

VASUDHAIVAKUṬUMBAKAM **A Family of God on Earth**

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Abstract: Jojo Parecattil, taking a cue from the Upanishadic teaching on, *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, 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 Upanishdic 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 vīṭ*, *beth rauma* and *tapasu bhavan*. Chavara, a great devotee of the Holy Family, considers it a Christian model of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*.

Keywords: Family, *Mahopaniṣad* Chavara, school, Hindu, Dalits, Church, Catholic, theology, Vedāntic, John Paul II, Śāṅkara, Pope Francis, tomb, Scriptures, Congregation, Roccas, Malayalam, Tamil, *sanyāsa*, Mannanam, *Ātmānutāpam*, home, Carmelites, Holy Family, Spirituality.

1. Introduction

Ayaṁ nijaḥ paro vēti gaṇanā laghucētasām

Udāracaritānām tū vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam

“The thought that one person is related to me, and another is not, is that of the narrow-minded people. For the broad-minded, indeed, the whole world is one family” (*Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-73). Great minds at all times and circumstances rise above the narrow domestic walls of caste and creed, culture and religion, region and nation. They respect and celebrate the diversity of humanity as it is very well expressed in the

concept of *vasudhaivakutumbakam*. St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who was a firm devotee of the Holy Family, considered the entire humanity as a single family, irrespective of its diverse differences. The starting of Sanskrit school, where both the high class and low class could sit together as children of God and learn that sacred language, symbolizes his commitment to safeguard the fundamental human dignity on the one side and on the other side to preserve the authentic Indian ancient culture, and its age old traditions and values. The learning of the Sanskrit language together with other students provided him a gateway to understand the Hindu way of life, which in turn helped him to promote, healthy and holy interfaith and intercultural relations with people of other faith and culture. His close association with the poor and the marginalized people of the society, the various initiatives for the uplift of Dalits, personal relations with the members of other religious communities, especially with that of the Echarachar an offshoot of a Nair family of Chittezham and Osanier Rauthar of Ettumanur and others, are the living testimonies of this inclusive outlook and resultant approach of wider network of relationships.

The Church is catholic, and it literally means 'all embracing, universal or general.' Imbibing this spirit of the Catholic Church, St Kuriakose embraced everyone and consequently initiated a social, cultural and religious revolution in the Kerala society of the 19th century, which marked a new era of inclusivism. O. N. V. Kurupp, a prominent poet of Malayalam, who was awarded *Patmabhūṣaṇ*, testifies: "In this great land of Advaita (Non-Dualism), Saint Chavara is one who by his holy deeds has written in golden letters the truth that the Christian faith is not different from that of Advaitic philosophy."¹ In his swan song *Ātmānutāpam*, St Chavara presents the whole Christ-event through a transymbolization of interreligious concepts, idioms and symbols. Because of his deep and affective knowledge of the Indian culture and religion, and having a moving openness and a dialogical approach to them, St Chavara developed a relevant cultural modification of his own faith, which will have its unique stamp in the Indian Christian Theology.

Archbishop Antonius Petti, the Promoter General of Faith for the Causes of Saints, in 1983, while requesting to Pope John Paul II, for the

¹O. N. V. Kurupp, "Adānapradānaṇṇṭuṭe Suviśēṣakan," in A. Paikada, ed., *Kalam Namikkunna Karmayogi: Sukrtam Smara*, Part 2, Kochi: Bethe Rauma, 2013, 32-46, 38.

beatification of Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, presented him as “a pearl truly Indian and oriental.”

Here is a man named Kuriakose Elias Chavara
a pearl truly Indian and oriental,
a model to follow Jesus of Nazareth
he shows us how to love and serve others
in family life, religious life and priestly life.²

Cardinal Lourdusamy, then Prefect of the Oriental Congregation, during a public gathering held in Rome to commemorate the beatification of Kuriakose Elias, portrayed him as “one who relentlessly sought after the soul of India, finding it in its depth and permeated in that consciousness as a spiritual persona.”³ Truly, St Chavara imbibed the spiritual essence of the ancient Vedāntic ideals to himself through *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* and thus identified with the soul of India. A. Shridharamenon, a well-known historian of Kerala, considered St Chavara as the pioneer of inculturation among the St Thomas Christians. In his opinion, the initiative like composing *Ātmānutāpam* is a typical example of it. He observes:

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

²Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachitram*, Ernakulam: Chavara Secretariate, 2004, 81.

³Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachitram*, 82.

church were examples of adopting Indian customs. The many customs he introduced to revitalize the spiritual field were Indian.⁴ In his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II makes it very clear that Church is not opposed to any culture, and indeed positively, it is always open to other cultures and engages itself with them to adopt divine forms which are alien to it. The pope also reminds that in India, it is the duty of Christians to draw from this ancient rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought.⁵ India's willingness to listen and the desire to explore and discover more from other spiritual customs and traditions of the world is classically expressed in the *Rgvedic mantra*, "*Ā no bhadrāḥ-krtavo-yantuviśvataḥ*" (1-89-1), which means "let noble thoughts come to us from every corners of the world," and this was the great ideal of Indian *Rṣis* for all times. St Chavara cherished this noble attitude of openness towards other customs and traditions, especially with the Hindu tradition, and this Indian orientation was an important aspect of his spiritual consciousness. Thomas Kadankavil notes in this regard: "St Chavara is a typical embodiment of the classical Indian consciousness that would like to see universal unfolding of the divine signs and revelations."⁶ This study is an attempt to reflect on that inclusive spirituality of St Chavara, especially in the field of inter-religious studies and acknowledge and appreciate the unique contributions he has made for fostering the spirit of unity and oneness in the Church as well as in the society.

2. *Vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*: A Vedāntic Family Consciousness

Although humanity is a single family, today, it is divided by walls of religion, politics, colour, caste, age, continent, country, county and so on. In the midst of all these dividing walls, the concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* gives hope to humanity as it is a universal invitation to change all these divisions into unity, the inhuman elements into human and thus transform this world of humanity from chaos of division and separation into a loving single family. The

⁴Shridharamenon, "Kalattinu Munbe Nadanna Navothana Nayakan," in J. Panthaplamthottiyil, ed., *Chavarayachan*, Kottayam: Deepika Publications, 2004, 16-20, 18.

⁵John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 72.

⁶Thomas Kadankavil, "Uyarattile vit: siddhiyum siddhanthavum," in J. Panthaplamthottiyil, ed., *Chavarayachan*, Kottayam: Deepika Publications, 2004, 99-100, 99.

display this great thought of universal brotherhood in the foyer of the parliament of India is highly significant. This noble Vedāntic vision of the oneness of the entire humanity occurs in the *Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-73, and is repeated in other texts like *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Hitopadeśa*, which is a collection of Sanskrit fables in prose and verse (1.3.71). The context of this verse is to describe as one of the attributes of an individual, who has attained the highest level of spiritual progress, and one who is capable of performing his worldly duties without attachment to any material possessions.⁷

The Vedic term *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* is a combination of three Sanskrit words, i.e., *vasudha* (earth), *ēva* (alone or indeed) and *kuṭumbakam* (family), which literally means the earth, indeed is one common family. As humankind shares the sun, moon, stars and everything that is there on this mother earth, so also, they should feel oneness with the whole world and with the entire humanity, which is actually a single Family of God. The waves in an ocean are varied at the surface, but there are no such differences at the deepest level of the ocean, where there is no movement. As an entity moves on from the gross to the subtle and from the subtle to the more subtle or the subtlest, all sequences of differences are eliminated. Similarly, even though, there is plurality in the human families at the physical and empirical level, at the deepest level or transcendent level i.e., in the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, they are part of the one and the same family - the Family of God.

In Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta Philosophy, reality has three levels of existence: Absolute-Existence (*Pāramārthika-Satta*), Relative or Empirical-Existence (*Vyāvahārika-Satta*) and Phenomenal-Existence (*Prātibhāsika-Satta*). These three levels of existence are like the existence of an ocean, waves and foam. The foam or bubbles of water depends for its existence on the wave and the wave depends on the ocean. What really or ultimately exists is only the ocean and waves and foams have only relative and phenomenal existence. Similarly, the ultimate ground of all existence and the unifying force of the entire universe is Brahman. Applying it to the familial existence, God or Brahman, the absolute existence is indeed the unifying force of all earthly families. Just like the waves and foams ultimately get merged in the ocean, all

⁷One is a relative, the other stranger, say the small minded people.
But for the magnanimous, the whole world is a family.
Be detached, be magnanimous, lift up your mind,
enjoy the fruit of Brahmanic freedom (*Mahopaniṣad* 6:71-75).

the human families finally get merged in the Family of God – *vasudhaivakutumbakam* – by becoming a single integrated family of humankind.

The Vedāntic concept of *vasudhaivakutumbakam* is a universal invitation to believe in the unity of all human as well as non-human beings. As one grows in this harmonic consciousness, all the boundary lines between the living and the non-living vanish, and gradually the connecting links emerge. “For the broad-minded, indeed, the whole world is one family.” Accordingly, everything in this cosmos – persons, animals, birds, plants and all their endless variety of species together form a harmonious family. St Francis of Assisi, who considered the sun as brother and the moon as sister, grew to this harmonic consciousness. Pope Francis in the opening lines of his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, rings a bell about it: “Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.”⁸ The mango tree, which St Chavara as the Prior of the Congregation planted and later came to be called and known as *Prior-mango tree* has also a lot to say about such harmonic and intrinsic consciousness. He grew into this great Christian and Vedāntic consciousness, by going beyond his own Chavara-family to the family of the humanity, and created an atmosphere in the Kerala society that was conducive for major social changes, which are analysed below.

3. Transcending the Chavara Family

Chavara, as a surname, might be a compound word, comprising of *chāv* + *ara* (dead + tomb) and they literally mean ‘the tomb of dead.’ The possible reason for the name is that the ancestors of St Chavara owned a plot of land in which the dead were buried. Although the provenance of the name in its relationship with the dead is inconclusive, it is certain that in the Chavara family, except St Chavara and his four sisters, all others – his father, mother and the only brother – died at an early age and surrendered their life to dead-tomb - *chavara* in an epidemic. He was the only surviving male member of the family. In other words, except Kuriakose, all others moved from this world to the world of – *chavara*. The point is that St Kuriakose, by his saintly

⁸Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 1.

life, has transformed this *tomb of the dead* into a *womb of life*, as from that family, there was born a great son of the Indian Church. Comparing this tomb of the dead to the tomb of Jesus, which later became the tomb of life, we see a Christological meaning in the surname of *Chavara*. In this regard, it is good to recall, how Sukumar Azhikkode in his mystic imagination interprets the term ‘Chavara’ as ‘the tomb of life’:

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

It is to that tomb of life this member of Chavara family turned his face. Let me figuratively state that Chavara pondered deeply over the aim of his spiritual life very early in his life.⁹

Just like the empty tomb of Jesus has been the symbol of life, the life of St Chavara has indeed given a new life to the Kerala Church and society by his various new initiatives. Paul writes: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve” (1 Cor 15:3–5). What he really intends to communicate here is this passing of Jesus from mortality to immortality: “that He was buried, that He was raised.” The reason why the tomb was found empty was that the man who was buried there had risen from the dead. This resurrection of Jesus from the dead is indeed a victory of life over death and also a sure proof that He was who He claimed to be (Mt 12:38-40; 16:1-4) – the risen Son of God, our only hope of salvation. It is to that “tomb of life” Sukumar Azhikkode compares the surname of St Chavara. “It is to that life of tomb this member of Chavara family turned his face. I figuratively assume that the term ‘Chavara’ speaks to the thinking people in an unknown mystical form that the purpose of his spiritual life was pondered over it in his mind at an early stage itself.”¹⁰

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

⁹Azhikkode, “Kalatitamaya Maha Jyotissileykke,” Part 2: *Sukrutham Smara*, ed. John Paul, 21-30. Kochi: Beth Rauma, 2013.

