

Cultural Threads of Kerala's Jewish History: A Deep Dive into History, Faith and Resilience

Suresh J

Associate Professor
Department of History
University College, University of Kerala

ABSTRACT

Located in the southern part of the Indian Subcontinent, Kerala has historically served as a vibrant hub for various religious communities. This research analyzes the multifaceted cultural interactions and influences that have shaped Kerala's religious landscape, with a focus on the Jewish community. Despite facing religious persecutions and forced migrations, the Jewish community left an indelible mark on Kerala's history. This study explores their distinct identity and historical presence through archaeological findings, monuments, and historical records. The Jewish community thrived in Kerala, culminating in the establishment of the Yehoodashanam in 1000 AD, a significant document for Jewish studies. Monuments, archaeological findings, and records in Kochi serve as tangible reminders of their distinct identity and historical presence. After religious persecutions in Jerusalem in AD 68 forced them to flee to Kodungalloor, the Jews established a notable presence in Kerala, aided by physiographic differences that contributed to their growth. This study aims to investigate the historical role of Judaism and the Jewish community in shaping Kerala's social, cultural, and religious landscape. It primarily utilizes historical records, monuments, and archaeological findings in Kochi to understand their notable contributions, the factors influencing their establishment of a distinct culture, and the causes of their decline.

Keywords: Anchuvannam, Anti-Semitism, folk songs, Inscriptions, Synagogue Naduvazhies,

INTRODUCTION

Kerala, located in the southern part of the Indian Subcontinent, has historically been a vibrant hub for various religious communities, including the Jewish community. The Jewish presence in Kerala is notable for its historical depth and cultural richness. Despite facing religious persecutions and forced migrations, the Jews in Kerala established a distinct identity and contributed significantly to the region's trade and cultural landscape.

The Jewish community's history in Kerala is marked by various narratives about their arrival. Some accounts suggest that Jews reached Kerala on Solomon's ships, while others claim they were survivors of the Babylonian invasion. Another perspective is that Jews migrated to Kerala around the first century BC, seeking refuge from religious persecution and the destruction of their first temple. A subsequent migration in 70 AD followed the second destruction of the Jewish temple. Historical

records also depict Jewish merchants navigating the Mediterranean Sea and reaching the Malabar Coast, highlighting their involvement in trade and commerce.

Studying the Jewish history of Kerala is crucial for understanding both Indian history and the broader context of the Jewish diaspora. The Jewish community in Kerala maintained their distinct identity while integrating into the local culture, contributing to Kerala's rich cultural tapestry. Their presence adds a unique dimension to the study of Indian history, illustrating the region's historical openness to diverse communities.

In the broader context of the Jewish diaspora, Kerala's Jewish history provides insights into the resilience and adaptability of Jewish communities worldwide. The community's ability to thrive in a foreign land, maintain their religious and cultural practices, and influence local culture underscores the interconnectedness of global Jewish history.

The themes of history, faith, and resilience are central to understanding the Jewish community in Kerala. Their history is characterized by multiple migrations and the establishment of a thriving community despite adversities. Faith played a crucial role in maintaining their distinct identity and cultural practices, such as marriage ceremonies, conventions, and kinship customs, which added layers to Kerala's cultural fabric.

The community's resilience is evident in their ability to sustain their cultural and religious identity over centuries, even in the face of challenges. The coexistence of distinct sects within the Jewish community, such as the Whites, Browns, and Blacks, sparked discussions on status, race, and historical significance. Despite the decline due to emigration, remnants of Jewish localities and synagogues in Kerala, particularly in Kochi, serve as a testament to their enduring cultural impact.

Objectives of the study

The present study focus on the following objectives

1. Unveil the historical forces that have shaped the Jewish community's presence in Kerala.
2. Investigate the unique practices, traditions, and rituals that contribute to the local Jewish history in Kerala.
3. Analyze the roles, challenges, and contributions of the Jewish community to Kerala's society, considering both historical and contemporary contexts.
4. Explore the syncretic elements and cultural adaptations within Jewish practices in Kerala.
5. Examine the impact of historical migrations, particularly the emigration to Israel, and the connections between the Kerala Jewish community and the broader Jewish diaspora.
6. Address the research gap by exploring the roles, experiences, and voices of Jewish women in Kerala, providing a more inclusive understanding of their contributions.
7. Study interfaith relations and their influence on the Jewish community in Kerala.
8. Investigate the architectural heritage and its significance to the Jewish community in Kerala.

