

Igniting the Minds: Legacy of Ke Chavara and CMI Institutions

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Abstract

Human civilization and empowerment is possible only with education. There are some who have contributed greatly to ignite the young minds for the transformation of the society. Definitely, Kuriakose Elias Chavara played a vital role in education of masses starting from Kerala and later spreading to different parts of India through the congregation he founded. This article elaborately and clearly presents the contribution made by CMI congregation by its innovative, inclusive, and proactive vision, mission, and strategies to the society through the medium of education. This explains how the tireless works done by the congregation through the diverse educational and ecclesiastical institutions brought about social transformation and empowerment.

Keywords: CMI Congregation, Integral Development, Humanization, Empowerment

India is a land that has always engaged in deeper search for the attainment of truth and transformation in the same. Among the Rishis of the old, we come across with an eternal longing for ongoing transformation, an unceasing and affirmative search for the real, a move towards light, and a quest to attain the life eternal. All these yearnings are immortalized in the chant of India:

Asatoma sat gamaya / Tamasoma jyotir gamaya

Mrtyorma amrtam gamaya / Om Santi, Santi, Santi!

Indeed, this quest succinctly brings to us the importance of education and other human transformative processes. Although such a noble and forceful quest was inherently part of India in general and Kerala in particular, it is sad to know that formally pursuing this quest was restricted to certain classes of people, whose eligibility for the attainment of knowledge was exclusively based on birth. Moreover, the religio-political structures were so rigid that the scriptural justification for the enforcement of such inhuman religious and legal injunctions deprived the people of their natural development and evolution along with the rest of the world, which, in turn, crippled the social and cultural progress of the people of India. Such crippled and crippling social structures, even if backed up by the religious authorities, are certainly unjust and bound to be pulled down. As the horizon of human development in the Kerala society of the nineteenth century was darkening, the limited openings that were available to certain individuals like Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871), Chattampi Swamikal (1854-1924), Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928), and Ayyamkali (1866-1941) paved the way for personal

and societal transformation through the imparting of basic education to all and various other programmes for social uplift.¹

K. E. Chavara was a unique personality both by secular and religious parameters. More than the institutional establishments enveloping the different realms of society, the vision he has bequeathed to the later generations is noble and worthy of emulation. He was a man of prophetic vision which challenged him and his contemporaries to respond to the ills of the time; despite the mounting difficulties, he proactively responded to those challenges by letting himself and all that he could gather together to be spent for the greater good of the society. Moreover, his prophetic vision was equally matched with his practical mission, which ultimately made him an instrument of personal and social transformation. Thus, his life and mission stand out from the rest, as they were “revolutionary in concept and application.”²

Chavara was not a mere social reformer. To the core he was an Indian *niṣkāmi* whose consciousness was firmly established in God experience which prompted him to involve in supporting and enhancing the lives of his fellow human beings, especially of those who were side-tracked by the then existing socio-political structures. R. Venkataraman, the former President of India, has remarked on the life of Chavara in the following words: “A mystic, he could also be an engine of activity. Capable of withdrawing into his innermost being, 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.”³ As a seer rooted in a universalizing faith experience, his strategies for reformation of Indian society emerged out of his firm conviction that the hapless masses must be supported and accompanied in uplifting their own human lives. Not only he trusted in God in everything he did, but was ready to sacrifice himself and all that was at his disposal for the good of the people around him, without expecting anything in return. It is this *niṣkāmakarma* practised by Chavara that makes him a social reformer par excellence, especially in the context of the nineteenth century Kerala. *Niṣkāmakarma* is seen only in the lives of those who have practised yogic *sādhana* climaxing in total kenosis (self-giving), whereby union between themselves and the divine, between themselves and the others, and between

¹ Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born on 10 February 1805 at Kainakary, a tiny village near Alleppy, as the youngest son of Kuriakose Chavara and Mary Thoppil. After his initiation in a local village school (*kalari*) under the guidance of a teacher (*āśān*), in 1818, Kuriakose was admitted to the Pallippuram seminary, run by Father Thomas Palackal, to undergo training necessary for ordination as a Catholic priest. After a period of training and study extended over eleven years, in 1892, he was ordained priest by Monsignor Aurelius Stabilini, interim Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. After his initial service in different parish churches and assistance at the Pallippuram seminary, young Kuriakose joined Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, two senior priests, in founding the first indigenous religious congregation for men, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate by laying the foundation stone of the first house in Mannanam on 11 May 1831. Chavara, along with ten others, formally constituted the religious community on 8 December 1855; he assumed the office of the superior general of the community, which he had occupied till his death on 3 January 1871. He had founded communities of this religious congregation at six different places in Kerala, all of which had been opened up on the request and support of the people from the localities.

² Justin, “Foreword” in Biju Tharanyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bhopal: Navchetana, 2004, 3.

³ R. Venkataraman, “Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at Its Best” in *The Lord of Heaven and Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal*, CMI, eds. Paul Kalluveetil and Paulachan Kochappilly, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 86.

themselves and the entire creation is attained. Niṣkāmakarma yoga is not a state of withdrawal from the world and inaction, but an impelling inner call to involve in integral action to transmit the wholeness experienced in one's own inner self to the other, be it human or any other element in creation, so that personal and social transformation could be effected.

Abdul Kalam has stated in his book, *Ignited Minds: Unleashing the Power within India* that "when we believe in our goals, that what we dream of can become reality, results will begin to follow."⁴ It is here that the minds are ignited. The right ignition of imagination and all other human powers that are facilitated by the educational endeavours would propel the right mindset and right action can open the whole new horizon of human development and social transformation. Chavara not only dreamt of a society liberated from the evils perpetuated by vested interests, but also tried hard to abolish such evils by way of positive involvement in the form of education, print media, starting of centres for the care of the sick and old, etc. The ignition of the Spirit that Chavara had in his personal life turned out to be the power to ignite many, especially the members of the CMI and CMC congregations in the Syro-Malabar Church of India.

Ideally, education is a process that should ignite the minds of those who participate in the process, which, in turn, should result in personal as well as social transformation. These transformations depend very much on the nature and quality of the education imparted in any society, without disregarding any particular group of people based on caste, colour, gender, etc. Placed in the context of the nineteenth century Kerala, Kuriakose Elias Chavara – a visionary and an activist, a religious and an administrator, a charismatic leader and a true Christian disciple – could initiate unparalleled personal and social transformation through both formal and non-formal education by starting schools and other institutions. The social uplift that he ignited in the Kerala society has far reaching and lasting impact so much so that those initiatives are continued and perfected by the CMI and CMC institutions that he has started. The content, style, and the dynamics that were put in place by the educational initiatives of K. E. Chavara and, later, by the various educational institutions established and maintained across India by the members of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) are conspicuously innovative and inclusive so much so that they have not only created ever vibrant ripples in the social and cultural scenario of India, but continue to be catalysts for a better, dynamic, and all-inclusive social transformation of India.

Common Good of the People and the CMI Foundation

One of the agendas of beginning the monastic life – as Chavara shared it with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara – was to withdraw from the active life of the world; in fact, he had a natural affinity for asceticism and contemplation. As it had turned out, however, the plan was altered. The reply from the then bishop is telling: "We have only

⁴ A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, *Igniting Minds: Unleashing the Power within India*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002, Preface.

a handful of priests like you to guide the people of God in proper way and if you go for contemplative monastic life who will take care of them? If you prefer going for monastic life to teaching the people, start a monastery that may benefit all.”⁵ This statement was a clarification of the mission that Chavara and his confreres would undertake in the course of time, initiated through the channels opened up by the CMI Catholic religious fraternity, the first of its kind started in India. Although he had an ardent desire to cherish the personal call, the discernment of the need of the people made Chavara (along with Palackal and Porukara) to engage himself wholeheartedly in the service of the society at large, reaching out to all, including the downtrodden and marginalized. As it is captured by his biographer, K. C. Chacko, “... he [Chavara] withdrew from the world so as to permeate it more forcibly.”⁶ A. M. Mundadan, a renowned Church historian, elaborates it further: “He retired from the world not because he was afraid of it, or tired of it, or disliked it, or belittled it, but because he wanted to leaven the dough, to educate and to reform the sons and daughters of God, so that they became really His children. With a singleness of purpose he tried all through his life to equip himself with knowledge, wisdom and virtue and disseminate them to his fellow religious, priests, nuns and the laity at large.”⁷

The initial inspiration to found a monastery, as it is recorded in the Chronicles that Chavara had written, is referred to as a quest to establish a Darśanaveedu,⁸ a house of vision, or a house that facilitates profounder experience or vision of reality, the ultimate and the manifest. Although its primary significance is spiritual with a specific Indian-Christian content, the very name seminally captures the various missions that were to become prominent in the life of Chavara and, subsequently, the CMI community and its institutions. The establishment of the first indigenous religious congregation in India was not only keen on the spiritual fervour and the vision of the divine that would transform their personal spiritual life; equally significant was the intention of Chavara and other founders to be available for the uplift of the society through the vision that they had acquired through their spiritual sādhanā. In fact, the vision was fundamentally Christian, yet universally open and contextually all-embracing. Keeping in mind the noble Indian worldview of vasudaiva kuruṅakam (universal brotherhood), the CMI institutions turned out to be facilitators of a new vision in the Kerala society (and gradually the larger Indian society) of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that imparted a vision to everyone associated with them so much so that everyone was made to be part and parcel of their programme, be it religious or secular, preaching or teaching. The darśan imbibed by the members of the CMI, in turn, inspired all those who came in contact with

⁵ Jacob Kaniyanthara, *History of the Foundation of Mannanam Monastery* (Malayalam), 1846, 6; emphasis added.

