

Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 6



DARŚANAVIṬ

A Theology of Inclusive Home in
SAINT CHAVARA

JOJO PARECATTIL CMI



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Jojo Parecattil CMI

2020

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***Darśanavīṭ: A Theology of Inclusive Home
in Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra***

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THEOLOGICAL STUDIES ON SAINT CHĀVARA

Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvara (1805-1871) – a Carmelite religious priest and a professor of theology (*Malpan*) in the Syro-Malabar Church, who pioneered consecrated life in the Indian Church by founding the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI; in collaboration with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, in 1831), the first indigenous religious congregation for men and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC; in collaboration with Leopold Beccaro OCD, in 1866) – is widely recognized for his pioneering efforts to reform the Church in Kerala and the society of the nineteenth century. His credible Christian witness along with the leadership he offered to the Church of Saint Thomas Christians, at a time when it was passing through multiple jurisdictional crises, scripted a spiritual and disciplined growth in the Kerala Church.

Canonized on 23 November 2014, Saint Chāvara's personal sanctity and Christian wisdom are identified to be unique. While the secular society admires his contributions in pioneering a set of revolutionary changes in uplifting people on the margins and those who were socially ostracised through educational and social initiatives, the fundamental core of all his achievements is solidly established in his filial discipleship of Jesus Christ, whom he addressed '*ente nalla appa*' (my beloved father).

Saint Chāvara had a firm foundation in Christian faith, which is clearly visible throughout his life and it is testified by those who knew him. He articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounter with Jesus and also based on his readings and theological reflections. They are available to us through his extant writings, which are published in four volumes in the *Complete Works of Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvara*. Some of these works, recognized as pioneering

efforts in Indian literary genre, offer us a mine of rich and sound theological insights. Although his access to scientific Christian literature was minimal (if not completely absent), his writings draw from the biblical as well as other Christian traditions, which he had faithfully and creatively interpreted for the enhancement of the faith life of the Christian community that he had catered to throughout his life.

Theological Studies on Saint Chāvāra – a joint effort of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) – attempts to promote and publish fruits of scientific investigation into the unique and varied theological insights of Saint Chāvāra in the form of monographs. These theological investigations will be instrumental in appreciating and popularising the sound and solid theological contributions he made to enhance Catholic faith in the nineteenth century, which, in turn, indicate that he deserves titles like ‘Father of the Syro-Malabar Church’ and ‘Doctor of the Church’. As the publication of this series is undertaken with the blessings of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Archiepiscopal Church, which also had benefitted from the eminent theological acumen, pastoral insights, and ecclesiastical leadership of Saint Chāvāra, these studies would bring to light the multifarious theological heritage that he had bequeathed to the Church and the subsequent generations of faithful in India.

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Foreword

COSMIC FAMILY

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Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra of the nineteenth century is generally considered one of the most remarkable icons of the modern Christian spiritual experience in India. He is a man who, despite his alarming speed of life and activities, had a vision for the future, and he worked towards that future. About the various aspects of this vision, he wrote several accounts. In the religious literature of the time and place, these accounts are unparalleled. They explored the most profound mysteries of the Christian faith. The clarity and depth of perception, the precision and accuracy of his theological presentation, and the sincerity and beauty of his expression reveal a mind and personality of exceptional strength and charm.

The present volume by Jojo Parecattil is on the vision of Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra regarding the coming together of the members of a mystical family. Saint Chāvāra, the Indian mystic, is putting into words his spiritual experiences and the musings that were prompted by such experiences. However, how to make sense of these experiences? Mysticism could be understood as the practice of religious ecstasies, experiences in other states of consciousness, together with whatever ideologies, ethics, rites, myths, legends, and magic may be related to them. The term *mystes*, which is at the root of the modern 'mysticism,' is derived from the Greek verb *myein* ("to close," especially the eyes or mouth) and signified a person who kept a secret. Early

Christianity appropriated the technical vocabulary of the Hellenistic mysteries but later disavowed secrecy, resulting in a transformation of the meaning of *mystes*. In subsequent Christian usage, *mystes*, or mystic, referred to practitioners of doctrinally acceptable forms of religious ecstasy.

From late antiquity through the Middle Ages, Christians used prayer to contemplate both God's omnipresence in the world and God in his essence. The soul's ecstasy in contemplation of God was termed a "spiritual marriage" by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the highest mystical authority of the twelfth century. In the thirteenth century, the term *uniomystica* came into use as a synonym. During the same period, the range of objects of contemplation was increased to include the Passion of Christ, visions of saints, and tours of heaven and hell. In the nineteenth century, the mystical movement shifted the emphasis from theology to individual experience. There was a widespread growth in interest in ecumenism, which led to the invention of the term mysticism and its extension to comparable phenomena in other religions. Many seekers of spiritual experience found common ground between various individual religious traditions through mysticism.

Hand in hand with the discovery of common ground, the competition between the perspectives of faith verbalized by theology and science resulted in a compromise in which several varieties of what had been traditionally called mysticism were dismissed as merely psychological phenomena. Only one variety, which aimed at union with God, would stand the test of the time. Crossing every religious boundary, the perception of the seeker's essential unity or oneness with God was claimed to be genuinely mystical, and *Darśanakūṭumbakam* is the epitome of the union

of those who embrace the theological inclusiveness envisaged by Saint Chāvāra.

In the history of Christianity, there were mystics such as Pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite in the fifth century, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the fourteenth century, for whom the most desirable mystical experience or perception was not of unity but instead of nothing, or nothingness. This is why perhaps, Bonaventure, in addition to encouraging a program of mystical union with Christ in his death and resurrection, also recommended devotion to the wholly transcendent nothingness of Pseudo-Dionysius' theology. In the fourteenth century, Meister Eckhart sought experiences in which his soul disappeared, leaving only the mind, emotion, or the will of God. In the seventeenth century, Saint Teresa of Ávila, almost certainly in ignorance of historical precedents, demoted the communion described by Saint Bernard to the status of a "spiritual betrothal" instead, and emphasized the soul's disappearance in the "spiritual marriage." Saint Chāvāra takes it a step further and forms a *Darśanavīṭ*.

In India, the R̥gveda contains examples of mystical experience. One of the Vedic hymns mentions long-haired ascetics (*keśin*) or silent ones (*muni*), who were either naked or dressed in red. In their ecstasies, they are "possessed by the gods" and able to fly outside their bodies. A dramatic change in Indian mysticism is indicated in the Upaniṣads. *Maitri Upaniṣad* outlines a practice of Yoga that consists of breath control, the withdrawal of the senses, and the voluntarily induced loss of sense perception, meditation, concentration, reasoning, and absorption. The goal of Upaniṣadic Yoga is to realize the identity of personal self with the cosmic self, or Ātman, and the identity of Ātman

with Brahman, or the divine essence. This divine essence in the purest form was conceived as *vāk* (logos); it developed secondarily into sacred sounds, such as *AUM*, and only after that into coherent words. Meditating on and uttering the sacred syllable are considered a means of inducing a mystical union with the divine essence. Once this union was achieved, the self disappears, and all existence turns divine.

Jesus, the Logos-incarnate, was giving an invitation to the naval-gazing and boundary-guarding religious custodians of his day when he acknowledged that he had found faith, a grater one at that, outside of Israel (Mt 8:10). It is when we realize that God is greater than our little hearts (1 Jn 3:20) that like Saint Chāvāra, we can take a peek at the goodness that is found across the religious fence. Saint Chāvāra seems to be the first one, at least, who has left some literature to this effect, to tell us that there is much good in the religious milieu of India where Christ has to take flesh. He attempts him at least linguistically in his writings.

In *Darśanaṅgī: A Theology of Inclusive Home* in Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra, Jojo Parecattil, a confrere and friend, is exploring the relevant literature from Saint Chāvāra, who in his mystical experiences, sees the mystery of the incarnation and is making an attempt to fathom the depth of the Christ-event in Indian categories. One of the peculiarities of work is that Jojo is featuring the notion of family in its different aspects found in the literature of Saint Chāvāra. The attempt of Jojo is also opportune since we are in the 150th commemorative year of the publication of *Chāvaruḷ*, a letter that Saint Chāvāra wrote to the families of his home parish.

Jojo is looking at the family through the literary prism of the literature from Saint Chāvāra and sees how the concept is hermeneutically diffracted into various shades of

meaning. The *Darśanavīṭ*, a dream project of Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvara and his companions, represents a lofty ideal of a cosmic family of mystical union (*vasudhaiva-kuṭumbakam*). This ideal inclusive family, in irresponsible living, could easily be turned into a lunatic asylum (*akuṭumbakam*). Saint Chāvara's way, as delineated by Jojo, is to reach this ideal inclusive family by negating the *akuṭumbakam* and through the natural family to the spiritual family (*Sanyāsa-kuṭumbakam*), which is a part of the ecclesial family (*Sabhā-kuṭumbakam*) and finally achieving the *Darśana-kuṭumbakam*, which is God's own family.

Jojo, an Indologist, and a Carmelite delves deep into the literature left by Saint Chāvara and makes an Indian reading of the various texts. He looks at Saint Chāvara and his world through an Indian prism. In this work, Jojo emerges with pearls of native Indian insights, which he has used in interpreting Saint Chāvara's mystical and spiritual experiences. He makes an excursion through the Indian political, religious, social, and ecclesiological realities as he reads Saint Chāvara. Jojo reads *Ātmānutāpam*, one of the volumes of Saint Chāvara as an offer of the Living Water in an Indian cup. The same can be said about *Darśanavīṭ*, the present volume in which Jojo is presenting the Inclusive Vision of Saint Chāvara.

Anyone who has a mystical bend of mind and is familiar with the life and writings of Saint Chāvara would find this volume fascinating, especially as Jojo gives the literary contributions of Saint Chāvara an Indian twist. I wish each reader of this volume an enriching time as he/she browses through the pages therein.

Acknowledgements

Namaḥ

Sarvēśvarāya namaḥ! – Salutation to the Lord of all! It is with this Indian greeting of God, Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra, opens *Jñānapīyūṣam*, the first book printed and published from the press at Mannanam. Nevertheless, again, another section of the same book, i.e., the section on the daily prayers, also gets going with the salutation of *Anādyāya namōstu!* – Salutation to the Eternal! Indeed, this book is not a theological treatise, but a typical Christian prayer book meant for the use of the faithful. It is in such a book of pure devotion, that he is using such Indian or Hindu salutations, that too, one century before the Second Vatican Council, which made a path-breaking theological shift towards other religions. These noble inter-religious gestures which branch out from the life of Saint Chāvāra give us deep insights regarding the Indian consciousness and ethos that shaped his theological and spiritual outlook.

Thomas Kadankavil notes in this regard: “Saint Chāvāra is a typical embodiment of the classical Indian consciousness that would like to see universal unfolding of the divine signs and revelations.”¹ The present work is an attempt to reflect on the inclusive spirituality of Saint Chāvāra, in the pluralistic religious context of Kerala. It is to acknowledge and appreciate the unique contributions he has made for fostering the spirit of unity and oneness in the Church and the society.

My heartfelt thanks to all my *kūṭapirappukal*, especially to the Prior General Rev. Dr. Paul Achandy CMI for his

¹Kadankavil, “Uyarattileviṭ: Siddhiyum Siddhānthavum,” 99.

paternal love and the General Councillor for Evangelization and Pastoral Ministry, Dr. Saju Chackalackal CMI for choosing me to be part of this noble project. I wish to express my great appreciation to Dr. Benny Thettayil CMI for blessing me with a Foreword and Sr. Jossy CMC for enriching me with her knowledge about the primary sources. I owe much to the diligence of Mr. Arul Gaspar and I am thankful to him for the language correction of the text. Fr. George Edayadiyil CMI, Fr. Jose Nandhikara CMI, Bro. Chris Padiyara CMI, Bro. Joseph Idiyakunnel CMI, Bro. Jojo Vakiamadathil CMI, Bro. Shijo Chowallor CMI, members of Darsana (Wardha), Darsanalaya (Faridabad) and Dharmaram (Bengaluru) also deserve my sincere thanks for their timely help at various stages. Finally, my batchmate and loving *kūṭapirappu* Fr. Joji Puthirickal CMI and David of Smriti, Thrissur, deserve great appreciation and thanks for the attractive cover design.

Sarvēśvarāya namaḥ!

Salutation to the Lord of all!

Sarvēśām namaḥ!

Salutation to all my *kūṭapirappuka!*

3 January 2020
Feast of Saint Chāvara

Fr. Jojo Parecattil CMI
Dharmaram, Bengaluru

ABBREVIATIONS AND MEANINGS

AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i>
AK	<i>Ādhyātmika Kṛtikaḷ</i>
Am	<i>Ātmānutāpam</i> (Compunction of the Soul, poetic work by Saint Chāvāra in CWC I and CSK I)
Apostlic Vicar	Delegate or representative of the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, with special powers of jurisdiction in the assigned territory especially when things are in a fluid state
Besrouma	A house on hilltop (reveals the desire to have God experience associated traditionally with holy mountains)
BG	<i>Bagavad Gītā</i>
BrUp	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i>
CSK I, II, III, IV	<i>Chāvārayachante Sampūrṇa Kṛtikaḷ</i> in 4 Volumes (Malayalam)
CU	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
CWC I, II, III, IV	Complete Works of Blessed Chāvāra in 4 Volumes (English)
<i>Darśanaviṭ</i>	House of vision (a place set apart for divine reflection and high spiritual ideals)
DS	<i>Dhyāna Sallāpaṅgal</i> (Malayalam) CSK III
IsUp	<i>Īśa Upaniṣad</i>
JP	<i>Jñāna-Pīyusaṃ</i>
<i>Kūtapirappukaḷ</i>	Co-borns
<i>Malpān</i>	Rector of the indigenous seminary patterned after the Indian <i>Gurukulam</i> where students used to stay with the Master
MG	Mother's Grief
MuUp	<i>Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad</i>

NA	<i>Nostra Aetate</i>
PrUp	<i>Praśna Upaniṣad</i>
Schism	Discord and conflict in the Church on grounds of differences in belief or practice leading to the setting up of breakaway organization
SK	<i>Sāhitya Kṛtikaḷ</i> (Malayalam), CSK II
Syro-Malabar Church	One of the ancient Eastern Catholic Rites of apostolic origin from Saint Thomas the Apostle, also known as Saint Thomas Christians
<i>Tapasubhavan</i>	The House of Penance
TaUp	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣad</i>
VC	<i>Vivekachūḍamaṇi</i>

INTRODUCTION

The Genius of an Inclusive Vision

*Ayam nijah paro vēti gaṇanā laghucētasām
Udāracaritānām tū vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam.*

“The thought that one person is related to me, and another is not, is that of the narrow-minded people. For the broad-minded, indeed, the whole world is one family” (*Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-73). Great minds at all times and circumstances rise above the narrow domestic walls of caste, creed, culture, region, religion and nation. They respect and celebrate the diversity of humanity, as it is clearly expressed in the concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra, who was a firm devotee of the Holy Family, considered the entire humanity as a single-family, irrespective of its distinct differences. The starting of Sanskrit school, where both the high class and low class could sit together as children of God and learn that sacred language, symbolizes his commitment to safeguarding the fundamental human dignity on the one side and on the other side to preserve the authentic Indian ancient culture, and its age-old traditions and values. The learning of the Sanskrit language, together with other students, provided him a gateway to understanding the Hindu way of life, which in turn helped him to promote healthy and holy interfaith and intercultural relations with people of other faith and culture. His close association with the poor and the marginalized sections of the society, the various initiatives for the upliftment of Dalits, personal relations with the members of other religious communities, especially with that of the Echaracharan offshoot of a Nair family of

portrayed him as “one who relentlessly sought after the soul of India, finding it in its depth and permeated in that consciousness as a spiritual persona.”¹ Indeed, Saint Chāvāra imbibed the spiritual essence of the ancient Vedāntic ideals to himself through *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* and thus became identified with the soul of India. A. Shridharamenon, a well-known historian of Kerala, considered Saint Chāvāra as the pioneer of inculturation among the Saint Thomas Christians. In his opinion, the initiative, like composing *Ātmānutāpam*, is a typical example of it. He observes:

Though Christian in faith, in all other respects, they were Keralites with a fundamental national vision. The truth is that they were integrated into the social fabric of the land. In recent times, all over India, there is a new enthusiasm for such a lifestyle. It was Fr. Chāvāra who initiated this new fervor. He was able to bring the Catholic community to the mainstream of Kerala society. It was to assimilate the Indian spiritual wealth that he exhorted his followers. For this, he gave importance to the study of Sanskrit and, for the purpose, started a school. He adopted many practices based on customs among the Hindus. Following the *sandhya-nāma-kīrttanam* (evening praise of the name of God), prevalent in Hindu homes, he has taken leadership in writing prayer songs based on the life-stories of Christ and encouraged others to do the same. He wrote many devotional books, including minor epics (*Ghaṇḍa-Kāvya*s). He wrote prayer songs on the life of Christ in the style of *kiḷipat* by Ezhuthachan. The insistence on replacing flowers made with cloth and paper with that of fresh flowers, and on

¹Panthaplackal, *Chāvārayachan: Oru Rekhachitram*, 82.

singing good songs in the church were examples of adopting Indian customs. The many customs he introduced to revitalize the spiritual field were Indian.¹

In his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II makes it very clear that the Church is not opposed to any culture, and indeed positively, it is always open to other cultures and engages itself with them to adopt divine forms which are alien to it. The Pope also reminds that in India, Christians have to draw from this ancient rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought.²

It is just because of the openness and inclusive attitude of imbibing right elements from the other spiritual traditions by Saint Chāvāra and the other founding fathers that they called the *āśram*, which was founded at the hill of Mannanam with different names like *Bethrauma*, *Darśanavīṭ*, and *Tapasubhavan* even though it was already named as Saint Joseph's Monastery. As being great scholars (*Malpāns*)³ they would have known the various philosophical, theological, and religious nuances of those terms and hence preferred to call it in such Syrian and Indian names. It was not merely for namesake that they used such terms. Instead, they were practicing and living the implications of those names in their life. That is why people were going to there irrespective of their caste and creed. The Sanskrit school, the two seminaries (one for religious and one for diocesans), the press, and the mango tree which Saint Chāvāra planted

¹Menon, "Kālattu Munbe Naḍanna Navothāna Nāyakan," 18.

²John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 72.

³The word *Malpān* is a Syrian word for the scholar, and during the time of Saint Chāvāra, the seminary professors were usually called with this title.

there and it later came to be known as *Prior-mango tree*¹ have their own stories to say about the inclusive atmosphere of the *Darśanavīṭ*. It was real, a God's own home in God's own country.

There are countries, which are considered as God's own countries.

There are places, which are considered as God's own holy sanctuaries.

There are things, which are considered as God's own sacred things.

There are homes, which are considered as God's own dearest homes.

There are times, which are considered as God's own acceptable timings.

There are works, which are considered as God's own lovely works.

There are men, who consider themselves as God's own men – self-styled God's men.

At the same time, there are also men, whom others consider as God's own men.

Saint Chāvāra was such a towering persona, whom the whole world honor and venerate as a man of God. The works which he did in his life were indeed God's own works! The various initiatives he took up in the Kerala

¹In a Letter written by Saint Chāvāra to Fr. Kuriakose Eliseus on September 6 1870, he wrote like this: "In order to remind all the brethren of our Congregation that men are weak and faltering and that the fruits of their spiritual endeavors would be more lasting and more delicious as these sweet mangoes, 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)." CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 45.

Church and society, including the *Darśanavīṭ* that he built at Mannanam together with the other founding fathers – everything is considered as God’s own. Regarding the founding of it, he reminds its members, “Beloved, brethren (*kūṭapirappukaḷ* or co-borns), this humble Congregation of ours is not man-made. You are witness to the truth that God has nurtured it with genuine care and helped it grow. Persecution by men or discouragements from them cannot destroy it.”¹ A firm conviction of a man of God about that grand God’s own house and God’s great activities!

As the word *Darśanavīṭ* indicates, it is a vision about humanity, as well as a universal home of humanity, where an inclusive theology and spirituality is lived considering the entire humanity as the children of the same God. It is not merely a physical reality, rather a metaphysical reality; that is why it is called as *Besrouma* (A house on hilltop) and *Darśanavīṭ* (House of Vision), even though it already established in the name of Saint Joseph. That is why Saint Chāvāra often addressed the members of that house as *kūṭapirappukaḷ* and used the same term even to address the outsiders. Surprisingly, in his own words, we understand that in the *Darśanavīṭ* he had brethren, who loved him more than his own brothers and sisters:

I left my home and parents for the sake of God. Now, I am writing this from Elthuruth. I have my loving *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns) here who love me more than my own brothers and sisters. Tomorrow if I go to Koonammavu, I will have the same experience there as well, so also if I go to Mannanam or to Vazhakulam.²

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 61.

²CSK, IV: *The Letters*, 126.

As it is mentioned, he wrote these words from Elthuruth, and the word Elthuruth means “an island of God.” Seeing the entire humanity as one’s brothers and sisters – *kūṭapirappukaḷ* – is indeed a divine vision, which one receives while he or she is elevated to higher consciousness. Hence, living in Elthuruth means to live with such a divine and noble vision (*darśanam*). In this sense, indeed, *Darśanaviṭ* is a home for all homes of the earth – another *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, an extended home for humankind, whether one lives in Elthuruth, Koonammavu, Mannanam or Vazhakulam.

This book, *Darśanaviṭ: A Theology of Inclusive Home* in Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvara, is an attempt to reflect on that familial inclusiveness of Saint Chāvara, in the inter-religious context of Kerala and to acknowledge and appreciate the unique contributions he has made towards fostering the spirit of unity and oneness in the Church as well as in the Kerala society at large. It consists of five chapters, and the first chapter explains the concept of *Darśanaviṭ* relating it with *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* and some of the Chāvara terms like *kūṭapirappukaḷ* and Holy Family. The second chapter, *Akuṭumbakam* gives a realistic picture about different non-familial elements – the *bhēda-cintas* of caste, creed, and culture of the nineteenth century in Kerala that extinguished the fellow spirit (*kūṭapirappukaḷ* - co-borns) of the people of Kerala by which the Church and the society declined as an asylum of lunatics, an expression used by Vivekananda about Kerala during the time of Saint Chāvara. The third chapter explains on how Saint Chāvara overpowered all the evils of exclusivist thinking of his times by his inclusive approach and changed the *akuṭumbaka* situations into a familial one – *kuṭumbakam*. The fourth chapter unfolds the Indian consciousness, and the interfaith

inclusivity reflected in the various works of Saint Chāvara. Based on these findings, the final chapter draws some conclusions on the inclusive vision of Saint Chāvara.

According to the well known Kerala historian A. Sreedhara Menon, "The life and achievements of Saint Chāvara cannot be restricted to the Catholic Church. They are relevant to all communities and to all times."¹ I hope this study will take the memories and contributions of Saint Chāvara to all communities and all people.

¹Menon, "Kālattu Munbe Naḍanna Navothāna Nāyakan," 20.

Chapter 1

DARŚANAVĪṬ

A Home with an Inclusive Vision

India's willingness to listen and the desire to explore and discover more from other spiritual customs and traditions of the world is classically expressed in the *Ṛgvedic mantra*, "*Ā no bhadrāḥ-krtavo-yantuviśvataḥ*" (1-89-1), which means "let noble thoughts come to us from every corner of the world," and this was the high ideal of Indian *Ṛṣis* for all times. Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra cherished this noble attitude of openness towards other customs and traditions, especially with the Hindu tradition, and this Indian orientation was an essential aspect of his spiritual consciousness.

The religious house that was started at Mannanam by Saint Chāvāra together with the other founding fathers on 11 May 1831 had been called by different names by the first fathers like, *Darśanavīṭ* and *Tapasubhavan*. "Seeing that a lot of good has not been done due to the absence of a *Tapasubhavan* (House of Penance) in Kerala even for the priests, it was desired by all means to start a *Darśanavīṭ* (House of Vision) at least for priests."¹ These Indian names remind us about their earnest desire to adopt the right elements from the rich Indian *sanyāsa* tradition, especially from the *āśrams*, where the sages were leading a holy life. '*Tapas*' means heat, blow, austerity or mortification, and *tapovanam* was indeed a holy home of intense spiritual exercise undertaken by the monks in as intense desire to realize God.

¹CSK, I: *Nālāgamaṅgal*, 1.

The term *Darśanavīṭ*, is a composition of two words, i.e., *darśana* and *vīṭ*. The Sanskrit word *darśana* means 'vision,' and the word *vīṭ* in Malayalam means 'home,' and as these two words are combined, they mean 'a house of vision.' The Sanskrit word *darśana* is derived from the root *drś*, which means 'to see', and that is why its noun form is generally translated as 'direct vision' or 'perception.' The seeing can be performed both by external as well as internal eyes (either physical or intuitive eyes - third eye - *trikaṇṇ*). In Hindu religious understanding, the eye of Lord Śiva is considered as the third eye or the intuitive eye. Sometimes, it is also referred to as *rudrāṣṁ*, which means 'the eye of Rudra' (*rudrasya aṣṁ* (eye) *rudrāṣṁ*) which is another name for Lord Śiva. In order to see the reality with the divine eye, sages wear the chain made of *rudrāṣṁ* while they meditate, and they also make use of it to count while reciting the *mantras*. The word *rudrāṣṁ* is also interpreted as 'Rudra's teardrops.' According to a legend about Śaivism, Lord Shiva shed a tear when he opened his eyes after extended meditation and this tear evolved into a *rudrāṣa* tree.

The term *darśana* has deeper philosophical and theological meanings. The traditional Sanskrit scholars usually prefer to use the word *darśana* for philosophy and philosophically it means 'a scientific account of reality, putting the intuition to proof and propagating it logically' and applied to philosophy it indicates 'the true insight into the nature of reality or the true vision of reality.' Theologically, *darśana* means the spiritual perception or a complete view revealed to the soul sense. For Indians, the *darśana* of the Ultimate is the decisive purpose of all philosophical pursuit, and even the ordinary people here go

to the temples to get the *darśan* or the vision of God, which is the inner thirst of every human heart.¹

The repeated prayer of Saint Chāvāra in the third chapter of *Ātmānutāpam* for getting the vision of God indeed testifies the fact that while living as a member of *Darśanaṅī* in each moment of his life his heart was longing to see the face of God:

O! Merciful, provide me the power
To see with my inner vision,
For ages long, I have nursed an ambition
To perceive the all-glorious shower.
Glory to the Man! The Immortal!
How I wish to see the radiance,
Of the divine Baby's munificence,
With thy gift- my eyes- mortal,
I wish to see how the newborn,
Stole all the sun's yellow shine,
Only to hid it in his body divine
Doubling, the lustre of the morn (I.1-12).

In short, the *Darśanaṅī*, which Saint Chāvāra initiated is a house of vision true to its name: transcendently, a home in which he had the vision of God, and inter-subjectively, a home in which he incorporated all other homes of the earth and regarded the entire humanity as a single-family, considering them as children of the same heavenly Father. In this way, *Darśanaṅī* is indeed a Christian replica of the *vasudhaivaikuṭumbakam*. It was indeed a home for all homes and beings.

¹Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. I, 43-44.

1.1. *Vasudhaivaikuṭumbakam*: An Indian Family Consciousness on Humanity

Although humanity is a single-family, today, it is divided by walls of religion, politics, color, caste, age, continent, and county. Amid all these dividing walls, the concept of *vasudhaivaikuṭumbakam* gives hope to humanity as it is a universal invitation to change all these divisions into unity, the inhuman elements to humanness, and thus transform this world of humanity from the chaos of division and separation into a single-family. The display of this great thought of universal brotherhood in the entrance hall of the parliament of India is highly significant. This noble Indian vision of the oneness of the entire humanity occurs in the *Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-73, and is repeated in other texts like *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* and *Hitopadeśa*¹ (1.3.71). The context is to describe an individual's attribute who has attained the highest level of spiritual progress. It also defines his capacity to perform his worldly duties without attachment to any material possessions.²

The Indian term *vasudhaivaikuṭumbakam* is a combination of three Sanskrit words, i.e., *vasudha* (earth), *ēva* (alone or indeed) and *kuṭumbakam* (family), which means the earth, indeed is one universal family. As humankind shares the sun, moon, stars, and everything that is there on this mother earth, so also, they should feel one with the whole world and with the entire humanity, which is a single-family of God. Waves in the ocean are varied at the surface, but there

¹It is a collection of Sanskrit fables in prose and verse.

²One is a relative, the other stranger, say the small-minded people. However, for the magnanimous, the whole world is a family. Be detached, be magnanimous, lift your mind, Enjoy the fruit of Brahmanic freedom (*Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-75).

are no such differences at the deepest level, where there is no movement. When an entity moves from gross to subtle, and from the subtle to more subtle or the subtlest, all sequences of differences disappear. Similarly, even though there is plurality in the human families at the physical and empirical level, at the deepest level or transcendent level, they are part of the same family - *vasudhaivaikuṭumbakam* - the Family of God.

In Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta Philosophy, reality has three levels of existence: Absolute-Existence (*Pāramārthika-Satta*), Relative or Empirical-Existence (*Vyāvahārika-Satta*) and Phenomenal-Existence (*Prātibhāsika-Satta*). These three levels of existence are like the existence of an ocean, waves, and foam. The foam of water depends for its existence on the wave, and the wave depends on the ocean. What really or ultimately exists is only the ocean, and waves and foams have only relative and phenomenal existence. Similarly, the ultimate ground of all existence and the unifying force of the entire universe is Brahman. Applying it to the familial existence, God or Brahman, the absolute existence is indeed the unifying force of all earthly families. The Biblical teachings also emphasize the fact that God's Fatherhood is the epitome of all human fatherhood and families: "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name" (Eph 3:15). Hence, the family-hood - the fatherhood, motherhood, brotherhood, and sisterhood of humanity is to be better understood and lived spiritually rather than physically, as a real relationship is one of unity - a shared feeling of loyalty to a common Lord. Just like the waves and foams ultimately get merged into the ocean. Similarly, all the human families finally get merged in the Family of God -

vasudhaivakuṭumbakam – by becoming a single integrated family of humankind.

1.2. *Vasudhaivakuṭumbaka Spirit of Darśanaṅī*

Āśrams are the centers of Indian culture and traditions. As the centers of Indian heritage, they are the places where people from all walks of life take refuge at any time and being there at their disposal, like their own homes. The spiritual seekers are initiated there to different methods of meditation; princes are trained in martial arts, Kings are given political counsel, students learn the Sacred Scriptures, householders receive instruction on their family duties, farmers get training in agricultural skills, and young artists are introduced to music, dramatics. Because of these reasons as the word *āśram* indicates, they are genuinely the centers, where ‘a total pursuit’ is being done and as they are fully dedicated for the holistic development of humanity, they can be rightly considered as the sacred places in which the spirit of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* is expressed and lived.

In the sacred and serene atmosphere of a *āśram*, people are free and enjoy all kinds of freedom and happiness. Kālidāsa, the great poet of India, regards a *āśram* as another heaven on earth in his famous play, the *Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam*. For example, in the seventh act of the play, through the words of King Duṣyanta, he identifies *āśram* with heaven:

It is a place more delightful than heaven. Indeed, I am looking on with amazement. Here in this forest of *Kalpa*-trees, they draw from air life’s necessary sustenance; in waters yellow with the golden dust of the lotus, they perform ablutions for religious vows; on jeweled slabs, they meditate; and restrain their passions amid celestial

nymphs; they practice penance in a place which other sages by their austerities seek to win (7.12).

The serene life depicted in the forest-hermitage communicates that all the members of the *āśram* experienced the self in all beings and all beings in the self, so they cannot isolate themselves from the rest of the creation. Saint Chāvāra and the other founding fathers of *Darśanaṅgī* took special care to establish their *āśram*, in a place where all these characteristics were met as explained by him in *The Chronicles*:

Then we all set out to have a good look over this *Besrouma*. As the whole place was thickly wooded, we climbed up with great difficulty, breaking or cutting off branches and reached almost near the well. We found it so very broad and breezy, so that all of us liked it.¹

We stayed at the *Besrouma* very late charmed by the cool breeze and overwhelmed by the vastness and the multitude of the burned-up woods lying spread out before we got down.²

In the settings of a *āśram*, the whole creation, including man, animals, and the vegetative kingdom, is living and vibrating with cosmic harmony. The sages “rise above the petty distinction of a tree and a creeper, a bird and a beast, a man and a God.”³ The conversations of the servants, as seen in the first chapter, underline their great love for plants and how they look after them:

Anasya: Friend Śākuntala, I think the trees in the hermitage are dearer to father Kāśyapa than your self

¹CWC, IV: *The Chronicles*, 15.

²CWC, IV: *The Chronicles*, 18.

³Sarma, *An Interpretative Study of Kalidasa*, 219.

since he has appointed even you, who are soft like a *Navamālīka* flower to fill their basins.”

Śākuntala: “It is not only in obedience to our father, but I feel the affection of a sister for them.”

On another occasion, Śākuntala says: “I shall even forget my self for the sake of the plants.” According to Indian spirituality, love for the other is a love for one’s self. “*Ātmanah kāmya sarvaṃ priyam bhavati*” (For the sake of the self, everything is dear). Even the most comprehensive forms of affection were conceived to flow from the central fountain of self-love. The common forms of self-sacrifice and self-denial have their roots in self-love.¹ In this sense, service to the society is not sacrifice but a fulfillment of self-love properly conceived, by which one feels the nobler joy of service, cares not for any reward and fears not the consequences as by action he is not affected – it is an end in itself.

The spirit of *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam* teaches us the fact that spirituality is being one with reality, and reality is a network of relationships: cosmic, human, and divine relationships. Regarding this interconnectedness, the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* declares, “All these creatures, my dear, have their root in Being. They have Being as their abode, Being as their support” (CU 6.8.4).² The Upaniṣad continues, “That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its self. That is the truth. That is the self. You are that (*Tat*

¹Kapoor, gen. ed., *Encyclopaedia of Indian Heritage*, vol. 39: *Ancient Indian Society*, 26.

²*San mlāḥ, saumya imāḥ sarvāḥ prajāḥ sad-āyatanāḥ, satpratiṣṭhāḥ* (CU 6.8.4).

tvam asi), Śvetaketu.”¹ Indian *āśrams* were such centers of holistic spirituality, where the high ideal of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* was lived and experienced.

The Vedāntic concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* is a universal invitation to believe in the unity of all human as well as non-human beings. As one grows in this harmonic consciousness, all the boundary lines between the living and the non-living vanish, and gradually the connecting links emerge. For the broad-minded, indeed, the whole world is one family. Accordingly, everything in this cosmos – persons, animals, birds, plants, and all their endless variety of species together form a harmonious family. Saint Francis of Assisi, who considered the sun as brother and the moon as a sister, grew to this harmonic consciousness. Pope Francis, in the opening lines of his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, draws our attention, “Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.”²

In the lines of *Ātmānutāpam*, Saint Chāvāra depicts nature as never being separated from the human world, as both are part of the organic whole and remain together in harmony. For example, the farewell of Mother Mary depicted in the XI Canto reflects the inclusive outlook of Saint Chāvāra, in which we see the nature feeling with human beings. The scene is presented as a perfect fusion of natural beauty and human emotions.

¹Sa ya eṣo’nimā aitatātmyam idaṃ Sarva tat Satyam, sa ātmā tat tvam asi, Śvetaketu iti (CU 6.9.4).

²Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 1.

Thus while the Lady for the journey prepared
From places near Palestine and around
Faithful in numbers came to mourn
Elsewhere in the world no such found
Besides the grief of Palestine
E'en the stars and planets signs
Of sorrow showed; the birds
Of the air moaned in pain
Ever since she left her home
The fauna flew roundabout
And in the chorus, they sang aloud
To the earth descending low
"Alas! Our queen has forever left us!"
The pain momentarily hurt their heart
For her blessing sweet, they longed
For it long they fondly waited (XI 305-320).

Mother Mary is presented here as having a passionate relationship with nature in such a way that her separation turns out to be a heartbreaking experience to nature. That is why, together with the people of Palestine, the stars, planets, birds, air, fauna, and earth also join in expressing their sorrow. Even the wild animals feel with them:

And lo! wild beasts, from caves
On the mighty hills and mounts
And abysses deep like comrades came
Long before her day of demise
Gathered around in several groups
These mountain dwellers many
Moved by deepest pain those tigers
And beasts of prey for sweet queen Mary
Some bent low in reverence deep
Bowing their heads stood the wolves
They in pain loudly roared

Weeping for her in utter grief (XI 305-332).

And, right at the moment escorted by Him
She adjourned forth to dwell the Land of Life
Behold, the Sun bedimmed his face through woe
This he did on the day the Son chose to die
The fauna of the air besides flew hither and thither
Clamoring aloud displaying their woe to all.

(*The Last Canto*: 5-10)

Saint Chāvāra paints the whole story using nature and depicts how love occurs in nature, and how Mother Mary and nature love each other. Indeed, it is profoundly rooted in nature, and he did not believe in any religious theology or spirituality that excludes nature or any creatures of the earth. He established *Darśanavīṭ* not to exclude anyone, but to include all. It is very evident from his religious faith, propositions, and actions. For him, a theology that would shut out from Christ's heart any human creature is a wrong theology and mere escapism! The spirituality of *Darśanavīṭ* is always vibrating with an inclusive love for all.

1.3. *Darśanavīṭ*: An Adaptation of the Holy Family

Holy Family is the family of Jesus on earth, and hence, it can be understood as a typical embodiment and a living model of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* and *Darśanavīṭ* for human imitation. In the Catholic Church, the month of February is mainly dedicated for the devotion to the Holy Family, and Saint Chāvāra who was born on this month (February 10) had a special devotion to the Holy Family as it is very evident from his name, "Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra of the Holy Family." In the members of the Holy Family, as Pope Leo XIII teaches, "all men might behold a perfect

model of domestic life, and all virtue and holiness.”¹ The harmony, unity, and holiness of the Holy Family make it the model for all Christian families and also for all earthly families. We are challenged to make their way of life, our way of life. They are a source of virtue; they enlighten our minds, and they show us how to love through sacrifice.

