

Empowered Womanhood

Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Socio-Pastoral
Vision for Women and the Legacy of the
Congregation of the Mother of Carmel



Navya Maria CMC

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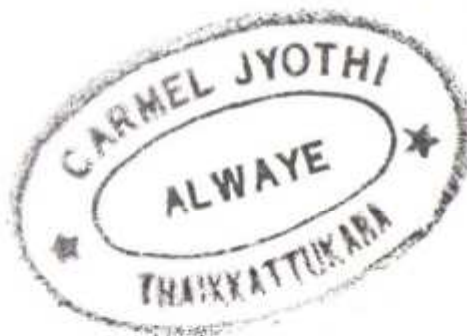
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*With Best Compliments and
thanks*

*So. Navya Maria cme
KLM*



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© Author

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GEORGE CARDINAL ALENCHERRY

Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

Prot. No. 423/2014

28 February 2014

Message

"We must tell you today how much the Church esteems you and loves you. You have generously left your homes and families to follow the Lord, to minister to His needs in the Schools, in little children, in the sick, the aged and the infirm, and to dedicate lives of prayer to Him and His Church. We thank you for all that you do for our blessed Saviour and for His Mystical Body. How great are your accomplishments, how high your merit!" These were the words of admiration that Pope Paul VI had for the empowered Indian religious women when he met them in the Cathedral of Bombay, in May 1966. The Church in India has gone through many measures for the empowerment of women in the Church and the society. Education is the best means for the empowerment of women.

The ancient Apostolic Church of St Thomas which had taken roots in India right in the 1st century AD, was happily blessed with the gift of a visionary in Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara after eighteen centuries of her existence in the land. Sr. Navya Maria CMC makes a thorough study of the momentous contributions made by Blessed Chavara in the 19th century towards the empowerment of women by means of the foundation of a religious congregation for women in 1866.

Rooted in the biblical traditions on women, the journey that the author makes through the history of the contemporary society of Kerala analysing the socio-religious and educational status of women in the 18th and 19th centuries makes an unsettling, at the same time, a stimulating reading. In the light of this journey, she makes an assessment of Blessed Chavara's contribution towards the empowerment of women in the ecclesial and social arenas of his time which had a constructive effect for the subsequent times. The author rightly underscores the realization of the socio-pastoral vision of Blessed Chavara through the ecclesial mission of Congregation of the Mother of Carmel, which he founded.

The women in today's society are endowed with power, dignity or honour and we do not speak of *empowering* women any longer as though they lack them. Instead, we need to speak about making them aware of what they are naturally gifted with and facilitating an ambience in which they can enjoy these gifts. The various strategies adopted by CMC to conscientize the women of the modern world are not only in conformity to the founder's vision and mission for a renewed church and society but also in keeping with the changing time. These efforts are both admirable and worth emulating.

In brief, what we find in the volume is the profound admiration that Sr. Navya Maria has for the illustrious person of Chavara and her passion for a better society in contemporary India where all God's children are equal in status. Further, it is an urgent appeal made to the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel, her own religious community, to make a renewed response to the dream of Chavara chalking out programmes to create a better world also for the less privileged.

I appreciate very much Sr. Navya Maria for the courage that she has exhibited in grappling with the socio-religious issues that we face in today's world. I pray God's blessings on the works of this sort that she is taking up for the good of the Church and the society.



George Cardinal Alencherry

George Cardinal Alencherry
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

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The Congregation of the Mother of Carmel feels proud to present *Empowered Womanhood: Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Socio-Pastoral Vision for Women and the Legacy of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel* to the Church and the society. My hearty congratulations to Sr. Navya Maria CMC whose relentless efforts have led to the realization of a dream! This book had its genesis as the author's Ph. D. thesis. This is a pioneering study in projecting the socio-pastoral vision of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara in empowering the women of the nineteenth century. Through this book Sr. Dr. Navya Maria emphasizes the role of Blessed Chavara in empowering women through the foundation of the Women TOCD in Koonammavu, with the help of Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD in 1866. It was one of the great contributions of Blessed Chavara to the mother Church in the 19th century. I am glad to note that it is an authentic work which has made use of a large number of archival materials and original manuscripts. Some of these documents make their first appearance here. It is a befitting tribute to the genius of Blessed Chavara who had envisioned an empowered society through empowered womanhood.

From its very inception, CMC has concentrated in rendering dedicated service for the uplift of women and children. And this work analyses and evaluates the frameworks through which the sacred mission is being carried out by the congregation while pinpointing the loopholes. The book reminds the congregation and thus the members to re-vitalize its call to become abode of *veda* and abode of virtue, the lofty visions of the congregation.

Apart from the theological concepts it is definitely built on solid historical and sociological foundations of the past century. It shows a ray of light to the women of our land and inspires them to go beyond the barriers. I recommend this book for a serious study for all the members of the congregation, the women especially in India and all those who are interested in women empowerment.

Sr. Sancta CMC
Superior General



APPRECIATION

Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Socio-Pastoral Vision for Women and the Legacy of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel written by Sr. Dr. Navya Maria is an honest attempt to trace the historical development of empowerment of women in Indian context. Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara is one of the towering personalities who led the Renaissance Movement in Kerala. It is the renaissance movement that enlightened the mindset of *Malayalees* and transformed them from the secluded collection of two legged beings to a harmonious society. Chavara started his mission as a social reformer by establishing a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846 to provide Sanskrit education to all the needy. Sanskrit at that time was not considered just a language but it was treated as the beginning and end of a passage that leads man to possess wisdom, wealth, power and fame. Therefore figuratively it was termed as God's own language and the learning as well as its transactions was exclusively limited to a gifted few who belonged to the first three *Varnas* of the four fold classification of Indian society. The celebrated *Varnas* who were competent to learn Sanskrit were Brahmin, *Kshatriya* and *Vysya*. The *Sudras* who constitute the large chunk of population was totally left out of the sphere of learning along with the *Panchamas*. Therefore the majority of population was totally kept out of learning of the God's own language. It is at this point of time that Blessed Chavara as a young *Sannyasin* showed the audacity to establish a Sanskrit *Pata sala* for all irrespective of caste, creed and community which was a revolutionary deed.

As a missionary led by proper vision his next attempt was to persuade the church **to establish schools along with every church** to provide modern education to one and all who deserve it. A proclamation to that effect was made in 1864 by the Catholic

Church and it was signed by Blessed Chavara as the Vicar General of the Catholic Church. No doubt historically speaking the date of that proclamation was the beginning of an era of formation of Civil Society in Kerala because it was through the schools established by the catholic Church that humans belonging to different religions and caste came and sat together in the class rooms and thus they could realize that there are many things in common among them. These true deeds of Chavara paved the way for the beginning of a new societal pattern breaking the conceptual prisons created by the customary practice that can claim a history of thousands of years. These two deeds could empower humans cutting across caste, creed and community. He was of the firm conviction that human empowerment can never be fulfilled without having proper spiritual training and practice, hence he instituted Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, an order of *Sannyasins* for men and Congregation of the Mother of Carmel an order of *sannyasins* for women. Both these orders of *sannyasins* are the contribution of a Christian trained in the Indian Context to world Christianity. In this sense these congregations are the embodiments of Christian spirituality in the Indian context.

He had clear percepts and concepts of empowerment of mankind. Since man cannot live by bread alone and since he needs the help of word that comes from the mouth of God, he was of the opinion that no person can be empowered without having spiritual empowerment. Spirituality for Blessed Chavara was nothing but the practice of the word of God on earth. Hence social, political, economic and cultural empowerment of humans can be attained only when they attain the capability to practice the spiritual empowerment. The most effective tool of spirituality is self regulation. Unregulated empowerment in any field is only an unnecessary calamity that should be avoided by the wise men on earth. Every type of empowerment must be regulated by a mechanism that is more powerful than the one to be regulated. Blessed Chavara could realize that spirituality is the most powerful mechanism in heaven and earth. Spirituality is powerful enough to regularise the other modes of empowerment therefore he was of the opinion that human empowerment through

spirituality alone can regulate social, political, and cultural empowerments.

This is the background in which the role of CMI and CMC institutions are to be evaluated. One of the cultural fabric of Indian society is its vibrant spiritual traditions that was capable even to regulate the mighty political and economic empowerment of great emperors who conquered the known territories of the world to enrich the treasury of their empire. The spiritual power on the contrary never accumulates power, wealth or position but it gives us everything for the attainment of the power to regulate oneself. The self regulated being is the powerful personality who is capable to regulate all other modes of empowerment. According to Indian tradition he who gives up everything to experience something by which one need not have to experience any other thing above or below of it is blessed person. A person who experiences such a thing is often called as a *sannyasin* in Indian tradition. A *sannyasin* is a fully satisfied being because he need not have to experience anything other than what he had already experienced. Therefore his mind and sense organs will be completely under his control and only such persons will be able to control the whole world and he who controls the world is the empowered being.

Hence Blessed Chavara thought of the empowerment of womanhood through spiritual empowerment and so he established the Congregation of Mother of Carmel. Blessed Chavara established Sanskrit *Padasala* and modern schools to provide empowerment to the masses. He was equally concerned of the spiritual empowerment without which every mode of empowerment would be disastrous to the community as a whole. Sr. Dr. Navya Maria traces the historical development of CMC and evaluates its relevance in the formation of an egalitarian society in Kerala and she enumerates its merit to be appreciated and demerits to be corrected. She is of the opinion that “the members of CMC need to open their eyes and take the responsibility of finding out new ways of empowering women”. Her intention, I think is to interpret the vision of Chavara in the

changing context to provide practical guidance to the women of the present day to attain empowerment.

Women empowerment has been entertained by all including the leaders of political parties. They are seriously thinking about giving equal opportunities to women to come forward and serve our country in social, economic, political and cultural spheres. But they are not concerned of the spiritual empowerment of womanhood. It is in this context that the thesis of Sr. Dr. Navya Maria attains relevance.

Dr. K. S. Radhakrishnan
(Chairman, Public Service Commission, Kerala)

FOREWORD

At a time when atrocities against women, children and the marginalized are on the increase in our country, Sr. Dr. Navya Maria CMC's research publication, *EMPOWERED WOMANHOOD: Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Socio-Pastoral Vision for Women and the Legacy of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel* is to be appreciated for its very theme and timeliness. These days, Pope Francis has emphasized the fundamental importance of the women in the Church, a value which has not been duly recognized in the long tradition of the Church. Dr. Navya Maria's book fundamentally highlights three elements: 1) analyses the contribution of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara towards the empowerment of women in the nineteenth century Kerala Church and society; 2) foundation and growth of the CMC congregation and 3) its present day relevance and mission in the light of its long legacy coming from the second half of the nineteenth century Kerala.

Looking at the references and the citations and various related fields of study, one can easily see that this is a deep and serious academic contribution resulting from strenuous hard work and perseverance. This work will surely enrich the reader by the inspiring, insightful, committed and selfless personality of Blessed Chavara, especially in relation to the foundation of the CMC congregation.

The title and the thesis statement are very clear and the subject matter of the study is interesting, relevant, challenging, contextual and very useful especially as the author is a member of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel. She has covered all the elements required of any serious theological research undertaking. The theme is especially challenging in light of a couple of recent works that have discussed the question of the founder of the

TOCD for women from hypothetical positions. The author has successfully struck a balance in the work by tackling this issue in the light of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel from a historic, scientific and logical stand point.

Coming to contextuality, the author has carefully analysed the historic, socio-cultural, educational, ecclesial and pastoral context of 19th century Kerala to put into context the pioneering and transformative contribution that the ecclesial visionary Blessed Chavara made in the Church and the society through the congregation of TOCD for women. In the final chapter, she situates the study in the present milieu by analyzing the challenges that women face today and the needed responses required of the CMCs. The author has developed the work based on the solid foundation of both the "then" and "present" contexts.

As to the usefulness of the doctoral research, as she herself writes, the congregation is "to be inspired by the original vision of the founder to make the community 'an abode of *veda* and virtue' and to share them with the society through their apostolate" (cite page no. later). Further, she writes, "The relevance of the existence of CMC in the Church and in the world depends upon her faithfulness in the mission of empowering women" (cite page no. later). At least one thing seems clear, the author is deeply convinced of the relevance, role and mission of CMC in the present context and she shares her vision and tries to inspire other CMCs and the general readers as well, to work for an empowered womanhood.

Sister has done ample justice to the title of the work. Considering that she has not only studied Blessed Chavara's Socio-Pastoral Vision of Women and the Founding of the TOCD for women, but also evaluates the relevance of the CMC congregation in the present changing and challenging times, the work becomes all the more relevant and meaningful. The various points discussed in the book, such as (1) The basic biblical perspectives on women; (2) The Socio-religious scenario of women in the 19th century; (3) The life of Chavara and the various influences on him and his impact on the Kerala society of the 19th century; (4) Chavara and the foundation of TOCD for women; (5) The realization of the socio-

pastoral vision of Chavara in the mission of CMC; and (6) The response of the CMC for the empowerment of women in the contemporary society are all well integrated to give a solid study of the empowerment of women through the instrumentality of Blessed Chavara and the CMC Congregation. This is a laborious and monumental task undertaken in a very successful manner.

In order to understand Blessed Chavara's empowerment programme for women, the researcher has gone into an in-depth study of the situation of women of Kerala in the 19th century. So, too, she has studied the contemporary situation and challenges that the women in India face and gives a creative response to these challenges, being inspired by Blessed Chavara and the CMC legacy.

In the work, the author has properly acknowledged the role of Fr Leopold in the foundation of the congregation with the expressions, "Blessed Chavara along with Fr Leopold" and "Founder and co-founder". Further, she acknowledges Mother Eliawa as the first member of the congregation of TOCD for women. This may help to bring some common ground to the many and varied interpretations of the foundation of the CMC. On the day of the death of Blessed Chavara, Leopold, the co-founder of the convent, wrote in his personal diary: "The founder and the first Prior of the Third Order of Carmelites in Malabar with much difficulty founded also the convent of the nuns." (cite page no. later).

The work is presented with scientific and methodological precision. In an age where researches welcome inter-disciplinary and holistic approaches, Dr. Navya Maria's research is well within that line. Though it is a research study in theology, it uses a multi-disciplinary approach which contributes especially to women's studies, ecclesiology, pastoral theology, Chavara studies, etc., especially in the context of the Church and society of Kerala. One has to appreciate the proper balance achieved in the use of these materials to create such a meaningful work.

It focuses on the pioneering and untiring work of Blessed Chavara towards the renewal of the Church and society through women's empowerment. Even though there are a couple of

previous studies on Blessed Chavara and the foundation of the TOCD for women, there has been no study as such, until now, that focuses on the role of Blessed Chavara in the empowerment of the women and its impact and the needed response and mission of CMC today. The zeal, commitment and enthusiasm with which the author has researched and fashioned this work is to be admired and I am sure that this excellent research publication will illumine, influence and inspire many readers.

Dr. George Edayadiyil, CMI
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DVK, Bangalore

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This book *Empowered Womanhood: Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Socio-Pastoral Vision for Women and the Legacy of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel* is my doctoral thesis presented on 9th October, 2013, at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Pontifical Athenaeum of Philosophy, Theology and Canon Law, Bangalore. Through this book I have tried to bring out Blessed Chavara's lofty ideals of womanhood and his dreams about the great contributions an empowered woman could extend to the betterment of the society.

At the close of a long voyage of this research, with overwhelming heart I acknowledge the power of the God Almighty which guided and supported me throughout this journey providing his numerous chosen instruments who were generous enough to contribute timely assistance without hesitation. I am deeply indebted to all my superiors and sisters of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC), for their unfailing support and encouragement.

With immense joy, I express my whole hearted gratitude to Rev. Dr. George Edayadiyil, my director, for his scholarly guidance, academic excellence and genuine concern in the completion of this work and, the encouragement and timely support for the technical work for the publication of the thesis. I acknowledge with thankfulness the unique contributions of Prof. Dr. Saju Chackalackal, the President of DVK, Prof. Dr. Thomas Kollamparampil, Dean, Faculty of Theology, Prof. Dr. Francis Thonippara, the former President of DVK and Prof. Dr. Paulachan Kochappilly, the former Dean, faculty of Theology. I am extremely grateful to Rev. Dr. Benny Thettayil, Sr. Dr. Maria Anto and Sr. Dr. Alphonse Maria, for their readiness to lend me creative suggestions and corrections during my research and especially during the documentation process of the thesis. I owe

special thanks to Miss Juanita Campbell for her attentive reading of the final proof.

Now with admiration I remember His Beatitude Mar George Cardinal Alencherry, Major Arch Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Church and Mother Sancta the Superior General of CMC for their Message and Dr. K. S. Radhakrishnan, the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, Kerala for the appreciation of this book. I would like to express my special thanks to Dharmaram publications for the generous assistance in making this work available to the general public.

I express my sincere thanks to the superiors of Jnanodaya and all the community members who stood by my side at all moments of joy and anxiety of this expedition. With sentiments of love and gratitude I remember my loving parents, brothers, sisters, and all my near and dear ones for their unfailing love and prayerful support all through my life.

Sr. Navya Maria, CMC
Kothamangalam

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ACMCG	Archives of CMC Generalate, Aluva, Kerala
ACOC	Archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Rome
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> , "Decree on Church's Missionary Activity," Second Vatican Council
AH	<i>Asian Horizon: Dharmaram Journal of Theology</i> , Bangalore
AIC	Archives of the Immaculate Convent, Puthenpally, Kerala
AG OCD	Archives of OCD Generalate
Ap	<i>Apostolice</i>
APF	Archives of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, Rome
ASJM	Archives of St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, Kerala
ATC	Archives of St. Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu, Kerala
AVPH	Archives of Vimala Provincial House, Ernakulam, Kerala
BBC	<i>The Broadman Bible Commentary</i>
BDV	<i>Bulletin Dei Verbum</i>
BEB	<i>Baker Encyclopaedia of the Bible</i>
BILA	Bishops' Institute of Lay Apostolate
BT	<i>Bible Today</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTDB	<i>Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible</i>
CBCI	Catholic Bishops Conference of India
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
CCEO	<i>Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium</i> , "The Code of Canons of Eastern Churches"
CCWI	Council of Catholic Women in India
CDOTP	<i>Catholic Dictionary of Old Testament Pentateuch</i>
cf.	Compare with
CICLSAL	Congregation for the Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Rome
CKC	<i>Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent, Kerala</i>
CMC	Congregation of the Mother of Carmel
CMI	Carmelites of Mary Immaculate
CMM	<i>Chronicles of Monastery at Mannanam, Kerala</i>
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CO	<i>Christian Orient</i>
CPDBT	<i>The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i>
CRI	Conference of Religious India
CSK	<i>Chavara Sampurna Krithikal</i> , Kuriakose Elias Chavara
CSST	Carmelite Sisters of St. Therese
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradendae</i> , "Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis," John Paul II
CTC	Congregation of Teresian Carmelites
CWB	<i>Commentary on the Whole Bible</i>
CWC	<i>Complete Works of Blessed Chavara</i>
DBT	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i>
DCL	Deepika Children's League
Dele.	<i>Delegationē</i>
DPW	<i>Dictionary of Paul and his Writings</i>
EA	<i>Ecclesia in Asia</i> , "Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation," John Paul II
ed., eds.	editor, editors
EDB	<i>Eerdmans' Dictionary of the Bible</i>
EMMC	<i>Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle</i>
EN	<i>Evangelic Nuntiandi</i> . "Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World," Paul VI
ER	<i>The Epistle to the Romans</i>

et al.	et alii (and others)
et cetera	et cetera (and others of the same class, and so forth)
f. ff.	folio, folios
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference
FORUM	Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace
GAOCD	General Archives of the OCD, Rome
GE	<i>Gravissimum Educationis</i> , "Declaration on Christian Education," Second Vatican Council
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," Second Vatican Council
HB	<i>Harper's Bible Dictionary</i>
HE	<i>Herald of the East</i>
id est	id est (that is to say)
IM	<i>Inter Mirifica</i> , "Decree on the Means of Social Communication," Second Vatican Council
ISBE	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia</i>
JD	<i>Journal of Dharma</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Religious Studies</i>
JTC	<i>Journal of St. Thomas Christians</i>
KCL	Kitex Childrenswear Limited
KCSL	Kerala Catholic Students League
KJ	<i>Kristu Jyoti</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," Second Vatican Council
LMS	London Missionary Society
MD	<i>Mulieris Dignitatem</i> , "Apostolic Exhortation on the Dignity and Vocation of Women," John Paul II
ME	Malayalam Era
MR	<i>Mutuae Relationes</i> , "Directives for Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church," SCRSI, Rome
MSJ	Medical Sisters of St. Joseph
MSB	Manuscript Source
NBCLC	National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre
NCBC	<i>The New Century Bible Commentary</i>

NCCR	<i>National Council of Churches Review</i>
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIB	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NJBC	<i>The New Jerome Bible Commentary</i>
NMI	<i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i> , "Apostolic Letter on the Close of the Year of the Great Jubilee 2000," John Paul II
NNIBD	<i>Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OCD	<i>Ordo Carmelitarum Discalceatorum</i> (Order of Discalced Carmelite)
ORISI	Oriental Institute of Religious Studies
OT	Old Testament
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> , "Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life," Second Vatican Council
plut.	<i>Pluteum</i>
Prot. No.	Protocol Number
PT	<i>Pacem in Terris</i> , "Encyclical Letter on Peace on Earth," John XXIII
Ref.	Reference
RM	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> , "Encyclical on the Mission of the Redeemer," John Paul II
Rs.	Rupees
RSV	Revised Standard Version
rubr.	<i>Rubrica</i>
SAC	<i>Start Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium</i> , CICLSAL, Rome
SC	Sacred Congregation
SCPCS	<i>Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis Sanctorum</i> , Rome
SCRSI	Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institute, Rome
SD	Sisters of Destitute
SHG	Self Help Groups

SD	Society of Nirmala Dasikal
SV	<i>Sub Verbo</i> = under the word
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat
TBD	<i>Tyndale Bible Dictionary</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TOCD	<i>Tertius Ordo Carmelitarum Discalceatorum</i> (Third Order of Discalced Carmelite)
Trans.	Translator, Translated by
UN	United Nations
V	<i>verso</i>
VC	<i>Vita Consecrata</i> , "Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Consecrated Life," John Paul II
VJR	<i>Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection</i>
Vol., Vols.	Volume, Volumes
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WNWCD	<i>Webster's New World College Dictionary</i>
WORTH	Women Religious Theologising

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Empowerment as a term applied to human beings refers to increasing the spiritual, social, political, educational, cultural, gender and economic calibre of individuals or groups of individuals. It is a very broad term encompassing several types of the above said enablement. One of which concerns gender empowerment in Indian culture almost always points to empowerment of women. The dream of liberating women can only come true when every section of the society is free from gender bias and advocates improvement of the status of women in the society. In order to empower women, the society needs to adopt an integrated approach towards uplifting them. It is necessary to raise their spiritual, economic, cultural, religious, political, educational, social and gender status so that they may be brought into the mainstream of national development.

The Constitution of India guarantees certain rights and privileges to women as it delineates Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles. In Article 14, it confers on men and women equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres. As a safeguard, the Constitution imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce all practices derogatory to the dignity of women. However, it goes without saying that the present position and status of women in the Indian society in general, and the rural society in particular is still not satisfactory. The various incidents of crime committed against women that are reported all over the country illustrate this fact.

The Statement of the research is a theological study of the contributions of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara¹ in the 19th

¹His religious name is Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family. Some authors use the name as Cyriac Elias Chavara. Kuriakose was the

century towards the empowerment of women by means of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel,² the first indigenous religious congregation for women in the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala. The study is based on the socio-pastoral and ecclesial issues of women of the time and the responses Chavara made to improve, safeguard and promote their position in the society, which is his legacy to CMC, and the realistic responses made by CMC in the Church from the time of its inception to these changed and challenging times.

The social life of the people of Kerala until the 19th century was not governed by the principles of social freedom and equality. Its chief problem was the deep chasm which separated the people of the high castes from those of the low castes. Those who belonged to the high castes enjoyed numerous privileges and a high social status. The social values of equality, liberty and dignity were unheard of in the society of Kerala in the 19th century. Practise of untouchability was prevalent at the time.³ The Kerala society was a tradition-bound one, where women, even in the context of religious practices and observances, were discriminated against. It is in this situation that one has to see the role played by Chavara in

name given to him at the time of baptism, whereas Elias was a later addition which he assumed when he made his religious profession in 1855. Chavara is his family name or the surname. He was born on 10th February 1805 of pious and devout Syrian Catholic parents at Kainakary in Alappuzha, Kerala. At the age of eleven, he entered the seminary at Pallippuram and was ordained priest on November 29, 1829. He is one of the first to be declared blessed in the Syro-Malabar Church along with St. Alphonsa. Hereafter he will be referred to in this work as Chavara.

²The Congregation for Women (TOCD) was founded by Chavara Kuriakose Elias with the help of Fr. Leopold, an Italian missionary in 1866 at Koonammavu. After the bifurcation of the Church in Kerala into Latin and Syrian Churches in 1887, TOCD Congregation for Women in Koonammavu was also divided into two. On March 2, 1967 the Holy See raised the Syrian wing of the congregation to the status of *Iuris Pontifici*. The new name 'Congregation of Mother of Carmel' (CMC) was given to the congregation under the new Constitution, which was provisionally approved.

³ *Kerala State Gazetteer*, Vol. II, 457.

bringing about a radical change in the Church and the society through his personal charisma and prophetic vision and action.

Chavara was a multifaceted ecclesial personality chosen by God to shed the light of love and wisdom of God in the dark recesses of the 19th century Kerala society. He listened to the voice of God speaking to him in various ways, and he was determined to respond to the divine call to act, once he discerned it. In his sagacity, he understood the glory of God's vision regarding women as revealed in the Bible. In response, he decided to undertake the task of bringing about a change in the people's attitude towards women that was prevalent in the Church and society of his times. Chavara himself had a vision of the dignity of women, which was patterned on the divine vision and the original fullness of womanhood in God's providential care of humankind.

Chavara's holistic vision regarding creation in general, and regarding humankind in particular, included in a special manner, women and their much-needed empowerment. (It can be confidently stated that Chavara was an instrument in executing God's plan and purpose for women during those dark times, and he realized his goals in a significant manner, especially through the founding of the first indigenous religious congregation for women (TOCD) in 1866 and through the task he entrusted to it. In view of empowering women in the Church and the society, Chavara in his farsighted vision empowered the first community and spelt out various programmes and activities for the community. Later, this led the way to the elevated status of women in the Church and in the society.) His broad vision for the empowerment of women and the integrity as well as of the family can be seen in his Chronicles and other writings. Inspired by this great vision of Chavara, the members of the CMC take up various prophetic and ecclesial tasks and work towards the socio-religious empowerment of women in the present day Church and the society.

In the research, the focus is on the following seven areas: (1) The basic biblical perspectives on women; (2) Socio-religious scenario of women in the 19th century; (3) Chavara's life profile; (4) Chavara's impact on Kerala society of the 19th century; (5)

Chavara and the congregation for women; (6) Realization of the socio-pastoral vision of Chavara in the mission of CMC; and (7) The response of the CMC for the empowerment of women in the contemporary society. All the major works by and on Chavara have been consulted in preparation for the research and it has been found that no serious study that focuses on his understanding of the role of women in social change has been made yet. During the past two centuries several studies had been made by various authors on Chavara's person and mission. There are more than a hundred books which are published about Chavara. The important works that are related to the themes of the research are evaluated in the thesis.

The thesis has made use of the primary sources such as works by Chavara and the contemporary writings on Chavara such as chronicles, letters, diaries, books, account books (Vol.I, 1866-1868, Vol.II, 1868-1871), etc. There are four volumes in the *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara (CWC)*, each of them with separate subtitles: Volume one, *Chronicles* (Vol.I, 1831?-1855, Vol. II, 1855-1870); Volume two, *Literary Works*, which includes "Compunction of the Soul" (1869-70), "Dirge" and "Anasthasia's Martyrdom" (1862); Volume three, *Spiritual Works*, which includes "Colloquies with the Heavenly Father" (1868); Volume Four, *Letters*. The translation of *CWC* in Malayalam is titled *Chavarayachente Sampurna Kruthikal*. The works of his contemporaries such as *Diary*, 3 vols. and *Letters of Leopold* and *Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu* by Parappuram Varkey (1857-1888?) are also considered as primary sources. There are three editions of the two volumes of *the Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent* (Vol. I, 1866-1870 and Vol. II, 1870-1909). The first Malayalam edition came out in 1988 titled *CMC Nalagamam*. Then in 2002 the English edition titled *Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent* was published. The next edition again in Malayalam was published in 2008 known as *Nalagamangal: Koonammavu Madam*. The first volume has one more edition published in 2009 which has both, original and modern language together.

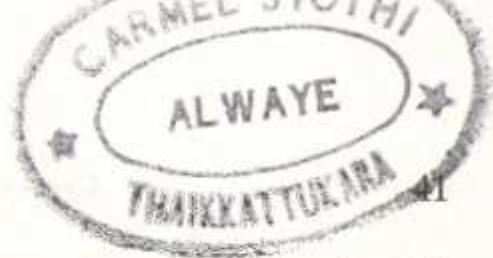
The first biography of Chavara was written by Leopold Beccaro soon after the death of Chavara in 1871 and was published as the introduction to *Atmanuthapam* in the first printed edition in 1905. As a contemporary and a constant companion of Chavara, Beccaro's work on Chavara is more authentic than any other work on him. The book gives us the details and the aim of the foundation of the first religious congregation for women in India. *Mapakapitakkanmar (The Founding Fathers)*, which is edited by Alexander Joseph (1905), tells the story of the three founding fathers of CMI Congregation⁴. Pages 24-31 of the book describe the history of the first Prior General, *Malpan* Chavara as told by Fr. Kuriakose Eliseus Porukkara in 1871, who was the second Prior General of the CMI congregation. Eliseus Porukkara's work is very significant as he was a contemporary of Chavara. *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan* (1936) was written by Mathias Pattakaran. It is considered as the third biography of Chavara. Some of the special incidents in the life of Chavara described by Mathias are relevant for the study of his personality. *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam* (1939), a more comprehensive and well documented biography, was written by Valerian Plathottam. Valerian gives us a wide vision about Chavara's virtuous life as well as the contributions made by him and the CMI congregation to the Kerala Church.

There are some authentic and inspiring studies in English on Chavara and on his contributions to the Church as well as to the society in the 19th century. *Blessed Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (1959) by K. C. Chacko is an authentic work about Chavara. The author has highlighted the richness of his spirituality and the contributions he made to the society as a prophet of the time. *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East* (1993) by Z. M. Moozhoor is an admirable biography of Chavara. The English translation is done by Sheila Kannath. It tells the story of the commendable part played by him to uplift the people not only of

⁴The Congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate is a religious congregation for men founded by *Malpan* Thomas Palackal, Fr. Thomas Porukkara, and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara in 1831 in Mannanam. This is the first indigenous religious congregation for men in India.

the Kerala Church but also of the universal Church. The book shows that there is a proliferation in the studies on Chavara not only among the Kerala society but also among the English speaking people. *The Lord of Heaven and Earth* (2004) edited by Paul Kalluveetil and Paulachan Kochappilly contains articles on Chavara and is dedicated to Lucas Vithuvattical who was the Postulator for the cause of Chavara. The third part of this book is devoted to the studies on Chavara. There are twenty articles on various aspects of the life of Chavara. All these scientific articles are written by eminent scholars and these articles help the readers to widen the horizon of their knowledge and create a special interest for the person of Chavara and his life. These articles are very useful for further studies and research on Chavara. *Pearl Truly Indian: Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (2005) was authored by Thomas Panthaplackal sheds light on the life, activities and spirituality of Chavara. In this study we see the religious and social settings of the early 19th century Kerala and identify his distinctive and original contributions to the nation and the Church. *Chavara Atyalmikatha* (2005) written by Kuriakose Elia Vadakketh is an authentic and scientific work on the spirituality of Chavara. It highlights the contemplative life style of Chavara from an oriental perspective. *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (2008), which is written by Mathias Mundadan is a valuable source book on the life and work of Chavara. The fifth chapter of the book deals with the foundation of the congregation for women (TOCD). All other chapters are the biography of Chavara and the contributions of CMI congregation to the Kerala Church.

A detailed history of CMC is found in *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High* (1997), edited by Jossy Maria. It tells the story of the foundation, charism and the first community of TOCD for women, division of TOCD and the gradual growth of the CMC. This gives a detailed idea of the expansion of CMC from its foundation until 1997. The article "Blessed Chavara: A Prophet for Women Empowerment" published in *Asian Horizon* in 2009 is an eloquent article of Jossy Maria. The author has examined the vision and activities of Chavara for the empowerment of women. She



describes very systematically the situation of Kerala society in 19th century.

The first scientific and documented study on Chavara is the doctoral Dissertation titled *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (1986) by Joseph Kanjiramattathil. In this work Chavara is depicted as a great pastor of the Malabar Church in the 19th century Kerala. Kanjiramattathil clearly explains Chavara's various pastoral activities by which he renewed the life of the faithful and laid the foundation of the spiritual and cultural progress of the Malabar Church.

Formation of Religious Women in the Syro-Malabar Church: With Special Reference to the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (1990) is a dissertation submitted for the Degree of Doctorate in Canon Law. The author, James Thalachelloor, makes a survey of the various religious congregations having their origin in the Syro-Malabar Church and gives an idea of the rich religious treasure of the apostolic Church. In this study the author analyses to the initial formation of CMC.

The Evolution of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel and its Impact on Society and Culture (with Special Reference to Women) 1866-1991 (2002) is a doctoral dissertation of C. J. Mary. In this work the author traces the history of CMC – its origin, growth, contributions and its impact on society and culture in the rural as well as urban areas of Kerala. The author highlights the significant role played by CMC for the empowerment of women since 1866.

Another dissertation on Chavara is *The Mystical and Missionary Spirituality of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (2009) authored by Joseph Xavier Eroorickal. It is an objective and comprehensive study on Chavara's spirituality. The work gives a broad vision on his spirituality in which the dimensions of contemplation and action were well integrated. The author has presented him as a prominent mystic and a missionary in the Church, particularly in the Kerala Church.

The recently published book on *Servant of God Mother Eliswa, the Foundress of TOCD (CTC and CMC) for Women: The Critical Study of the History of Foundation (1866-1913)*, (2010) is a study

by Sucy Kinattungal about Mother Eliswa, the first member of TOCD Congregation which was started in Koonammavu in 1866. It highlights the role of Mother Eliswa in the foundation of the TOCD congregation for women in Kerala.

The work draws valuable references from the above mentioned books and studies. This research is an attempt to study Chavara's vision of women which no one has ventured to research to date. The researcher has surveyed all relevant works related to various other issues taken up in the study, such as, theological and biblical perspectives on women, history of the 18th and 19th centuries of Kerala, contemporary scenario of women and their role in the ecclesial fields etc.

This theological research deals with both social and pastoral issues in the field of women's studies. As and when the study demands, the researcher also explores other scientific disciplines such as sociology, history, Scripture etc. The method of research employed in this study is descriptive, analytical, critical and synthetic. In order to reach a reliable conclusion, manuscripts and authentic documents available in various archives have also have been consulted.

CMC plays a vital role in the socio-religious and educational milieu of Kerala Church and the society and in this domain lies the relevance and scope of the research. (The religious women belonging to the CMC congregation spend themselves whole heartedly for the integral development of the women of the society, to mould in them integrated personality. By their earnest efforts women become more enlightened and better conscientized about their dignity and rights. In order to step up the contribution the community makes to the society today, it is important to take a fresh look at the role and contributions of the CMC congregation in the past years and gain a clearer picture and the objectives of this first indigenous women's religious congregation of Syro-Malabar Church.)

The study will certainly enable the members of the CMC congregation to reconscientize and rededicate themselves to the wider mission given to them by God through the instrumentality of Chavara, the founder. Thus reading the signs of the times, CMC

may be able to renew, revitalize and reinterpret its vision and mission to ensure a better status for women in the Church and society in every corner of the world where she is called to bear witness to Christ. Moreover, the study will be of great help for the members of the congregation to look back at the original vision and mission of the congregation, so that they can face the challenges posed by the modern globalized society in a more Christian and human way. From this perspective, it is highly imperative to look at the personality and work of Chavara, who was instrumental in forming the basic vision of the CMC congregation.

One of the major objectives of this study is to highlight the role of Chavara's programmes for the empowerment of women in the 19th century especially in second half of it. These programmes are evaluated from an ecclesial and socio-pastoral perspective. Other specific objectives of the research are: (1) to help women realize that they can be agents of major changes in the Church and the society; (2) to present an ecclesial vision for the empowerment of the members of CMC and their concrete response to the social issues of the time; (3) to explore ways and means to empower women, to help them play their creative and critical roles, and to convince them of the importance of their contribution and bring them to the mainstream of the nation and the building up of the Church; (4) to assess the impact of women's education and social change and (5) to evaluate the present status of women in the Church and society and to propose a creative response that CMC can give in facing the challenges of our times.

The research is divided into five chapters, along with the general introduction and the general conclusion. Chapter one explores the biblical understanding of human beings along with its theological and anthropological nuances based on some key texts of the Bible. From the *Book of Genesis* to the *Book of Revelation* one of the prime focuses of the Scripture is the intervention of God in the human history. The creation accounts in Genesis bring up the divine vision regarding man and woman. In this divine design one is neither above nor below the other; ontologically, man and women are equals, though functionally different. The present chapter examines the status of women in the Old Testament, in the

Jewish society of Jesus' time and Early Christian community as seen in the Pauline letters. This background analysis can help us to understand better the status of women in the 19th century in the light of the divine call.

The second chapter is titled, "Women in Kerala Society: Socio-Religious and Educational Scenario of the 18th and 19th Centuries." The socio-religious and educational condition of women during the second half of the 19th century is the main focus of the study here. A few of the important social institutions of that time such as, the caste system, the *janmi* system, *sambandham*, *smartavicharam*, *devadasi* and *marumakkathayam* system are examined in order to make an evaluation of the status of women in Hinduism. Analysis is also made of the status of women in Muslim and Christian religious traditions. Various empowerment programmes initiated by Protestant missionaries, Catholic Church, the government of Kerala and the social reformers to bring about a social change, especially among women of these communities are also discussed in detail. The women empowerment programme of Catholic Church in the second half of the 19th century unearths clearly the originality and the relevance of Chavara in this field of apostolate. The pastoral endeavours of Chavara make it clear that for the social uplift of the families and for the renovation of the Church the empowerment of women was inevitable in the 19th century.

Chapter three discusses the theme, "Chavara: A Man with a Vision and Mission for a Renewed Church." His life and activities reveal that he responded to the divine call sincerely, wholeheartedly and contextually. For the salvation and sanctification of the people of his time he became an effective instrument in the hands of God. He was a visionary and a committed man in the service of God which made him fully a man for the others. The foundation of a religious congregation for women was a landmark in the process of uplifting women both spiritually and socially. He wanted to raise the status of women and to make them more resourceful and self reliant. As an effective means to achieve this aim he envisaged for them a religious community living by the foundation of the religious

congregation for women (TOCD). Along with Leopold Beccaro, a Carmelite Missionary, he founded this congregation at a time when community living and education of women were rare practices and vocational training programmes for women were uncommon. To enhance the position of TOCD women further, he empowered them in various ways.

In chapter four the discussion is about the "Realization of the Socio-Pastoral Vision of Chavara in the Mission of CMC." For Chavara, the empowerment of women was an important dream. He acknowledged women as the ever-flaming lamp of the family and the Church. It is mainly from this dream of the founder and co-founder that the vision and mission of CMC evolved. They had a great vision that the members of the community should be the core of the Church and society to transform it. This chapter studies how the vision of Chavara and Leopold were handed down to the newly founded community and how imbibing the vision of the fathers, the members of the community work for the uplift of women through their mission. The spiritual and evangelizing activities of the first community and the evangelizing activities of the community today, including the pastoral work they are doing in the field of the empowerment of women in the modern society owe their inspiration to the founder and the co-founder. According to Chavara, the aim of the congregation is to become "An abode of virtues for the girls of Kerala and a convent for them to learn *vedakaryangal* [religious matters] and thus grow up as good Christians."⁵ According to him, religious community life followed by women is for self-sanctification, for the salvation of souls and to empower their fellow women in the Church. The members of the community would be instrumental in forming and training the women of Kerala Church and the society. In the ensuing years, CMC congregation became an effective catalyst of change in the Church and society. The foundation of the congregation was an attempt to empower women through women.

The final chapter is "The Response of CMC for the Empowerment of Women in the Contemporary Indian Society and Church." The

⁵ Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 12.

chapter focuses on the present social scenario in which women play their creative roles and face the various challenges, both negative and positive. The analysis made in the study shows how much CMC could contribute for the uplift of women and what would be the focus of their pastoral ministry towards the empowered womanhood today.

At present more than six thousand CMC sisters work directly or indirectly for the uplift of women in the Indian Church and society and three other continents of the world. In order to empower women, they are in an assiduous search for an integrated approach to raise their educational, economic, cultural, religious and social status so that women might join the mainstream and contribute towards the creation of a vibrant and dynamic Church and to build up an egalitarian society. Furthermore, an attempt is made to address the question of how CMC congregation can respond creatively and critically based on their vision which was handed down by the founder. This research also investigates how the vision of Chavara can inspire the sisters of CMC to address many contemporary issues of the Church and society. In the light of these analyses, the final section of the chapter tries to make a review of the relevance of the congregation in this changed situation of the modern world and the response CMC needs to make in the present scenario where oppression of women takes diverse dehumanizing forms.

Chapter One

WOMEN IN BIBLICAL TRADITIONS

1.1. Introduction

"God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). They are the crown and glory of all that God created. Creation in God's image and likeness constitutes the greatness of men and women. Both of them are exhorted to exercise dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26). Nevertheless, the history of the human race reveals that this ideal – man and woman being in the image of God, together taking care of the created world – always remained an ideal. Despite this lofty ideal, the patriarchal mind formed in the Judeo-Christian tradition of patriarchy would always prevent women from coming to the centre stage. They would play either in the margins of the stage or behind the curtains and hence, remain marginalized.¹ Throughout history, man, through pride, ignorance or moral perversion has treated woman as an inferior being and has enslaved and degraded her accordingly. So she became mere chattel, a burden-bearer, with no rights whatsoever to equality with man.² Today, woman is aware of this discrepancy and is seeking ways and means to re-establish her true status which, as seen in the *Book of Genesis*, was embedded in God's vision for women.

To regain the ideal status of women, it is necessary to understand the original vision of God about women as

¹Thettayil, "The Religious Women in the Mission," 570.

