

THE SONGS OF THE JEWS OF COCHIN AND THEIR HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

BY

Dr. A. I. SIMON, M. B. B. S.,

(*Burma Medical Service, Retd.*)

To understand fully the importance and the historical significance of the songs of the Jews of Cochin, it is essential to *remember certain broad and fundamental facts* connected with the relationship between the Land of Israel and South India; the probable date of the advent to Malabar of the Paradesi or so-called White* Jews of Cochin, and their subsequent colonisation of Cranganore and Cochin; the intermediary functions carried on by Jewish travellers between the west and the East; the cultural contribution of the Jew to Spain and Portugal; and the progressive history of the community in South India.

1. *The chronological history of the community covers broadly a period of about 3000 years*-from the time of the First Patriarch and his contact with the sea-faring Phœnicians to this day. Whether it be the Synagogue calendar¹, the songs² they sing

*The so-called white and black Jews will throughout this paper, be termed as the "Paradesi" or "original" Jews and the "Malabar" or "indigenous" Jews respectively, as done by Paiva, Castro & Barros. The words "White" and "Black" will not be used to represent them, as they are both un-Jewish and un-Indian.

1. Eben Saphir p. 57. 2. Standard Books of songs - Hebrew and Malayalam.

or their social or every day life, *this fact is recorded, demonstrated and never forgotten.*

2. Their *every day re-capitulation of the composition of the incense used in the Temple* in the land of Israel (Palestine) and the enumeration of the eleven kinds of spices³ entering into this composition, *bring to their minds the close association of their mother country (Palestine) with their adopted mother-land (South India).* The mere mention of cloves, cassia, cinnamon, sweet calamus or lemon-grass oil, karkom or "kunguma-Poo", spikenard or jatamansi or 'balchur' as the Hindus call it in Northern India, — *all these make the Jew in Malabar feel quite at home in his adopted motherland.* No wonder he accepts Cochin as a small Jerusalem. The solemn service on the day of atonement, the most important day of their calendar, with the reading of the impressive part taken by the High Priest (Cohen Gadol) in the service of the day, *reminds them of the robes of South Indian linen⁴ and gold cloth (from Hyderabad and Benares?) worn by the priest at the temple during this great day.*

3. *The close association of Events in Malabar with those elsewhere in the Jewish world, and the repercussion on this community of every anti-semitic movement in other parts of the world must also be remembered.* Here is a community that, extensively traded with the East and the West, received its Jewish settlers from Palestine, Asia Minor, Middle East, Spain, Holland and Central Europe, and sent their off-shoots to China, Strait Settlements and various parts of India and Burma. *No wonder it acquired a global importance.*

3. Talmud - Treatise - "Keriloth", fol: 6.

4. " " " " "Yomea" p. 47.

4. *The Paradesi Jews were well established as a colony in Cranganore, at least by the end of the 5th or the beginning of 6th century of the Christian Era : and the Jews that colonised Cranganore at the time were those who were completely familiar with conditions prevailing in the Land of Israel, at the time of the Roman invasion and the loss of national independence, or who were the descendants of such persons and were therefore well-versed in their Temple traditions.*

5. *The extensive use of the aramaic language (Targum)—a language most closely related to Hebrew and in common use in Palestine at the time of the second Temple⁵ by the Paradesi Jews is significant. Aramaic was undoubtedly the spoken language in Cranganore in the Early centuries, and much of its use in service books remains to this day.*

6. Though the *main influx of Spanish Jews* came to Malabar after the expulsion of Jews from Spain⁶ (1492 C. E.,) and they were officially there in 1511 C. E. or 54 years before the final expulsion of Jews from Cranganore, *individual spanish (Castillian) Jews* were in Craganore long before that date. Paiva⁸ in 1686, saw in Cochin Spanish Jews whose great-great-grandfathers had come from Spain (to Cranganore). The influence of this great influx of Spanish Jews was such that, in 1584, Van Linschoten⁷ found *perfect spanish to be the spoken language of the Paradesi Jews. Even a devotional song, sung by them is in Spanish, but written in Hebrew characters.*

5. Book of Ezra IV 8 to VI 18; Book of Daniel Jewish Encycl: Vol. I p. 67. 6. Notice—as Judeos or Cochin by Mosseh or Pereira Paiva 1686. 7. The intinerario of J. H. Van Linschoten 1596.