1.4. Broadness and Inclusiveness of the Holy Family

Family is an excellent source of love and acceptance, and Jesus, too, enjoyed such a stronghold of support and encouragement from his family. The physical family of Jesus consists of Mary, his mother, and Joseph, his foster father. The Gospels also give indications about Jesus’ brothers and sisters, and accordingly, his brothers were James, Joses (or Joseph), Simon and Judas (Mt 13:55-56, Mk 6:3). The same verses also mention unnamed sisters of Jesus. However, Jesus showed a broader and broader understanding of the family in Mathew 12:46-50, and in it, Jesus is challenging us to grow into a kind of inclusive spirituality and become actual members of *vasudhaivakutumbakam* and *Darśanaṅī*.

While speaking with the crowds, his mother and his brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you.’ However, he said in reply to the one who told him, ‘Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?’ Moreover, stretching out his hand to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my

¹Connell, “Catholic Prayer: February Devotion: The Holy Family,” *catholicculture.org* <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgical/year/prayers/view.cfm?id=754> (accessed on 26 July 2018).

heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mt 12:46-50).

Jesus offers this statement, not as a condemnation of the members of his blood; instead, he is trying to redefine family relationships; to make the idea of the family more inclusive and expansive. God’s expansive love cannot be contained in just biological bonds. In other words, he did not deny the relationship he had with his biological family; he merely expanded the family circle to include any number of people. He pointed to a spiritual instead of a physical kinship as the basis of life in the kingdom of God.

Jesus is reminding us of the fact that the people around him belong to his family in two ways: Firstly, some belong to the earthly family in which he was born, people like his mother Mary, foster father Joseph, and other close relatives. His second family is made up of those who do the will of God and those who are going to be his true disciples. Mary belongs to both as she is pre-eminently the one who has said, “Let it be done unto me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). For this reason, she is the first disciple of Jesus and the model for all Christians. She became one of Jesus’ most devout followers. She stayed by his side and, if at all a small distance, till the right foot of the Cross. Thus, Jesus does not deny his family ties but extending it to all believers, so that we all become members of that one family where God is our Father. It means that Jesus has the same affection that he had towards his parents and siblings. The relationship we have with Jesus is founded on something more profound than even the most deep-seated human relationships of the family. We are the family of God and brothers and sisters to Jesus when we try to do God’s will and strive to make God’s kingdom come. That is the Good News! Jesus’ relationship with his family moved to a new level.

Moreover, it is with such a spirit of family togetherness of the Church that Saint Chāvāra narrates the farewell episode of Mother Mary:

The Lady greeting them in turn
 Spoke to her son's beloved ones.
 And to her kinsmen as well, who came:
 "Cool your fatigue and get refreshed."
 They did it without a moment's delay
 Along with James, Jesus' brother
 In and around Jerusalem city
 Hearing the tidings on the happy day
 Followers gathered as willed by God
 Seeing the crowd, Simon the Rock.

Gave the reason for his arrival (XII.43-53).

Jesus changes what is usual: He valued his relationship with his disciples more than that He had for his family. This does not mean that Jesus turned his back on his family. Later on, we see that Jesus still cared for his family. At the cross, he entrusted the care of his mother to one of his closest friends (Jn 19:26). Jesus was not putting his family down; he was elevating the importance of his spiritual family and redefining the boundaries of family-hood to new possibilities for deeper and more enjoyable relationships.

1.5. Church as a Family of God

Greek word *ecclesia* that is used to refer to Church means "gathering together, assembling." To be a Church, people of God have to assemble, not a social gathering but, as a family. God is the Father, and Jesus is the elder brother of this human family. The new relationship between Mary and John explained in the Gospel of Saint John has to be understood in this spirit of the family fellowship.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." Moreover, from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home" (Jn 19: 26-29). The early Church continued this family spirit of one heart and mind by gathering together and praying together (Acts 1:14). "The apostles often met together and prayed with a single purpose in mind. The women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, would meet with them, and so would his brothers."

Amid his sacrificial self-giving on the cross, Jesus named Mary and his disciples as mother and son and made them into a family. A new family is created in the shadow of the cross. Through the Blood of Christ shed for us, a new home, a new community comes to life. In Acts 20:28, we read that Christ "purchased the Church of God with his blood." We are blood relatives - not through our blood, but through His, shed on the cross for us all.¹ Therefore, one of the gifts that Jesus gave us from the cross was the Church: a loving, caring, sustaining, encouraging family beyond the family. Moreover, it is a great encouragement that he illustrates the meaning of the Church in the way he established the relationship between John and Mary.² Sticking on to this

¹"John 19:25-27 - Mothering Sunday," *St Andrew's Enfield*, <https://www.standrewsenfield.com/index.php/11-sermons/92-john-19-25-27-mothering-sunday> (accessed on 17 June 2019).

²Piper, "The Third Word from the Cross," *DesiringGod*.<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-third-word-from-the-cross> (accessed on 6 March 2018).

great ecclesial truth of Christian sonship Saint Chāvāra sings in his *Ātmānutāpam* as follows:

To her dearly loved Son, John
 The mother entrusted her tunics both
 The cloth that I give you now
 Give to the maids who served me
 "Give it, if so, you deem."
 And then with John, her loving son
 She kissed the Feet of Peter
 And she turned to John to kiss his
 She then knelt down and prayed
 My son, while hanging on the cross
 Gave me as a mother to disciple John
 And John to me, to be my son
 With a mother's love, I served
 Him not, but from him received ample
 Loving service, my son for this
 Forgive me I do beg (XII 113-128).

In these few lines of Saint Chāvāra's poetic imagination, where the familial bond of Mother Mary with Saint John is being enumerated, we get a vivid picture of the whole ecclesiology of Christian fellowship of family-hood. As members of the Church, we are called to lift the level of our love for others to the level of love that only a family could share and enjoy. It is the implied idea behind Our Lord's words from the cross when He says, "Mother, behold thy son. Son, behold thy Mother." The bond between Mary and John at Golgotha must be the bond we strive for with everyone that the Father places in our lives: the down, the well to do, our close circles of friends, our collaborators at work, the neighbours next door, and all those for whom we pray. It also extends to our adversaries and even to our enemies!

Jesus told Peter that His disciples would have ‘hundredfold brothers, sisters, and mothers in this lifetime’ (Mk 10:28-30), and this is an allusion to the Church, which is now “the household or family of God” (1 Tim 3:15). Jesus, therefore, offers those willing to do the will of the Father, the opportunity to be born into the family of God (1 Pet 1:22-23), to enjoy God as our Father, Jesus as our “Elder Brother” (Heb 2:11-12), and thus to have countless thousands as brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers (1 Tim 5:1-2). Thus the Church of Jesus Christ is the real Family of Jesus Christ today and forever! This was one of the reasons why the Church grew so fast in Roman culture. People saw in their solidarity the sharing of material resources, and their primary loyalty to each other.

Addressed the gathering in faith and joy

His brothers, the Disciples of Christ

He mentioned of all, the foremost.

Loving sons, Christians, keep

In love and reverence his dear command (XII 54-58).

“The family is the fundamental locus of the covenant between the Church and God’s creation, with that which God blessed on the last day with a family. Without family, not even the Church would exist, nor could she be what she is called to be, namely “a sign and instrument of communion with God and the unity of the entire human race” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1).” declared Pope Francis at the World Meeting of Families on 27 September 2015.¹

¹Pope Francis, “The Family Is the Fundamental Locus of the Covenant between the Church and God’s Creation,” posted on 27 September 2015, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=11023> (accessed on 8 March 2018).

Jesus knew that some of his followers would lose their families because they had chosen to follow Jesus, but then Jesus assured them: “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29). In the Church, we have the fulfillment of that promise: that those who have lost brothers and sisters or fathers and mothers for Jesus’ sake will receive a hundredfold back. Moreover, the Church has to give up the foolish notion that a man is a brother because we were born of the same mother. We are brothers who are one in the soul, one in conviction, one in hope! The early Church followed this great ideal of one family, and because of that, the believers were called brethren. Indeed, in those days, the Church was in the house, right in its life and its constitution.

Saint Chāvāra, elevated to the venerable status of sainthood, in his higher level of spiritual awakening, reconciled what is practically meant by the ideals of his Christian faith in the Holy Family with that of the Indian concepts of *vasudhaivaakūṭumbakam* and *Darśanavīṭ*. For him, God-experience was a state of absolute inclusiveness. In that state of unity, there was no possibility of fragmented perception. It is with that DNA, which is Christian, typically Catholic in the sense of embracing all, and characteristically Indian in consciousness that he brought about incredible changes in the Kerala Church and society. It may be because of this conviction that he became a firm devotee of the Holy Family and modified his name as ‘Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra of the Holy Family.’

1.6. The Familial Inclusiveness of *Darśanavīṭ*

Darśanavīṭ is a broad and enduring reality, and it can never be looked upon as an entity in its singularity. As it was initially founded and initiated by Saint Chāvāra and the other founding fathers, it was a driving force in the Church and society through which there was a flow of streams that could fertilize all the spheres of human life - rivers of brotherhood, sisterhood, cooperation, knowledge, charity and of all such ministries, which assured all forms of inclusive growth in the Kerala Church and society. Accordingly, Saint Chāvāra and the other founding fathers who built the *Darśanavīṭ*, through it built the Kerala Church and society of the nineteenth century, which was undergoing deterioration. This extended act of renovation and reconstruction can be brilliantly verified from the annals of the Church and the society.

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

borderless. In brief, the essence of the spirituality of *Darśanaṅī* was its unconditional love for humanity and the uninhibited spirit of catholicity.

1.7. The Family Consciousness of Saint Chāvara

The concept of family is something very close to the heart of Saint Chāvara, and one can notice its impact on his religious, spiritual, and social life. For example, it is attached to his name, as he is known as Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvara of *Holy Family*. This concept is found in the names given to the monastery at Mannanam like *Darśanaṅī* (The House of Vision), *Besrouma* (The Upper House), and *Tapasubhavan* (The House of Penance). Further, in writings like *Chāvaru!* (*Testament of a Loving Father*) and *Ātmānutāpam* (*The Compunction of the Soul*), we see vivid memories of his family. The good Catholic family background, which he was fortunate to have by the providence of God, had a vital role to play in his character formation. Those loving memories about his family and childhood days are beautifully recalled in *Ātmānutāpam*:

You, to tend me as an infant unto tests,
 Gave me mother gentle who devoid of any party,
 Imparted the love you offered her merry,
 That gushes forth in the nectar of her breasts.
 As slowly sped I to be fully capable,
 To echo Thy eulogies in Thy honor as she sang,
 And she taught me its meaning sprung,
 In my veins, the current of appraise able.
 Slowly I realized You O! Saviour, mine
 Sitting at my mother's holy feet,
 As she at midnight her prayers meet,
 Which I adhered to seek You fine (I 45-56).

These lines of the *Compunction of the Soul* are so moving with such holy familial experiences of the childhood days of Saint Chāvāra that the following critical evaluation of C. P. Sreedharan is so relevant: “Usually, poets try to make their poems beautiful with metaphors, and alliterations, even though their hearts might be devoid of the same beauty and richness. Nevertheless, mystics like Fr. Chāvāra make their poems attractive not with the external beauty of lines, but with the fragrance of their soul which is sublime.”¹

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

Indeed, if the mother is excellent, then her son is also excellent, “*yathāmātātathāsutha*” and “the mother who gives birth to such a devotee, she is blessed; as the child is greatly influenced by the mother.”²

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

¹Moozhoor, *Blessed Chāvāra: The Star of the East*, 97.

²*dhinjananiyyāreeysutjāyāey, sohanthālbajāyāey.*

The Son of God took his human scheme,
 From all its sins mankind redeem,
 Forcing his way from the purest womb avow.
 Also stories of Pontius Pilate's objection-
 Made famous through Jesus did,
 Though his endless torments he did bid,
 Only to complete the full round of resurrection,
 Did the third day erect.
 Mother' stony gaze would me now screw,
 Childish fears mine when hence overflow
 As she retold the holy tenet.
 Never ever touched me has she mighty
 Either with a stick or manually but her,
 Eyes were so powerful that ere,
 Tame me into goodness and piety (I 65-84).

As honey is sweet, so also is the home. A home is where there is unceasing love of the mother, the attention of the father, the love of the siblings, and a lot of other memories. The above-quoted memories of Saint Chāvāra throw light on such familial and maternal memories and influences; how his loving mother gave him the primary lessons of Catholic life and prayer. And as a culmination of it, later when he was declared a saint by the Catholic Church, "his family, mother, birthplace, and residence became more purified, and his forefathers danced in the heavens" (*Skandapurāṇa, Mahe, Kaumār* 55/140).¹

Kulāmpavitramjananīkṛtārtha
Vasundharāvavasatish ca dhanya
Nṛtyantisvargepitaro'pitesām.

¹Ramsukhdas, "Feeling of Oneness with God," www.swamiram.sukhdasji.net/eBooks/Feeling-of-Oneness-With-God (accessed on 16 March 2018).

Saint Chāvāra always experienced a kind of paternal and maternal love from his Congregational and Ecclesiastical authorities. For example, he considered the superior of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites, Rome, not as someone who exercises power over him, instead as a loving father, as it is very well reflected in his letter to him: “We could read your letter only with tear-dimmed eyes because it was written by our father in his hand – a father who loves us, but staying far away. While I hold it in my hands, the feelings that we experience are similar to those experienced by a son reading his beloved father’s letter.”¹ Similarly, he was enjoying a kind of both paternal and maternal love and concern from his Local Ordinary, as he testifies it: “Our dear Vicar Apostolic, our Father, and Shepherd, is guiding and governing us with the utmost interest and vigilance. We are happy to learn from your letters that you are kept informed of this fact. He attends to all our affairs with maternal love and concern. The efforts he makes to protect us from all dangers and to nurture our souls are beyond description.”²

1.8. Transcending the Chāvāra Family

Chāvāra, as a surname, might be a compound word, comprising of *chāv* + *ara* (dead + tomb) and they mean ‘the tomb of death.’ The possible reason for the name is that the ancestors of Saint Chāvāra owned a plot of land in which the dead were buried. Although the derivation of the name in its relationship with the dead is inconclusive, it is inevitable that in the Chāvāra family, except Saint Chāvāra and his four sisters, all others – his father, mother, and the only brother – died at an early age and went back to the

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 31.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 31-32.

tomb - in an epidemic. He was the only surviving male member of the family. In other words, except Kuriākōse, all others moved from this world to the world of - *Chāvāra*. "Now, going to a cemetery is like going home, and going home is like going to the cemetery."¹ The point is Saint Kuriākōse, by his saintly life transformed this *tomb of the dead* into a *womb of life*, as from that family, there was born a great son of the Indian Church. Comparing this tomb of the dead to the tomb of Jesus, which later became the tomb of life, we see a Christological meaning in the surname of *Chāvāra*. In this regard, it is good to recall how Śrī. Sukumar Azhikkode, in his mystical imagination, interprets the term 'Chāvāra' as 'the tomb of life':

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

It is to that tomb of life this member of the Chāvāra family turned his face. Let me figuratively state that Chāvāra pondered deeply over the aim of his spiritual life very early in his life.²

Just like the empty tomb of Jesus, which had become the symbol of life, the life of Saint Chāvāra has indeed given a new life to the Kerala Church and society through various initiatives. When Saint Paul writes, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve" (1

¹Antony, *Aakasa Deepangal Saakshi*, 25.

²Azhikkode, "Kalatitamaya Maha Jyotissileykke," 21-30.

Cor 15:3-5), what he intends to communicate is this passing of Jesus from mortality to immortality: "that He was buried, that He was raised." The reason why the tomb was found empty was that the man who was buried there had risen from the dead. This resurrection of Jesus from the dead is indeed a victory of life over death and also a sure proof that He was who He claimed to be (Mt 12:38-40; 16:1-4) - the risen Son of God, our only hope of salvation. Furthermore, it is to that "tomb of life" Śrī. Sukumar Azhikkode compares the surname of Saint Chāvāra. "It is to that tomb of life that this member of the Chāvāra family turned his face. I figuratively assume that the term 'Chāvāra' speaks to the thinkers in an unknown mystical form that the purpose of his spiritual life was pondered over in his mind at an early age itself."¹

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

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

That family, which never excludes anyone, belongs to the responsibility of God. Monks are persons who have

¹Azhikkode, "Kalatitamaya Maha Jyotissileykke," 21-30.

taken the vow to link their family to the entire human family. They are the fingers of God. With those fingers, God caresses the lepers, takes care of the sores of the wounded, and wipes off the tears of those who weep. That is the path of Lord Jesus journeyed.¹

Admittedly, that is the path, which Saint Chāvāra, too, traveled as a faithful follower of the Master. Earlier, we had seen how Jesus transcended his earthly family and extended it to all believers and made it a true *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, with all its Indian positive implications. Saint Chāvāra is a genuine member of that great family as his complete name is Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra of the Holy Family. By founding the first indigenous Christian religious congregation of India for men and embracing religious life, he transcended the Chāvāra family and linked it with the family of God and called it *Darśanavīṭ*. Just like Jesus, Saint Chāvāra, too, without excluding his physical family, extended the family bonds to the entire humanity and included everyone in his family. That is why he could say, “I left my home and parents for the sake of God. Now, I am writing this from Elthuruth. I have my brethren here who love me more than my brothers and sisters. Tomorrow if I go to Koonammavu, I will have the same experience there as well, so also if I go to Mannanam or Vazhakulam.”²

Darśanavīṭ was thus home of an inclusive vision, where humankind was considered as the children of one heavenly father and incorporated all the families of earth into that family. Thus *Darśanavīṭ* was made another Holy Family or *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* of the earth by Saint Chāvāra. The various humanitarian initiatives that he initiated in the

¹Azhikkode, “Kalatitamaya Maha Jyotissileykke,” 21-30.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 126.

nineteenth century of the Kerala society and particularly in the Church for the poor and the marginalized, speak volumes of that divine membership of Saint Chāvāra in the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, which fuelled a fundamental dream of humanity for all.

1.9. *Kūṭapirappukaḷ*: Co-borns

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

My dear *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns), let the vicars of each of our monasteries foster real charity among themselves and maintain an actual bond. However, numerous the monasteries are, all must be like the members of one family, children born to, nursed, and brought up by the same mother. Never let this love weaken, but let it grow stronger from day today. Bear this in mind as an essential piece of advice. In order that this love may not weaken, let the vicars of the monasteries vie with one another to show greater interest in meeting the needs and requests coming from other monasteries.¹

These words of Saint Chāvāra give a real presentation of the concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. He conceives the CMI spiritual existence as family existence, to be exact, as an existence in the one Family of God on earth – *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Again, to emphasize this divine aspect of family existence, he envisaged that when one

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 71.

becomes a member of the Congregation, one would be a child born to, nursed and brought up by this mother, i.e., the CMI Congregation, as in the case of physical birth in a natural family. As a member of the Congregation, one should understand and live; one's religious life in a real fellowship of family existence. Saint Chāvāra boldly advised the members in this manner, because, he had considered the CMI Congregation as a divine family and a holy fellowship. God was his Heavenly Father, and he lived in His presence as a member of His family. For him, the call to CMI Congregation was a call to live as a member of God's family on earth – as a member of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, which is the bedrock of humanity.

1.10. *Kūṭapirappukaḷ*: A Word Full of Spirit and Life

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

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

the divine sonship, which is very well articulated and implied in the term *kūṭapirappukaḷ* is much thicker than that of the kin-blood tie that exists in the household relations. The Spirit is thicker than blood. In the Gospel of John 6:63, Jesus reminds us: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” Furthermore, the word *kūṭapirappukaḷ* is indeed a word full of that Spirit and Life (Jn 6:63), enlightening us about that divine sonship “who were born, neither of blood nor the will, neither of the flesh nor the will of man, but God” (1:13).

The consideration that each human being is a *kūṭapirappu* is the life and spirit of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Saint Chāvāra was a Spirit-filled man, and whatever he did and said indeed had the signature of the Spirit. Moreover, in this context, the word *kūṭapirappukaḷ* is indeed a familial term full of spirit and life. By using this sweet word of addressing, he is inviting us to imbibe the soul and spirit of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Through his spirit-filled life, he also reminds us that the highest ideals of humanity can turn sectarian over time if the spiritual awakening of *kūṭapirappukaḷ* does not guide us.

The word *kūṭapirappukaḷ* is a combination of *kūṭa* + *pirappukaḷ*, and they mean ‘in the company’ and ‘born’ respectively. It means children born from the same womb, and usually, it refers to the members of the same family, where they are born of the same mother and have a blood relation. Hence, it cannot be used for members of different families. However, Saint Chāvāra makes use of it to address all, extending it to the non-kin-blood relations, and thus different earthly families converge to a single supernatural family under this unifying compound. It has broken down

the wall of kin-blood relations that parts humanity into different families.

Just as all human beings belong to one species, because of the distinctive characteristic of humanness, so also, because of this same humanness, all human beings belong to one family. If kin-blood relation is the fundamental norm of membership in a natural family, humanness is the primary norm of membership in *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Indeed, for him, humanity is a single family as it comes from the same God and also shares the same DNA and heritage of the children of God. Hence, the term *kūṭapirappukaḷ* transcends the boundaries between families, races, and ethnicity; it unites all as members of one single family. All distinctions and barriers between people fall, in the spirit of *kūṭapirappukaḷ* of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. It takes away all barriers between man and man, and family and family. It unites different families into one family of humanity and destroys all the walls of divisions. The term *kūṭapirappukaḷ* used by Saint Chāvāra is a unifying name of humanity and is profound with the ideals of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* as it expresses in one word the single confraternity of humanity.

We have not found an apt English word to convey the more profound meaning and significance of the term *kūṭapirappukaḷ*. *The Complete Works of Blessed Chāvāra* translates it into 'brethren,' which sounds empty and miserably fails to communicate the first implication of the membership of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* or the oneness of humanity. A better translation for this Chāvāra term is *co-borns*, which is closer to the literal translation of the term; at the same time, it retains all the implications mentioned above. When one is filled with the spirit of *kūṭapirappukaḷ*, one is reborn or twice-born to *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* and becomes co-borns or

siblings in that one family. Let us further analyze the familial spirit of *kūṭapirappukaḷ* and its universal significance.

1.11. *Kūṭapirappukaḷ*: Members of *Darśanavīṭ*

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

Beloved *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns) and dear sons, you are aware of the fact that we who write this letter are both advanced in age and are fast failing in health and are preparing to present ourselves before the just throne of God.¹

Beloved *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns), this humble Congregation of ours is not human-made. You are witness to the truth that God has nurtured it with genuine care and helped it to grow.²

O, my beloved *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns), if we were having been called by God, had joined the monastery to live according to our wills obeying only the superiors whom we like, then our behavior is no better than that of the unbelievers."³

My dear *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns), be sure, if you continue to live thus, there will not be any of these monasteries here twenty years hence. The strength of monastery does not rest in the thickness of its walls, but in the virtue and the religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them.⁴

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 61.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 61.

³CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 64.

⁴CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 65.

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

Lastly, my beloved *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns), loving sons, none of us were drawn to this life in the monastery, being drawn by hunger or desperate living circumstances in the world.¹

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

I your servant, brother Kuriākōse Elia, address my dear *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns), Rev. Brothers, Priests, my dear Children the Novices and the lay Brothers, swearing my fidelity to Christ and giving you my advice and farewell greetings.²

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

Lastly, to the Very Rev. Vicar Apostolic, Very Rev. Delegate, and the Very Rev. Missionary Fathers and all the members of the monasteries, I beg pardon. I beg of them before God to pardon me all my shortcomings and lapses in the performance of my duties. Again I pray my *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns) religious, pray for me.³

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

Although God has willed to found this Congregation for the salvation of our Christian *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns),

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 66.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 70.

³CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 74.

due to the shortage of members, we are not able to render the help they need.¹

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

This is my testament to you, who are my *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns), in two ways, as members belonging to my family and as my spiritual children. Let this remain a proof of the fact that you are my kith and kin.²

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

Hence, my beloved brethren *kūṭapirappukaḷ* (co-borns), remember the words of our Lord that he who enters the sheepfold, not through the right door, is not the true shepherd, but the false one; is a wolf in sheep's clothing (Jn 10:1). If such shepherds come to you without the decree of the Pope, be a cautious note to give ear to their false teachings, nor take sides with them and be prepared even to suffer martyrdom at their hands for being faithful to the true vicar of the Pope, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly.³

Jesus once told a rich man to sell all he had and follow him. The man turned away, and Jesus said, "How hard it would be for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And then Peter said, "Behold we have left everything and followed you." Moreover, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for my sake and the gospel's, but

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 71.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 117.

³CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 98.

that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." Nowhere in this life are we going to receive 100 children and 100 mothers? Is it not in the Church, which is the new family of God?

1.12. *Adelphoi*: The Biblical Spirit of *Kūṭapirappukaḷ*

The biblical term that is more close to the spirit of *kūṭapirappukaḷ* is *adelphoi*. In fact, the singular form of this Greek masculine noun is *adelphos*; and exactly it means "of the same womb" (*kūṭapirappu* or co-born); 'a' is a copulative prefix with the meaning "of the same" and *delphus* means "womb." The term *adelphos* in its various forms occurs approximately 343 times in the Greek New Testament. It is sometimes used in its literal sense to mean a "brother;" one from the same womb (Jn 1:41). It can also mean "one who shares a common ethnic heritage (Acts 22:13). It sometimes means "neighbour" (Mt 7:3-5). It can also refer to "one who shares the same faith in Christ, "a fellow-believer" (Col 4:7). *Adelphoi*, the plural form of *adelphos* is used frequently in the Greek New Testament with the meaning of spiritual siblings in the family of God. Males and females who have believed, repented, confessed, and were immersed into Christ (Gal 3:26-29). They were "born again," (Jn 3:3-5; Tit 3:5-7), and are therefore adopted into the family of God (Eph 1:5; 1 Tim 3:15). In all these references, the term *adelphoi* reflects the spirit of *kūṭapirappukaḷ*, in which the members maintain a tender affection and concern for the fellow human beings like that of the family members.

Recently, I could learn one exciting thing about Saint Chāvāra from Mr. John Paul. As Saint Chāvāra was in his death bed, once he was given with some rice porridge

(congee), after having two or three spoons from it, he stopped taking it, as he could not take it to inside. Then, one of his *kūṭapirappu*, instead of wasting that remaining portion of the congee, thinking that it was the balance of a saintly soul had it. Furthermore, interestingly, it is that particular *kūṭapirappu*, who insisted that Saint Chāvāra should be vested with the religious habit, instead of the official sacerdotal vestments of the Vicar General at the time of his burial.¹ Honestly, the community life of our *Darśanavīṭ* was an expression, what is meant by the *kūṭapirappu*-DNA.

Certainly, *Darśanavīṭ* was not a natural family; instead, a supernatural family. In a natural family, the members are having the same DNA of their parents, whereas here, it was through their conscious effort that they nurtured and developed gradually, the *Darśanavīṭ*-DNA, which is nothing but the DNA of *kūṭapirappukaḷ*. The word *coventa*, which is traditionally used for monasteries, comes from two Latin words, *cum* (with) and *venire* (way), and they jointly mean ‘coming together from different ways.’ Indeed, the members of *Darśanavīṭ* were people who came there from different ways, from different families, and different backgrounds, but lived in that family-like “siblings of the same parents” – *kūṭapirappukaḷ*. *Kūṭapirappukaḷ* denotes the affection, which is shared between brethren. People who are born of God, whichever physical family they were born into, belong to the same family of God and therefore should love each other like brothers and sisters in the flesh.² Universal brotherhood

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 451.

²Deffinbaugh, “35. Love and Liberty: Liberties Love Will Not Take (Romans 14:1-23),” *Bible.org*, posted on 18 August 2004, <https://bible.org/seriespage/25-love-without-limits-romans-129-2> (accessed on 4 July 2019).

should never remain as a mere name. Instead, it should take flesh and blood by the affections of a relationship of kindred. Indeed, living this family spirit of brotherhood is, in fact, one of the tests of the members of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, as it is often seen in the New Testament (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12, 15:17; Eph 5:2; 1 Thes 4:9; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Jn 3:14; 2:7-8; 3:11; 3:23; 4:20-21). Just like the Greek term *adelphoi*, the Chāvāra term *kūṭapirappuka!* also invites us to love each other and to be devoted to one another as a close-knit family.

1.13. *Darśanavīṭ*: A Heavenly Abode in a Vision

Darśanavīṭ is a heavenly abode in a vision rather than merely any physical structure or reality. It is a spiritual disposition of having the fortune of seeing God and His heavenly abode in a vision while living on earth, which great souls like Mother Theresa could experience. It is to remind oneself about the intellectual dimension of *Darśanavīṭ* and to live each moment of stay in that home accordingly. Saint Chāvāra and the other founding fathers called the mother-house with that particular Indian name, together with the title of Saint Joseph's Monastery. In the following extract taken from the *Dhyānasallāpaṇal*, the vision statement of the *Darśanavīṭ* is stated clearly.

O, my dear mother, Mary Magdalene, the Lord is remembered and received only on solemn feast days. He is forgotten in the absence of festivity. Therefore, beloved mother, bring the Lord and His mother to dwell in my heart. Dear mother, you know how secure is my desire to invite them so that they come to stay in my heart. At the same time, you must not forget the fact that my home (heart) is ill furnished, and I am unable to give them fitting welcome suiting their status. But because of the

great love, Jesus bears for you, He will oblige you and will certainly come to my heart, however poor and unfinished it is... The Lord found a beautiful dwelling place in the heart of Mother Theresa, who, while on earth, had the fortune of seeing His *heavenly abode in a vision*. I have resolved to open out my heart for the Lord and His blessed Mother. Let them take up their abode in my poor home. When He comes to stay in my heart, you see to it that He does not bemoan as He once lamented over the city of Jerusalem. I would like to borrow the rich trappings of your homes to furnish mine so that I may receive Him in a manner befitting His status and position as the prince and overlord of heaven earth.¹

This explanation also makes it clear that *Darśanavīṭ* is a higher disposition of the heart, and only those people who are having that elevated state of consciousness can have an inclusive approach in their outlook and attitude. The term heart is repeated seven times in these few lines, and it underlines the need for interiority as one lives in the *Darśanavīṭ*. In different theologies and spiritualities, religion is often understood and explained as the cry of the heart. Indian thinking by nature is more intuitive, and accordingly, God or Brahman is recognized as the inner controller (*antarayāmin*) of man who is residing in the cave of the heart. Therefore, in search of reality, one enters into one's being and tries to understand the self as the Supreme Self. This naturally ends up in the experience and assertion of an immanent God, and that is why *Ātmānam viddhi* - know the self sums up the law and the prophets.²

¹CWC, III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 20-21.

²Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. I. 28.

The above-quoted passage is a Chāvāra version of this inward journey for which he always requested the intercession of the Saints like Mary Magdalene and Mother Theresa. The same idea is repeated throughout the work: “Come and take over my soul, O Lord. My heart is ready with its doors wide open to receive you. Reside in my soul as you sat on the lap of your mother.”¹ Indeed, the *Darśanavīṭ* was such a heavenly abode of vision and spiritual experience for him, and that is why he exclaims, “How blessed and enraptured are those holy souls as they enjoy the vision of the Most Holy Trinity!”²

1.14. *Darśanavīṭ: Kūṭ (Bhavanam) and Vīṭ (Ākāśamōkṣam)*

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

Most probably, the words *kūṭ* and *vīṭ* have come into Malayalam from Tamil. The noun *kūṭ* in Tamil originally means ‘a place to come together, to join, to meet, to associate, and to cohabit.’ In its verbal root *kūṭal* is ‘to make join, marry, and to have intercourse with and the state of being joined with.’ In this sense, this term indicates family, where members of the same family, clan, or tribe live

¹CWC, III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 22.

²CWC, III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 21.

together. The second noun *vīṭ* is derived from the root *viṭ*, which, in Tamil, means 'to leave,' 'to abandon,' 'to release,' or 'to liberate.' Even though the term imparts the sense of giving up, in actual popular and literary usage, it has a very positive meaning of home. Accordingly, this Tamil word *vīṭ* means 'a home of release' or 'a home of liberation' (*viṭtural*). *Kūṭ* is an earthly reality, whereas *vīṭ* is a transcendental reality and can be understood as *ākāśa-mōkṣam*, which is an eternal abode of liberation. Just as in one's own home one is free from constraints, in the religious sense, *Darśanavīṭ* is a synonym for the ideal of total freedom.

Frequently, Saint Chāvāra uses *kūṭ* and *viṭ* in his communications as it is evident in the expressions like *kūṭapirappukaḷ* and *Darśanavīṭ*. In his *Testament of a Loving Father* addressed to the members of the parish of Chennenkary, he gives a beautiful definition of a Christian family by combining the meanings of both *kūṭ* and *vīṭ*: "A good Christian family is the image of heaven (*ākāśa-mōkṣam*), where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, and seeking eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life."¹ Here, he explains family as a place 'where members live together by the bond of blood and affection,' and the meaning of *kūṭ* is evident. At the same time, he also identifies family with heaven and the word used for heaven in his original expression is *ākāśa-mōkṣam* which carries the meaning of the term *vīṭ*. From this point, one can recognize that for Saint Chāvāra, a family is both an earthly as well as a heavenly reality. For him, the family is a *kūṭ*, a place where

¹Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 9.

kūṭapirappukaḷ live together and a *Darśanavīṭ*, where liberated souls (*jīvan-muktas*) live together.

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

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

In the Indian tradition, it is believed that one's soul becomes liberated as he purifies his body in the fire. Moreover, if one has already burned his body while he was alive, then, no further burning is required, after his death. That is why, usually, the body of a *sanyāsi* is never burned after death, whereas, in the case of ordinary people, it is required as they have not yet done it while they were alive.

The physical wearing of saffron clothes by a *sanyāsi* is a symbol of burning all the desires of his body, at each moment of his life, as long as he lives in it. The colour saffron is a combination of white, red and black colours, which are respectively the symbols of *sattoa*, *rajo* and *tamo-guṇas*. Wearing the saffron clothe, one is expected to transcend all the limitations of *thri-guṇas*. Without being the slave of lust, by his continuous *tapas*, through the focus of intellect, mind and all other limbs of action (*karmendriyas*), one becomes the sovereign monarch of the *Brahma-loka* or *ākāśa-mōkṣam* elatedly. For such people, their earthly abode (*kūṭ*) is a heavenly experience of *viṭṭal* (liberation), and naturally, it becomes a *vīṭ* (a place of liberation) or *Darśanavīṭ*.

Saint Chāvāra, who has been instrumental in instituting the first two living religious congregations of the Catholic Church (CMI and CMC) in India, inculturated the Indian traditions of *sanyāsa* into Christian religious life, through these indigenous movements. Indeed, for Saint Chāvāra and his companions, inculturation was not merely a superficial imitation of certain Hindu customs and practices. They never wore saffron clothes or *rudrākṣa*; instead, it was much more in-depth, and life-oriented one, as they imbibed the most prevailing values of Indian *sanyāsa* like silence, penance (*tapas*), and *darśan* of God to their daily lives and thus became people who enjoyed *deha-mukti* in their *Darśanavīṭ* and *videha-mukti* in the *ākāśa-mōkṣam*.

Feeling the unity of themselves and humankind, Saint Chāvāra and his companions were vehicles of the universal spirit, love, charity and freedom. They were not people, who sat by the warm fireside of *Darśanavīṭ* and could not think of the destitute outside. *Darśanavīṭ* was not a chosen and favorite comfortable spot of life for them, which were

overloaded with benefits and advantages; instead, it reminded them of the regions, which needed attention and much self-sacrifice. They never degraded the domestic blessings of *Darśanavīṭ*, nor did they make it an instrument of selfishness. Instead, thinking of the innumerable destitute children who had no such opportunities of culture and advancement, the members of the *Darśanavīṭ* traveled from place to place. They had a spirit of going out, a missionary spirit, and a spirit of distribution that did not rest until the Gospel had been preached to every corner of the world. They appear before us as men who had great thoughts for God and His people. They lifted the *Darśanavīṭ* beyond its mere earthly existence into a broader and more enduring reality, which will be elaborated in the successive chapters.

Chapter 2

AKUṬUMBĀKAM **A Home of Exclusiveness**

The first chapter has been explaining how the *Darśanavīṭ* of Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra can be understood as a home of inclusive vision, in the model of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* relating it with his term *kūṭapirappukaḷ*. The current chapter further elaborates this theme with the help of the historical, social and ecclesiastical exclusivist situations of Kerala during the second half of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Those diverse dark *akuṭumbaka* contexts will better explain the impact of the tremendous inclusive vision of *Darśanavīṭ* and its creative role in the process of transforming the exclusivist structures of the Church and the society into a real family of God (*kuṭumbakam*).

2.1. Lion's Backward Look (A *Siṃhāvalokanam*)

A text is better understood when it is interpreted in its context; similarly, a person is better understood in the context of his social, religious, and historical backgrounds. Several currents and cross-currents of events have been affecting the socio-religious life of Kerala during the time of Saint Chāvāra. There is a beautiful maxim in Sanskrit called *siṃhāvalokana-nyāya*, which means 'lion's backward look.' It is used when one casts a retrospective glance at what he has left behind while at the same time he moves on, just as a lion going in search of prey, now and then bends his neck back to see if anything is within his reach. Sometimes, it is both a kind of introspection as well as a recapitulation as usually done by a lion standing on the top of a mound assessing the

path taken by him not for retracing but to prepare for the next leap. It is a look back to leap ahead. Similarly, in this chapter, we are making a *simhāvalokanam* – a backward glance into the historical, social, and religious contexts of Saint Chāvāra, to understand him better. Before leaping into the *kuṭumbaka* situations created by him in the Church and society, which will be the theme of the coming chapter, here we have a backward look to the *akuṭumbaka* conditions of his time.