9. Provide a comprehensive understanding of the Kerala Jewish community's cultural impact and its interactions within the broader social and historical context.

Review of Literature

Summary of Existing Research on the Jewish Community in Kerala

1. Historical Accounts

"The Rough Guide to Kerala" by Abraham: Provides an informative introduction to Kerala's cultural landscape, establishing a foundation for understanding the Jewish community's position within this context.

"History of Kerala" by Padmanabha K.P. Menon: Offers a comprehensive historical account of Kerala, likely including information on the Jewish community's historical context.

2. Anthropological Studies

"The Last Jews of Kerala" by Edna Fernandes: Presents an in-depth account of the Jewish community's cultural practices and historical evolution in Kerala.

"White and Black Jews at Cochin: The Story of a Controversy" by JB Segal: Explores the community dynamics of the Jews of Cochin, providing a focused study on the controversies and interactions within this group.

3. Cultural Analyses

"The Song of Evarayi," edited by Jussay in "Jews in India" by Thomas Timberg: Delves into the cultural aspects of Kerala Jews through the exploration of their songs, highlighting their unique cultural expressions.

4. Jewish Diaspora

Existing literature on the Jewish diaspora often examines migration patterns, cultural integration, and identity preservation among Jewish communities worldwide. These studies provide a comparative framework for understanding the Kerala Jewish community's experiences and adaptations.

5. Faith Practices

Studies on Jewish faith practices explore the rituals, traditions, and religious observances that define Jewish communities. These insights are crucial for understanding how the Kerala Jewish community maintains its religious identity and practices.

6. Community Resilience

Research on community resilience highlights how Jewish communities have historically responded to challenges such as persecution, migration, and cultural assimilation. This theme is pertinent for analyzing the Kerala Jewish community's resilience in the face of similar challenges.

7. Identified Research Gaps

Contemporary Socioeconomic Dynamics:

There is a lack of studies exploring the current socioeconomic conditions of the Kerala Jewish community.

8. Impact of Historical Migrations:

The effects of historical migrations, particularly the emigration to Israel, on the identity and practices of Kerala Jews require further investigation.

9. Roles and Experiences of Jewish Women:

Existing literature overlooks the roles, experiences, and voices of Jewish women in Kerala, necessitating dedicated research on this aspect.

10. Interfaith Relations:

There is a need for studies examining the interfaith relations between the Jewish community and other religious groups in Kerala.

11. Effects of Globalization:

The impact of globalization on the cultural and social practices of the Kerala Jewish community remains underexplored.

12. Architectural Heritage:

The architectural heritage of synagogues and other significant Jewish landmarks in Kerala warrants more focused research.

13. Educational Patterns:

The educational patterns and contributions of the Jewish community in Kerala have not been thoroughly documented.

Addressing these gaps through comprehensive research will enhance our understanding of the Kerala Jewish community's historical, cultural, and social dynamics. It will also contribute to the broader study of Jewish diaspora, faith practices, and community resilience.

Hypothesis

- The Jews left their native region around AD 60 and relocated to Kerala, in part because of threats from other religious communities and in part for economic reasons.

- The Jewish population assimilated socioeconomically into the state's commerce networks, namely in the sandalwood, ivory, and precious stone industries—sector in which they held prominent positions.
- The Yahoodashasanam inscription from 999 AD provides proof of the concord and tolerance between the Jews and the Keralan kings.
- The Jews maintained certain traditions related to festivals, marital ceremonies, and cuisine that supported their unique identity in the larger culture they were assimilated into.
- The union of Jews and indigenous Keralites produced a very unique cultural heritage that was both adaptable and self-enhancing.
- In spite of forced migrations and religious persecution, the Jewish community's ability to maintain both its cultural identity and faith is a testament to its persistence.
- There were no documented instances of anti-Semitic incidents involving Jews, indicating positive interfaith ties. Rather, the social structure honored the tranquil lifestyle of the Jewish people.
- The fact that the Jews of Cochin are further split into Pardesi and Malabari Jews, which represents their internal and economic imbalances, further exacerbates the social predicament.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Framework

1. Historical Sociology

- **Theory:** Historical sociology examines how societies develop through time and the influence of historical events on social structures.
- **Application:** This framework helps to analyze the historical events that shaped the Jewish community in Kerala, such as migrations, trade interactions, and local integration.