¹⁰Azhikkode, “Kalatitamaya Maha Jyotissileykke.”

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

That family, which never excludes anyone, belongs to the responsibility of God. Monks are persons who have taken the vow to link their family to the entire human family. They are the fingers of God. With those fingers God caresses the lepers, takes care of the sores of the wounded and wipes off the tears of those who weep.

That is the path Lord Jesus journeyed.¹¹

Surely, that is the path, which St Chavara too travelled as a faithful follower of the Master. The family of Jesus is known as Holy Family and it was indeed a true *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, with all its positive implications. St Chavara is a true member of that family as his complete name is St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family. By founding the first indigenous Christian religious congregation of India for men and embracing religious life, he transcended the Chavara family and linked it with the family of God i.e., with that of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. The various humanitarian initiatives that he initiated in the nineteenth century of Kerala society and particularly in the Church for the poor and the marginalised speak volumes for that divine membership of St Chavara in the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, which fuelled a fundamental dream of humanity for all.

4. The Members of One Family: Children of the Same Mother

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

My dear *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), let the vicars of each of our monasteries foster real charity among themselves and maintain a true bond. However, numerous the monasteries are, all must be like

¹¹ Azhikkode, "Kalatitamaya Maha Jyotissileykke."

the members of one family, children born to, nursed and brought up by the same mother. Never, let this love weaken, but let it grow stronger from day to day. Bear this in mind as an important piece of advice. In order that this love may not weaken, let the vicars of the monasteries vie with one another to show greater interest in meeting the needs and requests coming from other monasteries.¹²

These words of St Chavara give a real presentation of the concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. He conceives the CMI religious existence as a family existence, to be exact, as an existence in the one Family of God on earth – *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Again, to emphasise this divine aspect of family existence, he envisaged that when one becomes a member of the Congregation, one would be a child born to, nursed and brought up by this mother, i.e., the CMI Congregation, as in the case of physical birth in a natural family. As a member of the Congregation, one should understand and live, one’s religious life in concrete fellowship of a family existence. St Chavara boldly advised the members in this way, because, he had considered the CMI Congregation as a divine family and a holy fellowship. God was his Heavenly Father, and he lived in His presence as a member of His family. For him, the call to CMI Congregation was a call to live as a member of God’s family on earth – as the member of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, which is the bedrock of humanity.

4.1. ‘*Kūṭapirappukal*’: A Word Full of Spirit and Life (Jn 6:63)

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

Truly, the family ties are stronger than any other relationship; and as it is said, ‘blood (or better in this context the kin-blood) is thicker than water’; but, in Chavara’s supernatural vision of familial ties, the

¹²The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 71.

tie of humanness or the divine sonship, which is very well articulated and implied in the term *kūṭapirappukal* is much thicker than that of the kin-blood tie that exists in the household relations. The Spirit is thicker than blood. In the Gospel of John 6:63, Jesus reminds us: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." The word *kūṭapirappukal* is indeed a word full of that Spirit and Life (Jn 6:63), "who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:13).

The consideration that each human being is a *kūṭapirappu* is the life and spirit of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Saint Chavara was a Spirit-filled man and whatever he did and said had indeed the signature of the Spirit. And in this context, the word *kūṭapirappukal* is indeed a familial term with full of spirit and life of unity and oneness. By using this sweet word of household addressing, he is in fact, inviting us to imbibe the soul and spirit of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Through his spirit-filled life, he also reminds us that the greatest ideals of humanity can turn sectarian over time, if we are not guided by the spiritual awakening of *kūṭapirappukal*.