According to the ‘Great Man Theory’ developed in the nineteenth century by Thomas Carlyle, the contemporary of Saint Chāvāra, history can be primarily explained by the impact of great men, who, due to their natural attributes, such as superior intellect, heroic courage, or divine inspiration, have a decisive historical effect. Carlyle who gave a series of lectures on heroism in 1840, later published them as *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*, in which he states:

Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at the bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a broad sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men, sent into the world: the soul of the whole world’s history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these.¹

¹“Great Man Theory.” *Wikipedia*, posted on 30 August 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_man_theory (accessed on 30 December 2018).

This 'Great Man Theory' of Thomas Carlyle is very much applicable to Saint Chāvāra. "Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most that eventually made it possible for evil to triumph."¹ But, Saint Chāvāra, with his great prophetic life, proved that even one individual could begin a movement that turns the tide of history for triumphing over all the evils of his time. Just like nature converts the saline water into sweet water through rain, Saint Chāvāra could convert the various evils of his time into graces by his inclusive outlook and humanitarian activities.

Kṣāram jalam vārimucaḥ pibanti tadēva kṛtoā madhuram vamananti

Santam tathā durjanadurvācāmsi pītvā hi sūktāni samudgiranti.

Clouds drink the saline water (of the seas), and after converting it into sweeter water, pours it down (as rain); similarly, good people, after hearing the reviling of the wicked, speak out only that which is good. Saint Chāvāra was one of Kerala's most tireless crusaders who fought against social discrimination based on caste, class, gender, religion, and rite. The evils of exclusivism with which he had to fight were so malicious and alien from all the great values of humanity and God. The prophetic significance of the various revolutionary acts that Saint Chāvāra initiated in the Church and society can be better appreciated only when we evaluate the history of the existing practices of his time, with all its *akuṭumbaka*, *anātmaka*, and *bhēdaka* situations. If those pleasant and unpleasant life situations of Saint

¹Haile, "Quotations by Haile Selassie." *Brainyquote*, posted on 13 February 2001, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/haile_selassie_540912?src=t_history (accessed on 20 April 2018).

Chāvāra can be compared to the white and black keys of a piano, as he was playing with it, he could produce a piece of mesmerizing music from them. Those storms and rough waters proved that Saint Chāvāra is indeed a skillful sailor. "History is not just the story of bad people doing bad things. It is quite as much a story of people trying to do good things."¹ As this is a chapter on the history of the Kerala Church and society, I have quoted here profusely from the works of Mathias Mundadan, E. R. Hambye, Joseph Thekkedath, A. Sreedhara Menon and Augustine J. Kulakkatt.

2.2. *Akuṭumbakam* (Non-Family)

The word *kuṭumbam* means 'one's own family' and *kuṭumbakam* is referred to as one's 'ancestral home' (*taravāṭ*); it may also mean 'a joint family.' As the word *akuṭumbakam* is prefixed with 'a', it is having the opposite meaning of *kuṭumbakam*, i.e., 'non-family.' In Sanskrit, one of the ways to make the antonym of a word is to add the prefix 'a' with that particular word; for example, *satyam* - *asatyam*; *naśvaram* - *anaśvaram*; *martyan* - *amartyan*, etc., and similarly in this case, by adding the prefix *a*, *kuṭumbakam* becomes *akuṭumbakam*. It is a situation in which the family bonds are broken and where no possible familial relationships exist in a family. Saint Chāvāra, in his *Testament* (*Chāvaruḷ*), explains it as the most distressing and painful experience. He says, "It is most distressing to live in a family, where there is no order or peace, and where, the members are unconcerned about the service of God and their salvation. How

¹Lewis, "Brainy Quote," brainyquote, posted on 13 February 2001, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/c_s_lewis_717978?src=t_history (accessed on 23 April 2018).

unfortunate the families are that have no concern over peace at their homes. How often these have led to quarrels, sins, destruction, and death.”¹

In these words of Saint Chāvāra, we get a realistic picture of what an *akuṭumbakam* is! It is said, God created a family to show humanity, how heaven looks like, and He also designed it to show them how the hell is as well. “A good family is the image of heaven, where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people”² says, Saint Chāvāra. On the contrary, an evil family or *akuṭumbakam* is a hell on earth.

The *akuṭumbaka* condition can be better explained as a situation where humanity loses the feeling of *kūṭapirappukaḷ* concerning one’s relationship with fellow human beings. It is the feeling of *kūṭapirappukaḷ* that makes this world a family of heaven. It becomes central, i.e., the spirit of *vasudhāivakuṭumbakam*; when one loses that sense of inter-relatedness whether in the society or Church, then this world is no more a *vasudhāivakuṭumbakam*. Instead, it becomes another hell or *akuṭumbakam*. Regarding human co-existence and inter-relatedness, Kunjunnimash, the dearest poet of Malayalam, laments like coise: “I have a world; you have a world; but, we do not have a world.”³ Though, often it is proclaimed that ‘no man is an island,’ still, in reality, it is a fact that often human persons live in their isolated worlds of seclusions and separations – *akuṭumbakams*. It is like I live in my world of an island, and you live in yours, and there is no connecting link between these two worlds of ours. The

¹Chāvāra, “Introduction,” *Testament of a Loving Father*, 10.

²Chāvāra, “Introduction,” *Testament of a Loving Father*, 10.

³*Enikkunḍoru lokam, ninakkunḍoru lokam, namukkilloru lokam.*

have are in their world of comfort and luxury, and the have-nots are in their world of misery and distress. No one is willing to share his/her resources with the have-nots.

In terms of religion, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists live in their own secluded and isolated worlds - *akuṭumbakams*, where these people of different faith can no more live as children of one Heavenly Father on this earth, which is the typical ancestral home - the *taravāṅgī* of the entire humanity. It is always tainted by the considerations of caste, creed, hereditary, and ascription. In such a situation, even in a particular religion, people can no more co-exist as a single-family, because of the rivalries going on between different denominations, castes, and colours.

In Christianity, for example, the Catholics, the Protestants, Methodists, Calvinists, Lutherans, and all such different faiths cannot remain united as one people of God. In Hinduism, because of caste discriminations, Brāhmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śudras are fighting each other on their grade and dignity. Further, if you take a particular denomination, for example, the Catholics, they cannot remain as a single-family because of different rites like Latin, Syrian, and Malankara, which are supposed to add more beauty and charm to the one Church like the various flowers of the same garden. Yet again, more terrible even in a single rite itself, people are fighting each other on the name of the liturgy, altar, spirituality, region, and diocese, which are meant to help them remain united as one people of God. All these factors make the family of humanity an *akuṭumbakam*.

2.3. The Non-Familial Families (*Akuṭumbaka-Kuṭumbams*)

The world depends on how the family goes. Family is the driving force and the real foundation of any society. If

families are going on the right track, then the future of that society is very safe. On the contrary, if they are moving in the wrong direction, then it will turn towards disastrous ends! The picture that we get from the writings of Saint Chāvāra about the families of the nineteenth century Kerala is not a bright one.

How regrettable it is to find in the home discord between the brothers and the womenfolk. The country that is divided against itself cannot survive, says our Lord Himself. Those families where there is discord will soon perish. If you won't forgive yourself, how will outsiders forgive you? We have inherited from our great father, Adam enough trials and difficulties. Should you add to them voluntarily? Woe unto the heads of families that give a reason for such quarrels in the families.¹

From his own life experiences, Saint Chāvāra gives vivid narrations of such families: "How many are the families that rue their relationship with rich families and ruin themselves." ² "There was a man who habitually went around speaking ill of others. He ended his days as a mad man biting his tongue and was festered with worms and boils."³ We get a real image of what an asylum of lunatics is, from these accounts of Saint Chāvāra, as some of the families of his time were real hells on earth! His remainder about the litigation is based on his own life experience that others imposed on him, and what they had to suffer at the end. "Even in the most just case, we will finally feel that it was better not to have gone to court. Nobody has been

¹Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, I.10-11.

²Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, I.12.

³Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, I.13.

happy or better for having gone for litigation.”¹ “How often have parents come to grief by imprudent conduct?”² It is said that in 1780, there were at Kollam some 80 mixed couples. Much frequent were the forced marriages among those Indian Catholics.³ One can imagine the internal tensions and crisis, which such situations would have created in the traditionalistic Christian families. From all these stories that are told to us, one can make out a realistic picture of those families of Chāvāra’s time, which became hells.

2.4. The Non-Familial Church (*Akuṭumbaka-Sabha*)

The Church is both divine and human at once, and to illustrate these good and bad elements of the Kerala Church during the time of Saint Chāvāra, it can be compared with the river Ganga which is holy on the one side, but not pure on the other side. In the Bible, we see the kingdom of God and Church often compared to a sea in which the elements of good and evil are inherent. In the book of Revelation, the sea, as a body of water, symbolizes “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (Rev 17:15). In Mt 13:47, Jesus teaches his listeners that just as the drag-net does not or cannot discriminate between the good and the bad, so the Church cannot distinguish between the useless and the useful.

Ganga is one of the most sacred rivers of the Hindus. The sanctity given to Ganga in the Indian tradition is unparalleled. It is an excellent support to millions of Indians who live on its banks. Originating in the Gangotri river, Ganga flows through the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar

¹Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, I.11.

²Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, II.21.

³Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 73.

Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand and finally joins the Bay of Bengal. On the one hand, the river Ganga reminds us of the holiness and the richness of the Holy Church.

On the other hand, we know that, unfortunately, the water of Ganga, the so-called 'Holy River' is severely polluted with all kinds of industrial and human wastes. A large number of industries, slaughterhouses, textile mills, and chemical plants on the bank of Ganga dump their trash into this river resulting in its pollution. The millions of people bathing in Ganga during the festive seasons, food, leaves, flowers, thousands of half-burnt bodies, and similar other wastes left in it adds to its pollution. This pollution of Ganga is indeed a substantial environmental challenge today. Over the years, several steps have been taken to clean the river, but these actions hardly had any impact on reducing the pollution levels.

As in the case of Ganga, which is holy but not pure, in the different internal mechanisms and arrangements of the Malabar Church during the time of Saint Chāvāra, one can see both sacred and unholy elements. Just like in the holy Ganga, there was the presence of the holy people and their sacred practices. There were some unholy elements- the relation of the faithful to the Bishop that was similar to that of an *akuṭumbakam*. Saint Chāvāra, in one of his letters, grieves over saying, "The mutual understanding that should exist between the father and his spiritual children is entirely missing here. Day after day, mutual relations are not improving; rather, even the thought for unity is being obstructed, and mutual relations have deteriorated."¹ The faithful lost the familial tie-ups with the Bishop, and they

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 58.

were filled with fear and were having a kind of slavish mindset, which is a situation of *akuṭumbakam*.

In his letter, Saint Chāvara goes on with this *akuṭumbaka* situation stating that "There is lack of devotion and the existing bond between them is not that of a father and children but that of a master and slaves. This gives rise to a slavish fear in the priests and the common people. Such a discrepancy of the rites is not found anywhere in the world except among the Syro-Malabarians."¹ Regarding the tensions that existed between the different religious groups of the Propaganda and *Padroado*, E. R. Hambye also holds the same opinion: "Much more frequent, however, and also more lasting were the tensions between the Propaganda religious and those of the *Padroado*, obviously outside Portuguese-held territories. It was the case in Kerala between the Jesuits of the *Padroado* and the Carmelites of Propaganda."² In thinking in line with Saint Chāvara's thought, the *akuṭumbaka* circumstance can also be understood and explained as a condition where one has wrong identification with others, as he cautions about it concerning ecclesial matters on falsely recognizing with the Babylonian Church. He states, "Brethren, we are of the same blood' we easily fall to that side and at the slightest provocation run towards Babylon, and when one person appears, the whole flock goes after him."³

2.5. The Non-Familial State (*Akuṭumbaka-Rājyam*)

The eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries are certainly not the brightest periods of Kerala's history. During the time

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 58.

²Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 5.

³CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 72.

of Saint Chāvāra, i.e., at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the political rule of Kerala was divided into various principalities. Travancore, Cochin, and Calicut were the three critical princely states of the area. These states were independent at the time of the arrival of the English. The East India Company, which reached India seeking direct trade with the country, gradually grew, from a commercial presence to an executive presence, and became the ruler of the country. It was by their friendship with the leaders of various states, and by friendship treaties with those rulers, which ensured them special privileges in trade and mutual military assistance in the time of their need.

About 1740, the British and the French entered into a contest soon to become an armed conflict above all in South India. All this ended with the definite victory of the British, which gave them such superiority that by the end of the century, even all the Dutch strongholds had fallen into their hands. Moreover, the last efforts by indigenous rulers, Haidar and Tipu, to create an empire in South India were also defeated by the English. And thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, only one real power counted in the whole of India, the English.¹

The battle of Kulachil that terminated the Dutch ascendancy in Travancore helped the rapid growth of the British influence there. The Treaty of Perpetual Friendship, which concluded in 1795, gave the British a more significant say in the political administration of Travancore. The Third and Fourth Mysore wars depleted the economic prosperity of Travancore. The harsh financial measures introduced in the country ended in domestic rebellions and conflicts. To counter the local problems, the Maharāja was constrained to

¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 2.

conclude the Treaty of Subsidiary Alliance, in 1805. It allowed the English to interfere even in the internal matters of the country. After the death of Kārthika Thirunāl Rāma Varma, better known in history as Dharma Rāja, his successor Bālarāma Varma (1798-1810) ascended the throne. When King Bālarāma Varma died in 1810, there was a dispute about the succession to the throne. The convulsions within the royal family of Travancore offered a golden opportunity to Munro to imprint his will on the selection of the next ruler.

When Princess Ranī Lakṣmi Bhāi and her uncle contested for succession to the throne, Munro advised the Company to bid its support to Ranī Lakṣmi Bhāi, who in his judgment was best suited for safeguarding British interests in the regions. The Company upheld the claims of Ranī Lakṣmi Bhāi, and her inconvenient uncle was soon deported to Chengelpet. The installation of Princess Ranī Lakṣmi Bhāi on the throne of Travancore made the Company all-powerful to intervene in the affairs of the state.¹

These unwanted interventions of the Company in the local administrations created many socio-religious problems and tensions in society. They eventually spoiled the unity and solidarity of the people of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, and thus Kerala became a turbulent state - *Akuṭumbaka-Rājyam*. In the closing years of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century, there were organized attempts to overthrow British authority and regain the lost independence.

The sterner of such revolts against the British in Malabar was organized by Pazhaśśi Rāja (1793-1805). The British

¹Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, 387-388.

reversed the revenue policy of the Mysoreans, and according to the new system, it was the duty of the Rājas to collect the revenue directly from the people. The Rājas failed to receive the revenues in the face of organized opposition from the people as they could not pay. Pazhaṣṣi Rāja objected to the arrangements made by the Company and fought against it. In Travancore and Cochin, the leaders of the revolt were Velu Tampa Daiwa and Paliath Achan. On January 19, 1809, the combined forces of Cochin and Travancore, which were about 3,000, launched an attack on the British army, but they were forced to withdraw after a substantial loss. Such was the immediate situation of Kerala before the birth of Saint Chāvara.

2.6. The Non-Familial World (*Akuṭumbaka-Viśvam*)

During the time of Saint Chāvara, the situation of the world scenario, especially that of Europe, which had a direct influence on the Church, was also not different from that of Kerala and Travancore. In his letter to Fr. Chandy Ouseph of Mutholy, written on 3 August 1870, while explaining about the Ecumenical Council and the declaration of the Dogma of the Infallibility of the Pope, Saint Chāvara also enumerates the sad story of the disastrous effects of the Franco-German War of 1870 which divided and made both the countries as enemies and killed thousands of soldiers.

On 21 August, at dawn, France and Prussia entered into the war. Fifty thousand soldiers of France and 40,000 soldiers of Prussia died. Prussia invaded France and hoisted their flag in the cities... The next night, in the biggest city of France, 5000 seven-storied buildings were burned down. O! how many churches, convents and other properties were destroyed.

This Franco-Prussian war or Franco-German war, which Saint Chāvāra mentions here, was a conflict between the Second French Empire of Napoleon III and the German states of the North German Confederation led by the Kingdom of Prussia. It is often referred to in France as the War of 1870 (19 July 1870 – 10 May 1871) or in Germany as 70/71. The conflict was caused by Prussian ambitions, which extended over German unification. The German forces were superior in numbers, had better training and leadership, and made more effective use of modern technology, particularly railroads and artillery. The fight became extremely intense, becoming a door to door battle of survival and caused many casualties on both sides. That is why in another letter written by Saint Chāvāra to Fr. Kuriākōse Eliseus on 6 September 1870, he once more reminded the members of the Congregation for the resolution of the situation in Rome: “I have already informed you of what is happening in Rome. The tussle is still going on. Pray for the Holy Church.”¹

2.7. *Anātmakam* (Soulless)

The word *anātmakam* is used here to indicate a situation in which the Church and humanity lose their souls. The human body has a soul, and it is the animating principle of life. It is the soul that gives life to the body; without the soul, the body is lifeless, and it will be confirmed as dead. Similarly, everything has a soul; every culture, religion, and nation has a soul; every religious ritual and spiritual practice has a soul; every family has a soul, so also the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, which is the family of God on earth, has a soul. It is already explained that the soul of *Darśanaṅgī*

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 45.

is the feeling of *kūṭapirappukaḷ*, and when humanity loses that spirit, this world becomes *akuṭumbakam*.

2.8. “Lost Its Soul”

Gandhiji started his first *āśram* at Sabarmati in Gujarat, and it was a laboratory where he did experiments for the realization of Truth. A few of his close relatives and friends also joined him in this *āśram* movement for the understanding of their life. This *āśram*-community was a family, which was not linked by blood or property, but by allegiance to common ideals like opting for truth, celibacy, poverty, and use of home-made articles as a vow. But in 1928 or so, Gandhiji’s nephew named Maganlal Gandhi, his cousin’s son, died. By his death, Gandhiji felt that the Sabarmati *āśram* “lost its soul” due to which he left from there and started his second *āśram*, the Sevagram (village of service) at Wardha in Maharashtra. Through this significant decision, Gandhiji makes it clear that everything has a soul, and when that soul is lost, all is lost.

The soul is the foundation of life, so also of any society and human system. Without the soul of man, the flesh is of no value, so without the strengthening of internal elements, all forms of external structures and aspects are dead and worthless. The difference between a live baby and a doll is life. Both have arms, legs, and face. Some toys are remarkably real. They can speak, and you can even feed them, and they cry. But there is a world of difference as one is having a life while the digital object lacks it. Sometimes, it also could be possible that there could only be dead society, dead religion, dead rituals, dead customs, and dead practices - that is of the flesh. All of them only bring us spiritual emptiness. It was true the Kerala society in the nineteenth century was undergoing a kind of degeneration

and lifelessness by which it became *akuṭumbakam* - an asylum of lunatics as Vivekananda called so. The community and the Church turned out to be more and more polarised and sectarian over time, as they lost the spirit of *kūṭapirappukal* and all such ethical human values.

The Church and society are only as active as their members. If they are getting influenced daily by a corrupt value system, then it is virtually impossible to counter such culture. As it is evident from the history, during the time of Saint Chāvāra, the Church was so influenced by a secular culture that it was almost impossible to counteract. The world's standard of self-promotion, power-clash, money-motives, and caste-politics weakened the Church and the society, and it was an unpleasant experience for him. For example, according to the chronicle of Fr. Parappuram Varkey, the people of Vypin were always unnecessarily quarrelling with their Bishop Bernardine, and they even filed a case against him in the civil court of Cochin. While the Archbishop of Goa was visiting them, there was a big quarrel between the Parankies and Ezhunuttikkar on the issue of receiving him. It even led to physical fight as a result of which some got wounded. Seeing those people bleeding, the Archbishop returned to Cochin without entering the church of Vypin.¹ There are many other examples of divisions and conflicts which will be discussed later in this chapter. Conflicts are inevitable, and that is why in Romans 12:18, Saint Paul advises, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live peacefully with all." Paul knew that living at peace is not always possible because, though it depends partly on oneself, it also requires the cooperation of one or more people other than oneself.

¹Parappuram, *The Chronicle of Mannanam*, vol. III, 1012-1014.

2.9. “The Corrupt and the Corrupting World”

The Chronicles of Saint Chāvāra contain the history of the nineteenth century of the Kerala Church and society. As it is explained in them, the root cause of all other crisis which the Malabar Church was undergoing in the time of Saint Chāvāra was its spiritual dryness and barrenness. It is to solve that fundamental concern, Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara came with the idea of starting a religious house about which Saint Chāvāra mentions it on the first page of the Chronicle: “He (Fr. Palackal) and his most intimate friend Rev. Fr. Thomas Porukara had yearned to establish a religious house of Penance for priests in Malabar since much good could have been realized through it. They were sad at heart as there was no one to support them, but they went on praying.”¹ The same idea is repeated in other words, in the Constitution of the CMI Congregation: “The original charism and vision of the founding fathers shall be the enduring source of our inspiration in religious life. They had a profound experience of the love of God which called them away from “the corrupt and corrupting world” to a life of solitude, but at the same time made them realize the need to work for the salvation of their fellow-men.”²

This “corrupt and the corrupting world” that pained the first fathers, and prompted them to turn to religious life is something yet to be answered. We get specific hints from history that despite their training in major seminaries, the clergy was occasionally subject to criticism. There were occasional charges of moral shortcomings such as greed,

¹CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 1.

²Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, *Constitutions and Directory 2016*, No 3.

drunkenness, and unchastity among them.¹ Again, ambition, combined with a lust for money, led to frequent competition. In about 1757, some priests of the vicariate not only tried to be appointed by the Dutch to individual parishes but went so far as to offer them bribes to get those which yielded better income.² *Yathā purohitā tathā janā* – As the priests are, so the people and, hence, there was a real need in the Malabar Church to renew itself from within starting from its priests. As Jesus insisted, his disciples “that repentance and forgiveness of sins are to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47), which was then headquarters of the Church. It inevitably means repentance should begin at home – if there’s light, fire, revival, and love within the Church, Jesus says it will reach out like the ripple on a little lake to the farthest shore and the humblest home.

In Lk 13:6-9, Jesus, using a parable of a barren fig tree, speaks to us of the shame of spiritual barrenness. The same was the case of the Malabar Church. In its long history of nineteen centuries, it could not produce even a single saint, and the first fathers were depressed about this dry-spell situation of the Church. Only when the favour of God rests upon the Church, the fruit of godliness will reside in us. In its absence, the Church got degenerated to non-family attitudes and approaches. “Necessity is the mother of invention,” and it is this spiritual hardship of the Church that later turned out to be a real blessing, as it was properly received by Saint Chāvāra and the other founding fathers and resulted in the founding of a *tapasu-bhavanam* for the priests which was the real need of the Church.

¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 42.

²Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 75.

2.10. *Bhēdam* (Division)

The spirit of *vasudhaivakuṣumbakam* can be better explained as not *bhēdam* (differentiation) but as *abhēdam* (non-differentiation). It is not when humankind has *bhēda-cinta* (*Dvaitam* or Dualism) instead of when we imbibe the spirit of *kūṭāpirappukaḷ* by following the path of *abhēda-cinta* (*Advaitam* or Non-Dualism), this world becomes a real *vasudhaiva-kuṣumbakam*. In Vedānta philosophy, *bhēdam* or *dvaitam* is always considered as a vice, and *abhēdam* or *advaitam* is regarded as a virtue. *Bhēdam* or *dvaitam* here means looking at humanity with an attitude of differentiation and *abhēdam* or *advaitam* means having the spirit of *kūṭāpirappukaḷ* considering humanity as a single family of God.

The *Advaita* philosophy is viewed as the water-mark, the most flowering form of Indian philosophy, and the bedrock of humanity. The undivided supreme unity is the whole message of it. It is the solitary nucleus and essence of all Indian thoughts and spirituality. It echoes deep in the soul of India, for all time, proclaiming that all beings are the makeover of the same divine spirit. It is this same blissful philosophy that taught humanity to see divinity in human beings and respect them accordingly. But the malice of caste and class systems divided Indians, and thus the unifying foundations of essential humanness are neglected, ignored, and abandoned. It is a sad plight of our glorious India.

One day, Śrī Śāṅkara on summer noon after taking a bath in the holy Ganges in Vāraṇāsi was proceeding towards the temple of Lord Viśwanāth. His disciples went along with him. The great *āchārya* saw an outcaste, a *chandāla*, coming along with his dogs in his way. According to the caste practices prevailing in the society, filled with the spirit of *bhēda-cinta* (the thought of differentiation), he told the

chaṇḍāla, “move away, move away.” But to his great surprise, the *chaṇḍāla* responded with an unexpected question: “Move away, Move away! Do you wish to move matter from matter, or you mean to separate spirit from the Spirit? You have established that the Absolute is everywhere - in you and me, and yet you want me to get away from you as if I were different. Is not this body that you wish to keep a distance from that body also built up of food? Or do you want to separate Pure Awareness, which is present here from the same awareness present there?”¹

Even for Śāṅkara, it was indeed a painful undertaking to bring out the high ideals of the philosophy of Advaita or better *abhēdakam*, into the practical situations of daily affairs. Though a teacher of Advaita (Non-Dualism or Non-Differentiation), he, who propagated the principle of one Infinite Self in all, asked the *chaṇḍāla* to move away from his path. The fact was that by avoiding the outcast man out from his way, he was having *bhēda-cinta*, and with that, he was disrespecting the indwelling divine spirit in him. It is easy to proclaim the great gospel of the indivisibility of the mind, and it is tough to practice an attitude of accepting and acknowledging the same spirit in all human beings. Any contradictory conception or practice is not appropriate either to the doctrine of *Tattoamasi* or to the philosophy of Advaita. According to the scripture, there should always be a consistency between thoughts, words, and deeds,

¹*Annamayādannamayamathavā caitanyamēva caitanyāt
Yativara dūrīkarttumvāñchasi kīmbṛūhi gaccha gacchēti.
Pratyagvastuni nistaramgasahajānandābōdhāmbudha
Viprōyam śvapacō'yamityapi mahān kō'yamvibhēdabhramah?
Kīmgamgābuni bimbitē'baramaṇa caṇḍālavithīpayah
Pūrēvāntaramasti kāñcanaghaṭī, mṛtakumbhayōrvāmbarē?*

especially of great people.¹ So, to correct Śaṅkara, Lord Śiva appeared to him in the form of a *chāṇḍāla* and taught him how to practice his Advaita philosophy.

It was when Śaṅkara could see God in a *chāṇḍāla* that he could succeed in living the tremendous Vedāntic philosophy of solidarity and harmony. Divisive attitude is not proper for the pure and sacred wisdom of *Advaitam* (Non-Dualism) or *Abhēdakam* (Non-Differentiation). This understanding cleansed the caste-based isolations and impurity of thoughts of Śaṅkara. This eventually made him a great prophet and a proponent of unity and companionship among various castes of the society.

2.11. Caste Division (*Jāti-Bhēdam*)

The caste-ridden society of Kerala during the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century was lagging in social freedom and equality. The society was generally divided into lower-castes and upper-castes. The upper-caste consists of Brāhmin, Kṣatria, Vaiśya and Śudra; and the lower-caste consists of Īzhavas, Parayās, Pulayas, Arayās, Ullāḍas. Both the upper and lower castes were divided into various aspects, namely, their social, religious, political, and economic lives. In spite of the governance by the English East India Company, untouchability was rampantly practiced, which prevented the upper and the lowered caste from making contact with each other. Because

¹*Yathā cittam tathā vācaḥ yathā vācastathā kriyāḥ
Cittē vāci kriyāyām ca sādhunāmēkarūpatā.*

The subject of thinking, speaking, and working must be the same and similar in human life. In the presence of saints and great persons, we do not find the difference among the objects of thinking, talking as well, as working.

of such unfortunate and humiliating social conditions, Vivekananda called Kerala as *an asylum of lunatics*.

The Kerala Brāhmins, who were called Nambūtīrīs, were the most respected group in the region. They were also able to wield significant influence in the politics of the country. This was due to several reasons. First of all, they controlled the considerable portions of land that belonged to the temples. Another reason was the matrimonial alliance of their younger sons with royal families and those of the leading Nāyar aristocrats.¹ The other Hindu communities, like the Tiyas or Īzhavas, were agricultural labourers. They were not permitted to share in the civic and political life of Malabar and much oppressed by the Nāyars.² More than all these, slavery was prevalent in Malabar during this period. There was a particular class of slaves called Pulayas whose task was to till the lands of their lords. They were attached to agricultural lands and were transacted along with property as goods. The lords had the right of life and death over their slaves.³ When the Pulayas walked along the road, they were expected to cry out to warn the high caste people of their approach. If they saw a high caste man or woman walking along the road, they had to get themselves entirely out of the way. Otherwise, they might even be killed.⁴ Caste made some not just untouchable to others, but even the sight of them was believed to bring impurity. Distances

¹Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, 20.

²Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, cited in 21, K. M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese* (1929), 20-21.

³Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, cited in 21, P. C. Alexander, *The Dutch in Malabar*, 134-135.

⁴Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, cited in 21, D. Ferroli, *The Jesuits of Malabar* (1939), I, 36.

were assigned for every caste, the number of feet they should stand away when an upper-caste Brahmin walked on the streets. Twelve for the Kṣatriyas, 24 for Nāirs, and Īzhavas to Paravas, it varied from 36 feet to 100 feet. Regarding religious studies, a low caste person could be punished by pouring molten metal into his ears if he happened to listen to the recital of Veda.

A. Sreedharan gives a more detailed account of the irrational practices and customs prevalent in the Kerala society during those days of Saint Chāvāra in the nineteenth century:

The dominant feature of Hindu society at the time was the predominance of the upper castes and the relatively subordinate position occupied by the lower castes. The principles of social freedom and equality found no place in Hindu social organization. The upper castes like the Brāhmins, the Kṣatriyas, and the Nāirs enjoyed several immunities and privileges which were denied over the centuries to the Ezhavas, the Harijans, and the other backward classes. The upper castes constituted the land-owning class, and they freely oppressed the members of the other castes considered inferior to them in the social scale. The law administered by them was not equalitarian in any sense.¹ The social evils of untouchability, unapproachability, and unseeability continued to be a disgrace to the Hindu society. The result was the complete segregation of the Hindus of one caste from their brethren belonging to the other castes in the society. The Avarṇas were denied access to temples, schools, and places of public resort, and there were restrictions even on their freedom to walk without fear along the public

¹Menon, *Kerala History and Its Makers*, 200.

road. The practice of pollution was widely observed. Inter-dining was held in horror.¹

Such caste and class practices divided the Kerala society into different groups, and because of that, the unifying foundation of essential humanness was being neglected, ignored, and abandoned. In the nastiest forms of the slavery system, we see the saddest of all sights – man arrayed against man. Not man against a savage beast, but man against his kind, disrespecting the face of one made in his and God’s image and likeness; is there any sight sadder than that where humanity was declined to *akuṭumbakam*? Such was the state of society in those days.

One who objectively revises those situations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cannot deny the fact that the distinction among the people as higher and lower castes led to various forms of social tension in this state from where the great Saint Śrī Śaṅkarācārya hailed. His legacy is best known by the crest jewel of philosophy called ‘Advaita Vedānta,’ which is also known as the philosophy of *Abhēda*. The *Abhēda* (Advaita) philosophy enunciated the primary unity of all existence, and this great philosophy of monism was honoured more in other places than in the position of its origin. It is also disheartening that the place which gave birth to a valuable philosophy of non-dualism became the home for the worst type of social division and disunity, including the social evil of untouchability and all other kinds of social discriminations.

2.12. Slavery in Travancore

The worst form of caste practice was slavery, and it was prevalent in Kerala, particularly in Travancore, even in the

¹Menon, *Kerala History and Its Makers*, 201.

nineteenth century. Among the four castes, it was the Śudras who were reduced to the status of slaves, and the slave trade was prevalent in that period. Most of the castes below Nādārs and Īzhavas, such as Pulayas, Parayas, Paravas, Kuravas, and Vettuvans, were generally regarded as slaves. They were sold and bought for prices that varied from half a *parrāh* (unit) to six *parrāhs* of paddy per year, depending on their physical ability.¹ In some areas of Travancore, there were some kinds of the badge used by the Dalit people for identifying them as slaves. For example, Pulayas of Kollam used ornaments made out of stones and metals. They had no right to use gold and silver. Generally, these ornaments were known as *kallumāla*. These *kallumālas* were absolutely the symbol of slavery.²

The slave feared to look at the face of their mater and speak freely. Even at the time of expression, the slave had to place his hand over the mouth lest the breath should go forth and pollute the person. During this time, different types of taxes were imposed upon the slave. A special tax was imposed upon the slaves on their marriage and, on special occasions, squeezed off their hard earnings. And the slaves were compelled to pay a tax for the hair they grew, and the moustache they had.

¹Cristweets, "Slavery to Caste Attacks: An Exhibition to Mark 82nd Kerala Temple Entry Anniversary," *The News Minute*, posted on 13 November 2018, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/slavery-caste-attacks-exhibition-mark-82nd-kerala-temple-entry-anniversary-91466> (accessed on 20 December 2018).

²Renjini and Natarajan, "Rani Gowry Lakshmi Bai: Abolition of Slavery in Travancore," *International Journal of Home Science* 2017, posted on 25 March 2017, <http://www.homesciencejournal.com/archives/2017/vol3issue3/PartF/3-3-84-673.pdf> (accessed on 23 December 2018).

Shamefully to say that even the women had to pay a tax called the breast tax. The upper caste considered the slaves as their property, and their position was less than that of animals. In later periods the masters used their slaves in the field and kept them away from their houses. The masters never allow the slaves to touch them.

Even death punishment was given if they happened to touch accidentally... The husband, wife, and children were brought to the market like cattle and sold or auctioned without kindness. And in the fields when they were at work, the slaves starved and lodged like buffalos. They had to work without rest from morning until night under the scorching heat of the sun for rice that was kept at a distance. Thus in a caste dominated society the upper caste had the right to sell or kill the slaves.¹

It was only after the arrival of Christian missionaries that there began a change in the life of these poor people. Missionaries presented an appeal to the Madras Government, so with the instruction of Madras Government, the Travancore government decided to pass an Act for the emancipation of the slaves. Here witnessed the significant role of Rāṅi Gowry Lakṣmi Bāi. She directly observed the situation of the people and on seeing that she felt sad. Thus after considerable thinking, Rāṅi issued a proclamation and published it in 1815 (on 21 Vrichikam 987) for banning the practice of slavery.

¹Renjini and Natarajan, "Rani Gowry Lakshmi Bai: Abolition of Slavery in Travancore," *International Journal of Home Science* 2017, posted on 25 March 2017, <http://www.homesciencejournal.com/archives/2017/vol3issue3/PartF/3-3-84-673.pdf> (accessed on 23 December 2018).

Concerning the natives and foreigners who for the sake of profit, buy at a cheaper rate, the boys and girls of several low caste people of this country and sell them for higher prices, take them to distant places and pay tolls at seaports and thus make a regular bargain of them. As this is an inhuman and disgraceful custom, which ought to be checked, we now noticed that no person should, for cultivation, buy or sell Pulayas, Kuravas, Malayars, Vetars, Pariah and others in mortgage, *janmam* or *pattam*. If anyone raises his voice against this proclamation and has a regular dealing of the slaves he shall be subjected to severe punishment, their property should be confiscated, and they will get banished from the country.¹

This Act was not able to find a lasting solution for abolishing slavery, but at the same time, it was a great effort done by Rāṇi as a lady. It gave great inspiration to others, and the authorities formulated many rules. In the Act of 1843, the Government of India felt that the proclamation of Rāṇi Lakṣmi Bāi was not a complete solution for the removal of slavery, in a sense it was ineffective. So the Viceroy and Council decided to forward another act in 1843 for the emancipation of the slaves. Finally, in June 1855 was issued another proclamation. The aim of this proclamation was the complete abolition of slavery. Similarly, the final blow to slavery in India was struck by section 370, 371 of the Indian Penal Code, which came to force in January 1862. On the

¹Renjini and Natarajan, "Rani Gowry Lakshmi Bai: Abolition of Slavery in Travancore," *International Journal of Home Science* 2017, posted on 25 March 2017, <http://www.homesciencejournal.com/archives/2017/vol3issue3/PartF/3-3-84-673.pdf> (accessed on 23 December 2018).

bases of this proclamation any person found to possess slaves was to be punished.¹

2.13. The Breast-Cloth Repression (*Māru Marakkal Samaram*)

The dress code repression faced by the Nāḁār women of the Shanar community in Travancore from 1813 to 1859 is another example of the caste practice that prevailed during the time of Saint Chāvara. The Nāḁār women had to fight for the right to wear upper-body clothes to cover their breasts, which is known in history as the *Māru Marakkal Samaram*. It was an age-old practice and shockingly, according to one tradition, in the eighteenth century, when a Nāir woman from Kerala had gone to see Europe and on coming back home, thought it all right to visit the princess of Attingal wearing the upper garment. In those days, Nāir women were expected to lower their upper garments and uncover their breasts at palaces and temples. The European traveller was punished for her actions. Her breasts were cut off in front of the princess; it is recorded in history.²

The same situation continued even in the nineteenth century, and in Travancore, the lower-class women were not allowed to wear clothes that covered their breasts. Standing

¹Renjini and Natarajan, "Rani Gowry Lakshmi Bai: Abolition of Slavery in Travancore," *International Journal of Home Science* 2017, posted on 25 March 2017, <http://www.homesciencejournal.com/archives/2017/vol3issue3/PartF/3-3-84-673.pdf> (accessed on 23 December 2018).

