

## AN INDIAN READING OF *ĀTMĀNUTĀPAM*

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**Abstract:** Jojo Parecattil makes an Indian reading of *Ātmānutāpam*. He banks on the Ṛgvedic willingness to explore and learn from various spiritual traditions of the world and to listen to noble thoughts from every corner of the world. He makes a rereading of the poem and discovers the Indian implications of the poem that are lost in translation. He begins his analysis with the significance of the title of the poem and comments on the Indian *sanyasa* tradition and goes on to make a philological analysis of the relevant terms that appear in the poem that are loaded with meaning and noted that the salvation history is pictured by Chavara essentially in Indian terms. Moreover, inculturation is written all over the poem and for this reason, the author is considered the pioneer of inculturation in India. He also brings in an Indian shepherdess in conversation with Mary who is addressed *mātr-devi*, *sūrya-deva-janani*, and St Joseph is presented as a *muni* and *tāpasan*. Discussing the various Indian terms that are used in the poem Parecattil comes to the conclusion that through *Ātmānutāpam*, Chavara is presenting the living water in an Indian cup.

**Keywords:** Sanskrit, *ṛṣis*, inculturation, traditions, customs, translation, semantics, discernment, inculturation, Hindu practices, Hindu prayer, saffron, *sanyāsa*, Indianization, Hindu customs, *darśan*, *tapas*, ascetic, vocation, vestments, *Brāhmaṇa*, gospel, disciples, Hindu Scriptures, Āryan, Trinity, offerings, temple, shepherdess, sun, *muni*, contemplation, Indian spirituality, lotus, Hindu faith, third eye, Indian Philosophy.

### 1. Introduction

Archbishop Antonius Petti, the Promoter General of Faith for the Causes of Saints, in 1983, while requesting to Pope John Paul II, for the beatification of the Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, presented him as “a pearl truly Indian and oriental.”

Here is a man named Kuriakose Elias Chavara  
a pearl truly Indian and oriental,

a model to follow Jesus of Nazareth  
 he shows us how to love and serve others  
 in family life, religious life and priestly life.<sup>1</sup>

Cardinal Lourdasamy, then Prefect of the Oriental Congregation, in a public gathering held in Rome to commemorate the beatification of Kuriakose Elias, portrayed him as “one who relentlessly sought after the soul of India, finding it in its depth and permeated in that consciousness as a spiritual persona.”<sup>2</sup> Chavara, who founded a Sanskrit school, and learned Sanskrit together with other students, indeed, in that process imbibed the spiritual essence of the ancient *ṛṣis* for himself through *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* by totally getting identified with the soul of India.

A. Shridharamenon, a well-known historian of Kerala, considered Chavara as the pioneer of inculturation among the St Thomas Christians. In his opinion, the initiative like composing *Ātmānutāpam* is a typical example of it. He observes:

Though by faith they are Christians, in all other matters they are typically Keralites with national orientations. They have integrated themselves with the culture of this land. In the recent times, there is a new enthusiasm towards this Indian way of life, and it is St. Chavara, who first initiated this new fervour. He advised his followers to imbibe the spiritual wealth of India. He gave great importance to Sanskrit studies, and started a Sanskrit school. He incorporated some of the relevant Hindu practices to Christian rituals. Following the *sandhya-nāma-kīrttanam* (an evening praise of the name of God), prevalent in Hindu homes, he has taken leadership in writing prayer songs based on the life-stories of Christ and encouraged others to do the same. Imitating the *kīlipat* style of Malayalam poet Ezhuthchan, he has also written epic-poem on the life of Jesus for the sake of the faithful.<sup>3</sup>

India’s willingness to listen and the desire to explore and discover more from other spiritual customs and traditions of the world is classically expressed in the tiny spark of Ṛgvedic mantra, “*Ā no bhadraḥ-kṛtavo-yantuviśvataḥ,*” which means “let noble thoughts come

<sup>1</sup>T. Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan oru Rekhachithram*, Ernakulam: 2004, 81.

<sup>2</sup>Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachitram*, 82.

