

**Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 13**

**KURIAKOSE ELIAS  
CHAVARA  
THE PIONEER OF SOCIAL  
AND ECCLESIAL REFORM**

Dharmaram Publications

No. 561



**Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 13**

**KURIAKOSE ELIAS  
CHAVARA  
THE PIONEER OF SOCIAL  
AND ECCLESIAL REFORM**

**Jossy Maria CMC**

**Chavara Central Secretariat  
Kochi 682030 Kerala, India  
&  
Dharmaram Publications  
Bangalore 560029 India  
2024**

Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 13

*Kuriakose Elias Chavara*

*The Pioneer of Social and Ecclesial Reform*

**Jossy Maria CMC**

Email: jossymaria52@gmail.com

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI

*General Editor, Theological Studies on Saint Chavara*

kalambukattunaiju@gmail.com

© 2024 Chavara Central Secretariat, Kochi

Cover design: Jebin Jose Attokaran CMI

Printing: Viani Printings, Kochi

ISBN: 978-93-92996-48-1

Price: Rs 250.00; US 15\$

**Chavara Central Secretariat**

CMI Prior General's House, Chavara Hills, Kakkanad  
Post Box 3105, Kochi 682 030 Kerala, India

Tel: +91 484 2881802/3

Email: info@chavaralibrary.com

Web: <http://www.chavaralibrary.in/>

&

**Dharmaram Publications**

Dharmaram College, Bangalore 560029, India

Tel: +91-8041116137; 6111

Email: dpoffice3@gmail.com

Web: [www.dharmarampublications.com](http://www.dharmarampublications.com)

## CONTENTS

Theological Studies on Saint Chavara	7
Foreword	11
Preface	15
Introduction	17
<b>Chapter I</b>	21
Ecclesial Situation of the Nineteenth Century Kerala	
<b>Chapter II</b>	47
Integral Social Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara	
<b>Chapter III</b>	65
Kuriakose Elias Chavara, An Apostle of Families	
<b>Chapter IV</b>	87
Education for Social Empowerment	
<b>Chapter V</b>	113
Social Empowerment through Empowered Womanhood	
<b>Conclusion: Continuing the Catalytic Action</b>	143
<b>Bibliography</b>	159



## THEOLOGICAL STUDIES ON SAINT CHAVARA

Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871) – a Carmelite religious priest and professor of theology (*Malpan*), who pioneered consecrated life in the Syro-Malabar 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 Catholic Church in Kerala and broader nineteenth-century society. His credible Christian witness, along with the leadership he offered to the St Thomas Christians, at a time when they were undergoing multiple jurisdictional crises, a spiritual and disciplined growth in the Kerala Church.

Canonised on 23 November 2014, Chavara's personal sanctity and Christian wisdom have been identified as unique. While secular society admires his contributions to uplifting those existing on the margins and who were socially ostracised through educational and social initiatives, the fundamental core of all his achievements is solidly established in his filial discipleship to Jesus Christ, whom he addressed '*ente nalla appa*' (my beloved father).

Chavara had a firm foundation in Christian faith, which is clearly visible throughout his life and is testified by those who knew him. He articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounter with Jesus and only secondarily based on his readings and theological reflections. They are available to us through his extant writings, which are published in the four volumes

of the *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*. Some of these works, recognized as efforts hitherto unprecedented in Indian literature, offer us a goldmine 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 of the Christian community that he had catered to throughout his life.

*Theological Studies on Saint Chavara*, a joint effort of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC), attempts to promote and publish the fruits of scientific investigation into the unique and varied theological insights of Chavara in the form of monographs. These theological investigations will be instrumental in appreciating and popularising the sound and solid theological contributions he made toward enhancing Catholic faith in the nineteenth century, which, in turn, indicate that he deserves titles such as '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 has also benefitted from the eminent theological acumen, pastoral insights, and ecclesiastical leadership of Chavara, these studies will hopefully bring to light the multifarious theological heritage that he had bequeathed to the Church and the subsequent generations of faithful in India.

The present number in the *Theological Studies on Saint Chavara* (TSSC-13) titled, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the Pioneer of Social and Ecclesial Reform* by Jossy Maria CMC unveils convincingly the pioneering contributions of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and his vision of a just society based on the



gospel values with clarity and depth. Her work has a special merit of presenting the Saint as a pioneer of social and ecclesial reform highlighting elaborately his immense contributions for all people in different strata of the society. As an ecclesial and socio-cultural visionary, Chavara embraced the Church and the society with a keen interest to uplift the people from the existing situations, and he courageously took several radical steps for the ecclesial and social reform. The flame of divine love in him urged him constantly to devote himself at the service of the entire humanity. Jossy Maria, an authority in Chavara studies and a zealous missionary disciple, delves deep into the vision and mission of Chavara and propounds how he contributed to the Church and the society at large.

**Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI**  
(kalambukattunaiju@gmail.com)  
General Editor



## Foreword

We find ourselves in a world, in which history is manipulated and distorted according to the vested interests of the concerned. This is widely the case in the countries of national fundamentalism as well as totalitarian ideology. Those in power hire people to rewrite history as it suits their purposes. Recent developments nationally and internationally testify to this unfair trend. Simple people are misled or forced to believe the distorted stories as genuine history. This is at the root of wars and new nomenclatures. The only remedy to this evil is objective study of history based on facts and authentic documents. This is applicable to the secular field and unfortunately the religious field, including the ecclesiastical domain related to certain cases of eulogization/ caricaturization of persons. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the co-founder of the present CMI Congregation of Kerala, the first indigenous religious institute for men in India, and the charismatic founder of the present CMC Congregation, the first indigenous religious organization for women in Kerala, is such a great personality, who has been ignored and obscured for social and church-political reasons. The social agencies have simply ignored his great contribution in the field of social reform in the nineteenth century in Kerala by his revolutionary ventures to change and uplift the sad situation of the outcastes, lower castes and women by launching new educational policies and even starting a Sanskrit school for all, while the church political forces try to ignore his role as the founder of the first women religious institute, called the T.O.C.D. Dr Jossy Maria, CMC, has now come forward with her new book authentically challenging the unjust attitudes and highlighting convincingly the pioneering contribution of

Saint Chavara. She has successfully established it based on facts supported by authentic documents, using many manuscript sources both from India and abroad. Sr Jossy has also highlighted in her work the social and ecclesiastical situation of the nineteenth century Kerala, which informs of the unjust and inhuman social structure based on caste system and the sad plight of the victims of this system. The book also exposes the unfair and colonialistic mentality of the foreign missionaries toward the Oriental Christians or the Mar Thoma Christians and the humiliation they had to suffer under the jurisdiction of the Latin Rite ordinaries. The author also depicts how Saint Chavara fought against the Roccas schism and helped the believers of the Saint Thomas Christians to remain loyal to the Roman Pontif and so to uphold the unity of the Catholic Church.

The thrust of the book is, however, as the title suggests, in showing how Saint Chavara acted as a pioneer for social and ecclesiastical reform. His valuable contribution for social reform by making education available to the marginalized groups and facilitating it in every parish under the motto "a school attached to each parish church" can never be overlooked. It was he, who started the system of midday meal in the schools, a system that the governments in Kerala have adopted recently. He tried his best to abolish the practice of discrimination towards the lower castes and outcastes, who were considered untouchables by the orthodox Hindu society. Even before the renowned social reformer Sri Narayana Guru attempted this, St Chavara had already worked on it. Unfortunately, St Chavara's name is not mentioned among the leaders of social reform and renaissance in Kerala. By starting a religious institute for women and a boarding house for girls, he also tried to empower the much disregarded and often oppressed and ill-treated

women-folk of those times. By imparting training in handicrafts he helped the women to be active contributors to the society as well as independent livelihood earners of the families. This boosted their self image and promoted their dignity in the society.

In the spiritual, pastoral and ecclesiastical field, Saint Chavara achieved a lot through his pioneering endeavours. Together with the priests Thomas Porukara and Thomas Palackal he founded the first indigenous Congregation for men and led it as its first Prior (General) and founded several monasteries throughout Malabar (Kerala). He tried to elevate the academic standard of the clergy by imparting good theological formation to the seminarians, organizing a good library for them and translating valuable books into the vernacular. He pleaded for a local hierarchy for the Saint Thomas Christians. His attempts to build monasteries by pooling the local resources was a new venture. Retreat preaching and giving homilies during the Eucharist helped to improve the spirituality of the believers. He also founded a confraternity to assist people fulfil the formalities related to death in their families. He established a printing press in Kerala from which later started the first Malayalam Daily. He introduced the system of 40 hours adoration among the Saint Thomas Christians. His various books, especially, *The Testament of a Loving Father*, contain great spiritual vision and remain valuable source of inspiration.

I sincerely congratulate the author Dr Jossy Maria, CMC, on this great work and wish the book a wide readership.

**Sebastian Athappilly CMI**  
Professor, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram



## Preface

Christian faith has always emphasized the salvific value of social concern and social justice, for the crucial teaching of Jesus Christ is precisely love of God and love of the neighbour. He even taught that the love of neighbour is equal in importance as the love of God. This was a revolutionary feature of his message. The parable of the Last Judgement (Mt 25) confirms powerfully the importance of Jesus's teaching on the law of love of neighbour. Love of neighbour is not merely limited to charitable and social works of mercy but also encompasses social justice and social action. The social encyclicals of the popes and the various social teachings of the Church reaffirm this. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara had already recognized this in the nineteenth century. As part of his Christian responsibility of evangelization, he therefore, took the pains in order to commit himself for social reform of Kerala, which was badly in need of such a reform owing to the unjust and inhuman caste system that discriminated among human beings as the untouchables and outcastes, on the one hand and the low castes and high castes on the other. Also the status of the women was miserable. In the Concluding Statement of the CBCI Assembly (1992) the Bishops said that discrimination against women seems to be embedded in the structure of our society, violence (physical, sexual, psychological) practiced against women is the result of inhuman attitudes. With a sense of sorrow they admitted that women feel discriminated even in the Church. Realizing this fact, one and a half century ago, Chavara worked for the empowerment of women.

The condition of the church was equally determined by colonial mentality of hegemony that showed itself in

the church administration by the European bishops and missionaries set over the local Saint Thomas Christians, a church that was much earlier than the western church. Chavara fought against both the situations by creative programmes. At the social level he brought reform by means of a new and revolutionary educational system by establishing school attached to each parish, starting a Sanskrit school for all, founding a religious institute for women, boarding house for girls, and by establishing a printing press. At the ecclesiastical level, he pleaded for a local hierarchy for the Saint Thomas Christians. He also worked for promoting the academic and spiritual standard of the clergy. His role as one of the founders of the first indigenous religious institute for men, Third Order of Carmelite Discalced (T.O.C.D.), is here to be especially mentioned.

In the present work I try to highlight and bring to the attention of the public the pioneering contribution of Chavara as a social and ecclesiastical reformer of Kerala. By all standards he deserves to be named among the leaders of social reform and renaissance of Kerala. I owe a lot to many persons, who helped me in this venture. I gratefully remember the editing work done by Fr Saju Chakalackal CMI. Fr Sebastian Athappilly CMI read the book very carefully and refined the language. I am very much indebted to Fr Najju Kalambukattu CMI, the general editor of Theological Studies on Saint Chavara for his guidance and suggestions. This work will hopefully help to interpret and appreciate how Chavara understood the sighs and signs of the nineteenth century Kerala church.

**Jossy Maria CMC**  
Dehradun



## Introduction

Being from an interior, remote and undeveloped village of Kainakary, geographically on the periphery, Kuriakose Elias Chavara committed himself to work for the people on the margins. He cared for the *Dalits* and the poor. Inspired by the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth, which was an unknown and despised place in Galilee, he took the name Fr Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family at the time of his religious profession. Chavara represented the minority section of Kerala wherever he lived. In the *Kalari*, the village school, the majority were Hindu children and the *Asan* (teacher) was Hindu. Hindu customs were followed there. Yet he learned to cherish this diversity and constantly preached homilies on reconciliation, forgiveness, and unity, especially in the 1860s when the church in Kerala was rocked by the Roccas schism. When Chavara was appointed the Vicar General of the St Thomas Christians (1861), he continued to pursue a mission to reach out to the poor and the oppressed, the lost, the last and the least. He always sought to speak out for justice, freedom and human dignity for everyone; the image of God in humans was so central to his understanding of the mission of the Church.

It is sad to note that although Chavara worked for the unity and growth of the church and for the integral development of the society, some do not recognize his contributions as a social reformer. At the same time, they confer this title on other leaders who came after him! The people of his time believed rightly that without him life in the church would have been very different and much darker and appreciated his services.

He had the clarity of vision and mission. He wanted to see the people of Kerala freed to love and serve others. To achieve this, they needed to rid themselves of the evil forces such as sin, addiction, injustice, discrimination and unjust structures. In order to enjoy full freedom, there must be truth in everything. As a priest, his motto was “The Lord is my portion” (Ps 16:5); he put his trust in the Lord in everything. He was a *karmayogi*, who travelled all over Kerala and preached the Gospel in all the parishes. He beautifully blended contemplation with action; he was a *bhakti-karmayogi*, in its true sense.

In this volume, we discuss the special situation of the Kerala church at the time of Chavara and his role in making the face of the church and society brighter. The first and second chapters deal with the ecclesial and social conditions of the nineteenth century. Both the chapters speak of the lived experience of the people of God, the context within which Chavara worked. Here we analyze how the social vision of Chavara and the programmes and projects he initiated in Kerala led to the integral welfare of the society.

Chavara believed that the society would become prosperous only when the families are integrated and women’s welfare has been assured and those who are at the periphery are thoroughly motivated for development. His instructions for a happy and healthy family life form the subject matter of the third chapter. He was fully aware of the complex issues faced by the families of his time. In *Chavarul, (The Testament of a Loving Father)*, Chavara speaks of the meaning and role of the family. He wrote extensive reflections on transforming family into an image of heaven. These reflections were meant to awaken the desire to keep alive the dream of a heavenly home of

brothers and sisters. This has guided many men and women in this land. The family is the arena, where we properly welcome and protect life, the gift of God. It is equally the seat of the culture of life, as opposed to the culture of death.

Chavara's vision on education and his educational contributions are explained in detail in the fourth chapter. He believed that a society is integrally developed only when all the people are educated and become God-fearing. Chavara's welcoming attitude and approach towards the education of the marginalized questioned the status quo, disapproved the reigning system, and encouraged the movements of the people on the social ladder, especially for the poor and the downtrodden, and made justice, equality, and freedom accessible to everyone. His mission to those at the existential peripheries continues to challenge the present generation for its eloquent witness of God's closeness to the poorest of the poor.

The fifth chapter is on women empowerment programmes Chavara introduced in the Kerala church through the foundation of the first indigenous religious congregation for women. In the nineteenth century women were kept in a state of utter subjection; they were denied the basic rights, suppressed and oppressed. Women were left economically, socially, educationally and politically dependent on men. Chavara instilled in the women of Kerala the conviction that they were born with potential, goodness, trust, ideas, dreams and greatness. Realizing the importance of women in shaping and guiding the society, Chavara initiated new ventures for their development for they are the agents of social change. The unhealthy social mindset is the main reason behind the lower status of women in India. A society with archaic ideologies of

patriarchal joint families where male chauvinism is prevalent cannot treat its women equally along with men. Male domination leads to the subjugation of women as second class citizens. It also leads to violence (domestic and social) against women.

The concluding chapter discusses the factors that worked to realize Chavara's visions and carry on his activities, especially through the religious congregations he founded. It was the first time in the history of Kerala that a Catholic priest worked for the empowerment of women by founding a religious institute for women, a boarding house and school for girls, vocational training, and income generating projects for women, and so on. Chavara's powerful motivation enabled him to begin new projects and his followers made it a habit to keep it going.

Indeed, Chavara sincerely lived his idea of holiness in responding to the cries of the poor. Jesus' emphasis on the humiliated and afflicted finds a voice in the stand taken by Chavara. His social interventions greatly strengthened the social awareness of the oppressed and the marginalised and addressing inequities in the society. His social engagement brought in moral and spiritual dimensions into the lives of the people.

# Chapter I

## Ecclesial Situation of the Nineteenth Century Kerala

### 1. A Church of “Master and Slaves”

A clear understanding of the ecclesial situation of the Saint Thomas Christians of Kerala of the nineteenth century is necessary to understand the circumstances in which Chavara was working for the integral growth and unity of the Church. According to a report of the vicariate of Varapuzha sent to the prefect of Propaganda Fide, Rome, on 25 March 1859, the Catholic population of Latin Christians was 10,000, and that of Syrians 160,000. Indigenous priests and seminarians of the Latin Church stood at 28 and 29 and that of Syrians 340 and 240 respectively. Parishes of the Latin community were numbered at 23 along with 37 chapels; Syrians had 115 parishes and 120 chapels. The number of Italian Carmelite missionaries in Varapuzha was five. In the vicariate of Mangalore there were 40,000 Catholics, 24 indigenous priests and 6 Italian missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

The above report clearly depicts the anomalous situation of the vicariate of Varapuzha, namely, that it was governed by a Latin bishop, although the Eastern Christians formed the vast majority of the faithful. In fact, more than two-thirds of the Christian faithful and parishes in the vicariate of Varapuzha belonged to the Oriental Church. The Syrian Christians were convinced that they had every right to obtain a bishop of their own Rite and nation.

---

<sup>1</sup> AGOCD., *Registro delle Cose*, 362; 181c.

Chavara was well aware that in India all the other vicariates put together had less number of Catholics than that of Saint Thomas Christians of Varapuzha vicariate. It pained him that this ancient Apostolic Church with 160,000 Catholics, 340 priests and 115 parishes was treated as an appendix to a church of later origin in Kerala with another Rite, that too, with very few faithful and meagre infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> Chavara stated in no uncertain terms that “Such discrepancy of the Rites is not found anywhere in the world except among the Syro-Malabarians.”<sup>3</sup> Chavara was ordained by a foreign bishop, Monsignor Aurelius Stabilini at Arthunkal, which was a Latin parish. All the priests were ordained by foreign bishops. After his ordination, he offered his services under Italian Carmelite bishops throughout his life: Francis Xavier of Saint Anna, Ludovic Martini, Bernardine Baccinelli, and Leonard Mellano. Chavara was vocal about the kind of relationship that existed between the bishop and the priests and also the pitiable situation of the priests and faithful of his church.

In the official Report of 1867, Monsignor Baccinelli, the vicar apostolic openly admitted that nine Syro-Malabar priests were appointed to serve in Kollam vicariate, which

---

<sup>2</sup> AGOCD., Stato delle Missioni Estere dell’Ordine de Carmelitani Scalzi nel 1863, 448r, 448v. Indie Orientali Costa Malabarica. According to the report sent to Rome in 1863 the number of priests in Syrian Rite has been reduced to 300 and parishes 113. Is it because the statistics went wrong or because of the disturbance caused by Roccus schism many left their priesthood? There were 340 priests and 240 seminarians in 1859; within four years how is it possible to have considerable change in the number of priests? On 18 May 1876 when Monsignor Leo Meurine, apostolic visitor, wrote to Rome the number of priests 328, seminarians 124, parish churches 158 chapels 10. TOCD monasteries 6, in which priests 37, lay brothers 24, novices 33 (ACO., *Ponenze* 1876 ff. 725-730).

<sup>3</sup> Chavara, *Complete Works of Chavara (CWC)*, vol. 4, *Letters* VI:4.

was exclusively for Latins. "Because of great scarcity, with my permission nine priests serve the vicariate apostolic of Kollam as vicars or assistant vicars."<sup>4</sup> It means that the vicariate of Kollam was maintained at the expense of another individual church or Rite. A vicariate was installed even without having sufficient priests of their own. This was true about the vicariate of Varapuzha, which could not provide Latin priests for the Latin parishes. An Italian Carmelite missionary, Leopold Beccaro's letter on 18 September 1865 confirms this. He writes, "According to the current situation of this mission, it is impossible that all the Latin churches are governed or directed by their Latin priests, not sufficient in number, but necessarily some of these churches as in fact is now practiced, should be directed by *Suriani* priests."<sup>5</sup>

According to Chavara, the lack of local ecclesial leadership of their own Rite was the basic reason for the lack of identity consciousness, growth, unity, poor quality of priestly formation, and all other problems related with the life of the believers of Saint Thomas Christians. The church was in the midst of an inner battle, overwhelmed by discrimination and discouragement. It saddened Chavara that there existed no cordiality between the bishop and the priests. He writes,

---

<sup>4</sup> Archives of the Congregation of the Oriental Churches (ACO), Rome, *Ponenze* 1873, 681-709. See also Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the Saint Thomas Christians in 1867: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?* Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, Q. 57, p. 71. Hereafter referred to as Baccinelli Report 1867, with question number. Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 58, p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> ACO., *Ponenze* 1873, ff. 673-677, *Letter of Leopold Beccaro on 18 September 1865*. Persico Report also mentions about the lack of sufficient number of Latin priests for the numerically few Latin Parishes in Varapuzha vicariate. ACO., *Ponenze* 1877 ff. 593-637, Persico Report, Para. 54, 33.

In Malabar our priests know only the Syriac language which they use for liturgical purpose. Their bishops and missionaries use a different language and follow a different Rite. This situation stands in the way of unity and mutual understanding that should exist between the father and his spiritual children, which is entirely missing here ... The language used by the bishop to ordain priests is not the same as the one used by the priests. Hence, there is lack of devotion and the existing bond between them is not that of father and children, but that of master and slaves. This gives rise to a slavish fear in the priests and in the common people ...<sup>6</sup>

### **1.1. Sign of Contradiction for the Carmelite Missionaries**

The Carmelite missionaries unjustly considered Chavara's longing for the self-government for the Saint Thomas Christians as an act of usurpation. Naturally they did not support the idea. In the course of time, Leonard Mellano, the vicar apostolic, showed much dislike towards Chavara for his legitimate suggestion to have an ecclesial leadership separately for the Saint Thomas Christians, a church with a large number of Christians and better infrastructure and resources. We have to remember here that the Malabar church is not the fruit of the labours of Western missionaries, but an apostolic and *swadeshi* church rooted in Kerala, founded by Saint Thomas, the Apostle of Christ. The irony is that they were ruled by the European missionaries. Chavara persisted boldly to let the higher ecclesial authorities know the strange and unfair situation of the

---

<sup>6</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters VI*: 4.



Malabar Church. He wrote to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide, "We are Mar Thoma Christians and have received our faith from Saint Thomas. For the past many years, we had no bishop of our own. But those who received faith in very recent times have bishops of their own."<sup>7</sup> Chavara offered his humble suggestion as to how they could overcome this handicap so that the people would stay united and contented. He wrote, "Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion which I consider good. It is good to have two bishops here: one for the Latin Church and another for the Syrian Church. Then their longing to have a bishop of their own will cease."<sup>8</sup>

From the second half of the nineteenth century the Oriental Christians became fed up with the Carmelite missionaries. Their dissatisfaction grew in leaps and bounds. Realizing the sentiments of the people with regard to the lack of native leadership of Saint Thomas Christians, Chavara joined the like-minded priests and again informed the proper authority in the Church, namely, the Propaganda Fide, through a letter sent on 22 July 1861. Realistically with genuine concern, he wrote, "Lastly we wish to inform you of one more fact. For quite some time now, our laity and priests have been alienating themselves from the Archbishop [Bernardine]. The reason for this alienation, according to them, is that his orders are harsh to accept and his directions are excessive."<sup>9</sup> From the time of the appointment of Latin bishops in 1599, the Saint Thomas Christians ardently desired to have bishops of their own

---

<sup>7</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* II: 4. Letter to Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda Fide.

<sup>8</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol 4, *Letters* II:5. Letter to Alexander Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda Fide.

<sup>9</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol 4, *Letters* II:1. Letter to Alexander Cardinal Barnabo on 22 July 1861.

Rite, because they wanted sacred ordinations and other episcopal ceremonies in their own Rite and liturgical language. If they had been given a bishop of their own Rite and nation according to the provisions of the Fourth Lateran Council as a vicar general of the vicariate of Varapuzha, Roccas schism would not have taken place.<sup>10</sup> Apostolic visitors appointed by the Propaganda Fide had acknowledged the lack of national leadership for the church as the real cause of repeated schisms in Malabar.<sup>11</sup> The Carmelite missionaries totally failed to assign any office of authority to the priests of Saint Thomas Christians.

Moreover, the system of seminary formation was inadequate to equip the priests to guide the people of God. Apostolic Visitors have repeatedly reported it to the higher authorities of Rome. Monsignor Meurine, Apostolic Visitor, wrote to Rome on 1 June 1876 that in the seminaries subjects of Philosophy, Theology (Theologia dogmatica), Church History, Canon Law, etc. were not taught.<sup>12</sup> Monsignor Aiuti, Apostolic Delegate of the East Indies, reported from his first-hand knowledge that the training of the indigenous clergy in Malabar was very poor and inadequate.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, p.120. See also Charles Pyngot, *Kerala Sabha Pathonpatham Nootandil (Meurinte Kathukal)*, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 1996. Letters of Monsignor Meurin, no. 6. Letter written to Propaganda Fide on 10 June 1876 from Mannanam, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> ACO., Letters of Monsignor Meurin, no. 6. Letter written to Propaganda Fide on 10 June 1876 from Mannanam.

<sup>12</sup> ACO., Monsignor Meurine's Letter to Propaganda Fide on 1 June 1876. Cf. Charles Pyngot, *Kerala Sabha Pathonpatham Nootandil (Meurinte Kathukal)*, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> ACO., *Scrit. rif. Malabaressa*, vol.2 f. 663v.

Chavara feared that the seminarians and deacons who were trained and ordained by a foreign bishop would gradually lose their ecclesial heritage and identity-consciousness. He saw the need to have bishops of their own Rite and to have liturgical celebrations in Syriac language in view of an ecumenical outlook. Hence he wrote, "This [separate bishop] would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and to return to the unity of the Catholic fold."<sup>14</sup> He experienced an agony to be alive to the mission of the Lord in his time. We see in Chavara a keen desire for an Indian church that would enhance her identity as a true local church.

Another cause of grief for Chavara was the lack of theological treatises and other systematic books. He lamented that while the Greeks and Latins had excellent theological books and good treatises the Syrians had not produced so far good books or treatises. He observed that all nations and people had their own bishops and missionaries who were well-versed in sacred sciences and that they had produced in the course of years good literary works and theological treatises. According to him, the situation of the Syrians could only be improved by granting them local bishops well versed in sacred sciences.<sup>15</sup>

In the official report sent by Monsignor Baccinelli to Rome in 1867, Question 57 read, "Whether amongst the priests there are alumni of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, or of Saint Athanasius College in Rome...whether they accomplish their work satisfactorily?" To this, Baccinelli gave the following answer: "There are not any."<sup>16</sup> When the above-mentioned

---

<sup>14</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* II:5. Letter to Alexander Cardinal Barnabo.

<sup>15</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* VI: 4.