The word *kūṭapirappukal* is a combination of *kūṭa* + *pirappukal*, and they mean 'in company' and 'born' respectively. Literally, it means children born from the same womb, and usually, it refers to the members of the same family, where they are born of the same mother, and having a blood relation. Hence, it cannot be used for the members of different families. But St Chavara makes use of it to address all, extending it to the non-kin-blood relations, and thus different earthly families converge into a single supernatural family under this unifying compound. It has broken down the wall of kin-blood relation that parts humanity into different families.

Just as all human beings belong to one species, because of the distinctive characteristic of humanness, so also, because of this same humanness all human beings belong to one family. If kin-blood relation is the fundamental norm of membership in a natural family, humanness is the primary norm of membership in *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. Truly, for him, humanity is a single family as it comes from the same God and shares the same DNA and heritage of the children of God. Hence, the term *kūṭapirappukal* transcends the boundaries between families, races and ethnicity; it unites all as members of one single family. All distinctions and barriers between people fall, in the spirit of *kūṭapirappukal* of the *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. It takes away all barriers between man and man, and family and

family. It unites different families into one family of humanity and destroys all the walls of divisions. The term *kūṭapirappukal* used by St Chavara is a unifying name of humanity and is profound with the ideals of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* as it expresses in one word the single confraternity of humanity.

We have not found an apt English word to convey the deeper meaning and significance of the term *kūṭapirappukal*. *The Complete Works of Bl Chavara* translates it into ‘brethren,’ which sounds empty and miserably fails to communicate the original implication of the membership of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* or the oneness of humanity. A better translation for this Chavara term is *co-borns*, which is closer to the literal translation of the term, at the same time it retains all the implications mentioned above. When one is filled with the spirit of *kūṭapirappukal*, one is reborn or twice-born to *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* and becomes co-borns or siblings in that one family. Let us further analyse the familial spirit of *kūṭapirappukal* and its universal significance.

4.2. *Kūṭapirappukal*: Members of the *Vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*

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

Beloved *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns) and dear sons, you are aware of the fact that we who write this letter are both advanced in age and are fast failing in health and are preparing to present ourselves before the just throne of God.¹³

Beloved *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), this humble Congregation of ours is not man-made. You are witness to the truth that God has nurtures it with genuine care and helped it to grow.¹⁴

O, my beloved *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), if we were having been called by God, had joined the monastery to live according to our own wills obeying only the superiors whom we like, then our behaviour is no better than that of the unbelievers.¹⁵

My dear *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), be sure, if you continue to live thus, there won’t be any of these monasteries here twenty years hence. The strength of monastery does not consist in the thickness

¹³The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 61.

¹⁴The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 61.

¹⁵The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 64.

of its walls, but in the virtue and the religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them.¹⁶

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

Lastly, my beloved *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), loving sons, none of us was drawn to this life in the monastery, being drawn by hunger or desperate living circumstances in the world.¹⁷

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

I your servant, brother Kuriakose Elia, address my dear *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), Rev Brothers, Priests, my dear Children the Novices and the lay Brothers, swearing my fidelity to Christ and giving you my advice and farewell greetings.¹⁸

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

Lastly, to the Very Rev Vicar Apostolic, Very Rev Delegate and the Very Rev Missionary Fathers and all the members of the monasteries, I beg pardon. I beg of them before God to pardon me all my shortcomings and lapses in the performance of my duties. Again I pray my *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns) religious, pray for me.¹⁹

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

Although God has willed to found this Congregation for the salvation of our Christian *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), due to the shortage of members we are not able to render the help they need.²⁰

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

This is my testament to you who are my *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), in two ways, as members belonging to my family and as my spiritual children. Let this remain a proof of the fact that you are my own kith and kin.²¹

¹⁶The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 65.

¹⁷The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 66.

¹⁸The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 70.

¹⁹The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 74.

²⁰The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 71.

²¹The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 117.

