their zeal to maintain their Jewishness even on an alien place. Along with the strict observance of other Jewish traditions, the use of Hebrew language was given equal significance. The Hebrew language was seen as the connecting link between the Jews scattered all over the Malabar region and elsewhere. The queries sent by the Malabari Jews regarding the social discrimination to the rabbinical authorities in Cairo in sixteenth century were framed in Hebrew language. Along with using the native language Malayalam for all practical purposes, the Jewish community resorted to the Hebrew language for their religious and cultural purposes. It can be said that Hebrew became the language of Synagogue.⁷⁰ Ezekiel Rahabi, one of the most influential Jewish merchants during the days of Dutch trade (1663-1795), used Hebrew in both of his private and trade correspondences with the other Jewish merchants. In order to preserve the Hebrew language and the Jewish culture, Rahabi bought many books in Hebrew language from Holland.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Nathan Katz, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India*

⁶⁹ For information on various aspects and detailing about these Jewish rituals, prayers and festival see Barbara C. Johnson's doctoral thesis. Abraham Rabbi Chill, *The Minhagim: The Customs and Ceremonies of Judaism, Their Origins and Rationale*, New York, 1979. Jacob Rabbi Cohen, *The Royal Table: An Outline of the Dietary Laws of Israel*, Jerusalem and New York, 1970

⁷⁰ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History," p. 54

⁷¹ Ibid, pp. 55-57 for more information on Rahabi also see A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras, 1912, pp.222-3

6.4 Irony of Social Division: The Mixed Legacy of Merchant-Slave Relationship

The need and process of identity building for Jewish community of Kerala has been narrated in sections above. However, this process also included denial of the history of a particular section (Native or Black Jews) over the time. The presence of a large number of Malabari Jews from 10th century onwards on the coast of Malabar⁷² is quite a convincing rationale for the theory of diaspora. The social division between Malabari Jews and Paradesi Jews lies in the background of such assumptions. This social division was also influenced by the host society, which was based on the concept of lineage and purity.⁷³ This division, created within the Cochin Jewish community, was based on the theory that one of the groups belonged to the descendants of slaves.⁷⁴ There are numerous documents which claim such notions related to legacy and lineage. These documents often seem to highlight the shallow knowledge of the early Jewish settlers of Malabar in matters of manumission of slaves. However, this claim appears a bit contradictory since there are many letters available, which are related to manumission of slaves in the *Geniza* collection and they do not corroborate the theory.⁷⁵

In this row, an argument has been made by David Mandelbaum who says that the non-existence of '*kohanim*' (hereditary priest) among the black Jewish community points out to the fact that they were converted slaves and servants of the early Jewish merchants who came to Malabar for the purpose of trade. However, Mandelbaum believes that these conversions were not done forcefully as the socio-economic incentives must have been the encouraging factor behind such an action.⁷⁶ Talking about the presence of *Kohanim* in the early 19th century, The *Paradesis* often coerced and convinced a foreign Kohen to settle in Cochin, if they feared that their own Kohen was going to die. In an incident, When Yaakob David Cohen, of Baghdad visited Malabar on a business tour, he was convinced to stay in Cochin and marry a *Paradesi* woman of high priestly descent, as that would be the most divine way of life, despite the fact that

⁷² Rabbi Benjamin in M. N. Adler's (translated), *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, New York, p.92, 140 & Henry Yule and Henry Cordier (ed.), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Vol.II, New Delhi, pp.375-376 & H. A. R. Gibb, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, tr. and ed. London, p. 238

⁷³ Walter J. Fischel. *Unknown Jews in the Unknown Lands: The Travels of Rabbi David D' Beth Hillel (1824-1832)*, KTAV, New York, 1973, pp. 111-14 also see H.H. Smythe and T. Gershuny, " Jewish Caste of Cochin, India," *Sociology and Social Research*, vol. 41:2; 1956, pp.108-11

⁷⁴ J.B. Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin," the Story of a Controversy" pp. 230-31

⁷⁵ "Instructions for manumission of a slave girl written by Abraham ben Yiju", Egypt, After 1152 in S.D. Goitein, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza*, Leiden, 2008, p. 723

⁷⁶ David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 1: 4, Oct., 1939, p.445

the man was already married in Baghdad. Sometimes later, the man's son came looking for him in Cochin and he was also convinced that he should marry here in Cochin and stay like his father and which eventually happened.⁷⁷ Thus, this import of Cohen by the *paradesi* Jewish community points out to the fact that, this might have happened to the Cohen legacy of Malabari Jews as well. However, unlike the *Paradesi* community, the Native Jews did not choose to manipulate and fabricate the position of *Cohanim* within their community. By this logic, the theory of non-originality of Malabari or so called black Jews gets diminished.⁷⁸

The *Paradesi* Jews used their social status and colour of the skin to overpower the social status of the Malabari Jews. Later on, taking this idea forward, they also introduced the concept of purity within the Cochin Jewish society.⁷⁹ Thus, the *Paradesi* Jews tactfully shifted the question of who came early to who were of pure lineage in order to pull down the social and economic status of the already established Jewish community. The assistance of natives was vital for these newly arrived Jewish merchants. Where male slaves served them as agents, females working under them became their partners.⁸⁰ As the *Geniza* men were involved in overseas trade, they used to be away from home for months or even years, which made the married life of Jewish merchants very unstable.⁸¹ But men on foreign lands often married or fell in love with the local women of that country. This document contains an affair between a Jewish merchant named Halfon ha Levi b. Shemarya and a slave woman in the Sudanese port.⁸²

While talking about Jewish merchants, who were specifically involved along the trade route between Mediterranean and Malabar, the name of Abraham ben Yiju comes across. Abraham

⁷⁷Ibid. p. 450

⁷⁸Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, "Jewish Apartheid and a Jewish Gandhi", p. 158

⁷⁹Nathan Katz, "The Ritual Enactments of the Cochin Jews: The Powers of Purity and Nobility." *Journal of Ritual Studies*, vol 4:2; 1990, pp. 189-225 for more information also see A. DeCosta, "The White and Black Jews of Malabar", *India Church Quarterly Review*, 1895, pp. 110-14 & H.H. Smythe and T. Gershuny, "Jewish Caste of Cochin, India," *Sociology and Social Research*, vol. 41:2; 1956, 108-11& Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, "Jewish Apartheid and a Jewish Gandhi", *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 50:3/4, 1988, p. 162& J.B. Segal, "White and Black Jews of Cochin, the Story of a Controversy", p. 233

⁸⁰Bama was the slave agent of the famous Jewish merchant Abraham Ben Yiju and he also married a native slave women from Malabar named Ashu and gave her and her children all rights. For details see S. D. Goitein and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza, (India Book)*, Leiden, 2008, pp. 341, 607, 620, 626, 630 (for Male Slave Agent) & 70, 632-34 (for Female Slave)

⁸¹S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, Vol.III, pp.261-263

⁸²*Letter from the Rabbinical Court of Fustat to Madmun b. Hasan re Estate of Ibn Jumayhir*, Fustat, 1146 in S. D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages* p.525

ben Yiju lived in Manjarur (modern day Mangalore) for around seventeen years (1132-49).⁸³ A few months after his arrival in India, Yiju bought and liberated an Indian Slave girl, whom he refers to as “Ashu the slave girl, the proselyte of Tuluva”. The deed of manumission is dated October 17, 1132, just few months after Yiju’s arrival in Malabar. This indicates the fact that manumission of Ashu was done with the intention of marrying her.⁸⁴ This marriage was, of course not a simple affair, as ben Yiju was a prominent personality. This may be a reason why abundant information is available regarding him and his personal life. As far as the Talmudic Laws were concerned, one could only marry a slave after they were freed and converted to Judaism. Conjugal relationships between slaves and masters were strictly prohibited, and one could not marry a slave after entering into a conjugal affair.⁸⁵ Yiju must have, therefore, taken a well thought out decision of freeing Ashu as he was firmly resolved to marry her. He also followed proper procedure of manumission as he not only wished to marry her but also to provide her a respectable status within the socio-religious space of the community. The unique relationship between Yiju and Ashu here was unlike any other master-servant conjugal engagement. Yiju not only emancipated her but also gave her a Jewish name, ‘Berakha’, which was not a common practice (as traced in *Geniza* documents).⁸⁶ Except for the deed of manumission, no other document speaks about this female slave-turned-wife.

Yiju and Ashu had three children together-two boys and a girl. These children, unlike their mother, were referred to in the various letters written by the merchants during that time. These merchants often sent their best wishes to children of Yiju. The letters reveal that the name of the elder son of Yiju was Surur.⁸⁷ It was a common wish among Jewish merchants to go back to their home land; same was with Yiju as well. Yiju finally left India somewhere around 1148-49 and went to Aden along with one of his sons and the daughter. Though he did not mention about

⁸³“*Accounts of Abraham Ben Yiju’s Workshop for Bronze Vessels,*” India (apparently 1132-39, 1145-49) in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p.644 also see Amitabh Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, New Delhi, 1992, for a fascinating life story of Abraham ben Yiju

⁸⁴“*Deed of Mnumission of Ashu, Slave Girl Purchased by Abraham Ben Yiju,*” Mangalore, October 17, 1132 in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 632-634

⁸⁵S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages* p.69

⁸⁶*Deed of Mnumission of Ashu, Slave Girl Purchased by Abraham Ben Yiju, Mangalore*, October 17, 1132 in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 632-634

⁸⁷*Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abraham Ben Yiju,, Aden*, 1134 in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, p. 70

his wife in the letter like he specifically mentions his son and daughter, it is very much speculated that Ashu was also accompanying him.⁸⁸

However, the journey of acceptance of a slave girl within the Jewish community of Yemen was not smooth. A document of *Responsa* from Yemen concerning a slave girl's betrothal was a clear indication that some people were not happy with this slave-master relationship. This might be the reason why Yiju was in Yemen for some time without his family.⁸⁹ Despite the societal pressure, Yiju always tried his best to mingle his new family within the community he belonged to. Yiju's deep urge to marry her daughter within his own family was one such effort.⁹⁰ As far as the inheritance of Yiju's property is concerned, he gave it to his daughter and Surur, the son-in-law (who happened to be his nephew) as both his sons died.⁹¹ Thus, in spite of facing pressure from the society, the children of Yiju and Ashu got their rights due to the socio-religious aura of their father. Nevertheless, this is only one example which was documented in the *Geniza* documents.

There must be numerous others which did not get documented. Yiju, being an influential merchant, might not have been scared of the societal norms. However, the small scale merchants might have felt the other way round. Yiju himself was a learned man who was well versed in Torah literature, wrote some instructions regarding the manumission of slave girls. He must have been inspired to do so by the need of the fellow merchants engaged in such kind of relationships.⁹² The Cochin Jewish settlement in Malabar is considered to be established by these merchants who came from Mediterranean to Malabar for the purpose of trade, and during that time, they got involved with the local women or slaves or servants working for them as their wives did not travel with them. Thus, such engagements had sown the seeds of Jewish diaspora in Malabar. However, the social evil of class and caste distinctions do not let people cherish that past, rather some consider it to be a mark of shame. When it comes to identity-building, the role

⁸⁸Letters from Abraham Ben Yiju to his Brother and Sisters after His Safe Return from India, Aden, 11 September, 1149 in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.681-683

⁸⁹S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 73-78

⁹⁰Letters from Abraham Ben Yiju to his Brother and Sisters after His Safe Return from India, Aden, 11 September, 1149 in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.679-80

⁹¹Letters from Abraham Ben Yiju to his Brother Joseph in Mazara, Sicily, Fustat, 1153 in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages* pp.727-730

⁹²Deed of Manumission of Ashu, Slave Girl Purchased by Abraham Ben Yiju, Mangalore, October 17, 1132 & Instructions for Manumission of a Slave Girl Written by Abraham Ben Yiju, Egypt, after 1152 in S.D.Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages* p.632 & p.723

and importance of the serving class has been sidelined. It may not as well be an exaggeration to say that the social division among Cochin Jewish community was done in the background of the then prevailing merchant-slave interactions.

