

# THE SEPHARDI DIASPORA IN COCHIN, INDIA

Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg

*The influx of Sephardim into the ancient Jewish community of Cochin, in south India, resulted in a pattern of social organization unique in the Jewish world: the infamous white Jew/black Jew/brown Jew system. The Jews of Cochin organized themselves in patterns derived from their Hindu social context, a system known in the West as the caste system.*

*The "white" or Paradesi ("foreign") Jews were Sephardi immigrants together with a few Jews from Iraq, Europe and Yemen, who joined with an indigenous elite. The "black" Jews, better known as Malabari Jews, were an ancient community which may have originated at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. Each of these groups were slave-holders, and manumitted slaves (meshuchrarim) from the Paradesi community were called "brown" Jews, while manumitted slaves from the Malabari community were known by the Malayalam (local language) term, orumakers. Paradesi Jews would not count any of the other groups for their minyan, would not allow them synagogal honors, would not marry them, and would not eat meat slaughtered by their ritual slaughterers.*

*Ever since the 1520 responsa by the eminent Sephardi halakhist Rabbi ibn Zimra, foreign Jews had been unanimous in condemning this discriminatory behavior, and Paradesi Jews in Cochin had been uniform in ignoring these admonitions.*

*Yet while Indian culture may have been the source of the problem, it was also the inspiration for its solution. A.B. Salem, known as the "Jewish*

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*Gandhi," led sit-ins, hunger strikes, and other forms of "civil disobedience" (satyagraha) against these Paradesi practices, which came to an end only recently.*

A unique system of Jewish community organization reflecting the Indian caste system evolved in Cochin, a port city in southwestern India, wherein the "white" or "Paradesi" (foreign) Jews, Sephardim who came to Cochin via Turkey, Syria and Iraq, discriminated against two other groups of Jews: the indigenous "black" Jews who had lived on the Malabar coast perhaps since the destruction of the Second Temple; and the "brown" Jews, manumitted slaves, *meshuchrarim* in Hebrew. The Paradesis were mostly Sephardim, some of whom arrived in Cochin as early as 1511, but they also included a few leading families from Cranganore as well as immigrants from Europe (Poland and Germany) and a few Yemenites.

The *meshuchrarim* were not permitted synagogal honors in the Paradesi Synagogue (nor, for that matter, in the seven synagogues of the Malabari Jews); they could not intermarry with the Paradesis, nor could they circumcise their sons in the synagogue. As for the Malabaris, they did not intermarry with the Paradesis; nor would Paradesi *kohanim* (hereditary priests) perform *pidyon haben* (the rite of redemption of the first born) with them; nor would the Paradesis eat meat slaughtered by Malabari *shochetim* (ritual slaughterers).

This pattern of social organization began within an entirely and typically Indian context, reflecting the liabilities imposed by the Malabaris upon their former slaves. But it was exacerbated by the arrival of Sephardi emigres during the sixteenth century. In order to be accepted by the high-caste Indian society of the maharajas, the newly-arrived Sephardim did what many immigrant communities in India have done: they identified with a recognizable indigenous caste, in this case the Malabari Jews, and came to ally with its elite in a pattern of discrimination against subservient elements of that caste.

## **Jews and Cultural Adaptation**

Cochin Jews not only carved out a niche in Kerala's complex caste system, but they also reflected Hindu caste behavior by dividing themselves into subcastes. This internal division was purportedly based on those Jews considered to be, or not to be, descended from ancient Israel. However, some community members claim it was racist in nature, based on skin color. The result: a "white" or "black" or "brown" Jew pattern of religious and social organization. Jews who were not part of the white subcaste were denied religious equality in the Paradesi (now called Cochin) Synagogue and were not allowed to marry members of the white faction.

Many Western Jews are shocked to learn of a segment of the Cochin community's blatant discrimination against its brethren. There are two interrelated reasons for this uncharacteristic and unegalitarian behavior. First, it demonstrates what is characteristic of all Jews: an unflagging ability to adapt to various lands and survive. Second, it reflects the Cochinites' high degree of assimilation into Indian culture, replacing Jewish egalitarianism with Hindu hierarchy. Indeed, history shows that their aloof behavior was not an isolated case: Dutch Jews were known not to mix with their Baghdadi brethren in Indonesia and, closer to home, the same held true in America between German and Eastern European Jews.<sup>1</sup> Although Judaism was certainly a common bond, respective regional cultures were also strong identification factors — so much so that interaction between groups was sometimes impossible.

As Sephardi Jews came in waves to Cochin from such lands as Iraq, Syria, and Turkey — as well as much smaller groups from Yemen and Germany — they found in India a group of fellow Jews who were so different from themselves that these barriers seemed insurmountable. These cultural obstacles were only fortified by Kerala's caste system, to which, typically, these foreign Jews adhered. Within a relatively short span, they became Indianized. Although they never faltered in their faith, they did conform — by and large admirably so — to India's societal norms, dominated by caste distinctions and, later, compounded by colonial rule.

In modern-day India, A.B. Salem, nicknamed the "Jewish Gandhi," led a tireless struggle for equal rights among his people, inspired by the Mahatma's teachings. Salem undertook such non-violent methods of protest as a hunger strike and sit-ins to end the discrimination in his synagogue and community.

Within the last decade, all social and religious divisions have disappeared — but then, so has most of the community. Emigration to Israel, which began in 1950 and accelerated during the 1970s, has decimated this once-thriving community. While once more than 2,500 Jews lived in the Princely States of Cochin and Travancore, today less than 60 remain. Some elders view Cochin's legacy of discrimination as a curse that led to the community's seemingly inexplicable demise.

### "Substance" as a Mode of Identification

Jewish law states that a Jew is the child of a Jewish mother or someone who is converted to the faith according to *halakhic* rituals. These definitions of who is a Jew, by birth or by conversion, are universals. As observant Jews, the Cochin Jews scrupulously followed these rules and regulations.

However, they were also Indians. They resembled their fellow countrymen by adopting additional traits, influenced by the Hindu caste system, and applied them to their own religious and social conduct. Preservation of their self-identity depended on it, as did their coveted high caste status within the society at large. As a result, definitions of Jewish "substance" or "blood" went several steps further. Not only were the Cochinites concerned about a mother's substance, but the purity of a father's substance as well. Marriage and sexual relations were, therefore, of paramount concern, because if the Jewish blood of a couple was considered "tainted," the partners and offspring of that union were no longer recognized as "proper" Jews by the Cochin community.<sup>2</sup>

Conversions to Judaism also were influenced by the Indian caste system. A "kosher" conversion did not ensure full religious and social rights among one's fellow Jews. Although a convert symbolically started his life anew, in fact he often

carried the baggage of his former caste status into his newly adopted community.

An emotionally charged issue regarding substance focused on those Cochinites who were considered to be — or not to be — descendants from ancient Israel — *meyuchasim*. Though small in number, the *meyuchasim* used their status to exert power over the community's larger group, who were denounced by those of lineage as having tainted blood. Contested for centuries by both groups were their rival claims of ancestry from Cranganore, the traditional Jewish home in Malabar.<sup>3</sup> A seemingly historical rather than religious issue, actually it was both. Those who said they had Cranganore blood thereby asserted that their ancestors were settlers from ancient Israel who came to the Malabar coast. Not only did this give them attested Jewish lineage, but longstanding Indian lineage as well, both of which earned status among high caste Jews and Hindus.

This sibling-like rivalry between the Paradesis and Malabaris was about *yichus*. Theirs was a struggle about place, both in the sense of their place in India's hierarchical social structure, and in the sense of their place of origin. In this sense, place is never a mere given, but a social achievement, claimed through myths and established through rituals. Indeed, the Cochin Jews established their social place with reference to their place of origin. The double *yichus* of origins in Cranganore and ancient Israel earned them social position, and thus it became an issue of the utmost seriousness for both groups.

Closely related to the rivalry over place was that over Jewish substance, which was judged by Cochinites to include biological inheritance and ancient Israeli ancestry among other factors, and was strictly regulated. But what is important to realize is that these regulations were not just Jewish in origin, they were also Hindu. For several centuries, Cochin's religious and social policies were dictated by what could only be described as a merging of both traditions. Those who were judged to have impure substance were barred from prayer services in the Paradesi Synagogue as well as from marriage with Cochinites for fear of pollution — very much a reflection of Hindu concerns about purity. It is undeniable that racism also played a role in defining and enforcing Jewish substance, adding fuel to this fiery debate. Color distinctions were a way of life in India long

before the arrival of fair-skinned European conquerors and immigrants; however, these foreigners exacerbated the situation and used it to their advantage.

By going well beyond *halakhic* practice — at times even *defying* it by opting for Hindu caste-like behavior over standard Jewish law — not only did the Cochin community assert its status among non-Jews, but among Jews as well. The inevitable friction this caused among its own people led to bitter divisions in an already tiny religious minority. These ongoing splits and disputes, believed to have stretched over at least four centuries, no longer exist. Yet many community members, in India or resettled in Israel, still remember and bear painful scars from this “Jewish Apartheid.”<sup>4</sup>

### Early Divisions within the Cochin Community

It is impossible to pinpoint when divisive problems among the Cochin Jews first arose and among whom. As in any ancient community, myths abound. One version of a popular legend has it that the first internal dissension dates back to Cranganore, where the Jews were granted an independent principality and their leader, Joseph Rabban, special privileges by the ruling Hindu king. In the fourteenth century there was a power struggle for the Jewish territory between Joseph Azar, then leader, and his brother Aaron. The rivalry was further complicated by the brothers’ wives joining the fight; another version says sides were taken by two factions of the community, with the Hindu king taking Joseph’s side. In the end, there were no winners. The king expelled Aaron and his supporters and, later, Joseph swam the twenty miles to Cochin with his wife on his back.<sup>5</sup> Of course, less colorful reasons for the Jews’ departure from Cranganore were to escape attacks by warring Muslim and Portuguese powers, as well as to better their economic situation after a massive flood silted up the Cranganore harbor and made sea-related trade there impossible.

