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**SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**  
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*Editorial*

**HEAVENLY HAVEN OF DANCING  
DEMONS**

**The Caution of Chavara against Sibling Incest**

**Benny Paul Thettayil**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

It has been 150 years since the publication of the 'testament' of Chavara to Christian families, titled *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (*Testament of a Loving Father*). The booklet was written by Chavara as a pastoral instruction to the Christian families in his home parishioners, with a view to transform them into ideal homes.

**1. Chavara and His Veiled Injunction**

In the *Chavarul*, Kuriakose Elias Chavara makes a passing and veiled reference to the possibility of a deviated sexual relationship when he instructed his parishioners that boys and girls who have reached a certain age should not be allowed to share a room together to sleep in. Was he referring to a problem in his community or was he just referring to the possibility of the abovementioned danger, we do not know. We do not have any kind of literature from his times that either mentions or deals with such a subject. However, today's experiences show that this instruction of Chavara to the family, which he considers a heaven on earth, is very relevant today. In the following pages, we look at how this heavenly haven of a family can turn into a floor for the dancing demons.

Sibling sexual abuse is the least recognized form of incest<sup>1</sup> and the victims of sibling abuse usually remain unseen. It can be described as a

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<sup>1</sup>According to M. A. Swann, "Incest", in D. J. Atkinson et al., *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1995, 479, incest occurs when "Any male person who has carnal knowledge of a female, who is, to his knowledge, either his granddaughter, daughter, sister or mother." As seen in this definition, it occurs across the generation and within the generation. The Old Testament background of the prohibition of such activities could be seen in Lev 18:6-16.

deviated sexual relationship between children of the same parents or adopted children. There are times when some siblings are victimised. However, there are also cases in which a pair engages in sexual activities willingly for the lack of knowledge or for the joy that is naturally part of the activity. Fragmented family, lack of education and socio-cultural characteristics have been considered as the contributing factors. Low socioeconomic status and lack of education about puberty and sexuality of children can be problematic. Adding fragmentation of the families into the equation makes the problem more dramatic as it can be observed in several cases.

## **2. The Actual Social Scenario**

In a pastoral scenario, we came across with a group of religious candidates. Out of the two dozen in the group, who were given counselling, two of them were helped to handle the after-effects of the childhood sexual experiments with their brothers at home before they joined the community. Both of them were distressed as they were narrating their story. One of them, X, showed signs of guilt and internal agony, whereas the second one, Y, was casual about the experience. X had come to the practice of experiment with a younger brother when the parents, having no one to childmind them, had habitually locked them in the house when they went to work. X and the brother had access to the internet and they surfed together and stumbled on some sexually explicit scenes and watched them together. Gradually, they began to enact what they watched on the screen. Both of them, young as they were, had felt that what they were doing was wrong and so they never shared their experience with anyone. Y, on the other hand, for the lack of space at home, used to share a bed as child with a younger brother and they had some kind of sexual experiments which they continued for several years.<sup>2</sup> However, Y did not want to be very specific about it. What is worth noting in these two cases is that these candidates had come from very traditional Catholic families in which aberrations of these sorts are not usually expected to happen.

In another case, a social worker confirmed the following story of a young brother and his sister who was found pregnant. Their mother

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<sup>2</sup>In the Christian ethical view, according to Swann, "Incest," *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, 479, it is accepted by many that inappropriate sexual contact between family members is just as harmful to children, and could be viewed as incestuous.

was dead and their father was to be married to someone else. The fourteen year old girl stated that she has been sleeping with her brother since the age of 10 and they were having sexual intercourse for the last 2 years. The boy confirmed the statement. The siblings are raised by their grandmother who observed that they loved each other so much therefore they were sleeping together.<sup>3</sup>

The girl said in an interview that she was in love with her brother very much, and she did not have complaints about the sexual relationship with her brother. She was happy until she was taken to the hospital, but she was no longer happy because the social workers had placed her in a dormitory. She said that they had made love at first due to curiosity, then they continued because of it was enjoyable, and she added she was untroubled by it.

In the examination of the brother, he said that he had his first sexual experienced with his sister. They did so because they were curious. He admitted that he did not force her. They had not received any education from anyone on this issue and they did not know what would happen. The expert counselling revealed that there was no mental retardation or psychiatric disorder in the two children. To make a profile of the event, the environment and the state of the children's mind were evaluated together. The report stated that the boy and the girl were too young to have the ability to perceive the meaning and consequences of their sexual behaviour.

In in a third case, in February 2011, 19-year-old twins Kellie and Kathie Henderson told the world their horrific story of 10 years of sexual abuse by two brothers and more. They revealed the shocking details of their experience. They had found the courage to come public six years after their rescue by a neighbour in whom they had finally confided.

This story of sibling and paternal sexual abuse reflects a social problem that is far greater than generally acknowledged. Known as incest, family sexual abuse is shrouded in secrecy and social stigma. Hidden from relatives, communities, schools and neighbours, incest is underreported and under-recognized and many of those involved

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<sup>3</sup>M. L. Winterstein, "Incest," in R. J. Hunter, ed., *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, Bangalore: TPI, 2007, 574, notes that recent reports identify adolescents as a group amongst whom the perpetration of incest is on the increase.

tend to suffer in silence. As they turn adults, they manifest numerous psychosocial problems.<sup>4</sup>

A survey was conducted by T. C. Johnson and others regarding healthy family practices among the siblings. With regard to the practice of siblings sleeping in the same room, they hold that “same gender siblings can sleep in the same room up to age 14 for the older child; in mixed gender siblings, sleeping in the same room is acceptable up to age six for the older child.” However, when they discussed the practice of siblings sleeping in the same bed, they held that “same gender siblings can sleep in the same bed up to age eight for the older child; in mixed gender sibling pairs, sleeping in the same bed is acceptable up to age five for the older child.”<sup>5</sup>

### 3. The Social Scenario Reflected in Literature

The discourse of sibling incest has got into a stream of fiction and films with shades of clinical, sociological and criminal genres. They present an idea that it is unequivocally harmful. They contain, in various measures, discourses surrounding sexual relationships between brothers and sisters. These pieces of literature speak to literary fiction’s need for twisted romances for the purposes of the literary market. A more detailed look into three such novels will give us an idea of how the writers explore such ‘unlikely’ possibilities. Tabitha Suzuma’s *Forbidden*,<sup>6</sup> Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History*,<sup>7</sup> and Pauline Melville’s *The Ventriloquist’s Tale*<sup>8</sup> show how this logic of sibling incest as a shady romance works in practice.

In *Forbidden* by Tabitha Suzuma, Maya and Lochan are brother and sister, living in London with their mother and their three younger

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<sup>4</sup>The issue is so wide spread but unnoticed because although father-daughter incest is the most commonly reported type of incest, professionals involved in this field feel that brother-sister incest is the most common. Swann, “Incest,” *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, 479.

<sup>5</sup>T. C. Johnson et al., “Sibling Family Practices: Guidelines for Healthy Boundaries Guidelines for Healthy Boundaries,” in *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, Vol. 18, No. 3, (2009) 339–354, April 2009: 351. ([http://www.tcavjohn.com/pdfs/sibling\\_practices.pdf](http://www.tcavjohn.com/pdfs/sibling_practices.pdf)) (Accessed on 29.09.2018).

<sup>6</sup>Tabitha Suzuma, *Forbidden*, London: Random House Children’s Publishers 2010.

<sup>7</sup>Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*, First Vintage Contemporary, New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.

<sup>8</sup>Pauline Melville, *The Ventriloquist’s Tale*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997.

siblings. Their mother is an irresponsible alcoholic who is usually either working or is with her boyfriend; as the story goes on, the mother becomes even less of a presence in the family home. Lochan is the oldest, at 17 and Maya is about a year younger. They have been taking care of their younger siblings for a while now, at least since their father left their mother. Both Maya and Lochan are good surrogate parents and work well together, but obviously the responsibility is a burden to them.

Maya and Lochan are pretty saintly. They are smart, responsible and more patient with their sometimes challenging younger siblings than a lot of 30-year-old biological parents would be. They have little use for their feckless mother; they do not show any anger towards her or towards their absent father. The family atmosphere has damaged their young lives. Their relationship with each other lacked real awareness and their screwed-up family dynamics played a part in them falling in love.

Maya and Lochan do not see the role that their dysfunctional family plays in their relationship. In their discussions with each other on the nature of their relationship, both Lochan and Maya say that they have never "felt" like brother and sister, but rather like "best friends." You can be both sibling and best friend. But what they meant was that they did not relate to each other as they did to their younger siblings. They are a year apart from each other but about 4 years from their younger brother and even more from the other two. Together, they parented all three. But their mutual relationship is not the same as the relationship they had with the other siblings. They justify the taboo relationship by discussing the various types of unhealthy, abusive relationships that society accepts while condemning incest.

Lochan and Maya had turned to each other when they were a few years younger – as they begin to feel and explore their sexuality, the unusual intensity of their bond would manifest itself in a sexual way. Lochan does not love Maya because he lusts after her; he lusts after her because he loves her. As a result, Lochan operates well within the family, being responsible, patient, caring and articulate. However, outside of the family, Lochan is a mess. He suffers from severe social anxiety to the point that he is friendless, incapable of talking to his peers, and terrified of speaking in class. He has panic attacks. He appears to have a stutter. His internal monologues are disturbing; he often thinks in terms of losing his mind. He is depressed, tormented and exhausted. He has mental health issues and his school forced him to see a counsellor at one point.

One day, Lochan and Maya are surprised by their mother as they were making love. The mother assumes that Lochan is raping Maya and calls the police; while they are waiting for the police to arrive, Lochan tries to convince Maya that she *must* claim that he was forcing her. If they admit the relationship is consensual, they will both be in legal trouble and likely neither will be allowed to care for the younger three siblings. His reasoning is that one of them needs to be around to take care of the children, or they will only have their irresponsible mother to care for them, which will most likely result in them quickly becoming wards of the state. Maya agrees, and Lochan is taken away.

In his cell, Lochan works out a way to hang himself from the bars in his cell and does so. The novel lets a serious reader to see how twisted Lochan's and Maya's worldviews had become.

*The Secret History* by Donna Tartt is the second book that, though in a limited manner, is concerned with both the beautiful and the terrible facts of life and relationship at the same time. The book is both a thriller and a meditation on the inherent fragility of youth and friendship. The story revolves around a group of boys and a girl. Although it is a sub plot, the story has Charles and his beautiful twin sister Camilla who are orphans. Charles, who has had an intimate, incestuous relationship with his twin, becomes violently jealous when Camilla is in love with Henry who is one of the boys. Charles goes on a drinking binge that sends him to the hospital.

The third novel in line is *The Ventriloquist's Tale*. It is Pauline Melville's richly realized debut set in modern-day Guyana. Religious, social and philosophical tensions vex all the characters of the novel. Two illicit love affairs are the plot of an absorbing story set against the background of colonial life in exotic surroundings. As Wifreda reminisces her childhood, the narrative plunges into the story of the previous generation, telling of an incestuous affair between Chofy's uncle Danny and Beatrice, Danny's sister and the birth of an autistic baby. This hint of incest among her forebears lies at the heart of the novel. Wifreda is becoming blind and her blindness is superstitiously attributed to Beatrice's curse because the former has discovered her incestuous relationship with her brother.

All the three novels mentioned above give us a glimpse of the continuum between human nature trying to snap its cultural moorings. Each of them, in its own way, is inextricably tied to the discourse of incest and its various concatenations. The distance between the gentle force of nature and the violent force of culture is a commonality found in all these three books.

Incest is an important issue with social and psychological effects that concerns the entire community. Low educational level, fragmented families and closed social and familial structure are the risk factors contributing to the problem. In the familiar discourse of the literature, cases 'forbidden love' are presented mostly as an older male in the family in relationship with a younger girl.

The case that was recounted in the beginning differs from the prevalent situation in the literature. These cases are of a brother and sister whose ages are close to each other. The crucial aspect of most of the stories is that the reason of the sibling love relationship is curiosity and experimentation rather than one child's sexual satisfaction. However, the effects of incest on the child varies depending on the relationship with the 'partner', the type of sexual activity, the use of violence, the presence of physical and psychological damage, the child's cooperation and age.<sup>9</sup>

#### **4. The Impact of the Media**

The parents will do well if they get to know the rating of the video games, movies and television shows that the children are exposed to. Provision of appropriate alternatives is an important part of avoiding exposure to the easily available sexual content in the media. Be aware that children may see adult sexual behaviours in person or on screens and may not tell you that this has occurred, as it is the case with the person X described in the beginning.

Today, the children are over-exposed to adult material on the internet and other domains of social media, but those who are in charge of them are often under-prepared. As a result, the effects of early exposure of our children to sexual content in these domains have disastrous consequences. They are being sexualized earlier and earlier. With widespread access to the internet at their fingertips, curious children are either accidentally or intentionally exposed to thousands of pages of material that is uncensored, sexually explicit and potentially harmful.

The question asked often is, if children do not understand it, how can they be affected by it? Experts in the area say that even if young children cannot understand sex or its role in relationships, the images they see leave a lasting impression. It is a basic premise of marketing that what we watch, read, and direct our attention to, influences our

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<sup>9</sup><https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2090536X16300661>  
(Accessed on 29.09.2018).

behaviour. As any marketer knows, sex sells. This is why we see products and services that have nothing to do with sex being marketed in increasingly sexualized ways.

Children as young as 8 and 9 are coming across these sexually explicit materials. Although the negative effects of the use of internet has not been fully known, there is reason to believe that exposure to sexual content may have undesirable effects.

### **5. Early Exposure to Pornography**

Very young people who watch movies or exposed to pornography tend to engage in those behaviours themselves. The earlier the children are exposed to sexual content, the earlier they start having experiments in the area with the available means. Even as we read specific books and show educational movies to our children and hope that they learn lessons from the characters, so the media too provides a type of sex education to young people. These uncensored messages normalize early sexual experimentation and portray sex as casual and consequence-free, encouraging various kinds of sexual activity long before children are emotionally, socially or intellectually ready for such activities.

The earlier a child is exposed to sexual content and begins having sexual experiences, the more likely he/she is to become sexually promiscuous in life. Studied estimations show that more than 66 percent of boys and 40 percent of girls reported wanting to try some of the sexual behaviours they watched in the media.

Early exposure to pornography can lead to sex addictions and other intimacy disorders. In a study conducted among the adults, of 932 sex addicts, 90 percent of men and 77 percent of women reported that pornography was a factor in their addiction. With the widespread availability of explicit material on the Internet, and with the proliferation of the gadgets with internet access, these problems are becoming more prevalent and are surfacing at younger ages.

An early exposure to pornography increases the risk of a child becoming a victim of sexual violence or acting out sexually against another child. In some people, habitual use of pornography raises a desire for more violent or deviant material, including depictions of rape, torture or humiliation. If people seek to act out what they see, they may be more likely to commit sexual assault, rape or child molestation.

## 6. Role of the Parents and the Elders

Banning media from the home or the life of the child is not a realistic option. A national survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that with technology allowing nearly 24-hour media access as children and teens go about their daily lives, the amount of time young people spend with entertainment media has risen dramatically. Today, 8-18 year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes to the use of entertainment media across a typical day. That would make more than 53 hours a week.<sup>10</sup> In an urban setting, more than half of that content contains sexual images or references. An early exposure to this sexual content in the media will have a profound impact on children's social and ethical values, attitudes and behaviour toward social and familial relationships.

The parents will have to come out of the mythical assumption that all children who are brothers and sisters repel each other when it comes to their sexual bonding. Since the early days of their sexual development in their relationship with the other are normative, they can get fixated in the bonding that they make early on, because it is fascinating for them. Moreover, the parents are to bear in mind the possibility of the unprecedented and unchartered ways children can travel with the help of the media.

The goal of the discussion here is to approach the issue head-on so that children might learn about healthy relationships from the parents who are their most trusted source; the parents might learn that the portrayal of the media does not always reflect the message that they want to give the children. Guiding them in the right way, the parents are able to preserve their childhood. Given below are a few ways in which parents in a modern urban setting, can ensure that the message is heard and their values are imparted to their children:

The parents are invited to (1) be aware of the fact that children are exposed to as they are watching, playing and listening to certain materials that are available to them. (2) Win their trust, and in love, discuss any inappropriate content of their conversation or an objectionable behaviour detected in them. (3) With their concurrence, set limits around screen time, monitor the stuff they surf and enforce the regulations you have made together. (4) Take recourse to internet filters and parental controls that can *filter* the *web*, blocking inadvertent access to websites that open the gateway to inappropriate and

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.kff.org/other/event/generation-m2-media-in-the-lives-of/> (Accessed on 29.09.2018).

unhealthy content. (5) Assess your family's values and expectations regarding sex and relationships and share it with your children, instilling in them the conviction that going against these can jeopardise their family honour. (6) Proactively talk to your children about representations made by the media regarding sex, relationships and gender roles are contrived and teach them to question the accuracy and intent of the contents that they come across on various sites on the web.

From the time the child first asks parents "where do babies come from?" parents spend a lot of time worrying about how to talk to our kids about sex. At some point in time, the parents are expected, to engage their children at a deeper level initiating them to the realities of life. Traditionally, at a deeper level, the parents had two sex-talks with their children. The early talk, given to a child, involves the lesson about how birds and the bees are born and then, the more delicate discussion with the child on how to navigate a healthy sexual life as a young adult. In the modern urban areas, parents are invited to wrestle with a third kind of talk – the pornography talk.

Since this third kind of talk, the pornography talk, is unscripted and only developing, there is neither a set pattern developed, nor a predictable moment for initiating such a conversation. It can happen at as early an age as 6 or 7, when a child is not yet able to understand the basic mechanism of sexual life.

In an urban setting, the need for such a talk for a perceptive parent is typically set off when a youngster comes in contact with an adult material by chance or by choice. A child's accidental wanderings online or the deliberate searches of a curious teenager for the adult stuff on an electronic device can be an opportunity. Modern youngsters constantly deal with smartphone, laptop, tablet or other devices that have made it nearly impossible for them to grow up without. These constantly invite them to encounter sexually explicit material.

If a child is playing with an electronic gadget linked to the web, sooner or later, he/she is going to be webbed by it and is going to look at porn at some point. As most of the members of the family owns a smart phone that is linked to the web and as these phones are lying around in the house, it is almost inescapable. The parents are faced with a new digital-era dilemma: (1) is it better to try to shield children from explicit content? or (2) is it better to accept the fact that the web and its contents are so omnipresent that it has become a fact of life, and it requires its own conversation? If so, what is this conversation?

Sometimes danger lurks where parents least expect it. A few clicks on YouTube can land a child in unexpected territory. One of their most common experiences is that they discover that their children have been exposed to such sexually explicit material. Although conventional wisdom dictates that strict rules about screen time set for the children and installation of internet filters and parental controls will solve the problem to a great extent as they block these kinds of contents either by age or by categories like pornography, chat or games, they cannot be a lasting solution. These materials are available almost anywhere in any form. Given the number of screens, large and small, that fill the average urban home, those strategies may be as effective as building a wall as the tsunami rolls in.

## **7. The Nature and Effects of the Issue**

Since the subject of sex-play in children and all that it can lead to is shrouded in taboo, researchers who have begun to explore the aberration of sexual relationship between young siblings estimate that the rate of sibling incest may be five times the rate of parent-child sexual abuse and this kind of incest is known to be underreported. In some societies, sibling sexual abuse is dismissed as mere "child's play" and/or seen as a normal aspect of sexual development. When sexual acts are initiated by one sibling with or without the other's consent, it is a serious and secret problem and the effects are traumatic, long-lasting, and damaging. However, victims often do not see themselves as victimized, and families fail to recognize the abuse. The secret often remains hidden, camouflaged by play and the complex dynamics of abusive sibling relationships.

Children, in their ignorance, fail to identify themselves as victims of sibling incest. In these cases, older brothers or sisters take advantage of the sexual ignorance of the younger ones and trick them into incestuous behaviours. These advances are frequently couched in the context of play, co-watching something on the web, and younger ones, in trust, are likely to find these activities joyful. A special and affectionate relationship with an older one may be welcomed by a younger sibling in a dysfunctional family, which is inattentive to the needs of the child.

During an assessment of dysfunctional families, only a superficial examination of sibling relationships can be done and detection of a problem is hard. This sexual behaviour can be progressive, evolving over months into increasingly invasive and consensual or coercive sexual activities. In this stage, these behaviours are likely to be

experienced as wrong and shameful by the younger ones. However, the closeness of age and relationship with the offender often lead to a confusion in the younger ones about the responsibility for the behaviour. When these feelings are detected in the victim, clever offenders tend to amplify these confused feelings and shame, inhibiting the likelihood of disclosure to maintain the secret. Unlike other cases of sexual abuse, young sibling victims often appear free of the trauma or other evidence of abuse. Moreover, since they are likely to feel at least partially complicit in the act, the indicators of sibling incest often remain buried.

Many youngsters carry the secret into adulthood, remaining confused about issues of mutuality and consequently maintain confusion, guilt, shame and low self-esteem. Some of them try to bury the secret and consequently fail to connect their childhood with current life problems such as depression, anxiety, poor job performance, and interpersonal difficulties. This is likely to lead to unhappy married life where natural sharing of healthy sexuality becomes difficult. Such experiences are a block to an enjoyable family life.

### **8. Sex Education for Parents from Chavara**

Sibling incestuous relationship, as we have noted in the analysis of the literature, could often be found in dysfunctional family environments that subtly foster these behaviours. These families are characterized by emotional violence, marital discord, explicit and implicit sexual tensions and blurred and confused familial boundaries. Emotionally and/or physically absent parents may empower older siblings to assume parental roles. These environments are not conducive to disclosing the secret.

The parents are invited to face the reality head on. Mostly, they freak out at the thought of describing to the children what happens between adults. But what about the sex lives of children? Are they not sexual beings? How do children grow up to be sexually healthy adults? Where is the line between typical exploration and exploitation and abuse? What is normal and what should be seen as raising a red flag in this area? These traditional questions that the parents ask have become all the more complicated by the communication explosion.

Sex-play in children is very common. About half of adults remember engaging in it when they were children. Not all people who had engaged in it were somehow harmed by it. However, one should neither oversimplify it nor blow it out of proportion. D.W. Haffner

notes that it is important for parents who catch their child getting naked with another kid, even if they are brother and sister, not to freak out or yell. But she suggests the parents not to be alarmed, for such a reaction on the part of the parents tends to instil shame. She notes that the children might play doctor, mostly just because of the intense curiosity about other people's bodies.<sup>11</sup> It is also noted that in some children, no sex play is seen at all. In some of these cases, the reason we do not see the presence of a sex play, especially with 6 to 9 year-olds, is that they learn pretty early that it freaks the adults out. If they are threatened, they do not stop doing it, they just go underground.

Trying to deal with the issue, the parents are encouraged to teach their younger children to give older siblings their privacy. The older siblings might teach the younger ones to get their clothes on because they might have friends visiting or because they are maturing and feel modest even in front of their younger brothers and sisters.

Sibling sexual abuse is an insidious and destructive social and ethical problem characterized by secrecy, shame, and concealment. Although it is not in a very detailed manner, when Chavara tells his parishioners not to let the girls and boys sleep in the same room when they have reached a certain age, it was his way of making the families aware of the problem and thus saving the society from a moral danger they were prone to. He had perceived that an increasing public awareness of the problem would help children and their parents to avoid the damage that can be done to them and their future.

By incorporating a point to heighten the awareness of sibling incest with proactive approaches to intervention, Chavara, in his own way, begins to combat this hidden social problem. Today, the *Chavarul* of Chavara invites the parents to become aware of the destructive side of the social media and the web and to become instrumental both in uncovering sibling incest and prevent it from happening on both the societal and the individual levels.

The main entries of the present issue of the *Herald of the East* focus on various aspects of the *Chavarul*. Ann Mary explores the 19<sup>th</sup> century socio-cultural and economic and political milieu of Kerala and places the familial vision of Chavara in the context to understand the full extent of his instructions that are enshrined in the *Chavarul*, given by Chavara to his parishioners. In order to understand the *Chavarul*, one

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<sup>11</sup>Debra W. Haffner, *From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children - From Infancy to Middle School*, New York, NY: Newmarket Press, 2008.

needs to understand the world behind the text. Discussing the social scenario, she refers to the caste system and the patriarchal familial system, whereas in the discussion on political situation, she goes through the various currents foreign and native that shaped the political life of the people. In the economic scenario, the agrarian society and the interplay of caste and economy in the society is analysed. Taking the literary scenario into consideration, she looks at the educational ratio of the members of various significant social groups, which leads to a discussion on Christian contribution to education, in which the contributions of Chavara are significant. Narrowing her focus down to family system, the author speaks of family and marriage, joint family system, which had a great effect on the families to which Chavara is writing his *Chavarul*.

George Kaniarakath, reading Ben Sira in the light of the literary contributions of St Kuriākōse Chāvāra, especially his *Chavarul*, considers him a teacher of family theology. The author considers his family background and holds that the inspiration for life came from his own family. Later, as a result of the meditations of Chavara on the biblical picture of family, a picture of a modern ideal family unfolds before his eyes. This picture is further enhanced by his own personal devotion to the Holy Family. It is from these three different sources that a comprehensive picture of an ideal Christian family is evolved by Chavara as it is enshrined in the *Chavarul*. The main features of the little document are a theocentric life lived in the family, which has to be a life characterized by the fear of God, relationships maintained only with the God-fearing, keeping only God-fearing servants, timely worship of God, life according to the will of God backed by a healthy reading habit daily and timely prayer and modesty in personal appearance. An ideal Christian life also calls for a philanthropic family life, in which Christians refrain from lawsuits and unchristian talks. They have ideal friends and they respect their privacy, give just wages to the labourers in time. It also calls for the wise management of family property, and not wasting days in an idle manner. Chavara teaches his people the true doctrine of Christian family.

John Eattaniel reflects on the relevance of the vision of Chavara on family and applies the vision to the present day families of the postmodern society. Based on the *Chavarul*, which is intended to be an effective practical guidebook of family life, the author outlines the revolutionary shifts and changes families face today. The postmodern standards and values for families that are often opposed to the classical values bring a jolt to the family. The author makes a

comparison between the familial values and relationships in the past and the postmodern functionalist view of family where living with children becomes impossible on practical grounds and the parents depend on old age homes for the rest of their life. It is in this context Chavara's vision on Christian families becomes all the more important. This foresight of Chavara on families and family life challenges and encourages families to foster intimacy and interpersonal relationships among the family members. The relevance of *Chavarul* is in the fact that it warns families about the hidden dangers arising from the various post-modern approaches. The study ends with a note on the relationship between parent and children. The author presents *Chavarul* as the testimony of a perceptive prophet of the Christian families with ingenuity.

Jojo Parecattil, taking a cue from the Upanishadic teaching on, *vasudhaivakutumbakam*, the universal family, looks at the way Chavara views family life and the institution of the family as a family of God on earth. This vedāntic family consciousness points to the heavenly family that Chavara speaks of. In order to reach such a family, Chavara transcends his own family, the Chavara family. This is the ideal that Chavara gives his confreres when he asks them to live as the "members of one family and the children of the same mother" although they came from different families. Taking various terminologies that denote relationship used by Chavara in his writings, like *kūṭapirappukal*, the author brings out the correlation between the Upanishadic and biblical connotations of the concept. He goes on to study the Jewish religious vision on the family as the sanctuary of tradition. The sum total of this ideal could be found in Chavara's *darśana viṭ*, *beth rauma* and *tapasu bhavan*. Chavara, a great devotee of the Holy Family, considers it a Christian model of *Vasudhaivakutumbakam*.