7. Several *Jewish Literary Celebrities* have been to Malabar while the Jews were in Cranganore, most of them having come from Spain, the then seat of culture — thanks to the services rendered by Jews to Christendom. Amongst these were certainly two or three Poets or Singers as they were called, namely R. Judan Halevi (the Levite: The Jewish Shakespeare) Rabbenu Nissim, and Abraham ibu Ezra. Paiva⁸ makes mention of this fact. The association of these famous Jews with Malabar is immortalised by songs and hymns composed by them *for the Jews of Cochin and exclusively used by the Jews of Cochin.*

8. My article on *Language a clue to History* published in the Bulletin Vol. X Part I, clearly illustrates the composition of the "Malabar Yiddish", if I may so term it, used by most of the Paradesi Jews as their spoken language and containing many foreign words. This point comes into consideration when we refer, later in this paper, to the language used in composing *the so-called Malayalam songs.*

9. It must be remembered that *music is a particularly faithful index of assimilation*; and so, Jewish religious and folk music have, on the whole, reflected with the utmost fidelity, the atmosphere of their Environment. Thus the music of the modern European Jew, the Bagdadian Jew and the Paradesi in Cochin satisfies this great principle in the art of music. Again, Jewish musical talents find their outlet only in Lands of greater freedom and toleration.

8. Notice as *Judeos or Cochin* "by Mosseh de Pereira Paiva 1686.

10. *Every historical event in the life history of the Jews, finds an expression in songs, rendered in Hebrew or the Vernacular of the country of their adoption.*

11. *Of the eight synagogues now in existence in Cochin State 'old boundaries' all were constructed in the 16th or 17th century—that is, after the final dispersion from Cranganore in the 16th century. Most of these synagogues were built by "Mudochiers" or other leaders of the Paradesi community.*

12. *Tradition has played a notable part in Jewish music. The most important melodies of the Synagogues and even many secular songs are derived ultimately from Biblical chants. These in turn antedate the dispersion, since (with many variations) they are substantially the same in all Jewish Communities throughout the world.*

The above-stated broad facts in the history of this community form the basis from which the subject of this paper could be constructed. While the Bible reveals hardly a trace of the songs of the ancient Jews, it supplies numerous references or allusions which furnish evidence of this existence. In the Biblical period music was freely Employed on occasions of rejoicing and sorrow. Special mention is made of the songs that were sung by Moses and the children of Israel after the crossing of the Red Sea; the "Lament of King David over Saul and Jonathan";⁹ Issiahs' "Visions";¹¹ "God in nature" as represented in the Book of psalms; and others.

From these few examples, it can be seen that Singing was an indispensable element in the life of the people of Bible days.

9. Exodes xv 1 to 18.

During the Talmudic period, there were similar references, for example, Sabbath was welcomed by appropriate song, and wedding guests were entertained by special singers.

There is an important fact to be noted that the *development of folk songs were marked in peaceful regions*—I mean, regions or countries, where there was complete toleration. Is it then a wonder that in Malabar—God's own chosen *peaceful land*, (in spite of the Portuguese) with a spirit of toleration unparalleled in the history of the world, and gloriously depicted, and made history of, at the recent San Francisco Conference of the nations of the world by Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, the Indian representative, in the very first sentence of his noted speech there—*yes, in Malabar, it developed to a very high degree in ancient days, compared with even Europe—the ungrateful intolerant Europe.*

A new form of Jewish self-expression arose in the middle ages, namely, *devotional poems or "Piyyuthim"*. These poems written by R. Judah Halevi and others were eagerly accepted by the laymen and incorporated into the Liturgy of the Synagogue, where they were intuned to various chants. Some of these were sung outside the Synagogue,—at the Sabbath table, Passover Home service ('seder') etc.

The knowledge and use of musical notation being unknown at that age, we have no way of telling what melodies

10. This mourning dirge is probably the only surviving poem that was actually written by and not attributed to David (I—Sam. 29—II—Sam. 1)

11. ISAIAH. v 1 to 7 & 11 2 to 4.

were employed for these poems or whether the melodies current today are of ancient origin or of more recent years.

