

“The Queen & her Jews”

A Vernacular/Historic

pocket in a metropolis -

‘The Jew town of Kochi’.

Visual Communication Special Project

(March-98’)

Project by Rajesh N S (96625010)
Guide Prof. M Bhandari

VCMSR-
श्री. ए. ए. बंधारी
A. D. G. LIBRARY
13th VC/96-98 Batch.

APPROVAL SHEET

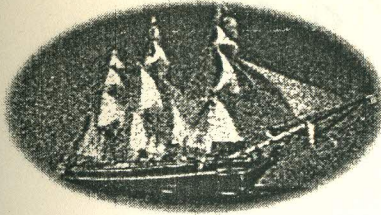
This Visual communication Special project entitled A Vernacular/Historic pocket in a metropolis - 'The Jew town of Kochi', is hereby approved as partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Design.

Guide: _____

M. G. Gnanaprakasam

Internal Examiner -1: _____

Internal Examiner - 2: _____



**I travelled from Spain,
I had heard of the city of shingly
I longed to see an Israel King
Him I saw with my own eyes.**

Rabbi Nissim.

Rabbi Nissim, was a 14 th century Hebrew poet and traveller.
These lines were written after he visited the jewish settlement in
Chingavanam (Kerala), or Shingly as known to the rest of the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

INTRODUCTION	1
ABOUT KERALA	3
THE CITY AND THE VERNACULAR POCKET	4
HISTORY OF JEWS IN INDIA	5
KOCHI AND HER JEWS	8
JEWS AND THE ANCIENT SOCIETY	10

I would like to thank Prof. M. Bhandari for allowing me to work on this project, and for his valuable guidance all throughout the project.

JEWS - RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL LIFE	15
----------------------------------	----

I would like to thank Mr. Cohaen, and Mrs. Cohaen and Mr. Hellaegua, who spared a lot of time to share his knowledge on his community.

BIRTH AND DEATH	19
-----------------	----

My special thanks to all the other people I met and talked in the Jew town, who helped me a lot to carry out this project

OLD BELONGINGS	23
----------------	----

THE CASE STUDIES	26
------------------	----

JEW TOWN, WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD	29
------------------------------------	----

Rajesh N S

March 1998

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
ABOUT KERALA	3
THE CITY AND THE VERNACULAR POCKET	4
HISTORY OF JEWS IN INDIA	6
KOCHI AND HER JEWS	8
JEWS AND THE ANCIENT SOCIETY	10
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE	11
THE PRESENT JEW COMMUNITY	12
THE BLACK JEWS	14
JEWS - RELEGIOUS AND SOCIAL LIFE	15
FESTIVALS	16
FASTING	17
MARRIAGES	18
BIRTH AND DEATH	19
LIVING AND EATING HABITS	20
THE ARCHITECTURE	22
THE SYNAGOGUE	23
OLD BELONGINGS	25
THE CASE STUDIES	26
JEW TOWN, WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY	30

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project is to observe the coexistence of ethnicity and modernisation, to identify a Historical vernacular pocket in a metropolis, learn about its religious and cultural rootings and also to observe the changes due to the onslaught of modernisation and how traditional culture has endured or adapted itself to form a new self into the present times.

The study extends into that of images, architecture, remains, monuments and as well as its people, their needs, fears and desires. This also leads to a chance to compare the city with the vernacular pocket or it is the study of co-existence of tradition and modernisation. The role of a designer in this project is as just an observer who pans his eyes through the past, present and the future of that community.

Kochi, as known to the western world is “the queen of the arabian sea”. Her contact with the western world, which dates back to the history explains her evolution as a major metropolis and the trade capital of kerala. She is different from the other parts of the state as a lot of radical changes has taken place in her history.

ABOUT KERALA

The land of Kerala, I would call a 'vernacular pocket', when talking about India as a whole. Kerala is separated and isolated by the western ghats from the rest of the country, whose heritage has evolved from many migrations and invasions from the Aryan period to the Moghul times. The culture and nature of people is hence to a large extent decided by the rest of India, while Kerala has less of an external cultural mix.

She is green and lies on the south west coast of India, occupies 590 kilometres at a stretch

The vernacular pocket identified for this the Jew Town of the Mattancherry township a major part of the metropolis Kochi. Mattancherry is a small town in Kochi which is not much affected by the fast growing pace of the city and has a mix cultured community comprising of Kerala Hindus, the biggest part, Muslims Christians and a minor north Indian community of Parsees and Gujarathis mostly. The Jew town part of Mattancherry was once in her full glory dating back to centuries and now on its journey, becoming a monument of that glorious past, with a few Jews freezing inside it, still the conservative nature and strong social bonds of this community is another reason for working on this particular area.

The study extends to documentation of people, places, objects, phenomenae, activities and rituals, looking and observing things from a designers point of view, for whom an awareness and information on the society in which he lives is very important... Let us get into telling the story of the "Queen and her Jews"

THE ABOUT KERALA VERNACULAR POCKET

The land of Kerala, I would call a 'vernacular pocket', when talking about India as a whole. Kerala is separated and isolated by the western ghats from the rest of the country, whose heritage has evolved from many migrations and invasions from the Aryan period to the Moghul times. The culture and nature of people is hence to a large extent decided by the rest of India. While Kerala has less of an external cultural mix.

She is green and lies on the south west coast of India, occupies 590 kilometres at a stretch along the coastal line. She has a rich cultural heritage which has evolved over the centuries largely by itself and shows wide vividness from place to place. Population is thick in the coastal area and declines as it goes up into the mountainous forests on the east side. The agricultural area is in the centre as we travel from the west to east.

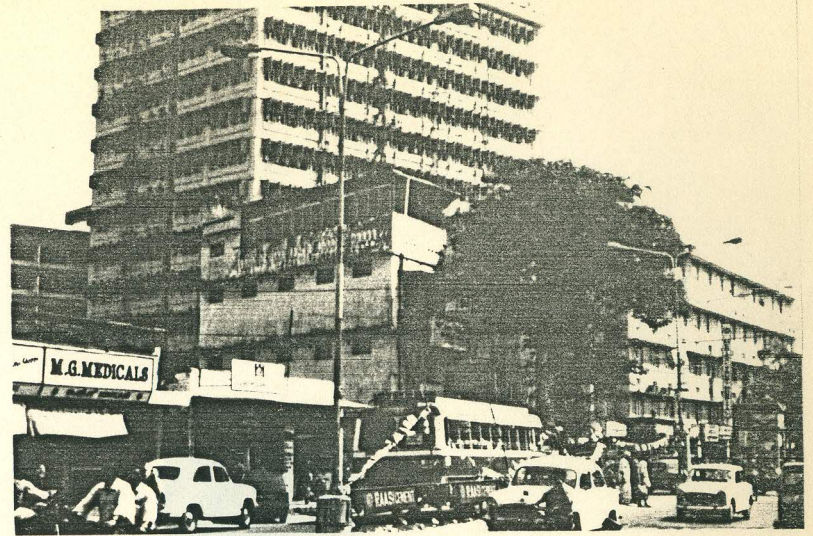
Kerala is thickly populated (about 1100 people per square kilometre). The rural and urban life almost merges with each other, one hardly notices when a city merges into a rural area as he travels from north to south along the state. The state holds first position for the literacy rate in the country. The major population is Hindus and has more than half of the Christian population of the country. The only external contact (trade relations) identified in the history was with the Arabs, Portuguese, and the Jews, which has left behind a new generation of people from these communities. This project aims at an intimate observation of the Jew community of Mattancherry.

THE CITY AND THE VERNACULAR POCKET

Kochi is the trade capital of kerala. The very peculiar geographical nature of kochin makes it an important sea port. A flood in 1341 caused the port of kochi to silt up leaving the port of Crangannore into the history, which was the major port till that time. Kochi had been having trade relations with people from persia, china, and Portugal and still has their influence in the lifestyle of the people. Religious invasions also took place in those periods, Christianity came and a lot of people started following Christianity and got converted. Inter caste marriage gave birth to communities like the Anglo Indians.

Kochi still remains to be an inlet for the outside world, to kerala, which has up to a large extend brought a western culture into the city. Kochi is developing at a faster pace in the present, extending itself by adding new pieces of land by filling the surrounding back waters.

But mattancherry seems to be least affected by this fast urbanisation. Mattancherry is the township in which the jew town is situated, which is about 10 kilometres away from the city by road and less by waterway. The life in mattancherry is less fast as compared to the city of kochin and has a lot of historical monuments which talks of the glorious past it has come through.

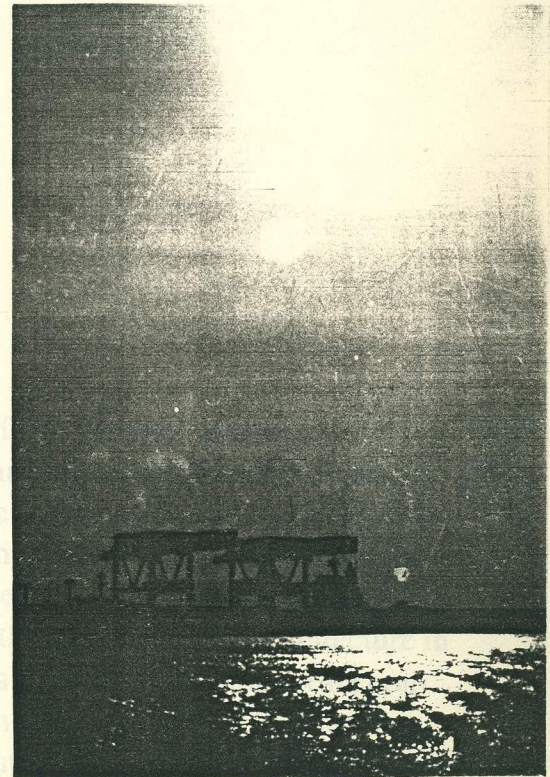


GLIMPSES OF KOCHI THE METROPOLIS

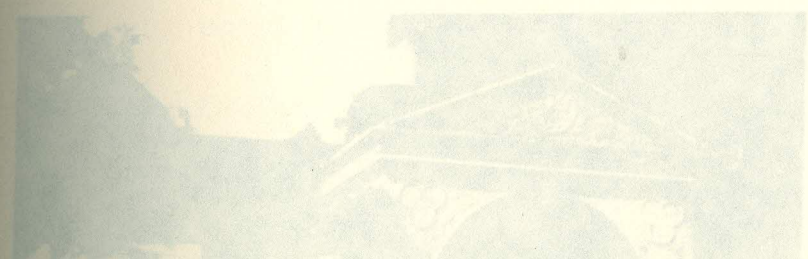
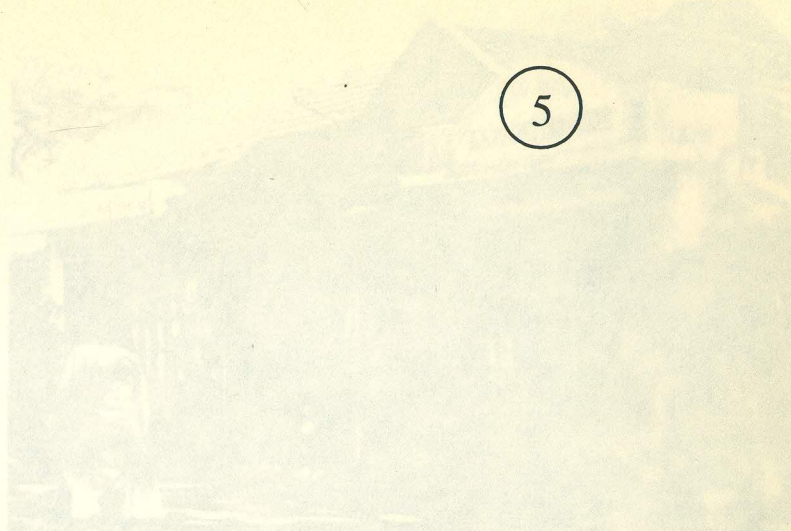


VIEW OF THE CITY FROM THE SEA

The jew town hardly takes an area of 2 square kilometres. It is much bigger. The jew town shows an entirely different route from the rest of the city. If it has taken an entirely different direction somewhere in the city. The jew town is different in architecture, layout of the streets. Jews faced the problems of invasions and lootings in the past. The area is peculiarly tall and is often protected by huge walls. The jew town is concentrated to a centre and the synagogue is in the centre. This tight layout is due to the religious nature (proximity to the synagogue) and the structure of the community.



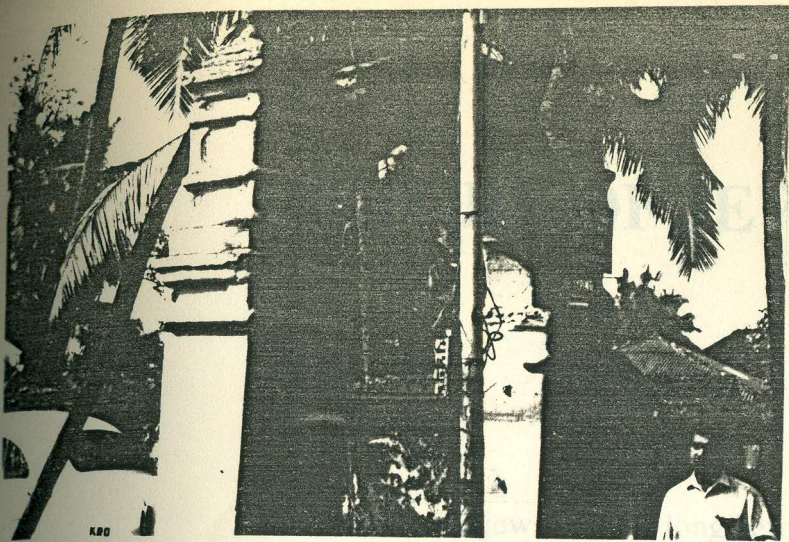
COCHIN HARBOUR



The Jew town hardly takes an area of 2 square kilometres from the total area of Mattancherry which is much bigger. The Jew town shows an entirely different nature which seems like it has taken an entirely different route from the other parts of the town, looks as if it has taken an entirely different direction somewhere in the course of its development. The Jew town is different in architecture, layout of the streets and the lifestyle of the people. Jews faced the problems of invasions and lootings in the past, hence the architecture in the area is peculiarly tall and is often protected by huge walls around. The houses are concentrated to a centre and the synagogue is in the centre. The Jew cemetery is found quite away from the Jew town's residential area. This tight layout of the residential area shows the religious nature (proximity to the synagogue) and the strong social bonds among the members of the community.

A DEVI TEN

MATTANCHERRY: FAST AFFECTED BY MODERNISATION



A DEVI TEMPLE



'MATTANCHERRY', LEAST AFFECTED BY MODERNISATION.