The following two entries are not directly related to the main focus of the present issue but general studies on Chavara and the religious congregation that he was instrument in founding. Paul Kalluveetil, in Part I of his contribution that appeared in the last issue, discussed Mount Moriah, Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion as the biblical symbols of *Beth Rauma*. In Part II of the study, he explores the biblical symbols of Mount Carmel, which is the symbol of the battle field of righteousness, place of true worship, place of Covenant Renewal and the place of blessing; the Mountain of the Lord Almighty, which is the place of banquet; God's Mountain, which is the place of proclaimers of Good News, *shalom*, *thob* and *Yesuah*; Mount Tabor,

place of Transfiguration, where the face of the Son of Man shone like the sun; Mount Golgotha, which is the place of suffering and the place of glory; and Mount Olives, which is the Mount of Ascension. The author finds all these reflected in the writings of Chavara with amble references given to them.

Thomas Mampra, in this entry, make a study on the name and the circumstances that led to the affiliation of the Indian Carmelite congregation, the first indigenous religious congregation for men in India, founded by Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukkara and Kuriakose Elias Chavara, to OCD as its Third Order, in the light of a few documents published recently. He begins with excurses through the letters and writings of Chavara to see what he says regarding the name of the congregation. Having explored the primary sources, he turns to the secondary sources and scans through the pages of the early historians and their writings on the issue. To explore further, the author subjects the letters sent to Rome by the members of the congregation protesting certain moves of the ecclesiastical authorities and the reply they received. He goes on to speak about the fact and process of affiliation into the Carmelite Order and the consequences of the affiliation. He concludes the study with a question regarding the say that the members of the congregation had in this matter.

## **THE FAMILIAL VISION OF CHAVARA** **The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Socio-Cultural Context**

**Ann Mary Madavanakad CMC**

**Abstract:** Ann Mary explores the 19<sup>th</sup> century socio-cultural and economic and political milieu of Kerala and places the familial vision of Chavara in the context to understand the full extent of his instructions that are enshrined in the *Chavarul*, given by Chavara to his parishioners. In order to understand the *Chavarul*, one needs to understand the world behind the text. Discussing the social scenario, she refers to the caste system and the patriarchal familial system, whereas in the discussion on political situation, she goes through the various currents foreign and native that shaped the political life of the people. In the economic scenario, the agrarian society and the interplay of caste and economy in the society is analysed. Taking the literary scenario into consideration, she looks at the educational ratio of the members of various significant social groups, which leads to a discussion on Christian contribution to education, in which the contributions of Chavara are significant. Narrowing her focus down to family system, the author speaks of family and marriage, joint family system, which had a great effect on the families to which Chavara is writing his *Chavarul*.

**Keywords:** Family, community, John Paul II, children, *Chavarul*, Chavara, society, mission, Kerala, Christian, Muslim, cultures, development, untouchability, caste, religion, *Brahmins*, *Sudras*, *Nayars*, *Ezhavas*, *Thiyyas*, *Pulayas*, *Parayas*, discrimination, patriarchal, Syrian, parish council, women, laws, British, economy, *janmi*, labourers, landlord, education, schools, Philosophy, Grammar, Theology, Law, missionaries, denominations, Carmelites, Jacobites, Dalits, Mannanam, family, marriage, Polygamy, *sambandham*, Thomas Christians, widows, joint family, matriarchal, modernisation, orphans, destitute.

### **1. Introduction**

Family, as the basic unit of society, plays an important role in it by making use of its human resources and the power to influence

individual, household and community behaviour.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, it has become the focus of analysis in most social sciences. Interdisciplinary approaches have made family also part of theological investigation. Family plays a very significant role in the life of everyone in this world as it determines the future of the individual. John Paul II observes in this regard: "It is the path common to all, yet one which is particular, unique, and unrepeatable, just as every individual is unrepeatable. It is a path from which man cannot withdraw. Indeed, a person normally comes into the world within a family, and can be said to owe to the family the very fact of his existence as an individual."<sup>2</sup>

Since human life is entrusted to the family to nurture and care, the heads of the family are invited to be conscientious about the duty of the upbringing of the children and care of the members. It is in this context that the significance of the *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara comes to the fore. It is primarily seen as a set of guidelines to the families. However, in order to understand the importance of *Chavarul*, one has to look into the socio-cultural context of the society in which Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born, brought up, and carried out his mission, especially his mission of consolidating the family. It is with this objective in mind that we embark on an analysis of the socio-cultural context of the society of Kerala in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, we hope to have a deeper understanding of family life at the time of Chavara as he envisioned the *Chavarul*.

## 2. Socio-Cultural Context of Kerala in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The contemporary Kerala comprises of the former Provinces of Travancore in the South, Cochin in the centre, and Calicut in the North.<sup>3</sup> Malabar is a stretch of land that is enveloped by Kanyakumari in the extreme South about 580 Kilometres up to Gokarnam in the North. It is situated between 8° 18' and 12° 48' North latitude and 74°

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<sup>1</sup>Ramalakshmi Sriram, "Family Studies in India: Appraisal and New Directions," in *Human Development and Family Studies in India: An Agenda for Research and Policy*, T. S. Saraswati & B. Kaur, eds., New Delhi: Sage Publishers, 1993, 122-128, 125.

<sup>2</sup>John Paul II. *Letter to the Families*. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_02021994\\_families.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families.html) (Accessed on 29.08.2018), 210.

<sup>3</sup>E. R. Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. 3: *Eighteenth Century*. Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1997, 15.

52' and 77° 24' East longitude and the coastal belt is lying between the Western Ghats in the East and the Arabian Sea in the West.<sup>4</sup>

The narrow strip of land between the Arabian sea and the Western Ghats is considered 'a gift of the Sea', which is symbolized in the legend of Parasurama.<sup>5</sup> The mountains also possibly have played a role in its formation. Geologists and soil-scientists testify that this stretch of land, once under sea, might have been formed as a result of the operation of volcanic or seismological factors.<sup>6</sup> Another contributing role is played by the rivers and the sea. The numerous rivers, originating in the Western Ghats may have brought down in their course large quantities of silt, while ocean currents deposited immense quantities of sand on the shore.<sup>7</sup> The steady accumulation of silt and sand in turn, created a vast stretch of land.

The land was called *Keralam* or *Cheralam*, a name, which gradually turned into *Kerala*. Etymologically, it is a composite word formed by *chera* (sand) and *alam* (region), or *cher/chernta* (added) and *alam* (land), indicating a land, which was added on to the already existing mountainous country.<sup>8</sup> The Arab navigators called this region *Male*, which in later centuries assumed Arabic equivalents like *Malibar*, *Manibar*, or *Malayalam*, meaning the hill country.<sup>9</sup> The Portuguese called it *Serra* also meaning hill country. The language which developed as separate from Tamil was perhaps called *Keralabhasha*, which in the course of time, became *Malayalam*, *Malayma*, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Since Kerala is situated at the edge of Indian peninsula, it has been the meeting place of ancient religions, cultures and traditions,<sup>11</sup> which

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<sup>4</sup>A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd., 1967, 1.

<sup>5</sup>According to this legend, the land of Kerala was a gift of the Arabian Sea to Parasurama, one of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Legend has it that Parasurama hurled his axe across the sea from Gokarnam to Kanyakumari and water receded up to the spot where it fell. See A. S. Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 10.

<sup>6</sup>A. Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008, 2.

<sup>7</sup>W. Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. 1, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2009, 3.

<sup>8</sup>A. S. Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 12.

<sup>9</sup>A. S. Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 12.

<sup>10</sup>A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 3.

<sup>11</sup>K. Raman Pillai, "Coalition Politics: The Kerala Experience," in *Rethinking Development: Kerala's Development Experience*, Vol. 1, M. A. Oommen, ed., New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences, 1999, 99-110, 99.

have greatly influenced the culture of Kerala. Kerala has a composite and multicultural nature to which numerous people and races have made their significant contributions. Its salient feature is unity in diversity. The culture has been influenced by the Christian and Muslim cultures which thrived under the patronage of the tolerant Hindu princes. Over the centuries, Kerala has remained a living museum of ethnology, culture, religion and bio-diversity.<sup>12</sup>

The peculiar geographical position of Kerala helped the people to develop a culture and noticeable virtues of unity and solidarity in every sphere of life and activity. At the same time, Kerala's millennia-old foreign contacts helped the evolution of a way of life and culture noted for its catholicity and universality. The neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka also have influenced the evolution of the life and culture of the people there. The culture is known for its antiquity, unity, continuity and universality because of the richness and variety of its content. It represents a collective achievement of a people in the fields of religion and philosophy, language and literature, art and architecture, education and learning, and economic and social organization.<sup>13</sup> The system of joint families, caste and religious practices, and rules and rituals about purity and pollution bound them together.<sup>14</sup>

### **3. Socio-Economic and Political Situation**

Owing to Kerala's separate and distinct history, religious composition and demographic diversity, the socio-economic and political development was very unique.

#### **3.1. Social Scenario**

Kerala history till late nineteenth century was not based on the principles of social freedom and equality. A deep gulf separated the high castes from the low castes. In spite of the centralization of authority in the hands of the king in Thiruvithamcore and Kochi and the direct administration of the English East India Company in Malabar, the upper castes like the *Brahmins*, the *Kshatriyas* and the *Nayars* continued to enjoy several social privileges. They continued to

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<sup>12</sup>K. Raman Pillai, "Coalition Politics," 99.

<sup>13</sup>A. Sreedhara Menon, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala: An Introduction*. Cochin: East-West Publications Private Ltd., 1978, 2.

<sup>14</sup>Leela Gulati, *Gender Profile: Kerala*, New Delhi: Royal Netherlands Embassy, 1991, 1.

be the land-owning class and they freely oppressed the tenant class. The law that prevailed in the land was not egalitarian. The penal code was extremely severe as far as the lower castes were concerned. Slavery in the most primitive form prevailed in the land even in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were a series of unjust taxes,<sup>15</sup> which imposed a heavy burden on the under-privileged sections of the society.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the poor became poorer still. Untouchability and unapproachability practised in the society made their life miserable.

### 3.1.1. Caste System

The society in Kerala in the nineteenth century was hierarchically structured and territorially fragmented. Caste system prevailed in Kerala with utmost seriousness and in all its ritual rigour of purity it was more oppressive than the way it had prevailed in other parts of India.<sup>17</sup> The values of equality, freedom and brotherhood were not maintained in the society. Most of the rites and practices observed at the time of birth, marriage, pregnancy, death, etc. were absolutely absurd and irrational. Often, the people were in revolt due to the rigidities of caste and religion.

The *Brahmins* were the traditional custodians of the *Dharmasāsthras*. They were the lawgivers and interpreters. By the laws created by *Brahmins* with the help of the kings, the *Sudras* were created for the service of the *Brahmins*. In spiritual matters, including matters of worship, they were the masters. They enjoyed a monopoly of scriptural knowledge. Hence, the *Sudras* were prohibited to read the sacred books and perform religious ceremonies. The rule was that if a *Sudra* heard the *Vedas*, they would pour molten lead down his ears and if he uttered a line from the holy book, they would cut his tongue off. If the *Sudra* acquired the knowledge of the *Vedas* he would challenge the authority of the *Brahmins*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Samuel Mateer, *Native life in Travancore*, New Delhi: J. Jettley Asia Educational Services, 291-294.

<sup>16</sup>G. Krishnan Nadar, *History of Kerala*, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1993, 264.

<sup>17</sup>P. J. Cherian, ed. *Perspectives on Kerala History: The Second Millennium Kerala State Gazetteer*, Vol. 2, Part 2, Trivandrum: Kerala Gazetteers, 1999, 460. Also cited by P. Bhaskaranunni, *Patthompatham Noottantile Keralam* (Malayalam), Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 2000, 265.

<sup>18</sup>G. Krishnan Nadar, *History of Kerala*, 199.

The caste rules were operated in the most irrational manner. The *Sudras* were seldom considered as human beings.<sup>19</sup> Below the *Nayars* were the *Ezhavas* and *Thiyyas*. Some of the groups below the *Ezhavas* were the *Shanars*, the *Cherumas*, the *Pulayas*, and the *Parayas* who were agrarian slaves maintained by their masters. They were tenants or sub tenants of the *Brahmins*, *Nayars* or Christians. They did menial jobs but the members of the higher castes considered that they would be polluted if a *Thiyya* or *Ezhava* came ten or fifteen metres close to them. They were not permitted to enter temples.<sup>20</sup>

Occupation was determined on the basis of caste, which prevented intermingling. Public roads were few, and the outcastes had no entry to them. The use of public highways, wells, post offices, schools, law courts, government offices and markets were forbidden to the lower classes.<sup>21</sup> Those who polluted temples, houses, tanks or roads by approach or touch were awarded corporal punishments by the *Brahmins* and their agents.<sup>22</sup> The *Sudras* had to keep a little away from the *Brahmins*. A *Brahmin* had to have a wash in order to become clean if he touched a *Nayar*. An *Ezhava* had to keep a considerable distance from a *Brahmin*. *Ezhavas* could not be approached by *Pulayas* and *Parayas*. If they went near him, an *Ezhava* got polluted.<sup>23</sup> To secure immediate identification of such lower classes, they were required to be uncovered above the waist.

The law that existed in the land was not egalitarian. The penal code was extremely severe as far as the lower castes were concerned. Slavery in the most primitive form prevailed in the land even in the beginning of the nineteenth century. There were taxes that imposed a heavy burden on the under-privileged sections of the society.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the Syrian Christians of the time who were converted from the high caste families, also shared many of the existing caste practices. It is in this context that the contribution of the British enlightened approach and the liberative and educative programmes of the

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<sup>19</sup>S. C. Simon, *State and Society in Kerala*. [http://www.universityofcalicut.info/SDE/Lay\\_out\\_State\\_Society\\_on17\\_Feb2016.pdf](http://www.universityofcalicut.info/SDE/Lay_out_State_Society_on17_Feb2016.pdf) (Accessed on 13.04.2018), 6.

<sup>20</sup>C. V. Kunjuraman, *Thiyyarude Avasthakal* (Malayalam), Wayanad, 1937, 11.

<sup>21</sup>Samuel Mateer, *Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and Its People, Special Reference to Missionary Labour*. London, 1870, 32.

<sup>22</sup>K. Rajayyan, *History of Tamil Nadu 1565-1982*, Madurai: Raj Publishers, 1982, 182-189.

<sup>23</sup>M. K. Sanu, *Narayana Guru Swami*. Kottayam: National Books, 1986, 7.

<sup>24</sup>A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 9-10.

missionaries, especially the unique role played by Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the building up of modern Kerala society are praiseworthy. With the spread of education and liberal ideas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, members of the backward communities became increasingly conscious of the discrimination.

### 3.1.2. Patriarchal Familial System

Another feature of the society of the nineteenth century Kerala was the patriarchal system. Women were negatively bound by the rules and customs both of the society and religion. In the patriarchal society, women had no freedom either at home or in society or in the religion. Often, the education of women ended with the *Kalari* under an *Asan* (Master). They were totally subject to men and no education was given to them after adolescence. The low caste women were forbidden to have even *Kalari* education.<sup>25</sup>

The St Thomas Christian community, as a socially integrated group, observed strictly the patriarchal customs and practices in the religious and social fields. The Syrian Catholic girls were married off at an early marriageable age and the dowry given to them became the property of the husband. She was supposed to be confined to the duties at home, be a good wife and mother. She had no right to seek a job and earn money. She was totally dependent on others. Even in religious matters, they assumed a lower place. Girls were not allowed to participate in feasts, weddings or ceremonies after a death. Women were not represented in the Parish Council and in other policy-making or decision-making bodies.<sup>26</sup> They had no role in society or in the Church, except childbearing, rearing and working for the comfort of those at home. Consecrated life for women was unknown. For these reasons, Syrian Catholic women, like all other women, were backward socially, economically, educationally and religiously. Their potential to serve humanity in varied ways lay hidden in themselves as circumstances did not permit it to be realized.<sup>27</sup>

Several of the European travellers and Christian missionaries who visited Kerala between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries have left

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<sup>25</sup>Cleopatra, "Blessed Chavara's Vision and Action for the Enlightenment of Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," *Herald of the East* 6. 1-3 (2003): 41-63, 41.

<sup>26</sup>Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*. Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1970, 96-97.

<sup>27</sup>Cleopatra, "Blessed Chavara's Vision and Action for the Enlightenment of Women," 41-42.

written records about the patriarchal system and the condition of women in the family during the period. According to these records, all women were to obey the unjust laws and customs and they were considered simply as instruments for the happiness of men.<sup>28</sup> All these customs and practices had made the life of women intolerable.

### **3.2. Political Situation**

The arrival of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese traveller at Calicut in Kerala in 1498, paved the way to the invasion of Portuguese. They made their colonial moves at the close of the fifteenth century. They were eventually replaced by the Dutch and then the French powers in mid-seventeenth century in Kerala. The Dutch who seized the trading centres of Travancore from the Portuguese in 1663 were driven out by King Marthanda Varma in the battle of Kolachel in 1741. From the end of the seventeenth century, the English began to make their presence felt in several places. Their supremacy became a reality in India only by the last decades of the eighteenth century. After the Sepoy Revolt of 1857 the British Crown took direct charge of the administration of British affairs in India. In 1877 Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India.<sup>29</sup>

The British made their presence felt in Malabar establishing a trade centre at Thalassery in 1683. By 1730 they obtained the monopoly of trade in Dharmapatanam and during the Canarese War (1732-1736) they attained the exclusive possession of Dharmapatanam Island. By 1752, Thalassery was brought under their control. After 1792, the whole of Malabar came into the hands of the British. By a treaty between the English and the Raja of Kochi in 1791, the latter became a vassal of the English.<sup>30</sup> In 1795, Travancore accepted the British supremacy.<sup>31</sup> In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the entire Kerala was under the British rule.<sup>32</sup> However, there were numerous local revolts against the British in this period. The revolts of the heroic

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<sup>28</sup>S. Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, 209.

<sup>29</sup>A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 4.

<sup>30</sup>A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 5.

<sup>31</sup>A. S. Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 322.

<sup>32</sup>A. S. Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 304.

Pazhassi Raja in Malabar, those of Velu Thampi and Paliath Achan in Travancore and Kochi were stifled by the British.<sup>33</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the British colonialists began to initiate radical social changes all over the Indian territories in their control. The society on the Malabar Coast was no exception to the rule. As the result of the economic, political and ideological interventions of the colonialists, radical positive alterations were effected in the caste-based social groups of Kerala.

### 3.3. Economic Scenario

The economy of the land revolved around the private ownership of land, which is said to have been the case in Kerala long before the Sangam age.<sup>34</sup> Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, the ownership was passed to the present class of landholders.<sup>35</sup> The rights over land were structured in such a way that the owners were the *Janmis* who were *Brahmins*. A few aristocratic *Nayars* owned land but did not cultivate it. They leased it to the *Kanams* who were drawn mainly from *Nayar* communities for twelve years. They leased it to the *Ezhavas* for a period of three years. These were the actual cultivators of the land. The *Cherumas*, *Pulayas*, and *Parayas* were below these castes and had no right to own the land but formed the majority of the agricultural labourers.<sup>36</sup>

According to the *Janmi* system, the slave class constituted the tenants who worked on the soil but the landlords (*janmi*) had the ownership of the land. These labourers were often treated as slaves who had no rights even on their own persons. This social agrarian system caused a steep decline in the moral life of the people.<sup>37</sup> They lived on the generosity of the landlords and masters who fed, clothed,

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<sup>33</sup>Pazhassi Raja and Velu Thampi who died in 1805 and 1809 respectively are considered as patriots and martyrs for freedom. See G. Krishnan Nadar, *History of Kerala*, 292.

<sup>34</sup>Sangam age roughly corresponds to the early centuries of the Christian Era, from first to third century AD.

<sup>35</sup>Elamkulam P. N. Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1970, 324.

<sup>36</sup>G. Aloysius, *Interpreting Kerala's Social Development*, New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2005, 6.

<sup>37</sup>A. S. Menon, *A Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1979, 268.

and sheltered them.<sup>38</sup> In Kerala, there existed a huge gap between the rich and the poor. It affected the intellectual, psychological and mental development of the people. The Christians and Muslims followed the practice of the class dominated versions of the same social hierarchies and were accommodated in the overall system.<sup>39</sup>

In the nineteenth century, trade with Europe thrived and led to the flow of wealth into the country from new sources. It also introduced European fashions and luxuries to Kerala. Though there were developments in various areas of life, caste system and slavery that were prevalent in the society remained largely untouched. It was in this context that Kuriakose Elias Chavara came forward with the vision that if the families were empowered, the society would be empowered, the Church, and the Nation would be empowered. He hoped that it would reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.

### **3.4. Educational Scenario**

Among the Indian federal states, Kerala stands in the forefront in the matter of literacy. India had a literacy rate of around 12% at the time of independence and through constant efforts, has now attained a literacy rate of 72.99% as per the census of 2011, whereas Kerala has the highest literacy rate of 94.00%, with the male literacy rate in Kerala of 96.11% and the female literacy rate of 92.07%.<sup>40</sup> The unique position, which Kerala has attained in the educational map of India is not the result of a shoot up of activity in the field of education in recent times. It is the result of the enlightened policies implemented by its rulers from early days and the intellectual pursuits of the people spanning over several centuries.<sup>41</sup>

The history of education in Kerala goes back to the Sangam age. There were traditional village schools, which had initiated learning. There was a high level of literacy in this period, in which co-education and universal schooling must have been the practice.<sup>42</sup> There is no evidence of any restriction imposed on the right of education either to

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<sup>38</sup>Elamkulam Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1970, 325.

<sup>39</sup>However, Aloysius claims that there were important differences in the various regions of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. See G. Aloysius, *Interpreting Kerala's Social Development*, 6.

<sup>40</sup>Which state of India has the highest literacy in 2017? [Online]

<sup>41</sup>A. S. Menon, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 160.

<sup>42</sup>E. Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 15.

the members of the low castes or women. But mass education gradually declined due to the Aryanization and increasing hold of caste system. Women and the members of the low castes lost their right to education, which became the privilege of the male members of the high castes. Although the exact statistics is unavailable about the literacy rate of the population of Kerala in beginning of the nineteenth century, it is generally concluded that the literacy level was a high among the Brahmin boys, and other castes below the *Brahmins* had gained a certain level of education from the village schools called *kalari*.<sup>43</sup>

The temples built in different parts of Kerala during this period served as centres of all cultural activities. Educational institutions came to be established in all major temples. The system of education evolved in these places aimed at the moral, intellectual and physical well-being of the pupils. Specialized courses in subjects like Philosophy, Grammar, Theology, Law, etc. were given there.<sup>44</sup> Apart from these regular educational institutions, social education was also fostered by special endowments made for the recitation and exposition of Puranic stories in the temples. There were libraries attached to the temples with a good collection of books. In this period, especially during the reign of King Kulasekhara Varma, there were both formal and non-formal education programmes. After the fall of Kulasekhara Empire, Kerala came under the rule of various local dynasties, which continued their patronage of these learning centres. The Travancore court of the eighteenth century became a centre of attraction for men of learning. There were schools attached to the temples in North and Central Kerala which were intended for *Brahmin* youths for Vedic studies. In addition to these, there were also institutions like the *Ezhuthupalli* under Ezhuthachan and Asan, which were intended for non-*Brahmin* youths. Education in the *Ezhuthupalli* received a boost in the seventeenth century under Tunchat Ezhuthachan, the "Father of Malayalam Language."<sup>45</sup> *Ezhuthupalli* continued to function actively in Kerala until the advent of the British.

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<sup>43</sup>P. K. Michael Tharakan, "Socio-Economic Factors in Educational Development: Case of Nineteenth Century." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19(46), 1959-1967. (1984). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4373769> (Accessed on 18.07.2018).

<sup>44</sup>A. S. Menon, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 164.

<sup>45</sup>A. S. Menon, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 163-169.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the education scenario in Kerala began to shift. Under the influence of the foreign missionaries and the British government, particularly Colonel Munro, the resident in Travancore and Cochin, several educational institutions were opened. The initiation of Western education was an important milestone in Kerala. It brought tremendous changes in the social, economic, religious, political and cultural life of the people.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.4.1. Christian Contribution to Education

The credit of introducing western education and its liberal ideas in Kerala go to the Christian missionaries.<sup>47</sup> While Catholic missionaries were doing active evangelizing work in Kerala, the Protestant missionaries were engaged in educational work as well. In Travancore and Cochin, several Protestant Missions such as London Missionary Society (LMS), the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Basel Evangelical Mission started working in the nineteenth century under the patronage of the local rulers.<sup>48</sup> As a result, educational activities received a great momentum in Kerala. In 1819, Rani Gouri Parvati Bai of Travancore set up Vernacular schools.<sup>49</sup> Subsequently, a large number of schools were opened and many of them were closed down in a short span of time for various reasons.<sup>50</sup> It was Swathi Thirunal Maharaja who began English education in Travancore. He brought Reverend Roberts, the Head Master of Nagarcoil Seminary and opened a school in 1834.<sup>51</sup>

The Synod of Diamper changed the course of history of the Syrian Christians of Kerala. In addition to many basic changes in the worship and liturgy of the native Christians, the Synod also made several decisions on various aspects of life including education. In a precautionary move, the Synod prohibited Syrian Christians from learning from the people of other denominations and religions.<sup>52</sup> It

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<sup>46</sup>G. Krishnan Nadar, *History of Kerala*, 248.

<sup>47</sup>K. V. Eapen, *Kerala Charithram*, Kottayam: Kollett Publications, 1993, 250.

<sup>48</sup>A. S. Menon, *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, 297.

<sup>49</sup>*Saravajñāna Kōsam (Encyclopedia)*, Vol. 8, 390, cited in T. Chathamparampil and J. Kureethara, "Unique Contributions of Blessed Chavara in Educating the Kerala Society." *Journal of St Thomas Christians* 16 (2005): 121-127, 123.

<sup>50</sup>A. S. Menon, *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, 298-299.

<sup>51</sup>*Saravajñāna Kōsam (Encyclopedia)*, Vol. 8, 386.

<sup>52</sup>*Udayamperoor Soonahadōsinte Kānōnakal Session*, 111, Decree, 12, cited in T. Chathamparampil and J. Kureethara, "Unique Contributions of Blessed Chavara in Educating the Kerala Society," 122.

also insisted that Syrian Christian tutors should not attract the children of other faiths.<sup>53</sup> The consequence of these restrictions on the community was too severe and negative in the context of the limited educational opportunities that were available at the time.

Those who headed the Church after the Synod did succeed to a great extent in implementing the Synodal decisions. However, the educational activities among the Syrian Christians were totally ignored until the foreign missionaries left the administration of the Church. It is recorded in the historical report of Ignatius Persico: "The Carmelites who rule the Syrian Christians have not done anything considerable in the educational field."<sup>54</sup> Charles Piaget observes that in general, "the missionaries have not done anything remarkable for the education of the priests and the Christians who were entrusted to their care. The Syrian Christians who were experts in agriculture and business were not encouraged to tread in a changed path."<sup>55</sup> This is the basic reason for the absence of any leading literary figure or academic genius coming up from among the Syrian Christians before Kuriakose Elias Chavara. The letter to the Prefect of the *Propaganda* by the assembly of Syrian clergy on 5 October 1884 refers to the situation: "There is no one from among the Syrian Christians who have completed college education and secured a degree. There are more than a hundred degree holders among the Jacobites. While there are many lawyers, doctors, and judges in other communities, there is none among us."<sup>56</sup> Kuriakose Elias Chavara addressed this pathetic condition by taking a historic step to start schools attached to every parish<sup>57</sup> in order to spread education in the Catholic community.

### 3.4.2. Contributions of Chavara

Kuriakose Elias Chavara wanted the integral education and consequent uplift of the society in spiritual, social and educational

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<sup>53</sup>Udayamperoor Soonahadōsinte Kānōnakal Session, 111, Decree, 11, cited in T. Chathamparampil and J. Kureethara, "Unique Contributions of Blessed Chavara in Educating the Kerala Society," 122.