<sup>16</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 57, p. 71.

report asked about convoking provincial and diocesan synod, the vicar apostolic openly admitted that the Carmelites never convoked any synod.<sup>17</sup>

Saint Thomas Christians felt the disregard of the Carmelite missionaries that they did not work for the growth of the local church so that they did not send any priest for higher studies. Moreover, they did not show any interest even to teach the priests Syriac language; they did not show respect for their local culture or the system of administration of their church. The Saint Thomas Christians had many other grievances.

In September 1869, Chavara wrote a letter to the Superior General of the Carmelite Order, Rome, informing him about the need and importance of having a separate bishop for Syrians. Monsignor Leonard Mellano happened to see the letter, which caused in him much displeasure towards Chavara,<sup>18</sup> and may be because of that displeasure, the bishop did not even join the funeral service of Chavara on 4 January 1871.

## **1.2. Chavara, Vicar General of Saint Thomas Christians**

On 8 June 1861, within a month after the arrival of the intruder bishop Thomas Roccas in Kerala from Baghdad, Monsignor Baccinelli appointed Chavara the vicar general, “in order to administer spiritual ministries to priests and lay persons in the parishes of Syro-Malabar Church under our jurisdiction and thus to govern them.” He saw Chavara

---

<sup>17</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 14, p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> ASJM., Parappuram, *Diary*, p. 1015. Some of the letters of Mellano to Rome has reference to Chavara’s letter asking for bishops for his own Rite. Cf. Letter of Leonard Mellano written to the prefect of Pro paganda Fide on 20 October 1875.

as the only alternative to the stagnation and crisis the church was in. The bishop thought that Chavara could overcome the crisis and in the letter of appointment to Chavara, the bishop lavishly enumerated his qualities. "In fact, I am persuaded that you have the fortitude, skill, wisdom and the virtues which are necessary to fulfill this responsibility. Therefore, in addition to the powers and faculties, authority and privileges which the common law recognizes, we grant you all those privileges and authority which our patent-letter recognizes to be granted."<sup>19</sup> Here it is also worthwhile to recall that archbishop Baccinelli appointed Chavara the vicar general, precisely because he found it almost impossible to powerfully execute anything in the churches of Kerala. Being aware of the magnitude and the seriousness of the problem caused by the arrival of bishop Roccas, Baccinelli openly admitted his inability to have control over the situation as he testified in the letter of appointment given to Chavara.

Because of our advanced age and the consequent exhaustion and indisposition, and, moreover, since through our administration we do not see spiritual fruits both among the priests and among the laity, in the present circumstances of things, according to the decree of the council of Trent, it is necessary to constitute a vicar general. Hence, we appoint you as vicar general, so that you govern, as regards spiritual affairs, priests and lay people in the Syro-Malabar churches under our jurisdiction.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Baccinelli's Letter of Appointment to Chavara. See ASJM., *Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum* (P. N. 1174), Changanacherren. Seu Verapolitana, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Cyriaci Eliae Chavara, Positio super introductione Causae et super virtutibus*, Romae 1977, 217-2180.

<sup>20</sup> ASJM., Baccinelli's Letter of Appointment to Chavara.

The archbishop had even contemplated consecrating Chavara a bishop in order to satisfy the people in the context of Roccas schism. He had made this request to the Prefect Cardinal Barnabo.<sup>21</sup> On 15 June 1861, Baccinelli wrote to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide informing him of the appointment of Chavara as the vicar general, in which he listed the good qualities of Chavara:

The Prior of the old and principal monastery, and head of the whole congregation, a man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, very well-versed in Sacred Scriptures, most proficient in Syriac language, who in this circumstance with his deeds proved himself to be very faithful to the Catholic religion and to the Holy See, even though the Intruder and his seditious group from Baghdad itself endeavored to draw him to their side; here also they tried all the means possible and astuteness, even promising to consecrate him bishop ...<sup>22</sup>

With all the great expectations and blessings mentioned above Chavara was appointed vicar general on 8 June 1861. Nevertheless, we do not see any document signed by Chavara as vicar general. It was ten days after his appointment as vicar general that he wrote letters to the Holy Father to know the truth about bishop Thomas Roccas. Even in those letters he did not introduce himself as the vicar general; instead, he signed the letter as the Prior of the TOCD. This was true about his five letters to the

---

<sup>21</sup> ACO., *Ponenze* 1865, 687-690. See also Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, pp. 18-21.

<sup>22</sup> ACO., *Ponenze* 1865, ff. 687-690.

Prefect of the Propaganda Fide and to other Bishops, priests, and lay people.<sup>23</sup>

One year after his appointment, in 1862, in the second and third weeks of September (12-22 September), the three Vicars Apostolic of Varapuzha, Mangalore, and Kollam and their respective vicars general assembled at Varapuzha to discuss and determine important disciplinary laws of their vicariates.<sup>24</sup> The decisions taken at the conference were sent to the Propaganda Fide on 5 October 1862, under the signatures of Monsignor Michael Antony of Saint Luigi Gonzaga, vicar apostolic of Mangalore, Monsignor Carlos Hyacinthus, vicar apostolic of Kollam, and Monsignor Bernardine, vicar apostolic of Varapuzha and their respective vicars general. Father Philip of Saint Joseph, a Carmelite missionary, represented the vicariate of Varapuzha as vicar general.<sup>25</sup> Though Chavara was the vicar general, his signature is found missing in the report and, accordingly, we do not have any evidence of his participation in the conference while many discussions and deliberations of the Conference were regarding the Oriental Christians.

It leads us to think that when the immediate problem of the arrival of the intruder bishop Thomas Roccas was settled and Roccas went back to his country, probably Chavara was forgotten within one year by the bishop himself who appointed him vicar general of the Syrian Christians. But, Chavara's convictions and his inner

---

<sup>23</sup> Thanks be to God! Even then he knew that his position as the Prior of the monasteries was far higher than that of a vicar general of a vicariate! Moreover, we feel proud of him that this little 'political' appointment did not affect him much.

<sup>24</sup> ACO., *Scritt. rif. nei Congressi Chaldei* (1862-1866) f. 114.

<sup>25</sup> ACO., *Scritt. rif. nei Congressi Chaldei* (1862-1866) f. 118.

tranquility remained the same as before. The process of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace-building in a spirit of fraternity was fostered from the beginning by the active involvement of the TOCD priests and promoted by Monsignor Baccinelli. During his tenure as vicar general, Chavara gave the vicariate a firm foundation with seminaries and houses of formation, where he guided those in priestly formation with kindness, firmness and patience. He wrote to his priests that the priest who is not united to God is a stream that is disjointed from its source.<sup>26</sup>

We see an anomaly in the question of consecrating Chavara as bishop. In the letter informing the prefect of the Propaganda Fide regarding the appointment of Chavara as the vicar general, Baccinelli had made a request to consecrate Chavara as bishop. He had written, "My opinion and my request to Your Eminence (is to consider), whether it will be convenient to consecrate him as coadjutor bishop for the *Surianis*, in case the sole dignity of vicar general is not enough to hold back (arrest) the multitude from following the Intruder, and to divert them from him and from the Chaldean Patriarch."<sup>27</sup> In the same letter Baccinelli had informed Rome, "If they [Roccas party] could have obtained his [Chavara] consecration, all or almost all would have followed him, since he enjoys great esteem, respect, and authority among all." But, in 1865, when the Propaganda Fide considered the question of his Episcopal consecration, Monsignor Baccinelli and his missionaries were not in favour of it.<sup>28</sup> With the end of Roccas schism,

---

<sup>26</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 3, *Dhyanasallapangal*, p. 55.

<sup>27</sup> ACO., *Ponenze* 1865, 687-690; Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, pp. 18-21.

<sup>28</sup> ACO., *Ponenze* 1873, 668-669; Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, pp. 39-52.



they thought that there was no need of immediately appointing a native bishop and according to the missionaries, all the Syrian priests were unworthy of episcopate.

Studying the Roman documents of that period Paul Pallath observes, "If Chavara had been consecrated bishop and the permanent office of a native vicar general with Episcopal character had been established as desired by the Propaganda Fide, the Mellus schism and its consequences could have been avoided. History proves that the Western missionaries always strived their best, utilizing the entire arsenal at their disposal, to jealously preserve the episcopacy and jurisdictional power for themselves and this was the main cause of troubles, divisions and schisms among the Saint Thomas Christians in India, whose forefathers had embraced Christianity even before the Christianization of Europe."<sup>29</sup> Chavara's reflections were along the same line. He penned a document called *Alochana*,<sup>30</sup> in which he evaluated the reason for the Syrian Christians turning to Babel to get bishops of their own Rite.

In the first place, Chavara was a man of God. His concern was that all should be led by the Spirit of God and that all his fellow beings should mature to the divine image and likeness. He dedicated his life to this mission. He loved the Church as his mother and wanted to have many canonized saints<sup>31</sup> that others may get inspired. His life provided a good example of saintliness through his synergistic and harmonious commitment for the unity and

---

<sup>29</sup> Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, p. 120.

<sup>30</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters VI*: 4.

<sup>31</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1, *Chronicles*, p. 217. He will rejoice from heaven seeing the number of Saints and Servants of God from the Syro-Malabar church.

growth of the Church. In order to preserve the spiritual heritage and identity of the Oriental Christians in Kerala and conform to God's plan, he committed himself to ensure its unity and growth.

R. Venkataraman, the President of India in 1987, expressed his appreciation of Chavara's wide vision of the Church and the society in the following words:

Few people have been able to combine the contemplation of God with the service of man as naturally and creatively as Father Chavara did. There was in fact no dichotomy in his mind between the world of faith and the world of action. Father Chavara represented both. A mystic, he could also be an engine of activity. Capable of withdrawing into his inner-most being, Father Chavara was at the same time a motive force for the establishment of a social order in which everyone could live in dignity and faith.<sup>32</sup>

## 2. A Man of Wider Ecclesial Vision

Chavara was the recognized leader of his time. People rightly understood what Chavara had been for the Church and society and what he did for both. As they received the news of Chavara's death, the Sisters of Koonammavu Convent wrote in their chronicle, "This father was a mirror and lamp to all the Christians in Kerala. Moreover, he was a strong pillar that supported the holy Church in protecting its faith. With zeal, he worked for its growth and expansion."<sup>33</sup> He could hold the whole universe

<sup>32</sup> R. Venkataraman, "Fr Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at its Best" Speech delivered at Thiruvananthapuram, on 20 December 1987, releasing the commemorative stamp. *Herald of the East*, vol.1 no.1 (1991), pp. 7-11.

<sup>33</sup> *CKC*, vol. II: 23.

in his heart: while on his death-bed, even though he was not able to celebrate Holy Mass after his illness increased, he remained “one in spirit with the priests, who offer to God the Father, the Divine Lamb, every hour continuously during day and night in the four parts of the world, in Asia and America, etc.”<sup>34</sup>

Chavara was a pastor, who envisioned his mission far beyond geographical, liturgical, and other boundaries. He specifically instructed the members of his congregation to open up monasteries, convents, and boarding houses for girls in the vicariates of Kollam and Varapuzha.<sup>35</sup> Although Kollam vicariate was exclusively for Latin Christians, Chavara was concerned about their growth and development as well. When he printed *Jnanapiusham* in 1847, the first book from the Mannanam Press, he printed ‘the rite of the Holy Mass’ of both the Latin Church and of the Syrian Church. He was sensitive to the needs and the pains of others at all times to be true to his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. He was actively involved in the kingdoms of Travancore and Kochi and established monasteries in both these kingdoms.

### **3. A Man of Wider Ministries**

#### **3.1. Spiritual Ministry in the Parishes**

Preaching retreats in the parishes was the major apostolate of Chavara and his confereres from the beginning. This pastoral activity was coordinated and organized beautifully well. Preaching ministry was structured as pastoral care for all, at the service of the vicariates and of their mission. This was elaborated as a common missionary

---

<sup>34</sup> ASJM., *Mannanam Nalagamam*, vol.3 [MSS] (1864-1872), p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* VI: 6.

project of both the TOCD priests and the Carmelite missionaries. It enabled the TOCD Fathers to go beyond territorial limits of the parish or monastery, to make ecclesial communion more clearly transparent by means of the synergy between ministries and diverse Monsignor Ludovic Martini, the Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha (1839-1859), sent a charisms. Already in 1849 circular letter to all the parish priests and faithful of his vicariate (both Latin and Syrian) instructing them how to welcome Fr Chavara and the priests from Mannanam monastery when they would arrive the parishes for preaching retreats.<sup>36</sup> Even before the canonical erection of the religious congregation Chavara and his team were engaged in a wider level in the field of preaching retreats in various parishes as indicated by the above cited letter of the Vicar Apostolic Monsignor Ludovic Martini.

As years went by more priests committed themselves for this spiritual ministry and in 1867, Monsignor Baccinelli presented the details of the systematic way of preaching retreats in the parishes. "For six or seven continuous months in the year, except some small breath, they [TOCD priests] have been out of their monasteries, in which remain only those who are purely necessary for the care of the chapel and the monastery, and for their other responsibilities, as well as the sick or the disabled ...; the monks go continuously to give spiritual retreats in determined parishes, completely observing the method and standards prescribed by Saint Alphonse to his own, under the direction of one of the two missionaries, ..." <sup>37</sup> Parappuram records in much detail the origin of preaching retreats in the parishes of Kerala and how it became

---

<sup>36</sup> ASJM., Letter of Vicar Apostolic Ludovic Martini, 8 January 1849.

<sup>37</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 68, p. 74.

systematized.<sup>38</sup> *The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* provides the detailed list of such parishes in which they conducted retreats from the year 1856 to 1871.<sup>39</sup> They covered 103 parishes. It also records that in 1861 and 1862 they could not preach retreats in the parishes owing to the troubles created by Roccas schism.<sup>40</sup>

Chavara himself was an eloquent and effective preacher and he had preached in all the parishes of his time on different occasions. He was keen that the members of his congregation take up this apostolate effectively and in a big way about which Fr Kuriakose Porukara wrote in Chavara's biography:

These brothers, at the order of superiors, preached in different parishes having thousand or two thousand or even five thousand and more faithful, spiritual retreats and missions, taught catechism and heard confessions. Thus they rooted out the reign of the devil and brought salvation to the people. The glory of God and the salvation of souls effected in this way gave joy to the ecclesiastical superiors, priests and laity, for which they thanked God. In order to spread this good work all over Kerala, he [Chavara] visited many places and founded monasteries.<sup>41</sup>

About the system of preaching retreats, Beccaro wrote with great appreciation to his superiors in Rome in 1864. He stated with a sense of admiration and called it a miracle of divine mercy that leaving behind their homes

---

<sup>38</sup> ASJM., Parappuram, *Diary*, pp. 1142-43; 1199-1200, 1434, 556-57.

<sup>39</sup> For the list of the churches see ASJM, *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, vol. 3, pp. 158-162.

<sup>40</sup> ASJM., *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, vol. 3, p. 158.

<sup>41</sup> Palathara, ed., *Stapakapithakanmar*, p. 34.

and works, thousands of people of ten or twelve parishes came together for retreat and they all made their confession ...<sup>42</sup>

Although Chavara had no formal authority or office, he worked for the integral growth of the Church even before he was appointed vicar general. When he was entrusted by Monsignor Ludovic to settle some problems in Kumarakam church in 1848, Chavara was given many powers and authority and the bishop fully approved Chavara's decisions. Thus, the following faculties were given to Chavara, "to consecrate the church, to give forgiveness and reconcile the schismatics of the parish, to release the scholastic from excommunication, to find out a good priest and grant him the faculties of a vicar and appoint him there."<sup>43</sup>

Chavara's timely intervention saved the church from division at the time of Rocco's schism. He nurtured the faith of the people by conducting retreats in the parishes, arranging ten days retreat at Mannanam for the priests of the vicariate, initiating forty hours adoration in Kerala, making several books available through the printing press, introducing liturgical reforms, encouraging family prayer, and many other renewal programmes. Historians record Chavara's efforts in preparing Breviary for the priests and for the Syrian Christians. From his various letters we get a picture of his strenuous efforts to print the Breviary.<sup>44</sup> Monsignor Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic reported to Rome that the Breviaries were all manuscripts, none of them was printed completely and they were not uniform.<sup>45</sup> Baccinelli himself tells us that Chavara remedied the limitations of

<sup>42</sup> Leopold, *Leopold Missionariyude Kathukal* II: 1.

<sup>43</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* III: 1. Reply of Monsignor Ludovic to Chavara on 29 March 1848.

<sup>44</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4 *Letters* IX: 7. A circular letter written by Chavara to the parish priests on 15 February 1869. Also refer *CWC.*, vol. 4 *Letters* II: 3. Letter to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide.

<sup>45</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 68, p. 75.

the vicariate in the administration, liturgy, devotional practices, catechism, evangelization, education, priestly formation, and so on.<sup>46</sup> Above all, the Malabar church could overcome the internal caste divisions and become creative, committed and a compassionate community according to the ecclesiological vision of Chavara. According to Chavara, the evangelizing action of this church must be oriented towards the pastoral care of parish communities and build new communities by bringing new people to the church.

### **3.2. Preaching Homilies during Holy Mass**

Chavara believed that faith could be deepened and would grow only when it is shared. We strengthen the faith of the believers by sharing our faith, especially through interpreting the Word of God during the Holy Eucharist. Monsignor Baccinelli openly confessed, "in times past there was no custom of preaching and teaching people, nor of explaining the Christian doctrine or Catechism, with the exception of delivering a sermon on the feasts of patron saints or protectors. On the holy days of obligation and on Sundays according to the decree of the Sacred Congregation a few heads of Doctrine were only read out to the people for about half an hour."<sup>47</sup> This was the sad state of fulfilling priestly obligation of teaching and guiding the people of God in Malabar church in the nineteenth century. The bishop continues how he remedied the situation. "I divided all the parishes of the vicariate among the four monasteries of our Tertiaries [TOCD priests] assigning to each monastery the most neighbouring parishes, so that when it is possible one or two of the Fathers may go in turn on each day of obligation to hear confession, preach, and to

---

<sup>46</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 68, pp. 74-75.

<sup>47</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 37, p. 64.

visit the schools even delivering a short instruction there.”<sup>48</sup> Chavara initiated the system of preaching homily during the Holy Mass. In *the Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, we see a practical instruction motivating the priests to prepare seriously for preaching the homily. It reads,

Being religious, we are obliged to work hard for the spiritual growth of the faithful. For this purpose, the Sermon on the Gospel passage delivered on Feast days and Sundays without any proper order and interpretation will give no effect in the hearers. In order to avoid this in the previous week itself decide the person who has to read; and write his name on the chart. To have good effect on the faithful take any point and prepare the sermon in writing it orderly by giving importance to the gist. So that one may get sufficient time to prepare the sermon one is dispensed from the evening meditation and night prayer of the community. No one should deliver sermon without the preparation in writing. On ordinary days, do not speak more than fifteen minutes so that the hearers will not feel dislike and boredom.<sup>49</sup>

The above practical guidelines of Chavara to his conferers regarding the preparation of homilies highlight his special zeal and interest for the ‘Breaking of the Word of God’.

### 3.3. Priestly Formation

The vibrancy of the Church depends on the quality formation given to the priests from time to time. According to Chavara, much of the disturbances and troubles in the

---

<sup>48</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 37, p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> ASJM., *Mannanam Nalagamam*, vol. 3 (1864-1872), pp. 18-19.



Malabar church could rightly be imputed to the poor formation of the clergy. The Decree on the Training of Priests of the Second Vatican Council echoes this conviction of Chavara. "The Council is fully aware that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends in great part upon a priestly ministry animated by the spirit of Christ and it solemnly affirms the critical importance of priestly training."<sup>50</sup> Chavara understood the seriousness of the situation much earlier and was convinced of the urgent need of reforming the formation programme of the clergy. Chavara was of the firm conviction that only learned and saintly priests can effectively lead the people of God. It motivated him to focus his attention on forming the leaders. His first biographer and confessor, Leopold Beccaro OCD noted about him, "The young cleric [Chavara] realized that an uneducated priest was not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but might be even detrimental to the salvation of souls."<sup>51</sup> Chavara was actively engaged in the priestly formation from 1833 onwards, namely, roughly two years after the foundation of the monastery at Mannanam. Esteeming his contribution in the field of seminary formation, Monsignor Francis Xavier appointed Chavara the 'Examiner of all the priests of Syro-Malabar Church' and the Malpan on 16 February 1844.<sup>52</sup> Kuriakose Porukara calls Chavara 'the Malpan of the Malabar church.'<sup>53</sup> Fr Mathew Palakunnel also calls him with the same title.<sup>54</sup> Chavara was authorized to grant

---

<sup>50</sup> Vatican Council II, *Optatam Totius* Decree on the Training of Priests, (O.T. Introduction).

<sup>51</sup> Beccaro, *Short Biography of Chavara*, p. 5ff.

<sup>52</sup> ASJM., Appointment Letter of Monsignor Francis Xavier on 16 February 1844. Cf. Chavara, CWC, vol. 1, *Chronicles*, p. 44.

<sup>53</sup> Porukara, *Sthapaka Pithakanmar*, the title given to the biography of Chavara.

permission to priests to preach and to hear confession, and make recommendation for the deacons for priestly ordination.<sup>55</sup> He continued these services until his death.

Chavara was ready to sacrifice his pet project of founding a convent for women at Puthenpally in 1861 for the sake of starting a seminary for priestly formation in the vicariate of Varapuzha. Being convinced of the necessity of quality formation for priests as the need of the hour, Monsignor Baccinelli decided to convert the two-storied convent building into a seminary. This was for remedying the damage caused by the arrival of Bishop Thomas Roccas in Malabar. This change of plan was painful to Chavara. Since he gave top priority to priestly formation he consented. There was an urgency in his thinking and action for the intellectual and spiritual formation of the clergy. He was not only concerned about the formation of the priestly candidates but also the ongoing formation of the priests, their discipline, priestly identity and dignity, which made the priests more respectable before the people. What Saint Chavara expected from the candidates for priesthood was responsibility in thinking and serving as the true sons of the Church.

There were many shortcomings in the *Malpanate* system<sup>56</sup> of priestly formation that had existed in Malabar. Until Baccinelli was appointed Vicar Apostolic in 1853 very little was done to organize or improve the seminary formation. He separated the seminarians of St Thomas Christians from those of Latins. The four new seminaries -

---

<sup>54</sup> *Palakunnel Valiachante Nalagamam*, p. 63.

<sup>55</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol 4, *Letters* III: 9. See the reply of Monsignor Baccinelli to Chavara.

<sup>56</sup> Candidates for priesthood gather under one learned priest (Malpan) and receive formation by staying with him.

Mannanam, Vazhakulam, Elthuruth, and Pulinkunnu - were for the Syrians and Varapuzha for the Latins. Thus, in the Varapuzha vicariate, the formation of local clergy became the responsibility of the TOCD monasteries and there was a revival in the formation of the clergy. The aim of establishing the seminaries was to revitalize the moral and spiritual life of the clergy and to provide them deeper knowledge in theology. Chavara, with exceptional zeal and enthusiasm, carried out effectively the establishment and organization of seminaries; he introduced proper monitoring system. In spite of the erection of separate seminaries for the Syrians to substitute for the *Malapanate* system, the intellectual training and priestly formation imparted in those seminaries did not fulfill the needs of the time. Systematic theological education was not available to the seminarians.

### 3.4. Retreat for Priests

Mar Louis Pazheparampil, the first Vicar Apostolic of Ernakulam has recorded how the tradition of retreat preaching in Kerala developed. He connected it with the origin of religious institute for men at Mannanam. He says, "From the time religious orders were established in Kerala (Mannanam), it was the religious priests who conducted retreats in the churches... This same retreat was given to the religious in their ashrams in the same way as it was being preached in the parishes... Later, priests of the vicariate also attended this retreat."<sup>57</sup> With regard to the spiritual services Chavara and the TOCD priests rendered to the priests of the Kerala church, Baccinelli reported to Rome that they preached spiritual retreat at two different times to ecclesiastics so that all of them might have the

---

<sup>57</sup> Louis Pazheparampil, Preface to the Retreat for Priests, Ernakulam, 16 May 1912, p. iv.

convenience to participate in it. They had also the care of the seminaries. For example, Puthenpally, where two of them resided always with the missionary rector and a lay brother; Mannanam, where they taught the priestly candidates the liturgical rubrics and preached to them spiritual retreats.<sup>58</sup> The priestly spirituality was promoted by the ten days retreat arranged annually for all the priests at Mannanam from 1865 onwards.

### 3.5. Mediator in Disputes

Baccinelli entrusted Chavara with the responsibility of settling disputes of the parishes, priests, and individuals from the time he was appointed the Vicar Apostolic of Malabar. His predecessor Monsignor Ludovic also was confident of Chavara's creative problem-solving charisma. The ten letters that Chavara wrote to the bishops, during the period of 1848 -1856, record the wise and prudent methods he employed in reconciling people and bringing peace in the parishes.

In those letters, he signed as 'Chavara *Kathanar*'; he was simply a priest of the Syro-Malabar Church and the Prior of TOCD monasteries.<sup>59</sup> He was proud of his priestly as well as religious identity. He saw the hand of God in everything that happened in his life.<sup>60</sup>

On certain occasions people thought his interventions were necessary and they approached him for settlement of issues in their parishes. For example, in the month of November 1869, when some problems occurred in Anakallunkal parish, though Chavara was sick and unable to travel, people wanted him to be present to solve

---

<sup>58</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 68, p. 75.

<sup>59</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* III:1-10.

<sup>60</sup> Chavara, *Dhyanasallapangal*, 1981, p. 13.

the matter amicably. The following words from the Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery express the earnest desire of the faithful regarding the intervention of Chavara, "they requested Fr Prior that in view of the salvation of our souls and the wellbeing of our church, in spite of his physical exhaustion, he should come before the unrest breaks out. The letter was signed by most of the leaders of the people."<sup>61</sup> Even the *Tahsildar* of the place personally made a request to Chavara to visit Anakallunkal to settle the matter; Chavara reached there and did the needful.<sup>62</sup> The concluding pages of the Mannanam Chronicle gives some details of the joyful and colourful reception given to Chavara when he reached the parishes of Anakallunkal, Edamattam, Lalam and Pala new church and old church. He himself has quoted the talk given by him at Anakallunkal.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.6. TOCD Priests as Deputies

From the time when the community life was started at Mannanam, the TOCD priests were actively involved in the pastoral ministry of the vicariate of Varapuzha. In the pastorally problematic circumstances of Varapuzha vicariate, the bishop appointed them as deputies and entrusted the pastoral care to them, in order to sustain Christian life and to continue the evangelizing mission of the community. It was in view of the vastness of the territory and the complexity of the pastoral obligations that Baccinelli divided the vicariate into several units, each unit comprising of ten or twelve churches, and entrusted each unit to a member of the TOCD priests, who were called

---

<sup>61</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1, *Chronicles*, p. 121.

<sup>62</sup> *CKC.*, vol. 1: 152-53.