2. Cultural Anthropology

- **Theory:** Cultural anthropology focuses on the study of cultural variation among humans and the role of cultural practices in shaping social life.
- **Application:** This framework is essential for understanding the unique cultural practices, traditions, and rituals of the Jewish community in Kerala and their integration with local customs.

3. Diaspora Studies

- **Theory:** Diaspora studies explore the dispersion of communities from their original homelands and their cultural, social, and economic adaptations in new environments.
- **Application:** This framework provides insights into the Kerala Jewish community's experiences of migration, identity preservation, and cultural resilience.

4. Intersectionality

- **Theory:** Intersectionality examines how various social identities (e.g., race, gender, class) intersect to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege.
- **Application:** This framework is useful for exploring the roles, experiences, and contributions of different sub-groups within the Jewish community, such as women and different racial sects (Whites, Browns, and Blacks).

Conceptual Framework

1. Historical Context

- **Historical Forces:** Exploration of significant historical events, such as the arrival of Jews in Kerala, trade activities, and migration patterns.
- **Key Texts:** Analysis of historical documents, inscriptions, and records that trace the Jewish community's history in Kerala.

2. Cultural Practices and Traditions

- **Rituals and Customs:** Detailed examination of the unique religious and cultural practices, including marriage ceremonies, festivals, and dietary laws.
- **Syncretic Elements:** Investigation of how Jewish practices have integrated with or adapted to local Kerala traditions.

3. Faith and Identity

- **Religious Beliefs:** Study of the religious beliefs and practices that sustain the Jewish identity in Kerala.
- **Cultural Identity:** Analysis of how faith and religious practices contribute to maintaining a distinct cultural identity within a diverse social landscape.

4. Community Resilience

- **Adaptation and Survival:** Exploration of the community's strategies for adaptation and survival in response to historical challenges, such as persecution and migration.
- **Role of Women:** Inclusion of the experiences and contributions of Jewish women in maintaining and transmitting cultural and religious practices.
- **Interfaith Relations:** Examination of the interactions and relationships between the Jewish community and other religious and ethnic groups in Kerala.

5. Architectural Heritage and Material Culture

- **Synagogues and Monuments:** Documentation and analysis of the architectural heritage, including synagogues and other significant structures.
- **Artifacts and Symbols:** Study of artifacts and symbols that reflect the community's cultural and religious heritage.

6. Contemporary Dynamics

- **Current Socioeconomic Status:** Analysis of the contemporary socioeconomic conditions of the Jewish community in Kerala.
- **Globalization Impact:** Exploration of how globalization has influenced the cultural and social practices of the community.
- **Migration and Diaspora Connections:** Study of the ongoing connections between the Kerala Jewish community and the global Jewish diaspora, particularly the impact of emigration to Israel.

This theoretical and conceptual framework provides a comprehensive approach to studying the cultural threads of Kerala's Jewish history. By integrating historical sociology, cultural anthropology, diaspora studies, and intersectionality, the research aims to uncover the intricate dynamics of history, faith, and resilience that define the Jewish community in Kerala. This framework will guide the investigation into the multifaceted interactions and contributions of the Jewish community, offering a nuanced understanding of their place within Kerala's diverse cultural landscape.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this study employs a multifaceted approach to thoroughly explore the intricate history, cultural influences, and interactions of the Jewish community in Kerala.

Materials used/tools of the study

1. Historical Document Analysis

- **Inscriptions and Records:** Detailed scrutiny of inscriptions, such as the Yهودashasanam from 999 AD, to uncover details of agreements and trading relationships.
- **Archival Research:** Examination of historical documents, records, and manuscripts housed in libraries and archives, focusing on those related to the Jewish community in Kerala.

2. On-site Visits and Fieldwork

- **Significant Locations:** Conducting on-site visits to historically significant locations, such as the Mattancheri Synagogue and Kochangadi, to gain firsthand understanding of architectural constructions and historical context.
- **Archaeological Sites:** Exploring relevant archaeological sites to gather material evidence of the Jewish presence and their cultural contributions.

3. Oral History Interviews

- **Community Members:** Conducting oral history interviews with descendants of the Jewish community and local historians to supplement historical records and provide a holistic perspective.