<sup>54</sup>Charles Piaget, *Kerala Sabha Pathonpatham Noottāndil*. Kottayam: OIRSI, 1969, 41.

<sup>55</sup>Charles Piaget, *Kerala Sabha Pathonpatham Noottāndil*, 70.

<sup>56</sup>*Archives of Oriental Congregations*. Quoted in Charles Piaget, *Kerala Sabha Pathonpatham Noottāndil*, 103.

<sup>57</sup>*Chronicle of Mannanam*, Vol. 3, 1864-1871, Mannanam: 1880, 90.

spheres.<sup>58</sup> He used education as an instrument of social progress, not merely for his own community but also for the marginalized section of the society, which was denied any access to the tools of social mobility. The initiatives he took in the field of education originated in his own exceptional personal charisma.<sup>59</sup> Taking into consideration the social situation of the time, Chavara took admirable steps to raise the living standards of women, Dalits and the downtrodden. By means of education, Chavara enabled them to rise above the clutches of caste system. In 1846, he founded the first Catholic Sanskrit school at Mannanam where he admitted children of all castes and creeds.<sup>60</sup> It was a unique contribution of Chavara, when schools were mainly intended for the education of *Brahmin* children and village schools functioned for the general education of the non-Brahmins,<sup>61</sup> Chavara allowed and encouraged the children of the low castes to learn Sanskrit at his school at Mannanam. In this respect, he is considered the first reformer in Kerala to break the unjust taboos of caste system and to liberate people from such discriminative system.<sup>62</sup>

Chavara knew well that the progress of a community greatly depended on the growth from within. So, he launched a process of education at various levels such as theological education and systematic formation of clergy through seminaries and education of children through schools attached to all parishes.<sup>63</sup> His educational vision was a vision filled with joy and hope. Its essence is to be a servant of God and lover of his people.<sup>64</sup> It was a challenging and transformative vision, which brought forth historic revolutions in the society. He became the instrument to a great movement, which picked up momentum and it has been serving humanity through pastoral care, education, health services and media and social apostolates.

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<sup>58</sup>K. C. Chacko, *Blessed Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: The Vice-Postulator, Cause of Fr. Kuriakose Elias, 1986, 61.

<sup>59</sup>J. Kuriedath, *Christianity and Indian Society*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2013, 54.

<sup>60</sup>Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, Mannanam, 1940, 137.

<sup>61</sup>A. Sreedhara Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 281.

<sup>62</sup>Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 137.

<sup>63</sup>J. Pathrapankal, "Chavara: A Prophet of Our Times" in *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, P. Kalluveetil and P. Kochappilly, eds., Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 127-134, 130.

<sup>64</sup>J. Pathrapankal, "Chavara: A Prophet of Our Times," 130.

#### 4. Family System

The emergence of the family, with husband and wife as active partners in running it, is a stabilizing feature. The early basic traits of an individual's personality are formed in the family which transmits the cultural heritage to him, and maintains a cultural continuity between him and the society. A child meets with his first experiences and new stimuli in the family. In fact, the influence of the family environment on the child is very deep that it acquires at an early age the personality and character traits visible later in adulthood. Only in a healthy family can social instincts find the basis for growth.<sup>65</sup> Hence, it is essential to make an analysis of the family system that was prevalent in the nineteenth century Kerala to have a better understanding of the *Chavarul* that he wrote to the families of his parishioners at Kainakari.

##### 4.1. Family and Marriage

Family, the basis of society, is composed of parents and children, and normally it is born in the institution of marriage.<sup>66</sup> In Kerala, among the *Nayars* and other castes except the *Brahmin*, marriage was not considered to be a sacred alliance as found among the Christians. They enjoyed some freedom in the selection of their mates and in separation. Polygamy was a common practice among the male members of all castes in Kerala.<sup>67</sup> Though the *Brahmin* women were a privileged class, they were not free from social taboos.<sup>68</sup> Dowry, polygamy and family traditions were means employed by men to keep them under subjugation.<sup>69</sup> For this reason, the community in general, welcomed the birth of a girl child without much of a celebration. This discontent is turned into restrictions as the child grew. Her movements, deeds, words and even thoughts were so restricted as to make her life worse than that of a slave.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>L. A. Krishna Iyer, *Social History of Kerala*, Vol. 1: *The Pre-Dravidians*, Madras: Book Centre Publications, 1968, 164.

<sup>66</sup>L. A. Krishna Iyer, *Social History of Kerala*, Vol. 1: *The Pre-Dravidians*, 78.

<sup>67</sup>K. K. N. Kurup, *Aspects of Kerala History and Culture*, Trivandrum: College Book House, 1977, 41-43.

<sup>68</sup>R. N. Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education in Kerala*, Trivandrum: South Indian Social Centre, 1988, 18.

<sup>69</sup>Suma Rose, *Polity, Society, and Women: With Special Reference to Travancore 1700-1900*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2004, 66.

<sup>70</sup>Suma Rose, *The Polity, Society, and Women*, 66.

The *Brahmins* developed a very specific custom of marriage relation within their caste. In their anxiety to preserve the *Brahmaswam* lands undivided, only the eldest son of the head of the family was permitted to contract an official marriage. The permission was extended to the second son when this was necessary to secure succession. The practice of *sambandham* (concubinage) of the younger siblings of the *Brahmin* family was observed as they entered into relationship with women from the lower castes but not below the *Nayars*. These could not bequeath property to their children or even maintain their family. So, the *Brahmins* introduced strict monogamy for the women. But the menfolk continued polygamy and several other practices prevalent in the other lower castes.<sup>71</sup>

In the *Brahmin* society, the marriage of girls immediately after attaining puberty, and even at an earlier age, was very common. According to the custom, a very heavy dowry had to be given to every bridegroom. Hence, the girls of the poor families having no money to be given as dowry suffered from frustration.<sup>72</sup> Those who were economically less privileged found it impossible to give their maidens in marriage, with the result that they remained unmarried and were eventually ruined.<sup>73</sup>

Sexual taboos were observed only in the case of women.<sup>74</sup> They were not free to engage in marriage alliances of their choice. The poor *Brahmin* women were often forced to marry old men and live as co-wives, for the elder son in the *Brahmin* family can have more than one wife. Even teenage girls were given in marriage to old men. As a result, there were many young widows in the *Brahmin illams* (houses). The total denial of education and their social narrow-mindedness made the *Brahmin* women to be totally submissive to their men. They had no opinions and beliefs of their own other than those spelt out by

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<sup>71</sup>B. Rajeevan, "Cultural Formation of Kerala" in *Essays on the Cultural Formation of Kerala*, P. J. Cherian, ed., Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala State Gazetteers Department, 1999, 9-34, 9.

<sup>72</sup>W. Logan, *Malabar Manuel*, Vol. 1, 155-156.

<sup>73</sup>Kumari S. Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women in the Public Life of Kerala from 1850-1956*, PhD Dissertation, Thiruvananthapuram: University of Kerala, 2002, 37.

<sup>74</sup>K. S. Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women in the Public Life of Kerala*, 38.

their men.<sup>75</sup> In brief, they had absolutely no right to the property and they had neither legal nor social status in the society.

Among the St Thomas Christians, the marriage is arranged by the parents and not much attention was paid to the wishes of the boy or the girl, and the couple generally met each other for the first time at the time of marriage.<sup>76</sup> Girls were married at an early age and were given dowry in the form of gold or jewels. The tying of the *tali* was the principal ceremony at the wedding and this is performed in the Church.<sup>77</sup> Christians are very strictly monogamous. Although widows could remarry, very seldom do widows in a respectable family, with children, think of a second marriage.

#### 4.2. Joint Family System

Joint family system was prevalent in Kerala until recently. Large joint families lived in a common residence was called *taravad*. The property of a *taravad* was the joint property of all descendants of a common ancestress, in the female line only.<sup>78</sup> The property was the common property of all the members of that particular *taravad*. Partition of property was very rare although it was possible with a mutual agreement between all the members. The eldest male member called *karanavar* managed the common property.

Generally, *Nayars* followed the matriarchal familial system of inheritance called *marumakkattayam* and lived in a joint family. Christians, Muslims, *Brahmins*, majority of *Ezhavas* and tribal castes followed *makkattayam* or patriarchal system of inheritance. However, the *Brahmins* and a few other caste groups also practiced the joint family system. Under the joint family, even the distant relations lived together sharing the fruits of property under the leadership of *karanavar*.<sup>79</sup>

As the property of the joint family would be passed on to the eldest member, the other members would take no interest to develop it.

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<sup>75</sup>L. A. Krishna Ayer, *Cochin Tribes and Castes*, Trivandrum: Government Press, 1939, 206.

<sup>76</sup>K. C. Alexander, *Social Mobility in Kerala*. Poona: Deccan College, 1968, 78.

<sup>77</sup>K. C. Alexander, *Social Mobility in Kerala*, 79.

<sup>78</sup>R. Jeffery, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance Society and Politics in Travancore*, 15; C. A. Innes and F. B. Evans, eds., *Malabar Gazetteer*, Vol. I and II, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Gazetteers, 1997, 98.

<sup>79</sup>V. Mathew Kurian, *The Caste-Class Formation: A Case Study of Kerala*, New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1986, 8-9.

Moreover, the *karanavar*, in many cases was not keen about the welfare of an estate which would be passed on to the niece or nephew. This attitude affected the prosperity and economic development of the *taravad* negatively. In spite of several advantages of a joint family, often it prevented the development of a nuclear family and the healthy human development there.<sup>80</sup>

The St Thomas Christians who followed the *makkattayam* (patrilineal) system. The father was the head of the family and was called *karanavar*, a title that was given to the eldest male member in the family.<sup>81</sup> All sons inherited their father's property but the daughters were provided with a dowry. In order to keep up their family traditions, if a couple had only female children, they would adopt as their heir a boy related to the father in the male line, and they did not make their daughters heirs to their properties.<sup>82</sup> Hence, in the patrilineal community, sons were preferred over the daughters. The sons were given preferential treatment, education, etc.<sup>83</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The traditional society of Kerala underwent continuous changes through ages, which brought fundamental reforms in the socio-economic, political and cultural spheres in the state. The activities of social reformers strived to put an end to the social evils such as caste system, untouchability, patriarchal system, etc. through organizational initiations, which aimed at ensuring equality of opportunity in all areas of life. In these social reforms, they attempted to put an end to the evil customs, practices and superstitions that prevailed in the society. To a great extent, they brought radical changes in the basic nature of the traditional society. The attitude of the society towards women also took a positive turn. However, the weaker sections of the society needed more effective measures to improve their pathetic condition.

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<sup>80</sup>V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol 2, Trivandrum: Government Press, 1906, 364.

<sup>81</sup>Jackson John, "Life Style of Kerala Christians." <https://www.nasrani.net/2008/04/15/lifestyle-of-kerala-syrian-christians/> (Accessed on 28.07.2018).

<sup>82</sup>Scaria Zachariah, ed., *Randu Prachina Gathyakritikal: Udayam Peroor Soonahadosinte Kanonakal A.D. 1599*, Changanassery: The Sandessanilayam Press, 1976, 90. Zachariah, *Randu Prachina Gathyakritikal*, 90.

<sup>83</sup>K. C. Alexander, *Social Mobility in Kerala*, 77.

The biographical sketch of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, points to the fact that the formation he received from home and from the seminary, equipped him to have an intense craving for God. As he worked on this desire, it filled him with God experience. He looked at the people with the eyes of God and loved everyone as children of God. This love overflowed through his various innovative contributions such as the indigenous printing technology which catalysed the state's modernisation. He organized the *pidiyari* collection to provide free meals, clothes, and study materials to the students and to give opportunity to the poor and the untouchables to study. He opened a house called *upavisala* for the welfare of the orphans and the destitute. The starting of a Sanskrit school in Mannanam in the late forties was a daring step towards reformation. Yet another daring move was the setting up of schools managed by the parish church.

Chavara was instrumental to giving shape to the indigenous Christian monastic life in Kerala.<sup>84</sup> This move aimed at the wholesome development of society. He popularised the concept of vocational training among women, thereby, making them self-reliant. He was a literary genius with an incredible range and depth. Chavara liberated Christianity from its cultural and institutional constraints and saved the Church from fragmentation. He popularized vernacular literature and prayers. One of the first vernacular dailies in the country, the *Deepika*, was printed at the press that he established at Mannanam, a daily which acted as a catalyst in bringing social reform throughout the state.

A. Sreedhara Menon, the noted historian and Padma Bhushan awardee, wrote in a note sent to the Department of Research and Documentation, Chavara Hills, Kerala as follows: "I feel sorrow for not having been able to study more deeply about Father Chavara whom I have often met in studying and writing about Kerala history. This note is meant at least in part to remove that sorrow. People like Father Chavara should be given the place they deserve."<sup>85</sup> Yes, Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a person with an extraordinary measure of spiritual stamina, which he applied in re-energizing the society that led to the

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<sup>84</sup>The congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) was founded at Mannanam in 1831 and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) was founded at Koonammavu in 1866.

<sup>85</sup>A. S. Menon, "A Renewal Leader Who Walked Ahead of Time" in *Chavarayachan: Chavara Birth Bicentenary Special*, Jose Thomas Pattara, ed., Kottayam: Deepika Publications, 2004, 16-20, 19.

rebirth of the Kerala society. The vision with which Chavara initiated the movements has been imbibed by several other leaders who came after him over the years with their own individual endeavours. So much has been done that the Kerala society has been transformed positively beyond recognition over a span of a hundred and eighty years.

Chavara's God orientation was germinated in the family and it grew in his community and finally its effect was felt by the whole Church and the country at large. He has left behind, as his will and testament for the families, a code of conduct and science of good manners that touches various aspects of life. Chavara's vision on the formation of good Christian families is enshrined in his *Chavarul (The Testament of a Loving Father)*.

# ST KURIĀKŌSE CHĀVARA: A TEACHER OF FAMILY THEOLOGY A Reading in the Light of Ben Sira

George Kaniarakath CMI

**Abstract:** George Kaniarakath, reading Ben Sira in the light of the literary contributions of St Kuriākōse Chāvāra, especially his *Chavarul*, considers him a teacher of family theology. The author considers his family background and holds that the inspiration for life came from his own family. Later, as a result of the meditations of Chāvāra on the biblical picture of family, a picture of a modern ideal family unfolds before his eyes. This picture is further enhanced by his personal devotion to the Holy Family. It is from these three different sources that a comprehensive picture of an ideal Christian family is evolved by Chāvāra as it is enshrined in the *Chavarul*. The main features of the little document are a theocentric life lived in the family, which has to be a life characterized by the fear of God, relationships maintained only with the God-fearing, keeping only God-fearing servants, timely worship of God, life according to the will of God backed by a healthy reading habit daily and timely prayer and modesty in personal appearance. An ideal Christian life also calls for a philanthropic family life, in which Christians refrain from lawsuits and unchristian talks. They have ideal friends and they respect their privacy, give just wages to the labourers in time. It also calls for the wise management of family property, and not wasting days in an idle manner. Chāvāra teaches his people the true doctrine of Christian family.

**Keywords:** Chāvarā, *Chavarul*, testament, family, parents, Ben Sira, code, exhortation, letter, *Ātmanūtāpam*, covenant, Commandments, marriage, Holy Family, authority, Trinity, incarnation, Nazareth, Congregation, guidelines, Jerusalem, God, sinfulness, righteousness, Peter, Psalm, discipline, Holy Spirit, God-fearing, servants, neighbours, worship, Vatican II, sacrament, Eucharist, Sabbath, endurance, parish, scriptures, prayer, modesty, dignity, philanthropy, lawsuits, privacy, friends, wages, labourer, property.

## 1. Introduction

St Chāvarā's theological understanding and teaching on family is succinctly articulated in his introduction to his *Chāvarul* or 'Farewell Words', which is presented in the form of a testament that he wrote to his people in Kainakary.<sup>1</sup> It begins with a precise and meaningful description: "A good Christian family is the image of heaven. Its *raison d'être* is that those related by bonds of blood and love, live together respecting and obeying parents, peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to their state of life." A similar picture is given by the book of Ben Sira in his typical way: "I take pleasure in three things, and they are beautiful in the sight of God: agreement among brothers and sisters, friendship among neighbours, and a wife and husband who live in harmony" (25:1). Both Chavara and Ben Sira speak about the involvement of God and the mutual love that keep people together.

The letter written by St Chāvara in 1868 is the first explicit and rather complete treatise on the topic in the Church. The year 2018 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> year of its publication. It is described by the author as a *chattam* or code, which concern 24 aspects of family life in general, continued by 16 points on the upbringing of children; together reaching the biblically significant number 40.<sup>2</sup> The instructions given in the testament are biblical, theological, and above all highly pastoral.<sup>3</sup> The style of writing is simple with memory devices like similes, stories and anecdotes. The biblical thinking behind the text is discernible, though there are no direct references.

In his introduction to the *Testament*, Chavara gives a beautiful definition of the family that is followed by theoretical and practical

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<sup>1</sup>In the Bible we have the final and touching words of Jacob (Gen 49:1-27); Moses (Deut 33:1-29), Paul to the Elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:18-25), and Jesus (Jn 13:31-16:33).

<sup>2</sup>The number 40 is symbolic and significant in many biblical passages referring to a journey of probation or difficulties. To be noted is that the Israelites were in the desert for 40 years before reaching the promised land (Num 4:34; 32:13; Acts 7:30); Prophet Elijah, fleeing from Jezebel, had to journey 40 days to reach Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8); and Jesus fasted 40 days in the desert. Life is often compared to a journey of trials; 40 is also the period of a generation (Num 32:13). Hence what Chavara gives is the *torāh*, an instruction for family life, which is a journey beset with trials.

<sup>3</sup>Our preferred text is *Chāvara Kuriākōse Ēliyāsachante Sampooranarthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, Second Edition (Malayālam), Lukas Vithuvattickal, ed., Mānnānam: CMI Prasādakha Committee, 1986.

instructions. The body of the letter ends with an exhortation to children to honour their parents and never cause them any pain. To illustrate the message, the author narrates a Japanese story in which one of the three brothers is declared a thief by the other two before the authorities. By doing so, they hoped to win the promised reward given to the informers in order to feed their mother who was in utter poverty. However, the authorities could not be fooled, but for their noble intention, the brother was spared and they were rewarded by the authorities.

After the main body of the letter, and the signing off at the end, there is an appendix in which the saint gives a few personal directives that are very touching, and which may be considered as a fitting conclusion to the *Testament*. Chavara feels sorry that he was not able to do anything special for his own people and so offers the letter written in his own hands as an immortal reassurance. He instructs them to receive it as his last testament and copies to be made and distributed, to be read on Saturdays. The people are ever to remember the goodness of their forefathers and mothers. He further instructs the people that on the day of his death, he only wishes that they remember it, no other commemoration is to be made, but pray, "May your servant be acceptable to you."

The letter has two parts. The first part presents the general principles that govern a Christian family and the second part deals with the important question of the upbringing of children. In this essay, our modest attempt is to make a biblical reading of the first part of the book. In our analysis, we refer to the contents of the letter with the serial numbers given in the original text.

## 2. Chāvarā's Inspiration

### 2.1. Family Background

Chavara must have been deeply impressed and inspired by his own family background, especially by the example of his beloved mother about whom he has written some very revealing facts in the first two chapters of his partially autobiographical poem titled *Ātmanutāpam – My Compunction*. In the poem, he recalls Mariyāmma Thōppil, his mother, who nourished him with the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph with her own milk. In these chapters the saint narrates also how, though unworthy, God showered on him manifold graces and how he felt great compunction for being unworthy and even for failing to

cooperate with the Lord completely. The rest of the poem elaborates on the life of Jesus and Mary with some personal reflections.

## **2.2. The Biblical Picture of Family**

The concept of family is extremely important in the Bible, both in a physical sense and in a theological sense. The concept of family is introduced in the very beginning, as we see in Gen 1:28, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" God's plan for creation was for men and women to marry and have children. A man and a woman would form a "one-flesh" union through marriage (Gen 2:24), and they with their children become a family, the essential building block of a human society. The teachings of Ben Sira, which are applicable to various conditions of life are relevant to parents and children, to husbands and wives, to the young, to masters, to friends, to the rich and to the poor. Many of them are rules of courtesy and politeness and a still greater number contain advice and instruction as to the duties of a person toward oneself and others, especially the poor, toward society and the state, and most of all toward God. Again, we have Psalm 45, which is a matrimonial hymn and the Song of Songs dramatizes the love between a prince and a princess.

The importance of family is evident also in the provisions of the Mosaic covenant. Two of the Ten Commandments<sup>4</sup> deal with maintaining the cohesiveness of the family. The fifth commandment regarding honouring parents is meant to preserve the authority of parents in family matters, and the seventh commandment prohibiting adultery protects the sanctity of marriage.

This is not solely a First Testament phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> The Second Testament also makes many of the same commands and prohibitions. Jesus speaks on the sanctity of marriage and against frivolous divorce in Matt 19. Paul talks about what Christian homes should look like when he gives the twin commands of "children, obey your parents" and "parents, do not provoke your children" (Eph 6:1-4 and Col 3:20-21). The 'great mystery' of marriage that demands total commitment in mutual love is compared to the love of Jesus for the Church (Eph 5:33).

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<sup>4</sup>In Hebrew 'Ten Words' (Ex 34:28; Deut 4:13, 10:4)

<sup>5</sup>Following the general trend today, I call the Old Testament, First Testament and the New Testament, Second Testament.

### 2.3. Devotion to the Holy Family

Chavara was deeply devoted to the Holy Family. There is no reference to the family of Nazareth in the Church as a group until around the beginning of the seventeenth century, mainly because the idea of family was much wider than the way we think of it today. The Bible spoke of family, which included all the people under the authority of the head of the house, including relatives and servants. St. Bernardine of Siena (1380-1444) seems to have for the first time used the term 'Holy Family' in reference to Jesus, Mary and Joseph as early as 1440.<sup>6</sup> The authors before the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth used the words 'Trinity,' 'earthly Trinity' or 'created Trinity' in reference to the Holy Family. Then the Holy Family came to be seen as an ideal, as it was a compelling witness to the greatness of the institution of the family. The incarnation of Jesus, which is a unique event, happened in this family chosen by God. Mary and Joseph fulfilled their vocation within the framework of a family in the holy relationship between themselves and with the Son of God. This family of Nazareth inspires Christian families to be communities of praise and love, and to live on the earth as pilgrims on their way towards God, their heavenly Father.

It is remarkable that Chavara kept and venerated a picture of the Holy Family in his room, and his very name in the religious congregation was Kuriäkōse Ēliya of the Holy Family. Moreover, he entrusted the CMI Congregation whose co-founder he was, to the Holy Family on his death bed.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. General Guidelines for Families

The author also gives several general guidelines for families, in which the following three visions are seen evolving: 1) a theocentric, 2) a philanthropic and 3) a common vision of mastering and managing of material things wisely. These are envisioned by Chavara in his two dozen instructions in the first part of the letter. The central idea here is, as given in the definition of a Christian family, "walking peacefully before God and man," which means leading a wholesome life with God and neighbours. What is proposed is a theocentric life, which has

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<sup>6</sup>Annie Hayde, "The Holy Family: The Emerging of Devotion in the Church."

<sup>7</sup>Valerian, in his biography of the saint in Malayalam, "*Malankara Sabhamāthāvonte Oru Veerasanthānam, Athava Va. Divyasree Kuriäkōse Āliyasachan (Jeevacharithram)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Mannanam: SJ Press, 2013, 315. It makes reference to *Charamavathsaram*, 11-17.

God at the centre of one's existence and activity as the determining and overarching reality and ultimate motivation in life; one finds one's identity and purpose in God. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy with him forever.

### 3.1. A Theocentric Life

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, the famous saintly American radio-preacher, begins his book *Three to Get Married*<sup>8</sup> with the following thought-provoking statements:

It takes three to make Love in Heaven  
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
 It takes three for Heaven to make love to earth  
 God, man and Mary, through whom God became man.  
 It takes three to make love in the Holy Family  
 Mary, and Joseph, and the consummation of their love, Jesus.  
 It takes three to make love in hearts  
 The Lover, the Beloved, and Love.  
 That nations, hearts, and homes may learn  
 That love does not so much mean to give oneself to another  
 As for lovers to give themselves to that Passionless Passion,  
 Which is God.

Sheen continues: "It takes three to make love, for lover and beloved are bound together on earth by an ideal outside both. If we were absolutely perfect, we would have no need of loving anyone outside ourselves. Our self-sufficiency would prevent a hankering for what we have not. But love itself starts with the desire for something good. God is good. God is being, and therefore has no need of anything outside him." Sheen is referring to the role of God in family life.

The thought proceeds from the conviction that the finite and imperfect human beings can find most satisfaction and fulfilment when they focus on the infinite, unlimited God who is love, living a life with God in the centre, becoming merciful, peaceful, humble, selfless and friendly to all God's creation. This makes life more pleasant for oneself and others. God, the author of life and everything, deserves to be the focal point of our existence. And God assures us that happiness is found by keeping him at the centre. A man who delights in God's law and meditates on it is blessed "like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither" (Ps 1:3). Like branches on a vine loaded with grapes are

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<sup>8</sup>Fulton J. Sheen, *Three to Get Married*, New York: Appleton-Century, 1951.

those who "abide" in God bear much fruit (Jn 15:5). When we walk by God's Spirit, being led by him, we naturally exhibit the fruit of his Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). As long as God is an active partner, there is peace and harmony in the family. For Chavara, a God-centred life is simultaneously God-oriented and it leads to 'eternal life'.

### 3.1.1. A God-Fearing Life

In a theocentric life, the divine presence is ever active and people live with a sense of mystery that is tremendous and fascinating.<sup>9</sup> Moses had such an experience of it at Horeb, the mountain of God, when he found a bush blazing, yet it was not consumed (Ex 3:1-6). Another striking experience is narrated by prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem in his autobiographical note (6:1-13). In the year of the death of King Uzziah, the prophet had a vision in the temple of Jerusalem. Yahweh, the king was sitting on the throne being praised by the Seraphs (vv.1-4). The setting of the temple is clear in the antiphonal song, the altar with the red-hot stones, the smoke of the incense that fills the sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies. The prophet sees Yahweh himself seated upon the throne, clothed in majesty. The thrice-holy anthem resounds in the temple, and the 'glory' (*kavod*)<sup>10</sup> of the Lord fills the whole earth. God is all holy; the God of Isaiah is the "Holy One of Israel" (*qedosh yisrael* 1:4). We are given the idea of awe, dread, fascination and vitality. The trisagion in Ps 99 (vv. 3, 5, 9) is the supreme praise of the 'holy' God whose name is 'awesome,' and 'worshipful.'

During the vision, Isaiah becomes conscious of his impurity and unworthiness in the presence of God (v. 3, 5). This response is evoked by the sense of the holiness of God, who is God and not man (Hos

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<sup>9</sup>Rudolf Otto, in his book *Das Heilige: Übr das irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältniss zum Rationalen* (1917), writes about God who is the *Numinous* and the *Mysterium Tremendum* and *Fascinans*. According to him, the *Numinous* as holy is ineffable and wholly other and beyond human words. Humans feel creaturely and entirely dependent before the awfulness and feel overpowered. C. S. Lewis, in his *The Problem of Pain* (1940), opines that the fear of the *Numinous* is different from the fear we have for wild animals or ghosts, before the *Numinous* one feels a sense of inadequacy and is moved to prostration.

<sup>10</sup>The word means weight or heaviness which shows one's inner worth demanding respect from others. It has been defined as holiness (J. L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, London-Dublin, 1965, 313).