<sup>3</sup>A. Sridharamenon, “Renaissance Leader who Walked ahead of his Time,” *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 16/1 (January-March 2005) 56-63; Shridharamenon, “Kalathinu Munpe Nadanna Navothana Nayakan,” 18.

to us from every corners of the world."<sup>4</sup> It was the great ideal of Indian *ṛṣis* for all times. Chavara also had this noble attitude of openness towards other customs and traditions, especially with the Hindu traditions, and this Indianness was an important aspect of his spiritual consciousness. Thomas Kadankavil notes in this regard: "St. Chavara is a typical embodiment of the classical Indian consciousness that would like to see universal unfolding of the divine signs and revelations."<sup>5</sup> The present study is an attempt along this line to reflect more on the Indian consciousness of Chavara, by making an Indian reading of his swan song, *Ātmānutāpam* (*The Compunction of the Soul*). As the various orientations and thinking patterns of an author are invariably reflected in his works, we have a reasonable hope that, by analysing this work, we get insights on such orientations of the author. In the same way, a critical appraisal on *Ātmānutāpam* will also unfold some insights on the Indian consciousness of Chavara, its author.

## 2. The Indian Implications Lost in Translation

*Ātmānutāpam* has been translated into English with the title *The Compunction of the Soul*.<sup>6</sup> This translation, however, has some limitations. As it is usual with any translated work, this text too cannot convey the true meaning of some of the terms and concepts of the original Malayalam text, which causes certain semantic problems, which are not easily solved. To make it clearer, though, the translation has been kept as close to the original as literally and as precisely as possible, consistent with English sense and phrase, while translating certain words and concepts from Malayalam, it has miserably lost the original Indian sense. For example, by translating terms like '*kali-yugam*,' '*veda-nāthan*,' '*pāda-paṅkajam*,' '*ṛṅkannu*,' etc., into 'ages-back,'<sup>7</sup> 'Lord of the Gospel,'<sup>8</sup> 'leg,'<sup>9</sup> 'darling-eyes,'<sup>10</sup> respectively, they have

<sup>4</sup>Ano bhadrah krtavo yantu viswatah. *Rgveda* 1.89.1.

<sup>5</sup>Kadankavil, "Uyarattile Veedu: Siddhiyum Siddhantavum," 99.

<sup>6</sup>I am thankful to Mary Leo CMC for her English translation of *Ātmānutāpam* (*The Compunction of the Soul*), which has been of help for me in this study, especially to give references to *Ātmānutāpam*.

<sup>7</sup>And besides, His just laws to maintain

*Ages back*, a warning message He sent (VI.57-58)

<sup>8</sup>Call of disciples, *O Lord of the Gospel*

To proclaim your word, I long to see (III.95-96)

<sup>9</sup>Nicodemus helped; They bore Him down the cross

Mary of Magdalena in grief held *His legs* (IX.105-106).

<sup>10</sup>The holy child gazing at His mother

lost their Indian nuances completely, which the original Malayalam terms beautifully conveyed. For this reason, to better appreciate the Indian implications of *Ātmānutāpam*, the transliterated version of the original Malayalam lines are given wherever it is required.

### 3. Assimilation with Discernment

Chavara had a natural inclination for relevant and meaningful adaptation, both in secular and religious matters. For “cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle ... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied” (AL 3). That is why he adapted *paḷḷikūdam* for *āsān kaḷari*, seminary education for *malpānate* system. In addition, he integrated liturgical elements from the Latin tradition, like Holy Saturday service, the funeral service for children, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and popular devotions that fostered the spiritual nourishment of the people. The motive behind all these kinds of adaptations and integrations was always a higher cause, as it was based on some of the practical considerations of his time. To better understand and appreciate his motive, let us examine what Mathias Mundadan says with regard to the adaptation of liturgical elements from the Latin tradition to the Syrian Liturgy:

The intention of Blessed Chavara in attempting to reform the liturgy, was that the public worship should be performed with decorum and solemnity. Whatever traditional matter was available in any form he made use of. For the rest he had to borrow from the Latin sources. His natural inclination towards piety and devotion and his close association with the missionaries and western practices prompted him to adopt many of those devotions and practices, which, he believed, would foster the spiritual life of the priests and lay persons. But this does not mean that he was negligent or indifferent towards the age-long liturgical traditions of the St. Thomas Christians.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear from the above citation that it was for the noble cause of better spiritual experience of the people that Chavara opted for adaptation. In that regard, it should also be remembered that he had the courage even to integrate enriching elements from the Indian tradition. From the time of *kaḷari* education onwards, he was exposed

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With *darling eyes*, I long to see (III.29-30).

<sup>11</sup>A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2008, 266.

to various Hindu practices, and in the beginning, he followed them blindly, as it was recalled in the lines of *Ātmānutāpam*:

When I thus reached the age of five,  
 There came a noble guru of non-Christian faith.  
 Sitting beside me, he made me write with finger  
 On grains of rice spread on the floor,  
 And also made me to utter words one after another,  
 And indeed, I pronounced them,  
 Regardless of their being good or bad! (I. 87-93).