<sup>63</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1, *Chronicles*, p. 123.

deputies.<sup>64</sup> These deputies were accorded ample faculties and even empowered to make pastoral visits. In the above-mentioned official report of Baccinelli in 1867, the bishop wrote to Rome, "I divided all the parishes of the vicariate among the four monasteries of our Tertiaries assigning to each monastery the most neighboring parishes, ..." <sup>65</sup> The bishop admitted hereby that practically Chavara and the monasteries founded by him gave face to the pastoral care of the people. They were also entrusted with the responsibility of the priestly formation in the vicariate of Varapuzha. The TOCD priests were ever ready at any point to make the church vibrant.

Having analysed the ecclesial situation of the nineteenth century kerala, we focus in the next chapter on the social condition of that time to better appreciate Chavara's contribution in the domain of social renaissance.

---

<sup>64</sup> Baccinelli Report, 1867, Q. 37, p. 65; Cf. also Valerian, *The Life of the Servant of God, Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: St Joseph's Monastery, 1939, pp. 400-414; Bernard of St Thomas, *Mar Thoma Christianikal*, vol.1, Palai, 1916, p. 265.

<sup>65</sup> Baccinelli Report, 1867, Q. 37, p. 65.

## Chapter II

### Integral Social Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara

#### 1. Social Context of Kerala in the Nineteenth Century

The Kerala society at the time of Chavara, though divided into petty kingdoms, was ruled by the British Resident. During his lifetime, the church was under Italian Carmelite bishops. St Chavara was a visionary leader of the time who envisaged many plans for spiritual and social progress. The society was very much backward at the cultural and educational levels. In the nineteenth century, Kerala was thoroughly caste-ridden; it had the most rigid and elaborate caste structure in India. Four major groups with strict hierarchical orders existed, namely, the Brahmins, Kshathrias, Vaishyas and Shudras.

Kerala society was divided into a number of heterogeneous castes, which were mainly based on occupation. It made a microscopic minority richer while the great majority of the poor were driven to the margins of mainstream social life. All these low-caste people were characterized as poor and oppressed. They lived below poverty line, lacking even the minimum required for human survival in terms of food, clothing and housing; they were hopelessly exposed to hunger, disease and degeneration. Various forms of oppression and social injustice afflicted them. Millions of landless labourers were forced to live in the villages of Kerala in inhuman conditions. The lot of numerous child labourers and bonded labourers in the countryside was sad. There were atrocities against the countless low caste people. The

landlords exploited cruelly the tribal people. There was abuse of political power against weaker sections of the society. Indignities were heaped upon women due to economic and sexual exploitation.

The position of each caste in the social hierarchy matched with the agrarian economic hierarchy. The society denied the rights of the poor. The approach of the caste Hindus to the fellow Hindus of the lower castes was strictly based on the gradations in the caste hierarchy and the norms enshrined in the Hindu *Shastras*. The lower castes were treated as rubbish, without the slightest sense of guilt on the part of the upper castes. They were not allowed to enter Hindu temples, to bathe in temple ponds, to go to the public markets, and to use the public roads. The Kerala society was not based on the principles of freedom, equality, and social mobility. Neither men nor women of the downtrodden castes were allowed to wear clothes above their waist; any woman who wished to cover the upper part of her body was even made to pay special taxes. They were also prohibited to wear ornaments and to construct houses with roof-tiles.<sup>1</sup>

The low castes were denied the right to education, property, development and participation in public gatherings and worship. Untouchability, social, educational and economic backwardness were their plight. The *Ezhavas*, *Pulayas* and *Parayas* were bundled together as outcastes and they were numerically quite strong.<sup>2</sup> The *Pulayas* and the *Parayas* were the most inferior among the untouchables.

---

<sup>1</sup> T. K. VeluPillai, *Travancore State Manual*, vol. 1, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1940, p. 825.

<sup>2</sup> Leela Gulati, Ramalingam, and I. S. Gulati, *Gender Profile, Kerala: Looking Back into History*, New Delhi: Royal Netherlands Embassy, 2000, pp. 1-6.



They were believed to be the aboriginals of the state; women as well as men of these communities suffered several disadvantages. They were bought and sold like cattle, made to starve, flogged like buffaloes, made to work all day for a little rice. They were not allowed to walk on the public roads, to go to markets and temples where even the animals might freely stray.<sup>3</sup> The practice of Untouchability and unapproachability divided and degraded the society into opposing groups. The upper castes believed that not only the touch but also the proximity of certain castes caused pollution to them.<sup>4</sup> These social groups had to keep some specified distance from each other according to the position each occupied in the social order.<sup>5</sup>

The state of affairs of the nineteenth century Kerala society challenged Chavara to initiate various programmes and projects for the less privileged and the marginalized of the society. His dedication opened up new ways of showing solidarity with the marginalized and he worked for their advancement. By doing this, he proved himself a man ahead of his time. Chavara's capacity to respond meaningfully to social issues of Kerala has brought forth integral development of the Church and society.

Even though Kerala was blessed with fertile land, many rivers and other water resources, enough food materials were not produced. This was because of the caste system

---

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Mateer, "The Paraya Caste in Travancore," *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Britain and Ireland* (1884), p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> Poet Kumaran Asan described them as: തൊട്ടുകുടാത്തവർ, തീണ്ടിക്കുടാത്തവർ, ദൃഷ്ടിയിൽപ്പെട്ടാലും ദോഷമുള്ളവർ. The untouchables were also made unseeable, unapproachable and even unhearable.

<sup>5</sup> C. N. Somarajan, "Foundations of Kerala Society and Politics," *Journal of Kerala Studies* 15 (March-September 1988), p. 105.

and untouchability practised by the people.<sup>6</sup> If pulayas were engaged in working in one field, parayas could not work there. If a paraya came close to a pulaya, the latter would be polluted, making it necessary for the polluted person to take bath three times in three different ponds.<sup>7</sup>

To sum up, the traditional caste system brought extreme social inequality. Occupations were thought to be divinely ordained based on the caste divisions, which remained unchangeable. This made vast majority of the population “slaves” and they were exploited in every possible manner. Punishments meted out to them were very cruel even in the case of trivial crimes. The people were neither organized nor prepared to fight against untouchability or other forms of injustices done against them.

After visiting Kerala in 1897, Swami Vivekananda commented on the ugly practice of caste system that existed in the society and pictured Kerala as ‘a mad house of religion’. The fact that this observation was made twenty six years after the death of Chavara gives us a clear understanding of the pitiable social conditions of Kerala society. We discuss below the role of Saint Chavara in the awakening of Kerala society and culture regarding human dignity and thus leading to liberation from the shackles of inhuman caste divisions and unhealthy traditions in the nineteenth century.

---

<sup>6</sup> The word *Dalit* means “broken” or “scattered.” They were formerly commonly referred to as “untouchables” and are denied many work opportunities.

<sup>7</sup> Padnabha Menon, *Kerala Charithram*, vol. II, Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1937, p. 275.

The academic discussions and literature in Kerala have never represented the reformative nature and the role of the person of Chavara for the awakening of Kerala society. The scholars, who dealt with the aspects of history, culture, modernization and awakening of Kerala have neglected the social relevance of Chavara's activities and often remained silent or ignored it willfully.<sup>8</sup> Many scholars, who attempt to depict the contributions of social reformers, such as Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal, Vaikom Mohammed Moulvi, V. T. Bhattathiripad, and so on as the progenitors of renaissance in the Kerala society, leave out Christian contributions in general, and Chavara's contributions in particular. If at all the Christian contributions are mentioned they refer only to the contributions of LMS, CMS, Basel Mission, and so on, That too, as mere agents of colonial modernity.<sup>9</sup>

It is in such a scenario, that studies on Chavara's organized attempt to modernize the Kerala society become relevant. He brought forth reformation and awakening to a great extent in the Kerala society in the nineteenth century. He was well-known for reaching out to the poor; he played a major role in educating and uplifting the people, especially of the lowest strata of the society. Mannanam remained as an animating centre in order to build up structures by which this presence could become real in every village or parish. One of the purposes of the activities of the religious congregations instituted by Chavara was educational programme. Chavara urged this community

---

<sup>8</sup> പി. ഭാസ്കരനൂണ്ണി, പത്തെമ്പതാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിലെ കേരളം, തൃശ്ശൂർ: കേരളസാഹിത്യ അക്കാദമി, 2012. See also P. K. Gopalakrishnan, Keralathinte Samskarika Charitham (Malayalam), Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala State Bhasha Institute, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> K. N. Ganesh, Reflections on Pre-Modern Kerala, Thrissur: Cosmo books, 2016, p. 263.

to spare no efforts in engaging in harmonious and supportive cooperation for the benefit of all, especially the most needy.

## 2. Social Vision of Chavara

The vision that guided and motivated Chavara to work for the social development programme was his love for the people whom he called Koodappirappukal (siblings). God is merciful and loving Father, and all His children are brothers and sisters. Chavara translated this faith into charity to have a community of fraternal love and sharing. His compassionate heart made it possible for him to recognize all the troubles his neighbours underwent as the troubles of his Koodappirappukal. For him every human face was the face of his brother or sister. He knew that the marginalized people looked for brothers and sisters who could take away their fears and anxieties.

Three areas - family, empowerment of women, and service for the excluded - were Chavara's special concerns, which form his social liberation and transformation programme. Chavara's attitude towards people is echoed in the words of Pope Francis who told the youth of today, "When we speak of 'the people', we are not speaking about the structures of society or the Church, but about all those persons who journey, not as individuals, but as a closely-bound community of all and for all."<sup>10</sup> Being inspired by Jesus' option for the poor and needy, Chavara understood that his life was meant for the service of the excluded and he sought for God in solitude and in human relationships. There evolved a spirituality in him that came from relating to people, especially the simplest of people. He paid tribute to many simple people who, by being who they were, had

---

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, n. 231.

helped him to be a better priest and a religious. He told Fr Joseph Chavara, his nephew, "My time of hard work is about to be over. God has given me a longer life than that of my parents. Now I understand it very clearly that in the greater mercy of God, it was given to me, not for my sake but to labour for others."<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Altruism in Religious Life

While realizing that his life was meant for the wellbeing of others Chavara defined the purpose of religious life in terms of other-orientedness:

The purpose of religious life is, in short, to love the Lord whole-heartedly and follow Him in His footsteps, bringing your neighbour also to Him; to grow in the practice of virtues and make others to do the same; to keep away from sin and make others to do the same ... You are by your vocation, not only to work for your own salvation but also for your neighbour... working zealously for one's own sanctification and the sanctification of others.<sup>12</sup>

The religious institute for men started at Mannanam was the fruit of Chavara's labour along with his Malpans Thomas Palakal and Thomas Porukara. In this community, the sick were given special care and concern. Once Chavara wrote to Fr Kuriakose Porukara, the superior of Mannanam monastery, regarding the value and importance of suffering in the lives of priests in the community, "I am scared of the monasteries where we have no sick people. Saint Teresa of Avila used to believe that God would shower more blessings on those monasteries where continuously there

---

<sup>11</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters V*: 16. Letter written to his nephew Fr Joseph Chavara on 21 July 1868.

<sup>12</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol.3, *Dhyanasallapangal*, p. 49.

are sick people.”<sup>13</sup> The same letter speaks of his concern for the elderly and sick priests. The chronicles record that when he returned from travels, first he visited the sick and spent time with the elderly priests in the monastery. We see him praising those priests, who nursed the sick and he valued their service as means to grow in holiness.<sup>14</sup> In this spirit, Chavara encouraged his parishioners to open a home of charity and Confraternity for Happy Death at Kainakary.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, Chavara was a man of deep contemplation. Following the prayer method taught by a great Spanish Carmelite mystic, saint Terese of Avila, he enjoyed a life of contemplative prayer. Without minimizing the spiritual benefit of solitude, Chavara explored the possibilities of seeking God through contact with people and developed a spirituality that comes from relating to people, especially the simplest of people who helped him to be a good priest and a religious.

In the community at Mannanam, life of communion and fellowship was given special preference; and it was modelled after the early Christian community as we see in the Acts of the Apostles (2:43-47; 4:32-37). All the members of the community, while being perfectly turned to God, were totally involved in fellowship, sharing and service of each other. We get a description of their commitment to

---

<sup>13</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol.4, *Letters* V:16. Letter to Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, the Superior of Mannanam monastery on 2 September 1870.

<sup>14</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol.4, *Letters*, IX :11.

<sup>15</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol.4, *Letters*, IX:11. Circular letter addressed to the parishioners of Kainakary regarding the home of charity. He gives the inspiring example of Fr Jacob Valliara who nursed the sick at Mannanam monastery.

this sort of fraternal life and communion in the handwriting of Chavara as an introduction to their account register:

In the year of our Lord 1840 on 18 June, Corpus Christi Day, a common account was started by Fathers Thomas Porukara, Kuriakose Chavara and Geevarghese Thoppil, all residing together in the Beth Rouma (house on hill-top). For we felt that as we are enjoying spiritual brotherhood, we should hold in common all our worldly goods and possessions and account for them in common following the example set by the early Christians led by Saint Peter.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, they began to record all the details of purchase for the monastery, for example, "Price paid for ten white cups bought from Alappuzha to be used by us and our fellow-residents = Rs. 2." The attitude of this newly formed religious community towards wealth was radically new. While the human tendency is to consider wealth as private property, to reserve it for one's own exclusive use and to hoard it anxiously, they distributed it to those who are in need of it. In his Testament to the members of his congregation written in August 1870, Chavara encouraged each community to share whatever they had with others.<sup>17</sup>

Chavara termed the religious community as *darsanaveedu* (house of darsan) which should remain as sign or model for the society; a lampstand that shines the paths of the people. He lived and implemented his vision for the society in the religious community he established, which

---

<sup>16</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1 *Chronicles*, p. 208.

<sup>17</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. IV: *Letters* VI:5.

was a community of sharing, fellowship, equality and caring for the sick and the elderly.

Being a man of God, Chavara embraced all diversities in the spirit of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (whole universe is one family). Expressing his mindset on this regard, once he said, "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 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."<sup>18</sup> In fact, he did not leave his family; instead, he embraced all the families as his own and all the people as his own brothers and sisters. Thus, the whole world became one family of his own. He instructed the members of his congregation to retain this kind of family-bond in the communities, "My dear brethren, let the vicars [superiors] of each of our monasteries foster real charity among themselves and maintain a true bond. However numerous the monasteries be, 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 to day. Bear this in mind as an important piece of advice ..."<sup>19</sup> In order that this love may not weaken, he suggested some practical methods as well.

Chavara was well aware of the contribution that the consecrated men and women bring to the evangelizing mission of the Church. It is firstly, at the level of their "being", namely, the witness of a radical following of Christ through the profession of the evangelical counsels; and

---

<sup>18</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. IV: *Letters IX*:7.

<sup>19</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. IV: *Letters VI*:5.



only secondly, at the level of their “doing”, namely, the works carried out in accordance with the charism of each Institute, for example, catechesis, charity, formation, youth ministry, and care of the sick.<sup>20</sup>

Chavara took his fundamental Christian call seriously; for him, living his Christian call was the way to attain fullness of his human vocation, not in isolation, but primarily within the ecclesial communion (including the communion in his religious community), and, then, in the social communion of all peoples. Instead of segregating one group from another, Chavara’s inclusive and integral vision of human communion prompted him to make room for everyone. In this process, he did not appear as a revolutionary; instead, in his Christian charity, he could devise positive strategies to cater to the needs of different social groups, without offending and fighting with others.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4. Social Sensitivity**

For Chavara, social sensitivity meant to feel with the needs of the less privileged, the poor and the marginalized and share with them his resources without calculating the rewards. He was convinced that the last and the least are the privileged heirs of the Kingdom of God. The poor pariahs and the casteless masses of Dalits are dearest to God. For God a Brahmin has no precedence over a pariah or a pulaya. We should struggle for a social system, which recognizes and respects their true human worth. Caste distinctions of any sort should never be tolerated among

---

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life – Congregation for Bishops, *Mutuae Relationes*. Directives for the mutual relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church (14 May 1978), nos. 10; 14 a.

<sup>21</sup> Saju Chakalalakal, “Presentation” in Jossy Maria, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, p. xlvii.

Christians, whether their ancestors received the Gospel two thousand years ago or twenty years ago; for no man may boast of merits or claims before God. Like the Good Samaritan, we have to get personally involved in the task of relieving the sufferings of our neighbour ignoring all manmade barriers.<sup>22</sup>

Chavara's social consciousness and spiritual and apostolic vision enabled him to work for social integration and reform. While he felt called to a direct social mission, all his activities had an essential dimension of social justice and liberation. Also the Christians of those days practiced untouchability and other caste discriminations.<sup>23</sup> One of the revolutionary decisions of the Synod of Diamper was against the practice of caste system among the Christians; the Synod prohibited the rules of purity and the practice of pollution.<sup>24</sup> Chavara expressed his solidarity with the neglected and the abandoned. He lived with the minimum facilities because he knew that any tint of luxury would counteract the credibility of his social commitment as a priest and a Christian leader.

Chavara believed that unless and until the social discrimination has been removed from the minds and lives of the people peace would not reign in the society. Peace results from that harmony built in the human society by its divine Founder and actualized by humans as they thirst for ever greater justice.

---

<sup>22</sup> George Mangatt, *Jesus the Good News*, Kottayam: Pontifical Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 998, p. 118.

<sup>23</sup> See Scaria Zacharia, ed., *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*, Hosanna Mount: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1994, pp. 31-32.

<sup>24</sup> Zacharia, ed., *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*, pp. 49; 202-203.

Chavara tried to implement Jesus' love for the marginalized in the Kerala society. With the initiatives of Chavara, there emerged a new awareness among the members of the church that the church is a servant at the service of the humankind, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, and nationality. It represents a new concept of the society. Chavara's social vision became an integral part of the evangelizing ministry of the church; it seeks to proclaim the Gospel and make it present in the complex network of social relations. Through this, the church attempts to interpret the social realities of the world in the light of the Gospel values. Chavara proved that the church, when it is being truest to itself, is capable of embedding the priority of the social life beyond the reach of mere economics and politics.

#### 4.1. Pooling Local Resources

As a leader of social renaissance, Chavara exercised his leadership qualities in pooling resources for the projects he initiated for the welfare of the society. He did it by motivating the people of the locality. His approach was different from that of Vicar Apostolic. In 1860, when the convent for women was getting ready at Puthenpally, Monsignor Bernardine Baccinelli wrote letters to the Priors of Carmelite monasteries and Carmelite cloistered nuns in Italy for financial help. The letter reads, "The building is still incomplete for lack of funds and I do not know when we would be able to accomplish this task ..."<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, the approach of Chavara was to depend on local

---

<sup>25</sup> AGOCD., *Plut.* 35e. Letter of Monsignor Baccinelli to the Provincials, Priors and Religious of the Carmelite Order, dated 29 June 1860; APF., see also *Indie Orientali* 1859-1861, Vol.17, ff. 1420-1421. The letters written on the same date to both men and women religious have the same content with a slight difference.

resources, not to look for foreign help. Even for the construction of a seminary and centre for higher education, he did not seek financial aid from abroad. Through a circular written to the parish priests in 1850, he motivated the priests to raise fund for the same.<sup>26</sup> He was a motivator, facilitator and inspiring leader.

Within seven or eight months, a two-storey convent building was ready at Koonammavu with the generous contribution of the local people. The sisters knew the source of funds for the construction of the convent. They recorded, "Our Fathers by their efforts and their letters inspire some persons, to give us donations ... Once or twice loans were taken from the monastery and some others and works were continued."<sup>27</sup> They have mentioned the name of the persons, who contributed the wood and other materials for the construction work.<sup>28</sup> They continue, "Towards the end of the work, too, once it happened like this. Seeing that the money was over the fathers said, 'Let us send a letter to Kaduthuruthy and Muttuchira and see whether we get some money or not.' It was a real wonder. They collected Rs. 600/- in cash and sent it, through the Father Superior of Mannanam monastery."<sup>29</sup> Chavara recorded in his diary the details of the donations he received; there were names of rich and poor, parishes and priests and lay people. He has specifically noted the contributions of some women as well. Regarding the funds collected for the construction of the convent, when the construction was just completed, Monsignor Baccinelli informed the Propaganda Fide in his official report on 20 February 1867, "Their house is constructed with the alms given for this purpose by the

---

<sup>26</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters IX:2.*

<sup>27</sup> *CKC.*, vol. 1: 46.

<sup>28</sup> *CKC.*, vol. 1: 47-48.

<sup>29</sup> *CKC.*, vol. 1: 48.

faithful of some churches and priests; in the meantime they live, it can be said, in a hut miserable in everything.”<sup>30</sup> The construction of the convent and their daily expenses were met with their own money, not with any contribution from the bishop. Baccinelli testifies, “They sustain themselves with the dowry (patrimony) that they must bring with; for three poor [sisters] I provide for the food at the rate of about 14 coins a month for each one.”<sup>31</sup>

Other contemporary documents testify to the fact of local contributions for the construction of the convent. ‘The Book of Consultation of Mannanam Monastery’ called *Alochana* clearly bears witness to the fact that even the bishop did not donate anything for the same. “When there was no hope at all, still they hoped against hope. Without anything from the Very Reverend Archbishop and from the Pidiyary, in a miraculous way, so to say, from the local churches, from the faithful and in a manner unheard of (as a new news) from the parish priests, we obtained about Rs. 8,000/- most of which were collected through letters. Thus, within a short span of time, the convent was built in a fine model ...”<sup>32</sup> According to *The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* they could not receive anything from the bishop or from Pidiyary system, because the collections of Pidiyary would take time to come and funds were needed for the seminary and other beneficial activities undertaken by the Archbishop.”<sup>33</sup> Baccinelli’s main interest at that time was to open a seminary at Puthenpally<sup>34</sup> and

---

<sup>30</sup> Baccinelli Report, 1867, Q. 72, p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 72, p. 76.

<sup>32</sup> ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 139. Book of Consultation of the Monastery at Mannanam, MSS. 1864-1871. It is the record of the discussions and deliberations of the monthly council meeting of the TOCD Superiors of all the monasteries with Chavara and Father Leopold, the Delegate Provincial, held at Mannanam Monastery.

<sup>33</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol.1 *Chronicles*, p. 130.

<sup>34</sup> The seminary at Puthenpally was opened on 15 August 1866.

to buy a land and construct a monastery for the Latins at Manjummal.<sup>35</sup> The report of Baccinelli to Rome in 1867 corroborates this. He says, "Another one [monastery at Manjummal] emerges now, the foundations of which have been completed, and this will be the first one for the Latins."<sup>36</sup> The construction of the Koonammavu convent with the fund raised by Chavara's efforts is an evidence of his influence as a recognized leader. The people were ready to support generously whenever he approached them for help. All, irrespective of caste and creed, collaborated with Chavara to build up the religious communities in Kerala.

#### 4.2. Care for the Servants

Kerala witnessed different kinds of social discriminations against low caste people in the nineteenth century. They were considered slaves even at the time of Chavara, and their human dignity was not recognized; the dalits were compelled to work. They were not given just wages. Chavara objected to this system and practice. He insisted that just wages should be provided to them because he understood that God sides with the poor. Chavara wrote, "Never withhold just wages from labourers or make undue delay in paying them, because it is an offence that cries out to God for justice. Do not insult the poor; neither should you vex them because if God sees them weeping he will surely wreak vengeance on you."<sup>37</sup> This spiritual vision led him to be an innovator of many socio-pastoral, cultural, educational and social reforms.

Chavara instructed families to take care of the spiritual needs of their servants. "Masters should know that they are responsible for caring for the needs of their servants and assisting them in their spiritual welfare."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol.1 *Chronicles*, p. 132.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 63, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1: 18. *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters IX*: 10.

<sup>38</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 23. *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters IX*: 10.

He even told them to limit the number of domestic workers to be kept in families and spoke about the just wages to be paid to them regularly. They must be sent for Sunday Mass, he insisted.<sup>39</sup> His instruction about just wages and honouring the dignity of workers was something unique; it was unheard of in Kerala at that time. By insisting on paying decent wages to workers at the right time without having them to wait for long, he respected the dignity of human person created in the image of God.

### 4.3. Home of Charity

Chavara expressed his love for the less privileged of the society by instituting a 'Charity Home' for them. That was a project motivated by hope. It is heart-warming to see the way he encouraged and motivated his parishioners to open a home of charity in Kainakary. He presented them many examples of people from European countries, who were engaged in nursing the sick and helping the poor from every strata of the society, and also of persons known to them, such as Father Ouseph Chavara and Fr Chacko Valliara from their own parish. The letter he wrote to his parishioners motivating them to open a charity home was inspiring.<sup>40</sup> Until then there were no charitable institutions in Kerala, where the aged persons or orphans were cared for and protected; there were no pious associations to help the dying peacefully. He told his parishioners to be the first in assisting the sick and the dying, the elderly and the lonely and to institute a pious organization called 'Confraternity of St Joseph for happy death'. He knew the religious aspect of death and he discussed about the spirituality of the dying. According to him, the best help offered to others is the help extended to them at the time of their death. He knew that people needed spiritual support at the time of death because they may have uncertainty,

---

<sup>39</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 23. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX*: 10.

<sup>40</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX*: 11.

insecurity, anxiety and fear. Nobody has the right to choose how and when to die and put an end to suffering. He elucidated to them who all could be the members of the home of charity.

Let the poor and the destitute who have no one to take care of be taken here, as also women or beggars in the street who are sick, the wandering, the catechumens, the neo-converts and others could be accommodated and cared for. Help them stay here peacefully and this will be the first home of charity in Malabar.<sup>41</sup>

Chavara included the catechumens and the neo-converts in the list of people who are to be cared for by the people of Kainakary, for he knew their struggles in the caste-ridden Kerala society of his time. In Chavara's conviction, the worst discrimination the poor suffer, would be the lack of spiritual care. Therefore, he made spiritual books available to those who live in the 'Charity home' and even prepared a library for them.<sup>42</sup> In his 'Testament', he requested the members of his congregation to offer to the home of charity some relics, which he used, "for it would be a sign of protection and salvation to them."<sup>43</sup> His compassionate and integral outlook towards the needy in the society prompted him to evoke the awareness in the people to become aware of their duty to help others and recognize the equal value of all. It had instilled in them the conviction that if they joined hands together for a good cause in the name of the Lord, it could be accomplished easily. According to A. M. Mundadan, this was the beginning of the organized humanitarian work of the Kerala Church.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters IX*: 11.

<sup>42</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters V*: 15.

<sup>43</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters VI*: 4, para 4.

<sup>44</sup> Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.