⁶ K. C. Chacko, *Blessed Father Kuriackos Elias Chavara*, p. 61.

⁷ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 345.

⁸ Chavara, *Chavarayachante Sampoorṇa Kruthikal* (Collected Works of Blessed Chavara), vol. 1: (*Nalagamangal*) The Chronicles, Cochin: CMI Prior General, 1981, 1: “Seeing the considerable good had not been done in Kerala due to the absence of a tapas Bhavan (house of penance) even for priests, he desired to start a *darsanaveedu* at least for priests.” (Translation from Thomas Panthapalackal, “The Ecclesial Dimension in Chavara’s Endeavours” in *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 195).

them through the various institutions. A statement in the Cochin Census Report 1901 made by Shankara Menon is worth noting in this regard: "The Christians, who form one-fourth of the [Kerala] State are better off in education than the members of other communities. As a school is attached to every church, the children of this community get better opportunities to attend school. In these schools, they are taught to read and write; they also get chance to study certain lessons in the Bible. The efforts of the missionaries, especially of the indigenous priests, need special mention. Moreover, the services they render in the area of primary education are very special and noteworthy."⁹ It is to be remembered that Chavara insisted that all children, irrespective of religion or caste, should be admitted to these schools, though attached to churches. Church was chosen as the centre of education by Chavara as it was the ideal place to meet and teach, and also because, as the Vicar General of the Syrian Catholic community, he had no political power to issue commands to the public, but only ecclesiastical power over the Christian faithful, which he conscientiously exercised for the welfare of the people.

A Holistic Approach to Education

Chavara was an educationist with a vision for the blending of the classical with the modern. As he started to establish educational institutions, he paid attention to the fact that the children should not only be initiated into the modern Malayalam language, but also into Sanskrit and Tamil. While Tamil was taught in the ordinary education system of the day,¹⁰ Sanskrit was not accessible to many, especially to those who belonged to the non-Hindu communities and the marginalized peoples. It is in this context that Chavara conceives of the necessity of instructing the students in Sanskrit and started a Sanskrit school in Mannanam. Apart from the high social status that is attached to the learning of Sanskrit, Chavara realized that it would initiate the children into the age old wisdom of the land, which, in turn, would also mould and refine their character. His quest for the modern education did not immediately catch up with English education, as, in the given circumstances, English was almost invariably associated with the Protestant missionaries attached to the British colonial rule. Moreover, getting access to trained personnel in English also was almost impossible.¹¹ However, in 1885, the quest of Chavara to blend the ancient learning with the modern is found realized with the starting of a Catholic English High School at Mannanam by his successors.¹²

⁹ Shankara Menon, Kochin Census Report, 1901, cited in Kokkattu, *Vazhthappetta Chavarayachante Dalit Darsanam*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁰ It was known as *Kalari*, i.e., a school with a single teacher, along the tradition of Gurukulam.

¹¹ Officially, the Catholics belonging to the Syrian tradition were forbidden by the ecclesiastical authorities of the Diocese of Verapoly to seek any assistance or support in education from any other community. This insistence barred the Syrian Catholics from taking advantage of the English education that was being imparted by the English missionaries.

¹² The first CMI English private school was started in 1874, which was later developed into a full-fledged high school in 1885. See Honere, "Secondary and Higher Education in Catholic Malabar" (article published originally in 1924), Kuriachan Puthukkattil, KCSL *Vidyabhyasa Rangathe Prakasa Gopuram*, Changanacherry, 1994, 189. (cited in Chennattussery, "CMI Congregation and the Syro-Malabar Church" in CMI, eds. P. Kochappilly, et al., Kottayam: Denha Services, 2011, 314).

By starting a Sanskrit school, Chavara made sure that the marginalized of the society, especially those from the Dalit communities, had access to letters and culture that were considered to be the sole domain of the high caste people. At a time when untouchability was so widespread and education was the exclusive birthright of the upper castes, it was practically impossible for the children of the lower castes to get admitted to schools. Considering these as children of God and understanding their prerogative for education, Chavara strenuously struggled for their uplift. One of the most rewarding initiatives that he had put in place was keeping the schools accessible to all sections of the society. This was a revolutionary step towards the elimination of not only poverty, but also untouchability and discrimination. In fact, understanding the dynamics of the life of the poor people from the lower strata of the society, especially the fact that the children, instead of giving access to education, were absorbed into the agricultural labour, Chavara strategically put in place a midday meal scheme for the school children.¹³ The strategy was such that he distributed not only the meal but also the required books and clothing to those who regularly attended the school. Against the background of economic backwardness of many people in the nineteenth century Kerala, this was a move in the right direction, as Chavara could mobilize children from the nearby villages to regularly attend the schools. If Kerala could make an impact in the arena of primary and secondary education, later in the twentieth century, the innovative steps, including the midday meal scheme, of Chavara must be recognized as significant milestones.

In his capacity as the Vicar General of the Diocese of Verapoly (Kerala), in 1865, Chavara was instrumental in issuing an innovative and epoch-making directive to all Catholic parishes by the then Archbishop Barnadenos to start schools attached to every church. It is from this order and the subsequent practice that the very word *Pallikudam* – having a school attached to the church – has probably evolved.¹⁴ It was insisted in this mandate that if the school is not opened under the parish church, the latter would be closed down. This was a strategic instruction to channelize the resources of the parish community to put in place the required facilities to run schools. Had it not been for this insistent move from Chavara, the schools that came up on most of the church premises – mostly in the rural villages of Kerala – would not have been a reality; then, naturally, the educational matrix of Kerala, which now boasts of full literacy, would have been

¹³ Chavara was a man of practical sense. He believed that a noble cause would not suffer due to the lack of funds. With the support of certain generous Catholics, he purchased some paddy fields near the St. Joseph's Monastery in Mannanam with a view to cultivate rice and other agricultural products, which would in turn be the source not only for the midday meal, but also to procure the necessary educational assistance, including the books and clothing.

¹⁴ Valerian C. D., *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam or Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, Mannanam, 1938, 137. Chathamparampil and Kureethara write: "The order that the churches that do not follow the instructions would be closed down, had salutary impact in creating a revolutionary change in the academic hemisphere. That circular which was written by Fr. Chavara in his own hand, was signed with the official seal by Archbishop Bernardino. Fr. Chavara did not remain complacent after getting the circular issued. He delegated the members of his Congregation to ensure the implementation of the order and to energize educational activities. Each monastery was to oversee these activities of the parish churches in its neighbourhood..." Chathamparampil and Kureethara, "Unique Contributions of Blessed Chavara in Educating the Kerala Society," p.125.

totally different. If the State of Kerala has such a glorious achievement in the field of formal education, the contribution of the Catholic Church, which was moved into the field of education by Chavara, is very significant.¹⁵

Chavara also wrote about the importance of education in the life of any individual and the necessity of due care in monitoring the progress as follows: "When children reach the age of discretion, they should be sent to school. Besides, the parents should enquire about their studies and their friendship. On Sundays, what they had studied in the previous week is to be examined."¹⁶ Thus, in the educational policy of Chavara, teaching the youngsters was not only the responsibility of the teachers, but equally a serious responsibility of the parents and the senior members of the family. These instructions are of greater value when we realize the fact that most of those who sent students to schools at that time were not necessarily educated; even those who were educated were mostly engaged in agriculture. Given this context, Chavara's instructions become really significant, especially as they were the most practical insistences which go hand-in-hand with his foundation of schools and other institutions for the common good of the society. It was an invitation and insistence to the parents and elders of the family to personally accompany the children at home as they were instructed in schools. The collaboration between parents and teachers that Chavara visualized is, ideally speaking, the best suited module for effective learning and social upbringing of children.