11:9). God is in the world but not comprehended by it; he is not one to be controlled and manipulated by humans. Isaiah's message of holiness means not only the sublimity of God as contrasted with man's creatureliness; it also means the contrast between God's purity and man's sinfulness. "The Holy One of Israel" is a favourite expression of the prophet (Is 5:19; 14:26; 28:29). Before God's holiness he confesses that he is unclean and is the member of a community in which there is no health (Is 1:4-9) and cries out: "Woe is me! For I am lost!" In the presence of the holy God, one is a miserable sinner. In Psalm 99:4, we read: "Mighty king, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob." "The Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God is sanctified in righteousness." His holiness is contrasted with that of humans who are lying, stealing, oppressing and even murdering (Is 1:4, 21-23; 5:20; 9:17).

In the Second Testament also we have some episodes in which the awe is experienced by the disciples and others at the presence of Jesus, the Son of God become man. In Luke 5:1-11 and John 21:1-8, we have the description of a miraculous catch of fish. According to Luke, at the sight of the wonder, Simon Peter "fell down at Jesus' feet, saying: 'Go away from me, for I am a sinful man!' For, he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken" (vv. 8-9). Again, we have the story of Jesus having been transfigured (Mt 17:1-8; Mk 2:8; Lk 9:28-36) on a high mountain. There was "a transformation of the entire person (of Jesus), which even extends to his clothing. What is described is a metamorphosis (v. 2) in which is revealed his essential divine glory, no longer veiled by the trappings of human form and appearance."<sup>11</sup> We are told about the presence of Moses and Elijah representing *Torah* (Law) and the *Neviim* (Prophets) representing the First Testament. The whole scene was awe-inspiring for Peter, James and John.

The wisdom Psalm 128 gives a beautiful description of family which is enclosed within 'the fear of the Lord' (vv. 1, 4), which is key to the understanding of a fulfilled family life:

Happy are those who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways.  
 You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands;  
 and it shall be well with you.  
 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within our house;  
 Your children will be like olive shoots around your table.  
 Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.

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<sup>11</sup> F. Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew, a Commentary*, Oxford, 365.

The Lord bless from Zion.

May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of life.

May you see your children's children.

It is remarkable that the Psalm begins with a beatitude in which fear of the Lord is put parallel to 'walking in his ways,' implying that such people are on the right path" (Ben Sira 2:15-17; 19:20-24). The psalm assures that those who fear God will be happy and live long bringing prosperity to the family, town and the entire nation.

Ben Sira very positively sates:

The fear of the Lord is glory and exultation,

And gladness and a crown of rejoicing.

The fear of the Lord delights the heart,

And gives gladness and joy and long life.

Those who fear the Lord will have a happy end;

On the day of their death they will be blessed (1:11-13).<sup>12</sup>

Again, we are told that "the fear of the Lord is like a garden of blessing, and covers a person better than any glory" (40:27; 9:16). Accordingly, fear of the Lord, which is a filial sense of love, respect, piety, awe and submission to God, is the key to a peaceful, happy and fulfilled family life.

The first mention of the *fear of God* in the Bible occurs in Genesis 22:12, where we have the story of the test of Abraham by God. Abraham is prepared to sacrifice his son, as per the real divine demand. God forbid him and commended him for putting his trust in God saying: "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now, I know you fear God." Prophet Isaiah speaks about the shoot that shall sprout from the stump of Jesse and adds: "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord" (Is 11:1-3). Here the 'fear of the Lord' is put with highly positive gifts. In the book of Proverbs, fear of the Lord is instruction or discipline (15:33); it is the beginning of wisdom (1:7; 9:10). There is no fear of God in the wicked (Ps 36:1; Rom 3:18) and it hates evil (Rom 8:13). In Catholic tradition fear of the Lord is counted among the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. For Chavara, family life was to be confirmed and consolidated by this healthy and ennobling gift of the Spirit.

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<sup>12</sup>Ben Sira continues his eulogy of the fear of the Lord in 1:14-20, 27:30; 2:7-18b 17:410, etc.).

### 3.1.2. Relationship only with the God-Fearing

Chavara writes: "Do not contract relationships with the disorderly and who have no fear of God. For, it is not the rich who bring blessing and joy to your family, but the orderly, God-fearing relatives' (no. 8). The wealth of a family is its fear of God and piety (no. 18). Chavara knew well and taught that the greatest wealth on earth was fear of the Lord and that alone could make people happy and content in life. People in general run after money and prestige, both of which have been risky and dangerous temptations for the human race. He even warns that not all are to be welcomed home; only those well-behaved and God-fearing shall be (no. 9). Our companions and friends can be a great source of consolation and support for us, while they can also dehumanize and lead us away from God. Birds of the same feather gather together and our company declares who we are.

It is not any pharisaic attitude or an attitude of superiority in knowledge or morality but a real sense of the fear of the Lord that should impel us to keep away from or be at least cautious about people who do not fear God or man. One has to be fearful of such people. Ben Sira counsels:

Do not invite everyone into your home,  
 For many are the tricks of the crafty...  
 For they lie in wait, turning good into evil,  
 And to worthy actions they attach blame.  
 From a spark many coals are kindled,  
 And such a sinner lies in wait to shed blood.  
 Beware of scoundrels, for they device evil,  
 And they ruin your reputation forever.  
 Receive strangers into your home  
 And they will stir up trouble for you,  
 And will make you a stranger to your own family (11:19-34).

Of course, we have to see to the actual situation and act wisely. Chavara knew well that all people were to be welcomed and loved; but one had to be ever prudent. Jesus was a friend of the sinners and the tax collectors and he even went in search of them not to revel with them, but precisely to win them to the reign of God.

### 3.1.3. Have God-Fearing Servants

Chavara teaches that those who work for and serve us must be God-fearing people. We are duty bound to take care of their spiritual needs (no. 23). At the time of the saint, there must have been a healthy

familiar feeling, possibly that of an extended family, with and among the workers and servants and even neighbours.

### 3.1.4. Worship of God

In the First Testament, the seventh day is a day of 'rest', remembering God's rest after the creation (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 34:21); it was also to remind the people that they belonged to the Lord through the covenant (Ex 31:13; Ezek 20:12). In the Second Testament, Christians remember and celebrate on Sundays, the great paschal mystery of Jesus suffering, death and resurrection. Chavara insists that the days set apart for divine worship be strictly observed (no. 3); other festal celebrations like marriage or even commemoration of the dead are to be deferred. If someone died in the family, those needed may stay back (no. 22).

This instruction of Chavara anticipates Vatican II which teaches: "Hence the Lord's day is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them in such a way that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work. Other celebrations, unless they be truly of overriding importance, must not have precedence over this day, which is the foundation and nucleus of the whole liturgical year."<sup>13</sup> Worship of God means accepting him as the supreme master and Lord of everything; there is no one or nothing equal to him and so he is to be preferred above all and worshiped. More than obeying a command, it should be a sense of creatureliness, loyalty and joyful thanksgiving that assemble the people before the Lord, singing praising and enjoying the company of our brothers and sisters.

A monthly reception of the sacrament of reconciliation is recommended and novenas in preparation of the feasts of Mother Mary and Joseph are to be recited at least at home. Chavara advises daily participation in the Divine Liturgy or on certain days in honour of Mother Mary or to pray for the diseased. If not all the members, some should try to do it (no. 18). He tells us that it is not enough to participate in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Sundays and days of obligation. They should be days on which you hear and reflect on the bible and to visit the sick, especially the poor (no. 22). In the book of Deuteronomy, Sabbath is 'holy' in the sense that it is set apart for God. In a way, it is a 'tithe' of time given to God. Man is not to be a slave of labour, and people have to remember how in Egypt they were subject to hard labour and so all the household, including children,

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<sup>13</sup>Constitution on *The Sacred Liturgy*, no. 106.

domestic workers, aliens and even the livestock were to be free from work (5:12-15). Prophet Isaiah gives the true spirit of Sabbath (58:13-14); if one is free from all selfishness and rejoices in the Lord doing well to others, Sabbath is meaningful.

The humane spirit of Sabbath is declared and accepted by Jesus when he healed a man with dropsy on the Sabbath (Lk 14:1-6). It is a day for honouring God, for helping others in need and being free to think of oneself. In Mark 2:27, we have a revolutionary statement of Jesus, "The Sabbath is made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath."<sup>14</sup>

### **3.1.5. Ever Resigned to the Divine Will**

One has to be happy and content in adversity as well as in prosperity. The one who is patient only when things go well, is not a man of strong character. To be able to live with composure and calmness in the midst of turbulences in life is something great; it is the result of a strong conviction that God loves us and that whatever happens to us ultimately is for our benefit and that nothing happens to us without his knowledge and consent. Luke tells us that one will save oneself through endurance (21:19). Similarly, the psalmist assures us: "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved" (Ps 55:22). Job was ever resigned to the will of God; he could always say: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21); but the mystery of innocent suffering was puzzling for him.

At the announcement of the birth of Jesus and the choice of Mary as his mother, she responded to angel Gabriel: "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). In Matthew we read the instruction of Jesus: "Do not worry, saying, 'What we will eat?' or 'What we will drink?' or 'What we will wear?' For, it is the gentiles who strive for all these things. And indeed, your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (6:31-33; Lk 12:31). Jesus, in his agony on the Mount of Olives prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). This is the highest expression of spirituality, which is ever seeking and living the

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<sup>14</sup>J. L. McKenzie, in his *Dictionary of the Bible*, 752, writes that it "sums up the teaching of Jesus in a single sentence better than any other."

will of God. At the time of his minor orders, St Chāvāra adopted the motto, "The Lord is my Portion forever" (Ps 16:5), which speaks about his life-long self-surrendering commitment to the Lord and his will.<sup>15</sup> For Ben Sira exhorts: "Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable in the furnace of humiliation" (Ben Sira 2:4-6).

Being resigned to the divine will no way means to be passive or lazy; as intelligent persons, we are to pray to God seeking his will, trying at the same time to change or improve the situation of poverty, sickness, natural disasters or any other misfortune or trouble. We pray that at least we may be given the strength and courage to withstand the problem. Jesus in Gethsemane also prayed to the Father to remove his pain, being absolutely submissive to the Father's will. With the psalmist we may pray:

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.  
 Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.  
 It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating  
 ... he gives sleep to his beloved (Ps 129:1-2).

### 3.1.6. A Healthy Reading Habit

Chāvāra instructs his parishioners to feed their intellect and spirit with the habit of reading good books. Our reading can inform, encourage, entertain, console and even change our minds and hearts. The saint, however, cautions and reminds that keeping pagan (*kavyar*) scriptures and forbidden books of schismatics and those containing obscene songs is like hiding fire in the haystack. Books evoking devotion to God and right thinking are to be treasured for children, as far as possible.<sup>16</sup> A God/Christ-centred life requires that we grow in genuine knowledge and devotion (no. 21).

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<sup>15</sup>See G. Kaniarakath, "The Lord Is My Portion" (Ps 16:5; 119:57). A Key to the Spirituality of St Chāvāra," P. Kalluveettil and P. Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth, Chāvāra Studies in Honour of Fr Lukas Vithuwattickal*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 49-59.

<sup>16</sup>We know today, as taught by Vatican II, that the books of other religions also contain truth and that we can learn from them (*Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, no. 2). Here we should remember that we are slaves of history and that we are limited by the times in which we live.

### **3.1.7. Open and Close the Day Praising God**

Chavara proposes a God-centred daily time-table for the family (no. 24). All are to get up by six o'clock in the morning and begin the day with the morning prayers. After this, if possible, all or at least some members of the family are asked to participate in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. In the evening, the proper prayers are to be recited and half an hour is to be spent in meditation. If needed, it is to be done with the help of a good book. After supper, an examination of conscience is to be made and the night prayers are to be recited. The family has to gather in prayer even if visitors or guests are present at home (no. 24). In this way, the saint envisions an orderly and regular life that is centred on God.

### **3.1.8. Modesty in One's Person and Appearance**

Our body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11; 12:1) and its dignity has to be maintained in our postures, dress, movements, play and communication. Chavara approaches modesty from the point of view of the virtue of chastity (no. 19). Of course, dress is something relative, but modesty is needed to safeguard human dignity and purity of heart.

## **3.2. A Philanthropic Family Life**

Chavara was deeply convinced that a true Christian family should be based on love of God and love of man. Where love of God and man is absent no true family life is possible. After having seen the theocentric aspect of the Christian family in Chavara, we now turn to its philanthropic character. According to Chavara, a good family is formed by bonds of blood and love. The members respect and obey the parents and live together peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one's state of life. Here we are told about the love that should exist among the members of the family as well as other persons whom we encounter in our life. Paul exhorts the Roman believers: "Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves" (Rom 12:10). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus has taught us that anybody in need is our neighbour and we should and help all (Lk 10:25-34). In his first instruction, Chavara requires of the family members to love each other and he adds the important aspect of mutual forgiveness, the result of which is peace on earth and eternal bliss in heaven. He laments a

situation in which brothers and their wives live in quarrel without love.

### 3.2.1. Lawsuits

Going to the law courts to settle disputes even in genuine cases does not help much, only does harm (no. 2). "Whatever your eyes have seen do not hastily bring into court; for what will you do in the end, when your neighbour puts you to shame? Argue your case directly..." (Prov 25:9). Paul recommends the mediation of a believer who is just (1 Cor 6:1-6ff.).

### 3.2.2. Respecting Privacy

One is not to poke one's nose unnecessarily into the affairs of others (no. 7). One should be interested in the wellbeing of one's neighbours, but that is not to be driven by mere curiosity; here is a gentlemanly behaviour is advocated. Let others have their free space and activity. "Do not meddle in matters that are beyond you..." (Ben Sira 3:23).

### 3.2.3. Unchristian Talks

One is not to engage in disorderly and unchristian talks or in tale bearing and speaking ill of others (no. 10). Charitable and correct use of the tongue is very important in interpersonal relationships. Narrating the faults and shortcomings of others brings only harm. St. James writes: "Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with bridle" (3:2). Similarly, Ben Sira writes extensively about conversation: "A fool's chatter is like a burden on a journey, but delight is found in the speech of the intelligent. The utterance of a sensible person is sought in the assembly, and they ponder his word in their minds" (Ben Sira 21:16-17).<sup>17</sup>

### 3.2.4. Wasted Days

Through an anecdote, Chavara instructs his people that a day on which we have not done any good to others will not be counted in the book of life (no. 13). God wants our daily life to be useful and helpful to others (no. 14). This is a highly spiritual thought concerning Christian life.

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<sup>17</sup>See also Ben Sira 9:15; 26-28; 22:12-15; 23:13, 14; 27:11-15; 28:13ff.

### 3.2.5. Ideal Friends

We need only selected friends and the criterion for selection of the friends is that they be people who fear and love God (no. 16). God-orientation of a person has its effect on every aspect of life and behaviour. The friendship between David and Jonathan was genuine and went on increasing even in the midst of dangers and sufferings, and it is to be emulated. The wise Ben Sira has a lot to say about human friendship:

Let those who are friendly with you be many,  
 But let your advisers be one in a thousand.  
 When you gain friends, gain them through testing,  
 And do not trust them hastily.  
 For there are friends who are such when it suits them,  
 But they will not stand by you in time of trouble.  
 And there are friends who change into enemies,  
 And tell of the quarrel to your disgrace.  
 And there are friends who sit at your table,  
 But they will not stand by you in the time of trouble.  
 When you are prosperous, they become your second self,  
 And lord it over your servants; but if they are brought low,  
 They turn against you, and hide themselves from you.

(Ben Sira 6:6-12; 6:14-17).

### 3.2.5. Just Wages in Time

An important and very humane teaching of Chavara is that the workers are to be paid just wages in time; both the time of payment and the amount are important. Our treatment of the workers and the poor is a matter of justice that cries out to God (no. 18). The divine instruction in Leviticus 19:13 is remarkable: "You shall not keep for yourself the wages of a labourer until morning." Similarly, Deuteronomy 24:15 elaborates the humane character of the deal: "You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt."

### 3.3. Wise Management of Family Property

St Kuriākōse is also concerned about the material wellbeing of the family and he has given some practical counsel in this regard.

1. One should not borrow money from others unless inevitable, if one has already done it, one has to return it at the earliest. Lend

only when required by charity. Attend to it immediately if there is any obligation with regard to the Eucharistic celebration or parents owing money to others (no. 4; Ex 22:25ff). Ben Sira 29:1-7 has a similar instruction.

2. Make not a show of one's wealth; such people easily loose (no. 5). Indeed, it is our experience that such people easily end up in misery. Ben Sira cautions us: "Do not rely on your wealth, or say: "I have enough" (5:1).
3. In celebrations one has to be aware of one's limitations; they should not make one a pauper (no. 6). The words of Ben Sira are strong and relevant: "Do not revel in great luxury, or you may become impoverished by its expense. Do not become a beggar by feasting with borrowed money, when you have nothing in your purse" (18:32-33).
4. Before searching for more and more, make the best use of the property one has; the wealth of a family is not the amount of possessions but their quality. When a small farmer was suspected of making wealth unjustly, he declared to his accusers that his small plot of land was a treasure and the sweat of his face gold on the land (no. 11).
5. Everybody should have the habit of hard work according to one's status (Ben Sira 7:15; 40:1); refusing to work does not make one respectable or acceptable. Laziness is the mother of all vices and it is the father of drinking which is disgraceful (no. 12).
6. Chavara sees taking alcohol despicable before man and evil before God (no. 12). However, Ben Sira (40:20) speaks about wine and music as gladdening the heart (Ps 104:15. Similarly, Qohelet 9:7 instructs: "Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart" (Sira 31:23-31). Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy: "No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." But, in his letter to the Galatians (5:20), Paul listed 'drunkenness' among the evil works of the flesh. Again, in Ben Sira we read: "Who has woe? Who as sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger late over wine, those who keep trying mixed wines. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Your eyes will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of the mast." (23:29-34). The Bible teaches that any

extreme is harmful, and that people have to control their appetites.

7. Business and trade are dangerous to both soul and wealth. If no other way is open for a living, there is no objection to pursuing it; it has to be done with care and a sense of justice. No unjust trader has ever maintained a steady progress. The riches amassed through deceit and fraud will soon melt away like snow (no. 13). In our modern economy business and trade are important services, but the principle of justice and equity are to be maintained. James is realistic in the matter: "Come now, you who say, 'Today tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes, instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes we will do this or that.'" (4:13-15).
8. One is not to be too stingy or too generous; the former forfeits it to the moth and the latter to the air (no. 15). Wealth and money bring wellbeing of man and have to be used prudently.
9. Nobody is to keep stolen things at home (no. 17). The idea is that one should not take what belongs to another and that one should not cooperate with such an action. When poor Tobit heard the bleating of a goat, he suspected that it might be stolen by her wife and said to her: "Return it to the owners; for we have no right to eat anything stolen" (2:13). Indeed, it was freely given to her with her wages. Through a story Chavara illustrates that through the act of stealing one is borrowing money from Satan.

#### **4. Conclusion**

St Kuriakose Chavara sees Christian family as built on three pillars, God-centeredness, philanthropy and wise economics. Such a family begins with a man and woman united by God who is love. In that family there is mutual love, faithfulness, forbearance and stability. The *kudumbakramam*, family code, given by Chavara, is original and unique on many counts. He indeed, teaches us the true doctrine of Christian family and is to be esteemed as a doctor and patron of Christian families.

# FAMILIES OF THE POSTMODERN SOCIETY

## Relevance of Chavara's Vision on Family

John Eattanial CMI

**Abstract:** John Eattanial reflects on the relevance of the vision of Chavara on family and applies the vision to the present day families of the postmodern society. Based on the *Chavarul*, which is intended to be an effective practical guidebook of family life, the author outlines the revolutionary shifts and changes families face today. The postmodern standards and values for families that are often opposed to the classical values bring a jolt to the family. The author makes a comparison between the familial values and relationships in the past and the postmodern functionalist view of family where living with children becomes impossible on practical grounds and the parents depend on old age homes for the rest of their life. It is in this context Chavara's vision on Christian families becomes all the more important. This foresight of Chavara on families and family life challenges and encourages families to foster intimacy and interpersonal relationships among the family members. The relevance of *Chavarul* is in the fact that it warns families about the hidden dangers arising from the various post-modern approaches. The study ends with a note on the relationship between parent and children. The author presents *Chavarul* as the testimony of a perceptive prophet of the Christian families with ingenuity.

**Keywords:** Relationship, Trinity, postmodern, society, like, intimacy, kinship, allegiance, attachment, youth, intimacy, altruism, connectivity, divorces, marriage, children, freedom, parents, sexuality, reciprocity, leisure, gay, gender, patriarchy, class, ethnicity, religion, charity, fraternity, love, justice, kenosis, possessions, debt, laziness, labourers, *Chavarul*, Chavara.

### 1. Introduction

This is the 150<sup>th</sup> year of the publication of Saint Chavara's renowned 'testament' to Christian families, titled *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (trans: *Testament of a Loving Father*; popularly called the *Chavarul*). Saint Chavara wrote this much-admired booklet as a fatherly instruction to

the Christian families and bequeathed it to his home parishioners, to help transform families into ideal Christian homes. In his own words, the reasons behind his writing the booklet is to encourage them to lead an organised, peaceful, God fearing, exemplary Christian family life, blessed with an atmosphere of mutual affection, unity and intimacy of the members.

Chavara, an outstanding mystic and a visionary of his time, pictured families as images of heaven; they are heavenly paradises on earth, where the members of the family practice and cherish mutual love and interpersonal relationships. Christian families receive their call and the grace they need to live an exemplary family life from the Most Blessed Trinity. They must be inspired by the Trinitarian communion that they experience through the faithful practice of the baptismal life. *Chavarul* is intended to be an effective practical guidebook of family life to them.

Today our families are living in a postmodern context, and are challenged by revolutionary changes happening in every sphere of family life. *Chavarul* would be a guiding light for them, which sheds bright light on the path and efforts of designing and constructing more vibrant family relationships and structures in par with the changed situation that arose from drastic changes in the social, economic, moral and religious fields. *Chavarul* has a catalytic potency to reform and revitalise Christian families, safeguarding them from destruction.

## **2. The Revolutionary Shifts and Changes Families Face Today**

Nowadays, families are confronted with revolutionary shifts and alterations with regard to the patterns existing in the family organisation, structure and relationships, which depend heavily on the changing social, economic, and ideological situations of our times. Several sociologists have come out to alarm individuals and societies regarding these far-reaching changes taking place in our postmodern society. Families all over the world are facing unprecedented, unimaginable, never-before-ever situations, which nobody can ignore. The pressures and tension they suffer are unavoidable; because they come from the shifts occurring in various existential aspects and essential realms of families that affect the very core – especially those related to the shape, structure, formation and internal dynamics that are at work in the family.

Shifts in interpersonal relationships present in the family; the shifts happening in areas related to family bonds, the sweeping alterations evolving in the way of seeing, assessing and evaluating the value and

significance of the different aspects like intimacy, kinship, allegiances and attachments in the family circles of relationships; the unusual importance that the friend-circles and peer groups enjoy, have unprecedented significance today. They are playing prominent roles in the form and types of interpersonal relationships actively operative in the families. They are now the elements, which really decide and set the nature and extent of different kinds of friendships and relationships in the families. Those traditional reference points employed in shaping and maintaining family bonds and family ties are becoming more and more irrelevant today. The values and perspectives of the postmodern period have taken up their place in shaping family structures, organisation, and infixing the interconnectedness and the nature and extent of interpersonal relationships inside and outside families. A kind of neo-individualism with its standards and values controls every aspect of the family. Family structures and activities are ordered, assessed and evaluated, vindicated or rejected measuring them against the postmodern values and standards.

### **3. Postmodern Standards and Values for Families**

The classical romantic models of love relationships in families are mere myths of the past for our present generation. It hardly presents any charm to the postmodern youth; they believe such lasting relationships are impossible in the present social and familial setup. In a hectic schedule of work and life, people do not get time for intimacy and altruism in interpersonal connectivity. We live in a world of swift changes that are taking place in every realm of life. Nobody has enough time to care for the other. So, if you want something, do not expect any assistance from anyone else. Such a realisation encourages each one to be a man or woman of one's own self.

Members in the family have become terribly demanding in the process of establishing their rights in everything. They plan and implement smart projects, which attract admiration and support from others and attain their personal goals of growth and welfare. The supreme concern of the families today should be the self-satisfaction and personal fulfilment of each individual member; and their communion, solidarity, intimacy, etc. are marginal to successful career and self-projection. Everything else stands subordinate to self-fulfilment and career. Friendships in life, whether in marriage or in family relationships, have become mere sporadic and are considered only as one of the available possibilities for the time being.

All types of interpersonal relationships are gauged temporary according to postmodern scales, relationships are mere interconnectivities, okay only for the time being, connection can be lost at any moment. Marriages in the family have narrowed down to mere partnerships, and monogamy and one partner relationships are hardly believable for many. Friendships and neighbourhoods last only for a limited span of time. Postmodern nomad living, especially in search of job and better facilities of life are accepted fairly natural and normal and many enjoy the advantages of the anonymity they provide. Divorces in marriage are often judged as a better option for some couples in their family life. Likewise, parenthood is also shrinking to shorter periods of time for several reasons. Even in normal long-lived marital relationships, people consider parenthood responsibility towards their children as a short term responsibility. Moreover, children consider that their filial obligations and duties cease when they reach adulthood. Nobody has any longstanding obligation or duty towards anyone; nobody owes anything to anybody. Family bonds and ties are just something 'alright for now'.

No one in our postmodern society considers family as an objectively essential institution of the society. In contrast to the former times, family has lost its significance as an essential supportive system of human growth and development. Many argue and assert that today the majority of individuals feel that it is all right for them and their life, even without the support and backing of their families. They believe that an individual's success and contentment come not from outside but from within, from his or her own personal efforts and hard work. The role and place of women in the family is also under paradigmatic shifts today; they are no longer confined to the boundaries of domestic chores. The women of this millennium are no more considered bread bakers but bread winners for the family. They play this role either together with their men or independently without them; they play both their primary and supplementary roles in the income generation. The society today considers assigning to women the role of housewife as their primary role as something outmoded.

Children enjoy enormous freedom at home today; they are hardly controlled by their parents, rather they live actually controlled, influenced and manipulated by their friends and peers. Parents switch over their role from acting like mature adults who control the behaviour and activities of their children to acting as mere friends giving their children an impression that there is no gradation or difference in life experience in family set up and everybody is equal in

the family. Parents have abandoned their pedagogical role in the society. Freedom and personal responsibility are slogans and norms of family relationships and activities at home. So also long-standing values of showing special concern and care and support towards parents when they advance in age are also neglected today. Instead, people consider those parents who expect their children to take care of them when they retire as awfully selfish. Their children who are now young couples excuse because they have their own priorities and duties towards their immediate family and career.

#### **4. Values and Relationships in the Past**

In the past, family was viewed as a key institution of the society constituted through the exercise of a unique interpersonal relationship that existed among its members and practiced and realised in tune with the values and visions approved by the society at large. Formerly, families seemed to be wider webs where people knitted together their ability to interlink each other in human connectivity with a higher sense of interdependency and reciprocity, generosity and self-gift. Generativity and sexuality were realised and made fruitful in conjugal love in the families. In the past families were never looked at from a functional and utilitarian angle. In the bygone days for a family to be an ideal family it must be a community which in its solidarity practiced and safeguarded an elated practice of self-gifting among its members, practiced in their interpersonal and social involvement among their relatives and neighbours. In those days it was in the family and its contexts that people used to learn practicing gratuitousness seen in the interpersonal relationships. Commercial logics and values were never allowed in the family circles. Family members in those days used to compete in offering one another as complete gift completely availing their life at the service of the other. And everyone used to accept and acknowledge the offering of the other with an immense gratitude.

Another important element seen in family relationships was reciprocity. Reciprocity was a normal practice among the members; and was expected from everyone for it is an essential customary gesture that fostered and strengthened family ties. It was the rule of marital relationships and for close family bonds and ties. In the past, generativity in the family was expressed not only through begetting children through the biological union of the married couples, but expressed also in the practice of adoption of other individuals who are not related to the family through biological or kinship bonds.