It may however, be noted that after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, *the Sephardic or Spanish Jews brought along with them the CASTILIAN DIALECT (Ladhino or Lathino) and literature* which included many folk songs. *This would explain* the very large number of melodies—over 500—in use amongst the Paradesi Jews of Cochin, *and many songs in Hebrew and the Vernacular, unknown to the other Jewish communities of the world.*

Taking the word "Song" to mean a union of poetry and music, the songs in common use amongst the Jews in Cochin may be classified into those written in (A) *Hebrew* and (B) *Malayalam* the melody to which they are set, being sometimes the same.

(A) *Hebrew*:—There are poetical pieces in the prescribed Liturgy especially on important occasions such as the new year and the day of Atonment; and these are sung or uttered with musical modulations. Apart from these there are devotional poems or "*Piyyutim*" incorporated, as I have already stated, into the Liturgy of the Synagogue where they are intuned to various chants. Jewish communities all over the world have a collection of such poems or songs, some of which are common amongst all or most of them. Here I have before me two books of these devotional songs in Hebrew, —one in use amongst the Jews in the middle East, Far East, and India other than Cochin, and the others exclusively used by the Cochin Jews. *The latter, "the standard books of songs", used only by the Jews of Cochin contains many poems or songs used on special occasions, and unknown to and never used by any other Jewish community in the*

world, and are the compositions of local and foreign Jewish celebrities in Cochin. These songs or poems or recitations number about a couple of a hundred of which about 30 are clearly historical and composed and sung at Cranganore¹¹ and Cochin. And the manuscript *Book I have before me is dated 5410 or 1650* and was in use about 100 years before the same appeared in Print.

A careful scrutinisation of these songs or poems will reveal the standard of Literature at Various periods in the history of the Jews in Malabar, and the composers of the time. *Those songs or recitations composed in Aramaic, partly or wholly, are undoubtedly the earliest compositions produced in Cranganore, for reasons already alluded to.* Of the others, some are written in classical Hebrew by writers whose names adorn world Jewish history, and others are composed by purely local talents. Of the world famous Jewish writers R. Judah Halevi¹² the Jewish Shakespeare, stands out prominently. The poems or songs under his name, and used by the Jews of Cochin are ten in number and include one particular song "(YASHRU BEHENAI)" which like others is sung in "Cranganore or Shingly Tune" and composed by R. Judah in Cranganore. This famous song is considered traditionally so important by the community that no Reader is certified as such if he does not know the tune of this song.

Here a diversion may be permitted to point out that two of the greatest modern Jewish historians—Grätz and Cecli Roth—*both state that the year of the death of this great Jewish poet*

12. Letter of EZEKIEL RAHBI to TOBIAS BOAS a Prague, answer to Q .11.

(*R. Judah and the site of his grave are both unknown. According to Paiva, the famous learned men ("Hachamin") the Jews had in Cranganur included both R. Judah Haliva and his father R. Samuel Halevi; and Paiva clearly states that at a place near Cranganur, the tomb of R. Samuel Halevi could be seen at the time he visited Cochín (1686 C. E.) He adds that R. Judah and his father brought with them from MAJORCA (Spain) two gold trumpets belonging to the sacred temple and gives full details about these Trumpets. Sike and other writers confirm this statement of Paiva.*

It may be stated that Rabbenu Nissi, (1320—1380)—a great scholar and Robbinical authority—has one or two poems in his name, exclusively used by the Jews of Cochín—namely the song "Nomar Shira", and another. This, however, namely "Nomar Shira" is so important that its last verse summarises the entire history of the community in Cranganur or Shingly. Its translation will read as follows:—

"I travelled from Spain and heard of the country of Shingly (Cranganur); I desired to see an Israelite King, and him I saw (there) with my own eyes".

This verse clearly indicates that Nissim was in Shingly and he saw the Jewish Chief there with his own eyes. It is disappointing to see some recent writers playing on this verse, without a knowledge of Hebrew. One translated the Hebrew expression "Melech Israel Thahabthi" as meaning "I wanted to see a King of the Jews", and promptly declared it to be applied to the Rajah of Cochín; whereas the expression in Hebrew means that he desired to see an Israelite or Jewish King. Otherwise where is the sense in it? All Jewish communities were under different kings; but no Jewish Chiefs,

On the other hand in Shingly alone—the first Jewish state after dispersion as Kloetzel so well puts it—there was a Jewish Chief whose glory is to this day recognised. Again, where does Joseph Robban, the President of the Jewish Sanhedrim or Parliament in Cranganur, come in, if any other explanation is given? Now, you can understand why I, belonging to a practical profession, should be a narrator of history. The childish mistakes made by some writers to prove their own theories, without any semblance of historical honesty, made me give up my profession and take to seriously this duty of notifying these errors and correcting them.