²Cristweets, "Slavery to Caste Attacks: An Exhibition to Mark 82nd Kerala Temple Entry Anniversary," *TheNewsMinute*, posted on 13 November 2018, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/slavery-caste-attacks-exhibition-mark-82nd-kerala-temple-entry-anniversary-91466> (accessed on 20 December 2018).

bare-chested was taken as a sign of respect towards those castes supposedly “superior” to them – for both men and women. Higher-class women covered both breasts and shoulders, whereas Nādār climber women were not allowed to cover their bosoms, as most of the non-Brahmin women, to punctuate their low status. Uneasy with this degrading social status, a large number of Nādār climbers embraced Christianity and started to wear “long cloths,” strengthened by their new belief system, which offered equal rights to all men (and women). When many more Nādār women turned to Christianity, many Nādār women started to wear the breast cloth and them together with the Īzhava women successfully campaigned to be allowed to cover their breasts.

In 1813, Colonel John Munro, British Dewan in the Travancore court, issued an order granting permission to women converted to Christianity to wear upper cloth. The order was withdrawn when members of the Rāja’s council, complained about this, arguing that this right would wipe out caste-differences, and lead to widespread pollution in the state. Still, these women continued their fight, and this led to increasing violence in the 1820s against Nādār women, and also the burning of schools and churches. In 1828, the Travancore government again forbade Nādār women the Nāir-style breast-clothes but permitted the wearing of the jacket. In 1829, the queen issued yet another proclamation, which denied the right of Nādār women to wear upper cloths.

In 1858, new violence broke out in several places in Travancore. On 26 July 1859, under pressure from Charles Trevelyan, the Madras Governor, the King of Travancore issued a proclamation proclaiming the right for all Nādār women to cover their breasts, either by wearing jackets, like

the Christian Nādārs, or tie coarse-cloth around their upper-body, like the *Mukkavattigal* (low-caste fisher-women). Yet they were still not allowed to cover their breasts in the style of the higher-class women. This solution was not satisfactory to the missionaries, who regarded all men and women to be equal. Nādār women continued to ignore the restrictions, developing an upper-wear style that resembled the style of the higher-class Hindu women, which offended some Hindus who saw it as a provocation by the missionaries. To avenge it, in 1859, two hundred Nāyars attacked Christian Shanars at a village near Nagarcovil, beating them and stripping the upper cloths from the women. Houses were burned and looted. In the face of such violence, the breast-cloth controversy was finally settled in favour of the missionaries. In 1865, the right was granted to all people of the lower caste. A large number of conversions followed in the wake of this social revolution.¹

2.14. Non-Entry to the Temples and Public Roads

According to the caste and untouchability practices that existed in the Kerala society, the low caste people were prohibited from entering any of the temples and roads surrounding the temples. A group made the first-ever attempt of entry into the temple of about 200 Īzhava youth in 1803-04. Avittom Thirunāl Bālarāma Varma was the King of Travancore, and Velu Thampi Dalawa was the Diwan or Prime Minister. A date was fixed for the entry to the temple premises of Vaikom and worship by the Īzhava youths. Those who were in charge of the temple carried the news to

¹“Channar Revolt,” Wikipedia, posted on 16 December 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Channar_revolt (accessed on 11 September 2019).

the King and the authorities, and the King promised to take necessary action. On the day of the proposed temple entry, an intelligence officer for the Maharāja's army came to Vaikom and met the temple authorities. They wondered how this single man would stop 200 able-bodied young men. The young men organized themselves into a procession from Tiruvelikkunnu on Kottayam Road. They planned to enter the temple from the eastern side. They gathered near Dalawa Kulam¹ (a pond), about 150 meters east of the temple beyond which they were not permitted to move towards the temple. Koya Kutty collected about a dozen Nāir warriors from the locality, and the sight of Koya Kutty on horseback and the Nāirs on foot wielding swords frightened the Īzhavas, and they fled from the area. In the melee, a few got injured, and 2-3 people died falling in the pond. Later this incident came to be known as 'Dalawa Kulam Incident.'²

Later in 1865, the Government of Travancore had published a notification that all public roads in the state were open to all castes of people alike. In July 1884, the Government, by new information, reaffirmed the policy laid down in the previous order and enjoined that any violation of those orders would be charged with the severest displeasure of the Government. This notification came up for a judicial review before the High Court. The High Court then considered it expedient to distinguish the King's

¹This pond, initially, a small one meant for pilgrims to take a bath before entering the temple, was renovated by Ramayyan Dalawa in the 1750s and hence the name 'Dalawa Kulam.'

²"Vaikom Satyagraha," *Wikipedia*, posted on 10 March 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaikom_Satyagraha (accessed on 24 May 2019).

Highways (*rāja-vīthis*) and village roads (*grāma-vīthis*). The court decided that the public roads mentioned in the notification of the Government were intended to mean only the *rāja-vīthis* and not *grāma-vīthis*. The roads around Vaikom Temple were considered *grāma vīthis* and consequently even after 65 years of Government proclamation, they were barred to the *Avarṇas*, and a unit of police (consisting of *Savarṇas*) was stationed in the vicinity to enforce the custom. This was held near Kottayam.¹

2.15. Conversion of Low Castes to Christianity

To save themselves from all forms of caste oppression, the lower caste people of Hinduism embraced Christianity on a large scale. The plight of the Shanars is already mentioned above in connection with the dress code repression (*Māru marakkal samaram*). Similarly, in the second half of the nineteenth century, CMS missionaries began to see large numbers of Pulayas (agricultural labours) turning to Christians. This group, like the Shanars, was not on the lowest rung of the outcaste society. The conversions of a large number of outcastes and how missionaries fought for their “rights” sometimes had critical and disturbing implications for relations between the Syrian Christians and the wider Hindu Community.² The effects of numerous low-caste conversions, coupled with demands for various privileges, were disturbing for some within the Syrian community.

¹“Vaikom Satyagraha,” *Wikipedia*, posted on 10 March 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaikom_Satyagraha (accessed on 24 May 2019).

²Eric, *Christians, and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, 149.

By the mid-1880s, partly as a result of the reactionary (or right-wing) Hindu movements, Syrians were routinely being excluded from Hindu festival sites. Indeed, some of the main religious festivals became moments of provocation and score-settling. During the 1880s and 1890s, there were riots between Hindus and Saint Thomas Christians. Officials stopped the building of Syrian churches on sites near Hindu temples or near procession streets. There were mob attacks on Syrian Christians who tried to affirm their *savarna* or clean-caste status by approaching Hindu temples. That case was taken to court, and the Christians were invariably charged with provoking the affrays. A chasm between the Syrian Christians and their high-caste neighbours was built.¹ The objection faced by the founding fathers at Pullarikunnu by the people of Kumaranalloor village is typical example of the tension which existed between Syrians and Hindu brethren.²

2.16. Caste Division within Christianity

During the time of Saint Chāvāra, the Indian Christians of Kerala were divided into two main groups: the Saint Thomas Christians and the New Christians (Latin Christians). The Saint Thomas Christians considered themselves to be of a superior caste, held high social positions in the society, and turned away from the company of the New Christians. By quoting Vincent Mary O. C. D., Joseph Thekkedath reports to us that “they come next after the Brāhmins. Like Nāyars and noblemen, they would ride

¹Eric, *Christians, and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, 151.

²CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 12-13.

on elephants.”¹ Further, based on Sebastiani’s testimony, he tells that they did not even baptize those of the low castes, fearing that it may result in losing their social position. Instead, they would send them to the Portuguese for baptism, and after baptism, they would not admit them to their churches, nor have any relation with them. They washed, in case they happened to touch someone of a lower cast.² Testimonies of this kind show that the Saint Thomas Christians, like the high caste Hindus of the time, were strict in keeping the caste laws about untouchability and unapproachability in their relations with the converts from the lower castes.

Joseph Thekkedath also cautions that it does not mean that all the New Christians descended from low caste converts:

It would not be correct to affirm that all the Latin Christians descended from the lowest castes. There were among them Brahmin converts and many Nāyars. But the greatest number came from the artisan castes and from the Cegos or Tiyams (i.e., Īzhavas) who cultivate the palm trees.³

Even worse were the relations between the Saint Thomas Christians and the New Christians (Latin Christians) conditioned by caste prejudices, but also the various Latin

¹Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, cited in 22, D. Ferroli, *The Jesuits in Malabar*, II, 134.

²Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, cited in 22, Archivum S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Scrittura Originali Riferite Nelle Congregazioni Generali, vol. 233, 472.

³Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, cited in 22, Thomas Thayil, 21-22, Footnote 40.

Christian groups maintained among themselves these caste prejudices and sentiments.

We are told that when several Pulayas were baptized in the Latin Church of Palluruthy in 1571, they had to be given a separate mass on Saturdays since they would not be allowed to attend mass with others on Sundays. Their children had to go for catechism separately in the evenings, while the other children went in the mornings. Even the feasts were celebrated on different days, e.g., the Pulaya converts celebrated Christmas on 26 December.¹

Even though these incidents took place three centuries before the time of Saint Chāvāra, these recorded historical facts give indications on how the low caste people were treated in the society by the high caste. They made sure that the entrance of the Īzhavas and Mukkuvas to Christianity brought no change in their social standing. Not only did the Brāhmins and the Nāyars, but even their co-religionists, the Syrian Christians, continued to treat them in the same way as before. Similarly, the Īzhavas and the Mukkuva converts refused to associate with the Pulaya converts. Though the Christians of Kerala, who were proud of their faith, and related their intimate fellowship in the family of God, by calling God as their Father, they paid little attention to the Christian belief in universal brotherhood and the fundamental equality of men. God promises the Christians, “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me” (2 Cor 6:18). It is also written – “because of the great love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God” (1 Jn 3:1), all their faith

¹Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, cited in 23, DI, VIII, 503-504: *Jesuit Annual Letter from Cochin*, 3 January 1572.

did not make any change in them, and they were as much caste-ridden as the Hindus among whom they lived.

2.17. Cultural Division (*Saṁskṛti-Bhēdam*)

The Saint Thomas Christians of Kerala were very proud of their denomination and much attached to it. They were also having more spontaneous relations with the people of other faiths, especially with that of the Hindus. They had a secure attachment to the Indian culture and its diversified traditions and customs from the first century onwards. More than any other denominations, the Syrian Christians were very much influenced by the local rulers and culture. As Placid Podipara well expresses it, the characteristic note of the Saint Thomas Christians was that they were Hindu in culture, Christian in religion, and Oriental in worship. As Indians, they were attached to the Hindu way of life by following the social customs, diet, inter-dining, ritual purity, as were prescribed to the particular caste they belonged.

This life of loving communal harmony took a new turn in the fifteenth century by the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries. They began to alienate the local culture under the prejudice that their religion was superior to the native cultures just as seen in the Old Testament, the Jews considered themselves as covenantal people and rejected all non-Israelite cults and practices. The missionaries shielded Saint Thomas Christians from the local traditions of other religions, and it marked the history of rivalry and deteriorating relations. Along with that, the Portuguese missionaries also tried to impose all forms of Western practices upon the Saint Thomas Christians, and it created a tension between the Saint Thomas Christians and Portuguese missionaries, the climax of which was evident in the Synod of Diamper in 1599. From the part of

missionaries, they were insisting on it because of the fear that they might other-wise go back to some of their former beliefs and practices. If any such backsliding came to light, the Inquisition dealt with the case. However, this protection was far too exaggerated. The Goan inquisition frowned upon several innocent social usages and customs and forbade them under severe penalties.¹ The various prohibitions and restrictions imposed by the Synod of Diamper are clear indications of the indifferent attitude of the Portuguese missionaries on the native culture.

Positively, in the opinion of Matthias Mundadan, “these prohibitions and restrictions imposed by the Synod are a witness to the communal harmony and cordial relations that existed between Christians and Hindus. Their communal harmony and spirit of tolerance should be considered typical Indian contribution to the Christian vision.”² As a result, the Saint Thomas Christians of Malabar Church developed a kind of *akuṭumbaka* relationship with their Hindu brethren characterized by various forms of exclusiveness and narrowness, which were imposed on them by the Portuguese as well as the other European missionaries.

2.18. Religious Division (*Mata-Bhēdam*)

Religious discrimination was one of the core issues that the Kerala society faced during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. To understand it better, we need to analyse the social administration of those times. As the old feudal system made way for a centralized administration by

¹Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, 489.

²Mundadan, *Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy*, 49.

1790, there was progress in the public services. In this period of modernization, the Saint Thomas Christians of Kochi and Thiruvithamcore, and the Latin Christians, were obliged to give up some of their long-cherished tax exceptions. The Latin Christians of Kochi seem to have been particularly affected as they lost the protection of the Dutch in 1753 and became the target of harassment by the Rāja of Kochi. Śakthan Thampurān, the then Rāja did not hesitate even to expel some of the Latin Christians. To add fuel to the fire, the troops of Tipu, based in Kerala, had an anti-Christian attitude, and it led to the destruction of thirty churches. Further, sixty priests and 10,000 Saint Thomas Christians perished as victims of his hatred, and due to this, the people migrated to safer places.

Also, the Christians who were converted from Hinduism had to undergo much discrimination. Besides the various caste practices that prevailed in the society, there were many strict laws enforcing religious discrimination within Hinduism. If an individual or a family or even a few families dared to give up their ancestral religion, and embrace Christianity, then they had to face the danger of social exclusion. According to Paulinus, in 1790, the whole territory stretching from Ezhimala down to Kanyakumari was inhabited by 2,054,600 people. These included 1,600,000 Hindus, 100,000 Muslims, 20,000 Jews, 94,600 Catholic Saint Thomas Christians, 50,000 Syrian Orthodox, and more than 100,000 Latin Christians.¹ Between 1753-1762 some 1209 adults were baptized at Varapuzha. According to first-hand information from Paulinus, approximately 300 adults were baptized every year in the vicariate apostolic. Among them

¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 19.

were several Nāyars and Īzhavas.¹ According to the Hindu *Dharma Śāstras*, succession to the property of the parents is bound up with the performance of the last rites.

If an individual ceased to be a Hindu, then he was deprived of the faculty of conducting his parents' funeral rites. As a result, he was not entitled to inherit their property. Converts would most often be considered having fallen from their caste, and hence marriages with the people of their rank and social standing would become almost impossible. It was a sacrifice that most people were unwilling to make, even though they might accept the truth and beauty of Christianity. Thus under conversion to either Christianity or any other religion, as was the Hindu tradition, one would forfeit the right to inherit parental property.²

Most of the Christian converts of the time were from the lower casts. Naturally, the new Christian communities formed by missionary enterprises were deprived of all social rights. Some of the disabilities that Christians suffered are mentioned below by one of the ICS officers, Alfred Lyall:

Up to the year 1831, native Christians had been placed under severe disabilities by our regulation, which formally adopted and regularly enforced the loose and intermittent usages of intolerance, which they found in vogue, native Christians were excluded from practicing as pleaders and from the subordinate official departments. However, no such absolute rule of exclusion had been set up against them by the Hindus and Muhammadans. At the same time, converts to Christianity were liable to be deprived, because of their

¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 69.

²Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, 94.

conversion, not only of property but of their wives and children, and they seem to have been generally treated as a pretty sect with whom no one need be at the trouble of using any sort of considerations.¹

For the Company, religion and religious issues were outstanding as far as they supported the interests of the Company. Many, especially the missionaries, often criticized the company for the lack of support for the new converts. The new converts suffered different types of disabilities because of their conversion to Christianity.

Though the missionaries and many others pleaded for immediate action in favour of the Christian converts, the company was reluctant to do so, because it did not want to disturb the existing order, traditions, and the tranquillity that prevailed in the society by hasty legislation. The company maintained the status quo whenever it found that the changes would cause unrest among the native population. The company and its supporters argued that any change in the status quo regarding religious matters would end in the loss of the British possessions in India. Hence, in their opinion, it was suicidal to attempt to make alterations to the existing social order.²

As a result, the inter-religious living between the Hindus and the Christians of Kerala had become an interreligious struggle. And the golden age of harmony was only a fading memory.

¹Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, cited in 92-93, Lyall, A. C. Asiatic Studies, Religion, and Social, First Series, London, 1907, 272.

²Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, 419-432.

2.19. Religious Division within Christianity

The whole essence of Christianity is that it binds men to their fellow brethren, and invites us to live with each other and for each other. The first Christian community was a living example of that great fellowship and union, which the Church lost as the centuries passed. The Church of Kerala was not an exception to this disunity of different Christian denominations. Not only were they divided, but also at times were fighting each other in the name of Jesus. It was a counter-witness to Jesus in the world. Because of the various internal fights, divisions, and exclusiveness, they lost their Christian credibility in the Kerala society.

2.20. Rite Division (*Rite-Bhēdam*)

A study on the personal history of Saint Chāvara makes one convinced of the fact that he was a victim of the age-old tension of rite division. Fr. Palackal, who was his guru, had the conviction that to acquire knowledge and virtue along with the local languages and Syriac, the study of Latin was essential for seminarians. So, he sent three seminarians who were right in studies to Varapuzha to learn the Latin language, after due negotiations with the concerned authorities. Mathai Kadavil, Chandy Mangalath, and Kuriākōse Chāvara were those three seminarians. Fr. Palackal himself took them to Varapuzha, and after making all arrangements with his friend Fr. Nicholas for their stay, food, and study, he left for Pallipuram. For classes, they had to go to the seminary where at that time, only the Latin Rite students were staying. When they went to the seminary the next day, the Latin students in the seminary refused to

admit the three and to sit with them. It was an affront to the students and their *malpan*.¹

The age-old tension between the Latin and Syrian rites is evident from the letter written by Saint Chāvāra to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith in 1869.

We are Mar Thoma Christians who have received our faith from Saint Thomas. For the past many years, we had no Bishop of our own. But those who have received their faith in very recent times have a Bishop of their own. Provoked by such envious thoughts, when they get an opportunity, they will go to Babel, saying, "let us resort to Babel for getting a Bishop of our rite." They will come at last, petition to them in writing, and those greedy people will accept such a request.

Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion, which I consider useful. It is good to have two Bishops here: one for the Latin Church and others for the Syrian Church. Then their longing to have a Bishop of their own will cease. Then gradually, their relationship with Babylon will end.

It would be very opportune and useful. Many non-Catholics in our midst are our kith and kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold.² This letter is said to have significantly influenced the Propaganda Congregation to grant an indigenous Bishop for the Syrians. According to the opinion of A. M. Mundadan, "It is also alleged that this incident raised a severe storm in Varapuzha and caused great displeasure in Archbishop

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 59.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 14.

Leonard towards Saint Chāvāra. It may be a reason for Archbishop Leonard for not attending the funeral of Saint Chāvāra, even though he was there in Varapuzha during the death of Saint Chāvāra.¹ The letter is also referred to in the letter of Pazheparampil (see Pareparambil 1920:4) and in the mass petition of 13 January 1876."²

The sad situation of crisis in rites and language, which was a stumbling block for the unity of the Church, is more deeply reflected in another letter of Saint Chāvāra written to the members of his congregation.

The Greeks and the Latins, have excellent theological books and useful treatises, and we, the Syrians, have not produced so far good books or treatises. And how can this situation be improved? The answer we find is that all nations and people and not only the monasteries have their Bishops and missionaries who are well-versed in sacred studies and that they have produced in the course of years good literary works and theological treatises. But in Malabar, our priests know only the Syriac language, which they use for liturgical purposes, but their Bishops and missionaries use a different style and a separate rite. This situation stands in the way of unity. The mutual understanding that should exist between the Father and his spiritual children is entirely missing here. Day after day, bilateral relations are not improving; instead, even the thought for unity is being obstructed, and the mutual relations have deteriorated. Our people interpret the orders given with the best of intentions by the hierarch as coming from one who does not know our Syriac language and who does not follow our rite, and as

¹Kadankavil, *Chāvāra: A Multidimensional Saint*, 126-127.

²Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Êlias Chāvāra*, 443.

intended simply to destroy our ritual. So the only means of weaning the Malayalees from the people of Babylon is to convene all the members of the congregation and make a resolution in the conference to bring down a few missionaries from Europe and study the Syrian language and to adopt our Syro-Malabar Rite so that they may offer Mass in our language and rite. In due course, along with the petitions from the churches, let us also send an appeal to the Holy See to appoint, on the termination of the tenure of our present Archbishop, one of those missionaries as our prelate. If we succeed in getting European missionaries in whom are combined the knowledge, devotion, and familiarity with our Syriac language and our Syro-Malabar Rite, there can be no greater blessing possible to our community.¹

It is also interesting to note in this connection, how daringly Saint Chāvāra is appealing for a Bishop of Syro-Malabar rite:

Further, if we succeed in the plan proposed above, the one objection put forward by the Jacobites that we Syrians have no Bishops of our rite will be solved, and there is every chance for the Jacobites of Malabar joining our fold. If the missionaries coming to us, because they are priests, find difficulties in studying a new language – Syriac and to adopt the Syro-Malabar rite, let them come here as clerics so that they may efficiently study the language here.²

To save the Malabar Church from the possible dangers like clinging to the Babylonians and putting themselves in slavery under them, Saint Chāvāra is suggesting here the innovative plans like bringing the missionary scholastics to

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 57-58.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 59.

India and forming them in the indigenous rite and its traditions. It can have positive social and ecclesial consequences, as he expected. "Like priest, like people." Bad priests make bad people. The fountain was impure, and the stream was consequently defiled. Whether in Church or society, it is a fact that their leaders influence people; and sometimes they are even shocked by the priests. These letters of Saint Chāvāra indeed give us an accurate picture of an *Akuṭumbaka-Sabha*, where there were division and disunity on the holy name of the rite.

2.21. Division between *Padroado* and *Propaganda Fide*

The Portuguese word *Padroado* means 'patronage' and it was an arrangement between the Holy See and the Kingdom of Portugal, affirmed by a series of concordats, by which the Vatican delegated to the King of Portugal the administration of the local Churches. By the coming of Portuguese to India, eventually, the Malabar Church came under the *Padroado* rule. In the medieval period, Portugal was a Catholic country, and the Portuguese people, unlike the other European colonizers of India, i.e., the Dutch, French, and English, were interested in the evangelization of the country. The King of Portugal was the grandmaster of the order of Christ, which counted the expansion of Christ's kingdom on earth among its primary duties. That is why the Pope granted the unique privilege of *Padroado* to the King of Portugal.

Over time, however, this system became incapable of furthering the mission of the Catholic Church, and this was the main reason why the Pope intervened through the Roman Office popularly known as 'Propaganda' (propagation of faith). By the Coonan Cross Oath (Bent Cross Oath), the ancient Church of India split into two

groups, the *Pazhayakūr* and the *Puthenkūr*, and it also put an end to the effective Portuguese administration over the Malabar Christians. The seriousness of the situation alarmed Rome, which sent a delegation of three Carmelites to Malabar to deal with the situation. The Carmelites were chosen for this task because they had long-standing relations with the archdeacon and the Saint Thomas Christians. The Concordat of 1698 between Pope Innocent XII and the Dutch Government cleared the way for the rule of the Carmelite Bishops in Malabar. The Carmelite Bishops began to administer as Vicars Apostolic from Verapoly. At that time, the archdiocese of Kodungalloor was not suppressed. Then, the territories of the archdiocese of Kodungalloor and the vicariate of Malabar were the same. As a result, the Saint Thomas Christians came under the two jurisdictions of *Padroado* and *Propaganda Fide*, which caused much confusion that nobody knew for sure under which authority they were. It also created a very unpleasant situation of rivalry and dispute between Rome and the Portuguese Kings on the issue of exclusive patronage, and this state of affairs prevailed till the conclusion of the concordat between Pope Leo XIII and the Portuguese King in 1886.¹

These quarrels have left their mark on the Saint Thomas Christians themselves and the non-Christians as well. Though there was a double jurisdiction among the Saint Thomas Christians, the Roman authorities expected both the Bishops to work together. Often they did not. The Catholic Christians were divided into two ecclesiastical groups. A majority of them depended on a Vicar Apostolic, a Bishop directly appointed by Rome. The rest remained under the

¹Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, 361-362.

Archbishop of Kodungalloor. With the Vicar Apostolic, there were half a dozen Carmelite priests, who were either Italians or citizens of the German empire.¹ Kodungalloor sought to bring more churches under its wings against the wishes of the vicariate. In 1725, thirty churches of the Saint Thomas Christians came under the Archbishop, while there were forty under the Vicar Apostolic. The Carmelites strongly opposed the encroachments of Kodungalloor, so much so that Archbishop Anthony Pimentel, felt obliged to complain to Rome.²

The Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* took advantage of the troubled situation in Malabar to extend its control over there and put an end to the exclusive right of patronage of the King of Portugal over Malabar. At the same time, the Carmelite missionaries messed-up the situation further for safeguarding their interests in Malabar. The Carmelites, foreseeing threats hidden in the unity moves of the *Puthenkūrians* and *Pazhayakūrians*, put obstacles in the path of the reunion efforts. It resulted in the perpetuation of the breach in the Saint Thomas Christian community.³ All over again, the members of various religious orders were extremely jealous of their real or presumed rights, and they often sought to prevent others from entering into territories which they considered as their preserves.⁴

The community became restless and held many general gatherings and decided to send a delegation to Rome.

¹Italians and Germans were accepted by the Dutch according to a standing agreement with the emperor of Germany (Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, 107).

²Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 26.

³Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, 363.

⁴Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, 488.

Accordingly, in 1778, Joseph Kariyattil and Thomas Paremmakkal undertook the historic journey to Lisbon and Rome, to find out ways to reconcile the Jacobites and Catholics and to have an Archbishop appointed for the vacant See of Kodungalloor. To their surprise, one of them, Kariattil, was nominated Archbishop of Kodungalloor by Queen Mary on 16 July 1782 in keeping with the *Padroado* privileges. Though there was again a fruitless attempt to bring Kodungalloor under Goa, Kariattil was confirmed by the Pope and was granted the *pallium* on 16 December 1782. Such a nomination also seemed to be a trap. The papal confirmation obliged the new Archbishop to pass over to the Latin rite. Kariattil, however, on his way back before reaching Malabar, died in Goa in 1786. Following the death of his companion, Paremmakkal became the administrator of Kodungalloor.

Paremmakkal's famous book, *Varttamāna-pustakam*, which is regarded as the first travelogue in any Indian language, is a journal of their journey to Rome and Lisbon. In it, Thoma Kathanar lashes out at the Carmelite missionaries for their alleged misdeeds, especially their opposition to the Saint Thomas Christians' aspirations for a ritual and national leader. It also postulates that the foundation of Indian nationalism rests on the basic principle that Indians should rule India. Long before the debates on nationalism shook the intellectual circles of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the author vehemently argued that foreigners should be kept away from India and that it should be ruled only by Indians.¹ The agitation against foreign Vicars

¹ *Varthamanappusthakam*, *Wikipedia*, posted on 1 September 2010, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varthamanappusthakam> (access ed on 16 July 2019).

Apostolic continued to gain momentum among Saint Thomas Christians. In 1787, representatives of 82 churches under Paremmakkal assembled at Angamaly to draw up a document called *Angamaly Paṭiyola* which, besides energetically demanding native Bishops, lists the sins of communion and omission perpetrated by foreign missionaries against the community.¹

As Saint Paul admitted, “some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry” (Phil 1:15) was right in their case as both were having their vested interests and motives in proclaiming the Gospel, and it had a distorting effect in the Church. While both were zealously working for the propagation of the Holy Name of Our Lord, there existed a considerable amount of jealousy and exclusiveness among them for the honour and reputation of their rites and traditions. This rivalry adversely affected the spiritual atmosphere of the Kerala Church in the nineteenth century.

2.22. Division between Saint Thomas Christians and Jesuit Missionaries

As the name indicates, the Saint Thomas Christian community was founded by the apostle Saint Thomas, and it was the only Christian community that existed in India before the arrival of the Europeans. By the arrival of the European missionaries, there had been rivalry and fight between the foreign missionaries and the traditional Saint Thomas Christians of Kerala. Though it started with the Dutch and the English people, it later got worse with the Portuguese missionaries. The Portuguese approach to Saint Thomas Christians was marked by high assertiveness and aggressiveness, which the latter could not bear and accept.

¹Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 61.

In the sphere of religion, they claimed that they owned the whole truth and that they had the correct answers to all the questions which could be raised. Hence, anything which did not tally with their ideas was regarded by them as abuse, which should be kept far away.¹

It may be because of such attitudes of the missionaries that Gandhiji criticized them: "A missionary is labouring under a double fallacy. The missionary thinks that what he believes to be the best is really the best and that what is best for him is also the best for others."² Mahatma reminded them that they could stay in India only if they change such an attitude of antagonism and hostility. The foreign missionaries, including the Portuguese, came to India to conquer and dominate. The Saint Thomas Christians became the victims to it, together with the people of other faith, for which the Father of Nation advised them, "Missionaries then would have to go to the lowly cottages, not to give them something, but to take something from them... In a word, let them go to the people not as patrons, but as one of them, not to oblige them but to serve them and to work among them."³ The receptiveness, humility, and willingness, which Gandhiji could not find in the missionaries, were proofs that they could not identify themselves with the masses, was noticed by Saint Chāvāra, which will be explained in the third chapter of this book.

According to Joseph Thekkedath, the Saint Thomas Christians, on the other hand, while being firmly attached to the traditional observances and structures of their Church, were, in general, not adequately instructed in the tenets of

¹Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, 481.

²Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 63, 93-94.

³Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 27, 434-439.

the Christian faith. They did not have a clear theology of their own.¹ Hence many of them had a kind of submissive attitude towards the missionaries and were willing to be taught by them so that they may remain in the Catholic Church, instead of associating with the Babylonians, which were explicit in the Letters of Saint Chāvāra:

So the only means of weaning the Malayalees from the people of Babylon is to convene all the members of the Congregation and make a resolution in the conference to bring down a few missionaries from Europe, people who are prepared to study the Syriac language and who are willing to adopt our Syro-Malabar rite so that they may offer Mass in our language and our ceremony. In due course, along with the petitions from the churches, let us also send a request to the Holy See to appoint on the termination of the tenure of our present Archbishop, one of these missionaries as our Bishop. If we succeed in getting European missionaries in whom are combined the knowledge and devotion, and familiarity with our Syriac language and our Syro-Malabar rite, there can be no greater blessing possible to our community. And when such missionaries are appointed as Vicars in our parishes, we will get several blessings; our Church will also rise to saints.

As it is pronounced in the letter that Saint Chāvāra considered the presence of the missionaries as a blessing to the Syro-Malabar Church, provided they mastered Syriac and were willing to adopt the local rites and practices of the local Church. The Saint Thomas Christians and Saint Chāvāra did not want to change the institutions and

¹Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, 481.

customs which were part of their life, about which Joseph Thekkedath observes:

During the more significant part of our period, the Thomas Christians were in contact with European missionaries. This contact raised the standard of Christian instruction among them to a certain extent. It was also instrumental in removing some unwholesome practices. But the missionaries were not satisfied with these results. Through a combination of persuasion, enticement, and force, they managed to Latinize the rite and discipline of the Thomas Christians considerably.¹

Thekkedath continues to criticize the Portuguese people for their exclusivist attitude:

Throughout the sixteenth century, there was hardly any effort made to adapt Western Christianity to the culture and outlook of the Indian people. The reception of baptism often meant the abandonment of much of one's cultural ties with the past. The name and the family name or the surname of the convert was given up in many cases, and a Portuguese surname appeared instead. In the territories governed directly by the Portuguese, the new Christians were even given Portuguese dress on the day of their baptism. Besides, many of the missionaries were inclined to see idolatrous practices and superstition even in social customs, which were quite harmless, and hence they sought to suppress them. Some of the more discerning missionaries felt it was necessary to distinguish between idolatry and the custom of the country or region.²

¹Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, 481.

²Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, 485.

The Missionaries' mind-set to condemn anything which even slightly differed from the customs of the Spanish peninsula had adverse effects in the later history of the Saint Thomas Christians.

2.23. Division between Saint Thomas Christians and Carmelite Missionaries

Regarding the relationship of the Saint Thomas Christians with the Carmelite missionaries, generally, they maintained a better relationship with them compared to that of the Jesuit missionaries. The founding fathers of the CMI congregation tried to keep a healthy tie-up with them. At the same time, there were moments in which Saint Thomas Christians had tensions in the relations. The following two specific events, for example, broke the tension between them to the brink of a revolt. On the occasion of Bishop Florence's death (26 July 1773), the leading diocesan priests wanted to carry the bier, which they considered as their prerogative. The Carmelites bluntly refused this honour and carried the bier themselves to the great humiliation of all concerned.

Moreover, the vicar of Edapilly church was accused of having stolen a sacred vessel; the person leading the accusation was Fr. Francis of Sales, the future Vicar Apostolic. The vicar was taken forcibly to Varapuzha, shut up in a room, tortured, and finally was starved to death. Though this case was partly cooked up by the enemies of the Carmelites, some misdeeds were committed by them to the ill-repute of the local clergy. The Propaganda Instruction sent to the Vicar Apostolic in 1774 mentioned that several instances of imprisonment with chains and severe scourging were used against the "quarrelsome priests" of the Saint

Thomas Christians. By such events, the Carmelites had offended the most profound sentiments of these Christians.¹

Another event that engaged their anxious attention was the appointment of John of Saint Margaret as the new Vicar Apostolic of Malabar. This Carmelite was known to be hostile to the Saint Thomas Christians. Kariattil tried his level best, to have this appointment rescinded. He met the Portuguese ambassador, who resolved to act at once. He also met Pope Pius VI and succeeded in getting him to cancel the appointment. Thus, even if the other affairs that had brought the Malabar mission to Rome remained unsettled, it succeeded at least in saving the vicariate from an unwanted Bishop.

From the documentation at hand, it is clear that the Propaganda authorities had become prejudiced against the Saint Thomas Christians and were reluctant to recognize their claims because of the letters sent by the Carmelites to Rome.² Kariattil and Paremakkal during their visit to Rome, brought to the notice of the authorities some of the pressing needs of Saint Thomas Christians like, “to provide ten seats for Malabar seminarians of all communities in Propaganda College; to re-organize the Varapuzha seminary under the direction of two Malabar priests; to supply those seminarians with copies of the Holy Scriptures in Syriac and with Syriac prayer books; to see that the Carmelites behaved with propriety, modesty, and purity, avoiding all selfishness.³ The Carmelites in Malabar, including the Bishop of Kochi, a Portuguese Carmelite, tried their best to misguide both Rome and Portugal against Kariattil. They strongly felt

¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 28.

²Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 31.

³Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 31-32.

that no Indian should be made a Bishop, and if that mistake, as in this case, had been made, the Indian Bishop must be prevented from ruling his diocese. If Kariattil succeeded in reaching his diocese, all the Saint Thomas Christians would follow him, and the Carmelites would have no other choice but to leave.¹ Both Kariattil and Paremmakkal decided to spend the rainy season in Goa and to go to Malabar in September. But it did not happen. After nearly a month of severe gastric fever, Kariattil expired on 19 September 1786. He was solemnly buried in the choir of the Old Goa Cathedral. It was a tragic end of a journey full of promise for the Saint Thomas Christians. All the hopes entertained for years had been crumbled. It was a terrible blow for the Church in Malabar.²

Thomas Paremmakkal was nominated administrator of Kodungalloor by the Archbishop of Goa on 21 September 1786. Three months later, he was back home. As soon as he landed in Kochi, a portrait of the deceased Kariattil was taken in a procession from Alangad to Angamaly. It was followed by a general assembly of the Saint Thomas Christians. They did not want to go back to the state of division. What they wanted was one Archbishop and one Archdiocese. Strong anti-Carmelite sentiments were unleashed.³ The Angamaly assembly, inspired by Paremmakkal, published a *paṭiyola*, or decree, which was of considerable and lasting value. It contained the solemn oath, sworn and signed by the chief delegates, not to accept any foreign or Latin prelate any more.⁴

¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 33.

²Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 34.

³Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 34.

⁴Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 34.

As the Angamaly general assembly had taken a definite anti-Carmel stand, the Carmelites' reaction was not slow to follow. From their standpoint, it became all the more urgent because serious accusations were levelled against them by the leaders of the Saint Thomas Christians. The Carmelites decided to clear themselves before the Thiruvithamcore court. They succeeded in having their case decided in their favour. The Catholic Saint Thomas Christians had to pay a fine of Rs. 24,000. But the Carmelites, under pressure from the Thiruvithamcore government, had to make some concessions. The state of tension between the Carmelites and the Saint Thomas Christians continued, though perhaps not so passionately as before.¹ By the end of the eighteenth century, the Carmelite vicariate was still tottering without adequate personnel, without funds and the support of the Saint Thomas Christians.

2.24. Division among the Carmelites

When Francis of Sales of the Mother of Dolour's, the new Vicar Apostolic arrived at Varapuzha on 13 October 1775 amidst problems, his Carmelite confreres were divided among themselves. The prelate replaced their superior. As a result, the Carmelites turned against the Vicar Apostolic. They sent a delegate to Rome, demanding the return of the Vicar Apostolic. It became, therefore, impossible for him to stay on at Varapuzha.² Such pictures of division and disunity are never absent from the canvas of the Church history.

¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 35.

²Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 29.