HISTORY OF JEWS IN INDIA

The existence of Jews in India long before the Christian era, was first brought to limelight of history by 'Antiquities of the East'. In his book the 'Zand Avesta', mention is made of meeting a rich Jew who informed him that a colony of his co-religionists had settled in Malabar and certain privileges had been conferred on them by a Hindu ruler.

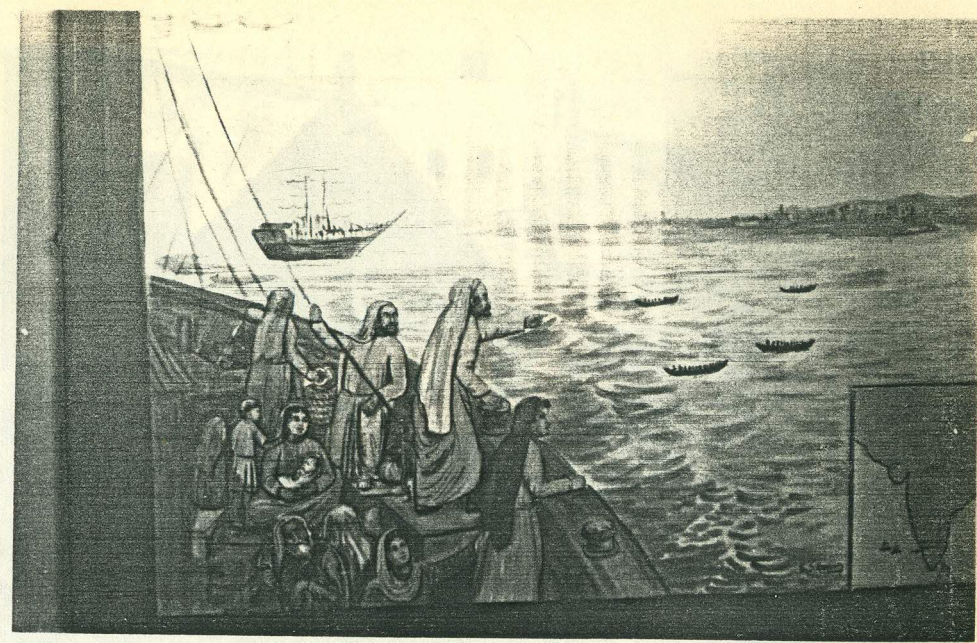
Of all the maritime nations that traded with ancient India, the Jews were the first to come to India not only as traders but as settlers. They made their home on the south west coast of India as early as the first century, if not earlier. The Jews then were the first aliens to settle in India and it was as a result of the generosity and tolerance shown to the Jews by successive Hindu rulers of southern India, that India first earned the name as the land of tolerance and understanding of all religions.

In attempting to speak on the history of the Jews of Kerala one becomes at once conscious of the difficulty of the task as many important and interesting facts connected with the ancient colony on the south west coast of India are shrouded in obscurity. How and when they came into the ancient port of Cranganore or Shingly as the Jews called their old settlements are still some of the unsettled problems of their ancient history, but whatever be the date of their first settlement, it is an undisputed fact of history that from 5th to 15th century, the Jews in Cranganore had a virtually an independent principality ruled over by a Prince of their race and choice.

Crangannore known as Muzhiris to the Greeks and Shingly to the Jews was the only sea port in India known to the outside world. It was to this port therefore the jews turned for a haven of refuge and centre of trade. The destruction of Crangannore is often compared to the devastation of palestine in miniature and the consequent dispersal of the jews from their Holy land.

As the other schools of thoughts which believe, the first jews arrived in Kerala in king solomons merchant fleet. other theories says kerala jews are the descendants of the tribes taken into captivity by Shamanazar, a greek king and that after freed they came to crangannore or, as another historian would have it, that they are the descendants of the jews taken to Babylon by Nebuchandanezar.

Still most historians and jews of kerala prefer to believe that they are descendants of jews who came to india as a result of the destruction of their holy temple in palestine and hence the resulted dispersal.



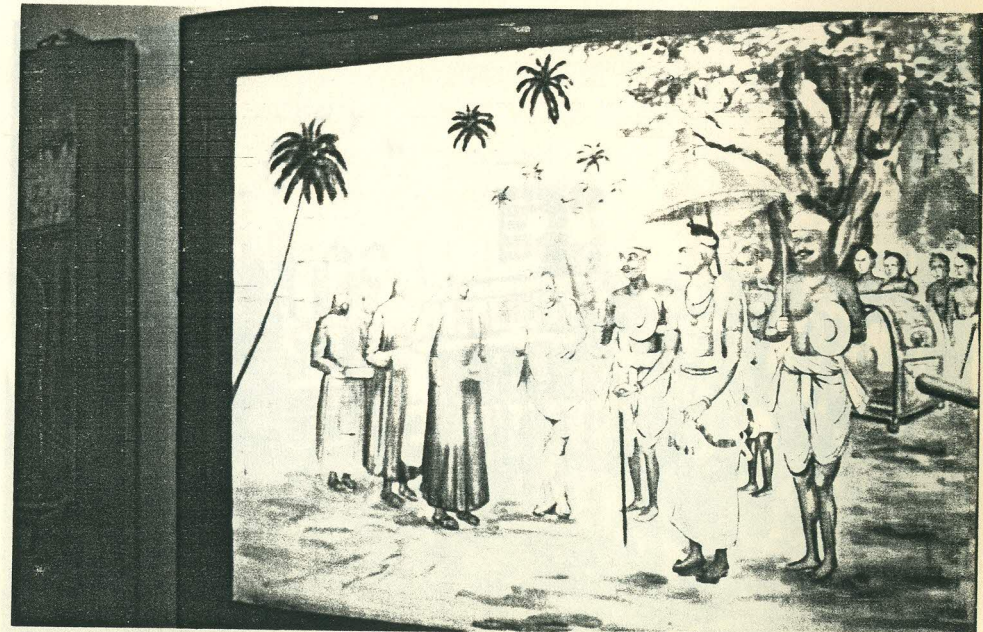
②

PICTURES IN THE KOCHIN SYNAGOGUE - HISTORY OF JEWS IN KERALA

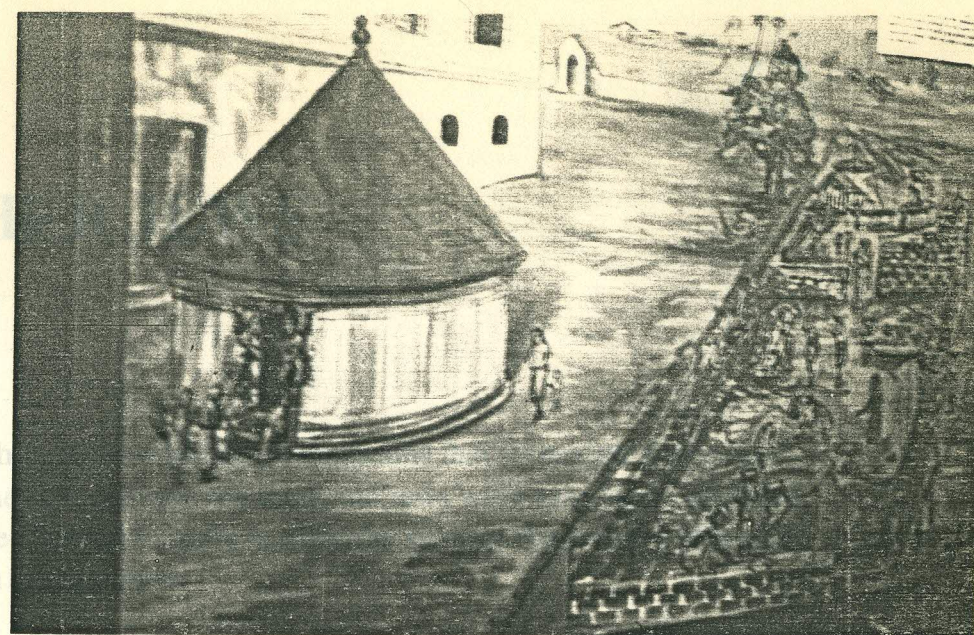
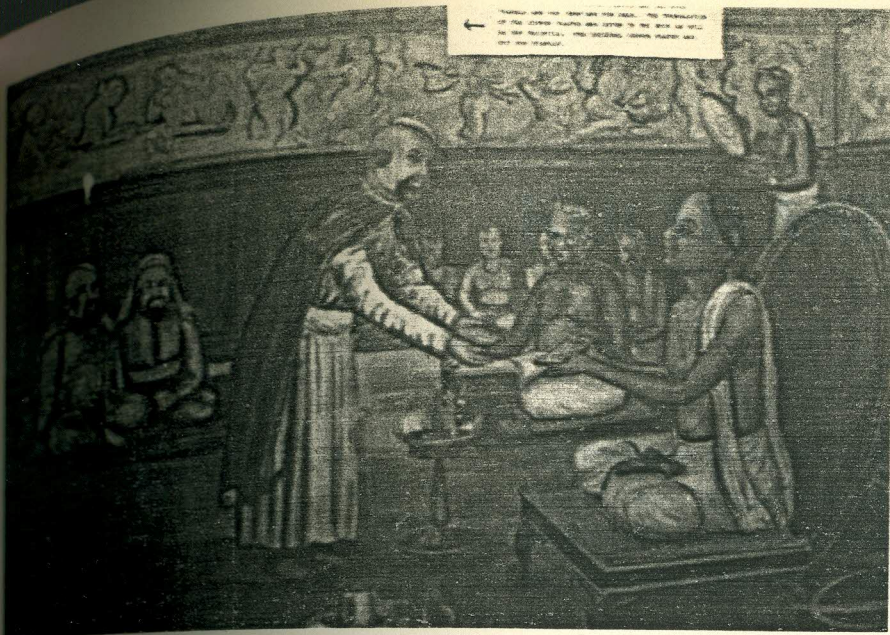
① KING SOLOMONS FLEETS HAD TRADE RELATIONS WITH
THE MALABAR COAST (992-952) BC, EXPORTING SPICES TO PALESTINE

② ROMANS DESTROYED THE JEWISH TEMPLE IN JOCE, AND JEWS FLED
TO DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD, SOME CAME TO INDIA.

③ JEWS LANDED IN SHINGLY AND WAS RECEIVED BY
THE RULER THEN.



③

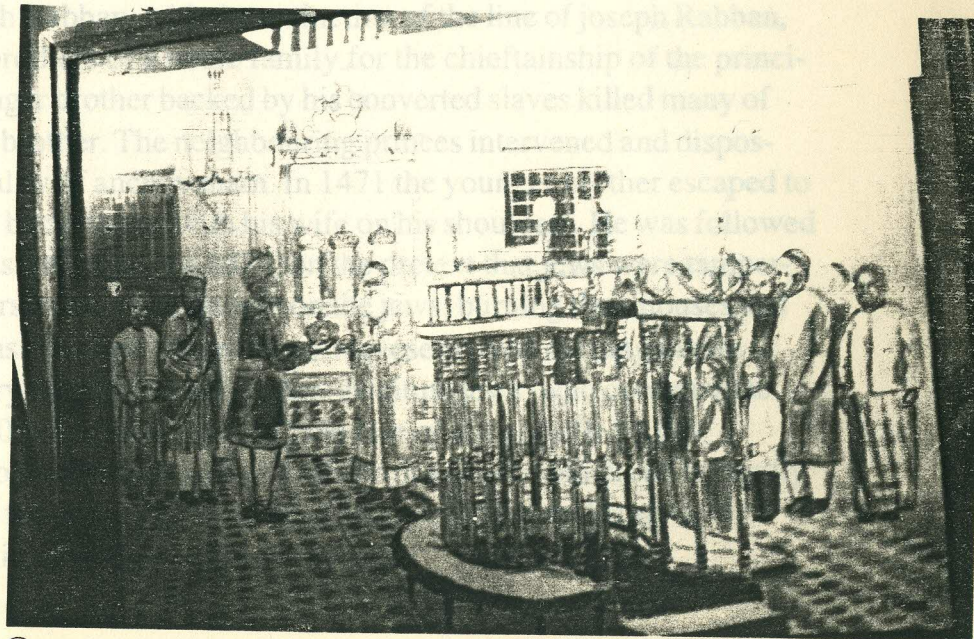


The Jewish settlers enriched by the influx of Jews from Spain and other European countries continued to prosper more than a thousand years after the grant of the copper plates which tells about the privileges given to the Jews by the ruler then.

④ IN 314 CE THE COPPER PLATES WERE GRANTED TO JOSEF RABBAN AND MADE THE KING OF ANCHUVANAM WITH FULL POWERS.

⑤ IN 1524 GRANCANNORE WAS DESTROYED BY MOORS AND JEWS FLED TO KOCHI. THE KOCHI KING GAVE PROTECTION AND PLACE TO BUILD THE CHURCH AND A JEWISH TOWN NEAR HIS PALACE AND TEMPLE, WHICH IS STILL THERE.

⑥ KOCHI MAHARAJA GIFTS A GOLD CROWN FOR TORAH IN 1805. (TORAH IS A FESTIVAL)



KOCHI AND HER JEWS

The tradition of the jews of kochin on the other hand, maintains that soon after the destruction of their second temple in the first century, ten thousand jews were graciously received by then the hindu ruler and were allowed to settle in different parts of the country of which the majority made their home in crangannore.

The jewish settlers enriched by an influx of jews from Spain and other European countries continued to prosper more than a thousand years after the grant of the copper plates which tells about the previlages given to the jews by the ruler then. The first jewish king was Joseph Rabban. with the extinction of the line of joseph Rabban, dissension arose between two brothers of a noble family for the chieftainship of the principality of anchuvanam. The younger brother backed by his converted slaves killed many of those who came under his elder brother. The neighbouring princes intervened and dispossessed the jews of their principality of anchuvanam. In 1471 the younger brother escaped to kochin by swimming across the backwaters, with his wife on his shoulders. He was followed soon by his elder brother and his followers. In 1524, on the pretext that jews were tampering in the pepper trade, the moors made an onslaught on the jews, burning their houses and synagogues. The destruction was complete when the portugeese arrived in crangannore in the beginning of the 16th century they found only a few destitute jews, who continued to live a miserable life there for 40 years more. In 1567 the rest of the jews fled from anchuvanam forever and went to the Hindu Rajah of kochi with a liberty which can be hardly understood, granted them a site for a town by the side of his own palace and temple. Here was built in 1567 jew town and in 1568 the cochin synagogue.