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

Hence, my beloved brethren *kūṭapirappukal* (co-borns), remember the words of our Lord that he who enters the sheepfold not through the right door is not the true shepherd, but the false one; is a wolf in sheep's clothing (Jn 10:1); if such shepherds come to you without the decree of the Pope, be cautious not to give ear to their false teachings, nor take sides with them and be prepared even to suffer martyrdom at their hands for being faithful to the true vicar of the Pope, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly.²²

4.3. *Kūṭapirappukal*: The Biblical Spirit of *Philostorgos* (Rom 12:10)

For the members of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam* namely, the *kūṭapirappukal*, the world is one common family. The Pauline instruction, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love” (Rom 12:10), reflects the spirit of co-borns. The Greek term *philostorgos* used in Rom 12:10 refers to familial ties, i.e., the love practiced in one's family, the reciprocal affection or tenderness of parents and children. The Greek word *philostorgos* is used only here in the whole of New Testament, and it is stronger than in the translation in conveying the family spirit of brethren. The term denotes “tender affection” within a family and accordingly it means one should have a tender affection and concern for the fellow brethren like that of the family members. He then compounds this thought with the term *philadelphia* means ‘brotherly love’ (from *phileo*, ‘to love’ and *adelphos*, ‘brother’), by which one is expected to exercise warm affection, family love and brotherly love toward fellow human beings.

Kūṭapirappukal denotes the affection, which is shared between brethren. People, who are born of God, whichever physical family they were born into, belong to the same family of God and therefore should love each other like brothers and sisters in the flesh.²³ Universal brotherhood should never remain as a mere name, rather should take flesh and blood by the affections of a relationship of kindred. Certainly, living this family spirit of brotherhood is in fact one of the tests of the members of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, as it is often seen in the New Testament (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12, 15:17; Eph 5:2; 1 Thes 4:9; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Jn 3:14; 2:7-8; 3:11; 3:23; 4:20-21). Just like the Greek terms *philostorgos*

²²The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 98.

²³<https://bible.org/seriespage/25-love-without-limits-romans-129-21>.

and *philadelphia*, the Chavara term *kūṭapirappukal* also invites us to love each other and to be devoted to one another as a close knit family.

4.4. Family: *Kūṭ* (*Bhavanam*) and *Vīṭ* (*Ākāśamokṣam*)

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

Most probably the words *kūṭ* and *vīṭ* have come into Malayalam from Tamil. The noun *kūṭ* in Tamil originally means 'a place to come together, to join, to meet, to associate and to cohabit.' In its verbal root *kūṭal* is 'to make to join, to marry, to have intercourse with and the state of being joined with.' In this sense, this term indicates family, where members of the same family, clan or tribe live together. The second noun *vīṭ* is derived from the root *viṭ*, which, in Tamil, means 'to leave', 'to abandon', 'to release', or 'to liberate'. Hence, etymologically, this Tamil word *vīṭ* means 'a place of release' or 'a place of liberation' (*viṭutal*). *kūṭ* is an earthly reality whereas *vīṭ* is a transcendental reality and can be understood as *ākāśamokṣam*, which is an eternal abode of liberation.

Frequently, St Chavara uses *kūṭ* and *vīṭ* in his communications as it is evident in the expressions like *kūṭapirappukal* and *darśanavīṭ*. In his *Testament of A Loving Father* addressed to the members of the parish of Chennenkary, he gives a beautiful definition of a Christian family by combining the meanings of both *kūṭ* and *vīṭ*: "A good Christian family is the image of heaven (*ākāśamokṣam*), where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life."²⁴ Here, he explains family as a place 'where members live together by the bond of blood and affection,' the meaning of *kūṭ* is evident. At the same time, he also identifies family with heaven and the word used for heaven in his original expression is *ākāśamokṣam* which carries the meaning of the term *vīṭ*. From this, one can recognize that for St Chavara family is

²⁴St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 9.

both an earthly as well as a heavenly reality. For him, family is a *kūṭ*, a place where *kūṭapirappukal* live together and a *darśanavīṭ*, where liberated souls live together.