2.25. Division between *Anjūttikkār* and *Ezhunūttikkār*

The Christians who followed the Lain rite in Malabar were categorized into three social groups. The first and the largest of them composed of all the fisherfolk of Malabar. The second group was somewhat amorphous, consisting of former Nayars, Izhavas, Nādārs, and Pulyas. To the third group belonged the topazes (Dubashi, Tupasi), nearly all of whom were Eurasians of Portuguese descent with Portuguese surnames.¹ Even among the Latins the distinction of the Five Hundred Party (*Anjūttikkār*), the Seven Hundred Party (*Ezhunūttikkār*) and the Three Hundred Party (*Munnūttikkār*) resulted in open fight. For example, listen to what Saint Chāvāra has to say about the stubbornness and objection of the Seven Hundred Party for giving ordination to the candidates belonging to the Five Hundred Party:

His grace was there to ordain priests from the group of Five Hundred. He found no reason to deny it as they followed the way of Our Lord. But the Thopassans and the group of Seven Hundred had asserted that they would not agree to it and declared that the ordination would grieve them and force them to rebel. The Bishop, therefore, asked the clerics from among them to sign a paper that stated that ordaining priests from the group of Five Hundred was right and that they had no objection to it. But they went away to consult their vicars and elders who forbade them to sign such a paper. And their churches prepared a long petition against the intended ordination and brought it to the Bishop. Seeing that their grievance was not reasonable, but due to obstinacy, he had a written statement sent explaining at length with much evidence in support that the ordination was just,

¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 71.

fair, and by the Divine ordinance. Yet they remained unconvinced.¹

Mutual rejection of the Holy Name of God was indeed the pathetic situation of these two groups of the Latin Church in those days. It proves that the faith, by which believers could live together in peace, could also bring ethnic divisions and violence in God's name. One of the Proverbs, traditionally written by Solomon, remarks how difficult it is for brothers to reunite: "A brother wronged is more unyielding than a fortified city; disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel" (Prov 18:19). This scriptural truth has become a reality in the conflict that held between the Seven Hundred Party and the Five Hundred Party of the Latin Church. Saint Chāvāra looked forward to a time, when these children of God can be united again, by repenting and embracing each other as siblings - *kūṭapirappukaḷ*.

2.26. Division between *Pazhayakūr* and *Puthenkūr*

As mentioned earlier, because of the over interference of the Portuguese missionaries in the religious and administrative practices of the Saint Thomas community, it got divided into two major groups by the Coonan Cross Oath on 3 January 1653. The group which remained faithful to Rome came to be called the *Pazhayakūr* (The Old Connections) and the other group which got separated from the Catholic Church was known as *Puthenkūr* (The New Connections). The *Pazhayakūr* remained as Roman Catholics (Syrian Catholics), maintaining its relations with the Catholic prelate of the place. At the same time, the *Puthenkūr* broke away from their allegiance to the Roman Catholic prelate and installed the archdeacon (the local clergy leader) as their leader and

¹CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 3.

tried to get someone from their fold ordained as their Bishop by the patriarch of Antioch (Syrian Orthodox). Even after the division, the two groups still considered themselves as parts of the same community and were not unfriendly to each other. But there were attempts, both from the region of Catholic and CMS missionaries, to extinguish this fellow-feeling with the help of the East India Company. For more than a century, one of the signs of the former unity of the community was the “shared churches.” It meant that in quite a few places, both the Catholics and the Orthodox worshipped in the same church at different times. But the successive Vicars Apostolic became increasingly impatient with such ‘sharing’ and did their best to get rid of them. By the end of the century, there were only five such churches left, viz., those of South Parur, Changanacherry, Narameli, Pallikar, and Parotta.¹

After the division, the *Puthenkūr* Church was experiencing many uncertainties. First and foremost, they lacked an ordained Episcopal leadership that affected the unity of the Church drastically. The local authorities often considered them as rebels, and hence, they failed to gain respect from them. Because of this and of other reasons, they always suffered humiliations at the hands of the missionaries² and though they wanted to be united with the *Pazhayakūr* and live in harmony with them, the Catholic foreign missionaries blocked all their efforts using their influence with Rome. On the other side, the CMS missionaries (Church Missionary Society), pressurized the Company officials in Travancore to intervene in the affairs

¹Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, 78.

²Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, 432.

of the *Puthenkūr* and ally it with the imperial religion, the Anglican form of Christianity.

For example, during the end of the residentship of Munro, an attempt was made to transfer certain churches in possession of the *Pazhayakūr* to the *Puthenkūr*, with the consent and knowledge of Ranī Lakṣmi Bhāi, the then ruler of the Travancore. In 1819, a royal proclamation notifying the transfer of the 40 churches in Changancherry, Alleppey, Kottayam, and Piravam to the *Puthenkūr* was issued. However, in Changancherry and Alleppey, the *Pazhayakūrians* reoccupied the churches. Before the transfer of the churches took place, Munro left Travancore, and Major General McDowall was appointed in his place. Due to protests and commotion, Ranī finally revoked her order on the recommendation of the new Resident. Thus the attempt for the transfer of the churches to the *Puthenkūr* failed, and only the CMS missionaries were dissatisfied with the reversal of the order. But it created unwanted tension between the *Pazhayakūr* and the *Puthenkūr*.¹

The idea of the transfer of churches seemed to have been initiated by the CMS missionaries in connivance with Munro. Missionaries of the CMS patronized by Munro, were instrumental in having several churches used by the Syrians who performed Latin rites taken away from them because they had initially belonged to the Jacobites.² Measures were taken to strengthen the position of the *Puthenkūr* in Travancore and thus bringing them more and more close to the Anglican Church. But the takeover was not done as per the request of the *Puthenkūrians*. It was not their need but

¹Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, 401-403.

²Eric, *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, 144.

the need for the CMS missionaries and Munro. The higher authorities of the company wanted to settle the issue amicably at the earliest because they did not want to give a chance to any kind of unrest in the state that would endanger the British interests. So, they recommended the Rani to withdraw her edict, which promulgated the transfer of the churches to the *Puthenkūr*.

According to Augustine Kulakkatt, when Munro worked out his plan for keeping the *Puthenkūr* as the allies of the English in Travancore, he had in mind the idea to bring the *Pazhayakūr* also into this fold. Another reason for extending help to the *Puthenkūrians* was that

The Roman Catholics consider our power with sentiments of jealousy rather than of friendship. They are incredibly willing to avail themselves of our protection but are withheld by no motive of attachment of Christian zeal or of worldly interest from joining our enemies on any emergency adverse to our power. Some of the most active partisans of the rebel Dewans were found among the Roman Catholic servants of the British at Anjengo, and many instances of extraordinary duplicity and perfidy were manifested by the Roman Catholics holding confidential situations even under the British Resident. But if the Roman Catholics were converted to the Protestant religion, they would be united to our Government by favourable ties of common interest and faith. They would constitute not only strong support to our power but an efficient means for propagating Christianity in India.¹

¹Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, cited in 408, Munro to Thompson, Curtallam, 28 August 1817, Birmingham, Birmingham

It was because of the tension between the CMS missionaries and the Saint Thomas Christians that Saint Chāvāra was twice denied the chance to visit the press at Kottayam owned by the CMS missionaries.

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.¹

While we study the history of a break in the fellow-feeling of *Pazhayakūr* and *Puthenkūrians* in India by the CMS missionaries, we find in it another hidden history, namely the age-old tale of rivalry between the Catholics and Protestants that existed all over the world. The relations between the Catholics and the Protestants at the ecclesiastical level were generally hostile. In the second half of the seventeenth century, whenever the Dutch ousted the Portuguese from any place, they expelled all the foreign Catholic priests from there, confiscated most of the churches and presbyteries, and placed various other restrictions on the practice of Catholicism. Eventually, there was constant bickering between the Anglican pastors and the Catholic priests, especially regarding the baptism of children born of mixed marriages.² The tension, which the CMS missionaries created between the *Pazhayakūr* and *Puthenkūr*, through the sponsorship of the East India Company, was, in fact, its Kerala version. It can also be viewed as an ecclesiastical

University, Heslop Room. *CMS Handlist, West Asia Group I, South India Part I, Early Correspondence, Box No CI2 E2, Letter No. 15.*

¹CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 38.

²Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. II, 488.

version of the 'divide and rule' policy of the Company, which they very effectively executed in dividing the various princely rulers of India in attaining the full political power of the nation.

2.27. Economic Depression (*Dāridrya-Kuṭumbakam*)

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, together with the entire above mentioned non-familial social situations, Kerala was also a home of impoverishment - *Dāridrya-kuṭumbakam*. The conquest of Tipu in places like Palaghat (1756-57) Calicut (1783), Cannanore (1788), and Travancore towards the end of the eighteenth century had its financial results too.

Due to the continual warfare and the brutalities indulged in by the Mysoreans, people belonging to all walks of life had migrated from these places to safer places. The peasants who suffered at the hands of the Mysoreans took refuge in the forests and jungles. It led to the ruin of agriculture, and eventually, the trade and commerce of the flourishing towns also suffered heavily. As a consequence, the country passed through a period of economic depression. The suspension of the cultivation of pepper vines in different parts of the country brought the pepper trade almost to a standstill. The decline of agriculture and trade crippled the economy of the land and led to the impoverishment of large sections of the population. The gold and silver which Kerala had acquired as a result of centuries of trade contacts with the West practically disappeared from the land.¹

When the King Bālarāma Varma became the ruler, Travancore was passing through great financial difficulties,

¹Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 249-250.

due to the third Anglo-Mysore war. Lord Cornwallis levied the expense of the war from Travancore in the pretext that it was fought for defending Travancore from the Mysorean invaders. To tide over the financial crisis, caused by the war obligations to the Company and the debts that the state owed to several financiers, the Rāja decided to collect money from landowners, which led to the Nāir Revolt of 1799 under the leadership of Velu Thampi, a Nāir leader of Nanjunad. In the wake of the rebellion, the Rāja appointed their leader, Velu Thampi, as his new Dalawa. He failed to make any improvement in the financial condition of the state.¹

Syrian Christians in Kerala, along with people from other elite communities, had been under severe pressure since the 1790s. The unstable political situation had led to shifts and dislocations in the economy. There had been a downturn in Malabar's seaborne exports, and the trade routes into the Tamilnadu had been disrupted. The old tradition of Syrian Christian involvement in commercial activity had led them to be significantly affected by these disruptions. The Syrians were also hard hit by the loss of their privileged military role in the state.

2.28. Another Dead Sea (*Akuṭumbakam*)

The overall situation prevailed in the Kerala society and the Church at the end of the eighteenth century and, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was a kind of closed mentality. It can be compared to that of the Dead Sea. We know the Dead Sea is one of the saltiest bodies of water on earth, almost ten times saltier than the normal ocean water. All that saltiness has meant that there is no life at all in the

¹Kulakkatt, *Trade, Politics and Religion*, 310-311.

Dead Sea, no fish, no vegetation, and no sea animals. Nothing lives in the sea and hence is the name of the Dead Sea. The main reason for the saltiness of the Dead Sea is the fact that it never flows out. It receives water from river Jordan but keeps it all to itself. As it is below sea level, there is no outlet for it to flow. Some amount of water in the course gets evaporated, leaving the salt behind, and in the process creates a dead environment. Seven million tons of water evaporates from the Dead Sea every day, and because of that, it becomes more and more stagnant, lifeless, and bitter.¹

As the Dead Sea that is closed in itself and never having any outlets, the Church and the society of the nineteenth century during the time of Chāvāra, due to their closed mentalities, ended up like the Dead Sea with a dead Church and a fallen society. As people became narrow-minded in their thinking (*laghu-cētasām*), their world also became narrow and closed. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is 55:8-9). Here, the prophet Isaiah speaks about the considerable difference between the thoughts of God (*abhēda-cintas*) and the views of men (*bhēda-cintas*). God’s thinking is upward and heavenly, whereas a man’s thinking is downward and earthly. As water cannot rise above its level, men cannot grow and act above the quality of their thinking level. Men act according to the quality of their thinking, and the little-minded men can never be greater than their thoughts and thinking patterns. As the tree so the

¹“Sea of Galilee,” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Galilee (accessed on 13 October 2018).

fruit, every tree goes grows after its kind. Similarly, as the thoughts so the deeds, every thought matures into acts after its kind. Great deeds are followed only by great thinking.

Aṭanēna mahāraṅyē supanthā jāyatē śanaīḥ. “When one often walks in the forest, a good path is gradually created.” Beyond doubt, the nineteenth century of the Kerala society was passing through a period of intense depression and gloom; likewise, the members of the Malabar Church, more particularly the Saint Thomas Christians were a people in crisis as they had an immature Church at all levels. Consequently, this society and the Church were very much in need of a radical renewal and a holistic revitalization. It is precisely this task which Saint Chāvāra had to take up, and by renewing the society and the Church from within, he could lead both of them to a glorious future.

Chinnōpi rōhitō taruḥ kṣīṅō’pyupacīyatē punaścandraḥ

Iti vimṛśantaḥ santaḥ saṁtapyantē na lōkēṣu.

“Truncated branches grow afresh, a small streak of moon waxes again; like this, an optimist overcomes, adverse situations, and remains serene.” Indeed there was a battle to be fought, and Saint Chāvāra could overcome all the adverse conditions. As an optimist, trusting in the providence of God, he set himself against the customs of his time, the popular thinking and policies of the Church circle in which he moved, and the prejudices of the missionaries whose friendship he valued. In the end, all the evils of exclusive outlook that prevailed in the society and the Church were overpowered by the goodness of his inclusive thinking. Thus, like a true valiant man, he changed all the *akuṭumbaka* situations of his time into a heavenly one - *kuṭumbakam*.

Kim karōti kusamsargō nijadharmadr̥ḍhātmanaḥ

Sarpaśīrṣōṣitaḥ kim na haratē’hiviṣam maṅiḥ.

“What effect has an evil association upon him, whose soul is firm in its righteousness? Does not the jewel that dwells in the head of the serpent absorb the poison of the serpent?” Yes, indeed, Saint Chāvāra was a real blessing for his time, and how he changed all the *akuṭumbaka* situations into *kuṭumbaka* situation will be discussed in the coming chapter.

Chapter 3

KUṬUMBĀKAM

The Familial Inclusiveness

“Family is not an important thing. It is everything,” says Michael J. Fox.¹ The tie of family bond, that is, the concepts of *vasudhāivakuṭumbakam* and *darśanavīṭ*, is indeed a loving mystery of human relationship and brotherhood. It invites us to enlarge, ennoble, and embolden the horizons of our minds. As it was already made clear in the first chapter, the members of *Darśanavīṭ* can never have any kind of little-minded thinking. If one is sectarian, he finds no place in the familial sanctuary of humanness. The ideals of *Darśanavīṭ* invite one to give up all kinds of exclusivism and get filled with the inclusiveness of God’s family, where the rich and poor, young and old, black and white, upper class and lower class, Jew and Gentile, Indian and Pakistani, American and Japanese, healthy and handicapped all live with a feeling of *kūṭapirappukaḷ*.

Yathānadyassyandamānāssamudreastam

Gacchantināma-rupevihāya,

Tathāvidvānnāma-rūpādvimuktaḥ

Parāt-paramapurūṣamupaitidivyaṃ (MuUp 3.2.8).

“Just as the flowing rivers disappear in the ocean, casting off name and shape, even so, the knower, freed from name and form, attains to the divine person, higher than the high.” Likewise, all different rivers of exclusivism that flowed into

¹Shutterfly, “55+ Family Quotes and Family Sayings,” posted on 6 November 2018, <https://www.shutterfly.com/ideas/family-quotes/> (accessed on 13 March 2019).

the Kerala Church and society eventually became merged in the vast ocean of the inclusive wisdom of Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra and *Darśanavīṭ*.

3.1. Tie of Family Bond

The memories we have of our family are something special, and such a family bond is the most primal and powerful bond of any human being. For Saint Chāvāra, “The only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and difficulties in this valley of tears is the membership and life in a family where love, order and peace reign.”¹ It is such a tie of family bond that motivated Mo Farah of Great Britain to overcome his fall and win a thrilling gold medal in Rio Olympics 2016, in the 10,000 metre race. Farah’s hopes looked in danger when he was accidentally tripped over by training partner Galen Rupp with 16 laps to go, but he recovered and bounced back immediately, and held off a spirited last-lap attack from Kenyan Paul Kipngetoch Tanui to clinch a thrilling victory. “I was not going to let it go,” he said. “I got up quickly. I thought about my family. It made me emotional. I thought ‘get through, get through.’ I believed in myself.”² Farah won in 27 minutes 05.17 seconds by a little less than half a second, and his victory also fulfilled a promise to his daughter, who asked her father to win a gold medal for her. Family is family, after all, and there is no substitution for the family on earth. One of life’s greatest

¹Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 10.

²Shillingford, “7 Olympic Moments from Rio to Inspire You,” *LinkedIn*, posted on 22 August 2016, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-olympic-moments-from-rio-inspire-you-davidshillingford> (accessed on 13 January 2019).

beauties is such a sense of belonging, and feeling that we have bonded to a family.

To introduce a new lesson for that Sunday class, a catechism teacher of the first standard asked each of her students, whose image they resembled, either that of their father or mother? Some replied they had similar faces of their fathers, mothers or of the grandparents. Though their reply was correct, the teacher reminded them of the biblical truth: they had the image and the likeness of God, who is their Heavenly Father, and because of that, humanity is one family with single parenthood and family. If one limits his/her life to earthly families, he/she will miss the heavenly experience of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* and *darśanaṇvīṭ*, which is the grand home of humanity on this earth.

It is natural that in a family, the children will be having the image and likeness of their parents. There are many generations in a family – grandparents, parents, uncles, siblings, cousins, and grandchildren. When a new baby is born, similarities to other members of the family are noted – hair like the father, nose like the mother, and temperament like the uncle. The baby can be identified as belonging to a particular family looking at these and many other traits that one has in common with the other members of the family because of the specific genetic inheritance. Similarly, as the entire humankind is created with the divine genetic inheritance, i.e., with the same image and likeness of God – with the same DNA of God, without the exception of any particular caste, creed, or culture, all of them belong to the family of God. Humanity gets this argument of it being one family – the concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, from the theory of divine image and likeness with each human being, is created. The Scriptures confirm that God “hath made of one ancestor all nations of men to dwell on the face of the

earth" (Acts 17:26). The tenth chapter of Genesis gives its all details: "These are the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, to whom sons were born after the flood... Such were the clans of Noah's descendants, listed by descent and nation. From them, other nations branched out on earth after the flood" (Gen 10:1-32). While giving commentary to the tenth chapter of Genesis, Joseph Parker gives a beautiful reflection to the fountains of history:

A clear conception of the import of this marvellous chapter should enlarge and correct our notions in so far as they have been narrowed and perverted by our insular position. We should recognize in all the nations of the earth one universal human nature. This reflection is both humbling and elevating. It is humbling to think the cannibal is our relative; that the slave crouching in an African wood is bone of our bone; and that the meanest scum of all the earth started from the same foundation as ourselves! On the other hand, it is elevating to think that all kings and mighty men, all soldiers renowned in song, all heroes canonized in history, the wise, the strong, the good, are our elder brothers and immortal friends. If we limit our life to families, clans, and sects, we shall miss the genius of human history, and all its ennobling influences. Better join the familiar lot. Take it just as it is. Our ancestors have been robbers and oppressors, deliverers and saviours, mean and noble, cowardly and heroic; some hanged, some crowned, some beggars, some kings; take it so, for the earth is one, and humanity is one. Where does home end; where does foreign begin?¹

As citizens of the universe and the members of the *vasudhaivakutumbakam*, each human person is never expected

¹Parker, *Preaching through the Bible*, vol. I, 174.

to become like the narrow-minded people, rather be like the broad-minded ones for whom indeed, the whole world is one family (*Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-73). Joseph Parker reminds us that "If we have narrow sympathies, mean ideas, paltry conceptions, we are not scholars in the school of Christ."¹ If we shut ourselves in a tiny prison of our own family, our religion, our caste, and our nationality: then our family becomes small, and our world shrinks.

3.2. The Same DNA of the Heavenly Father

The biblical narrative: the Book of Genesis, only the human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (1:26-27), and because of that, they are considered as the crown of creation. The faith in the image and likeness of God is the central theme of Christian anthropology, and accordingly, this image of God is better interpreted as the image of Christ. As Saint Paul teaches, "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him, all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him, all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (Col 1:15-18). As each human being is created in the image and likeness of God, or the image and likeness of Christ, he or she should always be looked at from this divine perspective and should be honoured and respected accordingly.

The Christian doctrine of the divine image and likeness of human beings is the sole norm of all humanness, and it

¹Parker, *Preaching through the Bible*, vol. I, 175.

destroys all forms of walls of division among human beings. The original way of human beings is this image and likeness of God, and it is one and not many; therefore, the racial and casteist distinctions between one human and another are baseless. It is the foundation of Christian universalism and Catholicism and the Church's all-inclusive approaches. Saint Chāvara believed in this divine image and likeness of human beings and considered each human person as inheriting the DNA of the Heavenly Father. By his life, he taught that no distinctions are possible in humanity socially or religiously, and any division based on heredity and ancestry is false and a great sin.

3.3. "Our Father": A Family Prayer

"Our Father" – the prayer which Our Lord taught us to pray indeed can be considered as the prayer of God's own family – *vasudhaivaakuṭumbakam* or *darśanaṅī*. In this family prayer, we are invited to address God in the most intimate of terms with complete confidence and full freedom of God's children. "The early Church Father, Tertullian, called the Lord's Prayer the perfect summary of the whole gospel."¹ The uniqueness of the New Testament spirituality is very vivid in this beautiful prayer of Jesus. Different exclusivist approaches of the Old Testament paved the way to a kind of inclusivism here. Jewish God was a sectarian God as Yahweh was a God of Jews alone. But, in the New Testament, Jesus had the inclusive idea of God – God as the Father of the entire humankind. Jesus presented God as His

¹Camille, "Why Is the Lord's Prayer So Important," *Vision Vocation Network*, posted on 10 January 2013, https://vocationnetwork.org/en/blog/questions_catholics_ask/2013/01/why_is_the_lords_prayer_so_important (accessed on 26 July 2019).

Father and the Father of the whole of humanity. In the Old Testament, we never see Abraham, Moses Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, or anyone else calling God as his Father. But, in the New Testament spirituality, one can observe Jesus addressing God as His Father employing the Hebrew word *Abba*. According to Martin Luther, "There is more eloquence in the words 'Abba, Father,' than in all the orations of Demosthenes or Cicero put together!"¹

As a family word, *Abba* indicates a close, personal, intimate relationship with God as one's Father. It occurs three times in the New Testament: In Gethsemane, Jesus uses this "family term" in His prayer (Mk 14:36), in Rom 8:15 and Gal 4:6. As we reflect it in light of these passages, we understand *Abba* Consciousness as the awareness, acceptance, and realization of God as "Our Father." It brings the love of the brethren into its proper focus. This new awareness of sonship helps men to conceive humanity as a single human family bonded together in brotherhood under the Fatherhood of God. What is unique about this *Abba* doctrine of Jesus is the universality that he gives to it, namely, God presented as the Father of the entire humankind.

It is said that what makes the New Testament new and distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish is summed up in the knowledge of the fatherhood of God. In the Gospel of John, after the Resurrection when he meets Mary Magdalene, Jesus says: "I am ascending to my father and your father" (Jn 20:17). That means the relationship between God and Jesus can be our relationship with God as

¹Austin, "The Name of God: *Abba, Father,*" *Preceptaustin*, posted on 21 February 2015, <https://www.preceptaustin.org/abba-father> (accessed on 26 July 2019).

well. He and ourselves form a 'We together' before God and belong to the same family in which Jesus is our elder brother. This most intimate close fellowship in the family of God is one of the greatest blessings of the New Testament spirituality. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we have been given new birth into the family of God – *darśanavīṭ*, "Our Father."

3.4. Inclusive Spirituality of "Our Father"

The Lord's Prayer does not teach us to pray 'My Father'; instead, it teaches us to pray 'Our Father.' It is very significant that in the Lord's Prayer, the words I, me, and mine never occur; it is right to say that Jesus came to take these words out of life and to put in their place we, us, and ours. God is not any man's exclusive possession, as the Jewish religion often asserts it. The phrase, Our Father, involves the elimination of oneself and his ego. We might have noticed the Hindu brethren breaking the coconut before entering the temple. What does it mean? It's a significant ritual. The coconut is covered with a hard outer shell. And if we want to taste its sweet water and kernel the white substance, which is there in the inside, we have first to break that harder outer shell. Here, the outer shell is the symbol of one's ego. And only when you break that ego, which is very hard and rough, you can see the God who is there in the temple of your own heart. According to the Indian understanding, God is *Antarayāmin*, and the inner soul dwells in the depth of one's soul. Usually, one goes to the temple to get God's *darśan*. But actually, God is there in your own heart. So if we want to see God, we have first to break our ego and then enter into the temple of our own heart. It is what they symbolically proclaim while breaking the coconut. In other words, if we want to experience God,

first of all, we must uproot all kinds of our ego feelings – I, me, and mine. All these should be thrown away, which is the root cause of all forms of sin.

What is a sin? s-I-n. When that 'I' which is there in the centre of sin is changed into zero, it becomes s-O-n; yes, when our I-ness is reduced into zero, we become the sons or children of the Heavenly Father. Sincere prayer promotes humility, patience, self-denial, gentleness, and inclusiveness. Whenever we recite Our Father, it invites us to uproot our ego, which is the ultimate cause of all exclusiveness and fills us with inclusiveness.

3.5. *Appa* Consciousness: Source of Saint Chāvāra's Inclusivity

The experience of God as Abba was for Jesus the basis and the most potent force for his ministry. Following this Abba spirituality of Jesus, Chāvāra understood Jesus as his Loving Father – *Appan*. *Appan* is the Chāvāra name for God. As we reflect on the interfaith receptiveness of Saint Chāvāra, I think it was his *Appa*-consciousness that formed the foundation of his all-inclusive approaches. He continuously addresses Jesus Christ as *Appa* (Father), *EnteAppa* (My Father), which has the endearing and intimate meaning of 'father' reserved exclusively to the children. "O my father (*enteappan*), I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy of being called your son. My heart, however, tells me to call You by no other name than *enteappan*."¹ The word '*Appa*' is used thirty-one times, which brings out his *Appa* consciousness and reveals how the picture of the loving father deeply impressed his soul. It is the same consciousness that compelled him from within to

¹CWC, III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

work for the wellbeing of entire humanity, irrespective of their caste and creed, by considering them the children of that Father.

Narrow-minded only thinks about all that is yours and mine. For the generous persons, the whole world is a big family. God is the father of families, parents, brothers, sisters, friends, and foes. God is the father of all ethnic races, the whites, the blacks, the yellows, the browns, and the good and the bad. In Him, there is neither Greek nor Barbarian, neither slave nor master, neither man nor woman, but all are free, enjoying the freedom of the children of God; all are equal in the essential equality of His love and sublimity of their vocation – for He makes the sunrise on the just and the unjust alike (Mt 5:45). Man makes a mockery of the Father in heaven when he despises or belittles his brethren.

3.6. Human Family (*Mānava-Kuṭumbakam*)

Saint Chāvāra believed in the religion of humanity, and accordingly, he loved humanity as a whole, as himself. He identified himself not with his ethnicity, nationality, or religion but first and foremost with humanity, and it is this heart of altruism that made him a lover of humanity and expanded his kinship. For him, every life was worth just as his own, and identifying with humanity was possible for him in the direst of circumstances. He was pretty convinced of the fact that “if anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, is a liar” (1 Jn 4:20). His fraternal love had no limits or boundaries; it flowed towards all, especially to the poor and the sick, through which he could create a religion of the human family, which recognized its collective human identity and cared about all humanity.

You just see how pleasing it is before the Lord to nurse the sick. Now my intense desire and earnest request to you is to begin a confraternity that has taken origin from such a motivation. Though I may not have the good fortune to witness the beginning of such an institution, if you so desire, you can get it realized. Keep a charity box with the label “Happy death charity box” and without being ashamed of it, beg of others and raise a fund yourselves and build a modest charity home near the small chapel of yours and let, at least one or two sick people who have no one to take care of, stay in the house and thus try to cultivate at least a shadow of this virtue. It will help the act of mercy to grow in Malabar.¹

In his second letter to Chandy Kattakayam (V/11) Saint Chāvāra while granting him permission for establishing a Confraternity in his locality, also advises him to combine his objective of the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart that was meant to take care of the Sick with the Confraternity of Saint Joseph suggested for preparing the dying for a happy death.

Since it is challenging to establish several Confraternities in the same locality, it is more convenient and useful to combine the different objectives in the same Confraternity. It is vitally essential to prepare the dying for a happy death. The sick people are given special care and help in their sickness. The Holy Church is eager to open branches of this Confraternity everywhere.²

In this letter, we see Saint Chāvāra taking steps to ensure a good death, a death with dignity for all his dying brethren. It is a must that the sick person lying in bed needs someone to hold his hand and tell him: We will look after you; we

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 125-126.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 50.

will ensure that you won't be in pain. Providing all possible emotional and spiritual support to a person close to death is understood by him as the prime duty of the Church. Though in the Western Catholic Church, the Confraternities for a good death were functioning from 1600 onwards, in the Kerala Church we had to wait until 1869, when he started the first lay charitable organization, the 'Confraternity of Saint Joseph for Happy Death' at Kainakary. He untiringly moved with such humanitarian works, and in the same year in the same place, he also founded the first Home of Charity, *Upaviśāla* for the sick, old and destitute. Charity begins at home, and in the Letter written to Kuriāköse Eliseus on 2 October 1870, he reminds the members of the Congregation to take care of the old and sick ones of the community.

I have my fears about the houses where there are no sick members. The presence of a sick member in the home will bring God's blessings in its wake, says Saint Theresa. Thomman tells us that you do not show much concern for our *Valliachan* (aged priest) and that you are not giving him sufficient bread and milk. This is the reason why he seems very weak. Aren't you sorry or it?¹

Saint Chāvāra never had any grudge or resentment towards those who did things wrongly. By loving his friends as well as the enemies, he became a true son of his Heavenly Father. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be the children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45). As always, context is the key to understanding this passage. In the verses immediately before verse 45, Jesus notes a

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 46.

popular sentiment and then gives a countercultural command: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (verses 43-44). Then, in the first half of verse 45, Jesus gives the rationale behind the command: “That you may be children of your Father in heaven.” Similarly, in the context of the *akuṭumbakasituations* of the society and Church, Saint Chāvāra, too, gives a countercultural command in his Testament, written in August 1870 while he was bed-ridden, and entrusted it with the novice, who was then the infirmarian.

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. Secondly, since it is the two families of Thayil and Perumalil who have given us this plot to found our monastery, we are bound to remember them forever and to love them in Christ. So also, those of the Carmel Monastery should remember the Parayee family; those of the Elthuruth Monastery must remember Tharakan and Kallukaran, and those of the Ampazhakad Monastery must remember Kanichai Ittoop.¹

Through the words of his Testament, Saint Chāvāra asks members of the Congregation to love their enemies as well as their benefactors so that his *Darśanavīṭ* will become another *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. MathenKalapurackal had unjustly taken some of the properties of the monastery in his possession, and though the civil court punished him for unjust appropriation, later, he filed a complaint against

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 73.

Saint Chāvāra in the criminal court of Alappuzha.¹ But, Saint Chāvāra never wanted to retaliate: “The blessing and honor of a family consist of its peaceful existence without any quarrel. Even animals can retaliate. But to ignore wrong is possible only for the prudent, strong, and dignified man” (I.1).² Saint Chāvāra was such a strong and dignified man, and that was the honor of his *Darśanaṅgī* as he asked the members of that family to practice it. K. C. Chacko testifies: “to understand the intensity of Chāvāra’s love for his neighbours, we have to look beyond the usual fraternal charity, to the very generous and noble way he treated those who, in any manner, opposed or wronged him or judged him irrationally. It is enough to think about how he behaved towards Bishop Roccas, who caused much disturbance in the Church and even personally offended Chāvāra (see *Positio*: 626).³

Udayansavitāraḥrakṭaḥrakṭaēvāstamēti ca

Sampattau ca vipattau ca mahatāmēkarūpatā.

“When the sun rises, it is red: when it sets, it again is red. The excellent maintain their uniformity both in prosperity and adversity.” Saint Chāvāra was one of such great minds. He had love and concern for all, and even bitter experiences did not stop him from embracing in love those who caused them. He was very much aware of the harm done by Archbishop Meneses and other Portuguese missionaries, especially the Jesuits. But he did not condemn them as many others did but points out the good the community received from them and exhorts his fellow religious to be grateful to them. He had no reluctance in mixing with all sorts of

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 161.

²Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 11.

³Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 473.

people, both high and low, friends and enemies, elders, and children. Fr. Louis reports that Fr. Prior used to sit and watch the games of the boys. When he was present, the boys did not quarrel. Not only did he used to watch the boys play, but according to Fr. Marceline, even joined them and played ball with them.¹ He was a firm believer in the human family (*mānava-kuṭumbakam*) and the best model of fraternal charity.

3.7. Harmonious Blending of Spiritualities (*Sanyāsa-Kuṭumbakam*)

A dispute ensued at the death of Saint Chāvāra regarding the dress, in which, he had to be buried. Immediately after his death, his companions first dressed his body in the official sacerdotal vestments of the Vicar General, as he was the Vicar General of Verapoly. But, his close companions, who knew him better, believed that it was not the sacerdotal vestments but in the religious habit that the body was to be buried in as Saint Chāvāra always loved his religious habit more than the sacerdotal vestments of the Vicar General. We read the following incident in the chronicle of Koonammavu monastery: “Though the body with priestly dress had been exposed in the church in the morning and the office of the dead was being recited before it at night after 8 o’clock, his body was taken into the Koonammavu monastery, and the vestments of the Vicar General were exchanged with his religious habit. Mantle was not used in the Congregation at that time; instead, surplice and stole were put over the cassock.”² It is also admirable to observe the circular of the Vicar General to the churches (see Saint Philomena’s

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Êlias Chāvāra*, 451.

²Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Êlias Chāvāra*, 394-395.

Monastery Chronicle, *Positio*: 461) that “advised the people and priests to come without any pomp or show, and unaccompanied by the parade of confraternities. The reason given was that all such show and pomp were against the discipline of the religious.”¹

This particular incident is a testimony of the fact that even though Saint Chāvāra adorned many titles and positions, his companions – the *kūṭapirappukaḷ* – identified him first and foremost as a *sanyasi* and they respected him accordingly. In their stay with Saint Chāvāra, they all personally observed and realized his great love for religious life, which was manifested in various forms, and one of them was his regard for the religious habit. The word ‘habit’ indicates a set of regular practices one follows, and one’s religious habit is a symbol of certain religious habits and practices, which he/she is supposed to follow in the consecrated life. In the case of Saint Chāvāra, it is the practice of those values rather than the wearing of the religious habit that made him a true faithful. He could discover the pearl of high price implied in his religious habit through his daily religious practices.

In the Indian tradition, the saffron dress is considered as the official dress of a *sanyāsi*, and it is only by the wearing of saffron habit one officially enters into *sanyāsa*. What is its implication in one’s religious life? It is believed that one’s soul becomes liberated as he purifies his body in the fire. When a *sanyāsi* wears the habit in saffron, it is a reminder that he should burn all the desires of his body as long as he lives in the body. Then, if one has already burned all his bodily passions and desires, no further burning is required after his death. That is why, in the Hindu tradition, the body

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 395.

of a *sanyāsi* is never burned after his death, whereas, in the case of the ordinary people, it is required just because they have not yet burned it while they were alive.

Sacrificing oneself is the essence of the Christian *sanyāsa* too. The Christian *sanyāsa* emerged in the Church as an alternative to martyrdom. When Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal, and when the Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, the need for sacrificing one's own life to become a Christian was no more necessary. After Christianity was made the state religion, by merely being a Christian one received wealth and means of luxuries from the empire, because of which, the Church lost its original Gospel values. To regain those lost ideals, some Christians moved to the deserts of Egypt and started *sanyāsa* there. Thus, *sanyāsa* was a new alternative to martyrdom to live an authentic Christian life. In short, our religious vocation is an invitation to lead a life of sacrifice by burning all kinds of bodily and worldly passions and desires.

Realization of the great dream of *tapasubhavanam* and the giving of the title *Ātmānutāpam* for the epic poem that he has written at the end of his life is the flowering forms of the aptitude of *tapas*, which Saint Chāvāra always cherished in his life. He who has been instrumental in instituting the first two living indigenous religious congregations, namely the CMI and CMC, in 1831 and 1866 respectively, actually inculcated Christian traditions of religious life with the farsightedness of a prophet:

Religious institutes, working to plant the Church, and thoroughly imbued with mystic treasures with which the Church's religious tradition is adorned, should strive to give expression to them and to hand them on, according to the nature and the genius of each nation. Let them reflect

attentively on how Christian religious life might be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions, whose seeds were sometimes planted by God in ancient cultures already before the preaching of the Gospel (AG, 18.40).

Saint Chāvāra anticipated the second Vatican Council's teaching in the nineteenth century itself and implemented it rewardingly in the Indian context. Saint Chāvāra and the first fathers chose inculturation of religious life as a vehicle to carry the soul of the Gospel to the Indian soil, which is very much rooted in *sanyāsa* traditions of *Ṛṣis*. Because he started the religious life in the Indian soil, Saint Chāvāra is justly called "the Saint Benedict of India."¹ The measure of services he rendered for the cause of religious life is beyond comparison. It was Saint Chāvāra, who initiated the first seven Indian monasteries. They are Mannanam (1831), Koonammavu (1857), Elthuruth (1858), Vazhakulam (1859), Pulincunnu (1861), Ampazhakad (1868), and Mutholy (1870). These monasteries were the spiritual control-centres of the Church during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which could effectively create a familial atmosphere in the Church and society.

For Saint Chāvāra and his companions, Indianization was not merely any superficial imitation of certain Hindu customs, practices, or names. They never wore saffron clothes or chains of *rudrākṣa*; instead, it was much more profound and life-oriented, as they imbibed the universal values of Indian *sanyāsa* like silence, penance, and *darśan* of God, as per the Council instructions. Seeing that India was the cradle of *sanyāsa*, Saint Chāvāra and his companions opted *sanyāsa* as the primary medium of inculturation. Even when Saint Chāvāra became a priest, his only dream was to start a *tapas-*

¹Panthaplackal, *Chāvārayachan: Oru Rekhachithram*, 91.

bhavan for embracing the religious life for it was the intention of his 'First Holy Mass.' In his deathbed, Saint Chāvāra was unable to do any other forms of penance as he was very much weak in his body. But his determination to complete the epic poem *Ātmānutāpam*, which required a lot of *tapasya* itself can be considered as an act of *tapas*, as it is clarified in his own words:

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

Thus, by composing *Ātmānutāpam*, through being a *tāpasan* (an ascetic), Saint Chāvāra continued his great *tapas* even in the sickbed. In each line of *Ātmānutāpam*, his contrite soul is burning (*tap*) with divine love, as he reflected on the life story of Jesus' redemption of humanity, as well as, lamenting on his sins. Therefore, *Ātmānutāpam* should not be viewed as a mere poetic work; instead, it is the essence of his own *tāpasa* life (ascetic way of life).