## Chapter III

### Kuriakose Elias Chavara an Apostle of Families

#### 1. Healthy Family for Healthy Society

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a promotor of the family values and tried to inculcate an ethical vision of the families through his *Chavarul*.<sup>1</sup> This chapter is an attempt to highlight his vision of healthy families that leads to nation-building and how he worked hard to build up an enlightened society. We also look into the family values presented in the *Chavarul* that strengthened the families to respond to the challenges of their time. Saint John Paul II's instruction in *Familiaris Consortio* echoes a similar tone regarding the influence of families in strengthening the society. It reads, "The strength and vitality of any country will only be as great as the strength and vitality of the family within that country. No group has a greater impact on a country than the family. No group has a more influential role in the future of the world."<sup>2</sup> The mutual love, unity of mind and heart, and fidelity of a couple offer stability and hope to a world torn by hatred and division. By their lifelong perseverance in lifegiving love they show the unbreakable and sacred character of the sacramental marriage and promote the dignity and worth of human life from the moment of conception. The role of the family in building up a just, emotionally stable and healthy society has gained attention. It is a topic of concern for people of all religious backgrounds.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term *Chavarul* is the combination of two Malayalam words, *chavarul*, which means the words of a dying person.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42, AAS 74: 134.

## 1.1. A Code of Conduct for Families

Chavara's 'Family Code', which he named 'The Testament of a Loving Father,' (*Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*) was a laudable contribution that positively impacted the community, society and the world at large. Saju Chackalackal observes that this insightful and down-to-earth document, surprisingly, the first of its kind in the history of the Church, offers practical direction to families in leading a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life. It emphasizes the role of parents and family members regarding the training of their children in religious, moral and social values. Chavara bequeathed this Testament to his beloved family members and relatives in his native village of Kainakary and through them to the entire human family, which, he believed, would keep him united with them by the regular reading of the text and following the instructions contained therein. As an instruction manual for families, its hundred thousands of copies in more than thirty editions and different Indian and foreign languages were circulated among the Christian families of the world.<sup>3</sup> Chavarul is called a popular work. By "popular" it is meant that it has a connection with the people, because it expresses their genius. Children have it in their hands, young people read it, adults understand it, and old people praise it. Not merely some small group of experts, but people at large can somehow perceive it as their own. Chavara cherishes in this booklet joyful childhood memories of his Kuttanadan family. His interest in the topic of family-ties and family prayer is reflected there. Before Pope Francis invited all pastors to go an extra mile to support the families to face their challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel, Chavara's instructions in the

---

<sup>3</sup> Chackalackal, *Saint Chavara : Champion of Families*.

Chavarul did the same a hundred and fifty five years ago. The holistic and practical insights of Chavara come in handy, provided we are ready to translate them into contemporary idioms and make use of them to respond to the challenges faced by the modern families. While the biblical insights and inspiring anecdotes contained in the Testament attest to the fact that Chavara had a deep sense of Christian foundations for leading a genuine family life, his insightful practical directives indicate how thoroughly he understood the dynamics of a family, especially on grooming children and nurturing discipline within the family.<sup>4</sup>

It is with the intention of transforming all the families into “image of heaven”<sup>5</sup>, that Chavara invited the family members in a spirit of prayer and discernment and yearning for “God’s light and peace,” to cultivate love, order and peace. He codified the Testament as a practical guideline in forty paragraphs and he divided the 40 precepts in the Chavarul into two parts. The first part consists of 24 precepts, which he considered vital for ordering the family structure and interpersonal relationships. He named it ‘Rules for Family’. Part two, ‘Upbringing of Children’ has 16 paragraphs. Being convinced that the family is a sacred place and the foundation of the Church, Chavara had great concern for the well-being of Christian families, for it needs to be supported and nurtured.

For Chavara, the family is the community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, where the members exhibit mutual respect and practice obedience to parents and walk in peace before the Lord and the people; and each one ac-

---

<sup>4</sup> Chakalackal, *Saint Chavara : Champion of Families*.

<sup>5</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul* (Introduction), CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX*: 10.

ording to this proper state of life seeks to attain eternal salvation and lives peacefully.<sup>6</sup> Chavara reflected on the divine nature of family deeply and stated that the Triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection.

## 1.2. Holy Family of Nazareth

The image of the Holy Family was an inspiration for Chavara to envision the model of the ideal family, where all the members lived in perfect harmony, in an atmosphere of love, faith, and discipline. Chavara was a supporter of families and his Testament to his parish community was a great treatise for effective family life. He prepared this insightful and practical document on 13 February 1868 and it has reached millions of families all over the world. It was his experience and conviction that family is the replica of heaven on earth'. He gave importance to 'family-centred spirituality'. He instructed his parishioners on the significance of family prayer, family timetable, Sunday observance, sacramental life, relationship with their servants, and so on. He advised the family members to be present at home for prayer at the bell for 'Angelus', rung in the parish church. He presented Mother Mary as the 'Queen of the Family' and he advised the people to accept the Holy Family as the model of all families, so that the parents and children support one another in adherence to the Gospel, which is the foundation of a family's holiness.

Chavara, being a devotee of the Holy Family, instructed the parents to guide their children in devotion to the Holy Family of Nazareth, which was presented for our

---

<sup>6</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul* (Introduction), CWC., vol 4, *Letters IX*: 10.

<sup>7</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 2. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX*:10.

pious reflection and generous imitation.<sup>7</sup> Chavara's meditative eyes rested on the tender love of this unique couple for each other and for their child,<sup>8</sup> on their fidelity to religious duties of prayer and worship and on their dedication to work as a means of earning their livelihood. In his *Atmanuthapam*, Chavara praises the mutual commitment and subjection of Joseph and Mary.<sup>9</sup> Even at his death-bed, pointing to the image of the Holy Family that he had always kept in his room, he told to those who had gathered around his bed to imitate the virtues of the Holy Family. He recollected how his mother led him to the veneration of that sacred family.

Chavara's instruction on mutual respect of husband and wife is unique and original. He states, "By seeing the respect of the father towards mother, children respect her; in the same way mother's respect to the father is the model for children to respect their father."<sup>10</sup> In those days in many circles woman's subordination to her husband was often described as her punishment because of Eve's sin. But Chavara propagated the idea of 'mutual subjection' and mutual respect in view of developing healthy and holistic relationships within the families. These counsels to the Christian families are universally applicable and are relevant to this day. Chavara's insights are very well reflected in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, of Pope John Paul II. According to this document, the mutual subjection of husband and wife, which the Pope calls "the Gospel innovation" is based on the Letter to the Ephesians 5:21-33.<sup>11</sup> He states, "All the

---

<sup>8</sup> Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 41-44.

<sup>9</sup> Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos 107-118.

<sup>10</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 9. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* IX:10.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 1988, no. 24.

reasons in favour of the 'subjection' of woman to man in marriage must be understood in the sense of a 'mutual subjection' of both 'out of reverence for Christ'."<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Transmission of Faith in the Families

Chavara reflects on the social conditions that can facilitate the handing on of the faith to new generations. He instructs on the nutrients that are needed in the new soil of childhood and youth to embrace the faith of their ancestors and the dispositions required to cultivate in each growing person so that the incarnate Jesus will find a home to be born. He dwells on the way be gradually smoothed out so that the manifestation of Christ takes place in the lives of those who will succeed us in time.

Education in faith is the prerogative and mission of the family, which receives from the Church the support it needs to realize this task and to devote itself to it with fervour. Pope Francis reminds that grandparents, with their wisdom, can make a decisive contribution to this mission.<sup>13</sup> Among the elements that can help parents carry out their mission well, Chavara suggests that they show their children affection, good example, balance, loving respect, active gestures and practicing of loving correction. He recommends nurturing human sensitivity in the face of situations of illness. He refers to the content of education in faith, because he sees it above all as a transmission of the family experience of prayer and missionary commitment. "Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek him and sense their need for him, for only in this way does 'one generation laud your works to

---

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 1988, no. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 192.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 287.

another, and declare your mighty acts'."14

## 2.1. Dignity of Mothering Experiences

In spite of its importance and relevance, marital spirituality is seldom talked about. It is the spirituality of the bond in which divine love dwells.<sup>15</sup> The couples have to strive for this spirituality in the midst of their daily household activities, troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. It is not so much by doing extraordinary things, but by paying attention to small and seemingly insignificant things with love. Such actions of love are the ingredients of true marital spiritual life. God dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory.

The third canto of Chavara's *Atmanuthapam* is a meditation on the deep mystery of Incarnation, which remained one of Chavara's favourite themes. He pondered deeply on mothering experiences of Mother Mary such as conception, pregnancy,<sup>16</sup> childbirth,<sup>17</sup> kissing and embracing of the new born baby,<sup>18</sup> breast-feeding,<sup>19</sup> and so on, and presented these acts as spiritual practices. Those acts are women's God-experience and should be cherished, appreciated, celebrated and valued. Whereas in the Old Testament priests were asked to make atonement and sin-offering for the woman who gave birth to her child (Lev 12:6-8). Chavara contemplates the great gift of giving birth and breast-feeding etc., and presents these as spiritual exercises and not as acts meant for atonement and sin-offering. These

---

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 315.

<sup>16</sup> Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos V: 83-90.

<sup>19</sup> Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos V: 37-40.

acts are to be celebrated and no more considered taboo for women. Here is an example of his contemplation on the experience of mother and child while breast-feeding:

സ്നേഹാധികൃത്താൽ ചുരത്തിയ പാൽ തള്ള  
മോദാൽ കൊടുത്തതും കാണാകേണം.  
പുത്രൻ പാലുണ്ണുമ്പോൾ മാതാവിലുണ്ടായ  
ചിത്രമാം ഭക്തിയും കാണാകേണം.<sup>20</sup>

Chavara specifically says that the mother experiences a holy awe while the babe takes milk and it was an experience of supreme devotion (chithramam bhakti) to her. No male poets have contemplated so deeply in those experiences of both mother and child during the process of breast-feeding. He even recollects that his mother taught him prayers while breast-feeding. He was thus a campaigner of restoring the dignity of woman's body and her mothering experiences. He shared his own life experience with his parishioners of having strong family bond, especially with his mother.

## 2.2. Family at the Feet of the Lord

In the 'Upbringing of Children', Chavara as a loving father reminded the families of the importance of gathering together for family prayer, "At dusk, when the bell for the Angelus is rung, ensure that the children are at home to pray with the family. Train them to greet and kiss the hands of the elders and parents saying "Praise be to Jesus" as soon as the family prayers are over."<sup>21</sup> It was Saint Chavara,

---

<sup>20</sup> Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 37-40. (With tender love, the mother breast-fed the babe in joy, I long to see. The holy awe, the mother enjoyed, While feeding him, I long to see).

<sup>21</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 11. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX*:10.



who made the people aware of the meaning of the evening church bell. It reminds them that it is the time to join the family after the day's work in different places; it is the time to gather the family members in front of the picture of the Sacred Heart, which is placed at the centre of the house and turn towards the Lord in prayer and adoration. Parents have the responsibility to keep their children in the presence of God to accept and acknowledge the primacy of God in their lives and in their family. This tradition of evening prayer along with the church unites the family members as the saying goes, "family that prays together stays together". The history of Kerala church shows that this spiritual exercise became deep rooted in the families. It is from this kind of praying families that vocations to priestly and religious life abounds. This instruction of Chavara to pray together in the evening at the church bell contributed towards the increasing number of vocations from Kerala to a great extent.

### **2.3. Importance of Time Management**

Life and time are best teachers. Life teaches us the use of time, and time teaches us the value of life. On 13 February 1868, Chavara offered a model family time-table to the parishioners of Kainakary, and he instructed the families for the best use of time. He affirms that the family is a place of support, of accompaniment and of guidance. The family is capable of ensuring a basic education; it is the the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom; it is the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one. He presented before them a methodology for evolving a happy, prosperous and peaceful society on our

planet. This was intended to evolve an enlightened society for human solidarity.

Chavara's precept for the ideal daily routine includes an examination of conscience.<sup>22</sup> Setting a spiritual atmosphere of the families the time-table begins like this, "Be careful to go to bed at a fixed hour and to awake at the proper time. Observe the following rules. Wake up at least at 6 O' clock in the morning and recite the Angelus. Then, let all those who can go for holy Mass of the church."<sup>23</sup> As part of preparing the parishioners of Kainakary to receive the sacrament of Holy Eucharist, he also instructed them on the importance of the sacrament of confession.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Parents as Saints

In the Apostolic Letter *Gaudete et exultate*, Pope Francis says: "I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love and sacrifices ... This is the holiness which we often find in our 'next door neighbors' who live amidst us and 'reflect God's presence'."<sup>25</sup> Again, the Pope tells: "Our very parents become living saints with all their self-emptying concern and care for us."<sup>26</sup> "Are you a parent or grand-parent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus."<sup>27</sup>

In his meditation on the birth of Jesus Chavara conveyed the message that the birth of every child is a holy

<sup>22</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 24. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX*:10.

<sup>23</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 24. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX*:10.

<sup>24</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 19. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX*:10.

<sup>25</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, no. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, nos. 6, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, no. 14.

and joyful event and it unites the couples and the family members together. The sleepless nights of nursing the children at their sick bed, postponing of so many activities, career sacrifices, and so on are some of the sacrifices of the parents. The prize of parenting comes at a heavy price.

Much before Pope Francis instructed the people of God to consider their parents as saints, Chavara always believed and respected his mother as a saint. The life she lived in the family by caring for her children and husband was enough for Chavara to consider his mother a saint. For example, before receiving Holy Communion as a preparation to welcome Jesus into his heart, Chavara invited Mother Mary and his other favorite 'mother saints', including his own mother, ('എന്റെ അമ്മ എന്തെ പെറ്റവൾ')<sup>28</sup> to be present with him when Jesus would enter his heart. Believing that he was not worthy to welcome Jesus into his heart, he requested the presence and the virtues of these saints. He strongly believed that his mother was deeply loved by God in the heavenly abode and that she would continue to support him in his faith-journey.

Holiness is imagined as "ordinary horizon" We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do. Considering his own mother a saint Chavara accorded holiness to every parent for his/her sacrificial love and commitment for the family.

### **3.1. Parents' Role in Upbringing Children**

The family is the most precious human institution and every couple has the important responsibility to safeguard it

<sup>28</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 3, *Dhyanasallapangal*, p. 23.

against the numerous forces that seek to destroy or weaken it. Chavara has given a series of guidelines to the parents on the education of their children. As a person of good observation, Chavara instructed the parents on the method of disciplining the children. He says, "Both extreme strictness and too much leniency towards children are evil. While too much affection will make them proud, excessive anger and punishment will lead to a lack of trust, shamelessness, and intellectual incompetence in them. Before inflicting corporal punishment, prudently make the children understand why they are being punished, and honourably advise them along with rationing their food and, occasionally, making them kneel down. Pouring out abuses in the process of correcting the children will not only have adverse effect on them but will make them repeat the same to their children when they grow up."<sup>29</sup>

In this precept, Chavara outlines the pros and cons of the extreme approach of disciplining the children. He also instructed parents to exercise caution, while disciplining their children verbally and to keep the decorum of language they chose while correcting the children, because children pick up manners from their parents. As part of prudent disciplining, through appropriate counselling, children can be mentally prepared to accept the physical punishments. Children become conscious of their mistakes when parents speak in a calm and emphatic tone. An awareness of decent behaviour is to be created in them in a prudent manner, and punishments may be awarded to children for their mistakes.

Taking the example of his own mother, Chavara spoke of the prudent disciplining of children. He grate-

---

<sup>29</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II:9; CWC, vol. 4, *Letters* IX:10.

fully acknowledged that his mother never used corporal punishments to discipline her children. He revealed that his mother never beat him:

Never once did she use the rod to chastise me  
Nor with a harsh touch did she smite me  
Her eyes, they wielded the mighty power to hit me  
Or need be, to fondle me, in approval.<sup>30</sup>

She disciplined him with her looks; there was no shouting, no beating, and no scolding. Her approval or disapproval for his behaviour was conveyed in her gaze or gestures.<sup>31</sup>

A successful life is built on discipline. Disciplining children is an integral part of parenting. It involves keeping an eye out to observe where the child is. The constant practice of discipline in life unfolds the magnanimity of a person's character. He clearly says,

Both extreme strictness and too much leniency towards children are evil. While too much affection will make them proud, excessive anger and punishment will lead to lack of trust, shamelessness, and intellectual incompetence in them. Before inflicting corporal punishment, prudently make the children understand why they are being punished, and honourably advise them along with rationing their food and, occasionally, making them kneel down. Pouring out abuses in the process of correcting the children will not only have any positive effect on them, but will only make them repeat the same to their children when they grow up ... Don't train children in lying or cheating, or other shadowy tricks, saying that it is normal and that they need to be cunning to survive in the world. When you come across their mistakes, rebuke and correct

---

<sup>30</sup> Chavara, *Atmanutapam*, Cantos 1: 81-84.

<sup>31</sup> Jossy, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, p. 71.

them. Teach them to hold truth and justice in high esteem.<sup>32</sup>

The above citation from the Chavarul presents before us a set of instructions for the prudent disciplining of children. It emphasises the necessity to be cautious about using the proper corporal punishments with discernment. This method of disciplining appears to be primarily external. However, it eventually leads to form an integral personality.

Chavara encouraged parents to orient their children and make them aware of the situations of risk, preparing them to face the possible challenges. Chavara reminded those parents who experienced difficulty in controlling their children that the real question was not where our children were physically, or whom they were with at any given time, but rather where they were existentially, where they stand in terms of their convictions, goals, desires and dreams. He warned about the negative influence or danger of bad books in the life of the children. At the same time, he encouraged reading habits and reminded the parents to collect good books for the children.<sup>33</sup>

Chavara envisioned families as the abode of virtues. Therefore, he instructed the parents to teach their children various aspects of faith and prayers by their life-examples in daily life. Hope cannot be captured through our senses but can be discovered in our life through our unflinching trust in God who could turn our sorrows into joy. Charity is the motivating force that leads us to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. Chavara exhorted the parents to

---

<sup>32</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 10; CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX:10*.

<sup>33</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 21; CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX:10*.

practise the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity in their family life. The love and affection among the family members, particularly the parents, would help the children acquire the virtue of charity, which begins at home.

### 3.2. Parents as Role Models

In the Chavarul Chavara offers a fresh viewpoint on parenting, setting a good example for children. "The mother should set an example to the children in respecting and honouring the father; so, shall the father teach the children by his example to love and respect the mother. If parents do not love and respect each other, their children will also not respect them."<sup>34</sup> Children are diligent students of parental behaviour. They learn how the parents work together for societal welfare from their living examples. Hence, setting a good example for the children becomes an important part of parenting. In the above-given guidelines of the Chavarul, Chavara speaks of the new dimension of parenting, setting good examples. His words in the *Atmanutapam* demonstrate how human beings develop through parental care, teaching and companionship. The Catholic Church makes earnest efforts to accompany her faithful to discern and adopt their vocation of responsible parenthood.

### 3.3. Mother's Space in Family Dynamics

Saint John Paul II exhorts, "Thank you, women who are mothers! You have sheltered human beings within yourselves in a unique experience of joy and travail. This experience makes you become God's own smile upon the newborn child, the one who guides your child's first steps, who

---

<sup>34</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II:9; CWC., Vol. 4, *Letters* IX:10.

helps it to grow, and who is the anchor as the child makes its way along the journey of life.”<sup>35</sup> Chavara visualized a mother as the formator of her child. She is the one, who creates a domestic Church; the child is attuned to it.<sup>36</sup> He recollects,

Huddled close to her feet, I learnt aright  
Gently, of matters sublime, of my faith  
As at midnight she rose and knelt at prayer  
Warding off sleep and petty dullness to the air  
Long hours, on her knees, in prayer she stayed  
Leaning on her then I would seat myself  
While devoutly [pray] a string of pious words  
To mother of God and the Christ, King of Kings.<sup>37</sup>

Mothers have the privilege to teach prayers to their children, assign duties, and distribute the responsibilities among the family members according to their interests and abilities. Children turn to them for love, sympathy, empathy, understanding and recognition. Mother is concerned about the physical wellbeing of every member of the family – the helpless infant, the sickly child, the adolescent youth, the elderly parents, the needy neighbour, etc. Obviously, a society devoid of mothers would be dehumanized, for mothers are always, even in the worst of times, witnesses to tenderness, dedication, and moral strength.<sup>38</sup> St John Paul II believes that mothers are simply better at sacrifice than fathers because they learn to sacrifice naturally through the experience of pregnancy.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, no. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Cleopatra, “Blessed Chavara’s Vision and Action for the Enlightenment of Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Chavara, *Atmanutapam*, Cantos I:II, 53–60.

<sup>38</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 174 (AAS 108: 280–281).

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 18–19 (AAS 80: 1693–1700), where the Pope links childbirth to the self-emptying sacrifice of the cross.



There are several roles that women assume in the family: wife, mother, leader, guide, administrator, economist, disciplinarian, teacher, and so on. They are the chief executives of family enterprises. A woman's role as a mother is very significant in the emotional and psychological development of children. As the first teacher of the child, she transmits the social, moral, and spiritual codes and ideals and shapes the personality of the child.

Chavara believed that his mother had played a great role in promoting his vocation to priesthood. When he first felt that he was called to priesthood, he shared it with his mother; she encouraged him to pursue his vocation. He painted the scene of his mother's joy when she came to know of her youngest son's vocation to priesthood:

My Mother's heart leaped with exultation  
That God did ear-mark me to be His possession  
Tear-dimmed eyes gleamed as sun amid clouds  
Could a heart maternal brave such parting?

Emotions twain wrung her heart in sooth  
That her son, one of two, God's own would be.  
Pain of parting a wrench foreseeing  
She wisely prepared, to the Holy Will to bow

She wooed detachment, her heart firm fixed on God  
Praising Him for the Infinite Mercy He showed.<sup>40</sup>

A mother would help guide her child to figure out its goals and values in life as well as teach it the importance of sacrifice. Chavara understood that the Church and society

---

<sup>40</sup> Chavara, *Atmanutapam*, Cantos 1: 119-122.

needed holy mothers to bring the divine into children, in order that they might become holy men and women.

### 3.4. Parents as Educators

According to Chavara, parents are the first educators of their children and he reminds them of their responsibility in giving quality education to the children. He desires the integral education and consequent uplift of society to eradicate ignorance from the spiritual, social, and educational spheres. He understands that the progress of a community greatly depends on the growth from within. Hence, he emphasises the importance of education in families, which begins by educating the children when they are young. According to the then prevailing standards, Chavara was an educated man. Though he had only elementary education in the traditional manner, he was fortunate enough to obtain a good theological education and spiritual formation under one of the most reputed Malpans (Professors) of the time. Almost all who knew Chavara gave unstinted tribute to his intellectual acumen and continuous pursuit of knowledge. In all his endeavours, we can easily discern a person of keen intelligence, thirsting to acquire and spread knowledge. His sense of right discernment and correct judgement flowed from his intellectual acumen and wide knowledge of various aspects of life.<sup>41</sup>

In order to elevate society out of the darkness of ignorance, Chavara desired to give the integral education of children. Therefore, he advised the parents, "As soon as the children come of age, they should be sent to school. From time to time, parents should enquire about their

---

<sup>41</sup> Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 412.

progress in studies and also about the type of friendships they cultivate. Every Sunday parents must review what they have studied."<sup>42</sup> The educational commitment of parents is not merely a task or a burden, but an essential and irreplaceable right and duty that can be supported and supplemented, but never supplanted by other institutions, not even by the state, which is merely subsidiary.

It is the duty of the parents to take care of the intellectual formation of their children. In this piece of counsel, Chavara reminded the parents of their obligation to look after the children's academic future by sending them to school at the proper time, which enables the children to grow in creativity, imagination and language. The parents must enquire about their children's progress from time to time and have a weekly revision of their studies. Besides taking care of cognitive development, parents must also be concerned about their integral formation and holistic development, which take place in their peer group. Therefore, he instructed them to be watchful of their children's friendship circles too. In this precept, Chavara's conviction is clear about the interrelationship of the allies in the educational project, namely, society, the family and social institutions. Education is not the sole responsibility of the educators, who are often overworked and poorly recognized. It was his belief that education, whether formal or informal, would contribute to a model of progress and human life that respected persons and the society. The restoration of humanity reconciled with itself will only be possible through the educational contribution offered by the family, institutions and social partners.

---

<sup>42</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II:6, ; CWC., vol. 4, *The Letters* IX:10.

#### 4. Respect and Care for Parents

The *Chavarul*, the code of conduct for families, is of great use in chalking out solutions for various problems and challenges faced by families. Chavara concluded the guidelines for families with an inspiring story of love and care for the parents. He explained that the parents are visible God and God is the invisible parent. Emphasising the importance and the high status held by parents, Chavara advised children to respect their parents and take care not to make them sad or burdened on any account.<sup>43</sup> To the parents, he warned that they must not be indecisive or show undue regard for their children, even when they are grown up and have become erudite and competent.<sup>44</sup>

The elderly assist us to appreciate the continuity of the generation, by their charism of bridging the gap.<sup>45</sup> Very often, the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren by their grandparents, and “many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian faith to their grandparents.”<sup>46</sup> Many resources belong to the elderly. Through prayer and advice, the elderly can enrich the world. Their resources enrich the home. Their immense capacity for evangelization by word and example, and by activities is a force for the Church yet to be thoroughly understood or adequately utilized.<sup>47</sup> The elderly provide the vital function of being a witness of the past and a source of wisdom for the young and the future.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II:16; CWC., vol. 4, *The Letters IX*:10.

<sup>44</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II:15; CWC., vol. 4, *The Letters IX*:10.

<sup>45</sup> John Paul II, *Address to Participants in the International Forum on Active Aging*, 5 (AAS 72: 1035).

<sup>46</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 192 (AAS 108: 388).

<sup>47</sup> John Paul II, *Address to Participants in the International Forum on Active Aging*, 5 (AAS 72: 1036).

<sup>48</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 27 (AAS 74: 113).

## 5. Family's Social Commitment

Every civilized society exists not for day-to-day life, but lives for the future and the generations to come. Such a situation would pre-suppose that each individual in such a society, particularly the youth, would cherish the sense of responsibility towards others and a total commitment to live and let live. In this connection, regarding one's attitude towards wealth, Chavara reminded the families that both extravagance and miserliness are unbecoming for human happiness. Therefore, one should always be judicious in one's expenditure.

Chavara inculcated in the family members their solidarity with the poor and the sick and instructed them to visit and serve them on Sundays.<sup>49</sup> He made the people aware of their social responsibility. It was this sense of responsibility towards the needy and vulnerable of the society that motivated him to encourage his parishioners to open a 'Charity Home' for the sick and the dying. In his second letter to the people of Kainakary he instilled in them the value of caring for others. One may wonder his sense of solidarity and concern for the beggars, widows, disabled, orphans, sick, elderly and lonely. Chavara appealed to Christian communities to support the families in their mission. He visualized the family as the most vital edifice of humanity whose inbuilt tradition would have immense influence in nurturing mature individuals, and in turn, building up a stable society.

---

<sup>49</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 22. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX*:10.



## Chapter IV

### Education for Social Empowerment

This chapter discusses on certain significant aspects of educational vision of Chavara, which took shape against the socio-economic and educational background of Kerala in the nineteenth century. Our discussion is based on his key documents such as the circular letter written on 25 March 1850, instructions given to the parents through the *Chavarul* and the system of education he established in the convent at Koonammavu. Chavara, a man of unique vision and right motivation, realized education as the best means of human uplift and social mobility. His contributions laid a strong foundation for the educational, social and financial development of Kerala. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the state government of Travancore began to take interest in the field of education in line with the Protestant missionaries.