In his "Testament of a Loving Father" (a letter of 1868, addressed to the people of Kainakari, his hometown or village), Chavara has given direction not only on family life and religious observance, but has given also insightful directives regarding education. In view of the personality development of children, he has proposed that from their childhood, they must be given freedom and recognition; at the same time, he maintained that freedom is not licentiousness but the exercise of personal discretion and choice with an understanding of the responsibility. Further, Chavara insisted that, as they mature in age, they should be given the right to choose their own vocation or status of life; he went one step further in instructing that the youngsters should be free to select their own life partner.¹⁷ The revolutionary character of these instructions, especially the aspect of personal freedom and, finally, the choice of life partner, would be better appreciated only when we understand that the rule of the day even in the twenty-first century Kerala - without caste or creed difference - is arranged marriages. While insisting on the proper education and grooming of the children, Chavara did realize the fact that they could be developed as independent and self-reliant persons only if they are given the chance to exercise their choices; indeed, he wanted the parents and elders of the family to accompany them in making them stand on their feet. Truly, the approach

¹⁵ It is due to the visible and stable success of his educational enterprises that his portrait is exhibited in the Kerala Legislative Assembly Hall in Thiruvananthapuram.

¹⁶ Chavara, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," §6, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. 4: The Letters, 113 (translation altered).

¹⁷ Chavara, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," §14, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. 4: The Letters, 115.

of Chavara was holistic, aiming at the integral development of persons, the parents, teachers, and religious leaders contributing their own share at one stage or the other.

Non-Formal Education to Break the Barriers

Partnership of the Public in Education

Most of the educational institutions, in the secular or religious sphere, were started by Chavara relying on the financial and political support of the people of the locality. This is found verified starting with the first religious house in Mannanam, the foundation of the seminary in different locations, the schools started in Mannanam and Arpookkara, the printing press, and the starting of the convent in Koonammavu. As all these institutions were directly or indirectly contributing towards the uplift of the people and the transformation of the society, Chavara had no reservation in tapping the resources from those who could afford and had the goodwill to contribute towards such noble causes. This is yet another instance of informal education whereby he could not only pool the resources from the public, but conscientize them with regard to their responsibility for the common good, especially for the good of the marginalized and less privileged.

Formation of the People in Charity

To educate is not only to introduce the pupils to letters and the advanced thinking. Education is fundamentally a process of humanization, leading to personal as well as societal transformation, which caters to the wellbeing of every member of the society in an inclusive manner. Chavara had a keen mind so much so that nothing escaped his attention. Although, the mission of Chavara, as an ordained minister of the Church, had taken him far away from his native village near Alleppey, he maintained very close contact with his relatives and the people of the village. Given the context of this village, Chavara was aware of the fact that there were elderly and sick people who were not properly cared for in the families, especially due to social and economic backwardness. However, he was not ready to settle with it as if it was nothing of his concern. In view of providing for the welfare of this group of hapless people, Chavara decided to open an orphanage in his own native village, the maintenance of which was entrusted to the people.¹⁸ The home for the destitute (originally known as Upaviśāla, meaning a house of charity, and meant for the care of the destitute, sick, and dying who did not have anyone to care for them) was established in 1869 at Kainakari, his native village.

As the first institution of organized humanitarian services in Kerala, Chavara's simple but farsighted vision proposed a very simple strategy. In order to run this Upaviśāla he formed an association of laypeople, namely, "Confraternity of St. Joseph for Happy Death." Apart from the generous donations he had collected from the public to form a corpus fund for the foundation of the institution, he proposed that all families spare a

¹⁸ Chavara, "Second Letter to the People of Kainakari," in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. 4, The Letters, pp. 117-128.

handful of rice every time they cooked and the produce of one coconut tree. It was an instance of instructing the whole community with regard to their responsibility towards the downtrodden and the needy. Instead of a theoretical discourse, Chavara could impart the lesson of reaching out to the needy, despite the personal inconveniences and material difficulties, through the mechanism of running the Upaviśāla, primarily by way of their daily collaboration. According to Chavara's instruction to the people of his native village, "the day you could not do any good for others is not counted in your life."¹⁹ It is really praiseworthy to see that he could evoke a proactive social consciousness and ignite a sense of responsibility for the other among his own people by way of initiating various voluntary acts of charity.²⁰

Instruction in Religion and Formation of Goodwill

The settings of the church during the lifetime of Chavara were not very conducive for imparting a renewed consciousness. For, the churches were more attuned to be ritualistic. However, as he became involved in the affairs of the community in his capacity as a parish priest, Chavara identified that it was the best of the opportunities to instruct the faithful and to guide them to a transformed consciousness and way of life. Hence, he started the practice of preaching homilies during the masses, which was not a custom in the Kerala churches at that time. The homilies he preached were well appreciated for their Christian content and the sense of practical application in the daily life of the people. As this practice was found to be very fruitful, in the course of time, other priests also started to preach homilies. So, the Sunday services in the churches were no more an instance of mere ritualistic experience, but the best opportunity to offer instruction in religious and social value consciousness. Later, after the establishment of the monasteries, Chavara also initiated retreat preaching in parishes on an annual basis.²¹ As his confreres from the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (then, TOCD) were available, Chavara could design the retreats in different parishes in such a way that they were instances of introspection and collective decision making for the heralding of a better society.

Inclusive Education

While the prophetic vision and most of the uplifting activities initiated by the socio-religious reformers of the nineteenth century Kerala were restricted to the in-group members of the religion of the reformers, we find a total departure from this practice within the mission of Chavara. Neither his prophetic vision for a better morrow and

¹⁹ Chavara, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," §13, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. 4, The Letters, 108.

²⁰ Following the footsteps of Chavara, the CMI congregation runs the following institutions to reach out to the orphans and mentally and physically challenged persons: 2 centres for the street children, 3 centres to take care of the beggars, etc., 5 AIDS care centres, 7 homes for the aged, 7 orphanages, 9 centres for the mentally challenged, 10 centres for the physically challenged, and 20 free boardings for poor children. They also run 51 clinics and 9 hospitals in extending medical care to the needy.

²¹ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, pp. 241-243.

the innovative practical action needed for realizing the vision was restricted to the members of his own religious community, i.e., the Syro-Malabar Catholics of Kerala. Whether it is in the starting of the schools, convents, or press, the inclusive approach was a necessary characteristic of Chavara's involvement. As the children from the socially and culturally marginalized were offered a chance to be educated, Chavara facilitated not only their socio-cultural and financial uplift but also their re-integration into the mainstream of the society.

The admission policy of the schools that were opened up by Chavara or other missionaries was not restricted to the members of his community; indeed, the integral education imparted by Chavara was at the same time an inclusive one to the core, so much so that he insisted on the admission of children from backward classes, which was impossible in the then existing schools run under the auspices of the upper caste or the state government.²² The revolutionary character of Chavara's decision to admit students from all classes into the school will be better understood when we take note of the fact that he not only admitted them to the school, but even dared to offer them training in Sanskrit language (in 1846, he started a Sanskrit school in Mannanam), which was traditionally forbidden to the members of the Śūdra community and the outcastes.

In the context of the deprivation meted out to millions of low castes and outcastes, Indian Constitution has made special provisions to protect their interests in the form of reservation in educational institutions and job opportunities. Although it was an epoch-making decision made by the Indian democracy, the fact is that not many from among the low caste and outcaste could be brought to formal education. Despite the fact that many have taken advantage – and some of them undue advantage at that – of the special provisions offered by the Indian Government, even after almost six decades after the promulgation of the Indian Constitution, the government policies are yet to penetrate into the heart of the problem and enable the downtrodden and marginalized to feel respected and self-reliant. If we could place the initiatives of Chavara against this background, which he set in motion in 1846, we would realize the importance of his futuristic vision and goal-oriented practical action. His inclusive and universal outlook, inspired by Christian vision and mission, motivated him to invest whatever was at his disposal for the good of the people, especially of those who were marginalized by the inhuman socio-religious systems of the time. Indeed, while India as a nation took another one hundred years or more to develop a social consciousness that recognized the human dignity of the marginalized, Chavara and his institutions did initiate effective processes of educating the masses, without any discrimination in the name of caste or creed.