²Locker, *All the Women of the Bible*, 13.

delineated by the scripture. This chapter highlights the God-given dignity of women with its theological and anthropological interpretations based on the *Book of Genesis*. It serves as a biblical and theological background for the whole thesis, the main concern of which is the empowerment of women. The discussion is carried out against the backdrop of the 19th century socio-pastoral uplift of women especially, through the person of Chavara. It also reveals how Chavara's vision of 'women empowerment through women' is materialised in today's society through the life and mission of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel.

The chapter briefly analyzes (1) the status of women as seen in the creation stories in the Old Testament and (2) the dignity of women in biblical times by examining (a) various books of the Old Testament; (b) in the Jewish Society of Jesus' time and (c) in the Early Christian Community as seen mainly, in the Pauline Letters.

1.2. Women in the Creation Stories of Genesis

The accounts of human creation in the Bible come from two different traditions – Yahwist (Gen 2:18-24) and Priestly (Gen 1:26-28). The former is thought to have been originated in Judea under David and Solomon and therefore dates back to the 10th century B. C. And the latter probably comes from the 6th century B. C. after the Exile³ and declares the theological

³The Babylonian exile was the period in Jewish history in which the Jews of the ancient Kingdom of Judah were captives in Babylon. The Babylonian exile lasted from 586-538 B.C. In exile Jews were forced to live outside of the Promised Land. Babylon had replaced Assyria as the reigning world power after defeating Egypt at the battle of Carchemish in 609 BC. They conquered Jerusalem in 586 B.C. This was the main exile of Judah when the Temple was flattened and Jerusalem was destroyed. Many of the Israelites had chosen to flee voluntarily and had settled in Syria, Egypt and Turkey. This was a very dark period in the history of Israel. There was no king and no temple. In 538, Cyrus granted permission for the Jews exiled in Babylonia to return to Jerusalem. This long period of trial left a powerful impression on the

significance of human persons as composed of male and female. In the Yahwistic account the focus is on the creation and nature of human beings.⁴ In order to have a better look into the understanding of these ancient authors and to see how they understood women and their dignity, both the Priestly and the Yahwistic accounts of creation are analysed here.

1.2.1. Divine Image and Likeness: Significance (Gen 1:27)

The most noteworthy statement of the Priestly account regarding the creation of human beings is "God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them" (Gen 1:27). An image refers to "an imitation or representation of a person or a thing."⁵ The Broadman Commentary observes that an image is "an exact resemblance, like a son who is the very image of his father."⁶ Being created in God's image, human beings resemble the divine. This image of God in human beings also makes available a unique communion fellowship between the divine and human which is not possible for other creatures to attain.

Likeness which means 'appearance' is a more indefinite term and emphasizes the fact that, although man is like God, he is not God. Man is not deity but reflects the divine nature within his humanity.⁷ God's likeness is not something that humans can hear, see, sense, or recreate. God is God, as such,

religious life of Israel. By it God revealed to them his uncompromising holiness and his overwhelming faithfulness. Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 89; Lesquirit and Albert, "Exile," 152; Elwell and Comfort, "Diaspora of the Jews," 380-381.

⁴Maly, "Introduction to the Pentateuch," 3.

⁵Agnes, "Image," 712.

⁶Allen, "Image of God," 125. In the Scripture the term "image" is the translation of Hebrew *selem* and Greek *eikon*. See also Merrill, "Image of God," 442.

⁷Allen, "Image of God," 125. See also The Hebrew and Greek connotations for the term likeness are *demut* and *homoiosis* respectively. Merrill, "Image of God," 442.

necessarily beyond our comprehension.⁸ At the same time, human beings participate in the divine nature.

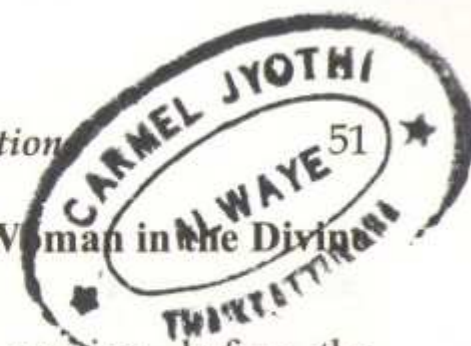
Here the main point of focus is that human kind – male and female – is created in God's image and according to his likeness. It was the whole human being that was created in the image and according to the likeness of God and the whole race, both male and female, was so created. It calls our attention to the fact that the female shares the image of God and reflects God's power and majesty on earth in the same manner as the male does, and is commanded to multiply and have dominion over the earth as the male is. The male and the female are pictured together as the representation of their Maker.⁹ According to Evans, within Genesis 1 there is no distinction between men and women as being in the image of God or as having dominion over all the earth. The blessing and commission of Genesis 1:28 is given equally to both. Moreover, God sees men and women cooperating together in managing the creation as 'very good.'¹⁰ Here the terms male and female together stand for the human race. It is not a matter of division but rather a communion.

This verity brings to mind their unity in nature and diversity in sex. The sum total of divine image and likeness is found in love, since God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16). The human likeness to God is most vibrant when human beings are most like God in actions that proceed from love. The very essence of human beings is love because divine love dwells in them, and they reflect that love which graces them with goodness, humility and compassion.

⁸Kathe, "Image and Likeness," 20.

⁹Allen, "Woman, Doctrine of," 2156.

¹⁰Evans, "Women," 900.



1.2.2. The Unique Dignity of Man and Woman in the Divine Vision

According to the Priestly account of creation, before the creation of human beings God seems to address thus the divine assembly: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Then the next word reports: "So God created humankind¹¹ in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). The Hebrew word for man, *Adam*, is grammatically singular in form, but plural in connotation. Hence, here it stands not for a single man, but for human beings both male and female, illustrating their equal status and unity. In the divine design they are one and equals.¹² Human beings are the high point of the whole order of creation. Both male and female are the crowns of the work of creation. Gen 1:28 makes this fact clear. God blessed the male and female and gave them the grace of fertility and authority over the whole creation.¹³ The creator entrusts dominion over the earth to the human race, who derive their dignity and vocation from the common *beginning*.¹⁴ The man and woman complement each other at the level of both having and being.¹⁵ Both man and woman are human beings to

¹¹In the RSV, instead of humankind, man is used: "God created *man* in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Gen 1:27). Unless otherwise noted, our biblical quotes come from NRSV.

¹²Kalluveettil, "Women in the Divine Vision," 4.

¹³Kalluveettil, "Women in the Divine Vision," 4.

¹⁴*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 6, is an Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II on the dignity and vocation of women in 1988. The letter highlights the equal dignity of man and woman, basing its foundation on the Bible which observes human being as created in the image and likeness of God as male and female (cf. Gen 1:27).

¹⁵The granting of a complementarity dimension to women has been an improvement from the earlier approach of subsidiarity. However, many Feminist theologians are not satisfied with this improvement in language, because they feel that this complementary dimension does not sufficiently safeguard the equality dimension. See also Paul II, "Appeal

an equal dignity; both are created in God's image and are entrusted with a divine vocation.

1.2.3. Creation of Woman as a Sign of Mutuality (Gen 2:18)

The Yahwistic tradition of the creation account can be seen in Gen 2:18. The Yahwist observes: "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper as his partner" (Gen 2:18). These words recognize that the 'not good' situation of v.18 has now become good. "Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (v. 23) the phrase that specifies kinship, literally highlights mutuality and equality.¹⁶ As Wenham points out, the creation of woman from man's rib supplies what was missing for his perfect happiness.¹⁷ Most of the biblical commentators stress the idea that the creation of man becomes complete only through the creation of woman. For instance, Youngblood states,

A major emphasis of Genesis chapter two is the creation of woman as a companion for man. Man's incompleteness apart from woman is shown in his loneliness and frustration. None of the animals could meet Adam's need. Then the Lord created woman from Adam's rib.¹⁸

In its allegorical description of the creation of woman, the Yahwist account also highlights the equal footing of man and woman (Gen 2:18-25). Adam is made from the dust and Eve is created from the rib of Adam. She is created by God *from the rib* of the man and is placed at his side as another *I* as the companion of the man, who is alone in the surrounding world of living creatures and who finds in none of them a *helper* suitable for himself.¹⁹ According to the biblical commentators,

on Behalf of Women," 679, states: "Man and woman complement each other not only physically and psychologically at the level of behavior, but more profoundly at the level of being."

¹⁶Fretheim, "The Text of Genesis," 353.

¹⁷Wenham "Genesis 1-15," 69.

¹⁸Youngblood "Creation," 309.

¹⁹MD, 6.

"Woman was taken from under man's arm to symbolize his protection of her. She was taken from near his heart that he might love and cherish her. She was not made from a head bone to rule over man, or from his foot to be trampled on and degraded. Like the man, she reflects God's image."²⁰

1.2.4. Interrelatedness of Man and Woman

In biblical language the name *woman* indicates her essential identity in relationship to man. She shall be called *ishshah* (woman) as she was taken out of *ish* (man) (Gen 2:23).²¹ "Hebrew words *ish* and *ishshah* demonstrate their inseparability; one is the definition of the other, the synonym of the other, the symbol and image of the other, the echo of the other."²² Looking at the woman for the first time, the man exclaims: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called woman, for out of man this one was taken" (Gen 2:23). Certainly, the emphasis of Adam's outburst, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" in v.23 highlights the similarity rather than any differences between these first two human beings.²³ The man's exclamation implies that male and female complement each other, that they complete each other, and that they are inseparable.²⁴ Kalluveettil comments: "In the biblical story she is both mate (*ina*) and helper (*tuna*) and comrade (*saqi*) Gen 2:18. Man and woman are considered as equals. Their union is this sign of love."²⁵ When one consider this complementary vision what is obvious is an inter-personal relationship between man and woman.

²⁰Youngblood, "Creation," 310. See also Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, cited in Locker, *All the Women of the Bible*, 13.

²¹MD, 6.

²²Kalluveettil, "Women in the Divine Vision," 5.

²³Craich, "Woman," 825.

²⁴Kalluveettil, "Women in the Divine Vision," 5.

²⁵Kalluveettil, "Women in the Divine Vision," 5.

A critical examination of the Yahwistic account and its various explanations suggest that woman is created as a companion corresponding to man. However, there are scholars who hold a different view. "For them man was created first and woman was created only to be a help to him. It brings to mind according to them the lower place of woman which is her God-assigned role even at the time of her origin in the state of paradisiac innocence."²⁶ Another proposal along this line is made by Elwell and Comfort: "In Semitic thought, the giving of names signifies dominion or ownership. This means that Adam's naming of his wife was an act of lordship. However, the name that he gives her is the equivalent to his own, meaning the male affirmed her equality with him."²⁷ Other scholars argue that, the phrase 'suitable helper' in v. 18 has traditionally been taken to imply a functional subordination of woman to man as people understood in creation, but this interpretation is increasingly being rejected. Adam's outburst, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" in v. 23 highlights the equality between man and woman. Brown follows this line of thought when he remarks: "The creation of woman from man (Gen 2:22) in no way implies subordination of woman to man, but rather stresses their common identity, as poetically expressed in the man's jubilation in Gen 2:23."²⁸ Mary also observes in the same vein:

Some pickup the word "helper" in v. 18 and say that if woman was created to help man then it follows that she does not have an existence of her own. Here again we have to insist that in interpreting Scripture, it is of paramount importance to follow the mind of the author. Meanings that are at variance with his thinking are not counted as scriptural. In the mind of the author God wanted to give man a helper who will remove his loneliness. The parade of

²⁶Mary, "Woman in Creation Story," 97.

²⁷Elwell and Comfort, "Image of God," 1307.

²⁸Brown, "Creation," 294.

animals is meant to impinge on the minds of the people of his time that animals can be one's property but no fitting companion for man. So the help intended here is real companionship that can be given only by an equal.²⁹

In short, the Scripture highlights the fact that woman is truly equal to man. The work of God is completely perfect, for man is created to live in happiness with the animals to serve him, and to live with the woman, his other self, as his companion.³⁰

"The woman is another 'I' in a common humanity."³¹ Scholars have shown that woman's designation as 'helper' does not denote inferiority, but rather, man's incompleteness without woman; the making of Eve from Adam's rib symbolises their essential unity.³²

The two approaches in Genesis, and the two accounts of creation achieve the same result of presenting men and women as distinct beings whose relatedness is stressed more than their distinctness and who are both interdependent and responsible.³³

The implication is that human life in every area can only be lived in the way that God intends when women and men cooperate each together; for man to be alone, without the partnership of woman, is 'not good.'³⁴ This picture in Genesis 1 and 2 is of men and women as different but united, cooperating together as perfect complements, each playing a part in the God-given task of governing the earth.

1.3. Dignity of Women in the Biblical Tradition

The dignity of woman in the biblical stories emerges from the fact of being created in God's image. The concise scriptural phrase "in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26) contains the fundamental anthropological truth. As mentioned above,

²⁹Mary, "Woman in Creation Story," 99.

³⁰Wicks, "Creation," 99.

³¹MD, 6.

³²Edwards, "Woman," 1090-1091.

³³Evans, "Women," 900.

³⁴Evans, "Women," 900.

when God created humankind, he created both 'male and female' (Gen 1:27). Both were created in God's image and both were given the responsibility of exercising authority over God's creation. According to the Yahwist, the man was created before the woman. Because the man needed companionship and a helper, God created woman.³⁵ In this regard Pope John Paul II observes, "Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of God."³⁶ They are representatives of and witnesses to God's power and love in all creation. Both man and woman share this responsibility and this greatness. Both bring God's touch to the world.³⁷ All these show that man and woman have equal dignity before God and their duty is to make God's presence felt in the world. Gen 2:24 highlights the basic power of love between man and woman as the completion of God's intention for His human creatures regarding their manner of living. Human beings thus share with God freedom, dignity and responsibility. However, history bears witness to a mixed story of both degraded and empowered womanhood.

1.3.1. The Social Condition of Women during the Old Testament Times

This section analyses the social conditions of women in the time of the Old Testament. In Israel, family associations and tribes based on patriarchal nature and patrilineal descent exercised political as well as social functions. One consequence of patrilineal organisation was that women were to some extent either aliens or transients within their family or residence.³⁸ In this patriarchal nature, women had a low status and were

³⁵As noted already the word *Adam* is not a personal name, but a collective name which includes women and men. In Hebrew *Adam* denotes human and *Ezer* indicates 'helper'. Chatterji, *The Good News for Women*, 39.

³⁶*MD*, 6.

³⁷Bergant, "Image of God," 459.

³⁸Bird, "Women," 952.

inferior and subordinate to men. A woman was identified not as a separate individual, but in relation to man, on whom she was always dependent in her family.

In ancient Israel, a girl was married at an early age, twelve or thirteen, within her tribe and family, and the marriage was arranged by her parents. The family was always a male-headed household, in which descent and transmission of property were reckoned through males.³⁹ The *mohar* was paid by the groom to the bride's father as compensation, besides other gifts to her family members. Thus, she became her husband's property⁴⁰ (Ex 20:17). Another issue of the family organisation was that women did not normally inherit land. The importance of patrilineal organisation in ancient Israel may be seen in the prominence of genealogies and genealogical narratives in the Old Testament. The genealogies, which serve a variety of social, political and literary functions, account for the majority of personal names recorded in the Old Testament and for the great preponderance of male over female names.⁴¹

A woman could neither attend the rabbinic school to learn to read the Torah nor receive any schooling. A perpetual minor, she had no property of her own. Whether wife or daughter, she could not inherit anything, except if her father died without sons (Num 27:8 ff). A wife's duty was to bear children, preferably male, and only through this function did she obtain some honour and status in society and, in the case of queen mothers, some power as well.⁴² All these point to the single fact that in Hebrew culture and society the dignity and honour of women were ignored.

³⁹Bird, "Women," 952.

⁴⁰The Hebrew word *Mohar* means 'bridal money.' The term always refers to gifts which the bridegroom or his father must give to the father or guardian of the girl before she is 'given over' to her 'lord.' Lipinski,

"Mohar," 143.

⁴¹Bird, "Women," 953.

⁴²Chatterji, *Good News for the Women*, 11.

There are many women that appear in the pages of the Bible. Some of them played very prominent and illustrious roles in the history of the people of God. They recognised their responsibilities and were aware of their dignity in the society in a different way. They were judges and prophetess; caregivers and teachers; prominent matriarchs of large clans or quiet disciples; woman who suffered alone or sang joyous praises to God amid the crowds.⁴³ They are representatives of the human race in whom one could find a natural mix of sin and goodness, fear and courage, bondage and freedom. Their stories are not always easy to read, but even in their suffering, they teach us about dignity and courage.⁴⁴ There were times when women led the nation when Israel lacked adequate male leadership. The examples of Miriam, Deborah, Judith, Ruth and Esther are not any less illustrious than that of the renowned male figures of their time.

1.3.1.1. Self-Empowered Women in the Old Testament

Though the social condition of women in the history of Israel was very poor and they were subordinate figures, there were those like Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Ruth and Judith who were outstanding, each having a distinction and mission of her own, as our discussion in this section will point out. These women who appear in the Old Testament are visionaries and self-empowering women leaders, who excelled in their times in taking initiatives, making decisions and executing them and even at times saving the whole nation of Israel. Some of them were able to reach beyond the limits of their socio-cultural and religious barriers and accomplished unimaginable tasks denied to women. This unquestioned sense of dignity was their spiritual gift from God.⁴⁵ God gave them a special gift of faith, compassion and loyalty. This section describes a few women

⁴³Hollyday, *Clothed with the Sun*, xi.

⁴⁴Hollyday, *Clothed with the Sun*, xii.

⁴⁵Kimbrough, *She is Worthy: Encounters with Biblical Women*, 8.

characters and the unique roles they played in their community.⁴⁶

1.3.1.1.1. Miriam: Gifted Poetess and Great Leader (Ex 15:20-21; Num 12)

Miriam⁴⁷ is the first prophetess mentioned in the Old Testament. She is the only woman in the Bible whose recorded story spans from childhood to death.⁴⁸ She was a devoted sister who played her role in preserving the life of her infant brother, Moses. With Moses and Aaron she toiled in bringing Israel out of Egypt, she lifted voice in the song of deliverance which was composed by Moses; and Miriam led the women in singing and dancing in celebration of the triumph.⁴⁹ Scholars argue that this is the most ancient piece of literature in the Bible (Ex 15:20).⁵⁰ Miriam's life had been one of service and leadership. She expressed all the robust qualities that are best: courage and ingenuity in a dangerous situation, loyalty to her family, a lover of music, story-telling and dance, and one capable of intellectual enquiry into questions about authority and social

⁴⁶Since the consideration of all the women characters in the Bible would make the study too long, it can be limited to the study of a few main characters.

⁴⁷Miriam, the sister of Moses, played a very important part in the exodus and wilderness events alongside Moses and Aaron. According to the divine design she is especially called by Yahweh to bring Israel out of Egypt and redeem them from the land of slavery. She organized the women folk during the march from Egypt towards the Promised Land. She displayed admirable qualities like energetic initiative and untiring enthusiasm.

⁴⁸Hollyday, *Clothed with the Sun*, 139.

⁴⁹Ritual singing by women was common in ancient Israel. Women sang particularly at victory celebrations, going out to meet returning warriors and greeting them with songs which expressed their relief, joy, and jubilation at the defeat of enemies.

⁵⁰Coats, *Exodus 1-18*, 122.

responsibility.⁵¹ She remains a model for women and men today.)

1.3.1.1.2. Deborah: Warrior and Prudent Judge (Judg 4:4-9)

Deborah⁵² was the fourth Judge and the only one who is actually described serving a judicial function (Judg 4:4-9). The judges were in essence tribal heroes or deliverers, whose authority from God was acknowledged by the people.⁵³ As the position of women in those days was subordinate to men, Deborah's prominence as a ruler was extra ordinary. All Israel was under her jurisdiction, and from the palm tree bearing her name, and elsewhere, called "the sanctuary of the palm", she dispensed righteousness, justice and mercy.⁵⁴ The phrase "She was judging Israel" (Judg 4:4) would mean, she was a guide to the people of Israel; she represented Israel before God and God before Israel; she dispensed justice and mercy to the people like any other judge mentioned in the Book of Judges.⁵⁵ She was also known for her talents as a military strategist and a leader of songs – a very gifted woman. So loved was she that she was called a 'Mother of Israel.'⁵⁶ The song praises Deborah for all time as a deliverer by God, who empowered her people in a war of liberation. Forty years of peace endured during Deborah's reign as judge.

⁵¹Fletcher, "Miriam Bible Woman: Sister of Moses and Aaron" [Online].

⁵²Deborah means a 'bee.' There is no genealogy of this female warrior and writer. The only personal touch is that she was 'the wife of Lapidoth' (Judg 4:4), whose name is the only thing the Bible gives us. Their home was between Bethel and Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim. In honour of her works, it became known as "the Palm of Deborah" (Judg 4:5). Locker, *All the Women of the Bible*, 40.

⁵³Hollyday, *Clothed with the Sun*, 145.

⁵⁴Locker, *All the Women of the Bible*, 41.

⁵⁵Raja, *You are Graced: Women in the Old Testament*, 72.

⁵⁶Hollyday, *Clothed with the Sun*, 145.

1.3.1.1.3. Ruth: Loyal and Faithful Daughter-in-Law (Ruth 1-4)

Ruth⁵⁷ is depicted within the succession of generations of the tribe of Judah as the great grandmother of David (Ruth 4:18-22). Just as the whole people of Israel owed its survival in Egypt to courageous women (Ex 1-2), so the Judahite royal dynasty was founded on the initiative of two women on the fringes of the society, on the brave actions of the widows, Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:22).⁵⁸ From Ruth's outstanding qualities of unselfishness and loyalty, one learns that such virtues are the only foundation upon which true happiness can be built. Ruth also teaches us that attractive graciousness is worth cultivating and that racial hatred and religious narrow-mindedness can be solved by a right relationship with God who is the creator of all human beings. In Matthew's genealogy, which identifies Jesus as the son of David, Ruth is listed as one of his female ancestors (Mt 1:5).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ The name Ruth, possibly a contraction of *Reut* in Hebrew, which means 'a lady friend' or 'a female companion'. Ruth is the widowed daughter-in-law of a widowed mother-in-law, a woman surrounded by death. She is a foreigner in Israel. Worse, she is a Moabite. She speaks the words that have become a well-known testimony to undying love: "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die - there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you." (Ruth 1:16-17). She is a gentle, kind, and unassuming woman. The devoted love between Ruth and Naomi, two powerless widows, gives rise to the line of David whose dynasty, God promises, will endure forever (2 Sam 7:16). Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament*, 91-94.

⁵⁸ Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled with God*, 129.

⁵⁹ Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament*, 94. Mt 1:5-6 reads, "...and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David."

1.3.1.1.4. Judith: Woman of Courage and Strength (Jdt 8-16)

Judith⁶⁰ was a widow who dauntlessly came forward to liberate God's people from the clutches of Assyria,⁶¹ when the fainthearted political and religious leaders were ready to kneel down before the invaders. Putting her faith in Yahweh she went into the Assyrian camp, made the military general dance to her tune, chopped his head off and brought it back to her people.⁶² Judith sees the action of the elders of her time as an act of fear and despair. So she sends for the elders and chastises them for their failure to trust God, reminds them of God's actions in the past, and exhorts them to take courage.⁶³ Her speech reveals that she is prayerful and wise. She does not hesitate to summon and reprove even the elders of her city. She acts as a prophetess, calling her people to radical faith in God, no matter how desperate the situation seems.⁶⁴ Through her, God saved Israel.

1.3.1.1.5. Esther: Saving Star of Israel (Esth 2-14)

The story of Esther⁶⁵ is the story of a beautiful young Jewish woman who rose to great power. Esther grew up quickly, her

⁶⁰Judith means 'Jewess'. She was typically a Jewess, one who loved and lived for her religion and people, even willing to sacrifice everything completely for the sake of liberation of the community.

⁶¹The Book of Judith says that Nebuchadnezzar (the king of Assyrians) began his terrible conquest of the world in the 18th year of his reign on the 22nd day of the first month (2:1). Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament*, 153-154.

⁶²Kalluveettil, "Women in the Divine Vision," 10.

⁶³Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament*, 156.

⁶⁴Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament*, 156.

⁶⁵The name Esther comes from the Persian word *starch* which means 'star'. Locker, *All the Women of the Bible*, 53. Esther was the daughter of Abihail who lived at Shushan, the Persian royal city. When her parents died she came under the guardianship of Mardecai, a palace official. Esther was always obedient to her uncle and even when she became queen, sought his advice. Because of her beauty Esther became

innocence transformed into courage when the lives of her people came under threat. She offered one of the bravest declarations in all of Scripture: "I will go to the King, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esth 4:16).

She persuaded God with a reminder of God's faithfulness to Israel in past ages and acknowledged God's justice in sending the people into exile. She is certain, however, that the total extermination of the covenant people is not God's desire. She declares her worthiness to act as God's minister in this act of salvation.⁶⁶ She has been faithful to her Jewish tradition; she does not glory in the pomp of the court. Her only joy is in God. Her prayer ends with a petition: "O God, whose might is over all, save me from my fear" (Esth 14:19). At the end of the story she has reached the zenith of power as a faithful Jewish woman and the Persian queen. Through Esther, God once again saved the covenant people.

These are some of the inspired women in the Old Testament who played their unique role in salvation history. Women could lead the society according to the aspiration and will of God.⁶⁷ Though the general status of women was very pathetic, Deborah led the society as a judge, Ruth taught the people of the greatness of womanhood and called everyone from the religious narrow-mindedness of the Jewish society. Miriam, Judith, and Esther became role models through their fervent faith in God, loyalty to their community and dedicated life.

1.3.2. The Social Condition of Women in the New Testament Times

In the New Testament, the ministry and words of Jesus give a clear evidence of the establishment of a new community, a new kingdom (Lk 4:18-19; Mk 2:17). As in the days of the OT, the women who lived in Palestine at the time of Jesus were

an inmate of the palace, and when courageous queen Vasti was deposed, Esther was chosen to succeed her (cf. Esth 2-3).

⁶⁷Howell, *Women in the Old Testament*, 204.

considered and treated as inferior to men. In Jesus, one finds, a movement of women's empowerment against all forms of bondage, poverty, suffering, disease, untouchability, sexual slavery and adultery.⁶⁷

Women were not allowed to study the Torah and had no schooling. Jesus taught them the Word of God, the way of salvation, as he did for his other disciples every day of his public life. His new and free outlook, his principles and conduct were in opposition to the social and religious traditions of his time.⁶⁸ The rabbinic perspective of Jesus' times considered women inferior to men and talking to them in public was looked down upon and even forbidden. In such a social context, Jesus dared to speak with the Samaritan woman at the well; breaking the sectarian custom which perplexed even his disciples.⁶⁹

According to the synoptic Gospels, the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection were witnessed by female disciples. They were present at the cross and they came to the tomb at Sunday dawn and found it empty (Mk 15:40-41; 16:1-2). However, their testimony was not welcomed by male disciples. It is none other than Mary Magdalene who becomes 'the apostle to the Apostles'⁷⁰ (Jn 20:1-2, 18). What greater honour can a woman have than becoming an *apostle to the Apostles* in a patriarchal society? It is true that no woman appears among the company of the twelve. But it is not clear if this reflects any timeless principle beyond a commitment to present the gospel to a given culture in an acceptable manner. *b*

⁶⁷Noronha, "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society," 403.

⁶⁸Cluade, "Women in the Ministry of Jesus," 98.

⁶⁹Irudaya, "Significance of Jesus' Mission with the Marginalized Samaritan Woman," 63.

⁷⁰Finkel, "Women in the Bible," 12. See also Craich, "Woman," 826.

1.3.2.1. Jesus and the Dignity of Women

The coming of Jesus was the beginning of new life and hope for all, especially for women. As mentioned above, they did not count in the society of Jesus' day. In opposition to the prevalent custom, Jesus' attitude toward women was striking. He dealt with them as persons, worthy to be talked to, listened to, and worthy of being part of his band of followers in need of salvation equally with men.⁷¹ Jesus liberated them from the chains of unwise customs and practices. Its effects were seen not only in his time but also in the rest of the New Testament era. Lk 8:1-3 narrates the good deeds of women, albeit minimally.⁷¹

The Gospels clearly show that Jesus' relationship with the many women he met during his ministry was marked by a unique inner freedom, openness and serenity. He was not constrained by the Jewish prejudices and taboos which governed the dealings of men with women.⁷² According to the teaching of Jewish rabbis, one should beware of unnecessary contact with women; this resulted from the intensified interpretation of the 6th commandment.⁷³ One should not speak with a woman unnecessarily, not even with one's own wife.⁷⁴ However, in his healing ministry Jesus spontaneously touched women. To heal Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus goes to the sick woman, and bending takes her by the hand, and raises her up (Mk 1:29-31). This is quite remarkable because Jewish custom did not permit a respected rabbi or religious leader to touch or take a woman by the hand. In Luke he touched and healed the crippled woman in the synagogue, "When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God")

⁷¹ Many women were collaborators in the movement initiated by Jesus. They accompanied him during his public ministry along with his male disciples" (Lk 8:1-3).

⁷² Mangattu, "Jesus' Option for Women," 161.

⁷³ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 296.

⁷⁴ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 296.

among the followers and friends of Jesus, the Galilean women continued the movement initiated by Jesus.⁸⁴

1.3.2.2.1. Samaritan Woman: Receiver of Revelation (Jn 4:4-42)

John has positively presented the Samaritan woman as a channel of profound revelations.⁸⁵ In this story (Jn 4:4-42), she is depicted as experiencing the progressive stages of faith in Jesus. She met Jesus, she learned about him and she came to believe in him – she who was considered marginalized, unclean and immoral in the society of her time. Jesus dared to speak with her at the well – to her, a Samaritan woman – thus breaking down the most dehumanizing custom of cultural prejudices.⁸⁶ In the Gospel of John, she is presented as a model of faith and mission.)

In his revelation – *I am He* – Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman his identity as the Messiah. She was a simple woman of Samaria. However, she became the person to whom Jesus revealed his identity.⁸⁷ She accepted the self-disclosure of Jesus and brought others to him by her witness. The woman took initiative in the mission of proclaiming Jesus without looking

⁸⁴Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 139.

⁸⁵Irudaya, "Significance of Jesus' Mission with the Marginalized Samaritan Woman," 169.

⁸⁶Irudaya, "Significance of Jesus' Mission with the Marginalized Samaritan Woman", 163-164. By beginning to talk and continuing his conversation with the woman, Jesus went beyond the three social barriers of talking to women. 1. Jesus started to talk with a strange woman in public, which was not expected of a man in his society. 2. Jesus as a Jew spoke to a woman who was Samaritan. This went against the cultural prejudice and custom where Jews did not share things in common with Samaritans (Jn 4:9c). 3. Jesus as a rabbi talked to the woman and this was not consonant with the dignity of a rabbi of his times (Jn 1:38-40; 3:2-26; 4:31). Jesus' respect for women as persons did not deter him from the prevailing customs.

⁸⁷Cluade, "Women in the Ministry of Jesus," 111.

his approval or seeking the permission of anyone.⁸⁸ She became a model of a mature disciple. She abandoned her water jar and went into the city to spread the good news of her encounter with Jesus, the Messiah (Jn 4:28-30). The people listening to her also came to believe in Jesus. The woman is presented as the announcer/evangelizer of the man near the well of Jacob, who told her everything she had ever done (Jn 4:29a).⁸⁹

After identifying Jesus as a prophet and Messiah, the woman became a medium for, bringing her fellow Samaritans to him. Later, she along with her villagers proclaimed Jesus as saviour of the world.⁹⁰ It is remarkable that the end of this story is a 'portrayal of the evangelized as having become an evangelist.' This woman not only received new life from Jesus but also gave it to others. She brought many Samaritans to faith.⁹¹ According to Schneiders, the Samaritan woman was a female disciple, for the following reasons: (1) She engages theological discussion with Jesus; (2) She comes to believe in Jesus through his prophetic knowledge of her past; (3) As a missionary, she brings her people to Jesus.⁹²

In the opinion of Irudaya, the Samaritan woman's coming into new life in Christ inspired and impelled her to communicate

⁸⁸Hollyday, *Clothed with the Sun*, 212, presents the proclamation of the Samaritan women's response in a dramatic way: "She ran to her neighbours, breathless with excitement. She gathered them together, insisting, 'Come and see, Come and see!' The ripple of living water washed over them, and the people who had once scorned and shunned her 'believed in him because of the woman's testimony' (4:39). Because of this one woman, the Samaritans invited Jesus – a Jew, an enemy – to spend a couple of days with them.

⁸⁹Irudaya, "Significance of Jesus' Mission with the Marginalized Samaritan Woman," 172.

⁹⁰Irudaya, "The Samaritan Mission of Jesus to the Marginalized," 661-662.

⁹¹ Evelyn and Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus*, 117. Cited in Arceparambil, *A Relevant Theology of Women Empowerment*, 172.

⁹²Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church," 40.

that Christ experience to others and lead them into it. The woman was indeed a missionary to her own people.⁹³ In a society where women were treated as impure and untouchable, Jesus had chosen such a woman to be a missionary, communicating her Christ experience to her people and leading them to him.⁹⁴

1.3.2.2.2. Mary Magdalene: The First Witness to Resurrection (Jn 20:16-18)

6 The Gospel versions vary as to which women stood by the cross and went to the tomb. But all agree that Mary Magdalene⁹⁵ was there. Her name often appears first in the list of women who surrounded Jesus. No other disciple, male or female, surpassed her in ardent devotion to Jesus. Luke's resurrection account places Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the Mother of James at the tomb. When these women went to tell the disciples of the resurrection, they considered it 'an idle tale' (Lk 24:11). However, the Gospel of John emphasizes the special role of Mary Magdalene. She is the first to meet the Risen Christ.⁹⁶ Pope John Paul II notes that Mary

⁹³Irudaya, "Significance of Jesus' Mission with the Marginalized Samaritan Women," 176.

⁹⁴Irudaya, "Significance of Jesus' Mission with the Marginalized Samaritan Women," 176.

⁹⁵Mary Magdalene is distinguished from all others of the same name as *The Magdalene*, which identifies her with her place of birth. Magdala means *tower* or *castle*, a populous town on the coast of Galilee about three miles from Capernaum. Locker, *All the Women of the Bible*, 99-100. Mary Magdalene appears in every one of the Gospels as one of the Galilean women who was at Jesus' crucifixion, Mt 27:56, saw where he was buried, Mk 15:47, and returned to the tomb on the first day of the week, Jn 20:1. With the exception of Jn 19:25 she is always the first mentioned, indicating her importance among the woman. Reid, *Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 124.

⁹⁶According to Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 139, "Mary of Magdala was the most prominent of the Galilean disciples, because according to tradition she was the first one to receive a vision of the resurrected Lord."

was the first eyewitness of the Risen Christ (Jn 20:16-18), and for this reason she was also the first to bear witness to him before the Apostles. Hence, she came to be called 'the apostle to the Apostles.'⁹⁷ This event crowns all that has been said previously about Christ entrusting divine truths to women as well as to men.⁹⁸)

According to John Paul II, the Prophet Joel's prophecy is fulfilled in this context: "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," (Joel 2:28). By the power of the Spirit, woman becomes the living subject and irreplaceable witness.⁹⁹ Against the prevailing culture of his time, Jesus courageously accepted and recognized women's dignity. In Jesus' time women followed Jesus faithfully and contributed to the movement with much enthusiasm. By their faithful lives, the Samaritan woman became known as a zealous missionary and Mary Magdalene became the apostle to the Apostles.

1.3.3. Paul and the Dignity of Women

The discussion in this section is on Paul's vision of the dignity of women. In order to understand the attitude of Paul towards women, the focus of examination is his female co-workers and their active apostolate in the early Church.) As in every other ancient society, in Judaism and in the Roman Empire men were considered superior to women. However, when Paul got into the mind and world vision of Jesus, all such discriminatory considerations had to be abandoned, and Paul stood for the equality of all human beings.¹⁰⁰ Labelling Paul as a *misogynist* and *misogamist* as some superficial and unscientific exegesis have done, considering only some passages from the Pauline letters has rendered very little service to the theology and

⁹⁷ MD, 16.

⁹⁸ MD, 16.

⁹⁹ MD, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 18.

person of Paul.¹⁰¹ The little that has been achieved so far has been to exonerate Paul from some of his misunderstood and misinterpreted texts related to women.¹⁰² According to Brendan Byrne, Pauline literature in the New Testament "has formed the battleground upon which women's issues in the Church have been contested."¹⁰³ The apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the Pauline letters can be understood only when they are viewed from the socio-cultural and religious milieu of Paul and of his Christian communities.¹⁰⁴ Here the intention is to present, the positive and constructive Pauline reflections on the role and mission of women and then to analyse and explain the so-called negative remarks about women in his writings.

1.3.3.1. Paul and Women Co-Workers

The vigorous involvement of a few women in the mission of the Church invites our attention. An analysis of the role of women during the ministry of Paul, shows that he considered them as his partners in the evangelizing work. Both, the Acts and the Letters of Paul reveal that the apostle had several women colleagues, co-workers and collaborators who actively participated in the work of the gospel initiated by him.

The author of Acts tells us: "A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. Then she and her household were baptized," (Acts 16:14-15). It is noteworthy that Lydia not only received baptism, but also invited Paul and his companions to sojourn at her house, and that Paul accepted the hospitality of this Gentile woman. Lydia seems to have teamed up with Paul to further the work of evangelization in Thyatira.

¹⁰¹Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 17.

¹⁰²Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 17.

¹⁰³Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Women*, XIII.

¹⁰⁴Pauline, "Paul and Women," 188.

Paul mentions a number of women as his co-workers who laboured with him in the ministry of the word.¹⁰⁵ Phoebe is described as a sister, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae and she was also one of the benefactors of Paul (Rom 16:1-2).¹⁰⁶ Paul's appreciation and affirmation acknowledges the effectiveness of her ministry and the significant contribution made by her in the church at Cenchreae. This is further underlined by the fact that she became a benefactor of many people in the church.¹⁰⁷ There is evidence in the letters of Paul that women were involved in the animation of house churches.¹⁰⁸

Prisca¹⁰⁹ and her husband Aquila are referred to as close co-workers of Paul in several passages in the Pauline letters (Acts

¹⁰⁵ These are Paul's associates in his missionary labour: Phoebe, Prisca, Aquilla, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus, Philologus, Julia, Nereus and Olympas (cf. Rom 16:1-3, 6, 12, 13, 15).

¹⁰⁶ The designation *sister* is traditionally used to refer to the female members of the Church. Cenchreae was a town close to Corinth. It is probable that Phoebe was a leader of the Church, helping many and organizing a small community there, similar to a house-church. According to, Malone, *Women and Christianity*, 69, the house-church was the earliest organizational unit of churches among the early Christians. It is usually associated with fairly affluent believers, who owned a house of sufficient size to host the gathered community.

¹⁰⁷ Chennattu, "Paul's Understanding of Women's Place in the Church," 264.

¹⁰⁸ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 177, observes: House churches were a decisive factor in the missionary movement insofar as they provided space, support, and actual leadership for the community. The house-churches were the place where the early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper and preached the good news. Since women were among the wealthy and prominent converts (Acts 17:4; 12), they played an important role in the founding, sustaining, and promoting of such house churches.

¹⁰⁹ Malone, *Women and Christianity*, 69, states: "One of the most ubiquitous women is Prisca, who is always partnered with Aquila. They are mentioned six times in the New Testament." They preceded Paul in the missionary work of the Church and, after Paul's conversion; he

18:2, 1 Cor 16:19, Acts 18:26). Paul recommends that all the churches of the gentiles be grateful for the service rendered by them just as he is himself (Rom 16:3-4). The fact that Priscilla's name is always mentioned first before the name of her husband indicates her prominent role in the ministry of the gospel (Acts 18:18, 26; 2 Tim 4:19). In some texts Prisca is also called Priscilla (Acts 18:18, 26). The *Acts of the Apostles* shows that Priscilla is teaching Apollos, the learned Alexandrian Jew (Acts 18:25-28).

Another couple mentioned in Paul's greeting is Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7), who were his relatives and fellow prisoners. They were Jewish Christians and outstanding members of the circle of the apostles. Until recently most scholars doubted whether the name Junias designated a woman. The reason, according to Byrne, is being prejudiced on the part of scholars who "took it as unthinkable that the title 'apostle' could in any way apply to a woman."¹¹⁰ Whatever be the prejudice, the fact is that Junia deserved the title 'apostle'.¹¹¹ According to Paul, the mark of true apostleship consists in joyfully accepting the labours and sufferings as an integral and complementary part of missionary work (1 Cor 4:8-13; 2 Cor Chapters 11-12).¹¹² Andronicus and Junia fulfil these criteria of true apostleship.

joined them in their house-church in Corinth, perhaps in the year 50 A. D. Paul made tents in their workshop, as they shared this same trade (Acts 18:1-3). In Rome, Corinth and Ephesus, they founded house-churches."

¹¹⁰Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Women*, 72. See also Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 533-534.

¹¹¹Bieringer, "Not Male and Female," 29, opines: In the most recent revision of the Revised Standard Version (and many others) the masculine name 'Junias' is thus changed to the feminine name 'Junia'. This change is of particular significance because in Rom 16:7 Paul speaks about two people as being prominent among the apostles. If the second name in 16:7 indeed refers to a woman, this might provide evidence that there was at least one woman apostle in earliest Christianity.

¹¹²Pauline, "Paul and Women," 201.

Paul himself attests to it in Rom 16:7. In sum, Paul includes women among the outstanding apostles of the early church.¹¹³

The letter to the Colossians also has a direct reference to a house-church in the house of a woman: "Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house" (Col 4:15). Laodicea was a town not far from Colossae and the house-church is said to be that of Nympha, who had excellent qualities to lead a community of believers. From the analyses of the various references to house-churches one derives the conclusion that it was a regular phenomenon in the early Church and that most of these churches were taken care of by women associates of Paul. In short, there was an active participation of women in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ in the early Church.¹¹⁴

1.3.3.2. There is neither Male nor Female but All are One in Christ (Gal 3:26-29)

The recipients of the letter to the Galatians were Gentile Christians. In Gal 3:6-25, Paul explains the entire process of the history of Israel starting with Abraham and concluding with the Christ Event. Paul concludes his reflections stating that in Christ all humans are made into a new community through faith and baptism. The 'neither male and female' assertion does not mean the total abolition of sex differences in a biological sense but concerns relationships; since status in the community depended solely upon the faith and baptism common to all,

¹¹³Chennattu, "Paul's Understanding of Women's Place in the Church," 264.