The traditional Hindu practice of *vidyārambha* is what is recalled in the above lines by Chavara. Accordingly, the *āśān*, who was a Hindu teacher, initiated him to learning by making him write the alphabet with the right index finger on the grains of rice spread on the floor, and making him repeat after him the Hindu prayer: "*Hari Śrī Gaṇapatāye namaḥ.*" Making such a prayer to a Hindu God is something that was not acceptable to the Christian faith and hence, he regrets having said it unawares, at the beginning of his *kaḷari* education. It is a clear instance of a blind imitation of the Hindu practice, not considering whether they are good or bad. Though at that tender age, he was not able to sort out things properly and make correct judgements, later when he grew up in age and in Christian wisdom,<sup>12</sup> gradually he learned to distinguish good from bad and selected the good practices of Hindu tradition, which were in tune with his Christian faith.

#### 4. The Significance of the Title *Ātmānutāpam*

The realization of the great dream of '*tapasu bhavanam*' and giving of the title *Ātmānutāpam* for the epic poem that he wrote at the end of his life are the flowering forms of the aptitude of *tapas*, which Chavara always cherished in his life. The title *Ātmānutāpam* is actually a component of three words, i.e., *ātma+anu+tāpam*, and here the verbal word '*tāpam*' is derived from the root  $\sqrt{\text{tap}}$ , which originally means 'to burn' and in this context, it may be interpreted as 'compunction' or 'repentance.' In order to have a better understanding about the

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<sup>12</sup>"We may remember that, in those days, the European missionaries' apologetic theology and totally negative approach to faiths and cultures other than their own were prevalent, which certainly were a great influence on Bl. Chavara's religious thinking. This largely explains the dark picture he paints of his experiences with non-Christians during the *kaḷari* days." T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2014, 28-29.

implication of the title *Ātmānutāpam* with *tapas*, we need to analyse the Indian concept of *sanyāsa*.

Saffron as a colour is always revered in the Indian culture as a symbol of purity and sanctity. It is by the wearing of saffron cloth that one officially enters into *sanyāsa*. As one enters into *sanyāsa*, which is the final stage among the four stages of human life (*caturāśramas*) i.e., *brahmacarya*, *gārhastya*, *vānaprastha*, and *sanyāsa*. As one enters *sanyāsa*, he renounces fire, which is permitted in the stage of *gārhastya*; no more in his life, neither he cooks, nor receives the heat from fire, and performs sacrifices like *agni-hotra* as his sole concentration is only on the soul. It is at this juncture that he wears the saffron cloth, which is made in the colour of fire, a symbol of cremation of his body in fire. In the Indian tradition, it is believed that one's soul becomes liberated as one purifies one's body in fire. And if, one has already burned his body while he was alive, then, no further burning is required, after his death. That is why, usually the body of a *sanyāsi* is never burned after death, whereas, in the case of ordinary people, the body is cremated after death.

The saffron cloth of a *sanyāsi* symbolises the constant burning of all the bodily desires as long as he lives in the body. Saffron is a combination of white, red and black colours, which are respectively the symbols of *sattva*, *rajo* and *tamo guṇas* and by wearing the saffron cloth, he is expected to transcend all the limitations of *thri-guṇas*. Without succumbing to lust, by his continuous *tapas*, focusing of intellect, mind and all other faculties of action (*karmendriyas*), he becomes elatedly the sovereign monarch of the *Brahmaloka*.

Chavara who has been instrumental in instituting the first two living indigenous religious congregations, i.e., CMI and CMC, by which he actually inculturated Christian traditions of religious life and vice versa foreseeing the farsightedness of a prophet:

Religious institutes, working to plant the Church, and thoroughly imbued with mystic treasures with which the Church's religious tradition is adorned, should strive to give expression to them and to hand them on, according to the nature and the genius of each nation. Let them reflect attentively on how Christian religious life might be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions, whose seeds were sometimes planted by God in ancient cultures already prior to the preaching of the Gospel (*Ad Gentes*, 18.40).

Chavara anticipated the teaching of Vatican II in the nineteenth century itself, and implemented it rewardingly in the Indian context. Along with his companions, he chose inculturation of religious life as a

vehicle to carry the soul of the Gospel to the Indian soul, which is very much rooted in *sanyāsa* traditions of the *Ṛṣis*. For Chavara and his companions Indianization was not merely a superficial imitation of certain Hindu customs and practices; rather, it was deeper and more life-oriented one, as they imbibed the most prevailing values of Indian *sanyāsa* like silence, penance, *darśan* of God, which were to be seen in the instructions the Council later.