²² A. Sreedhara Menon, "A Renaissance Leader Who Walked Ahead of His Time" in Thomas Panthaplackal, *A Pear Truly Indian*, Rome: Cause of Blessed Chavara, 2005, 78; originally published in Chavarayachan (Malayalam), Kottayam: Deepika Publications, 2004.

Women Empowerment through the Foundation of Convents

The same was said to be the vision behind the initiation of the starting of the convent and the education of women heralded by the schools and boardings started under the management of the sisters. Jossy and Kochumuttom write:

It was a time when the women were largely deprived of even the basic rights of education, property inheritance, and proper clothing. They were not expected to attend even the retreats and festivals in the parishes, and the family gatherings such as Sradham, adiyantiram, and marriages; and they had no role in the process of making policies and decisions in the family, the Church and the society. Thus, the women, more especially the Syrian Catholic women, were extremely underprivileged religiously, socially, economically, and educationally. The establishment of a religious congregation for women was certainly an antidote for those socio-cultural evils affecting the women, as its subsequent history has already proved.²³

Against this background, starting the religious congregation for women, according to Chavara, had a twofold purpose, as it is evident from the chronicles of Koonammavu convent: "Besides striving for their own spiritual realization, the members of the Congregation have to teach other girls, and train them in some handicrafts."²⁴ It is clear from the original goal of founding the convent that its primary thrust included, along with the spiritual realization of the members, education, social uplift, and the wellbeing of womenfolk in the society. Indeed, starting of the convent was a powerful instrument to empower women in a multi-dimensional manner.

The subservience of women in the Indian society has its source in barring them from formal education. This remained a destructive phenomenon within the Indian society, especially owing to the practices prevailing in the Hindu community, which, in practice, was also extended to other communities as well. Forbidding formal education to any particular group of humanity not only closes the door for socio-cultural uplift but also economic independence and wellbeing. This could be found verified in the nineteenth century Kerala society, where women were mostly restricted to the chores of the household and agricultural field. All these phenomena constituted a vicious cycle so much so that freeing them from the clutches of a male chauvinistic slavery was almost impossible. In fact, lack of economic independence led to the maintenance of a brutal and unbecoming gender-based segregation which was not only socially destructive but also unproductive and backward looking for the whole Indian society.

²³ Jossy and Kochumuttom, *Dream Fulfilled: Blessed Chavara and the Foundation of CMC*, Gazhiabad: CMC Pushparam Province, 2005, p.4.

²⁴ Chavara, *Collected Works of Chavara*, vol. 1, p.195; see also Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent, 23, cited in Jossy, "Blessed Chavara and the Founding of the CMC Congregation," *Herald of the East* 6 (8 December 2004), 15. The Positio also affirms that the scope of starting the religious community for women was to train and educate girls. Positio, 131.

While some male chauvinistic seers of the past made room for the institution and maintenance of subjugation of women in the Indian society, there were some other liberated and liberating enlightened seers who adopted an all-liberating perspective in their vision and mission. Chavara was one such who wanted to put an end to the oppression and subjugation of women by the male dominated religious and secular society. The best way to set things right, as he had understood, was to provide them the opportunities for education. Given the context of Chavara's initiatives, most of which was channelized through the religious setup of the Catholic Church in which he was also an ordained minister, he spontaneously planned for the establishment of a convent.²⁵

Although the original inspiration was to provide a conducive atmosphere for the training and development of chosen women to lead a spiritual life according to the Christian tradition, by itself, it turned out to be an apt instrument and the best opportunity to provide quality education not only to those who became members of this religious society (originally started with four members, this community was divided later into two congregations and they were christened as Congregation of Mother Carmel – CMC – of the Syro-Malabar Rite and Congregation of Teresian Carmelites – CTC – of the Latin Rite), but also to a large number of young women whose care was entrusted to these trained and spiritually motivated religious women. It must be noted that the foundation of the convent turned out to be a confluence of divine and human grace, facilitating the enlightenment and integral development of the womenfolk through education. It is heartening to note that the women trained within the walls of these convents have turned out to be catalysts of social and cultural transformation of Kerala and the wider Indian society.

The educational initiatives of Chavara, blossomed through the Carmelite convents, have championed the uplift and empowering of the womenfolk setting a noble example for the rest of the society to be emulated. Indeed, the rest of the society, especially their counterparts from the majority Hindu society of Kerala as well as the Muslim community have treaded along the same path, and all these initiatives together have made such a lasting impact upon the social fabric of the Kerala society to such an extent that Kerala stands on top among all other states of Indian in the number of formally educated and self-reliant women.

Admitting students from all classes, including the backward classes, and offering chances to the girls in the school were strategic steps in Chavara's educational endeavours, as later they turned out to be conspicuously powerful in effecting social and cultural transformation and the grooming of a self-reliant group of people from among the subaltern in Kerala society.²⁶ Although the starting of the seminary (1833) and his

²⁵ The involvement of an Italian Carmelite missionary, Leopold Beccaro, was certainly important in realizing the project. While Chavara is officially acclaimed to be the founder of the CMC congregation, Beccaro is considered to be the co-founder.

²⁶ Writes J. Chirayil: "At a time when the women folk of lower castes were not permitted to cover up the upper part of their body, Fr. Chavara wanted to raise the status of women in general. For this purpose they should be educat-

high investment in this regard may be identified as primarily serving only Christian community, an extensive analysis of the impact made by those who received training in the seminary would attest to the fact that even the seminary aimed at an inclusive approach as those trained ministers were instrumental, in the course of time, in taking Chavara's prophetic vision and inclusive action to the different corners of India.

Uplifting and Empowering the Subaltern Communities

The marginalized in the society, especially the Dalit in the Indian society, must be given opportunities to redeem their own humanity and to let them experience the glory of being human before any other right or privilege is offered to them.²⁷ The most effective strategy to realize this ideal is to open up educational facilities to the members of such communities. Whether it was for training of the local hands for the administrative needs of the colonisers or the genuine concern for the betterment of the less privileged, many would attest to the fact that, historically, the opening of various educational institutions by the Christian missionaries in India paved the way for quality education accessible to the poor and the underprivileged and, consequently, the social transformation and uplift of those oppressed classes. When the missionary schools were opened mostly by the various Christian denominations in different parts of the country, there were only very few initiatives of the sort from the Catholic church of the time. This was certainly true in the Kerala context. However, as Chavara established himself as the head of the newly founded religious community, and as his acceptance was extended to the larger Christian as well as secular society, he took bold steps to open up schools attached not only to the institutions that he had established, but to attach educational institutions to every church so much so that education became the catchword among those involved in the administration of Catholic churches across Kerala. One most notable dynamism of all these schools opened up under the supervision and patronage of Chavara is the fact that they were schools which were open to pupils from all strata and all classes of the society, without discriminating against any student on the basis of class, caste, or gender. Here is the cornerstone of Chavara's innovative and inclusive vision of education, which he conceived and practised in the Kerala society of the nineteenth century, which was practically divided on the line of caste and class.²⁸

ed. He founded a religious order for women (CMC) to educate girls irrespective of caste and creed and thus help them ascend the social ladder. He wanted all the Harijans to go to school, study and equip themselves to be eligible for government services and thus come to the limelight administration. If we look back we can see that thousands and thousands of girls of lower castes and Harijans were educated together with the students of upper castes in these schools." J. Chirayil, "Bl. Fr. Chavara: The Saviour of Harijans" in Plathottam, *Bl. Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Savior of Harijans, the Protector of the Poor*, pp. 62-63.

²⁷ In order to get a realistic picture of the trivial caste practices and the humiliation involved on the part of those who were considered to be outcastes, see William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, pp. 118-119.