¹¹⁴McGinn, "Women Co-Workers of Paul," 217, holds that: "There are some other names of women co-workers mentioned in different letters of Paul. Euodia and Syntyche of Philippi (Phil 4:3), Apphia was one of the leaders of the church in Philemon's house (Phlm 2), Mary and the sisters Tryhaena and Tryphonsa were workers of the Lord in Rome (Rom 16:6, 12), the mother of Rufus, Julia, Olympas and Nerus' sister were leading members of two or more of the Roman house-churches (Rom 16:13, 15), etc. Unfortunately these women missionaries, evangelists, church leaders and apostles are not so prominent in the memories of Christians today."

status and privileges based on gender had no relevance.¹¹⁵ Man and woman were equal in dignity and responsibility before the Lord. Paul continues his reflection in 3:26-28, as he begins to reflect on faith and baptism in so far as all those who believe in Christ Jesus and are baptised in his name are children of God.¹¹⁶ Gal 3:28 is also a part of an early baptismal liturgy.¹¹⁷ In a society that was devoted to patriarchy and servitude to hear that there is no longer slave nor free or that there is equality between man and woman was to welcome a utopian society, the dream and goal of all those who were marginalized and unjustly treated.¹¹⁸ Special mention must be made concerning the expression: "All of you are one in Christ" (Gal 3:28b). The most important focus of this statement is the meaning of the word 'one'. If all people, Greek or Jew, male or female and slave or free are regarded on an equal footing, it is because in Christ everyone appears the same.¹¹⁹

Ethically, socially, and interpersonally, the new community was a dynamic reality of inter-related persons, all having their own cultural and social distinctions, but having no discrimination of one against the other. It corresponds to the concept of the "new person" in Eph 2:15. Speaking about the

¹¹⁵Bhavya, *Indian Women in Religious Life*, 84.

¹¹⁶Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 19.

¹¹⁷Martyn, *Galatians*, AB, Vol. 33A, 375, explains baptismal liturgy in the following way: It was probably from the baptismal liturgy that Paul took the motif *son of God*. In formulating the liturgy, Jewish Christians before him had apparently claimed for themselves the fulfillment of God's promise to reestablish Israel as his sons. Some dimensions of this tradition may already have been incorporated into the early Christian baptismal liturgy Paul is citing, Christians intended by it to say that the prophetic promise of a reestablished divine sonship had now been fulfilled in the church, the community made up of the baptized sons of God. Affirming the corporate existence already given the Galatians; therefore, Paul can boldly say, 'You are sons of God.' See also Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 19.

¹¹⁸Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 19.

¹¹⁹Guthrie, "Galatians 3:26-28," 111.

equality of male and female, Paul is also recalling what the Priestly writer had written about the creation of humankind in the image of God as male and female (Gen 1:27).¹²⁰ The Church is the body and Christ is the head, in which case the only permissible distinctions are those of function, like the distinction between the hand and the foot. There is no room for a few to think that he is any special part of the body, and the same applies to all the other distinctions.¹²¹ In sum, Paul's vision of a new life in Christ marks the end of discrimination of every kind, particularly that of gender, and establishes full equality among the members of the church.¹²² This new community characterised by equality, justice and peace becomes God's new Israel or chosen people and makes God's kingdom visible here on earth. Gal 3:28 calls for the abolition of socio-cultural and sexual discrimination.

1.3.3.3. Misunderstood and Misinterpreted Pauline Texts

For centuries Paul has been seen as one of the strongest supporters of androcentric practices in Christian communities.¹²³ Some fundamentalists refer to some of the texts such as, 'women should be silent in the churches' (1 Cor 14:34), 'women ought to have a veil on her head' (1 Cor 11:2-16) and 'the husband is the head of his wife' (1 Cor 11:3), in order to defend the subordinate place of women as divinely sanctioned.¹²⁴ However, in order to interpret the writings of Paul properly, one should differentiate Paul's doctrinal statements from his disciplinary norms and, moreover, keep in mind that both his doctrinal statements and disciplinary norms were conditioned by the culture of his time.¹²⁵ On the one hand,

¹²⁰Padrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 19.

¹²¹Cuthrie, "Galatians 3:26-28," 111.

¹²²Chennattu, "Paul's Understanding of Women's Place in the Church," 266.

¹²³Heringer, "Not Male and Female," 10.

¹²⁴Heringer, "Not Male and Female," 11.

¹²⁵Chennattu, "Paul's Understanding of Women's Place in the Church," 263.

Paul rejected all forms of inequality that existed between men and women and, on the other, he seems to have been instrumental in perpetuating some of the traditional practices which sprang from the view that women are inferior to men. Here it must be noted that the analysis of these texts must be done in their context, and not in the abstract.

1.3.3.3.1. Women ought to have a Veil on Her Head (1 Cor 11:3-16)

The first letter to the Corinthians is basically a pastoral letter, in which Paul had to address several pastoral issues, both doctrinal and ethical. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city and the Christians there followed Greek customs and practices. Women at Corinth, after having become Christians, were interested in living in freedom, which gave little credence to veiling their heads at worship. Both Hebrew and Greek society had long-established customs for the conduct of women, although life in the Roman Empire was bringing rapid changes to some of these, including such customs concerning women.¹²⁶ Women participated in prayer and prophesied in the church. Following the Greek custom they did it without veils on their heads. Chloe's people had brought to Paul disturbing news about the Corinthian community. One such report was regarding the dress code that was improper and the disunity that existed in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

In this passage Paul approves women praying aloud and prophesying in Christian assembly, insisting only that it not be done 'with head unveiled' (1 Cor 11:15). Fiorenza understands the basis for Paul's concern in a different way. She understands Paul's theological arguments in the following manner:

First, there is a descending hierarchy, God-Christ-Man-Woman, in which each preceding member, as 'head' or 'source,' stands above the other 'in the sense that he establishes the other's being.' Therefore, Paul can declare

¹²⁶Allen, "Veiling of Woman at Worship," 353.

that man is created to be the image and manifestation of God, while woman is the glory of man, and hair is the glory of woman. It is important to note, that woman is not said to be the image of man. Thus the statement does not deny woman the "image of God" status, but explains why man is the glory of God. The arguments focus on 'glory' and climaxes with 'hair as the glory of woman' (v. 15).¹²⁷

... Second, perhaps sensing that his *midrashic* proof could be misunderstood, Paul insists that he does not want to deny the equality of women and men "in the Lord." 1 Cor 11:11 is usually translated, "In the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman." The Greek term *choris* is thus interpreted in the sense of v.12, which states that even in creation women and men are interdependent, because woman was (in the beginning) made from man, but now man is born of woman and in any case "all things are from God." Clearly, v. 12 states that Paul's *midrashic* scriptural argument does not want to deny the creational interdependence and mutuality of men and women. If *choris* is translated as 'without' or 'independent,' then v. 11 would maintain the same for their relationship in the Lord.¹²⁸

Paul holds the view that women and men are independent by nature and they are equal before God. Paul underlines the fact that God is the origin of everything. The major concern of Paul is not biological and theological, but rather the common good and the unity of the community. Maintaining good order and the common good was of primary importance for Paul while he was making decisions on practice and customs.¹²⁹

Allen, in his commentary on the Corinthians takes decorum as the issue: Prostitutes in Corinth did not wear veils. They gave considerable attention to their coiffures. Shaved heads were

¹²⁷ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 229.

¹²⁸ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 229.

¹²⁹ Padrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 27.

that man is created to be the image and manifestation of God, while woman is the glory of man, and hair is the glory of woman. It is important to note, that woman is not said to be the image of man. Thus the statement does not deny woman the "image of God" status, but explains why man is the glory of God. The arguments focus on 'glory' and climaxes with 'hair as the glory of woman' (v. 15).¹²⁷

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¹²⁷ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 229.

¹²⁸ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 229.

¹²⁹ Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 27.

marks of disgrace. According to Jewish teaching, a woman convicted of adultery was to have her head shorn. Since it was demeaning for a woman to avoid wearing a veil and to cut off her hair, the women in the church at Corinth should avoid both of them. Such practices did not elevate the status of women; they lowered it. The woman who does not wear a veil when she prays or prophesies brings dishonour upon her head.¹³⁰

There are many more interpretations regarding women's wearing of the veil. Women's hair was a prime object of male lust in the ancient Mediterranean world; societies which employed head coverings viewed married women with unveiled head, as unfaithful to their husbands, that is, seeking another man (virgins and prostitutes, conversely, were expected not to cover their heads, since they were looking for men).¹³¹ Women who covered their heads could thus view the uncovered head of women as a threat; women with unveiled hair, however, undoubtedly viewed the covering custom as restrictive and saw the way they dressed their hair as their own business. Significantly, the unveiled women probably included the cultured women of higher status, whose family homes hosted most of the house churches.¹³² Statues show that well-to-do women pursued fashionable hairstyles and uncovered heads, styles that poorer women probably considered seductive. Given the class conflict in the Corinthian church evident from other passages in 1 Corinthians, this could easily have flared into a major issue of controversy.¹³³ Another possible interpretation is that the woman's veil was accepted as a symbol of the respect that was due her as a woman of good report.¹³⁴ From these discussions one can conclude that Paul was not against women or their mission in the early

¹³⁰Allen, "Veiling of Woman at Worship," 353.

¹³¹Keener, "Man and Woman," 585.

¹³²Keener, "Man and Woman," 585.

¹³³Keener, "Man and Woman," 585.

¹³⁴Allen, "Veiling of Woman at Worship," 354.

community, rather, he was against the mischievous practices of the Corinthian community.

1.3.3.3.2. Women's Silence in the Churches

(1 Cor 14:33b-36)

It is debated whether these verses are an authentic Pauline injunction or whether they were added by a later editor of Paul. If one recalls the active role played by women during the apostolic activities of Paul, which is already analysed in this study, it is very difficult to understand how and why Paul took a different and totally negative stand towards the active presence of women during worship in the Corinthian church. Now the question is about the silencing of women in 1 Cor 14:33b-35, as it stands in contrast to the directive given by Paul in 1 Cor 11:2-16 and to Paul's vision of an egalitarian society in Gal 3:26-28, especially as the text conflicts with the actual experiences of women in the Pauline communities.

In fact, even in the authentically Pauline letters there are some texts that assign inferior roles to women. The most quoted text of 1 Cor 14:33b-35 reads: "As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home." There is controversy among the scholars whether this is an interpolation or later addition.

There are a number of important arguments that lend support to this hypothesis,¹³⁵ but one is of particular importance: the obvious contradiction between 14:33b-35 and 11:2-6. As

¹³⁵ According to Bieringer, "Not Male and Female," 13, many exegetes hold it is as impossible that Paul could have written these lines. They explain the presence of 1 Cor 14:34-35 as follows. The autograph of 1 Corinthians did not contain the text of 1 Cor 14:34-35. At some point early in the process of copying the text, someone added these lines as a gloss in the margins. Later in the process of the text's transmission, a copyist included these words in the actual text of the letter.

Chennattu observes, the texts lend themselves to various interpretations:

At least six explanations have been given by scholars:

- (1) The text prohibits only disruptive speeches during the worship, it does not prohibit women to pray and prophesy;
- (2) Paul forbids only married women; so unmarried women can speak in public;
- (3) Women should keep silent in the larger assemblies, but they are allowed to speak when the church meets in their homes;
- (4) Paul prohibits women prophets to speak in public at Corinth;
- (5) Verses 34-35 are a later interpolation and thus they are non-Pauline;
- (6) The text represents the opinion of the Corinthian church which Paul in fact correct in his letter.¹³⁶

According to Pathrapankal, there are two strong views maintained by the exegetes with regard to the interpretation of 1 Cor 14:33b-35. While some take this passage as a later interpolation,¹³⁷ others take it as the position taken by some misogynistic men in the Corinthian community whom Paul confronts through his correct teaching about the rights of women to speak in the worship assemblies.¹³⁸ The second view is more challenging and more difficult to explain, but, at the same time, it is worth analysing because of the stylistic nature of this entire letter in which Paul from time to time encounters his readers with challenging questions akin to the ancient

¹³⁶Chennattu, "Paul's Understanding of Women's Place in the Church," 272. For a detailed discussion on various explanations, see also Perriman, *Speaking of Women: Interpreting Paul*, 103-135.

¹³⁷"...the hypothesis that these verses (14:34-35) are a post-Pauline interpolation has been accepted by many scholars. Not all, however, agree on the extent of the insertion. A number of recent studies reject the hypothesis that vv. 34-35 is a post-Pauline interpolation..." Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," 90-91.

¹³⁸Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 27.

literary form of diatribe.¹³⁹ This approach to the issue presupposes that there was a certain group of overzealous men who maintained that women are not allowed to have any role in the worship gatherings. It is their view that is reflected in verse 34 and 35.¹⁴⁰

E. A. Fiorenza is a typical representative of a trend which maintains that vv. 34-35 were written by Paul. She claims that there is no contradiction between these verses and 11:5, which takes it for granted that women can pray and prophesy in public.¹⁴¹ The whole chapter deals with the subject of corporate worship in the Christian church. According to C. Pauline, most of chapter 14, especially from v. 26, contains a set of rules on "speaking in tongues and prophesying" so that there is no disorder in the assemblies.¹⁴² A simple survey of 14:26-36 brings out the three main rules applicable to three categories of people.¹⁴³

vv. 27-28 rules for glossolalists

vv. 29-33 rules for prophets

vv. 34-36 rules for wives

These are formulated in a similar structure thus:¹⁴⁴

vv. 27, 29, 34 general sentence of regulation

vv. 28, 30, 35 complementary sentences for concretization

vv. 31-32, 34a, 35b expanded reasons for regulation

v. 36 containing a double rhetorical question

The intent of the command is to interdict situations in which wives publicly contradict what their husbands say or think or embarrass them by an interchange of conversation. Thus, they may be rejecting the authority of their husbands which was

¹³⁹Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 28.

¹⁴⁰Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 28.

¹⁴¹Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," 90-91.

¹⁴²Pauline, "Paul and Women," 197.

¹⁴³Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 230.

¹⁴⁴Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 230, see also Pauline, "Paul and Women," 197.

firmly fixed in the sociology of their religion.¹⁴⁵ In 1 Cor 11:5 Paul indicates that women could pray or prophesy in the church. Here Paul is contradicting himself and he enjoins silence in matters other than praying and prophesying.¹⁴⁶ However, the community rule of 14:33-36 has a specific situation in mind, namely, the speaking and questioning of wives in the public worship assembly. Here, as in 7:34 and 9:5, Paul appears to limit the active participation of wives in the 'affairs of the Lord'.¹⁴⁷ In places of worship, women were segregated from men. It is said that men were frequently interrupted by their wives with questions which would better be answered at home. Deprived of substantial education in religious matters, most women found it difficult to grasp the interpretations of the Scripture at meetings. Obviously they had to seek clarifications, and preferably from their own husbands.¹⁴⁸ According to Allen, on the other hand, women were not permitted to engage in a lot of chatter and questions and violate the rules of social decorum of that era. Paul is merely following widely accepted Jewish and Roman practice

¹⁴⁵Orr, and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians*, AB Vol. 32, 313.

¹⁴⁶Orr, and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians*, AB Vol. 32, 313. See also Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 233, added: "In the preceding analysis I have attempted to argue that the Pauline injunctions for women in 1 Corinthians should be understood in the context of Paul's argument against orgiastic behavior in the worship of the community. On the one hand, 11:2-16 does not deny women's prophesy and prayer in the worship assembly but insists that in Christian community women and men equal."

¹⁴⁷Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 233. See also Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the time of Jesus*, 360. Among the Jews of that time, men were strongly discouraged from speaking in public to women. No wonder the disciples were surprised when they saw Jesus talking to a woman (Jn 4:27).

¹⁴⁸Pauline, "Paul and Women," 198.

in his insistence that women should not intervene on their own volition in public worship.¹⁴⁹

The answer is to be found within the context of 1 Cor 11 and 14. As already mentioned, Paul's instructions pertained to order and discipline in public worship. Whatever hinders his missionary activity should be checked. Wherever disorder and confusion exist, restrictions ought to be imposed. The operative principle behind Paul's admonition to silence is his genuine concern in "building up the church"¹⁵⁰ (14:12). Fiorenza holds that Paul is most concerned about the order and propriety that are to be preserved so that an outsider cannot accuse the Christians of religious madness. In both passages Paul places a limit and qualification on the pneumatic participation of women in the worship service of the community.¹⁵¹ To sum up, the injunction imposing silence on woman in 1 Corinthians, like all others, may be understood and interpreted in the light of its context and purpose. Considering Paul's attitude towards women elsewhere in the churches, he cannot be labelled a male chauvinist, enjoining silence and subordination upon women in the Corinthian church.¹⁵² The opinion of Bieringer: If women prayed and prophesied in the assembly, as is taken for granted by Paul in 11:5, then logically they were allowed to speak. Paul is thus not responsible for the directive that women must be silent in the church.¹⁵³

In the letters of Paul, mainly in 1 Cor 14:26-36, was dealing with pastoral issues and not with abstract theological issues. Pastoral issues are to be treated from a practical and theological perspective where theological precisions are not the ultimate

¹⁴⁹ Allen, "Test of Self Control (1 Cor 14: 26-36)," 382, The author added that: "there is therefore, no convincing reason to consider vv.34-35 either an interpolation or in a dislocated position."

¹⁵⁰ Pauline, "Paul and Women," 198.

¹⁵¹ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 233.

¹⁵² Pauline, "Paul and Women," 198.

¹⁵³ Bieringer, "Not Male and Female," 13.

concern.¹⁵⁴ So, these texts need to be understood as pastoral directives aimed at specific situations and concrete problems for the building up of the church. One needs to be careful in distinguishing the voice of the apostle from the concerns of the early churches (1 Cor chapters 7 and 14). However, Paul's colleagues and co-workers like Lydia, Phoebe, Prisca, and Junia are testimonies of women's active participation in the ministry of the gospel in the early Christian communities. It is therefore difficult to deny Paul's vision of a new society brought into being by the power of God's grace which transforms the old inequalities and discrimination.

1.4. Conclusion

The present chapter has been an attempt to highlight the dignity of women who are created in the image and likeness of God. This theological discussion further tries to shed light on the role of woman and her status in the society as well as her role in the emancipation of society in the biblical times. The chapter explains that man's attitude towards women is different from that envisaged in God's policy and programme in the biblical context. The whole human race irrespective of sex was created in the image and according to the likeness of God. This view calls our attention to the fact that along with the male, the female shares the image of God, reflects his power and majesty on earth and is commanded to multiply and have dominion over the earth. However, in the society, women had a low status and were inferior and subordinate to men. Though the Hebrew society was patriarchal, there many illustrious female characters playing their roles in the pages of the Bible. Each of them had a unique role to play in the history of her people. There are judges, prophets, teachers, prominent matriarchs of large clans and disciples.

The coming of Jesus was the beginning of new life and hope for all, especially for women. Jesus dealt with women in a

¹⁵⁴Pathrapankal, "Women in Pauline Theology," 28.

manner that reinstated them to the dignity they were created with. In the gospel Jesus is empowering the Samaritan woman and restoring the dignity of her womanhood and enabling her to participate in his mission. There are many other examples of women as collaborators of Jesus such as Mary Magdalene, the first witness of Jesus' Resurrection (Lk 24:1-9) and Martha and Mary, friends of Jesus whose house he visited (Lk 10:38-42). Jesus' relationship with women during his ministry was marked by a unique inner freedom, acceptance, openness and serenity. In this regard *Mulieris Dignitatem* states: "In the eye of his contemporaries Christ became a promoter of women's true dignity and of vocation corresponding to this dignity."¹⁵⁵

The analysis of Paul and the dignity of women also leads to the conviction that none of Paul's statements implies that he thought of woman as less the object of God's redemptive love than man. He worked with women most actively and his love and respect for women did not diminish. He showed an all-embracing attitude towards women as partners in his evangelizing work. The key to a correct understanding of the dignity of woman is to start with Paul's central belief, indicated by his insistent and clear teaching on the breaking down of all traditional barriers between male and female in the new situation, which he describes as 'in Christ' (Gal 3:28). All Christians, Jew and Greek, slave or free, male or female now enjoy the same freedom, based on their identity in Christ Jesus.

Chavara's dream is in tune with the glory of God's vision for women as revealed in the Bible. He tried to bring about a change in the attitude to women prevalent in the society of his time for their own betterment and for the good of the Church. The Bible and the various female characters featured there were true models for him in this mission. Chavara was attracted especially to the compassionate and welcoming attitude and approach of Jesus towards women. An ecclesial vision of the role of women in the Church and the society is further

¹⁵⁵MD, 12.

undertaken in chapter five of our study. The next chapter examines the status of women in the 18th and 19th centuries of Kerala to obtain a better understanding of the context in which Chavara lived.

Chapter Two

WOMEN IN THE KERALA SOCIETY: SOCIO-RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO DURING THE 18th AND 19th CENTURIES

2.1. Introduction

The vast economic and social changes that have taken place around the world in the society due to technological and scientific developments have generated among some sections a keen interest in women's status. To ensure the quality of their life, the emphasis is given to their education and empowerment. Though Indian culture purports to give an enviable status to women, when one looks closely at the ground reality, one can realize that this claim does not correspond to the actual situation. This section of our study takes into account the socio-religious condition of women in Kerala during the 18th and 19th centuries. In order to make an evaluation of the status of women in the Hindu, Muslim and Christian religious traditions of the time and to consider how much they influenced the status of women in that period, it is necessary to examine the prevalent social institutions of the time such as the caste system, the *janmi* system, the social practices of *sambandham*, *smartavicharam*, *devadasi* and the *marumakkathayam* systems. Further, the analysis highlights the efforts by Protestant Missionaries, Catholic Church, Government and Social Reformers of that time towards the empowerment of women.

The study in this section is aimed at a better understanding of the significance of the involvement of Chavara in the pastoral

and social problems of the Church and the society in Kerala in the second half of the 19th century. His keen sensitivity and strong determination enabled him to discern the anomalies that existed in his society with regard to women. It seems that despite the limitations that he had, Chavara adopted effective measures to bring the women of Kerala into the main stream of the society.

2.2. A Brief Survey of the Kerala Society During 18th and 19th Centuries

Before the analysis of the status of women in Kerala in the 18th and 19th centuries, a brief study on the cultural and geographical background of Kerala would be in place in order to get a clear idea of the society. The history of Kerala is part of the general history of India and its culture is one of the major streams that have enriched the composite culture of the country. At the same time, Kerala was a distinctive geographical¹ entity from the very early days.² Kerala as a state came into existence a decade after the Independence of India in consequence of the country's linguistic reorganisation in 1956.³ Two of the princely states,

¹Kerala State lies between 8° 18' and 12° 48' North latitude and between 74° 52' and 77° 24' East latitude. The land of Kerala is bounded on the east by the western Ghats and on the west by the Arabian Sea. The Union territory of Lakshadweep, a cluster of islands, is situated in the Arabian Sea off the coast of north Kerala, while the State of Tamil Nadu borders it on the south and partly on the east and the State of Karnataka on the north and partly on the east. Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 3.

²Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 1.

³By the time of the arrival of the Portuguese (1498 A. D.) there were many warring principalities in the state, which gave the Europeans an easy footing here. Varghese, *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequence*, 13, identifies forty-three principalities in the small state of Kerala, prior to the British conquest. But in course of time, again, a process of political consolidation took place. At the time of the British, three local kingdoms emerged in the state's political scenario. They were Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. However, in politico-economic terms, Travancore became the most powerful principality. On 1st July, 1946,

Cochin and Travancore in the south and the British administered Malabar in the north were merged together into one state which was named Kerala.⁴ All the three units, in spite of their separate political identities, shared broadly the same customs, social practices and language. The system of joint families, Malayalam language, caste⁵ and religious practices and rules and rituals pertaining to purity and pollution bound them together. Nevertheless, as a result of their separate and distinct history and the religious composition of the population, there also existed wide variations in their social and economic development.⁶

During the 19th century, apart from many small principalities, Calicut, Cochin and Travancore were the three dominant kingdoms of the region. Among these kingdoms, Travancore played an important role in the later history of Kerala. Until the middle of the 18th century, Travancore was a small kingdom known as Venad. The modern history of Travancore begins with Marthanda Varma (1729-1758), an illustrious King of Travancore.⁷ He successfully annexed to his kingdom the territories that were under the Dutch. Known as the 'Maker of Modern Travancore,' Marthanda Varma's tenure of reign is a

Travancore and Cochin states were integrated to form Travancore-Cochin state. Under the State's Reorganization Act of 1956, Travancore-Cochin State and Malabar were united to form the state of Kerala on 1st November, 1956. Kurian, *Caste-Class Formation*, 72-73.

⁴Henceforth, when these provinces are referred collectively, the term 'Kerala' is used unless they are mentioned separately. However, there is a danger of anachronism.

⁵'Caste' is said to have come from the Spanish word "*casta*" which means lineage or race. It is derived from the Latin word '*castus*' which means pure or chaste. (Mann, *Macmillan Student Encyclopaedia of Sociology*, 33). The usage came into prominence through the Portuguese who employed it to denote the Indian institution of '*jati*' which was maintained by keeping the purity of blood or lineage. Palackappillil, *Dalits of Syrian Catholic Church in Keralam*, 28.

⁶Gulati, *Gender Profile Kerala*, 1.

⁷Menon, *The History of Travancore*, 114.

remarkable period in the history of Kerala.⁸ He dedicated his kingdom to Sree Padmanabha in January 1750.⁹ He declared that he and his successors would rule Travancore as *Padmanabhadhasas*.¹⁰ This had a tremendous impact on the socio-religious life. Under the rule of the king who was highly religious, the Brahmins were respected and venerated and he became the patron of the Brahmins and the guardian of Hindu *dharma*.¹¹

Marthanda Varma maintained a very friendly relationship with the English East India Company and had hardly any contact with the other European trading companies. The English East India Company supplied him with arms and ammunitions and bought pepper from him. This relationship continued till the last decade of the 18th century.¹²

The Mysorean invasions (1766-1790 A. D.) paved the way for British supremacy. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the traditional eighteen *nads* of Kerala had been reduced to three, Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. The British governed Malabar directly, and controlled Travancore and Cochin as suzerains through their Resident. While Travancore and Cochin reflect the benefits of British rule, Malabar reveals its defects.¹³

Gradually a centralized administration on the model of the Madras government took shape in Travancore with the Raja as the head and the *Diwan* as the chief executive and minister.¹⁴

⁸Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 283.

⁹Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 282.

¹⁰Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 282, observes: The title became a title for all the successive kings in Travancore. The implication of this step is that thereafter the king and his successors became the servants of Sree Padmanabha and ruled the kingdom in his name and as a sacred trust.

¹¹Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movements*, 50-51.

¹²Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movements*, 51.

¹³Ayyar, *A History of Kerala*, 326.

¹⁴Ayyar, *A History of Kerala*, 327.

The remodelling of the administrative system began with Col. Sir Thomas Munro, who became *Diwan* in 1811 A. D.¹⁵ He was very enthusiastic in reforming the Syrian Christians in Travancore as well as in supporting the work of the Protestant Missionaries. He wrote:

Regarding as I do, the diffusion of genuine Christianity in India, as a measure equally important to the interests of humanity and to the stability of our power, I view, with the most sincere pleasure, the commencement of a systematic plan for the attainment of that object... Indeed from the situation of the Portuguese in India, strong arguments may be adduced for the diffusion of the English language, as a means of supporting the British Power, as well as of extending the protestant religion.¹⁶

This observation of Munro shows that the attainment of English supremacy in Travancore provided ample support for the work of the Protestant Missionary societies there.

The Rajas of Travancore were ready to please the Resident and as a result, on many occasions, the Christian missionaries received considerable help from them. Thus by the beginning of the 19th century, the political situation became favourable for the work of the Protestant Missionaries in Travancore and in its later history their work played an important and widely influential role.

3.3. Socio-Religious and Educational Status of Women

A look into the socio-religious and educational background of women in Kerala in the 18th and 19th centuries would be appropriate at this juncture. In Kerala, the positions of women never were as low as it is found in some other parts of India.

¹⁵ Ayyar, *A History of Kerala*, 327.

¹⁶ "Letter of Munro to the Secretary of CMS," dated 1816, cited in Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movement*, 55.

Here, women enjoyed a high social status in the *Sangam Age*.¹⁷ In this period, women enjoyed complete freedom of movement as well as the right to education. Owing to the high level of literacy among women, the *Sangam Age* produced many a gifted poetess.¹⁸ The *Sangam* literature contains references to many educated and learned women who contributed much to the cultural life of their times. The wives were looked upon as *sahadharmanis* in all walks of life, enjoying equal rights with their husbands, and the education of women had a fairly wide popularity among all classes of people of the time.¹⁹ According to Menon, "Music, poetry and dancing provided entertainment to the upper classes and they were systematically cultivated. There were professional poets and poetesses who composed poems in praise of their patrons and were generously rewarded by the latter."²⁰

In the subsequent period the society was transformed and the status of women took a downturn. Kunjanpillai argues:

Only after the *Varnasrama* came into full force was education denied to women, as to untouchables. That started in the 8th century. After that we do not see the Pana women or Veda women as poetesses. The number of educated

¹⁷The generally accepted view is that the *Sangam* age in Kerala is the first five centuries of the Christian era. Kerala at that time was not a separate cultural or political entity. It was part of Tamilakam and being so, its people shared with the people of Tamil area a cultural heritage which was common to the whole region. Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 45-46.

¹⁸Some of the well known poetesses of this period are the Kurava lady Ilaveyini, Ilaveyini who was Pey's daughter, Venni Kuyatti, Kakkai Padini, Masatti, Kamakkanni and the Kura lady Kuri Eyini. They belonged to the Kurava or Veda castes or the alike. Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 121.

¹⁹Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 121, states: "Women were educated like men and were free. Certainly we can infer the general status of women and their educational privileges from this. In *Purananuru* alone there are over fifteen poetesses."

²⁰Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 83.

women shrivelled up. With the rigid enforcement of caste rules child marriage also became essential. Women were suppressed like slaves and untouchables. When the *Varnasrama* gathered force, it was accepted that the duty of the woman was to serve her husband and remain within the kitchen... Man's aim was to make woman an object of enjoyment, and gradually that was what she became. Yet it was not so in the *Sangam* Period.²¹

In the course of time, due to Brahmin domination, the *sambandha* system, child marriage, ban of widow marriage and the denial of education to women were thrust upon the society, pushing women were pushed down to a lower status.²²

Life in Kerala society until the late 19th century was not based on the principles of social freedom and equality. Its chief characteristic feature was a deep chasm which separated the people who belonged to the high castes from those of the low castes. The people who belonged to the high castes enjoyed all the privileges and a high social status. In this period, untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability were at their peak. Several of the European travellers and Christian missionaries who visited Kerala between the 16th and 19th centuries have written accounts about the condition of the women of the period.²³ According to these accounts, women were considered simply as instruments for the happiness of man.²⁴

²¹ Kunjanpillai, *The Studies in Kerala History*, 121.

²² Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 80-82.

²³ Ibn Batuta, Abdul Razak, Nicolo Conti, Barbosa, Buchanan, Mateer and Francis Day were early foreign travelers, writers and observers of Kerala from 16th to 19th centuries.

²⁴ Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, 209, explains that the men assumed the right to dishonour any woman, whatever her rank or circumstances; and the laws permitted them to put anyone to death on the spot, who resisted their brutal demands. Without education, moral training or real knowledge of the world, the majority of women spent their time mostly

Not until the 19th century was sufficient attention given to women's education in Kerala. The people of the high caste did not like to send their girl children out of the house.²⁵ They learnt the art of home-making, child-rearing and participating in the family occupation through an apprenticeship to their mother or elderly women in the family. As a result, the level of literacy among women was very deplorable. The condition of the members of the backward communities and outcastes was miserable and nobody showed any interest in their education. The absence of a well-organized system of education, caste and communal barriers in the field of education compelled a large number of people to live in illiteracy and ignorance.

The 19th century was a period of transition for Kerala society as a result of the commercial and cultural interaction with various European countries and the consequent spread of Western education. The 19th century socio-religious and educational movements initiated by the newly emerging middle class and the Western educated intelligentsia served as an impetus for the government to issue a series of edicts and proclamations effecting the eradication of many social evils and practices that contributed to the plight of women.

2.3.1. Social Institutions and Marginalisation in the Society

To evaluate the status of women in the 18th and 19th centuries in Kerala society, it is necessary to examine a few prevalent social institutions such as the caste system, *janmi* system, *sambandham*, *devadasi* system, *marumakkathayam*, etc. The social institutions and customs prevalent in Kerala during the period give us a clear picture not only of the society, but in a special way, of the status of women in that society.

within the four walls of the kitchen or in gossiping with their friends on the most frivolous and profitless topics.

²⁵Sahanam, *The Contribution of LMS Missionaries in the Field of Education*, 24.

3.3.1.1. Caste System

Kerala was one of the most caste-ridden societies of India.²⁶ The caste order in Kerala was quite different from that of North India.²⁷ This fact has been observed by foreign writers. According to them, in Kerala caste was in the most accentuated form, the "touch and distance pollution" between higher and lower castes. It is true that in these two respects "Kerala was a worse sinner than the rest of India."²⁸

The caste system was an innovation introduced by the Aryans who came here from outside.²⁹ It is to be assumed that there was a fluid form of social stratification based on profession, even before the arrival of Aryans in India. Before the arrival of the Aryans, writes Kunjanpillai, "The caste system was unknown in Dravidian society."³⁰ During the pre-Aryan period, the social stratifications were not based on birth, but on function where mobility between functional groups was possible. There was no stigma attached to any of the castes. The Brahmins who reached Kerala from the Deccan were able to subjugate the land and during the period between the 8th and 11th centuries A. D., Kerala was "enclosed in the straitjacket of the caste system."³¹ Since then, "caste has been the dominant factor in the economic and cultural life of Kerala."³² In course of time, the distinctions between castes increased.

²⁶Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women*, 33.

²⁷Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women*, 33.

²⁸Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women*, 34.

²⁹There is no unanimity among historians about the date of the arrival of the first wave of the Aryans in Kerala. According to Menon it might have been around 3rd century B. C. Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 65. But there is no historical foundation for his claim. However, Kunjanpillai is of the opinion that Aryans came to Kerala around 8th century A. D. *A Survey of Kerala Society*, 95.

³⁰Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 311.

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³⁰Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 311.

³¹Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 311.

³²Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 312.

The Brahminical or Aryan tribes in early ages subjugated the primitive inhabitants of India, and to retain them in a condition of subservience and inferiority, invented the legends which are now related in the Hindu *Puranas* concerning the origin of caste. According to Gladstone, to cement the distinctions, religious sanction was brought in.³³ It was taught that the Brahmins were born from the mouth of *Purusha*, the creator, the *Kshatriyas* from the limbs, the *Vaisyas* from the waist and the *Sudras* from the feet.³⁴ In this way the Brahmins placed their claim to superiority on a religious basis; and the result fully justified their shrewd and selfish policy.³⁵

The effect of the Brahminic policy was also seen in Kerala where the Hindu community was divided into a number of distinct sections based on castes.³⁶ The orthodox and conservative Hindus strictly observed the ancestral norms of conduct and religion. Any deviation from the established system was looked upon with suspicion and superstitious dread.³⁷ The effects of caste, when analysed, include a wide array of issues including the deterioration of health due to the endogamous system, the backwardness of women, lack of education, oppressive practices, extensive poverty and backwardness in general.³⁸ However, the most wide spread symbol and greatest impact of the caste system were untouchability and the social discrimination it brought to the whole fabric of social life.

³³Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movement*, 18.

³⁴*The Hymns of Rg Veda*, X: 90. 12.

³⁵Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 27.

³⁶According to Alexander, *Social Mobility in Kerala*, 11, Caste is a system by which the accident of birth determines once and for all the whole course of one's social and domestic relations. This system gave rise to hierarchical gradation and social discrimination regarding privileges, marriage, social intercourse and choice of occupation. Persons of different castes had different degrees of purity and ritual status depending upon the caste to which they belonged.

³⁷*The Proclamation by the Rani of Travancore*, 63-64.

³⁸Palackappillil, *Dalits of Syrian Catholic Church in Keralam*, 36.

2.3.1.1.1. Untouchability

The strict observance of the caste practices in Kerala gave birth to the most undesirable idea of untouchability. Not only persons, but things and occupations were classified into pure and impure. The idea of untouchability was carried to such an extent that even contact with the members of some castes caused pollution. In some cases, the mere presence or nearness of the members of some castes corrupted those of higher castes. It was further believed that pollution could be transmitted even by the sight of a person of lower caste.³⁹ The caste rules operated in a very irrational manner. The triple social evils of untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability were observed by people at all levels of the Hindu society.⁴⁰ In the 19th century, the Hindu society in Kerala was divided into two classes, popularly known as the *savarnas* and the *avarnas*. These evil practices touched every aspect of the life of the Hindus of the time.⁴¹ *Savarna* means those who were fair in complexion. They were considered touchable, the high caste Hindus. *Avarana* means dark skinned. They were considered untouchables; they are low caste Hindus.⁴²

Denied civic and cultural facilities under the rigid caste system, *avarnas* underwent inhuman social oppression for ages.⁴³ The peculiarity of this system was that an untouchable could himself/herself be polluted by the touch of another untouchable belonging to a still lower caste. The distance for pollution they maintained was in proportion to the caste grade. Seeing

³⁹Fuller, *The Nayers Today*, 11.

⁴⁰Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 66.

⁴¹Sivathambika, *The Untouchables and their Struggle*, 12.

⁴²The *savarna* castes were regarded as pure and the *avarna* castes as polluting. Each caste was characterised by a number of attributes significant to its position in the ritual ranking. Thus the distinction of purity and pollution set one section of the peoples above the other section and thus the polluting castes were suppressed by the so called pure castes.

⁴³Peter, *The History of Ezhavas*, 3.

someone of a lower caste itself was polluting.⁴⁴ Barbosa speaks of the arrogant behaviour of the Nairs towards the lower castes in the following terms: "When they walk along a street or road, they shout to the low caste folk to get out of their way; this they do and if one will not, the Nair may kill him without punishment."⁴⁵

2.3.1.1.2. Social Discrimination

Apart from promoting the observance of untouchability in a barbarous manner, the caste system also operated in such a way as to confer on the high caste Hindus certain special immunities and privileges and to deny to the low castes even the most elementary human rights. The administration of justice was neither impartial nor fair. After the 'sanskritization'⁴⁶ of Kerala, the Brahmins, as a caste, gained absolute dominance over the society.⁴⁷ According to Sreedhara Menon, "The Brahmins alone had the authority to interpret the law and pronounce judgements. Law was administered in the most discriminatory

⁴⁴*Kammalar* and *Panar* – 24 feet; *Velanmar* and *Arayar* – 32 feet; *Kanakkmar* and *Koodar* – 48 feet; *Cherumakkal* and *Pulayas* – 64 feet; *Parayar*, *Nayadikal* and *Kadar* – 72 feet, Pallath, "Women and Caste Discrimination" [Online]. See also Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 68, *Ezhavas* – 36 feet and *Ullatan* – 72 feet.

⁴⁵Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, 49.

⁴⁶During the expansion of 'sanskritization' there was mobility of castes below the rank of Brahmins. There are many examples where the ruling class had been accepted into the four-fold caste structure and christened as *Kshatriyas*, the farming groups as *Sudras*, etc. Srinivasan, *Social Change in Modern India*, 9.

⁴⁷Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 29, observes: Among the Brahmins also there were divisions. The division was broadly made into two. One was the Malayalam speaking Brahmins, who were supposed to be the earlier immigrants and regarded as superior to other groups of Brahmins: they were known as *Nambudiris*. The other groups were brought in from other regions by kings; still other groups of Brahmins migrated to Kerala for trade. Non-*Nambudiri* Brahmins were generally known as foreign Brahmins. It was the *Nambudiri* Brahmins who had enormous power in Kerala.

manner."⁴⁸ The Brahmin writers who propounded the structure of society based on castes "placed them at the top and gave them the privilege of declaring the duties of the other castes, including kings."⁴⁹

According to Ayyappan, "The whole frame work of Hinduism was conceived for the comfort and exaltation of the Brahmins."⁵⁰ Brahmins were the only caste exempted from all social and religious disabilities. As early as 1743 J. C. Visscher⁵¹ wrote about many of the privileges which they enjoyed in Kerala.⁵² They interpreted and administered the sacred laws in the most discriminating manner. Mateer comments in this regard: "His word is law; his smile confers happiness and salvation; his power with heaven is unlimited; the very dust of his feet is purifying in its nature and efficacy..."⁵³ Brahmins were the guardians of Hinduism in its orthodoxy, the interpreters of scripture and the authors of philosophy, the learned men and the priests of the temples of their tradition of Hinduism. The segregation of the society into different castes and the cementing of the distinctions with the rules of purity and pollution imposed serious hindrances to the possibility of progress and development for the people who belonged to lower castes.⁵⁴

⁴⁸Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 69.

⁴⁹Srinivasan, *Social Change in Modern India*, 5.

⁵⁰Ayyappan, *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village*, 65. Cited in Ivy, *The History of Ezhavas*, 5.

⁵¹Visscher was the Dutch Chaplain of Cochin from 1717 to 1723. He gives a detailed account of the political conditions of the kingdoms of Kerala of his day and the religions, customs and ceremonies of the people. Kunju, *Rise of Travancore*, 131.

⁵²Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, 130-131.

⁵³Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 31-32.

⁵⁴A lower rank next to the Nairs in the social order was occupied by the *avarnas* or non-caste Hindus. The *Ezhavas* were at the top of the *avarnas*. They suffered many disabilities along with the other non-caste Hindus. Among the unprivileged classes the lowest were the slaves, composed mainly of the *Pulayas* or *Cherumas* and *Parayas*. The *Pulayas*

2.3.1.2. *Janmi System*

The *Janmi* system was another important socio-economic institution of medieval Kerala. The social relationships also found their expression in the system of the ownership of land. Land was the most important factor of production in an agrarian economy like that of Kerala. The system of land ownership, known as the *janmi – kudiyan*⁵⁵ system, which helped to maintain the right of ownership of property in the hands of the landlord and made the tenant only an agent to work in the fields caused a steep decline in the moral character of the people.⁵⁶ "Power and prosperity were the unchallenged monopoly of the Brahmins of the *janmis*, who were extremely strong through the Brahmin-Nair alliance which existed through a fusion of blood."⁵⁷

In order to please the Nairs, which was the military caste and to have a close contact with them, the *Nambudiris* divided the land

were the descendants of the aborigines who preferred slavery in the plains to freedom with starvation in the jungles. Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer Containing a Description of Hindustan*, Vol.II, 181.