3.8. One Family of Different Churches (*Sabhā-Kuṭumbakam*)

Saint Chāvāra was a person who loved the Catholic Church as his own family – *sabhā-kuṭumbakam*. Accordingly, he was always 'thinking with the Church' and 'feeling with the Church,' and hence he should be regarded as a living model of *sentire cum ecclesia* (feel with the Church). As the well-known Indian Church historian A. M. Mundadan presents, he was hundred percent an ecclesiastical man: "whenever he heard about any good thing that happened in the Church (e.g., the First Vatican Council, and the definition of the Immaculate Conception), he rejoiced, and he was grieved whenever any calamity occurred (e.g., the occupation of

Rome by the forces of the Italian government)."¹ In the *Colloquies*, he admits it: "In all my life I wanted to see the victory and joy of the Holy Church."² For him, the Church with which he was thinking and feeling was the home of all; it is not merely a small chapel that can only hold a small group of people; it is not a particular rite in which a small group of people worships with a specific liturgy; preferably, it contains all the people of God. In his ecclesiastical life, he was feeling with them in their pains as well as joys.

Consolation rooted in prayer was certainly the action plan of Saint Chāvāra to comfort an afflicted Church. In a circular written on 25 February 1870 to the members of the Congregation (VI/3), Saint Chāvāra requests them to pray for the Church:

His Holiness the Pope has decreed that we pray fervently in a unique way so that the persecution of the Catholic Church may cease, and joy and peace may prevail all over the world. Those who can, offer masses for this intention. From the day you receive this letter, you are requested to recite the Litany of all saints in Malayalam from the prayer book *Pīyūṣam* having assembled in the chapel, for nine consecutive days. Besides, recite also the following prayer.

"Lord Jesus, remember that you did not spare yourself from those infinite sufferings at the hands of your enemies, and from the lack of faith and ingratitude of your apostles, look with mercy upon the same frail human family, we pray.

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriāḱōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 177.

²CSK, III: AK, 29. In the English translation of the work, this idea is lost. See CWC, III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 12.

“Eternal Father, in reparation for my sins, and through the merits of the Holy Catholic Church, I offer up to you the precious blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.”¹

In another letter written to Fr. Kuriākōse Eliseus on 9 December 1869 (V/6), he briefs how the new press is making initiatives to conscientize people about the Council:

Our latest press is trying to get people interested in the ecumenical council. We printed the prayer to Mary Immaculate and published it from the Mary Immaculate printing press, Koonammavu. We are selling the leaflet at one cash each, so that people, who buy it may feel, it is valuable. This will also inspire the people to pray for the success of the Council until the end. I have distributed the leaflets in Alangad, Varapuzha, Narakal, and Alwaye. All the copies printed have been distributed. More copies will be printed and distributed in other centres.²

When the First Vatican Council defined the Immaculate Conception of Mother Mary we see Saint Chāvāra rejoicing with the Universal Church, and it is vivid in his letter about how the various churches of Italy celebrated it by ringing joyous bells and booming canons:

The critical session of the Ecumenical Council was over by 20 August. On that day, the infallibility of the Pope was defined as a dogma of faith. Excluding those who had to leave for various reasons, there were 540 Bishops. Of these two voted ‘*nonplacet*’. That night the whole city of Rome was illumined as day and as mini heaven. Joyous bells tolled, and the canons boomed in all the churches of Italy, and their fellow beings were intimated

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 68.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 43.

by telephone messages. The whole of Italy celebrated the event as a great feast.¹

In his address to the participants in the plenary assembly of the international union of superior generals (i.u.s.g.), on Wednesday, 8 May 2013, in the Paul VI Audience Hall, Pope Francis said, “thinking with the Church finds one of its filial expressions in faithfulness to the Magisterium, in communion with the Pastors and the Successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome, a visible sign of unity.”² See how beautifully Saint Chāvāra presents this position of the Church in the lines of *Ātmānutāpam* through the lips of Mother Mary as she bids farewell to the beloved members of the early Church. She approaches Peter the head of the Church and kneels before him to show her respect:

She came at once, at the request
 And with reverence knelt before him
 For he was the Head of the Church
 Tears of devotion, stream like flowed
 Master, you are of this crowd,
 The Supreme Head of the Church, our Mother
 Accept along with them, this slave
 I humbly seek your blessing, I beg
 All my life stands replete
 With imperfections, forgive

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 52.

²Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,” *LibreriaEditriceVaticana*, posted in May 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/ma/documents/papa_francesco_20130508_uisg.html (accessed on 14 August 2019).

And grant me leave to enter Heaven

With all your hearts, my friends, I pray (XII.101-112).

The beauty of fidelity to the head of the Church reflected in these lines is the reproduction of Saint Chāvāra's loyalty to the Pope. He always maintained perfect union with the head of the Church; the Pope, with the ordinaries appointed by him, and the doctrines of the Church. The heroic steps that were taken by him to unite all Christians under the Pope are a faithful witness of it. His exhortation to those who were under *Padroado* also confirms it:

After all, they were our brethren (*kūṭapirappukaḷ*) and were behaving like that. So thinking that it would be against true charity and omission in the eyes of God, not to say a few words to them about the trap into which they had fallen. Fr. Prior began to speak to them: "As you are now honoring us and we all are so happy to be together, I wish so much that we should become one, though you have broken away. I am speaking out to you because I feel that otherwise, I would be failing in my duty towards God and you."¹

During the days of Rocco's schism, the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli became deeply concerned about it and felt that the situation was going beyond his control. It is because of this feeling of frustration that he seriously thought of associating closely with Saint Chāvāra and his religious community. In his letter appointing Saint Chāvāra as the Vicar General, he says: "I do not find by my administering the Church the desired spiritual fruits, either among priests or among the laity." In 1861, the Archbishop requested Saint Chāvāra to prepare a warning-notice against Rocco and publish it from the Mannanam press for the awareness of the people of

¹CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 140.

God. Accordingly, he made a circular (*Positio*: 215) in which he cautioned people about the coming of Roccas to disperse them from the sheepfold of Christ. If anyone submits to them, then he would be falling into schism. The circular exhorts the listeners to be ready to die for the defence of the unity of the Church. It is also believed that Saint Chāvāra composed his poem *Martyrdom of Saint Anastāsia* in this context to motivate people to fight heroically against the impending schism.¹

Saint Chāvāra was open and had an all-inclusive mind towards the liturgical reforms. While being closely associating with the Western missionaries, he adopted many good practices from them to perform the liturgy with decorum and solemnity. But this did not mean that he was negligent or indifferent towards the age-long liturgical traditions of the Saint Thomas Christians. He wanted to preserve the identity and traditions of his community, even when he was not reluctant to take over from the Latin Church whatever would be complementary and foster the spiritual tempo of the people as reflected in his *Alōcana* – Reflections. For example, from the Latin tradition, he adopted the funeral services for children, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the lectionary, Holy Saturday services, Forty Hours Adoration ceremonies, various benedictions, the prayers for wearing the vestments, the feast of Saint Francis and Saint Benedict. By reorganizing and shortening the Divine Office in tune with the ancient tradition of the Church, he facilitated the practice of saying it regularly by the clergy.²

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 199.

²Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 265-279.

In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul reminds us that the Church is the family of God: “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.” Saint Chāvāra was one who literally practiced these instructions by considering the Church as the family of God and behaved accordingly. During the Beatification ceremony of Chāvāra, held on 8 February 1986 at Kottayam, Saint John Paul II acknowledged his contributions for the unity of the 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.” Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity and to encourage the clergy and faithful to maintain unity with the See of Peter and the universal Church.¹

For him, the Church was not merely a belief system. Instead, it was a belonging system, and his words and life proclaim that he was indeed a true son of the Church.

3.9. God’s Own Family in God’s Own Country (*Kerala-Kuṭumbakam*)

Kerala, which is branded as God’s own country, is, to a certain extent, God’s own family. It is said that Kerala is the

¹John Paul II, Homily.343, <http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/f5f.htm#dbd> (accessed on 12 November 2018).

only place in the world where Hindus, Muslims, and Christians live together in such harmony. Not many other places in India or the world have such a significant variation of both Christians and Muslims living together with a not-too-large majority of Hindus. According to the 1981 census, Hindus comprise 58 percent, Christians 21 percent, and Muslims 21 percent of the population. According to the 2011 Census of India, there is a slight variation in it, as, at present, 54.73 percent of Kerala's population are Hindus, 26.56 percent are Muslims, and 18.38 percent are Christians.¹ Because of this particular demographical fact of the state, according to R. E. Miller, Kerala provides a unique history of trialogical relationships, a kind of laboratory even within multi-religious India.²

In December 2015, the heart of a Hindu man was transported across Kerala for a Christian patient in dire need of a new one. The event marked the humanitarian spirit of the state soaring high with advocate S. Neelakanda Sharma, 46, from Thiruvananthapuram, becoming the donor and Mathew being the recipient. Funds were raised by a Muslim businessman to pay for the operation, which was performed by the state's top heart surgeon, Jose Chacko Periappuram, a Christian. The entire state became engrossed as the story unfolded. An Indian Navy helicopter and an ambulance – both dispatched by the then Chief Minister of Kerala, Oommen Chandy – transported the heart from Thiruvananthapuram to Kochi. Everybody co-operated, and

¹"Hinduism in Kerala," *Wikipedia*, posted on 21 September 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Kerala (accessed on 14 August 2019).

²Miller, "Triologue: The Context of Hindu-Christian Dialogue in Kerala," in Coward, ed., *Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, 48.

the first organ airlifting in the state took place. Of course, “Kerala is not perfect. But it may be a model of how to keep multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities stable in the long term.”¹ In creating such a favorable atmosphere of inter-religious harmony in the Kerala society, Saint Chāvāra and his *Darśanavīṭ* also had an active role, together with the great personalities of the state like Chattambi Swāmikal and Nārāyaṇa Guru.

3.10. Search of a Suitable Site for *Darśanavīṭ*

In search of a suitable site for the *Darśanavīṭ*, the founding fathers saw in the Ettumannoor Taluk, a stunning small hill in the village of Kumaranalloor called Pullarikunnu. As a fitting place for the monastery, they made arrangements to get it registered, but in response to a notice issued by the Tahsildar, the landlords raised objection saying that it was the abode of the goddess of Kumaranalloor and the trustees would not consent. In the Chronicles, Saint Chāvāra gives his note on those difficulties, which the founding fathers had to face at Pullarikunnu.

They proceeded to Athirampuzha. There they visited the house of Eapen Mappila, the brother of Fr. Jacob Kochupurackal, our Malpan’s student. He extended to them a hearty welcome and offered them all assistance, gave them good advice, and introduced them to the

¹Nair, “There Is a Place in India Where Religions Coexist Beautifully, and Gender Equality Is Unmatched,” *HuufPost*, Posted on 6 April 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/chandran-nair/kerala-religiongender_b_9577234.html (accessed on 13 April 2019).

Tahsildar.¹ With his help, they got an order to inquiry and notices to the land-holders. They assembled and objected that as Pullarikunnu was the property of Kumaranallur Bhagavathy, no church could be erected there without the consent of the trustees. As there would be difficulties in the way of getting possession of the place, the Fathers hesitated to go forward.

The Fathers Shy away from Controversial Property

Then a prominent merchant at Ettumamoor named Ojenar Methar and several others urged them to occupy the site promising to stand by us when trouble arises. But the Fathers said they wanted no problem and would rather be content with a less convenient place.²

Instead of going for a quarrel with anybody, they decided to be content with a less convenient place. That was the noble attitude of the first fathers. According to Indian understanding, a *āśram* is a place where all living beings can live peacefully and joyfully without any worry or fear. It is a citadel of peace and harmony for the entire cosmos. Hence, the founding fathers might have thought that if it would become a place of dispute that might defeat the very purpose of their cause. Significant meanings will come out of little actions, as great trees come out of tiny seedlings. Often, God allows difficulties of one kind or another to move us physically to where He wants us to be (Acts 17:10), or to move us spiritually to “be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (Jas 1:4). In this case, God used the objection of the landlords of Pullarikunnu to deepen the

¹A *Tahsildar* is an executive Magistrate and tax officer of a particular locality accompanied by revenue inspectors. They are in charge of obtaining taxes from people concerning land revenue.

²CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 12-13.

founding fathers' confidence and dependence on Him, and they were growing in faith by such hardships.

3.11. "Pass on and Find Another Well" (Gen 26:16-33)

In the Book of Genesis, one can see a biblical parallel for the above-cited search for a suitable place of the founding fathers with the pursuit of a well of Isaac, the patriarch of the Old Testament. Isaac had possession of flock and herds, and hence he required a well to look after them. So he started making one. During that time, digging a well as one finds a water source was considered a claim of ownership of the land on which it was located, as it enabled a man to dwell there and sustain the herds. That was why the sentiments of the Philistines were concisely expressed in Abimelech's terse suggestion that Isaac departs from Gerar: "And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us; you have become too powerful for us" (26:16). Instead of fighting for possession of this property, Isaac retreated. In Genesis 26:18-22, we read:

Then Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the same names which his father had given them. But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water, the herdsmen of Gerar quarrelled with the herdsmen of Isaac, saying, 'The water is ours!' So he named the well Esek because they contended with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over it too, so he named it Sitnah. He moved away from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rehoboth, for he said, 'At last the LORD has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land.'" Again, God blesses Isaac.

Water in the wilderness is a potent symbol of God's supernatural blessing, in spite of nature. However, even while being blessed, there can be a great conflict. The Philistines repeatedly quarrelled over Isaac's wells. Yet, also while fighting, God was blessing Isaac.

According to Joseph Parker, the different names that Isaac had given for the wells, each time when his men dug. They were *Esek* (conflict – disputation of a worthy sort), *Sitnah* (hatred – the intense and robust dislike), *Rehoboth* (room – space to live in), and *Sheba* (covenant – unchangeable blessing) which represent various mental dispositions through which each person has to pass through his or her journey of life to perfection. Sometimes, these dispositions could be something with which we are fighting within ourselves; sometimes, they could be in others, or even in different events or realities that happen in life. Just like Isaac, who took the right course as he said, “Pass on and find another well,” each one has to go forward with patience until he or she reaches the last stage of the covenant, which is an unchangeable blessing. As the course of life runs through them, we can pass through them under the providence of God.¹ It is a great lesson one has to draw from the lives of the founding fathers in their hunt for a suitable place for a monastery. With the divine assistance, they could gracefully move from *Esek* – the ‘conflict-sight’ to *Sheba* – ‘the covenant-site.’

“Finding the monastery was not happening in their favor; the fathers decided to get another plot.”² A prominent merchant at Ettumannor, Ojanar Methar, and several others promised they would get the land, provided the fathers

¹Parker, *Preaching through the Bible*, vol. I, 254-261.

²CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 13.

were ready to face some challenges. But that could not change the mind of the fathers, and they did not yield to any such temptation. Yes, the right view in such circumstances indeed, and as the leaders were people of good temper, the others also gradually changed and backed off from their confrontation. There is a place for every one of us, could we but find it; sometimes, it may require a long search in finding that right place. Still being ready to take up that challenge, was the noble attitude of the fathers. There were incidents in the history of the world religions in which the concerned authorities took a different stand in similar cases, which created tensions between people of different faiths. Most of the fights between different religions were often on a disputed land, as it is evident in the history of crusades that took place in the medieval period between the Christians and the Muslims for the ownership of the Holy Land, or in the Israel-Palestine tension, Nilakkal issue in 1980, which unfortunately gave an occasion for a Hindu-Christian confrontation in Kerala, and the tension between Muslims and Hindus on Ayodhya issue. They are still going on, and so in the name of God, religions are fighting each other and many innocent people are brutally killed.

While searching the site for the monastery at Mannanam, see how Saint Chāvāra acknowledges the various help received by Fr. Porukara and his company from a boy who was belonging to the *Īzhava* caste called *Ittan*:

Determined to find a suitable place for the first religious house for the Congregation, our Malpan and Fr. Porukara set out. Jacob Kaniyanthara was attending on them. He was like a plant that is likely to have the fragrance of the tree on which it leans. There was also Ittiaaip Kallunkal of the parish of Pallippuram with them. Besides, there was one boy of the *Īzhava* caste

called Ittan, who by his contact with Malpan Abraham Thachil, known as the Malpan of the whole of India and who was teaching at Pallippuram, knew all the routes and had long explored the area extensively. This Ittan, too, accompanied them on several occasions.¹

In the case of the healing of ten lepers, Saint Luke particularly mentions, only one of the ten being a Samaritan, returned to glorify God and give thanks to Jesus for His great mercy and power (Lk 17:15). Here, Saint Chāvāra specially mentions the service of Ittan, the *Īzhava* caste boy. It clearly shows the great appreciation Saint Chāvāra had for the people of the lower sections of the society. We do not remark upon a man that he has the use of his right hand, that he writes with it, points with it, or performs the usual duties of life with it, but when a man is left-handed, the incident instantly strikes us as a peculiarity. All these peculiarities are noticed in the Bible.² “But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised for them a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man left-handed: and by him, the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab” (Judg 3:15). All kinds of men are made use in the building up of the kingdom of God. The same is the history of the CMI Congregation, and the story of Ittan is told to us by Saint Chāvāra to remember and imbibe this biblical message.

3.12. “Meek Could Inherit the Land” (Mt 5:5)

At last, the founding fathers succeeded in finding an appropriate place for the monastery. As the scripture teaches, “The meek would inherit their land” (Mt 5:5), in

¹CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 5-6.

²Parker, *Preaching through the Bible*, vol. V, 342.

God's good time. As it is narrated in Genesis, "He moved away from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rehoboth, for he said, 'At last the Lord has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land'" (Gen 26:22). As Isaac's search for a well ended happily, so the founding fathers' long search for a site finished with a happy note. For they could fix upon Mannanam hill, as the suitable site for the monastery, which was the place God had designated for them and strikingly, here too, together with the site we see the presence of a well as it is explained in the Chronicle by Saint Chāvāra: "Then we all set out to have a good look over this *Besrouma*. As the whole place was a thick forest, we climbed up with great difficulty, breaking and cutting off branches and almost reached near the well. We found it so very broad and breezy, and all of us liked it."¹ Later, the registration of the land and the obtaining of the required legal documents went on smoothly. "All this was obtained without any payment, thanks to Divine help and the assistance of the Revenue Officer. At this, we all felt relieved."² Finally, a site was found and cleared, and there was no opposition from any corner, and here, the parallel between Isaac's hunting of well and the founding fathers' hunt for a site for the monastery is indeed an inspiring one for generations!

The building up of the Mannanam Monastery was indeed the building up of an inter-religious society in Kerala. In clearing a path to the Mannanam hillside, there was a Muslim man called JenarMether, who generously extended his help for that noble cause. It is acknowledged and appreciated by Saint Chāvāra as follows, "The work

¹CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 15.

²CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 19.

which was discontinued during the Holy Week was taken up again on Monday after Easter. One day Jenar Methar also sent his Pulayas. On every following day, Kochupura, Peetakakal, Poveni, Tharen, and Malen did the same. Every day Tharakan and his brother came up to supervise the work and also sent their Pulayas to finish clearing everything up."¹

To add more colour to the inter-religious spirit that reflected in the instituting of the monastery, especially during the initial days of its construction, the founding fathers and other workers stayed at Eacharachar's farm-house, who was a great Hindu friend of Saint Chāvāra. "These days, the Perumali brothers took much trouble for us, feeding us, fathers, and the workmen. They went to Eacharachar's farm-house, had it cleared up for us to stay, and gave us supper there.² Again, for the wooden construction materials, trees were collected from an Illam as Saint Chāvāra testifies it: "we got from an *Illam* (adjacent to Mailakompu), a magnificent tree 18 Kols³ tall and about 26 in girth and had it felled and each of its branches cut into three or four pieces.⁴

Even in the instituting of the Ambazhakad monastery, we see some positive inter-religious connections. It was Ittoop Kanichai who donated the land for the monastery, who was the biggest landlord of that area, and there is an interesting story behind it. One summer, he had a quarrel with a Namboothiri and was arrested and imprisoned. While, in prison, an idea dawned on his repenting mind and

¹CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 16.

²CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 18.

³One *Kol* is 3 feet.

⁴CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 35.

accordingly, when he was out of prison, he gave his bungalow, plot, and also some field to establish a monastery at Ambazhakad.¹

The same spirit of inclusiveness is also observable in settling various issues related to the coconut cultivation of the Mannanam monastery with Namputhiripad in 1857.

Thus, from September 1844, Mathu Kathanar of Muttathu Puthenpurackal came and settled in our property, having constructed a small house. We bought about 2,000 coconut saplings from areas like Mannancherry, Alleppey, Kayamkulam, and Thrikunnapuzha and began cultivating and planting correctly.

The people of Namputhiripad came and began planting the saplings also in the area assigned to us. So we mutually agreed to stop there and not to proceed further. Thus we all decided to look after the space allocated to each one of us and to work independently. Therefore on 22 June 1846 in the year, we counted the trees at Theruvuchira and those towards the east and divided then amicably and signed the agreement requiring each one to care for the property assigned to each one.²

The spirituality of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* is a spirituality of inclusiveness. For the members of *Darśanavīṭ*, exclusiveness is always vice, and only inclusiveness is regarded as a virtue. Saint Chāvāra and the other founding fathers considered the Kerala society as their own family and tried to love them as *kūṭapirappukal*. Also, in some of the official letters of Saint Chāvāra written to the ecclesiastical authorities, it is very much reflected. Thomas Roccas,

¹CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 177-178.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 131-132.

concerning the Bishop, in his letter to His Holiness Pope Pius IX in 1861, concludes with a request for the papal blessing on the motherland and on all those who live there. He states, "Grant us a blessing in plenty, on all our parishes, our motherland and on all those who live here. We are living here, subject to authorities who hold other faith."¹ The same is repeated in his second letter to the Pope, and it was written in 1870: "Lastly, we implore your apostolic blessings on our country, on our Maharāja and our Ministers."² His concern for the motherland is further reflected in the letter to His Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Propagation of Faith written in 1861: "We beseech you to shower your paternal blessing on our land and to pray to God that He may not forsake us. We are sure that God will not forsake those who pray to Him earnestly and with a pure conscience."³

Saint Chāvāra was praying not only for the members of the Mother Church but also for all the members of the motherland. He requested the papal blessing for all, including the Maharāja and Ministers. He always tried to maintain a cordial relation with the Maharāja as there is no authority except God: "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom 13:1). In 1867, hearing that the Maharāja of Travancore was coming to Alwaye, he visited him and placed the offering of the Archbishop to His Highness, consisting of a decorative candle of 15 lbs.⁴ He rendered to Caesar the things that are

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 3.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 5.

³CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 8.

⁴CWC, I: *The Chronicles*, 114.

Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21). Such an inclusive spirituality is the right and straight path of religiosity; it is the gateway and the royal road for those who strive for realization, and it played a vital role in making an atmosphere of a *kuṭumbakam* in the society of Kerala.

3.13. A School of Indian *Saṃskṛti* (*Saṃskṛta-Kuṭumbakam*)

Max Mueller, who was a great philologist and philosopher of Indology, was convinced of the fact that Sanskrit was a common inheritance of the entire humanity. He celebrated the learning of Sanskrit, which was the grandmother and proto-type of all the Indo-European languages, like a linguistic coming back to his own mother's home, as he expressed it beautifully, "We all come from the East - all that we value most has come to us from the East, and in going to the East everybody ought to feel that he is going to his "old home" full of memories."¹ According to Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, "Sanskrit held the key to India's ancient thought and culture, and without studying it, one cannot familiarize oneself with his heritage."

"Sanskrit is like the river Ganga for our languages. I always feel that if it were to dry up, the regional languages would lose their vitality and power," said Mahatma Gandhi. As the Father of the Nations appropriately articulates, just like all other regional languages of India, Malayalam too receives its vitality and power from the Sanskrit language. Also, Sanskrit, which is regarded to be in the soul of India, had a remarkable influence on the Christian and Muslim traditions of Kerala. Regarding this vital influence, V. Raghavan, who was the former President of the

¹Mueller, *India, What Can It Teach Us?* 29-30.

International Association of Sanskrit Studies, observes: "In Kerala where Sanskrit and Malayalam have blended into a homogeneous amalgam, the community of Sanskritists is a commonwealth of Hindus, Christians, and Muslims."¹

Saint Chāvāra also understood the importance of learning Sanskrit in the cultural and spiritual background of our nation and established the first Catholic Sanskrit School in Kerala (1846), at Mannanam in the district of Kottayam and welcomed students irrespective of their caste and creed at a time when Sanskrit was considered to be the language par excellence. He believed that Sanskrit is the common heritage of all, irrespective of religion and spirituality. In the new school, as both the high class and low-class students could sit together as children of God and learn that sacred language, he showed how each Indian could integrate this common heritage into one's own spiritual experience. O. N. V. Kuruppu praises it as follows: "He started an institution for those who were condemned to have no right to study Sanskrit, and it was done only by a Christian who was a religious priest; it was made possible in that caste-ridden society, only because of his great will power."²

The first teacher of that school was a well-known Sanskrit scholar from Thrissur, and there is a convincing logic that Saint Chāvāra raised before the teacher as he had some reservations to teach the students of low cast people. Saint Chāvāra asked: "If the religion does not have any stipulation, for the rice that is to be used for the most sacred sacrifice, is prepared by the trampling of a low cast person's feet, then why there are such reservations only for studying Sanskrit, sitting together with him?" People who are close to

¹Raghavan, "Foreword" to *Kristubhagavatam* by P. C. Devassia, i.

²Kuruppu, "Adanapradananlute Suwisesakan," 38.

God are close to the poor and the least for; they are treated as an outcast and marginalized by society.

In 1888, Nārāyaṇa Guru wrote on the wall of the Śiva Temple the following slogan:

Without difference of Caste,
Nor enmities of Creed,
All live like brothers and sisters,
At least here in this ideal place.

But, Saint Chāvāra, even before Nārāyaṇa Guru practised this great principle in the classroom of the Sanskrit school, which he instituted in 1846 at Mannanam. It is relevant here to understand that Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra initiated a social and cultural revolution in the history of Kerala society, which significantly introduced a new era of inclusivism. Saint Chāvāra was a great apostle of Dalit movements. He also collected funds from parishes and beneficiaries to buy a plot of wet paddy field nearby and ordered that the monastery must run it to meet the expense of the school. Besides starting the first Catholic Sanskrit School at Mannanam, Saint Chāvāra had also given order while he was the Vicar General of the Malabar Church in 1864, to start schools (*Paḷḷikūḍam*) adjacent to every church. This became a milestone in bringing Kerala society at the forefront of literacy, together with other related social changes in the community. As a result, several schools came up, opening their doors to all children irrespective of caste and creed. This inclusive educational revolution initiated by Saint Chāvāra caused rapid socio-cultural changes.

Being a great apostle of inclusive education, perhaps Saint Chāvāra could be numbered among those who grasped and realized the lessons of *Tattvamasi* and practiced it in his life. He not only founded a Sanskrit school but also learned Sanskrit together with the other students, which

indeed provided him a gateway to understanding the Indian spiritual way of life, which in turn helped him to promote good interfaith and intercultural relationships. According to Swami Vivekananda, "The love and mercy contained in *Tattvamasi* is the basis of all Indian moralities."¹ Paul Doyens also considers it as the foundation of one's love for the neighbour: "It is highly impossible to love one's neighbor as oneself, without the base of *Tattvamasi*.² When a man started to love man as God, his love became divine as "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Saint Chāvāra was the one who dismissed all forms of split mentalities and realized the essence of *Tattvamasi* in himself and in the socio-historical context of his time.

3.14. A Lover of Languages (*Bhāṣā-Kuṭumbakam*)

Because of his inclusive thinking and also being a great lover of knowledge, Saint Chāvāra was always eager to learn different languages. He improved his understanding of his mother tongue, Malayalam, by learning Sanskrit. To have a broader knowledge of liturgical matters, he mastered the Syrian language. Then he had a working knowledge of Latin, Portuguese, and Italian. It is in the last years of his life; he studied Italian as he realized that there were perfect books in that language, like that of Maria A. Greda. Like his teacher, he also read Tamil books and probably helped in the translation of some into Malayalam.³

According to the opinion of Fr. Marceline, the knowledge of Saint Chāvāra on theological subjects, both dogmatic and moral, was comparable to great theologians, which he

¹Azhikod, *Tattvamasi*, 128-129.

²Azhikod, *Tattvamasi*, 141.

³Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 453.

developed by his constant reading, though he had no formal training in Western theology.¹ Even in those days, he took a keen interest in collecting a wide range of books for the libraries. For example, according to the information available in the third Chronicle of Mannanam (318-330), we see a list of books consisting of seven pages that were ordered by the Archbishop as not to be taken out of the Koonammavu monastery, as they were regarded as rare collections. The list gives all the details of each book, such as the name of the book, the language in which it is written, and other information about the publication. Other than Malayalam, there were books related to both Indian and European languages, including those in Arabic. It is incredible to know about the varieties of those collections. In some of his letters, often, we see references to a number of these books.

In reply to the request of the Superior, I searched for two books: "The Sorrows of the Mother" for Sr. Clara and "The May Devotions" for the Mother Superior. These books are not available. In case you need any book either to study Tamil or to read and if you specify it, I will send it to you. There was a retreat for the nuns in Rome in 1864. Our father missionary sends you this book to be kept there as your copy.²

I was reading these days "Monaca Santa," written by Saint Alphonsus Liguori, which treats the women religious. I feel holy envy at your immense good fortune. It is very accurate.³

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvara*, 454.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 75-76.

³CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 77.

Even without looking for it, I have found a small book in the room. When I opened the book, I found that the book treats the exemplary conduct of the sisters. I am sure God left it there for you. So, immediately, I translated the Tamil book into Malayalam. I have completed it. All of you must go through it at least once, by way of spiritual reading. Since the children have learned Tamil now, they could read the Tamil book as well and learn more words if the translation is read side by side with it. So, I send both the books to you. Use them with care.¹

Perhaps, it may be because of his multilingualism and reading of a wide range of books that might have helped Saint Chāvāra develop an inclusive outlook, consisting of more positive attitudes and less prejudice toward people who were different. It expanded his view of the world, and that naturally helped him to limit the barriers between people and have a kind of respect towards others and their cultures.

3.15. A Mystical Family of Oneness (*Ēka-Kuṭumbakam*)

According to the Upaniṣadic spirituality, in this universe, there is something that cannot be divided into parts, which is infinite in nature and exists everywhere. This vision of the unity of reality is summarised as *Īśāvāsyamidamsarvam* – the Supreme Being envelops all this. Hence, for a realized person, everything in the universe is part of one complete whole that is inseparable from God, and Saint Chāvāra's such vision of the *ēka-kuṭumbaka* spirituality is beautifully presented in the XI canto of *Ātmānutāpam*, in connection

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 87.

with the farewell of Mother Mary in which she bids goodbye to the earth, who is the common mother of all.

Rules the earth sky and water
Me, you nurture in your mercy
Though little do I deserve; the earth
Supports me and ever does please
Can I, your slave, thank you enough
For this grace? Behold your hand-maid
For my brethren, the dwellers of the Earth
Plead for them yet, I pray!
That they may love you as you deserve
They, my brethren, humankind,
That they may know you as their God
And their gratitude express (XI 449-460).

The moment my soul, my body leaves
To the Earth, the common mother of the man
My body shall pass and my soul
To God for whom it longs, shall go (XI.469-472).

Man's intimate dependence on mother earth is well presented in these lines. Human beings, as residents of the planet, are nourished and sustained entirely by the Mother Earth. She provides us our food and all the resources for life and thus continues all living in it. In return, Mother Mary had a filial love towards mother earth. That is why, as Mother Mary departs, nature expresses its sorrow.

And, right at the moment escorted by Him
She journeyed forth to dwell the Land of Life
Behold, the Sun bedimmed his face through woe
This he did on the day the Son chose to die
The fauna of the air besides flew hither and thither
Clamouring aloud displaying their woe to all.

(The Last Canto 5-10)

The mother earth feels sad at the imminent separation of the Mother Mary, the sun bedimmed his face, and the fauna shouts out aloud, displaying their woes. Saint Chāvāra is comparing the changes that took place in nature with that of the death of Jesus. The Crucifixion darkness is an episode in three of the canonical gospels in which the sky becomes dark at daytime during the crucifixion of Jesus. When Jesus died, then, “from noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over the whole land” (Mt 27:45). Jesus, from his birth to death, maintained an intimate union with nature. He appreciated the beauty of nature (Mt 6:28-29) and showed respect for life in his parables, which are rich in nature imageries.

Most of the essential events of Jesus took place in nature: At his birth, Luke tells us that Jesus was laid in a manger as there was no place for them in the inn (Lk 2:7). From there onwards, in his entire life, he had the first-hand contact with nature. He regularly returned to the hills to pray and spent long hours in commune with the Father (Lk 6:12). His baptism was not in the temple of Jerusalem, but in the sacred temple of nature – the river Jordan (Mt 3:13-17). He often taught people in the classroom of life (Mt 5:1-7), and many of his parables were centred on nature (Mt 13:3-9). In the end, his death also took place in life – in the mountain of Calvary. And, when nature lost its beloved one, we see in the gospels how nature reacted to it. Not only did the sun went off, but also, “the earth quaked, and the rocks were split” (Mt 27:51). These lines of *Ātmānutāpam* highlight the inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of humans begin with the cosmos. It also throws light on Saint Chāvāra’s attitude towards creation, which is of high respect and regard for nature. The essence of spirituality is our openness to reality, which is the openness to everything. The

consequence of such a vision is one's concern for mother earth.

In his letter to Fr. Kuriākōse Eliseus, in September 1870, Saint Chāvāra advises his companions to plant the saplings of Mango Tree:

To remind all the brethren of our Congregation that men are weak and faltering and that the fruits of their spiritual endeavors would be more lasting and more delicious as these sweet mangoes. I would wish that you plant at least one sapling of this fresh 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).

You may take one for Mutholi and also for Mannanam if you like.¹

Saint Chāvāra was a good farmer. His instructions to the sisters on how to take care of the coconut saplings make it clear:

The soil at the roots of the coconut saplings inside and outside the walls of the cloister must be tilled, and the fiber roots must be removed. Channels should be dug around them and packed with manure - ash and charcoal. The top of the coconut palms must be cleared of the dry leaves. Thus when the base and the top of the coconut palms are removed, the tree will bear more fruit, and we will obtain plenty of materials for fire in the kitchen.²

He not only maintained good fruit trees and coconut trees close to the monasteries but was also very generous to give away the fruits of those trees to others. On solemn feast days, he would announce to the novices of Koonammavu, "I

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 45.

²CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 81.

have blessed the whole of the orchard," which meant that he permitted them to pluck mangoes and other fruits and eat them freely. He treated the youngsters sweetly and affectionately, providing them various fruits of the orchard.

The third letter of Saint Chāvāra to the Sisters written on 4 April 1870, while he was sick, glows with his *ēka-kuṭumbaka* spirituality, in which he advises them to develop a kind of pure mysticism, in which every pulse of the veins, every winking of the eyes, every breath of human beings together with each little voice of the birds are converted into a prayer.

You and I suffer from the same ailment now, and so both of us need the same treatment at present, and we both need the same treatment: that is, to repair for the sins of the past life and the present fault commit, we need virtues. But we are unable to cultivate them. For such people, there is a secure method, which I will explain here below:

1. God punishes us not only for the sins committed by others but also when we rejoice in the crimes committed by others. So even if we enjoy over the good done by others. He shall be pleased with us. Hence we must offer to Him all the good done by the saints and martyrs and even the good works and repentance of the Sinner-Saint Mary Magdalene and rejoice over them as if they had been our own.
2. Offer up to God every pulse beat of our veins, every winking of our eyes, every breath of ours, each little chirping of the birds – yes everything as our prayer.
3. Offer all these in union with the works of our Lord, which are of infinite merit.

In this way, we will wash all our sins as well as acquire an abundance of merit.¹

It is a beautiful form of mystical prayer, in which one becomes united with all – not only with the entire humanity, including sinners and saints of the earth and heaven but also with the whole cosmos, including birds. Through this mystical prayer, Saint Chāvāra teaches us that suffering is a reality that is to be accepted positively. Through our creative approach, we can convert it into an abundance of merit. That is the secret of mysticism, and people who practice it live like a lotus plant, untouched by the waters of life, and suffering, yet drawing their nourishment from it and letting their consciousness bloom like the beautiful, thousand-petalled flower with its face turned towards the sun, who is God Himself. Through this kind of mystical spirituality, they always remain a blissful and happy throughout their lives even while they are encountered with various difficulties of life. Like Saint Francis of Assisi, realizing that all creatures come from the same primordial source, who is God our Father and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Chāvāra could also relate himself to Christ and all creation as brothers and sisters of the one universal family, and in this letter, he conveys that mystical experience to his beloved Sisters.

In short, Saint Chāvāra was following the universal rule of *Ēkam sad viprabahudhāvadanti* – Being is one and learned people call it with different names (RV 1.164.46). He believed in the oneness of humanity. Like the fingers of a hand, we appear as distinct and separate, we are all linked and are part of each other. We are all created to live and work together as members of one family – *ēka-kuṭumbakam*.