²⁸ Swami Vivekananda, in 1897, stated that the society of Kerala (he referred to as Malabar) is a lunatic asylum, as it is shamefully divided on the basis of caste and related practices: "Was there ever a sillier thing before in the world than what I saw in Malabar? The poor 'Paraiyah' is not allowed to pass through the same street as the high caste man, but if he changes his name to hodge-podge English name or to a Mohamedan name, it is alright. What inference would you draw except that these Malabaris are all lunatics, their homes so many lunatic asylums and they are to be treated with derision by every race in India until they mend their manners and know better. Shame upon them that such wicked and diabolical customs are allowed." Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swamy Vivekananda*,

A paradigm shift can be seen in the emphasis that Chavara laid on the uplift of the Dalit and women.²⁹ Usually, a person in authority would have been more attuned to look after the welfare of those who were close to the establishment and to maintain the status quo; he would prefer to cater to their needs as that would, in turn, safeguard and perpetuate his status in authority as well. However, Chavara had a totally different approach and perspective in dealing with the people around him. Without disregarding the welfare of the mainstream society, but at the same time without succumbing himself to the dominating and exclusive approaches prevailing among the high caste and well-to-do ruling class of the society, Chavara designed different strategies in the arena of education that would not only understand the plight of the marginalized but would also put in place provisions and institutions to take care of their needs and to pave the way for the emergence of a new perspective that was more inclusive of and beneficial to the people of the marginalized classes. In 1930, Chavara started two Malayalam schools in Mannanam and Arpookara keeping in view the formal education of the Dalit communities.³⁰ Chavara was a man with practical sense. Hence, wherever he started educational institutions, especially for the underprivileged, he also made detailed provisions for their maintenance. Parappuram Varkey wrote in his *Chronicles* that apart from the donations Chavara had taken from the churches and wealthy people to construct the structures needed to run the school, he bought a large stretch of cultivable land for the same purpose and gave instructions to the Monastery that they should continue to take care of the affairs of the school.³¹

Chavara's Writings

Along with his institutional initiatives of starting schools, convents, hostels, and the printing press, Chavara understood that true social and cultural transformation could come forth only through ongoing accompaniment and guidance, facilitated through books and other writings. One would wonder at the fact that despite his heavy religious and administrative commitments, he found time to compose literary works, both in prose and poetry. His prolific writing style is attested by the fact that the extant works, including the *Chronicles* that he had authored, are said to be more than one hundred.³²

vol. 3: *The Future of India*. See http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/complete_works.htm, retrieved on 15 April 2011.

²⁹ There were a few schools for the education of girls; however, they were restricted to the girls from the upper castes. Formally, the schools owned by the government were opened up for the girls from Christian and Ezhava (a group outside the Cāturvarṇya) communities only in 1910. Formally availing educational facilities to the dalit communities was all the more difficult, and it took longer. In 1914, even a 'Nayar-Pulaya' conflict arose as a girls' school in Neyyattinkara (Uruttusalam) was opened up to the girls from the Pulaya community. See Kokkattu, *Vazhthappetta Chavarayachante Dalit Darsanam*, p. 28.

³⁰ Apart from these two schools, Chavara opened schools at Edathuva, Pulincunnu, and Kainakari, which were accessible to the deprived classes. See Z. M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, p. 77.

³¹ Cited in Valerian C. D., *Chavara Kuriakose Eliaschan*, p. 137.

³² All these works have been published in four volumes in 1981-1982 by the CMI Prior General. The English translation of these works, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, were also published from Mannanam by The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara in four volumes in 1990 under the following titles: volume 1: *The Chronicles*, volume 2: *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, and Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, 3: *Spiritual Writings*, and volume 4: *The*

While some of his writings provided us deeper insights into the history of the time – both of the church and the society – the others offered down-to-earth instructions as to how a family life is to be conducted with decorum and in the fear of the Lord. One of his writings, “Testament of a Loving Father,” addressed to his own parishioners, was well received by the people of Kerala as it offered insights into and directions on the vicissitudes of daily life. Through this “Testament” Chavara called for a life imbued with a sense of social justice and equality. This was a clarion call from a prophet who was intent on setting things right in a society that was divided on caste and class lines. All his writings are imbued with a fundamental Christian vision, which has nothing to do with conversion of people into Christianity, but offered solid foundation for a lasting social life. In fact, his inclusive vision of society, based on fundamental Christian values, enabled him to usher in social reforms within a society that had no history of social reform bridging the gaps.

Chavara, a blessed poet, who wrote in his mother tongue Malayalam, has three major poems to his credit. They are *Ātmānuthāpam* (Compunction of the Soul), *Maraṅṅaveetil Pāduvānulla Pāna* (Dirge), and *Anasthāsyāyude Rekthasākṅṅitwam* (Anasthasia’s Martyrdom). These writings are rich in spiritual content and human inspiration. These literary productions were primarily Christian in content; in them we find an attempt to crystallize the author’s deeper Christ experience for posterity and to transfer the same for the benefit of his fellow beings. C. P. Sreedharan, in his review of the literary compositions of Chavara, opined that Chavara’s primary goal in all these writings was not to bring people to the religion of Christianity, instead to bring Jesus Christ to the people and their lives.³³ Thus, most of his writings were inspirational to the core.

At the same time, it is important to note that Chavara wrote these poems in Malayalam; its significance will be clearer only when we realize the fact that most of the writers of the time wrote either in Sanskrit or in Tamil, two classical languages of India, both of which were prevalent in the literary circles of nineteenth century Kerala. Just like many effective social reformers, Chavara’s choice of the language seems to be telling upon the fact that he wanted to reach out to the masses; he wanted to inspire them with a noble value consciousness. He knew quite well that a mostly illiterate society in Kerala will not be benefited by writings in classical languages; in fact, instructing and inspiring the masses was possible only by communicating with them in their own mother tongue. This indicates that Chavara’s literary productions were made with a social and spiritual intent. He wanted to bring about personal and social transformation through his writings.

Letters.

³³ C. P. Sreedharan, “Kraisthava Chaitanyam Malayālavalkaricha Kavi” (Malayalam) in *Chavarayachan Vividha Veekshanangalil*, Z. M. Moozhoor, ed., Cochin: Janatha Services, 1989, p.76.

Print Media Aiming at the Transformation of Society

Despite the insurmountable difficulties he faced, Chavara was convinced of the effectiveness of printing press in the ongoing education – be it in the sphere of religious or secular life, or formal or non-formal education. Hence, he started preparations to build a press by consulting the then existing two printing presses (CMS Press, Kottayam and Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram); with the assistance of a carpenter he made the first wooden press in 1844. It took some more time to manage the other accessories and peripherals for printing and, in 1846, *Jñāna Piyūṁam* (Spiritual Ambrosia), the first book printed in St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam, came out. According to his biographer, K. C. Chacko, "the most far reaching, illuminating, edifying and even sanctifying field of activity initiated by Fr. Kuriakose through the monasteries in general and primarily from Mannanam was that of printing."³⁴

Chavara was convinced of the great good that could be channelized through the print medium. As a person who was inspired by the rare but available books³⁵ (some of them were handwritten copies from their original, as neither he nor his teacher Thomas Palackal could afford to buy them), he knew that the transformation of Kerala Church as well as the larger society could be effected, along with education, through the publication of good books. While the existing presses were imported from Europe, we find Chavara's unflinching determination to make an indigenous printing press. Although it was initially ridiculed and rejected by many as a sign of mental derangement,³⁶ the conviction and farsightedness of Chavara stood the test of the time and finally succeeded in making the press, cutting the types, and procuring the required materials, and thus starting the printing. In the course of time, a number of publications have come out from this press and the other presses established by the CMI congregation.³⁷ Capturing the great enhancement of common good attained through the printing press and publication, Jacob Marangattu affirms: "Foreseeing the spiritual, intellectual, and cultural advantages and the progress which the press and publication would bring to the community, Chavara established a printing press at Mannanam, the first printing press of the Catholic Church in Kerala. We can confidently say that blessed Chavara is the man behind the two most effective means of communication in the Indian Church of his time: the pulpit and the press."³⁸

³⁴ Chacko, Blessed Father Kuriackos Elias Chavara, p. 97. Mathew Ulakamthara has opined along the same line: "If you ask me, what is Chavara's most valuable service to the Kerala Church, I will say that it is the establishment of St. Joseph's Press of Mannanam" ("The First Kerala Apostle of the Press" in *Chavara Charamasadabdi 1871-1971*, p. 44).

³⁵ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 445; see also 346.

³⁶ See "Editorial," *Nazrani Deepika*, 10 January 1896, cited in Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 354.

³⁷ CMI congregation has 17 publication centres; it also runs at least a dozen magazines and journals. The first newspaper in Malayalam, *Deepika*, was originally established and published from St. Joseph Press, Mannanam. Later, it was shifted to Kottayam; in the course of time, the ownership and management of this newspaper and its subsidiary publications have been transferred to the Church in Kerala.

³⁸ Jacob Marangattu, "Blessed Chavara: A True Pastor in the Footsteps of Jesus," *Herald of the East* 6 (8 December 2004), 77.