The political leaders, Gouri Parvathi Bai, with the assistance of Diwan Colonel Munro, introduced a system of free education under state control in 1817.<sup>1</sup> But this was the privilege of upper caste males of the time. Both the Hindus and the Protestants profited out of this. Catholics were not allowed to step into these institutions. Monsignor Baccinelli, in 1867, cleared his position in these words: "I do not allow anyone to go to them [Protestant schools], as even to those of the gentiles, and if anyone goes there I punish him until he leaves. I tolerate only for prudential

---

<sup>1</sup> V. NagamAiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol.I, Thiruvananthapuram: Gazetteers Department, Kerala Council for Historical research, 1999, p. 475.

reasons, and for not being able to do otherwise, that some go to schools, that a little ago the government has erected. However, there too, the teacher is a catholic and errors against the faith are not taught.”<sup>2</sup>

Knowing that the Catholic community would even remain subjugated if they did not move with the times, Chavara decided that the religious congregation should concentrate on the ministry of education. He knew that education is the key to development, but the Catholic community could not have the benefits of education because of its unavailability in the nineteenth century Kerala. He opened up schools in which apart from Christian doctrines, “it is taught to read, write, calculate, compose well in good Malabar language, etc. ...”<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Popularization of Education

Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara had the strong conviction of the need of education in Kerala. He began the popularization and reformation of education in the Catholic Church in Kerala by executing the motto, namely, the vernacular Malayalam phrase *pallikkoru pallikkoodam*, “A school for a church”. The phrase became popular so that the succeeding generations could take it up to their hearts. He was the first to open a school for the *dalits* on 9 October 1864 at Mannanam.<sup>4</sup> He never thought of separating spiritual formation from cultural formation and his vision of education evolved out of his profound ecclesial vision. We recognize his unique contributions in popularizing the system of education in Kerala in the nineteenth century

---

<sup>2</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 51, pp. 70-71.

<sup>3</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 51, pp. 70-71

<sup>4</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, p.139.



and his distinctive vision that inspired the educationists of his time and that of ours.

### **1.1. Establishment of Sanskrit School at Mannanam (1846)**

Chavara established a Sanskrit School, attached to St Joseph's Monastery at Mannanam in 1846.<sup>5</sup> Until then, education in general and learning Sanskrit in particular were the monopoly of the high caste brahmins. Others, low castes and out-castes, were not expected even to hear the chanting Sanskrit slokas. In case, they happened to hear those slokas they were to be punished with pouring of molten lead into their ears. It was a social revolution that Chavara opened a Sanskrit school for the public. Besides that, seminarians of the monastery and the children belonging to all castes attended the classes. Moreover, the teacher was a member of the high castes from Thrissur. His educational contributions laid a strong foundation for a just society in which all human beings were worthy of erudition, justice, respect and dignity.

### **1.2. A Circular Letter on Education (1850)**

On 25 March 1850, Chavara sent a circular to the priests of Kerala church making them aware of the value, importance and need of education. He mentioned in this letter that education brings sight to the blind both at the spiritual and material domains.<sup>6</sup> Quoting Saint Ephrem, Chavara wrote,

Saint Ephrem, a doctor of the Church, teaches that the second source of enlightenment is learning (knowledge). Just as without eyes, one cannot see

---

<sup>5</sup> Parappuram, *Diary*, pp. 1474-1475.

<sup>6</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters IX:2*. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

the material things of the world, so also, without knowledge, it will be impossible for us to see or understand the reality of the world that is above, and the Lord who dwells therein. As those who have no eyes are called 'blind,' so too, those who have no learning should be called spiritually blind."<sup>7</sup>

In this circular letter, Chavara reflected on a broader vision of the system of education namely, to develop *creativity, imagination and language in the students*. He envisaged different stages of learning: language study, study of other subjects, and so on. He was of the firm conviction that those who had no education were spiritually blind (*jnanakurudanmar*). According to him, it was due to this blindness that the Christians in Kerala lacked the seed and sapling of sanctity. Therefore, he wanted to find a solution to this problem. To this effect, Chavara sent the circular letter to the parish priests to motivate them for a centre of education, where Malayalam, Tamil, Latin, Syriac and so on could be taught. He intended to collect from the parishioners a contribution for the running of this centre of learning. Chavara instilled in them the awareness that education was vital and that knowledge and education alone could uplift a society.

Chavara made the priests conscious that they had grave responsibility in sustaining and spreading universal education. He maintained, "The priests are duty-bound to teach the faithful."<sup>8</sup> He also insisted on the necessity of an integral education as well as the religious foundation of educational action.<sup>9</sup> As an inspiring leader, he found time to encourage the people, build relationships and handle

---

<sup>7</sup> Chavara, CWC., Vol. 4, *Letters IX:2*.

<sup>8</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters IX:2*.

<sup>9</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol.4, *Letters IX:2*.

conflicts in a constructive manner. For Chavara, education is a dynamic reality; it is a movement that brings people to light. He was convinced that change in the society is impossible without right motivation and process of education.

The above circular bears witness to Chavara's zeal and fervour for imparting education. It effectively conveyed to the priests the growing need for their solidarity and cooperation; it invited them for concrete action; it prompted them to work together to build something new and beautiful; to join forces and harmonize their efforts to make their shared commitment to build and rebuild the society a better one.

## 2. Education for the Marginalized

When we discuss under this title 'education for the marginalized' we must look at it from the perspective of our call to evangelization. The documents such as *Alochana*, *Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery* volume 3 (1864 -1873), *Diary of Parappuram*, etc. mark a new interest<sup>10</sup> and urgency to work among the marginalized, the downtrodden and the vulnerable groups of people. Having taken leadership in the Malabar Church to impart education for the marginalized, Chavara opened a school at Mannanam.<sup>11</sup>

In various documents that discuss this theme, the term used is 'school' and they record the starting of many schools in different villages of Kuttanadu.<sup>12</sup> We get the real nature or function of such schools from the official report

---

<sup>10</sup> It is seen in the entries in 1860s.

<sup>11</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, p. 26. *Alochana* in September 1864.

<sup>12</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, pp. 105, 111, 159, 129, 202, 254-55. These pages refer to the baptism given to the number of *Pulayas* and programs conducted for them in their schools.

of Monsignor Baccinelli that he sent to Rome on 20 February 1867. Its question number 51 reads, "Whether there exist Catholic schools? and how many? How many young people are educated in them? ... What are the subjects taught to the boys and the youth in the same schools, and whether the rudiments of catechism are handed on?" As answer to this question, Baccinelli gave a separate list of schools as enclosure. According to that list, in 1867, there were 191 schools attached to parishes of Syro-Malabar Church.<sup>13</sup> With regard to the subjects taught he said, "The principal thing that is taught, and the only thing on public holidays, is the doctrine. On weekdays it is also taught to read, write, calculate, compose well in good Malabar language, etc."<sup>14</sup> From Monsignor Leonard Mellano's circular letter on 7 November 1872 we get the impression that the schools in the vicariate face a crisis, there is a lack of interest from the part of the parents to send the children to the school, some schools are without students, and without teachers ...<sup>15</sup> The remedy he suggested was to open up a Sanskrit school in every parish. He offered to provide text books for the Sanskrit schools.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.1. Education for the Public

Chavara opened schools for the common people. This was a solid step against the caste-dominated and privatized form of education, which was prevailing in Kerala.

---

<sup>13</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Document 11 (Enclosure), which has the title "List of parishes and respective chapels, priests, faithful and schools belonging to Syro-Malabar Christianity in the vicariate apostolic of Verapoly", pp. 92-107. In the two appendices followed there were 37 parishes in the archdiocese of Cranganore and 16 parishes divided between both Jurisdictions in 1867. Therefore, details were not given regarding these 53 parishes.

<sup>14</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 51, p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> ലെയോനാർദ് മെല്ലാനോ, ഇസ്കോള ക്രമത്തിനു അനുബന്ധമായ പരസ്യ കൽപന, കുനമ്മാവ് (1872), p. 610.

<sup>16</sup> ലെയോനാർദ് മെല്ലാനോ, ഇസ്കോള ക്രമത്തിനു അനുബന്ധമായ പരസ്യ കൽപന, p. 112.

Although the new schools were attached to the churches and supervised by the priests of the monasteries, education was meant for the public. Access to education was made open to all without the caste or class-based discriminations. He aimed at inclusive and integral education of all. Chavara reiterated that cooperation and solidarity are necessary and urgent conditions for re-construction of the society. He desired that the kingdom of God of all-pervading love, should reach all people, all minds, the rich as well as the poor, the oppressor as well as the oppressed. This attitude inspired pastoral action and social and moral advancement.

At some stage during a retreat of diocesan priests at Mannanam, in August 1866, in responding to the right to education of the Dalits, they were given a document of twentyfive points of Pastoral Action that provided practical guidelines to the priests and local churches. It identified some pastoral practices that could ignite their minds to transform the society.<sup>17</sup> Article number six of that document motivates the priests to open up new schools in their areas and administer them effectively. Parish communities would find herein a call to go out of themselves, offering instruments for reform, even structural, in a spirit of communion and collaboration, of encounter and closeness, of mercy and solicitude for the proclamation of the Gospel. Chavara worked consistently on the various issues of his time. Since October 1864, under the direct guidance of Chavara, the TOCD community was committed to uplift the people of God, especially the excluded and the marginalized. Their main concern was to support the church at the local and regional level in assisting people at every stage of their development and growth.

---

<sup>17</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, pp. 119-125.

## 2.2. The Curriculum in the Schools

The report of Monsignor Baccinelli sent to Rome provides us with some details on the system of education in the schools attached to various parishes in those days. He reported that on Sundays, catechism classes were given and on weekdays, students were taught to read, write, calculate, compose well in good Malabar language, etc.<sup>18</sup> Chavara saw to the details of planning and co-ordination related to finance, personnel, and material resources of the schools. The arrangement for paying salary to the teachers was made in such a way that, the appointed persons would collect their remuneration from each area or parish, since the parents were not able to pay.<sup>19</sup>

The monasteries were entrusted with the responsibility to open up new schools in their respective areas and to bring more children of the less privileged who were denied the right to education. Arrangements were made to inspect the schools regularly and periodical evaluations were done in order to assess the growth of the students in each stage of their study. All this was done in order to achieve prudent and authentic innovation and a wise and gradual growth of the individual and his or her life in the community. At times the religious priests gathered the students of four or five schools together and conducted retreats for them at Mannanam.<sup>20</sup>

## 3. Girls' Education

With the inauguration of a religious institute for women in 1866 and a boarding house for girls in 1867 at Koonammavu,

---

<sup>18</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867 Q. 51, p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> ASJM., *CMM.*, vol. 3, p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> ASJM., *Alochana* in May 1868.

Chavara created a great opening for the formal education of girls and women and their training in handicrafts. Chavara was successful in leading the whole community of women in this direction. It is impossible for us to get a full picture of the oppositions and criticisms he would have faced for imparting education to women, the downtrodden and the marginalized in the society. He would have certainly faced antagonism against the move both from a male dominated society, which was also largely Hindu, the Shastras or the Sacred Books of which did not support independence and self-reliance of women. He struggled uncompromisingly to make the society united by liberating the people from the evil customs they had followed. He decided to follow the value system brought by Jesus, namely, love for the marginalized, including women. Chavara had an integral vision of growth when he introduced the syllabus for the education for girls in the boarding house.

Much importance was given for cooking, needle work, music, kitchen garden, and many kinds of handicrafts such as rosary making, flowermaking and so on. The artistic talents of the sisters and the girls in the boarding house in flower making, embroidery, singing, writing poems, playing harmonium, etc., were encouraged, fostered, and exhibited.<sup>21</sup> This was in view of making them experience economic freedom and financial independence. Chavara took interest to teach the sisters and the girls in the boarding house Latin, which he believed, would open their minds to the wide world of philosophical, theological, and other literary treasures of the West. Though the attempt was not fully successful, sisters have recorded his interest and indicated that he had tried very hard to teach them Latin,

---

<sup>21</sup> Jossy, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, p. 152.

Syriac and Tamil.<sup>22</sup> Those who were trained at the boarding house at Koonammavu with Chavara's vision of integral education, became later good house-wives and mothers that enabled the society to have healthy families.

Chavara launched various elements to shape a new type of education that succeeded in producing the fruits that humanity and the world needed. In his writings and statements, the expression integral or multidimensional formation often recurred. We must try to integrate the language of the head with the language of the heart and the language of the hands. The most important issues that educational processes, formal and informal, visualized were: i) education to interiority and transcendence, ii) integral or multidimensional formation and iii) religious harmony. Chavara believed that the dynamics of the educational process must make room for the life situations.

Realizing the transforming power of education Chavara instructed the families on the importance of giving education to the children on the right time.<sup>23</sup> Social participation in education is a concern today. 155 years ago Chavara was well aware of the participation of teachers, parents and priests or family and society in giving best education to the children.

#### **4. Evangelization and Integral Welfare of the Excluded**

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of all the nations. Instilling new vigour and enthusiasm for evangelization in the priests, Chavara gave a new momentum in the 1860s. As the leader of the church

---

<sup>22</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters*, VII:1, 6, 11, 13 (2020); *CKC.*, 1: 152, 162, 163.

<sup>23</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II:6. *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* IX:10.



Chavara's intention was to help the people rediscover what the bible taught on the mission and responsibility of Christians to be led back to the biblical teachings, for he realized that the church lost its missionary thrust and the desire to carry out the mission of evangelization.

Because of the shallowness of inner experience and the hollowness of our worship people or even the priests were not interested in evangelization. They were not properly motivated for the same. The programmes and activities were designed for those, who were already members of the church. While picturing the sad state of affairs of the vicariate of Varapuzha on 23 November 1873, Leopold Beccaro wrote to Rome that in the vicariate, evangelization programme had been kept in a low key.<sup>24</sup>

We have no evidence of baptizing and educating the Pulayas and other backward communities in the Syrian church before the daring step taken by Chavara to open up schools for them. Chavara, thus, became a trailblazer for the kingdom values. His purpose was to realize the original creative plan of God for humankind. Therefore, his welcoming attitude and approach towards the marginalized questioned the status quo, disapproved the prevailing system, and encouraged the upward movement of the people on the social ladder, especially of the poor, the marginalized, or the downtrodden. He made justice, equality and freedom available to everyone. His mission to those at the existential peripheries continues to challenge the present generation for its eloquent witness of God's closeness to the poorest of the poor. All the baptized are called to know and love God and to announce the Gospel through witness, word, and works of charity, he believed.

---

<sup>24</sup> Leopold Beccaro, *Leopold Missionariyude Kathukal*, I: 1.

Indeed, Chavara sincerely lived his idea of holiness in responding to the cries of the poor.

#### 4.1. Disciples Make Disciples

Being convinced that outreach ministry is the responsibility of every follower of Jesus Christ, Chavara took initiative for the evangelization programme of the downtrodden. The final message of Jesus to his disciples was to go into the whole world, making disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that He commanded (Mt 28:18). If the Church wants to be in-line with what Christ commanded them to do everyone needs to be involved in outreach of some type. Chavara instructed all the monasteries to get involved in the ministry by taking the good news of Jesus to the periphery. He made them realize that outreach cannot be left to the professional ministers, missionaries, and evangelists. As Saint Paul believed, we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both the preachers and hearers (Rom 1:12).

Chavara had genuine love towards the marginalized and the less privileged of the society, especially the pulayas of his time, whose life was miserable. In 1860s, on the part of Chavara, we see an urgency to bring them to the mainstream of the society. The document called *Alochana* and the *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* volume 3, many pages of the Diary of Varkey Parappuram, and other contemporary documents speak of the fresh enthusiasm of Chavara and the TOCD monasteries towards the evangelization of the suppressed classes. Baccinelli appreciated their work among the Pulayas that they administered the sacraments for them. In the absence of some vicars or chaplains, they were commissioned to act in their place, and to help them or entirely substitute them

at the time of cholera or smallpox, diseases common in the country.<sup>25</sup>

## 4.2. A New Phase of Evangelization

Until the nineteenth century, the Syrian Christians were not willing to preach the Gospel to the lower castes. As we see in the canons of Synod of Diamper, Christians also enjoyed the privileges of the upper caste and practiced untouchability, apparently sharing the value system of the then Kerala society that was divided into different classes and castes. This was slowly changing in the 1860s by admitting the lower caste people to the church, which could be seen as a new phase of evangelization in the Syro-Malabar church.

According to Chavara, solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or superficial tenderness for the misfortunes of so many people near and far. On the contrary, it is firm and constant determination to cooperate for the common good. Saint Chavara played a key role in the social uplift of Kerala in the nineteenth century. He believed that the service of faith and the promotion of justice could not be separated, because they are radically united. The education programme he introduced enabled the people to come together to bridge the gap. Father Leopold Beccaro reported to his superiors in Rome about the process of welcoming the Pulayas to the church. According to his letters, 30 persons were baptized in the month of July 1860 and 300 people were preparing themselves to be admitted to the Church by the priests of Elthuruth monastery. He also noted that when baptism was administered to Pulayas there was strong criticism from various sections of the society, including Christians. They

<sup>25</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 68, p. 75.

commented: the church in which they were given baptism was polluted; even the sacrament of baptism was contaminated.<sup>26</sup> Father Mathew Palakunnel also had mentioned the objection and reactions of the people against welcoming the low caste people to the Church.<sup>27</sup> They were admitted to the church only after making proper preparation through retreats, catechism classes, etc. Beccaro gives us many details of the catechism classes. The catechumens learnt by heart the 'Catechism of Saint Bellarmine', which was taught by lay persons. It was conducted in some rooms of the TOCD novitiate house and some other houses in Koonammavu.<sup>28</sup> Such classes were conducted in some other districts also and those places and programmes were inspected by TOCD Fathers. Chavara prepared a text for the 'rite of baptism of adults',<sup>29</sup> which he translated from Latin into Syriac.

Chavara made one thing clear that the sacraments should be celebrated in such a way, that they express the encounter between Christ and his faithful, an encounter that deepens their faith and enhances their capacity to relate themselves to others. Faith is a constitutive quality of the mind whereby persons relate to their environment at all levels, for example, to cultures, to other people and to God. Faith is not something we have, but rather a mode-of-being in relation to others and to the Other.<sup>30</sup> Proclaiming the

<sup>26</sup> Mathew Thundathil, tr., *Father Leopold Beccaro OCD, Theresian Missionary (1837-1914)*, Trivandrum: CIPH, 2014, p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> Palakunnel Velliachante Nalagamam [Malayalam], p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Leopold Beccaro, *Leopoldu Missionaryude Kathukal* [Malayalam], ed. Jossy, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2010, II:1, pp. 29-32.

<sup>29</sup> ASJM, *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, vol.3, 1864- 1871, പ്രായം ചെന്നവരെ മാമോദീസാ മുക്കുന്നതിനുള്ള ക്രമം ക്രാസുപടി സുറിയാനി കയ്യെഴുത്തു പ്രതി, പുറം, 320; see also *Palakunnel Velliachante Nalagamam*, p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981, pp. 292-303.

Good News of Jesus to all along with the response of the depressed classes to the message of the Gospel became a catalyst of development among them.

The efforts Chavara took in bringing up those who were at the periphery represent a valuable opportunity for pastoral conversion that was essentially missionary. Parish communities would find hereby a call to go out of themselves, offering instruments for reform in a spirit of communion and collaboration, of encounter and closeness, of mercy and solicitude for the proclamation of the Gospel. His mission of evangelization was Kingdom-oriented rather than Church-oriented. He gave sufficient importance to the conversion and transformation of the members through the power of the Gospel, which could be seen in his continued efforts to make them grow in faith and assimilate and incorporate them to the full life of the community. It also indicated that the admission of the dalits to Christianity was not only an addition of members by way of baptism, but this change of identity had significance for their life and social status. This brought a life with dignity, better social and cultural progress. They were given education, which was denied for them for centuries.

Chavara wanted to inculcate in the low-caste people a healthy awareness of self-worth. He wished that they would not be ostracized in the society. For this, they must develop self-confidence and live a sound moral life. With these objectives, he opened schools at Mannanam and Arpookara, and later at Edathua, Pulinkunnu and Kainakari, which were all accessible to the deprived classes. The great number of students in those schools manifests their felt need of and just desire for living in dignity, solidarity and co-operation.

### 4.3. Respect for the Dignity of Human Person

Chavara was very sensitive to the basic needs as well as the dignity of human person. Introducing 'noon feeding' in schools he assured regular attendance of the students in the schools. By insisting on paying decent wages to workers at the right time without having them to wait for long,<sup>31</sup> he respected the dignity of human person, who has been created in the image of God. The two pious associations he established, namely, the Confraternity for Happy Death and the Association for Charities (upavishala) were meant to help especially those of the lowest rung of the society to have a peaceful and happy death,<sup>32</sup> for which every human being, created in the image of God has a right. Everybody born in this world has an inalienable right to live a decent human life and all, especially, the resourceful ones, are obliged to help him/her to get this right. Chavara made a personal appeal in this regard through his circular letter to his parishioners, which he wrote on 15 October 1869<sup>33</sup> and in his *Chavarul*.<sup>34</sup>

### 4.4. Catechism (*Vedopadesham*) for the Downtrodden

Chavara followed up the historical circular letter calling for 'one school for one parish' on 9 October 1864 by certain concrete steps, especially to welcome children from the *Dalit* families and the people from the socio-cultural margins. The *Alochana* recorded a thorough planning and preparation the TOCD Fathers made to begin the classes for them. Motivated by the invitation of Chavara to concrete action, earlier they decided to encourage the people of the locality

<sup>31</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, I:18. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* IX:10.

<sup>32</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* IX:1. This circular he wrote in October 1843.

<sup>33</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* IX:11.

<sup>34</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, I:18. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* IX:10.

to build a small structure to house the school for the pulayas. Since it was assessed that it might take longer, they decided to take money from Mannanam Monastery and to begin the school on 9 October 1864 itself. On that day at 10 a.m., seventy-five people, both men and women, were gathered and they were initiated by preaching the Good News to them.<sup>35</sup> The priests were convinced that they had to invest their time and money into reaching out to those around them who needed help. During the following months, more members were added to the group. Father Ephrem of Mannanam Monastery prepared the group by preaching retreat for them; out of them nineteen men and women received baptism in a solemn celebration in the Mannanam Monastery chapel. The new Christians were instructed to come for the Holy Mass daily at 5 a.m., which was offered specially for them.<sup>36</sup> To fulfill this common mission more rapidly and effectively many were involved. *Alochana* gives a clear picture of how the new Christians were cared for and how the whole community of Mannanam and other institutions were concerned about their upbringing and further development in faith. The TOCD priests, the neighbouring parishes and the local people were guided by the vision that they were all called to the sublime mission of working together so that the less privileged might feel welcomed, protected, promoted, and had a solid foundation for their proper integration.

The priests were interested not only in giving instruction prior to baptism but also in caring for all their needs. '*Vedopadesham*'<sup>37</sup> was the common term used for

<sup>35</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, September 1864, *Alochana*, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, p. 105.

<sup>37</sup> *Veda* stands for religion as well as sacred Scripture. '*Upadesam*' is instruction. They were instructed on both the Bible and the Christian religion.

instructing and incorporating them into faith. Similar type of instruction was continued for their children. Thus they were introduced to the power of the Word to transform the world.

Encouraged by Chavara's words and letters and following the successful experiences of Mannanam monastery, the TOCD Fathers took care of forty-two schools in the central Travancore in 1866.<sup>38</sup> Schools were opened in Cochi at Elthuruth, Koonammavu and Ambazhakadu as well. When all the parish priests gathered for their annual retreats, the Prior of Mannanam Monastery reminded them of their greater responsibility to educate the children of their locality.<sup>39</sup>

#### **4.5. The Table of the Lord**

Gathering around the Eucharistic table, eating from the same bread, and drinking from the same cup together constituted a new culture of uniting the newly baptized members. The 'Altar of the Lord' or the sacrifice of the Holy Mass remained the unifying factor of the newly formed Christian community. They were brought to a new freedom because until that day they were not allowed to enter any place of worship; they had no right to worship the Lord in public. Now, they were encouraged to worship, to enjoy, and experience their communion with the Lord and with one another. Thus, the 'Table of the Lord' was a medium that could be effectively used against caste discrimination. It was done with the conviction that the function of faith is to love, not to bruise. What always resonated in these gathering was their constant concern about the future of these believers and rebuilding of the world. Since its

---

<sup>38</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, p. 111.

<sup>39</sup> ASJM., *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, vol. 3, p. 122.



inception, this living community of believers was envisioned as a response to a precise pastoral need, namely, that of bringing the Gospel to the people through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the sacraments. Their gathering was visibly characterized then, as a place of worship, a sign of the permanent presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his people. Their bond of interpersonal relationship grew fast. Until then they did not have any other places of association. It remained an indispensable organ of primary importance in the visible structure of the Church.

The Fathers took keen interest in gathering the new group of believers on Sundays to care for the pastoral needs. Their number reached 100 in 1866,<sup>40</sup> and 250 in 1870 in different places of Kuttanad (Pulincunnu, Edathua, Changanassery, Kalloorkadu, etc.).<sup>41</sup> They were all well-mannered, devout, and of good character.<sup>42</sup> The first Holy Communion of the Christian children was celebrated on the feast day of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. To the lower castes, education became a symbol of eradication of their social deprivation and the most important means for the upward social mobility. As its head, Chavara, through his activities, did not hesitate to question the attitude held by the Church for many centuries.

From history, we learn that at Mannanam, there were two communities of Christians; the Holy Mass was celebrated for this new group of Christians separately; it is depressing to learn that even todate this division continues,

---

<sup>40</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, p. 129.

<sup>41</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, p. 269.

<sup>42</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, p. 111.

even in the new system developed by the Archdiocese of Changanacherry.<sup>43</sup> For many years, different Dalit Christian organizations in the country have been fighting to prove that the caste system is prevalent among Christians and that those who convert should have the privilege to maintain their SC status even after conversion.<sup>44</sup> Many have recorded painfully that they faced discrimination within the Christian community, i.e., the traditional Christians called them Puthu Christiani (new Christians) and their children were and are not allowed to play with those of other Christians.

#### 4.6. The Table of Midday Meal

Describing the scene of multiplication of loaves, the evangelist Mark depicts the approach of Jesus towards the hungry in terms of compassion. "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away hungry to

---

<sup>43</sup> One sad thing to be noted here is that although Chavara wanted to enable these Christians from the Dalit community come up in terms of social status, practically, the then traditional Catholic community was not mature enough to welcome them and to support them as their fellow Christians with equality. Given the fact that it would take longer to correct the mentality of the traditional Christians, Chavara and other TOCD Fathers made room for these new Christians by way of arranging for their separate Holy Mass, catechism classes, and other ecclesial provisions, which are continued even today, in the form of a personal parish, which is headquartered at Mannanam. Interestingly, and pitifully, when a new parish community was created at Mannanam, taking away all traditional Catholics, the Changanacherry Archdiocese continues the old strategy.