6.5 Nature of Social Composition of Malabar: Jews and the other Religious Communities

Apart from the Hindus who are the majority population of Kerala, other religious groups also contribute to the formation of multicultural society of Kerala.⁹³ Jews, Muslims and Christians are the other religious communities of Kerala. All these three communities try to position themselves in the elite socio-cultural category by framing legendary stories about their origin. In order to glorify one community over another, they somehow tend to prove themselves of being more ancient than each other. Each community follows a similar pattern of upward mobility, within which these communities try to trace their origin to a sacred period and place. The sea connection has been emphasized by all communities which show the importance of maritime trade in their lives.⁹⁴ As far as the maritime connections are concerned, the history created by the Jewish community has also taken care of the fact that they should be shown as a trading community, who are in good terms with the ruling authorities. Among the ten paintings which are hanging in the *Paradesi* synagogue at Cochin, six paintings convey that the Jews came to Cranganore for the purpose of trade and received great amount of respect from the rulers throughout the time.⁹⁵

All the diaspora communities that came for the purpose of trade were well received by the ruler in the lieu of trade and revenue benefits. The existence of trade guilds like *Anjuvannam* and *Manigramam* which belonged to the Jewish and Christians communities in Kerala respectively, points out to the prosperity of these diaspora communities. *Anjuvannam*,

⁹³ For detailed information on the various caste and religious communities present in Malabar refer to T. K. Gopal Panikkar, *Malabar and its Folks: A Systematic Description of the Social Customs and Institutions of Malabar*, G. A. Natesan and Co., Madras, 1900

⁹⁴ For legends related to Christian community see James, Montague Rhodes, trans. "The Acts of Thomas" In *the Apocryphal New Testament. Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1924, pp. 364-438; Thomas, P. J. "The South Indian Tradition of the Apostle Thomas", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1924, pp. 213-23; Shalva Weil, "Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lord, Israel: A Study of the Persistence of Ethnicity Identity", D. Phil. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1977; for Muslim community see M. J. Rowlandson, trans. *Toufut-ul-mujahideen: An Historical Work in the Arabian Languages*, by Zain al-Din (Zeen-ul-Deen), Oriental Translation Fund, 1833; J. B. Segal, "Jews of Cochin", p. 386; M. G. S. Narayana, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, p. 39; community see J. B. Segal, "Jews of Cochin", p. 386

⁹⁵ In order to portray the Jewish communities' history, ten paintings were got made by the community itself by local artist, S.S. Krishna. At present these paintings are kept in the store house of *Paradesi* Synagogue.

which had been considered by most historians as a merchant guild of Jews in Kerala, was given the responsibility of the care of the church as its guardian (*karalar*) along with *Manigramam* merchant guild, which has often been viewed as a Christian merchant guild.⁹⁶ The members of *Anjuvannam*, had been speculated to be Arab Jews, or Arab Muslim, Christians 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 merchants' group, which was semi-independent in nature.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ Keeping aside the debate over the origin and composition of these guilds, one thing comes out very clearly that Malabar was inhabited by many ethnic and religious groups and their economic conduct leads to the formation of a multi-structural society as well. The multi community structure of Malabar was at the core of its existence, as each group though working for their own benefits, benefited the socio-economic structure in its overall development. M.G.S. Narayan has called it cultural symbiosis.⁹⁹

The state was also very much dependent upon the economic gains facilitated by these merchants. However, this was not new for Kerala as one of the ancient Tamil texts; *Shilppadikaram*, written in the second century, highlights such an arrangement. The book reads:

*"The riches of the Puhar (Kaveripumpattinam) ship-owners made the kings of faraway lands envious. The most costly merchandise, the rarest foreign produce, reached the city by sea and caravans."*¹⁰⁰

Apart from the constant commodity movement, the movement of culture and idea was occurring correspondingly. As far as the copper plates are concerned, apart from the economic perspectives, it also sheds light on the social perspectives as it has been seen that the Jewish merchants were given the fifth status position in the society.¹⁰¹

The commonality of similar customs prevailed in more than one society, which hints at the pattern of adaptation in general. As far as the kinship ties are concerned, all societies such as

⁹⁶ Gopinath Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, p.68, 71

⁹⁷ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, New Delhi, 1988, pp.24-25

⁹⁸ M.G.S.Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, 1996, p.155

⁹⁹ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1972, pp. 1-8

¹⁰⁰ Alain Danielou, trans., *Shilppadikaram*, New York, 1965, p.6

¹⁰¹ Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India*, Columbia, 1993, p.

Hindu, Muslims, Christians and Jewish, had strong kinship bonds. According to this kinship system, there used to be one head of the family who also happened to be the head of the village with all the decision making powers in the both economy and social aspects.¹⁰² There are a lot of similarities in the customs that the Jews of Kerala had with that of the Syrian Christians. In the Kerala Knanaya section of the Syrian Christians' wedding, the bride stands on the right side and two rings are placed on both the bride and groom's fingers. Both of these customs are believed to be derived from Jewish temple rites.¹⁰³ There is yet another resemblance with the Hindu Brahmin rituals in the Cochin Jewish marriages, wherein while tying the knot, the bride wears a *Tali*, a golden ornament around her neck.¹⁰⁴ A special sort of canopy is used by the Knanaya Christians during their celebrations at home. This is similar to the canopy ritual of the Jewish wedding called *Huppa*. Also, the Christians take a ceremonial bathing on the eve of marriage, which has been linked to the *miqva*, the purifying bath of the Jews.¹⁰⁵ The Knanaya Christians have many rituals similar to that of the Cochin Jews. Even the taboos and myths were similar. The taboos about women in their menses¹⁰⁶ and a culture of hereditary priesthood were all common to both. The concept of hereditary priesthood was more of a reflection of the Hindu Brahmin pedigree.¹⁰⁷ In addition to these, not just the similarities in the rituals but legends, Malayalam folk songs, pattern of settlements and common sense of origin, all point to the intersecting stories of the diaspora communities in the Malabar.¹⁰⁸

6.6 Identity Building, a Need for a Diaspora Community: Legends and Popular Stories

In the quest for revealing the past of a community, it becomes inevitable to look within the community itself. While doing so, we come across some legends and stories created by the community itself. Though relying completely on these sources could distort the course of history, at the same time looking into it can give a socio-cultural perspective of the community. As far as the course of identity building by communities is concerned, it follows a similar pattern as the need of identity building seems crucial for all communities who were not native to the

¹⁰² M. David and Kathleen Gough, *Matrimonial Kinship*, Berkeley, 1961, p.334

¹⁰³ S. G. Pothan, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, Bombay, 1963, p.67

¹⁰⁴ M. David and Kathleen Gough, *Matrimonial Kinship*, p. 328

¹⁰⁵ Jacob Vellian, *The St. Thomas Christians Encyclopedia of India*, Madras, 1973, p.74

¹⁰⁶ Bahadur Rao Ayyar and L. K. Anantakrishna, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, Ernakulam, 1926, pp. xii

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 2-3

¹⁰⁸ Shalva Weil, "Symmetry between Christians and Jews in India: The Cnanite Christians and the Cochin Jews of Kerala," in *Jews in India*, ed. by Thomas A. Timberg, New Delhi, 1986, p.194

place. Kerala boasts of the existence of the three Abrahamic communities- Jews, Christians and Muslims. Each of these communities has their legendary account of how they have come to south western India and how sacred their place of origin is. For Jews, the story starts when their second temple was destroyed, and the diaspora spread themselves along the four corners of the globe. Thus, the holy city of Jerusalem was connected to Shingly as mentioned in the local Jewish traditions.¹⁰⁹ The accounts of three religions very reassuringly are based on a common plot of arrival in India, each with their own versions. For Christians, it was Jesus himself who sends Thomas to journey to India.¹¹⁰ Clearly, the time and place are quite significant here. The Malabari Muslims trace their story to Mecca and times of Prophet. There is a tale of the last Cheraman Perumal king, who went to Mecca and his meeting with the Prophet is clubbed with the arrival of the first Muslim pilgrims.¹¹¹ All the three religions make a clear reference to undertaking the sea travel, so crucial during those times to their economic development. The dependency and rise of maritime trade must have been the reason behind doing so.¹¹²

Another theme which is common among all the three stories is their grand welcome by the Cheraman Perumal to his land. Thomas tells an account of his meeting with Cheraman Perumal at a royal wedding feast, the song of the Jewish flute-player girl, and the conversion of the Brahmin families.¹¹³ In the Muslim version, The Muslim legend recollects the Cheraman Perumal king's invitation to the pilgrims to return after visiting Adam's Peak. In one of the versions, he accompanied them back to Mecca and converted to Islam.¹¹⁴ It is needless to say that each community received royal charters, two on copper plates and one on a stone inscription, which granted high privileges and a degree of autonomy. These charters are often associated with the creation of Synagogues, Churches, or Mosques.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin*, 1993, p. 16

¹¹⁰ Rhodes Montague James, trans. "The Acts of Thomas", in *The Apocryphal New Testament, Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses*, London, 1924, p. 365

¹¹¹ M. G. S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, p. ix

¹¹² Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin*, 1993, p. 16

¹¹³ Rhodes Montague James, "The Acts of Thomas", 1924, pp. 367-68

¹¹⁴ For more information on the history of the Muslims of Kerala see this Arabic work written by a Kerala Muslim in sixteenth century. Rowlandson, Lt. M. J., *Tohfut-ul-Mujahideen, An Historical Work in the Arabic Language*, by Zain-al-Din (Zeen-ul-deen), London, 1833

¹¹⁵ T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, pp.66-75. E. Hultzsch in *Epigraphia Indica*, Calcutta, 1894, Vol. 3, p. 69. Swiderski, *Blood Wedding*, p. 5. M. G. S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, pp. 38-42, 95-97

The self-understanding of communities has the capability to look between the remembered and the unremembered history. Moreover, this self-understanding also creates an identity of the group, their outlook and their social standing. As mentioned several times, copper plates are of immense importance to the Jews of Malabar, as it gives them a legacy to cherish their association with the royal authority. Though the historically proven date is different, the community loves to push it some more centuries back. The recipient of the Jewish copper plate Joseph Rabban, head of the Jewish community is the most cherished person within the Jewish legends. There are numerous stories and songs describing his goodness and bravery. The glory of these copper plates has been preserved by the Jewish community of Cochin in the form of folk songs. One such song, a long one titled “*Songs of Fame*”, describes the honor and protection lavished upon the Jews by their Hindu ruler:

“In the city of Kotsnagiri (Kodungallur; Cranganore), which God has established with increasing fame

Since ancient times in Glory -

There were elephants in the front, three Rajas,

and continues clapping of hands, honoring the king,

Joseph Rabban, born in grace, we sing his praises.

The loved one of the place, and endeared to the princes,

Accomplisher of things without outside aid,

Whom everyone adores, and who owns properties and all his daily wants,

Joseph Rabban, born in grace, we sing his praises.

As chief he has in procession

Clapping of hands, the hand lamp held by a chain,

The lamp of the day and the royal robes.

Will the eye be satisfied with the sight,

When with all the paraphernalia goes the chief Joseph Rabban,

Who sheds lustre all around?

Joseph Rabban, born in grace, we sing his praises.