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 78.

3.16. *Darśanavīṭ*: A Sea of Galilee

In the social, cultural, and religious background of the nineteenth century, the *Darśanavīṭ* was similar to the Sea of Galilee. Unlike the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee is rich with colourful marine life. There are lots of plants and varieties of fishes. As it is evident from the biblical narratives, it had supported the lives of many for the abundance of fishes that region had and the good harvest of crops in the lands surrounding its waters. In Jesus' time, the area around this sea was a string of thriving cities and it was the sea where Jesus found his "fishers of men" (Mt 4:18-22). It is the same sea where Jesus told the disciples to cast their nets to the other side of their boat. They caught so many fish that they struggled to bring them all in (Jn 21:1-10).

Geographically, the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea are only 63 miles apart and share the same region and same source of water. The Sea of Galilee is very tiny compared to the vast Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is only 21 km long and 13 km wide and pretty small in comparison to the Dead Sea, which is 67 km long, 18 km wide, and 1,237 feet deep. The same River Jordan flows into both these seas, and there is only one difference between these two bodies of water. The Sea of Galilee has an outlet; the Dead Sea does not! Water flows through the Sea of Galilee. Water flows into the Dead Sea but not out of it, and that causes the Sea of Galilee to be beautiful and alive while the Dead Sea is barren and lifeless.¹

According to the biblical narratives, even a Dead Sea can once again beam with life! The Old Testament prophets wrote of a time when abundant water would flow from the

¹"Sea of Galilee," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Galilee (accessed on 13 October 2018).

temple of God in Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea, “healing” the now lifeless saltwater and making it a sea that abounds with all kinds of fish and underwater life (Eze 47:1, 8-10). Similarly, the New Testament Book of Revelation describes a time in the future when a crystal-clear river will flow from Jerusalem, giving life to the area around it (Rev 22:1). Coming back to the social and religious situations of Kerala, the creative role played by Saint Chāvāra through his *Darśanaviṭ* is the fulfilment of these biblical prophecies.

As the Sea of Galilee receives water from the river of Jordan, contributions were flowing to the *Darśanaviṭ* from different corners of the society. According to Indian tradition, *āśramas* are built and managed by the contributions of generous people. For example, there is a board kept in the Gandhi *āśram* of Sevagram, stating that *āśramkāādihārjanādhār* – “the support of the *āśram* is the support of the people.” In the institution of the *Darśanaviṭ* also we see this support from the people. The place for the Mannanam monastery is given by Thayil Tharkan and his younger brother Kochupottan Mappila, for Ambazhakad by Ittoop Kanichai, for Mutholy by the Mannoor family, for Kuriyand by the Mattam family, for Champakulam by the Mappilasserily family and Vazhakulam by the Nampyaparampil family. Monsignor Stabilini contributed his share of a reasonable sum (Rs. 200) towards the erection of the *Darśanaviṭ*, and at the same time, sent circular inviting the churches and the faithful of Kerala to follow his example. The circular letter met with a happy response from the leading churches of the Saint Thomas Christians.

*Prathamavayasipītam̐tōyamalpaṁsmarantaḥ,
Śirasinihitabhārānārikēlānarāṇām
Dadātijalamanalpāsvādamañjīvitāntam,
Na hi kṛtamupahāraṁsādhaḥvōvismaranti.*

The coconut trees, remembering the little amount of water they were fed, when they were saplings, carry loads of coconuts on their top and supply humans with sweet tasty water in abundance during their life-span. The wise never forget the help received. In his childhood, Saint Chāvāra learned letters and primary lessons of knowledge from a Hindu teacher; later, he repaid it by starting a Sanskrit school. Similarly, during the infancy period of the *Darśanavīṭ*, he and his companions received generous contributions from others and later in return for all those different gifts received from others, like the Sea of Galilee through its various apostolic outlets, it supported the lives of many. *Sagacchadhavaṃsainvadadhvaṃsainvōmanāsijānatām*. “Let us meet together, talk together, and work together for the well-being of our society” (Yajur Veda X.191.2). The members of *Darśanavīṭ* with an inclusive approach, lived together and worked together for the well-being of Kerala society and the Church.

From the history of the *Darśanavīṭ* (CMI Congregation), it is very clear that it has grown to the present status just because of its missionary outlet. The more it opened itself to the various mission needs of times, the more it had become. On 8 December 1855, it only had 11 members. By the Reunion Movements in 1921 and High Range Malabar Mission in 1935, it had grown to 300 Members. Then there was a rapid growth by the North Indian Mission initiatives in 1955 and reached 900 Members. In 2000, it had 1,500 members, and at present, its members are working in 30 countries. In 2020, the number of priests will reach 2000. It could be said from this analysis of its history, that it is the flowing water of missionary outlet which brought real growth in the congregation. As mentioned in the circular of

Monsignor Stabilini, “by the zealous work of these selected souls, all possible blessings”¹ were obtained.

Saint Chāvāra and the members of his *Darśanavīṭ* could do all possible services for the Kerala Church and society, only because of their inclusive spirituality. Their exemplary lives proved that any spirituality that is exclusive and which prevents one from living in harmony with another is not spirituality at all. When one is confined to oneself, his spirituality becomes narrow, whereas, as one realizes oneself in others, the entire world becomes his family.

Yastusarvāṅibhūtāniātmanyevānupaśyati

Sucātmānamtatonavijugupsate (IsUp 6).

“He who sees all beings in his self and his self in all beings does not feel any revulsion.” This vision of all existences in the Self and of the Self in all lives was the foundation of their inclusive spirituality. It sustained the multiplicity of the Church and society. Their various ministries helped the society to live together as one family in co-existence and co-operation. For them, the problem of each became the problem of all and their mutual understanding and appreciation. The readiness to give and take, the ability to rise above all kinds of narrow thinking, divisions and of provincialisms created a better atmosphere of family inclusiveness in the Church and society, and thus the *kuṭumbakam* became a *kuṭumbakam*.

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 79.

Chapter 4

DARŚANA-KUṬUMBĀKAM **The Theological Inclusiveness**

This chapter is an attempt to make an Indian reading of the works of Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra. As the various orientations and thinking patterns of an author are invariably reflected in his works, we are reasonable in hoping that, by analyzing these works, we get insights on such orientations of the author. In the same way, a critical appraisal of the different literary works of Saint Chāvāra will also unfurl some insights on the theological inclusiveness and receptiveness. Being born and brought up in the grand *ārṣabhārata* tradition, he enriched his Christian revelation by the rich treasures of the Indian culture. By being faithful to his Christian revelation, which was built on the foundation of the apostles and Saint Thomas, he could make a meaningful cultural adaptation which was insisted by the Vatican Council II.

From the people's customs, traditions, wisdom, learning, arts, and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things, which can contribute to the glory of their creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace. Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these people. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. As a result, avenues will be opened for a more profound adaptation in the

whole area of Christian life, and the Christian life can be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture (AG, 22).¹

We are thinking in tune with the teachings of the Council, A. M. Mundadan holds that culture is to revelation what music is to dance, and when the two are judiciously and harmoniously blended, there emerges an organic unity. Such a revelation has a sacramental character.² And in this regard, the attempt made by Saint Chāvāra to meet the core of Christian revelation with other cultures has a significant value. It seems that Hinduism and various cultural elements of Indian tradition helped him to develop a new understanding of the Gospel.

4.1. Assimilation with Discernment

Saint Chāvāra had a natural inclination for relevant and meaningful adaptation, both in secular and religious matters. From the time of *kaḷari* education itself, he was exposed to various Hindu practices, and in the beginning, he followed them blindly, as it was recalled in the lines of his *Ātmānutāpam*:

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

¹Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, 612.

²Mundadan, *Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy*, 204-205.

The traditional Hindu practice of *vidyārambha* was recalled in the above lines by Saint Chāvāra. Accordingly, the *āśān*, who was a Hindu teacher, initiated him to learning by making him write the alphabet with the right index finger on the grains of rice spread on the floor and making him repeat the Hindu prayer: *Hari Śrī Gaṇapatāye namaḥ*. Making such a prayer to a Hindu God is something that is not acceptable in the Christian faith, and hence, he regrets having said it during the beginning days of the *kaḷari* education. It is a precise instance of blind imitation of the Hindu practice, without looking whether they are good or bad, though, at that tender age, he was not able to decide on things properly and make correct judgments. Later, when he matured in age and Christian wisdom,¹ he gradually learned to distinguish good from evil and selected the excellent practices of Hindu tradition, which were in tune with his Christian faith.

“Test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1 Thes 5:21), eventually became the guiding principle of Saint Chāvāra. That is why he replaced *Hari Śrī Gaṇapatāye namaḥ* with *Sarvēśvarāya namaḥ* and *Anādyāya namōstu, paḷḷikūdam* with *āśān kaḷari*, seminary education with *malpānite* system (*gurukulam*). Regarding the liturgical matters, he integrated various right elements from the Latin tradition, like Holy Saturday service, the funeral service for children, the Little

¹“We may remember that, in those days, the European missionaries’ apologetic theology and negative approach to faiths and cultures other than their own were prevalent, which certainly were a great influence on Bl. Chāvāra’s religious thinking. This largely explains the dark picture he paints of his experiences with non-Christians during the *kaḷari* days.” Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra*, 28-29.

Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and popular devotions that fostered the spiritual nourishment of the people. The motive of adaptations and integrations was to promote the better spiritual experience of the people. As the Church learns to breathe with both lungs, East and West, he enriched the Saint Thomas traditions by adopting from both the Eastern and Western cultures.

4.2. Indian Implications Are Missing in the Translated Text

The different works of Saint Chāvāra have already been translated into English in four Volumes with the title, *Complete Works of Blessed Chāvāra*. This translation, however, has some limitations. As is usual with any translated work, this text, too, cannot convey the true meaning of some of the terms and concepts of the original Malayalam text, which in turn causes some semantic issues, are not quickly resolved. That is, though the literal translation has been kept close to the original, certain words and concepts from the Malayalam original have miserably lost the unique Indian sense during the translation to English. For example, by translating terms like *kali-yugam*, *veda-nāthan*, *pāda-paṅgajam*, *trkkannu*, to ‘ages-back’, ‘Lord of the Gospel’, ‘leg’, ‘darling-eyes’, respectively, they have lost their Indian nuances completely, which the original Malayalam terms beautifully conveyed. For this reason, to better appreciate the Indian implications of the works, the transliterated version of the original Malayalam words and lines are given as footnotes wherever it is required.

4.3. The Inclusive Theology of Ātmānutāpam

In his poem *Ātmānutāpam*, Saint Chāvāra presents Christ and his Gospel message with an Indian touch. Even though

this epic poem (*Mahākāvya*) is written in Malayalam, it has a brilliant style of Indian presentation of the life of Jesus through the transymbolization of interreligious concepts, idioms, and principles. It consists of twelve cantos with 3,000 metric verses. Saint Chāvāra, who founded a Sanskrit school, and learned Sanskrit together with other students,¹ indeed, in that process of learning this classical language, imbibed the spiritual essence of the ancient ṛṣis for himself through *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* to effectively proclaim the message of the Gospel to the soul of India. That is why, in *Ātmānutāpam*, while explaining the episode of the Infancy Narrative, we see Saint Chāvāra celebrating the great feast of Christmas as a symphony of interfaith, where, the Child Jesus is given an Indian name - *Brahmanāthan*, *Veda-Nādhān*, and *Dinakaran*. Brahmācāriṇis worship him with all kinds of Indian offerings like milk, a garland of flowers, etc. The role of the Indian character called Śānti as an aged shepherdess making conversation with Mother Mary adds more Indian coloring to the whole occurrence.

4.4. Poetry: Transformation of Śoka into Śloka

In the Indian literary criticism, poetry (*kavanam*) is defined as the transforming of *śoka* (sorrow) into *śloka* (verse). The first poem (*ādi-kāvya*), *Rāmāyaṇa* is its typical example. As the sage Vālmīki, saw a hunter killing one of the two birds that are in love, he could not contain the sorrow or *śoka*. Later, the words that came out of his grief become the first *śloka* (verse). Here, the *śoka* of Vālmīki's mind is transformed into *śloka* (poem), even to his surprise, and that ultimately made him a poet, in fact, as the first poet. The poetry of Vālmīki is not something that was made, instead of as

¹Parappuram, *The Chronicle of Mannanam*, vol. III, 1474.

Wordsworth says, it is the spontaneous overflow of his emotions. This Indian definition of poetry can be very well attributed to *Ātmānutāpam*. In the lines of *Ātmānutāpam*, we can see the lamenting of Saint Chāvāra as he becomes aware of his shortcomings and failures.

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

That sorrow burned in his 'heart like a fire, a fire shut up in his bones' (Jer 20:9). This spiritual sorrow or compunction is the dominant mood of *Ātmānutāpam*, and it is this excellent compunction that made Chāvāra, a saint. The title *Ātmānutāpam* is a component of three words, i.e., *ātma+anu+tāpam*, and here the spoken word *tāpam* is derived from the root \sqrt{tap} , which originally means 'to burn.' In this context, it may be interpreted as 'compunction' or 'repentance'. The words of P. Govindapilla, the great scholar and historian of Kerala about *Ātmānutāpam*, approve this truth: "The psalms that were mounting out of the compunction of the soul offer the burning oil (*haviss*) that purifies oneself." As it is stated in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, "Evil does not overcome him, but he overcomes all evil. Evil does not afflict him, but he consumes all evil. He who becomes sinless, taintless, and free from doubts becomes true *Brāhmaṇa* (knower of Brahman)" (*BrUp* 4.4.23).

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

As evident in these lines, it is by the compunction of his soul, Saint Chāvāra 'became pure, cleansed, undecayed, and immortal' (*BU* 5.14.8). In this sense, *Ātmānutāpam* is never a

poem of mere lamentation; instead, it is a grand mystical love-poem of the soul.

4.5. Indian Name for Jesus: *Brahmanāthan, Gopālan, Nandanān, Āṇḍavar, etc.*

According to *Dhyānasallāpaṅgal*, Saint Chāvāra had no name other than *ente appan*, (beloved father)¹ to address Jesus. But at the same time in the lines of *Ātmānutāpam*, while explaining the Infancy Narrative, we see him addressing the Child Jesus as *Brahmanāthan*, which is the most sacred Indian name of God in the Upaniṣads.

And lauded the Infant (*Brahmanāthan's feet*) with laurels
honest,
Lovely damsels and virgins (*Brahmacāriṇis*) avowed²
(VI.29-30).

According to the Upaniṣads, Lord Brahman (*Brahmanāthan*), *Parabrahman*, or *Paramātman* is the ultimate reality behind all the diversity that exists in the universe. The word Brahman is derived from the root *brh* which means 'to swell, to grow, to expand, to promote' etc. Accordingly, the word Brahman means 'the great one.' Max Muller traces it to "Word," as is evident from the name *Brhaspati* or *Vācaspati*, Lord of speech,³ which is very meaningful and relevant in this context. This meaning of Brahman well matches with the purpose of *Logos* as it is seen in the Gospel of John, where God is understood as the incarnated Word. "In the

¹O my father (*ente appan*), I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. My heart, however, tells me to call You by no other name than *ente appan*." CWC III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

²*Brahmacāriṇimārām sundarāmikaḷ, bālar*
Brahmanāthante pāde mālakaḷ cūṭiṭunnu.

³Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. I, 164.

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). As that Word was incarnated in human form, according to the Indian culture and thought, Saint Chāvāra rightly calls Him *Brahmanāthan*.

It is very moving to see how Saint Chāvāra celebrates the incarnation of Christ in our Indian context. By his poetic imagination, Christ is being given an Indian birth in these lines of *Ātmānutāpam*. The word incarnation is a Latin term that means "the act of being made flesh." This Latin term was used in John 1:14, which already quoted above, speaks of Jesus who "became flesh and dwelt among us." Saint Chāvāra harmoniously identified Gospel with the Indian culture and gave it an Indian flesh. Giving an Indian name to Child Jesus is a typical example of it.

Saint Chāvāra also dared to address and praise the Lord Jesus with other appropriate Indian names of God like *Swāmi*, *Gopālan*, *Nandanān*, *Āṅṅavar*, etc.

The sick alone do need you, the Healer (*Swāmi*)!

Every sorry sinner, who fled to you (VII.359-360).¹

God's just anger to the stem, your accepting

The cowherd's (*Gopālan*) role, I long to see (III. Con. 31-32).²

In such prayers of longing to see Jesus as *Swāmi* and *Gopālan*, etc., it is the Indian heart of Saint Chāvāra that is being expressed to the readers. We also see him addressing Jesus as *Nandanān* in many places of *Ātmānutāpam*.

¹*Kelpukētuḷḷōrkkellām vaidyanuṁ nīyē swāmi!
Ninnuṭe pakkal ccērnna pāpikaḷ sakalarkkuṁ.*

²*Kōpatte nīkkuvān gōpālanāyi nī
Koccukuñṅāyippiranna nīne.*

How comes, sweet my Lady, your son beloved (VI.39).¹

Nandanān, her son, she saw lying before her (V.48).²

It could also be because of the Tamil influence that Saint Chāvāra also uses certain Dravidian titles to address God like *Āṇṭavar*, *Dinakaran*, etc.

Now as decreed by the Almighty (*Āṇṭavar*)

She made the faithful dwell in Sion (X.123-124).³

Then to the gathering, she spoke:

As Christ (*Āṇṭavar*) my son has taught me (XII.129).⁴

In Spain, through God's (*Āṇṭavar*'s) holy will (X.264).⁵

Three days ere the fixed one

All the disciples of the Sun (*divyadinakaran*) (XII.21-22).

Sun here refers to the Son of God, and it means 'One who makes day or light.' The theology behind fixing the day for the celebration of Christmas is the same. 25 December was first identified as the date of Jesus' birth by Sextus Julius Africanus in 221 and later became the universally accepted date. It was the Christianizing of the *dies solis invicti nati* ('day of the birth of the unconquered sun'), a popular holiday in the Roman Empire that celebrated the winter solstice as a symbol of the resurgence of the sun, the casting away of winter and the heralding of the rebirth of spring and summer. The Christians connected the rebirth of the sun with the birth of the Son of God.⁶ The fact that there were

¹Nandanān ninte sutaṅ sakalēśvarān sthitaṁ.

²Nandanān tirupputraṅ kaṇṭutaṅ purōbhāgē.

³Āṇṭavaṅ kalpiccapōl pārpiccu sehiyōnil.

⁴Āṇṭavaṅ daivaputraṅ nammūṭe snēhasutaṅ.

⁵Āṇṭavaṅ cittaṁ-yathā anuṣ-ṭhiccennaśēṣaṁ.

⁶Hillerbrand, "Christmas Holiday," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christmas> (accessed on 24 September 2019).

the Dravidian elements in the inculturation of Saint Chāvāra should be a guiding light for those who are often concerned only with the Āryan elements of Indian culture in the processes of inculturation.

4.6. The Worship of the *Brahmacāriṇis*

Saint Chāvāra was certain about the fact that the Spirit of God is present and active in Indian culture and religion. Therefore, he tried his level best to discern the Spirit and dialogue creatively with the Indian culture and its various religious expressions. The *Brahmacāriṇis* worshipping the Child Jesus is a classic example of this:

Sweet-limbed damsels, the avowed virgins (*Brahmacāriṇis*),
Adore the *Brahmanāthan's* feet with floral wreaths (VI.29-30).¹

In Indian tradition, a *Brahmachāri* is a male and *Brahmacāriṇi* a female person. The word *brahmacarya* is a component of two words, *Brahma* and *carya*, and etymologically, it means, 'acting/living/being in Brahman.' As a virtue, it has various context-driven meanings. Popularly, it means perfect continence for the unmarried, marital fidelity for the married, and *brahmacarya* is essential for spiritual realization. It is not mere sexual control, but more than that, which is something tough to obtain as it needs great control over the mind. If one does so, he can step ahead on the path of realization. According to the Upaniṣadic teachings, the staunch application of the mind to the state of becoming the Brahman is the essence of celibacy.²

¹*Brahmacāriṇimārām sundarāṅgikāḥ, bālar
Brahmanāthanṭe pādē mālakaḥ cūṭiṭunnu.*

²*Brahmabhāvē manaścāram brahmacaryam paramtapa (Darśnopaniṣad I.13).*

So, *brahmacarya* means keeping the mind in Brahman and know the ultimate truth of life. A hymn in another early Upaniṣad, the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* similarly states, “Through the continuous pursuit of *satya* (truthfulness), *tapas* (perseverance), *samyajñāna* (correct knowledge), and *brahmacarya* (celibacy), one attains *Ātman* (the Self).”¹ The great epic *Mahābhārata* also describes the objective of *brahmacarya* as knowledge of Brahman (Book Five, *Udyoga Parva*, the Book of Effort). Brahman is the end to which everything is moving (*MuUp* III. 2.8.9, *PrUp* IV. 7).² Everything is flowing like a river towards the ocean of Brahman.

With all these Indian meanings of *brahmacarya*, when we read the lines of *Ātmānutāpam*, i.e., “Sweet-limbed damsels, the *Brahmacāriṇis*, adore the *Brahmanāthan’s* feet with floral wreaths,” we are indeed having a better awareness about the incultural genius of Saint Chāvāra.

In this context, it is also good to observe that while explaining the virginal birth of Jesus, Jesus is presented as the son of *Brahmacāri* (*Brahmacāri vatsalan*), and Saint Joseph as a noble *Brahmacāri* (*Brahmacāri śreṣṭhan*):

The Son so chaste (*Brahmacāri vatsalan*), the Friend of the just

Conceived of a virgin in purity preserved

Of the purest bride of the chief of celibates (*Brahmacāri śreṣṭhan*)

Was born, and she a virgin still! (V.135).³

¹ *Satyēna labhyastapasā hyēṣa ātmā samyagjñānēna brahmacaryēna nityam* (*MuUp* III.1.5).

² *Mahabharata*, *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahabharata> (accessed on 4 October 2018).

³ *Brahmacāri vatsalan – dharmmagāmi snēhitan Brahmacāri śreṣṭhanām tannuṭe patnīratnam*

Here, we see how Saint Chāvāra beautifully, recognizes the positive values of Indian culture and shifts these rays of truth to Christian wisdom. By presenting Christ events through a similar transymbolization of the Indian concepts and religious principles, he has given a creative reinterpretation to the Gospel from an inter-religious perspective. In doing so, he has opened new avenues to accommodate the great Indian spiritual dispositions to the different areas of the Christian life.

4.7. Indian Offerings (*Pūjā-Dravyas*)

According to the Gospel narration, the wise people came from the East offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Child Jesus (Mt 2:11). What was the offering of the shepherds? While the evangelists keep silent on it, the poetic genius of Saint Chāvāra speaks likewise:

Little lambs some, others milk to drink
 To the Baby Shepherd, they gave
 Fruits of trees, garlands of blossoms sweet
 Babes in glee, tiny birdies they bring
 Offering these before His Sacred feet

To the Infant bright as the sun, they bow! (VI.21-28).

It is indeed a remarkable expression that all the successive generations of the world come to worship the Lord as one family. It is evident in this poetic imagination how much Saint Chāvāra was getting influenced by the Indian offerings of sacrifice, such as milk and garlands of flowers. They are neither biblical nor specifically Christian. Though flowers are used to decorate the altar also in the West, using garlands of flowers is typically an Indian practice. Still, Saint

*Kannihīnatvaṃ vinā, garbhadhāraṇiyāyi
 Kanyātvakṣayam vinā peṭṭutān daiivasutam.*

Chāvāra found no mistake in worshipping God in an Indian way as it has a wider universal outlook, which is already expressed in some of the passages of the Bible. For example, in the message of angels to the shepherds, one can observe the universality of Christmas: “But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Lk 2:10-11). It is for everyone and not according to religious creeds, race, rich, or poor, but by love.

“Let all around him bring gifts to the awesome one” (Ps 76:11). “All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name” (Ps 86:9). “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him” (Ps 22:27). So, it is a must that the worshipping of God should move out from the inner circle of the present Church to the remotest parts of the earth to attain all its various forms and expressions. Every tongue has a right to confess and worship the Lord; high and low, rich and poor, slaves and free men, all should come in their unique way to meet and worship the Lord to fulfill the universal vision of these scripture passages. That may be the reason why Saint Chāvāra had such incultural imaginations and their corresponding expressions in the lines of *Ātmānutāpam*.

4.8. Śānti an Aged Shepherdess

The poetic imagination of Śānti as an aged cowherdess making conversation with Mother Mary in the sixth chapter is another beautiful example of Saint Chāvāra’s Indian consciousness.

Śānti; an aged shepherdess one day

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

The wondrous tidings, spread and day after day

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

In this land of *śānti-mantras* (peace prayers), the giving of the name Śānti to that aged shepherdess, who came with the other shepherds, is very significant and appropriate, both in the context of biblical theology and in the framework of Indian spirituality. It reminds us of both the song sung by the angels during the birth of Jesus (Lk 2:14), as well as the prayer of Indian *Rṣis* for peace as they ended every prayer only with the *śānti-mantras*. It is with these same *śānti-mantras*, "The Waste Land" of T. S. Eliot, which is considered as the most prominent poem of the twentieth century, getting ended.¹ The truth that those who enjoyed the joy of *śānti* will always be singing about it, going beyond the dividing walls of religion, caste, creed, and nationality. It is very obvious to the author of *Ātmānutāpam* too, as Saint Chāvāra could realize, the striking resonance of the same ineffable mystery, which other religious experience embodies.

4.9. Saint Joseph as a *Muni* and *Tāpasan*

Presenting of Saint Joseph as a *muni* (monk) and *tāpasan* (ascetic) in the soil of *munis* is indeed gorgeous and striking! If a *muni* is someone who keeps *maunam* or silence, then it is that picture of Saint Joseph, which is presented in all the four Gospels.

Saint Joseph (*Yūse muni*), your succour, in the meantime

¹These fragments I have shored against my ruins.

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad again.

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.

Turns to your son with forbearing patience and love!
(II.237-240).¹

According to the description of Saint Chāvāra, Saint Joseph is also one who finds happiness in his deep meditation and contemplation.

Aware of these was Saint Joseph, the perfect of all men born
Yet propriety forbade him, trespass into the privacy
(V.101-102).²

Saint Joseph, who never shown to be speaking in the Gospels, is found speaking only to God and his angels. He, who is the excellent *muni* of *maunam*, only through silence, knew Jesus and His salvific works and communicated the same to us. The teaching of *Brhadāranya Upaniṣad*, that ‘to know Brahman one should know the importance of silence’ (3.5.1), can be smoothly ascribed to the life of Saint Joseph.

Perhaps, we can compare Saint Joseph to the great *Muni* of *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* named Bādhvan, as explained by Śāṅkara. It is through his silence that sage Bādhvan told about Brahman when the disciple called Bāṣkali approached him to get the knowledge about God. As Bāṣkali continued with his questions, the Guru answered, “Don’t you understand that this soul is silence.” Saint Joseph, one who always speaks the great language of silence in all the pages of the Gospels, is indeed a true *muni* with all its traits. It could be because of this reason that Saint Chāvāra and his companions gave the name of this great *muni* and *tāpasan* for the first *Tapasu Bhavan*, which they started at Mannanam. They might have aspired to become *munis* through *tapas*

¹*Kṣapanām pitāvene śaraṇam “yūse” muni*
Kṣamayāl pārṭtunōkkum sutane bahusnēhattāl.

²*Naraśrēṣṭhanām pitāyasēppu dhyānattināl*
Varasantōṣattōṭu kāṇunnuvennākilum (V.101-102).

after the great model of Saint Joseph. All these attempts of Saint Chāvāra to become deeply engaged in the Indian spiritual experience are to be seen as a befitting salutation to this nation, where God was sought with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence.

4.10. *Kamala-Tirupādam and Pāda-Paṅgajam*

The devotion at the 'Feet of the Lord' has a significant prominence in Indian spirituality. Kulaśekhara Ālvar, in his devotional poem *Mukundamāla*, says: "O Lord you can send me anywhere you want either to heaven or to hell, but even in my death, I will take refuge under your feet and contemplate over it, which is much more beautiful than the Lotus of the autumn season."¹ Lotus is regarded as the symbol of the good that converts vice into fineness as it rises out of the muddy water. Likewise, comparing Jesus to lotus, the Son of God who came to redeem the sons of men from the dirty water of sin is very much in tune with the Christian theology of salvation history.

As the lotus bloom or water lily rests?

The Baby reclined on the "ocean's star."

As the baby swan on a lotus bed

Him, the 'star of the sea' in her arms cradled (VI.33-36).

In the lines of *Ātmānutāpam*, often we see Saint Chāvāra comparing the Feet of Jesus to *Kamala-Tirupādam* and *Pāda-Paṅgajam*.

As the lotus full intent on the sun

With devotion, he kissed His Feet (*Kamala-Tirupādam*)

(V.129-130).²

¹*Divi vā bhūvi vā mamāstuvāsō narakē vā narakāntaka prakāmam
Avadhīrita śāradāravinda caraṇa tē maraṇe'pi cintayāmi.*

²*Ēttitan cenniyatil Kamala tiruppādam*

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

I would then be her humble handmaid; the Child
I would bow before Him, adore and kiss (*Kamala-
Tirupādam*) (MG 49-50).

On that night on seeing you, your feet (*Pāda-Paṅgajam*) I
did kiss (MG 73).

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

The spirituality of *tiru-pāda-vandanam* is not something new in biblical spirituality. It is there throughout both in the New and Old Testaments (Exo 4:25, 1 Sam 25:24, 2 Kgs 4:37, Esth 8:3, Mt 2:11, Mt 18:29, Mk 5:22, Mk 7:25, Lk 8:28, Lk 8:41, Lk 8:47, Jn 11:32, Act 5:10, Act 10:25, Rev 1:17, Rev 19:10). In some of these references, we see some inter-religious connections. In the Infancy Narrative of Matthew (2:11), wherein the three wise men knelt down and paid homage to Jesus, we have a perfect model of inter-religious worship. According to Western Christian tradition, Balthasar is often represented as a King of Arabia, Melchior as a King of Persia, and Gaspar as a King of India.

In Mk 7:25, we see a Syro-Phoenician woman, who was a Greek and a non-Jew coming to Jesus, like so many, begging for her daughter to be exorcized of her unclean spirit. In this particular incident, Jesus seems to be mocking those who considered salvation to be only for the Jews: “Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children’s

bread and throw it to the dogs.” The Jews were accustomed to dehumanizing their Gentile neighbors. The woman throws the joke right back at the Master: “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs,” a sign of her persistence and faith. The daughter is cured immediately. Jesus’ change of mind is an invitation to the change of our minds to receive the challenges of otherness, which may be catalytic for our growth in God’s experience. Through this, Jesus is reminding us of the original intention of God that humans are members of a single-family, though sin disrupted that human unity. And Saint Chāvāra’s presenting of Jesus to the Indian context, through the devotion to His Holy Feet, is something very close to the heart of biblical spirituality.

4.11. *Tiru-Vedam, Veda-Nādhān, and Śravaṇam*

India being the land of Vedas, Saint Chāvāra uses the term *tiru-vedam*¹ to refer to the Gospels in the twelfth chapter of *Ātmānutāpam*, where Jesus is entrusting his disciples the mission of preaching the Gospel, though, in the English translation, it is paraphrased as ‘living word.’

Spread abroad his living word (*tiru-vedam*)

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

By this, Saint Chāvāra was initiating an innovative path, even before Vatican Council II envisaged about it, for the effective proclamation of the Gospel, in tune with the Indian situation, where Vedas are celebrated as eternal truths (*Vedā hyamṛtāh*). He not only considered Gospel as Vedas; further, he even addressed the Lord of the Gospel as *veda-nāthan*.²

¹Tannuṭe tiruvēdam prasiddhappettuvān

Tanna kalpanavaśālōrōrō nātukaḷil (XII.59-60).

²Vēdamatiyippān śiṣyarekkūṭṭiya

Call of disciples, O Lord of the Gospel (*veda-nāthan*)

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

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

The Sacred Books of Hinduism generally classified into two sections, i.e., *Śruti* and *Smṛti*. *Śruti* means “that which is heard” (Vedas and Upaniṣads); *Smṛti* means “that which is remembered” (*Manusmṛti*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, etc.). Vedas are also called as *Śruti*, and Saint Chāvāra uses the term *Śravaṇam*¹ to indicate Gospel, in *Ātmānutāpam*, though it is translated as ‘Law and rituals, I long to see’ (III.83-84), by Mary Leo.

4.12. *Kaliyugam*

According to Hindu tradition, a *mahāyuga* has four periods, i.e., *satyayugam*, *tretayugam*, *dvāparayugam*, and *kaliyugam*. At present, humanity goes through the last one, namely the *kaliyugam*. It is a dark age of moral decline, in which humanity remains indifferent to God. Saint Chāvāra relates it with the teachings of Jesus, which are relevant today as He had warned about the imminent final judgment, against the evils of humanity. However, it was translated ‘ages back’:

And besides, His just laws to maintain

Ages back (*kaliyugam*),² a warning message He sent

Vēdanāthan tanne kāṅākēṇam (III.95-96).

¹*Muppatittāntuśravaṇam paṭhippicca*

Tatparan malpāne kāṅākēṇam (III.83-84).

²*Ennu tanneyumalla, tante nītiye pārppān*

But men on earth with burning passions rife
 His Will defied and were with fire destroyed! (VI.57-60).
 Saint Chāvāra retains the information that even then, the
 man just ignored this warning of Jesus and immersed in
 diverse immoral activities and disregarded Him.

4.13. *Āddhyātmika Kṛtika!* (Spiritual Works)

The different works of Saint Chāvāra are generally classified
 into two: literary writings and spiritual writings. The
 spiritual writings or *Āddhyātmika Kṛtika!* consist of *Dhyāna-*
sallāpāṇa!, Prayers used by Saint Chāvāra, and Forty Hour
 Adoration. These works reveal the concrete steps taken up
 by him for growing in prayer life and can be considered as
 the most profound spiritual feelings of a mystic. Priestly
 sanctity is their essential theme, and as in the case of
Ātmānutāpam, here too, we get some indications about his
 inclusive thinking.

4.14. *Dhyānasallāpāṇa!*: An Inclusive Outlook of Salvation

Dhyānasallāpāṇa! is the spiritual diary of Saint Chāvāra,
 consisting of 32 pages, which he wrote between 1840 and
 1850 and it is a standing testimony to the fact that he was a
 master of spirituality and attained highest levels of mystical
 experience. The inclusive thinking expressed in
Ātmānutāpam is continued in these meditative reflections
 too, as he wishes and prays for the salvation of the entire
 humankind, without excluding anyone.¹ He firmly believes
 that people of other religions, though they are not blessed

Munnamē kaliyugaṁ tannilaṅṅatiyiccu.

Pinneyuṁ mannil narar kāmamōhāgnivāśāl

Tanne nindicca hētuvagṅiyāl dahippiccu (VI.57-58).

¹CSK, III: *Āddhyātmika Kṛtika!*, 39, 42.

with Christian faith, still if they lead a faithful life according to the natural law and the dictates of their conscience they will be saved on the day of judgment: “nothing defiled can enter into His holy presence” and that pagans who do not live up to the natural law and the dictates of their conscience will be the victims of the justice of God and will be condemned to eternal fire.”¹ Being very faithful to the teachings of the Church Magisterium, how progressively he interprets God’s universal salvific will (1 Tim 2:4) and replaces the old dictum of “no salvation outside the Church.” For the incarnation of Christian theology into the Indian context, he uses the local terms like *aruḷvedam*,² *Yobumuni*³ etc., and tries to give Indian roots to it instead of transplanting Western theological jargon.

4.15. Borrowed Prayer from a Protestant Woman

Together with the meditative notes, the spiritual works of Saint Chāvāra also contain various prayers of his, like, *Preparatory Prayer*, *Prayer to the Holy Mother of God*, *Morning Prayer*, *Evening Prayer*, *Prayer for A Happy Death*, etc. Though concerning the establishment of the printing press, he had a humiliating experience from the members of the Protestant Churches, especially from that of the CMS group; he did not hesitate to adopt good things from them. For example, according to the *Āddhyātmika Kṛtikaḷ*, he was daily praying for a happy death by making use of a prayer composed by a converted Protestant woman.

The Prayer Composed by a Converted Girl for a Happy Death:

¹CWC, III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 22.

²CSK, III: *Āddhyātmika Kṛtikaḷ*, 38.

³CSK, III: *Āddhyātmika Kṛtikaḷ*, 36.

O Jesus, infinite love and infinite mercy! Father, stricken with sorrow and repentance, we cast ourselves before you. We offer you our death and all that may happen to us after death.

When our immovable legs tell us that our journey here on earth has come to an end, merciful Jesus, have mercy on us.

When our hearts are filled with sorrow because we are unable to hold the crucifix in our trembling hands and our eyes look upon you dimly in our agony, have mercy on us, O Lord.

When our frozen lips call on your holy name for the last time, have mercy on us, O Lord.

When our faces take an unwholesome hue and sweat appears on hair and waves of fear come upon us and on the on-lookers, have mercy on us, Lord.

When the ears are closed forever to listen to human conversation and are opened to hear the last verdict, have mercy on us, O Lord.

When frightful fantoms disturb our departing soul, have mercy on us, O Lord.

When the thought of our sins make us doubt about your mercy, and depression comes to our souls, have mercy on us, Lord.

When we tired and enervated with sickness fight with the enemy of our soul, have mercy on us, O Lord.

When the last drop of tear tickles down from our death bed, praying and weeping for us, merciful Jesus, have mercy on us.

When our friends and relations stand around our death bed, praying and weeping for us, merciful Jesus, have mercy on us.

While lying unconscious in the darkened world, undergoing the agony of departure, have mercy on us, O Lord.

When the last breath which strengthens the soul to give up the spirit, accept it as the intense desire of the soul to come to you, have mercy on us, O Jesus, at that most critical moment.