The first documented account of strife goes back to the early sixteenth century, when a letter of inquiry was sent about 1520 from Cochin to Rabbi David ben Solomon ibn Zimra of Cairo,

one of the Sephardi world's leading *halakhic* thinkers.<sup>6</sup> His Hebrew letter reads in part:

[F]rom the island of Cochin...there are about nine hundred heads of households. Of these one hundred are Jews by origin and of (Jewish) stock, and they are *meyuchasim*: the rest are rich and devout and charitable. The *meyuchasim* do not intermarry with them and call them slaves, and on this account they have contention and quarrels without end. Among these rich persons are some who are called partial slaves. A group are (descendants of) Jewish traders who came...from...Turkey..., Aden..., Germany and...Caucasia, and they bought female slaves and begot from them sons and daughters and emancipated them...in their land with the status of Jews. Another group did not emancipate them, but...after the master had gone, (the slave) remained with the status of Jew...and there is no one who would object to it....[Another]...group who had become *gerim* [proselytes] were mingled among them. All sections of these gentiles have intermarried among themselves and have held to the religion of 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 traders and [attested] *meyuchasim* Jews. The (latter) on the contrary are a minority and poor, but they call the 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 is permissible for the *meyuchasim* to interfere with them, whether they have the status of slaves or *gerim* — 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...who can deduce one matter from another.<sup>7</sup>

The inquiry provided Rabbi ibn Zimra with ample background about the Cochin community. Of its nine hundred Jewish families, one hundred were *meyuchasim*, or Jews of ancient



origin. They refused to intermarry with their coreligionists — a “rich, devout and charitable group,” close to the rulers of Cochin and dominant in the sea trade — whom they called slaves. The self-segregating group doing the name-calling was, by contrast, an impoverished minority which acted seemingly “out of jealousy and hatred.” Their aloof, superior behavior, the anonymous petitioner noted, caused ongoing divisive arguments in the community.

The complainants understandably were concerned about their social standing in the community and how it might affect them from a religious standpoint. As the petitioner acknowledged, they were a mix of peoples: offspring of foreign Jewish traders and local slave women, the mothers and children having been freed by their masters; descendants of slaves who were not liberated by their masters but were eventually accepted as freemen and as Jews; and *gerim*, or converts. Over a period of time, they grew into a large, prosperous group which “held to the religion of Israel.” Despite their professed religious learning and practice, however, they were unfamiliar with the *halakhic* rules concerning the manumission of slaves. None had in his possession an official document of manumission for his ancestors to prove he was a Jewish freeman. Moreover, no one in the community was knowledgeable enough to determine whether intermarriage between the *meyuchasim* and non-*meyuchasim* should be permitted or prohibited according to Jewish law. Clearly someone well versed in Jewish matters was needed to act as an arbitrator.

In his response, Rabbi ibn Zimra recounted that over the last two decades since the Portuguese takeover in 1498, reports of Cochin had begun to reach Egypt. Included in these reports were numerous requests for books, since the community said it had no copies of the Mishna, Talmud and other Jewish codes of behavior. This would explain why no one knew how to liberate slaves in a Judaically proper way or whether marriage was permissible between *meyuchasim* and non-*meyuchasim*. After deliberating the case, the rabbi decided that the two groups could marry, providing that the non-*meyuchasim* first underwent *tebilah*, ritual immersion in front of three witnesses, ordinarily performed by converts to Judaism, to remove any stain of doubt regarding their previous manumissions and conversions. From



that time forward, he declared, they were considered to be Jews; those who called them slaves were fundamentally wrong.

### **Increased Friction between *Meyuchasim* and Non-*Meyuchasim***

The advice was ignored by the *meyuchasim*, which prompted a similar letter of inquiry a generation later, ironically sent to ibn Zimra's student, Rabbi Jacob de Castro of Alexandria.<sup>8</sup> De Castro studied his teacher's arguments, and in his response to the Cochin community reiterated that Jewish law permitted marriage between the two groups, the only prerequisite being *tebilah* for the larger faction. Again the *meyuchasim* disregarded this advice and segregated themselves from the others. The exclusionary behavior continued, with two more attempts, in 1882 and 1951, to petition rabbinical authorities, both of whom held to the original, sixteenth century decision.

Why did the non-*meyuchasim* care whether or not the *meyuchasim* accepted them? It is indeed curious that a large group that seemingly had everything would clamor for acceptance by a self-segregating, impoverished group a fraction of its size. Obviously the smaller group possessed something the larger group did not have and wanted. That "something" seems to have been status, unquestioned Jewish status. Attested lineage was what ostensibly kept the *meyuchasim* apart from the others. In Malabar's rigid caste society, those claiming to have Jewish substance, refusing to mix or marry those who could not prove such purity because they feared pollution, fit neatly into that hierarchical system.

There was also, of course, the matter of non-*meyuchasim* being called slaves. Petitioners of the sixteenth century letter to Rabbi ibn Zimra claimed the *meyuchasim* called them the "offspring of slaves out of jealousy and hatred." Indeed, the smaller group had ample reason to envy the others. Although they did not have their much-touted Jewish substance, they had everything else: wealth, mercantile clout, and a high place in Hindu royal society. Perhaps the non-*meyuchasim* feared all that was at risk by being branded slaves — a low caste stigma from which they sought to rid themselves. With one's livelihood and social

standing determined by caste, it is entirely possible that their niche near the top of Malabar's social and economic pyramid could be jeopardized. But they had a problem. They could not prove that their ancestors had been emancipated because none of them had a *shichrur*, or bill of manumission. The remedy to this problem, as prescribed by Rabbi ibn Zimra and his successors, was ritual immersion. It would pronounce them free men and women, symbolically dissolving, as it were, any doubts of earlier manumissions.

Indeed, their fears foreshadowed inequities that were to come when the long-standing favoritism they had enjoyed from the Hindu royal family was transferred to the *meyuchasim*. About forty years after the petition to Rabbi ibn Zimra, there was a marked increase in the business, economic and social status of the *meyuchasim*, and, simultaneously, a sharp decline in these areas among the non-*meyuchasim*. At that time, the *meyuchasim* also received a parcel of land from the Maharaja of Cochin, adjoining his palace grounds, on which they built their own synagogue. During the Dutch colonial period, Governor Adriaan Moens claimed that the maharaja "always considered [the non-*meyuchasim*] as somewhat inferior" to the *meyuchasim*.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, whenever internal disputes arose between the rival Jewish factions, invariably the maharaja ruled in favor of the *meyuchasim*. Could it be that the non-*meyuchasim* had fallen out of favor in part because they continued to be denounced — and gradually came to be viewed by other communities — as low caste slaves?

### Segregation between the Sephardi and Malabari Jews

The *meyuchasim* never considered the non-*meyuchasim* as equals. While they did recognize them as Jews, they apparently saw no other commonality to warrant interaction with them. Who were the *meyuchasim*, and why were they so intent on segregating themselves from their own people? When did divisions between these two factions become so pronounced? A viable explanation was posited by David Mandelbaum, one of the foremost scholars of Cochin Jewry, who believed that many of the distinctions were introduced by Sephardi Jewish immi-

grants from Europe and the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> Those described as *meyuchasim* in the early sixteenth century letter to Rabbi ibn Zimra may have been mostly recent arrivals who had fled religious persecution by the Portuguese. Upon reaching exotic Malabar, these foreign Jews were caught up in a cultural dichotomy: they found a group of fellow Jews who were so utterly different from themselves — in language, dress and diet, to name a few traits — they could not readily associate with them. These social barriers were further exacerbated by the caste system, which they came to hold steadfastly. Wanting to carve out a niche for themselves in their newly-adopted society, they used whatever assets they had to their advantage. Aside from boasting attested Jewish lineage, the newcomers did have greater Jewish knowledge than their Malabari counterparts, who had been somewhat cut off from the rest of the Jewish world. More important, the foreign Jews were familiar with European trade practices and knew the languages understood by the Portuguese and other European merchants who came to south India at that time. They were useful to those in power and thereby became powerful themselves.