<sup>44</sup> <https://mattersindia.com/2020/08/why-activists-fight-for-christian-and-muslim-dalits/>

their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come a long way" (Mk 8:2-3). It was this attitude of Jesus that inspired the TOCD Fathers in planning the distribution of midday meal at the beginning of November 1864. Their concerns were listed in the following manner: "On Sundays many children come for catechism; some are very poor; some of them come a long way; and the classes are till evening."<sup>45</sup> This moved them to arrange for serving free lunch to the children.

By introducing midday meal, Chavara brought about a change in the food habits and food pattern of the children. The children began dining together having the same food for all, which was never experienced in their life. This brought about tremendous transformation in their attitude towards others; as they all ate together a sense of oneness, unity, togetherness and a renewed vitality began to emerge among them. Rice was a luxury for them. Since they were children of landless agricultural labourers or mere farm slaves, rice was available to them only for a few weeks of the year. Hence, what they used to eat was some kind of radish, grains, chameleon, rats, etc., or anything edible that their parents could gather. Naturally, Dalit children were undernourished, illiterate, and were even denied access to water resources in their villages and public roads or institutions due to widespread social segregation. The schools initiated by the TOCD Fathers took them to the 'Table of the Lord' and the 'table of midday meal', which provided them stomach full, and it was an added reason to enhance the flow of children to the schools.

One of the means sought for the preparation and distribution of midday meals for the children was pidiyari scheme, for which the Fathers sent letters to the

---

<sup>45</sup> ASJM., *Alochana* in November 1864 (Entry on 1 December 1864).

neighbouring parishes. Thus they started to collect rice from the parishes of Pallippuram, Muttom, Vechoor, Vaikom, Muttuchira, Kudamaloor, Kaippuzha, etc.<sup>46</sup> When schools were opened in those parishes, they also made use of the *pidiyari* scheme in their own respective places. Therefore, on 3 December 1865, the Fathers bought eighteen acres of paddy field with the purpose of meeting the expenses of the schools.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4.7. Dress Distribution and Enhancement of Self-Respect

Men and women of slave castes of Travancore were not allowed to wear upper clothes. Children walked around naked which was a painful sight for Chavara during his Kalari education.<sup>48</sup> In his *Chavarul*, he specifically instructed the parents not to allow children go naked even inside the house.<sup>49</sup> He decided to distribute dress for women and children when they started coming to church for learning catechism. The church also provided them with clothes so that they could look good for their classes. What Chavara did for providing uniform for the children is also significant. In the month of March, a part of the collection at the Mannanam Chapel for the feast of Saint Joseph was spent to buy clothes for the children. Introducing uniform was an initiative of Chavara, which he inaugurated at Mannanam in May 1865.<sup>50</sup>

Chavara visualized each school as a platform for drawing children and young people close to one other. Indeed, a school is not an end in itself; it is a platform, a

---

<sup>46</sup> ASJM., *Alochana* in November 1864.

<sup>47</sup> ASJM., *CMM.*, vol. 3, p. 90.

<sup>48</sup> Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos 1: 93-112.

<sup>49</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 3. Chavara, *CWC.*, vol 4, *Letters*, IX: 10.

<sup>50</sup> ASJM., *Alochana* in May 1865.

support area, which serves as a base for other operations. Schools are also privileged places of personal development as it offers an integral education for the rest of life.

Chavara considered education under triple aspect. First and foremost, it is an *act of love*, because it gives life in its multidimensionality. It assists the people to overcome self-centredness; it helps them to have confidence and win over the interiority, it assists the people to put their potentials and possibilities into action and reality, to open up themselves to the transcendence, and to help the discarded ones of the globalizing society.

Secondly, education is an *act of hope*. It is a dynamic reality with transforming power. To educate is to invest in and give the present the hope that breaks the determinisms and fatalisms with which the selfishness of the strong, the conformism of the weak and the ideology of the utopian want to impose themselves so often as the only possible way.

Thirdly, the educational programme initiated by Chavara brought forth a noticeable change from a church, which was hitherto inwardly focused to an outwardly focused church. This was easily accomplished by his strong leadership with pastoral concerns for the downtrodden. He was committed to the mission of leading the church to the peripheries. It is observed that his style and manner of leadership had deep impact on the style and function of the Kerala church. The leaders' understanding, vision and focus influence everyone.

Thus, with the concerted efforts of the priests, parents, women in the families and many others, within a period of three to four years, a system of common education was established. Regular classes were conducted with

prescribed syllabus; in addition, the system of paying the salary, midday meal, uniform, pastoral care of the students as well as their parents, etc., were taken care of. Thus, the school became one of the places where awareness is exercised and developed, a habit of critical thinking is created.

Before 1864 Catholics had no doors open for education of their children because Monsignor Baccinelli was against the Catholics going to the schools run by non-Catholics.<sup>51</sup> It is against this background that we see the revolutionary changes Chavara and his confreres made in different parts of Kerala by introducing a new educational system. It opened the educational and cultural horizons to both the Catholics and the Dalits and brought in a positive change in the lives of the less privileged in the society. It lifted up their social status.

In 1864, Chavara changed his residence to Koonammavu; but very often he visited Mannanam to motivate his confreres and to take care of the educational projects initiated there by them. Religious instruction and general education were, for Chavara, two sides of the coin, which is echoed in the term *pallikkoodam*.<sup>52</sup> He regarded education as a means of uplifting the poor. It was indeed a revolutionary act of the time. During the formal release of the stamp of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, held at Trivandrum on 20 December 1987, R. Venkataraman, former President of India, affirmed: "Christian missions worked among the adivasis, the aboriginals, and among the *Harijans*, in a

---

<sup>51</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 53, p. 70.

<sup>52</sup> *Pallikkoodam* literally means along with *palli*.

practical implementation of the Christian ethic of service. Few people have exemplified this dimension of Indian Christianity as memorably as Father Chavara.”<sup>53</sup>

According to Chavara, education is the antidote to individualistic culture because it is capable of embracing diversity not as a threat, but rather as a blessing for one’s own identity. In this way, it can give rise to a culture of dialogue, encounter, fraternity and inclusion with social participation in education. Chavara initiated an integrated and comprehensive education and inspired his successors to continue this broad vision of inclusive, integral and quality education with timely expansion and renewal. This could be a model of modern education with strong fundamentals of moral and spiritual training along with intellectual formation, psychological maturity and skill development.

---

<sup>53</sup> R. Venkataraman, “Fr Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at its Best,” *Herald of the East*, vol.1 no.1, (1991), pp. 7-11.





## Chapter V

### Social Empowerment through Empowered Womanhood

Women everywhere in the world had to struggle or fight for their equal dignity. Violence on women, as we all know, is indeed a socially accepted, routinized, normalized and an invisible pandemic that despite years of struggle and changes in law continues. Women are left with little or no access to support, be it legal, emotional or economic. The dominant tendency in patriarchal communities has always been to confine women and women's issues to the private domain. Socially women are kept in a state of utter subjection; they are denied the basic rights and they remain suppressed and oppressed. Women are economically, socially, educationally and politically dependent on men. Caste hierarchy, religious traditions, and patriarchy were three most ancient and strong social institutions in Kerala that were basically discriminatory in nature, rendering the lives of women unbearable. The operational dynamics of patriarchy is deeply woven into the Indian cultural fabric and it persists in spite of women advancing in human development indices. In India, there exist an invisible set of special rules and code of conduct for women. Accordingly, women are to be obedient, docile, unquestioning, meek and never-complianing.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, "To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman."<sup>1</sup> He believed that a country, in which women were not honored, could not be considered civilized. Many years before Gandhi

---

<sup>1</sup> *Young India*, 4 October 1930.

came on the scene, empowerment of women was a concern of Saint Chavara, as he knew that the socio-cultural conditions of women were very miserable and, hence, required concerted effort. Chavara envisaged a world where both women and men can enjoy total freedom and equality to grow in the image and likeness of God.

As the patriarchal system prevailed in the families, girls developed a low self-esteem. Generally, they were not allowed to go out of their homes, though Christian girls could attend Sunday Mass. According to Bernard TOCD, a church historian of the nineteenth century, women did not attend the retreats preached in their own parishes.<sup>2</sup> They were not involved in the decision-making in the families, in the church, or in the society. Moreover, girls were given in marriage at a very young age. Chavara firmly believed that the sanctity of families depended mostly on well-groomed women in society. According to Christian anthropological vision, women have equal rights to participate in the cultural, economic, social and political life.<sup>3</sup>

In the nineteenth century, different religious institutes were active in many parts of South India. Convents were founded in Poonamalli (1790), Coimbatore (1853), Trichy (1854), Pondicherry (1844), and Bangalore (1827, 1854, 1860). Their main fields of activity were catechesis, education, serving the sick, caring for the destitute and other social services.<sup>4</sup> Those committed

---

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Thoma, *Malayalathile Karmelitha Moonnamsabhayude Charithram*, Mannanam: St Joseph's Monastery, 1980, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Ouadragesimo Anno*, AAS., 23 (1931) 13, 44.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Alex Paul Urumpackal, *Vocations in India, the Religious Women*, vol.1. Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1986, 21-216. Cf. also, Jossy, ed., *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High*, pp. 14-15.

women who were free for the Gospel played great role in raising the life-standard of women in those areas. The people of God were served and enriched by the life and services of these women religious. This gives the picture of women participating more and more in the missionary activity of the Church. With this, the church and the society noticed the effective leadership women could give, especially in empowering the women. Some church historians glorify this involvement of women as a unique contribution of the modern times in the history of the church.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. Women Freed for the Gospel

Founding of a religious institute for women in Kerala was a long cherished dream of Chavara. Until nineteenth century, the Malabar Church was devoid of any religious, eremitic or monastic. He felt that the church was barren<sup>6</sup> without the fruits of saintly religious life. By introducing a special life style for the sisters in Koonammavu convent, Chavara was telling the world that women deserve to lead consecrated life. The first pages of the *Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent* (CKC) tell the story of expectant waiting of the women of Kerala to be freed from a lifestyle that was prevailing and their struggles to lead a life of total commitment to God, namely, a chaste life. By recording the words of Eliswa, the first member of the Koonammavu convent, Chavara gave voice to Kerala women's single-minded devotion as well as ardent longing to remain united to God. The establishment of religious life for women at

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. C.B. Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1960, pp. 209-214.

<sup>6</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol.1, *Chronicles*, p. 172.

Koonammavu is presented as God's answer to the cries of women in Kerala to lead a life totally dedicated to God.<sup>7</sup>

The Chronicles and letters written by Chavara and the Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent, Mannanam Monastery, Vazhakulam Monastery and the Diary of Fr Varkey Parappuram amply bear testimony to the role of Chavara in mentoring and nurturing 'the Brides of Christ' in the Malabar Church. Leopold Beccaro, the first biographer and spiritual guide of Chavara, recorded in his biography the main purpose of founding the religious institute for women as learning religion and the scripture,

It was his [Chavara's] great desire to start a religious house for women for learning *vedakaryangal*<sup>8</sup> and to grow as good Christians. A full account of all the great things he had done for the realization of this desire, when God willed it so, is beyond the scope of this short biography. It is known to all how interested and zealous he was in the orderly progress of the convent in virtue and perfection, once it was founded."<sup>9</sup>

Beccaro testified that Chavara worked earnestly to fulfill this vision. In Kerala Chavara demonstrated an entirely different set of values and life style for the sisters other than what was accessible for women of his time. He was successful in creating an environment through positive, economic and social awareness for the overall development

---

<sup>7</sup> CKC., 1: 1. See also AGOCD., *Plut.35e*. Letter of Monsignor Baccinelli to the Provincials, Priors and Religious of the Carmelite Order, dated 29 June 1860.

<sup>8</sup> *Vedakaryangal* can be understood as matters related to the Scripture and religion.

<sup>9</sup> Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, pp. 7-9, 12.

of women, which enabled them to realize their full potential. Being grateful for the bold and beautiful life of the women religious, Pope John Paul II in his *Letter to Women* encouraged them to be committed to the cause of the Gospel. Those words of the Pontiff echo the mental disposition of Chavara.

Thank you, consecrated women! Following the example of the greatest of women, the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, you open yourselves with obedience and fidelity to the gift of God's love. You help the Church and all mankind to experience a "spousal" relationship to God, one which magnificently expresses the fellowship, which God wishes to establish with his creatures.<sup>10</sup>

Chavara had great expectations about the sisters. The life style introduced for them was something new to the people of Kerala at that time. Some bishops paid their visits to see it for themselves and invited the sisters to open convents in their dioceses.<sup>11</sup> Chavara opened a boarding house for girls at Koonammavu in 1868 and envisioned 'One Boarding House for One Convent'.<sup>12</sup> He instructed the sisters of the first convent to teach the girls in the boarding house different languages, lessons to grow in spiritual life and Christian virtues. He encouraged their reading habit and made many books available to the girls, in Tamil, Syriac and Latin. The boarding house at Koonammavu convent remained a launching pad for the women of Kerala to leap forward to development and advancement.

---

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> CKC., II: 32.

<sup>12</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* VI:4.

## 1.1. Women Freed from Kitchen

Very few men understand the importance of women's avenues of self-development and that of the need to have contact with the world beyond home. Hardly any man understands how monotonous, confining and unrewarding domesticity is. Regarding the role of women, Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Womanhood is not restricted to the kitchen." He opined and felt that, "Only when the woman is liberated from the slavery of the kitchen that her true spirit may be discovered."<sup>13</sup> It does not mean that women should not cook, but only that household responsibilities be shared among men, women and children. Kitchen holds women in bondage so that their minds cannot become free for other things. Realizing this, Chavara took women and girls away from their homes for study, which enabled them to embrace consecrated life. He freed them from the kitchen and engaged them in other serious and new activities such as reading, writing on paper,<sup>14</sup> learning different languages, various vocational training, etc. Writing on paper was very rare thing even for priests at that time.<sup>15</sup> When Chavara was planning the lifestyle in the Koonammavu convent first thing he did was freeing the sisters from kitchen work. It was a real freedom; they were freed from the smoke, heat, fire, cooking, washing pots and pans, etc. This was in view of making them free and totally available for the Gospel.

The sisters had to study different languages, south Indian languages such as Tamil and Malayalam, and liturgical languages of Syriac, Latin, etc. On the first day

---

<sup>13</sup> Nandela Krishan, "Gandhi on women's empowerment" see [www.mkgandhi.org/articles/krishnannandela.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/krishnannandela.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Until then the children were taught only to read. Writing, if at all, was done on palm leaves.

<sup>15</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 38, p. 66.

itself of the inauguration of the Bamboo-mat convent Chavara noted down in his diary that sisters Anna and Teresa started to write on paper, to learn to play harmonium and to get training in handicrafts.<sup>16</sup> One of the letters of Father Kuriakose Porukara to the Sisters at Koonammavu highlights their previous situation and the change that had come up in their lives. He observed,

Dear children, I read your letter most happily, again and again. I praise God, because the hands that were once engaged in holding the pounding piston and in washing pots and pans, have now written like this and also because, you, who did not know how to read properly putting letters together, and who like animals, were confined to work in the kitchen, have now been raised to such a great height.<sup>17</sup>

Father Chandy Kattakayam, one of the first members of Mannanam Monastery, once visited the Koonammavu Convent in 1882, and noted down in his diary his impressions of wonder and admiration for the artistic talents developed in the sisters,

They [Sisters] got trained ... in many handicrafts proper to women, who knew only to cook rice and clean up pots and plates. Anyone will be convinced of this if at least once they enter their convent chapel. Experts in various handicrafts were brought from faraway places to train them in embroidery and sewing. On those days in Malabar, it was difficult to find at least four women, who knew the art of writing on paper, not even on palm

---

<sup>16</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 1, *Chronicles*, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Letter written by Father Kuriakose Porukara from Mannanam Monastery to the Sisters at Koonammavu, dated 23 October 1874; it is kept in the archives of the Koonammavu Convent.

leaves. It was true about women's ability in reading and writing. But now, these sisters write neatly on paper and teach the same to other girls. There are more than 100 girls in the school who are day-scholars; they study along with the girls of the boarding house. They learn all these things. They are trained in flower making, scapular and rosary making, stitching liturgical vestments such as Alb, Surplices, etc., preparing candles, 'host' making, and so on and so forth.<sup>18</sup>

Fr Chandy Kattakayam would have thanked the Lord for his mysterious plan regarding the vocation and mission of women in the world. Chavara was convinced that one had to foster women's skills and expertise to bring about familial, economic, social, political and religious equality in Kerala.

## 2. Empowerment of Women through Women

Chavara, imbued with his deep spirituality of *Appa* experience, opened up the avenue for women to stand up in the social sphere and to stamp their own unique signature in strengthening the spiritual and cultural fabric of the society. Hence, it was natural for him not to regard women as impure or powerless. Instead, he depicted them as models of great faith and dignity and promoted a civilization of equality.<sup>19</sup>

Chavara's vision of the society was to empower women through women by making them agents of social liberation and transformation. He trusted women's generous hearts and gave recognition for their right space

<sup>18</sup> ASJM., Chandy Kattakayam, *Diary*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>19</sup> Saju Chakalackal, "Presentation" in Jossy Maria, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, p. xxiii.



in the Church. He envisioned a Church where women's charisms and gifts were acknowledged and the breadth of *God's call to women* was recognized. He valued the wisdom of women; he cherished their spirit of self-sacrifice; he loved their spiritual aptitude, simple faith. In his writings, he presents women highlighting and praising the gift of femininity.

## 2.1. World of Books

Unlike many, who hold the view that women cannot aspire to spiritual knowledge, and that their domain is limited to earthly activities, Chavara allowed them to participate in religious discussions and shared with them his deep spiritual experiences. He made Sr Anna and other sisters aware of their potential to express themselves in writing. He was very supportive and he influenced their life-goal. He recognized their need to have contact with the world of books beyond their mother tongue, Malayalam. Thus, he took interest in teaching the girls of the boarding house and the sisters different languages.<sup>20</sup> His contemporaries noticed the daring steps he took to introduce the sisters to the study of Latin language.

The Sisters were introduced to some fields which were unfamiliar to them that could brighten their lives; the world of books and developing their reading and writing habit. In their daily time table there was specific time for reading in common as well. He took effort to make books available to them so that they could be acquainted with the writings of great saints and doctors of the Church. Chavara's interest to introduce the sisters to the Latin language and literature was revolutionary at that period of history. Learning Latin was the rarest thing, which he

---

<sup>20</sup> CKC., 1: 152.

introduced to the sisters and they marveled at his hard work with gratitude and surprise:

Our *Priorachan* gave us four books, printed both in Latin and in Malayalam. Their transliterations were also printed, to enable us to learn Latin without the help of a teacher. One copy of the book was for the children of the boarding house and the other three were for us. *Priorachan* often came and taught us how to read and write Latin and we began to pick it up slowly.<sup>21</sup>

Sisters noted that the arrangement he made was to learn Latin without the help of a teacher. Chavara had fresh memories of the struggles he had to face when he went to learn Latin.<sup>22</sup> On those days, it was not possible to get somebody to teach the sisters Latin. It was his firm belief that in order to have real knowledge in virtues and spirituality one should learn Latin.<sup>23</sup> His readiness to encourage the sisters to learn as many languages as possible is obvious from the fact that he made himself available to teach the sisters different languages. He told them in one of his letters, "Please tell me which book you require in order to read and learn Tamil, I shall get it for you."<sup>24</sup> On another occasion, he told them to learn to read Tamil well; because "there are many spiritual books in Tamil. More books in Tamil may come."<sup>25</sup> Thus, Koonammavu convent

<sup>21</sup> CKC., 1: 152. This is the entry on 1 October 1869. While Beccaro was in Europe Chavara took more interest in teaching the Sisters Latin and other languages. In his letters of this period as well as in the CKC, one often sees frequent references to this effect. See CKC., 1: 152, 162, 163; Chavara, CWC, vol. 4, *Letters VII*: 1, 6, 11, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 1, *Chronicles*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>23</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 1, *Chronicles*, p. 71.

<sup>24</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters VII*: 1.

<sup>25</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters VII*: 6.

had collected a good number of books in various languages, both printed and manuscripts.<sup>26</sup> When the Kerala society in general discriminated and condemned women, Chavara restored them to their dignity and humanity. There are a number of instances, which significantly show Chavara's exceptional concern and attention for women and his attempt to bring them to equal status in the society. Women's status was strictly limited by the caste-ridden society and against this background, Chavara had a preferential option for women, which definitely upheld their dignity and accorded them their rightful place in the society. This attitude reveals his unique love for women and their welfare.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2. Promotion of Women Through Education

Chavara was convinced that education is the most important instrument for human resource development and the best means for women to realize their dignity and privileges. It enabled women to acquire the basic skills and abilities required for successful living. It was made clear that without literacy one cannot go forward. But many parents did not see the value of educating their female children because of which Chavara had to visit their families and motivate them. In his *Chavarul*, written on the second anniversary of the founding of the convent at Koonammavu and given to his parishioners at Kainakary, Chavara reminded the parents of their responsibility of imparting and facilitating proper education to their children. He gave clear instructions to the parents: As soon as the children come to the age of reason, they must be sent to school. Besides, parents should inquire whether and how the

---

<sup>26</sup> CKC., 1: 195-197.

<sup>27</sup> Jossy Maria, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, pp. 158-59.

children study and behave, and who their companions are. Their studies should be tested every Sunday.<sup>28</sup>

When Chavara saw the blessing of the new convent building for the sisters at Koonammavu on 27 March 1867, he prayed with a sense of fulfilment, "God, Almighty! I believe that it is to make me more indebted to You that You gave me a longer life so that I could live to see this event, too; let Your name be glorified forever and ever. Amen."<sup>29</sup> These words resemble the ecstatic outpouring of the holy man Simeon in the Jerusalem Temple as he took the Baby Jesus into his hands and gave thanks to God, "Now, Master, You can let Your servant go in peace, just as You have promised, because my eyes have seen the salvation, which You have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of Your people Israel" (Lk 2:29-32).<sup>30</sup> At that moment when the child Jesus was received by the aged Simeon the old Israel was already passing into new. In the same manner, Chavara got wisdom of realization of seeing the empowerment of women that could take place through the convent at Koonammavu. For Chavara the transition from the old situation of women to the new order of things was made even clearer and more evident.

Therefore, Chavara's idea of constructing the convent was to build, the boarding house, the convent and school for girls as one unit at Koonammavu.<sup>31</sup> Thus, it became the first school for girls and the first boarding house for girls in the vicariate of Varapuzha. It slowly grew and in 1883 according to the report submitted by Monsignor Marcelline

---

<sup>28</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 2: 14 in CWC., vol. 4: *Letters*, IX: 10.

<sup>29</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 1: *Chronicles*, p. 139.

<sup>30</sup> Jossy, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, p. 137.

<sup>31</sup> CKC.,1: 47.

to Rome, the number of girls in the boarding house reached thirty and the girls in the school, hundred.<sup>32</sup> Exclusive girls' schools run by the Women TOCD and their convents, which render yeoman service towards women empowerment in regaining the worth and dignity of women are a source of inspiration for other religious communities.

These schools for girls had an objective of enabling girls to grow self-reliant with all the values of our culture and tradition. This developed in them a creative outlook in their lives. Chavara is best remembered for uplifting women through education. When women are empowered, nation is empowered. His contributions resulted in unimaginable social changes for which the society is indebted to him. His unique contributions opened a new era of educational revolution for women, which increased their resourcefulness, self-confidence and dignity. He walked ahead of others of his times.

Chavara shaped the coming generations through education by means of boarding houses, schools and seminaries. The wide network of educational institutions under the auspices of different religious congregations and dioceses of Christians has played a pivotal role in popularizing education and making it available even to the poor and the marginalized. Through these institutions, the Church has been trying to spread the values of the dignity and equality of all human beings and equip every individual to develop one's potential to the maximum and eventually contribute towards the development of the

---

<sup>32</sup> ACO., *Scrit. rif. nei Congressi Malabaresse (1878-1889)* ff. 1158-1178. Report of Monsignor Marcelline Berardi in 1883, (f.1170): "In questo hanno un educando di circa 30 educande, ed una scuola giornaliera di circa 100 ragazze ..."

whole society. Only in the year 2006 the church in India decided to give special preference for the girl students particularly those from the marginalized sector.<sup>33</sup> Chavara did it already one hundred and fifty years ago.

With the purpose of making women catalysts of change and transformation in the society, Chavara included in their school curriculum topics such as cooking, painting, stitching, handicrafts, gardening, etc. This bears testimony to his farsightedness. He did not intent to make education merely academic. He gave equal importance for both manual work and intellectual work.

According to Chavara, the three important factors that promote women empowerment are: education, employment and change in social structure. He believed that all the three components are equally important and mutually related. Chavara experimented in all these three fields already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and showed the way for the empowerment of women and the improvement of their status in the country. Though education is the most important factor, simply development of education of the women would not automatically empower them if it did not bring about change in social structure. Some authors observe that although the state of Kerala has hundred percent (100%) literacy the womenfolk even today are not free from exploitation. This is because the traditional Keralite society is yet to be reformed to provide equal rights to women in *de facto* terms.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> CBCI Commission for Women. *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India*, New Delhi: Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Pinkumani Barman, "Gandhi and His Vision for Women Empowerment" <http://www.caesjournals.org/sp/uploads//IJBASS-2013-012.pdf>. IJCAES Special Issue on Basic, Applied and Social Sciences, Vol. 3, January 2013, pp. 41-43.

### **2.3. Economic Freedom and Financial Independence of Women**

One of the major indicators of the economic status of women in a country is the rate of work participation of its women. The level of work participation of women in Kerala was very low, owing to the discriminatory practices of low wages and lack of employment opportunities for women even in agricultural sectors. This had adversely affected the economic situation of women and their families. Knowing that the economic freedom of women is vital for upholding the rights of women and maintaining their dignity, Chavara made many attempts to make them financially independent. He considered economic equality as the master key to women empowerment.

In the nineteenth century, women of Kerala, especially Nazrani women, had no right to property, no right to earn and they were not allowed to go out to work. The family property had been divided among the boys; girls had no right over it. They were given dowry at the time of their wedding, which became the property of their husbands, who used it according to their own will and wish. The women were totally dependent on men for financial matters. Chavara advocated equal rights for women in family-owned land and property by giving away his family share to his elder sister, who was married in Edathwa.

Equality between men and women, which remained as a wild dream in Kerala, exists only when both the sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and wealth, have the freedom to express views and opinions, have equal opportunities for employment, financial independence, enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal skills. In such a situation

Chavara created opportunities for women to earn money for themselves which made them financially independent. He also acknowledged the contribution of women as nurturer of life and provider in the family.