Begetting children was not considered as family achievement alone but also as a great contribution of the family towards the common good of the group or society at large. People really experienced in family a forum where they can share and borrow satisfaction and accomplishment of their needs for love, mutual concern, communion and solidarity. Thus families grew to the stature of a joint venture where people cherished success in personal social relationships and advancement in various realms of their socioeconomic endeavours, and there they cherished the security and safety of themselves and their group.

### **5. Postmodern Functionalist View of Family**

The postmodern society has been transformed into something resembling an endless shopping mall where people have greater choice about how they look, what they consume and what they believe in. Postmodernists are critical of functionalist ideas about the family; they want to experiment alternative types of family. The functionalist theory of the family provides a simplistic romantic picture on family. In this view, there is no place for anger, resentment, inequality, stress, depression and physical or sexual violence in the family. However, postmodernist thinking recognises families as normal possibilities and therefore families have to pursue other successful strategies as positive alternatives. They assert a pluralistic approach to family and to the life within the family, which advocates constant changes in the structure and shape and types of relationships in the family. For them there is no perfect or ideal family anywhere on the globe, no particular type of family can be generalised.

The relationship accomplished among the members of the family and their interactions within the boundaries of the family are kernel to the kinship bonding even among the extended families. Such relationships transform family bonds into a family history that links or joints other significant bonds together. In this way, relationships found in the family define the structural aspects and mutual expectations of the family members and of the relatives of the extended family. A unique relationship is derived from this is bond (often non-economic), or an exchange between the subjects of the family is occurring. This encourages the subjects to handover a cultural heritage which they represent within their bond.

Postmodernists argue that families are no longer solely influenced by what 'significant others' (relatives, friends and neighbours) might think, but are more concerned with and influenced by what the wider

range of 'insignificant others', i.e., their fellow consumers, think of them. The wearing of designer labels, the family car and the conspicuous consumption of leisure (e.g. the satellite dish, the foreign holiday etc.) may all become more important than family interaction and intimacy. There is evidence that children are increasingly being viewed by parents as fashion accessories. Parents may spend considerable sums of money on their children to show off to their neighbours, friends, relatives, etc. Today, individuals stress on 'personal life' instead of 'family'. The concept of 'personal life' is more neutral and flexible because it goes beyond marriage and biological kinship to include newer types of relationships such as post-divorce relationships, same-sex relationships and relationships in which people commit to each other but live apart from one another as friendships. Some critics of the postmodern theories on family diversity consider them as fairly exaggerated ones. Though postmodern theories on family assume a variety of family forms and relationships, the majority still keep continuity and similarity with the former ways and patterns of family life.

The sociological studies of the family today focus on the 'life-courses' of individuals rather than 'the family'. In other words, they examine the way our lives evolve and change as we experience personal events or rites of passage such as marriage, the birth of a child or death of a partner. This life-course analysis focuses on the meaning that people give to life-events that occur during their life-course. These stages may involve distinctly different sets of family interactions and relationships, e.g., marrying someone through an arranged marriage may result in a qualitatively different type of family set-up than and marrying someone outside the arranged marriage. Likewise, the family experience of a child who stays with a settled nuclear family will be different qualitatively and effectively, in procedure and in personal experience.

As adolescence develops, many have to leave home to go to university they may live in a hall of residence and return to the family home occasionally. They may then move into a shared student household and in later adulthood decide to cohabit. These experiences are also influenced by other choices, e.g., the decision to be straight or gay. If we take into account the family decisions older people make, when the children leave home, they revert to being a married couple household. They may decide to spend their retirement and savings enjoying themselves through, for example, travelling the world. They may do voluntary work or decide to take part-time work. They may

help out their children with child-care. Grand-parenting may be important to them. However, these future choices may be partly shaped by events such as death, sickness and disability. Sometimes people have to live as a single-person household after the death of their partner. Living with their children may not be possible on practical grounds. Some even have to dependent on old age homes for rest of their life.

All these remind us of the need for taking seriously into account the postmodern realities that the families of today are confronting every day. In any discourse on family nowadays we have to pay keen attention to such elements present in the family relationships and organisations. The corresponding diversities in the organisation and structuring of contemporary families in the life style and in the ways of the family relationships are coming normally from within the social, economic, and cultural ambience of contemporary family life. It is true that many consider families not merely as a concrete structure, but more as a practical way of arrangement for what actually people do in their efforts to lead a successful and comfortable life on earth, manipulating what is available to them for the moment. The old distinctions between structures are no longer relevant. For example, the distinction between 'households' and 'families' is blurred by gay relationships in which friendships with other gay people are gauged as kinship. If we focus on life course and practice families follow, it will allow us to see more clearly the influence of wider social structure and norms such as gender/patriarchy, social class and ethnicity/religion on the member's expectations and actions.

## **6. Chavara's Vision on Christian Families**

Saint Chavara was a great visionary of his period, whose visions on Christian families surpassed the horizons of his epoch. His deliberations on family give us a profound knowledge about his ingenuity in dealing with the topic of family. Families are depicted as dynamic centres of sublime human love and interpersonal relationships. In the introduction of *Chavarul*, he introduces families as premier locale of human communion and solidarity. There members are joint together in a high degree of human relationship through the bonds of blood and affection; and where children are duly respecting and obeying their parents, walking peacefully before God and one another. The members live there enjoying the sweetness of their relationships in pursuit of their eternal salvation, proper to their state of life. Family is the only place for the members to enjoy unimaginable

sweet consolation when they wander through the sorrowful valleys on this earth. However, families which are real image of heaven can be turned into the most disgusting place to live, when there is no order, no peace or no concern for one another, or no service mindedness prevail among its members.

This foresight of Chavara on families and family life challenges and encourages families not to focus too much on the rigid institutional character and dimensions of their family, but to mull genuinely over innovative ways and means, which foster intimacy and interpersonal relationships among the family members. Chavara rejected any static or institutional framework in conception of family, because they would objectify and make it something that is a finished product. He wanted to project the dynamic, vibrant, and ever-growing aspects current in the very concept and paradigm of family itself. He envisaged families as an institution with both institutional and relational aspects, which empower them to become an ever-open-to-change institution of the society. Families should not be tired of seeking strategies to make them a well-planned social institution with a human face on which reflected the innate thirst of men and women for living a lasting solidarity and communion which is dynamic, creative, passionate and mundane.

Chavara wants Christian families to perfect the spontaneous and natural ties that occur in family life into a love-relationship, which reiterates the divine paradigm of the Trinitarian communion; and the unity in the families must be the perfect oneness of the Three in the Holy Trinity. Foreseeing the pivotal role that the mutual love and affection of family relationships are playing in the formation, nurturing and stabilising the families, Chavara urged Christian families to act jointly in Gospel harmony and communion. The affectionate love and unity found in families shall foster Gospel magnanimity in forgiving each other's mistakes and shortcomings. Families shall consider these as the primary precept of their life. *Chavarul* warns families about the hidden dangers arising from dissensions and discords prevailing in homes between brothers and sisters; such families will soon perish (*Chavarul*, 1).

Chavara presents the living together of the family members as the *raison d'être* of a family. He highlights that the honour and blessing of every family lie in the ability and smartness to coexist within its family setup. A sweet, happy family keeps dissensions and quarrels away from among its members, and turns their life into a blissful co-existing that provides them a foretaste of heavenly paradise. Chavara

encouraged families to ignore faults and shortcomings in others and to forgive them and to consider them as normal in human relationships, as strong, prudent, and honourable people do. By all means, families must refrain from civil litigations, for a bright future of the family. Families must practice financial discipline in every sphere of life, avoid overbrowning and overspending, refrain from showy life styles, display of the status of wealth; must be frugal in spending, must not spend beyond their means in celebrating anniversaries and festivals. These are the advices that Chavara offers to the families (*Chavarul*, 5-6). These instructions seen in the *Chavarul* are precious even for today's families.

### **7. Relevance of *Chavarul* for the Present Day Families**

Family in no way is a human invention; in no way it needs human justification. It is a divine institution, which the world needs to examine and comprehend. Chavara believed this fact and writes in the dedication page of *Chavarul*: "The omnipotent God most kindly brought me into this world. As I have been born in this family and from these parents, it is but natural that, in the order of charity and justice, I am." In the context of the insights that *Chavarul* exposes about the families, whether evaluated in the backdrop of the postmodern scenario or not, we appreciate the foresight and intellectual acumen that Chavara showed in assessing families of every time.

Family is divine call and a task to the whole human race; everybody has to play a role according to the state of life God assigned to her or him. However, if we fail to assimilate and properly make use of this great gift, accepting it as a mystery both with divine and human aspects, we distort that precious gift through negligence and recklessness. That is why Chavara wrote in the introduction: "Praying for divinely inspired clarity and peace of mind, I have framed these rules of conduct for families with the intention of their avoiding sin and destruction resulting from disorderliness."

In the first part, *Chavarul* suggests measures for turning families into an ideal Christian family. It looks at the family from different angles: first, the place of family in the divine design; second, how family is placed in the mission of the Church; third, importance of family in the society as a social institution and as social measure that initiates and nurtures interpersonal relationships among individuals in a society. From an ecclesial angle, family should be a house of God, a domestic Church, where sacrifices and prayers are carried out, and sacraments are efficaciously celebrated and God's real presence and

actual saving actions are felt and experienced. Family shall be a place where love, reconciliation, faith and mutual trust, charity, fraternity, love for neighbour, justice, concern for other, self-emptying, kenosis, sharing each other's burden, mutual respect, prayers and offerings, purity in mind and body, hope, trust in divine providence, search for the Kingdom God, Word of God, relentless efforts for salvation, communion and solidarity, peace and joy, etc. are experienced and practised.

In the above sense, family is an icon of the Church. From the angle of social relationships family is a social institution with structures and unique relationships that arise out of interpersonal bonds. The Holy Family of Nazareth is the paradigm here. Christian families should gaze upon the ordinary Jewish village family of the carpenter Joseph and Mary and Jesus, their child. Every Christian family should become an icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth, where mutual respect, hard work, simple life, faithful practice of religion and faith plays the crucial role. Fear of God, proper love and involvement with the neighbours, healthy relationships among the members, love and concern for the poor, righteousness, etc. are scrupulously practiced by the members. Even today, an authentic teaching on Christian families continues to emphasise these elements as fundamental traits of an ideal Christian family.

In the first part of the *Chavarul* we see Chavara's precepts for the family. The fundamental rule for any Christian family is mutual love, which empowers its members to accept and forgive human weaknesses and shortcoming in the family circles. It encourages families to live in the spirit of the Gospel demands of magnanimity, reciprocity, mercy and forgiveness. Such an atmosphere in the family helps the members to experience the sweetness of a heavenly peace and joy. Unity and solidarity will prevail and flourish there. The natural environment that helps to maintain communion and spontaneous interpersonal relationships in the family comes from the power and force innate to the kinship of the members.

*Chavarul* insists on safeguarding the synergy these spiritual and biological factors provide to the formation and progress of the institutional and relational aspects of family life. But in the present day society, due to several factors, these spontaneous and natural joining together or living together of the family members is hardly possible. Because of the unprecedented socio-economic situations prevailing in the present day society our postmodern generation is dragged into numerous unaccustomed forms of family life. Solidarity and unity are

shattered; family ties, contacts and connectivity are getting dangerously fragile, casual, thin and loose. Family bonds, kinship, direct person to person communication etc. are becoming rare; family entertainment and picnics, family celebration and family meals have become stuffs of bygone era.

In the name of better job opportunity and assured job security, higher and excellent education facilities and opportunities for children, easing of tensions and hectic routine of life, better travel facilities and easy mobility, etc., the new generation cultures have created in people a mentality of easily compromising family and family values. People today prefer economic self-sufficiency and career success to family or to connectivity with their kin. The final outcome of all these is the disintegration of family and destruction of interpersonal relationships. *Chavarul* points to the wisdom of our forefathers and asks families to take recourse to the fear of God, trust in divine providence when faced with trials and tribulations. The fear of God is the most valuable possession of a family; and patience will encourage people to entrust themselves to divine providence (*Chavarul*, 12, 20).

*Chavarul* encourages people to be moderate in their everyday life and instructs families: "Do not become too materialistic and keep acquiring novel items; instead, try hard to improve the holdings you already possess. The wealth of a family does not lie in amassing innumerable possessions, but in their quality" (*Chavarul*, 11). Chavara reminds people that the wealthiest family is the one which is not in debt (*Chavarul*, 4). Chavarul cautions families against seeking easy compromises for economic and other gains, which will not last long. Instead, learn to accept human limitations when challenges are confronted in life. *Chavarul* insists families to respect God and divine rule in the family; and to bring children in faith in God and encourage them to practice gospel values in their life. Families should not discard religious principles and moral teachings in their personal life and social engagements. They must sincerely work for the project of constructing sweet homes which are a great consolation for the members even when they endure trails in life.

## **8. The Relationship between Parent and Children**

*Chavarul* in its second part concentrated on the relationship between parent and children and on the Christian and human upbringing of Children. Chavara presents family as a communion that brings parents and children together into a unity that safeguards the coexisting of

blood related kin, forming a wider family circle. Families should look after bonds and affections as the apple of one's eye; order and discipline should help to regulate the pattern and styles of life in the family. Parents have to take up the responsibility of organising and keeping unity and order in the family; children must practice respect and obedience at home. However, postmodern families are very loosely knit together; parents have lost confidence in themselves for their inability to lead their children in a mature way. Practice of mutual respect and obedience from either sides of children and parents remain confusing to many. Many parents are averse to properly reprimanding their children. Children show an uncontrolled freedom and an uninhibited way of easy-going life. *Chavarul* advises parents to take up their duty of upbringing their children as the most important and primary duty of their parenthood; they have to consider children as a gift from God to them, God has entrusted children to their care with the definite goal. Parents have to offer them back into God's hand on the day of final judgement (*Chavarul*, 2.1).

Chavara further insists parents to ensure that children are trained to be good Christians in their tender age. Attitudes of fear and love of God in the children will train them to respect and love parents and others. Parents must be diligent in bringing up children in a religious atmosphere (*Chavarul*, 2.2). Chavara has a lot of practical suggestions to the parents for training children in human and moral standards. He advised them to keep away from the tendency of presenting children as an object parent's pride and vanity (*Chavarul*, 2.12). Over-concern for children can spoil them. Hence, parents should be realistic when they correct their children regarding their behaviour and relationships. Parents should be involved in the choice of their mature decisions regarding their state of life. They shall not be indecisive or show undue regard for children even when they are grown up and have become erudite and competent. They must be prudent enough about when and how to entrust them the management of the household affairs (*Chavarul*, 2.15).

In the first part of *Chavarul*, Chavara proposes several precepts for the families, which he considered vital to them, in ordering the structures and interpersonal relationships. He wants love as the cornerstone of family life. When family is built up on love, everyone in the family avoids dissensions and discords, and would remain reluctant to go for public litigation against anyone related to the family. Christian families shall base their life and activities on the gospel values. They will lead a humble and ordinary life where they

are satisfied with what is available to them; and never be extravagant in the celebrations of the family. When one reflects seriously on the significance and importance of these instructions, one realises that they are immensely relevant today.

The culture of family members, especially parental figures, is important when they assemble to solve family problems in the interpersonal relationships. People easily approach civil courts even for petty quarrels and ego problems, which often destroy unity and concord in the family, and increase enmity among the relatives and neighbours. The new generation is not ready to give up anything, because of their over-emphasis and ego worship. Individual's self-assertion, self-satisfaction and self-glorification are asserted in everything. Pride and vain glory are like cancers that eat up the security and serenity of the families. Bombastic buildings, household appliances, pompous life-styles, etc. are destroying families. Enormous spending and huge borrowings multiply debt. Hedonistic outlook to life and the marginalisation of religion and moral values turn families and societies into brooding grounds of social and moral evils, control and reign over the contemporary family and social situations. Chavarul presents the antidote to the present day woes of families as it makes a plea to heed to the gospel call to "love one another," and practice real humility and simplicity in life; taking religion serious in life of individuals, families and societies, which rejuvenate the people of our times into a God-fearing people.

The various socialisation processes taking place in the families are to be monitored closely, for in the name of socialisation several evils can creep into the family. So, Chavara discourages indiscriminate access given to everyone who visits the family. He also reprimands loose talks in the families. He warns against the tendency of wandering into the homes neighbours as silly news mongers. He cautions people to take extra care in selecting their close friends; and directs his readers to pick up individuals who lead a self-disciplined orderly life as God-fearing persons; do not move along indiscriminately with anyone and everyone, but seek and keep the company of honourable gentle and respected ones.

Families shall be exemplary locations where human friendship and dignity are respected and safeguarded in talk and actions. Choose friends carefully - one from among a thousand, who is trustworthy, genuine and dependable to the end. In the family labour according to your status in life, and avoid every chance for laziness. Don't amass wealth by fraud and deceit. Perform at least one charitable act daily so

that one can render at least something good to someone a day. Families shall not deny or delay just wages to labourers, and consider it as a grave sin before God. Chavara is pleading for a special love towards the poor and the marginalised and asks families to deter from actions that humiliate or trouble the poor. *Chavarul* encourages reading of good and inspiring books in the family, and warns about the dangers of indiscreet reading habits. Parents shall procure for their children the treasure of books packed with wisdom and philosophical knowledge that enhance piety, which will help them conform their life to noble ways. Everyone shall abide strictly to a fixed timetable in their everyday life, something that should not exclude any aspect of their life from dawn to dusk.

### 9. Conclusion

The admonitions of *Chavarul* may appear old-fashioned and insignificant. For many today, the postmodern scenario is drastically different from that of Chavara's time. When we examine the situations of the past and the present, we identify several similarities between the two scenarios. Take the case of efforts for socialisations in the family. Changes are more in the realm of technology that is used and in the gravity and extent of damages done. For socialisation, the postmodern society depends more on the cyber world and social communication media. If we use them without discretion in the name of social interconnectivity and interpersonal availability, human face of the family will be affected adversely. Smart phones and other information technologies will destroy human life dangerously making everything further and further virtual rather than real. Personal commitments and person to person contacts will be minimised; direct conversations and dealing between individual and individual turn to be more and more dubious. Moral unrighteousness and human dignity can get marginalised.

Internet and social media have begun to dominate and decide human standards and values of life. Social justice and concern for the poor are to be safeguarded and practiced painstakingly in family. Work and work culture should be organised and practiced with human dignity. Job and job satisfaction should not be determined discarding family and family relationships; wage and wages difference should be controlled and regulated in such a way everyone employed can have a decent living together with his family. Employment opportunities to work in the society where one lives shall be ensured, giving priority to family and its concerns. Safeguarding openness and

privacy in the society and families is vital for a secure, free and contented welfare society, which honour human dignity and a God-fearing life. In short, *Chavarul* is the testimony of a perceptive prophet of the Christian families, Saint Chavara, whose ingenuity is beyond comparison.

## **VASUDHAIVAKUṬUMBĀKAM** **A Family of God on Earth**

**Jojo Parecattil CMI**

**Abstract:** Jojo Parecattil, taking a cue from the Upanishadic teaching on, *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, the universal family, looks at the way Chavara views family life and the institution of the family as a family of God on earth. This Vedāntic family consciousness points to the heavenly family that Chavara speaks of. In order to reach such a family, Chavara transcends his own family, the Chavara family. This is the ideal that Chavara gives his confreres when he asks them to live as the “members of one family and the children of the same mother” although they came from different families. Taking various terminologies that denote relationship used by Chavara in his writings, like *kūṭapirappukal*, the author brings out the correlation between the Upanishadic and biblical connotations of the concept. He goes on to study the Jewish religious vision on the family as the sanctuary of tradition. The sum total of this ideal could be found in Chavara’s *darśana vīṭ*, *beth rauma* and *tapasu bhavan*. Chavara, a great devotee of the Holy Family, considers it a Christian model of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*.

**Keywords:** Family, *Mahopaniṣad* Chavara, school, Hindu, Dalits, Church, Catholic, theology, Vedāntic, John Paul II, Śāṅkara, Pope Francis, tomb, Scriptures, Congregation, Roccas, Malayalam, Tamil, *sanyāsa*, Mannanam, *Ātmānutāpam*, home, Carmelites, Holy Family, Spirituality.

### **1. Introduction**

Ayaṁ nijaḥ paro vēti gaṇanā laghucētasām

Udāracaritānām tū vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam

“The thought that one person is related to me, and another is not, is that of the narrow-minded people. For the broad-minded, indeed, the whole world is one family” (*Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-73). Great minds at all times and circumstances rise above the narrow domestic walls of caste and creed, culture and religion, region and nation. They respect and celebrate the diversity of humanity as it is very well expressed in the



beatification of 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>2</sup>

Cardinal Lourdusamy, then Prefect of the Oriental Congregation, during 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>3</sup> Truly, St Chavara imbibed the spiritual essence of the ancient Vedāntic ideals to himself through *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* and thus identified with the soul of India. A. Shridharamenon, a well-known historian of Kerala, considered St 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 Christian in faith, in all other respects they were Keralites with a fundamental national vision. The truth is that they were integrated into the social fabric of the land. In recent times, all over India there is a new enthusiasm for such a life style. It was Father Chavara who initiated this new fervour. He was able to bring the Catholic community to the main stream of Kerala society. It was to assimilate the Indian spiritual wealth that he exhorted his followers. For this, he gave importance to the study of Sanskrit and for the purpose started a school. He adopted many practices based on customs among the Hindus... 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. He wrote many devotional books including minor epics (*Ghaṇḍa Kāvya*s). He wrote prayer songs on the life of Christ in the style of *kīlīpat* by Ezhuthachan... The insistence to replace flowers made with cloth and paper with that of fresh flowers, and to sing good songs in the

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<sup>2</sup>Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachitram*, Ernakulam: Chavara Secretariate, 2004, 81.

<sup>3</sup>Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachitram*, 82.

church were examples of adopting Indian customs. The many customs he introduced to revitalize the spiritual field were Indian.<sup>4</sup> In his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II makes it very clear that Church is not opposed to any culture, and indeed positively, it is always open to other cultures and engages itself with them to adopt divine forms which are alien to it. The pope also reminds that in India, it is the duty of Christians to draw from this ancient rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought.<sup>5</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 *Rgvedic mantra*, "*Ā no bhadrāḥ-krtavo-yantuviśvataḥ*" (1-89-1), which means "let noble thoughts come to us from every corners of the world," and this was the great ideal of Indian *Ṛṣis* for all times. St Chavara cherished this noble attitude of openness towards other customs and traditions, especially with the Hindu tradition, and this Indian orientation 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>6</sup> This study is an attempt to reflect on that inclusive spirituality of St Chavara, especially in the field of inter-religious studies and acknowledge and appreciate the unique contributions he has made for fostering the spirit of unity and oneness in the Church as well as in the society.

## 2. *Vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*: A Vedāntic Family Consciousness

Although humanity is a single family, today, it is divided by walls of religion, politics, colour, caste, age, continent, country, county and so on. In the midst of all these dividing walls, the concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* gives hope to humanity as it is a universal invitation to change all these divisions into unity, the inhuman elements into human and thus transform this world of humanity from chaos of division and separation into a loving single family. The

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<sup>4</sup>Shridharamenon, "Kalattinu Munbe Nadanna Navothana Nayakan," in J. Panthaplamthottiyil, ed., *Chavarayachan*, Kottayam: Deepika Publications, 2004, 16-20, 18.

<sup>5</sup>John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 72.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Kadankavil, "Uyarattile vit: siddhiyum siddhanthavum," in J. Panthaplamthottiyil, ed., *Chavarayachan*, Kottayam: Deepika Publications, 2004, 99-100, 99.

display this great thought of universal brotherhood in the foyer of the parliament of India is highly significant. This noble Vedāntic vision of the oneness of the entire humanity occurs in the *Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-73, and is repeated in other texts like *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Hitopadeśa*, which is a collection of Sanskrit fables in prose and verse (1.3.71). The context of this verse is to describe as one of the attributes of an individual, who has attained the highest level of spiritual progress, and one who is capable of performing his worldly duties without attachment to any material possessions.<sup>7</sup>

The Vedic term *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* is a combination of three Sanskrit words, i.e., *vasudha* (earth), *ēva* (alone or indeed) and *kuṭumbakam* (family), which literally means the earth, indeed is one common family. As humankind shares the sun, moon, stars and everything that is there on this mother earth, so also, they should feel oneness with the whole world and with the entire humanity, which is actually a single Family of God. The waves in an ocean are varied at the surface, but there are no such differences at the deepest level of the ocean, where there is no movement. As an entity moves on from the gross to the subtle and from the subtle to the more subtle or the subtlest, all sequences of differences are eliminated. Similarly, even though, there is plurality in the human families at the physical and empirical level, at the deepest level or transcendent level i.e., in the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, they are part of the one and the same family - the Family of God.

In Śāṅkara's Advaita Vedānta Philosophy, reality has three levels of existence: Absolute-Existence (*Pāramārthika-Satta*), Relative or Empirical-Existence (*Vyāvahārika-Satta*) and Phenomenal-Existence (*Prātibhāsika-Satta*). These three levels of existence are like the existence of an ocean, waves and foam. The foam or bubbles of water depends for its existence on the wave and the wave depends on the ocean. What really or ultimately exists is only the ocean and waves and foams have only relative and phenomenal existence. Similarly, the ultimate ground of all existence and the unifying force of the entire universe is Brahman. Applying it to the familial existence, God or Brahman, the absolute existence is indeed the unifying force of all earthly families. Just like the waves and foams ultimately get merged in the ocean, all

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<sup>7</sup>One is a relative, the other stranger, say the small minded people. But for the magnanimous, the whole world is a family. Be detached, be magnanimous, lift up your mind, enjoy the fruit of Brahmanic freedom (*Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-75).

the human families finally get merged in the Family of God - *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* - by becoming a single integrated family of humankind.

The Vedāntic concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* is a universal invitation to believe in the unity of all human as well as non-human beings. As one grows in this harmonic consciousness, all the boundary lines between the living and the non-living vanish, and gradually the connecting links emerge. "For the broad-minded, indeed, the whole world is one family." Accordingly, everything in this cosmos - persons, animals, birds, plants and all their endless variety of species together form a harmonious family. St Francis of Assisi, who considered the sun as brother and the moon as sister, grew to this harmonic consciousness. Pope Francis in the opening lines of his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, rings a bell about it: "Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs."<sup>8</sup> The mango tree, which St Chavara as the Prior of the Congregation planted and later came to be called and known as *Prior-mango tree* has also a lot to say about such harmonic and intrinsic consciousness. He grew into this great Christian and Vedāntic consciousness, by going beyond his own Chavara-family to the family of the humanity, and created an atmosphere in the Kerala society that was conducive for major social changes, which are analysed below.

### 3. Transcending the Chavara Family

*Chavara*, as a surname, might be a compound word, comprising of *chāv* + *ara* (dead + tomb) and they literally mean 'the tomb of dead.' The possible reason for the name is that the ancestors of St Chavara owned a plot of land in which the dead were buried. Although the provenance of the name in its relationship with the dead is inconclusive, it is certain that in the Chavara family, except St Chavara and his four sisters, all others - his father, mother and the only brother - died at an early age and surrendered their life to dead-tomb - *chavara* in an epidemic. He was the only surviving male member of the family. In other words, except Kuriakose, all others moved from this world to the world of - *chavara*. The point is that St Kuriakose, by his saintly

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<sup>8</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 1.

life, has transformed this *tomb of the dead* into a *womb of life*, as from that family, there was born a great son of the Indian Church. Comparing this tomb of the dead to the tomb of Jesus, which later became the tomb of life, we see a Christological meaning in the surname of *Chavara*. In this regard, it is good to recall, how Sukumar Azhikkode in his mystic imagination interprets the term 'Chavara' as 'the tomb of life':

Lord Jesus interpreted the Upanishadic truth that advised to move from mortality to immortality as a journey from life to eternity. As time comes to a standstill in eternity, there will be the indirect experience of eternal time.

