

# Songs and Traditions Of Jews in Kerala

Field Study By Dr. Joseph J. Palackal CMI.



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MUSICOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY OF INDIA

Fieldwork Report  
Joseph Palackal

Wednesday  
Oct. 18, 1995

I went with Fr. Johnson Vayhappilly and Mr. Kunjikrishnan, Lecturer in History Dept, U.C. College, Alwaye, to Manjaly near Parur to meet Mr. Nannia's son

- We arrived at Nannia's house on the bank of the backwaters at 4.15 pm.
- Mr. Nannia was not at home. His wife Ruby Nannia welcomed us. We asked her a few questions.
- The Jews in Parur and Ernakulam are known as Askēnādim, and the Jews in Cochin (Mattanchery) are known as Sepharadim (from the Hebrew word sepher meaning "book"). The Mattanchery Jews are also called "Paradesi" (foreign) Jews.
- Ruby said that the Jews in Parur and Ernakulam are the descendants of Israeli men who came to India and married local, Tamil women. There were similarities in the style of dressing of Parur Jewish women and Tamil women. Ruby showed two "kannu" kept as samples that were worn by her mother.



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- today, the total no. of Jews in Parur are ~~are~~ in 23.  
parur : 5, ~~...~~ : 5, ~~...~~ : 8,  
and ~~...~~ : 5 (5 + 5 + 8 + 5 = 23).
- latest marriage in their Community was in 1992. Nannias Sister's son married a Nair girl. It was an intercaste marriage.
- She was converted into Jewish religion.
- The wedding was done in Nannias' house.
- The reason for the choice of location :  
~~...~~
- wedding was acc. to Hebrew rite.
- Ceremony was conducted by Abraham Abraham Hi. He lives six months in Bernakulam and 6 months in Israel.
- The Wedding was not a solemn celebration, in the sense that there was no singing by women. ~~and~~ former days wedding used to last for one or two weeks. Women used to sing songs. now-a-days, there is not any women who can sing these songs.
- In 1990 Ruby's brother Joseph married a Christian girl, Lissy. She was converted to ~~Jewish~~ Judaism and was given the name "Judith".
- The video of this wedding is available.

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- There was no singing in Malayalam at this wedding

Synagogues: The synagogue in Erumbore is not functioning; nor the one in St. George. Both are ~~over~~ taken over by the Archaeological department of the Govt.

- There was service in Parur Synagogue until last year. Now, there are not enough people to complete the quorum (i.e. ten male members).

- Many Jews in these areas went to Israel and settled down there. Some are planning to leave!

- In Mattanchery, there were two more synagogues: Cross Street Synagogue, St. George Synagogue. In St. George also there were two: St. George Synagogue, St. George Synagogue.

- Nannias Aunt; Mrs. Sarah Elias may be able to sing a few songs. She is in Ernakulam: Elias Chambers, on the side of Sarita-Sarita Theatre.

- one lady from Belgium (!), a professional photographer, is now studying the Jews of Kerala. Her address:  
Suzon Fuks + James Cunningham  
x1/730 Bishop Garden  
Fort Cochin, 682001

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- We left Nannian's beautiful home at 6.30 p.m.

- From Manjaly we went to ൧൦൭൧൧൧൧൧൧;  
Parur, to meet Nannian's brother-in-law

Address → { P.M. Manahem  
Pallivattukal House  
Thittazhathu parambu  
Kaitharam P.O, Parur.

- The family Greeted us well. Manahem's wife Ariam, ~~son~~ They have a son (Saphir) and a daughter.

- Interview with Manahem is ~~was~~ recorded (audio) cassette no. ...

- We saw Manahem's wedding photographs. The gown that was ~~is~~ worn by him at the time of wedding is kept in tact. We have to take a photo of that during next visit.

- Manahem sang a few Hebrew ~~so~~ chants (was recorded) for the occasion for marriage, Sabbath evening etc.

- Prayer is called ~~namaz~~ (namaz) in Muslim (Mappila) in Kerala, too, use the same word. So, too, ~~Church~~ Catholics.

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circummission is referred to as  
"circummission" (circummission)  
circummission is referred to as  
circummission

- I took a photo of Miriam and Manahem, another photo of the thead (David's star) ~~separately~~ worn by Miriam.
- While leaving the house Manahem said that we should go there again on Friday evening, so that Miriam can ~~cook~~ <sup>make</sup> special for Jewish preparations that are eaten on Sabbath days. She learned those recipes from her mother and she still cooks them <sup>for</sup> Sabbath days. We said we would be delighted to go back and participate in a Jewish meal made in Kerala!

4) I was impressed by the enthusiasm and zeal with which Manahem tries to keep the Jewish tradition.

- obs:
- 1) Manahem reads Hebrew. There are Hebrew prayer books at home. He said he didn't understand the meaning of all the words.
  - 2) Manahem's brother is in Israel.
  - 3) some books with Malayalam Jewish songs were given to Dr. Rajam Gurukulal by his family.

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- Jews of Kerala (both Sephardim and Ashkenazim) share similar traditions with the Hindus.
- Talikettu is an important part of wedding celebrations. Tali is in the form of David's Star.
- Tali, a pendant made of ~~gold~~ gold worn with a golden chain; <sup>prayer is called</sup> ~~prayer~~ <sup>from the number</sup>
- The only functioning synagogue in now is in Mattanchery. Both Sephardic and Ashkenazim Jews worship here.
- There are two kinds of Jews: Sephardim & Ashkenazim whose physical characteristics are similar to the local people.
- There are only 17 ~~of~~ Sephardim white Jews left. The rest have migrated to Israel. They do not marry outside their community.
- Two kinds: synagogue music and secular music.
- Semi-religious song texts
- Cross cultural influences in the music of Jews: Yemanite, Arab?, Hindu Rigvedic chant
- ↳ Middle Eastern Maqam
- ↳ Syllabic style and logogonic rhythm. "Poetic-metric rhythm" (p. 56-57)

p. 56-57

Indian classical music  
Calapam, Gamakas  
p. 58

Intercultural  
sic too.



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