JEWES AND THE ANCIENT SOCIETY

The year of 1500 saw the portuguese in malabar. the nation that was helped to discover a new sea route to india, by jewish astronomers, travellers and interpreters soon forgot their services and subjected to torture. this 160 years were the darkest period of jews in cochin as it was under the occupation of the Portugese. The portugese not only completed the destruction of the already shattered jewish principality in crangannore but also sacked the jew town in cochin with its houses and synagogues

When the Dutch came to Cochin the jews openly supported them for which they had to pay a heavy penalty in blood. the flourished existance of jews in kochi aroused the interest of the jewish community in Amsterdam, who sent a delegate called Mosses De Pereya. According to him there were 4 synagogues and 150 jews in Angyceymal. In Parur 1 synagogue and 100 people. 1 synagogue and 10 families in Chenot, 1 synagogue and 50 people in muttam. In 1795 the country passed into the hands of the british, who granted the same previlages what the kings had given to them. this age was a golden period in the jewish history. when the country got freedom again the new government gave a respected position to the jews as well.

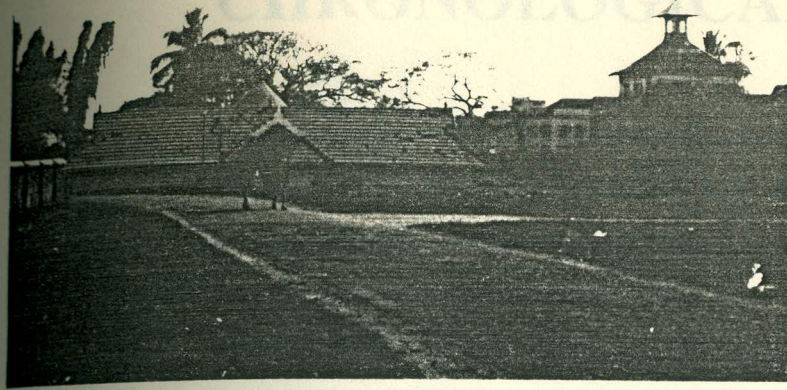
JEWES AND THE ANCIENT SOCIETY

Jews held a quite respectable position in the ancient kerala society. Though there are many records to show of the contribution of Jews to the economic prosperity of malabar during the dutch period from 1663 to 1795, there are interesting references to trading activities of the jews between Malabar, China and Egypt. From many sources it is learned that Jewish merchants were engaged in import and export of pepper, timber, amber, coral, rice etc. the ships of jewish merchants were held in high esteem by European trading companies as well as by the rulers of Kochi. The jews used to help th ruler of kochi with men, money and warfare equipments in times of war, and the jews themselves used to fight for the kings.

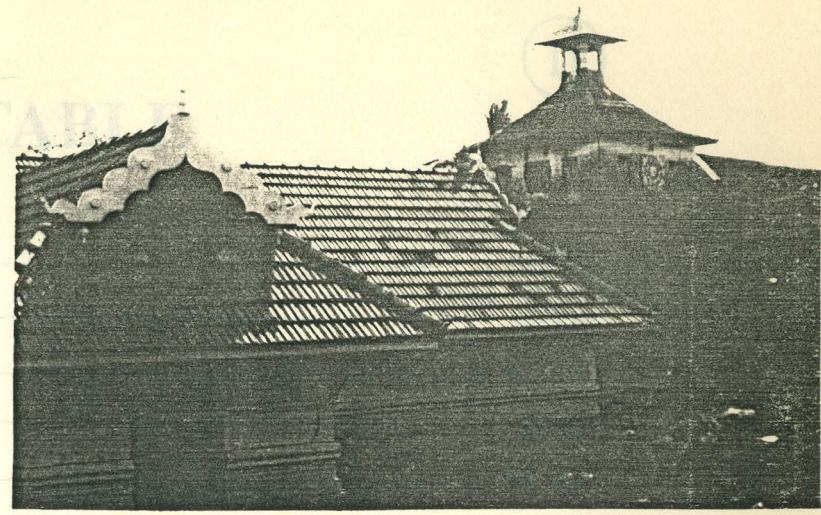
To avert an attack by Hyder Ali, a rich jew named Ezeikel Rahabi sent his sons with riches which made Hyder stop the attack and turn his invasion towards Canara. David Rahabi the father of Ezeikel took an active part in settling the dispute of adoption of the cochin throne with the help of the Dutch Governor, and defeating the rebel chiefs of cochin and the actual heir from the perumpadappu family to be throned.

KOCHI RAJAS TEMPLE AND THE JEWISH CHURCH WHICH
WAS BUILT CLOSE BY, SHOWS THEIR FRIENDLYNESS.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE



Arrival of Joseph Azar to Kochi



CE 1344

Building of Kochi Rajas Synagogue

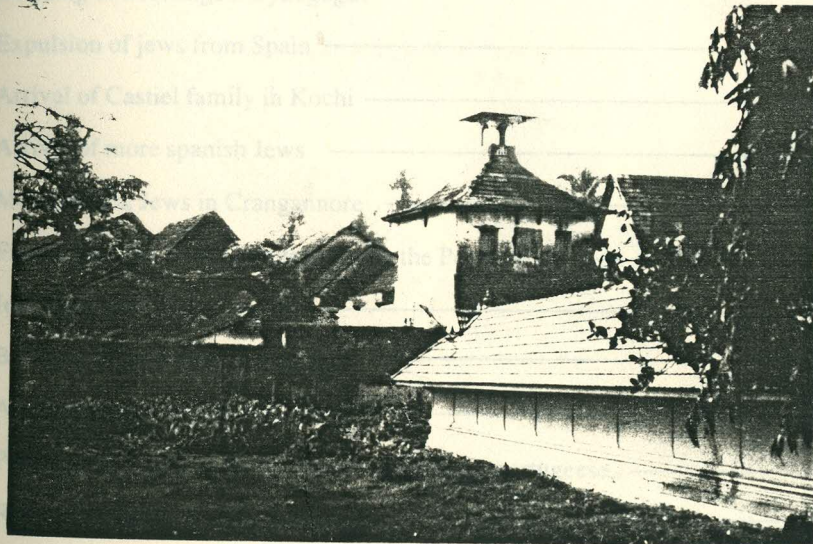
Expulsion of Jews from Spain

Arrival of Casriel family in Kochi

More Spanish Jews

Jews in Cranganore

The Portuguese



Building of the clock tower

Presentation of the gold crown by the Maharajah



CE 1514

CE 1524

CE 1534



'REMINDEES OF THE PAST RELATIONS'-
KOCHI RAJAS TEMPLE AND THE JEWISH CHURCH WHICH
WAS BUILT CLOSE BY, SHOWS THEIR FRIENDLYNESS.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Advent of jews to india and colonialization of crangannore	CE 72
Grant of the copper plates to Joseph Rabban	CE 379
Advent of more jews from Babylon and Persia	CE 490 - 518
Jewish colony in Crangannore contacts China	CE 900
Arrival of Hachamim (a jewish traveller) in Kerala	CE 1141
Advent of Joseph Azar to Kochi	CE1344
Building of kochangadi Synagogue	CE1345
Expulsion of jews from Spain	CE 1492
Arrival of Castiel family in Kochi	CE 1511
Arrival of more spanish Jews	CE 1514
Moors attack Jews in Crangannore	CE1524
Final expulsion from Crangannore by the Portugeese	CE1565
Jew town built and occupied	CE1567
Building of the kochin synagogue	CE1568
Appointment of the first mudaliar	CE1570
Partial destruction of the kochin synagogue by portugeese	CE1662
Rebuilding of the kochin synagogue	CE1664
Building of the clock tower	CE1760
Presentation of the gold crown by the maharajah	CE1805
Celebration of the 400th anniversary of the synagogue	CE1968



THE JEW TOWN 30 YEARS BACK,
(THE CHURCH CAN BE SEEN)



THE SAME STREET TODAY,
AS A TOURIST ATTRACTED SPOT.

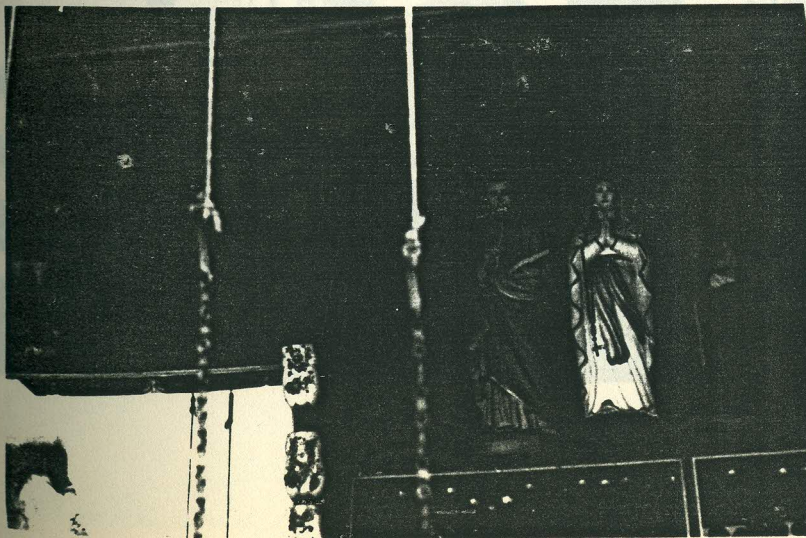
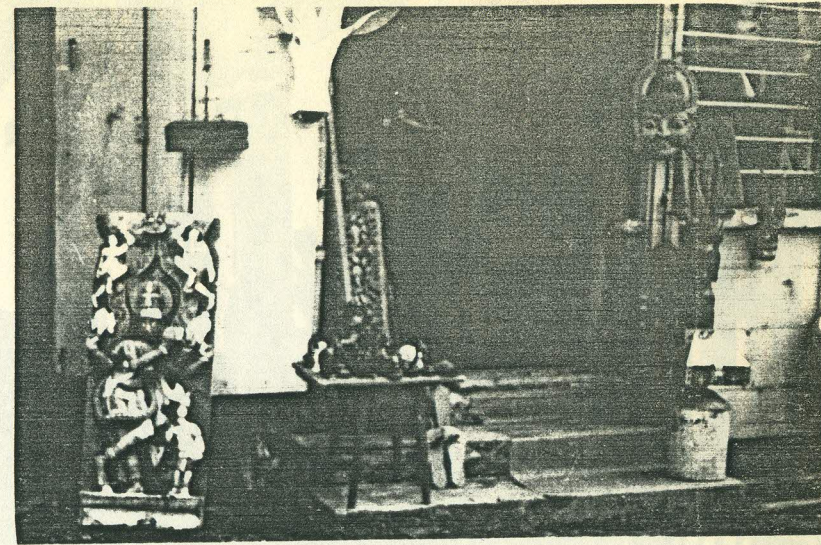
THE PRESENT JEW COMMUNITY

The Jew community faced major changes after the independence. The jews were seen as an upper class and had contacts and relations with the kings and royal families and had least contact with the local crowd, living outside the Jew town. So till then the development within the Jew town was different from the development which took place out of the jew town. In fact these two areas developed in two different directions over a large period of time and had the least cultural mix though these areas were lying close to each other. Jews still now is

Although the Jews of Kerala had a loud history, the present state is different. The present state can be defined more accurately as the date from which the Jewish state of Israel was born. Jews as a result of the expulsion from the holy land, had fled and settled in different parts of the world. The birth of Israel aroused a feeling of patriotism, togetherness and belongingness in every Jew's heart all over the world. Hence causing a flow to their promised land and leaving behind all the riches and positions in their settled lands. In Kerala the emigration wave among Jews started somewhere in 1948 and ended around 1985, when a major part of the Jews left their homes due to religious sentiments leaving behind some people who really did not want to go, and who felt more sentimental to the land where they were born than their ancestral land which they had just heard of. "Tragedy" says one of the remaining Jew, about the emigrations. The Jew town which was once very lively, now has just 7 families and 17 Jews living in it, out of which 14 are over 60 years and 3 over 35 years old, and a lot of abandoned houses. It was mostly the young people who emigrated, leaving behind their parents and relatives who did not want to go. As per the emigrations rules they were not permitted to transfer any of their riches, so these people once left, still comes to cash down their properties and to visit their friends and relatives.

The Jew community faced major changes after the independence. The jews were seen as an upper class and had contacts and relations with the kings and royal families and had least contact with the local croud, living outside the Jew town. So till then the development within the Jew town was different from the development which took place out of the jew town. in fact these two areas developed in two different directions over a large period of time and had the least cultural mix though these areas were lying close to each other. Jews still now is a conservative society, but now a contact with the other societies have developed upto a certain extent. Another reason for this development of this cultural mix is that after independence Jews like anybody else started to take up government jobs other than their traditional business and often had to move out of the Jew town and stay outside. This led to a socio cultural exchange between the Jews and the other communities.

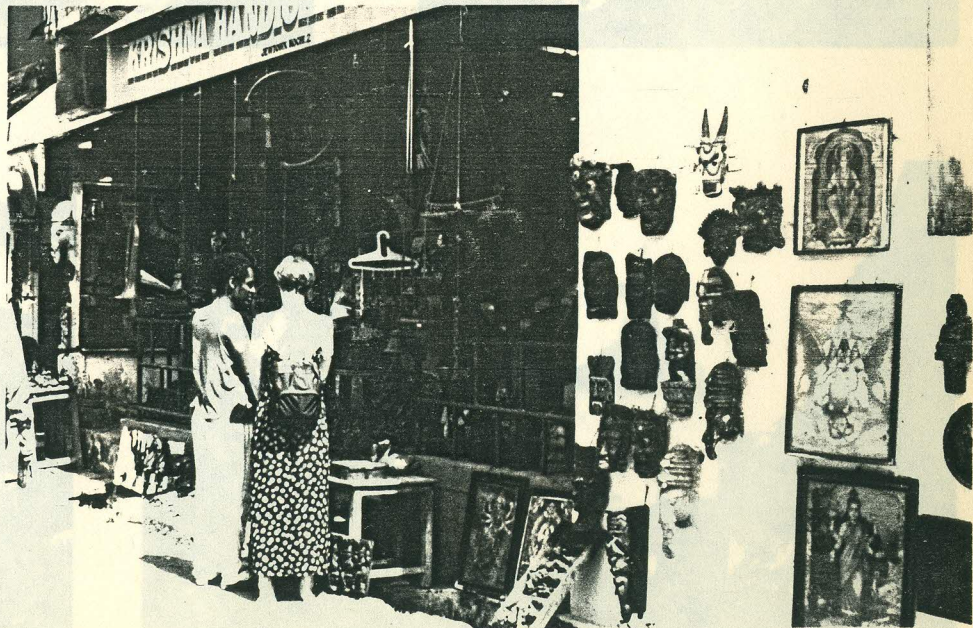
Now the Jew town in Kochi which has a sound history has started to become a tourist attractive centre, both from tourists inside the country and also abroad, and also other Jews from different parts of the world. This tourist wave has also brought many kinds of tourist attractive spots and centres inside the Jew town. The antique and spice sellers shops are just one of them. This brings a lot of locals inside to do business inside the jew town and hence resulting in an extensive cultural mix between the Jews and the other communities. Many Jews rent out shops and rooms for these sales which is a profit for them. Modernisation has hence made its way into the Jew town, and the further study was more done to observe the onslaught of modernisation into the Jew town and how the traditional culture has endured itself to adapt to this situation.