CMI Institutions as Torchbearers in Modern Education

Chavara laid the foundation of the CMI vision of education. Taking into account the different spheres of education that Chavara had opened up during his lifetime, anyone would be convinced that he was such a versatile educationist. Being both innovative and inclusive in his educational policies, Chavara focused on both the religious and secular spheres of education. As we have already seen, immediately after the laying of the foundation stone of the first indigenous religious institute, in 1833, the first organized seminary (centre for the training of priests) was opened in Mannanam. Later, in 1846, the first school also started functioning from the same campus. Although there are differences in content and approach adopted by these two types of educational endeavours, both have the same aim of developing integral human beings who would be personally transformed and socially integrated. While the religious education is more attuned to the creation of a set of committed leaders of the society, general education imparted through schools and colleges primarily focuses on the integral development of individuals who would become responsible members of a family and the nation at large.

Chavara and CMI Ecclesiastical Education

Chavara had taken full advantage of the education imparted at the Malpanate (training centre for priestly candidates after the model of Gurukula system) under the direction of Thomas Palackal. According to the first biographer of Chavara, Leopold Beccaro, an Italian Carmelite missionary, Chavara, even as a young cleric, realized that “an uneducated priest was not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls.”³⁹ Hence, he worked hard to learn languages and the sacred sciences, especially the Bible so much so that, after his priestly ordination, he was acclaimed to be very efficient both in preaching and teaching and administration of the affairs entrusted to him.

When Chavara started assisting his guru Thomas Palackal in instructing the students in the Malpanate (at Pallippuram), he is said to have inspired the candidates to invest their best into the training. Later, when the seminary started to function in Mannanam, Chavara was instrumental in designing the programme in such a way that at the end of the training, they would be more effective in realizing not only the salvation of the souls, but also the renewal of the society as a whole and the uplift of those people who were segregated against in the social and religious structures of Kerala.

As it was already mentioned, the foundation of the first indigenous religious congregation for men is coupled with the foundation of the first formally organized seminary in the Syro-Malabar Church of Kerala. In 1833, the first seminary was

³⁹ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (originally written in Malayalam in 1871), trans. Postulation of the Cause of Bl. Chavara, Mannanam: St. Joseph Monastery, 2003, 6. According to Joseph M. O. Nedumkunnam, “realizing that the good future of the Kerala Church lies in well disciplined priests, the founding fathers established a seminary at Mannanam.” “Chavara and the Religious Congregation of Mary Immaculate” (Malayalam) in *Chavara Charamasadabdi 1871-1971*, p. 6.

established at Mannanam (i.e., just two years after the laying of the foundation stone for the monastery). It was meant for the seminarians of both the religious community and the diocesan clergy. Compared to the Malpanates conducted exclusively by one priest, the new seminary with a formal training programme under the auspices of the CMI Mannanam monastery, with more priests to instruct and discipline the candidates, was found to be more effective. Those priests and missionaries who completed their training in this seminary were acclaimed to be well-versed in the Bible and various skills to communicate the Word of God and to administer the needs of the communities. In fact, according to Kaniampampil, "What prompted him to start a serious and systematic seminary formation was his deep conviction that the growth and wellbeing of the Church could emerge only through the instrumentality of priests spiritually deep-rooted, morally upright, intellectually erudite, and well-trained in communication skills."⁴⁰ Seeing the good that this seminary under the leadership of Chavara had made, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Monsignor Bernardin instructed Chavara and his confreres to start more of such seminaries in different parts of Kerala (Vazhakulam in 1866, Elthuruth in 1868, and Pulinkunnu in 1872) so that quality ecclesiastical education could be imparted to all candidates for priesthood and a spiritual and social renewal could be effected through the organs of the Catholic Church in Kerala.

It is interesting to note that Chavara facilitated learning of Sanskrit both by the priestly candidates and children from various parishes in the school established in Mannanam in 1846. At the time of the establishment of the Sanskrit school, he sent out an instruction to various parishes that two students each should be sent to the school. Although these two groups do not seem to be very huge in terms of the number, it was another innovative and strategic step adopted by Chavara to ensure that the members of the Catholic Church in Kerala had people who were well-versed in Sanskrit, a language in which many of the classic literary compositions of the country were available. In the course of time, this facilitated the training of many a Christian in Sanskrit, who, in turn, also made significant contributions in Sanskrit language. Moreover, the learning of Sanskrit language by a few in the Church is to be identified as a very significant step as it gradually opened up the gates of Indian and Hindu thought to the Christian community. Knowledge of Sanskrit facilitated better understanding of their worldview and greater appreciation of their life patterns. Thus, the recognition of Indian philosophy and its adoption into the seminary curriculum, which may be recognized as an innovative step adopted by the Indian Catholic Church after the Vatican Council II, have their beginning in the vision of Chavara as it is reflected in the starting of Sanskrit school.⁴¹ Moreover, the later generations have made significant contributions in this regard not only by imparting training in Sanskrit language, but by opening up various centres of learning with a specific focus on Indian culture. The establishment of cultural and

⁴⁰ Mathew Kaniampampil, "Blessed Chavara and His Unique Contributions to the Church in India," *Herald of the East*, 6 (8 December 2004), 4.

⁴¹ Z. M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, trans. Sheila Kannath, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 1993, viii.

dialogue centres across the country by various Christian Churches in general, and by the CMI members in particular,⁴² especially after the Vatican Council II, have accentuated the processes already set in motion by the open-minded and all-embracing educational motive of Chavara.

The contribution of Chavara and CMI institutions in the area of ecclesiastical education is momentous. "From its very inception, giving leadership in intellectual, spiritual, and contextual formation to the priestly and religious candidates has been one of the perceptible charisms of the CMI congregation."⁴³ The seminary established in Mannanam, in 1833, and the programme of training initiated by Chavara, were extended further by the opening of three more seminaries, as it was stated above. At a later stage, when the facilities in the seminary had to be upgraded, it was re-founded at Chethipuzha, in 1918. The inspired members of the CMI congregation, especially Fathers Maurus Valiyaparampil and Jonas Thaliath, had greater plans to transfer this seminary to Bangalore in view of better and more effective training and wider socio-cultural exposure to the students and thus to assume wider apostolic responsibilities. Thus, in 1957, Dharmaram College was founded in Bangalore. Although it started to function as the major study house of the CMI congregation, in the course of time, it has attained greater heights. In 1976, the Faculty of Theology was established as an independent institute, having the powers to award the degrees of bachelors and masters in theology and bachelors in philosophy. The Faculty of Philosophy was established in 1983, raising Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK) into the status of a pontifical athenaeum with the provision to award degrees up to PhD in philosophy and theology. Determined on the further growth of the athenaeum, and sensing the need of the Syro-Malabar Church to have well-versed experts in Oriental Canon Law, an Institute of Oriental Canon Law was established in 1999.

Dharmaram has made strides in the path of growth by opening up four regional extension centres to impart contextualized training to the priestly and religious candidates. First, in 1983, Darsana Institute of Philosophy was established in Wardha, Maharashtra. Second, Samanvaya Theological College started functioning in Bhopal in the year 1994 as an extension centre of the Faculty of Theology. At present, Samanvaya has centres also in Rshikesh and Jagdalpur. Further, four institutes of theology and philosophy are affiliated to DVK. With a number of postgraduate and doctoral research programmes, DVK has more than 1100 students (largest among the ecclesiastical centres of learning in India) taking their training in the disciplines such as philosophy, theology, canon law, spirituality and counselling.

Along with the formation of the clergy, the CMIs take keen interest in the formation of the laity as well. There are various programmes offered at Dharmaram to cater to

⁴² The CMI congregation has established 17 cultural centres, 3 art galleries and museums, and 5 dialogue centres in different parts of the country.

⁴³ *DVK Handbook 2010-2011*, p. 13.

the training of those who want to deepen their understanding of the Bible, Christian doctrine, etc. Centre for the Study of World Religions, Centre for Dalit Solidarity, Centre for Environmental Studies, Centre for Women Studies, etc., are its organs which keep the portals of DVK open to the wider world for the training of all, including the laity, in the disciplines that require special attention in the development of a renewed society. There are various philosophical and theological journals published by the CMI fraternity, from DVK and elsewhere, to bring to the public the latest research findings in different domains of ecclesiastical interest. While *Journal of Dharma: Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies* and *Jeevadhara: Journal of Theology* (both in Malayalam and English) have successfully carried out their mission over a period of 35 years, there are many other scientific journals, such as *Third Millennium*, *Asian Horizons*, *Vinayasadhana*, *Iustitia*, etc., published with the intention of reaching out to the public at large. One of the key features of these journals is the aim of pooling together international scholarship in the development of a genuinely Indian and Christian thought and perspective, be it in the domain of philosophy or theology, or any other specific area of interest. Another significant involvement of the CMI members is the starting of the Indian Theological Association (by Constantine Manalel) and the Association of Christian Philosophers of India (Albert Nambiaparampil as an initial collaborator) at the national level. There are many other organizations which are founded and managed by the CMI members and institutions in different parts of India. In all, these institutions and organizations have been continuing the legacy of innovative and inclusive methods of formal and non-formal education in the domain of ecclesiastical studies as they were opened up by Chavara and his first generation confreres.