Not surprisingly, they enjoyed their new prestige and were determined to keep it. Conforming to the immediate world around them meant there was no room in their coveted circle for their fellow Jews who did not “measure up.” They were not alone in their exclusionary behavior. Indeed, they resembled Malabar’s high caste Christians and Muslims, those who claimed foreign origin and who shunned any social or religious interaction with their own “native brethren” to assert their purity and thus maintain their high status in Hindu society.<sup>11</sup>

However, it is impossible to uphold the Jews’ claims that they never mixed with indigenous peoples. Since the reign of King Solomon, Jewish merchants had joined other traders from the Middle East, Far East and Europe in undertaking the long, hazardous, yet profitable journeys to India for valuable goods, spices in particular.<sup>12</sup> Some of these Jewish merchants and crews settled in Malabar. On these early expeditions, fraught with physical hardships and marauding pirates, it seems quite unlikely that they would have taken any family members with them. Much more likely is that they married or lived with local women. The mates and offspring of these unions, as well as

many household servants and slaves, were converted to Judaism. This social pattern continued for centuries virtually uninterrupted except for a small, sporadic influx of Jewish traders, a few of whom may have brought their families. Because there were so few foreign settlers, there probably were no formal social distinctions between them and local Malabari Jews.<sup>13</sup> What abruptly changed that dynamic was the mass migration of entire Sephardi Jewish families fleeing Spanish and Portuguese persecution in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is ample documentation to show that these foreign Jews kept to themselves, refused to mix with their coreligionists who preceded them, and ultimately drove a wedge between themselves and the others which only widened with time.

### The Importance of Ancient Jewish — and Indian — Ancestry

Why and when this polarity arose between the local Malabari Jews and the Paradesi, or “foreign,” Jews, as they were called, are at best speculations. As noted, the earliest known account of internal community strife was about 1520, when a group of Cochinites petitioned a Cairo rabbi to verify their Jewish status and rid them of their stigma as slaves. While the *meyuchasim* did acknowledge that the Malabarais were Jews, they still continued to call them the offspring of slaves, and used that as an excuse to eschew any contact with them. For centuries, this segregationist behavior was mentioned repeatedly in foreign travelers’ reports about the community.

One such report was authored by Moses Pereyra de Paiva, a member of a Dutch-Jewish delegation of Sephardi Jews who visited Cochin in 1686. De Paiva noted that despite the two groups’ commonality of worship, there were cavernous fissures between them. The Sephardi Paradesis kept their distance, religiously and socially, from the Malabari Jews. They condemned intermarriage, did not count a Malabari Jewish man as part of an *atsarah* (*minyan*, or quorum for prayer), and would not eat meat ritually slaughtered by the other group. Why? According to de Paiva, “They allege as a reason they [the Malabari Jews] are slaves of slaves and that they are mixed with Canaanites, con-

verts and Muslims."<sup>14</sup> Echoing the past, the Paradesis denounced the others as having tainted lineage, a belief they passed on to foreign travelers who usually heard only the Paradesis' side of the story, since only the latter, after all, spoke European languages.

Understandably, the Malabari Jews were angry with the Paradesis, whom they accused of spreading slanderous lies about their origin. The Malabari Jews countered that their lineage was actually more impressive than that of the Paradesis. Unlike these newcomers, they claimed that a number of their Jewish ancestors had arrived in Malabar from ancient Israel more than two thousand years earlier. One foreign traveler who was "inclined to believe as correct" the Malabaris' version of their history was Rabbi David D'Beth Hillel, who came from Jerusalem to Cochin in 1828.<sup>15</sup> He recorded that they "believe themselves to be the descendants of the Israelites of the first captivity who were brought to India and did not return with the Israelites who built the Second Temple."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the story goes, those Israelites who remained in India were the first settlers of Cranganore. The Jewish population of Cranganore grew steadily, periodically absorbing foreign Jewish traders and families as well as converted servants or slaves from Jewish households. Among these early Jewish settlers was Joseph Rabban, recipient of the prized copper plates which named him leader of his fellow Cranganore Jews who were granted autonomous government by the Hindu King Sri Bhaskara Ravi Varma.<sup>17</sup> However, if this account is correct, then why were the copper plates in the Paradesis' and not the Malabaris' possession? Some Malabaris say this is because the Paradesis were guilty of absconding with the plates, or that the plates were actually copies of the originals which were lost long ago. There is no way to ascertain which group was the true beneficiary. There are no written accounts or, if there were, they did not survive Portuguese colonial rule, when all Jewish religious and historical books were burned by the fanatics of the Inquisition. In fact, there is little written about the Malabari Jews; foreigners did not even begin to document their views until the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Some Jews, such as Rabbi D'Beth Hillel, as well as non-Jews, tended to believe the group's origin story that many of their ancestors were descendants of the Israelites who may have

first docked in India after the destruction of the First Temple. Thus, not only could they claim ancient Jewish lineage but ancient Indian lineage, both of which were highly respected traits in Malabar society.

The Paradesis vehemently denied these claims, and over the course of some time developed their own origin story. They asserted that they were the only Jews descended from ancient Israel and, moreover, they were the true descendants of the original Cranganore settlers. During de Paiva's stay in Cochin in 1686, he recorded the community's origin as espoused by the Paradesis. Most of the Paradesis, or "Spanish Jews," as he called them, actually journeyed from various parts of Europe and the Middle East, first arriving on the Malabar coast in 1511. However, he noted that, at the time of his visit, there were at least three among the Paradesi Jews, Joseph and Zacharias Zackai and Abira Aaron, who were "descendants from the first families of Cranganore."<sup>19</sup> Over the next three centuries, the Paradesis continued to embellish and hone this origin story in a series of chronicles and correspondences, written in both Hebrew and English.<sup>20</sup> With the passage of time, these writings became increasingly more vehement about the group's antiquity and assertive of being the true Cranganore settlers, denying the Malabar Jews' claims to this ancestry.<sup>21</sup> In 1895, a Paradesi resident noted that:

The presence of the copper plates in the possession of the White Jews, the real *meyookasim*, is an insurmountable impediment to the pretensions of the black Jews, and therefore they try their utmost to make them theirs, and it is for the same purpose that they now call themselves by the names of *meyookasim*, Anjuvanam [another name for Cranganore, according to Hallegua] Jews...and even White Jews....Even now the family 'Zackai' exists whose forefathers came to Cranganore many centuries ago. There are others among us, not from Cranganore, but their residence in Cochin covers a period of more than 10 generations.<sup>22</sup>

By then the Aaron clan, one of the "first families of Cranganore" according to de Paiva's 1686 report, apparently had died out. However, at least one member of the Zackai

household, also allegedly of Cranganore origin, was reported to have lived in Cochin as late as 1937.<sup>23</sup> A dwindling Cranganore lineage as well as arranged marriages between members of "approved" households was enough for Paradesi "whites" to hold firm to the belief that they all had Cranganore blood. A.I. Simon reflected the views of his group when he wrote in 1940 that:

[De Paiva's] list of surnames proves that the descendants of those Pardesi Jews who were in Cochin in 1686 are still here, and some of them originate from Cranganore, and they have all bred in and in such a way that Cranganore blood runs in the vein of every Pardesi class of Jews seen here today.<sup>24</sup>

They claimed Joseph Rabban as their own. The Paradesis repeatedly mentioned him in their letters and chronicles, sang his praises in their Hebrew and Malayalam folk songs, and symbolically likened a bridegroom to him in their wedding rituals. Joseph Rabban, recipient of the copper plates that, according to one translation, pronounced him ancient Cranganore's "Prince of Anjuvanam," was embraced as an ancestral hero. Also held in great esteem was the Hindu royal family, called by the Paradesis their protectors from the time of Sri Ravi Bhaskara Varma's rule in Cranganore to the reign of his descendant, the Maharaja of Cochin. Even today, some Paradesi Jews who can directly trace their ancestors back to Iraq or Spain nonetheless speak proudly of their forefather, Joseph Rabban. Sarah Cohen, of Yemenite origin, was typical. Like other Paradesi women, she kept notebooks of songs, meticulously hand-written in Malayalam, which she and other women sang on special community occasions, weddings in particular. These notebooks, incidentally, contained only the lyrics; there were no musical notes whatsoever, the women having memorized the various melodies which had been passed down from one generation to the next. After she gave an impromptu performance of a traditional wedding tune, Sarah followed with a brief explanation. "On that day," she explained, "the bridegroom is like Joseph Rabban; he is like a king."<sup>25</sup>

Certainly the Cochin Jews were not the only ethnic group in India that could be accused of having selective recall of history.



They conformed to the immediate world around them, and resembled Kerala's high caste Hindu Nambudiri Brahmins, Canaanite Christians and high caste Muslims, all of whom claimed descent from early immigrants.<sup>26</sup> Christians and Muslims, too, claimed early Cranganore settlements, replete with privileges similar to the Jews' granted by the Hindu royal family. Among the Paradesi and Malabari factions, therefore, *yichus* or pure lineage was not just a matter of who was descended from ancient Israel, but from Cranganore as well. Indeed, for centuries the Jews have drawn certain parallels between the destruction of Jerusalem and that of Cranganore, as well as their subsequent dispersions from both places — the two homelands have had a dual history of tragedy and reverence.<sup>27</sup> "To this day," said P.M. Jussay, a local Christian, close friend of the Cochin Jewish community and editor of *The Kerala Times*, "Jews will not spend a night in Cranganore. But they used to go to Cranganore and take a handful of earth for burials, scooping out what came to be known as 'Jews' Pond,'"<sup>28</sup> reflecting and adapting the more common Jewish practice of burying their dead with a few grains of earth from the Promised Land.

There has been much debate as to which group, the Malabar or the Paradesi, could lay proper claim to ancient ancestry from both Israel and India. Entering into this debate have been the two groups themselves plus scholars, foreign travelers, and colonial officials from various periods who stayed in Cochin. One of the most compelling arguments to support the Paradesi's claim of pure Jewish lineage is that they have families of *kohanim*, or hereditary priests, obviously descended from ancient Israel. Despite their inherited posts having lost much of their importance after the destruction of the First and Second Temples, *kohanim* are still an integral part of Jewish, especially Sephardi, ritual practice and are needed for certain duties that only *kohanim* can perform, such as conducting the ceremony of *pidyon haben*, or redemption of the first-born male, or of blessing the congregation on most holy days, the *duchen* rite.