⁵⁵Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 324. *The Acts and Proclamations of Travancore* Vol. I, 279-280, recorded: *Janmi* means a person in whom the (*janmom*) right over *janmom* lands is vested and includes, in the case of *Devaswom* sowning *janmom* (right), the managing trustee or trustees of the institution for the time being. *Kudiyan* is a person who holds lands on *kanapattom* tenure. *Kanapattom* denotes a demise of *janmom* land made or renewed by the *janmi* by whatever names such demise is designated. *Kanom* means the *arthom* or consideration (in money or in kind) paid for the *kanappattom* and also included the value of improvements made by *kudiyans* and treated as *arthom* or consideration. *Pattom* means the assessed (annual) rent of the holding prior to the deduction of interest due from the *kudiyan* to the *janmi*, whether in money or in kind, and includes services due in lieu of rent. *Janmikaram* in respect of a *janmom* land or holding means the amount payable in respect of that land or holding under the provisions of this Act by the *kudiyan* to the *janmi* every year in lieu of all and every one of the *janmi*'s claims in respect of the land or holding.

⁵⁶Menon, *A Social and Cultural History of India*, 268.

⁵⁷Menon, *A Social and Cultural History of India*, 267.

and its lordship among the Nair chieftains. Thus it became the exclusive privilege of the upper castes, viz., the Brahmins and Nairs to be *janmis*.⁵⁸ They enjoyed special privileges and exemptions, since they were feudal lords and the custodians of all arable and waste lands. Usually each *janmi* had thousands of *kudiyans* under him. The *janmis* therefore rented their lands to *kudiyans* by way of mortgage or lease in a permanent or temporary manner.⁵⁹ The lower caste such as, the *Nadars*, the *Ezhavas*, the *Pulayas* and the *Parayas* were always at the mercy of their landlords who had the right to evict their *kudiyans* at any time they pleased. Generally the payments that were to be made by the *kudiyans* to the landlord fell under three heads, viz., annual, occasional and periodical. In this case a burden of heavy debt would fall on the shoulders of the *kudiyans* so much so that his position was little better than that of a slave. The taxes levied by the chieftains point to the injustice and cruelty which they inflicted on the masses.⁶⁰ Although the landlords enjoyed protection in an economic, social and religious sense, the social system created a large number of unprotected people.

2.3.2. Marginalisation of Women

In the caste-ridden Kerala society the people were hierarchically categorised into Brahmins, Nairs, *Ezhavas* and slave castes.⁶¹ In the caste hierarchy, each caste was destined to have its own social status, high or low. In this special social environment a number of social taboos existed.⁶² The status of women also varied in accordance with the status of the caste they belonged to.

⁵⁸Rose, *Polity, Society and Women*, 69.

⁵⁹Mayer, *The Land and Society in Malabar*, 79.

⁶⁰Wingram, *A Commentary on Malabar Laws and Customs*, 100.

⁶¹Rose, *Polity Society and Women*, 65.

⁶²Kerala State Gazetteer 1999, 457.

2.3.2.1. Women in the Hindu Society

'The Laws of Manu'⁶³ says that a woman must be kept in dependence by the male members of her family all through her life. "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence."⁶⁴ The position of women in Hinduism became very low and they were completely subservient to, and dependent on, men for everything. Woman's position continued to decline and she was virtually a slave or chattel, her only function being to minister to man's physical pleasures and wants. She was considered incapable of developing any of those higher mental qualities which would make her more worthy of consideration and more capable of playing a useful part in life.

2.3.2.1.1. Women in the Brahmin Community

The Brahmins were given the highest place in the society. The whole frame work of Hinduism was conceived for the comfort and exaltation of the Brahmins. They dominated the whole society in all spheres of life. Even the ruling chieftains were kept under their heels.⁶⁵ Among all classes of women, the Brahmin women enjoyed a singularly high and unlimited superiority. They were known for their beauty and cleanliness.⁶⁶ They covered their bosom with a piece of cotton cloth, the extremity of which was thrown over the shoulders. Unlike the

⁶³The Laws of Manu is a collection of ordinances, the authorship of which is attributed to the sage Manu. He is believed to be the son of Brahman: he was the most ancient and greatest of all lawgivers. There are differences of opinion as to the time of origin of the Laws of Manu. A more accepted period is between 300 and 200 BC. The Hindu community always followed this ordinance. Bhavya, *Indian Women in Religious Life*, 29

⁶⁴*The Laws of Manu*, IX: 2-3.

⁶⁵*Reports on the Census of India 1931*, 376.

⁶⁶Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women*, 35.

women of lower castes, the Brahmin women enjoyed the right to wear ornaments.⁶⁷

2.3.2.1.1.1. *Antarjanam*

The women of *Nambudiris* are called *Antarjanam*.⁶⁸ The very name highlights their position of anonymity and lack of any legal and social status. They were not allowed to move freely in society; when they went out of the homes they were carefully concealed from the public gaze. In such times they were covered in cloths or covered by a cadjan umbrella.⁶⁹ Anantha Krishna Iyer reports in this regard: "When they go out of their houses they had to cover their face with an umbrella (*olakkuda*) and the entire body with white cloth, so that their body could not be seen by anyone."⁷⁰

The *Nambudiri* women in those times, in spite of the above said privilege, had no other status than their roles within the family and that confined them to the kitchen and the bedrooms. They had to cook and place the dishes on the table, but were not allowed to eat with their husbands. It was considered indecent and contrary to custom.⁷¹ However, the wife should eat from the same plantain leaves used by the husband; the water used for washing the feet of the husband was considered to be *theertham* (holy water) to the wife.⁷²

⁶⁷Yesudas, *History of Women's Education in Kerala*, 18.

⁶⁸The literal meaning of *Antarjanam* being "people inside the house" or one who keeps oneself inside the house.

⁶⁹Mateer, *Native Land of Travancore*, 144, reports: "The women are guarded with more than Moslem jealousy, even brothers and sisters are separated at an early age. When the *Nambudiri* lady goes to worship the village god, a Nair maid, who accompanies her, commands the retirement of all the males on the road, while the lady moves, all surrounded in cloth, with a mighty umbrella, which protects her from the gaze of profane eyes."

⁷⁰Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes* Vol. 1, 205.

⁷¹Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 18.

⁷²Pallath, "Women and Caste Discrimination Part-II." [Online].

2.3.2.1.1.2. Family and Marriage

Though the Brahmin women were a privileged class, they were not free from social taboos.⁷³ Dowry, polygamy and family traditions were the weapons employed by men to keep women under subjugation.⁷⁴ The community therefore, gloomily welcomed the birth of a girl child. This early gloom 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.⁷⁵ At an early age, the *Nambudiri* girls were aware of the fact that they would not have the same status as that of the boys and that they had to be contented with an inferior status in the society.

In the *Nambudiri* society, the marriage of girls immediately after attaining puberty, and even at an earlier age, was very common. The eldest son alone was allowed to marry.⁷⁶ The objective of this restriction seems to have been to prevent the family being divided into branches.⁷⁷ The inevitable result was polygamy, subject to the restriction that a Brahmin could not marry another woman while he had three living wives.⁷⁸ According to the custom, a very heavy dowry had to be given to every bridegroom. So the girls of the poor families having no money to be given as dowry suffered from mental tension and frustration.⁷⁹ Those who were economically less privileged found it impossible to give their maidens in marriage, with the result that they remained unmarried till thirty or forty years and were ultimately ruined.⁸⁰

⁷³Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 18

⁷⁴Rose, *The Polity, Society and Women*, 66.

⁷⁵Rose, *The Polity, Society and Women*, 66.

⁷⁶Raja, *The Brahmins of Malabar*, 632.

⁷⁷Raja, *The Brahmins of Malabar*, 632.

⁷⁸Raja, *The Brahmins of Malabar*, 632.

⁷⁹Logan, *Malabar Manual* Vol.1, 155-156.

⁸⁰Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women*, 37.

Sexual taboos were observed only in the case of women.⁸¹ They were not free to engage in marriage alliances of their choice. The poor *Nambudiri* women were forced to marry aged *Nambudiris* and live as his *sapatnis*.⁸² Even teenage girls who did not know the meaning of marriage were forced to marry old men.⁸³ Thus *Nambudiri illams*⁸⁴ were filled with young widows. A wife was supposed to be seen only by her husband; not even by her father-in-law or brothers-in-law. The total denial of education and their social insularity made the *Nambudiri* women totally subservient to their men. They had no opinions, beliefs and attitudes of their own other than those spelt out by their men.⁸⁵ To crown all this, they had absolutely no right to the property. In short, they had neither legal nor social status.

2.3.2.1.1.3. *Smartavicharam*

The *Smartavicharam* is one of the most important social institutions of the Brahmins and perhaps one of the cruellest ones related to sexual offences.⁸⁶ The system of enquiry into sexual offences was prevalent among the *Nambudiris*.⁸⁷ The

⁸¹Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women*, 38.

⁸²*Sapatni* means co-wife. The elder brother in the *Nambudiri* family can have more than one wife. This led to the *sapatni* system.

⁸³Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women*, 38.

⁸⁴The *Nambudiri* houses are called *illam* or *mana*; a *mana* was superior to an *illam*. *Nambudiris* chose places of natural beauty to build their houses that were isolated from other castes. The *illam* or *mana* compounds would be lush and green with a variety of trees and medicinal plants. The *Nambudiri* houses had their characteristic architectural designs. Generally, there would be one or more ponds in the *illam* or *mana* campus and a serpent grove, which added beauty and gave a mysterious atmosphere to the *illam* or *mana* environment. Pallath, "Women and Caste Discrimination: Part-I" [Online].

⁸⁵Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes*, Vol. I, 206.

⁸⁶Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 272.

⁸⁷There are six stages for a *Smartavicharam*. The first stage was *dasivicharam*. The second was isolating the accused in a special cell. Then the third stage involved questioning by the *smartan* regarding the status of the accused as an *Antarjanam*. The questioning continued for

wife."⁹⁵ The *Sambandham* system clearly revealed that the Nair women had always been considered not of their own caste, but the property of the male member of the *Nambudiri* family. Brahmin *janmis* imposed many social evils upon the Nair society. Velupillai explains the practice of *Sambandham*:

Only the *Moosad*⁹⁶ in the Brahmin *illam* was allowed to enter into *veli* (official marriage) with a woman from the Brahmin community. The *Aphans* were to enter into *Sambandham* with other Nair women. The Nair families which were matrilineal welcomed these *Nambudiri* youths as evening visitors arriving after supper and leaving before breakfast, to have liaisons with their women. The *Nambudiri* women became the worst victims of this unjust institution.⁹⁷

Sambandham was the simplest and loosest form of sexual union between man and women. The *Nambudiri* men were free to engage in *Sambandham* with as many Nair women as they could. The *Aphan Nambudiris*, who formed the majority who entered into *Sambandham*, were a pathetic social group. They could not be free in their own *illams*. Through *Sambandham*, they were not able to experience true marital love nor were they able to return the same to their cohabiting partner.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Madras Marriage Act IV*, 1896, cited in Moore, "Symbol and Meaning in Nayar Marriage Ritual" [Online].

⁹⁶ *Moosad* is the eldest son of the Brahmin family and the other sons of the family are called *Aphans*.

⁹⁷ Velupillai, *The Travancore Manual*, Vol. II, 260.

⁹⁸ The *Aphan Nambudiris* never experienced the loving care of their wife, never once knew the sublime feeling of commitment to their wife. Having lived for generations without tender feelings, they became strange creatures that lost the capacity to communicate love and affection. According to the practice of *sambadham*, the woman remains in her house, and the *Nambudiris* visit her at night. Because the family members, as well as the bride herself, could pollute him, he leaves the house early at dawn to purify himself through a ritual bath, leaving no space for developing a loving relation between the wife and the husband.

The *Sambandham* system was beneficial to the matriarchal upper castes as also to the patriarchal *Nambudiri* and other Brahmin castes of Kerala. Under this system, divorce was a simple affair. No sort of formality was necessary to dissolve a *Sambandham*. Women, however, were used as pawns in the property game and little importance was given to their personal feelings.

2.3.2.1.2.2. *Devadasi* System

The development of the *devadasi* system in medieval Kerala was a logical corollary of the growth of the caste and *janmi* systems. The *devadasis* were dancing girls attached to the temples.⁹⁹ It was their duty to raise funds for the temples by giving performances of music, dance and other fine arts. The institution seems to have had its origin elsewhere in South India in the 8th century A. D. and it came to be introduced in Kerala early in the 9th century A. D.¹⁰⁰ In the wake of the *Bhakti* movement and the rise of the temple to a place of prominence in the social and cultural life of the people, the post of the *devadasi* became a respectable one and women from aristocratic families came forward to take up the assignment on an honorary basis, even without accepting any remuneration or enjoying the perquisites that went with the post.¹⁰¹

In the beginning, the life of the *devadasis* was one of spotless purity.¹⁰² The term *devadasi* denoted a profession rather than a caste. They were considered to be ladies of virtue. Their superior position over the married women was because of God's

They beget children not knowing the burden of responsible parenthood. The children of this contract grow up under the supervision of an uncle without experiencing the care and affection of the father. Pallath, "Women and Caste Discrimination Part-II" [Online].

⁹⁹ Aiyar, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 382. *Devadasis* were locally known as *kudikkaris* and are referred to officially as *adumpatrams* (dancing girls).

¹⁰⁰ Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 81.

¹⁰¹ Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 81.

¹⁰² Nair, *Devadasi Tradition in Kerala*, 11.

mark on them.¹⁰³ The status of the *devadasi* in Kerala was perhaps higher than that of those in other parts of India. Many *devadasis* were rich at the time of their enrolment in the group.¹⁰⁴ In some cases, the images of *devadasis* were worshipped. They were also included in the committee that made important decisions concerning the temples. All these show that the *devadasis* had a high status in the society in Kerala and at least some of them accepted the post not for the monetary benefit attached to it, but only for the status accompanying it.¹⁰⁵ According to Menon,

With effect from the 13th century there was a basic change in the character of the *devadasi* system. The post of *devadasi* became hereditary and with it the respectability attached to it was lost. The main function of the *devadasis* hereafter was to entertain the *naduvazhis* and *janmis* and not to worship the gods.¹⁰⁶

People began to visit shrines not so much to pay their respect to the deities as to carry on their love and intrigues with the dancing girls there.¹⁰⁷

A number of factors contribute to the steady decline of the *devadasi* system. The moral laxity and indiscipline practiced by *Nambudiri* men from the 8th century A. D. onwards was primarily responsible for the degradation of the system. The *devadasi* system in Kerala declined also because of a lack of royal patronage. Later, the growth of education and Western influence laid bare the immorality inherent in the *devadasi*

¹⁰³Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India* Vol. II, 12.

¹⁰⁴Nair, *Devadasi Tradition in Kerala*, 12

¹⁰⁵Nair, *Devadasi Tradition in Kerala*, 14.

¹⁰⁶Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 82. Apart from inscriptions and literary works, the sculptures and paintings of the medieval period obtained from temples also bear evidence to the popularity of the institution of temple dancing by the *devadasis*.

¹⁰⁷Atlekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, 183.

system and hence it was condemned as a social evil.¹⁰⁸ At any rate, it had become a system which undoubtedly degraded the position of women in the society.

2.3.2.1.2.3. *Marumakkathayam*

The relatively high position, status and freedom of Nair women were primarily due to the matrilineal system of inheritance and the family organization connected with it. *Marumakkathayam*¹⁰⁹ denotes the system of inheritance in which descent is traced along the female line.¹¹⁰ *Makkathayam* or the patrilineal system was the original system of inheritance in Kerala until the 11th century A. D. *Marumakkathayam* or matrilineal system became the dominant system of inheritance in the state in the 14th century A. D.¹¹¹ Among the Nairs, neither the husband nor the wife changed residence. The husband was duo-local. Though the descent was traced through the mother's side, the responsibility of ancestral management of the *tarvad* property was vested in the hands of the eldest male member of the woman's family. The system which existed was not matriarchal but matrilineal.¹¹²

The chief purpose of the *marumakkathayam* system was the integrity of *tarvad*.¹¹³ Though the form of inheritance was along

¹⁰⁸ Lopez, *A Social History of Modern Kerala*, 164.

¹⁰⁹ *Marumakkathayam* denotes the system of inheritance and of family organisation; literally, "descent through sister's children"; bound up with which is the institution known as *Sambandham*, the loose form of marriage among the caste following *marumakkathayam* which entails no responsibility or legal obligation whatever on the part of the "husband" towards his "wife" and children. Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer*, 96.

¹¹⁰ Modayil, *The Principalities of Marumakkathayam Law*, 290.

¹¹¹ Modayil, *The Principalities of Marumakkathayam Law*, 8-9.

¹¹² Renjini, *Nayar Women Today*, 12.

¹¹³ *Tarvad* included all the members of a joint family, with community of property, governed by the *marumakkathayam* law of inheritance. According to Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer*, 97, *tarvad* consisted of all the descendants of the female line of one common female ancestress. Neither party to a *Sambandham* union becomes thereby a member of the other

the female line, the family system in existence was patriarchal in its running, since the *karanavar* of the *tarvad* became the guardian of the joint family. However, as the property of a *tarvad* was indivisible and the individual members were not entitled to enforce partition, the eldest male member of the *tarvad* was entrusted with the management of its property and allied affairs.¹¹⁴ Menon explains the major problems of the system as follows:

There was a basic conflict between the interests of the sisters and those of the wife of the *karanavar*, viz., the *ammayi* and this was a cause of potential discord. There was also the suspicion that the *karanavar* showed partiality towards the members of his own *tavazhi* or branch, viz., the children of his direct sisters. He was also often accused of being autocratic in the exercise of his powers. To complicate matters further, the *ammayi* was charged not only with having a sinister influence over the *karanavar* but also with acts of self-aggrandizement because she often appropriated for herself and her children whatever little the *karanavar* gained from the management of the *tarvad* property.¹¹⁵

Another important defect of the system was that the junior members of the family were often denied the right to education and the right to share the property. The revolt of the younger

family; and the offspring of the union belonged to their mother's *tarvad*, and had no sort of claim, so far as the law of *marumakkathayam* went, to a share of their father's property, or to maintenance there from. The *tarvad* property was the joint property of all the members, and each member was entitled to maintenance from it, but was not entitled to claim partition.

¹¹⁴Renjini, *Nayar Women Today*, 12. The position of the members other than the head of a family that followed *marumakkathayam* or a matrilineal family was precisely analogous. The relationship between the *karanavar* who administered the property and other members of the family were quite formal and determined by the principle of respect for seniority.

¹¹⁵Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 91.

generation of the *tarvad* often disturbed the peaceful home atmosphere. Moreover, the *tarvad* was weakened by economic and social change. In the later times, courts did not regard the conjugal union of a Nair female with a male sanctioned by custom as a legal marriage.¹¹⁶ As a result, there was no legal obligation on the part of the husband or the father to support his wife or children in any way. With the passage of the Hindu Succession Act which came into force in 1956, Hindu men and women in all parts of the country were given equal right to inherit property and monogamy has also become compulsory for all Hindus.

2.3.2.1.2.4. *Mannappedi and Pulappedi*

A peculiar custom that was in existence throughout Kerala was called by different names like *Mannappedi*, *Pulappedi* and *Parappedi* in different parts of the State. This was the result of the dehumanising practices prevalent at the time. These customs had great importance in the social history of Kerala. The lower caste scrupulously observed this custom as revenge against the high caste. The women of the high caste suffered much due to these cruel customs which made them real slaves of the lower caste men. According to this custom, if a slave like a *Pulaya*, *Paraya* or *Mannan* happened to see a high-caste woman alone after dusk, she would lose the status as the member of her caste and would have to go with him to his home.¹¹⁷

Another custom that prevailed in the society was that during certain months of the year if a person belonging to a low caste like *Pulaya* touched or threw a stone or a stick at a woman of the higher caste found alone after sunset, she would lose her caste status and would have to accompany him never to return.¹¹⁸ In order to save herself and her family, she had either to follow the person who saw her or hide herself in the house of

¹¹⁶Rose, *Polity, Society and Women*, 77.

¹¹⁷Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 411.

¹¹⁸Barbosa, *Description of the Coast of East Africa and Malabar*, 143.

See also Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 412.

some low caste family in order that her relatives would not kill her as a remedy for what has happened or sell her to some strangers as was the custom.¹¹⁹ The *Parayas* of North Travancore practiced the system of kidnapping women of higher castes like the Brahmins and Nairs and treating them in a brutal manner. This was known as *Parappedi*.¹²⁰ They broke into the house of the Brahmins and Nairs to carry off their women, children and property, which they pretended was an act of revenge.

There were some peculiarities in this custom. Those women who remained at home or those who ventured out accompanied by a male child of at least three years of age were never touched by the *Pulayas*. Another curious feature of this practice was that a pregnant woman who happened to be captured by a *Pulaya* was kept in isolation until her delivery. If she gave birth to a male child she could go back to her home and her relatives would gladly receive her.¹²¹ These customs were abolished in Travancore by an edict in 1696, issued by the Venad King Unni Kerala Varma, commonly known as Kottayam Kerala Varma.¹²² The reform of Kerala Varma alienated the orthodox and ended in a conspiracy which led to his death within six months from the promulgation of the Act. In Malabar this custom continued till the commencement of British rule.

2.3.2.1.3. Women in the *Ezhava* Society

A rank next to the Nairs in the social order was occupied by the *avarnas* or non-caste Hindus. The *Ezhavas*¹²³ as a community

¹¹⁹Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* Vol. VI, 139.

¹²⁰Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* Vol. VI, 139.

¹²¹Kunjanpillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, 412.

¹²²Aiya, *Travancore State Manual* Vol. I, 312.

¹²³Since they are outcastes, technically they do not fall under any caste. In the strict sense, the *Ezhavas* do not belong to the Hindu caste structure. However, several authors refer to them as a caste which seems to be a misnomer. Nevertheless, this study follows these authors and refers to them as castes.

were at the top in the category. They suffered many discrimination along with the other non-caste Hindus. They were known as *Tiyas* in Malabar, *Chokons* in Central Travancore and *Ezahvas* in the Southern part of the State.¹²⁴ Mateer states: "The *Ilavars*, *Shanars*, and others form a third great subdivision of the population."¹²⁵ These constituted the highest division of the low castes.

2.3.2.1.3.1. *Ezhava Community*

Ezhavas were spread evenly throughout Kerala. Basically a cultivating class, traditionally they were associated with growing and tapping coconut trees and the production and sale of the liquor produced from the coconut were supposed to be the hereditary works of the *Ezhavas*.¹²⁶ They were divided between matrilineal and non-matrilineal groups and the former faced some of the same problems of other matrilineal groups in Kerala. As a caste group, the *Ezhavas* were subject to a great many social injustices, including those relating to worship and access to temples.¹²⁷ An *Ezhava* was to keep himself, at least thirty six feet away from a *Nambudiri* and twelve feet away from a Nair.

Women of the *Ezhava* communities also suffered much under the clutches of the high caste.¹²⁸ To point out their degradation,

¹²⁴Singh, *People of India: Kerala*, 469, describes: The etymologies of these names are traced to the island nation of Sri Lanka. The term *lzhava/Ezhavan/Ilava* signifies; one who belongs to *Ezhathunadu* or *lzham* or *Ilam*, one of the former names of Sri Lanka, and *Thiya/Thiyan* is a corrupt form of *Dweepan/ Theepan*, which means one who belongs to dweep (islander); they are also known as *Chovan* or *Chokan*. The term *Chovan* originated from *sevakam* meaning one who serves.

¹²⁵Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 38.

¹²⁶Rajendran, *Ezhava Community and Kerala Politics*, 18.

¹²⁷Gulati, *Gender Profile Kerala*, 5.

¹²⁸The women of the community were required, young and old, to appear before caste Hindus, always 'topless'. In 1859, when an attempt was made to give up that practice and some young women covered their

they were forbidden to wear anything above their waist; but had to go about clad in a piece of coarse cloth called *mundu*, stretching from the waist to the knees.¹²⁹ They were tortured by the upper classes in many ways. Various taxes were imposed on the women.¹³⁰ Several kinds of torturing measures were applied to women especially in the absence of their husbands.¹³¹ The *Ezhava* women esteemed and valued chastity and their men did all that they could to protect their women folk from humiliation and dishonour that might come from the higher castes and royal family.¹³² The law of inheritance followed by the *Ezhavas* was generally *marumakkathayam*. Where the woman wished to take more husbands than one, her choice was limited to the brothers or members of the same family. In this society a widow was allowed to remarry. Divorce was common and easily effected.¹³³

bosoms, there was a furor created by intolerant Nair men, near Trivandrum. Rajendran, *Ezhava Community and Kerala Politics*, 24.

¹²⁹Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 41.

¹³⁰There was a tax for the hair one grew (hair tax) and for the breast (breast tax). Jnanadasam, *A Forgotten History*, 26. Cited in Rose, *Polity, Society and Women*, 82. See also Jose, *Channar Lahala*, 14-15, states a detailed description of the trials and tribulations of *Ezhavas* in the name of tax.

¹³¹Agur, *Church History of Travancore*, 586, reports: "The women in absence of their husbands are tortured by having rice pestle twisted into their hair or a great stone placed on four small pebbles on their backs standing all the time in an unnatural posture... The woman had been delivered of a child only a few days ago,... whilst she lay in a swoon her mother drew near and took off her jewels with which she satisfied the collectors. The distress is very great no money in the country to be got. Jewels are offered at an incredibly low price, silver none will buy as I am told. The woman's story made a deeper impression in all the country."

¹³²Rose, *Polity, Society and Women*, 82.

¹³³Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 400.

2.3.2.1.3.2. *Shannar/Nadar Community*

The *Shannars*¹³⁴ were another caste which had the same social status as the *Ezhavas*. They differed but little in employment and character from the *Ezhavas*. Their social conditions were deplorable at the beginning of the 19th century. However, their condition improved under the influence of Christianity.¹³⁵ Their social position somewhat corresponds to that of small farmers and agricultural labourers. Aiya gives us a detailed description of their social life as follows:

The *Shannars* generally marry after maturity, but infant marriages are not invalid among them. By a long established custom a man may claim his sister's daughter as wife to his son and her son as husband to his daughter, but it is not compulsory. None of the other relations can marry each other. Polygamy appears to have been strictly prohibited among them from early times. In former days a man who married a second wife while the first wife was alive or had not been formally divorced, used to be out casted and classed as *Viralli* along with his newly married wife. But now that practice seems to have gone out of use and there are at present instances of a man having two wives with impunity. Polyandry is unknown in the community and widow marriage is not permitted. A wife may be divorced for adultery; and the woman so divorced cannot marry again.¹³⁶

The rules and regulations for women's dress until the 19th century were different among the castes. Going by the dress restrictions imposed during that time all women had to go without an upper garment before their superiors, but the lower caste women, who belonged to the community of lower rank,

¹³⁴The *Nadars* were known as *Shannars* before 1921 in which year the Madras Government issued an order directing them to adopt the term '*Nadar*' in place of '*Shannar*'.

¹³⁵Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 41

¹³⁶Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 394.

had to go bare bosom before everyone. Even before the systematic work of the missionaries, the women of the *Ezhavas* and *Shannars* wanted to wear clothes on the upper part of their body. This was opposed by the Nairs who complained to the government. As a result the government issued an order in 1814 regulating the dress of women. This order prohibited the use of an upper cloth by the *Shannar* or *Ezhava* women, but did not prevent the use of loose jackets.¹³⁷

2.3.2.1.4. Women among the Slave Caste

Among the unprivileged classes the lowest were the slaves, composed mainly of the *Pulayas*, the *Cherumas* and the *Parayas*.¹³⁸ The *Pulayas* were the descendants of the aborigines who preferred slavery in the plains to freedom with starvation in the jungles. Their dwelling places were miserable huts, with walls of mud and roofs thatched with grass or coconut leaves.¹³⁹ Their women usually wore a profusion of beads and shell necklaces. They were steeped in the densest ignorance.¹⁴⁰ Campbell wrote about them in the following words:

The creatures in human form who constitute, to the number of 100,000, the agrestic slave population of the province (Malabar) being distinguishable, like the savage tribes still to be found in some of the forests of India, from the rest of the human race, by their degraded, diminutive, squalid appearance, their dropsically pot-bellies contrasting horribly

¹³⁷Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movement*, 82.

¹³⁸Yesudas, *History of Women's Education in Kerala*, 22. See also Saradmoni, *Emergence of a Slave Caste*, 44, describes that, in Malayalam the terms *Cheruman*, *Pulayan*, *Cherumar* and *Cherumakkal* denote the same. However, they were spelt differently by different authors, especially the 19th century writers. *Cheruman* and *Pulayan* are synonyms today, but these names by which the main bodies of agrestic slaves were known in the Malabar region and in the southern regions of Kerala respectively were entered as such in the first list of scheduled castes appended to the constitution.

¹³⁹Yesudas, *History of Women's Education in Kerala*, 23.

¹⁴⁰Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 42.

with their skeleton arms and legs, half-starved hardly clothed, and in a condition scarcely superior to the cattle they follow at the plough.¹⁴¹

The social circumstances and daily life of the poor slave women who were constrained to labour for their subsistence or starve if they remained idle, presented a sad picture of their degradation.¹⁴² They were to flee on the approach of a high caste man or woman. Mateer writes regarding these unfortunate women:

It is most painful to see a poor and inoffensive woman, with a load on her back, or burdened with an infant, compelled to scramble up the steep sides of the road and retire into jungle to allow a high caste man or woman to pass, or seeking for favourable chance to cross the highway or go along it. She waits till one party has gone on – then makes a dash – but perhaps it baulked by meeting another party in the opposite direction.¹⁴³

The untouchable slave women were prohibited from drawing water from the wells of the caste Hindus; they had their own wells near their habitations around which they placed the bones of animals to avoid the higher castes from touching them.¹⁴⁴ An untouchable woman was obliged to hold her hands before the mouth when she was to speak to the members of higher classes and remain at a distance. These were an extreme form of dehumanisation.¹⁴⁵ Their social situation was very pathetic and painful.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹"Madras Journal of Literature and Science," No.4, 249. Cited in Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 22.

¹⁴²Yesudas, *History of Women's Education in Kerala*, 23.

¹⁴³Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 290.

¹⁴⁴Yesudas, *History of Women's Education in Kerala*, 25.

¹⁴⁵*Slavery in Travancore and its Abolition*, Cover file, No. 286 of 1855, cited in Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women*, 53.

¹⁴⁶According to Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 26, no legal form of marriage existed among the slaves, and the mother enjoyed only

Covering the bosom with clothing was forbidden to these slave women. They went almost naked with only a few inches of cloth around the loins. Just like the *Ezhava* women, they paid the bulk of the state taxes. Deprived of education, the women of the slave caste were steeped in ignorance, lived in wretchedness, despised, disowned and shunned by all as symbols of disgrace and degradation.

2.3.2.1.5. Women in the Hill Tribes

Apart from these polluting castes, there were the *Nayadis* and the hill-tribes like the *Kanikkars*, *Malappandarams*, *Kuravans* and *Vetans*. The *Nayadis* were one of the most degraded and wretched of all the debased tribes of Kerala. Aiya reported their condition in the following words:

Almost naked and shunned by all classes, they lived far away from the villages in small huts erected in solitary places. There is a population of from 8000 to 10,000 wild hill men. They are quite distinct from the coolies living in 'lines' on the different tea estates, for they only go up to the hills for a time, while the tribesmen consider themselves the lords of the soil, and look on the forest as their home.¹⁴⁷

They were divided into twelve or fourteen tribes, and never intermarried.

very little rights over her children. The eldest born, whether son or daughter of a *Pulaya* couple, belonged to the master of the father and the other children to the master of the mother. Women of the slave classes worked as actively as the men for a living. Most of them were engaged in field work, gathering leaves and cutting twigs for manure, carrying these to the fields, transplanting and weeding, reaping and threshing rice. They were kept toiling in manure, planting or reaping throughout the day in the agricultural season by their masters. In the evening they returned to their huts, fatigued and hungry, to boil their rice and eat it with salt and pepper. During the months of scarcity they suffered much from sickness and from want of food.

¹⁴⁷ Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 407.

The hill-tribes in south Travancore lived in an exceedingly wretched, uncivilized, and degraded condition. As in the case of the slave castes mentioned above, the men went almost naked, having only a few inches of cloth round the loins, and a small cloth on the head. The women wore bracelets of iron or brass, numerous necklaces of coral or beads, and leaden rings in the ear. When they came in contact with the outside world, being unable to read or write or to count above a dozen, they made use of fibres of various climbing plants knotted in a particular way to express their wants. "They lived in little clans under the patriarchal rule of a head man called *muttukani*. They were in the habit of sending all their women into the seclusion of the jungles on the arrival of strangers."¹⁴⁸ They followed some of the similar customs of the Nair society such as the system of marriage, in that the marriage bond was of a mere temporary nature. The marriage rituals contained the *pudavakodukkal* ceremony and once that was over they could live together. The lowest age for marriage of girls was seven.¹⁴⁹ They have their own system of worship.¹⁵⁰

2.3.2.2. Women in Christian Communities

In the 18th century there were different Christian communities in Kerala. St. Thomas Christians had remained divided into two communities since 1665. The Catholic Christians of St. Thomas (*Pazhayakoottukar*), the larger community, maintained communion with Rome. The Syrian Orthodox Christians (Jacobites) established a close relationship with the Patriarchate of Antioch.¹⁵¹ There were also Christian missionaries from Europe and Latin Christian communities who lived mostly in the coastal areas. Protestant Missionary Churches were very

¹⁴⁸Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. 1, 18.

¹⁴⁹Rose, *Polity, Society and Women*, 84.

¹⁵⁰Mateer observes: "Being remarkably addicted to the worship of the hill demons, they are supposed to have great influence with those evil spirits, and are therefore often dreaded by the people of the low country." Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 49.

¹⁵¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. III, 21.

active during this period. Since a detailed study of all these different Christian communities would make our work too long, we limit ourselves to the study of two Catholic communities in Kerala namely, the St. Thomas Christians and the Latin Christians.

2.3.2.2.1. The St. Thomas Christian Community in Kerala

The Syrian Christian Church of Malabar which is also known as St. Thomas Christians is not only the oldest Church in India, it is also one of the oldest Churches in the whole world.¹⁵² St. Thomas Christians had their own spirituality, liturgy, theology and discipline until the 16th century.¹⁵³ But its ecclesial traditions have been subjected to many changes down through the centuries.¹⁵⁴ According to the Malabar traditions, the majority of the people converted by St. Thomas the Apostle belonged to the higher castes.¹⁵⁵ According to Podipara, "The Syro-Malabarians have always had a very high social status. In former times when the rules of caste were rigid, the Syro-Malabarians were considered equal to the Hindu nobility... The customs and manners of Syro-Malabarians are Hindu in origin and development."¹⁵⁶ Observers agree that the Christians still have some customs very similar to those of the higher Hindu castes although many such customs were suppressed in the

¹⁵²Zachariah, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, 3. There is a debate going on regarding the origin of the St. Thomas Christian Church from the Apostle Thomas. The Eastern mind is not keen on preserving historical documents. This is especially true in the case of Indian history. The living tradition and the Christianity of Kerala in its varied forms is a valid proof for the apostolic origin of this Church.

¹⁵³Achille, "Address for the Opening of the 8th Syro-Malabar Synod," 42.

¹⁵⁴Koodapuzha, "The Ecclesiology of the Thomas Christians in India," 86.

¹⁵⁵Mundadan, *Traditions of the St. Thomas Christians*, 130. Aiya, *Travancore State Manual* Vol. 1, 122, argues: "There is no doubt as to the tradition that St. Thomas came to Malabar and converted a few families of Nambudiris."

¹⁵⁶Podipara, "The Syro-Malabarians: Their Life and their Activities," 519.

Synod of Diamper.¹⁵⁷ Payngot states in this regard: "Women among the St. Thomas Christians kept the same life-style as their Brahmin counterparts and were of the same rank."¹⁵⁸ The St. Thomas Christian women of Kerala have many peculiarities in their customs and manners which distinguish them from the other women folks of Kerala. The clothes they wear are worthy of special note which in many ways resemble those of the high caste Hindu women.

2.3.2.2.1.1. Culture and Lifestyle of St. Thomas Christian Women

The St. Thomas Christian community adhered strictly to patriarchal customs and practices in the religious and social fields. The whole life style and customs, both religious as well as social, of the Syrian Christians were based on the St. Thomas tradition summarised in the phrase '*Marthommayude Margavum Vazhipadum*'¹⁵⁹ indicating the importance given to

¹⁵⁷Tisserant-Hambye, *Eastern Christianity in India: Authorized Adaptation from the French by Humbye*, cited in Mundadan, *Traditions of the St. Thomas Christians*, 130. Perumthottam, "Syro-Malabar Church a Short Historical Introduction," 236, holds: "The process of Latinization reached its climax at the Synod of Diamper in 1599. The synod was convoked by Dom Alexis Menezes the Archbishop of Goa. The decrees of the synod were against the ecclesial traditions of the St. Thomas Christians who were brought under the Portuguese jurisdiction at this synod."

¹⁵⁸Payngot, "Women among the St. Thomas Christians," 176.

¹⁵⁹Powathil, "Identity and Dignity of the Syro-Malabar Church," 71, 72, 74, speaks of St. Thomas Christians based on *Marthommayude Margavum Vazhipadum*: The sum total of their particular theological heritage was expressed by the phrase 'Law of Thomas' (*Thommayude Margam*) which implied their entire Christian heritage specifically expressed in the life style of their Church. *Thommayude Margam* was a dynamic expression of a living theology...They had an ecclesiology of their own in which the theology of the local churches was a living reality...The Church of the St. Thomas Christians had its own discipline which was very much indigenous. The theology of the local Churches formed the basis of their discipline. See also Aerthayil, *The Spiritual Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, 29, explained that the 'Law of

the religious practices in their life. It was the *elders* who constituted the decision-making body and became members of the *Edavakayogam* or *Pothuyogam*.

One of the areas of discrimination against women among the Thomas Christians was the denial of participation in the Church activities. *Palliyogam*, or the local parish assembly, which consisted of the heads of the Christian families and the clergy of the *edavaka* (parish) discussed all matters of common concern and made decisions. This institution was their decision-making and executive body at the local level. Women were not present in these bodies and had no place in them. Their sole social appearance was the occasional attendance at church services.¹⁶⁰

Bernard Thoma writes: "The Hindu women were allowed to go to the cultural entertainments conducted in their temple premises at night. But the Christian women were not permitted to go to the public ceremonies conducted in the parishes."¹⁶¹

There were no common customs or laws for women of the region, for the women's position were determined by their respective caste or community.

The Syrian Christian women first came into history through the account of Portuguese historians. They enjoyed upper caste status, observing untouchability and distant pollution. The customary practices of the community alone were applicable to the women, for their only social function was restricted to the Sunday services and festivals of the church. Here they seldom come into contact with the members of the other castes. As any upper caste women of the period, Syrian Christian women were also confined to their home as in the traditional period.¹⁶²

Thomas' was an important part of the spiritual heritage of the Malabar Church, because it was precisely this Law of Thomas that made the Malabar Church a distinct Oriental Church.

¹⁶⁰Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, 96-97.

¹⁶¹Thoma, *Mar Thoma Christyanikal*, Vol. 1, 254.

¹⁶²Jacob, *Changing Social Space of Women*, 96.

Christian women's status is further found in the report by Gouvea: "When the bishop enters the church they all go one by one to kiss his hand with great propriety, first of all kneeling down and bowing the head to the ground and then raising, they received the blessing with much reverence, so that they all look like well-behaved religious sisters."¹⁶³ It seems that some space was available for women in the religious activities.

Gouvea also reported that the Christian women were exceedingly modest both in life and dress and they were as a rule good looking and fairer than the eastern people.¹⁶⁴ They wore various gold ornaments, which was a privilege of women of higher castes. The amount of ornaments given to the bride was declared at the time of her marriage.¹⁶⁵ A St. Thomas Christian widow wearing no ornament was one more instance of

¹⁶³Zachariah, *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper*, 56. Gouvea was a Portuguese Chronicler in India.

¹⁶⁴Zachariah, *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper*, 56. A white cloth-length five and a half yards by one and a half yards is folded into a *pudava* which is again folded into fan like pleats. This fan like arrangement which is highly artistic completely covers the back portion of the woman when she wears the cloth... The upper portion of the body including the belly and the arm is completely covered with the loose blouse-like *kuppayam* or *chatta*. Going to the church they cover themselves from head to foot with a nice white cloth, when only the face will be visible. This dress is fully in keeping with the modesty and nobility of the Syrian Christian women. Mathew, "The Syrian Christian Women," 133-134; See also Pothan, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, 92; Joseph, *Kerala Christyanikal*, 162-63; Payngot, "Women among the St. Thomas Christians," 176.

¹⁶⁵Kolengaden, "Culture and Traditions of the Thomas Christians," 128. The dilated earlobes to contain broad discs with heavy pendants extending to the shoulders were the prevailing fashion among their women as among their Hindu sisters... Syrian Christian women wore no ornaments on the nose, which was supposed to be a characteristic of the lower castes. Various kinds of necklaces, *pathakamala* made of Venetian sequins, bracelets (*vala*), anklets (*thala*), loin ornament (*Ealas*) girdles (*Aranjnanam*), rings on the ten fingers were the order of the day. See also Puthukattukaran, *Kerala Krithavar*, 19-20.

the survival of the common practice among the people of high nobility.¹⁶⁶ The opinion of Monserrate was that "These people are of high rank and greatly reputed, well-formed and of good behaviour. The men are warriors; the women being honourable and rich, do the household works."¹⁶⁷ The women became proverbial for their modesty and chastity.

2.3.2.2.1.2. Manner of Property Inheritance and Family Life

The society of St. Thomas Christians was strongly patriarchal and inheritance among them was patrilineal. The father was the head of the family and was often called *karanavar*, a title which was also given to the eldest male member in the family.¹⁶⁸ The *makkathayam*¹⁶⁹ system was in force among them. All sons inherited their father's property but the daughters were provided with a dowry. If a couple had only female children, they would adopt as their heir a male related to the father in the male line, and this adoption took place in the presence of the bishop. To keep up their family traditions, the St. Thomas Christians would not make their daughters heirs to their properties. The synod of Diamper pointed out the defects of this system of inheritance.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Aiya, *The Travancore State Manuel*, Vol. II, 253, 270.

¹⁶⁷ Monserrate, 149, cited in Mundadan, *Traditions of Thomas Christians*, 121. Women of the higher caste were not free until recently to move about. Even now it is very rare that a Thomas Christian woman visits the houses of others unless they are nearest relatives. Now it is not rare for a woman to go to the Church alone. The early practice is well described by an anonymous document of the end of the 18th century. Joseph, *Kerala Christyanikal*, 161.

¹⁶⁸ John, "Life Style of Kerala Syrian Christians" [Online]. On discussing the Nair social customs it can be seen that the head of the family was called *karanavar*. This title was usually given to the eldest male member in the family. This shows that St. Thomas Christians followed many of the traditional practices of the higher caste Hindu society.