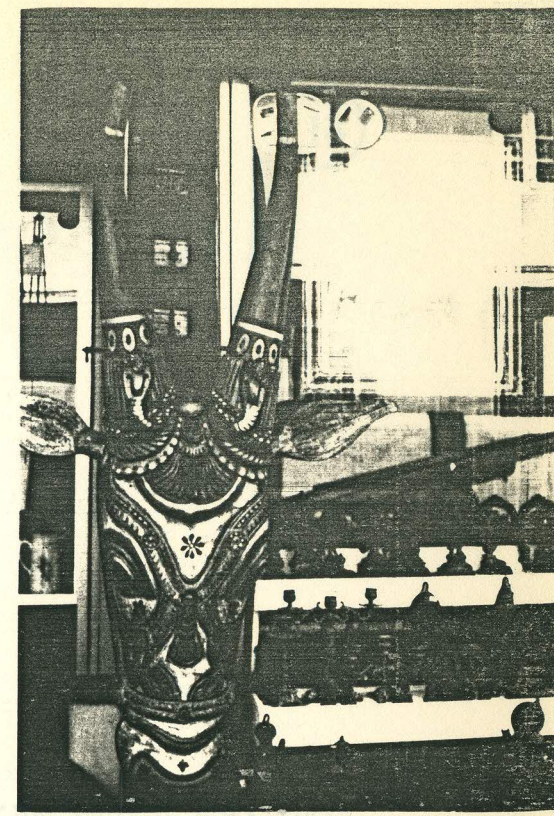
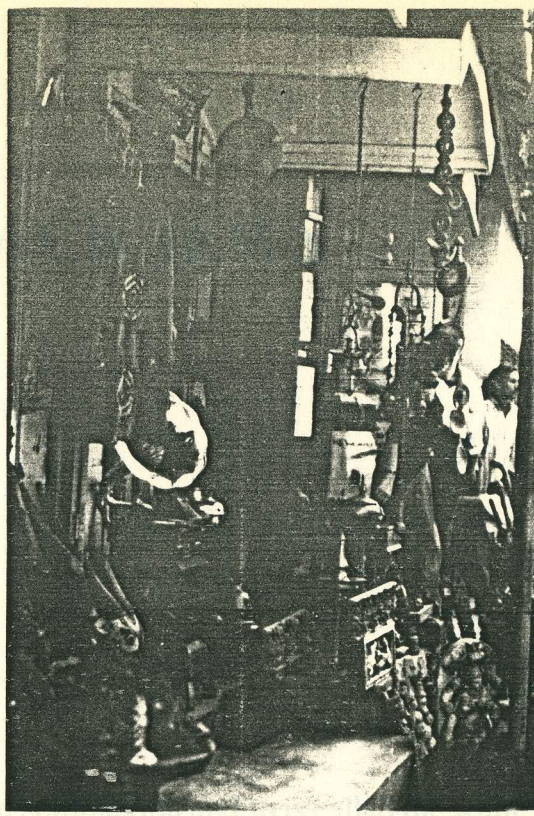


THE PRESENT 'JEW TOWN', - HAS STARTED TO
BECOME A TOURIST ATTRACTING SPOT.
(THE ONSLAUGHT OF MODERNISATION)

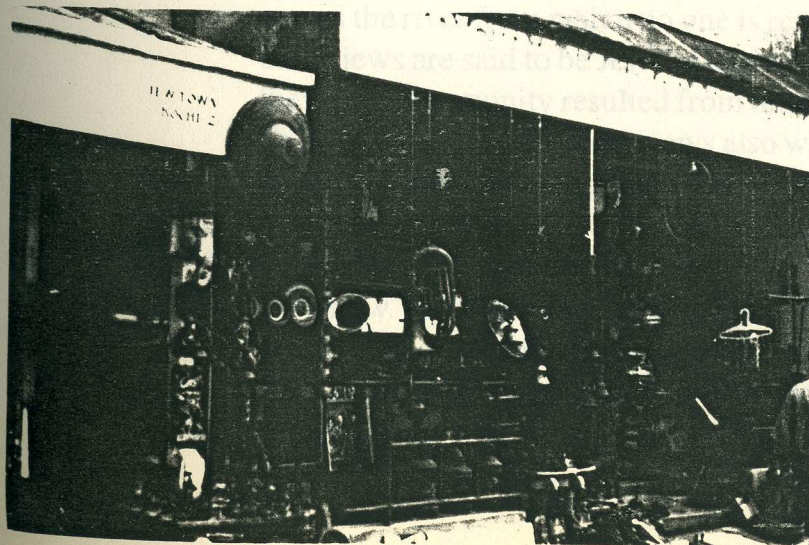


ANTIQUE SELLERS STALLS IN THE JEW TOWN.





ANTIQUE SELLERS STALLS



THE BLACK JEWS

The Jews are fair in complexion and so is called the white Jews or the 'pardesi' Jews. There is another community among the jews themselves called the black Jews (because of the colour of their skin) whose ancestry is still in debate. There were 30 black jews who stayed across the river from which no one is remaining, every one of them went back to Israel. The black jews are said to be Jews of negroid ancestry, but there are people who believe that they are a community resulted from inter caste marriages between the Indians and the Jews. This is denied by the pardesi jews also who believes that Jews never tried for converting people or inter caste marriages. The two Jew communities were always in an argument over an old matter. The historic copper plates granted to Josef Rabban by the king of Crangannore, permitting them with a lot of previlages are in possession with the pardesi jews now. The black Jews accuse the white jews for stealing them while kept for drying which they claim to be actually theirs. Whatever the actual fact is, there is not even a single pardesi jews left in the whole of Mattancherry and the copper plates are safe in the Kochin synagogue.

JEW - RELEGIOUS AND SOCIAL LIFE

The Jew society comprises of highly orthodox people, and maintains a strong social relation among its members. Jews show similarity to both Christians and Muslims, when talked about their religion and social practices (both Christianity and Islam are said to have evolved from Judaism, and Jesus Christ was born as a Jew). Jews pray three times a day and goes to the synagogue thrice a day. This explains why Jews in the olden days did not prefer taking up government jobs and tried to be back home by dusk

Custom prayer- The Jews attend custom prayer twice a day in the synagogue. But it is required to have 16 people at the least, to perform this prayer and all the people should be 13 years old. This prayer in the present situation happens very rarely because of the decline in population. But even now whenever 13 or more Jews happen to gather together (even with the Jews who visit the synagogue from other parts of the world) this custom prayer is performed. This prayer once happened twice a day happens rarely, once in a month.

FESTIVALS

Pass over (Feast of Easter)

Pass over is the Jewish version of the Easter, and this is the most important Jewish festival, celebrated by Jews all over the world. On this festival Jews feast in the synagogue instead of eating at the home. All members of all the families which belong to the synagogue gather together in the synagogue hall and after the prayer have the feast. This festival also serves a chance for a social gathering which is a very interesting peculiarity of the Jewish community.

Feast of Tabernacles.

This festival has a very old historical background. This is for the reminder of the day when Moses gathered the people from Jerusalem and went to Israel. On the journey they had to face a lot of hardships, had to cover oceans and mountains and finally on the 7th day Moses got enlightened and was granted the ten commandments to a better way of living from Jahoba. Tabernacles means hardships, and this is the reminder of the centuries old event. Jews indulge themselves in prayer for 7 days and on the 7th day there will be a big feast. Even though they go to the synagogue on these days, the feast takes place at their homes.

Feast of weeks (Harvest festival)

This feast takes place every week in all Jew families on Wednesday nights. This is called the harvest festival because on this day they usually invite another family to feast with them. Two families having a feast at one place. This festival is for having a strong social bond between the members of the society. In olden days this used to happen very frequently or almost twice a month. But in the present times this festival is not celebrated at all and just remains in the hearts of all Kochi Jews.

FASTING

The Jews have quite often fasting habits, which are very much followed by all. The most important of all is the fast of Attornment, This happens on the 10th day of new year when they fast for 27 hours followed by a grant dinner. During this fast they are not supposed to even drink water and spends most of the time in the synagogue. This fasting has a lot of similarity with the fasting of the muslims.

Fast of ab- The word ab in Hebrew means destruction or this is the feast they follow on the day of the destruction of the synagogue in Palestine, which caused the Jews to flee from the holy land and settle in different parts of the world. The Palestine temple was dewasted and looted by moorish attack and even now on that date (in the month of march) they fast the whole day.

Sabbath day- Sabbath means rest. It is the rest day for Jews, after working for six days a week they rest on the seventh day (saturday according to the Christian calendar) on all Saturdays of the week they prefer to stay at home without going anywhere. On this day the synagogue will also be closed as the people there also takes rest on that day. But as the Jews started to get employed in government jobs they could not rest on this day as sunday is the holiday according to the government. So in these days this practice is not followed except for that the synagogue remains closed on saturdays.

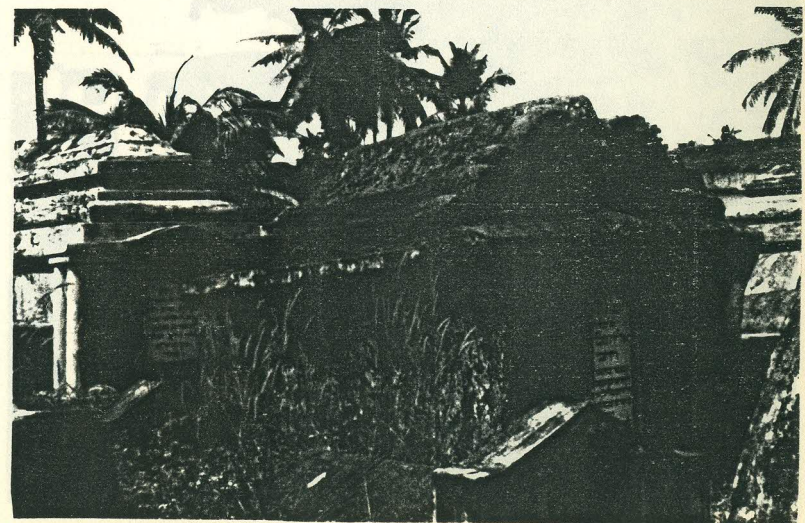
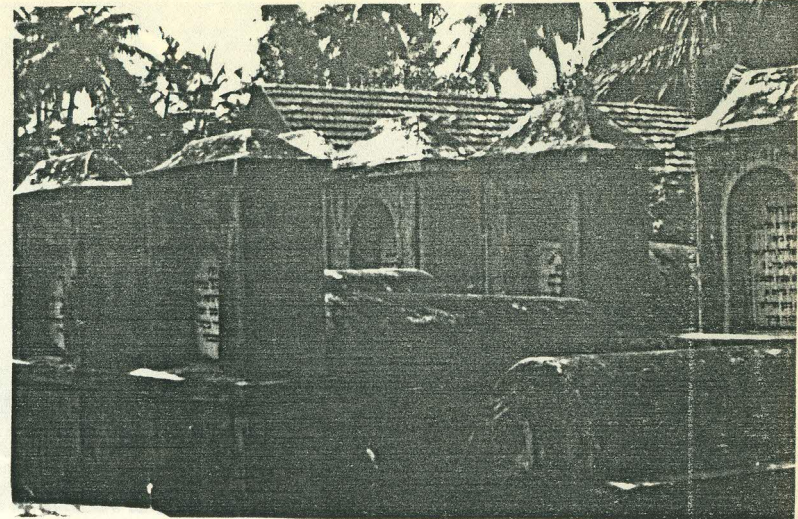
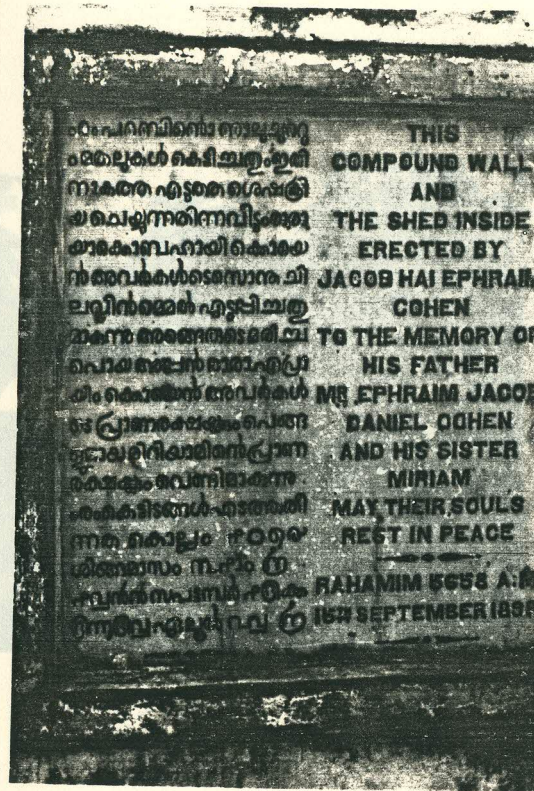
MARRIAGES

Wedding ceremonies- Wedding ceremonies are less complex in the Jewish community and it does not happen in the synagogue, but at the grooms place. The three most elderly men from the society witness the marriage and in the presence of both the family members of both the bride and the groom and the crowd disperses after the function. The same night after 8 pm a tea party is arranged at the grooms residence to all the invited people and disperses in a couple of hours. The marriages takes place only on Tuesdays and only one marriage takes place in one community in a week because it would require the same elderly people to be there. The ceremonies of the marriage is astonishingly simple as compared to other Jewish activities and people of other communities are not invited for the marriages. In the Kochi community the last marriage was that of Mrs. and Mr. Koder who has now left for Israel.

BIRTH AND DEATH

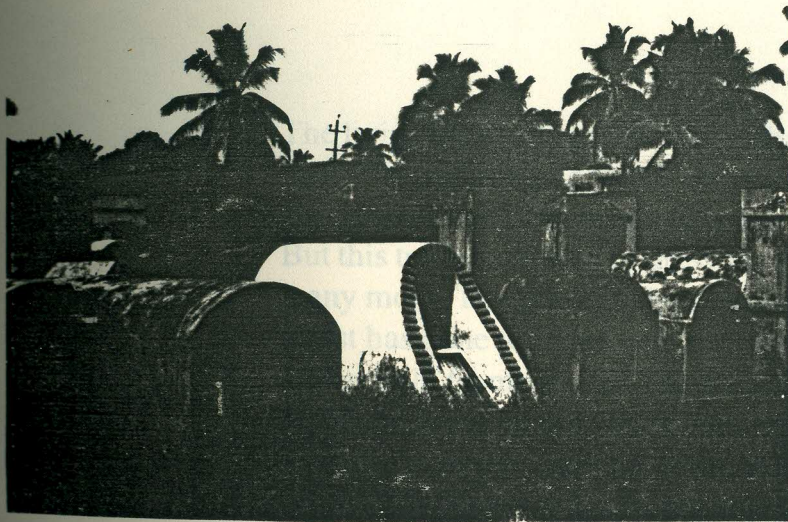
On the seventh day of birth of a male baby 'sunneth' is performed. This is then followed by a big feast on the same day and the whole community will be invited. The sunneth is a religious ceremony followed also by the muslims, but they perform sunneth at a more elder age (5-7 years). The birth of a female baby is not celebrated because in the Jewish society men holds a more important position than women.