Seeing that India is the cradle of *sanyāsa*, Chavara and his companions adopted *sanyāsa* as the primary medium of inculturation. Even as he was being ordained a priest, his only dream was to establish a '*tapas-bhavan*' by means of which he could embrace religious life, which was also the intention of his 'First Holy Mass.' As already pointed out in the beginning, the realization of '*tapassu bhavanam*' and *Ātmānutāpam* are the flowering forms of the aptitude of *tapas*, which he always had. In his death bed, when he was unable to perform any other forms of penance, as he was very weak in his body, his determination to complete *Ātmānutāpam*, which required a lot of *tapasya* itself can be considered as an act of '*tapas*,' as it is given in his own words:

To turn an ascetic, I lack the needed strength  
 I can muse upon your sacred passion  
 And seek my hope in your precious blood  
 All else is beyond my power, my Lord! (VII. 365-370)

In composing *Ātmānutāpam*, as a *tāpasan* (an ascetic), Chavara continued his great *tapas* even in the sick bed. In each line of *Ātmānutāpam*, his contrite soul is burning (*tap*) with divine love, as he reflects on the story of Jesus redemptive activities while lamenting on his own sins. In the composition of *Ātmānutāpam*, he burned all his sins, just like a Hindu *sanyāsi* by wearing the saffron cloth and living such a life, burns all his limitations of *thri-guṇas*. Hence, *Ātmānutāpam* should not be viewed as a mere poetic work; rather, it is the essence of the poet's own *tāpasa* life (ascetic way of life).

More than anything else, what Chavara valued in his life was his religious vocation. This is very evident from the dispute persisted even in death, regarding the clothes in which his body was to be exhibited before the burial. He always preferred his religious habit to the sacerdotal vestments of the Vicar General. As he was the Vicar General of the Syrian Christians of the Archdiocese of Verapoly at his death, the members of his community clothed his body not in religious but sacerdotal vestments. However, when his close companions who knew him better arrived to pay their respects, they were of the opinion that it

was not the sacerdotal vestments but in the religious habit that the body was to be buried. Hence, the historian records: "though the body with the priestly apparels had been already exposed in the church in the morning and office of the dead were being recited before it, at night after 8 o'clock the vestments were exchanged with those of religious. Since mantle was not in use in the Congregation at that time, in its place surplice and stole were put over the cassock."<sup>13</sup> It is also admirable to observe the circular of the Vicar General to the churches that "advised the people and priests to come without any pomp or show, and unaccompanied by the parade of confraternities. The reason given is that all such show and pomp were against the discipline of the religious."<sup>14</sup> Chavara was first and foremost a religious (*sanyāsi*); as he loved his religious vocation and his religious habit more than the office of the Vicar General and its sacerdotal vestments, people also held him in high respect.

In the Indian literary criticism, poetry is defined as the transforming of *śoka* (sorrow) into *śloka* (verse). The first poem (*ādi-kāvya*), *Rāmāyana* is a typical example. As the sage Vālmīki, saw a hunter killing one of the two birds that were in love, he could not contain the *śoka* (sorrow). Later, the words that came out of his sorrow became the first *śloka* (verse). Here, the *śoka* of Vālmīki's mind is transformed into *śloka* (poem), even to his surprise, and that made him ultimately into a poet, in fact the first poet. The poetry of Vālmīki is not something that was made, rather as Wordsworth notes, it is the spontaneous overflow of his emotions. This definition of poetry can be very well attributed to *Ātmānutāpam*, where what we see is the lamenting of Chavara as he becomes aware of his shortcomings and failures.

I find my soul, O misery! packed with vice  
 Bitter agony unsettles my mind!  
 And one sin, a sin terrible augments my woe  
 You alone my hope, none else have I (VI. 203-206)

Sorrow burned in his 'heart like a fire, a fire shut up in his bones' (Jer 20:9). A similar spiritual sorrow is the dominant mood of *Ātmānutāpam* and it is this great compunction that made Chavara, actually a saint. The following words of P. Govindapilla, the great scholar and historian of Kerala, about *Ātmānutāpam* approve this truth: "The psalms mounting out of the compunction of the soul is the

<sup>13</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 394-395.

<sup>14</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 395; see St. Philomena's Monastery Chronicle: *Positio*: 461.



burning oil (*haviss*) that purifies oneself."<sup>15</sup> As it is stated in the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, "Evil does not overcome him, but he overcomes all evil. Evil does not afflict him, but he consumes all evil. He becomes sinless, taintless, and free from doubts becomes true *Brāhmaṇa* (knower of Brahman)" (4.4.23). Similarly, by the compunction of the soul, Chavara 'became pure, cleansed, undecaying and immortal' (Brha. Upa. 5.14.8). In this sense, *Ātmānutāpam* is never a poem of mere lamentation; rather, it is a grand mystical love-poem of the soul.