Town and kingdom all shown with lights,

To have glaze to see the king,

*Handsome he is, with scepter in hand,
Linked gracefully in poise and carriage,
Accompanied by the golden flag and the victory banner,
He is welcomed as chief of the land,
Joseph Rabban, born in grace, we sing his praises,
Joseph Rabban, born in grace, we sing his praises.*

*When in procession, his palanquin is borne by bearers.
People yearn for the sight.
And when the palanquin comes into sight
The dancers and clowns swing to the rhythm,
Thus shedding luster.
Joseph Rabban, born in grace, we sing his praises.*

*Singing and dancing, spreading the dust at their feet,
Reciting his praises and virtues,
Are you coming, oh little bird?
Along the streets, partaking in the procession of glory,
Joseph Rabban, who is resplendent and born in grace, we sing his praises.*

*Thus with banner fluttering, dust enveloping,
The king reaches the palace in pomp.
At the palace gate gold coin are thrown (to the poor).
Oh little bird, are you coming to witness the scene of Joseph
Rabban's procession?
Loved and respect and shining in glory,
Joseph Rabban born in grace, we sing his praises.*

*With the horns (of the bulls) tastefully decorated,
With birds flying about them in grace,*

*The king enters and makes arrangements
To curb the predatory Jonnakar (Muslims) shedding innocent
blood in his domain,
With the assistance of the three Rajas.
Joseph Rabban, born in grace, we sing his praises.”¹¹⁶*

Along with the songs on the grand reception of Joseph Rabban the head of the community, these songs also covered the history related to the famous copper plates received by their head. The folk song written in Malayalam reads:

*“In world famous Vanchi (Cranganore), from the exalted monarch,
He (Joseph Rabban) received favors such as the crown, the daytime lamp, and walking cloth (like our “red carpet”
a cloth a greatly honored individual would walk upon).
He filled the city with money gladly scattered under head and foot.
He, the chief subject of the crowned king.
Sprinkle 3600 grains of rice!
In the year yarivitare (reckoned an acrostic for 1246 CE), from him according to everybody’s desire,
He got the copper plates beautifully engraved.
You shall have an elephant if you describe the coming of Sri Anandan (Blissful Lord,” an horrific for Joseph
Rabban).
See the royal Sri Anandan come rising on the back of an elephant;
See the virtuous Sri Anandan come riding on horseback. Under a green umbrella, behold!
Women received him and he entered the synagogue.”¹¹⁷*

The plates express a relationship between the leader of the Jews, Joseph Rabban “the Syrian,” and the CheramanPerumal king, Bhaskar Ravi Varman I. They symbolize Jewish-Hindu relationships in general and moreover they gave the Jews a magnified perception of themselves,

¹¹⁶Translation by Jacob Cohen in Barbara C. Johnson, “Shingli or Jewish Cranganore in the Tradition of the Cochin Jews of India”, with an Appendix on the Cochin Jewish Chronicles.” Maters’s thesis, Smith College, 1975, pp. 124-25

¹¹⁷ I. A. Simon, the songs of the Jews of cochin and Their Historical Significance”, *Bulletin of the Rama Varma Research Institute*, vol. 13, 1947, pp.22-23

wherein they viewed that all Jews were Joseph Rabban, and all Nayyar rulers were Cheraman Perumal.¹¹⁸

The relationship between the Jews and the ruling authority has been a major factor in the history of Jewish diaspora of Malabar, which led to the survival of Jews and which has been often glorified in the Jewish folk songs sung by the women of the community. These songs were sung by them for a variety of occasions in the life of Jews, such as religious festivals, weddings, circumcision etc. These songs are in a unique Jewish version of adialect of Malayalam with the inclusion of words from Hebrew, Tamil, Spanish, Dutch and English languages. The songs have been passed on from generation to generation, and some of them have been written in the notebooks conserved by women of the community, who used to sing these songs. There is another song which again glorifies the stay and status of the Jews in Hindu society of Kerala:

“The hero who received investiture from the lord of the unique city (Cranganore) arrives.

Get ready the silver cup, the betel and the big silver plate.

Let everything be ready! Let everyone be merry!

When he arrived on elephant back

With ornamental fans decorated with a thousand peacock plumes,

He lavishly throws money into every lap.

The jewel of a hero, the Syrian (Joseph Rabban),

Let the Jewish synagogue prosper for hundreds of years!

Let us proclaim that Jews live here!

Let us bow down at the Jewish synagogue!

Let it flourish for the hundreds of years!”¹¹⁹

Thus, the praises were showered on Joseph Rabban and he was made the ideal man of the entire community, to be followed by all the Jewish men from all generations. Along with proposing an idol and his intimate relation with the Kings, these songs reflect the idea of going back to their promised land someday, which Israel is. The song reads:

¹¹⁸ Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India*, 1993, p.46

¹¹⁹ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, pp.84-85

“May Shaddai the Almighty bless you and make you great.

May you be the greatest among the great.

So says God, who blesses Abraham.

The land that is promised, from where you were dispersed-

May you inherit it, and all blessings will be yours.

May you be the leader, like Joseph Rabban.”¹²⁰

Though the songs mentioned before reflect the thankfulness of the Jewish community towards the king for giving a grand reception and a good position to the Jews in Malabar, this very song echoes the dream of the community to go back to their holy land, which is Israel. Though the idea of going back to their home land where they belong to, has been reflected in the *Geniza* documents. The Merchants came for the purpose of trade and preferred to go back to their home land.¹²¹ The inclusion of this kind of thought was the development of the post medieval era, as the medieval documents lack such extreme emotions. This was the major social change which took place in the Jewish community of Malabar, in the time span between medieval to modern.

The migration of Jews to India happened in several phases. With every phase, there are different Jewish narratives of varying origins, as documented by different visitors to Cochin. P.M. Jussay suggests that from the study of Malayalam folk songs of the Cochin Jews, Shingli and Joseph Rabban were the focal point of *paradesijews*' historical accounts whereas the Malabari Jews have accounts of different cities and rulers. This conclusion was on the basis of the analysis of three songs- “The Song of Evarayi,” “The Song of the Bird,” and “The Song of Psliathachan,”¹²²

“*The Song of Evarayi*” talks about EvarayiMoliaru, Malayalam term for Mudaliyar (the office of Jewish community leader established by the Dutch) and begins in Jerusalem. The song describes that Evarayi begged his father's permission to visit Malnad (Malabar or hill country). After receiving his father's blessings of peace, he made his first stop in Egypt, and then in

¹²⁰ Barbara C. Johnson, “Shingli or Jewish Cranganore”, p. 127

¹²¹ *Letters from Abraham Ben Yiju to his Brothers and Sisters after his safe Return from India*, Aden 1149 in S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp. 679-87

¹²² P. M. Jussay, “The Song of Evarayi”, in *Jews in India*, ed. Thomas A. Timberg, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 145-60

Yemen, where he employed the best carpenter available to build the best ship for him. He even rewarded the skilled carpenter with a silk shawl and golden bracelet, a custom unique to Kerala. The learned Rabbi Avaroh (Abraham) joined him on his journey and they sailed together. Their ship was approaching Persia, which induced them with fear and they instead headed towards Parur Bay, in central Kerala. There they got frightened again and fled to Shibushu, decoded by Jussay as some nearby region of Chennamangalam or Cranganore. They got a grand reception there by the local people and then they decided to build a synagogue at that place for which they called the best carpenter present on the land. Once the synagogue was established, Rabbi Avaroh chanted blessings and Evarayi studied the *Midrashim*.¹²³ Then the learned Rabbi along with Evarayi decided to make an offering. The local Nayar leaders caught a deer, slaughtered a deer, inserted a silver rod into its mouth and made the offering.¹²⁴ This tale of the fact that all the Jews originated from ancient Israel and made their way to India via Egypt and Yemen, with a very short stay at Persian port is what the community wishes to reflect. Before an agreement on the direct route from Jerusalem to Cranganore, as shown in the Cochin synagogue paintings, local Jews often told visitors that they had come to the Malabar from Persia, where they had fled the fifth-century persecution of King Khobad.¹²⁵

There are interesting accounts of Parur, as has been repeatedly mentioned in the Jewish legendary tales. Parur was one of the most traditional settlements of Jews in Kerala, located to the north of Cranganore. During the 11th century, the Chera Empire fell and the Zamorin of Calicut rose to power. They used to favour Muslims and this became a big hassle in the Jewish control over trade. The consequence was an exodus of Jews from these regions of the north to the territory of the raja of Cochin, who had maintained a pro Jewish policy.¹²⁶

Faced with odds, the Jews were welcomed to their new home, *shibushu*, which also finds a mention in the “the song of Evarayi”, which was somewhere around Chennamangalam or Cranganore. There was an increased importance to Nayyars joining Evarayi and the Rabbi in the

¹²³In general *Midrashim* is a narrative intended to fill in gaps in the larger Torah narrative or to explain it. *Midrashim* is a text that the leader of the Jews, Evarayi consulted as they built their synagogue, though the song does not say which *Midrash* specifically

¹²⁴ P. M. Jussay, “The Song of Evarayi”, in *Jews in India*, ed. Thomas A. Timberg, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 153-54

¹²⁵ Krishna Chandra Sagar, *Foreign Influence on Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1992, p. 250

¹²⁶ P. M. Jussay, “The Song of Evarayi” in A. Thomas Timberg, ed. *Jews in India*, New Delhi, 1986 p. 149

deer hunt, as hunting was considered to be a royal privilege in India.¹²⁷ This also somewhere indicates how well the Jews were treated by the Kings of Kerala. This royal treatment found its mention on several occasions where Jews were conferred on royal grants and copper plates. Various songs on Cochin Jews talk about their arrival in Kerala. One particular song, “The Song of the Bird”, has been used very symbolically where the travails of a little bird, which is in search of a guava has been described. The little Bird- Parrot has come to stand for Jews and their journey for the search of guava signifies their journey to India, which was considered to be a land of opportunities.

The song talks about the bird being chased by a hunter, who shot it with his slingshot. The bird was in great agony and it lost all the colours on its feathers, which could have primarily given it a flight in air. Everything here is very symbolic and the loss of colour has been attributed to the loss in some of their observances.¹²⁸ This change is very visible as the Jews resorted to social division, a feature of Hinduism, which was against the preaching of equality of Judaism. As the song progresses, the bird keeps flying as it does not get a resting place by the side of Parur sea and continued to fly till it reached a green mansion under a diamond studded umbrella, in an elevated spot. The elevated spot in discussion is considered to be one of the hills at Kunjarkari, as mentioned by Ibn Batuta. Yet another song in “Song of Paliathachan” clearly associates the entire event of Jewish arrival in Cranganore with the assistance of local ruling authorities. The Paliathachan, as described in the song has been identified as PaliathAchan, a Nayar nobleman, who had vowed his allegiance to the Rajah of Cochin, whose mansion is still situated at Chennamangalam, a few miles to the east of Cranganore.¹²⁹

6.7 Shingli Tune of the Cochin Jews

In the pursuit of finding historical narratives through the unconventional sources, Johanna Spector, has analyzed the Jewish music, with special reference to Shingli tune¹³⁰ of the Cochin Jews, in order to trace the origin of the Jewish community of Kerala. She tells us how music

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 150

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 155

¹²⁹ P. M. Jussay, “The Song of Evarayi”, pp. 150-51

¹³⁰ Cochin Jews have a sizeable body of prayer melodies which they call Shingli tunes, a name that has been identified by historians and medievalists with the original place of settlement for Jews on the Malabar coast of India. Cochin Jews claim that the tunes originated in Cranganore or Shingli, that is why it had been named such.

reflects the history and reveals lots of facts related to the Jewish past in Malabar. Music will help us to know the influences and inspirations of the Cochin Jewish community. There have been numerous efforts by scholars to trace early Jewish connection with Balylonia and Yemen, which Jews, often claim in their legends. This work largely focuses on their stories in the context of Malabar and various places within it. In doing so, the examination of Shingli tune becomes inevitable. As has been mentioned several times, Jews take pride in attaching their legacy to the old town of Cranganore, known to Greeks as Muziris and Shingly to the Jews. It seems that there is a clear influence of Yemenite music on Jewish folk songs. Though the community had a motive to prove themselves to be as ancient as possible, historically speaking, we come across traders who were active along the trading networks of the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean regions, and also had a close connection with Yemen. Madmun b. Hasan b. Bundar, a celebrated ship-owning merchant in *Geniza* documents during twelfth century was *Nagid* (Prince) of the Land of Yemen.¹³¹

The beauty of the women of Yemen is often praised in the Hebrew literature and the merchants mentioned in *Geniza* documents have been recorded to have married Yemenite women.¹³² The interaction through commerce must have engaged the Jewish community in exchanging some cultural aspects as well. In the background of this cultural development, it has been found that the Cochin religious music had been strongly influenced and inspired by the Yemenite, Babylonian and sometimes Kurdish style as well.¹³³ Another important observation regarding Cochin Jews in the context of music is that, they never used music apart from their socio-religious purposes. However, the Jews of the Middle East had been great musicians. The Cochin Jews did not choose the profession deliberately in order to maintain their high status in the Malabar society. The profession of a musician was not considered a high class profession in the Jewish society or culture.¹³⁴

Along with Yemenite influence, the major part of the Jewish prayer songs is Sephardic in nature. This influence must have come after the arrival of Jews from Spain. The characteristics

¹³¹“Letters from Madmun b. Hasan to Abu Zikri Kohen,” Aden, 1130-1140, in S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, pp.371-76

¹³²Ibid. p.11

¹³³ Johanna Spector, “Yemenite and Babylonian Elements in the Musical Heritage of the Jews of Cochin, India”, *American Society for Jewish Music*, vol. 7:1; 1986, p. 19

¹³⁴ Laurence D. Loeb, “The Jewish Musician and the Music of Fars”, *Asian Music*, vol. 4:1; 1972, pp. 8-9

such as softness, clear phrasing, effortless voice production and a slow tempo in the Cochin cantillation seems to have been taken from Sephardic tradition.¹³⁵ Though the multicultural nature of Malabar has affected the life of the Jewish community in various ways, they have been successful in keeping their synagogue music unaffected by the host culture.¹³⁶

6.8 A look at the Past through the Paintings

In the arrangement of unfolding history through unconventional sources, the visual depiction forms an interesting category just like the folk songs, music and legends. Last but not the least, this chapter will end up with the discussion on the ten paintings that were made by the Cochin Jewish community on the occasion of four hundredth anniversary of the building of the *paradesi* synagogue located in the Mattancherry's Jew Town, in 1968.