Unlike the Paradesi, however, the Malabar Jews "have not among them a single priest [*kohen*]," reported traveler Rabbi D'Beth Hillel during his visit to Cochin in 1828.<sup>29</sup> While no one knows for sure whether this was always the case, it appears to have been so at least as far back as the eighteenth century. The

distinguished Paradesi leader, Yechezkel Rahabi, wrote in a letter dated 1768 that most of the Malabari Jews did not observe the redemption of the first-born male. As Mandelbaum observed, the "important rite...requires the participation of a *kohen*, a Jew of the traditional priestly descent. There were none among the Malabar Jews and apparently men so qualified among the...[Paradesi] Jews were either not acceptable to the others or else would not accept their invitation."<sup>30</sup> Instead, the Malabarists waited until a foreigner who was a *kohen* happened to come to Cochin. Because these visits could be sporadic, there were times when the ritual was performed for a number of males, many of whom were no longer infants but by that time young men. Mandelbaum concluded that "the absence of priestly descent tends to confirm the possibility that the...[Malabari] Jews were originally converts, for converted natives could naturally not occupy hereditary offices."<sup>31</sup>

However, basing a group's ancient Israeli ancestry on whether it has or does not have *kohanim* among its population could be misleading. Although we can confirm that the Paradesis had ancient Jewish lineage because they were known to have *kohanim*, we cannot confirm that the Malabar Jews did not have such lineage because they did not have *kohanim*, as documented within the last three centuries.

Consider the story of Yaakob and Daniel Cohen. In the early nineteenth century, the Paradesis pressed a foreign *kohen* to remain in Cochin when it was feared by the group that its own *kohanim* were dying out. The Baghdadi visitor, one Yaakob David Cohen, seems to have gotten more than he bargained for when he came to the Malabar coast for commercial purposes. He was married to a Paradesi woman also of priestly descent and remained in India. However, the man was already married and had a family in Baghdad, and within a few years his son Daniel came to Cochin looking for him. With yet another *kohen* in their midst, the Paradesis pressed the son to remain in Cochin with his father. Apparently they were persuasive because that is exactly what Daniel did and, in turn, also married a Paradesi woman. Having studied the genealogies of many Paradesi families, Mandelbaum said "their farsightedness was justified, because the descendants of Jacob [Yaakob] David Cohen and his wife Rachel have all died out, while the family of Daniel and his wife

Esther Moses Sarphati now provide the lay priests of the synagogue."<sup>32</sup> No doubt, the Paradesis' farsightedness was to be applauded. However, based on this information, it is not far-fetched to speculate that had they not convinced the Cohens, senior and junior, to remain in Cochin, they might have been without any *kohanim* of their own. Nor is it farfetched to speculate that perhaps the Malabaris had had families of *kohanim* which had become extinct and, unlike the Paradesis, they were unable to "import" new blood. There is simply no conclusive proof, at least on the basis of priestly descent, to deny a group's claim to ancestry from ancient Israel.

### Foreigners' Impressions of Paradesi and Malabari Origins

Indeed, it is just as frustrating to try to prove a group's ancient Indian ancestry or, for that matter, determine who first settled in Cranganore. Any early records that may have existed were destroyed by the Portuguese when they burned and sacked Jew Town in 1662. Later, the Paradesis chronicled their people's history, which was disseminated to numerous colonial officials and foreign travelers. As noted, most foreigners heard only the Paradesis' version of Cochin history. Yet there were others, such as Rabbi D'Beth Hillel, who not only heard but believed the Malabaris' version — namely, that many of their people came from ancient Israel and were the original Jewish settlers of Cranganore. Another believer was the Rev. J. Henry Lord, an English missionary who wrote that he upheld "the theory that it is amongst the...[Malabari] Jews of Cochin that the lineal descendants of the earliest Jewish settlers...are to be sought."<sup>33</sup> Although he noted that such a view would "bring him into conflict with many modern writers," Lord listed fourteen reasons to support his claim.<sup>34</sup> One modern writer who dismissed most of Lord's arguments as "irrelevant or factually inaccurate" was Mandelbaum, yet he conceded that "two do bear some weight."<sup>35</sup> One was that the smaller Cochin group was called — as was its synagogue until very recently — Paradesi or "Foreigner," which certainly suggests that it was not the first group to settle in India. Another of Lord's arguments which

Mandelbaum believed had merit was that the Kochangadi Synagogue, built in 1344 and the oldest in Cochin, was used solely by the Malabari Jews — indicating that the Malabaris preceded the Paradesis in Cochin, or at a minimum that the division between the two groups was more recent than the construction of the synagogue. In addition to the two arguments that Mandelbaum accepted, a third argument of Lord's is also worthy of consideration. The Malabari Jews in Cochin and Ernakulam built two synagogues respectively, both of which were called Kadavumbagham or "Riverside," and Thekumbagham or "Southside." Lord argued that the names referred to the positions of two earlier synagogues in Cranganore, names only the Malabaris continued to use, which was "another indication that the...[Malabari] Jews were at Cranganore, and that the...[Paradesi] Jews were not."<sup>36</sup>

Claudius Buchanan, a missionary who was in Cochin from November 1806 to February 1807, and again in January 1808, divided the Jews into two classes, the "Jerusalem or White Jews" and the "Ancient or Black Jews."<sup>37</sup> Of the latter he wrote, "It is only necessary to look at the countenance of the Black Jews to be satisfied that their ancestors must have arrived in India many ages before the White Jews."<sup>38</sup> However, he assigned the name of "Jerusalem Jews" to the Paradesis, implying that when it came to the matter of "pure" Jewish lineage they, not the Malabaris, were the ones with *yichus*. He described the Malabaris thus:

Their Hindoo complexion, and their very imperfect resemblance to the European Jews, indicate that they have been detached from the parent stock in Judea many ages before the Jews in the West; and that there have been intermarriages with families not Israelitish. I had heard that those tribes, which had passed the Indus, have assimilated so much to the customs and habits of the countries in which they live, that they may be sometimes seen by a traveller, without being recognized as Jews. In the interior towns of Malabar, I was not always able to distinguish the Jew from the Hindoo....The White Jews look upon the Black Jews as an inferior race, and as not of a *pure* cast; which plainly demonstrates they do not spring from a common stock in India.<sup>39</sup>

It is indeed curious that about twenty years later, the traveler Rabbi D'Beth Hillel reported that the Malabar Jews were "of somewhat darker complexion than the white [Paradesi] Jews, yet they are not of the colour of the natives of the country or of persons descended from Indian slaves."<sup>40</sup>

### Race as a Determinant of Jewish "Substance"

No one can deny that skin color played some role in determining whether one had Jewish "substance," or blood. Indeed, color distinctions have been a way of life in India ever since the Vedic imposition of the *varna* system more than 3,000 years ago — well before the arrival of fair-skinned European colonists, immigrants and travelers. While foreigners did not necessarily create the situation, they did, however, exploit it.

It was the Portuguese who in the late fifteenth century first introduced the term *casta* — meaning breed, race or lineage — to describe the complex social stratification they found in India.<sup>41</sup> The anglicized term "caste," *jati* in Indian languages, is still used generally to identify groups carved out of a large, hierarchical society by descent and marriage. During Portuguese rule of India, the colonists developed numerous racial distinctions among themselves and others. For example, at the top of their racial pyramid were *brancos*, or "pure" whites: those Portuguese who were born in their homeland and not in India. A notch below that esteemed group were Portuguese who had been born in India: despite both their parents having been born in Portugal, they nevertheless were not considered *brancos*. This multi-tiered social stratification, which dictated every area of public policy, was elaborate and extended to all Portuguese subjects, colonizers as well as the colonized.

When the Sephardi Dutch Jew Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva came to Cochin and conducted a census of the community, he indicated before each Paradesi household whether or not it was *branco* by inserting a "B" before the family name. However, the visitor from Amsterdam had a somewhat different interpretation of who should be considered *branco* than the earlier Portuguese definition. Three families named Aleva, who were second

generation Cochinites originally from Aleppo, Syria, were not considered to be *branco*. Yet the *chazzan* (cantor), whose great-grandfather came from Aleppo, was seen as a *branco*, as were the Zackai and Aaron families, said by de Paiva to be descendants from ancient Cranganore. "It is reasonable to assume," explained scholar J.B. Segal, "that the term *branco* is here applied to persons whose families had not yet acquired an Indian strain."<sup>42</sup> But, Segal was quick to point out, all the families de Paiva listed in his census, *branco* or not, evidently were members of the so-called "white" Jews' synagogue, despite the seemingly incongruous fact that some were not considered to be "white."