It is to that tomb of life this member of Chavara family turned his face. Let me figuratively state that Chavara pondered deeply over the aim of his spiritual life very early in his life.<sup>9</sup>

Just like the empty tomb of Jesus has been the symbol of life, the life of St Chavara has indeed given a new life to the Kerala Church and society by his various new initiatives. Paul writes: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve" (1 Cor 15:3-5). What he really intends to communicate here is this passing of Jesus from mortality to immortality: "that He was buried, that He was raised." The reason why the tomb was found empty was that the man who was buried there had risen from the dead. This resurrection of Jesus from the dead is indeed a victory of life over death and also a sure proof that He was who He claimed to be (Mt 12:38-40; 16:1-4) – the risen Son of God, our only hope of salvation. It is to that "tomb of life" Sukumar Azhikkode compares the surname of St Chavara. "It is to that life of tomb this member of Chavara family turned his face. I figuratively assume that the term 'Chavara' speaks to the thinking people in an unknown mystical form that the purpose of his spiritual life was pondered over it in his mind at an early stage itself."<sup>10</sup>

To explain it further, Azhikkode notes that while he became a monk, he never renounced his family rather transcended it and extended it to *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*.

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<sup>9</sup>Azhikkode, "Kalatitamaya Maha Jyotissileykke," Part 2: *Sukrutham Smara*, ed. John Paul, 21-30. Kochi: Beth Rauma, 2013.

<sup>10</sup>Azhikkode, "Kalatitamaya Maha Jyotissileykke."

Fr Chavara never renounced his family, when he became a *sanyāsi*. The general concept is that the one who embraces religious life breaks the family chain. But, those who go astray by cutting the link of their family-chains are 'prodigal sons.' Being a good son, Kuriakose Elias did not abandon his family, rather, transcended it. In transcending, none is lost; rather, each boundary is made wider. The family of the one who embraces religious life gets extended to the whole world including the impoverished orphans and the destitute; a situation called '*vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*.'

That family, which never excludes anyone, belongs to the responsibility of God. Monks are persons who have taken the vow to link their family to the entire human family. They are the fingers of God. With those fingers God caresses the lepers, takes care of the sores of the wounded and wipes off the tears of those who weep.

That is the path Lord Jesus journeyed.<sup>11</sup>

Surely, that is the path, which St Chavara too travelled as a faithful follower of the Master. The family of Jesus is known as Holy Family and it was indeed a true *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, with all its positive implications. St Chavara is a true member of that family as his complete name is St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family. By founding the first indigenous Christian religious congregation of India for men and embracing religious life, he transcended the Chavara family and linked it with the family of God i.e., with that of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. The various humanitarian initiatives that he initiated in the nineteenth century of Kerala society and particularly in the Church for the poor and the marginalised speak volumes for that divine membership of St Chavara in the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, which fuelled a fundamental dream of humanity for all.

#### **4. The Members of One Family: Children of the Same Mother**

St Chavara visualized and nurtured each monastery as a *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. In his last Testament, written to the members of the CMI Congregation, in August 1870, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara advised them to live as siblings like the members of one family, and the children born to, nursed and brought up by the same mother, whatever the number of the monasteries be.

My dear *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), let the vicars of each of our monasteries foster real charity among themselves and maintain a true bond. However, numerous the monasteries are, all must be like

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<sup>11</sup> Azhikkode, "Kalatitamaya Maha Jyotissileykke."

the members of one family, children born to, nursed and brought up by the same mother. Never, let this love weaken, but let it grow stronger from day to day. Bear this in mind as an important piece of advice. In order that this love may not weaken, let the vicars of the monasteries vie with one another to show greater interest in meeting the needs and requests coming from other monasteries.<sup>12</sup>

These words of St Chavara give a real presentation of the concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. He conceives the CMI religious existence as a family existence, to be exact, as an existence in the one Family of God on earth - *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Again, to emphasise this divine aspect of family existence, he envisaged that when one becomes a member of the Congregation, one would be a child born to, nursed and brought up by this mother, i.e., the CMI Congregation, as in the case of physical birth in a natural family. As a member of the Congregation, one should understand and live, one's religious life in concrete fellowship of a family existence. St Chavara boldly advised the members in this way, because, he had considered the CMI Congregation as a divine family and a holy fellowship. God was his Heavenly Father, and he lived in His presence as a member of His family. For him, the call to CMI Congregation was a call to live as a member of God's family on earth - as the member of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, which is the bedrock of humanity.

#### 4.1. ‘Kūṭapirappukal’: A Word Full of Spirit and Life (Jn 6:63)

The principle of the oneness is pivotal in St Chavara's vision of humankind and his ideal of humanity as one family. This can be further understood and explained by the term *kūṭapirappukal*, which he often used to address others, including the members of the Congregation. It is a unifying term of humanity that proclaims the unequivocal principle of the solidarity of human race. It also reflects the spiritually animating bond that should exist between members of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, and it can be used for all the members there. This Chavara-expression invites humanity to love the fellow brethren with the affection of a natural brother or sister. This inclusive term refers to the confraternity of brotherhood and is rich in meaning as it communicates the sense of oneness.

Truly, the family ties are stronger than any other relationship; and as it is said, ‘blood (or better in this context the kin-blood) is thicker than water’; but, in Chavara's supernatural vision of familial ties, the

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<sup>12</sup>The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 71.

tie of humanness or the divine sonship, which is very well articulated and implied in the term *kūṭapirappukal* is much thicker than that of the kin-blood tie that exists in the household relations. The Spirit is thicker than blood. In the Gospel of John 6:63, Jesus reminds us: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." The word *kūṭapirappukal* is indeed a word full of that Spirit and Life (Jn 6:63), "who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:13).

The consideration that each human being is a *kūṭapirappu* is the life and spirit of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Saint Chavara was a Spirit-filled man and whatever he did and said had indeed the signature of the Spirit. And in this context, the word *kūṭapirappukal* is indeed a familial term with full of spirit and life of unity and oneness. By using this sweet word of household addressing, he is in fact, inviting us to imbibe the soul and spirit of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Through his spirit-filled life, he also reminds us that the greatest ideals of humanity can turn sectarian over time, if we are not guided by the spiritual awakening of *kūṭapirappukal*.

The word *kūṭapirappukal* is a combination of *kūṭa* + *pirappukal*, and they mean 'in company' and 'born' respectively. Literally, it means children born from the same womb, and usually, it refers to the members of the same family, where they are born of the same mother, and having a blood relation. Hence, it cannot be used for the members of different families. But St Chavara makes use of it to address all, extending it to the non-kin-blood relations, and thus different earthly families converge into a single supernatural family under this unifying compound. It has broken down the wall of kin-blood relation that parts humanity into different families.

Just as all human beings belong to one species, because of the distinctive characteristic of humanness, so also, because of this same humanness all human beings belong to one family. If kin-blood relation is the fundamental norm of membership in a natural family, humanness is the primary norm of membership in *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Truly, for him, humanity is a single family as it comes from the same God and shares the same DNA and heritage of the children of God. Hence, the term *kūṭapirappukal* transcends the boundaries between families, races and ethnicity; it unites all as members of one single family. All distinctions and barriers between people fall, in the spirit of *kūṭapirappukal* of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. It takes away all barriers between man and man, and family and

family. It unites different families into one family of humanity and destroys all the walls of divisions. The term *kūṭapirappukal* used by St Chavara is a unifying name of humanity and is profound with the ideals of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* as it expresses in one word the single confraternity of humanity.

We have not found an apt English word to convey the deeper meaning and significance of the term *kūṭapirappukal*. *The Complete Works of Bl, Chavara* translates it into 'brethren,' which sounds empty and miserably fails to communicate the original implication of the membership of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* or the oneness of humanity. A better translation for this Chavara term is *co-borns*, which is closer to the literal translation of the term, at the same time it retains all the implications mentioned above. When one is filled with the spirit of *kūṭapirappukal*, one is reborn or twice-born to *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* and becomes co-borns or siblings in that one family. Let us further analyse the familial spirit of *kūṭapirappukal* and its universal significance.

#### 4.2. *Kūṭapirappukal*: Members of the *Vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*

In the Circular (VI/I) written jointly by Fr Chavara and Fr Leopold Beccaro to the members of the Congregation, to address them *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns or siblings) is frequently used:

Beloved *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns) and dear sons, you are aware of the fact that we who write this letter are both advanced in age and are fast failing in health and are preparing to present ourselves before the just throne of God.<sup>13</sup>

Beloved *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), this humble Congregation of ours is not man-made. You are witness to the truth that God has nurtures it with genuine care and helped it to grow.<sup>14</sup>

O, my beloved *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), if we were having been called by God, had joined the monastery to live according to our own wills obeying only the superiors whom we like, then our behaviour is no better than that of the unbelievers.<sup>15</sup>

My dear *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), be sure, if you continue to live thus, there won't be any of these monasteries here twenty years hence. The strength of monastery does not consist in the thickness

<sup>13</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 61.

<sup>14</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 61.

<sup>15</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 64.

of its walls, but in the virtue and the religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them.<sup>16</sup>

It is with this same term he has concluded the letter:

Lastly, my beloved *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), loving sons, none of us was drawn to this life in the monastery, being drawn by hunger or desperate living circumstances in the world.<sup>17</sup>

In the *Testament* written in August 1870, to the members of the Congregation, the same familial expression is seen:

I your servant, brother Kuriakose Elia, address my dear *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), Rev Brothers, Priests, my dear Children the Novices and the lay Brothers, swearing my fidelity to Christ and giving you my advice and farewell greetings.<sup>18</sup>

While concluding his *Testament* asking for pardon and requesting the prayers of the confreres, once more St Chavara uses the same term:

Lastly, to the Very Rev Vicar Apostolic, Very Rev Delegate and the Very Rev Missionary Fathers and all the members of the monasteries, I beg pardon. I beg of them before God to pardon me all my shortcomings and lapses in the performance of my duties. Again I pray my *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns) religious, pray for me.<sup>19</sup>

It is not only the members of the Congregation whom St Chavara considered as his *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), but also the people in the society outside. For him, it was a much wider term of kindred relation reaching up to all the members of the society. For example, in the *Testament* written in August 1870, the same phrase is adopted:

Although God has willed to found this Congregation for the salvation of our Christian *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), due to the shortage of members we are not able to render the help they need.<sup>20</sup>

See the same expression is seen in the *Testament* written to the people of Kainakary:

This is my testament to you who are my *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), in two ways, as members belonging to my family and as my spiritual children. Let this remain a proof of the fact that you are my own kith and kin.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 65.

<sup>17</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 66.

<sup>18</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 70.

<sup>19</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 74.

<sup>20</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 71.

<sup>21</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 117.

In the Circular IX/4 sent to the parish churches instructing the parishioners about the dangerous situation caused by the arrival of Bishop Thomas Roccas on 9 May 1861, St Chavara addresses the people as *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns):

Hence, my beloved brethren *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), remember the words of our Lord that he who enters the sheepfold not through the right door is not the true shepherd, but the false one; is a wolf in sheep's clothing (Jn 10:1); if such shepherds come to you without the decree of the Pope, be cautious not to give ear to their false teachings, nor take sides with them and be prepared even to suffer martyrdom at their hands for being faithful to the true vicar of the Pope, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4.3. *Kūṭapirappukal*: The Biblical Spirit of *Philostorgos* (Rom 12:10)

For the members of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* namely, the *kūṭapirappukal*, the world is one common family. The Pauline instruction, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Rom 12:10), reflects the spirit of co-borns. The Greek term *philostorgos* used in Rom 12:10 refers to familial ties, i.e., the love practiced in one's family, the reciprocal affection or tenderness of parents and children. The Greek word *philostorgos* is used only here in the whole of New Testament, and it is stronger than in the translation in conveying the family spirit of brethren. The term denotes "tender affection" within a family and accordingly it means one should have a tender affection and concern for the fellow brethren like that of the family members. He then compounds this thought with the term *philadelphia* means 'brotherly love' (from *phileo*, 'to love' and *adelphos*, 'brother'), by which one is expected to exercise warm affection, family love and brotherly love toward fellow human beings.

*Kūṭapirappukal* denotes the affection, which is shared between brethren. People, who are born of God, whichever physical family they were born into, belong to the same family of God and therefore should love each other like brothers and sisters in the flesh.<sup>23</sup> Universal brotherhood should never remain as a mere name, rather should take flesh and blood by the affections of a relationship of kindred. Certainly, living this family spirit of brotherhood is in fact one of the tests of the members of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, as it is often seen in the New Testament (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12, 15:17; Eph 5:2; 1 Thes 4:9; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Jn 3:14; 2:7-8; 3:11; 3:23; 4:20-21). Just like the Greek terms *philostorgos*

<sup>22</sup>The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 98.

<sup>23</sup><https://bible.org/seriespage/25-love-without-limits-romans-129-21>.

and *philadelphia*, the Chavara term *kūṭapirappukal* also invites us to love each other and to be devoted to one another as a close knit family.

#### 4.4. Family: *Kūṭ* (*Bhavanam*) and *Vīṭ* (*Ākāśamokṣam*)

If we analyse the derivation of the word family in different languages, at least in some cases we find that its root meaning is 'to join'. The Hebrew word for family, *mishpahhah*, is derived from the root *shaphahh*, which means 'to join'. The Sanskrit words like *kulam*, *kuṭumbam* and *kuṭumbakam*, which are also used in other South Indian languages like Tamil and Malayalam come from a root *kūṭ* or '*kuṭal*' and mean 'to join'. Family is a group that is joined together where each role in the family serves a specific function to keep the family joined together.

Most probably the words *kūṭ* and *vīṭ* have come into Malayalam from Tamil. The noun *kūṭ* in Tamil originally means 'a place to come together, to join, to meet, to associate and to cohabit.' In its verbal root *kūṭal* is 'to make to join, to marry, to have intercourse with and the state of being joined with.' In this sense, this term indicates family, where members of the same family, clan or tribe live together. The second noun *vīṭ* is derived from the root *vīṭ*, which, in Tamil, means 'to leave', 'to abandon', 'to release', or 'to liberate'. Hence, etymologically, this Tamil word *vīṭ* means 'a place of release' or 'a place of liberation' (*vīṭtal*). *kūṭ* is an earthly reality whereas *vīṭ* is a transcendental reality and can be understood as *ākāśamokṣam*, which is an eternal abode of liberation.

Frequently, St Chavara uses *kūṭ* and *vīṭ* in his communications as it is evident in the expressions like *kūṭapirappukal* and *darśanavīṭ*. In his *Testament of A Loving Father* addressed to the members of the parish of Chennenkary, he gives a beautiful definition of a Christian family by combining the meanings of both *kūṭ* and *vīṭ*: "A good Christian family is the image of heaven (*ākāśamokṣam*), where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life."<sup>24</sup> Here, he explains family as a place 'where members live together by the bond of blood and affection,' the meaning of *kūṭ* is evident. At the same time, he also identifies family with heaven and the word used for heaven in his original expression is *ākāśamokṣam* which carries the meaning of the term *vīṭ*. From this, one can recognize that for St Chavara family is

<sup>24</sup>St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 9.

both an earthly as well as a heavenly reality. For him, family is a *kūṭ*, a place where *kūṭapirappukal* live together and a *darśanavīṭ*, where liberated souls live together.

The transcendental meaning of family, i.e., *vīṭ* is easier in the term *darśanavīṭ*, a name given to the first religious house established at Mannanam. A religious house is an earthly abode where liberated souls dwell together - a place where people who abandon all kinds of worldly pleasures live together in order to get released from all earthly bonds, and become liberated souls. The climax of that liberation, which one experiences on earth can be enjoyed only in heaven (*ākāśamokṣam*) in the coming life, as seen in the concepts of *dehamukti* (liberation attained by a person during the life-time) and *videhamukti* (liberation attained by a person after death).

The colour saffron is always revered with great respect in the Indian culture, as it is being the symbol of purity and sanctity. It is by wearing the saffron clothe that one officially enters into *sanyāsa*, which is the final stage among the four stages of human life (*catuṛāśramas*, i.e., *brahmacarya* (studenthood), *gārhastya* (householder), *vānaprastha* (forest dweller), and *sanyāsa* (renunciation). He renounces fire, which is permitted in the stage of *gārhastya*. He neither cooks, nor receives the heat from fire, nor performs sacrifices like *agni-hotra* as his sole concentration is on the soul. It is at this juncture that he wears the saffron clothe, which is made in the colour of fire, as the symbol of cremation of his body in fire.

In the Indian tradition, it is believed that one's soul becomes liberated as he purifies his 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, it is required as they have not yet done it while they were alive. The physical wearing of a saffron clothe by a *sanyāsi* is the symbol of burning all the desires of his body, at each moment of his life, as long as he lives in the body. The colour saffron is a combination of white, red and black colours, which are respectively the symbols of *sattva*, *rajo* and *tamo guṇas*. Wearing the saffron clothe, one is expected to transcend all the limitations of *thri-guṇas*. Without being the slave of lust, by his continuous *tapas*, through the focus of intellect, mind and all other limbs of action (*karmendriyas*), one becomes elatedly the sovereign monarch of the *Brahmaloka* or *ākāśamokṣam*. For such people, their earthly abode (*kūṭ*) is a heavenly experience of *viṭṭal* (liberation) and naturally it becomes a *vīṭ* (a place of liberation) or *darśanavīṭ*.

St Chavara, who has been instrumental in instituting in India the first two living indigenous religious congregations of Catholic Church (CMI and CMC) through which he inculturated the Indian traditions of *sanyāsa* into Christian religious life. Certainly, for St Chavara and his companions, inculturation was not merely a superficial imitation of certain Hindu customs and practices. They never wore saffron clothes or *rudrākṣa*; rather, it was much deeper and life oriented one, as they imbibed the most prevailing values of Indian *sanyāsa* like silence, penance (*tapas*), *darśan* of God, etc., to their daily lives and thus became people who really enjoyed *dehamukti* in their *darśanaviṭ* and *videhamukti* in the *ākāśamokṣam*.

#### 4.5. Family: Sanctuary of Jewish Tradition

Family has a great impact on all the aspects of our daily life like religion, spirituality, culture, etc. Family is central to Jewish religious practice and values. Though the importance of synagogues and other Jewish institutions cannot be minimized, home remains the place where most people first encounter ritual and where much of Jewish life takes place. Following the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 AD, the centre of Jewish life was destroyed. Even after two millennia, they have not been able to restore it, and at present, they are a people without a temple of their own. In that moment of crisis, when the temple was destroyed, the rabbis decided to let the homes be the “small sanctuary,” a holy place to foster the family’s spiritual life. The rabbis transferred the temple in Jerusalem into the Jewish home, moving its rituals, personnel, sacred space, food, blessings and prayers to the family and the family Sabbath table. Each tool and the space of the temple were transferred to home. According to the decision of the rabbis, the Jews have focused on creating holy space within their personal dwellings, homes and thus their house and family became their temples where have the vision of God.<sup>25</sup>

In his commentary for Torah, Rabbi Yehiel E. Poupko – explains the Jewish people as first and foremost a family. They are a huge clan or family than a religious group or geographical country. The first name given to the Jews in the Bible is ‘the children of Israel’ and here, ‘Israel’ does not refer to the country, but the patriarch Jacob. The Jews address God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is not a God of concepts they cry out to, but rather the God of their Jewish family. In this context, it is good to recall that the name that Jesus used to call

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<sup>25</sup>[www.bje.org.au/learning/jewishself/family/family.html](http://www.bje.org.au/learning/jewishself/family/family.html)

God is a family name - *Abba*, which means father. Similarly, St Chavara's most favourite term to address Jesus was *Appa*, which also means Father. It may be because in the Hindu tradition, family is considered as a sanctuary (it is common in many traditions) that one does not wear footwear inside home like in the temples or other holy place. In short, just like the concept of family and the familial relations influence the Jewish people in their religious and cultural life, family and its ties have a vital impact on different spheres of human beings, in any culture or religion.

### 5. The Family Consciousness of Chavara

The concept of family is something very close to the heart of St Chavara and one can notice its impact in his life. For example, it is attached to his name, as he is known as Kuriakose Elias Chavara of *Holy Family*. This concept is found in the names given to the monastery at Mannanam like, *darśana viṭ* (The House of Vision), *beth rauma* (The Upper House) and *tapasu bhavan* (The House of Penance). Further, in the writings like *Chāvarul* (*Testament of a Loving Father*) and *Ātmānutāpam* (*The Compunction of the Soul*), the vivid memories of family are found. The good Catholic family background, which he was fortunate to have by the providence of God, had a vital role to play in his character formation. Those loving memories about his family and childhood days are beautifully recalled in *Ātmānutāpam*:

You, to tend me as an infant unto tests,  
Gave me mother gentle who devoid of any parry,  
Imparted the love you offered her merry,  
That gushes forth in the nectar of her breasts.

As slowly sped I to be fully capable,  
To echo Thy eulogies in Thy honour as she sung,  
And she taught me its meaning sprung,  
In my veins the current of appraise able.

Slowly I realized You O! Saviour, mine  
Sitting at my mother's holy feet,  
As she at midnight her prayers meet,  
Which I adhered to seek You fine (I 45-56).

These lines of the *Compunction of the Soul* are so moving with such holy familial experiences of the childhood days of St Chavara that the following critical evaluation of C. P. Sreedharan is so relevant: "Usually, poets try to make their poems beautiful with metaphors,

alliterations etc., even though their hearts might be devoid of the same beauty and richness. But mystics like Fr Chavara make their poems attractive not with the external beauty of lines, but with the fragrance of their soul which is sublime."<sup>26</sup>

Pray on my knees I would as she,  
Did unto the Holy Mother entreat!  
Admonishing You in her prayers neat,  
Long and divine and blissful spree.

As she called you O! Lord of lords,  
Her prayers to the Virgin pressed,  
Singing in praise of your rule blessed,  
Which like a flower white illumines the worlds.  
And slowly would I doze off on her legs thin two,  
Remembering the stories that shaped my identity,  
Of the Holy Trinity and their separate entity,  
So of the Innocent Martyr, my Lord too (I 45-64).

If the mother is excellent, then her son is also excellent, "*yathā māta tathā sutha*" and "the mother who gives birth to such a devotee, she is blessed; as the child is greatly influenced by the mother."<sup>27</sup>

As soon as I started my syllables first,  
She made me call loud your names grand-  
The Holy Mother, the pious Joseph and,  
You O! My great Lord Jesus Christ!

I loved most the story of how,  
The Son of God took his human scheme,  
From all its sins mankind redeem,  
Forcing his way from the purest womb avow.

Also stories of Pontius Pilate's objection-  
Made famous through Jesus did,  
Though his endless torments he did bid,  
Only to complete the full round of resurrection,

Did the third day erect.  
Mother' stony gaze would me now screw,  
Childish fears mine when hence overflow

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<sup>26</sup>Z. M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Sheila Kannath, trans., Kottayam: Publisher Fr. Moozhoor, 1993, 97.

<sup>27</sup>*dhin janani jyāre ey sut jāyā ey, sohan thāl bajāyā ey*

As she retold the holy tenet.  
 Never ever touched me has she mighty  
 Either with a stick or manually but her,  
 Eyes were so powerful that ere,  
 Tame me into goodness and piety (I 65-84).

As honey is sweet so also home is. In fact, it is a home where there is always the unceasing love of the mother, attention of the father, and the love of the siblings and a lot of other memories. The above quoted memories of St Chavara throw light on such familial and maternal memories and influences; how his loving mother gave him the primary lessons of Catholic life and prayer. And as a culmination of it, later when he was declared a saint by the Catholic Church, "his family, mother, birthplace, and residence become more purified and his forefathers danced in the heavens" (*Skandpurān, Mahe, Kaumār. 55/140*).<sup>28</sup>

kulaṁ pavitraṁ jananī kṛtārtha  
 vasundharā va vasatish ca dhanya  
 nṛtyanti svarge pitaṛo'pi teṣām

St Chavara always experienced a kind of paternal and maternal love from his Congregational and Ecclesiastical authorities. For example, he considered the superior of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites, Rome, not as someone who exercises power over him, rather as a loving father, as it is very well reflected in his letter to him: "We could read your letter only with tear-dimmed eyes because it was written by our own father in his own hand - a father who loves us, but staying far away. While I hold it in my hands, the feelings that we experience are similar to those experienced by a son reading his beloved father's letter."<sup>29</sup> Similarly, he was enjoying a kind of both paternal and maternal love and concern from his Local Ordinary, as he personally testifies it: "Our dear Vicar Apostolic, our Father and Shepherd, is guiding and governing us with the utmost interest and vigilance. We are happy to learn from your letters that you are kept informed of this fact. He attends to all our affairs with maternal love and concern. The efforts he makes to protect us from all dangers and to nurture our souls are beyond description."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup>[www.swamiramshukhdasji.net/eBooks/Feeling-of-Oneness-With-God.pdf](http://www.swamiramshukhdasji.net/eBooks/Feeling-of-Oneness-With-God.pdf)

<sup>29</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 31.

<sup>30</sup>*The Complete Works of Bl Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 31-32.

### 6. Holy Family: A Christian Model of *Vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*

Holy Family is the family of God on earth, and hence, it can be understood as a typical embodiment and a living model of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, for human imitation. In the Catholic Church, the month of February is particularly dedicated for the devotion to the Holy Family, and St Chavara who was born on this month (February 10) had a special devotion to the Holy Family as it is very explicit from his name, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the *Holy Family*. In the members of the Holy Family, as Pope Leo XIII teaches, "all men might behold a perfect model of domestic life, and of all virtue and holiness." The harmony, unity and holiness, which characterized this Holy Family make it the model for all Christian families and so also for all earthly families. We are challenged to make their way of life, our way of life. They are a source of virtue; they enlighten our minds and they show us how to love through sacrifice.

St Chavara, who has been elevated to the venerable status of the sainthood, in his higher level of spiritual awakening, reconciled what is practically meant by the ideals of his Christian faith in the Holy Family with that of the Upanishadic concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. For St Chavara, God-experience was basically a state of absolute inclusiveness. In that state of unity, there was no possibility of fragmented perception. It is with that DNA, which is basically Christian, typically Catholic in the sense of embracing all, and characteristically Vedic in consciousness that he brought about landmark changes in the Kerala Church and society. It may be because of this conviction that he became a firm devotee of the Holy Family and modified his name as 'Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the *Holy Family*.'

### 7. *Darśana Vīṭ*: A Broader Reality of the Broad-Minded

*Darśana vīṭ* is a broad and enduring reality and it can never be looked upon as an entity in its singularity. As it was originally founded and initiated by St Chavara and the other founding fathers, it was a driving force in the Church and society through which there was a flow of streams that could fertilise all the spheres of human life – rivers of brotherhood, rivers of sisterhood, rivers of cooperation, rivers of knowledge, rivers of charity and rivers of all such ministries, which assured all forms of inclusiveness in the Kerala Church and society. Accordingly, St Chavara and the other founding fathers who built the *Darśana vīṭ*, by it actually built the then Kerala Church and society of

nineteenth century, which was undergoing deterioration and decline. This extended act of renovation and reconstruction can be brilliantly verified from the annals of the Church and the society.

No sooner did St Chavara and the other founding fathers started to dwell in the *Darśana vīt*, than they had a realistic vision (*darśana*) about the then Kerala Church and society, which needed an immediate renewal. Their wisdom and virtuous disposition did not remain encaged in theoretical knowledge or ritualistic religious tradition, but were shown forth in all its resplendence in their day-to-day conducts. Just as one good thought begets another and as one noble action prepares the way for another, so also, *darśana vīt*, which was a pure and happy home could expand and include in it the Church and the society, which were also made an object of solicitude and generous care. For them *darśana vīt* was not synonymous with religion. It was a stepping stone for spiritual awakening. Spirituality of *darśana vīt* was uninhibited spirit of catholicity. There it is easy to follow the directions and injunctions of traditional and ritualistic religions as its spirituality was expansive and borderless. In brief, the essence of the spirituality of *darśana vīt* was its unconditional love for humanity and the uninhibited spirit of catholicity.

