



The review and history of Paradesi Synagogue, Kochi, Kerala

Joshua Jose ¹, Priyaranjan Behera ²

¹ Student, Bachelor of Design, SOD, Presidency University, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

² Professor, SOD, Presidency University, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

* Corresponding Author: **Joshua Jose**

Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 03

Issue: 04

July-August 2022

Received: 01-06-2022;

Accepted: 15-06-2022

Page No: 57-59

Abstract

Judaism is thought to have first arrived in Kerala around 2000 years ago, when the first Jews were spice and timber traders. Despite the lack of written evidence, Hebrew scholars date it to the reign of King Solomon. I would like to introduce readers to the traditional architecture of the synagogue through a unique style of Jewish architectural and artistic form in this paper. And the current state of Jewish churches in Kerala. For this paper, we will concentrate on Cochin Jews, their lives and influences, and, most importantly, Parades Synagogue.

Keywords: Paradesi Synagogue, Kerala, history

Introduction

The Malabar Jews, also known as Cochin Jews, established a prosperous trading community in Kerala by controlling a large portion of the spice trade. Migrated from the far north of Kerala and other parts of the world in fear of Portuguese persecution during the Goa Inquisition. During the 16th century, the raja of Cochin gave land to the Jewish community under his protection, and in 1558, the synagogue was opened in Mattancherry, which is still used for worship today.

As of now, Paradesi Palli is Kerala's only functioning synagogue, as the site has been turned into a tourist attraction and a place of remembrance for Cochin Jews who left India and migrated to other parts of the world.



Source Images: Internet

Fig 1: Paradesi Church

Architecture of Paradesi Synagogue

Historically, Jews have been a minority in any of the regions where they have settled. There are no written rules or concrete rules on synagogue design, which has resulted in vibrant designs of synagogues such as the Knesset Eli yahoo in Mumbai, also known as the blue synagogue of Mumbai, which is not originally blue but was restored with bright indigo borders between 2018 and 2019.



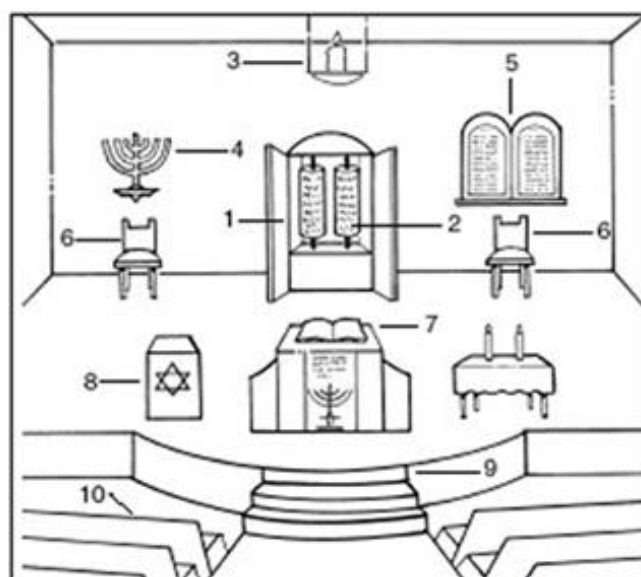
Source Images: Internet

Fig 2

As you have noted from the difference between exterior and interior of Paradesi and Knesset Eli Yahoo synagogues from the above pictures.

Aside from the architectural aspects of the synagogues, the religious requirements are the same, such as the ark of covenant (where the Torah scrolls are kept) or that the central bismah (alter primarily) face Jerusalem, as seen in other synagogues throughout India. The image below depicts a close-up of the interior of a synagogue.

Below you will find a diagram of a common synagogue and a list of features.



- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A. Congregation seating | D. Menorah | G. Ner Tamid |
| B. Torah Scrolls | E. Rabbi's and Cantor's seats | H. Ark |
| C. Ten Commandments | F. Bimah | I. Rabbi's podium |
| | | J. Cantor's and Torah reading table |

Source Images: Internet

Fig 3

Now some of the architectural components of Kerala's synagogue are:

1. Padippura (Gateway) - A rectangular gateway was its functioned as a transaction space where the meetings are held and the prayers given.
2. Sanctuary: All religious rituals are performed in this space. In Kerala synagogues, the sanctuary is typically a double-height rectangular hall.
3. Ark of the Covenant: A location where the Torah scrolls

are kept, with a view of Jerusalem.

4. Torah Scrolls: Are the holy book of Judaism, consisting of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai and rolled up into heavily orated scrolls.
5. Bimah: A raised podium in the centre of the sanctuary adorned with jewels and brass that faces the alter and is where the Torah scrolls are read and the rabbi teaches. And men sit on benches on either side of the Bimah.
6. Upper Bimah: It is only found in Kerala synagogues,

where it is used for special occasions and is primarily used by rabbis. Women primarily use this area for seating.

7. Mechitza (Partition): It is a segregation or partition area located behind the upper bimah and is primarily used by women.
8. Eternal Flame (Ner Tamid): It was customary in ancient Jewish times to keep the flame burning as a reminder of how pure/holy Jehovah is. However, in modern times, the lamp, which is usually powered by electricity, remains lit even when the synagogue is closed.

Conclusion

Through my research, I hope to reach a conclusion about how this historical synagogue, a cultural monument, has been well preserved by successive generations. How well Jewish and Indian culture and architecture have merged to form one of the world's most beautiful synagogues, and how Indian style lotus motifs are used to design the interiors of synagogues and are used as decorative elements in these places.

References

1. <https://www.sahapedia.org/cochin-jews-and-seven-synagogues-kerala-history-and-architecture>
2. <https://www.keralatourism.org/kochi/paradeso-synagogue-mattancherry.php>
3. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Paradesi-Synagogue>
4. <http://cochinsyn.com/page-paradesi.html>