The Jews bury their dead in the Jewish cymetry which is situated out of the Jew town. The cymetry is well protected by huge walls around and there is a care taker of the cymetry who maintains the tomb stones. The Jews cover their dead in white cloth completely before the burial and the rituals are performed in the cymetry. A hand full of sand from the holy land is also put in the coffin and in the case of Kerala Jew a handful of sand from anchuvanam also goes with the holy sand. The sand from anchuvanam is also considered as holy as the sand from Palestine because anchuvanam was the first settlement of Jews in Kerala. The religious ceremonies and rituals also has changed over the time due to the decline in population and changed living habits of the Jews.



WHERE THE ANCESTORS SLEEP.
 THE JEWISH Cymetry.

LIVING AND EATING



aged over the period due to the decline in the popula-
is called the kaway which is very similar to that of a
wear the same difference with very less difference.
as somewhere dropped decades back and no one wears
ue used to wear it in the time of ceremonies but the
ortant religious ceremonies like Simcha Torah, priests
way of dressing is not used. It is said that the
ribonal Jewish dress was
me. The
ansform

pendence when Jews actually started to ming

Homes- All the Jewish homes look alike from
ent, but overall has a feel of a christian home
and antique pieces, does not show a common
with attractive show pieces but elements which
absent. Interiors are usually spacious and tidy
television, refrigerator and coolers.

'STEPHEN', CARE TAKER OF THE CYMETRY.



LIVING AND EATING HABITS

The living styles of the Jews have changed over the period due to the decline in the population. The traditional dress of the Jews is called the kawayya which is very similar to that of a Christian priest. Both men and women wear the same difference with very less difference. But this traditional way of dressing was somewhere dropped decades back and no one wears it any more. The priest in the synagogue used to wear it in the time of ceremonies but the priest has gone to Israel, and for important religious ceremonies like Simcha Torah, priests are brought from outside. The present way of dressing is not something evolved from the Kerala dressing style or from their traditional Jewish dress. Most of the men wear pants and shirt and pyjamas and shirt while at home. The ladies also wear western style dresses even at home. The period of time when this transformation happened is guessed to be after independence when Jews actually started to mingle and match with the other communities.

Homes- All the Jewish homes look alike from outside, but the interiors are equally different, but overall has a feel of a Christian home. Furnitures even though some places have old and antique pieces, does not show a common style. The interiors are mostly rich looking with attractive show pieces but elements with which a Jewish identity can be identified is absent. Interiors are usually spacious and tidy and now rich with universal appliances like the television, refrigerator and coolers.

THE ARCHITECTURE

The architecture of the the jews reflect a sense of hugeness. This actually does not have anything to do with the traditional architecture of it is no way similar to that of Palestine or Israel, and it is not similar to the architecture of the other Jewish communities living in the other parts of the world. The Kerala jews follow an architectural form which is similar to the traditional architecture of Kerala, or moreover an extension of the same. The jews faced problems of invasions in the past from the portuguese and the moors. So in order to protect themselves and their riches they built huge walls and gates around and the buildings also looked huge and invincible, and often have only one strong door in the ground floor and not even a window in the ground floor whereas there are lot of windows in the first floor and above. This is obviously due to security reasons, the houses have very strong cellars or holds. The wall around the synagogue is more than 20 feets high.

The Jewish houses also follow the same pattern of having a single door in the ground floor and a lot of windows on the top floors. This also could be due to the conservative nature of the religion. The houses are called 'hall' or the name of the houses, followed by the word 'hall'.

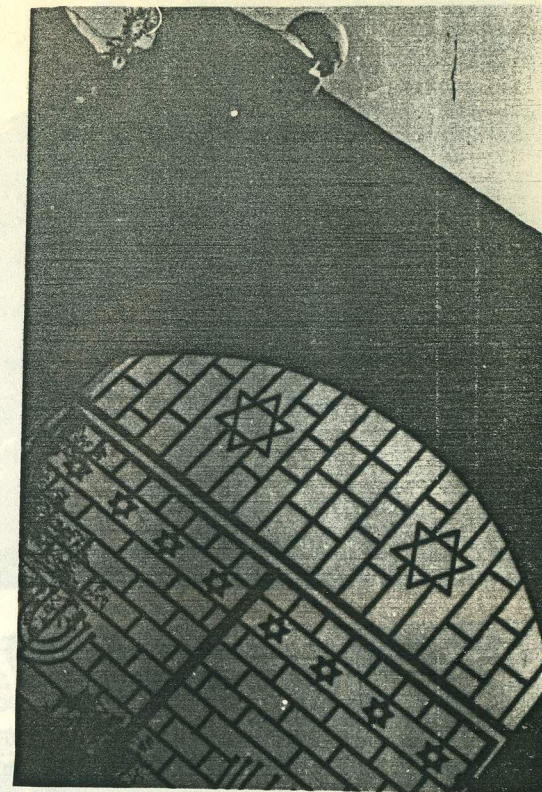
Eating habits- The Kerala Jews have no particular eating styles, but they follow some strict religious diet. They call their food by the name Quessor food, which means certified food. The diet consists of all vegetables and milk products, but when it comes to fish and meat they have religious preferences. A jew eats only meat which is taken from an animal by a certified person, who is certified to kill and serve. The Jewish community has a person appointed for this job and only he is permitted to kill the animals to be eaten for the whole community. Now in the present context, the last certified person has left for Israel without leaving a heir. So the jews does not take meat now. The Jews are permitted to eat only animals with double hoofs (cattle, pigs etc.) and are not allowed to eat meat of a single hoofed animal (example horse) and animals with claws. The Jew eats only fish with scales and fins and crustaceans or fishes with outer bones are not allowed to eat.

THE ARCHITECTURE

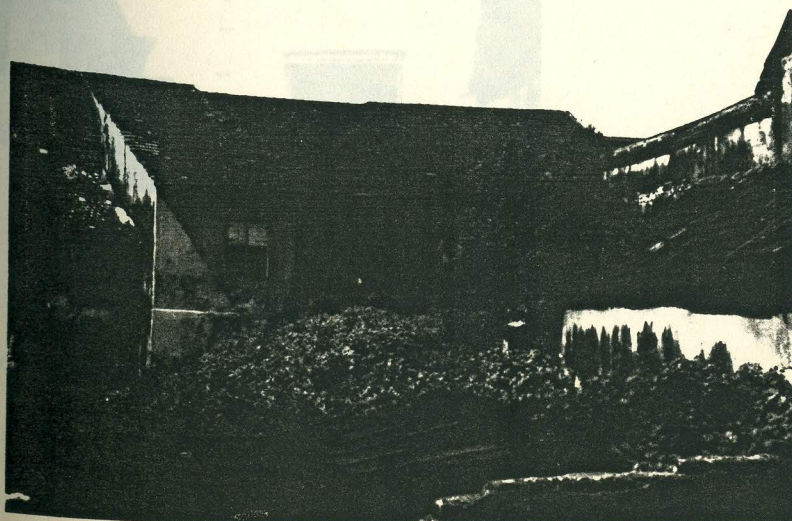
The architecture of the the jews reflect a sense of hugeness. This actually does not have anything to do with the traditional architecture or it is no way similar to that of Palestine or Israel, and it is not similar to the architecture of the other Jewish communities living in the other parts of the world. The Kerala jews follow an architectural form which is similar to the traditional architecture of kerala, or moreover an extension of the same. The Jews faced problems of invasions in the past from the portugeese and the moors. So in order to protect themselves and their riches they built huge walls and gates around and the buildings also looked huge and invincible, and often have only one strong door in the ground floor and not even a window in the ground floor whereas there are lot of windows in the first floor and above. This is obviously due to security reasons. the hoses have very strong cellars or holds. The wall around the synagogue is more than 20 feets high.

The Jewish houses also follow the same pattern of having a single door in the ground floor and a lot of windows on the top floors. This also could be due to the conservative nature of the relegion. The houses are called 'hall' or the name of the houses followed by the word 'hall' (perriara hall, vinci hall etc). Hall means meeting place. the reason why houses were called meeting place is still unknown. The houses are arranged on both sides of the street and the street leads to the synagogue. This also spells the strong community bonds and attachment to the synagogue and an attitude to be very much within themselves.

This method of architecture was followed in the olden days, but the present architectural constructions are different and does not stick to this old ways. This can be seen from the new extensions done to the old buildings and the new buildings in the Jew town. The houses of people who has left for israel is sometimes seen abandoned or some are purchased by other people and still unused. This also brings the local culture to mix with the traditional culture.



JEWISH ARCHITECTURE.

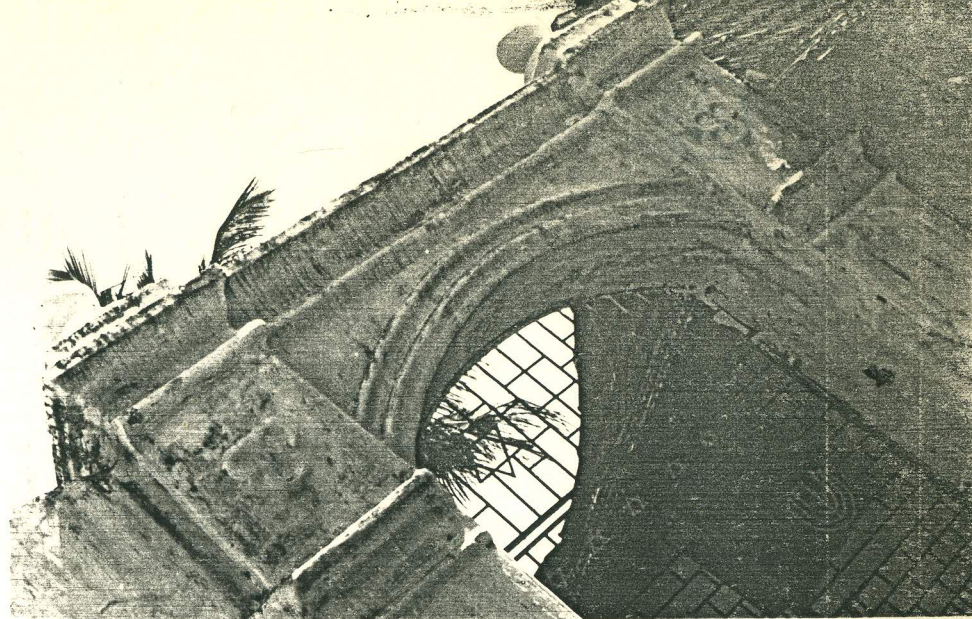


AN ABANDONED BUILDING.





THE CLOCK TOWER OF THE CHURCH



ENTRANCE
TO THE CHURCH.

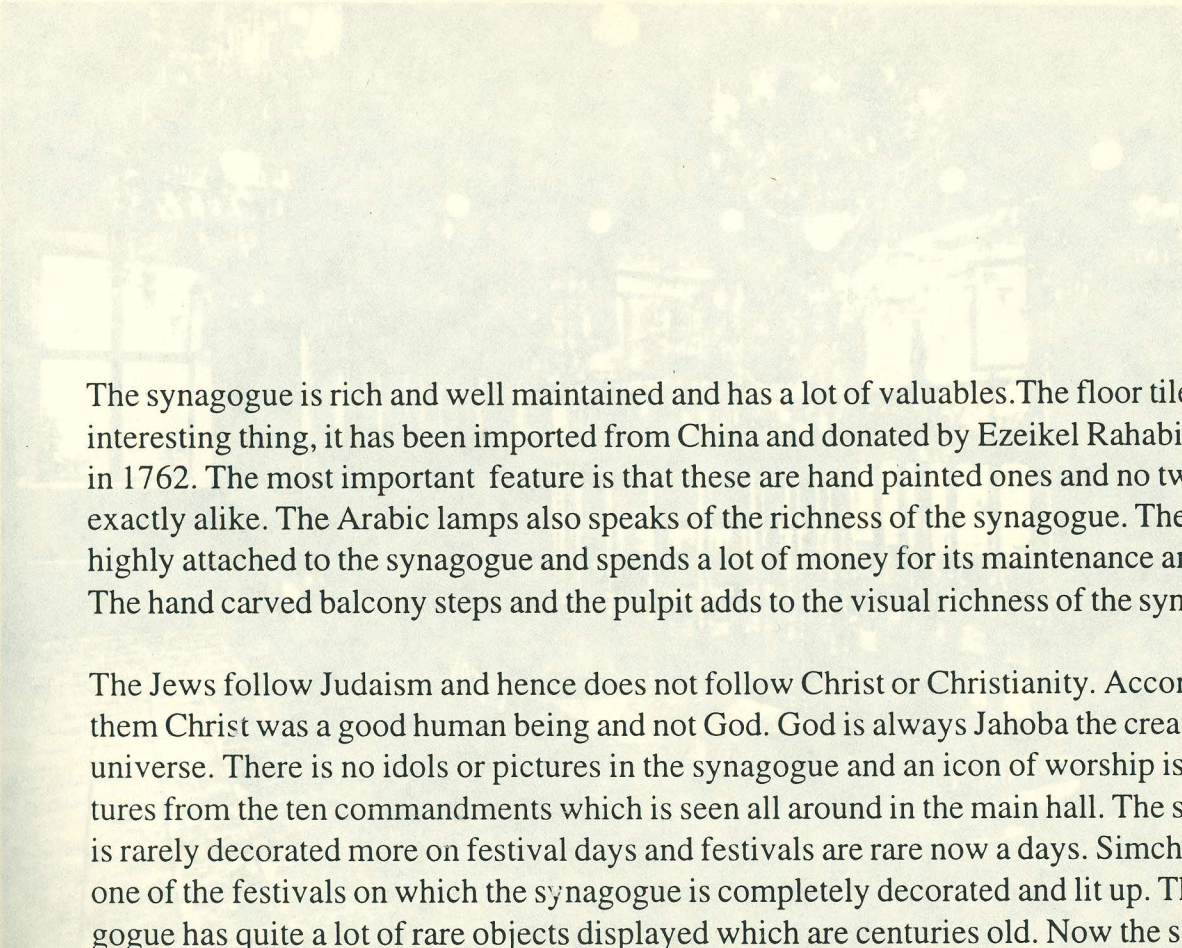


HOUSE OF MR. HELLEGUA

THE SYNAGOGUE

The Synagogue is the church or the place of worship of the Jews. The Kochin synagogue is one of the oldest 5 synagogues in the world and the oldest in the British common wealth. The kochi synagogue celebrated its 400th anniversary in 1968 with an 8 days seminar and over 1000 visitors pouring in from all parts of the world. The meaning of the word synagogue in Hebrew is 'place of worship'. The synagogue is situated in the end of the Jew town and a meeting ground, both protected by huge walls and gates. There were 10 synagogues in kerala and the kochin synagogue is one of the oldest one and the only remaining one. The rest have been destroyed by invasions in the past and by the flow of time. The last one which came down was the kochangadi synagogue in a place called kochangadi near kochi and some stone slabs with Hebrew inscriptions which was a part of the kochangadi synagogue is now displayed in the Kochi synagogue.