O furnace of love, ardently I thirst  
For the treasure of your mercy even though  
Hindered by sin; when your eyes benign  
Often I've felt, chasing my doubt (V.159-162).

### 5. *Tiru-vedam*, *Veda-nāthan*, and *Śravaṇam*

India being the land of Vedas, Chavara uses the term '*tiru-vedam*'<sup>16</sup> to refer to the Gospel in the twelfth chapter of *Ātmānutāpam*, where he narrates the scene in which Jesus is entrusting to his disciples the mission of preaching Gospel, though in the English translation, it is paraphrased as 'living word.'

Spread abroad his *living word*

In diverse parts of the wide world (XII.59-60).

By this, actually St. Chavara was initiating an innovative path, even before II Vatican Council envisaged about it, for the effective proclamation of the Gospel, in tune with the Indian situation, where Vedas are celebrated as eternal truths (*Vedā hyamṛtāḥ*). He not only considered Gospel as Vedas, further, he even addressed the Lord of the Gospel as '*veda-nāthan*':<sup>17</sup>

Call of disciples, O Lord of the Gospel

To proclaim your word, I long to see (III.95-96).

These days such terms coined to denote *veda* are rather common in Christianity. For example, a Christian priest is commonly known in Indian context as '*vaidikan*' which literally means one who knows *veda* and the learning of catechism is termed as '*vedapātham*', etc., are some of the examples.

<sup>15</sup>A. Njallampuzha, *Azhakulla Atmav*, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 2014, 143.

<sup>16</sup>*tannude tiruvedam prasiddhappeduttuvan  
tanna kalpanavasalororo nadukalil* (XII.59-60).

<sup>17</sup>*vedamariyippan shishyarekuttiya  
vedanathan thane kanakenam* (III.95-96).

The Sacred Books of Hinduism are generally classified into two sections, i.e., *Śruti* and *Smṛti*. *Śruti* means “that which is heard” (Revelation – the Vedas and the Upaniṣads); *Smṛti* means “that which is remembered” (Tradition – *Manusmṛti*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, etc.). As the Vedas are also called *Śruti*, in *Ātmānutāpam* Chavara uses the term ‘*Śravaṇam*’<sup>18</sup> to indicate the Gospel, though it is translated by Mary Leo CMC as ‘Law and rituals, I long to see’ (III.83-84).

### 6. *Swami, Gopālan, Nandanān, and Āṇḍavar*

Chavara also dared to see Jesus with an Indian face, and to address and praise the Lord accordingly with suitable Indian titles like *Swami*, *Gopālan*, *Nandanān*, *Āṇḍavar*, etc.

The sick alone do need you, the Healer!  
Every sorry sinner, who fled to you (VII.359-360).  
(*kelpukettullorkellam vaidyanum niye swami  
ninnude pakkal chernna papikal sakalarkum*).

God’s just anger to stem, your accepting  
The shepherd’s role, I long to see (III.31-32)  
(*kopathe neekuwan gopalanayi nee  
kochukunjayippiranna ninne*)

In such prayers of longing to see Jesus as *Swami*, shepherd, etc., it is the Indian heart of Chavara that is being expressed to the readers. Again, we also see him addressing Jesus as ‘*Nandanān*’ in many places of *Ātmānutāpam*.

How comes, sweet my Lady, your son beloved (VI.39)  
(*nandanān ninte suthan sakaleswaran sthitam*)

Her son, she saw lying before her (V.48).  
(*nandanān thirupputhran kandudan purohbage*).

May be because of Tamil influence, Chavara also uses certain Dravidian titles to address God like *Āṇḍavar*.

Now as decreed by the Almighty  
She made the faithful dwell in Sion (X.123-124).  
(*andavan kalpichapol parppichu sehiyonil*)

Then to the gathering she spoke:  
As Christ my son has taught me (XII.129).  
(*andavan deivaputhran nammude snehasuthan*)

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<sup>18</sup>*muppathittandu sravanam padhippicha  
tatparan malpane kanakenam* (III.83-84).

In pain, through God's holy will (X.264).

(*andavan chittam yadha anushtichennasesham*).

Indeed, it is a fact that there were Dravidian elements in the inculturation of Chavara should definitely be a guiding light, for those who are often concerned only with the Āryan elements of Indian culture in the processes of inculturation.