## 8. Conclusion

St Chavara and his companions were not people, who sat at the warm fire-side of *darśana vīt*, and could not think of the shivering and destitute poor persons of outside. *Darśana vīt* was not a chosen and favourite comfortable spot of life for them, which were overloaded with benefits and advantages; instead it reminded them of the regions, which needed sedulous attention and much self-sacrifice. They never degraded the domestic blessings of *darśana vīt* nor did they make it an instrument of selfishness. Instead, thinking of the innumerable destitute children who had no such opportunities of culture and advancement, the members of the *darśana vīt* travelled from place to place in the sanctification of life. They had a spirit of going out, a missionary spirit, and a spirit of distribution that did not rest until the Gospel has been preached to every corner of the world. They appear before us as men who had great thoughts for God and His people. They lifted the *darśana vīt* beyond its mere earthly existence into a broader and more enduring reality.



## **BES RAUMA: A BIBLICAL SYMBOL II**

**Paul Kalluveettil CMI**

**Abstract:** Paul Kalluveettil, in Part I of his contribution that appeared in the last issue, discussed Mount Moriah, Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion as the biblical symbols of *Beth Rauma*. In Part II of the study, he explores the biblical symbols of Mount Carmel, which is the symbol of the battle field of righteousness, place of true worship, place of Covenant Renewal and the place of blessing; the Mountain of the Lord Almighty, which is the place of banquet; God's Mountain, which is the place of proclaimers of Good News, *shalom*, *thob* and *Yesuah*; Mount Tabor, place of Transfiguration, where the face of the Son of Man shone like the sun; Mount Golgotha, which is the place of suffering and the place of glory; and Mount Olives, which is the Mount of Ascension. The author finds all these reflected in the writings of Chavara with ample references given to them.

**Keywords:** Carmel, mountain, Tabor, prophets, Canaanite, apostasy, Mahabharata, *Pandavas*, *Kurukshetra*, Elijah, *Beth Rauma*, sacrifice, Baal, liturgy, cult, clergy, seminarians, faithful, Promised Land, prophecy, Transfiguration, Moses, Calvary, suffering, Golgotha, Jerusalem, Mary, ascension.

In the last issue of the *Herald of the East* (volume 13, issue 1) we discussed Mount Moriah, Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion as the biblical symbols of *Bes Rauma*. In this essay, we study the biblical symbols of Mount Carmel, the Mountain of the Lord Almighty, God's Mountains, Mount Tabor, Mount Golgotha and Mount Olives.

### **7.5. Mount Carmel**

Mount Carmel extends North-West to within 200 yards of the Mediterranean Sea. It means garden, vineyard or orchard (Is 10:18; 16:10). The term reflects the fertility of Mount Carmel's slopes. The beauty of this mountain is celebrated in the Bible. Song of Songs 7:5 says the loved one's "head crowns you like Carmel..." It was here that the prophet Elijah assembled the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, through whom Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab

was spreading the Canaanite cult in Israel. The true prophet of Yahweh had vehemently opposed it and proclaimed severe famine throughout the country (1 Kgs 17:1). He had to hide himself from the wrath of Ahab. It was after three years of draught that Elijah appeared before the King, rebuked him for the apostasy, and asked him to summon the false prophets and people at Mount Carmel. The scene is depicted in 1 Kgs 18:19-45. There Carmel appears as the symbol of *Kurukshetra* (the battle field of righteousness), place of true worship, place of Covenant Renewal and the place of blessing.

### 7.5.1. *Kurukshetra*

Mahabharata Epic narrates how *Pandavas*, the men of righteousness fought against the huge and militarily well-equipped army of the wicked *Kauravas*, defeated and annihilated them with the help of Lord Krishna. Mount Carmel was another *Kurukshetra*. Elijah, with the divine help, slaughtered all the prophets of Baal and Asherah at Kishon Valley (1 Kgs 18:40). Thus he tried to eradicate the religious evil from Israel.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara (henceforth KEC) and his companions stayed at *Bes Rauma*, and ceaselessly fought against the religious, social, economic, cultural, cultic and illiteracy evils that had crept into the Kerala society, such as discrimination, alienation, dominance of caste and gender, ignorance and poverty. They themselves were men of righteousness and persons of singular devotion and God-centeredness. It made them new Elijahs, those who were zealously zealous for the Lord God Almighty (in Syriac: *methen thenes Ie Maria Alaha hylsana* (1 Kgs 19:10, 14). The Hebrew name *Eliyahu* ("My God is Yahweh") befitted them. The inhabitants of *Bes Rauma* stood for the biblical God of justice and compassion. They were the living images of Christ, the new Elijah, whom the zeal for the Father's house consumed (Jn 2:17). They did not have recourse to earthly weapons or worldly strategies. Rather, they took up the shield of faith, with which they could extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one, took the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." (Eph 6:13-17). It was indeed Christ, the divine warrior who led the warfare.

### 7.5.2. Place of True Sacrifice

At Mount Carmel, Elijah flung down a challenge to the prophets of Baals: "Prepare the bull, but do not light the fire; let then call on the name of their gods, so that fire may come down from heaven and burn

up the sacrifice" (1 Kgs 18:22-29). Accordingly, the prophets of Baals called on the name of the deity, shouting and dancing and cutting themselves from morning till evening, but to no avail. Thereby the people understood that Baals were not true gods, and the so-called sacrifices to them were fake and ineffective. Then, Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord, dug a trench round it and asked the people to fill it with water, as well as pour water on the offering and on the wood. At the earnest prayer of Elijah Yahweh sent fire, and burnt up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and soil and also licked up the water in the trench (1 Kgs 18:30-38). Thus, the prophet proved that Yahweh was the only true God, who can work wonders. One has to offer sacrifice to Him alone.

The inhabitants of *Bes Rauma* not only offered the authentic sacrifice of Christ, but also made their lives a living sacrifice. KEC dedicated himself to restore the Syro-Malabar liturgy, wrote down its rubrics, and helped the priests to celebrate the authentic sacrifice of Christ in the parish churches. He and his companions taught the seminarians and the people how to actively participate in the Divine Liturgy, and make their life a living sacrifice together with Christ, the High Priest.

### 7.5.3. Place of Covenant Renewal

By adhering to the Baal cult the people of Israel had broken the covenant relationship with Yahweh. In His place they had accepted Baal as their overlord. On Mount Carmel, the prophet confronted the people: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (18:21). But the people kept silent. Now Elijah demonstrated the uniqueness of the Lord. It was an invitation to the people to recommit themselves to Yahweh. They immediately and spontaneously responded: Falling prostrate they loudly declared: "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God" (18:39). In the Ancient Orient the treaties or covenants were ratified by act and word that avowed the relationship with the sovereign. Now Israel, the inferior partner of the covenant, knelt down - an act that demonstrated their slave-like status before the Lord Almighty. By the oral declaration (twice repeated formula "the Lord, He is God") they asserted that Yahweh is their only God, whom they willingly and joyfully recognize as all of all and all in all of their life. It was they who had broken their covenant relationship. Now they take the steps (of course prompted by Yahweh) to reaffirm their total submission and subservience.

The Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel faithfully and devotedly lived the new covenant life. They totally dedicated themselves to the Triune God. By words and actions, the community avowed *Mar walah* ("you are my Lord and my God"), the proclamation of Thomas (Jn 20:28). The Apostle of India was thereby re-establishing the broken covenant on behalf of the other apostles. The Congregation at *Bes Rauma* was doing the same thing. They lived the life of the disciples of Christ. By preaching and charitable activities KEC and his companions brought a radical renewal in the life of secular clergy, the seminarians and the faithful. All were attracted to the new covenant life of the inhabitants of *Bes Rauma*, and many became the members of the religious community. This paved the way for a new spiritual dawn in the life of Syro-Malabar Church.

#### **7.5.4. Place of Blessing**

At the covenant renewal declaration of the people of Israel, the cause for famine ceased. Yahweh was willing to bless the people and the country by sending rain. Elijah foretold King Ahab of this fact. As the sign of the ratification of the relationship with the Lord, he asked Ahab to take part in the covenant meal and rush to Jezreel before rain overtakes him (1 Kgs 18:41-45).

Then Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. He, the mediator between God and people was earnestly praying for the blessing of rain. Elijah had complete trust in his divine Master. Now and then he was asking his servant to go and look towards the sea, to find out any trace of the coming rain. At the seventh time the servant reported the sky growing black with clouds. Yahweh blessed Elijah for his persevering prayer of petition on behalf of the people. It rained cats and dogs. The power of the Lord came upon the man of God, and tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of the royal chariot all the way to Jezreel (18:46).

KEC and companions were serving as mediators of the new covenant blessing for the country. At *Bes Rauma* they spent long hours in prayer and penance to obtain the divine graces. Putting their trust in the new covenant Overlord they persevered in the long vigils. The inhabitants of *Bes Rauma* taught the faithful to adhere to the Lord in incessant prayer, like the widow in Lk 18:1-8. They thus obtained the divine blessings – not only spiritual, but also social, financial, cultural and religious graces for the whole land. These sons of prophet Elijah also served as the herald of the good news of the divine blessings.

## 7.6. The Mountain of the Lord

### 7.6.1. Text

"On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all people, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain, He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken" (Is 25:6-8).

### 7.6.2. The Place of Banquet

In the Ancient Orient when a new king was crowned, there used to take place an inaugural banquet to which the people were invited. The text speaks in this background. A new era of salvation will be dawned. This prophecy is oriented towards Christ, the universal Redeemer. All the humans are urged to hilariously partake of sumptuous banquet prepared at the mountain of the Lord by the Almighty himself. Yahweh will wipe away the tears from the face of the participants. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away.

In the Gospels, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to royal banquet (Mt 22:1, 8-11; Lk 14:15; 13:28-29). In Lk 22:16, 18 the Son of Man says that He will not eat the Passover or drink again of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes. At the Last Supper, which was consummated at Mount Calvary, Jesus gave his body and blood as the food and drink, that provide everlasting life (Jn 6:35,58; 4:13-14; 7:37-38). Christ, by his death defeated the curse of death (Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 15:12-57; 1 Thes 4:14; Rev 1:17, 18; 21:1-4). The last of these texts speaks of a new heaven and a new earth, the realization of the promise of the Son of God.

We may compare *Bes Rauma* to the Mountain of the Lord Almighty. Its inhabitants, who represented the people, relived the new Passover and enjoyed the spiritual banquet with joy, praise, gratitude and worship. KEC and the companions broke the Word of God, and fed the faithful. *Bes Rauma* embodied the new heaven and the new earth, the symbol of the new humanity, where the lord Almighty wipes every tear from the people's eyes. All could enjoy salvific bliss, finding their heaven on earth.

## 7.7. God's Mountains

### 7.7.1. Text

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace (*shalom*), who proclaims good (*thob*), who proclaims salvation (*yesuah*), who says to Zion, Your God reigns!" (Is 52:7).

### 7.7.2. Place of Proclaimers of Good News, *Shalom, Thob, Yesuah*

Isaiah was speaking to his people, the captives in Babylon. They had lost the land and the Temple – the symbols of their national and religious entity and identity. In this desperate situation the prophet was sent to proclaim to them the gospel of a new exodus that will bring them back to the Promised Land. The original words in Hebrew radiate exultation. Isaiah announces the coming of the messenger of salvation in poetic terms. His feet are compared to the beautiful feet of the bride of the Song of Songs, since he bears an enchanting and captivating message. Like the bridegroom of the Song of Songs 2:8, he comes leaping upon the mountains. The messenger has become transformed into the joyful message. His whole person is irradiating the bliss of salvation that carries *shalom*, *thob* and God's reign. This prophecy found its fulfilment in Christ, the great proclaimer of the good news.

The inmates of *Bes Rauma*, with heart and soul endeavoured to realize the dream of their divine Master. They were transformed into the living good news of *yesuah*, *shalom* and *thob*. God reigned in their hearts. KEC and companions converted *Bes Rauma* into the abode of good news, of divine welfare (*shalom*), of divine beauty (*thob*) and blissful salvation. The people experienced this truth, and tried their best to appropriate the divine blessings into their life.

## 7.8. Mount Tabor

### 7.8.1. Context

At the prediction of the Master's suffering and death (Mt 16:21-28), the apostles became very depressed, as their future dreams were shattered. In order to fortify them with the reality of glorious resurrection, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John to the Mount Tabor. There he was transfigured (Mt 17:1-8).

### 7.8.2. Place of Transfiguration

The face of the Son of Man shone like the sun, his clothes became as white as the light. Two OT figures, Moses and Elijah were found conversing with Jesus. The transfiguration scene was intended to imprint in the minds of the disciples the true significance of the Calvary event. Suffering is indeed glorification; cross is crown; failure is success. The authentic followers of Christ have to participate in his sufferings, and thus become transfigured ones. For them, Mount Calvary means Mount Tabor. Such a vision will transform the sons of men into sons of God.

The inmates of *Bes Rauma* were given the grace to live as transfigured ones like their Master. They had graced with an intuitive vision of the celestial face of suffering. Hence KEC and companions wholeheartedly embraced the cross of Christ. They fostered a deep devotion to the Crucified One, and tried their best to resemble Him by mortifying their bodies through severe fasting and penance. It made their faces radiant like that of Moses who spent forty days in the company of Yahweh, Ex 34:29-30. One can compare it also with the glorious countenance of Jesus, the new Moses who spent forty days in prayer and penance, and in conversation with the heavenly Father (Mt 4:1-2). The inmates, through their lives, words and deeds, taught the people how to transform their Calvarys into Tabors.

### 7.9. Mount Golgotha

According to John, Golgotha, the place of suffering was the place of glory. There Jesus became the king of heaven and earth. It is he who willingly carried his cross, underwent the mortal pains and gave up his spirit (Jn 19:17-28, 30). There Jesus consummated the new covenant.

KEC offers a radically new vision on Mount Golgotha. For the mystic it is the wedding tent, the mansion of celebration (*kalyaṇapantal*) of Christ, the divine Bridegroom, and the cross, the bridal chamber (*maṇavara*) of glory. The *bhaktayogi* looks at the Lord's march to Calvary, and ascending on the cross from the perspective of *Song of Songs*. Jesus is the Spouse. In his booklet, *Colloquies*, KEC gives a vivid and mystical articulation to the divine Bridegroom's march to *kalyaṇapantal*, and his solemn entrance into *maṇavara*. Also in his work *Compunction of the Soul* the poet gives a dazzling account of the nuptial procession to Calvary, the wedding tent (VIII/13-14; 70-104). It is indeed amazing to note that elsewhere KEC was narrating the earlier

parts of the passion in a pathetic and hypersensitive way. Now suddenly he changes his tone and provides a mystical articulation to the glorious and nuptial perspective of the Mount Calvary. This is indeed a model for the Syro-Malabar Christians who are used to shed bitter tears at the Good Friday (which is for them *Dukha Velli*) Liturgy.

## 7.9. Mount of Olives

### 7.9.1. Texts: Lk 24:50; Acts 1:9-12

On the Mount of Olives, the Risen Christ was taken up into heaven before the very eyes of the disciples; they were looking intently up into the sky as he was going.

### 7.9.2. Mount of Ascension

The Mount of Olives got its name from the olive trees which grew on its slope. It is situated to the East of Jerusalem. The triumphal entry of Jesus into the city began on this mount (Mt 21:1ff; Mk11:1ff; Lk 19:28ff). He left the world from Mount of Olives, and ascended to his Father. The disciples were enchanted by this sight, and continued to look into the heaven. The angels filled them with trust saying that the ascended Lord will come back to them in glory to take them up to heaven. At this the disciples returned with joy and spent the days in prayer under the leadership of Mother Mary in expectation of the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14).

For KEC and his companions, *Bes Rauma* was the symbol of Mount of Olives. They lived there fixing their eyes on heaven, making their own the words of Rev 22:20: "Come, Lord Jesus (*Mārān 'āttā*)" – the incessant *mantra* of the Early Church. Although they lived in the world, they did not belong to the world (Heb 11:8-10). Like Abraham, the father of the salvation history, they rejoiced at the thought of seeing Christ's day; they saw it and were glad (Jn 8:56). Mary, the Mother of the Church was their leader, guide, protector, councillor and mediator. The inmates converted *Bes Rauma* into the upper room of Zion (Acts 1:13) from where hymns of praise, honour and thanksgiving were continuously ascending to heaven. KEC and the confreres practised the Eastern worshipping act of prostration, avowing that they were mere dust and ashes (Job 42:6). Their exemplarily life attracted many secular priests and seminarians to embrace this life of contemplation in action. Also the faithful got inspiration to make their home a place of ascension

## THE FIRST INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION Its Name and Affiliation to OCD

Thomas Mampra CMI

**Abstract:** Thomas Mampra, in this entry, make a study on the name and the circumstances that led to the affiliation of the Indian Carmelite congregation, the first indigenous religious congregation for men in India, founded by Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukkara and Kuriakose Elias Chavara, to OCD as its Third Order, in the light of a few documents published recently. He begins with excurses through the letters and writings of Chavara to see what he says regarding the name of the congregation. Having explored the primary sources, he turns to the secondary sources and scans through the pages of the early historians and their writings on the issue. To explore further, the author subjects the letters sent to Rome by the members of the congregation protesting certain moves of the ecclesiastical authorities and the reply they received. He goes on to speak about the fact and process of affiliation into the Carmelite Order and the consequences of the affiliation. He concludes the study with a question regarding the say that the members of the congregation had in this matter.

**Keywords:** Congregation, religious, Discalced, Carmelite Order, Chavara, chronicles, biography, Palackal, monastery, Mannanam, Baccinelli, Constitutions, charism, scapular, Third Order, Porukara, community, Stabilini, Malabar, Mellano, affiliation, Tertiaries, Prior, Peschetto, Martini, Beccaro, Propaganda Fide, Vicariates.

The name of the first indigenous religious congregation for men in India, which later came to be known as CMI congregation, had some evolution in the past. The congregation was once affiliated or aggregated to the Discalced Carmelite Order. This article is an attempt to get some clarification on the matter, especially on the affiliation to the OCD as its Third Order, in the light of some recently published documents.

### 1. Chavara on the Name of the Congregation

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, one of the founders of the CMI congregation, mentions the name of the Congregation on three occasions in his chronicles. Chronologically he mentions it first in the context of the first religious profession he and his companions made on 8 December 1855 at Mannanam.<sup>1</sup> Speaking of the constitutions given to the Congregation, he mentions its title as the *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Most Immaculate Mother of Carmel*. The religious habit consisted of the usual white cassock, a leather girdle and a small scapular worn inside the cassock.<sup>2</sup> The second instance is when Chavara speaks of the name of the Congregation in the introduction of the biography of his beloved Malpan Thomas Palackal, which he began to write in 1864 after reaching Koonammavu monastery in the same year. There, Chavara gives the name of the Congregation as the 'Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel' which is the Third Order of Carmelites Discalced whom on 8 December 1855... etc.<sup>3</sup> The third instance where Chavara mentions the name of the Congregation is when he gave the text of the Vicar Apostolic Msgr. Baccinelli's letter of 27 February 1861, announcing the aggregation of the congregation to the Carmelite Discalced Order. In that letter Baccinelli says that the congregation named the 'Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel' which he founded in Malabar... etc.<sup>4</sup>

Looking at the text of these three instances, one can easily make the following observations:

- a. The first text speaks of the name given to the newly approved and ecclesiastically established religious congregation at Mannanam on December 8, 1855. The second text introduces it in 1864, three or four years after the affiliation of the already established congregation. Here Chavara juxtaposes the names of the Congregation before and after its affiliation to the Discalced Carmelite Order, maybe for clarity's sake. Although he was going to write the biography of the first among the founders of the religious community, he did not speak of the name of the community in 1841, probably because at that time there were only very few members belonging to it and hence no particular name was given to it. The third instance is a reproduction of the letter of

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<sup>1</sup>*Complete Works of Chavara* (CWC) I (2000), 75.

<sup>2</sup>CWC I, 75.

<sup>3</sup>CWC I (2000), 56.

<sup>4</sup>CWC I (2000), 168-170.

Baccinelli informing that the Congregation, which he claimed he had established in Malabar and its various houses and members were accepted and aggregated to the Carmelite Discalced Order as its Third Order etc. Baccinelli mentions only the name of the Congregation at the time of its official approval and establishment in 1855.

- b. There is no compelling reason why Baccinelli should give the community the name 'Servants of Mary Immaculate' either before its formal approval as a religious congregation or after that. On the other hand the fact that they were formally approved and accepted under the Rule and Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Order with certain changes according to the climate and culture,<sup>5</sup> had a strong claim for considering it as a congregation with the Carmelite charism.
- c. In his letter to the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelite Order in September 1855, Baccinelli even mentioned that with their prayerful/contemplative life on the one hand and their apostolic life on the other, the community of the 'Cathanars' were leading a life similar to that of their own OCD missionaries.<sup>6</sup> Again, the fact that as part of their religious habit he gave them a small scapular to be worn inside the cassock was probably indicative of the charism of the congregation, namely Carmelite charism. It may also have been one of the early steps taken by Baccinelli to establish a juridical relationship between the Discalced Carmelite Order and the indigenous Carmelite Congregation by accepting and aggregating the congregation as its Third Order. From all these facts it is reasonable to think that Baccinelli added that part of the

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<sup>5</sup>*I cassanari di un convento o Rritiro esistente gia da molti anni in questo vicariato, avendomi domandato di dargli una regola et forma di religiosa congregazione, coll'aiuto del P. Marcellino, che si e reso ben capace in questa lingua malabarica, vado adattando al detto oggetto la nostra regola dataci del Patriarcha S. Alberto, e la nostre Costituzione, datraendo, locali e lo scopo dell'istituto richiedono, e non solo per loro spirituale vantaggio, ma anche di queste cristiani ossia battezzati, e desidero mandare ad effetto questa Istruzione nel giorno 8 dicembre, in cui faranno i voti semplici e si dare principio alla Regolare osservanza.* See Sunny Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary* (2005), 190, 113.

<sup>6</sup>In his report on the Vicariate, Mgr Baccinelli wrote about the Congregation: "Hanno le medesima nostra regola nelle Costituzione pero vi ho fatto qualche variazione onde adattarla al di loro principale scopo, che il medesimo di quello dei Missionari ed alle circostanza, ben diverse dalla nostra di questa regione." Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 190, 113.

name namely 'Mother of Carmel' to the already existing name of the rather sizeable number of the members of the community called 'Servants of Mary Immaculate', though we do not have so far any documentary evidence to support it. However, there is a letter of Fr Marceline OCD dated 14 August 1857 to Chavara addressing him as Rev. Fr Kuriakose Chavara, Servant of Mary Immaculate, Prior of Mannanam Monastery.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Historians about the Name

The chronicles of Chavara and the history of the congregation written by Fr Bernard of St Thomas<sup>8</sup> and Fr Valerian<sup>9</sup> speak of some evolution in the name of our congregation. Malpan Thomas Palackal had a special devotion to St Dominic, the founder of the Order of Preachers and he had taken St Dominic as the patron of the Malpanate at Pallipuram.<sup>10</sup> He and his friend Fr Thomas Porukara, the pioneers of the congregation, were convinced of the great need of preaching the gospel to the Catholic community of Malabar for making it a vibrant Christian community. That may have been the important reason why the patronage of St Dominic was accepted. Palackal had also thought of giving shape to the proposed religious congregation according to the ideals of the Dominican Order.<sup>11</sup> At the time of laying the foundation stone for the first religious house and the church at Mannanam on 11 May 1831, Palackal suggested St Dominic as patron though finally all agreed on the name of St Joseph as the patron as suggested by Fr Thomas Porukara.<sup>12</sup> Though a seminary started functioning at Mannanam from 1833, no particular name seems to have been given to it, although it is mentioned that after the demise of Malpan Palackal the seminarians from Pallipuram used to bring the statue of St Dominic to Mannanam for the feast there and had special prayers in his honour. Community life started at Mannanam on 18 June 1840, but no name seems to have been given to the community. Even at the time of the death of Malpan Porukara on 8 January, 1846, the community did not seem to have taken any particular name.

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<sup>7</sup>*Positio*, Vatican: 1977, 179.

<sup>8</sup>Bernard of St Thomas, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades* (Mal.), 1908.

<sup>9</sup>Valerian, *Most Rev Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: 1939.

<sup>10</sup>CWC I, 13, 24.

<sup>11</sup>*Letters*, CWC IV, 2011, 99.

<sup>12</sup>CWC I, 24; Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 14.

According to Fr Bernard, the small community at Mannanam used to live a pious and devout life according to what they had known about religious life. They used to have meditation, they prayed the canonical prayers, offered the Holy Mass, prayed the fifteen decades of the rosary and several other prayers, preached homilies on Sundays in the parishes, hear confessions etc., and thus did their best to make the Christian community vibrant<sup>13</sup> and the result was noticed by the Vicar Apostolic, priests and people alike. They used to follow some instructions, which Vicar Apostolic Maurelius Stabilini had given to them in the beginning, noted Fr Bernard.<sup>14</sup> We come across a document reportedly given by Stabilini from Kudamaloor on the day after laying the foundation stone for the first religious house and church at Mannanam, as some guidelines for the observance of the future community there. It consisted of ten rules. The Vicar Apostolic addressed them saying that the following rules were given by Bishop Maurelius to all the Reverend Fathers for leading a devout life:

1. Words fly but actions remain.
2. Make confession often with contrition to devout confessors.
3. Spend half an hour daily in meditation and read some spiritual books at least for half an hour.
4. Celebrate the Holy Mass with adequate preparation and spend some time in thanksgiving after the Mass.
5. Pray the canonical prayers with devotion.
6. Keep moderation in eating and drinking; speak with lay people rarely and in a moderate voice.
7. Have the examination of conscience every day in the evening.
8. Vicars shall deal with lay people entrusted to their care with humility, consideration, love and truthfully.
9. At the confessional, be a father, a judge, a doctor and a teacher.
10. Visit the sick often and console them and as the vicars, take special care that you do everything necessary at the time of death, in order to lead them to a happy death. St Paul metes out excommunication to all those who not love Jesus Christ.

Fr Maurelius  
E. P. Dole<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 36-40.

<sup>14</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 36-37.

<sup>15</sup>J. T. Medayil, *Karmala Kusumam*, August 2016, 14-18.

Even in 1850, when Msgr Ludovic, the Vicar Apostolic visited the Mannanam community, he made no mention of the name of the community.

By 1855, when Bishop Bernardine Baccinelli decided to approve the community as a formal religious congregation by giving it the Rule and Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Order with some changes,<sup>16</sup> the community had a sizeable number of priests and seminarians in its ranks.<sup>17</sup> Was the community known by any name at that time is a pertinent question. We have not come across any document of that time bearing the name of the community. Fr Bernard notes that the name given to the community at that time was 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'.<sup>18</sup> That name was later changed to Third Order of Carmelites Discalced at the time of the congregation's affiliation to the Carmelite Order.<sup>19</sup> In his letter to Chavara and the Superiors of the various houses announcing the fact of the affiliation of the Congregation on February 27, 1861, Baccinelli says that the religious community, which he established in Malabar by the name 'Servants of Mary Immaculate of the Mother of Carmel' was aggregated to the Carmelite Order as its Third Order.<sup>20</sup> It is quite possible that he added 'of the Mother of Carmel' to the then existing name 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'. Since Baccinelli had given them the Rule and Constitutions of the Carmelite Order with some changes he considered it as a congregation with Carmelite charism, and in order to indicate this charism, he might have added 'of the Mother of Carmel' to the existing name 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'.