The kochi synagogue has a huge external wall and a small and strong door to the inside. The huge clock tower near the synagogue was meant for letting the whole community know about the prayer timings and emergencies at the synagogue. As one enters the synagogue, there is an inner courtyard in which the church is situated. The visitors are so much that now an entrance fees is levied from all visitors. The new addition to the kochi synagogue is the museum of jewish history in Kerala.



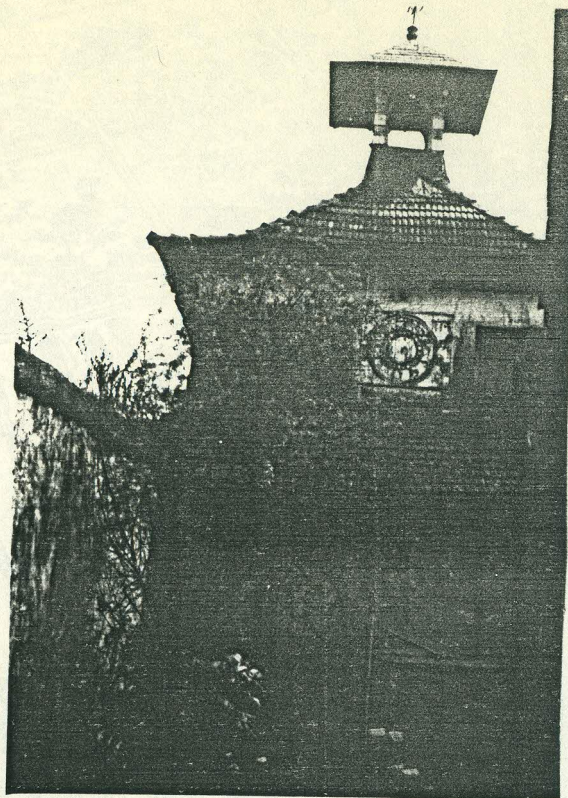
The synagogue is rich and well maintained and has a lot of valuables. The floor tiles is a very interesting thing, it has been imported from China and donated by Ezeikel Rahabi a rich jew in 1762. The most important feature is that these are hand painted ones and no two are exactly alike. The Arabic lamps also speaks of the richness of the synagogue. The Jews are highly attached to the synagogue and spends a lot of money for its maintenance and repair. The hand carved balcony steps and the pulpit adds to the visual richness of the synagogue.

The Jews follow Judaism and hence does not follow Christ or Christianity. According to them Christ was a good human being and not God. God is always Jahoba the creator of the universe. There is no idols or pictures in the synagogue and an icon of worship is the scriptures from the ten commandments which is seen all around in the main hall. The synagogue is rarely decorated more on festival days and festivals are rare now a days. Simcha Torah is one of the festivals on which the synagogue is completely decorated and lit up. The synagogue has quite a lot of rare objects displayed which are centuries old. Now the synagogue is looked after by the government by the supervision of Mr. Hellagua the care taker of the synagogue. In course of time it is planned to be preserved as a national monument by the government of kerala. The synagogue is the most tourist attracted spot in the whole of the jew town.

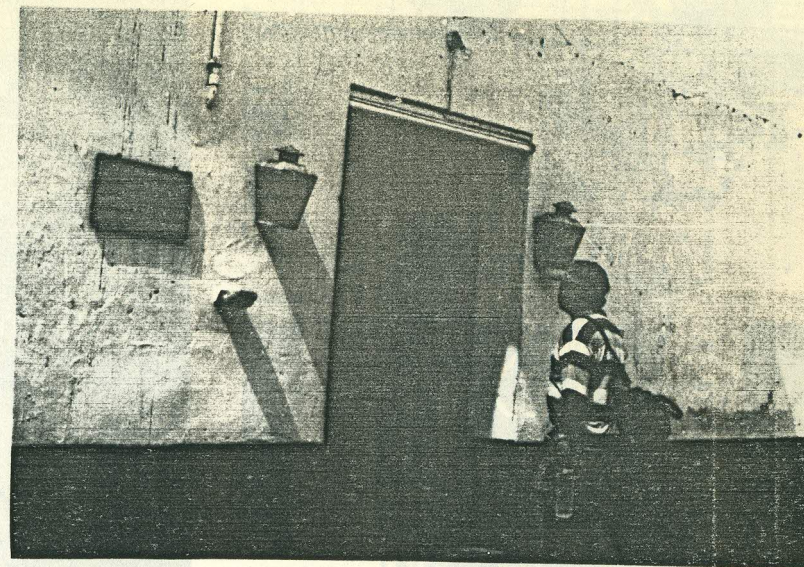


THE SYNAGOGUE DECORATED FOR 'SIMCHA TORAH'

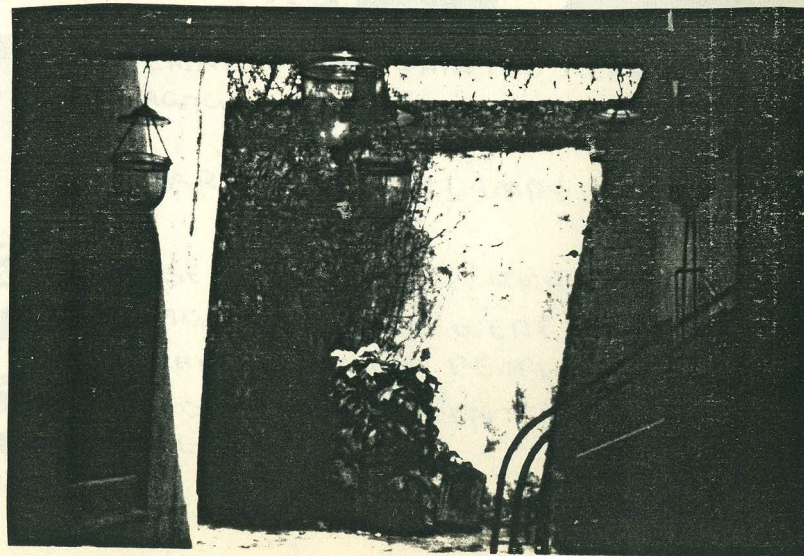
THE
CLOCK
TOWER



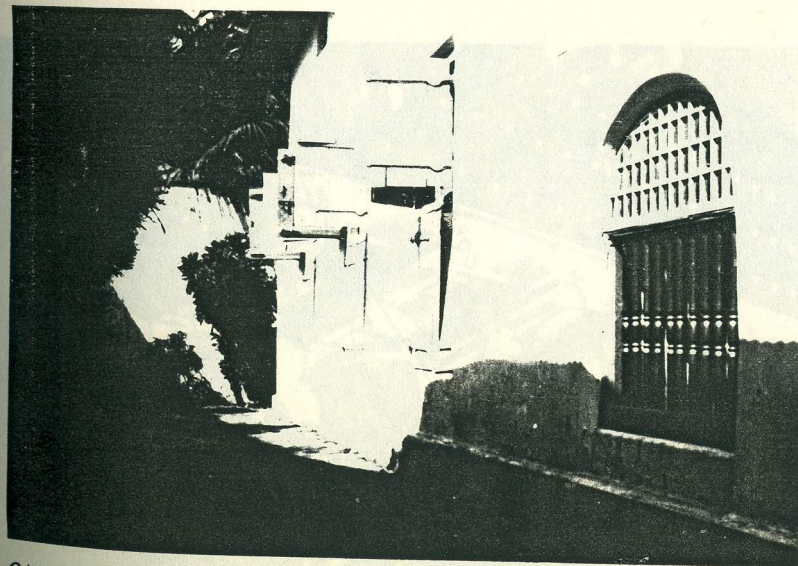
MAIN ENTRANCE

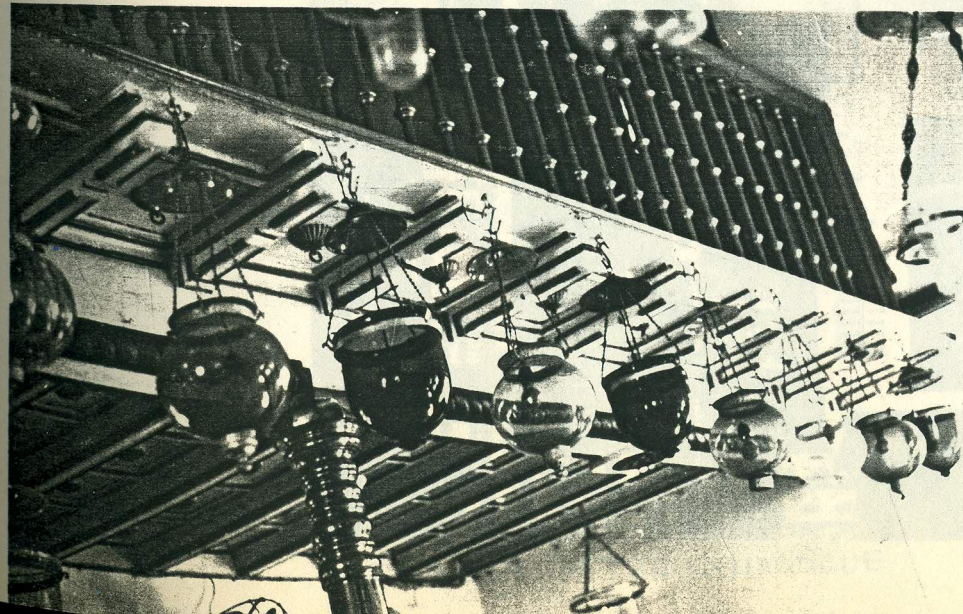
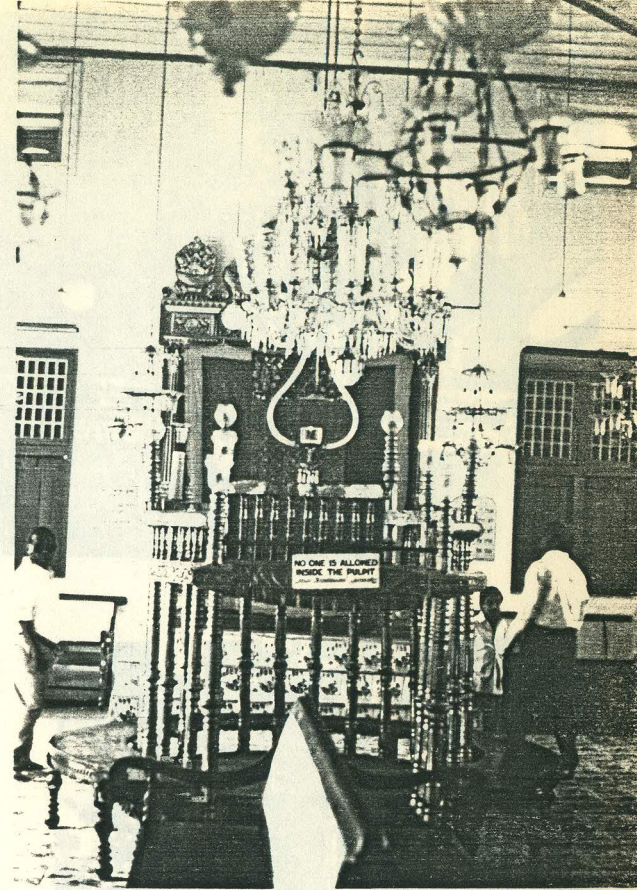
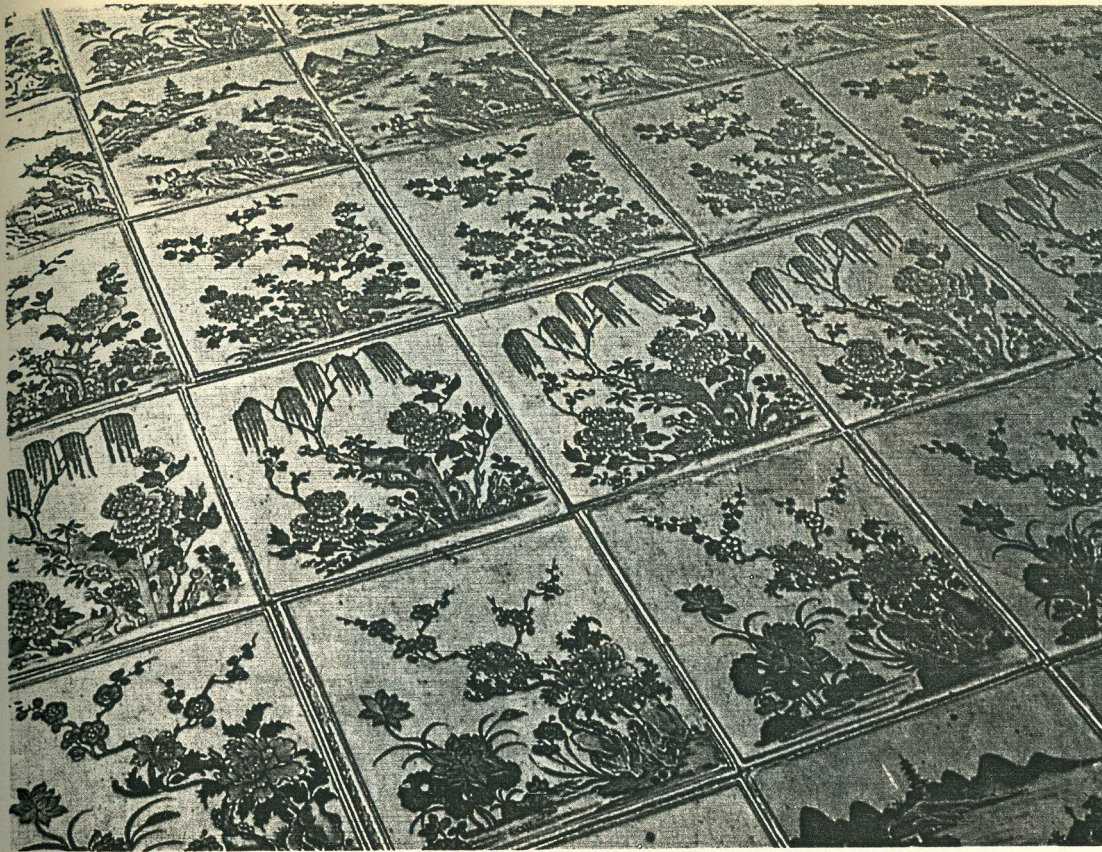