Obviously "whiteness," like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. De Paiva himself observed that the Paradesis' "colour is brown, which is certainly due to the climate, seeing that they are wholly separate from the Malabarais in rank, and consider it a great disgrace to marry them."<sup>43</sup> If this was so, then how were these non-*brancos* Jews — with "an Indian strain" — allowed to mix religiously and socially with Paradesis, while other Jews were inexplicably excluded? Since the onslaught of foreign colonization and domination, a profound change had evolved among Indian Jewry. Rather than defining Jewishness solely by religious lineage, as they always had, they adopted new classifications which sometimes were erratic, subjective, and based on such factors as perceptions of one's skin color or economic situation. It has been reported that some converts who were fair-skinned foreigners, as well as high caste Indians, were automatically accepted in the "white" Jews' synagogue, whereas some Jewish emigres from Yemen "allegedly were not accepted as 'white' Jews because of their darker skin color — complexion being in some cases more important than 'substance.'"<sup>44</sup>

There were two sets of distinctions made about the Cochin community; while these systems often overlapped, they were not identical. One was the indigenous distinction between *meyuchasim*, those with attested Jewish lineage, and non-*meyuchasim*, those without such lineage or were converts to Judaism — also known as *meshuchrarim* (manumitted slaves) or *gerim* (converts) — and their descendants. These divisions, drawn along religious lines, were based on whether one had long term Jewish lineage or had converted to the faith.

The second distinction, established by European conquerors and immigrants, was racial rather than religious in nature. Jewish identity was no longer defined by whether or not one had ancestry from ancient Israel but, rather, by the color of one's skin. From the perspective of the Paradesis and most European visitors and scholars, in general the "white" Jews were said to be *meyuchasim* whereas any non-"white" or "black" Jews were said to be *meshuchrarim*. However, as mentioned, there were alleged instances where fair-skinned European converts were accepted as "white" Jews despite the obvious fact that they could not have Jewish lineage. Similarly, some Yemeni Jews who had proper lineage were considered "blacks" and were not accepted into the "white" synagogue. Our attempt to understand Cochin Jewish social stratification becomes confused by conflating these two distinct systems of discourse. Keeping them separate, on the other hand, presents us with a clearer picture, even if Cochin Jews today often blend them.

Although it was the Portuguese who introduced these elaborate, discriminatory racial distinctions, manifestations of this practice continued among the Cochin community long after those invaders had left the Malabar shores. During the reign of the Dutch, the most benign of colonial rules, the Paradesis set down a law stating that their congregation did not recognize as equals children born from unions between "white" men and any non-"white" women. A 1757 entry in the Paradesi record book stipulated:

If an Israelite or *Ger* [convert] marries a woman from the daughters of the Black Jews [Malabaris] or the daughters of the *Mschuchrarim*, the sons who are born to them go after the mother; but the man, the Israelite or *Ger*, he stands in the congregation of our community and he has no blemish [*pagam*].<sup>45</sup>

Put another way, a child born to a woman from the Malabari or *meshuchrar* faction and a man from the "white" congregation — be he a Jew of lineage or an "acceptable" convert — inherited the mother's "impure" substance; however, the man's substance — even if he was a convert — had "no blemish" and remained pure. This particular example illustrates that not only were the



Paradesi Jews influenced by foreigners who came to their shores, but by surrounding Indian communities as well. The idea of a Jewess from a low status group having had — and passed on — “impure” substance went against Jewish law. However, the concept fit neatly into the Hindu hierarchical scheme of things. This type of arrangement was described by Manu, the fourth-century social architect, as *anuloma*, the Sanskrit term we know as hypergamy. Among Malabar’s Brahmin Nambudiri caste, for example, men took as lovers women from the slightly lower, landholding Nayar caste. Any children that resulted from the union inherited the mother’s Nayar lineage. Although there were “allowable sexual relations between [these] high-status men and low-status women, [it] did not lead to acceptance of the children into the father’s group, nor to any sort of social or ritual equality.”<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, the Paradesi Jews walked a fine line, trying to please both high caste Hindus — in particular the Maharaja of Cochin, upon whom they could depend for support in times of trouble — and various colonial powers, which often determined their livelihood. As a result, the “white” Jews were known to bend their own religious rules when it proved advantageous.

### **British Colonialism’s Influence on the Cochin Jewish Community**

Although the British did not directly rule Cochin, which nominally remained under the maharaja’s jurisdiction, in fact the British exercised tremendous control over every facet of the princely state, including its people. They were not like the Portuguese who followed overtly racist policies; the British government was much more discreet, first refining these policies, then institutionalizing them. In the guise of egalitarianism, British Protestant missionaries set up English-language schools and promptly went to work trying to convert “heathens” as well as the economically and socially disadvantaged. The Jews of Cochin were no exception. Children from both the Paradesi “white” and non-“white” factions attended mission schools. Although those running the schools hoped to win over Jews to Christianity, especially the *meshuchrarim* who faced discrimina-

tion from their own people, they had few takers. The Malabari Jews' children during the nineteenth century never even set foot in the Christian schools, receiving a purely Jewish education from their own teachers. Indeed, the Jews kept close watch to ensure that they did not lose their brethren to missionaries, one of whom was transferred because he was so unsuccessful, and another whom the community literally ran out of town for harboring a family that expressed an interest in the alien faith. Whether or not it was consciously perceived by the Cochin Jews, most missionaries "shared with administrators and British entrepreneurs a colonial mentality which limited their reform efforts to breaking down caste distinctions among Indians, whom they had no intention of treating as social equals to themselves."<sup>47</sup>

British government officials and commercial powers made sweeping reforms to Kerala's economy. Whereas the Dutch had dominated trade but largely left other matters in the hands of Indians to govern, the British took over everything with money-making potential. Malabar's rich, fertile lands, which always had been the inherited property of high caste communities, could now be purchased by anyone with cash, regardless of religion or caste. Understandably, a good number of low caste Hindus followed the formula for upward mobility: conversion to Christianity, English-language education, and employment in the newly-created bureaucracy, which earned them places in an equally novel middle class. Breaking with centuries-old tradition, class rather than caste emerged as an increasingly important factor in determining one's status. By the mid-nineteenth century, the British had made slavery illegal. Although on the surface it seemed a humanitarian act, in fact it enabled new landowners, especially colonial entrepreneurs, to hire suddenly available cheap labor. As a result, the British "introduced commercialized agriculture, plantation technology, and eventually joint stock companies to dominate the process of production as well as the export trade."<sup>48</sup>

Directly affecting the Paradesi Jews was the lucrative trade business, in which they had always played a major role. They had enjoyed special privileges under the Dutch, and many had made their fortunes serving as agents for the Dutch East India Company. British India changed all that. The Jews no longer

found themselves to be the favorites; instead, they were forced to compete with powerful merchants from India as well as foreign entrepreneurs. Moreover, with the rapid development by the British of the northern port cities of Bombay and Calcutta, trade was no longer concentrated in Malabar but was significantly diverted. With a change in colonial rule came an enormous change in their economic status, as they lost their privileges and key means of livelihood.

Indeed, the Paradesi Jews' economic decline within a relatively short time span was dramatic. In the autumn years of Dutch colonial rule, Adriaan Moens, who served as governor of Cochin from 1771 to 1781, described the "white" Jews as "among the wealthiest and most distinguished merchants."<sup>49</sup> By contrast, Moens noted that the "black" Jews lived more modestly, earning their living from agriculture, cattle rearing, and as small traders of food items, such as butter and poultry.

About fifty years later, Rabbi D'Beth Hillel described a profound reversal of fortunes. He noted that during the time of the Dutch, the "white" Jews:

...were great and wealthy merchants, but they have since that time sunk weak and are even in a miserable state, living chiefly by the sale of trinkets and furnitures purchased in more fortunate days. They are too proud to work for their livelihood, but spend their time chiefly in making visits....But some families still retain their landed property in value from about two thousand to ten thousand rupees.<sup>50</sup>

Many of the "black" Jews, on the other hand,

...are in easy circumstances, and scarcely a poor man is to be found among them. Yasoni, a ship builder, is reputed to be very rich and is in every way a respectable man....Most of them are engaged in mechanical employments. There are no agriculturists among them. Even their garden grounds are cultivated by Hindus.<sup>51</sup>

It had been a long time coming, but the Malabari Jews, most of whom according to officials' and travelers' reports had been at the bottom of the Cochin community's economic ladder for

about three hundred years, were back on top again. The Paradesi Jews, many of whom had depended upon the good graces of colonial rule and then found themselves out of favor, took a decidedly downward turn. Indeed, within half a century these "merchant princes," as they had been called, were reduced to pawning personal goods.

