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KERALA AND HER JEWS



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This short history is compiled from a paper read by Mr. S. S. Koder before the Kerala History Association in 1965, his article in the Souvenir printed on the occasion of the inauguration of the Nehru Memorial Town Hall, Mattancherri in 1968 and Miss Fiona Hallegua's thesis "The Jewish community of Cochin - its twlight years" for her Master's degree in Sociology written in 1984.

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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 this ancient colony on the South-West coast of India are shrouded in obscurity. How and when they arrived in the ancient port of Cranganore or Shingly as the Jews called their old settlement 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 the 5th to the 15th century, the Jews in Cranganore have had virtually an independent principality ruled over by a Prince of their own race and choice. The fame of this little Jewish kingdom spread far and wide. Thus said Rabbi Nissim, a 14th century Hebrew poet and traveller.

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.

Cranganore, 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 a centre for trade. The destruction of Cranganore is often compared to the devastation of Palestine in miniature and the consequent dispersal of Jews from their Holy Land.

The attachment of the Jews, especially of those of Parur and Mala, to Cranganore was so strong that till recently a handful of Shingly sand found a place in the coffin of every Jew along with that from the Holy Land. The majority of the Jews even now avoid visiting Cranganore, and, if business brings a Jew thither, he hurriedly leaves the place before sunset.

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CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Advent of Jews to India and colonization of Cranganore	.....	C. E.	72
Grant of the copper plates to Joseph Rabban	.....	„	379
Advent of more Jews from Babylon and Persia	.....	„	490-518
Jewish colony in Cranganore contacts China	.....	„	900
Arrival in Cranganore of Hachamim' including Judah Halevi	.....	„	1141
Advent of Joseph Azaar to Cochin Town	.....	„	1344
Building of Kochangadi Synagogue	.....	„	1345
Expulsion of Jews from Spain	.....	„	1492
Arrival of Castiel family in Cochin	.....	„	1511
Arrival of more Spanish Jews	.....	„	1514
Moorish attack on Jews in Cranganore	.....	C. E.	1524
Final expulsion from Cranganore by the Portugese	.....	„	1565
Jew Town built and occupied	.....	„	1567
Building of the Cochin Synagogue	.....	„	1568
Appointment of the 1st Mudaliar	.....	„	1570

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Maharikash's response	.....	„	1600
Partial destruction of the Cochin Synagogue by the Portugese	.....	„	1662
Re-building of the Cochin Synagogue	.....	„	1664
Building of the Clock Tower by Ezekiel Rahabi	.....	„	1760
Tiling of the Synagogue with tiles from Canton by Ezekiel Rahabi	.....	„	1762
Presentation of a Gold Crown to the Synagogue by the Maharaja of Travancore	.....	„	1805
Celebration of the 400th, anniversary of the Synagogue	.....	„	1968

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