The first painting shows a bazar filled with spices and ivory, a shipping interport of the ancient world. It is Shingly, the Jew's ancestral home in Malabar. The caption for this painting reads: "There was trade between King Solomon's Palestine (992-952 BCE) and Malabar Coast. The biblical name for India was Odhu (Hodu). Teak, ivory, spice and peacocks were exported to Palestine." long before the emergence of the Cochin Jewish community, the linkage between India and Israel was established. The entire history of the community was grafted onto earlier traditions.

¹³⁵ Johanna Spector, "Jewish Songs from Cochin India: With Special Reference to the Cantillation and Shingli Tunes", *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. IV, Jerusalem, 1973, pp. 246

¹³⁶ Johanna Spector, "Jewish Songs from Cochin India", pp. 245-51 & Johanna Spector, "Shingli Tune of the Cochin Jews", *Asian Music (Indian Music Issue)*, vol. 3:2; 1972, pp.23-28



PAINTING NO. 1

Source: Bala Menon, "Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue," online source, October 2011

The second painting depicts the migration of Jews to Shingli and beginning of Jewish diaspora in India. The painting contains the image of Jews who are being attacked by a soldier. On the other hand, some Jews are ready to sail to Shingli in order to escape such horror. This painting has two captions: “Destruction of the second temple in 70 C.E. by the Romans” and “The consequent dispersal of the Jews to the four corners of the earth from Palestine.”¹³⁷



PAINTING NO. 2

Source: Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue,” online source, October 2011

¹³⁷Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue,” online source, October 2011, also see Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The last Jews of Cochin*, 1993, p. 4

The third painting shows a ship full of Biblical looking Jews about to land on a verdant, hospitable coast. The painting also contains a map of India on its right corner specifically pointing towards Shingli, where Jews initially arrived. The painting has the caption: “*Landing of the Jews at Shingli (Cranganore) in 72 C.E.*”



PAINTING NO. 3

Source: Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue,” online source, October 2011

The fourth painting depicts the reception of the Jews by the King and Jews offering some gifts to the King. The king is attired like an idealized Nayar maharaja, his personnel holding the royal parasol and beating royal drums. The caption for this painting reads: “The raja of Cranganore receives the Jews,”



Painting No. 4

Source: Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue,” online source, October 2011

The fifth painting based on the theme of warm reception, is one of the most significant among all. The most celebrated Copper plate in the history of Jewish Community is being bestowed to Joseph Rabban, the great leader of the community. Looking at the painting, it makes it clear that they have tried to show the palace of the Maharaja of Cochin at Mattancherry, where the King had been shown to hand over the copper plate to Joseph Rabban. The caption says:

“Joseph Rabban, the leader of the Jews receiving the copper plates from Cheraman Perumal.”

He was made the prince of *Anjuvannam*, and thus, a Jewish kingdom was established at Cranganore in 379 C.E. According to the facts provided by historians, this copper plate was given to the Joseph Rabban by the Chera ruler Bhaskar Ravi Varman in 1000 C.E.¹³⁸ *Anjuvanam* was the Jewish merchant guild of Cranganore.¹³⁹ The basic idea behind pushing the time period of these copper plates and to call *Anjuvanam* a kingdom reflects the urge of the Cochin Jews to establish their unique and grand identity. Moreover, showing an intense socio-cultural bond between Hindu rulers of Kerala and Cochin Jews, has been the enduring intent.

¹³⁸ 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; ElamkulamKunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History* Kottayam, 1970

¹³⁹ T.A. Gopinath Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vol.II, Madras , 1916, pp. 66-75



PAINING NO. 5

Source: Bala Menon, "Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue," online source, October 2011

The sixth painting is based on the theme of quarrel among the Jewish community which reads:

“Two of the original silver trumpets, used in the second temple at Jerusalem, with the ineffable name carved on them, were brought to Cranganore and were blown by Levites on the eve of the Sabbath. Once the Levites were late and the Laity (non-Levites) usurped their privilege and in the resulting quarrel, the trumpets were unfortunately destroyed.”

There is no historical evidence to this event; it is completely based on the oral tradition. This can be interpreted as an event to establish the Cochin Jews’ connection to the ancient Israel in the days of the Temple and the destruction of the trumpets might be an unfortunate symbol for the loss of the paradisiacal Shingli.¹⁴⁰ However, this event can also be interpreted as the conflict between the two sections of the Cochin Jewish community to claim superiority over Cranganore.¹⁴¹



PAINTING NO. 6

Source: Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi Synagogue*,” online source, October 2011

¹⁴⁰Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The last Jews of Cochin*, 1993, p. 5

¹⁴¹Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi Synagogue*,” online source, October 2011

After showing destruction of Cranganore, next in the row is the movement of Jews from Cranganore to Cochin. The caption for the seventh painting reads: “Construction of the Cochin Synagogue next to the Maharaja’s palace and temple in 1568.” This painting like the earlier ones continues to cherish the warm relationship between the Jewish community and the ruler. This time, the ruling authority is Maharaja of Cochin, who did not only give them shelter but also allowed to build a synagogue adjacent to his palace. Through this painting, the growing significance of Cochin Jews is very prominent, which grew by each passing day.



PAINTING NO. 7

Source: Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue,” online source, October 2011

It seems there is a chronological mistake as the eighth painting depicts the fall of Shingli in 1524. The time of its occurrence makes it to be on the seventh position. However the caption reads: “Destruction of Cranganore by the Moors and Portuguese in 1524. Joseph Azar, the last Jewish prince, swam to Cochin with his wife on his shoulders. The Jews placed themselves under the protection of the Maharaja of Cochin.”



PAINTING NO. 8

Source: Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue,” online source, October 2011

The ninth and tenth paintings share the common theme of the special socio-cultural bond between Jewish community and maharaja. The caption for this painting reads: “The Maharaja of Travancore presenting gold crown for the Torah in 1805”.



PAINTING NO. 9

Source: Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue,” online source, October 2011

The caption for the last painting is “The last reigning Maharaja of Cochin addressing the Jewish subjects in the synagogue before relinquishing his throne in 1949.”¹⁴²



PAINTING NO. 10

Source: Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue,” online source, October 2011

¹⁴²Bala Menon, “Paintings in the *Paradesi* Synagogue,” online source, October 2011 & Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The last Jews of Cochin*, 1993, pp. 6-7

These paintings tell the story of Jewish community of Malabar very evidently. Each painting unfolds events of the past, in its own dramatic way. These paintings are not a mere piece of art and it was not even meant to be such. These paintings contain the historical perception of the Cochin Jews about themselves. It is their way of narrating their history, in which they chose to present the community to be the most ancient among other communities present there. Though there is a lag in terms of chronology and time period of the events, it does not make it a total myth. The historical sources also prove the existence of Jewish people in Malabar since early times. It is just that the Jews want to begin their history even before the historically estimated time for the purpose of creating a unique identity which will eventually help them position themselves high in the socio-cultural ladder.

6.9 Conclusion

Thus, the social fabric of the Jews in Malabar has undergone various changes in terms of its behaviour. Although, the Jews across the world adapted to various cultures, their assimilation of the local culture was unique. The Jewish community also saw a social division, a feature non-existent in the Judaism elsewhere. Jews along with other communities were also trying to talk of their legacy, tracing it to the most ancient times, so that they could create a distinct identity of their own in the land of Malabar. While all this is significant, the underlying reason of why such unique events unfolded was their ability to take maximum advantage of the ever-expanding economic opportunities. *Pardesi* Jews used discrimination as a successful tool to gain dominance in wealth and top position in social hierarchy, all because they saw the Malabari/Black Jews to be wealthy.

It is clear on multiple occasions that Malabari Jews would often consult their heads in Egypt on matters of dispute. This hints towards the fact that Jews in Malabar came from different places and their return to homeland is about going back to the land from where they came in the proximate past. Jews attach themselves to the place where they were commercially and religiously bound with in their proximate memory. Depending on where Jews migrated from, they dreamt of going back to their place of origin like Cairo, Alexandria, Tunisia, and Sicily etc. The idea of returning to their native land persisted between the period of 11th to 14th century. During this time, there were no Synagogues in India. The Jews were yet to carve a

socio-cultural identity for themselves in the social sphere of Malabar through trade. Largely, the notion of going back could also be because of the trading opportunities provided by the ruling authorities back in Cairo and Baghdad. Cochin Jews found themselves in the milieu of not just trade, but an intricate web of culture and religion that went on to define their standing amidst the actual realities at local level vis a vis the diasporic network at the global level.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

The Jewish community through the period of Tenth Century to Seventeenth Century has sustained oddities and flourished because of their ability to adapt to newer situations, and most importantly, create a society of various economic beneficiaries, where right from the commoner to the ruler, everybody stood to gain from their mercantile presence and endeavours. But wherever financial gains came into question, there were other factors that came into play, which made it a complex potpourri of elements like power, politics, religion, culture and identity, all getting mixed to create a multi-dimensional socio-economic power play, tugging at each other to keep tilting to a new balance. Sometimes, the situation was favorable, at others times, it got difficult, but through all of it, the Jewish community, always kept doing what they were best at- 'trade'. It is, however, important to note that trade at times came at the cost of financial gains and at times came at the cost of their very identity itself. The foregoing discussion highlights the factors that came to play to create the environment in which Jewish mercantile community operated for commodity movements between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean and further the historical process of socio-cultural evolution in the background of economic reasons.

While there have been waves of migration of the Jewish community to the Malabar coast since the ancient time, the study focused on movement of Jews from Mediterranean to Malabar that occurred in the background of maritime commerce from Eleventh Century onwards. Jews being a trading community, got attracted to the ongoing lucrative commercial opportunities opened up on the Western coast of India. Apart from these opportunities, the oddities occurring on the Mediterranean trading zone created the need for a new set of markets on the rim of coastal western India. The mechanism of trade almost remained the same like in the Mediterranean. Closeness with the rulers, mutual cooperation among the members of own community and harmonious behaviour with the people of other religion and community were some basic factors with which the Jewish mercantile community emerged as a locally acceptable and receptive group.