¹⁶⁹ In the *makkathayam* system, the son inherited the rights of property from the father.

¹⁷⁰ Zachariah, *Randu Prachina Gathyakritikal*, 90. Among the Christians no daughter could inherit, and it often happened that the dying father, left many daughters, but the inheritance passing to a male relative in the

K. C. Alexander notes: "Property is traditionally divided among the sons only and daughters are not given any share of it."¹⁷¹

Within the family, because of the patrilocal residence, patrilineal inheritance and the practice of dowry, sons were preferred to daughters to some extent, and preferential treatment was given to sons in such matters as education, etc.¹⁷² The community was characterized by a very high death rate, very high birth rate and 10 to 12 children per married woman.¹⁷³

2.3.2.2.1.3. Marriage Customs and Practices

From the Decrees of the Synod of Diamper,¹⁷⁴ and from the 16th century reports of the missionaries, it is clearly seen, that the St. Thomas Christians had adopted the marriage ceremonies of the high class, mainly in their social aspects; even today, the Christians follow most of these ceremonies.¹⁷⁵ Since these are very elaborate and lengthy¹⁷⁶ only a summary of these ceremonies, especially to show the status of women in the community is given here.

Marriages are arranged by the parents. Previously as most of the marriages took place early in the life of an individual, not much attention was given to the wishes of the boy or the girl, and the couple generally saw each other for the first time at the time of marriage.¹⁷⁷ Girls were married at an early age and dowries

third, fourth, or remote degree, even of collateral line while the daughters perished of hunger, and therefore took to a disreputable life. Zachariah, *Randu Prachina Gathyakritikal*, 206. See also Annie, "Women Religious Congregations and the Empowerment of Women," 247.

¹⁷¹ Alexander, *Social Mobility in Kerala*, 79.

¹⁷² Alexander, *Social Mobility in Kerala*, 77.

¹⁷³ Zachariah, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, 4.

¹⁷⁴ Zachariah, *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper*, 69.

¹⁷⁵ Aerthayil, *The Spiritual Heritage of The St. Thomas Christians*, 46.

¹⁷⁶ An elaborate description of a Christian marriage is given in the book, Paret, *Malankara Nazranikal: Padaviyum Jatyacharangalum*, 271ff.

¹⁷⁷ Alexander, *Social Mobility in Kerala*, 78.

have always been common. The dowry was given in the form of gold or jewels.¹⁷⁸ E. Poonem reports:

The Syrian Christians like the *Nambudiris* offer a fat dowry, the very reverse of marriage by purchase. Dowry had no doubt its origin in the excellent conception that the daughter had a real share in the estate of her father. The measure of the dowry is now on the merit of the bargaining power of the bridegroom, and not on the mind of bride's parents.¹⁷⁹

Hambye recorded: "Dowry was a common practice. In the case of most of the poor girls, the dowry was provided by the church funds or from the community or from taxes imposed on rich Christians. In case of orphan girls, the dowry was generally 1,000 *fanams* but sometimes half the sum."¹⁸⁰

The tying of the *tali* was the principal ceremony and this is performed in the church along with the sacramental service.¹⁸¹ Early marriage, as among the locals was originally in vogue amongst Syrian Christians. Though widows remarried, very seldom did those of any respectable family, with children, think of a second marriage. Syrian Christians are very strictly monogamous. Whoever breaks the norm is excommunicated from the church.

Their social and religious lives were not very distinguishable from each other and thus the community and its members were some of the most conservative and religious people. Their religious views largely governed the social lives. As most of the Syrian writings and documents were burned by the Latin

¹⁷⁸ Velupillai, *The Travancore State Manual* Vol. 1, 419.

¹⁷⁹ Poonem, *The Report of the Christian Committee*, 23.

¹⁸⁰ *Viaggio*, 138, cited in Hambye, *History of Christianity in India* Vol. III, 38.

¹⁸¹ Velupillai, *The Travancore State Manual* Vol. 1, 420. See also Alexander, *Social Mobility in Kerala*, 79; Pothan, *The Syrian Christians*, 70.

Missionaries, an elaborate discussion about the different areas of the St. Thomas Christian community is nearly impossible.¹⁸²

2.3.2.2.2. The Latin Christians of Kerala

Regarding the origin of the Latin Christians of Kerala, many writers have expressed varied opinions. According to G. T. Mackenzie¹⁸³ the origin of the Latin Christian community of Kerala does not go beyond the time of the Portuguese missionary work in Malabar. The nucleus of the present-day Latin Christian community was formed by those converted by the Portuguese in the vicinity of their fortresses and places of influence.¹⁸⁴ However, according to Ayyar they are recent converts to Christianity (1500 A. D.) – the descendants of the converts baptized by Francis Xavier, Father Miguel Vaz and other Portuguese Missionaries.¹⁸⁵ The *Cochin State Manual* states the following about their origin:

The Latin Christians *Munnuttikar*, *Anjuttikar* and *Ezhunuttikar*, (the Three Hundreds, Five Hundreds, and Seven Hundreds) belong to this community, but they do not themselves admit they were recent converts. There is considerable dispute among the three sections with regard to social precedence: each, while it claims to have descended from the early St. Thomas Christians, denies the same claims to the others. ...but one point is worthy of note, viz., that the

¹⁸² After the Synod of Diamper (1599), in order to bring the Syrians under the Latins, Bishop Menezes visited the Syrian churches throughout the country, and wherever he could find any Syriac texts which he considered heretical, he burned them and headed a procession, which marched around the burning pile, chanting hymns in the praise of God. Day, *The Land of the Perumals*, 232.

¹⁸³ G. T. Mackenzie was a British Resident in Travancore-Cochin who wrote a pamphlet with the title "History of Christianity in Travancore". His opinion is widely quoted by the authors of the various State Manuals of Kerala.

¹⁸⁴ Mackenzie, "History of Christianity in Travancore," 135.

¹⁸⁵ Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, 253.

undisputed Syrians do not by their tradition or by their practice support the claims of either of these parties.¹⁸⁶

Francis Day in his *Land of the Perumals* gives a detailed description about the divisions. For him four groups of people belong to the Christians:

The four Roman Catholic castes are at the present time divided in the following manner. The first the *Arwatnalkar* (the community of the sixty-four) is said to have consisted originally of converted Brahmins and Nairs. The second, the *Munnuttikar* (Three Hundred) are Latins or *Topasses*, so named from wearing hats and believed to have mostly sprung from the domestic slaves. The third the *Anjuttikar* (Five Hundred) are known to have originally sprung from *Mucuvass* or converted fisherman, and other low caste people; they generally call themselves *Moplas*. The fourth the *Ezhunuttikar* (Seven Hundred) are the descendants of the soil slaves. The *Catanars* or priests are generally taken from the second or the fourth of these communities or castes.¹⁸⁷

Ayyar also gives us short descriptions about the background of *Munnuttikar*, *Anjuttikar* and *Ezhunuttikar*.¹⁸⁸ However, there

¹⁸⁶ Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, 286.

¹⁸⁷ Day, *The Land of the Perumals*, 232.

¹⁸⁸ Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, 255-257, describes that the name *Munnoottikar* also known as *Topass* is derived from two Portuguese words "*tupaĩ*" (thou boy), because the Portuguese in early times taught their languages to the slaves born in their houses and employed them as interpreters in dealing with the people of the country. *Anjoottikar*, the members of the community are known as *Mukkuvans* or *Kadakodies*. Their origin is attributed to the conversion of the multitudes of fishermen who were baptised after the year 1532, along the coast northward from Cape Comorin by Father Miguel Vaz, St. Francis Xavier and subsequently by other Portuguese Missionaries. Seven Hundred is made up of the low caste converts from the *Ezhavans*, *Pulayans* and *Parayans*, and the Syrians very much resented their priests wearing the habit and conducting themselves as Syrian Priests.

were protests against these conversions from the upper classes not on religious grounds but for social and economic reasons. This led to several problems.¹⁸⁹ Since the Latin Christians came from different social groups or castes, even after their conversion these distinctions were preserved.¹⁹⁰ In a country like Malabar where distinctions based on the caste system were a prominent feature, most of the writers came to this same conclusion.¹⁹¹

2.3.2.2.2.1. Social Life of the Latin Christian Women

In spite of the gospel message of fraternal charity which is an initiation away from class distinctions, the influence of the caste system rigidly practiced by the non-Christians in Kerala was visible among the Christians. Speaking about the advantages that conversion to Christianity brought to the *Pulayas*, Padmanabha Menon, in his *History of Kerala*, writes:

In Travancore and to a certain extent in Cochin also, the various missionary bodies have tried and succeeded in a way in alleviating the miseries of these unfortunate beings... Conversion to Christianity or Mohammedanism at once lifts the social scale and gives him a passport to tread over ground hitherto forbidden. Their approach no longer pollutes higher castes...¹⁹²

This means that the general social statues of the lower caste, especially women, have been improved through their conversion. Latin Christian women enjoyed much freedom in the family, compared to other women. Bartalomeo notes that they “distinguish themselves by simplicity of manners, diligence and contentment.”¹⁹³ The Christian group consisted of people of all classes at that time, as at present. Visscher observes that except for the St. Thomas Christians, all those

¹⁸⁹Tharakan, “History of Conversions to Christianity in Kerala” [Online].

¹⁹⁰Thayil, *The Latin Christians of Kerala*, 278.

¹⁹¹Thayil, *The Latin Christians of Kerala*, 279.

¹⁹²Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol. III, 477.

¹⁹³Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 27.

converted by the Latins were either the slave children or people belonging to the lowest castes, none being higher than the *Nadar* or *Ezhava*.¹⁹⁴ The lower classes joined Christianity to free themselves from the discriminations that they suffered.¹⁹⁵ When they became Christians, they were more esteemed irrespective of their sex, and were permitted to enter palaces and other places which were unapproachable before. The caste Hindu women, who were expelled from other castes, for caste offences mostly, joined Christianity.¹⁹⁶

Though the Christian converts from the low castes during the time of the Portuguese missionaries did not have a position similar to those of the twentieth century, they however, were looked after by the missionaries and, as Christian communities, received protection from the Portuguese.

2.3.2.2.2. Marriage Customs and Practices of the Latin Christians

The Roman Catholics of the Latin rite include the three communities among whom there is no intermarriage. Marriage is endogamous in each community. Among the Catholics of the Latin rite, the marriage customs do not differ very much from those of the Syrian rite. The marriageable age of boys and girls, their betrothal, the publication of the banns in the two parish churches, the usual wedding feasts in the houses of the bride and the bridegroom, the bridegroom returning with his bride to his house and the attendance of the married couple in the parish church of the former are all the same.¹⁹⁷

Ayyar describes some of the differences between the celebrations of the marriage of the Latin Christians from that of the St. Thomas Christians as follows:

¹⁹⁴Visscher cited in Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 27.

¹⁹⁵Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 27.

¹⁹⁶Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 27.

¹⁹⁷Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, 261.

After the return of the bridal pair from the church they are received at the gate by their god-father and god-mother. The former marks the sign of the cross on their fore-heads with the tip of the finger, while the latter after marking a similar sign with a ring on the bridegroom's head and with one of the beads of a necklet *moni-kontha* on that of the bride's, presents both to the married couple... After this they are seated on a mat inside, and the bridegroom leaves to join his own party. They are again invited to the bride's house from which they return to the house of the bridegroom to attend the Mass on Sunday in his parish church and on the following Monday the nuptials take place in his house. It is interesting to note that at the wedding feast two members eat from one leaf as a sign of close relationship.¹⁹⁸

The bride's parents gave her the following ornaments; *moni-kontha*, *vairamoni*, *ukkazhuthu* (necklet), *mekkamothiram* and *kathila* (ear ornaments), *mothiram* (rings for the fingers), bracelets and other ornaments, along with the dowry proportionate to their means, out of which a sum of 7.5% of the *pathuvaram* is given to the church. No dowry was paid at the time of the marriage.

1.3.2.2.3. Manner of Property Inheritance and Family life

There is little doubt that mixed marriages between Latin Catholics and Protestants were fairly frequent among Latin Catholics. This was particularly the case in ports like Kollam and Kochi, where Dutch employees, generally Protestant by persuasion, took a Latin Christian girl as their spouse.¹⁹⁹ Among the Latin Christians, until some years ago, all the heirs, whether male or female, of the same degree, took equal shares in the intestate property, the right of the daughters of a Latin Christian

¹⁹⁸ Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, 261.

¹⁹⁹ Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol.III, 73.

to share equally with their brothers in their father's estate was fully recognized.²⁰⁰

Like the St. Thomas Christians, in order to keep up their family traditions, Latin's also followed almost the same system of inheritance.²⁰¹ There were no uniform practices among the Latin community; it changed according to the area. The law of inheritance among them was not very clear.

2.3.2.3. The Muslim Community in Kerala

From the very early times there had been considerable trade between Arabia and Malabar, in the 8th and 9th centuries and it is therefore probable that the religion of the prophet was introduced to Kerala by Arab traders.²⁰² Many of the traders settled here and they enjoyed the patronage of the local chieftains. The settlers married local women, mostly Nair and *Tiyas* and their descendants are called *Moplahs* or *Mappilas*.²⁰³ The early Muslims appear to have been the offspring of the union between the local women and the Arab traders, who

²⁰⁰ Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, 262.

²⁰¹ According to Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, 263, in the case of a man who dies leaving only daughters, the girls are allowed to divide the property among themselves equally, and take their respective shares absolutely. The girls, in some cases, according to an old custom, were precluded from inheritance, even if no sons were in the family, in which case their inheritance went to the next male cousin or uncle on the father's side.

²⁰² Menon, *Cochin State Manual*, 293.

²⁰³ Kunnikrishnan, "Matriliny among the *Mappilas* of Malabar," 56. The transliteration *Mappila* has taken several different forms, the most common being, *Mappilla*, *Mappila* and *Moplah*. The origin of the term is not clear, but it appears to have been basically a title of respect. In the partial form, *pilla*, is frequently found among Nairs. It was a common honorific term for Christians in middle Kerala, and this usage continues to some extent to the present. At an earlier period Muslim and Christian *Mappilas* were differentiated as *Jonakka* and *Nasrani Mappillas* respectively, but in recent times the term has tended more and more to be used as an exclusive name for the Kerala Muslim. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala*, 30.

would naturally come without their women, and the women of the lower classes of the Hindus, and as the early Muslims were remarkable for their proselytising zeal, their ranks were swelled by conversions, chiefly from among low caste Hindus.²⁰⁴ Of the Muslim population of Cochin, 80% are *Mappilas*, who are the descendants of the offspring of mixed unions or converts from the lower classes. These are the only Muslims indigenous to Cochin.

1.3.2.3.1. Social Customs and Practices

Even though Islam came to Kerala, several social practices prevalent in Kerala were absorbed into their fold locally due to various factors beyond their control. It is also assumed that Muslim women were not allowed by their men to take part in many events of social life; they were pushed into stereotype roles of looking after household chores which undermined their capabilities and capacities and the like.²⁰⁵ In the Muslim community, early marriage, at the age of eight or nine, became a common practice in the 18th and 19th centuries. The arrangement of marriage was entirely the concern of the parents on both sides, who agreed to the condition of the contract and fixed the date of marriage. At that time girls were not allowed to express their opinion regarding their marriage.²⁰⁶

Women wore a *mundu* of some coloured cloth (dark blue was most usual); a white loose bodice more or less embroidered; and a veil or scarf on the head. In the case of the wealthy, the *Mundu* could be of silk of some light colour. Women of the higher classes were kept secluded and hid their faces when they went out; but the lower classes were not particular in this respect.²⁰⁷ Women's jewellery was of considerable variety and was sometimes very costly. It took the form of necklaces, earrings, bracelets and anklets. The women of the *Tiya* and

²⁰⁴ Menon, *Cochin State Manual*, 293.

²⁰⁵ Azim, *Muslim Women: Emerging Identity*, 12.

²⁰⁶ Indumenon, *Status of Muslim Women in India*, 17-18.

²⁰⁷ Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer*, 188.

mukkuva communities wore a great number of ear-rings; the rim of the ear being pierced as many as ten or a dozen times in addition to the one in the lobe. Nose-rings were not worn.²⁰⁸

2.3.2.3.2. The Position of Women in the Muslim Community

There was a widely prevalent notion that Muslim women in Kerala enjoyed the lowest status in every sphere of social life compared to their counterparts belonging to other religious communities. The major part of the Muslim community in Kerala was made up of local converts from various Hindu castes like the Nairs, *Mukkuvas* and *Tiyas*, and for this reason, Islam absorbed several Hindu practices like paying of a dowry to the bridegroom, purification ablutions after birth, and dress habits.²⁰⁹ In spite of conversion they did not give up some of their customs and traditions. Adherence to old Hindu customs and practices could be seen in many of the Muslim communities in Kerala.²¹⁰

The veil (*parda*) constantly reminded a Muslim woman that her real place was home and that she was not expected to go out to meet strangers. When she had to meet a male member outside the home, she would veil herself. According to Menon, "The Muslim women in Kerala are still educationally backward and are hardly found in any of the literary fields. Their general education is very inadequate."²¹¹ Of late, schools have been started in Kerala for *Mappilas*, and they are being slowly weaned from their radical habits into more favourable paths of life.

2.4. The Uplift of Women

In this section the discussion is on the uplifting programme for women through education and various reform movements. Until

²⁰⁸Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer*, 188. See also John, "Muslims of Kerala" [Online].

²⁰⁹Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women*, 55.

²¹⁰Kurup and Ismail, *Emergence of Islam in Kerala*, 52.

²¹¹Menon, *The History of Kerala*, 294.

the 19th century, sufficient attention was not given to women's education in Kerala. The educational facilities for women were very few. The people of the high caste did not like to send their girl children out of the house.²¹² Education was usually imparted to them by *asans*, village schoolmasters, in indigenous schools normally called 'pial' schools.²¹³ The reformers found that the women were hardly receiving any education and they were acting only as servants to the men. The missionaries active at the time in Kerala, wanted to put an end to this state of affairs and improve the status of women by imparting education to them. The history of the education of women in Kerala reveals the remarkable transformation in the quality and status of women which was transformed materialized through the education imparted to them.

2.4.1. Empowerment through Education

The education of women which soon became popular and widespread in the state motivated the people, especially women, to see the realities in the society.²¹⁴ It equipped them to transcend the barriers of subjugation and traditions, with a new spirit of emancipation and progress. They knew quite well, that home life would be happy only if the women folk were educated.²¹⁵

²¹²Sahanam, *The Contribution of LMS Missionaries*, 24.

²¹³Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore*, 83. The ancient educational institutions in Kerala were called *ezhuthupallies* or pial schools. In the pial schools, the *Asan* or the village school master taught alphabets and simple Arithmetic.

²¹⁴Rose, "Female Education in the Princely State of Travancore," 129.

²¹⁵The reaction of a missionary to this state of affairs could be seen in the following words; "In childhood and youth they have no education, no cultivation of any kind whatever there is not a single girls' school in all India, and the mother being herself entirely unlettered and being the devoted victim of a dark cruel superstition, is utterly incapable of improving her child." *Evangelical Magazine*, December 1820, 531. Cited in Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 27. See also Sahanam, *The Contribution of LMS Missionaries*, 24.

2.4.1.1. Protestant Missionaries

At the dawn of the 19th century several missionary societies²¹⁶ were organized and firmly established with the objective of spreading the message of Christ. The London Missionary Society (LMS), the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Church of England, Zenana Missionary Society and the Basel Mission were some of them. Schools for girls to provide modern education were first started in Kerala by the wives of the Protestant Missionaries in the beginning of the 19th century. The main aim of the missionaries in founding girls' schools was to raise the status of women on the social scale and to disarm them of the prejudice which was found to be a barrier to the progress of Christianity.²¹⁷

2.4.1.1.1. London Missionary Society

Mrs. Mead, the wife of Rev. Charles Mead, a missionary of the LMS, immediately after her arrival, started a boarding school for girls at Nagercoil in 1819, and that was the first girl's school in the southern part of Kerala.²¹⁸ This school became one of the leading schools of Kerala under the leadership of Mrs. Mault, the wife of Rev. Charles Mault, another LMS missionary.²¹⁹ The primary objective of this school was to impart a simple education united with religious instruction. No books, except moral and religious, were allowed in the school.²²⁰ In 1821, lace-making was introduced on a small scale to help defray the expenses of the school. The girls in the school were also taught knitting

²¹⁶Since the consideration of all these Protestant missionary activities in detail would make the study too broad, it is mentioned very briefly their names and their concern to uplift the women in Kerala in the 19th century.

²¹⁷*Report on the Nagercoil Station, 1829, cited in Yesudas, A History of Women's Education, 28.*

²¹⁸Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 474.

²¹⁹Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 474.

²²⁰Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 28.

and sewing by the missionary ladies. The profits from this branch were used for the boarding, clothing and education of the children.²²¹

At first the missionaries experienced much difficulty in getting female students due to the opposition of orthodox Hindus. They were provided with board and clothing, and for their education, no fee was charged. The period from 1859 to 1866 marks an increase in the spread of Christianity resulting in remarkable growth of conversion to the newly established Christian religion. The reason for this growth was that it is a religion that preached the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and its major emphasis was equality and fraternity among all people. Thus there was no question of class differences and the resulting restrictions in clothing. Hence it was but natural that many people from the lower stratum of the society, especially from the Hindu *Nadars*, embraced Christianity.²²² The missionaries launched a series of programs for popularizing girls' education as there was resistance from the indigenous society.²²³ The state still had to depend on the mission schools for the education of high-caste as well as low-caste girls.

2.4.1.1.2. Church Missionary Society

In Central Kerala, the work of girls' education was undertaken by the missionaries of the Church Missionary Society. Like the other missionary societies, evangelization was the main aim of the CMS missionaries. According to Velupillai, as mentioned, the earliest attempt at girls'

²²¹ *L.M.S. Report*, 1823, 70.

²²² Hacker, *A Hundred Years in Travancore*, 55.

²²³ *E.M.M.C. Report of the Nagercoil Mission*, 1830, Vol. VIII, 322, recorded: They published several articles among which the pamphlet in Tamil on the advantage of girls' education deserves special mention. This compelled the parents to send their daughters to schools and also to allow the daughters to remain unmarried at least until the age of fourteen.

education in Travancore was made by wives of LMS missionaries, in 1819 at Nagercoil.²²⁴ Since the CMS lady missionaries started girls' education from the very beginning of their mission at Kottayam, they may be considered the pioneers of girls' education in Kerala. However, as Nagercoil is now part of Tamilnadu, it can definitely be said that the CMS missionaries, were the pioneers of girls' education in Kerala. Mrs. Bailey, Mrs. Fenn and Mrs. Baker deserve the credit for starting education of girls in this State.²²⁵ The CMS missionaries established different kinds of institutions for the development of education. The Syrian College, Syrian Girls' School, Parochial Schools and Training Schools were some of them.²²⁶ The remarkable contributions of the CMS missionaries to the education of women in Kerala in the 19th century are admirable.

2.4.1.1.3. *Zenana Missionary Society*

Miss Augusta Blandford was the first missionary of the Zenana Missionary Society to work in Kerala. She founded the Fort School for Girls in Trivandrum in 1864.²²⁷ This school, started mainly for the education of the caste Hindu girls, received the patronage of the royal family of Travancore. Through this school, Miss Blandford diffused English education among the high caste women and her influence extended to the ladies of the royal house.²²⁸ In 1864, even though girls' education in Travancore was about half a century old, it was very difficult to get girls into the school. Miss Blandford worked with zeal and

²²⁴Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. III, 700.

²²⁵Eapen, *Church Missionary Society and Education in Kerala*, 146.

²²⁶Rose, "Female Education in the Princely State of Travancore," 138. The beneficent activities of the CMS missionaries in the field of education had produced an abiding impression regarding their abundant labours for the spread of enlightenment among the people. Yesudas, *A History of Women's Education*, 39.

²²⁷Rose, *Polity, Society and Women*, 110.

²²⁸Eapen, *Church Missionary Society and Education*, 155.

earnestness, and her efforts helped to remove the prejudice of the higher castes in Trivandrum toward women's education.²²⁹ The school from its inception maintained a high standard in teaching and discipline, producing commendable results.²³⁰

1.4.1.1.4. Basel Mission

Basel Mission with its base in Basel, Switzerland, obtained permission from the English to launch their activities in India in 1833.²³¹ The Basel Mission and other Christian Missions were responsible for the spread of women's education in Malabar including Cochin. Basel Mission started schools on October 24, 1834 in Calicut and October 30, 1834 in Mangalore. A great number of girl students studied in the Basel Mission School at Calicut. Co-education was popular in Malabar also, and a good number of girls attended these schools. The state relied heavily on the missionaries for the education of girls of all castes. The *Pulayas*, Nairs and *Tiyas* were the most enlightened caste in the field of women's education.²³² It was not until the late 19th century that the state began to pay attention to women's education.²³³

1.4.1.2. Endeavours of Syrian Catholic Church and Latin Catholic Missionaries

When the Protestant Missionaries introduced modern education, especially English education in Kerala, the Catholic Church had great concerns about the possible spread of Protestantism through English education. The Italian Carmelites working

²²⁹Rani Lakhmi Bai, the senior Rani of Travancore, Kalliani Ammachi of Quilon and the wife of Ravi Varma were some of the ladies who were educated in the Fort School. Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 475.

²³⁰Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 475.

²³¹Mathew, "Introduction" *Indian Constitution, Education and Minorities in Kerala*, 8-9.

²³²Innes, *Malabar Gazetteers*, 296-297.

²³³Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore*, 98.

among the Catholics of Kerala had serious concerns about English and modern education in general on account of the Protestant ideals.²³⁴ The Latin as well as Syrian Catholic communities in Kerala were under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Portuguese *Padroado* until 1886. The Portuguese authorities forbade the Syrian Catholics to attend the schools run by the Protestant Missionaries.²³⁵ It is in this context, the contributions of Chavara in this field become crucial. Chavara was a well-known person in the Syrian Catholic Church of the 19th century. When he became the Vicar General of the Syrian Church (1861) he was aware of the real situation of the Syrian Church.²³⁶ He took keen interest and worked for the empowerment of the Church through the education especially for women.

2.4.1.2.1. Educational Endeavours of Blessed Chavara

Chavara considered school education as one of the most effective means for the development of the community. In 1846 he established a Sanskrit school at Mannanam where he admitted children of all castes and creeds.²³⁷ It was a daring step at a time when the schools in Kerala admitted only children of the upper castes. Besides, Sanskrit, the sacred language of India was considered to be the prerogative of the Brahmins. But Chavara allowed and encouraged the children of the low castes to learn Sanskrit at his school at Mannanam and in this respect to be considered as the first reformer in Kerala to break this unjust taboo.²³⁸

²³⁴Tharakan, "Socio-Economic Factors in Educational Development" cited in Mathew, "Introduction," *Indian Constitution, Education and Minorities in Kerala*, 9.

²³⁵Mathew, "Introduction," *Indian Constitution, Education and Minorities in Kerala*, 9.

²³⁶There is a detailed study of the situation of Syrian Church and Chavara's efforts in section 3.4.1.

²³⁷Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 137.

²³⁸Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 137.

Chavara became the Vicar General of the Syrian Catholic Church in Kerala in 1861. With the permission of Msgr. Bernardin Beccinelli the Vicar Apostolic of Varpoly an official letter was sent in 1864 to all the churches telling them to start *pallikoodams* (schools) attached to the parish churches; those priests who did not comply with this order were threatened with *amsamudakku*.²³⁹ Chavara was very careful to implement this order in all the Syrian churches which were great in number compared to the Latin churches of the time. Therefore without any hesitation one can affirm that part of the credit for the high literacy rate of Kerala state goes to the farsighted policy of Chavara in establishing schools attached to the parish churches.²⁴⁰ Chavara himself revealed that the Christian formation of the people, especially women and children, was the main objective of establishing schools. His hard work to uplift the women was very explicit in the foundation of a women's religious congregation.

2.4.1.2.2. Chavara and Revival of the Catholic Women

Chavara turned his attention also towards the deplorable condition of the women in the society. He wanted to raise the dignity of women and make them self-reliant. Here too, the most important means he relied on was education. With this aim in view, he founded a religious congregation for women (TOCD)²⁴¹ with the help of Leopold Beccaro OCD²⁴² in 1866 at

²³⁹CMM, Vol.III, 90. See also cf. Panthaplackal and Jossy eds., *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, IX/5:1-2; 24; Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 137; Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 75. There is a detailed study of Chavara's educational endeavours in section 3.4.5.2. *Amsamudakku* means forbidden from ministering of the Sacraments.

²⁴⁰Panthaplackal, "Blessed Chavara: A Brief Biography," 12.

²⁴¹At the time of the foundation, the congregation was known as the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites which included both Latin and Syrian members. After the establishment of Vicariates according to the rites in 1887, both Latin and Syrian sisters were separated and accordingly formed two Congregations which are now called as

Koonammavu.²⁴³ The objectives of a religious community life, according to Chavara were self-sanctification and the salvation of the souls and the empowerment of women for social action.²⁴⁴ Even as the members of the community strove towards their own spiritual realization, they had to bear in mind that they had an equally important task of educating and empowering women to become better citizens of the country.²⁴⁵ The great vision of Chavara was that women should become agents of their own progress. Along with the foundation of the first convent at Koonammavu, an *educandath* (boarding school) was established for the education and formation of girls. On 2 January 1868, the first boarding house was opened at Koonammavu.²⁴⁶ The house aimed at the spiritual as well as the intellectual development of the girls, that they might be transformed into holy and educated members of the society and the Church. The uplift of women was one of his main dreams. He acknowledged women as the ever flaming lamp of the family. It is noteworthy that through the foundation of the convent, he intended to enable women to uplift themselves. The

Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) and Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC). There is a detailed study of the foundation and separation in section 3.5.2 and 4.1.

²⁴²Leopold Beccaro was a European Missionary who came to Kerala in 1859 for the missionary work *CKC* Vol. I, 2. His name is Rev. Leopold Maria De San Juse [Leopold of Mary and St. Joseph]. Beccaro is his Sur name. Hereafter he will be referred to in this work as Leopold. There is a detailed study about Leopold Beccaro in 3.2.1.5.

²⁴³*The Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. I, 1-13; See also John Paul II, "A Heroic Son of the Church in India," 81, Extracts from the homily during the Beatification of Chavara, on 8th February, 1986. In this thesis the manuscript sources are used instead of printed works. Here the manuscript with its literal translation which it is making use of will be abbreviated as *CKC* with the volume number following. In all these editions the page number of the manuscript is given inside the pages.

²⁴⁴*CMC Plan of Formation*, 23-25.

²⁴⁵Maria, "Blessed Chavara: A Prophet of Women Empowerment," 77-78.

²⁴⁶*CKC* Vol. I, 84-85.

foundation of the first indigenous congregation for women cannot be understood outside this context. This is elaborately dealt with in the third chapter.

2.4.1.2.3. Catholic Missionary Efforts

The European Catholic Missionaries started schools for the natives and so did a few Women's Religious Congregations who came to Kerala for missionary work in the 19th century. St. Joseph's Girls' School was started in Calicut in 1862 by the newly erected Mangalore diocese.²⁴⁷ The congregation of the Apostolic Carmel²⁴⁸ took charge of this school and admitted the students without any distinction of caste or creed.²⁴⁹ St. Theresa's Anglo-Indian School was founded by Father Louis Mary Martelly in Cranganore in 1862 and entrusted it to the

²⁴⁷Father Gabriel Goncalves under the diocese of Cranganore started St. Joseph's Boys' School at Calicut in 1793 which could be the earliest public school run by the Catholic Church. Though the Catholic Church had done much for the education in Kerala, here mainly the girls schools in Kerala are considered.

²⁴⁸Mother Veronica is the Foundress of the congregation of the Apostolic Carmel, Mangalore. She was born on October 1, 1823, in England as a daughter of an Anglican Chaplain to the British Embassy at Constantinople. She was received into the Catholic Church in 1850 and joined the Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition in 1851 receiving the name Sr. Mary Veronica of the Passion. She dedicated her life to the education of youth. She came to India and at Calicut met the saintly Carmelite Bishop, Marie Ephrem, who guided her in her work of founding the Apostolic Carmel, a Congregation of Carmelite women devoted to teaching. She obtained the sanction of the Holy See, and, leaving her own Congregation, joined the Carmel of Pau, France. She prepared a band of young girls, French, English and Irish, and sent them to India in 1870. They first settled in Mangalore. The Apostolic Carmel was firmly established in Indian soil as an Order devoted to teaching and education. "Mother Mary Veronica of the Passion (1823 to 1906)" [Online].

²⁴⁹Mathew, "Introduction" *Indian Constitution, Education and Minorities in Kerala*, 10.

congregation of the Apostolic Carmel in the 1870's.²⁵⁰ Another school for girls was established in Tellicherry in 1886 with the name Sacred Heart School.²⁵¹ In 1880, a high school was established by the Holy Angels Convent at Trivandrum. This school run by the Latin Catholic Missionaries was recognized for the purpose of preparing girls for the matriculation examination in 1885. In 1888 the school presented four candidates for the matriculation examination, the first girls' high school to do so in Kerala.²⁵²

2.4.1.3. Efforts of the Government in the Field of Education of Women

The missionaries drew the attention of the government to the need of educating women by sending the authorities various petitions. Their ceaseless efforts to spread women's education opened the eyes of the government and inspired the officials to enter into the academic field.²⁵³ Rani Parvati Bai (1814-1829) who laid the foundation of a state level education in Travancore (1817) proclaimed the educational policy of the state thus: "...that the state should defray public cost of educating the people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion of education they might become better subjects and public servants and the reputation of the state might be advanced thereby."²⁵⁴

Diwan T. Madhava Rao (1862-72) who became the *Diwan* of Travancore in 1862 paid considerable attention to the education of women, for he considered the role of women to be important in achieving his goal of modernization. He stated in his first administrative report of 1862-63 that very little had been done

²⁵⁰ Mathew, "Introduction," *Indian Constitution, Education and Minorities in Kerala*, 10.

²⁵¹ Mathew, "Introduction" *Indian Constitution, Education and Minorities in Kerala*, 10.

²⁵² *Report of the Travancore University Committee*, 1923-24.

²⁵³ Menon, *History of Kerala*, 414-415.

²⁵⁴ *Report of the Travancore University Committee*, 1923-24, 12.

for the education of women. He called for prompt attention to the subject of education, since education must be, among other advantages, the foundation of important social reforms.²⁵⁵ Thereupon, the government established schools for girls.

The first government school for girls was built in 1864 at the cantonment in Trivandrum, and was supervised by European women.²⁵⁶ Another vernacular school for girls was opened by the government within the Fort at Trivandrum in 1869 at the request of the people. The first government girls' school in Cochin was started in 1887 at Trichur. There was great demand in the 19th century for girls' education and a number of schools were established in the state and girl students increased considerably.

All the above attempts for the education of girls notwithstanding, compared to that for boys, the state clearly paid far less attention to the education of girls. Many of the teachers in the girls' schools were men, and this prevented girls from continuing in school beyond a certain age.²⁵⁷ The state tried to improve this situation by supplying qualified lady teachers to several of the girls' schools. In 1887, it established a teachers' training school for women but this school trained teachers only for the vernacular schools. The English training branch was not added until 1904.²⁵⁸

2.4.1.4. Education of Girls and Grant-in-Aid of 1875

Diwan T. Madhava Rao and his successors largely maintained a favorable relationship with the missionaries, at least in the 1870s and the 1880s. This was mainly because they expected the missionaries to undertake the education of the lower castes, which the state was not ready to deal with. The introduction of

²⁵⁵ *Report on the Administration of Travancore for the Year 1862-63*, 44.

²⁵⁶ Aiyar, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 475-476. See also Aiyar, *Progressive Travancore*, 277.

²⁵⁷ *Report on the Administration of Travancore for the Year 1886-87*, 131.

²⁵⁸ Aiyar, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, 476.

the grant-in-aid system in 1875 is one example of their encouragement in this period.²⁵⁹ The Travancore government started grant-in-aid programs in 1868-69 so as to encourage 'the educational efforts of the missionary societies.'²⁶⁰ The commencement of the large-scale grant-in-aid system in 1875 was largely the result of the demand from the missionaries. They, especially the LMS missionaries, suffered financially in the early 1870s, and this was the direct cause of the demand for state aid. The LMS missionaries then presented a petition to the Maharaja, appealing to him to open all the government schools to all classes and to set up a grant-in-aid system. Under these circumstances, the Maharaja and the *Diwan* adopted a policy of introducing a large-scale grant-in-aid system which was probably the best possible option for the Travancore government.²⁶¹ The policy of extending grant-in-aid to indigenous schools continued during the 1880s, and the number of aided indigenous schools increased sharply.

The favourable relationship between the missionaries and the Travancore State which had continued since Madhava Rao's reforms deteriorated considerably in the 1890s. The state came to adopt a number of policies which were considered hostile to the missionaries.²⁶² Like other education reforms in Travancore,

²⁵⁹Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore*, 98-99.

²⁶⁰*Report of the Education Expenditure Committee*, 1921. Cited in Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State Travancore*, 98-99.

²⁶¹Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State of Travancore*, 100.

²⁶²The code of 1894 changed the whole educational pattern of the state, and brought it under the authority of the government. This measure of the government severely affected the educational work of the missionaries. The government gained the right to interfere in the working of the schools by the introduction of the new code and the missionaries found their right to maintain schools and educate the people violated. *LMS Minute book*, 279 cited in Aiya, *The Travancore State Manuel*, Vol. II, 444, 458. The regulations introduced in the code prevented the missionaries from using Christian text books and making their schools a medium for evangelical work. The code also disqualified a good number of teachers and insisted upon better school buildings, more school

the main purpose of the reforms of 1894 was to strengthen government control over education. The educational institutions of the missions were greatly affected by changes in the rules.

2.4.2. Socio-Religious Reform Movements and Empowerment of Women

The last decade of the 19th century witnessed the emergence of powerful social and religious reform movements among the women in Kerala. Hence the demands for reforms in inheritance laws and marriage regulations, equal and better opportunities in education as well as in government employment, which characterised this period, were not raised by all sections of the affected people together as common demands but separately by different communities. The aims of the resultant agitations, which are commonly termed social reform movements were also varied. The Catholic Movement, the Upper Cloth Movement, the *Ezhava* Movement, the Nair Movement, the *Pulaya* Movement and the Muslim Movement deserve special attention in this context. All these movements were directed towards eradication of discrimination on the basis of sex, caste and caste taboos and the establishment of a more just social order.

2.4.2.1. Shannar Agitation/The Upper Cloth Revolt of 1858-1859

Though the women of the *Shannars* and *Ezhavas* were desirous of having the freedom of dress, they were not permitted by caste and government rules.²⁶³ After 1850 the *Shannars* of Kerala, both Christians and Hindus, began to press for the freedom of dress for their women. They made many representations to the government to grant this freedom.

furniture, and a higher average attendance. The teachers were required to pass government examinations to qualify as teachers. Grants were refused to those schools which did not satisfy the provisions of the code. *Report on the Administration of Travancore*, 1896-97.

²⁶³Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala*, 82.

At this critical juncture, it was at the insistence of socio-religious reformers and LMS missionaries that the royal proclamation of Utradam Thirunal Maharaja was issued on 26 July 1859, abolishing all restrictions placed on any dress for the upper part of the body of the *Shannar* women. It was issued with a stipulation that they should not imitate the dress of the women of the upper castes. The LMS missionaries and British authorities continued to express their desire to the Maharaja, for a better legislation granting freedom to the people of the lower castes in the matter of dress. The pressure caused the Travancore government to issue a new legislation in this regard in 1865. Revolutionary changes were seen in the status of the lower class women, with the proclamation of Ayilyam Tirunal Maharaja on 19 June, 1865, permitting women of all the backward classes to cover their bosoms by wearing the upper cloth.²⁶⁴

2.4.2.2. Important Social Reformers in Kerala in the 19th Century

The second half of the 19th century Kerala witnessed powerful reform movements from all religions. The pioneering efforts of the Syrian Catholics in Kerala made significant contributions in education as well as emancipation of the downtrodden from the 19th century. Chavara (1805-1871) was one of the greatest socio-religious reformers of 19th century Kerala. Various Hindu reform movements were led by three outstanding leaders of non-Brahmin communities, viz., Sri Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1924), Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928), and Sri Ayyankali (1866-1941) the *Ezhava* saint. They revolted against the existing social order in which the Brahmins enjoyed a monopolistic position of privilege and eventually helped to usher in a new social order in which the non-Brahmin communities came to have their legitimate place. Abdul Khader

²⁶⁴Vide Appendix X—Proclamation of 19 Mithunam, 1040 M.E. Cited in Rose, *Polity, Society and Women*, 151. See also Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 305.

Moulavi (1873-1932), a scholar in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Malayalam was the pioneer of reformation among the Muslim community. Among all these reformers, Chavara stands as the pioneer.

2.4.2.2.1. Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871)

Kuriakose Elias Chavara realized that education was a powerful means of liberation and decided to use it as a weapon to fight against social evils. The social reforms he undertook resulted in inconceivable social changes whose effects are very visible even today. Considering the social situation of the 19th century, he took admirable steps to raise the living standards of women, the dalits, and the downtrodden, educating them and eradicating the caste system.²⁶⁵ He started schools at Mannanam and Arpookkara (1864) and arranged for the midday meal to be supplied from the monastery for uplifting the dalits and downtrodden. Chavara advanced the development and welfare of women by founding a convent. He launched a new trend of solving the problems of women by women themselves, through empowering and training a group of women.²⁶⁶ This was realised on 16 October 1872 when the Sisters were sent to teach in the school.²⁶⁷ He founded 'the house of charity' for the poor, the neglected, the despised and the destitute, where people received protection and care. He was also an apostle of the print media.²⁶⁸ The aim of the two congregations which he started for

²⁶⁵Vithuvattical, "Blessed Chavara the Un-Questioned Leader," 9-10.

²⁶⁶James, "Blessed Chavara: A Great Man Who Walked Ahead of his Times," 126.

²⁶⁷CKC Vol. II, 56.

²⁶⁸*Chronicles of the Monastery at Mannanam*, Vol. 1, 133-134; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 38. As it was mentioned concerning the CKC, here too, the manuscript will be abbreviated as CMM with the volume number following. Here the page number of the manuscripts is given. In all the editions, except in the English edition, the page number of the manuscript is given inside the pages. Hence, in our study, it is the English edition page number that is given. Hereafter the manuscript will

men and women was not only for personal sanctification of the members but also for the spiritual and social welfare of the people and for the service of the Church and the society. Considering the situation of the 19th century, his committed services for the society are praiseworthy.²⁶⁹ If Kerala is foremost in the human resources' development index, a part of the credit goes to this visionary endeavour.