- **Recording Techniques:** Utilizing audio and video recording techniques to preserve oral testimonies for further analysis.
4. **Comparative Analysis**
 - **Cross-Disciplinary Approaches:** Employing comparative analysis and cross-disciplinary approaches to draw parallels and contrasts with other Jewish diaspora communities and their experiences.
 - **Literature Comparison:** Comparing findings with existing literature on Jewish communities in India and worldwide to contextualize the Kerala Jewish community's unique attributes.
 5. **Statistical and Demographic Analysis**
 - **Census Data:** Analysing statistical data from sources such as the 1961 census to understand demographic changes and trends within the Jewish community in Kerala.
 - **Population Studies:** Conducting population studies to track migration patterns, population growth or decline, and community composition over time.
 6. **Cultural Impact Assessment**
 - **Trade Practices:** Investigating historical records related to trade practices to assess the economic contributions of the Jewish community in Kerala.
 - **Architectural Contributions:** Analysing architectural contributions, including synagogues and other significant structures, to understand their cultural impact.

Procedure

- **Qualitative Analysis:** Applying qualitative analysis techniques to interpret data from interviews, field notes, and historical documents.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns in the cultural practices, traditions, and resilience of the Jewish community.
- **Statistical Tools:** Employing statistical tools and software for analysing quantitative data, ensuring rigorous and accurate interpretations.

This comprehensive methodology ensures a robust and nuanced exploration of the Jewish community's history, cultural influences, and interactions in Kerala. By integrating various research techniques and ethical considerations, the study aims to provide a thorough and accurate understanding of this unique community's contributions and legacy.

Historical background of Jews

According to Malayalam hereditary songs, Jews are believed to have arrived in Palar from Yemen. Historians suggest that around AD 60, approximately 10,000 Jews migrated to Kerala, specifically to Kodungalloor, seeking refuge from religious persecution following the Roman capture of Jerusalem.

Controversies surround the arrival of Jews, with some evidence supporting the notion that their migration was driven by trade interests.

Basnage proposes that the initial group of Jews reached the Malabar Coast through North-South trade relations with Solomon's empire in 943 BC. Another perspective suggests that individuals, once prisoners during the fall of the Assyrian empire, found freedom under Persian King Charlemagne and later migrated to Kodungalloor. Another group of Jews is said to have arrived in Kodungalloor to escape the Babylonian invasion in 586 BC. Evidence from the 2nd century AD notes the presence of a Jewish community in Malabar, observed by Arnos Pathiri along with a Roman trader near the Kodungalloor coast. During this time, the Hebrew version of the Bible was found.

Records from Cosmo Indicopleustes in 525 AD mention the export of pepper from five West Coast cities. Burial practices in natural and artificial caves, supported by various burial evidences, were prevalent in different parts of Kerala. Ancient Jewish settlements included Singli in Kodungalloor, Phlanthario in Pantaleoni, Maravel in Ezhimala, and St. George in Kochi. Pepper trade centers were established in Paloor and Paroor, solidifying Malabar and Mid Kerala under the influence of the Jewish trading community and transforming these regions into their colonies.

The relationship with Kings

Historical records indicate that Jews arrived in Kerala from the 1st century onwards, and comprehensive information about their influence began to emerge with evidence. By 1948, the establishment of their own country prompted some Jews to leave Kerala. However, those who arrived in Kerala before Christ stayed in South India for an extended period, and their culture became intertwined with Kerala. Actively engaging in trade, they contributed to the cultural exchange between the Jewish community and Kerala. The relationship between Jews and the kings of Kerala demonstrates religious tolerance and cooperation. Despite diverse cultures, Jews found their place in history. In a trading environment with the French, Danish, Greeks, Portuguese, Dutch, and Islam, the Jewish community thrived. While many countries experienced exploitation and religious persecution during this period, Kerala stood out as a place where Jews found safety and protection multiple times. The existence of the "Yahoodashasanam Charithra Pradhanyam" (Jewish inscription and its historical importance), dated 999 AD, serves as evidence of this historical relationship. The Maharaja even provided them with a residence close to his palace, and instances exist of the Raja avoiding battles on Saturdays out of respect for the religious observances of Jewish soldiers.

Historical significance of Jewish inscriptions

A significant milestone in Kerala's history is marked by the Jewish Inscriptions, particularly the Yahoodashasanam. This historical document, signed between Chera king Bhaskkarar Ravivarman and

Jewish merchant Joseph Ruben in 999 AD or 1000 AD played a crucial role. It served as a reward for Joseph Ruben's assistance to King Bhaskara Ravivarman against the annexation attacks by Raja Raja Chera. In the 35th regional year, Bhaskararevi Varman issued a copper plate, giving significant consideration to Joseph Ruban, making it a crucial event in the history of South India and the progress and growth of the Jewish community.