While the Jews formed a wide network of trade 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 the 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 such 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 economic benefits, which the concerned rulers used to derive 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 take maximum advantage of the situation and expand to the shores of Western India.¹ The non-insistence of the Fatimids on the observance of the decrees of discrimination, such as wearing of a distinctive sign on the garments, their permission to construct and repair non-Muslim houses of prayer, particularly synagogues, 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.²

Egypt did not provide liberal atmosphere to the Jews before eleventh century; however, after 1000 AD, the attitude changed considerably, which was 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 political positions in Cairo.³ Jews were a literate community and they used this trait to not only uplift their status in the eyes of the rulers but also get a preference over other people when it came to dealing with matters related to trade.⁴ Jews were allowed to have their own trading establishments in various countries to facilitate better trade and

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

²Jacob, Mann, *The India in Egypt and in Palestine Under Fatimid Caliph*, vol. 1, pp. 34-36.

³Ibid. pp. 76-79.

⁴MaristellaBotticini&ZviEcksteinp, “From Farmers to Merchants, Conversions and Diaspora” p.909.

commercial ventures.⁵ Their community operated very much within its own social order, where the head of the community called *Nazid* was responsible for maintaining order within the community in the Fatimid Empire.⁶ Such liberal attitude of rulers towards Jews helped them get over oddities that they faced in the Mediterranean in trade as well as their survival. The cooperation between the Jews and the rulers was mutually beneficial. Joseph Rabban, the head of the Jewish community of Muzirikkode in Kerala, used to help the Chera ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varma with money, men and vessels when he was attacked by his rival or other Indian rulers of the south, out of which mechanism the Jews derived royal patronage for their commercial endeavours.

The Jewish merchants, who reached Kerala during the early medieval period used to get themselves organized into guilds, particularly *Anjuvannam*, as is referred to in the *copper plates* of Tharisappally (849 A.D.).⁷ It seems that 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 religious traditions that evolved in Cairo.

Though the *Geniza* documents suggest that permanent settlement of Jews from Egypt happened much later than tenth century, indigenous sources like the Tharisappally copper plate of 849 A.D. and the Bhaskara Ravi Varma copper plate of 1000 A.D. attest to their presence in Kerala even before the permanent settlement of Jews from Cairo. The letters of *Geniza* merchants involved in the Indian trade often show their desire to get back to their place of origin after the accomplishment of commercial enterprise. This shows that Cairo *Geniza* gives only a partial picture of Jewish history in India, and that for getting a comprehensive picture, local sources are to be analyzed against the information from *Geniza* documents, which further show that there was another layer of Jewish traders in Kerala prior to the entry of the Mediterranean

⁵Ibid. p.919.

⁶S.D.Goitein, *Economic Foundations in A Mediterranean Society*, p. 69, 84.

⁷ T. A GopinathaRao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vol.II, pp.66-75.

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.

Generally the trading alliances were made between Jews on the basis of trust and a sense of belongingness to the same religion, which was vital to the furtherance of trade. Very often, these trade ties meant long, age old relationships where the risk appetite was very less. The religious harmony came easy as the Jews attached themselves to the same nodal centre in Egypt,⁸ from where most of the Jews came down to Malabar. Along with the alliances, Jews also used to operate on an individual basis with the intention of making more profit. Nevertheless, commercial partnerships with the non-Jewish merchants were not a rare thing. The *Geniza* documents itself contain numerous instances of mercantile cooperation between Jews and Hindu, Muslim and Christian merchants across the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trade zone.

Jews who settled down on the western coastal India used to conduct business in the Mediterranean, and they knew the network of trade connecting India with Aden and then with Egypt. Commodities that were in high demand then in India like copper, paper etc. were imported to India through Jewish channels, while pepper was exported on a large scale. Some of them even started new types of craftworks in India, like Abraham ben Yiju, who set up a bronze factory in Mangalore and imported copper from the Mediterranean. 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.

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.⁹ Cochin had the largest number of Jewish population among these due to its strategic position as a maritime port city. The place also had a prosperous 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 century.¹⁰ Most of the secondary Jewish settlements were located on the banks of river Chalakudy and river Periyar or

⁸ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History" p.40.

⁹Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', p.7.

¹⁰FransisDey, *Land of Permaouls*, pp. 336-38.

along some water systems, through which commodities were taken from the hinterland to the sea ports.¹¹

Though not a diaspora in its typical definition, there was a huge settlement of the Jews on the western coast of India. Such a large presence of Jews during the medieval period in Cochin speaks volumes of the increasing settlements. According to the census of 1857, there were 1790 Jews in the entire kingdom of Cochin. The presence of the physical structures like tomb stones and synagogues also give an account of the life of Jews during that period. So, though it might not have been a diaspora by technicality owing to the presence of their large numbers, the Jewish settlements and their inimitable way of life is a unique case in itself. The Malabari Jews were equally skilled in both the local languages: Malayalam and the Jewish language of Hebrew. They also adopted many customs of the host society in due course of time. 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.

While studying the Jewish diaspora from their financial background, and through their mechanisms of trade, our enquiry also tried to figure out their ways by which they adjusted themselves within the foreign land. Most of the work on Jewish diaspora used to get lost somewhere in the debate of identity building, negating the mercantile nature of the community. In spite of linking the arrival of the Jewish community on Malabar with their commercial journey, the emphasis is on the purity of blood, family lineage, colour of the skin and the ancient arrivals. Though Jews were strict about their religious norms, they balanced their self well between trade and religion. Whereas the female slaves were manumitted with the intentions of marriages, the male servants were equally loved without conversion. Jewish mercantile community never let religion come in between mercantile processes. However, engagement of Jewish merchants with their female slaves and local women contributed to the expansion of Jewish population in Malabar; their rapport with the male slave agents led to the blooming of mercantile networks. Trade had been the major stimulating type of action by the Jewish community, both in the Mediterranean and Malabar.

¹¹Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', p.12.

The Jewish community along the west coast of India underwent a radical transformation with the arrival of the Portuguese, and the subsequent response 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 interpreters and mediators.¹² 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 period between 1570 to 1670, thanks to their participation in the private trade of the Portuguese.¹³

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, 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.¹⁴ 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 Jewish merchants of Mattancherry facilitated the New Christian merchants in many ways by using their links of the native place and West Asia,¹⁵ the new Christians must have helped the native Jews by using their links back in Portugal for commodity movements.

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 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

¹²Pius Malekandathil, 'The Jews of Kerala and the Wheels of Indian Ocean Commerce', pp.13-14.

¹³Ibid. p.14.

¹⁴ David Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.430.

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

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.

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 Christian 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 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.¹⁶ These opportunities were used by the Jewish merchants to strengthen their trade network stretching along the Euro-Asian water spaces.

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 commerce along the Malabar region, and that Portuguese officials encouraged inter-religious marriage in

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

the changed situation.¹⁷ As preference was given to the white skinned, white Jewish women would have been approached by the Portuguese. However, absence of any proper documentation regarding this hypothesis leaves us only with such assumptions.

While looking at major changes in the lives of Jews, it was the inclusion of evil practice of social division among their community that had become the biggest deviation in an otherwise religious and tradition abiding Jews, as Judaism does not have the concept of racial discrimination. The division of white, black and brown Jews in Cochin seems to have been inspired by the rigid caste system of the Indian social structure. 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 number of the 'native' Jews were perceived to be converted natives because of their similarities with the local population, and they were considered local Malabarians by foreigners or visitors. There has been a constant effort to create the history of superiority of *White/Paradesi* Jewish community since the arrival of European companies and the Jews from the various countries of Europe, who arrived at the western coast of India post sixteenth century.

First among them were the Portuguese and Jewish merchants, and like any other power entity, they tried to collaborate and create a balance in the background of trade benefits. Jews had to see a hard time during the time of Portuguese domination along coastal Malabar. However, the initial interaction of Jews and the Portuguese lay in the background of mutual benefits; however, the latter phase proved quite difficult for Jews. This period brought a major change within the social structure of the Jewish mercantile community as well. Arrival of New Christians and Jewish merchants from different parts of Europe in the background of inquisition started a new chapter in the history of Jewish community of Malabar.

In order to fetch more benefits in the field of trade and commerce, the newly arrived Jews made themselves closer to the rulers of Malabar and European companies. The similarity of culture and language was also used as a tool to enter into collaboration with the European companies and the rulers of Malabar, which were manipulated to create a sense of superior

¹⁷Adriaan 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.

socio-economic status for the *paradesi*/White Jews over the Malabari/Black Jews. The formation of trade network between *paradesi* Jews and the European companies helped the *paradesi* Jews to take over the monopoly of trade from the Malabari Jews which in turn also impacted their nature of relationship with the local rulers. The rulers of Malabar started giving preference to the *Paradesi* Jews in the order to seek financial benefits from the growing *paradesi* Jewish community and Europeans as well.

In this ongoing process of trade and commerce, the community got divided into two major parts- *paradesi* and Malabari. This social division was hardly a part of the social process; rather it was mostly done against the background of economic benefits. The association of dark-skinned Jewish merchants with their slaves, servants and native people which helped them in creating efficient network of trade was regarded as the major reason for their (Malabari Jews) defamation. The literature produced during the post-sixteenth century when both European companies and European Jews (*paradesi* Jews) arrived on Malabar, was filled with the data and narrations of proving Malabari Jews as the descendants of the slaves and servants.

Moreover the socio-cultural interaction between *paradesi* Jews and the Dutch gave another interesting angle for this relationship. The pro *paradesi* Jews writings in the seventeenth century were prevalent evidence of such changed scenario. Further by this time shrinking role of the Malabari Jewish mercantile community in trade, and the inferior status in the social structure were emphasized by the European travellers and Dutch officials. The narration was not only about highlighting this association, it was more about using this fact to create the notion that these Malabari Jews who look exactly like the natives are of mixed and so called impure blood. Further, the *paradesi* Jewish community, with their collaboration with the Dutch with whom they shared a strong bond both in the field of commerce and culture, produced number of literature to demean the identity of the Malabari Jews and glorifying the past of the *paradesi* Jews. The newly arrived Jews managed to prove themselves to be the oldest one, whose descendants came from ancient Israel during ancient time.

This fabrication of the past was done purposefully in order to enhance the social status of the newly arrived Jews who were not rich and unfamiliar to Malabar at that point of time. In this process of producing a manipulative literature, the local rulers of Malabar were not involved

though. However later on they offered their support to *paradesi* Jews over *Malabari* Jews. The preference to *paradesi* Jews over *Malabari* Jews was based on their own prejudices of caste system and concept of purity. India as a society strongly believes in caste system since ages, and the *paradesi* Jews took advantage of this evil practice of the host society, and introduced division among the Jews of Kerala as well. European company's favour to *paradesi* Jews was purely stimulated by the idea of financial gain.

With the increasing patronage that the King of Cochin extended to the foreign Jews against the background of their conflicts with the Portuguese, 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 conflicts existing between the white (foreign) and black (native) Jews. 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 was also a mercantile partner.¹⁸

These developments made the local rulers begin to 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 families¹⁹, consequently the relative domination of white Jews over 'black Jews' eventually emerged as social phenomenon of the Jewish enclave of Cochin. 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

¹⁸ Pius, Malekandathil. "The Jews of Cochin and the Portuguese (1498-1663)," pp. 240-41.

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

as his councillors, showing a pro-Dutch policy evolving among the Jews of Cochin and the local ruler even before the ousting of the Portuguese by the Dutch in 1663.

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.²⁰ The Jews helped the Dutch far more than the Portuguese, as the former gave them religious freedom, which they loved enjoying. The expertise of 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.²¹ All these in return brought Jewish prosperity in an unprecedented manner.

Many *paradesi* Jews like Ezechiel Rahabi II (1694-1771) evolved as leading Company merchants,²² who also held the office of Ambassador under the King of Cochin.²³ Ezekiel Rahabi's father also served the Dutch East India Company and maintained good relationship with the King as well. The Rahabis were among the most prosperous families at that time.²⁴ But their success should be attributed to their ability in balancing between the local rulers of Malabar and the Company. Samson Simon Rotenburg²⁵ was another eminent *paradesi* merchant of that time, whose legacy was later on followed by his son Joseph Rotenburg,²⁶ another prominent merchant of Cochin active during the period of 1763-1772. Issac Surgun²⁷ was another famous and influential Jewish merchant from Calicut who emerged as a significant merchant of the company by being acceptable to the VOC officials and local power houses. Ephraim Cohen and J. G. Febos,²⁸ Jacques de Paiva,²⁹ Issac Abendano Sardo, Abraham Salomons, and Salmon Franco

²⁰ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", p.44.