### 7. *Sṛṣṭi-Sthiti-Samhāram* (Creation, Maintenance and Destruction)

It is a great surprise for us to know that Chavara connected the Trinitarian idea of God with the three duties of Hindu triune Gods i.e., creation, sustenance and destruction which are discharged respectively by Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

As inseparable Trio, Father,

Son and Spirit Triune God

To you be glory entire of one

Mind, creation, providential care

And annihilation of your regime

You the author of life, your will (XI.443-446).

*pithavum suthan ruhadakkudasayennulla*

*piriyathulla munnal eka thritoadeivavum*

*ekami muvarkulla sthanayogyapurnavum*

*ekachithavum srisht sthiti samharam sarvum.*

Taking such ground-breaking paths in the field of Trinitarian thinking is indeed a great contribution of Chavara for Indian Christian Theology.

### 8. Indian Offerings (*Pūjā-Dravyas*)

According to the Gospel narration, the wise men who came from the East offered gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Child Jesus (Mt 2:11). However, there is no mention of the offerings made by the shepherds. While the evangelists keep silence about it, see the poetic freedom taken by Chavara as he contemplates the scene:

Little lambs some, others milk to drink

To the Baby Shepherd they gave

Fruits of trees, garlands of blossoms sweet

Babes in glee, tiny birdies they bring

Offering these before His Sacred feet

To the Infant bright as the sun, they bow!

Sweet-limbed damsels, avowed virgins

Adore their spouse's feet with floral wreaths (VI.21-30).<sup>19</sup>

This sort of poetic imagination evinces the extent of the influence that the ordinary rituals of common people in India on Chavara. The offerings of milk and garlands of flowers given to the deity were a common sight at any village temple in India in his days. They are neither biblical nor Christian; they are typically Indian practices. Moreover, Chavara found nothing wrong in worshipping God by singing "Sweet-limbed damsels, avowed virgins, adore their spouse's feet with floral wreaths" (VI.29-30).

### 9. Śānti an Aged Shepherdess

The poetic imagination of Śānti as an aged Shepherdess making conversation with Mother Mary in the sixth chapter is another classical example of Chavara's Indian consciousness.

Śānti; an aged shepherdess one day

Drew to the beautiful Mother's feet and said (VI.37-38).

The wondrous tidings, spread and day after day

Śānti and her kinsmen came, the Lord to adore (VI.263-264).

In the land of *śānti-mantras*, the giving of the name Śānti to that aged shepherdess, who came with the other shepherds, is very significant and appropriate, both in the context of biblical theology, and in the framework of Indian spirituality. It is reminiscent of both the song sung by the angels announcing the birth of Jesus (Lk 2:14), as well as the prayer of Indian *Rṣis* for peace as they ended every prayer with the *śānti-mantra*. It is with these same *śānti-mantras*, *The Waste Land* of T.S. Eliot, which is considered as the most prominent poem of the twentieth century, comes to a close. The truth that those who enjoyed the sweetness of *śānti* will always be singing about it, going beyond the dividing walls of religion and nationality is very obvious in the author of *Ātmānutāpam* too.

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<sup>19</sup>*balanmarum vridharum sisukkal sakthanmarum  
balanunniye kanman vridhavivadhukkalum  
ajakkuttiyum chilar kshiradipanangalum  
ajapalanam paithalunnikku kazhchveipan  
vrkshasyaphalam chilar pushpamalakal chilar  
pakshikkunjungal chila kochupaithangal modal  
iprakaramulloru kazhchakal vachumkondu  
talprabhakaranunnippaithale vandikkunnu  
brahmacharinimaram sundarangikal, balar  
brahmanathante pade malakal chudikkunnu (VI.21-30).*

### 10. *Mātr-Devi, Sūrya-Deva-Janani and Śamkh*

Chavara takes the freedom to present Mary as *Mātr-devi* (Mother Deity) and *Sūrya-deva-janani* (Mother of Sun God) in tune with Indian thought:

But when he came to the door of the Carmel (VII.184).

(*karmala matrdevi kovilin vathilathil*).

A land where sun is considered as a god and is worshipped in *sūrya-namaskāra*, Chavara regarded Jesus as the Sun God and portrayed Mother Mary as His Mother – *Sūrya-janani* in section of Mother's Grief:

John your beloved son before the sun rose at dawn

Rose up and receiving your blessing O mother of the noble son.

(Mother's Grief: 190-191)

(*suryodayamathinnummumpangananju snehasuthan yuvan*

*suryadevajananiyekkandu vazhuvangiyaseshamay matru*).