2.4.2.2.2. Sri Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1923)

Being a leading member of the Nair community, Chattampi Swamikal infused a new life and vigor into Hinduism, at a time when it was facing the threat of conversion of many Hindus into the fold of Christianity and Islam. He identified himself with the aspirations of the common folk, and spoke strongly against Brahmin domination. The Nairs, the *Ezhavas* and other non-Brahmin castes who suffered from serious social disabilities found in him the star of a new hope. However, his main achievement as a social and religious reformer was that he could arouse the social consciousness of the members of his own caste, viz, the Nairs and make them fight against the social evils that had crept into their ranks.²⁷⁰ The work of Chattampi Swamikal considerably helped the Nair Service Society and its leader Mannath Padmanabhan in their efforts to bring about the moral regeneration of the Nair community by eradicating such social evils as untouchability, caste barriers and observance of irrational social practices like *sambandham*, *devadasi system*, etc., which had impoverished many middle class Nair families.²⁷¹

2.4.2.2.3. Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928)

Like Chattampi Swamikal, Sri Narayana Guru also revolted against the existing social order in which the Brahmins enjoyed

be abbreviated as *CMM* with the specific volume number and page number.

²⁶⁹The details of this topic are given in section 3.4.

²⁷⁰Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 202.

²⁷¹Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 202.

a position of primacy. He was the great saint and social reformer of the *Ezhava* community who initiated a silent social revolution and spiritual revival in Kerala. In 1891, the historic document called *the Malayali Memorial* expressed the protest of all the Travancoreans against the discriminatory policy of the government. People of all castes and creeds – Hindus, Christians and Muslims alike, signed it. This document reflects the growth of social awareness among the people of Travancore.²⁷² Following the same pattern of peaceful agitation, another petition called the *Ezhava Memorandum* was put forward in 1896 to the Maharaja. This was especially meant to call the attention of the government to the grievances of the *Ezhava* community.²⁷³ According to Narayana, education was the only remedy for all the ills of the depressed classes, and he became the unwearied champion of modern education for the masses. His inspiring message “one caste, one religion, and one god” emphasized the brotherhood of man.

2.4.2.2.4. Sri Ayyankali (1866-1941)

Sri Ayyankali a *Pulaya* leader, who drew inspiration from the work of Sri Narayana Guru, founded the *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam* (1907) with the aim of working for the social uplift of the Scheduled Castes. The Harijans of Kerala benefited considerably in the following years from the work of Ayyankali and the *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam*.²⁷⁴ As a result of his earnest efforts, the government opened several schools exclusively for the education of the *Harijan* children, granting them free education.

2.4.2.2.5. Abdul Khader Moulavi (1873-1932)

The Muslim community produced some outstanding social and religious leaders who worked hard for its social uplift and moral regeneration. Abdul Khader Moulavi, the most prominent of

²⁷²Karakunnel, *Advaita and Liberation*, 46.

²⁷³Karakunnel, *Advaita and Liberation*, 46.

²⁷⁴Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 205.

them, exhorted the Muslims to give up all un-Islamic practices, take to Western liberal education and play a leading role in all progressive social movements. The basic problem confronted by this community was that of integrating social change as an essential part of their religious experience since their social customs had been in effect, religious customs.²⁷⁵ During this period, education and social freedom to Muslim girls were strictly forbidden. Hence, Abdul Khader entered the realm with revolutionary fervour, contributing much to the cause of women.²⁷⁶ By the eradication of social practices like polygamy, child marriage and a ban on the education of girls, the status of the Muslim women in society rose gradually.

2.5. Conclusion

The subhuman condition of women that prevailed in the society of Kerala in the 18th and 19th centuries has been brought to light in the chapter. If the caste system made the situation of the Hindu women worse, the fanatical and conservative rules of purity and pollution affected not only them but also the people who belonged to other religions. It seems that in one way or the other, in all religions women were considered as inferior to men. Their social status was deplorable due to the dowry system, polygamy, child marriage and other similar social institutions. As this study has exposed, discrimination against women was incomparably terrible, so much so that even the right to cover their nakedness was denied to the majority.

In such a situation the role played by the Christian, Hindu and Muslim reformers was crucial. As a result, the second half of the 19th century witnessed revolutionary changes in Kerala. Chavara represents the first glimmer of the rise of a social consciousness even before the advent of Chattampi Swamikal, Sri Narayana Guru and Ayyankali. Unfortunately, historians seem to have left out the name of Chavara from the list of social reformers of Kerala. However, he is remembered gratefully for

²⁷⁵Menon, *Social and Cultural History of India*, 210.

²⁷⁶Seethi, *Rediscovering the Principle of Iftimad in Islam*, 138.

his contribution to the uplift of the downtrodden in both the material and the spiritual realms. Nowhere else in the country were the reforms so profound and so all pervasive, redefining social conventions and family life beyond recognition, as it was made in Kerala.

The opening of the door to education was the most important pioneering attempt towards the empowerment of woman in Kerala society. However, the Catholic community was afraid of English education because of the spread of Protestantism. This was a great setback for their educational status. Chavara, the son of the soil, discerned the dangerous situation and acted in time. The Sanskrit school at Mannanam, other schools and the establishment of indigenous religious congregations, especially of congregation for women (TOCD) were witnesses of his prompt actions. The sole purpose of Chavara's mission for women was to educate them for the spiritual formation of families and society irrespective of caste and creed and culture and to make them socially and economically self-reliant. In the context of the 19th century, this vision and its execution by Chavara was revolutionary.

Chapter Three

CHAVARA: A MAN WITH A VISION AND MISSION FOR A RENEWED CHURCH

3.1. Introduction

Pope John Paul II, on the occasion of Kuriakose Elias Chavara's beatification, recognized him as a "heroic son of the Church in India."¹ Chavara was a multifaceted personality chosen and blessed by God to shed the light of love and wisdom in the dark recesses of the 19th century Kerala Church. His call was to renew and build up the Church of his time. According to R. Venkataraman, the former President of India, "Few people have been able to combine the contemplation of God with the service of man as naturally and creatively as Chavara did. There was in fact no dichotomy in his mind between the world of faith and the world of action. Chavara represented both."² The services that he rendered the Church and the society were manifold. It is remarkable to note also that Chavara was a pioneer in visualizing the empowerment of women in Kerala. He committed and dedicated his life for their uplift and development. It was through the religious community for women which he founded that he carried out the women empowerment programme in the Church.

¹Paul II, "Heroic Son of the Church in India," 79

²Venkataraman, "Father Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at its Best," 86. The speech he delivered on the occasion of releasing the commemorative stamp of Blessed Chavara on 20th December 1987.

3.2. Important Traits of Chavara

This section analyses the personality of Chavara and the persons and situations which moulded him as an ecclesial visionary. P. Ramachandran, the former Governor of Kerala, releasing the commemorative stamp of Chavara observed: "Chavara was a man of deep vision who thought and acted far ahead of his times. He had a sure grasp of spiritual verities as well as social realities."³ Chavara possessed many eminent qualities, both inborn and cultivated, of mind as well as heart, which enabled him to perform his mission successfully. He was born of a noble family, of exemplary parents and from them he inherited many natural virtues such as goodness, piety, righteousness, integrity and honesty.

3.2.1. The People Who Moulded Chavara's Vision

Man is a social being. The society in which one lives moulds him/her. Chavara was not an exemption to this. His personality was moulded by many persons. His own writings give proof of this. He records the sweet memories of his childhood in the pages of *Compunction of the Soul*.⁴ It is true that the family and the social environment contributed significantly to the development of his personality from childhood. The persons who influenced him mainly were his parents, especially his mother Mariam, his guru *Malpan*⁵ Thomas Palackal, his

³Ramachandran, "A Man of Deep Vision," 90.

⁴*Compunction of the Soul* [*Atmanuthapam* in Malayalam] is the best literary work of Chavara. It contains 4021 verses in thirteen Cantos written in Malayalam. The literary activity of Chavara began only towards the end of his life, that is, around 1869-70. Chavara had a very creative mind and produced works of admirable quality in both prose and verse.

⁵"*Malpan* is a Syriac word which means 'guru' or 'teacher' or one who is learned. Among the Thomas Christians those who gave training and formation to the priest candidates are known as *Malpans*. The Church considers only those priests who are holy and wise as *Malpans*." Kallarangattu, "St. Thomas Christians of India: Ecclesial Heritage and Perspectives," 33.

inspiration and guide Fr. Thomas Porukkara, his spiritual guide Leopold, his parish priest and his maternal uncle, father of Fr. Geevarghese Thoppil. In the *Compunction of the Soul* he writes of all these inspiring personalities except Fr. Porukkara and Leopold. Let us discuss the importance of these personalities who influenced the life of Chavara.

3.2.1.1. The Family Tradition of Chavara

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born on 10th February 1805.⁶ He was the youngest son of Kuriakose Chavara and Mariam Thoppil. The Chavara family traced its ancestry to the celebrated line of the Pakalomattom family in Palayoor which was one of the foremost Christian families of Kerala that received the faith from St. Thomas, the Apostle.⁷ Chavara was born at Kainakari, a tiny village in Kuttanadu, near Aleppy in Kerala.⁸ Since Kainakari was not a separate parish at the time of his birth he was baptized in Chennamkari parish church on 18 February 1805.⁹

⁶There are different opinions regarding the date of birth of Chavara. Chavara himself, in 1864, had given to Leopold Beccaro OCD a written script of names of the members with their dates of birth. Accordingly Fr. Leopold has given the details of the members in his personal diary, where the date of birth of Chavara is recorded as on 10th February 1805. It is this date that is accepted by the Church for the cause of beatification process of Chavara. *Diary of Fr. Leopold* Vol.III, 10-11.

⁷Chavara, descending from the Pakalomattom family from Palayoor could claim as its members many noble sons who shaped the fortunes of the Syrian Church in Kerala. Plathottom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias*, 16. This is the first English biography of Chavara published by Valerian in 1953. The best biography so far published in English is the one by the well known writer K.C. Chacko in 1959.

⁸Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 7. Valerian used his name in some other writings as Valerian Plathottam. In this book he used his name Valerian C.D [Carmelites of Discalced].

⁹Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 10. The devout parents had the child baptized on the eighth day in their parish church of Chennamkari according to the then prevailing custom in the Church. The child was given the name of his father, Kuriakose.

The parents of Chavara doted on their charming young son along with his four sisters and one brother. At the age of five Chavara was sent to *Kalari* where he learned Malayalam, arithmetic, Tamil and Sanskrit for five years¹⁰. Everyone loved the little boy who always spoke gently and sweetly. The spiritual formation of Chavara was accomplished mainly through the training he received from the family. He speaks highly of the exemplary upbringing he received mainly from his mother during his infancy and childhood. His family was the cradle of his spirituality.

According to Mundadan, "Kuriakose was particularly fortunate to have a very pious and devout Catholic family, a father well grounded and firm in faith and devotion, and a mother exceptionally pious."¹¹ Even though he does not write anything specific about his father, he mentions his 'parents' in *Compunction of the Soul*: "God gave me parents grounded in faith secure; And faith in me engraved full firm, besides."¹² From his own words one can infer that his family was an earthly replica of the heavenly kingdom.¹³ His parents

¹⁰At that time there were no public schools in Kerala as seen today. Children were given primary education in local schools called *kalari*. This was the only education available at the time for common people. Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 2.

¹¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 45.

¹²*Complete Works of Blessed Chavara Vol.II: Compunction of the Soul*, Canto 1, 43-44. Chavara has not written anything directly about his father in his writings. However, his biographers speak he was a pious devout and God fearing man. From the biographies one can get the information that during his seminary formation his father died along with his mother and the only brother by an epidemic. Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 26. Eroorickal, *The Mystical and Missionary*, 8-9, mentions that in former times, the father of the family was busy with outside affairs, whereas the mother remained at home taking care of the children and the household matters. The socio-cultural system of Kerala in 19th century was radically different from our time.

¹³CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/6 "Rule for a Family," No.1; Panthaplackal and Jossy eds., *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, IX/10:2.

experienced the divine presence in the family and were led by the same faith visions.

Like Chavara's mother, his father also must have been a God-fearing man.¹⁴ From what Chavara says about his mother, one gathers that his father had given her ample freedom and respect. A close reading of the text of *Compunction of the Soul* tells us that without the support of his father, his mother would not have been able to take her son to Vechoor church every year to offer him there.¹⁵ In his work, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*,¹⁶ Chavara has written: "A mother should show and teach how to respect and obey the father. Likewise, a father should teach how to love and respect the mother."¹⁷ It can be assumed that these words were formed from his life experiences which recall that his mother was a living model for the children. And also, his father admired his mother in such a way that the children could follow her example.

Another person of his family who influenced Chavara's life was his maternal uncle, the father¹⁸ of Fr. Geevarghese Thoppil. He took an interest in promoting Chavara's priestly vocation.¹⁹ However, it was no surprise that his parents' love

¹⁴CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto 1, 43-44.

¹⁵CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto 1, 1-16.

¹⁶There are two letters which Chavara had written to the Kainakari parishioners. The first one "*Chavarul*" or "*Kudumbachattom*" was written in 1868 and the second one "Upbringing of Children" in 1869. The former was published in 1910 under the title "*Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*." CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/6; Panthaplackal and Jossy eds., *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, IX/10:1-15.

¹⁷CSK Vol. IV: *Kathukal*, IX/6 "Upbringing of Children," No.9; *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, IX/10:13.

¹⁸In the Chronicles the name of Chavara's maternal uncle, who is the father of Fr. Thoppil is not mentioned.

¹⁹Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Elisachan*, 9. The author's original name is Fr. Mathias Joseph Maliempurackal. However, in this text he used his name as Mathias Pattakaran. *Pattakaran* was an old Malayalam term which means one who has received *pattom* (ordination). Hereafter his name will be used as only Mathias.

for him stood as a barrier to his admission in the seminary at the age of ten.²⁰ With sincere tenderness, his uncle advised Chavara's parents to send their son to serve God for the spiritual growth of the people. The parents, because of their great love for God and their son finally allowed Chavara to respond to the vocation to priesthood. In preparation for life in the seminary, he stayed with the parish priest of Chennamkari at the presbytery residence for two years.²¹

3.2.1.2. Mariam: His Mother

Young Chavara naturally owed a lot to his mother for the formation he received in his early childhood. Her religious fervour imprinted indelible marks in the mind of young Chavara. Right from his infancy, his mother initiated him to

²⁰There are different opinions about Chavara's age at the time when he joined the seminary. Some of the writers hold that it was 13, others say that it was at the age of 11. Chavara mentions in *Compunction of the Soul* that at the age of 10 he left home. In the *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, he writes; "That year though I was only eleven years old, I expressed my desire to study for priesthood, but my parents did not agree. They were successfully persuaded by my maternal uncle, the father of Fr. Geevarghese Thoppil and my paternal uncle to send me to the seminary." *CMM* Vol. 1, 96; *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 54. The impression that is getting from this is Chavara himself had used two dates about his entrance of the seminary. The opinion of Leopold is that *Malpan* Palackal took him to seminary at the age of eleven. Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Mal.) xi. Valerian holds that at the age of ten he joined the seminary. *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 14. In a wide sense, it is understood that he was invited to the seminary at that age but he entered it only when he was thirteen. As a note in *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 54: "We may not conclude from this that Chavara joined the seminary at the age of 11. After being called by *Malpan* Palackal, the boy Chavara, as arranged by his parents spent a period in the presbytery, under the direction of the parish priest."

²¹In *Compunction of the Soul* Chavara speaks about his stay in the presbytery before entering into the seminary. However, he does not mention the name of the parish priests. *CWC* Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto I, 135-140.

become a spirit-oriented person of Jesus and taught him the basic Christian values. In the second canto of *Compunction of the Soul*, Chavara recalls how his devout mother helped him to direct his steps to God. One of the most important incidents that he remembers is his dedication to the Blessed Mother in the church at Vechoor.²²

As a child, sitting by the side of his mother, he listened to the vibrations of the family prayer devoutly, and later this paved the way for him to become a man of all virtues.²³ He describes it in *Compunction of the Soul* thus:

Sitting at her feet
 Slowly I knew God
 Warding off sleep
 As she rose at midnight
 And knelt down and prayed,

²²CWC Vol.II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 1-16. There exists an ancient custom in Kerala called *Adimavekkal*. The baby is offered as a servant to the Blessed Mother Mary. The implication is that the child becomes the property of the Mother. He is under her control and authority. The family is to take care of the child in the name of the Blessed Mother. They have to pay a fixed amount of money every year to the church. The shrine of Mother Mary at Vechoor now belongs to the Archdiocese of Ernakulam, in the district of Kottayam. However, Mundadan notes: "We have not found in any source the mention of Vechoor. It seems that the place name is known only from later biographers, e.g., Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 10. Probably this came from tradition." Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 44.

²³CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto I, 53-60. One cannot exclude the imaginative power of the poet in the poem. One may question the historicity of the facts. However, with regard to the *Compunction of the Soul* many things that are written in the poem can be found in his other writings. For example, about Chavara's Childhood being offered to Blessed Mother CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 1-16; Education, CWC Vol. I: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto I, 85-92; Vocation, CWC Vol. I: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto I, 119-122.

I too would kneel down
 And while she recited with gratitude
 The night prayers, prayer to Our Lady,
 And ejaculations like
 Prayer to Christ, the King of Kings,
 'Jesus, the heavenly light save us;
 Victory to the flower that bloomed in the world'
 I slept huddled close to her feet
 Listening to these prayers.²⁴

These words clearly mention the spiritual fruitfulness of his mother. She was really a woman of God trying to turn her children to God by her witness. Thus Chavara, right from his childhood, developed a great zeal and enthusiasm for spiritual matters. He recited the night prayers sincerely with his family and used to say many short prayers.²⁵ When he was old enough to repeat the prayers of petitions, his mother helped him to recite the prayers addressing Jesus, Mary and Joseph.²⁶ Through these practices, she was sowing the seeds of the spirit of prayer in the tender mind of little Chavara which was to grow and make him a man of prayer.²⁷ The mother initiated the son not only in prayer but also to the mysteries of faith suitable to the young. She, in her own simple way, gradually presented to him the basic outlines of the mysteries of faith such as the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord.²⁸ She also took care to correct his mistakes and bring him up as a disciplined child. For that she had her own ways of doing. In *Compunction of the Soul* he writes:

Never did she chastise
 With the rod or her hand

²⁴CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto I, 53-66. This translation of the manuscript is done by the author.

²⁵CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 62-63.

²⁶CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto I, 67-70.

²⁷CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 2-16.

²⁸CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto I, 71-80.

She did all these with her eyes
They were enough to please me or sadden me.²⁹

Chavara gratefully reminisces that there was no shouting, no scolding, no beating, no punishments, no curses; but the very look of her eyes communicated the matter more powerfully than words. She was not only a mother for him but also a teacher. Her motherly corrections, not with stick or hand but by eloquent looks, left in his mind lasting and deep impressions, which gradually became the unconscious force in his life, inspiring him to lead a good life. Chavara, later in life, declared that he owed everything good in his life to his mother who was an embodiment of all virtues.³⁰

At an early age, Chavara responded to the call to priestly life. It must have been extremely difficult for him to part from his parents, especially his mother at this tender age. However, his mother, an exemplary, devoted and courageous woman, in tears embraced him and blessed him saying, "Hereafter your mother is the Blessed Mother and she will take care of you."³¹ As a mother, though it was a heart aching moment to part with her little child, she sent her beloved one to the magnificent life ahead of him. Valerian speaks of the vocation of Chavara in the following words: "Though the parents had some difficulty to send him, as *Malpan Palackal*³² insisted, they consented and he

²⁹CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam* Canto 1, 81-84. . The translation of the manuscript is done by the author.

³⁰CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto 1, 45-70.

³¹CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 13-16.

³²*Malpan* Thomas Palackal was born in 1780. He aspired from his early childhood to dedicate himself to priestly life. He was fortunate to study under the famous *Malpan*, Abraham Thachil of Kuthiathodu. Thomas was ordained priest in 1807. His family was an ancient family of South Pallipuram. It seems that the family had a priestly tradition for many generations. His ancestors had been rich and of repute. However, in the year 1780 an epidemic of small pox and famine raged in this parish and adjoining areas. Several capable leaders of his family died, and because

was taken to the seminary.”³³ For Chavara, the strict formation in the seminary was pleasant because from his childhood he had received more or less the same training from his pious mother.

3.2.1.3. Palackal Thomas: *Malpan* and *Guru*

The early days of the Christian formation of Chavara were greatly influenced by his mother and his *guru Malpan* Thomas Palackal. When Chavara was eleven years old, a memorable meeting that would strengthen his desire to serve God took place. One day *Malpan* Palackal came to Kainakari to visit his aunt in Kalassery house. *Malpan* Palackal happened to come upon the delightful little boy Chavara, of the neighbouring house. When he came to know of the boy's spiritual inclinations he wanted to take the youngster with him to prepare for priesthood.³⁴ Subsequently, he spent about two years in the parish rectory under the care of the zealous and loving parish priest. Then his parents discerned his divine call.³⁵ *Malpan* Palackal played a decisive role in Chavara's decision regarding his vocation and his priestly formation.

In the year 1818, Chavara joined the 'seminary' at Pallipuram under the tutelage of *Malpan* Palackal.³⁶ *Malpan* Palackal, the rector of the seminary became his inspirational force in life

of this and other untoward incidents, the family declined in wealth. Thomas' father also died in the epidemic. He had one elder brother and two sisters. As Chavara testifies, the mother, who was one of the most pious women of the time, suffered a lot to bring them up. Days before the *Malpan* said his first Mass, his mother died. Chavara, *A Short Biography of Palackal Thoma Malpanachan*, 1; *CMM* Vol. 1, 103-104. *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 53, 94.

³³Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 14.

³⁴Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 8-9; *CWC* Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto 1, 113-116; 119-128.

³⁵*CWC* Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto 1, 132-140; *SCPCS*, *Positio*, 28.

³⁶*CMM* Vol. 1, 95-96; *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 54; *SCPCS*, *Positio*, 50-51.

from then on. The young seminarian learned the wisdom – local as well as global, sitting at his feet. About twelve years of life under the personal guidance of *Malpan* Palackal, a person of strict asceticism and discipline, deep spirituality and learning, gave a solid theological frame and intellectual content to Chavara's prayer life.³⁷ Even after ordination he continued to be in close association with *Malpan* Palackal. In the biography of *Malpan* Palackal written by Chavara, it is mentioned thus:

For, from my youth *Malpan* Palackal adopted me as his protégé, looked after both body and soul, and met the expenses of my priestly studies. Until his death he took more interest in me than in any of his relatives or his other spiritual students. He considered me as his heir, and left me in charge of the work that was his heart's love, the further growth and development of the monastery to which he had dedicated his life.³⁸

According to Chavara, *Malpan* Palackal was a man of knowledge who led an exemplary life: hard working, austere, efficient and intellectual. In the seminary at Pallipparam, *Malpan* Palackal taught the students and also lived a community life with them. He joined them in their spiritual exercises and sat with them for study. He used to spend long hours in private prayer and study, sitting up late into the night. Chavara wrote about the austere life of his *Malpan*:

He used to sit there on a chair and on either side we were sitting and studying. We moved away from there only for meals or to answer nature's calls. This went on till 5 p.m. when we left for a short walk. After the noon meal, the *Malpan* retired to his room for a short nap. We spent this time in translating Syriac writings into Malayalam. Again at 6 p.m. we entered the church with the *Malpan* for litany, meditation, spiritual reading and rosary. It continued until supper. After supper we came back and went on engaging

³⁷Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara a Man of Prophetic Charism," 40.

³⁸CMM Vol. 1, 82-83; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 52-53.

ourselves in spiritual reading and spiritual conversation about the sacraments, etc., until the *Malpan* rang the bell, asking us to go and sleep. As we had no clock, sometimes, this went up to 11 p.m. All this while, he used to sit there wearing his cassock. Even after we went to bed, the *Malpan* would sit there and continue his reading.³⁹

Malpan Palackal led, even from his seminary days, a very ascetical life dedicated to penance, prayer and study. Chavara has written about his guru's life of renunciation:

The *Malpan*, when we were staying with him and – it seemed, even from the time he had said his first Mass – used to have full meal only at noon. In the morning he took nothing and his supper was a little *kanji*... He followed this schedule of food when he lived at Verapoly as secretary to the bishop.⁴⁰

Chavara's thirst for knowledge, his spirit of asceticism, his prayer life and reverence for the superiors were derived from his *Malpan*. *Malpan* Palackal's devotion to the Mother of Carmel was matched with his filial devotion to the mother Church. These traits of his rector were a great inspiration for Chavara to take his religious studies and spiritual life seriously.

Chavara was active not only in his studies, but also in sharing with the *Malpan* the responsibilities of administration, discipline as well as teaching. His active involvement in the liturgical reform was already seen during the seminary life, when, with the permission of his *Malpan*, he collected books of the divine office from different places, and wrote them down with great effort.⁴¹ By the time Chavara received priestly ordination after 12 years of training under *Malpan* Palackal, he had become a visionary with a clear and unprecedented action

³⁹CMM Vol. 1, 100-101.

⁴⁰CMM Vol. 1, 103-104.

⁴¹Porukkara, "A Short Biography of Our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 24. Kuriakose Eliseus Porukkara succeeded Chavara as the Prior General of CMI Congregation.

plan in his mind. After his ordination in 1829, at the age of 24, he entered into the usual field of pastoral ministry.⁴²

3.2.1.4. Porukkara Thomas: Inspiration and Guide

Fr. Thomas Porukkara, as a guide, greatly inspired Chavara.⁴³ According to Mundadan, "Fr. Porukkara was an extraordinary brilliant priest and religious. His piety and saintly life and dedication to priestly ministry were well-known; his contributions to the Kerala Church in the first half of the 19th century place him among her most illustrious sons."⁴⁴ He was born in 1800, in the well-reputed and devout Porukkara family of Kalloorkad, which was a prominent parish of the Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly.⁴⁵ Even as a child, Thomas was a source of delight as he was intelligent, pious and sincere.⁴⁶

When Thomas wanted to embrace priestly life, his father insisted that he should have the best training available for it and sent him to the seminary at Verapoly. In 1823 he was ordained as a priest.⁴⁷ After ordination, his first appointment was as the pastor in his own parish. Within a short time, he achieved a total spiritual renovation of the parish through regular Sunday homilies, solemn liturgical services with the active participation of the faithful, administration of the sacraments, daily gathering of children in the church for the evening prayers and similar activities.⁴⁸

⁴²Porukkara, "A Short Biography of Our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 25.

⁴³CMM Vol. 1, 71,138; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 27.

⁴⁴Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 71.

⁴⁵Porukkara, "A Short Biography of Porukkara Thomas Malpanachan," 15.

⁴⁶Porukkara, "A Short Biography of Porukkara Thoma Malpanachan," 15. See also *CMI 175 Years 1831-2006: A Book of Documentation*, 4.

⁴⁷Porukkara, "A Short Biography of Porukkara Thoma Malpanachan," 15-16.

⁴⁸Vadakketh, "Personality and Mission of Blessed Elias Chavara," 123; see also Porukkara, "A Short Biography of Porukkara Thoma Malpanachan," 16-17.

The initial proposal of starting a religious community for men was put forward by Fr. Porukkara.⁴⁹ His heart's desire from early in life was to leave the world and lead a life of contemplation in solitude. He communicated his desire to his friend Jacob Kanianthara⁵⁰: "When I shall be ordained, both of us shall go into solitude to lead a *vanavasa* [hermit life]. Salvation will be difficult, if we live in this world."⁵¹ This desire was communicated thereafter to *Malpan* Palackal and Chavara.⁵² Chavara who was a disciple of *Malpan* Palackal and Fr. Porukkara joined in their enthusiasm for starting a religious congregation.⁵³

⁴⁹Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 47.

⁵⁰Bro. Jacob Kanianthara was the first brother co-operator to be professed in the CMI Congregation. He had accompanied Fr. Thomas Porukkara in 1828 with the hope of dedicating himself to religious life. He worked with the pioneering fathers for establishing the monastery at Mannanam. However, he was not called to make the religious profession along with the fathers in 1855. The simple reason was that the congregation was established for priests, who were accepted as members only after priestly ordination. The situation became different when the congregation was affiliated to the order of the Discalced Carmelites in 1860, where there was provision for brotherhood. The constitutions corresponding to this affiliation came into force only in 1863. Thus Kanianthara was admitted to the novitiate in 1863 and was called to make the religious profession in 1865. After a long and fruitful life of committed service, he died at Mannanam Monastery on 13 July 1898, at the age of 98, and was buried in the monastery church. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 76; see also *CMI 175 Years 1831-2006: A Book of Documentation*, 14. *The Chronicles of the Monastery at Mannanam* also recorded about his profession. *CMM* Vol.1, 167; *CWC* Vol.I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 51.

⁵¹ASJM, *Diary of Kanianthara Jacob*, 1.

⁵²Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 47; See also Erooricakal, *The Mystical and Missionary Spirituality*, 20.

⁵³Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, xiii; See also Parappuram, *Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, 16. Fr. Varkey Parappuram who was one of the first members of the St. Joseph's monastery at Koonammavu, started in 1857, and was thus a contemporary of Chavara (*CMM* Vol. 1, 12-13). Even though his diary is

Since Fr. Porukkara was the secretary to the bishop he could approach the Vicar Apostolic with *Malpan* Palackal to get permission to start a religious community.⁵⁴ Even when this desire was granted by the bishop and the religious house at Mannanam was founded in 1831, Fr. Porukkara did not slacken his pastoral zeal for the people. He strove hard to inspire them through sermons and retreats and the celebration of the liturgy. His exemplary life and effective sermons preached with zeal on Sundays and feast days impressed the people and helped them to reform their lives.⁵⁵

Fr. Porukkara and *Malpan* Palackal set forth the ideal of combining contemplation with action and Chavara, their younger companion continued to uphold this ideal.⁵⁶ Their abiding interest in silence and prayer prompted them to work for the foundation of the first indigenous religious congregation.

Fr. Porukkara played an important role in searching for and fixing a site for the first monastic foundation. It was he who was deputed to lay the foundation stone for it.⁵⁷ He was a great devotee of St. Joseph and encouraged people to grow in that devotion. This devotion was instrumental in choosing St. Joseph as the patron saint of the church and monastery at Mannanam.⁵⁸ It was he, who, having good connections with

entitled "*Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*," historians have different opinions about it. According to some historians it can be called a chronicle but some others name it as a diary. However, going through the content one is forced to call it a historical document since it gives detailed descriptions of the events that happened in the 19th century.

⁵⁴CMM Vol.1, 18-19; CWC Vol.1: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 2.

⁵⁵Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 73.

⁵⁶Vadakketh, "Personality and Mission of Blessed Elias Chavara," 123.

⁵⁷CMM Vol. 1, 63-64; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 20-21.

⁵⁸CMM Vol. 1, 64; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 21, reads, "The Bishop suggested St. John the Baptist, our *Malpan* wanted the name of St. Dominic, the founder of the Order of Dominicans. Fr. Porukkara proposed St. Joseph. Finally everyone agreed upon the last. So the

many parishes and government officials, went about collecting alms and getting government permission for the construction of the monastery.⁵⁹ At the same time as the local superior, he supervised the construction work at Mannanam together with Chavara and Bro. Jacob Kaniyanthara. As a guide, Fr. Porukkara led Chavara to become an eminent pastor in his future ministry. From the beginning of the seminary at Mannanam Fr. Porukkara taught there. Considering his erudition and knowledge of theological subjects, he was endowed with the dignity of *Malpan* in 1844. After a painful illness, which he suffered with exemplary patience and faith, the heroic, hardworking and saintly ascetic slept in the Lord on 8 January 1846.⁶⁰ Chavara was deeply inspired by his originality, creativity and dynamic leadership. He had an ability to read the minds of the people, their yearnings and aspirations as he directed them to various paths of apostolic development.

3.2.1.5. Leopold Beccaro: Spiritual Guide and Co-Worker

Leopold Beccaro was born on 28th August, 1837 in North Italy. He entered the Order of Carmelites Discalced (OCD) at the province of Genova and made his religious profession on 23rd September 1855. In 1859, the Vicar Apostolic of Kollam asked the Congregation of the Propagation of Faith to send five missionaries to Kerala.⁶¹ At the age of twenty two, Sub-deacon Leopold came to Kerala as a missionary on 17th September 1859. He stayed at Koonammavu⁶² monastery, one of the important training centres for the Tertiaries. He was ordained a

foundation for Monastery Church named after St. Joseph was laid by Fr. Porukkara in the presence of the Bishop."

⁵⁹CMM Vol. 1, 38-43; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 21.

⁶⁰ Porukkara, "A Short Biography of Porukkara Thoma Malpanachan," 23.

⁶¹ Maniamkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 70, 72.

⁶² Koonammavu is a beautiful village located between North Parur and Puthenpally, roughly 16 Kilometres to the west of Aluva. This place, a part of the country of Travancore was underdeveloped till the first half of the 19th century.

priest on 8th October 1860.⁶³ After ordination he was appointed as provincial delegate, novice master of Tertiaries and spiritual director of Koonammavu parish.⁶⁴

Leopold did many things for the spiritual uplift of the people. He took extraordinary interest in learning Malayalam and it produced wonderful fruits. This helped him to understand the desires and culture of his candidates and the people of Malabar. According to Chavara, "after saying Mass he went on zealously looking after the spiritual affairs of the people under the Koonammavu church. Through confessions, he turned away many from their evil ways into virtuous lives."⁶⁵ He adjusted himself to the different culture, language, social and economic conditions of the country. Further, Leopold was a missionary who respected and accepted the identity of the St. Thomas Christians and stood with them in their plea for an indigenous bishop.

According to the plan of God both Chavara and Leopold met and stayed together in Koonammavu from 1864. Many determining factors in the history of the Kerala Church took birth through their collaboration. Chavara found a spiritual father and true friend in this young, zealous and energetic missionary. Being a gifted person, he rendered selfless service along with Chavara in the building up of the convent and its governance. The fulfilment of Chavara's long cherished dream of the foundation of a convent, with the presence and help of Leopold, is mentioned in the Chronicles as follows: "...Our present Delegate V. Rev. Leopold Maria of St. Joseph Moopachan's assistance and work brought this into existence. When [we] think about it, the Almighty has sent of this person

⁶³Maniamkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 74.

⁶⁴CKC Vol. 1, 2. The Chronicles states this: "He took keen interest in attending to the spiritual needs of the people belonging to the Koonammavu parish." See also Parappuram, *Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, 659-660.

⁶⁵CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, 194 (Eng).

solely for the purpose of running these monasteries and convents.”⁶⁶ It seems that Leopold became an instrument in the hands of God for the fulfilment of the divine inspiration received by Chavara. Leopold has written in his diary about their relationship: “I love him as I (loved) myself.”⁶⁷

Leopold wrote many books which strengthened the spirituality of the priests and the faithful of Kerala.⁶⁸ At the same time, he taught Latin to the seminarians and novices at Koonammavu.⁶⁹ As a true missionary, he discovered many new means to facilitate the growth of the people entrusted to him, such as conducting retreats, training the retreat preachers, writing books on meditation and giving spiritual direction to the people. The first biography of Chavara was written by Leopold as his confessor in 1871.⁷⁰ Leopold was well aware of the holiness of Chavara and he concluded *the Diary* on that day with an intercessory prayer to Chavara “O! Holy and beautiful soul, pray for me.”⁷¹ Chavara on his death bed instructed his fellow Tertiaries to love, pray and show gratitude to Leopold Beccaro and his family.⁷² As an ardent missionary, Leopold had served the Kerala Church for sixteen years. Leopold died on 22nd April 1914 at the age of 79 in Italy.

⁶⁶CKC Vol. 1, 2.

⁶⁷*Diary of Fr. Leopold* Vol.III, 25, “*compianto da tutti, specialment da me che lo amavo quanto se stesso.*” Copy of the diary is kept in ACMCG Aluva.

⁶⁸The important works of Leopold Beccaro are the following: *Vaidikarkkayulla Dhayanam*, *Sannyasa Muzhuvan Dhyanam*, *Ulkkotta* (translation of the Interior Castle).

⁶⁹Parappuram, *Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, 616-659.

⁷⁰Immediately after the death of Chavara in 1871, Leopold collected all relevant materials from persons concerned, especially from the members of the congregation and wrote this short biography in Malayalam, as an introduction to the poetical work of Chavara’s *Atmanutapam*, and published it the same year, together with a few excerpts from the book.

⁷¹*The Diary of Leopold Beccaro*, Vol. III, 18.

⁷²CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, VI/4.

3.2.2. Influence of Heavenly Women

Chavara's personality was moulded not only by people around him, but also by those in heaven, especially, a few holy women. This section describes the influence of the heavenly women in the life of Chavara. From his childhood, Chavara had imbibed from the Blessed Mother the virtues of love, humility, obedience, fortitude, trust in God and hope. Chavara was a brilliant paradigm of these virtues. His reflection on several holy women personalities helped him to form a lofty ideal on womanhood.⁷³ Heavenly women such as, the Blessed Mother, Teresa of Avila, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt and Mary of Cortona specially influenced Chavara and led him closer to God.

3.2.2.1. Blessed Virgin Mary: The Way to Jesus

Chavara was a great Marian devotee and his Mariology is biblical, ecclesial and experiential. In the spiritual family of Chavara, his biological mother's place was taken by the Blessed Mother to whom his earthly mother had dedicated him, praying: "I offer this fruit of my impure womb at your feet; accept him and protect him as your servant."⁷⁴ The priest then had said to her: "Bring up this child as a servant of the Mother; in fact he is not your son, but hers."⁷⁵ True to this dedication to the Blessed Mother, Chavara developed a tender devotion to her about which Leopold Beccaro says:

His devotion to Blessed Virgin Mother was characterized by a genuine filial love. He spoke eloquently of her glories to others and tried to inculcate upon them her devotion. Very often when the thought of death came into his mind, he would recall the kindness and mercy of the Blessed Virgin, whom he used to call his 'Mother' to overcome the

⁷³Kadankavil, "The Christian Family, a Prototype of Heaven on Earth," 223.

⁷⁴CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 4-8.

⁷⁵CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto I, 14-16.

terrible fears and temptations associated with that fateful moment.⁷⁶

The Blessed Mother has an important role in the Holy Family. She is the model for turning to God, as well as becoming one with him. The Blessed Mother was his inspiration, ideal, intercessor and protector. In the spiritual life, Chavara knew that there was no better guide who could take him to the heart of Jesus than Mary. There was no one else who could help him to become like Jesus. He prayed to her:

Hence, my lady and my sweet mother,
Who else will support me today except you?
I who was surely a servant of your majesty
Have been ungrateful to you through sinful desires of the world.⁷⁷

Chavara literally followed the example of the Blessed Mother who said "...for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Lk 1:49). Chavara considered the Blessed Mother as the most exemplary disciple of Jesus and exhorted others to follow her in their faith journey. In the life of the Blessed Mother he had seen a complete surrender to the will of God "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Chavara tried to imitate Mary's lifestyle personally and walk through her pathway intimately. After the second Canto in the *Compunction of the Soul*, he does not write anything about his own mother. The Blessed Mother had taken the place of his earthly mother. In the Canto VII Chavara takes pride in the fact that the Blessed Mother had given him her own habit, and he put his trust in her fully.⁷⁸ In this Canto he uses Blessed Mother's name more than fifty times.

⁷⁶Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Mal.) xviii.

⁷⁷CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto VII, 165-168.

⁷⁸CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto VII, 201-202.

Chavara saw himself as the servant of the Blessed Mother when he described his relationship with her. In Canto VII, lines 193-200 he expressed how the Blessed Mother took him as a 'servant':

Oh, I'm favoured, highly favoured, my Lady
For your son, the omniscient God bequeathed to me His
mother
As he did to all men; I was offered
Again by my mother, as a slave at your feet...⁷⁹

He considered his position as a servant of the Blessed Mother as a gift and proudly declared it from childhood.⁸⁰

Chavara regretted that he could not reach the expected level of servant hood, so with the freedom of a son, he reminded the Blessed Mother that he was a servant and repeated it more than twenty times in *Compunction of the Soul*.⁸¹ There are different passages where he reminds the Blessed Mother of his son ship and servant hood.⁸² He considered himself fortunate to be a servant of the Blessed Mother. He had joined the Legion of Mary which confirmed his position as a servant of the Blessed Mother⁸³ and counted it as a special favour of Mary. Chavara was so devoted to the Blessed Mother that he christened the first Indian Religious Congregation for men as 'The Servants of Mary Immaculate.'⁸⁴

⁷⁹CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto VII, 193-197.

⁸⁰CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 14-28.

⁸¹Chavara has used various titles such as 'servant hood' and 'son ship', when he described his relationship with the Blessed Mother.

⁸²"Save me by remembering that I am your servant." CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 286; "Remember me, intercede with your Son grant me a happy death and salvation." CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto IV, 209-210; "Mary my mistress, remember now your servant." CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto IV, 205.

⁸³CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto VII, 189.

⁸⁴CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, VI/4; Panthaplackal and Jossy, eds., *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, VI/5:2. The monastery life which was

3.2.2.2. Teresa of Avila: Woman of Contemplation and Action

Chavara showed a childlike love, trust and veneration for St. Teresa of Avila,⁸⁵ the foundress of the Discalced Carmelite Congregation. Chavara always addressed Teresa of Avila as 'mother'. In *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* he calls her 'mother' at least fifteen times. Often he attaches the adjective *my* to that title. He was convinced that this mother had accepted him as one of her spiritual sons. Teresa of Avila took the place of honour in his heart after his own mother and the Blessed Mother.

In matters related to contemplation, Chavara considered Teresa of Avila as his mentor. He says: "O! Mother, affectionate and generous, you being a well accomplished mistress in the mysteries of meditation, I again seek your loving intercession in obtaining for me from Jesus the great gift of love."⁸⁶ In order

known as 'The Servants of Mary Immaculate' became the Carmelite 3rd Order in 1861. It was in the General Assembly of the Discalced Carmelite Order held at Rome in 1860 that the Religious community at Mannanam came to be known so and was affiliated as the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites. Later in 1958 the name was changed to Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). Irrespective of this, the religious Congregation is identified as CMI throughout this work.

⁸⁵St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) is the foundress of the *Discalced Carmelite Congregation* i.e., *The Renewed Carmelite Religious Congregation*. Teresa was born at Avila, Spain, on March 28, 1515. On Nov. 2nd 1535, she entered the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation at Avila. At the age of 39, she began to enjoy a vivid experience of God's presence within her. She experienced a profound conversion before the statue of the wounded Christ. However, in 1562, Teresa received the approval for a new foundation at Avila which she began with her niece and three other nuns. She called it the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of the Primitive Rule of Saint Joseph. Difficulties and opposition to the newly established reformed Discalced Carmelite foundation persisted. Teresa made 17 foundations of the Discalced Carmelite convents. She died on October 4, 1582. Abiven, *Saint Teresa of Avila*, xv-xxi.

