

Social Impact Assessment *Study*
of
Black Jewish Synagogue
Mattancherry
(Ancient Monument Renovation & Protection Project)
(0.0351Hectares)

Draft Report (Date : 04/06/2019)
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Requisition Authority
Archeological Department

By
KERALA VOLUNTARY HEALTH SERVICES

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Abbreviations

APL	Above Poverty Line
BPL	Below Poverty Line
PWD	Public Works Department
DLPC	District Level Purchasing Committee
LA	Land Acquisition
NGO	Non - Governmental Organisation
NTH	Non - Title Holder
MSW	Master of Social Work
PAP	Project Affected Person
PAF	Project Affected Family
TH	Title Holder
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SIMP	Social Impact Management Plan
RTFCTLARR Act	The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act

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Introduction

Cochin Jewish Community.

The oldest of the Indian Jewish communities was in the erstwhile Cochin Kingdom. The traditional account is that traders of Judea arrived at Cranganore, an ancient port near Cochin in 562 BCE, and that more Jews came as exiles from Israel in the year 70 CE, after the destruction of the Second Temple. Many of these Jews' ancestors passed on the account that they settled in India when the Hebrew King Solomon was in power. This was a time that teak wood, ivory, spices, monkeys, and peacocks were popular in trade in Cochin. There is no specific date or reason mentioned as to why they arrived in India, but Hebrew scholars date it to up to around the early Middle Ages. Cochin is a group of small tropical islands filled with markets and many different cultures such as Dutch, Hindu, Jewish, Portuguese, and British. The distinct Jewish community was called Anjuvannam. The still-functioning synagogue in Mattancherry belongs to the Paradesi Jews, the descendants of Sephardim that were expelled from Spain in 1492, although the Jewish community in Mattancherry adjacent to Fort Cochin had only six remaining members as of 2015.

It is believed that Jewish history in Kerala dates back to the period of King Solomon. Many Jews are believed to have migrated here following the Roman attack of the tabernacle in Jerusalem. The other theory is that the Jews came to Kerala when extensive trade relations were established between the Malabar Coast and the Middle East during the time of King Solomon. Whatever be the reason, we know for certain that their first settlement was in Cranganore, now known as Kodungallore.

There are historical evidences to show that the erstwhile rulers gave trading rights and concessions in the area to the Jewish merchant Joseph Rabban. Following Rabban's death in the 11th century, a power struggle broke out among his sons which led to the break-up of the community. Many moved to Mattancherry, which went on to become a major Jewish settlement. A theory disputing this version says that it was the Portuguese invasion of Kodungallore that forced the Jews to move to Mattancherry where they were welcomed by the king of Kochi.

Central to the history of the Cochin Jews is their close relationship with Indian rulers, and this was eventually codified on a set of copper plates granting the community special privileges. The date of these plates, known as "Sâsanam", is contentious. The plates themselves provide a date of 379 CE, but in 1925, tradition was setting it as 1069 CE. Joseph Rabban by Bhaskara Ravi Varma, the fourth ruler of Maliban granted the copper plates to the Jews. The plates were inscribed with a message stating that the village of Anjuvannam belonged to the Jews and that

they were the rightful lords of Anjuvannam and it should remain theirs and be passed on to their Jewish descendants "so long as the world and moon exist". This is the earliest document that shows that the Jews were living in India permanently. It is stored in Cochins main synagogue. The Jews settled in Kodungallur (Cranganore) on the Malabar Coast, where they traded peacefully, until 1524. The Jewish leader Rabban was granted the rank of prince over the Jews of Cochin, given the rulership and tax revenue of a pocket principality in Anjuvannam, near Cranganore, and rights to seventy-two "free houses". The Hindu king gave permission in perpetuity (or, in the more poetic expression of those days, "as long as the world and moon exist") for Jews to live freely, build synagogues, and own property "without conditions attached". A link back to Rabban, "the king of Shingly" (another name for Cranganore), was a sign of both purity and prestige. Rabban's descendants maintained this distinct community until a chieftainship dispute broke out between two brothers, one of them named Joseph Azar, in the 16th century. The Jews lived peacefully for over a thousand years in Anjuvannam. After the reign of the Rabban's, the Jewish people no longer had the protection of the copper plates. Neighboring princes of Anjuvannam intervened and revoked all privileges that the Jewish people were given. In 1524, the Jews were attacked by the Moors brothers (Muslim Community) on a suspicion that they were messing with the pepper trade and the homes and synagogues belonging to them were destroyed. The damage was so extensive that when the Portuguese arrived a few years later, only a small amount of impoverished Jews remained. They remained there for 40 more years only to return to their land of Cochin. In Mala, Thrissur District, the Malabar Jews have a Synagogue and a cemetery, as well as in Chennamangalam, Parur and Ernakulam. There are at least seven existing synagogues in Kerala, although not serving their original purpose anymore.