THE SYNAGOGUE



OUTER COURTYARD

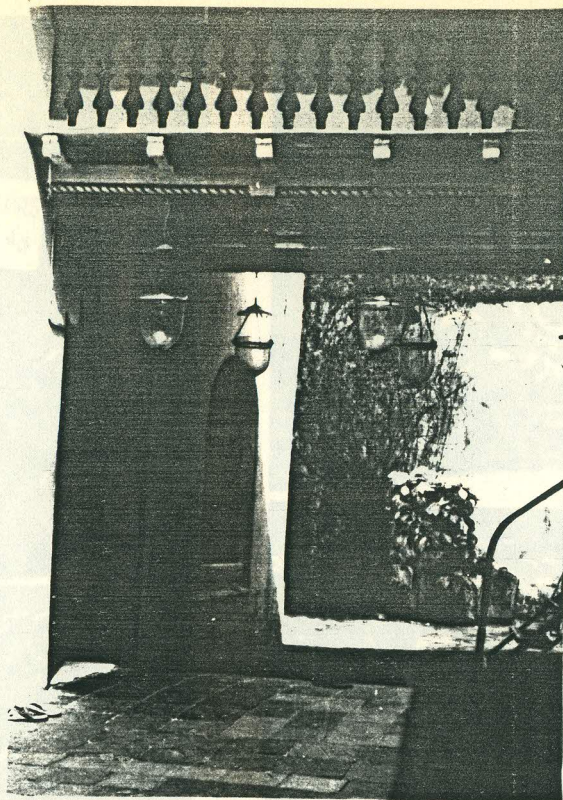




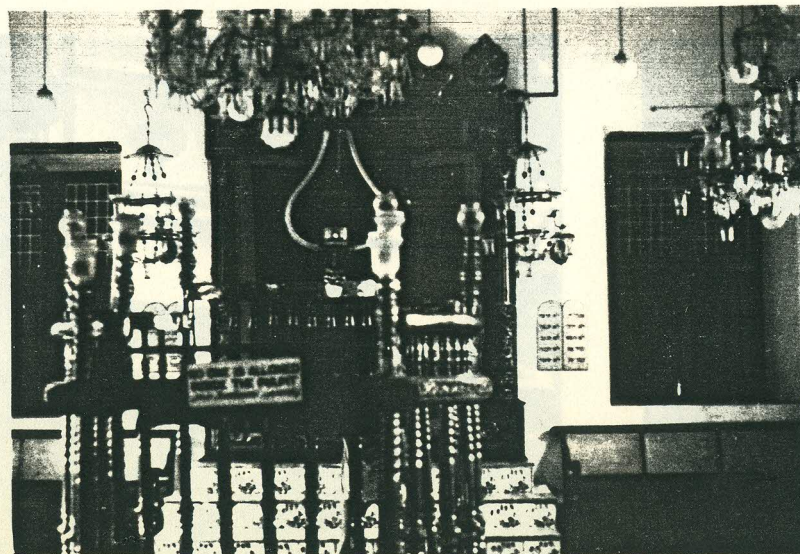
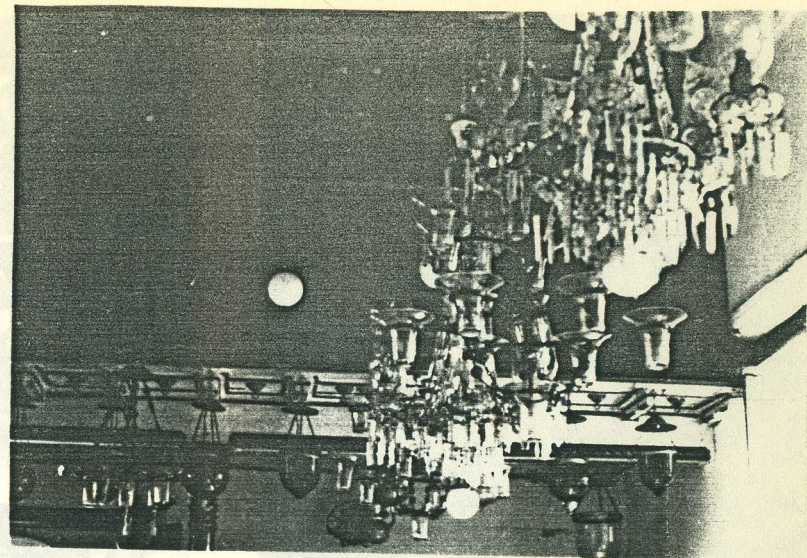
THE CHINESE HAND PAINTED TILES ON THE
SYNAGOGUE FLOOR (NO TWO TILES ARE ALIKE)

THE ARABIC COLOUR LAMPS

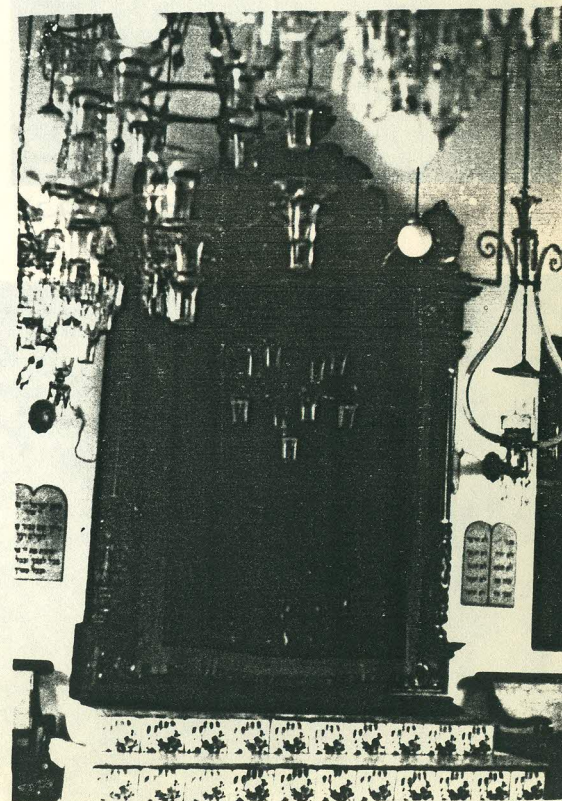
THESE SUGGEST THE RICHNESS OF THE
SYNAGOGUE. THESE WERE DONATED TO
THE CHURCH BY ITS PEOPLE, WHO TRADED
THINGS FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE
WORLD.

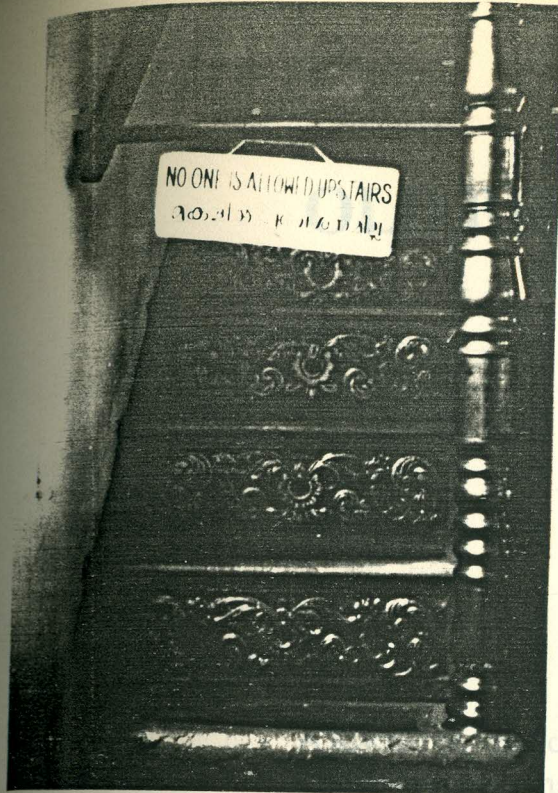


ENTRANCE TO THE CHURCH

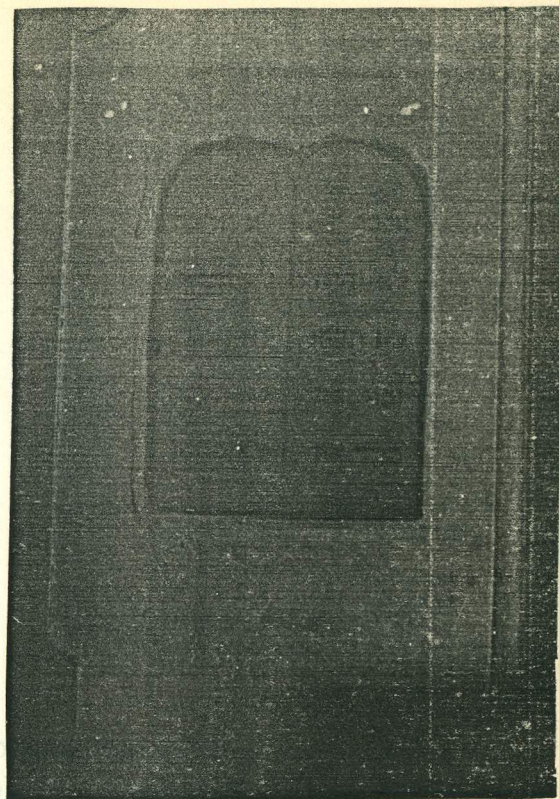
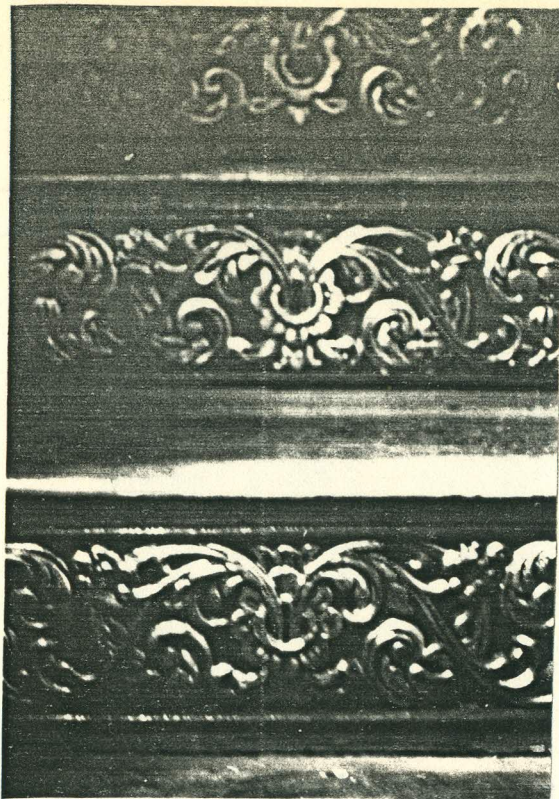


THE INSIDE OF THE SYNAGOGUE

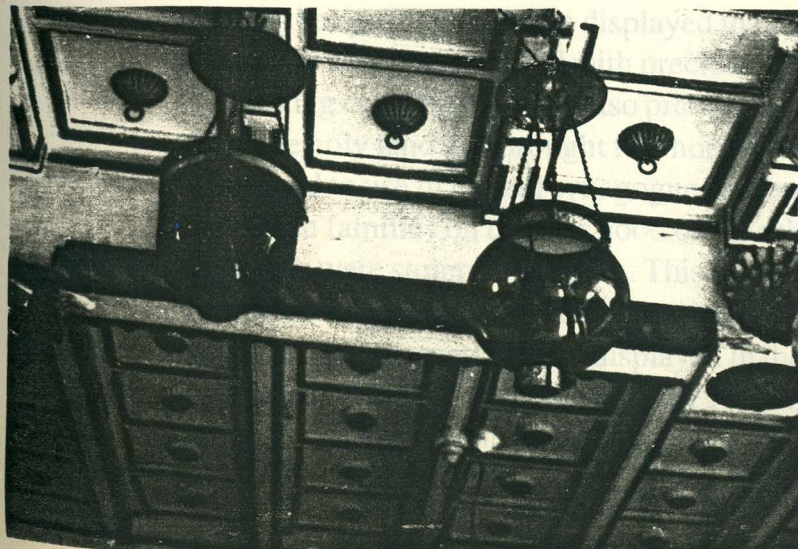




STEPS TO THE BALCONY



SCRIPTURES FROM THE
TEN COMMANDMENTS



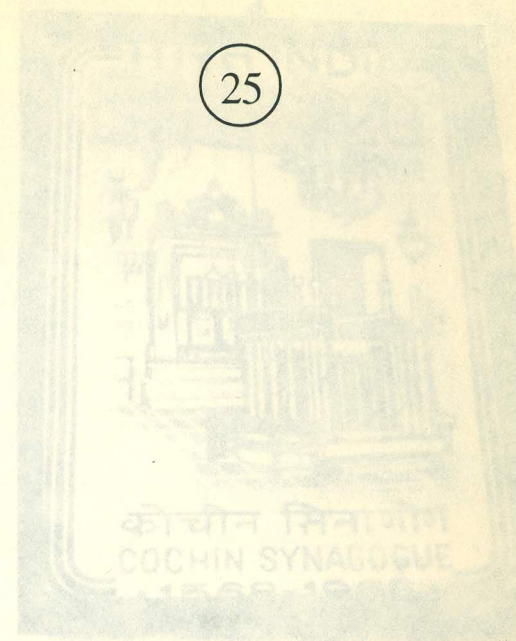
CEILING OF THE SYNAGOGUE -

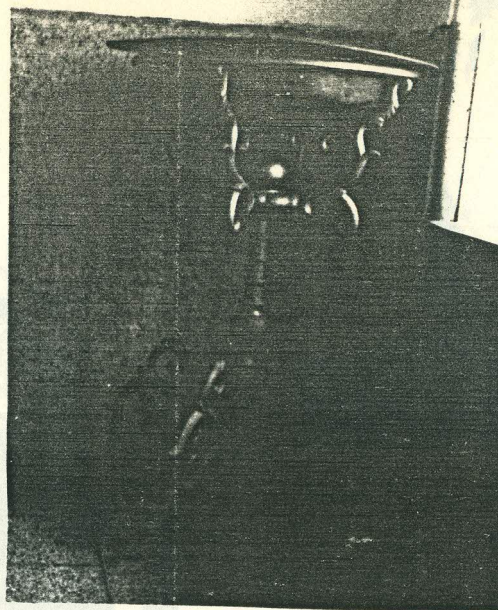


CHINESE HAND PAINTED TILES

OLD BELONGINGS

A Kochi Jew would point at the synagogue when asked about the old belongings, as Mr. Cohen says the synagogue is the only remaining belonging to the whole Jew community. The hand wash bowl in the synagogue which is meant for washing the hands of the priest while performing rituals is very old. The stamp which was published on the 400th anniversary of the synagogue is also displayed in the synagogue with pride. The top of the altar has the holy writings embedded with precious stones. The copper plate granted to Josef Rabban, by the king of crangannore is also preserved in the synagogue. The Jews when dewasted from the holy land had brought two horns which used to be blown in the holy temple and continued to use in the old synagogue of crangannore. But conflict arose between two brotheren families on the heir hood of the relegious horn blower, ended in a major fight and the horns were stolen in between. This was the only thing the Jew community had brought from Palestine at the time of devastation and now nobody knows where it is. The remains of some old synagogues are also displayed in the Kochin synagogue. The golden crown which was presented to the synagogue by the Maharajah of Kochi during a Simcha Torah is also preserved in the Kochin synagogue.