²¹ G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin", p.433.

²² Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, pp.222-23.

²³ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin in Jewish History", pp.49-50.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.46.

²⁵ *Malabar in the Colonial Archives* (K. A.), 1736

²⁶ K A., 1763-1773, *Press list of Ancient Dutch Records*, p. 90, no. 849, *Legal Records* 1768-1778, Documents No. 537-546; 563, 565, 580

²⁷ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, pp.106-7.

²⁸ Walter J. Fischel, "The Indian Archives", p. 199

²⁹ J. J. Cotton, *List Of Inscriptions on Tombs or Monuments in Madras*, Madras, 1905, p.123

were also in the list of famous *paradesi* Jewish merchants.³⁰ 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.

The good run of Jewish fate was very much dependent on trade. When the commercial orientation changed 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 Alleppey, the trade also shifted its course. The popular commodity of the time- spices, once being transported to Cochin now started getting traded through Alleppey. This meant a severe hit to the Jewish trade at Cochin. What also affected heavily was the policy of the state of Travancore to monopolize the spice trade, once the highly priced trade commodity between the Jews and the Dutch.³¹ The white Jewish merchant families, who had become prosperous during the good days of Dutch East India Company, got poverty stricken by end of the eighteenth century.³² Changes like the shift in the capital of Cochin's royal power from Cochin to Trichur during the time of Saktan Thampuran, and the subsequent establishment of satellite markets around Trichur for stimulating trade, which also became the hub of commercial activities during the British times, gradually led to the dwindling resources at Cochin, dealing a severe blow to the trade of Jews of Cochin.

However, the role of Dutch in the process of glorifying the role of *paradesi* Jews was immense. This period witnessed the production of a considerable amount of literature which proved the racial, economic, social and cultural superiority of the *paradesi* Jews, whom they proudly mentioned in their writings as white Jews, over the native *Malabari* Jewish community. This period not only established a superior status of *paradesi* Jews over the black Jews but also tried to manipulate and hijack the history of a community (Malabari Jews) who had existed in

³⁰Walter J. Fischel, "The Indian Archives", p. 206 & for more information on Jewish Tombstones consult H. D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800*, Indian Record Series, 3 Vols, London, 1913 & H. G. Reissner, *In the Jewish Advocate*, Bombay, June, 1934

³¹AswathiThirunal, *Thulasigarland*, Trivandrum, p.93.

³²Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, pp.107,127.

Malabar since a long time, even before the arrival of any European company or the white Jews. In these works, Malabari Jews were either mentioned as the so called low caste or impure blood/mixed blood or have just been completely deprived of any mention.

While talking about the discrimination and division among the Jewish community of Kerala between the White and Black broadly, one perspective gets overlooked, which is the removal of the role of an entire section of society who once provided their assistance to both *Malabaris* and the *paradesis*. This was the serving class, slaves and servants, who had a major role in the growth of commerce and well-being of the Jewish diaspora. Though these slaves have been mentioned by scholars very rarely and marginally, no one really bothered to write the history from their perspective. When *Malabari* Jews fought over their rights with the *paradesi* Jews, and both these communities tried to build a larger identity to fit in the societal framework, they discarded their association with slaves. The whole debate of social division in the context of calling *Malabari* Jews the descendants of the slaves and servants, the counter argument provided by the writers states that *Malabari* Jews were the most ancient, and it was because of the hot climate of Kerala that they became black. The merchant-slave association, which very naturally happened during that point of time, has been completely ignored. These slaves, who once helped their merchant masters make their position stronger on a foreign land, have been totally discarded in the great process of identity building.

Finally, at the end of this thesis, personal expression my disagreement needs to be shown with the use of term 'Black' for the Jews who settled in the Malabar way back in ancient or early medieval period and had come from the various countries of the Mediterranean. The term Black has been assigned to this community by the Europeans, with the intent of demeaning their social status and identity. Some writers give the logic of the climate for the black colour of these early migrants and since they were not originally from Malabar, they rather be called Black instead of *Malabari*. However, the origin and the use of the term 'black', was driven by the idea of racism and not ethnicity. Whereas calling an African black is inspired by a different notion, even that regressive argument cannot be applied in the case of the early Jewish settlers. This term has been coined to disgrace the origin of a specific community, and hence, it is inappropriate to even use this term. Going by the logic that the early settlers were not native of the place, and thus should not be called *Malabari*, is also not appropriate, since it disowns the long association of the Jews

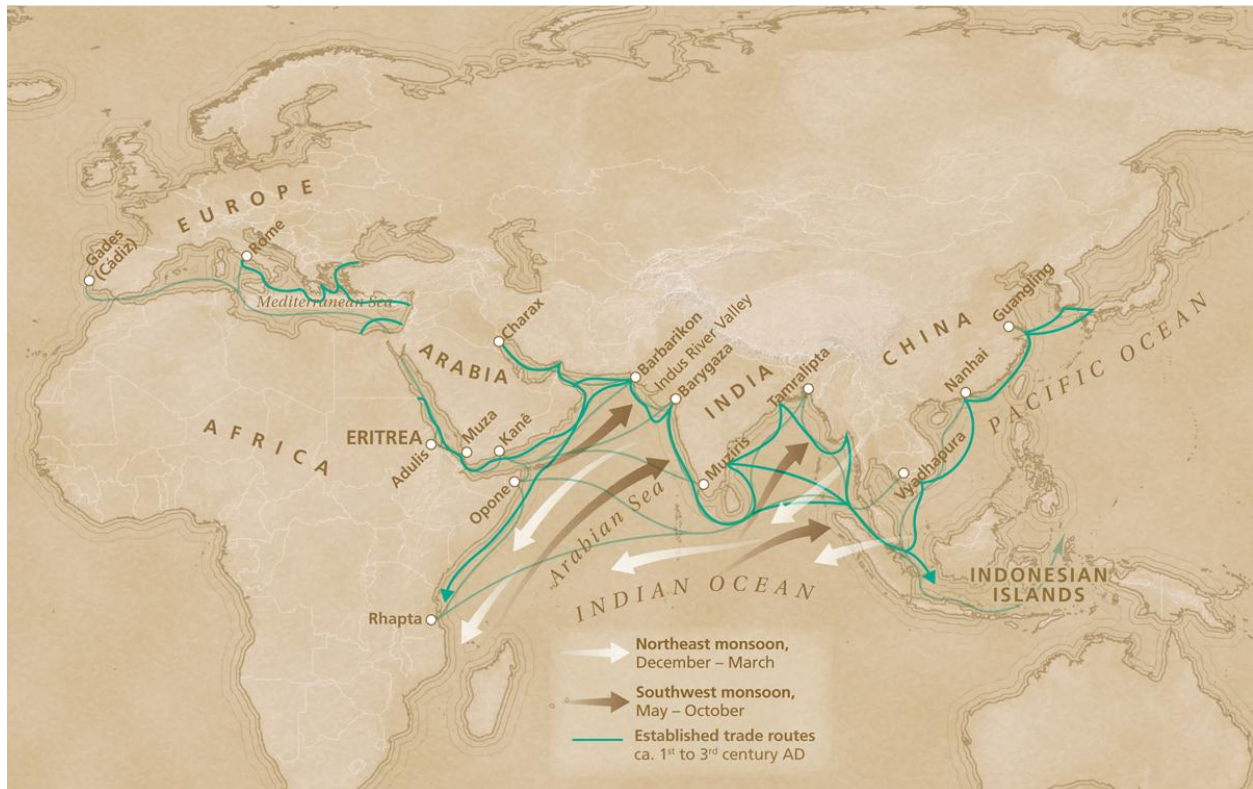
with Malabar. They can be named after the place they migrated from, just like Baghdadi or Ben Israeli Jews. They can be called Egyptian, Alexandrian, Tunisian, Sicilian Jews or else, in the larger sense, they can also be called Mediterranean-*Malabari* Jews just like Indians who have migrated to America are called Indian-American.

It also refers to the fact that the origin and identity of the Jewish people might be seen from a regionalist perspective rather than global. Jews who migrated to Malabar from Cairo always dreamt of going back to their native places like Cairo, Alexandria, Tunisia, and Sicily etc. This notion of going back continued between the period of 11th to 14th centuries. This was the time when India did not have any synagogue, and the Jews were still in the process of searching socio-cultural space for themselves through the road of trade. Moreover the trading opportunity provided by the ruling authorities back in Cairo and Baghdad was a major force behind this mentality.

However situation changed after the arrival of European companies on the western coast of India. By this time, the Jews must have got settled and the new trading opportunities provided by these companies were an added incentive for them not to think of going back and grow here itself. Establishment of synagogues during Portuguese period is the major event which points out to the socio-cultural growth of the community around synagogues. Earlier, the Jews who were dependent on the synagogues back in Cairo and Baghdad, now got their own synagogue in Malabar itself. These synagogues were not just mere prayer houses, but a symbol of the rising influence of Jewish mercantile community in the socio-economic space of Malabar. Moreover these synagogues also helped in binding the community during the adverse time of Portuguese aggression. The settlement of Jewish community near the Mattancherry Synagogue is an example of that, and these sacred structures were not only restricted to the religious affairs but it also helped the community to be united during all good and bad times. Thus formation of these synagogues not only marked the distinctive character of the evolving Jewish diaspora along Malabar but also marked their eventual parting from the nodal points back in Cairo and Baghdad, on which they used to be dependent earlier in the absence of proper socio-religious institution to keep them together in Malabar.

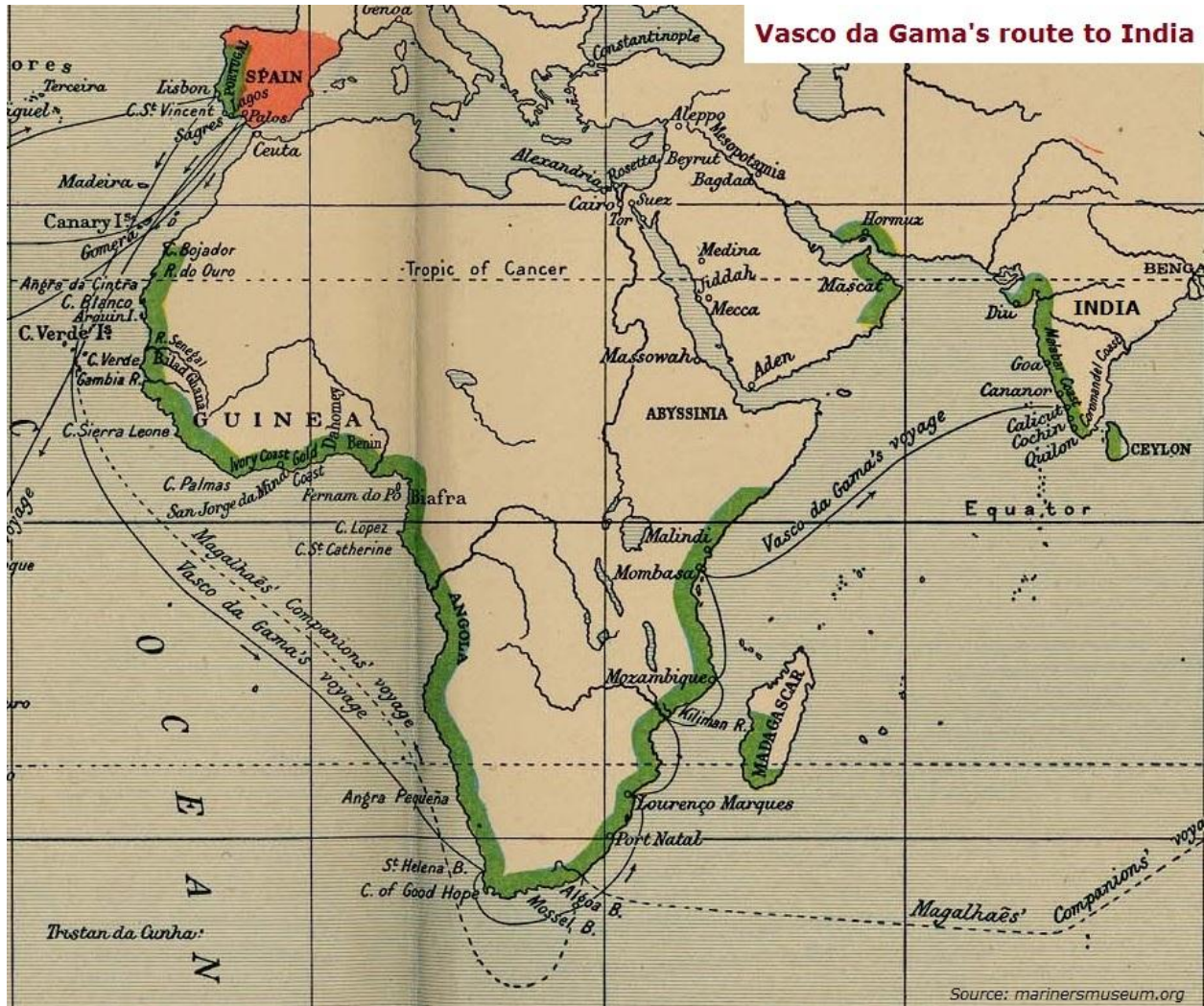
Appendix: Maps and Figures

Map I: Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trade route 1st to 3rd century