Malabar Jews (Black Jews)

Cochin Jews also known as Malabar Jews are the oldest group of Jews in India, with roots that are claimed to date back to the time of King Solomon. The Cochin Jews settled in the Kingdom of Cochin in South India, now part of the state of Kerala. As early as the 12th century, mention is made of the Jews in southern India. The Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela, speaking of Kollam (Quilon) on the Malabar Coast, writes in his *Itinerary*: "...throughout the island, including all the towns thereof, live several thousand Israelites. The inhabitants are all black, and the Jews also. The latter are good and benevolent. They know the law of Moses and the prophets, and to a small extent the Talmud and Halacha. These people later became known as the Malabari Jews. They built synagogues in Kerala beginning in the 12th

and 13th centuries. They are known to have developed Judeo-Malayalam, a dialect of Malayalam language. The group practiced endogamous marriage, maintaining their distinctions. Black Jews, similar in appearance to the locals, are believed to be the descendants of the Jews who first came to Kerala. They were allowed to worship in the Pardesi Synagogue, but were not given full membership.

Paradesi Jews (White Jews)

Following their expulsion from Iberia in 1492 by the Alhambra Decree, a few families of Sephardi Jews eventually made their way to Cochin in the 16th century. They became known as Paradesi Jews (or Foreign Jews). Paradesi Jews (White Jews) of Cochin who immigrated from Spain/Portugal during the 15th century. The European Jews maintained some trade connections to Europe, and their language skills were useful. Although the Sephardim spoke Ladino (i. e., Spanish or Judeso-Spanish), in India they learned Judeo-Malayalam from the Malabar Jews. The two communities retained their ethnic and cultural distinctions. In the late 19th century, a few Arabic-speaking Jews, who became known as Baghdadi, also immigrated to southern India, and joined the Paradesi community. Paradesi Jews also practiced endogamous marriage and maintaining their distinctions. White Jews, allowed full membership in the synagogue, are recent descendents of European or Middle Eastern origin. While the Black Jews were mainly tradesmen and craftsmen, the White Jews belonged to the professional and merchant classes.

Meshuhrarim Jews

The third group, were mainly freed slaves. They do not have any communal rights and are expected to sit on the floor or the steps outside while worshipping at the synagogue.

Life and culture of Black and White Jews Communities in Cochin.

Though both the communities neither eat nor drink together, nor intermarry, the Black and the White Jews of Cochin have almost the same social and religious customs. They hold the same doctrines, use the same ritual (Sephardic), observe the same feasts and fasts, dress alike, and have adopted the same language Malayalam. The two classes are equally strict in religious observances. In the early 20th century, Abraham Barak Salem (1882–1967), a young lawyer who became known as a "Jewish Gandhi", worked to end the discrimination against meshuchrarim Jews. Inspired by Indian nationalism and Zionism, he also tried to reconcile the divisions among the Cochin Jews. He became both an Indian nationalist and Zionist. His family were descended from meshuchrarim. The Hebrew word denoted a manumitted slave, and was

at times used in a derogatory way. Salem fought against the discrimination by boycotting the Paradesi Synagogue for a time. He also used satyagraha to combat the social discrimination. According to Mandelbaum, by the mid-1930s many of the old taboos had fallen with a changing society.