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

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

In the Indian tradition, it is believed that one's soul becomes liberated as he purifies his body in fire. And if, one has already burned his body while he was alive, then, no further burning is required, after his death. That is why, usually the body of a *sanyāsi* is never burned after death, whereas, in the case of ordinary people, it is required as they have not yet done it while they were alive. The physical wearing of a saffron clothe by a *sanyāsi* is the symbol of burning all the desires of his body, at each moment of his life, as long as he lives in the body. The colour saffron is a combination of white, red and black colours, which are respectively the symbols of *sattva*, *rajo* and *tamo guṇas*. Wearing the saffron clothe, one is expected to transcend all the limitations of *thri-guṇas*. Without being the slave of lust, by his continuous *tapas*, through the focus of intellect, mind and all other limbs of action (*karmendriyas*), one becomes elatedly the sovereign monarch of the *Brahmaloka* or *ākāśamokṣam*. For such people, their earthly abode (*kūṭ*) is a heavenly experience of *viṭṭal* (liberation) and naturally it becomes a *vīṭ* (a place of liberation) or *darśanavīṭ*.

St Chavara, who has been instrumental in instituting in India the first two living indigenous religious congregations of Catholic Church (CMI and CMC) through which he inculturated the Indian traditions of *sanyāsa* into Christian religious life. Certainly, for St Chavara and his companions, inculturation was not merely a superficial imitation of certain Hindu customs and practices. They never wore saffron clothes or *rudrākṣa*; rather, it was much deeper and life oriented one, as they imbibed the most prevailing values of Indian *sanyāsa* like silence, penance (*tapas*), *darśan* of God, etc., to their daily lives and thus became people who really enjoyed *dehamukti* in their *darśanavīṭ* and *videhamukti* in the *ākāśamokṣam*.

4.5. Family: Sanctuary of Jewish Tradition

Family has a great impact on all the aspects of our daily life like religion, spirituality, culture, etc. Family is central to Jewish religious practice and values. Though the importance of synagogues and other Jewish institutions cannot be minimized, home remains the place where most people first encounter ritual and where much of Jewish life takes place. Following the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 AD, the centre of Jewish life was destroyed. Even after two millennia, they have not been able to restore it, and at present, they are a people without a temple of their own. In that moment of crisis, when the temple was destroyed, the rabbis decided to let the homes be the “small sanctuary,” a holy place to foster the family’s spiritual life. The rabbis transferred the temple in Jerusalem into the Jewish home, moving its rituals, personnel, sacred space, food, blessings and prayers to the family and the family Sabbath table. Each tool and the space of the temple were transferred to home. According to the decision of the rabbis, the Jews have focused on creating holy space within their personal dwellings, homes and thus their house and family became their temples where have the vision of God.²⁵

In his commentary for Torah, Rabbi Yehiel E. Poupko – explains the Jewish people as first and foremost a family. They are a huge clan or family than a religious group or geographical country. The first name given to the Jews in the Bible is ‘the children of Israel’ and here, ‘Israel’ does not refer to the country, but the patriarch Jacob. The Jews address God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is not a God of concepts they cry out to, but rather the God of their Jewish family. In this context, it is good to recall that the name that Jesus used to call

²⁵www.bje.org.au/learning/jewishself/family/family.html

God is a family name – *Abba*, which means father. Similarly, St Chavara’s most favourite term to address Jesus was *Appa*, which also means Father. It may be because in the Hindu tradition, family is considered as a sanctuary (it is common in many traditions) that one does not wear footwear inside home like in the temples or other holy place. In short, just like the concept of family and the familial relations influence the Jewish people in their religious and cultural life, family and its ties have a vital impact on different spheres of human beings, in any culture or religion.