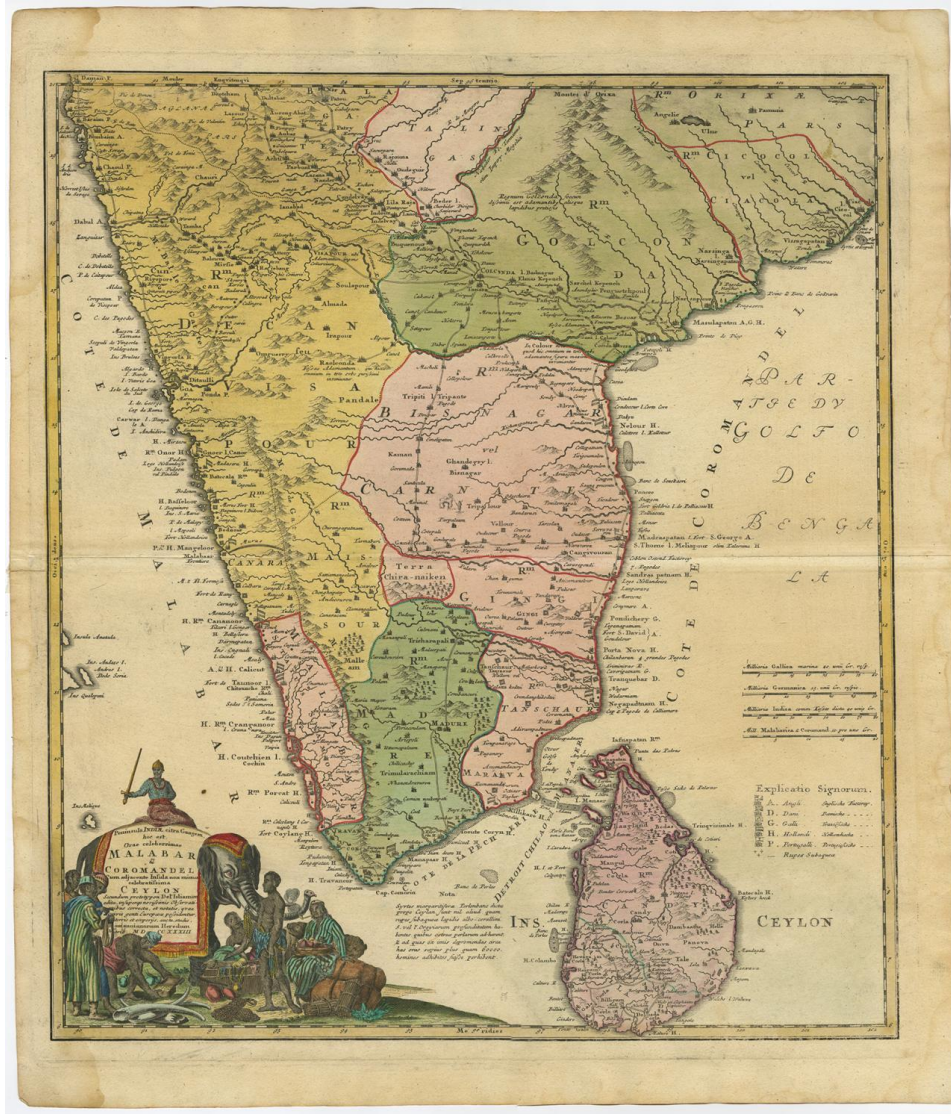
Source: Online Source; <http://discovermagazine.com/2016/nov/trading-places>

Map II: Vasco da Gama's Route to India



Source: Online Source; marinersmuseum.org

Map III: A Rare Map of India and Ceylon Issued in 1733 by The Homann Heirs



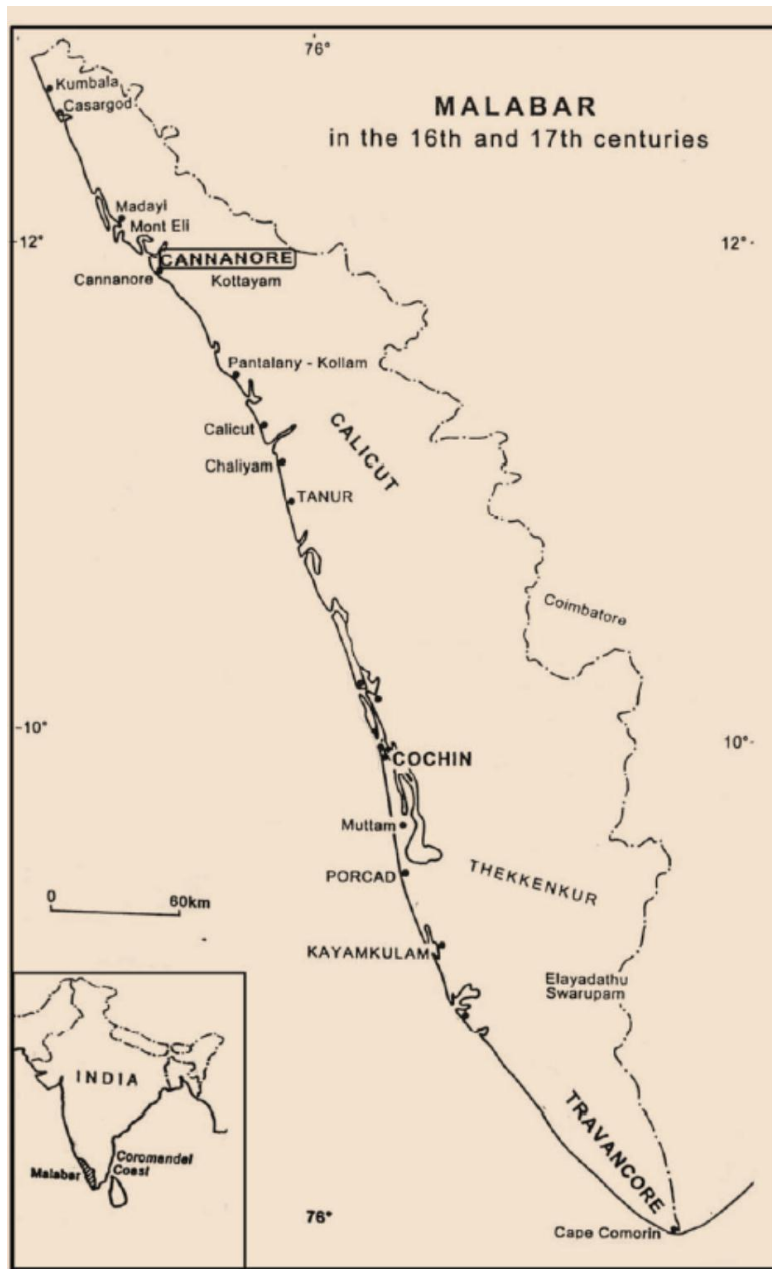
Source: Online Source; <http://www.geographicus.com/mm5/cartographers/homannheirs.txt>

Map IV: The Western Indian Ocean (1400 - 1750)



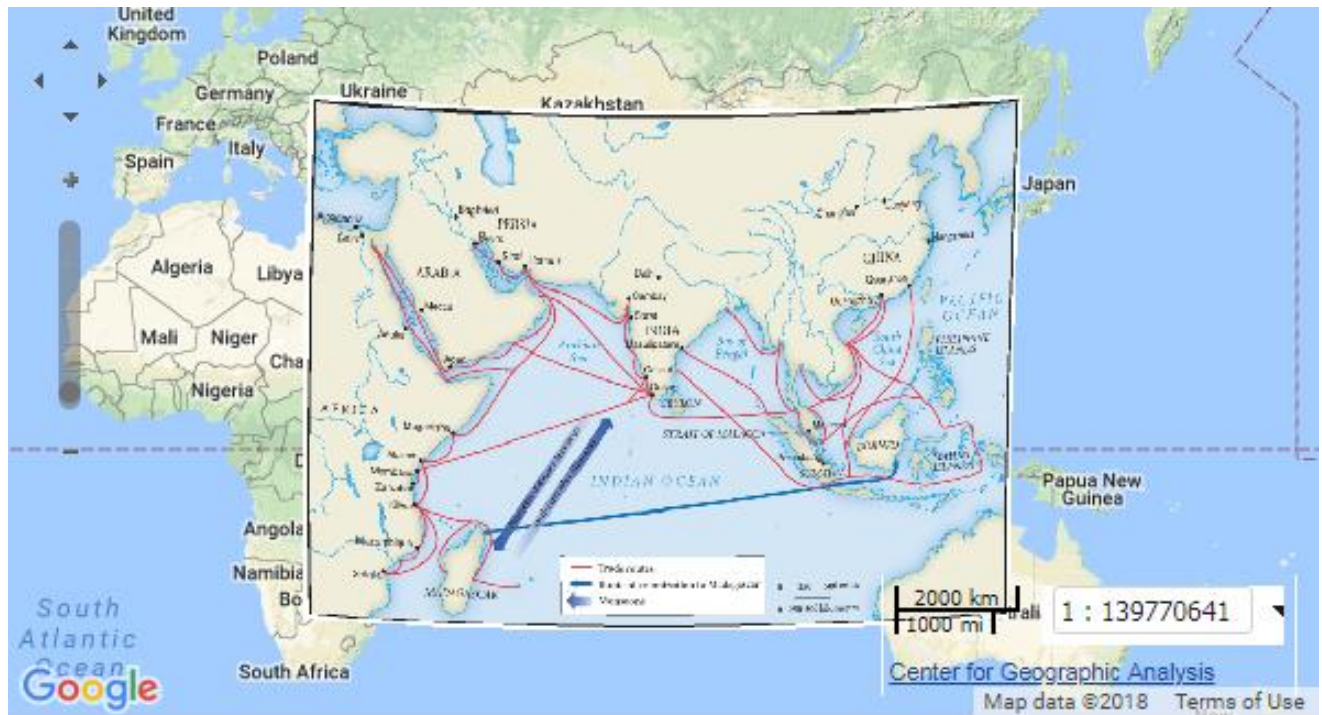
Source: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Of Imrat and Tijarat", p. 752

Map V: Malabar in the 16th and 17th Century



Source: F. Tho. Phillips (TR), "Cannanore before the arrival of Portuguese", *An account of the Religion, Manners, and Learning of people of Malabar, 1717*