Jews emigration from Kerala to Israel and Commonwealth countries

After India gained its independence in 1947 and Israel was established as a nation, most of the Malabar Jews made Aliyah and immigrated from Kerala to Israel in the mid-1950s. In contrast, most of the Paradesi Jews (Sefardi in origin) preferred to migrate to Australia and other Commonwealth countries, similar to the choices made by Anglo-Indians.

Jews Synagogues in Kerala.

Most of their synagogues still exist in Kerala, whereas a few were sold or adapted for other uses. Among the 8 synagogues that had survived till the middle of 20th century, only the Paradesi synagogue still has a regular congregation and also attracts tourists as a historic site. Another synagogue at Ernakulam operates partly as a shop by one of few remaining Cochin Jews. A few synagogues are in ruins and one was even demolished and a two-storeyed house was built in its place. The synagogue at Chendamangalam (Chennamangalam) was reconstructed in 2006 as Kerala Jews Life Style Museum. The synagogue at Paravur (Parur) has been reconstructed as Kerala Jews History Museum.

Black Jewish Synagogue in Cochin

There is no clear history available regarding the establishment of black Jewish synagogue. As per our field study it was understood that the synagogue was established in 16th century by availing sanction from honorable King of Cochin. After getting regular disturbance from the Malabar King many Jews both black and white shifted their settlement from Kodungallor to Western part of Cochin territory. The benevolent King of Cochin supported this Jews and gives all facilities to promotion of their trade. The black Jewish those who settled in West Kochi region decided to build a synagogue in Mattancherry. The aged people in Mattancherry area say that the synagogue was not only a worship place but also panoramic exhibition of Jewish culture and skills in handicrafts. After the establishment of country of Israel most of the black Jews immigrated to Israel. They give responsibility to Vanaja Traders a coir company to maintain the worship place and use part of the building for business purpose. There after the Vanaja Traders sold the property to

Mr.V.G. Antony by using a power of attorney from Mumbai Jewish Society (This statement is not having any authentic records except the statement from Mrs. Regina Thariyan, who she was the secretarial assistant of Vanaja traders). Thereafter Mrs. Regina Thariyan purchase the whole property and land in two phase. Firstly she registered 2.820 cent and thereafter 8.680 cent and the structure. Out of the total 11.5 cent she sold three cents Mr.Munaf C.K. She also pledged the remaining 8.5 cent and the structure in Punjab National Bank and the loan is due for repayment. At present the structure is totally abundant in nature and used by anti - social elements. But it is very evident and visible the role of Black Jewish Synagogue the history of Kerala and its cultural heritage. The monument is an important historical spot which gives lot of memories about the history of our trade between Indian Sub-Continent and Europe & Middle East. It is very difficult to establish the authenticity of transactions on this property did after 1970 at this juncture. But it is necessary to protect the monument and keep it for next generation. Therefore the project seems to be having high public importance in terms of preserving cultural heritage of our proud land.

1.1. Project and Public purpose

Government of Kerala give administrative sanction to Archeological department to protect and renovate the monument, Black Jewish Synagogue through the letter C-8-65887/16, under the provisions of the Kerala Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites & Remains Act 1968 (26 of 1969). The Black Jewish Synagogue of Mattancherry village of Kochy Taluk of Ernakulam district is an Ancient Monument which was used by Black Jews as worship place. The available history says that the synagogue was built in early 60th Century and renovated several times thereafter. The synagogue was owned by Black Jews and they handed over responsibility to maintain it after they all immigrate to Israyel to Vanaja Traders, a coir trading company. The precious wall writings, handicrafts, archeologically important materials etc. where either sold or transported to Israyel. Now the walls only be remind in an abundant position. After the Jewish immigration 3-4 transactions are made on the property. Now the possession of the property is with Mrs. Regina Thariyan. Punjab National Bank erected a notice board in the property stating that which states that the property is owned by them. Even though the monument is in very ruined state its importance in Kerala history and culture could not be neglected. Therefore the protection, renovation of the monument i.e. Black Jewish Synagogue is having public importance and therefore the project is treated as framed for a public purpose under the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 (30 of 2013) Section 2 (i)(b)(iii).