As it has evolved, the ecclesiastical education imparted by the CMI congregation is also innovative and inclusive. Following the footsteps of Chavara who made the innovative step of starting a formal seminary education system in Mannanam, Dharmaram has made innovation from different angles. With the intention of integrating the best of the Indian culture into the training of the students, Dharmaram has made an innovative curriculum, incorporating history of Indian philosophy, covering learning of Sanskrit and other classical languages, Śruti, Smṛiti, the Orthodox and Heterodox Philosophical Systems, and Modern and Contemporary Indian Thought. Moreover, the teaching of many systematic subjects is also imbued with the contributions from Indian thinkers. This has also paved the way for the opening of the Centre for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) and the publication of *Journal of Dharma*. Another innovative step made by DVK is the opening of Dharmaram Academy for Distance Education (DADE), which offers distance education programmes (postgraduate diploma) in more than 10 branches of ecclesiastical learning. DADE has opened up the domain of ecclesiastical learning to those interested parties who cannot afford to come for regular programmes to learn subjects related to philosophy, theology, canon law, and spirituality and counselling. With well developed curriculum and scientifically developed course materials prepared by experts in each field, this programme has already made a great

impact, especially among the laity and religious who are otherwise involved in various services and missions.

The coexistence of DVK and Christ University on the same campus and the mutual collaboration between these two institutions of higher learning in various academic and non-academic projects facilitate more inter-disciplinary learning and research. The creation of the Departments of Philosophy and Theology under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Christ University has also opened up the horizons of both the institutions to bridge between the ecclesiastical and general study programmes, which has been found to be very advantageous to the students pursuing various degrees under the ecclesiastical system.

In view of providing quality philosophical and theological training also to women in the Church, Dharmaram was opened up to the women religious, and it has the distinction of being the first seminary in India to be opened up to women. It is heartening to note that there are currently many women enrolling for various courses in all the ecclesiastical disciplines that are offered at DVK. The quest to provide inclusive education has also inspired the opening of different centres and programmes, especially the Centre for Dalit Solidarity (Faculty of Philosophy) and the Centre for Women Studies (Faculty of Theology). These centres offer programmes to the whole student body in such a way that they are gradually conscientized to have a more inclusive Christian approach in all their missions and activities. From the perspective of the Indian Church, DVK has the unique distinction of having students not only from all the three churches in the Catholic communion (i.e., Syro-Malabar, Latin, and Syro-Malankara churches) but also from non-Catholic churches and denominations. The exchange of views and knowledge of the lifestyle and ritualistic practices of all these different traditions enable the students to develop a cordial understanding and openness towards those who adopt different positions and practices even with regard to Christian vision and life.

General Education and CMI Institutions

The life vision of Chavara has set the tone and texture of the CMI institutions that he and his successors have founded across India, from Kanyakumari in the South to Poonch of Jammu and Kashmir in the North. The innovative steps that Chavara had initiated in bringing about an inclusive and holistic education have been followed by the CMI institutions. The social commitment of all CMI institutions, including the educational institutions, is obvious in their decision and implementation of a policy according to which 10% of the income of any institution is to be spent specifically for the uplift of the marginalized and economically weaker sections of the society. Along this line, every educational institution earmarks and spends a significant amount of money in its annual budgetary provisions for supporting students from the locality, especially those who come from marginalized sections or poor families.

The initial steps to establish schools on the part of Chavara and his colleagues have taken wings in the form of establishing more educational institutions across the breadth and width of India. K. C. Chacko wrote while narrating the educational endeavours of Chavara: "He had even planned a central college for Catholics when he was Vicar General; only it did not materialize then owing to various unfavourable circumstances."⁴⁴ Despite the non-realization of this centre for higher education at the time of Chavara, the CMI educational institutions penetrate all strata of the society and various localities, including remote villages, and they include a number of quality schools, including special schools, university colleges, teacher training colleges, medical and engineering colleges, a deemed university, and various centres of ecclesiastical learning and research.

The first university college of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate was established in Thevara, Kochi, in 1944. The presence of CMI institutions in different parts of India is very vibrantly felt through the services rendered by various types of educational institutions. At present, there are 24 science, commerce, and arts colleges, 12 professional colleges, 5 nursing colleges and schools, 1 polytechnic (Carmel Polytechnic, Punnappra, Alappuzha), 9 teacher training colleges, 12 industrial training centres (ITC), 72 higher secondary schools, 112 high schools, 6 special schools, 132 upper primary schools, 150 lower primary schools, 139 kindergartens, and 47 hostels and boarding houses for students. Along with the above, CMIs have established a medical college (Amala Medical College, Trissur), two engineering colleges (Rajagiri Engineering College, Kakkanad, Kochi and Christ College of Engineering, Bangalore), 15 documentation and research centres, and a deemed university (Christ University, Bangalore).⁴⁵

While recognizing the innovative and quality higher education imparted through various university colleges and other centres of learning under the management of the CMI congregation, it must be mentioned that Christ University in Bangalore has made a great leap in offering more innovative programmes of education, including professionally oriented undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes. Established in 1969, as an affiliated college of the Bangalore University, it has become the most sought after educational institution in the City of Bangalore. By the introduction of innovative and modern curriculum, insistence on academic discipline, imparting of holistic education and with the help of the creative and dedicated staff, Christ University has been continually rated among the top 10 educational institutions of the country. It has the rare distinction to be the first institution in Karnataka to be accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and University Grants Commission (UGC) for quality education. On 7 October 2004, UGC has conferred Autonomy to Christ College. On May 20, 2005, it became the first College in South India to be reaccredited

⁴⁴ Chacko, *Blessed Father Kuriackos Elias Chavara*, p.64. See also Thomas Chathamparampil and Joseph Varghese Kureethara, "Unique Contributions of Blessed Chavara in Educating the Kerala Society," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 16, 1 (January-March 2005), 121-127, (124-125).

⁴⁵ See http://www.cmi.in/information_list.php?action=search&category=id&txt=6&by_colms=col, retrieved on 16 April 2011.

with A+ by NAAC. UGC has identified it as an Institution with Potential for Excellence in June 2006. Later, on 22 July 2008, under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956, Ministry of Human Resources Development of the Union Government of India has declared it a "Deemed to be University." According to the vision statement of Christ University, "education should be relevant to the needs of the time and address the problems of the day. Being inspired by Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the founder of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and the pioneer in innovative education, Christ University was proactive to define and redefine its mission and strategies reading the signs of the time."⁴⁶ With its three faculties, 28 departments covering various disciplines, around 200 academic programmes (including professional courses such as BTech and MBA, and research programmes at the level of MPhil and PhD) Christ University has already made a benchmark in higher education. It is a champion in imparting education with a value consciousness and social commitment,⁴⁷ after the model of holistic education imparted by Chavara, equipping its students to sail through the vicissitudes of life in the twenty-first century with excellent professional competence and service-oriented personal confidence.

Education imparted by the CMI institutions focuses on the all-round development of students. Hence, as the CMI presence was spreading across the country, members have initiated and animated various student movements such as Neelamunnani, Deepika Children's League (DCL), Kerala Catholic Students' League (KCSL), Kerala Catholic Children's Association (KCCA), Chavara Sauhruda Vedi, etc. Along with faith formation and personality development of the children of the Church, these organizations have provided a very effective platform for their integral growth. Moreover, these organizations also have been instrumental in nurturing leadership qualities, social consciousness, and the readiness to address the needs of the society.

As educational and cultural developments are not restricted to educational institutions and student movements, the CMI members have also focused on the development of various cultural and inter-religious dialogue centres across the nation. In all, there are seventeen such institutions established and managed by the members of CMI congregation. A few among them are Kalabhavan (Kochi), Chavara Cultural Centre (Ernakulam and Kozhikode), Darsana Cultural Centre (Kottayam), Upasana (Thodupuzha), Divyodaya (Coimbatore), Centre for the Study of World Religions (Bangalore), Navachetana (Bhopal), Sadharmyam (Srinagar), and Jeevan Dhara

⁴⁶ See <http://www.christuniversity.in/secmenudisp.php?mid=1&subid=2>, retrieved on 20 April 2011.