British India was a time of tremendous economic and social upheaval for everyone. Among the Cochin Jews, the world of the Paradesi "whites" and the Malabari "blacks" had been turned topsy-turvy. No doubt, the 180 degree change in the two groups' economic fortunes was a sore point for the Paradesis, most of whom had dominated business as well as social and religious life among Indian Jewry since shortly after their arrival in Malabar. This trying period may have exacerbated the already testy feelings the "whites" Jews had for their non-"white" coreligionists, for "this was a time of increasing hostility between Paradesis and Malabaris, and a serious split within the Paradesi congregation itself."<sup>52</sup>

During this time, in particular, many social issues came to a head in the Cochin community. The Paradesi "whites," at a low ebb and perhaps to boost their bruised egos, wrote prolifically of their group's history, accounts which often reached grandiose and mythic proportions. They portrayed their long-time rivals, the Malabaris, in anything but a complimentary light — still labelling them the offspring of slaves and denying they had *yichus*, or lineage, from either ancient Israel or Cranganore. Not surprisingly, the Malabaris vehemently countered these charges, which they said were false, slanderous, and hurtful to their people. Ironically the situation resembled events that had transpired between the two groups' ancestors three centuries ago, when a large, prosperous faction tried to right what it considered a terrible wrong — being branded by a small, impoverished clique of foreign Jews as slaves. Appeals to eminent rabbis abroad had not resolved their unhappy situation centuries ago. At this time of economic hardship for the Paradesis, it only seemed to grow worse as they lashed out at the more prosperous Malabaris with poison pens. For their part, the Malabaris were determined to unshackle themselves from the hateful "slave" label they had been chained to for so long. It is at this time that we first find documentation by foreigners, such as Rabbi D'Beth

Hillel and the Rev. J. Henry Lord, who not only heard but supported the views espoused by the Malabar Jews pertaining to their history. As they had done repeatedly, the Malabarais were

...asserting their legitimate Jewish descent and also refuting implications of low caste origin within the Indian social system. Indeed, the descendants of their own slaves and converts (called non-*meyuchasim* or *orumaker*) had been given a separate status in the Malabari congregations, paralleling the separation of converts in Christian churches.<sup>53</sup>

### **The *Meshuchrarim*'s Fight for Religious Equality**

Yet the group that seemed most determined to shake off its second class status among Cochin Jewry was the so-called *meshuchrarim*. Although *meshuchrarim* means "the manumitted ones," a reference to slaves freed by their Jewish masters and converted to Judaism, in fact the Hebrew word was used loosely by the Paradesi "whites" to describe any of their fellow synagogue congregants they judged to be non-"white." This subgroup did include manumitted slaves, but also their descendants, *yelide bayit*, who were the offspring of "white" men and native servant women, as well as a number of Jews "of lineage" and converts. This derogatory — and in many cases inaccurate — label stuck, and continued to be used by the "whites" long after slavery was abolished by the British in the mid-nineteenth century. Unlike the Malabarais, who had seven synagogues to accommodate their people in the "Jew Town" section of Mattancheri and neighboring towns and villages, the *meshuchrarim* did not have their own house of worship. Instead, they prayed at the Paradesi Synagogue — but not without difficulties. Indeed, they resembled the Malabari *orumaker* Jews who were subordinate to the high status *meyuchasim* in every facet of life, including religion. Not only were Paradesi *meshuchrarim* denied ritual equality — they could not chant certain liturgical hymns, be called to the Torah to recite prayers or read a portion of the Scripture, bury their dead in coffins or, for that matter, in the Paradesi cemetery — but they were also proscribed from marrying any members of the "white" faction.

All of these prohibitions went against Jewish law. Moreover, they had to suffer the indignity of not being allowed to sit on benches inside the synagogue; they were forced to stand or sit on the floor of the synagogue anteroom, from where they could hear the religious services conducted by the "whites." Louis Rabinowitz, Chief Rabbi of the Transvaal in South Africa, visited Cochin in 1951 and lamented:

That...the Jews of Cochin could deny full Jewish rights not only to emancipated slaves but even to their descendants, is but one more example, of which we have so many in South Africa, that irrational prejudices take precedence over law and logic and ethics.<sup>54</sup>

The "whites" dictated every aspect of life in Cochin even though at one point they constituted less than a third of the Paradesi congregation, the balance being non-"whites."<sup>55</sup> Whenever "white"-ruled powers were challenged, the maharaja or colonial officials intervened on the "whites'" behalf.

With the *meshuchrarim* suffering such injustices, one might logically ask why they did not protest the "whites'" actions. They did. Repeated efforts were made to change discriminatory ritual practices in the Paradesi Synagogue, but to no avail. In fact, a number of foreign Jews who had heard about or witnessed these practices also argued the *meshuchrarim's* case, charging that the "whites'" behavior contradicted Jewish law. But the status quo remained unchanged.

By about 1840, many *meshuchrarim* found their lowly status intolerable. Those who had actively protested the religious inequalities were thrown out of the Paradesi Synagogue, whereupon they requested permission to build a synagogue of their own in Jew Town. When permission was denied them in 1842, the *meshuchrarim* settled for conducting prayer services in a Jew Town home. This, unfortunately, did not settle matters. After a particularly ugly open quarrel between the "white" and *meshuchrar* factions on Purim, the "whites" complained to the Diwan, the power behind Cochin's Throne, who directed a subordinate to ensure that no prayer services be conducted by the "group with impurity in the house appropriated for that

purpose, and told [them] that they should walk submissively to the 'white' Jews."<sup>56</sup>

### Avo's Struggle and Legacy

This "group with impurity" was led by a man named Avraham, known as Avo. There is some debate as to Avo's parentage. One version has it that Avo was the son of slaves owned by the prominent landowner Shlomo Hallegua. Yet another version asserts that Avo was a *yelid bayit* ("child of the House") — allegedly the son of Shlomo Hallegua and a woman named Hannah. Hannah's background is sketchy. According to some reports, she was either a native-born slave or the descendant of a poor foreign Jewish family. Whatever her origin, she was not accepted by the "whites," who branded her a *meshuchrar*. Because of that, the story went, the couple was barred from getting married in the Paradesi Synagogue, so Hallegua arranged a Jewish wedding for himself and his bride at his private estate, Vettacka. The result of this union was a son, Avo, who grew up in the Hallegua household and lived there for years with his mother. During this time, according to a document of manumission, Hannah was freed — appropriately on Passover eve — in 1826, with a stipulation that any sons she bore would be counted in the *minyán*.<sup>57</sup> After Avo was emancipated, it was reported, Hallegua — and in the other version, Avo's *meshuchrar* father — "lavished much money on his son to teach him Torah and wisdom."<sup>58</sup> Eventually, Hallegua bowed to social pressure and married a Paradesi "white" woman, with whom he had another son, the tale continued. When Hallegua died, Avo managed Vettacka single-handedly, since the younger Hallegua was still in his youth. All went well until his alleged half-brother grew up.

Then he had intended to manage himself all the matters and trades, and to keep the son of the liberated mother [Hannah] away from the house of his inheritance. And the son of the liberated mother was proud to say: 'Am I not your elder brother, for thus my mother told me that your father was my



father — and why cannot I also inherit the possessions of the house of our father?’<sup>59</sup>

The Paradesi community involved itself in the family matter, the “whites” siding with the younger brother and the *meshuchrarim* siding with the elder brother. Ultimately the issue was brought before the maharaja, who ruled entirely in favor of the “white” brother. Not only was Avo denied any inheritance from his late father’s estate, but he was ousted from the only home he had ever known. Later he would become embroiled in the biggest fight of his life with the Paradesi “whites” — not over inheritance rights, but religious rights.

Avo went on to become a leader of the so-called *meshuchrarim*, who agitated for equality in the Paradesi Synagogue. After the Diwan denied Avo’s faction permission to build their own synagogue in Jew Town and then directed them to “walk submissively to the ‘white’ Jews,” they decided to break off entirely from the congregation. The group moved to the British territory of Fort Cochin, where they founded their own makeshift synagogue in a large private house. Avo served as a *sofer* (religious scribe) and *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) for the new community. For a number of years they did well, enjoying religious freedom and social acceptance from their non-Jewish neighbors. According to a foreign traveler’s account in 1860, a good number of the Fort Cochin community was quite prosperous, even employing gentile servants. One British official noted that the women adorned themselves in gold jewelry, something he claimed they would not have been allowed to do publicly in Jew Town. By contrast, the Paradesi “whites” were still stuck on a low rung of the economic ladder. They were described by another British official as “miserably poor,” with few engaged in any “regular or lucrative profession.”<sup>60</sup>

But the Fort Cochin community’s seemingly idyllic life met with a tragic end: a cholera epidemic wiped out the vast majority of them in a matter of days. The few who survived either moved north to work in the rapidly industrializing cities of Bombay and Calcutta, or returned to Jew Town where they had to pay a fine to the Paradesi Synagogue to be accepted back. What is contradictory and puzzling is the Paradesi “whites”’ reaction to the departure of the *meshuchrarim*, as well as their ultimate fate.

Rather than being pleased that the troublemakers had finally left, as one might think, the “whites” viewed the act as a form of blasphemous rebellion. Shlomo Reinman, a Galicianer who lived for several years in Cochin and married a Paradesi “white” woman, wrote about the episode. Although he sympathized with the *meshuchrarim*’s quest for religious equality, he nevertheless believed that the breakaway faction was in the wrong for abandoning the congregation and had to pay the ultimate price for its unseemly act.

G-d punished the sin of the *meshuchrarim* who were disloyal and withdrew from the synagogue of the White Jews and desecrated its holiness...almost all of the *meshuchrarim* died with the plague and epidemic...and many who remained became mad and got out of hand. The remainder of the refugees turned to the White Jews, and paid a fine to the synagogue to accept them, as before. The *meshuchrar* Avo who wrote the Sefer Torah died naked and for want of everything, and his only son went out of his mind. From this case, we are able to observe the sanctity of the house of prayer of the Jews, even if justice was with the *meshuchrarim*.<sup>61</sup>

Despite — or perhaps because of — their having survived such a terrible human tragedy, the few *meshuchrarim* who returned to Jew Town refused to let their spirits die. They continued to fight for their religious rights in the Paradesi Synagogue, where nothing had changed since they left. As they had in the past, in 1882 they petitioned the Diwan to allow them to worship in a private Jew Town house. They even enlisted the help of David Sassoon, the Bombay business magnate, who wrote a letter on their behalf to the British Resident. Again, they were turned down.