1.2. Location

The project area is situated in Mattancherry village of Kochi Taluk of Ernakulam District. The survey number of the acquiring land is 601/3 and the total area of acquisition is 0.0351 hector. The project area is 600 mtr, 3 kilometer, 4 kilometer and 500 mtr. Fort Kochi – Ernakulam road, Fort Kochi, Thoppumpadi Junction and Mattancherry police station respectively. The presence of white Jewish Synagogue, Mattancherry Fort and heritage Jewish town increases the cultural importance of the project area.

1.3 Size and Attributes of Land Acquisition

Land Acquisition Authority

Land acquisition Thahasildar office, (L.A.) General Ernakulam is preparing the acquisition details including land sketch and extent of acquisition etc. Deputy Collector (Land Acquisition) is monitoring the land acquisition process and District Collector is the head of whole acquisition process.

Details of project affected families

The social impact study considered the following families and persons has project affected. 1) Regina Thariyan, who is having possession of land at present. 2). Punjab National Bank, who is claiming possession on the acquiring land. 3). Families those who are residing the acquiring land. 4). Persons who are having trade or business near by the monument. 5). Hires of Mr.V.G.Antonywho is the previous owner of the acquiring land. Mrs.ReginaTharyan is claimed to living in a rented building at Vaduthalaernakulam along with husband and daughter and granddaughter.

Details of the acquiring land

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1.4. Alternatives

The project is aimed to protect and renovate an ancient monument i.e. Black Jewish Synagogue. Therefore the suggestion for the alternative is not relevant. But the people in the area and historians demanding the acquisition and protection the whole land which was owned by Black Jews before their emigration including a well in the property.

1.5. Social Impact

Since all the people, families and persons supporting the project, therefore the impact of the project is categorized as minimum. The project is not displacing any residential house, business establishments and public amenities. In the other hand the project upscale the cultural and historical value of the area and make the spot become historically important.

1.6. Mitigation Measures

Payment of compensation and evacuate the encroachment if any is seems to be the mitigation measure. The acquisition will be conducted by understanding the historical importance of the monument may reduce the impact and maximize the mitigation.

1.7 Assessment of Social Costs and Benefits

Since there is no dislike/disagreement/resistance from the possession holders, those who are the residence nearby and the general public the impact of the project seems to be very minimum and the requisition agency can mitigate it effectively through compensation measures.

The honorable Government aimed to protect and renovate a century's old monumentie the black Jewish Synagogue which is in abandon and ruined state. The aged people in the area are still having clear memory about the glorious past of the monument. They told it was decorated with precious handicrafts and religious and cultural paintings. All those were either sold or send to the country of Israel. But no authentic record is available about the export to Israel. Now the monument is having only a structures which built by stone bricks. Government needed to invest lacks of rupees to renovate it. But it is very difficult to reinstate the handicrafts and cultural and religious paintings. The attempt of the Government to renovate and protect the monument is appreciated by

public but they also demanded a study regarding the whole transactions happened on the properties and land belongs to the monument. Protection and renovation of the Synagogue of Black Jews in Mattancherry is an important step towards the learning of the Kerala History. It motivated historians, sociologists and other learners to dig deep to the state's Trade, commerce and migration history since the era of King Solomon. By considering the historical and cultural importance the State acquired through the project the public importance of the project is clear and visible.

The social impact study is not able to trace the fact and figures behind the transactions regarding possession and title deed of the acquired property. But as per the village office records the title holder name is KaruthaYoodapally (Black Jewish). No authentic document is available on the title ship except Village records and title deed in the hands of the present possession holder. The study team sends a letter to Panjab National Bank after seeing a board in the project site which stating their claim on the possession of the property. But still today we did not receive any communication from the bank. Therefore the acquisition authorities may identify the title holder before paying the compensation. This may reduce the grievance and mitigate the impact.

The project is treated as framed for public purpose under the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (30 of 2013) Section 2 (i)(b)(iii). It is in this base, Government of Kerala notified to initiate acquisition procedure. Considering the public interest and Project's contribution in the preservation of Kerala's culture and heritage the project may treat as an inevitable need. In compared to the social impact the public importance of the project is much higher and therefore the project has to be implemented.

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Kerala VHS