⁸⁶CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 2-3.

to learn the meditation techniques of Teresa of Avila, Chavara made an effort to learn Spanish. He wished to read the *Interior Castle*⁸⁷ in the original language. He writes about this in his *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*:

St. Teresa, as a mother in spirit and mistress of contemplative life, would certainly see to my spiritual need. For she is the author of the *Interior Castle* with its seven mansions. She knows how to teach her children the way taking them through it. So I beseech your help, O! Mother, in comprehending the language or the sublime inner meaning of the *Interior Castle* or inspiring the same into my heart.⁸⁸

Chavara was quite familiar not only with the teachings, but also the style and language of Teresa of Avila. Even his understanding of meditation is identical with hers, and indeed he acknowledges that he had learnt it from her:

Contemplation is a colloquy with God. It is staying united to God through love. Its nature is to be with Jesus Christ, the spouse of the soul and talk to him. And I have read in your biography that, in your early days which you call the period of indolence, you considered it presumptuous to talk to God and meditate and hence you kept away from contemplation. My mother [St. Therese], it is true because, as meditation is sitting close to God and talking to him, it

⁸⁷*Interior Castle* is written by Teresa of Avila. The interior castle is the soul, in the centre of which dwells the Trinity. Growth in prayer enables the individual to enter into deeper intimacy with God signified by a progressive journey through the mansions of the castle from the outermost to the luminous centre. When an individual has attained union with God in the degree permitted to him in this world, he is 'at the centre' of himself; in other words, he has integrity as a child of God and as a human being. Teresa of Avila, "The Interior Castle," 269-279.

⁸⁸CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 2.

will be like talking to a friend. When friends sit together, they go on talking until they part from each other.⁸⁹

He always reminded the sisters of the convent at Koonammavu not only of Teresa's way of prayer, but also her compunction of soul and extreme humility before God and others. In his letter addressed to the community of the sisters, he again refers to the *Interior Castle*:

Then the bride will love more and more and the bridegroom will rejoice over it and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union. Then on there will be no fear. 1. Reading, 2. Solitude, 3. Meditative prayer, 4. Meditation. It is enough for the time being to aspire to this fourth degree of prayer. Our Mother Teresa attained the seventh stage. Some of her sisters reached up to the fifth and sixth. We must reach at least the fourth.⁹⁰

Chavara writes to the sisters of the convent at Koonammavu, recommending to them the Teresian practice of unceasing prayer as the essential mark of the Carmelite charism. Chavara was not only influenced by her contemplative way of life, but also by her active nature.

⁸⁹CWC Vol. III: *Dhyanasallapangal*, 14.

⁹⁰CWC Vol. IV: *The Letters*, VII/8.

3.2.2.3. Three Mariams: Women of Compunction and Contrition

Chavara's writings explicitly explain his extraordinary intimacy with Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt⁹¹ and Mary of Cortona.⁹² He considered them as models of great repentance and of rigorous penance. Going through the writings of Chavara, one feels that he had a filial love for Mary Magdalene who stood under the cross. He considered her an intermediary between himself and the Lord.⁹³ Chavara believed that the intercession of Mary Magdalene before Jesus was very powerful. On account of his purity of heart even the slightest sin done against God assumed mountainous proportions in his eyes. While in meditation, he called on Mary Magdalene to intercede for him before God.

⁹¹ Mary of Egypt was born in 344 and died on 421. The story of St. Mary of Egypt first circulated among the monastic communities of the Eastern Church in the early sixth century. At the early age of twelve Mary left her home and came to Alexandria, where for upwards of seventeen years she led a life of public prostitution. At the end of that time, on the occasion of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, she embarked for Palestine, not however with the intention of making the pilgrimage, but in the hope that life on board ship would afford her new and abundant opportunities of gratifying an insatiable lust. When she reached the church door, she suddenly felt herself repelled by some hidden force, and vainly attempted three or four times to enter. But she could not. Then she recognized the cause of her exclusion from the church. Bursting into bitter tears and beating her chest, she began to bewail her sins. Just then her eyes fell upon a statue of the Blessed Virgin above the spot where she was standing, and in deep faith and humility of heart she besought Our Lady for help, and permission to enter the church and venerate the sacred wood on which Jesus had suffered, promising that if her request were granted, she would then renounce forever the world and its ways, and forthwith depart whithersoever Our Lady might lead her. Following 47 years in solitude, she met the priest St. Zosima in the desert, who pleaded with her to tell him of her life. She recounted her story with great humility. From the moment they met, their lives were found to be reversed. Mary, the sinful woman, became teacher and giver of grace. She is revered as the patron

Likewise, Chavara looked up to Mary of Egypt and Margaret of Cortona as constant helpers in his spiritual journey.⁹⁴ He considered these saints the mediators of his reparation. He thus writes in this regard: "Their merciful hands are waiting to put their penance and tears on my behalf on the divine balance."⁹⁵ Just as these saints, he loved Jesus deeply and shed bitter tears for having offended him in the past. In his act of contrition

saint of penitents, most particularly in the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Eastern Catholic churches, as well as in the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. "Mary of Egypt" [Online].

⁹²In the *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Chavara has used Margaret of Cortona and Mary of Cortona to refer the same person. However, in history Margaret of Cortona is referred as a penitent. She (1247–1297) was an Italian penitent of the Third Order of St. Francis. She was born in Laviano a little town in the diocese of Chiusi in 1247. Her father was a small farmer. At the age of seven her mother died. Her stepmother had little care for her and she was rejected at home. Margaret ran off with a youth from Montepulciano and bore him a son out of wedlock. After nine years, her lover was murdered without warning. Margaret left Montepulciano and returned as a penitent to her father's house. When her father refused to accept her and her son, she went to the Friars Minor at Cortona where she received asylum. Yet Margaret had difficulty overcoming temptations of the flesh. One Sunday she returned to Loviana with a cord around her neck. At Mass, she asked pardon for her past scandal. Eventually, she joined the Third Order of St. Francis, and her son also joined the Franciscans a few years later. Margaret advanced rapidly in prayer and was said to be in direct contact with Jesus, as exemplified by frequent ecstasies. She also founded a hospital at Cortona and the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy. She showed extraordinary love for the mysteries of the Eucharist and the Passion of Jesus Christ. Divinely warned of the day and hour of her death, she died on February 22, 1297, having spent twenty-nine years performing acts of penance. She was canonized in 1728. Her feast day is February 22nd. Goodier, *Saints for Sinners*, 27-47; See also Mausolf, A. J. and Mausolf J. K., *Saint Companions for Each Day*, 78-79.

⁹³With this in mind Chavara writes: "I could enjoy the merits of Mary Magdalene as I place myself at the foot of the cross on the Mount Golgotha." *CWC Vol. III: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 13.

⁹⁴*CWC Vol. III: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

⁹⁵*CWC Vol. III: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 13.

Chavara continuously clung to the feet of Jesus and prayed: "Dear Father, I will not leave your holy feet unless you announce to me, as you have done to my mother Magdalene, Mary of Cortona and as you have opened the door of the church to Mother Mary of Egypt."⁹⁶

In his spiritual family Chavara considered himself as a prodigal son, come back home, full of repentance and ready to do penance for his mistakes.⁹⁷ Here he begins his journey to meet the Lord. But he is afraid to go alone to face the Lord as he considers himself to be a great sinner. So in the next step one can see that his soul is seeking the intercession of all the saints.⁹⁸ Here it dawned on Chavara that God would compensate for one's shortcomings, since He is ever kind and merciful. Chavara expressed his penitential feelings not only in his *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* but also in his *Compunction of the Soul*. In the pages of *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* he addresses these holy women 16 times as *amma* [mother] with much love and confidence. His special filial devotion to these saints can be seen in his prayers and meditations.

3.2.3. Chavara: A Man of God

This section is an effort to look more closely at Chavara, a man of God. The depth of his God experience resulted in the constant awareness of his filial relationship with God. This so

⁹⁶CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5. He encouraged the community of sisters to read the biographies of these saints, and to venerate their relics. See also CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/8.

⁹⁷CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5. Chavara presents his status in a prayerful way: "Here I come before you, oh my heavenly Father, with a heart full of repentance and firm purpose of amendment to feel your peace in my heart...As my sorrow bears no proportion to my multitudinous sins, I take heart to go to my heavenly Father by offering to Him, with my sorrow and grief, the penance and penitence of the great penitents like Mary Magdalene, Mary of Cortona who have always been helpful to me in evoking repentance for my sins."

⁹⁸CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

thrilled his heart that he could not but move to share this experience in love. He discovered God in people – sometimes the suffering God, sometimes the hard working God, and at other times, the God who longs for love and concern. Chavara was a person who spontaneously perceived, admired and adored the loving hands of the provident God in all that happened to him and around him. This may be described as a life of practical faith.⁹⁹ Here one's faith in God, instead of remaining just on the theoretical level, is made to bear on one's experience, pleasant as well as unpleasant.

Chavara's preoccupations and his enthusiasm to render maximum service to the Church and to the society around him did not impede his basic orientation to God. According to Merton, contemplation is a gift of God that absolutely transcends all the natural capacities of the soul and which no man can acquire by any effort of his own.¹⁰⁰ This does not mean that they are incompatible with action, with creative work, with dedicated love. On the contrary, these all go together.¹⁰¹ This contemplative nature fully bloomed in the life and person of Chavara.¹⁰² Chavara preserved a deep relationship with God and men. Through deep meditation he was one with God and through his intense charity he was one

⁹⁹Kochumuttam, "A Contemplative in Action," 136.

¹⁰⁰Merton, *What is Contemplation?* 11.

¹⁰¹Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, 154.

¹⁰²Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara a Man of Prophetic Charism," 33, compares this with the Indian context: "The Indian definition of such a person is *Karma-yogi*, meaning 'a contemplative in action.' This great ideal of spirituality is the key-concept in *Bhagavad-Gita*, a spiritual classic of India... Hence the advice is that one should be engaged in activities while remaining a contemplative: be a contemplative in action, a *karma-yogi*. This is the ideal that Chavara, true to his rootedness in the Indian and Carmelite traditions of spirituality, realised in his own person."

with the people. Chavara, who grew up in deep intimacy with Jesus Christ, saw God as his Abba.¹⁰³

3.2.3.1. A Man of Profound God-Experience

The practical wisdom of Chavara and the needs of the time prompted him to maintain a balance between prayer and action. He was insistent that all his service and activities must emerge from a radical and personal God-experience. According to Chavara, "...if meditation is a conversation with God, it presupposes a friendship with God. For, when friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without cessation."¹⁰⁴ These dialogues or prayers, according to him, did not require great communication skills but only a heart overflowing with love. He went so far as to say that prayer was not something to be taught, but something that blossomed spontaneously, provided there was love in the heart.¹⁰⁵

Chavara's *Abba* experience which he attained through Jesus is the most sublime aspect of his spiritual life. He considered God as his Father and himself as a child of God. This deep spiritual experience of God as Father led him to the experience of universal brotherhood and the vision of the Church as the body of Christ. Reflection of his God/Abba and Christ experience are scattered throughout his writings, especially in the *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* and *Compunction of the Soul*. Valerian holds that all the pastoral activities that Chavara

¹⁰³From his writings it is seen that Chavara has a deep experience with Abba. Many a time he addresses Jesus as his Abba. But one cannot claim that the term Abba is always addressed to Jesus. Therefore it is little difficult to distinguish his Abba experience from his Christ experience. CWC Vol.III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3. Chavara however, did not set aside the 3rd person of the Holy Trinity. In the *Compunction of the Soul* he has given an extensive space to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of both the Church and faithful. Hence one can clearly say that his God experience was a Trinitarian experience, CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto XI, 425-428; 485-488.

¹⁰⁴CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 2.

¹⁰⁵Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 258.

undertook were the expressions of his total commitment for self-sanctification and for the salvation of souls. Chavara was like the Prophet Elijah, who led a life burning with zeal for the living God. His biographers have recorded about it thus:

Though Chavara had worked a lot, he was always in the mood of prayer. One day conferrers witness that he had a great mystical experience in the midst of his work in his room. So also when he was in the time of meditation they feel that he has deep mystical experience. So we can say that he is the real son of the founder of the Carmelites, Prophet Elijah.¹⁰⁶

3.2.3.1.1. Abba Consciousness: Centre of Chavara's God-Experience

The uniqueness of Chavara's God experience is this Abba consciousness. He experienced God as his loving father, a father in whom he could trust for anything, at anytime and everywhere; a father who cared for him, who provided for him, who waited for him, who guided, inspired and directed him, who suffered for him and who crowned him with salvation. He expresses his Abba experiences in *Compunction of the Soul*:

Through Baptism you made me your son
Through ignorance I lost my fortune¹⁰⁷

This father-son relationship instilled in him a deep love for his fellow beings, too. The experience of this filial love expressed itself mainly in two ways. On the one hand, it was expressed in his profound sense of gratitude to this father, the source of everything good in and around him and on the other hand, his heart-rending sense of sin born out of this divine love. The divine love that had pitched its tent in his heart found

¹⁰⁶Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 259; See also Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 56-57

¹⁰⁷CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto II, 136-137.

expression and outlet in his poems. When this unforgettable experience of love touched his heart he wrote:

Alas, sin has brought deep sorrow to me.
I keep my eyes closed for shame.
O God! You are my father, you are my fortune
Without you what joy do I have?¹⁰⁸

He constantly engaged in such love affairs with his heavenly Father. He called God by the affectionate title, *Appa* [father], a title by which children would address their fathers in deep intimacy. "My heart however, tells me to call you by no other name than my *Appa*,"¹⁰⁹ he wrote in his *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*. Though there is frequent usage of the same word, particular adjectives and pronouns are often used to further define his Father.¹¹⁰

Chavara's loving relationship with the Father led him to unquestioning faith, trust, and unconditional love. This trust was clearly seen in the event of the foundation of the first convent: with a meagre sum of eighteen rupees he started the work of the convent at Koonanmavu for the first religious congregation for women in Kerala (TOCD).¹¹¹ It characterises

¹⁰⁸CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto II, 140-144. According to, Marangattu, "Blessed Chavara: A Life to Imitate or Be Inspired From" 51-52, Poetry is a language of the heart, which expresses emotions, feelings and thoughts in subtle ways through the use of symbols and metaphors. The depth of love cannot be expressed in dry words which have but limited scope for revealing the inner content of emotional heights.

¹⁰⁹CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

¹¹⁰My father (*ente Appa*-15 times), my good hearted father (*ente manoguna appa*-4 times), my beloved father (*ente priyamulla Appa*-3 times), my gracious father (*anugrahamulla appa*-1 time), and my good father (*ente nalla appa*-1 time).

¹¹¹CMM Vol. 1, 75; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 105, says, "In the beginning of the year 1866, a person donated Rs.10 out of a debt he was paid back through the monastery. With that and Rs. 8 from some other source, work on the house was begun."

his whole vision. He could meet his loving Father and see his love in creation in all things and in all events. His ardent faith and submission to the will of God are clearly expressed in his own words:

Are all these things which God has accomplished through me, mine? How did you come here? How did you enter the congregation? How was this congregation founded? Who gave you the title of 'Prior'? Are you worthy of this office? Not at all, to be sure. What then is to be said? May his holy will be done, which he will take care to be accomplished.¹¹²

Brother Rocky, a member of his community, who was with him while going from church to church preaching during the perturbed times of the Roccas' schism in the Malabar Church, noted: "Father Prior was preaching in the temporary *pandal* at the Puthenchira church in the morning. In the evening I found him in his room on his knees before the crucifix praying for a long time in tears."¹¹³ The strength and fire of his words came from the divine union he found in prayer.

Pope John Paul II said on the occasion of the beatification of Chavara in 1986: "His [Chavara's] success in all his many undertakings was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer, which characterised his daily life, his close communication with Christ and his love for the Church as the visible body of Christ on earth."¹¹⁴ The ardent and firm faith and close and constant relationship with the Father made him place his trust in him alone. The *Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent* describes an incident in connection with the sisters' existing house: "Now we confide in God alone. At this time (1866) casually I just said, God will give us a new convent before these bamboos and these coconut leaves go to

¹¹²CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

¹¹³SCPCS, *Positio*, 541.

¹¹⁴Paul II, "A Heroic Son of the Church in India," 81-82.

decay.”¹¹⁵ He always instructed the sisters of the convent at Koonammavu to enjoy the presence of Jesus and trust in his providence. In his letter to the sisters, he writes: “Above all, learn the art of loving Jesus Christ, stay constantly in his presence. Walk along with him. Converse with him continuously.”¹¹⁶

3.2.3.1.2. *Kanakenam*: Longing for the Divine Vision

Compunction of the Soul is a description of the contemplative experience of Chavara. It is a story of a soul turning to God, the Father. In the third Canto of *Compunction of the Soul*, he himself expresses the sentiments of his heart that throbs with love and the soul's ardent desire for intimate presence and union with God. In every two lines of the Canto the mystic expresses his desire for the divine *darsan*.¹¹⁷ In these lines of the poem he beautifully depicts the historical outline of the life of Jesus from his birth. The poet repeats the phrase *kanakenam* (I long to see), 49 times in the third Canto. After reciting each episode connected with the birth of Jesus, he says ‘I long to see’. The profound expression of great desire and longing for God is part of Indian spiritual tradition, that is, a quest for the divine vision (*darsan*), craving for God realization or craving for intense spiritual experience. *Darsanaveedu*¹¹⁸ is meant to facilitate a life of turning to God. The desire to see God was realized through *darsanaveedu*. The real *darsanaveedu* is a spiritual ecstasy by merging with the object of love. This desire

¹¹⁵CMM Vol. II, 77; CWC Vol.I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 107; See also CKC Vol. 1, 46.

¹¹⁶CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/6.

¹¹⁷The only exception is lines 3-6 in the third canto which has 100 lines. Here *Kanakenam* comes in the fourth line. The poet could not finish the line of thought in the second line. So he transferred the expression to the fourth line.

¹¹⁸In the vision of Chavara the monasteries should be a *Darsanaveedu* [House of *Darsan*]. *Darsanaveedu* means an abode of craving for “intense spiritual experience.” Hence one can trace the first roots of the Charism of the CMI Congregation.

is further expressed in his writings, especially, in his poems with the word *kanakenam*.¹¹⁹

In *Compunction of the Soul* the 'longing' expressed by Chavara is a longing to see Christ. He is contemplating the events relating to the incarnation, not as an event that happened in the past, but rather, as an event that is happening before his eyes at present. He ponders over it in his mind and makes it a part and parcel of his life.¹²⁰ The experience of God with us – Emmanuel – became an unforgettable experience for him. His ardent desire to see the one, whom every eye longs to see, every mind cherishes to experience, expresses certain sublime characteristics of his personality: his craving for the divine, his humanness, childlike simplicity, sense of wonder and appreciation, profound sense of gratitude and his open-mindedness to see greatness in little things.¹²¹ Chavara begins the third Canto of *Compunction of the Soul* as follows:

I long to see the glorious splendour
Of the Son of God, the Lord of Mercy.¹²²

As a poet Chavara expresses his desire to behold Christ as the redeemer of humankind. He wishes to behold the redemptive act of Christ in his conception which made him one with man, the birth of Christ in the manger, the holy Child gazing at his mother, the blood he shed and the pain he bore at circumcision, the agony the parents bore on the disappearance of their son, and the first miracle he performed.

In the opinion of Rose, Chavara's Christ experience had two important aspects.¹²³ One of them was the firm conviction of the eternal presence of the Emmanuel who was with him here and now and always. Chavara felt that the Messiah became

¹¹⁹Therese, "Marian Vision of Atmanuthapam," 281.

¹²⁰CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 77-80; 91-92.

¹²¹Rose, "Christ Experience in Atmanuthapam," 269.

¹²²CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto III, 1-2.

¹²³Rose, "Christ Experience in Atmanuthapam," 269-270.

man for him. Emmanuel lived in and with him, and was in search of him and waited for him.

As the best of my praise to you
Emmanuel, I sing carols to you.¹²⁴

The second aspect of his Emmanuel experience was his feeling that the Lord God wished to make his abode in his heart. He sings:

My heart longed for the indwelling
Of my Lord, the little babe Emmanuel.¹²⁵

No sooner had he expressed this desire than he would express his deep sorrow for rejecting his Lord and for not giving him a place in his heart. Because of these, he felt that he had become unworthy to receive his blessings. This sorrow is expressed in the following lines:

Alas, I, the wicked servant drove apart the virtuous one
By keeping my love in things of this world¹²⁶

These feelings of Chavara are in tune with the words of the gospel: "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (Jn 1:11). Chavara expressed in a very vivid manner this most tragic situation that exists in the God-man relationship: the rejection of God by his own people whom he himself had created and redeemed. The poet concludes the first part of the third Canto with a picturesque imagery of the good shepherd and sings:

I long to see the Good One
Who said, I am the good shepherd.¹²⁷

The second part of the third Canto¹²⁸ begins with recalling the infinite mercy of God in sending his son to blot out the sins of

¹²⁴ CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto II, 365-366.

¹²⁵ CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto IV, 189-190.

¹²⁶ CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto IV, 191-192.

¹²⁷ CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto III, 99-100.

humankind. The poet contemplates the self-emptying drama of Jesus and would like to see each act with his own eyes. He concludes the second part of the Canto with an appeal to the Blessed Mother who is clad in the rays of the sun and holds the moon at her feet:

I want to see the sacred feet
That the good Old man [Simon, the prophet]
Longed to see before his death.¹²⁹

Chavara's child-like trust and confidence in the Lord is one of the remarkable characteristics of his Christ experience.

3.2.3.2. A Man of Faith Committed to the Divine Will

Chavara's unfailing faith made him surrender to the will of God, the Father with love. This was the case especially in frustrating circumstances; he let go his will not knowing what lies ahead. Imbued with a dynamic faith, hope and love, Chavara was in close relationship with God through prayer and contemplation of the divine mysteries everywhere. For Chavara, the Blessed Mother was the primary source of inspiration for his decision to surrender himself to the will of God. The surrender was an expression of the overflow of his love of God and the Blessed Mother from his heart. He developed a close relationship with God through contemplation of the divine mysteries, especially, during the difficult moments in his life.

Chavara's parents and the only brother died when he was a student in the seminary. Their death was a terrible blow to this very sensitive seminarian. With a heavy heart and intense sorrow, he travelled to Kainakari with his uncles. On his way to

¹²⁸There are 68 verses added to the third canto as a supplement. These verses are probably an afterthought and hence a supplement he added. Here he does not frequently repeat the refrain, *kanakenam* in every second line. Still it occurs 16 times in this supplement.

¹²⁹CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto III, 67-68 (Second Part of the Third Canto). The translation of the manuscript is done by the author.

home from the seminary, he entered the church at Chennamkari and knelt down before the altar where he had served as an altar boy at the daily Mass. When he looked at the statues of Jesus and the Blessed Mother, he felt that the Blessed Mother was consoling him.¹³⁰ His mother's words to him before her death resonated in his mind: "Hereafter, the Blessed Mother will be your mother."¹³¹ About this, Chavara himself wrote: Therefore, O! My lady, my Mother, now who is there to favour me except you? Certainly I have been your servant. But I have been ungrateful to you due to my worldly desires. However, I see a sign that you have not forsaken me... It is my great blessing that you are my Mother and I am your servant.¹³² His strong, unwavering faith in the loving providence of God was made manifest in this most sorrowful event of his life.¹³³

With the death of *Malpan* Palackal in 1841¹³⁴ and Fr. Porukkara in 1846,¹³⁵ the task of guiding the new religious Congregation fell on his shoulders. About this Fr. Kuriakose Porukkara writes in his *short biography of Chavara*:

¹³⁰Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 278; See also Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 11.

¹³¹CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 15-16.

¹³²CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto VII, 189-200.

¹³³Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Elisachan*, 54, added that: "In his sufferings and struggles Chavara found consolation from the Blessed Mother. When his parents and the only brother passed away he got the peace of mind from the Blessed Mother."

¹³⁴After having suffered with great patience the tormenting pains of the disease *Malpan* Palackal died in the afternoon of Friday 16 January 1841. So Chavara commuted between Pallipuram and Mannanam. Chavara, "A Short Biography of Palackal Thoma Malpanachan," 13.

¹³⁵After the death of *Malpan* Palackal, Fr. Porukkara and Chavara were engaged in teaching and training the clerics; Chavara at the Pallipuram seminary and Porukkara at Mannanam. Unfortunately for five years after the demise of *Malpan* Palackal, Fr. Porukkara also passed away at rather a young age of 46 on 8th January 1846. Chavara was thus left alone to give leadership to the religious community at Mannanam. Chavara, *A Short Biography of Porukkara Thoma Malpanachan*, 23; See also Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 98-99.

Both of them entrusted everything in the hands of the Prior [Chavara]. He has written the life story of both. He was grief-struck at their departure and at the heavy burden of the work, which he inherited. But in extreme humility, trusting in God and the intercession of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, with his humble nature he started to walk in the path of his predecessors, carrying their burden.¹³⁶

However, he was neither discouraged nor disheartened, instead he trusted the heavenly Father would lead him on.¹³⁷

Although Chavara was the Prior of the religious community at Mannanam, he always acted in subordination to the Vicar Apostolic and his delegate. His approach was always conciliatory and he never disobeyed them.¹³⁸ He was ever conscious of the fact that the Congregation, of which he was the Prior, was established in the Church for the promotion of faith and for the service of the Church. For this reason, he was a caring animator to the members of the community. The rigor of the rules and constitutions given to the community in 1855 scared many of the members, especially the youngsters. Sensing the feeling of concern of the community, Chavara referred the matter to Vicar Apostolic Bernardine for reconsideration. Though the response of the prelate was rather discouraging to Chavara, with great pain he submitted himself to the decision of the Vicar Apostolic. He was very sad when two priests and nine students left the congregation due to the severity of the rules.¹³⁹ However, he was always ready to do the will of God.

The Congregation for men was officially affiliated as the Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites. As far as one knows this was influenced by the Vicar Apostolic and the general council

¹³⁶Porukkara, "A Short Biography of our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 26.

¹³⁷Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 95-96.

¹³⁸Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 153.

¹³⁹Parappuram, *The Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, 25-26.

of OCDs.¹⁴⁰ There was no evidence that Chavara and his community were ever consulted in the matter. Yet Chavara considered it as coming from the higher superiors, and the plan of Divine Providence. He tried to persuade his confreres to accept the event in this spirit.¹⁴¹

In his old age, in order to comply with the desire of Msgr. Bernardin Beccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic, he left the monastery at Mannanam where he had been living since 1831 and moved to Koonammavu in 1864, and lived there until his death in 1871.¹⁴² When the Vicar Apostolic and Leopold were away in Rome, Chavara fell ill. The attending physician, with the concurrence of his confreres at Mannanam suggested that he go to Mannanam for better treatment. There is a mention of this in the *Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent*:

The priests, especially Fr. Gerard *moopachan* [brother of Fr. Leopold, who was the spiritual director of the convent at Koonammavu in the absence of Fr. Leopold] did not want to send *priorachan* to Mannanam. So, when *priorachan* returned to the monastery, Fr. Gerard went to *priorachan* and asked him: "Father, do you want to go to Mannanam?" *Priorachan* replied: "Father, do I have a will different from

¹⁴⁰Parappuram, *The Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, 649-654.

¹⁴¹CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, VI/4, Chavara had written in his testament to the communities: "My beloved children, it is with the special grace of God, we are called the dear and loving Carmelite Congregation of Mother of God. This is not because of man's design but because of God's plan. The founders of this congregation *Malpan* Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukkara desired that the newly founded Congregation should follow the rules of the Dominicans. That is why we used the white cassocks. But seeing our weakness, Blessed Mother herself took the initiative and embraced us lovingly in her Congregation." Panthaplackal and Jossy eds., *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, VI/5:2.

¹⁴²CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, V/6.

yours? I am ready to do as you Fathers want me to do. I do not will either to go there or not to go there.”¹⁴³

However, when the sisters wanted him to stay on at Koonammavu, his response was similar. Their conversation is recorded in the chronicles as follows:

Then our mother said again: “Father, if you want, can’t you stay here and avoid going there [Mannanam]? Won’t everyone do as you wish?” Then Father said: “Do I have a will of my own? I have no desire either to go and stay there or to stay here. I am ready to do gladly what I am ordered to do.”¹⁴⁴

Chavara saw the will of God in all the decisions of his superiors. His faith was neither theoretical nor conceptual, but a concrete expression of his God experience. Faith was certainly the unique moving force of his life, right from the age of discernment.

3.2.3.3. A Man of Contemplation

Chavara was radically a man of contemplation.¹⁴⁵ He experienced God as his love and joy, food and drink, and his breath. In *the Compunction of the Soul* he wrote:

You are my love, you are my fortune
How can I live, if not through you?
You are my breath; you are my food and drink
Where do I have solace except in you?¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³CKC Vol. II, 13-14. The translation of the manuscript is done by the author.

¹⁴⁴CKC Vol. II, 13. The translation of the manuscript is done by the author.

¹⁴⁵According to Merton, “Contemplation is intimately connected with the pure and perfect love of God which is God’s greatest gift to the soul. It is deep and intimate knowledge of God by a union of love.” Merton, *What is Contemplation?* 3.

¹⁴⁶CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto II, 143-146.

He was conscious of the presence of God in each and every moment of his life and he made use of it throughout his conversation with God. As a result of his contemplative character he received suffering, reconciliation and compunction as graces. For him it was not a question of getting many extraordinary graces from God, but being able to convert every little experience of life into a God experience.¹⁴⁷ This contemplative character of Chavara enabled him to turn the painful experiences in life into moments of God experience.¹⁴⁸ He was a person who received from the hands of God all the pleasant and unpleasant events, all the painful and painless events with the same attitude.

3.2.3.3.1. Compunction and Contrition

The mystic souls who enjoy intimate friendship with God are gifted with the sense of sinfulness. "The sincere souls are rewarded with a little of the grace of compunction, which is the most precious of all helps in mental or any other kind of prayer."¹⁴⁹ Merton's opinion is that almost all the contemplatives experience this kind of I-Thou relationship.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷Kochumuttam, "A Contemplative in Action," 136-137.

¹⁴⁸John of the Cross teaches in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel* that suffering or spiritual trial is not a universal principle for all, but it applies to those who are called to the way of contemplative prayer. "...the true spiritual person might understand the mystery of the door and way leading to union with God...When he is brought to nothing, the highest degree of humility, the spiritual union between his soul and God will be effected." John of the Cross, "Ascent of the Mount Carmel," Book II, Chapter 7: 11.

¹⁴⁹Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 80.

¹⁵⁰Compunction is simply an awareness of our indigence and coldness and of our need for God. It implies faith, sorrow, and humility and above all hope in the mercy of God. For the man without compunction, prayer is a cold formality in which he remains centred on himself. For the man who has a sense of compunction, prayer is a living act which brings him face to face with God in an I-Thou relationship which is not imaginary but real, spiritual and personal; and the basis of this reality is our sense of

Chavara was not an exception to this and his compunction and contrition are often reflected in his poems.¹⁵¹ Chavara's writings, especially, *Compunction of the Soul* and *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* are filled with expressions of contrition and confession of sins, even though he had preserved his baptismal innocence unsullied.¹⁵² The lamentation of Chavara that echoes in almost every page of the *Compunction of the Soul* comes from the awareness that he has pained the heart of his loving heavenly Father. The first two cantos of the poem present the image of a soul praising and thanking God for all his graces. At the same time the soul repents over its drawbacks in co-operating with the grace of God.¹⁵³ Chavara who represents this repentant soul expresses a desire for renewal and a cry of hope. The main features of the poem are Chavara's sincere repentance and gratitude for the events related to the redemptive mission of Christ in the world.¹⁵⁴ When he remembers his divine call with a thankful heart he writes:

I am flabbergasted
That you have removed
The unworthiness of a sinner like me.
It is through your abundant mercy
That you let me stay
In your pasture, the church of St. Joseph, your foster
father!¹⁵⁵

In Chavara one could find a person conscious of sin, rather than someone with a guilt complex. In a guilt complex the point of

our need for God, united with faith in His love for us. Merton, *Spiritual Direction and meditation*, 80.

¹⁵¹Eroorickal, *The Mystical and Missionary Spirituality*, 78.

¹⁵²Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 465.

¹⁵³CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 360-364.

¹⁵⁴Eroorickal, *The Mystical and Missionary Spirituality*, 76.

¹⁵⁵CSK Vol. II: *Atmanuthapam*, Canto I, 129-134.

reference is law whereas in consciousness of sin the point of reference is the love of God.¹⁵⁶

In his book, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Chavara shared his mystical experiences in the form of compunction. He had a feeling that his compunction was not in proportion to the magnitude of his sins.¹⁵⁷ In the beginning of the *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, after recalling the advice his mother had given him – to keep away from pride and self-complacency – Chavara humbles himself saying that he was unworthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity, because he was “a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque, without virtues of cleanliness and modesty.”¹⁵⁸ In *Compunction of the Soul* Chavara is conscious of the ugliness of sin that pains the heart of the heavenly Father: “Father, my loving Father, I regret my offences, is the long drawn sigh that sweeps through the whole poem.”¹⁵⁹ Chavara calls himself as a sinner which shows that he was conscious of his sinfulness. And he considered himself the most ungrateful of creatures and unworthy of being called a human being.¹⁶⁰

Chavara repeatedly laments his sins and pleads for God’s mercy. However, Chavara revealed on his death bed that he had never in life tarnished the divine splendour of his ‘baptismal

¹⁵⁶ Eroorickal, *The Mystical and Missionary Spirituality*, 189.

¹⁵⁷ CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto II, 27-34; 61-64.

¹⁵⁸ CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

¹⁵⁹ CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, xii.

¹⁶⁰ In *Compunction of the Soul*, there are many sections which describe Chavara’s compunction and lamentations and subsequent trust in God’s grace. Canto, 2: 242; 2: 361-364; 5: 142; 5:144; 3: appendix 39-40. Here, the child-like simplicity, total dependence on Mother Mary and intense devotion inspired him to confess that he was a sinner. He looks into himself with deep sentiments of repentance for the childhood follies on the one hand, and on the other, with sincere gratitude for the many blessings of God. Kochumuttom, “Blessed Chavara a Man of Prophetic Vision,” 54.

innocence'.¹⁶¹ Only those who have come close to true holiness can realize the greatness and preciousness of this attitude.

3.2.3.3.2. The Way of Reconciliation

Chavara's charity inspired by the love of God made itself quite evident in the way he treated his enemies. Chavara wanted to receive the First Order in his parish church of Chennamkari. However, the parish priest had some objection and he did not allow him to take his First Order there. The event transpired in the following manner: When the congregation began to move in procession¹⁶² from his home and reached near the church he came to know that the parish priest had locked the church and had gone. He received his First Order in Mar Sliva Church, Alleppy with the help of the people.¹⁶³ That evening Chavara returned to Chennamkari church and stayed with the parish priest who had caused so much trouble.¹⁶⁴ He gave a statue of St. Joseph to the church and offered to preach a sermon every year until his death on the feast day of St. Joseph. Through this act, Chavara showed the people the importance of reconciliation when they were ill-treated by their enemies.¹⁶⁵

There were many more events in Chavara's life that illustrate his love for the enemy. After the departure of Roccas, Chavara worked diligently to bring back the churches that had joined the schismatics. Chavara himself narrates an event in which he ran to Muttuchira in the blazing heat of the sun to make peace with the schismatics. As a result of his intervention, the schismatic

¹⁶¹ *Diary of Fr. Leopold* Vol. III, 25.

¹⁶² During the time of Chavara, for the receiving of Holy Orders, usually the procession began from the home of the candidate.

¹⁶³ Panthaplackal, *Itha Njnan Aviduthe Dasan*, 74-77. See also Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 14-15. According to Mathias this incident happened at the time of his celebration of the First Holy Mass. All biographers except Mathias speak about his First Holy Mass which Chavara celebrated in Chennamkari Church.

¹⁶⁴ Panthaplackal, *Itha Njnan Aviduthe Dasan*, 74-77.

¹⁶⁵ Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 14-15, 55.

parish priest was reconciled to the Church within two days.¹⁶⁶ According to Vithuvattical, "with the great zeal of a good shepherd Chavara was able to bring back all the separated churches into the Catholic fold."¹⁶⁷

Chavara considered forgiveness as a great value and gave much emphasis to it in his life. For example, Fr. Antony Thondanad was the secretary of the intruder Bishop Roccas and the instigator of all the troubles created by Bishop Roccas in Malabar. After the departure of Roccas, when Fr. Antony was left alone by all, he turned to Chavara for help and sympathy. Chavara lovingly accepted him, gave him occasion to make a retreat at Mannanam and helped him to return to the Church. Chavara waited six hours patiently to meet him in Cochin.¹⁶⁸ According to Leopold, "Never did he himself back from any work, nor fight shy of any difficulty as he was always prompted by two motives: obedience to his Bishop and the salvation of souls."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶CMM Vol. II, 57-58; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 95. From Kaduthuruthy Fr. Prior sent a letter to the schismatic Vicar of Muttuchira. Two days later when the Prior had reached Mannanam Monastery the vicar came there and was reconciled with the Church. From that time, one by one, they all came back.

¹⁶⁷Vithuvattical, *Perspectives of a Heroic Christian Life*, 4.

¹⁶⁸Antony had written a letter to Chavara "...I beg you to allow me to see you. I will be able to explain to you all about my action and show to you several relevant records." "I [Chavara] reached the Church at Cochin at 11 a.m. and waited there. As he did not turn up even by 4 p.m. I came to have doubts, but sat on. Then at 5 p.m. he came along the southern lane, as if by stealth...Sitting on two chairs we began to talk. He showed me the patent of his ordination as Bishop by the Nestorian Patriarch Simon..." CMM Vol. II, 64-70; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 96-103; See also Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara a Man of Prophetic Charism and a Contemplative in Action." 36; Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian*, 25.

¹⁶⁹Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Mal.) xvi.

All his activities were natural expressions of his inner divine experience. He had a special grace to forgive others and he always tried to become reconciled to persons or situations. Mathen Kalapurackal of Manjoor was once the steward of the Mannanam Monastery. He filed a criminal case against Chavara in the district court of Aleppy with the help of forged documents, in order to humiliate Chavara. Chavara personally appeared before the court, the officials of which, including the judges, advocates and notaries, were all Hindus. After hearing the case, the judges declared Chavara innocent and the petitioner Mathen Kalapurackal was heavily fined and punished. However, later on, Chavara, knowing his family condition instructed that the Mannanam monastery should help him in all possible ways.¹⁷⁰ Pope John Paul II during the beatification ceremony remembered the reconciliatory role of Chavara in the Syro-Malabar Church in the following words:

But no apostolic cause was dearer to the heart of this great man of faith than that of the unity and harmony within the Church. It was as if he had always before his mind the prayer of Jesus, on the night before his sacrifice on the Cross: That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us' (Jn 17:21). Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity with the See of Peter and the universal Church. His success in this, as in all

¹⁷⁰Chavara became bed-ridden in October 1870. In August 1870, he had prepared a testament for his monasteries and entrusted it with the novice who was the *infirmarian* [bystander] when he became sick. The novice being faithful to the expressed desire of Chavara gave the letter to Fr. Leopold on the 4th of January after the funeral of the deceased. In this letter he had mentioned: "The monastery of Mannanam must render as much help as possible to the family of Mathen Kalapurackal of the parish of Muttuchira in Manjoor. In so doing you will be imitating the Disciples of Christ and setting a first model." *CWC*, Vol. IV: *Letters*, VI/4; See also Panthaplackal and Jossy, eds. *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, VI/5:6; Vithuvattical, "Blessed Chavara the Un-Questioned Leader" 9; Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 55.

his many undertakings, was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer which characterized his daily life, his close communion with Christ.¹⁷¹

This was the nature of the spirituality of Chavara. It was not a spirituality removed from the stark realities of everyday life, but one that was life-touching and life-transforming. Chavara practised it in his life, making this the basic vision and mission of his entire life. Thus he became a man of wisdom absorbed in contemplation which led him to his fellow beings, while his dedication to them in the Church led him back to union with God.

3.2.3.3.3. The Path of Suffering

There is evidence to show that Chavara practised the virtue of suffering in a heroic way. He was a man of great moral strength and fortitude. A contemplative believes that all his life experiences, especially the sufferings, come from the hands of God. According to Lozano, "Suffering is something we meet in the lives of all men, but especially in the lives of saints."¹⁷² When one accepts suffering as a participation in the sufferings of Christ, it becomes conducive to one's salvation and sanctification. When one accepts suffering with this vision, it becomes an experience of love.¹⁷³ Suffering in general is a most effective means for advancing in the ascetical life, whether it is voluntarily sought or generously accepted as the inevitable hardships one meets along life's way.¹⁷⁴ During his lifetime Chavara had to face many stresses and strains in carrying out his tasks and commitments. Every morning Chavara made an offering of his suffering to God which is quoted in his *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*: "I offer to you all my

¹⁷¹Paul II, "A Heroic Son of the Church in India," 81-82; See also Thekumkal, ed. *Itha Chavarayachan*, 110; Benicasia, "Blessed Chavara: An Apostle of Reconciliation," 23.

¹⁷²Lozano, *Mystic and Man of Action*, 238.

¹⁷³Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian*, 15.

¹⁷⁴Lozano, *Mystic and Man of Action*, 240.

sufferings and trials and all my undertakings not only of today but that of all my life. Together with my humble offering, I wish to add those good deeds of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph."¹⁷⁵

More than the bodily pains, what affected him were his mental struggles and sufferings.¹⁷⁶ For example, while only eleven years old he sensed the call of God to dedicate himself for priestly life and had no hesitation to respond with eagerness to that call, even though his parents raised some objections.¹⁷⁷ As it was mentioned above, when Chavara's beloved parents and the only brother died, in an epidemic in the region, his situation became no better than that of an orphan.¹⁷⁸

Chavara cultivated the habit of a continuous practice of humility which led him to face all the challenges in his life. He gracefully accepted the humiliation when he had to return to Pallipuram from the Roman Rite seminary at Verapoly where he was sent for further studies of the Latin language.¹⁷⁹ His

¹⁷⁵ CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 36.

¹⁷⁶ Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian*, 15

¹⁷⁷ CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto I, 123-128.

¹⁷⁸ Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Elisachan*, 11-12; See also Porukkara, "A Short Biography of our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 25.