Map VI: Indian Ocean Trade Routes

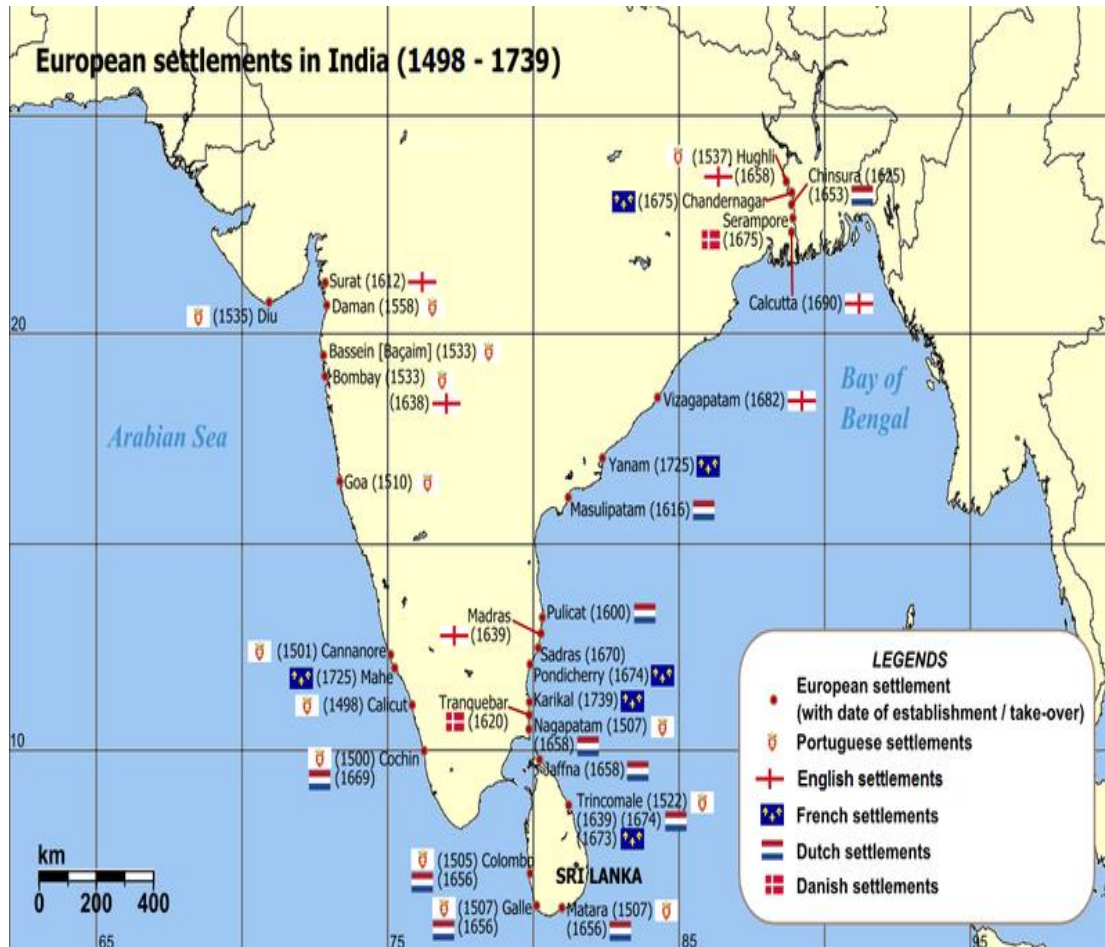


Source: http://worldmap.harvard.edu/data/geonode:indian_ocean_trade_routes_11k

Map VII: Settlements of Jewish Diaspora in India

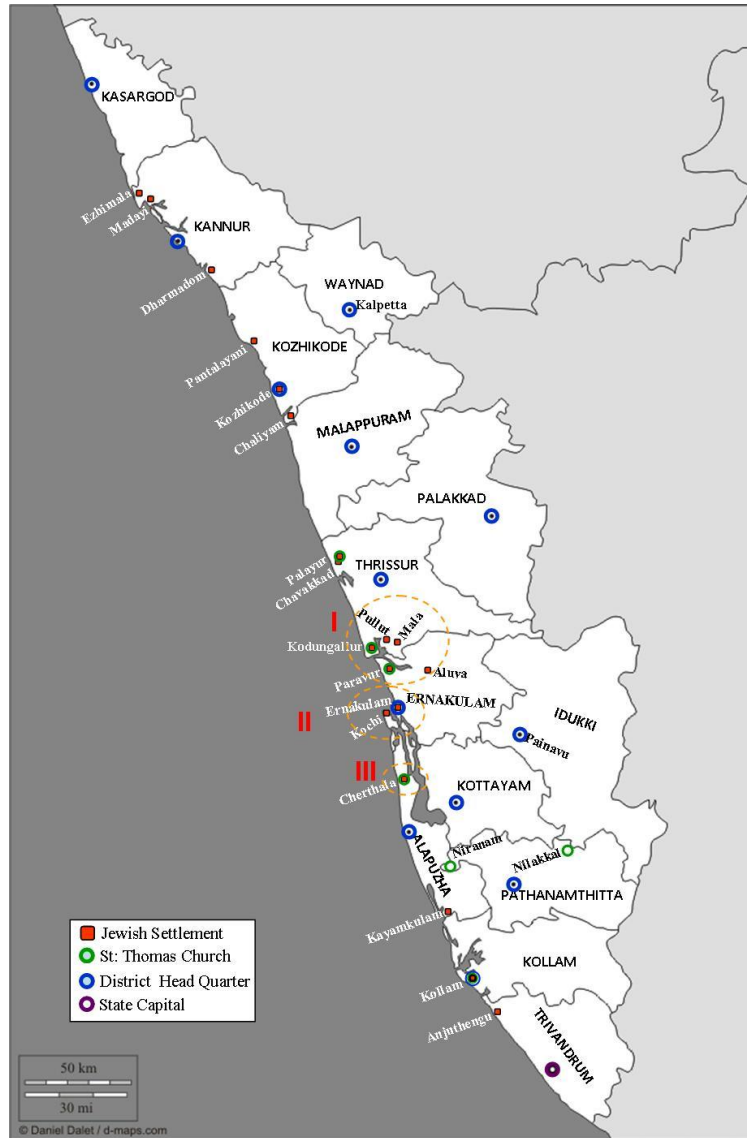


Map VIII: European Settlements in India (1498 - 1739)



Source: <http://www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/Company-rule-in-India>

Map IX: Jewish Settlements on Western Coast of India



Source: K. S. Mathew (ed.), Imperial Rome, Indian Ocean Regions and Muziris: New Perspectives On Maritime Trade, 2015

Figure I: Abu Zayd about to Board an Indian Ocean Ship. 13th Century



1. Abu 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.

Source: S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, 2008, P 901

Figure II: Letter from Joseph Lebdi to Hasan b. Bundar



28.22, Letter from Joseph Lebdi to Hasan b. B

Source: S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, 2008, P 905

Figure III: Letter from Abu, Ali b. Bu 'Umar to his Family before Travel to India'



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

Source: S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, 2008, P 910

Figure IV: Letter to Ben Yiju: The Death of Madmun



Source: S.D. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, 2008, P 915

Figure V: Chennamangalam Synagogue



Source: Online Source; <https://www.keralatourism.org/destination/synagogue-chennamangalam/363>

Figure VI: Tekkumbagam Synagogue, Ernakulam



Source: Online Source; <http://cochinsyn.com/page-tekku.html>

Figure VII: Kadavumbagam Synagogue, Ernakulam



Source: Online Source; <http://cochinsyn.com/page-kada-erna.html>

Figure VIII: Mala Synagogue, Thrissur



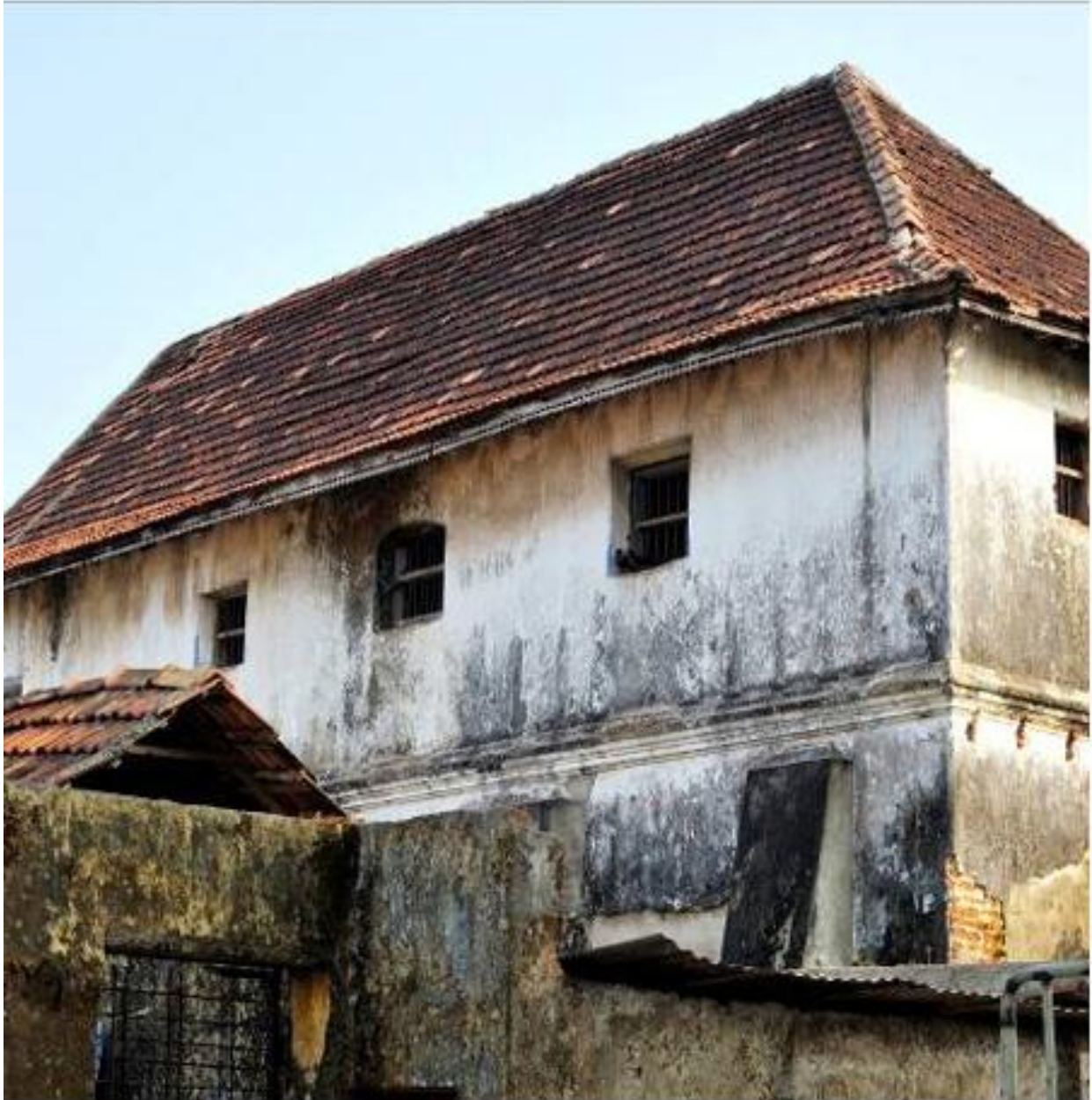
Source: Online Source; <http://cochinsyn.com/page-mala.html>

Figure IX: Parur Synagogue, Mattancherry



Source: Online Source; <http://cochinsyn.com/page-parur.html>

Figure X: Kadavumbagam Synagogue, Mattancherry



Source: Online Source; <http://cochinsyn.com/page-kada-mattan.html>

Figure XI: Jew Town Cochin in the 1970s



Jew Town Cochin in the 1970s. Note the stone oil lamps next to the doors of the houses. Photo: postcard from Cochin, 1970's, collection of Barbara Johnson.

Figure XII: Stamp Issued by the Indian Post Office In 1968 To Commemorate the 400th Anniversary of the Paradesi Synagogue In Cochin



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