During this period, word had gotten out about the “whites’” discriminatory religious practices toward the *meshuchrarim* — not only in Cochin, but as far as Calcutta and Bombay, where a number of them had resettled. There they were permitted to worship in Baghdadi synagogues, which predominantly followed Paradesi customs. Eventually the news reached all the way to Jerusalem, and rabbinical emissaries were sent to India to rectify the situation. As two of his predecessors had advised

the Cochin community three centuries ago, the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Rabbi Phanizel, ruled in 1882 that the *meshuchrarim* should enjoy full religious privileges, provided they undergo *tebila*, ritual immersion. As their ancestors had done in the past, the Paradesi “whites” refused to follow the ruling, despite an emissary actually coming to Cochin to argue the case.

### A.B. Salem: the “Jewish Gandhi”

However, the next generation would bring about dramatic changes in the *meshuchrarim*’s status. Most of these changes were embodied in one man who, fittingly, was the grandson and namesake of Avo: Avraham Barak Salem. Born into a poor family in 1882, A.B. Salem grew up to become the first university graduate among the *meshuchrarim*. He received his degree in law, but always seemed more interested in arguing cases for the masses on street corners than one at a time in a courtroom. Indeed, so frequent were his public addresses on a hillock in nearby Ernakulam that the spot was dubbed “Salem Kunnu,” or “Salem’s Hill.” He was a champion for the underdog, striving to improve the lot of low caste, low paid workers — such as boatmen and rickshaw drivers — by organizing labor unions. Outgoing and charismatic, Salem became involved in politics, co-founding and serving for many years in the Cochin Legislative Assembly. In 1929, as a delegate from the Native Princely States of Cochin and Travancore, he participated in the Congress Party’s session in the northern city of Lahore, where Mohandas Gandhi argued for Indian independence from the British.

Salem had the opportunity to meet many prominent politicians throughout India, but the man who made the greatest impression on him was Mohandas Gandhi. At one time he described Moses as “the Gandhi...of ancient Egypt,” describing both men as tireless “champions of the cause of the down-trodden.”<sup>62</sup> Taken with the Mahatma’s teachings of non-violent protest, Salem decided to use some of his mentor’s tactics to further the cause of his own people within the Paradesi community. He staged various forms of *satyagraha*, or civil disobedience, within the synagogue, at one time even threatening a fast

until death.<sup>63</sup> His most frequent action was refusing to sit on the floor of the synagogue's anteroom to which the *meshuchrarim* were banished; instead, he stationed himself and his three sons on the steps leading upstairs to the *bimah* (pulpit) where the Torah was read, effectively blocking the way for those who were called — and had to climb over them — to read.

Salem never gave up the fight. For decades, he continued to protest the "white" status quo, which still prohibited the so-called *meshuchrarim* from sitting on synagogue benches, being called to the Torah to recite blessings, or to read a portion of Scripture (they were allowed to read publicly from the Torah after the third *aliyah*, or blessing, only on Simchat Torah, and could not be honored by being called up by name), or be buried in the Paradesi cemetery. Perhaps frustrated by the "whites'" unwillingness to change, Salem periodically held full prayer services at his home or attended them at the homes of other non-"whites" who also could not bear the humiliation they were forced to endure in the synagogue. However, Salem's stamina — as well as his lawyer's oratory skills, which he used to convincingly plead his group's case to any "whites" who would listen — finally paid off. Indeed, a number of young Paradesi "whites" sided with Salem and protested their conservative elders' actions. When the young men threatened not to carry the heavy, metal-encased Torah scrolls for the Simchat Torah processions unless something was done to improve this unhappy situation, at long last some changes took place. A compromise was worked out that both sides accepted: two benches were set up at the back of the synagogue for the *meshuchrarim*. In addition, Mandelbaum reported during his visit to Cochin in 1937, "the *meshuchrarim*...may read from the Law on week days, though not on the Sabbath. These allowances still did not satisfy the grandson of the original rebel."<sup>64</sup> However, in 1942, the latter-day rebel could record excitedly in his journal:

For the first time in the History of the Paradeshi Synagogue I got the chance, by stressing on the Law of the religious services regarding the reading of Torah, the privilege of reading the Maphtir of this Sabbath and Rosh Hodesh. May G-d be praised....May the innovation become the order of the day!<sup>65</sup>

By the late 1940s, the *meshuchrarim* were allowed to bury their dead in the Paradesi cemetery — although in a separate section from the “whites.” In the synagogue, their men finally were allowed to be called to the Torah to read portions of the Scripture on the Sabbath as well as to recite blessings, although only for the fifth of the seven *aliyot* (honors). Synagogue rituals were far from egalitarian: non-“whites” still were barred from holding weddings or circumcisions there. Yet, it was a significant start.

### Baby and Balfour: The First Paradesi “Intermarriage”

There was no turning back. In 1950, a wedding took place that shocked the sensibilities of the Paradesi conservatives. As fate would have it, one of the parties involved had the surname Salem. Balfour Salem, the middle son of A.B. and Ruth Salem, fell in love with a woman from the “white” faction, Seema “Baby” Koder. Forbidden to marry in the Paradesi Synagogue, the young couple held their wedding in a Baghdadi synagogue in Bombay, with the bridegroom’s father and older brother Raymond as the only family members in attendance. Indeed, even many Cochinites who had resettled in Bombay refused to attend the ceremony. As for the Cochinites at home, most were so outraged by the couple’s action that when Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz visited the community, well after the wedding took place, he was consulted as to whether the marriage was actually legal. He held to the original ruling made by Rabbi ibn Zimra four centuries earlier, who held that marriages between members of these two groups were indeed legal according to *halakhah*. But Baby’s parents reflected the sentiments of most members of the Paradesi community: shock and dismay. They refused to answer their daughter’s letters from Madras, where she and her new husband settled after Balfour accepted a job as an engineer for All-India Radio. But as Yom Kippur neared, they at last broke their silence and invited Baby home for the holiday.

Before the new Mrs. Salem arrived back in Cochin, the more conservative forces among the Paradesi “whites” passed a resolution barring her from the synagogue premises. While they

obviously could not stop the marriage, a *fait accompli*, they could express their outrage at this controversial union in a tangible manner, "again using synagogue seating as a symbolic means of control, as they had for so long with the men of the '*mschuchrar*' faction."<sup>66</sup> In their eyes, Baby Koder Salem was no longer a member of the "white" community — she had forfeited that status when she married Balfour and, like him, was now one of the so-called *meshuchrarim*. Therefore, it was reasoned, she was no longer entitled to her former place upstairs in the "white" women's section. It was a desperate attempt to stop the inevitable move toward social and religious equality, which Baby and Balfour's marriage represented.

When Baby Salem arrived in Cochin for Yom Kippur, her parents and in-laws advised her to stay away from the synagogue during the services. The congregation, she was told, had even arranged a contingency plan if she did show up: they would move the services to nearby Sassoon Hall, a large private home, in protest, leaving her alone in the synagogue. Some of the synagogue's Torah scrolls already had been taken to Sassoon Hall in the event of a mass exodus. Baby heeded her family's advice and stayed at home for Yom Kippur. It was a moment, she recalled many years later, when she felt very much alone.<sup>67</sup>

But like her father-in-law, A.B. Salem, Baby was a fighter. Rather than stay in isolation while the Sabbath services were being held the next week, she braved the congregation and walked into the synagogue to take her old seat upstairs in the women's section. Reaction was swift and hostile. Most of the women as well as the men walked out. One man, who came upstairs to tell Baby it would be best if she left, was argued down by the brave young woman. Instead, she stayed until she had finished her prayers, and only then left. From that time onward, Baby Salem attended services in the Paradesi Synagogue, but no longer in the seat she had always occupied. Instead, she sat alone on a bench downstairs in the synagogue's anteroom, where the *meshuchrarim* were once forced to sit on the floor. Having forcefully made her point that one day, she said, was enough.<sup>68</sup>

Not everyone in the Paradesi community was against Baby and Balfour. Following stints in other parts of India due to Balfour's job relocations, the couple eventually returned to Cochin to live. Although they were ostracized by some families,

a number of people, especially their contemporaries, stood by them and made it a point to invite them to their homes. In fact, some “whites” who refused to attend a social event when they heard Baby and Balfour were invited, were themselves black-listed for a prolonged period from later Paradesi get-togethers.

### Gradual Changes

In 1957, Balfour’s younger brother, Gamliel, also married a Paradesi “white” woman, Reema Roby. Although Baby and Balfour had broken much ground for the younger couple, they too went to Bombay, where they married in a Baghdadi synagogue. Following her marriage to Gamliel, Reema could attend services at the Paradesi Synagogue, but she never went back upstairs to her usual seat with the “white” women. “I’m not a fighter,” smiled Reema Salem by way of explanation.<sup>69</sup> Like her sister-in-law, from that time onward she has always sat downstairs on a bench in the synagogue’s anteroom, and even today. Reema made light of her situation, and did not seem particularly bothered by it. A religious, well-liked woman, she joked that she actually preferred being downstairs where she could hear the services, rather than upstairs with the rest of the women, who at times were prone to gossip instead of pray.