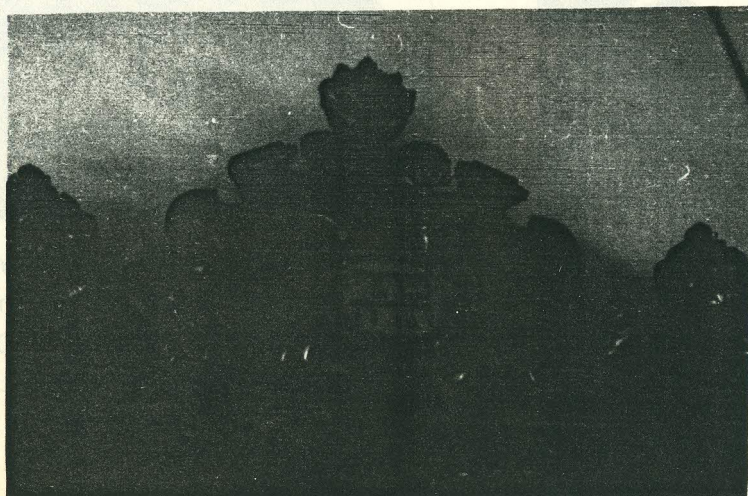




HAND WASH BOWL



STAMP PUBLISHED ON THE
400TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
COCHIN SYNAGOGUE -



TOP OF THE ALTAR



REMAINS OF THE 'KOCHANGADI'
SYNAGOGUE, WHICH WAS
BROKEN DOWN, NOW KEPT IN
THE KOCHIN SYNAGOGUE.



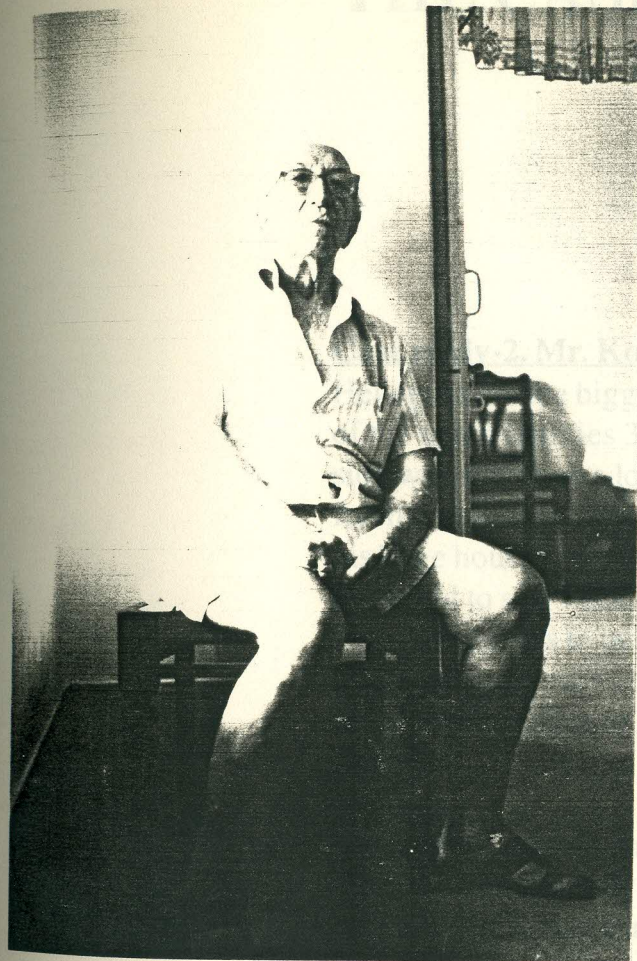
THE CASE STUDIES

Case study-1. Mrs. and Mr. Cohen.

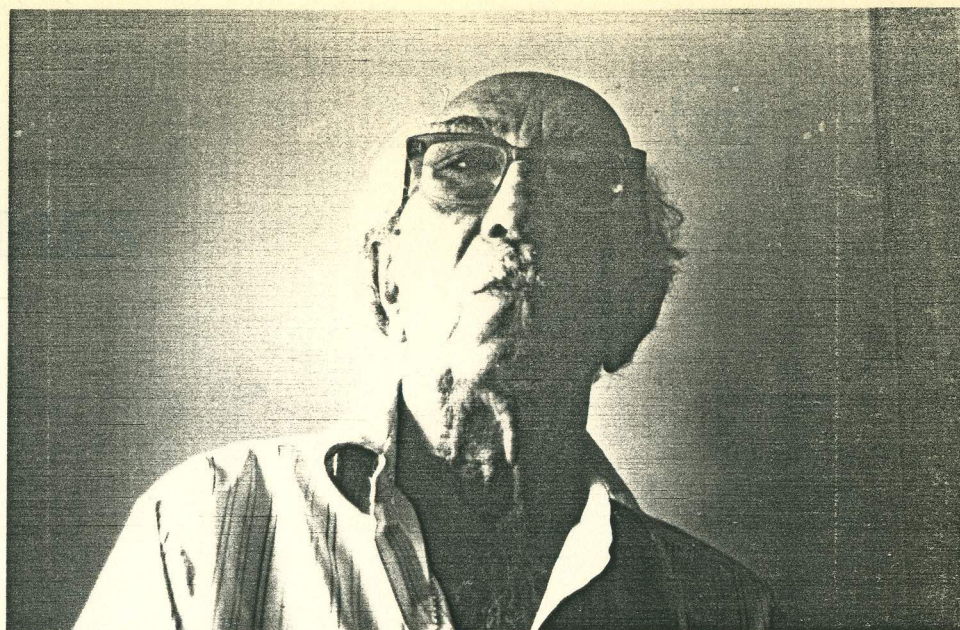
Mr. John E Cohen is the oldest member of the present Jew community. He is over 80 years old and his wife is over 60. His ancestors are from Bagdadh. He lives in his house with his wife and his brother whose sons have gone back to Israel and he is also 75 years old. Cohen is an advocate and retd. tax consultant of the government of Kerala. He is one of the few people came forward leaving the traditional business and go for a government job. The Jews even though are well educated, hardly prefers a government job because that might take them away from their town and often would have to work on Jewish holidays which is not a holiday as per the government of Kerala rules.

Cohen now spends time narrating the Jewish history to the tourists and make good money. he has no children, when talked of the people who went to Israel, Cohen calls them 'mad'. And the event of going back 'the tragedy'. as per him they are leading a miserable life in the promised land. He leads a very orthodox life and believes his wife is the queen of the house. Mrs. Cohen hardly comes out to the front when some one is there. 'I am rich like all Jews' says Cohen, a Jew is a business man and often goes all around the world, so he does not believe in concluding yourself to the place where he lives. He is a person unlike the other Jews, who has mingled a lot with other communities and never faced a problem being a member of a minor community, and he is very happy with his present life within his small community and church. He knows there has been a lot of changes in the life of a Cochin Jew and there's more to come, but he prefers to take it that way it comes and personally always welcomes modernisation.

THE CASE STUDY



MR. COHEN, THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE
KOCHIN JEWS.



MRS COHEN IN THE KITCHEN.

THE CASE STUDIES

Case study-2. Mr. Kora Hellegua

Helleguas are the biggest family in the Jew town and has their ancestry from Jerusalem. Out of the seven families 3 of them are the Hellaguas. Kora Hellegua is a historian by profession who has done a lot of research and earns his living with the royalties he gets from different publishing companies, even in his late seventies. He is a bachelor and lives alone in his huge house where he used to stay with his brother and family who left for Israel when he preferred to stay back. Mr. Hellagua is at present writing a book on the history of the Kerala Jews. He prefers to be a loner and permits very less interaction with others. "You are lucky if you get a chance to talk with him because he is the right person" said the antique seller who introduced me to Hellagua. This antique seller runs his business in a shop rented out by Hellagua.

Mr. Hellagua thinks that it is personal and religious reasons which took the major part of the Jewish community to Israel. He is a very conservative and religious person and he is the caretaker of the Kochin synagogue. The evenings at the Jew town sees Mr. Hellagua, walking and talking quite friendly through the Jew town, talking and making friends, with people who meet on the way. This is the only time people see him out of his house or the synagogue. Weaving bits of history together around him, he does not regret for not going to Israel or of his relatives who went back. He concludes in a few words 'that's how the history goes'.

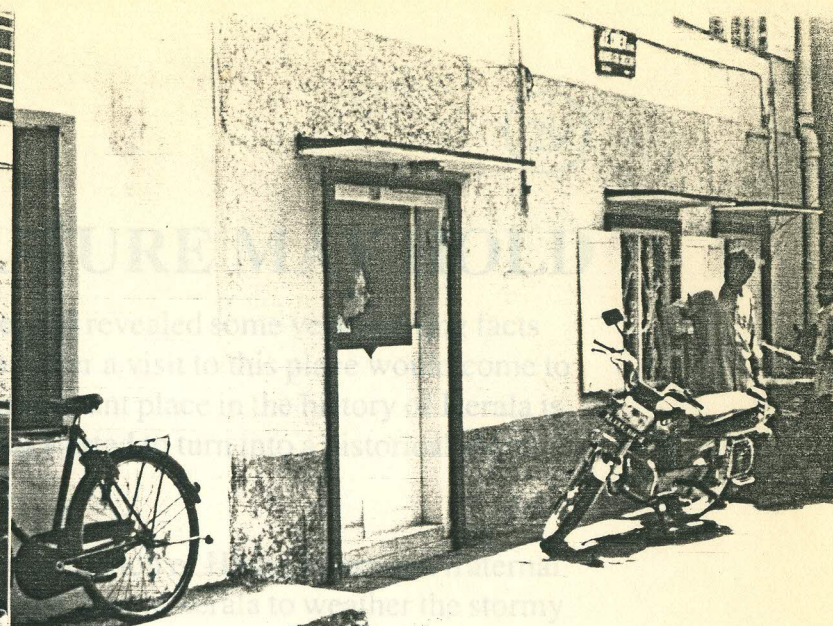
THE CASE STUDIES

Case study-3. People from the streets.

As the jew town started to become a tourist attracted spot and people started to pour in from different parts of the world to see the synagogue of kochi. This gave way to business which would attract tourists who come there. Starting from people who call themselves guides who offer help to everyone who looks like a tourist to antiques and spice sellers. The place where bus stops (Aanavathil) is full of refreshing houses and 'Indian' apparel shops. These people has made their way into the jew town and almost to the front of the synagogue. These people are often natives of the place itself. They say that they have more contacts with the jew families now than in the past. The elderly ones recalls their old days when the jewish community was in their best times, and less interaction with other communities. The Jews themselves sees a prospect of business, so there by renting their places for these sellers.

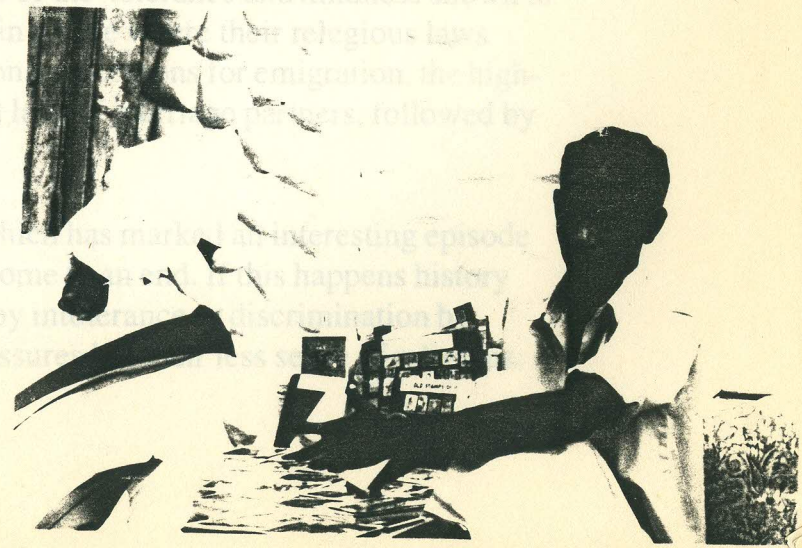


SHOP OF A SPICE SELLER



SHOPKEEPER INFRONT OF COHENS HOUSE
(MRS COHEN AT THE DOOR)

SHOP KEEPERS AND VENDORS
WHO SELLS IN THE JEW TOWN
WHICH STARTED ONLY AFTER TOURISTS
STARTED TO FLOW INSIDE THE TOWN



JEW TOWN, WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD

The study on the Jew Town was a great experience, and revealed some very exciting facts about the place, its people and their lifestyles. One after a visit to this place would come to the conclusion that the Jew era which had a very important place in the history of Kerala is coming to an end and the whole of the Jew town has started to turn into a historical monument, and a common question arises how..?'.

Unlike their brethren in Europe and elsewhere, the toleration of Hindu rulers and fraternal feeling of all the communities in malabar, enabled the Jews in Kerala to weather the stormy events of history and survive for nearly 2000 years.

It was religious settlement that was primary reason for the first wave of emigration. The establishment of the Jewish state of Israel brought an immediate response from the religious Jews of Kerala. One important point was that religious Jews in Kerala, who were in service with government or in private sector had to work on Jewish Sabbath (Saturday). Changes were taking place in the educational scene also. Examinations began to be held even on the important religious holidays of the Jews like the New Year, Passover and Tabernacles. The Cochin Jews were of course appreciative of the tolerance and kindness shown to them from time immemorial. But the desire to live in a state where their religious laws would have complete sway proved irresistible. Among the reasons for emigration, the highest importance is given to religious settlements and lack of marriage partners, followed by better employment opportunities.

After some years the story of the Jews of Malabar which has marked an interesting episode in the chequered history of the Jewish people may come to an end. If this happens history can record that their emigration was not motivated by intolerance or discrimination by government nor by external political and social pressures but their less sense of religious fervour to live and die in the holy land.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

With reference from:

A paper read by **Mr. S.S. Koder** before the Kerala History association in 1965, his article printed on the occasion of the inauguration of the Nehru Memorial Town Hall, Mattancherry in 1968

A thesis by **Miss Fiona Hellegua**, on the topic
“The Jewish Community of Cochin - its twilight years”
for her Masters degree in Sociology written in 1984.