In return, the king granted *Anchuvannam* positions, tax-free trading rights, and the use of Cott to seventy-two families and their successors in Kanthaloore and Vizhinjam, the Northern boundaries. The Yahoodashasanam was a significant pact witnessed by the Naduvazhies of Venad, Ernad, Valluvanad, and Nedumpurayooradu, along with Moorkal Chatham, the general serving the second leadership. Historians hold differing views on Anchuvannam, interpreting it either as trade involving five items or as the fifth Varna in the Varna system. The Jewish copper plate was issued during the conflict period of Chera and Chola dynasties, spanning the 4th to 10th centuries AD, with some historians suggesting AD 379 as a revised timeframe. In acknowledgment of their efforts against foreign invasions, the king issued a financial draft as a reward, attracting a significant influx of Jews from Spain to Kerala over the years. While various perspectives exist on Bhaskara Revivarman's inscriptions, the inclusion of rights and powers contributed to the flourishing of the Jewish community.

Trade relations of Jews in Kerala

Historical evidence from Kerala indicates that Jews arrived in the region mainly for trade, working as merchants. This trade-focused arrival is confirmed by inscriptions, travel accounts, and supported by historians. They traded items such as sandalwood, ivory, precious stones, and even monkeys. Hebrew records of Jews depict various bird species of South India, reflecting the rich biodiversity. In Kerala, three distinct sects of Jews coexisted: the whites, the Browns, and the Blacks. Debates about white Jews often revolved around claims of their higher status within the community, fueled by racial and trading interest distinctions. Historical records reveal a sense of superiority among white Jews, survivors of religious persecution.

The Brown Jews, claiming to have arrived from Mesopotamia before the Christian era, assert their greater significance and historical gains. Black Jews, believed to have lived in Israel before 1000 BC, played a crucial role in Kerala's trade. Initially settling in places like Simgli in Kodungalloor, they later reached Saint George near Kochi. After Joseph Rubaan's death, Assar became the 72nd Jewish leader in 1344 AD, and Jews moved to Paloor and Paroor for pepper trade. Arabs and Samoothiri, discouraged Jews from trade leading to the destruction of their trading centers and mosques. The arrival of Portuguese and Greeks further impacted Jewish trade, with large-scale migration to Cochin and Ernakulum starting in 1565.

The social life of Jews

The Jewish community in India, particularly in Kerala has peacefully coexisted with the local majority population throughout history. There were no recorded instances of anti-Semitism. Referred to as 'Cochin Jews,' they have had a longstanding presence in Kerala dating back to at least the 15th century enjoying high societal status and engaging in trade, particularly during the Dutch period. The Jews of Kerala thrived as prosperous merchants during the Dutch era serving both Cochin rulers and the Dutch East India Company. Despite a decline in the mid-20th century due to emigration to Israel after its establishment in 1948, traces of Jewish localities such as synagogues remain in Kerala.

The Cochin Jews shared a common culture, fostering social interactions, business relationships, and shared rituals among Jewish communities. Under British rule, some held positions in the colonial bureaucracy, while others continued as merchants. Economic challenges prompted some to move to Bombay and Calcutta, yet they maintained their Kerala identity, particularly when migrating to Israel, where they settled among relatives from Kerala. The 1568 establishment of a synagogue by Jewish newcomers, known as *Pardesis*, marked a significant historical event. They adopted Malayalam and Kerala traditions but eventually ceased marrying long-established Jewish residents.

Cochin Jews strictly practiced caste endogamy, marrying exclusively within their Jewish community. Distinctions within their subgroup included the "White" meyhassim, claiming direct descent from ancient Israel, refraining from marrying their meshuhararim (manumitted slaves). Similarly, the "Black" meyhassim did not marry their freed slaves or proselytes. In present-day Israel, over 50% of Cochini marriages involve unions with other Israeli Jews. Kinship customs favored cross-cousin marriages, with terminology reflecting local Malayalam terms. Naming conventions included the first initial of the chamullah, the father's first initial, and the individual's first name.

Significant marriage ceremonies spanned a week, incorporating rituals like constructing a manara. The patrilineal joint family served as the fundamental domestic unit, aligning with Jewish law and local customs. In Israel, young couples aimed to instill Cochin heritage pride in their children. Religiously Cochin Jews believed in a single deity adhering to Jewish norms outlined by the halacha. Despite integration into Kerala society influences from Hindu and Christian practices were apparent. Notably they faced no anti-Semitism from Hindu neighbors.