⁴⁷ The social commitment of Christ University is very vibrant in terms of its community reach out and development programmes in places like Hoskote (Karnataka) and Chandrapur (Maharashtra). There are occasions for students to extend their services in village contexts, and students from these supported villages are given chances to make use of the facilities on the campus. There are certain programmes which have got social work as a necessary component in the credits earned for the degree. In view of serving the local community, a Kannada Medium School, *Christa Vidyalaya*, is established by the CMI congregation on the same campus, and its establishment and maintenance are supported from the commonly pooled resources of various educational endeavours on Dharmaram College campus; this school is continuously adjudged to be the best Kannada Medium School in the whole of Bangalore.

(Jaiharikhal on the Himalayas). This list also includes two such centres abroad: CIIS, Rome, Italy and Chavara International Centre for Indian and Interreligious Studies, Sacramento, California, USA.

The web of CMI educational institutions across the different states of India aims at “the formation of the human person for the fulfilment of his individual and social responsibilities.”⁴⁸ Every CMI educational endeavour considers “the integral formation of the human person for the fulfilment of his/her individual and social responsibilities.” Further, it aims “at forming leaders who are intellectually competent, spiritually mature, morally upright, psychologically integrated, physically healthy and socially acceptable; who will champion the cause of justice, love, truth and peace and who are ever open to further growth.”⁴⁹

It is obvious that the CMI educational institutions are limited in their reach, especially when we consider the extent of India as a nation with over a billion people. Hence, intelligent planning and prioritization are usually employed. “Our limited resources dictate that we concentrate our energies in conducting institutions that provide quality education, especially for the benefit of the underprivileged. We are also obliged to reach out to the people who do not find a place in our institutions, through non-formal⁵⁰ and non-institutionalized methods of education.”⁵¹ These involvements “aspire towards creating a just and human society where dignity of the human person is respected, where unjust social structures are challenged, where our cultural heritage of ahimsa, religious harmony, and national integration are upheld, and where the poor and the marginalized are especially taken care of.”⁵² From this angle, in every educational institution run under the management of the CMI, programmes of social awareness are a necessary ingredient of the curriculum. That is, apart from the professional training imparted to interested and selected students in social uplift programmes, the CMI education has the necessary component of social awareness programmes which take the students to the real world outside the lecture halls so that they become aware of the ground reality of the lives of the masses and prepare them to respond to their needs in the most genuine way possible.

Moreover, the education imparted in CMI institutions is conspicuously religious, though not necessarily exclusively Christian in the narrow sense. The “CMI Vision of Education” articulates the justification for setting the religious thrust of the education imparted as follows: “Drawing inspiration and guidance from the life of Jesus Christ and all the noble sages, □□is, and prophets of our country, from the Gospel we proclaim,

⁴⁸ “CMI Vision of Education,” 1.1, in General Synaxis Secretariat, *In Search of CMI Charism and Identity*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2003, p. 345.

⁴⁹ “CMI Vision of Education,” 4.6.

⁵⁰ CMI congregation runs 55 non-formal education centres in different parts of India.

⁵¹ “CMI Vision of Education,” 3.2.

⁵² “CMI Vision of Education,” 4.6.

from the cultural heritage of our nation which is deeply and fundamentally religious, and from the spirit and tradition of the CMI vision of education, we respond to the demands of our times manifested in the needs of individual and society."⁵³ It must also be stated that the CMI institutions, while very clearly maintaining the Christian focus, have not been functioning as centres to convert people into Christianity; all our educational institutions, on the other hand, are employed as organs to convert people into better human beings imbued with the gospel values such as truth, justice, and unconditional love for all, which both Chavara and the CMI congregation along with the entire church deem to be the end of all educational processes and projects.

Conclusion

The value and impact of educational initiatives of Chavara cannot be inferred merely from the number of institutions that he had started. However, an understanding of the historical background of the then Syrian Catholics and other backward communities in Kerala in the domain of education, especially the need to start from the scratches, the courage and sagacity with which Chavara initiated the processes to start educational institutions attached to the monasteries and parish churches, his success in facilitating the collaboration of various individuals with their financial and moral support, his intent on opening the educational facilities to all children, including girls and the children from the marginalized groups in the society, his wisdom in choosing to start a Sanskrit school, accessible even to those who were otherwise forbidden to study that language, and his wholehearted involvement in the training of priests as the efficient and knowledgeable leaders of the Catholic community (and through them reaching out to the rest of the society) by establishing formal training in the newly established seminaries, etc., indicate very powerfully the innovative nature of his educational involvement. Indeed, the educational endeavours of Chavara are deemed to be more innovative as they were successful steps having lasting impact in bringing about a change in the consciousness of the people irrespective of caste, creed, gender, and economic status.

Education facilitates change at various levels of human existence and social intercourse. If education were to cease to be innovative, it would turn out to be an instrument of the vested interests to maintain the status quo; it would lead to the creation of a society that would be next to the dead. Education must unleash the creative energies of human individuals which would be properly channelized for the integral growth of the whole of creation. When education is restricted to a particular class, it would turn out to be the most destructive tool in the hands of that class to demean and degrade the others to such an extent that one human would exploit the other in any inhuman manner. If education is all-inclusive, making room for all, and inviting everyone aboard, the humanity would begin to blossom and the human society would thrive together; instead of exploitation of one by another, what would emerge is the development and transformation of everyone and the realization of the wellbeing of all. Being an

⁵³ "CMI Vision of Education," 4.5.

enlightened educator, Chavara was instrumental in providing an inclusive education. It is his courage and farsightedness, and his ability to inspire others in humane causes that enabled him to open up the centres of learning that he had started for the Dalits and women, which in turn, has been instrumental in transforming the entire society.

The integral view of life adopted by Chavara did not make a watertight compartmentalization between his religious commitment and commitment to the society; for him they were the two sides of the same coin,⁵⁴ where neither could be dismissed. His commitment to God was incomplete without his selfless services for the uplift of the humanity; his social consciousness and the acts of empowerment of all sections of the society, especially his conscientious and unflinching involvement in imparting education were incomplete without its religious fountainhead or commitment to Jesus Christ.

The greatness of an innovator is not only in being personally innovative, but in his ability to continue the strategy of innovation by those who succeed; the successors need to be not only innovative but they should be capable of continuing the founding legacies to their full stature. Indeed, the innovative and inclusive education that Chavara had started is adjudged to be successful especially based on Chavara's sagacity and determination in sharing his noble vision and relevant mission with his successors in the CMI and CMC⁵⁵ congregations. Cherishing the founding charism, these communities have continuously involved in the nation building and the ongoing renewal of humanity through various institutions, especially through their educational enterprises.

Although critical estimates indicate that India has only 37.5% functionally literate people (i.e., those who can read, write, and understand),⁵⁶ the concerted efforts made by the Christian educational institutions across the country have made very significant impact in the making of modern democratic India. While there were many who have contributed towards this cause, the role played by Chavara and the CMI institutions, especially in developing the educational index of Kerala and many other remote villages as well as towns and cities in different parts of India, and in imparting a value-based and professionally equipped education to the masses, is praiseworthy. CMI educational institutions continue to offer quality education to all. One of the thrusts of the CMI educational institutions, as it was adopted in the year 2008, is to make available quality education also to the poor and the marginalized. To this effect, apart from following the instructions of the government educational agencies, all CMI institutions have made special provisions like fee concessions and other admission strategies. Given the context of the twenty-first century and the fast pace of the progress that humanity is making,

⁵⁴ Venkataraman, "Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at Its Best," 87.

⁵⁵ With over 6270 members, 654 convents, 710 educational institutions (mostly catering to women), 58 healthcare institutions, 254 charitable institutions, and 8 social institutions, the Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC), which was founded by Chavara along with Leopold Beccaro in 1866, has made significant contributions towards the building up of Indian society. See for more information <http://www.cmcsisters.org/statistics.php>, retrieved on 21 April 2011.

⁵⁶ Arindam Chauduri, *The Great Indian Dream*, Bangalore, Macmillan Publishers India, 2003, p.49.

the CMI institutions are called upon to be more innovative, inclusive, and proactive in their vision, mission, and strategies. They need to keep pace with the times and involve in an ongoing self-examination so as to ascertain whether the personnel and institutional machinery are oriented to the glory of God and the common good of the people, which constituted the guiding principle of Chavara in all his educational and humanitarian endeavours.