(B) Coming to the Malayalam songs, and their origin, it is necessary to realize first that Jewish women, in the days of the Bible, though subject to the same punishments for the infringements of the laws laid down in the Bible, were exempted from those religious obligations of which a definite time is given, such as the study of the law. As a rule, therefore, women never studied (TORAH) Bible as academically as men; but, by constant practice, they became familiar with the main body of everyday laws. During the middle ages, a special literature arose, for the spiritual benefit of women, in the Vernacular (Yiddish) in certain parts of Europe.

In accordance with the above stated facts and traditions, the women amongst the Paradesi Jews were not in the olden days, both in Cranganur and Cochin, given any academical education in its modern and wider sense. However an indirect system of giving them some superficial idea of their religion and history were given with the help of a set of songs in Malayalam, which I term the 'ancient songs', on various subjects, and different tunes set to these songs.

The language of the songs (Malayalam) may be divided into three periods, in the same way as the growth of Malayalam literature is, namely the early, middle, and modern Malayalam—greatly modified by the corrupt forms of Malayalam words used by the Paradesi Jews. Some have even the copper plate language, and some recent folk songs, absolutely modern in composition and style. As regards the subject matter of these songs, it consists of a representative collection, ranging from ordinary folk-songs to those narrating well known events in history. They number about 110, and may, with reference to the subject matter, conveniently be divided into:—Biblical texts or themes 37; Hymns written in Malayalam 10; Translations of Hebrew Hymns 7; Historical songs including those regarding the 'Synagogue' 10; Miscellaneous, including epilogues and folk songs 47.

These songs were sung on special occasions such as wedding, circumcision, &c. by both classes of Jews—the Paradesis and the 'Malabar' Jews. It is almost clear that: (1) most of these songs or all of them were composed while in Cranganur and were in use there; (2) the words "Vehanashim meshor-rim Kemanhagam" (meaning, "and the Women sing according to their custom"), in the wedding section of the book, tell us that the singing of these songs by women is a shingly custom; (3) "Nomar Shira" (meaning "Let us sing"), the poem of Rabhenu Nissim, above referred to, is in it, and proclaims the visit of the composer to Cranganur in the XIV century and his seeing there the Jewish chief or Israelite king.

Let me now go back to the Malayalam songs. Most of these songs are sung during the wedding celebrations, which, in Cranganur and early in Cochin were of 15 days' duration,

later reduced to eight days, and now to one day. It stands to reason that practically very few of these standard songs are sung or could be sung during one evening's celebration of the wedding, spent mostly in eating, drinking, dancing and entertaining friends. Gradually all these songs have fallen out of use, and the present generation of Jewesses knows practically nothing of it. The customs pertaining to the Modern pseudo-civilisation have completely eclipsed the glory of these songs.

In classifying these songs, I referred to the ten historical songs, four of which make reference to the past in Cranganur and six composed in honour of the building of the synagogues in Cochin, including the Paradesi, Kadavumbhāgam and Theckumbāgam synagogues in Cochin and the Synagogues at Parur and Tirthoor, and equally important to history as the other four.

Here are extracts from four historical songs sung on the occasion referred to:—

Song No. 1. describes Joseph Rabban; No. 2. details the privileges conferred on him and enumerated in the copper plates; No. 3. describes the procession of the Chief to the palace of Cheraman Perumal to receive the grant of the copper plates and thence to the synagogue for the thanksgiving service; and No. 4. alludes to the historical arrival of the early colonists by sea at Paloor and other places.