### 3. Complaints to Rome

After the affiliation of the congregation to the Carmelite Order, when Archbishop Mellano changed the constitutions of the congregation drastically, the members protested bitterly against the change and sent several letters to the Propaganda voicing their complaints.<sup>21</sup> In one of

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<sup>16</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 40; see also CWC I, 75; also above footnote 5; M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2008, 103.

<sup>17</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 42-43.

<sup>18</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 45.

<sup>19</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 45-46.

<sup>20</sup>CWC I, 169. The formula of Profession of Chavara and formula of patent given to members had this name; *Positio*, 118, 119, 180-181, etc.

<sup>21</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 103-106.

those letters they mention, on the basis of the statement of four of the eleven fathers who had made their first profession on 8 December, 1855 and who were still alive, that the original name of the indigenous community at Mannanam was 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'. On the occasion of the first religious profession under the Rule and Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Order, which Baccinelli gave them, the addition 'of the Mother of Carmel' was made. Later, in 1861, at the time of the aggregation of the congregation to the Carmelite Order, the name was totally changed to 'Third Order of Carmelites Discalced', leaving out the original 'Servants of Mary Immaculate' completely.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. Decision from Rome

When Rome approved the constitutions of the congregation in 1893 and finally confirmed it in 1903, the name referred to officially was the 'Third Order of Carmelites Discalced'.<sup>23</sup> That letter of the members of the congregation to Rome in 1877 seems to be the only document referring to the original name of the community at Mannanam as 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'. Fr Bernard notes that this name was chosen because it was around that time that the Immaculate Conception of Mary was defined as an article of faith.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Fr Mathias Mundadan writes: "The pioneers of the Congregation, learning about the miracles worked and the conversion of sinners effected through the merits of the Sacred Heart of B.M. Virgin Immaculate, took this name, viz., 'Servants of Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate'."<sup>25</sup> Yet the congregation continued to be popularly known as 'Third Order of Carmelites Discalced' (TOCD) until 1958. When the renewed Constitutions was approved by Rome in 1958, the name of the congregation was changed to 'Carmelites of Mary Immaculate'.<sup>26</sup> That name is retained in the present constitutions approved by Rome in 1983.

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<sup>22</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 45-46.

<sup>23</sup>The official name of the Congregation became 'Community of the Third Order of Carmelites Discalced of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel existing in Malabar' (Sodalitas Fratrum Excalceatorum Tertiae Ordinis Beatae Virginis Mariae Immaculate de Monte Carmelo in Malabar existens); Carmelite Congregation of Malabar 1831-1931, Trichinapoly (1932), 102.

<sup>24</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 45.

<sup>25</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 105.

<sup>26</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 106.

### 5. The Fact of Affiliation

Historians of the CMI Congregation like Fr Bernard of St Thomas, the author of *The Syrian Carmelite Congregation of Malabar*,<sup>27</sup> Fr Valerian, the biographer of St Chavara,<sup>28</sup> and others have noted that Msgr Bernardine Baccinelli had sent a letter to the superiors of the then existing monasteries of the Congregation about its affiliation to the Discalced Carmelite Order. The letter was written from the Church of Amballoor on 27 February 1861. In the letter he wrote that he had received a decree saying that on 1 October 1860, the General Definitory of the Order presided over by the Superior General had accepted the Congregation of the Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel, which he had founded in Malabar, as Tertiaries (Third Order) of the Discalced Carmelite Order.

Consequently, they would receive a share in the indulgences and other spiritual benefits which accrued to the Order. Chavara sent a letter to the Superior General of the Order as suggested by Baccinelli thanking him for the benevolence.<sup>29</sup> We are also informed that already towards the end of March 1860, the missionary Fr Marcelline had gone to Mannanam and made a canonical visitation of the community in the name of the Vicar Apostolic. There he told that the Congregation was aggregated to the Carmelite Order and was accepted as its Third Order, and it was in that connection that he was conducting the visitation. He made a similar visitation to the monastery at Koonammavu also.<sup>30</sup> Fr Bernard mentions that already on 25 December 1859, the members of the community were asked by Msgr Bernardine, the Vicar Apostolic to wear a long scapular above the cassock as part of their religious habit. The Vicar Apostolic himself got the scapulars stitched and sent them to the monasteries.<sup>31</sup> In 1861, the name of the Congregation was changed from the 'Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel' to 'Third Order of Carmelites Discalced'. Together with that, Fr Bernard notes that certain changes were made in the existing constitutions. However, no mention is made

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<sup>27</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 45-46.

<sup>28</sup>Valerian, *Most Rev Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 109.

<sup>29</sup>Maniakkunnel, (2005), 156-57; Bernard *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 45-46; see also *Positio* (1977), 176-179.

<sup>30</sup>Chronicles, CWC I (2000), 88; see also Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 70.

<sup>31</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 68-69.

of the kind of changes made.<sup>32</sup> These changes did not create any serious reaction among the members because of the excellent relationship Msgr Baccinelli had with Chavara and other members who, in deference to Chavara the common Prior, complied.<sup>33</sup>

As far as we know, the only document given to the Congregation with regard to this radical change is the letter of Baccinelli on 27 February 1861.<sup>34</sup> Although the information does not have much relevance now, it may be of some interest to know how those things happened at the time. Several doctoral dissertations have been presented and defended in various ecclesiastical universities on subjects somehow connected to the period and rule of Msgr Baccinelli in which matters related to this topic are also discussed. Some of those dissertations were not published and some are published. In a recently published one by Fr Sunny Maniakkunnel OCD<sup>35</sup> a few documents concerning the affiliation of the Congregation to the Carmelite Order are presented. From Fr Marcelline's remarks in March 1860 at Mannanam, we come to know that the matter was decided already sometime in 1859, though the community received the official communication from the Vicar Apostolic only in 1861 but no copy of the text of the decision was made available. Neither Fr Marcelline nor the Vicar Apostolic in their communications provided the how and why and the circumstances related to that decision.

Maniakkunnel writes that the members of the religious group constantly requested Msgr Stabilini, the Vicar Apostolic and his successors down to Msgr Martini "to aggregate this community to the Carmelite Order, and to give them rule and constitutions."<sup>36</sup> Though

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<sup>32</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 45-46.

<sup>33</sup>Valerian, *Most Rev Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 109.

<sup>34</sup>*Positio*, 185.

<sup>35</sup>Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary: A Historical Study of the Life and Activities of Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD in Malabar/Kerala 1860-1877*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005.

<sup>36</sup>Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 153. Here Maniakkunnel seems to have confused between Ecclesiastical approval and affiliation to OCD. The concerned sentence in the book of Fr. Valerian, *Most Rev Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, as mentioned by Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 154, footnote 16 reads: "In the wake of the arrival of the Portuguese traders there came to Kerala, several religious orders such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites. The founding fathers became familiar with some of these. They found out that these religious had been approved by the Holy See either as Pontifical or exempt. Naturally Fr. Chavara desired to obtain for his

the second part of the sentence is correct, the first part namely requesting "to aggregate this community to the Carmelite Order" looks unrealistic. If Msgr Stabilini permitted the fathers to start a religious house only after repeated requests and then only reluctantly,<sup>37</sup> it is unlikely that the fathers again requested him for aggregation to OCD during the barely six months he continued to be the Vicar Apostolic and that too under disturbing circumstances. His successor Msgr Francis Xavier Peschetto is known to have been at first unfavourable and uncommitted though later he became friendly with the community. However, at the time, the community was so small that it is far from probable that the fathers asked for aggregation to the Carmelite Order. Mgr Ludovic Martini who succeeded him expressed his willingness to consider the approval of the community towards the end of 1850, but before taking any positive step in the matter, he had to leave Malabar early 1853.<sup>38</sup> There is no hint that the fathers requested him for aggregation either.

Msgr Bernardine Baccinelli then became first the Administrator of Verapoly and then the Vicar Apostolic. According to Fr Bernard, he was observing the life and activities of the community of priests at Mannanam, and after putting them to rather rigorous test for these years, decided to give them the rule and Constitutions of the Carmelite Order with some changes.<sup>39</sup> If so, the members of the fledgling congregation requesting for aggregation to OCD before 1855 also looks unlikely. The only document, we know of, speaking about the members requesting for aggregation to the Carmelite Order is a report submitted by the missionary Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD to his Superior General in 1870.<sup>40</sup> But it is to be remembered that Leopold came to Malabar only in 1859 as a sub-deacon and was ordained a priest in 1860. Hence, his information on this event which took place several years before his arrival in Malabar needs to be taken only with a pinch of salt. If the General Definitory discussed the question of aggregating the secular order of Oriental rite to the Carmelite Order in May 1853, it

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Congregation such an approbation from Rome. With this purpose he met the successors of Msgr Stabilini one after the other..." (Valerian, *Most Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 8.)

<sup>37</sup>Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 150.

<sup>38</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 38.

<sup>39</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 36, 40; Valerian, *Most Rev Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 101-102.

<sup>40</sup>*Positio* (1977), 190.

must have been based on reports or even requests of some Carmelite missionaries, and not from the community at Mannanam.<sup>41</sup>

## 6. Process of Affiliation

It is known that Baccinelli had written to the Propaganda Fide and the Superior General of the Carmelite Order in Rome about a group of secular priests living in a monastery a form of religious life, who requested him to give them a rule and form of religious life. He also mentioned his intention to give them the Rule and the Constitutions of the Carmelite Order with some changes, and to permit them to make their first profession on 8 December. He also requested the approval and blessing for that venture.<sup>42</sup> The Propaganda Fide gave a gracious response on 12 December 1855.<sup>43</sup> We do not know if that was the first letter of Baccinelli to the Superior General on this matter. However, this letter proves that at least from the end of 1855, the Superior General and possibly others came to know that an independent and indigenous community named after the Immaculate Mother of Carmel had come to being in Malabar. The letter informed the Superior General that the Vicar Apostolic was giving them the Primitive Rule and Constitutions of the Carmelite Order with some changes in the Constitutions, suitable to the clime and culture. He also wrote that with those changes made in the constitutions, the members of the new Congregation would be similar to their missionaries who were following the Constitutions with appropriate changes.<sup>44</sup> The new Congregation came into being on 8 December 1855, with the profession of the simple vows of Chavara and ten of his companions. Chavara was made the Prior of the religious community. The Rule and Constitutions of the Carmelite Order given to them and their name with the addition of the 'Mother of Carmel' to their possibly original name 'Servants of Mary Immaculate' were indicative of its Carmelite spirit.<sup>45</sup> The life of prayer (contemplation) and preaching (homilies,

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<sup>41</sup>The Congregation has clarified that "the affiliation was not asked by the fathers of the Congregation." The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar (1932), 45.

<sup>42</sup>Gregory Neerakal, *A Concise History of the CMI Congregation* (Mal.), 1970, 14-15; see also Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 190, footnote 113.

<sup>43</sup>Neerakal, *A Concise History*, 15-16.

<sup>44</sup>Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 190.

<sup>45</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 45; see also Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 190.

retreats and priestly ministry)<sup>46</sup> must have looked fairly similar to the life of the Carmelite missionaries. And the Vicar Apostolic was familiar with the Rule and Constitutions of the Carmelite Order, and so he gave the new congregation the same Rule and the Constitutions with appropriate changes and not the constitutions of the Carmelite Tertiaries.<sup>47</sup>

The Rule and Constitutions given to them do not seem to have made any significant change in the spirit and the lifestyle of the community. For one thing the devotion to the Mother of Carmel and the scapular was known and practised in Malabar at least from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>48</sup> It is known that Malpan Palackal himself, though an ardent devotee of St Dominic, established confraternities of the Mother of Carmel and the scapular and started celebrating the feast of St Teresa of Avila, the famous reformer of Carmel in parishes like Pallipuram and Kalloorkad (Champakulam).<sup>49</sup> Malpan Porukara was devoted to St Joseph. He had started practising the devotion in the seminary at Verapoly, which was managed by the Carmelite Fathers.<sup>50</sup> That devotion was taken up by the Carmelites following St Teresa of Avila who was devoted to St Joseph in a special way. Since devotion to the Mother of Carmel was known and practised in Malabar and since it was also practised by the two elder founding fathers of the Congregation, the community may not have had much difficulty in accepting the new name given to it, although the community was raised in the beginning, as Chavara himself testified, in the Dominican spirit. It may not be far from the truth that it was this apparent tilt from the Dominican to the Carmelite spirit which Chavara considered as effected not by any human calculation but by divine Providence and by Our Lady's special concern for us, noticing our weakness.<sup>51</sup>

Both Carmelites and Dominicans are mendicant orders formally founded in the Middle Ages. Although both of these orders had contemplation and preaching in their charism, the Carmelites emphasized contemplation in their way of life whereas the Dominicans put greater emphasis on preaching what was

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<sup>46</sup>Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 37.

<sup>47</sup>Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 190, footnote 113.

<sup>48</sup>Valerian, *Most Rev Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 8.

<sup>49</sup>*Chronicles*, CWC I (2000), 73; Valerian, *Most Rev Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 43.

<sup>50</sup>Porukara Kuriakose, *Biography of Thomas Porukara: Founding Fathers (Mal.)*, (1905), 21.

<sup>51</sup>Letters CWC IV, 99.

contemplated. That is clear from their motto 'to preach what has been contemplated' (*contemplata praedicare*). Both the Dominicans and the Carmelites were devoted to Our Lady also. Malpans Palackal and Porukara gave an emphasis to preaching because they had found it absolutely necessary to make the Church in Malabar a vibrant Christian community. At the same time, we know that both of them were really men of prayer and penance, spending long hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>52</sup> The community at Mannanam also used to spend long time in prayer, though they had also taken up various forms of priestly ministry like preaching homilies and retreats in the parishes.<sup>53</sup> That may be the reason why Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli found their life not very different from the way of life of the Carmelite Missionaries and gave them their Rule and Constitutions with some changes.<sup>54</sup> So at the time, there was not much difference externally or internally as the new Congregation was concerned except the addition of 'Mother of Carmel' to their name. The leather girdle given to them was a sign and symbol of their religious life and the small scapular was not an innovation in Malabar, though it was also a symbol of their Carmelite identity.

### 7. Carmelite Order and the Congregation

The net result of Baccinelli permitting the community of Mannanam to make their religious profession of simple vows under the Rule and slightly modified Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Order was the simultaneous presence of the members of the Carmelite Order and those of the new Carmelite Congregation in Malabar, but without any juridical relationship with the Carmelite Order. That may have given opportunities for discussion at various levels between the Vicar Apostolic and the higher superiors of the Order in Rome or between the Carmelite missionaries in Malabar and their higher superiors in Rome. Occasional reports on the Malabar mission also might have mentioned those facts along with explanations.<sup>55</sup> In his book on the life and activities of Fr Leopold Beccaro, OCD, the missionary,

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<sup>52</sup>Chronicles, CWC I, pp. 63-66; Porukara Kuriakose, *Founding Fathers*, 30; Valerian, *Most Rev Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>53</sup>Chronicles, CWC I, 32-33; Bernard, *CMI Congregation in Early Decades*, 39-40.

<sup>54</sup>For example, Baccinelli's Circular Letter to the Provincials, Priors and Religious of the Order dated June 29, 1860; Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 185-86, footnote 101.

<sup>55</sup>Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 153.

Maniakkunnel has brought to light several such documents which are published for the first time. Parts of some letters of Msgr Baccinelli to the superiors of the Order, certain decisions related to the 'aggregation' of the new religious Congregation in Malabar to the Discalced Carmelite Order as its Third Order etc. are presented in the book. In a decision made by the General Chapter of the Order in relation to the appointment of a Vicar Provincial for the Vicariates Apostolic in India on 20 May 1859 and approved by the Propaganda Fide on 11 June 1859, we read: "The three Apostolic Vicariates together will have one regular superior, who has the authority and the title of the Vicar Provincial... His jurisdiction shall extend to all the missionaries of the three Vicariates, and also to all the residences, and to the monasteries of the Tertiaries, both founded and to be founded, with regard to the general discipline, and to his authority shall be submitted all the missionaries and the Tertiaries."<sup>56</sup>

From the text it is abundantly clear that the decision pertains to the situation in the Malabar Vicariate where there existed both the Carmelite missionaries and the Tertiaries and their monasteries. There is no mention here who the Tertiaries were, or how those other than the missionaries became 'Tertiaries'. However, in order to bring the Tertiaries and their monasteries already founded and to be founded under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Provincial, a new post created.<sup>57</sup> There is also an indirect acknowledgment of the presence of the Tertiaries and their monasteries already existing in Malabar. Further ruling and specifics on the Tertiaries seem to have been left to the discussion and decision of the General Definitory of the Order.

### **8. Bishop Baccinelli's Request for Affiliation**

We learn that Msgr Baccinelli had 'formally requested' the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites in Rome to incorporate the new religious congregation in Malabar into the Carmelite Order as Tertiaries and to give them all the privileges and indulgences of the Carmelite Order.<sup>58</sup> The text of that formal request remains unpublished. In the light of the decision of the General Chapter of the

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<sup>56</sup>Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 194.

<sup>57</sup>Even though European Discalced Carmelite Missionaries were engaged in mission work in the Vicariates Apostolic for more than a century, it was for the first time that the post of the Vicar Provincial was created.

<sup>58</sup>Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 156. AGOCD, Plut. 35 E-Letter of Mgr Baccinelli to the Superior General OCD, dated July 20, 1860.

Order on 20 May 1859, and the formal request of Baccinelli on 20 July 1860, the General Definitory made the following decision on 1 October 1860: "The Definitory General approved the establishment of such monasteries in India to which can be admitted those from the secular indigenous clergy who desire the habit of the Order under the title of the Tertiaries, provided they in everything perfectly observe the rules of our Tertiaries, and in everything are subject to the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Vicar ad instar (just as) the missionaries, and also of the Vicar Provincial and Preposit General."<sup>59</sup>

The text seems to approve the establishment of monasteries already founded in Malabar or to be founded in future, where members from the indigenous secular clergy could be members. It adds three important 'provisos' or conditions namely: i) who desire the habit of the Order under the title of the Tertiaries, ii) in everything perfectly observe the rules of our Tertiaries, and iii) in everything are subject to the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Vicar, the Vicar General and Preposit General just as the missionaries. As far as we know, the text of none of those decisions was handed over to the superiors or members of the new Congregation. Without publishing the text of those decisions nor giving them a choice, Msgr Baccinelli declared the aggregation of the Congregation as Tertiaries of the Carmelite Order as an established fact.<sup>60</sup> Similar to his claim that *he* founded the Congregation of the Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel, he also claimed that the new Congregation was accepted and aggregated to the Carmelite Order as its Tertiaries. Though well-intentioned, the step was flawed to say the least. Unless otherwise proved, it may not be wrong to say that the aggregation of the Carmelite Congregation to the OCD as its Third Order was without the knowledge and consent of Chavara and other members of the new Congregation. We have no information of them receiving the Rules and regulations of the Tertiaries at any time. If Msgr Stabilini had wished to see the Mannanam community to grow as a Congregation of the sons of St Teresa of Avila,<sup>61</sup> Msgr Baccinelli

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<sup>59</sup>Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 135. AGOCD, Acta Definitori Generalis, 1835-63, 213.

<sup>60</sup>For the full text of the letter of Baccinelli, see *Chronicles*, CWC I, 168-169.

<sup>61</sup>Probably from the beginning of the community, the Carmelite Vicars Apostolic had hoped or desired that in future it will become a Carmelite Congregation of St Teresa of Avila. In the report of Fr Jerome Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Superior General, OCD, about Tertiaries dated 18<sup>th</sup> March 1884, he wrote: "Stabilini contribui con 200 rupie del proprio alle

fulfilled that by giving them the Rule and Constitutions of the Carmelite Order and later aggregating it to the Order as its Third Order, without their knowledge or consent.

### 9. Consequences

A crucial question still remains unanswered, namely, whether St Chavara and the other members of the Congregation were made aware of the important juridical consequences of the aggregation that they had to sacrifice the internal autonomy of the Congregation and accept the authority of the Vicar Provincial and his Delegate and ultimately of the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelite Order?<sup>62</sup> Were they aware of the fact that from then on they were reduced to mere spectators to both the helpful and hurtful rulings and actions of the new superiors without any say in the matter? From history we know that there were no serious problems as long as Msgr Bernardine Baccinelli and Chavara were still alive and Fr Leopold Beccaro was the Delegate of the Vicar Provincial. Though some changes were introduced by Fr Leopold, the Delegate into the Constitutions given by Baccinelli in 1855, it was known that it was in consultation with Msgr Baccinelli that he introduced them and so there was no much resistance from the part of the members of the Congregation. However, when Msgr. Leonard Mellano, Baccinelli's successor, started to make drastic changes in the Constitutions indiscriminately<sup>63</sup> with suppressive measures against some members reducing the other members to mere spectators and victims, the situation was moving to a point of no return.

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fondazione di quell Retiro, sperando per avventura che avesse a divenire un giorno un regolare convento di religiosi di S. Teresa." ACO Ponzona Maggio 1884, sommario 2. (Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 151. footnote 9). If that was the case, Msgr Baccinelli became the architect to make that dream a reality.

<sup>62</sup>In the letter of Baccinelli dated 27 February 1861 there was no mention of such matters which carried important consequences.

<sup>63</sup>Letters sent to Rome protesting against the changes made by Mellano, *Positio*, 178, footnote 28.

## BOOK REVIEW

Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the St Thomas in 1867: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?* Dharmaram Publications, Dharmaram College, Bengaluru 560029, ISBN: 978-93-84964-12-2; Pages: 198; Price: Rs. 250; USD 15.

Msgr. Paul Pallath, the author of this book, is at present a Relator of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, an Associate Professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, a Consulter at the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and a Commissioner at the Tribunal of the Roman Rota. To his credit there are 21 books and many scholarly articles. Although a trained canonist, through his rigorous research and scientific study of the history of the St Thomas Christians, the author has shed new lights into the history, liturgy and spiritual heritage of the St Thomas Christians of India. Many of his writings are the results of painstaking archival researches which give a unique stamp to his books.

In the present work under review, the author presents 13 archival documents in their original languages and in the English translation. These documents highlight the ecclesiastical situation of the St Thomas Christians, (at present they are known as the Syro-Malabarians) in the Vicariate of Verapoly (Varapuzha) in 1867, the historical context of the appointment of Kuriakose Elias Chavara as Vicar General, the reasons why he was not consecrated bishop of the Catholic St Thomas Christians and why the Office of the Vicar General for the St Thomas Christians became extinct with his death. The book shed light also on the liturgical, spiritual and devotional life of the St Thomas Christians in the Vicariate during that period.

The book has two parts with a general introduction and a general conclusion. The general introduction narrates the historical and ecclesiastical context of the St Thomas Christians and the start of the Roccas schism. To facilitate the easy reading of the book the author also explains the methodology he follows in the book. The first part presents the English translation of 13 documents, while the second part is dedicated to the original texts. For an easy and continuous reading of the text and to provide a logical coherence and sequence, the first part is divided into three sections, without interrupting,

however, the continuous numbering of documents, which are inserted in a chronological order.

Each section has a historical introduction which is the immediate historical context and that facilitates the better comprehension and appraisal of the documents. Further, each document is preceded by a brief introduction which elucidates the content and indication of the source for the easy grasping of the exact citation. Original footnotes, added footnotes and explanations make the book more readable. The first part ends with a general conclusion. The letter of Kuriakose Elias Chavara to Pope Pius IX and his reply, letter regarding the conversion of Antony Thondanatt and letter of the Prefect of Propaganda Fide seeking the opinion of Vicar Apostolic Bernardino on the Episcopal consecration of Kuriakose Elias Chavara (documents 3-6) also form part of the first section. The second part the documents are reproduced in the original language with an English title.

In the general conclusion, the author makes some pertinent observations regarding the change of attitude of the missionaries. In the documents 1 and 2, the missionaries speak about Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the context of making him the Vicar General of the St Thomas Christians. The Vicar Apostolic was very generous in attributing all available qualities to Kuriakose Elias Chavara and appointed him as the Vicar General of the St Thomas Christians to fight against the Roccas schism. He even proposed to the Holy See to consider the consecration of Kuriakose Elias Chavara as coadjutor bishop of Varapuzha. Propaganda Fide was seriously considering the Episcopal consecration of Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

In the backdrop of the return of Roccas and the conversion of Thondanatt Antony, the missionaries changed their mind and wrote against the Episcopal consecration of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and even against the constitution of a permanent Vicar General for the Catholic Thomas Christians. The missionaries could not find anything serious reason against the extraordinarily virtuous and saintly life of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Therefore, they took recourse to superficial arguments such as insufficient knowledge of morals, inexperience in administration, advanced age, indisposition and extreme weakness of body. They also presumed the possibility of a schism and the impossibility to find a successor after the death of Kuriakose Elias Chavara (documents 7-9).

It is worth quoting the last part of the general conclusion: "If Kuriakose Elias Chavara had been consecrated bishop and the permanent office of a native vicar general with Episcopal character

had been established as desired by Propaganda Fide the schism of Chaldean Bishop John Mellus (1874-1882) and its consequences could have been avoided. History proves that the Western missionaries always strived their best, utilising the entire arsenal at their disposal, to jealously preserve the episcopacy and jurisdictional power for themselves and this was the main cause of troubles, division and schisms among the St. Thomas Christians in India, whose forefathers had embraced Christianity even before the Christianization of Europe" (page 120).

The documents, especially 1 to 9, speak the historical context and the judgement of the missionaries about the St Thomas Christians. The documents 10 to 13 are very informative and give a detailed description about the life and other details of the St Thomas Christians. Document 10 is the report of Vicar Apostolic Bernardino on the state of St Thomas Christians in the Vicariate of Verapoly in 1867 which is very informative.

The present work is the latest attempt of Msgr Paul Pallath to bring to light original documents related to the St Thomas Christians preserved in the Roman archives. The author is stationed in Rome and well-versed in ancient and modern languages and is committed to scientific research. The Indian Church is very much indebted to him for bringing out many scholarly books pertaining to the Indian Church. The present book is a must reading material for all who are interested in undertaking a serious study on St Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Historical truths may not be always pleasing to all and in the present work Msgr Paul Pallath has fulfilled the task of an accomplished historian.

**Francis Thonippara CMI**

**NATIONAL SEMINAR ON EVANGELIZATION**  
**The Golden Jubilee of CMI Presence in MP**  
**“Sharing the Message of Jesus Christ: Missiological**  
**Trajectories for India Today”**

**Poornodaya, Bhopal 27-29 November 2018**

Every human person has a right to receive the good news of salvation. Jesus offers his love and compassion to all the creation. The turbulent and desperate lives of the people are in need of this message. It is the privileged mandate of all the Christians to share this message of peace and joy of Jesus Christ. The Golden Jubilee of CMI Presence in MP is definitely a golden opportunity to enhance the evangelizing mission in MP. The primacy of evangelizing mission has to sink into our minds, hearts, thoughts, plans and actions. The National Seminar on Evangelization aims to capture the above objectives.

It was in 1968 that the CMIs reached Sagar in MP for the first time to take up mission there. Now after fifty years of engagement in the mission, they look back and thank the Lord for all that has been accomplished there. This occasion makes us review our response to the missionary mandate of the Lord in the changed political and social situation of the country. The call resounds in our ears and hearts motivating us to invite with urgency the entire humanity to his message of compassion, reconciliation and mercy. In this context we evaluate the impact of the mission in the lives of the people around us in order to enhance our efforts at spreading the Good News.

The following themes were taken up in the discussion:

1. Foundations of Evangelization
2. Historical Perspectives of Evangelization in MP
3. Praxis of Evangelization
4. Evangelization through Apostolates

Millions of people in India are waiting the Good News. Committed and convinced persons are called upon to be the witnesses of the Good News of love and compassion of Jesus through their life, activities and proclamation. May this seminar enthuse us to be full timers as the messengers of Jesus.

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