## 2.4. Rosary Making and Vocational Training

Chavara worked for the empowerment of women through the women religious institute he founded and the boarding house for girls at Koonammavu. He imparted them training in handicrafts. According to him, “the sisters have to teach other girls to pray and train them in certain handicrafts.”<sup>35</sup> Saint Chavara and Fr Leopold Beccaro collected materials from different places for vocational training before the convent was inaugurated and they arranged many things such as threads of different colours, bundles of needles, beads for rosary, etc. in each one’s room and in common.<sup>36</sup> Later, their rosary making grew into a cottage industry in Koonammavu and other villages and rosaries made in the families were sent to different parts of the country and even abroad.<sup>37</sup> Chavara and Beccaro made many journeys to different places in search of getting skilled women, who were capable of training the sisters. So emerged the first church-based technical institution in the vicariate of Varapuzha. In order to address the needs and problems of poverty-stricken women they introduced income-generation programme for women.<sup>38</sup> The sisters gave

---

<sup>35</sup> CKC., 1: 5.

<sup>36</sup> CKC., 1: 10-12.

<sup>37</sup> Jossy, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, p. 167.

<sup>38</sup> See Archives of Saint Teresa Convent, Koonammavu, for a letter written on 8 April 1882 by some women of Koonammavu, thanking Signora Marchioness Fanny Anguissola Viscouti for providing materials for their handicrafts. This letter speaks of the development of this apostolate and the attitude of the beneficiaries towards it.



training to the women of the locality in view of making them financially independent. Chavara recognized the contribution of women to the socio-economic development of society.

An incident recorded in the *CKC* throws much light on Chavara's personal interest in the vocational training of sisters. In the month of October 1870, Chavara became seriously ill and could not walk on his own. In spite of being in this condition, he visited the convent twice on 15 October. In the afternoon when he came to the convent, he carried with him some kind of threads and dyes and instructed the sisters how to dye the threads. The Sisters were deeply touched by the gesture of their beloved Father and recorded it in their chronicle: "He taught us what thread to use for sewing, how to dye the thread, the process to be followed, and the colours to be used, etc."<sup>39</sup>

### **3. Women in the Writings of Chavara**

Chavara's perception of women was different from that of other writers and reformers of the nineteenth century. For Chavara, women were not mere toys or dolls in the hands of men, nor their rivals. In his speeches and writings, Chavara expressed that in many matters, especially those of tolerance, patience and sacrifice, the women are superior to men.<sup>40</sup> Chavara invoked the instances of biblical role models, who were epitomes of womanhood like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Martha-Mary, Mary Magdalene, other Galilean women disciples of Jesus, etc., to show that Kerala women could never be feeble. Even a quick reading of Chavara's writings cannot miss the powerful presence of

---

<sup>39</sup> *CKC.*, 2: 12.

<sup>40</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol.1 *Chronicles*, p. 59.

biblical women, who played great role in the ministry of Jesus. We meet a glorious array of women in Chavara's writings, who accompanied him as his close friends. It is remarkable that there is large material on women in his writings, especially in his *Dhyanasallapangal* and *Atmanuthapam*. His short epic poem *Anastasiayde Rakthasakshyam* celebrates the courage and faith commitment of a young woman Anastasia and the poem is named after her. He presents the girl martyr Anastasia as a powerful model for firm faith and heroic suffering for the Christians of Kerala, whose faith was shaken by the Roccas schism. Anastasia became an icon of courage to millions of women and a catalyst of change. Chavara wants to convey the message that women have equal mental abilities as that of men and an equal right to freedom.

Through his life and writings, Chavara set an example for appreciating and promoting feminine genius. In these writings, we find that he was surrounded and supported by many 'mother saints' in approaching God. Such an outlook would have sprouted from the integral formation he received from his mother. The powerful image of his mother, which was deeply rooted in him, enabled him to see God as mother. In one of his letters to the sisters of Koonammavu Convent, he presented before them God as a caring mother:

O! Joy of joys! O! Lord! ... Like unto the mother who nourishes her children with milk even while they are asleep, or are unable to express in words their hunger and thirst, You are looking after our needs every day.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol.4: *Letters* VII: 10.

Throughout his life, Chavara had the experience that God is a nurturing mother and a loving father. When his mother put him to sleep, he experienced as though a sleepless and vigilant angel guarded him.<sup>42</sup>

In Indian society, widows were a bad omen and people believed that husbands died young because their wives were evil. The widows were seen as curse in the family. But we see many stories of bold and courageous widows in Chavara's writings through which he tells that widows can live respectable lives. The first religious institute for women that he instituted in Kerala had two widows among the first members.

#### **4. Realizing *Streeshakti* - Feminine Spiritual Leadership**

Chavara believed in *Streeshakti*, women's resources, capabilities and power. He envisioned a new kind of leadership for women that they become spiritual leaders in the society. He found women capable of understanding theological subjects and he shared his deep spiritual experiences with the Sisters of Koonammavu convent. The first and most basic task required of the women religious of tomorrow is to get mastery over the movements of their own inner world. He invited the sisters to become familiar with the deep and significant movements of the spirit by entering into the centre of their being and become familiar with the richness of their inner life. This will enable them to feel at home with their own inner world, and to discover the dark corners as well as the bright spots. He opened before them creative ways to communicate with the source of human life, for which a practical means suggested by him was to "Abide in the love of Jesus! Remain always in

---

<sup>42</sup> Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos 1: 25-28.

His presence. Walk by His side; converse with him always.”<sup>43</sup> As an experienced mystic, he presented a clear picture and the process of the inner voyage. He led them to listen to the conversation between Jesus, their Spouse and human soul. Thus they experience and observe their spiritual journey that reaches the mystical union. He instructed the Superior of the convent to introduce this process to the girls of the boarding house and train them in the same path.<sup>44</sup> She was asked to prepare the coming generation in this sort of feminine spiritual leadership. He inculcated in them the value and importance of the same that they are there to strengthen the spiritual wealth of the church.

The letters addressed by Chavara to the Sisters are unique in spiritual content. One letter goes like this: “... thus Jesus comes into that soul in solitude, in order to be united with it in solitude and starts conversing with it. In the beginning that conversation and language may not be fully understood. Then the Lord will lead the bride to the wine cellar and make her taste a little of the finest wine. In the beginning only very little. When it is enjoyed the bride starts grasping the conversation of the Bridegroom. When the Bridegroom sees that the bride is following his language, he will speak more clearly. Rejoicing in their love, the Bridegroom presents the bride with ornaments. The doors of union with God are opened and fear vanishes.”<sup>45</sup> He made the sisters understand that reaching this state of solitude and union is not an accident. It is a

---

<sup>43</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters VII*: 6.

<sup>44</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters VII*: 8.

<sup>45</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters VII*: 8.

process, where the soul continuously strives to better herself. He instructed them that the convent should be a paradise of virtues.

Chavara's relationship with the sisters and his letters to them were intended to make them realize their dignity. He laid more emphasis on the role of women in the spiritual, economic and social growth of the country. Studies show that when women are supported and empowered, the entire society benefits. To be realistic, even today in this twenty-first century Chavara's vision on women remains unfulfilled.

#### **4.1. Pooling Feminine Resources**

Chavara was a collaborative leader, who recognized the power of a group approach to get effective and efficient results for the projects he initiated. He let others to collaborate with him in his projects, especially in the case of fund raising for the construction of the Koonammavu convent. *Pidiyari* system was such a move, which was truly women's contribution. When women put rice for cooking they set apart a handful of rice (*Pidiyari*) for the collective goals of the church. Thus, women became part of a large-scale network or joint responsibilities beyond their individual goals. This was a new social technology of the time.

Chavara valued the contributions of women and he recorded it in his diary. Parappuram notes that when the system of *Pidiyari* was introduced to women they were very happy at the news: "the women were motivated to do this and they happily approved the same. Therefore, it became easy to accomplish all the charity works initiated... For the construction of Pulincunnu monastery and the church,

could be financed by this income."<sup>46</sup> Regarding the system of *Pidiyari* the book of *Alochana* says, "For these sisters, fathers and siblings (*koodapirappukal*) carry out the work of this garden (*thottam* = convent) by collecting alms from different people. Besides, for this and for all other charitable services, in order to collect money through *Pidiyari*, patent was prepared and procurators were appointed in all parishes. More than thousand copies of both the label to be pasted on the container (vessel) and the ejaculation to be recited when women put the rice, were printed and sent from here."<sup>47</sup> The prayer was addressed to the Infant Jesus, "Infant Jesus, bless us."<sup>48</sup> It was a spiritual exercise for the women and the Infant Jesus became practically one member of the family. Chavara trusted in their sincere prayers as well as their generous heart. They kept an exact account of the collection from each parish and its expenditure.

Chavara acknowledged the donations of women for the many projects initiated by him. He specifically noted Mrs. Kunjanna Pathil's contribution of Rs 100/- when he went to the parishes of Kuttanadu for collection of money for the construction of the convent.<sup>49</sup> Also he wrote down in his diary that the initial expense of beginning the work of the press at Mannanam was from a woman, Mrs. Mariathumma Kappamavummoottil.<sup>50</sup> In his Testament Chavara specifically noted the mutual co-operation and collaboration of men and women religious in their expansion and in ministries.<sup>51</sup> Thus, he could change the

<sup>46</sup> ASJM., Parappuram, *Diary*, pp. 1182-1185.

<sup>47</sup> ASJM., *Alochana*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>48</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1 *Chronicles*, p. 129.

<sup>49</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1, *Chronicles*, p. 132.

<sup>50</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1, *Chronicles*, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters VI*: 5.

societal attitudes and community practices by encouraging the active participation and involvement of both men and women.

## 4.2. Rightful Participation in Decision-Making

Dependence on men is a trait that characterizes the condition of women worldwide. As a young girl, she is under the father's care and responsibility; at the time of marriage this authority is simply transferred from the father to the husband; she is often referred to as 'given' or 'offered' in marriage. The husband now becomes the master of his wife and she is seen as his possession. Girls are not permitted to take decision about their lives, only parents could. In traditional families, power is vested solely in the hands of the males. The husband makes the important decisions unilaterally; the poor wife just has to obey or implement the decisions of the husband. The woman's decision-making tends to be extremely limited to certain areas. It is in this context that the instructions in Chavara's *Chavarul* become revolutionary. As part of the directives to the parents on upbringing of children, Chavara wrote,

Give children due freedom to choose their vocation when they come of age; for, it is God who inspires them and it is their responsibility to choose. It concerns them essentially, and not the parents. How many parents and children have gone to hell owing to mistakes in this matter? Decisions must be taken when boys are about sixteen to eighteen and girls about fourteen to sixteen years old. Do not postpone much longer. Their consent must be ascertained before marriages are arranged.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 14, in *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters IX*:10.

The above instruction produced much fruit. It was the first time that the people of Kerala heard that girls should be given opportunity to take decision regarding their lives. Chavara not only established the equal right of girls to take decision, but also set before us an example of how to foster this equality of boys and girls in choosing their state of life. Saint Chavara valued, celebrated, and promoted the greatness of womanhood and motherhood in his life, writings, and ministry.

In Chavara's approach towards women, one does not find discrimination, but due respect and honour. There existed a bond of loving and respectful relationship between the sisters and him, the founder father. As Kuriakose Elias Porukkara, his biographer and contemporary, said, Chavara loved the Sisters more than his confreres, worked hard for the construction of the convent building and spiritual formation of the sisters. Father Porukara, who succeeded Chavara as the Prior General, observes, "Just as Patriarch Jacob had a greater love for his youngest son Benjamin so he [Chavara] loved them [the sisters] most deeply, and brought them up most carefully, providing them with all the needs even as a hen takes care of the chicks."<sup>53</sup>

The Catholic Church in India has promoted the empowerment of women over the years and has made a noteworthy contribution towards women's empowerment particularly in the field of education and health care. Worthy of mention is the pioneering work of the missionaries who were the first to promote girls' education in India.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Palathara, ed. *Stapakapithakanmar*, p. 29.

<sup>54</sup> *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India*.



In 1867 Baccinelli, admitted that “in times past there was no custom of preaching and teaching the people, nor of explaining the Christian doctrine or Catechism, with the exception of delivering a sermon on the feasts of patron saints or protectors. On the holy days of obligation and on Sundays according to the decree of the Sacred Congregation a few heads of Doctrine were only read to the people for about half an hour.”<sup>55</sup> The real miracle was that, given the difficult circumstances, the Christian faith was still transmitted from parents to children without much guidance of help from ecclesiastical authorities or structures. This went on till they got native ecclesial leadership. This is very much true in the Malabar church and in life of Chavara that he highly appreciated the way his mother imparted faith into his life and in his family.

### 4.3. Psychological Empowerment

Chavara believed that creating awareness on the dignity of the human person becomes a basic step towards restoring the dignity due to women. Greater efforts on sensitizing women over their God-given rights as ‘the image of God’ formed part of the psychological empowerment of women in order to help them shed the age-old inferiority complex and to feel that they too are equal partners in the society. Respecting the dignity of their womanhood and the special status they had attained in the Church, Chavara addressed the sisters as “O! Glorious royal ladies, (മഹാരാജാസ്ത്രീകളേ!) the spouses of my Lord and God! How great and glorious the status to which you are raised.”<sup>56</sup> This unique address reminded them of the greatness of their vocation to consecrated life and their spiritual proximity with the Lord. He seemed to say that everything they

---

<sup>55</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 37, p. 64.

<sup>56</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 4: *Letters*, VII: 2.

needed was already within them, only they must approach themselves with reverence and love. It would work wonders if they believed in themselves and the power within them. He never promoted self-condemnation and self-distrust. He instructed them to know their own worth, to think positive and have positive beliefs. These can be powerful in shaping one's life, mind, heart, and character.<sup>57</sup> He addressed the many crises of the sisters struggling in their psychological problems in their community life. Appreciating the inner beauty and talents of the sisters, on the opening day of the convent itself, Chavara openly wrote in his diary that Sisters Anna and Teresa were quick in learning everything.<sup>58</sup>

The impact of Chavara's words of admiration was overwhelming and the sisters developed their talents. In a letter written to the sisters on 1 March 1870, he writes, "While reading Saint Alphonsus Liguori's book *Monaca Sanctae* (Holy Nuns) I felt a holy envy at your immense fortune. It is undoubtedly very true! O! Queens and spouses of my God and Lord Jesus Christ! How great and praiseworthy indeed is the state of life you have embraced! Many of the empresses of this world will be jealous of you. You will realize it on the day of last judgment!"<sup>59</sup>

Chavara provided opportunities for the development of their hobbies; he enabled them to explore their talents and human potentialities by giving them psychological empowerment and emotional support which brought forth a social awakening. The aim of these programmes was to create awareness in them that they are also equal members of the society, created in the image and likeness

---

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Jossy, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, pp. 197-198.

<sup>58</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, 1: *Chronicles*, p. 127.

<sup>59</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters VII*: 2.

of God. We see women collaborating with him and contributing generously for the projects initiated by him. Chavara fulfilled his true mission of empowering and restoring women to their full human status. He was born and brought up in the patriarchal tradition, where women were considered the 'weaker' sex and were relegated to an inferior position. Women were oppressed by their social, cultural, and religious structures and were deprived of their original dignity of being in the image of God. But he stood firm for the cause of women through his ministry based on love, inclusion, and justice.<sup>60</sup>

The untiring efforts for social change and transformation begun by Chavara, continued by the TOCD Fathers and Sisters as well as other socio-religious reformers in the subsequent centuries that resulted in the overall renovation and restoration of the Kerala society. Those initiatives and adventurous ventures of Chavara initiated a spiritual awakening as well as social development of Kerala society in the nineteenth century. Thus, the awakening of Kerala was earmarked by the activities of Chavara in the nineteenth century, cementing the path for socio-economic progress and growth of Kerala in later period. Undoubtedly, Saint Chavara worked for the uplift of his community, the Syro-Malabar Church and its communion with Rome. All his thoughts and activities were permeated by the teachings of the Gospel that enabled the people to extend their wholehearted cooperation and support to his projects. It was his participatory and collaborative style of leadership that made this accomplishment possible. The leadership he offered to the Church and society in Kerala and the socio-cultural accomplishments he made during the nineteenth century, Chavara should remain a common property of the

---

<sup>60</sup> Jossy, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, p. 282.

Kerala society, and not merely of the Church. In fact, while fathering and shepherding the community of Saint Thomas Christians in Kerala, by the same set of heroic actions, Chavara uniquely empowered the social fabric of Kerala to such an extent that, without any exaggeration, we could claim that he fostered the larger society by fighting against the social evils that prevailed in the society and by putting in place a set of institutional provisions for its sustained organic growth. He struggled for a new society.

Naturally, even though the secular society of Kerala has not yet recognized his contributions, especially when we look at it in comparison with the great compliments accorded to other social reformers who came after him, the vision and contributions of Chavara do make a compelling case for the recognition of the Syro-Malabar Church and the society of Kerala, especially for his insightful and revolutionary leadership in working for the integral welfare of the poor, marginalized, and the downtrodden. Chavara has always practiced what he has preached. Nay, he has always preached what he has practiced, may be because of that a well known writer and social leader titled the biography of Chavara as *Jeevitham thanne Sandesham*<sup>61</sup> (Life is His Message).

## 5. Women's Spiritual Leadership

In his Last Will, Chavara entrusted to the members of his congregation the further growth and expansion of the convent. He specified the places where convent and boarding house for girls were to be opened, and which were the activities they must be engaged in, etc. He tells,

---

<sup>61</sup> M. K. Sanu, *Jeevitham thanne Sandesham*

It is necessary that more monasteries and convents be opened in the South, that is, one monastery each to East and West of Mannanam and some convents with boarding houses ... This will help very much to render necessary and useful spiritual ministry to the faithful of the two vicariates of Varapuzha and Kollam ... A little effort and diligence on your part would suffice to accomplish all these things.<sup>62</sup>

In his Testament, the phrase “monasteries, convents and boarding houses” appears twice and “monasteries and convents” thrice.<sup>63</sup> By using the phrase ‘monasteries, convents and boarding houses for girls’ in the Testament Chavara encourages the TOCD men to consider the TOCD women as co-workers, or equal partners in the ministry of the Church. He motivates them to ensure the participation and co-operation of women with the gift of their femininity in the life and mission of the church. He advocates a spirituality of collaboration for the women TOCD, that both men and women religious work hand in hand for the growth and unity of the Church in both vicariates of Varapuzha and Kollam.<sup>64</sup> The involvement of the TOCD Fathers as well as Sisters was necessary in carrying forward the new vision that Chavara had initiated. His contributions were holistic, aiming at the common good of the society. Thus, the community of TOCD Fathers and that of TOCD Sisters, as one family carried forward his legacy. For him to be a spiritual leader is to shift from exclusivism to inclusivism, believe in universal brotherhood and sisterhood and to break the walls that separate and divide people on the basis of Rites.

---

<sup>62</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4 *Letters*, VI: 5.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4 *Letters*, VI: 5.

<sup>64</sup> Jossy, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, pp. 104-106.



## Conclusion

### Continuing the Catalytic Action

Chavara was an instrument in the hands of God for initiating and nurturing religious life for men and women in the Malabar Church. He resigned himself totally to the divine plan. God, in his providence blessed the Church with CMI, CMC and CTC Congregations to continue Chavara's initiatives, with the intention of working constantly for the integral and total welfare of the people, especially the poor and the marginalized. Thanks to his efforts to remain in communion with Rome and to attain local ecclesial leadership for the Saint Thomas Christians they could preserve their ecclesial identity. Chavara is being increasingly recognized as a great source of inspiration, hope and light as lover of the Church and an educationist. Realizing the greatness of the personality and contribution of Chavara, Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, former Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar church, once said, "We should remember the historical fact that the Syrian church founded by Saint Thomas the Apostle might have been misled or destroyed if Chavara had not taken bold and powerful steps at the right time."<sup>1</sup>

Mannanam community was like a mother to all. It spread a culture of acceptance and solidarity. By living its motherhood effectively, it nourished, guided and accompanied all with patience, and drew the parishes close to it through prayer and works of mercy. This religious community was at the forefront in welcoming all the people and render charity and solidarity. Until the Saint Thomas

---

<sup>1</sup> *Deepika Souvenir*, 2004.

Christians got separate vicariates and bishops of their own, Mannanam was the centre of the church and place of gathering of the people. The Mannanam community accorded grand welcome to Apostolic Visitors and Apostolic Delegates when they came for the official visitation of the Malabar church. On such occasions the gatherings of the people were arranged there.<sup>2</sup> The much-awaited glad news of the separation of the Saint Thomas Christians along with the formation of the two separate vicariates for them and later the appointment order of the first bishop of Changanassery diocese, Charles Lavinge S. J., were announced at Mannanam. It was there itself that Monsignor Charles Lavinge was given the first grand welcome. The Saint Joseph monastery, Mannanam, was the first residence of Charles Lavinge.

## 1. Disseminating Knowledge

With a clear understanding of the power of media for the overall socio-cultural development, Chavara set up a printing press at Mannanam in 1846. We get first hand information in detail of the toils and troubles he took for the establishment of a printing press at Mannanam in his own hand. It is important to note that it has been written in the first person singular.<sup>3</sup> His contemporaries also testified to the greatness and the singular nature of the wooden press established by Chavara. According to Parappuram, the establishment of a printing press was a praiseworthy act. It

---

<sup>2</sup> I. C. Chacko, *Mar Louis Pazheparampil Jeevithavum Kalavum*, Thiruvananthapuram: M.M. Varkey, 1937. On 21- 22 May 1876 grand welcome to Monsignor Meurine, Apostolic Visitor, pp. 238-247. On 12 November 1885 welcome to Monsignor Agliyardi, Apostolic Delegate at Mannanam, p. 431.

<sup>3</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1, *Chronicles*, pp. 42-43.



deserves great praise and recognition, for, before Fr Prior established that press and many years thereafter there had not been a Catholic press in Kerala. The press was established at Mannanam some eight to ten years prior to the canonical formation of the men TOCD in 1855.<sup>4</sup>

According to K. C. Chacko, the most far reaching, enduring, all-embracing, illuminating, edifying, and even sanctifying field of activity, initiated by Chavara was that of printing.<sup>5</sup> This was the first indigenous Catholic printing press a Malayalee has ever built and instituted; all other presses that existed in Kerala at that time were iron presses which were imported from abroad, for printing machines and associated equipments were not manufactured in India at that time. Although some of his benefactors offered him to import press from abroad it was not possible because of his poor financial situation. He wrote in his diary, "Fr Manuel Rosari, the parish priest of Thankassery, from Edacochin supported and recommended our case to the Delegate. He wrote to Puthussery and Madras to get the press and ink. Reply came that ink was not available there and they would get down a press and send it to us if we promised to pay the price Rs. 500, and transportation charges. But since we did not have that much money, we were sad and looked in other directions."<sup>6</sup>

The establishment of press, which played a major role in the modernization of Kerala, became a key factor in information dissemination, instruction, and propaganda, all of which had played a pivotal role in the renaissance of the Kerala society as well as the Catholic community. By

---

<sup>4</sup> ASJM, Parappuram, *Diary*, pp. 1469-1471.

<sup>5</sup> K. C. Chacko, *Blessed Father Kuriakos Elias Chavara*, Ernakulam: The Vice-Postulator, Cause of Fr Kuriakos Elias Chavara, 1958, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. 1, *Chronicles*, p. 42.

toiling for establishing the printing press he became one of the catalysts of social reform of Kerala in the nineteenth century.

The establishment of the printing press was instrumental in educating the people through books and other materials, in imparting instructions, spreading devotional books, various prayers, disseminating Gospel values, and the spreading of unity and communion among families. In an effort to fulfill the mission entrusted to them by their holy founders the TOCD men and women committed themselves for the same.

Monsignor Baccinelli, the vicar apostolic, had full admiration for the TOCD priests for their work in the apostolate of printing and making the books available for the common people. He officially reports, "They attend to the printing of moral and devotional books and to the translation of some of them from Tamil language. They help to revise the books that should be printed in other presses."<sup>7</sup>

Monsignor Ludovic Martini, the vicar apostolic of the time of the establishment of the press, extended his helping hand to Chavara to obtain the needed royal permission for establishing a printing press and the ecclesiastical permission for publishing religious books.<sup>8</sup> By using his good offices, he supported Chavara to realize his wish for a press. Considering the scarcity of printed books in Malayalam language on those days, Monsignor Ludovic also gave sanction to Chavara to translate into Malayalam those books printed by Jesuits in their press at Pondichery. He instructed to print them in the press at

---

<sup>7</sup> Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 68, p.75.

<sup>8</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol.1 *Chronicles*, 51-52.

Mannanam and make them available to the people of Kerala.<sup>9</sup>

Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, Chavara's biographer and successor, the second Prior General, praised Chavara for establishing a press for the sake of the spiritual benefit of the people of the place, since in that region there was no press other than the press of the Protestants at Kottayam.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Reference Books, Dictionaries, Grammar Books

Chavara had a good collection of books, dictionaries and grammar books, of various classical languages, vernaculars of India and different European countries. The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery provides a list of books of seven pages with the title "The details of the books of the Monastery of Koonammavu. Monsignor Bernardine of Saint Teresa, Archbishop of Pharsalia and vicar provincial has ordered under excommunication that these books should not be taken out."<sup>11</sup> This list of books includes more than thirty-five books in Tamil language that are printed in Pondichery. This can be seen as the implementation of the sanction given by Monsignor Ludovic. Besides Tamil, there are books in Malayalam, Sanskrit, Latin, Portuguese, Italian, Hebrew, Greek, Chaldean, Arabic, Syriac, etc. Those books are printed in Rome, London, Lisbon, Paris, Bombay, Pondichery, Veliyanadu, Trivandrum, Kochi, Mannanam, and so on.

---

<sup>9</sup> ASJM, Parappuram, *Diary*, pp. 1472-74.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Palathara, *Sthapakapithakanmar*, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> "പടിക്ക് പുറത്ത് ഇറക്കിക്കൂടാ എന്ന മഹറോന്റെ കീഴിലായി വികാരി പ്രൊവിൻഷ്യാളായ ബെർണാർദീനോസ് ഒരു സാന്ത ത്രേസ്യ പർസല്യ എന്ന ദിക്കിന്റെ മെത്രാപോലീത്താച്ചൻ കൽപിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നതായ കുനമ്മാവുങ്കൽ കൊവേന്ത വക പുസ്തകങ്ങളുടെ വിവരം."

The list gives details such as the title of the book, price, language, translation, number of copies, place of printing, etc. The Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent also provides a long list of books that has been prepared in the same pattern.<sup>12</sup> We may wonder at the number and variety of grammar books in diverse languages, which include 'Gramati of Loraform, Michael, Guriel, Latin-Italian Gramati, Gramati of Hebrew language, Sanskrit grammar, Latin, Portuguese, Arabic, Syriac, Chaldean, Tamil, Malayalam, etc. The number of books, which Chavara collected in various Indian and foreign languages, both printed and manuscripts, for the use of his seminarians, priests and for the coming generations, is another wonder for us today.<sup>13</sup>

Chavara was a lover of various languages and a scholar in literature, well versed in seven or eight languages such as Malayalam, Tamil, Sanskrit, Latin, Italian, Portuguese and Syriac. He knew the power of books on human life from his personal experience, and also from his spiritual guide Leopold Beccaro who had brought various books in Syriac language to Koonammavu<sup>14</sup> motivated him to collect all sorts of books. Chavara decided to hand over knowledge to generations that became his passionate dream. It motivated him to collect all sorts of books. Chavara has laid a legacy for the church and the people of India to follow, especially in disseminating knowledge.