¹⁷⁹ Chavara, "A Short Biography of Palackal Thoma Malpanachan," 8, describes that, Fr. Palackal was convinced that the local language and Syriac were not sufficient to acquire knowledge and virtue. For this, study of Latin was essential. So he sent Chavara and another two seminarians to Verapoly to learn the Latin language. Malpan Palackal himself took them to Verapoly and made all arrangements with Fr. Nicholas for their study and went back to Pallipuram. For the classes they had to go to the seminary where at that time only Latin students were staying. When they went to the seminary on the following day, the Latin students in the seminary refused to admit the three and to sit with them. They were in trouble and distress because they could not communicate the matter to Malpan Palackal and they wasted several days doing nothing. CMM Vol.1, 114; CWC Vol.I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.)

extraordinary spirit of obedience was manifested in his compliance when he and Fr. Porukkara were transferred to distant churches in spite of their request to be allowed to continue the work of their dearest project, the monastery at Mannanam.¹⁸⁰ Though this experience was a great humiliation, he accepted it as the will of God.

There are experiences of rejection in his life which were painful to him. Chavara bore with equanimity the rejection at the hands of the people in the press at Kottayam where he went twice to see and learn about the setting up of a press.¹⁸¹ So with great inconvenience, he had to go to Trivandrum to visit a press, but he took the pain happily.

Chavara also suffered much from ill health hazards. The arduous journeys on foot, in canoes and by bullock carts through rugged paths, often affected his health adversely.¹⁸² Rheumatism with occasional fever became a life-long companion. Once he was making a trip to Malayattoor and

65; See also Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 35.

¹⁸⁰CMM Vol. 1, 67; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 24-26, records: Archbishop Francis Xavier became the Vicar Apostolic of Varapoly after Bishop Stabilini was called back to Rome. The Archbishop received many complaints about the monastery and the priests there. When the construction work was going on at Mannanam monastery, Chavara was in charge of it, Fr. Porukara had to go collecting the funds and Malpan Palackal was ill. At this crucial time without any information to them, the Archbishop issued an appointment order to Chavara as the vicar of Pallipuram parish and Porukara was appointed as the vicar of some churches like Kayamkulam, Pallithope in the diocese of Quilon. The fathers were much grieved and hurt by the change. In this situation there was no one else to stay at Mannanam. However, they believed that the superior's order was the will of God and they obeyed it. Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 21; See also Porukkara, "A Short Biography of Our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 26.

¹⁸¹Porukkara, "A Short Biography of our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 27.

¹⁸²Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 463.

other churches in the eastern parts sometime in October/November 1866, in order to collect alms for the completion of the construction of the convent. At Cheranallur, he developed rheumatic fever. In delirium, he was confined to bed for about two days.¹⁸³ With great fortitude and patience, Chavara bore all the pains and sufferings during his last illness.¹⁸⁴ The following are Chavara's own words from the letter to the sisters of the convent at Koonammavu: "Dear children, now because of the severity of the head-ache, I am constantly meditating on the crowning of the sacred head with thorns."¹⁸⁵ For many days he lost his eyesight completely. The medicines applied by doctors to regain his eyesight were also very painful, though he never complained about it.¹⁸⁶ The Chronicles and biographies note in this regard:

Patiently and joyfully he suffered, almost for three months, the pains of his last illness. One thing in this attracted the attention of all. For, it is common with people that when they lose their eyesight, they are affected by internal pain and disturbances. But nothing of this kind was noted in the case of our father. On the contrary there was a smile always on his face. If one looked at his face, one would not be able to suspect that he suffered any pain; but always remained serene and full of joy.¹⁸⁷

Even though he was very tired and found difficulty in walking, he celebrated Mass with great devotion, prayed continuously

¹⁸³ *Alochanapusthakam*, 130-132; *Alochanapusthakam* contains the details of the meetings and special events which took place from 1864 to 1871 in Monastery at Mannanam. Since each entry has the details of date – including day, month and year – the authenticity of this document seems to be unquestionable. See also SCPCS, *Positio*, 501.

¹⁸⁴ Porukkara, "A Short Biography of our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 27.

¹⁸⁵ CKC Vol. II, 10.

¹⁸⁶ Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 60.

¹⁸⁷ CKC Vol. II, 14; See also Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 60; SCPCS, *Positio*, 466.

during the day, and meditated and engaged in reading spiritual books.

The *Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent* describes the sufferings of his sickness the last three days of his life. Even when he was in acute pain, he was aware of the presence of his loving Father and experienced his love. It is evident from the words of Gerard Moopachan: "When I was giving him [Chavara] Holy Communion, I felt like looking at his face and I looked intently into his eyes. Then I saw an extraordinary bright glow and a joyous expression on his face, the kind that has never been seen."¹⁸⁸ The serious situations of these days were described in this way: "Each time, *Priorachan* was overcome by the torments of the disease, he used to struggle hard in his bed. One or two days passed in this state of severe pain and suffering."¹⁸⁹ Before receiving the sacraments, he gave a talk on the passion of Christ and on the glories of the Blessed Mother. After receiving the sacraments, he lost his consciousness.¹⁹⁰ However, his faith in divine providence was never shaken. It was in the providence of God that he found refuge in all these occasions.

3.3. A Man of Holistic Vision

Chavara, a man of holistic vision, had a mission. He had a vision for the Christian families, for the St. Thomas Christian Church and for the Kerala society. With that vision and zeal he empowered the Church and the Kerala society of the 19th century. The vision that Chavara had for the life of the lay people, priests and the religious was quite broad. Chavara's thoughts and actions in the social sphere made the way for a great reformation.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸CKC Vol. II, 20.

¹⁸⁹CKC Vol. II, 21.

¹⁹⁰CKC Vol. II, 21.

¹⁹¹Mukkuzhy, "Blessed Kuriakose Chavara A Loving Father of Families," 12.

3.3.1. A Spiritual Visionary

Chavara's ecclesial vision emerges mainly from his *Abba* consciousness. God is the father and all the human beings are the children. With filial love, in *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* he writes: "My heart however, tells me to call you by no other name than my Father."¹⁹² He committed himself for the integral development of the people of God, irrespective of caste, sex and creed. According to Mar Powathil, "Blessed Chavara has been undoubtedly one of the great spiritual *gurus* that Kerala has ever seen. He was a spiritual man and at the same time he was not devoid of anything human. He knew that God's glory was man's glory too. Therefore he was interested in all human spheres."¹⁹³ As mentioned earlier, he was a contemplative in action. His preoccupations and his enthusiasm to render maximum services to the society around him did not block his basic orientations to God.¹⁹⁴ Wherever he went, he became involved in the affairs of the people of God.

The young Chavara used to lament that his Church which was as old as Christianity itself with a long history of almost two millennia, was unable to produce even a single saint. He writes in the *Chronicles of the Monastery at Mannanam*: "For this Malabar, which had received the faith from St. Thomas the Apostle, remains *barren*, not having produced even one saint, while other countries and islands which received faith much later have brought forth several saints."¹⁹⁵ He was of the opinion that his homeland was short of saints due to lack of good examples. Having been deeply moved and taken up by the above thoughts, even as a young seminarian, he made a firm decision to bring his vision to realization, from the day of his

¹⁹² CWC Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

¹⁹³ Powathil, "Blessed Chavara: Prophet of Family Consolidation," 6. From the Presidential address at the public meeting in inauguration of Chavara Jayanthi at Mannanam on 3rd, 2004.

¹⁹⁴ Kaniamparambil, "Blessed Chavara and his Unique Contributions," 6.

¹⁹⁵ CMM Vol. III. *Some Episodes of the Past*, 1; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 146.

priestly ordination. The intention of his first Mass on 29 November 1829 was that the land may receive from God a special grace for the starting of an indigenous Religious Congregation which may help the reformation of the Church.¹⁹⁶ Chavara's challenging vision would not be implemented in Kerala for the lack of a *tapasubhavan* (house of discipline) even for priests, and it forced him and his companions to start a *darsanaveed* (house of vision) among the Christian community.¹⁹⁷ Choosing a hilly place for *darsanaveed* and giving it the name *Beth Raumma* were symbolic of a life that was God-centred and man-centred.¹⁹⁸ The top of the hill reminded them of the presence of God according to the Bible and the *house above* stood for a light house, a *darsanaveed* easily visible and approachable to the people.

3.3.2. A Pastoral Visionary

The first and foremost concern of Chavara was the pastoral care of the people. The activities he undertook for the renewal, reform and all-round development of the Church were many and varied. He understood that his call was to serve the Church of Kerala in its actual context and he launched deep into the root of the problems that infested it. The St. Thomas Christian Church of his time was unable to give vent to its innate right to have a native bishop of its own rite to lead the Church according to its ecclesial tradition. Except for the individual priests running a few residential seminaries at parishes, the idea of a major seminary was unheard of. And there were not properly trained priests and there was no regular preaching in the churches or organised retreats in order to impart moral and religious instructions for the Christian

¹⁹⁶ CMM Vol. II, 65; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 22.

¹⁹⁷ CMM Vol. II, 15-16; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 1.

¹⁹⁸ To achieve this aim, they found a suitable place on the hillock of Mannanam and laid the foundation stone on May 11, 1831 for the first house calling it *Beth Raumma*, which in Syriac means 'house above', or 'house in heaven'. CMM Vol. II, 63-64; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 20.

community. His pastoral mind was worrying about the situation of the spiritual growth of the family. He dreamt about the role of a family in the society and he instructed the people of Kainakari: "A good Christian family is the image of heaven on earth."¹⁹⁹ To materialize this dream he envisaged a *darsanaveed* for men and a *punnyasanketam* for women in the Church for the sanctification of themselves and for the salvation of the faithful.

Chavara is widely acclaimed as a great ecclesial visionary who took several concrete steps in order to impart spiritual renewal to the 19th century Kerala Church. He was a pastor who really understood the importance of liturgy in the life of the faithful. He was also a great reformer and defender of the faith and unity of the Church.²⁰⁰ Chavara's pastoral vision has gained more vitality and visibility through the foundation of two congregations, one for women and another for men. The ecclesial and pastor vision which Chavara handed down to the congregations was "to live for the glory of God and for the salvation of the souls."²⁰¹

3.3.3. A Socio-Cultural Visionary

Chavara's spiritual vision led him to be an innovator of many socio-pastoral, cultural, educational and social reforms. He was a guiding light in the field of education, mass media, home for the aged, etc. According to Chavara, life becomes meaningful when we live for others. In the words of *Mar Mathew Kavukattu*:

While he [Chavara] most scrupulously lived the life of a Religious, dedicated to the love and service of God, the same divine love in him inspired him to devote himself, as much as he could, to the love and service of men. It is a

¹⁹⁹CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, X/6; Panthaplackal and Jossy, ed. *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, IX/10:2.

²⁰⁰Kaniampampil, "Blessed Chavara: A Heroic Model in Spirituality," 15.

²⁰¹Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 259.

long and most praiseworthy record, his varied enterprises and activities for the religious, social, cultural and educational advancement of his fellow men.²⁰²

At the time, the Catholic community had not at all ventured into the field of education. Chavara's thoughts and actions in the social sphere paved the way for the transformation of the society. He worked hard for the betterment of the society mainly through education. He had a deep vision about education and he wrote in his circular:

St. Ephrem says that the second light is learning. That is, without eyesight, you can't see things in the world. Likewise, without the light of learning, one cannot know the world above and God who dwells there. Those who have no eyes are called 'the blind.' Those who have no learning are spiritually blind. Consequently, although we, the Nazarenes claim to be Christians of ancient origin, there is no seed or sprout of saintly lives amongst us.²⁰³

As a socio-cultural and educational visionary his vision embraced most of the important fields in the society. Chavara was a lover of humankind and firmly believed in the providential love of the Father and in the strength of the fraternity of his fellow human beings. He took a keen interest in uplifting the underprivileged classes, the orphans and the poor. He stood as the champion for the cause of women, the downtrodden, the sick, poor and *dalits*.

3.4. Chavara's Ecclesial Vision in Action

Chavara's spiritual, pastoral and socio-cultural visions were realized in his ecclesial and social mission. They made his mission unique. His services for the integral development of the people of the 19th century were numerous. All his apostolates were the natural out flow of his divine experience. He was burning with zeal for God and for the Church. There was a

²⁰² Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, i.

²⁰³ CSK Vol. IV: *Kathukal*, IX/2.

divine fire burning deep within him that prompted and empowered him for any action. According to Bishop Mathew Kavukatt, "The life of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a monk of extraordinary sanctity, a man of dynamic personality with broad vision and powerful push and unabated pluck, ever remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who care to look at it."²⁰⁴ He was a man beyond his time. His achievements during the short span of sixty five years were many, embracing all aspects of human and Christian life. There is no aspect of the life of the Syro-Malabar Church which has not received his personal stamp.²⁰⁵ As a practical visionary, Chavara worked with great zeal to realize his ecclesial and social vision.

Chavara looked at the Church as a mother with love and reverence. Whenever he spoke about the Church, he recalled the way in which the Blessed Mother guided the primitive Church. Chavara's narration in *Compunction of the Soul* Cantos X-XI highlights the relationship between the Blessed Mother and the Church. Throughout the poem, the Blessed Mother is placed on a unique pedestal of hope, joy, honour and vision for the Church. According to the poetic imagination of Chavara, after the ascension of Jesus, the Blessed Mother heard a heavenly voice. It was God, the Father entrusting the Church to her care: "My daughter, Your Son, my beloved Son, the Church was founded on earth by Him. It has so grown in number I entrust it to your care."²⁰⁶ Chavara describes very vividly how the Blessed Mother gathers the disciples with Simon and spends ten days in prayer and witnesses the formal inauguration of the Church on the day of Pentecost, when the number of believers began to increase.²⁰⁷ Chavara believed that the Church is always under the protection of the Blessed Mother.

²⁰⁴ Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, i-ii.

²⁰⁵ Vithuvattical, "Blessed Chavara the Un-Questioned Leader," 8.

²⁰⁶ CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto X, 80-84.

²⁰⁷ CWC Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto X, 125-132.

Chavara's personality was formed after the spirit and love of the Church. For him Church is where the fundamental encounter of God and humanity takes place. So he envisioned programmes in the Church to make this encounter meaningful and experiential. Chavara's whole life was identified with his ecclesial life.²⁰⁸

3.4.1. Chavara's Love for the Church

The ecclesial vision of Chavara was manifested in his great love for the Church. Chavara was a man who was completely dedicated to the Church and its pastoral concerns. The *Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent* reminds that: "...this father of ours was an exemplifying *lamp* and *mirror* to all the Christians of Kerala. Besides, he was like a *pillar* that supported the Catholic Church in his zeal for its growth and protection of the faith."²⁰⁹ According to Mundadan, Chavara's close association and his exemplary co-operation with the Vicars Apostolic and the missionaries, his services as Vicar General, his pioneering actions in the fields of education, social service and liturgical reforms were recognised with gratitude.²¹⁰ Leopold notes in this regard: "He was solicitous for propagating the truth and light of the Church on the whole earth. He was sad to the point of crying when he heard about persecutions and desired to see the triumph of the Church."²¹¹

Chavara established a religious Congregation for men which was totally dedicated to the spiritual renewal of the Church.²¹² From the very beginning, its members were earnestly engaged in various pastoral activities and the faith formation of the

²⁰⁸Vadakketh, "Personality and Mission of Bl. Kuriakose," 128.

²⁰⁹CKC Vol. II, 23. The translation from the manuscript is by the author.

²¹⁰Mundadan, *Blessed Chavara Kuriakose*, 225.

²¹¹Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Mal.) xvii.

²¹²Chavara had written a Testament for his confreres at on his death bed in 1870. He wrote: "Although God has willed to found this congregation for the salvation of our Christian brethren..." *CWC* Vol. IV: *Letters*, VI/4.

people. Chavara and his colleagues were aware of their duty to announce the word of God to the faithful and to nourish them with that spiritual food. It was a time when Sunday sermons or homilies were almost uncommon in the Malabar Church and the result was visible in the life of the faithful. Chavara enforced the custom of preaching retreats in churches and homilies on all Sundays and on days of obligation.²¹³ He sent members of his monastery in groups to various churches to preach retreats and prepare the faithful for the fervent reception of the sacraments, as a rule, in preparation for the pastoral visitations by the Vicar Apostolic. About twenty to thirty such missions were conducted every year.²¹⁴ He had given much care to the sacramental life of the people for their spiritual growth. In case of sick-calls in connection with people suffering from various contagious diseases, when it was very common in those days for priests to shun such cases, Chavara was always ready to visit those people, administer sacraments to them, and offer them consolation.²¹⁵

The Syro-Malabar Church should be ever grateful to Chavara for having redeemed it from schism. Without the painstaking efforts of Chavara, the Syro-Malabar Church would have been today just another separated from the Catholic Church. When the schism initiated by a Chaldean Catholic bishop, erupted in 1861-1862, Chavara fought vigorously to preserve the Catholic

²¹³Porukkara, "A Short Biography of our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 26.

²¹⁴...Thus priests were preaching retreats in various parishes consisting of 1000, 2000, 5000 or more faithful, according to the order of the ecclesiastical authorities and they were teaching catechism and hearing confessions. ... The ecclesiastical authorities, the vicars and the parishioners were pleased with the glory of God and salvation of souls resulting from their services, and they thanked God. Porukkara, "A Short Biography of Our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 28.

²¹⁵Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Mal.) xiii; See also Canicius, *The Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 27.

unity.²¹⁶ His sense of religious heroism and dedication was simply admirable in the uncompromising fight against the Roccas' schism.²¹⁷

In spite of the pastoral letter of the Vicar Apostolic Msgr. Bernardin warning the faithful of the danger of falling into schism, within two months the majority of the parishes including the leaders of the Church accepted Roccas. According to Bernard, by the end of October 1861, out of 155 churches in Malabar 86 accepted Roccas completely, 30 partially and only 39 churches remained obedient to the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly.²¹⁸ Vicar Apostolic Msgr. Bernardin appointed Chavara as a Vicar General for the Syro-Malabar Church. According to the Vicar Apostolic's wish Chavara sent a pastoral letter to all the parishes of the Syro-Malabar Church instructing them to beware of Roccas who was an imposter and exhorting them to be ready even to accept martyrdom.²¹⁹

²¹⁶Bishop Thomas Roccas, a Chaldean Catholic bishop came into the Malabar Church in 1861 against the explicit orders of the Congregation of the Propagation of Faith and of the Holy Father, claiming jurisdiction over the Malabar Church. The St. Thomas Christians' faithful were anxiously looking for a bishop of the proper Rite. Actually it was the protest against the missionaries who were working here and the poor response of the request of the autonomous Bishop that caused the faithful of St. Thomas Christians to receive him and considers him as their Bishop. Then Roccas acted according to the wish of the people and overpowered the Syrian community as a bishop. It made a problem in the Syrian Church of Kerala in 1861.

²¹⁷*CMM* Vol. II, 30-56; *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 82-94, reports that the schism that threatened the Malabar Church misleading the great majority of the churches, the prominent people of the Church, like the *Malpans*, one after another left the mother Church and joined the schismatics. When the schismatic threatened to occupy by force the monasteries of Mannanam, Elthuruth, etc., his sufferings must have been immense.

²¹⁸Thoma, *Mar Thoma Christianikal*, 726-728; See also Parappuram, *Chronicle of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, 721-724.

²¹⁹*CWC* Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/4. "Hence my brethren, remember the words of our Lord that he who enters the sheepfold not through the right door is

Chavara also requested the faithful to pray for the Church through the intercession of the Blessed Mother.²²⁰ Within ten months, Chavara managed to bring Roccas to repentance.²²¹ Eventually, Roccas went back to Babylon in March 1862. On the day of his departure Chavara left the Cochin port only after the ship carrying Roccas had set sail. Thus Chavara put an end to the Roccas schism that almost devoured the Syro-Malabar Church. In the episode of the struggle with the schismatics shines, in all their brightness, the virtues, sanctity and zeal of Chavara who can very well be called a champion of the Catholic faith in Malabar.²²²

Chavara, by his affection, care and concern for the Church, acted as a mother spending his whole life for the growth of the Church. During the trouble caused by Roccas, in a confused state of mind Chavara wrote:

...Or else those who come to know about it will read more than what I write. Yet I feel obliged to write about him, because he has been causing much spiritual destruction, and is likely to cause more. A few words about him may prevent further spiritual disaster by acting as a warning to

not the true shepherd, but the false one; is a wolf in sheep's clothing; 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 Varapoly."

²²⁰ CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/4.

²²¹ Chavara wrote to the Pope as well as the Congregation of the Propagation of faith and having ascertained that Mar Thoma had intruded into the Church of Malabar against the orders of the Holy See, travelled from church to church along with his confreres admonishing the people to ward off the intruder bishop lest they would fall into schism and would be subjected to the excommunication reserved the Holy See.

²²² The author of the book *Centenary of a Holy Death: Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 3, underlines: If Fr. Chavara had not fought for the Church and led the people, along the path of truth, the face of the Catholic Church of Kerala might not have been as of the present. Therefore he should be called as the saviour of the Syro-Malabar Church.

my brethren against being snatched away from our blessed and beloved mother, the Church of Rome. So I pray to my guardian angel to keep me from slipping away to left or to right out of human weakness and make myself guilty.²²³

Chavara identified the pope with the Church and to obey him and to help him wholeheartedly was considered as the duty of a true son or daughter of the Church. His devotion to the Holy Father and the Church was explicitly seen when he sent a sum of Rs.32007 to the Holy Father for the expenses of Vatican Council I of 1870.²²⁴ This large sum of money in the day's standards, he had collected from the faithful. When he started the seminary formation, it was his deep conviction that the growth and well-being of the Church could emerge only through the instrumentality of priests who were spiritually deep-rooted. His devotion to the Church and to her visible head the Holy Father, too, was unparalleled, to which Leopold testifies as follows:

Among his virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith and devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to the Holy Father. He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Catholic Church in all directions... Whenever he happened to hear the news of the Pope, he was always moved to tears, either of sorrow or of joy. It was because of this extraordinary faith that he showed great veneration, love and obedience towards the papal Delegate who was the representative of the Holy Father, and towards the missionaries who were the messengers of the Holy Church.²²⁵

²²³CMM Vol. III: *Some Episodes of the Past*, 16-17.

²²⁴CMM Vol. II, 116; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.), 131; See also Panthaplackal, "The Ecclesial Dimension in Blessed Chavara's Endeavours," 6.

²²⁵Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Mal.) xvii.

These words show how deeply Chavara was devoted to the Church. He advised his confreres to pray for the Church. Concentrating on the Church members, he sowed the seeds of social reform and the all-round development of the members of the Church and society.

Chavara loved the Church and desired that all the faithful should lead an authentic Christian life centred on the Holy Eucharist and strengthened by the sacraments. He introduced several devotional practices in the parishes adopted from the Latin Church. How enthusiastically he explains the starting of 40 hours adoration in the monastery at Mannanam and in other monasteries.²²⁶ However, his first and foremost concern was always the spiritual empowerment of the people.

3.4.2. Seminary Formation

In Chavara's time the Syrian Church followed the *Malpanate* system for the training of priests. This system is rooted in the ancient Indian *gurukula* system. The houses of training were known as *Malpanates*. On the other hand, it was a Church centred style of priestly formation.²²⁷ Chavara realized along with *Malpan* Palackal and Fr. Porukkara that the most serious problem of the Malabar Church of his time was the lack of spiritual leadership among the priests. With this profound conviction, in 1833 a major seminary was established in Mannanam along with the monastery. This was the first organised seminary of the Syro-Malabar Church.²²⁸ It was meant both, for the religious and the diocesan clergy. There was a time when about 150 seminarians were trained at a time in this seminary.

The effectiveness of his clerical training was very well manifested during the fight against the Roccas schism in 1861. What prompted him to start other seminaries was his deep

²²⁶ CMM Vol. II, 94; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.), 117.

²²⁷ Kallarangattu, "St. Thomas Christians of India: Ecclesial Heritage and Perspectives," 34. The section.3.2.1. is discussed about being a *Malpan*.

²²⁸ CMM Vol. I, 71-72; CWC Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.), 28.

conviction that the growth and well-being of the Church could happen only through the instrumentality of priests who were spiritually deep rooted, morally upright, intellectually erudite, and well-trained in communication skills. After the Roccas schism in 1862, the ecclesiastical authorities understood the need of devoted, well trained and dedicated priests. Hence, the construction of a convent at Puthenpally for nuns was halted, and the attention was turned to the construction of the seminary.²²⁹ In 1866 and 1868 two more seminaries were started at Vazhakulam and Elthuruth.

3.4.3. Formation of Religious Life

Chavara was one of the pioneers of the indigenous monastery at Mannanam, along with *Malpan* Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukkara. The religious life was started in Mannanam monastery in the year 1831. Many ordained priests joined the monastery to become religious. Chavara's role in the building up of the new religious community (TOCD for men) became more prominent after the death of the other two pioneers, *Malpan* Palackal in 1841 and Fr. Porukkara in 1846. The whole responsibility of nurturing the young community fell on his shoulders. Trusting in Divine Providence and getting support from everyone he came into contact with, he discharged his duties very efficiently and led those communities along the path of success. His spiritual calibre and good nature helped him get the support of everyone.²³⁰ Chavara animated and guided the community after the death of Fr. Porukkara with a zealous mind. The enthusiasm of Chavara did not end with the foundation of religious life for men at Mannanam. Following it, monasteries were founded in various parts of Kerala, like Koonammavu (1857), Elthuruth (1858), Vazhakulam (1859), Pulinkunnu (1866), and Ambazhakkadu (1868). He was the first Prior of the congregation of TOCD for men from 1855 for sixteen years, until his death in 1871.

²²⁹ *CMM* Vol. II, 72-73; *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.), 104.

²³⁰ Moozhoor, *Bl. Chavara: The Star of the East*, 45-46.

Archbishop Beccinelli in his 1861 report to Rome praises the various good qualities of the Prior, especially his prudence.²³¹ As the head of the congregation, he showed much love and made the community aware of the greatness of their call. He has written:

Finally my beloved brethren! Loving children! None of us has come to the monastery because of hunger or desperate circumstances in the world. All of us could have enjoyed the best of comforts if we had stayed in the world. But we have renounced our parents and our wealth. Now if we forsake the Lord through our negligence and our indolence, what a great mistake it would be, what madness!²³²

His care was extended to almost all the members undergoing various experiences in the community. In 1866 Chavara, the Prior wrote to Fr. Kuriakose Porukkara, Vicar of the Monastery at Mannanam, instructing him how to care for the sick members of the community:

I have my fears about the house where there are no sick members. The presence of a sick member in the house will bring God's blessings in its wake, says St. Theresa. Thomman [Probably a male servant appointed to look after the sick and the aged at Mannanam] tells me that you do not show much concern for our *Valliachan* [aged priest] and that you are not giving him sufficient bread and milk. That is why he has become very weak and I want to know whether you are sad about it.²³³

Chavara advised and encouraged the youngsters to take care of the sick and the weak members of the community. Scaria

²³¹Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 160-161. SCPCS, *Positio*, 259.

²³²CSK Vol. IV: *Kathukal* VI/1, The circular was written jointly by Chavara and Leopold to the members of the Congregation. See also Canicius, *The Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 30.

²³³CSK Vol. IV: *Kathukal*, V/9.

Kalathil says that the Prior used to spend a lot of time attending to and consoling the sick members.²³⁴

The concern and love of the Prior for the members of the congregation is evident in many instances such as sending the special sweet mangos he had received as a gift to various monasteries. He wanted this rare variety of mango to be planted in every monastery compound and be called 'our memory'. In his own words: "I would wish that you plant at least one sapling of this sweet mango in each of our monasteries. So I have sent them to a few places and I call it by the name *Dukhran* (in memory)."²³⁵ The monasteries complied with this desire and the mango eventually came to be called *Prior Mango*. Thus he promoted also the community feeling among the members.

Speaking of the ceaseless effort to be made in pursuit of religious perfection and commitment, Chavara wrote to the members of the community:

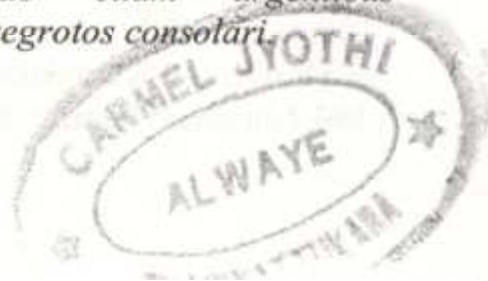
The strength of the monasteries is not measured by the thickness of the walls, but the zeal and virtue of its inmates. There were much bigger monasteries in many places. God knows how, they are now forests and shelters for wild animals. We are the beginners of these monasteries. We are their cornerstones. After fifty years, our successors will quote our names and cite our examples. They will be doing much less than what we are doing. They will not do better...²³⁶

As a Prior of the community Chavara had a delicate sense of responsibility and prudence, love, care and concern etc. Chavara never made his life-term as prior general a burden on

²³⁴SCPCS, *Positio*, 347, *Multum temporis impendebat ad consolandos fratres aegrotos, sicut p. Zacharias Ephrem Kalathil in chronicis monasterii Mannanam refert. Aliquando etiam urgentibus occupationibus praetermissis, curabat fratres aegrotos consolari.*

²³⁵CWC Vol. IV: *The Letters*, V/8.

²³⁶CSK Vol. IV: *Kathukal*, VI/1.



the community. Chavara's sincere and true love for the members is manifested in the esteem in which he held them and in generously appreciating their good example and achievements.²³⁷ He did not respect the rule for the sake of the rule. He loved everything and by this inspiration he led the community as a superior. God was the sum and centre of all his activities.

3.4.4. Formation of the Ideal Domestic Church

Lumen Gentium considers family as the domestic Church: "In what might be regarded as the domestic Church, the parents, by word and example, are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They must foster the vocation which is proper to each child and this with special care if it be to religion."²³⁸ Chavara had a great vision about the family. He has written a famous definition of a Christian family:

A good Christian family is the image of heaven on earth, where persons living together, by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying their parents, and walking peacefully before the Lord and people, which ensures their salvation, according to each one's state of life.²³⁹

According to Vadakketh, Chavara's concept about *domestic church* is that it is the material form of heaven on the earth. Chavara enumerates the basic rules of the domestic Church through the letter to the parishioners of Kainakari and the whole Church.²⁴⁰ Chavara looked at the Christian family in the first chapter of his 'epistle'²⁴¹ with the eyes of a pastor who is

²³⁷Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 159.

²³⁸LG, 11.

²³⁹CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, X/6; Panthaplackal and Jossy, ed. *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, IX/10:2.

²⁴⁰Vadakketh, *Chavara Atyalmikatha*, 707.

²⁴¹Chavara wrote about 86 letters. Among these, the first letter to his parishioners at Kainakari is an important exposition of his vision of an ideal Christian family. Panthaplackal and Jossy, ed. *Chavarayachante*

more practical than theoretical.²⁴² In the *Chavarul* Chavara addresses the parents directly and reminds them of their grave duty to educate their children properly. There he suggested sixteen rules for the smooth running of the family and for the formation of the children. Parents are the primary and principal educators of their children. This is the whole thrust of the second letter of the *Chavarul*.²⁴³ Even in this modern world the *Chavarul* has become universally accepted and approved by the people²⁴⁴ and it shows his farsightedness.

The main body of the letter is in the form of exhortations comparable to those in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.²⁴⁵ This *Chavarul* as a whole is a song of love for the brethren.²⁴⁶ As a father gives advice to his children, so did Chavara write to the parishioners and set forth the ideals for a Christian family. From his childhood experience and his impeccable devotion towards the Holy Family, he visualized the family as an image of Heaven.²⁴⁷ Making a study of the *Chavarul*, Kanjiramattathil states:

The main subjects treated are love and forgiveness, observance of the days of obligation, spending of money on different family celebrations, incurring debts, acquiring

Kathukal, 6. The details of this Letter of Chavara are given in section 3.2.1.1. According to Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 68, this letter is a code of conduct for Christian families.

²⁴²Kaniarakath, "The Chavara's Vision of a Christian Family," 14.

²⁴³CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, X/6, "Rules for a Family," No.10, 22; Panthaplackal and Jossy, ed. *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, IX/10:5; 10:10.

²⁴⁴Vadakketh, *Chavara Atyalmikatha*, 710.

²⁴⁵Kaniarakath, "The Chavara's Vision of a Christian Family," 12.

²⁴⁶According to Pathrapankal, "Blessed Chavara a Prophet," 21, in order to give a solid foundation for the Christian families, Chavara prepared an instruction manual for the families of his own parish in the form of an epistle, which he considered as a "Testament." It is a well-meditated, practical theology for the family with spiritual, moral, psychological and sociological insights, very relevant even in our times.

²⁴⁷Pathrapankal, "The Prophetic Personality of Blessed Chavara," 21.

properties, marriage relations, contact with people, keeping away from calumnies, love for work, charity to others... morning and night prayers, good upbringing of the children and children's duty to parents.²⁴⁸

The whole life of Chavara was dedicated to labour for the good of his brethren, particularly for the salvation of their soul.

In order to make the Christian family patterned on the family of God [an abode of Heaven], soon after community life was started in Mannanam, Chavara and others laid great emphasis on the spiritual renewal of the Church of Kerala, and proposed the preaching of retreats in the parishes as their first external activity.²⁴⁹ All the endeavours of Chavara to renew the families are filled with high Christian principles.²⁵⁰ Chavara covers all areas of life in the family from birth to death, and explains the possible dangers when affection, peace, justice, charity and order are not maintained in the families. With an outpouring of his heart, he addressed his relatives and other members of his parish, giving them this instruction manual as a patrimony. Chavara's theology of the family is to be found in the practical guidelines he gives to his people as a relative and pastor. For Chavara the supreme rule of the Christian family is mutual love and the consequent unity of mind and heart.²⁵¹ In the mind of Chavara, the parish, the family, and the parents are all immovable pillars in one's life.

Although Chavara loved and respected the family and the relations, he never let himself be tied up by family ties. For instance, Chavara never believed that his family line would

²⁴⁸Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 68.

²⁴⁹Porukkara, "A Short Biography of our Most Reverend Father Chavara Kuriakose," 28.

See also Parappuram, *Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, 293, 993-996, 1008.

²⁵⁰CWC Vol. IV: *Letters*, X/6, "Upbringing of Children," No.1-16; Panthaplackal and Jossy, eds. *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, IX/10:11-15.

²⁵¹Kaniarakath, "The Chavara's Vision of a Christian Family," 14-15.

become extinct just because there was no male heir in the family. This is clear from his firm stand in his priestly vocation in faith, believing that his elder brother's only daughter would continue his family line.²⁵² Here Chavara was upholding the noble ideal that a woman too can continue the family line – an ideal which has not been fully assimilated by our community even today.²⁵³ Thus empowering women in society to renew and strengthen the Church and society was a revolutionary vision of Chavara far ahead of his time. The family is certainly the foundation stone of society. Social progress and improvement is impossible without spirituality and solid family life. Being aware of this fact, Chavara took keen interest in the family in its spiritual, social and financial dimensions.

3.4.5. Church at the Service of the Society

Chavara wanted to imbue the common people with love for the Church and for Christ. He became a catalyst in the process of renovation and rejuvenation of Catholic life in Kerala.²⁵⁴ Chavara's life activities in the 19th century are recorded in the Chronicles in detail. This was generally a period of progress for Kerala Church. During the second half of the 19th century, Chavara appeared as a prophet of the time.²⁵⁵ According to Sreedhara Menon, "Fr. Chavara initiated the manifold changes in the Christian community. Therefore Fr. Chavara could be called the polestar of the cultural renaissance of Kerala Christians."²⁵⁶ It was his prophetic personality that made him what he was for the Church and the society of his times and

²⁵²The Manner of property inheritance and family life of the St. Thomas Christian community in the 19th century has been discussed earlier: "The Thomas Christians would not make their daughters heirs to their properties." The details of this topic are given in section 1.3.2.2.1.2.

²⁵³Kadankavil, "The Christian Family, a Prototype of Heaven on Earth," 217-218.

²⁵⁴*Centenary of a Holy Death: Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 3.

²⁵⁵Pathrapankal, "The Prophetic Personality of Chavara," 11.

²⁵⁶Menon, "Renaissance Leader Who Walked Ahead of his Time," 59.

what he is today. Chavara was a prophet of his time, a man who was called and was sent into the Church of his time to speak and to work in the name of God.²⁵⁷ R. Venkataraman qualified him as the pioneer in social reforms, "a profound scholar, an educator, a builder of institutions for the underprivileged, the illiterate, the destitute and the needy."²⁵⁸ Looking at what Chavara did for the Church and the people of Kerala during the 19th century, it can be concluded that he was aware of the pulse of the society and the need of the Church. He knew that the Kerala Church was in need of a radical renewal and revitalization.

3.4.5.1. Church Mission through Media

Second Vatican Council in the decree on the *Means of Social Communication* says: "The Church, our mother knows that if these media are properly used, they can be of considerable benefit to mankind."²⁵⁹ According to Mathew Ulakumthara,²⁶⁰ "The most valuable service of Chavara to the Kerala Church is the establishment of St. Joseph's Press at Mannanam."²⁶¹ Chavara established a printing press in Mannanam foreseeing the spiritual, intellectual and cultural advantages and the progress which the press and publication would bring to the Catholic community. This is the first printing press of the Catholics of Kerala. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council is very powerful regarding in the use of media for defending and propagating the truth:

It would be shameful if by their inactivity Catholics allowed the word of God to be silenced or obstructed by the technical difficulties which these media present and by their admittedly enormous cost. For this reason the Council

²⁵⁷Pathrapankal, "The Prophetic Personality of Chavara," 11.

²⁵⁸Venkataraman, "Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at its Best," 86.

²⁵⁹IM, 2.

²⁶⁰Ulakumthara is a well known Malayalam literary critic.

²⁶¹Ulakamthara, "The First Kerala Apostle of the Press," 44.

reminds them that they have the obligation to sustain and assist Catholic newspapers, periodicals, film-projects, radio and television stations and programmes. For the main aim of all these [media] is to propagate and defend the truth and to secure the permeation of society by Christian values.²⁶²

Erection of a printing press and a publishing house was one of the major ventures of Chavara in 19th century Kerala. He struggled for the establishment of a press. Kerala had no possibility for Catholic publications. Chavara had not seen what a printing press would look like.²⁶³ Eventually, he managed to see and examine the printing press owned by the Government at Trivandrum. He made a model of the printing press with a plantain shaft and with the help of a carpenter and ironsmith. The *Chronicles of the Monastery at Mannanam* states:

From September 1844 onwards we were interested in setting up a press for printing books. I went to Kottayam twice to see and learn about the setting up of a press. But I was denied the opportunity. So I went about asking people who were in this field and with that information started the work of constructing a press.²⁶⁴

Chavara made one, and started the printing press and publishing house at Mannanam in 1846.²⁶⁵ He had to face several difficulties to procure paper and ink for the press; but fortunately the providence of God came to help.²⁶⁶ Chavara has written his experience in the chronicles: "Soon we managed to pay this amount but we had no money left to pay the wages of the workmen, etc...One day while I was inside the church gloomily, but hopefully praying, I was called out to meet a visitor...he handed over to me five hundred *Chakrams* and

²⁶² *IM*, 17.

²⁶³ *CMM* Vol. 1, 133-134; *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 38.

²⁶⁴ *CMM* Vol. 1, 133-134; *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 38.

²⁶⁵ *CMM* Vol. 1, 133-134; *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 38.

²⁶⁶ Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 88-90.

promised to send another 500 *Chakrams* later."²⁶⁷ With the help of many persons he established the printing press for Catholics in Mannanam.

The Protestant Missionaries and Travancore government had at the time a printing press and publishing house in Kerala. But the Catholics of the time had no press and publication.²⁶⁸ K. C. Chacko also shares this opinion as he observes: "The most far reaching, illuminating, edifying and even sanctifying field of activity initiated by Fr. Kuriakose through the monasteries in general and primarily from Mannanam was that of printing."²⁶⁹ As a pastor Chavara found that a press was a great need. The influence of the press and publication in the life of a modern man is immense.

3.4.5.2. Education for the Transformation of the Society

Education always remains one of the noblest services for the development of humanity and the Church. For Chavara the upbringing of children was an important concern of his time.²⁷⁰ Children being the hope of the future, their upbringing and education were of utmost importance. This was the strong conviction of Chavara. Later on this is specifically insisted by the Second Vatican Council in *GE*. The document states that the Church should have special care for the education of children and young people.²⁷¹

R. Venkataraman the former president of India had spoken about the education attempt of Chavara: "Education was an activity close to his [Chavara's] heart. Religious and general education was for him two sides of the same coin."²⁷² Chavara

²⁶⁷ *CMM* Vol. 1, 136; *CWC* Vol. I: *Chronicles*, (Eng.) 39.

²⁶⁸ Mathias, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 42.

²⁶⁹ Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 97.

²⁷⁰ Panthaplackal and Jossy, ed. *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, IX/10:2. *CWC* Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/6 "Upbringing of Children," No.1-16.

²⁷¹ *GE*, 1, 3, 4.

²⁷² Venkataraman, "Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at its Best," 87.

made valuable contributions to remove the educational backwardness of Kerala.²⁷³ At a time when people were segregated in India under different castes and some were considered untouchables, Chavara considered all, irrespective of caste and creed, as brothers and sisters, loved them, and worked for their all-round progress.²⁷⁴ He understood that education was the basic step to build up a better society and to the knowledge of God.

He did not neglect the physical needs of the students. Where it was needed he provided also for their clothing and mid-day meals.²⁷⁵ He dared to start a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846 and appointed a *Varrier* from Trichur as the teacher.²⁷⁶ As mentioned earlier, Chavara gave admission to all children without distinction of caste and creed. This was done at a time when, even in government schools, admission was denied to low caste and dalit children.²⁷⁷ He established two schools, one at Mannanam and the other at Arpookara (1864) to educate low caste people, especially the Christian converts from such castes.²⁷⁸

As mentioned earlier, in 1861 when Chavara was the Vicar General of the Syrian Catholics of Kerala, he initiated a tidal wave in establishing schools attached to the churches under his

²⁷³Menon, "Renaissance Leader Who Walked Ahead of his Time," 60.

²⁷⁴Vithuvattical, "Blessed Chavara the Un-Questioned Leader," 9-10. Educational situation and development of Kerala and the condition of women were elaborately described in the section 2.4.1.

²⁷⁵According to Menon, "Renaissance Leader Who Walked Ahead of His Time," 60, Chavara took the initiative to provide noon meals to poor children in schools. This step of Chavara was the inspiration behind starting such a reform in Travancore. In the note submitted by *Diwan* Sir C.P. Ramaswami Ayer to the king on 1936 November 26, recommending the provision of noon meals for children in government schools, there was a reference that this was a practice followed in Christian institutions.

²⁷⁶Parappuram, *Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, 1474; See also Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 137.

²⁷⁷Menon, "Renaissance Leader Who Walked Ahead of his Time," 60.

²⁷⁸Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 137.