The Salem family — whether they were born or married into the clan — were often forced to be fighters. Gamliel Salem said that when he was young, religious discrimination was enforced primarily by members of his parents’ generation rather than his own. Disgusted by some of the elder hardliners’ behavior, which tended to dictate the policy for all, he said he boycotted synagogue services for twenty-five years following the completion of his *bar minyan*, the Cochinite *bar mitzvah*, when a boy at age 13 recites a special portion of the Torah and thereafter is counted as an adult and for the *minyan*. Although he had long since returned to the synagogue, Gamliel admitted that he was not religious. He said he only attended services on major holidays or, because of the dwindling number of Jews in Cochin, when he was needed for the *minyan* to get prayers under way. Gamliel’s two sisters, Esther Salem Rao and Malkah Salem Antony, married “outside the community” — Esther to a Hindu, Malkah to



a Christian — in part, their brother suggested, because they too were fed up with the Paradesi “whites’” hurtful attitudes.

Interestingly, the vast majority of the community tended to leave their prejudices at the synagogue. Although Paradesi “whites” severely restricted religious life for the so-called *meshuchrarim*, the two groups mixed socially. In fact, a number of close, life-long friendships sprang up between individuals who, under other circumstances, were each other’s nemesis. They ate at each other’s home, shared confidences, helped each other in times of illness and financial hardship, enjoyed summer vacations together — in short, were the best of friends. Yet when it came to synagogue matters, there was an unbridgeable gap between them. When told that most synagogues in America count blacks as well as whites as full-fledged members, Gamliel Salem, who spent his university years in the United States, aptly observed: “I bet it was completely equal in the synagogue, but completely unequal socially — just the opposite of Cochin.”<sup>70</sup>

### **The Next Generation: Final Barriers are Torn Down**

As for the children of these “mixed” marriages, some ritual barriers were still enforced by conservative, mainly affluent, hardliners. When Baby and Balfour’s son Leslie was born, they were told they could not have the baby circumcised in the synagogue but, rather, in Sassoon Hall. The couple was outraged by the decision, insisting that the *brit milah* ceremony be held in their house of worship, as was traditional. However, the conservatives would not budge, so Baby and Balfour opted for a Malabari synagogue in the nearby city of Ernakulam. Many Paradesis were appalled that the couple went to the rival community to have the baby circumcised, and only a few attended the event. The vast majority stayed behind at Sassoon Hall, and behaved as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. They held a feast at Sassoon Hall to celebrate the event, with the obvious absence of the parents and child. Later, however, when the *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son) ceremony was held in Jew Town, most Paradesis were in attendance. Reema and Gamliel Salem’s son Kenneth, born in 1962, shared

the same fate as his elder cousin. The parents were not granted use of the synagogue for their child's *brit milah*, so they held the ceremony in Sassoon Hall. However, shortly after that, said Gamliel Salem, any remaining distinction ended. Like other Paradesi boys between the ages of 5 and 7, Kenneth Salem read his first Haftarah on Shabbat in the synagogue, and later, at age 13, celebrated his *bar minyan* with the entire community. Today, all men share the same rights and privileges in the synagogue. The term *meshuchrar* no longer is used or applied in any way, and discrimination against others in the Paradesi congregation belongs to the past.

Each Salem couple also had a girl, both of whom experienced no problems whatsoever. Linda and Cynthia Salem sat upstairs with their female friends and relatives — except for their mothers, who remained downstairs. As Baby Salem, now in Israel, recollected, there was no reason for their daughter Cynthia to join her downstairs since “she had done nothing wrong, and her rightful place was upstairs” with the other women.<sup>71</sup> No one contested the seating arrangement, reflecting a new sign of the times: Jewish behavioral practice had become more important than Jewish “substance.” Indeed, the four Salem cousins asserted that they grew up experiencing no discrimination from Paradesi community members, upon whom they look with real affection. That affection, in turn, was warmly reciprocated — in Cochin and in Israel.

Perhaps the most tangible example of equality came in 1978, when Baby and Balfour Salem's son Leslie married Glennis Simon, from a prominent “white” family, in the Paradesi Synagogue. Not only were there no protests, but the community came out *en masse* to joyously celebrate the occasion.

## Conclusions

The twentieth century saw profound status changes in the Cochin Jewish community at the same time that it brought vast social, political, and economic metamorphoses throughout Kerala and India. On the state and national levels, the powerful status quo — British colonialism and an iron-clad caste system — were challenged.

The impact of education cannot be underestimated. Not only did it alter many people's vision of their world theoretically, it did so in a very immediate, concrete way. Western-style education was increasingly accessible to the masses as never before. Individuals from poorer families (such as A.B. Salem) were, for the first time, able to obtain university degrees, which opened doors to professional employment and vastly improved economic condition. No longer so tied to caste, they were part of India's new emerging middle class with more economic and social clout. Young Paradesis from all backgrounds who got a taste of this independence found it a heady experience. The changing, volatile world around them, coupled with relatively progressive, Westernized viewpoints espoused in the universities, had expanded and irrevocably altered their universe. Many of them no longer patiently accepted the restrictive social mores dictated by their elders or, more specifically, the economic elite. It was no coincidence that those young Paradesi "white" men who threatened not to carry the Sifrei Torah for Simchat Torah unless the so-called *meshuchrarim* were granted synagogue rights were the first generation to attend universities on a mass scale.

Nevertheless, as influenced as Cochinites were by modern Western thought, they were, and still are, very much Indian in their identities. As noted, they carved out a niche in Kerala's caste system which resulted in their adopting particular Hindu-like traits and applying them to their own religious and social codes of conduct. Typical of an Indian caste, the Jews proliferated into endogamous subcastes, each with its proscribed, exclusionary practices.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the concept of Jewish "substance" or "blood" was defined not only by Jewish law, but by certain high-caste Hindu sensibilities as well. Certain community members who were judged to have impure substance were barred from prayer services in the Paradesi Synagogue for fear of polluting the house of worship — very much a Hindu attitude, as low caste Hindus were routinely barred from entry into Hindu temples. Substance also was determined by one's ancestry, both from ancient Israel and India, whether or not one was a convert, and even by the color of one's skin. Indeed, the Cochinites went well beyond *halakhic* practice, at times even *defying* it by opting for Hindu caste-like behavior over standard

Jewish law. In so doing, they asserted their identify among non-Jews as well as their own people.

The concept of Jewish substance, based loosely and subjectively on these complex definitions, later gave way to shared, behavioral practice as the paramount concern. No longer was one's pedigree more important than whether one was observant and practiced Jewish law. This eventual breakdown of differences among the *Paradesis* resulted in the "whites" and the *meshuchrar* subcastes consolidating into a single group — a phenomenon as typical of caste behavior as the initial proliferation. When various factors — political, economic, social or demographic — cause a caste's position to weaken and its numbers to diminish significantly, subcastes tend to reaggregate into more viable units. The Cochin Jews are a model case. As Raymond Salem aptly put it, the "whites" finally acceded to the demands articulated by the oppressed *meshuchrarim* because "their wings have been cut."<sup>73</sup>

But for all the changes, some Cochinites who were lumped in the *meshuchrar* category still harbored pent-up pain and bitterness from the discrimination they faced. One Jew Town elder was quite convinced that the irrational, hurtful behavior of the "whites" resulted in a curse on the entire Cochin community. As "proof," he pointed out that there were a number of unmarried people, those who married either were childless or had small families, a history of mental illness marred some households, and, in more recent times, immigration to Israel had resulted in Jew Town's demise. A devout Jew who often quoted Torah forcefully when making a point in conversation, he said there was "no other explanation" — both for the terrible injustices to which innocent people were subjected for centuries, as well as the recent decimation of a once-illustrious community. "These people are cursed for what they did," he asserted. "It is this curse that explains the death of this Jew Town community."<sup>74</sup>

**Notes**

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  2. 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. 109-110.
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  8. On De Castro, see Angel, *Voices in Exile*, pp. 60-62.
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17. On these famous copper plates, see A.C. Burnell, "The Original Settlement-Deed of the Jewish Colony at Cochim," *The Indian Antiquary* 3 (1874):333-334; and cf. M.G.S. Narayanan, "The Jewish Copper Plates of Cochim," *Charitram Quarterly Journal* 3 (1971):22-32.
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28. P.M. Jussay, 3/18/87.
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42. Segal, "White and Black Jews at Cochin," pp. 236-237.
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48. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
49. Adriaan Moens, *Memorandum on the Administration of the Coast of Malabar, Dated 18th April 1781 A.D.*, trans. and ed. by A. Galletti, A.J. Van Der Burg, and P. Groot (Madras, 1911), p. 198.
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51. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
52. Johnson, "'Our Community' in Two Worlds," p. 58.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
54. Rabinowitz, *Far East Mission*, pp. 112-113.
55. Mosheh Sarphati, *Pinkas* [Record-book of the Paradesi Synagogue] (Cochin, manuscript kept in the Ben Zvi Institute, Jerusalem), pp. 82-83; quoted by Johnson, "'Our Community' in Two Worlds," p. 121.
56. Johnson, "'Our Community' in Two Worlds," p. 61.
57. Rabinowitz, *Far East Mission*, p. 112.
58. Shlomo Reinman, "Travels of Shlomo in Cochin" [in Hebrew, 1884], in Shalva Weil, ed., *Mi-Kotsin l'Eretz Yisrael [From Cochin to the Land of Israel]*, (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 20.
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61. Reinman, "Travels of Shlomo in Cochin," p. 37.
62. Avraham Barak Salem, *Eternal Light, or Cochin Jew Town Synagogue* (Ernakulam, 1929), p. 41.
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68. *Ibid.*
69. Reema Salem, 4/87.
70. Gamliel G. Salem, 3/87.
71. Baby Salem, 6/87.
72. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 34.
73. Raymond Salem, 4/25/87.