*Śamkh* (conch) is another important Indian symbol with deep revelatory significances. Its sound represents the voice of God, and sometimes, it is through the voice of *Śamkh* that God speaks to human beings. Hence it is considered to be a medium of divine communications. Its echo is respected as sacred. In this sense, the comparison of Mother Mary to *Śamkh* is thought provoking in the context of inculturation. According to Christian faith, it is through the medium of Jesus, who is the flesh and blood of Mother Mary that God has spoken to humanity.

Yet, my Lord remember your Mother she is

Her Heart so fair, pure immaculately so! (IV.119-120).<sup>20</sup>

In the description of Chavara, purity of the Mother is surpassing even that of the conch.

### 11. St Joseph as a *Muni* and *Tāpasan*

Presenting of St. Joseph as a *muni* and *tāpasan* in the soil of *munis* is striking! If a *muni* is someone who keeps *maunam* (silence), it is such a picture of St Joseph, in fact, is presented in all the four Gospels.

St. Joseph, your succour, in the meantime

Turns to your son with forbearing patience and love! (II.237-240)

(*kshapanam pitavente saranam yuse muni*

*kshamayal partunokkum sutane bahusnehathal*).

<sup>20</sup>*enkilum sarveswara, ninnude matruvival*

*chanklum venmayerum nirmalamaniyallo* (IV.119-120).

According to the description of Chavara, St Joseph finds happiness in his deep meditation and contemplation.

Aware of these was St Joseph, the perfect of all men born

Yet propriety forbade him, trespass into the privacy (V.101-102)<sup>21</sup>

St Joseph who never speaks to men speaks only to God and His angels. He who is a *muni* of great *maunam*, indeed knew Jesus and His salvific works and communicated the same to us in silence. The teaching of *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, that 'to know Brahman one should know the importance of silence' (3.5.1) can be smoothly ascribed to the life of St Joseph. Perhaps, we can compare him to the great *muni* of *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* named Bādhvan, as depicted by Śaṅkara. It is in his silence that sage Bādhvan taught about Brahman, when a disciple named Bāṣkali approached him to receive the knowledge about God. As Bāṣkali continued with his questions, "Don't you understand that this soul is silence," was the answer of the *muni*. St Joseph who always speaks this great language of silence is indeed a true *muni* in the true sense. It may be because of this reason that Chavara and his companions named the first *Tapasu Bhavan*, which they started at Mannanam, after this great *muni* and *tāpasan*. Their dream was to become *munis* through *tapas* after the great model of St Joseph.

## 12. Kamala Tirupādam and Pāda Pañkajam

The devotion to the 'Feet of the Lord' has a great prominence in the Indian spirituality. For example, listen to what Kulaśekhara Ālvar says in his devotional poem '*Mukundamāla*':

*divi va bhumi va samastuvaso narake va narakantaka prakamam  
avadhirit sharadaravinda charana te maraneapi chintayami.*<sup>22</sup>

It means, "O Lord, send me anywhere you choose, either to heaven or to hell, even in my death, I will take refuge under your feet and contemplate over them, which are more beautiful than the Lotus of the autumn season." Lotus is regarded as the symbol of good that converts vice into fineness as it rises out of the muddy water. Likewise, comparing Jesus to lotus, the Son of God who came to redeem the sons of men from the muddy water of sin is very much in tune with the Christian theology of salvation history.

<sup>21</sup>*narasreshthanam pitayouseppu dhyanathinal  
varasanthoshathodu kanunnuvonnakilum* (V.101-102).

<sup>22</sup>*ettidan chenniyathil karmala thiruppadam  
ettavum snehathale sundarakarangalum* (V.129-130).

As the lotus bloom or water lily rests?  
The Baby reclined on the "ocean's star"  
As the baby swan on a lotus bed  
Him, the 'star of the sea' in her arms cradled (VI.33-36)

In *Ātmānutāpam*, often we see Chavara comparing the Feet of Jesus to *Kamala Tirupādam* and *Pāda Paṅkajam*.

As the lotus full intent on the sun  
With devotion he kissed His Feet (V.127-128).

Mother benign, be pleased to move aside  
And rest your dainty feet, I pray, for a while (IX.65-66).

I would then be her humble handmaid; the Child  
I would bow before Him, adore and kiss His feet.  
(Mother's Grief: 49-50)

On that night on seeing you, your feet I did kiss.  
(Mother's Grief: 73)

Nicodemus helped; they bore Him down the cross  
Mary of Magdalena in grief held His legs (IX.105-106)

Such an innovative model of inculturation by Chavara to present Jesus in the Indian context is indeed a trailblazer in our efforts to understand Jesus in Indian categories.