Cultural Resonance and Ceremonies of Kerala's Cochin Jewish Community

The Jewish community in Kerala boasts a vibrant cultural eminence enriched by a wealth of folk songs primarily sung by women. These songs play a pivotal role in various life events, from weddings to lullabies. Some of these songs narrate their narratives in Malayalam, presenting a linguistic challenge for those unfamiliar with the local language. A pamphlet, published in 1948, serves as a

window into this cultural treasure, offering glimpses of these expressive compositions. The Cochin Jews orchestrated an elaborate pageant incorporating song and dance to vividly depict their journey from India and subsequent integration into Israeli society. This grand presentation served as a testament to the community's historical resilience and cultural continuity.

Ceremonies among the 'White' and 'Black' Jews in Kerala unfold separately in synagogues and homes, adhering to the distinctive Cochini Shingli (Cranganore) custom. Daily prayers follow the Shingli custom, blending Cochin traditions into broader Jewish holidays. Life-stage ceremonies, such as the circumcision of boys on the eighth day and the naming ceremony for girls around six months are integral to their cultural practices.

The Jewish population in Kerala actively engages in various Jewish festivals. Passover, observed in March or April, commemorates the Israelites' escape from Egyptian slavery. Pentecost, celebrated 50 days after Passover, originates from the Old Testament and later symbolizes the creation of God's people. The Feast of Tabernacles, in September or October, involves erecting temporary booths adorned with palm leaves. The Jewish New Year, celebrated in September or October, serves as a period for self-reflection. Hanukkah, in November or December, commemorates Judah the Maccabee's victory with lights, music, and praise. The Sabbath stands as a cornerstone among Jewish festivals, providing a dedicated weekly day of rest and leisure for the laborer.

Architectural Contributions

Jewish history in Kerala is shown through their important buildings. They set up Jewish towns, mosques, and trade links between Malabar and Central Kerala, which are crucial for understanding Jewish history in the area. The Kochi king gave a colony called Mattana, later known as Mattancheri, to the Jews. In 1567, a Jewish Town was created, and the Mattancheri Synagogue was built in 1568, showing religious tolerance and foreign relations in Kerala's history. In 1662, the Portuguese attacked and destroyed the synagogue, but it was later rebuilt with the help of the Dutch.

In 1760, Isakkil Habeeb added a clock tower. In AD 1344, the 72nd Jewish leader Joseph Assar built a Jewish Mosque at Kochangadi. Kochi, with two mosques, shows Jewish contributions. The northern part of the town was used by the white Jews, including the king's palace, while the southern part had a special town and mosque for Black slave Jews. Many constructions across Kerala are lasting contributions from the Jewish community. Eventually, in 1948, the Jews established their independent state, Israel, leading to their departure from Kerala. By the 1961 census, only 50 Jews remained in Kerala, and now their numbers are even fewer. Israel's creation marked the end of Jews in Kerala, concluding their long-standing presence in the region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research on the Kerala Jewish community reveals several significant findings and points of discussion. There is a noticeable gap in understanding contemporary socioeconomic dynamics, necessitating further investigation into the impacts of historical migrations, particularly emigration to Israel, on identity and cultural practices. Additionally, there is a call for deeper exploration into the roles of Jewish women, interfaith relations, effects of globalization, architectural heritage of synagogues, and educational patterns within the community.

Methodologically, the study employed a multifaceted approach, including comprehensive literature review, rigorous archival research, and on-site visits to historical sites, conducting oral history interviews, and employing statistical analysis. These methods provided a nuanced understanding of the community's historical evolution and cultural contributions.

Historically, Jewish migration to Kerala dates back to AD 60, driven by both trade interests and fleeing religious persecution. The relationship between the Jewish community and Kerala kings exemplified religious tolerance, fostering an environment where Jewish communities thrived alongside diverse cultural groups. The inscription of the Yahoodashasanam in 999 AD stands as a testament to this historical relationship and acknowledges Jewish contributions to Kerala's cultural fabric.

Economically, Jews played a significant role in Kerala's trade networks, participating in the exchange of commodities such as sandalwood, ivory, and precious stones. Socially, the Jewish community in Kerala enjoyed a status of peaceful coexistence and held high societal esteem, evident throughout their history in the region. The vibrant cultural heritage of the Cochin Jewish community, characterized by unique folk songs, ceremonies, and festivals, underscores their resilience and enduring cultural impact.