When the soul, at last, departs from the weakened and discolored body, let it be like an offering to you - have mercy on us at that moment.

When at last we stand before you, admit us into your merciful lap.

All loving and almighty Father, give us the grace to walk all our life in your sacred path and depart from this world in your grace and favor. This we ask in Jesus who lives in union with you and the Holy Spirit.¹

Saint Chāvāra, through his very life and example, dictates that “The bonds that unite us are stronger than the barriers that separate us.”² As we live, so we die, and there is no surprise in why he had a happy death preserving his baptismal innocence. It is all just because of his earnest preparation for it by his daily prayers and holy life.

4.16. Fresh Flowers for Chapel Decorations

It is Saint Chāvāra, who started the Forty Hour Adoration in Kerala, and he adopted it from the Latin tradition. While giving instructions for making arrangements for the Forty Hour Adoration, he advises the priests and the faithful to take care to decorate the chapel only with fresh flowers:

¹CWC, III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 38-39.

²Motto of Divyodaya Interreligious Centre, Coimbatore; it was coined based on an inspiration from *Gaudium et Spes* §92.

“Unnecessary decorations with paper, silk cloths, etc., in the altar other than the customary order of the church decorations, should be evaded during adoration. Use fresh and aromatic fresh flowers along with at least twenty white big candles. They should be lit throughout the adoration.”¹

The presence of flowers adds beauty and joy to nature and humans, and they are used for all the essential occasions of human life, such as birthdays, weddings, functions, house warming, funerals, etc. We give flowers to express love, sense of respect, or friendship. So, it is natural to think that offering flowers to God will strengthen our love and relationship with Him, and hence, they are common in religious and ceremonial uses. According to Hindu tradition, without flowers, there is no *pūja*. In the word *pūja*, *pu* stands for *puṣpam* or flowers, and *ja* stands for *japa* that is to chant the name of God.² They act as a mediator between the Almighty (the Supreme Power) and man. If those flowers are the result of one’s hard work, then it is a token of his/her dedication to God, and that significance is lost if the flowers are bought from either vendors or made out of paper cloth.

In this context, it is relevant to ask the question of why Saint Chāvāra was insisting on keeping only fresh flowers for church decorations. According to Hindu spirituality, they use only fresh flowers in the temples. The science behind this offering of fresh flowers, leaves, scents, and other aromatic substances is that they all have the

¹CSK, III: *Āddhyātmika Kṛtikaḷ*, 77.

²Sharma Anjesh, “Why Are Flowers Used to Worship Hindu Deities?” quora, posted on 22 September 2017. <https://www.quora.com/Why-are-flowers-used-to-worshipHindu-deities> (accessed on 13 June 2019).

characteristic of attracting positive and divine vibrations from the surroundings and thus sanctifying the *pūja* area, charging the atmosphere with heavenly vibes. Mango leaves, in particular, have this quality of gathering divine vibes from the surrounding atmosphere. The reason could be that the offering of fresh flowers represents a living being (a body and soul). They have life, and in time they wither. This is a symbolic means to teach us about the transient state of life, and that meaning is washed out if we are using flowers artificially made of papers or cloth.

In the Bible, flowers are often referred to as affording an emblem of the transitory nature of human life (Job 14:2; Ps 103:15; Is 28:1; 40:6; Jas 1:10). In Isaiah 40:6, it is said that human beings are like grass, or like flowers, "All people are like grass and all their goodness thereof is as the flowers of the field." Just as grass and flowers shoot up in a field after it rains, so too human life passes away. Life is transitory, fleeting, temporary, brief, and short-lived. The Apostle James referred to this passage in Isaiah to show the foolishness of focusing one's life merely on career advancement and the accumulation of material things. "But the rich ... is made low: because as the flower or the grass, he too shall pass away. For the sun no sooner raised with a burning heat, but it withered the grass, and the flower thereof fallen, and the grace of the fashion of it perishes: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways" (Jas 1:10-11).

"Consider the lilies of the field" (Mt 6:28) is a phrase with which we are very familiar, and this word "consider" is from the Greek word *katamanthano*, which means: "To learn thoroughly, i.e., to note carefully." It also says: "to concentrate upon, think about, to meditate upon," etc. As every flower is a soul blossoming in nature, with the care and nurturing of the Heavenly Father, it expresses and

shares with the people divine goodness, truth, beauty, care, and love for the blossoming of the human soul. Saint Chāvāra had this great insight about the different aspects of fresh flowers, which very few people ever had, and that may be the reason why he insisted on using only fresh flowers for decorating the altar and the premises of the tabernacle.

4.17. *Jñānapīyūṣam*: Universal Salutations for God

Saint Chāvāra being a great visionary, established a printing press at Mannanam in 1844, and it was the first Syro-Malabar Catholic Press in Kerala, and third in Travancore. It published mainly spiritual books for deepening the Christian life together with other books that were useful for the intellectual and cultural advantages of the people. *Jñāna-Pīyūṣam* (Nectar of Knowledge) is the first book that got published from Mannanam press in 1846 by Saint Chāvāra, and it contains different Christian prayers for the daily use of the faithful translated from Tamil with the permission of the Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha. Afterwards, he published books like *Jñāna-Prajāgaram* (The Vigil of the Wisdom), *Grahasta-Dharmodyānam* (A Garden of Family Moral Codes), and *Jñāna-Nava-Ratnam* (Nine Jewels of Knowledge), *Balanikṣēpam* (A deposit of Power), *Nityārādhana* (Perpetual Adoration) and so on.

The name *Jñāna-Pīyūṣam* is a combination of two Sanskrit words, namely *jñāna* (knowledge) *pīyūṣam* (nectar), and it means ‘nectar or ambrosia of knowledge.’ As explained in the *Jñāpakam* of the book, “it is named *Jñāna-Pīyūṣam* seeing that it is the spiritual food and drink, to walk in the path of virtue and attain eternity.”¹ Though it is exclusively a Chris-

¹*Jñāna-Pīyūṣam*, ii.

tian prayer book, still it does contain some inter-religious expressions like *Sarvēśvarāya Namaḥ*, *Anādyāyanamostu*, etc., which are typically an adaptation of Hindu holy practice.

4.18. *Sarvēśvarāya Namaḥ* (Salutation to Lord of All)

The Sanskrit word *namaḥ* is one of the most popular Hindu *mantras* of salutations commonly addressed to God. Being a *mantra*, it is a mystical locked sound, and as such, it is not meant to be translated. Grammatically as it is in the nominative form, it is used as the subject of the sentence, and accordingly, it means 'I bow to God' or 'I praise God' etc. In Sanskrit, *na* usually indicates 'negation,' and *ma* means 'mine'. Combining them together it means 'not mine.' It signifies the humbleness and total dedication of oneself towards the Almighty. It is the spiritual kenosis of one's ego in front of God and acknowledging His mercy as he or she bows to God, with the pure consciousness. The whole universe is His. Whatever humans do is because of Him. So, in the real sense, one does not have anything. Such a declaration is the right attitude and disposition of any form of worshipping. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* explains the meaning of *namaḥ* in the following way: "When one worships saying that it is not mine, the objects of desires throng to him and are ready to do at his bidding" (TU 3.10.4).¹

In this context, it is relevant to compare the meaning of the Greek name Kuriākōse with that of *namaḥ*. As indicating the same thing, both these words are complimentary in themselves. *Namaḥ* means 'I am not mine,' and Kuriākōse means 'I am of the Lord.' What is negatively stated by one is positively affirmed by the other! In a more in-depth analysis, it is not merely a linguistic resemblance, somewhat

¹*Tham nama ithi upāsītha namyanthesmai kāmā.*

a living resemblance as the life of Saint Kuriākōse was indeed a life of *namaḥ*.

According to Sanskrit grammar, when the indeclinable word *namaḥ* is used in a sentence, the related noun takes the dative case (*Chathurthi-vibhakti* or *Sampradāna-kāraka* form). As a result, *sarvēśvarāya*, which is the other component of this salutation, is used in the dative case. Accordingly, it gets the meaning of either 'to' or 'for,' and thus *Sarvēśvarāya namaḥ* means 'Salutation to the Lord of all.' Saint Chāvara, opens his *Jñānapīyūṣam* with this greeting to God - *Sarvēśvarāya namaḥ*,¹ and it is remarkable to note the fact that he addresses God with an inclusive title, i.e., *Sarvēśvarah*, which means, God who is the Lord of all. Its whole meaning is that universal consciousness is one.

4.19. *Anādyāya Namōstu* (Salutation to the Eternal)

The Sanskrit word *ādi* means 'beginning' and *anādi* means 'having no beginning'. The word *anādyāya* is invariably used with a dative case, and it means 'one who is having no beginning or end', 'eternal' or 'existing from eternity'. The words like *anādyananta* (without beginning and end; eternal), *anādinidhana* (having neither beginning nor end, eternal), *anādimadhyānta* (having no beginning, middle or end), *anādyanta* (without beginning and end; eternal), etc., more or less convey the same idea of infinity. They are salutations to the Infinite, and in Hinduism, it is an epithet of the Lord Parameśvara. The second component *namōstu*, means 'I bow down to him,' and *Anādyāyanamostu* means 'I bow down to him, one who has no ending.' In *Jñāna-*

¹*Jñāna-Pīyūṣam*, i.

Pīyusaṃ, Saint Chāvāra uses it while starting the section on the daily prayers – *Anādyāya namōstu*.¹

4.20. The Spirituality of Mantras

In the *Jñāpakam* (making known), which is given in the beginning of *Jñāna-Pīyusaṃ*, Saint Chāvāra refers to all the prayers, which are printed in the book as *mantra-japaṅḷ*.² Again, the very first prayer, which is used for making the Sign of the Cross, is referred to as *Slīvā-mantram*.³ Similarly, the prayer of Our Father is referred to as *Ākāśaṅgalirikkunna mantram*,⁴ the Hail Mary as *Nanma-nirañña-mariyam-mantram*⁵ and the Act of Contrition as *Uttama-manastāpa-mantram*,⁶ etc., are a clear indication of Saint Chāvāra's inclination for the deeply rooted *mantra* spirituality inherited from the Indian tradition.

The word *mantra* is composed of the verbal root *man* (to think) and the suffix *tra* (indicating instrumentality). Thus, a *mantra* is an instrument of thought. Its derivation is – *Mananāt-trāyate iti mantraḥ* – and accordingly, the *mantra* is that with which one is protected or released from the cycle of births and deaths by constant thinking or recollection. According to the traditional etymology, the word *mantra* gets its name from providing protection (*trāṇa*) for the mind (*manas*). Generally, *mantras* are considered as sacred formula as one saying goes, *mantrākṣaramayidevi*. It means the letters or sounds of a *mantra* are understood as different limbs of

¹*Jñāna-Pīyusaṃ*, 1.

²*Jñāna-Pīyusaṃ*, ii.

³*Jñāna-Pīyusaṃ*, 1.

⁴*Jñāna-Pīyusaṃ*, 14.

⁵*Jñāna-Pīyusaṃ*, 14-15.

⁶*Jñāna-Pīyusaṃ*, 19-20.

the body of that particular God or Goddess to whom it is addressed. In Indian *mantra* spirituality, the repetition of the *mantra* is called *japa*. Repetition of prayers is a common practice in most of the world religions. For example, Catholics repeat prayers using a string of beads called a rosary. *Dhikr* is an Islamic holy act, typically involving the recitation (mostly silently) of verses praising God. *Nianfo* is an East Asian Buddhist mindfulness practice in which the name of Amitabha Buddha is repeated.

Mindfulness, regularity, and a large number of repetitions of the *mantra* are the three most essential requirements. It is believed that mental purity will come through constant chanting of the divine name. The repetition (*japa*) of *mantra* can be performed in three fundamental ways: (i) verbalized (*vācika*), (ii) whispered (*upamśa*), and (iii) mentally (*mānasa*). The first style is audible recitation and is considered inferior to the other two styles. In whispered recitation, only the lips move, but no distinct sound escapes them. Superior to this style is mental recitation, where attention is fixed exclusively on the inner meaning of the *mantra*. A word acquires *mantric* value only when it has been empowered by an expert and transmitted to a disciple. Hence, the various prayers that are coming from Saint Chāvāra through the book of *Jñāna-Pīyūṣm* can be rightly considered as Christian *mantras* for God-realization. Successful *mantra* practice not only depends on proper initiation but also on realizing the essence behind the prayer. And that is why Saint Chāvāra took extra care to explain all such details in the *Jñāpakam*, for educating the faithful concerning the meaning, manner, and right disposition of the prayers, with which they are supposed to be recited (*japams*).

4.21. *Chāvaruḷ*: Noble Thoughts from Different Corners of the World

Oru Nalla Appante Chāvaruḷ (*Testament of a Loving Father*) is a document written by Saint Chāvāra addressing his family members and other parishioners of Kainakari in February 1868. Through this, he initiates a program to guide their family life, both spiritual and temporal. He considered the family as the basic and the fundamental unit of the Church and society. Here, he focuses on the rules and principles of an ideal Christian family. It is also an expression of his practical wisdom, which he could gather from his own life as well as from different other sources by reading, reflecting, etc. In it, we see examples where Saint Chāvāra accepts noble thoughts coming from philosophers, scholars, saints, and also from different corners of the world like Leuven, Japan, France, etc. These things he might have gathered from his wider reading or stories told by the foreign missionaries.

In an explanation to avoid all kinds of lavish spending on festivals and celebrations, and to be humble, Saint Chāvāra refers to an ancient Greek philosopher: “Democrates once answered that the most important man is the one who shows himself as the least. A scholar once said to a man who was lamenting over his bad days, which followed his extravagance: “Brother, if you did not burn your lamp at day time, you could have lighted it at night” (I.6).¹ While advising parents about Christian training, they are supposed to give to their children. He quotes Origen of Alexandria, who was an early Christian scholar: “Origen records that, on the last judgment day, God will ask of the parents a justification of all the activities of those children”

¹Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 12.

(II.1).¹ To emphasize the value of human suffering, he extracts an event from the life of Saint Ambrose: “Saint Ambrose once visited a house. He was told that in that house, there never was an instance of disease or grief experienced by any member. He immediately left the place exclaiming, “Let us get away from here quickly. For very soon, divine wrath will be falling on this house.” Very soon, the house fell and killed all the inmates” (I.20).²

To emphasize the need to respect the parents, he cites an incident of a mother in Japan: “In a heathen country, Japan, there lived a mother with three children” (II.16).³ On insisting on giving just wages to laborers without any delay, he tells the story of a rich man who lived in Louven. “There was a rich man in the city of Louven. A widow lived on his estate with her four children. He harassed then often to such an extent that one day, she sorrowfully prayed, “O Lord, deliver me from pain.” The rich landlord fell at the very instant” (I.18).⁴

Reminding them about modesty in wearing dresses, he tells of a boy who lived in France: “In France, a boy lived in perfect modesty, and even while he was alone, he would cover his whole body and even his arms. When he heard that he would have to be naked in hell, he became terrified and wept. See how much this boy prized his modesty” (I.19).⁵ To warn about the consequences of having a relationship with wealthy families, he tells of one more incident that happened in France: “In France, a certain man had an only

¹Chāvara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 18-19.

²Chāvara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 17.

³Chāvara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 21-22.

⁴Chāvara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 16.

⁵Chāvara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 16.

son. He made strenuous attempts to make his son marry a high-born knight's daughter on condition that all his family property should be bequeathed to his son. He agreed, and the marriage was solemnized. After some time, the bride and her parents started resenting his low birth and status, and he was dispelled from the household. He went begging and was forced to feed himself on the waste thrown out from his son's house during feasts and celebrations" (I.8).¹

In his second letter to the people of Kainakary (IX/7) written on December 1869, Saint Chāvāra told the people to start a house of charity attached to their chapel, in the model followed in the different parts of Europe:

There are several places in Europe, such as Genova, Rome, Naples, etc., where people render exclusive help to the sick and the dying. There are asylums for the mentally ill. There are hospitals for lepers: hospitals separate for men and women. There are houses to give refuge to the destitute, who have no one to look after. Such people are fed and clothed and are given regular occupation. Both their bodies and souls are thus being taken care of. Some men and women volunteer to do such works of mercy. Even though much of the ancient zeal is gone, even today, such acts of kindness are being carried out in cities like Genova, where every Sunday at day-break, there is the community mass offered by the parish priest. The lords and the officers with their escorts assist at the mass and receive Holy Communion. After the mass, all in their vehicles go to the hospitals. They visit the sick one by one. Then the servants bring hot water etc. The Lords and the nobles wash and clean the wounds, etc., of the sick, clean their beds, remove their

¹Chāvāra, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 12-13.

dirty clothes, clean the bedpans, etc. These lords themselves build some of these hospitals and nursing homes, and they have invested significant funds, with the interest from which the doctors, nurses, etc., are also paid.¹

We see the openness of a great soul to adopt good practices of the European Church for helping the poor and dying brethren. From the *Chāvaruḷ*, it is evident that even in those days Saint Chāvara had updated knowledge of the various events and happenings that are taking place both in the Church and society. He had a wider ecclesial, philosophical and theological outlook to Europe and other parts of the world, though physically, he did not travel to any of these places. He was a lover of wisdom and had the openness to receive the wisdom coming from different corners of the world. He was not like the frog that was happy with its tiny well. An exclusive person cannot comprehend the vast experiences of an inclusive man who communes with a broader world of people, culture, thought patterns, and roams in the sea of wisdom. A bigoted religionist can never even imagine the boundless happiness on seeing humanity as one family and all religionists as the children of the same one God. In this regard, the life of Saint Chāvara is a challenge to all those who are prisoned in their tiny well of caste, creed, and nationality and limit the great powers of God by the limitations of their narrow understandings.

¹CWC, IV: *The Letters*, 124.

Chapter 5

VIŚVAKUṬUMBĀKAM **A Universal Family**

The dialectical process of turning good to evil and evil to the right is an aspect of the history of any human society or system. In this progression of history, to turn evil into good, there must be someone to take the initiative for that. It is in this context that we become conscious of the significance of the creative role played by Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra in the then Kerala society and Church.

Ēkēnāpi suvrkṣēṇa puṣpitēna sugandhinā

Vāsitaṁ tadvanam saroam suputrēṇa kulam tathā.

“Even with a single good tree, which is full of flowers and fragrance, the whole forest becomes sweet-smelling, just as an entire family becomes famous by one good son.” Similarly, by the prophetic and heroic deeds of Saint Chāvāra, he could change the destiny of the society and the Church through which the Chāvāra family (a family in which he was born) and the family of *Darśanavīṭ* (a family in which he lived the rest of his life) became famous. Today, he is honoured as a great son of humankind and the Universal Church. In this closing chapter, some general observations are made on his inclusive vision and *Darśanavīṭ*, based on the findings that have been discussing hitherto in the previous chapters.

5.1. The Theocracy of *Darśanavīṭ*

From a biblical perspective, the ideal form of governance is not autocracy or monarchy; it is neither aristocracy nor democracy; it is instead a theocracy, and that alone is the

perfect governing form of any state or society. *Theo* means 'God' and, accordingly, theocracy means 'the rule of God'. It is an administrative system in which, even while some human authorities and arrangements are ruling us, ultimately, it is God the King of Kings, who is ruling us.

In the Book of Judges, there is a valid biblical account of this theocracy: "The people served the Lord, all the days of Joshua" (Judg 2:7). These words make it clear that during the ruling of Joshua, people were not serving him, but the Lord; He was giving the leadership, not for the people to help him, instead, to serve the Lord. Yes, this is what a true theocracy supposed to be - the Lord ruling over his people through human persons and systems. What a compliment it is for Joshua! It is one of the most beautiful biblical compliments that any human ruler on earth can get! It is the highest glory that any earthly administrative system can create on.¹ When God is the Supreme Ruler and the foundation stone of any religious community, it has its extraordinary graciousness and holiness.

It was indeed the sweetness of theocracy that the members of *Darśanavīṭ* were enjoying and celebrating under Saint Chāvāra, who was the Prior of the community. As the people served the Lord during the days of Joshua, and the days of Saint Chāvāra, the members of *Darśanavīṭ* served the Lord. It is that divine sweetness, graciousness, and holiness that they were celebrating in the house of divine vision. Because of that, *Darśanavīṭ* was indeed the great treasure of Kerala Church and society. God has endowed the *Darśanavīṭ* with a man of genius like Saint Chāvāra. As he leads it, each day, he was proving his strength, nobility, and magnanimity, through his modest, unselfish, unassuming,

¹Parker, *Preaching through the Bible*, vol. 5, 324-331.

and exemplary style of religious life. Thereby all realized and acknowledged that his governing system of the *Darśanavīṭ* was that of a theocracy. The freedom, which each member of that family enjoyed, and the freedom with which members of other communities and religion approached him for their various pastoral and secular needs, are the living signs of that theocracy. Saint Chāvāra embodied the soul of *Darśanavīṭ*.

In that theocracy system, the *kūṭapirappukaḷ* of Saint Chāvāra – each member of that loving family was doing his role very creatively and effectively. In the Gospel of John in connection with the wedding feast at Cana, we see Jesus asking the servants to “Fill the jars with water” (Jn 2:7). Though, Jesus is the almighty and all-powerful, and needs no helps. Still, he requests human help for performing miracles. Here, we see the beautiful, co-operative, and theocratic-functioning style of Jesus. Yes, God always works through human persons, and for that, He needs human rulers and social systems of administrations. *Darśanavīṭ* was indeed such a human form of theocracy. God needed each member of *Darśanavīṭ* to fill His jars with water. Even while doing that simple ministry, all those *kūṭapirappukaḷ* realized the fact that what they were asked to do in their various capacities was something like the filling of the jar with water. Converting that water into wine was the work of God. Those human beings could not do that; only God the Almighty One could do that. It was the work of the King of Kings.

At the same time, all of them had the self-fulfilment that by filling water, they were serving the Lord. As it is said, it is upon the little wheels, great things move, and it is by the little things which they all did together as one family, that the wheels of *Darśanavīṭ* moved. That togetherness day by

day enriched and enhanced their family spirit of theocracy into new divine heights and human depths. "All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings. Day by day, they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And every day, the Lord added to their group those who were being saved" (Acts 2:44-47). This brilliant and beautiful biblical account of universal brotherhood and theocracy was indeed a living reality in *Darśanaṅī* too!

5.2. Inclusiveness: An Imperative

In this study, I have been penning down a few examples and models from the life of Saint Chāvāra, in which he practiced the spirit of inclusivism and universalism. He who, left his family for the sake of God, considered the entire humanity as the family of God. He loved the mother Church, and the motherland as his own family and served them. With an inclusive approach, he worked for the growth and development of both, which in turn had significant impacts.

Yadyādācarati śrēṣṭhaḥ tattadēvōtarō janaḥ

Sa yatpramāṇam kurutē lōkasdunuvartatē.

"Whatever a great man does that the other man imitates, whatever standard he sets up, the generality of men follows the same" (BG 3:21). Throughout his life, Saint Chāvāra has shown us how the ancient and classical language of India, i.e., the Sanskrit can be a home for all different and differing expressions of India. If the Sanskrit school could accommodate them all 'linguistically', it is possible for us to have room for all diversities of India philosophically, theologically, culturally, and religiously. Saint Chāvāra,

with his knowledge, wisdom, values, and affection, paved the path of inclusivism for us to embrace and follow. It is this guiding spirit that has been and will always be the source of inspiration for us. I do think and believe that such possibilities are opened up by the classical life model of Saint Chāvāra. Undoubtedly Saint Chāvāra is a beacon of such high ideals and their expressions.

The only way in which we can affect tomorrow is by living wisely today. In the cast ridden mud of the nineteenth century, Saint Chāvāra has sown the seeds for a new era of inclusivism. As the twenty-first century members of that family, today, we are invited to harvest its fruits and take it to the next generation. According to the seed we sow will be the harvest we reap. Tomorrow is entirely in our hands, and that is in the sense that we have to show respect to this great soul. Let the soul of *Darśanavīṭ* be reborn today and let there be no fear of tomorrow bringing forth an evil harvest that divides humanity based on caste, class, and creed.

5.3. A Prophetic Vision of *Aggiornamento*

The Second Vatican Council, held from 1962 to 1965, is widely regarded as one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. Besides the immense influence exerted on Catholic theology and life, the Council has brought *aggiornamento* to the Roman Church. The Italian term *aggiornamento* means ‘the process of bringing an institution or organization up to date,’ and it was one of the keywords used during the Vatican Council II. The Council used it to mean letting open the doors of the Church in a desire to have a dialogue with the outside world.¹ Saint Chāvāra ante-

¹Chirico, “*Aggiornamento, or What Happened at Vatican II?*” *Local Forum of Christian Leaders*, posted on 17 March 2017,

dated Vatican II by a century, adapting good things from other religious traditions and cultures. As the Council teaches,

The Catholic Church rejects nothing true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love. In witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve, and promote the right things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men (NA 2).

We need to analyse the interfaith initiatives of Saint Chāvāra in the context of the pre-Vatican attitude of the Church, which considered other religions as pagans and their religious practices as mere superstitions. To realize it, see the statement of Pope Pius XI: “One of the greatest and most wonderful signs of love for one’s neighbour is when, by our loving care, the pagans are led out of their murky superstitions and are filled with the true faith in Christ.”¹ Pope Benedict XV also had more or less the same view saying, “An enormous number of souls must be saved from the proud tyranny of Satan and be brought to the freedom of the children of God ... in their misunderstanding many people are still very far away from the true faith... What

foclonline.org/webinar/aggiornamento-or-what-happenedvatican-ii (accessed on 3 September 2019).

¹Buhlmann, *All Have the Same God: An Encounter with the Peoples and Religions of Asia*, 27.

type of people needs brotherly love more than the non-believers who do not know God at all?"¹

As the faithful sons of this Church, it is with such an attitude the Christian missionaries came to India, which was questioned by Gandhiji:

We were described as a land of superstitious pagans who knew nothing about God and who denied God. I am convinced that to say that is a denial of the Spirit of Christ. What you find puzzling is that you look upon other religions to be wrong, or you mar them to such an extent that they equal falsity. You shut your eyes before the truth, which shines in the different religions and which give its believers true joy and peace. Therefore, I did not hesitate to recommend to my Christian friends a study of the other holy scriptures of the world, along with prayer and sympathy. From my own experience, I can say a study like this enabled me to pay tribute to them as well as to my religion. It has enriched my faith and has broadened my horizons.²

On the contrary, II Vatican Council, by its path-breaking shifts, opened the doors and windows of the Church to other religious traditions and dispelled the wrong notions about them. But, even before this high Council corrected the age-old negative views of the Church on other religions, Saint Chāvāra, as a prophet of inter-faith harmony, initiated bold steps in the Indian Church. Much before the Council teachings, he could break out of the sphere of an isolated religious sect. The starting of a Sanskrit school and learning

¹Buhlmann, *All Have the Same God: An Encounter with the Peoples and Religions of Asia*, 26-27.

²Buhlmann, *All Have the Same God: An Encounter with the Peoples and Religions of Asia*, 24-25.

Sanskrit symbolizes his commitment to preserving authentic Indian ancient culture, tradition and heritage. Sanskrit's learning provided Saint Chāvāra a gateway to understanding the Hindu religion, the way of life, and thought that helped him promote interfaith dialogue and intercultural relations. He understood that Indian tradition is preserved in its sacred books, which contain not merely spiritual and religious truth, but an entire outlook, the thought-patterns and accepted values of Indian society. Thereby, he knew that the Church never could be genuinely Indian without adopting these treasures.

5.4. *Ātmānutāpam*: "Living Water in Indian Cup"

While discussing different approaches of inter-faith, Raymond Panikkar considers the category of growth as the best model: "Panikkar considers that neither utilization nor interpretation is the best category to apply to 'religious encounter,' but it is the category of growth."¹ In his encounter with other religions, I would say, Saint Chāvāra uniquely followed this category of growth and the Infancy Narrative of *Ātmānutāpam*, is a poetic testimony of it. Later, the poetic successors of Saint Chāvāra following his footsteps of Indian approach and presentation of Christian messages contributed immensely. For example, following the model of epic poem *Ātmānutāpam*, P. C. Devassia has written *Kristubhāgavatam*, which is one of the most outstanding Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s in recent times. As the world is deeply indebted to its first travellers and its leading spirits, Saint Chāvāra deserves our appreciation for pioneering the Kerala Church for starting Sanskrit studies

¹Mundadan, "Inter-Faith Approaches: A Survey of Contemporary Indian Christian Literature," 109.

and writing epic poems to share the Gospel message in the Indian soil.

The one, who objectively and critically studies Saint Chāvāra's *Ātmānutāpam*, will certainly confirm that this poem is a classic example of foreseeing the great desire of the Vatican Council II.

*Kāvyaṃ karōti sukaviḥ sahr̥daya ēka vyanakti tattattoam
Katnam khaniḥ prasutē racayati śilpi tu tatsuṣamān.*

"A good poet composes a poem, but it is the understanding of the critic that brings out its charms; a mine produces a precious stone (in the crude stage), but it is the goldsmith who burnishes its brilliance." Similarly, now the literary critics have to explain the poetic beauty and other characteristics of *Ātmānutāpam* to the broader public. There is another Sanskrit saying that runs as follows:

*Khyātīm gamayati sujanaḥ sukavir vidadhāti kēvalam kāvyam
Puṣṇati kamalamambhē lakṣmyā tu ravir niyōjayati.*

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

*Antaḥ kuṭilatām vibhrac chaṅkhaḥ sa khalu niṣṭhrah
Humkarōti yadā dhmātas tadaiva bahu ganyatām.*

"A conch is inside curved, outside coarse; it only sounds when blown into, and so, one gets the right respect towards it." Similarly, only when serious and good critical studies are made on *Ātmānutāpam*, its readers will enjoy and appreciate its poetic qualities. In this poem, because of the in-depth and affective knowledge of Indian culture and religion, and having a moving openness and a two-way approach to them, Saint Chāvāra could develop a relevant cultural modification of faith, which will have its unique stamp in the Indian Christian Theology. It is easy for one to experience the soul of other religions, provided, first, he has

experienced the soul of his faith. For him, religion is never rituals and ceremonies. Instead, it is a spiritual realization, and it's sharing. *Ātmānutāpam* is such a sharing of Saint Chāvāra's Christ experience. It is a reply to the request of Sādhu Sunder Singh to the foreign missionaries, "Give us the living water in Indian cup."¹

5.5. Saint Chāvāra: A Son of Catholicity

The Church is catholic, and it means 'all-embracing, universal or general.' Imbibing this spirit of the Catholicity, Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvāra embraced every people and culture. He thought globally but at the same time acted locally by initiating social, cultural, and religious revolutions in the Kerala society of the nineteenth century, which marked a new era of inclusivism. Even while being a prophetic and heroic son of the Syrian Church of Kerala, Saint Chāvāra was a true son of the Universal Church. The last words, which he shared with his confreres just before receiving the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick on 2 January 1871, echo his outlook, concern, and prayer for the Universal Church. Due to ill health, he was unable to offer the daily Mass during the last few days of his life. He joining with the priests of the Asia-America who were offering the Mass of the Holy Lamb throughout the day from morning to evening, he spiritually provided it to the Heavenly Father, lying on the deathbed itself.

Let the pain of the fires that I would have to bear in (*besppurkkāna*)² purgatory can be alleviated by the act of

¹Marbaniang, *Beyond the Shadows and Other Essays*, 226.

²The Syrian word *besppurkkāna* means 'place of salvation' - (*bes* - place and *ppurkkāna* - salvation). According to the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, purgatory or *besppurkkāna* is a place or condition of

spitting the sputum which I do indeed with great difficulty, and I unite my intentions and myself with the priest who make the holy offering of the Holy Lamb to the Almighty Father at every moment and every instance throughout Asia-America and all-round the four corners of the world as I am unable to celebrate the Holy Mass due to increase in the gravity of my illness. On hearing this, everyone became uneasy and silent. Even then, the arrangements for him to receive the final sacrament were made immediately as his illness worsened.¹

Understanding the holy intention of Saint Chāvāra, the members of his congregation made arrangements to offer Holy Mass on behalf of him at the last moments of his life as it is mentioned in the third volume of Mannanam Chronicle.²

As we understand from the Gospel of John 21:15-17, his concern for the flock is indeed a proof of Saint Chāvāra's love for the Lord. These words about the sacerdotal law that 'the sacrifice of the Holy Lamb to the Almighty Father is to be offered at every moment in every place can be well identified as a Chāvāra version of the words of the prophet Malachi: "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal 1:11). These words are, without a doubt, a prophetic announcement of the universality of the Eucharistic

temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions (Mt 5:25-26).

¹Parappuram, *The Chronicle of Mannanam*, vol. III, 133-134.

²Parappuram, *The Chronicle of Mannanam*, vol. III, 135.

celebrations. This spiritual service, the prophet says, shall be offered in every place, whereas the Jewish worship was confined to the temple. The words of Jesus in Jn 4:21-22 are an excellent commentary upon this text and imbibing the spirit of this biblical teaching, Saint Chāvāra offered his prayers, praises, and sufferings in love and faith for God. Justin the Martyr says:

God has, therefore, beforehand declared, that all who through this name offer those sacrifices, which Jesus, who is the Christ, commanded to be provided, that is to say, in the Eucharist of the bread and of the cup, which is contained in every part of the world by us Christians, are well-pleasing to Him. But those sacrifices, which are offered by you and through those priests of yours, He wholly rejects, saying, "And I will not accept your offerings at your hands. For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, My Name is glorified among the Gentiles; but ye profane it."

He points out further the failure of the Jewish explanation as to "their" sacrifices, in that the Church was everywhere, not so the Jews. "You and your teachers deceive yourselves, when you interpret this passage of Scripture of those of your nation who were in the dispersion and say that it speaks of their prayers and sacrifices made in every place, as pure and well-pleasing, and know that you speak falsely, and endeavour in every way to impose upon yourselves; first, because your people are not found, even now, from the rising to the setting of the sun, but there are nations, in which none of your race has ever dwelt: while there is not one nation of people, whether Barbarians, or Greeks, or by whatsoever name distinguished, whether of those (nomads) who live in wagons, or of those who have no houses, or those

pastoral people that dwell in tents, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of all things, through the name of the crucified Jesus. And you know that at the time when the prophet Malachi said this, the dispersion of you through the whole world, in which you now are, had not yet taken place, as is also shown by Scripture.¹

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in number 1552, teaches that “The ministerial priesthood has the task not only of representing Christ – Head of the Church – before the assembly of the faithful, but also of acting in the name of the whole Church when presenting to God the prayer of the Church, and above all when offering the Eucharistic sacrifice.”² In this instance of Saint Chāvāra, we see how faithfully he follows that sacred duty. In number 1553, the document reminds us that “The prayer and offering of the Church are inseparable from the prayer and offering of Christ, her head; it is always the case that Christ is worshiped in and through his Church. The whole Church, the Body of Christ, prays and offers herself “through him, with him, in him,” in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to God the Father. The whole Body, *caput et membra*, prays and offers itself, and therefore those who in the Body, especially his ministers, are called ministers not only of Christ but also of

¹Pusey, “Chapter 7 How the Sacrifice of the Mass Is Carried Out,” *EWTN*, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/chapter-7-how-the-sacrifice-of-the-mass-is-carried-out-10106> (accessed on 10 August 2019).

²*Catechism of the Catholic Church.vatican.archive*, posted on 16 March 2018, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P4T.HTM (accessed on 18 June 2019).

the Church.”¹ Church subsists as an integral whole, and this universal outlook is reflected in the life of Saint Chāvara.

Saint Chāvara being as the superior of the religious congregation and the closest collaborator of the Bishop, in his capacity of the Vicar General of Syrians in the diocese of Varapoly, carried out his ecclesial service eminently by fraternal relations, collaboration with colleagues and by hierarchical dependence on the local Bishop, in communion with the Supreme Pontiff, sincerely heeding his directives for the Universal Church. The letters which he has written to the Popes and Prefects of the Oriental Congregation are testimonies of his universal ecclesial outlook and authentic ecclesial communion. As Śri Śaṅkara says it, in his *Vivekachuḍamaṅi*, getting the association of a great man is considered to be a blessing of God.

Durlabham trayamēvaitat daivānugrahaḥētukam

Manuṣyatvaṅ mumukṣutvaṅ mahāpuruṣasaṅśrayaḥ (VC 3).

“To be bestowed with the following three eventualities is a rare phenomenon, the human birth, a zeal for realization, and the counsel from an apt *Acharaya*; if such contingency occurs, it is undoubtedly a great boon from God.” And, in this respect, Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvara is an excellent boon from God to humankind, and very specially to the Indian society and Church.

¹*Catechism of the Catholic Church. vatican.archive*, posted 16 March 2018, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P4T.HTM (accessed on 18 June 2019).

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DARŚANAVĪṬ

A Theology of Inclusive Home in
SAINT CHAVARA

JOJO PARECATTIL CMI

As the word *Darśanavīṭ* indicates, it is a vision about humanity as well as a universal home of humanity where an inclusive theology and spirituality are lived considering the entire humanity as the children of the same God. That is why Saint Chāvāra often addressed the members of the consecrated community as *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns) and used the same term even to address the outsiders too. Surprisingly, in his own words, in the *Darśanavīṭ*, he had brethren, who loved him more than his own brothers and sisters: “I left my home and parents for the sake of God. Now, I am writing this from Elthuruth. I have my loving *kūṭapirappukal* [co-borns] here who love me more than my own brothers and sisters. Tomorrow, if I go to Koonammavu, I will have the same experience there as well; so also, if I go to Mannanam or to Vazhakulam.” As it is mentioned, he wrote these words from Elthuruth and the word *Elthuruth* literally means “an island of God.” Seeing the entire humanity as one’s brothers and sisters – *kūṭapirappukal* – is indeed a divine vision, which one receives while he or she is elevated to a higher consciousness.



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