### 13. *Devakovil*

According to Hindu faith, it is in the '*śrikovil*' that God dwells and accordingly it is respected as the sanctum sanctorum of a temple. While explaining the episode of taking the Infant Jesus to the temple of Jerusalem on the fortieth day of his birth, Chavara uses the term '*Devakovil*' interestingly as he refers to the temple:

Thus forty days, duly went by;  
To the magnificent temple to adore God (VII.97-100).  
They danced, they rained on Earth and Heaven (V.67-68).  
But when he came to the door of the Carmel (VII.184).

As mentioned in the beginning, although in translation *temple* is used, in the original text, it is '*Devakovil*' that Chavara has used.

### 14. *Trkkannu* (Third Eye)

'The Third Eye' is a vital concept in Indian thought as it is a bridge that links gurus with disciples, permitting mind communication to occur between the two. Again, it is through this inner eye, the door of the

spiritual life is unlocked before us, and it is only through this one attains spiritual insights and enlightenment. As Chavara aspired to attain this spiritual illumination from his childhood onwards, he was fond of this unique notion of Indian spirituality and employs it in *Ātmānutāpam*, while he mentions the eyes of Jesus.

The holy child gazing at His mother  
With darling eyes, I long to see (III.29-30).  
(*thrikkannukalkondu mathave nokkunna  
akkanmaniye njan kanakenam*).

When those gentle eyes that gaze at you (VI.225).  
(*snehamay ninneparthu sukshikkum thrikkannukal*).

### 15. *Kaliyugam*

According to Hindu tradition, a *mahāyuga* has four periods: *satyayugam*, *tretayugam*, *dvāparayugam*, and *kaliyugam*. At present the humanity is sojourning through the last one namely, *kaliyugam*. In fact, it is a dark age of moral decline, in which humanity is indifferent to God. Chavara is relating this notion with the teachings of Jesus as he narrates that during his life time, Jesus has given warnings about the imminent final judgement, against the evils of humanity. However, the term is translated as 'ages back':

And besides, His just laws to maintain  
*Ages back*<sup>23</sup>, a warning message He sent  
But men on earth with burning passions rife  
His Will defied and were with fire destroyed! (VI.57-58)

Chavara, in the poem, retains the information that man just ignored this warning of Jesus and got immersed in diverse immoral activities and disregarded Him.

### 16. *Ātmānutāpam*: 'Living Water in an Indian Cup'

It is easy for one to experience the soul of other religions, provided, first one has experienced the soul of one's own religion. For such a person, religion is never rituals and ceremonies, rather, it is a spiritual realization and it's sharing. *Ātmānutāpam* is this kind of a sharing of Christ-experience. *Ātmānutāpam* is a response to the request of Sadhu Sunder Singh to the foreign missionaries, "Give us the living water in

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<sup>23</sup>*ennu thanneyumalla thante neethiye parpan  
munname kaliyugam thannilangayirikku  
pinneyum mannil narar kamamohagnivashal  
thanne nindikka hetuvagniyal dahippichu* (VI.57-58).



Indian cup" although, in this case, the response predates the request. As Vatican II teaches, "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men." (*Nostra Aetate*, 2). Those who objectively and critically study *Ātmānutāpam*, confirm that this poem is a classical example of foreseeing this great desire of the Church.

*kavyam karoti sukavihsahrudaya eka vyanakti tatvatvam  
ratnam khanih prasute sujanah: rachayati shilpi tu tatsushaman*

A good poet composes a poem, but it is the understanding critic that brings out its charms; a mine produces a precious stone (in the crude stage) but it is the goldsmith too burnishes its brilliance. Similarly, now it is the duty of the literary critics to explain the poetic beauty and other characteristics of *Ātmānutāpam* to the wider public. The poet only narrates his/her experience:

*khyatim gamayati sujanah sukavir vidadhati kevalam kavyam  
pushnati kamalamambhe lakshmya tu ravir niyojayati*

It means, a good poet is engaged only in making the poem, (but) the noble man spreads the fame. The water nourishes up the lotus, but the sun joins it with splendour.

*antah kutilatam vibhracha chhankhah sa khalu nishthurah  
hunkaroti yada dhmatas tadaiva bahu ganyatam*

A conch is inside curved; outside coarse; only when it sounds when blown into, it commands the right respect. Similarly, only when serious and good critical studies are made on *Ātmānutāpam*, its readers can enjoy and appreciate its poetic qualities. This Indian reading of *Ātmānutāpam* will be continued, relating its major theme with that of the Indian Philosophy.