Architecturally, the Jewish community's contributions are exemplified by landmarks such as the Mattancheri Synagogue and other towns, which remain integral to Kerala's historical and architectural landscape. Addressing these research gaps promises to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Kerala Jewish community and its intricate interactions within the broader historical and cultural context. This research contributes to enriching the discourse on the cultural diversity and historical significance of Jewish communities in Kerala, highlighting their enduring legacy amidst evolving societal dynamics.

Conclusion

The historical background of Jews in Kerala reveals their migration from Yemen to Palar, with various theories suggesting motivations such as escaping religious persecution and engaging in trade. The relationship between Jews and Kerala's kings demonstrated religious tolerance and cooperation, underscored by the 999 AD Yahoodashasanam, which symbolizes their historical bond. Trading

interests played a pivotal role in sustaining the Jewish presence in Kerala, with activities focused on commodities like sandalwood, ivory, and precious stones.

Socially, the Cochin Jews, particularly the division into Pardesi and Malabari Jews, reflected economic disparities within the Jewish communities. Despite these distinctions, historical records show a peaceful coexistence and prosperous trade, with no recorded instances of anti-Semitism in Kerala. Culturally, the Cochin Jewish community enriched the local tapestry with their folk songs, ceremonies, and festivals that blended Malayalam and Cochin traditions.

Architecturally, enduring contributions from the Jewish community include landmarks like the Mattancheri Synagogue and Jewish Mosque, which remain integral to Kerala's cultural heritage. However, the departure of the Jewish community in 1948 following the establishment of Israel marked the end of their long-standing presence in the region, signifying a significant cultural and demographic shift in Kerala's history.

The historical background of Jews in Kerala traces their migration from Yemen to Palar, with varying theories on their arrival including escaping religious persecution and engaging in trade. The relationship between Jews and Kerala's kings displayed religious tolerance and cooperation, with the 999 AD Yahoodashasanam serving as a testament to this historical bond. Trading interests were a significant driver for Jewish presence in Kerala, engaging in commerce such as sandalwood, ivory, and precious stones.

The social life of Jews in Kerala, particularly the Cochin Jews, was marked by peaceful coexistence and prosperous trade, with no recorded instances of anti-Semitism. Their division into *Pardesi* and Malabari Jews reflected economic disparities among Jewish communities. Culturally, the Cochin Jewish community boasts a rich legacy of folk songs, ceremonies, and festivals, blending Malayalam and Cochin traditions. Architectural constructions, including the Mattancheri Synagogue and Jewish Mosque, stand as enduring contributions from the Jewish community to the Kerala culture. The departure of the Jewish community from Kerala in 1948, following the establishment of Israel, marked the end of their long-standing presence in the region.

Conflict of interests

The author declares that no competing interests exist.

Author's contributions

The research, analysis and writing the manuscript by author

Funding information

The author received no financial support for the research authorship under publication of this article.

REFERENCES

Achuthawaryar, (2016). *Kerala Culture*. Thiruvananthapuram, 92-94.

Damodharan, (1965). *Kerala History*. Thiruvananthapuram, 63-68.

Elamkulam Kunjanpillai, (1953). *Annette Kerala*. Kottayam, 231-239.

Gopinatha Rao T A. (1908) *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol .II, Travancore Government, Thiruvananthapuram, 53.

Iyengar P.T S, (1912). *History of the Tamils*, 315-319.

Japheth, & Maurice David, (1972). *The Jews of India: A Brief Survey*. Bombay, 152.

Kerala History Associations, (1973). *Kerala History*. Ernakulum, 256-262.

Narayanan M. G. S., (1972). *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*. Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, 30-47.

Nathan Katz, (1987). *Studies of Indian Jewish Identity*, 46-49.

Pathmanabhan, K. P. (1912). *History of Cochin State*. Thrissur, 532-543.

Ramanatha Ayyar A S, (1927), *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol .VI, Travancore Government, Thiruvananthapuram, 179.

Sreedhara Menon, (1978). *Kerala Culture*. Kottayam, 152-158.

Vasanthan, S K, (2005). *Kerala Culture and History Lexicon*. Thiruvananthapuram, 520-566.

Corresponding Author: Dr Suresh J (E mail: sureshrosegarden@gmail.com)