---

<sup>12</sup> CKC., 1: 195-99.

<sup>13</sup> ASJM., *The Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery* vol. 3, pp. 318-330.

<sup>14</sup> ASJM., *Parappuram, Diary*, p. 1408. Cf., Jossy Maria, *Malabarinte Manassarinja Mahamissionary, Fathar Leopold Beccaro*, p. 188.

Saint Chavara was a profound teacher, who taught through his sermons and lectures, writings and exhortations. Even at the peak of his activities his acquaintances knew him as a well-read and a well-travelled person which enabled him to have a thorough knowledge of his people. He was a social renaissance leader of the Kerala Church of the nineteenth century. His approach towards those who were in the periphery was fourfold: welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating. He initiated innovative undertakings for the uplift of the poor and the marginalized, to bring them to the mainstream of the society by according to them a sense of equality and respect. His activities sought to encourage God's people to become Christ-like. He treated all people equally in love, regardless of race, economic status, age or gender. He succeeded instilling in the people the most noble of aspirations, such as the desire for God, the dignity of every human life, equality among men and women and mutual respect within the single human family. He was guided by the desire to direct the Church and the society according to the needs of the changing world.

### 3. Love for Nature and Eco-Spirituality

An important mission to be undertaken by the Church is to work towards increasing the awareness about ecological issues and protection of the environment according to the teachings of *Laudato Si*, the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis.<sup>15</sup> Chavara had understood this principle one and a half centuries ago.

---

<sup>15</sup> 33<sup>rd</sup> General Body meeting of CBCI held at Bangalore on 2 February 2018.

Saint Chavara's love for nature and his eco-spiritual vision were evident in the process of searching and purchasing land for monasteries or other institutions. While planning to buy a new plot of land for a monastery at Chanaganassery, Chavara instructed the concerned person, "The place should be sufficiently distant from the market place so that the noise of the market may not disturb life in the monastery. There should be water. There should be a river close by so that we can conveniently reach the place by boat. The place should be sufficiently large with big trees around to moderate the heat. Besides the space for the construction of the monastery, there should be place also for gardens, etc."<sup>16</sup> He was a hard working person, lived a simple life and he loved animals, too. Mannanam Chronicle records his love for animal husbandry:

*The Valia Priorachan* Father Chavara bought a she-buffalo for Rs. 5/- and kept it where the monastery had a marshy paddy field (*kary*) near the place called Vennathottiyil. Father Prior tended the buffalo with special care. In the course of time she gave birth to many calves – so many that some of them did not survive. Finally, the remaining twelve were sold in the *kary* itself for more than Rs. 300/- by auction. Mannanam Monastery bought one of them named, Manappara for Rs. 45/- and kept it in the same field as a memento of the past.<sup>17</sup>

The instructions in the *Chavarul* such as, being frugal in spending and avoiding squander beyond one's means in the celebrations and festivals<sup>18</sup> and avoiding materialistic behaviour and amassing of novel items highlight Chavara's

---

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Father Cherian, parish priest of Changanassery, on 7 April 1868, Chavara, CWC., vol.4, *Letters* VIII:4.

<sup>17</sup> ASJM., *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* (MSS), vol. 4, p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> Chavara, CWC., vol. IV, *Letters* IX:10, I:6.

sense of eco-friendliness. He insisted that instead of greed in exploiting the resources, one must rejuvenate the nature and the environment of the residence with the positive energy of peace, love, compassion, and harmony.<sup>19</sup> These precepts of Chavara help us to value the nature and its good. The precepts of the Chavarul on the integral formation of families also make special mention of our duty to defend and take care of our Mother Earth.

#### 4. Positive Transformation of the Society

Whenever the priests were punished for any cause they were sent to Mannanam and Chavara was entrusted with the responsibility of preparing them for repentance and for hearing their confession. He was given faculties to reconcile them with the church. We have many examples for this even from the time of Monsignor Ludovic. Bishop Baccinelli<sup>20</sup> and bishop Leonard continued the same policy.

The saint had paved the way for a positive transformation of the socio-cultural landscape of India in general and Kerala in particular, especially in the field of education. All this gave Kerala a head start and by 1961, the state had double literacy rate of the rest of India, namely, 55 per cent compared with the Indian average of 28 per cent. As per 2007, the net enrolment in elementary education in Kerala was almost 100 per cent and was almost balanced among sexes, social groups and regions unlike other states in India.<sup>21</sup> On the International Literacy Day 2020,

---

<sup>19</sup> Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. IV, *Letters IX*:10, I:11.

<sup>20</sup> In Chavara's letter to Baccinelli on 20 January 1853 there is mention of three diocesan priests sent by the bishop to Mannanam to do their penance. Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4 *Letters*, III: 5.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0517/p12/legn.html>.

Hindustan Times recorded the literacy rate of India as 77.7 per cent while Kerala has emerged as the most literate state (96.2%) in the country. The survey showed that the male literacy rate is higher than female literacy rate among all states. In Kerala, however, the male literacy rate is 97.4 per cent compared to 95.2 per cent among females.<sup>22</sup> For this high literacy rate the state is indebted to Chavara and his followers to a great extent.

## 5. Women on the March

It must be recalled that the church of the nineteenth century Kerala was thoroughly male-dominated: it was male-organized, male-led, male-taught, and male-celebrated. However, there did not exist any clerical monopoly at that time. Laymen had greater participation in the decision-making process and administration of the Church. But, never in the history of this time do we see a woman participating in the '*palliyogams*' or synods of the Saint Thomas Christian community. One of the worst forms of exclusion of the women in the Church had been the denial of their access to theological knowledge until very recent times.

People who make changes in the world are those who are passionately involved with a cause for which they stand firm and sacrifice their lives. Chavara was a passionate champion of women empowerment, which he achieved mainly through establishing a religious institute for women. Members of this new religious community interrogated and deconstructed multiple representations of women in the Hindu *Shastras*.

---

<sup>22</sup> [www.hindustantimes.com/education/international-literacy-day-2020-kerala-most-literate-state-in-india](http://www.hindustantimes.com/education/international-literacy-day-2020-kerala-most-literate-state-in-india).



Chavara, however, respected and protected women, and ensured their collaboration in every realm of life. He accorded women special roles as spiritual animators in the society, equal status in the social and religious functions. Indeed, his words and works always expressed respect and honour due to women. He treated women with dignity and respect. He initiated an inclusive approach in gender-based relationships. He committed himself to work for the empowerment of the weaker sections. We see the advances women have made in the past 200 years, including right of franchise, right of inheritance, right to be considered eligible for education and employment, advancement in different branches of employment, election and appointment in political and civil administration, and inclusion in every profession.

Chavara made a lasting impact upon the life and faith of the Church of his time, raising the standard of life of the women where women's charisms and gifts were recognized and he is a pioneer in the field of women empowerment. Although this may sound to be an accommodative methodology, given the social taboos of the time, he could safely wade through the rigid social structures which were significantly influenced by the religious systems of the place and their Sacred Scriptures.

Chavara's initiatives of human empowerment in the nineteenth century Kerala were unparalleled both in the ecclesial and secular spheres. For example, (1) starting the Sanskrit school at Mannanam, attended by an unconventional group of students, (2) admitting members of the marginalized communities into the Christian fold, though it was resisted by many traditional Christians, which, later, also unfortunately led to the creation of an 'exclusive ecclesia', contradictory as it was, for this

community, and (3) leading from the front in establishing the first indigenous convent for Sisters along with a boarding house for the grooming and education of young girls, which together realized not only empowerment of themselves, but also became the herald of empowered womanhood across the country, especially within the Catholic community in Kerala, etc., opened up the possibilities for the blossoming of humanity, particularly of women and other marginalized classes, in an unprecedented manner.

## **6. Syro-Malabar Church 'A Nursery' of Religious Vocation**

Chavara was an instrument in the hands of God for bringing up religious life for men and women in the Malabar Church. Saju Chakalal has observed that following the establishment of the first indigenous convent at Koonammavu (1866), many convents and religious congregations were founded in Kerala, which enabled the Kerala Catholic Church to offer quality mission services across Kerala and, in addition, to send out innumerable number of missionary sisters to various parts of India and other countries. Indeed, as far as those who reach out to the missions across the globe, we know that their services are well recognized by the ecclesial bodies and leadership for their availability, particularly for their generous Christian commitment and quality services offered in remote locations.

The consecrated women religious from Kerala have made a mark in establishing and administering a number of institutions, particularly in the area of education and healthcare, that continue to contribute significantly to the enhancement of the common good of the society; naturally,

they also receive better recognition for their services from the civic authorities.<sup>23</sup>

Kerala has become the nursery of vocations to priesthood and consecrated life. There was a flow of boys and girls to many national and international religious institutes of both men and of women. Many boys joined various dioceses of India and abroad and they got ordained as priests as well as bishops and ministered other individual churches, namely, the Latin church and Syro-Malankara church.

The *Jnanapiyusham*, the first book printed at Mannanam press was a prayer book, which contained many personal prayers and family prayers. This book played a significant role in promoting the culture of daily family prayer among the Saint Thomas Christians, which in turn nurtured the seed of vocation in the children. In his *Chavarul*, Chavara's instruction to the parents to give freedom to their children to choose their vocation remained as an added encouragement for the increase of vocation. Moreover, schools attached to parish churches and convents facilitated the remarkable phenomenon of surplus religious vocation in Kerala.

Chavara was a genuine prophet who stood for revolutionary changes in the ecclesial as well as social realms; he denounced unhealthy and oppressive structures and practices of the times and called for a necessary return to social, spiritual, and moral values. Above all, he was a caring father for all and a symbol of God's love for the people seeking an acceptable life for themselves. Chavara

---

<sup>23</sup> Saju Chakalalal, "Presentation" in Jossy, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, pp. xxi-xxii.

lived at a time, in the nineteenth century, when our society was passing through a period of intense depression and gloom because of the rigid and cruel caste system that existed in Kerala. Regarding education, Chavara was strongly convinced that it has the potential to transform people and the world. It is the absence or lack of educational initiatives that has caused humanity to lose its sense of fraternity and respect for the environment, to become enclosed in selfishness and to practice a culture of waste. This is an intolerable situation that must be reversed. In this sense, education is a force for liberation.

By 1867 the total number of schools, in the parishes of Saint Thomas Christians, which came to exist through Chavara's ingenuity and coordinating efforts with his confreres as well as parish priests of the Syro-Malabar church reached about 200.

With the inauguration of a religious institute for women in 1866 and a boarding house for girls in 1867 at Koonammavu, Chavara created a great opening for the formal education of girls and women and their training in handicrafts. He was successful in leading a whole community of women in this direction. It is impossible for us to get a full picture of the oppositions and criticisms he would have faced for giving education for the downtrodden, women and the marginalized in the society. He would have certainly faced antagonism against the move both from a male-dominated society, which was also largely Hindu. The Shastras and the Sacred Books of the Hindus did not support independence and self-reliance of women. He struggled uncompromisingly to make the society united by liberating the people from the evil customs they followed. He decided to follow the value system of Jesus,

namely, love for the marginalized. Chavara, thus, became a trailblazer for the Kingdom values.

We have no evidence of baptising and educating the Pulayas and other backward communities by the Syrian church before the daring step taken by Chavara to baptise and educate them. He opened a school for them in 1864. At this time, Sri Narayana Guru, was only an eight year old boy. Then how can he be called the pioneer social reformer of Kerala? Another thing is to be noted that he gave leadership for the development of his own community, whereas Chavara's empowerment programmes meant for all the downtrodden of the society. It is sad to note that while Sri Narayana Guru is celebrated as a social renaissance leader from Kerala, Chavara is not given due recognition in this field.

It is also important to note that without Chavara's vision and contributions, Kerala society and the church in Kerala would have dwarfed itself, that it was he, who made the Church fulfill its social mission - which was not happening, at least in an organized manner - among the Christians in Kerala in general, and among the Syro-Malabar Christians in particular. He was a pastor, a shepherd, in its true sense, who had the qualities of mercy, forgiveness, farsightedness and suchlike.

It is my firm conviction that it was Saint Chavara, who made it possible for the Malabar Church to stand up against injustices by way of his teachings and actions. Our ecclesial community has a new identity of true Christian witness through the contributions of Chavara. Being an ambassador of peace and harmony he extended his unique and outstanding leadership in the spiritual, pastoral, and doctrinal realms in the Syro-Malabar Church.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 1. Primary Sources

#### i) Archival Sources

**ACO** (Archives of the Congregation of the Oriental Churches, Rome).

ACO., *Scritt. rif. nei Congressi Chaldei* (1862-1866) f.114.

ACO., *Ponenze* 1865, ff. 687-690.

ACO., *Ponenze* 1873, ff. 673-677.

ACO., *Ponenze* 1877 ff. 593-637, Persico Report.

ACO, *Scrit. rif. Malaba.*, vol.2 f. 663v.

ACO., *Scrit. rif. nei Congressi Malabaresse* (1878-1889) ff. 1158-1178.

**AGOCD** (Archives of the Generalate of the OCD, Rome).

AGOCD., *Registro delle Cose*, 362; 181c.

AGOCD., *Stato delle Missioni Estere dell'Ordine de Carmelitani Scalzi nel 1863*, 448r, 448v. *Indie Orientali Costa Malabarica*.

AGOCD., *Plut.35e*. Letter of Monsignor Baccinelli to the Provincials, Priors and Religious of the Carmelite Order, dated 29 June 1860.

**AST** (Archives of Saint Teresa Convent, Koonammavu)

AST., Letter written on 8 April 1882 by some women of Koonammavu, thanking Signora Marchioness Fanny Anguissola Viscouti.

**APF** (Archives of the Propaganda Fide, Rome)

APF., *Indie Orientali* 1859-1861, Vol.17, ff. 1420-1421.

### **ASJM (Archives of Saint Joseph Monastery, Mannanam)**

ASJM., Parappuram, *Diary* [Malayalam MSS].

ASJM., *Mannanam Nalagamam*, vol.3 [Malayalam MSS] (1864-1872).

ASJM., *Mannanam Nalagamam*, vol.4 [Malayalam MSS] (1873-1892).

ASJM., Archives of the St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam; Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum (P. N. 1174), Changanacherren. Seu Verapolitana, Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Cyriaci Eliae Chavara, Positio super introduction Causae et super virtutibus, Romae 1977.

ASJM., Appointment Letter of Monsignor Francis Xavier on 16 February 1844.

ASJM., Letter of Vicar Apostolic Ludovic Martini, 8 January 1849.

ASJM., *Palakunnel Valiachante Nalagamam*.

ASJM., *Alochana*, Book of Consultation of the Monastery at Mannanam, 1864-1871 (MSS).

ASJM, Chandy Kattakayam, *Diary* (Malayalam, MSS).

### **ADV (Archives of the Diocese of Varapuzha)**

ADV., Decree of Appointment of Fr Chandy Kattakayam, Superior of Mannanam monastery as a Deputy.

ADV., Leonard Mellano, ഇസ്കോള ക്രമത്തിനു അനുബന്ധമായ പരസ്യ കൽപന, കുനമ്മാവ്: (1872).



## ii) Books

- Beccaro Leopold, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, trans. Lucas Vithuvattical, Mannanam: Saint Joseph's Monastery, 2003.
- Beccaro Leopold, *Leopold Missionariyude Kathukal*, ed., Jossy, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2010.
- Beccaro Leopold, *Letters of Leopold Missionariy*, ed., Jossy, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2023.
- Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, Volume 1: Chronicles*, trans., P.J. Thomas, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 1990.
- Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, Volume II: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasathasia's Martyrdom*, trans., Mary Leo, Mannanam, The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 1990.
- Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, Volume III: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, trans., Jose Chittilappilly, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 1990.
- Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, Volume IV: Letters*, ed., Panthaplakal Thomas & Sr Jossy, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2010.
- Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, Volume IV: Letters*, Tr., Keemattom Augustine, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2020.
- Chronicles of Koonammaavu Convent*, Volumes 1&2. ed., Jossy, Aluva: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2008

### iii) Church Documents

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Virgin Mary in the Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*, Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1988.

Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life – Congregation for Bishops, *Mutuae Relationes*. Directives for the mutual relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church (14 May 1978).

Flannery Austin, trans., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, Mumbai: St Pauls Publications, 1999.

Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2016.

Francis, *Christus Vivit*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2019.

Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2013.

Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2018.

Francis, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2020.

John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1990.

John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1995.

John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42 (AAS 74: 134).

John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1994.

John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1995.

John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1988.

John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1987.

John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2002.

John Paul II, *Sollicitudinei socialis*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1987.

John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, Encyclical Letter, 1963.

Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 15 May 1891, AAS XI (1892), 97-144.

Paul II, *Address to Participants in the International Forum on Active Aging*, 5 (AAS 72: 1035).

Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1999.

Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Ouadragesimo Anno*, AAS 23 (1931) 13, 44.

United States Catholic Conference, ed., *Pope John Paul II on the Genius of Women*, Washington D.C., 1997.

## **2. Secondary Sources**

Bellenzier Garutti Maria Teresa, "The Identity of Women and Men according to the Teaching of the Church" in *Men and Women Diversity and Mutual Complementarity*, Bangalore: NBCLC Publication, 2006, pp. 83-108.

Bernard of St Thomas, *Mar Thoma Christianikal*, vol. 1, Palai, 1916.

Bernard Thoma, *Malayalathile Karmelitha Moonnamsabhayude Charithram*, Mannanam: St Joseph's Monastery, 1980.

C.B Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1960.

CBCI Commission for Women, *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India*, New Delhi: Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, 2010.

C. N. Somarajan, "Foundations of Kerala Society and Politics," *Journal of Kerala Studies* 15 (March-September 1988), 105-120.

Calvert-Koyzis Nancy and Heather Weir, ed., *Breaking Boundaries: Female Biblical Interpreters Who Challenged the Status Quo*, London and New York, T&T Clark, 2010.

Chackalackal Saju, *Igniting the Minds to Transform the Society: "Legacy of K.E. Chavara for Innovative and Inclusive Education" and Other Essays on Education*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2013.

Chacko K. C. *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: St Joseph's Monastery, 1986.

Cherian Mary, "Information and Communication Technology for Women Empowerment" in M.R. Biju, ed., *Women's Empowerment: Politics and Policies*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2006.

Cleopatra, "Blessed Chavara's Vision and Action for the Enlightenment of Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," *Herald of the East*, 44-48.

Cyril A., SJ, "Human Rights Education an effective weapon for creating Social Transformative Culture," *The New Leader*, June 1-15, 2018, pp. 10-13.

Daly Mary, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 1968.

Daly Mary, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

D'Souza Philomena, *Woman Icon of Liberation*, Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2005.

Elizabeth Johnson, Fiorenza Elizabeth Schüssler, "Word, Spirit and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities" in Ruether Rose Mary & Eleanor McLaughlin, ed., *Women of Spirit Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, New York, 1979, pp. 30-70.

Fiorenza Elizabeth Schüssler, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, New York: Crossroad, 1983.

Fowler James, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.

Gambero Luigi, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church. The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999.

Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, St Loius: Herder, 1954.

Gulati Leela, Ramalingam, and I. S. Gulati, *Gender Profile, Kerala: Looking Back into History*, New Delhi: Royal Netherlands Embassy, 2000.

Hickey James Cardinal, *Mary at the Foot of the Cross. Teacher and Example of Holiness*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988.

I C Chacko, *Mar Louis Pazheparampil Jeevithavum Kalavum*, Thiruvananthapuram: M.M. Varkey, 1937.

Josy, *Fostering Feminine Genius*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

Josy, & Ann Jose, ed., *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High*, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2022.

Josy & Thomas Kochumuttom, *Dream Fulfilled Blessed Chavara and the Foundation of CMC*, Ghaziabad: CMC Pushparam, 2005.

Josy, *Malabarinte Manassarinja Mahamissionary, Fr Leopold Beccaro*, Dehradun: CMC Pushparam Publications, 2023.

K C Chacko, *Blessed Father Kuriakos Elias Chavara*. Ernakulam: The Vice- Postulator, Cause of Fr Kuriakos Elias Chavara, 1958.

K. N. Ganesh, *Reflections on Pre-Modern Kerala*, Thrissur: Cosmo books, 2016, 263.

Kalappura S. "Spiritual Compositions of Chavara: Poetry Powered with Hope", *Herald of the East* 12, 1 (2016), 45-63.

- Kalluveetil P. and Kochappilly P., eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004.
- Kanjiramattathil Joseph, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1986.
- Kochumuttam Thomas, *The Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017.
- Longer Ending of Mark,” in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, vol. 63, April (2012), 106-124.
- Longkumer Bendanglemla, “Struggle for Gender Justice: Women Rights and Child Rights in India” *New Life Theological Journal*, Vol.8 no.2 (July-Dec. 2008): 76-83.
- Lorraine Buck P., “Voluntary Martyrdom Revisited,” in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, vol. 63, April (2012), 125-135.
- Mampra Thomas, *Chavara Retreat*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2018.
- Mangatt George, *Jesus the Good News*, Kottayam: Pontifical Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1998.
- Mannarathara John, ed., *Chavarayachan: Kerala Adhunikathvathinte Shilpi*, Kozhikode: Mathrubhumi Books, 2014.
- Mannarathara John, ed., *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015.
- Mannarathara John, ed., *Light on the Burnt Horizon: Chavara, the Reformer Saint*, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2017.

- Maria Navya, *Empowered Womanhood*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014.
- Mateer Samuel, "The Paraya Caste in Travancore," *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Britain and Ireland* (1884), 180-190.
- Menon A. Shreedharan, *Kerala Charithra Shilpikal*, Kottayam: D.C. Books, 2011.
- Menon Padmanabha, *Kerala Charithram*, vol. II, Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1937.
- Moloney Francis J., *Woman First among the Faithful*, Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1984.
- Moloney Francis J., *Disciples and Prophets: A Biblical Model for the Religious Life*, London: Darton Longmann & Todd, 1980.
- Moltmann-Wandel E., *The Women around Jesus: Reflections on Authentic Personhood*, London: SCM Press, 1982.
- Mortley R., *Womanhood: The Feminine in Ancient Hellenism, Gnosticism, Christianity and Islam*, Sydney: Delacroix, 1981.
- Mundadan M., *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008.
- Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.
- Munro W., "Women Disciples in Mark?", *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982), pp. 225-241.



- P. Bhaskaranunni, പത്തൊമ്പതാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിലെ കേരളം, തൃശ്ശൂർ: കേരള സാഹിത്യ അക്കാദമി, 2012.
- P.K. Gopalakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitham* (Malayalam), Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala State Bhasha Institute, 2010.
- Palathara, ed. *Stapakapithakanmar*, Mannanam: St Josephs Monastery, 1995.
- Pallath Paul, Tr., *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the St Thomas Christians in 1867 Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?* Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018.
- Parappally Jacob, "Marian Images and Devotions through the Ages" in R K Samy Ed., *Mary in our Search for Fullness of Life*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 2006.
- Pathrapankal Joseph, "The Prophetic Personality of Blessed Chavara" *Herald of the East* 8, 1 (2006), 5-28.
- Pinto Jeannette, *The Indian Widow from Victim to Victor*, Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2003.
- Plathottam V., *Malankara Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, Mannanam, St Joseph's Monastery, 1939.
- Plathottam V., *The Life of the Servant of God, Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: St Josephs Monastery, 1939.
- Puthenangady Paul, "A Relevant Vision for the Church in India", in Kuruvilla Pandikattu, Rosario Rocha, eds. *Bend without Fear Hopes and Possibilities for an Indian Church*, Delhi: ISPCK, and Pune: Jnanadeepa Vidyapeeth, 2003, 1-18.

Pyngot Charles, *Kerala Sabha Pathonpatham Nootandil (Meurinte Kathukal)*, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 1996.

Riley Maria, *In God's Image*, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1985.

Ruether Rosemary Radford, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1983.

Ruether Rose Mary Radford & Eleanor McLaughlin, ed., *Women of Spirit Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, New York, 1979.

Saldhana Virginia, "Christian Discipleship: Women's Perspective" Thomas D'Sa, ed., *The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 2005.

Saldhana Virginia, *Woman Image of God*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2005.

Schnackenburg R. *The Gospel according to St John, 3 vols.*, Burns & Oates/New York: Crossroad, 1968-1982.

Sebastian Joyce, "Make India Safe for Women", *Indian Currents* vol. xxx Issue No. 28, 09 - 15 July 2018, pp. 28-29.

Stagg E. and Stagg F., *Woman in the World of Jesus*, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1978.

Stein Edith, *The Collected works of Edith Stein, Vol. II, Essays on Woman*, ed., Gelber L. and Romaeus Leuven, Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing Centre, 1998.

Tavard G. H., *Woman in Christian Tradition*, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973.

- Tetlow E.M., *Women and Ministry in the New Testament*, New York: Paulist Press, 1980.
- Thapan Meenakshi, *Living the Body: Embodiment, Womanhood and Identity in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Sage, 2009.
- T. K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, vol. 1, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1940.
- Tripathi Chandra Bali, Chandra Mauli Mani Trans. *The Evolution of Ideals in Indian Society*, Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2005.
- Thundathil Mathew, tr., *Father Leopold Beccaro OCD, Theresian Missionary (1837-1914)*, Trivandrum: CIPH, 2014.
- Urumpackal Alex Paul, *Vocations in India, the Religious Women*, vol.1. Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1986.
- V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol.I, Thiruvananthapuram: Gazetteers Department, Kerala Council for Historical research, 1999.
- Venkataraman R., "Fr Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at its Best" Speech delivered at Thiruvananthapuram, on 20 December 1987, releasing the commemorative stamp. *Herald of the East*, vol.1 no.1, (1991), 7-11.
- Yasas Frances Maria & Mehta Vera, ed., *Exploring Feminist Visions*, Pune: Streevani/Ishvani Kendra, 1990.
- Zacharia Scaria, ed., *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*, Hosanna Mount: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1994.

## Website

- <https://zenit.org/articles/angelus-address-on-the-feast-of-the-holy-family-of-nazareth-full-text/>. Accessed on 31 December 2019.
- <https://mattersindia.com/2020/08/why-activists-fight-for-christian-and-muslim-dalits/>
- Nandela, Krishan, "Gandhi on women's empowerment" see [www.mkgandhi.org/articles/krishnannandela.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/krishnannandela.htm).
- Pinkumani Barman, "Gandhi and His Vision for Women Empowerment" <http://www.caesjournals.org/sp/uploads/IJBASS-2013-012.pdf>.
- <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0517/p12/legn.html>.
- [www.hindustantimes.com/education/international-literacy-day-2020-kerala-most-literate-state-in-india](http://www.hindustantimes.com/education/international-literacy-day-2020-kerala-most-literate-state-in-india).