

*Editorial***HEAVENLY HAVEN OF DANCING  
DEMONS****The Caution of Chavara against Sibling Incest****Benny Paul Thettayil***Editor-in-Chief*

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

**1. Chavara and His Veiled Injunction**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 3. The Social Scenario Reflected in Literature

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## 6. Role of the Parents and the Elders

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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