I

1. തന്ദുരാൻ മയിനാകകൊണ്ടു ചൊരിച്ചു
ചെലുവതും ഹക്കനകോതനഗരി
മന്നാനകണ്ടു മുൻതാളം കണ്ടു
മൂവർ രാജാക്കൾ ആരാരൂപചര
അനെയും ആളും അരുശനും ഉടം
ആരാനെക്കൊണ്ടു താളന്മാരവെച്ചു

ഇത്ര നയിമെയിൽ ചെറുവരമ്പാ
യൊഴുപ്പം റോണെ പാടുവാർന്നാമെ:



4. നാട്ടം നഗരവും കക്കവിളങ്ങി
നാട്ടിനെല്ലുക്കല്ലൊ കെനോളരകാമൻ
ചെമ്മാകരെ കണ്ടു ചിന്തയും കണ്ടു
ചെമ്മെയിൽ ചെല്ലാനാ ചിരിയാനന്തനും
ചൊന്നുകൊടികണ്ടു പൊർകൊടികണ്ടു
പൊർമണൻ എതിരൊര വരവായൊകിളിയെ
ഇത്ര നയിമെയിൽ ചെറുവരമ്പാ
യൊഴുപ്പം റോണെ പാടുവാർന്നാമെ.

II

1. കലക പൊകതുവെഴുന്നന്നീ കണക കരിവൻ കടയൊന്നൊടു, അരുള
ടയൊൻ താനാജ്ഞ തലയിപ്പുട്ടം വകവെള്ളക്കം പാവാടെ വഴി വഴിയെ, അടിക്കീളം,
മടിക്കീളം അവർ പെടാതെ അമ്മിട്ട നഗര നിറത്തി മടിച്ചെന്തൻ തലമാകറെ
മുവായിരത്തി അറുനൂറു അരി പെതൊ.

2. അരിവെന്തൊ ആഞ്ചവരെ അവരിലിരുന്നു അവരവര കഴയൊടെ ചി
താരത്തിൽ കുറിച്ചുകൊണ്ടു ചൊല്ലട്ടിൽ എഴുതിക്കൊണ്ടു ചിരിയാനന്തൻ നിരവു ചൊ
ല്ലുകിൽ, ആനാന്തരം ആന കഴിഞ്ഞൊ അരിയൊടയംചിരിയാനന്തൻ വരവുകാലാൻ
കതീരകുഞ്ഞൊ കൊണ്ടൊടയ ചിരിയാനന്തൻ വരവുകാലാൻ പച്ചക്കൊടിക്കീളെ
പാർമകളാര എതുരൊ പള്ളിപ്പുക.

III കാക്കൻ

തഞ്ചമില്ലാതതന്നിനഗരി
തമ്പിരാണൊടു അരുൾ ചൊറ വീരൻ
വെള്ളി ചെറുചെപ്പും വെററിയയും
ഖാജിമേട്ടും അതിറകത്തം
എള്ളൊളരും കുറവില്ല കണ്ടാൽ
ഏതവാനും ചൊറകല്ലാണം
ആയിരം ചൊയിവെച്ചൊരു ആലമ്പട്ടം
ആനകഴുത്തിൽ എഴുന്നുള്ളചൊലും
മടിച്ചുണം ഇട്ടു വഴിക്കൊരി
മാണിക്കവീരൻ ചിരിയാനന്തൻ.



പാരിമതൊതനും ചുതപ്പള്ളി
വരത ഇരിക്കണം നൂറൊണ്ടുക
ചുരുർ ഉള്ള ഗുലമിതെന്നു

ചുരുക്കത്തിലുള്ള കമ്പിളിവാൻ
 പാഠപത്ര ഇരിക്കണം നൂററണ്ടുക

IV കുറുകൻ

3. പാലൂർ കടലരികെ അയ്യയ്യ
 പാൽകററി മരങ്ങൾ കടലൻ അയ്യയ്യ
 പാലൂർ കടലരികെ അയ്യയ്യ
 എറണി കളിച്ചുകളി അയ്യയ്യ
 കാത്തിട്ടു ഇരിപ്പാണൊ അയ്യയ്യ
 ഒന്നമൊന്നം കണ്ടയില്ല അയ്യയ്യ
 പച്ചമണിമാടം അയ്യയ്യ
 പണിമുത്തം കൊട കെടയൻ അയ്യയ്യ
 കരുച്ചെല്ലാളം അയ്യയ്യ
 പറന്നുപറന്നു ഇരിക്കുന്ന കിളി അയ്യയ്യ.

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