5. The Family Consciousness of Chavara

The concept of family is something very close to the heart of St Chavara and one can notice its impact in his life. For example, it is attached to his name, as he is known as Kuriakose Elias Chavara of *Holy Family*. This concept is found in the names given to the monastery at Mannanam like, *darśana viṭ* (The House of Vision), *beth rauma* (The Upper House) and *tapasu bhavan* (The House of Penance). Further, in the writings like *Chāvarul* (*Testament of a Loving Father*) and *Ātmānutāpam* (*The Compunction of the Soul*), the vivid memories of family are found. The good Catholic family background, which he was fortunate to have by the providence of God, had a vital role to play in his character formation. Those loving memories about his family and childhood days are beautifully recalled in *Ātmānutāpam*:

You, to tend me as an infant unto tests,
Gave me mother gentle who devoid of any parry,
Imparted the love you offered her merry,
That gushes forth in the nectar of her breasts.

As slowly sped I to be fully capable,
To echo Thy eulogies in Thy honour as she sung,
And she taught me its meaning sprung,
In my veins the current of appraise able.

Slowly I realized You O! Saviour, mine
Sitting at my mother’s holy feet,
As she at midnight her prayers meet,
Which I adhered to seek You fine (I 45-56).

These lines of the *Compunction of the Soul* are so moving with such holy familial experiences of the childhood days of St Chavara that the following critical evaluation of C. P. Sreedharan is so relevant: “Usually, poets try to make their poems beautiful with metaphors,

alliterations etc., even though their hearts might be devoid of the same beauty and richness. But mystics like Fr Chavara make their poems attractive not with the external beauty of lines, but with the fragrance of their soul which is sublime."²⁶

Pray on my knees I would as she,
Did unto the Holy Mother entreat!
Admonishing You in her prayers neat,
Long and divine and blissful spree.

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

If the mother is excellent, then her son is also excellent, "*yathā māta tathā sutha*" and "the mother who gives birth to such a devotee, she is blessed; as the child is greatly influenced by the mother."²⁷

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

I loved most the story of how,
The Son of God took his human scheme,
From all its sins mankind redeem,
Forcing his way from the purest womb avow.

Also stories of Pontius Pilate's objection-
Made famous through Jesus did,
Though his endless torments he did bid,
Only to complete the full round of resurrection,

Did the third day erect.
Mother' stony gaze would me now screw,
Childish fears mine when hence overflow

²⁶Z. M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Sheila Kannath, trans., Kottayam: Publisher Fr. Moozhoor, 1993, 97.

²⁷*dhin janani jyāre ey sut jāyā ey, sohan thāl bajāyā ey*

As she retold the holy tenet.
 Never ever touched me has she mighty
 Either with a stick or manually but her,
 Eyes were so powerful that ere,
 Tame me into goodness and piety (I 65-84).

As honey is sweet so also home is. In fact, it is a home where there is always the unceasing love of the mother, attention of the father, and the love of the siblings and a lot of other memories. The above quoted memories of St Chavara throw light on such familial and maternal memories and influences; how his loving mother gave him the primary lessons of Catholic life and prayer. And as a culmination of it, later when he was declared a saint by the Catholic Church, “his family, mother, birthplace, and residence become more purified and his forefathers danced in the heavens” (*Skandpurān, Mahe, Kaumār. 55/140*).²⁸

kulaṁ pavitraṁ jananiṁ kṛtārtha
 vasundharā va vasatish ca dhanya
 nṛtyanti svarge pitaṛo’pi teṣāṁ

St Chavara always experienced a kind of paternal and maternal love from his Congregational and Ecclesiastical authorities. For example, he considered the superior of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites, Rome, not as someone who exercises power over him, rather as a loving father, as it is very well reflected in his letter to him: “We could read your letter only with tear-dimmed eyes because it was written by our own father in his own hand – a father who loves us, but staying far away. While I hold it in my hands, the feelings that we experience are similar to those experienced by a son reading his beloved father’s letter.”²⁹ Similarly, he was enjoying a kind of both paternal and maternal love and concern from his Local Ordinary, as he personally testifies it: “Our dear Vicar Apostolic, our Father and Shepherd, is guiding and governing us with the utmost interest and vigilance. We are happy to learn from your letters that you are kept informed of this fact. He attends to all our affairs with maternal love and concern. The efforts he makes to protect us from all dangers and to nurture our souls are beyond description.”³⁰

²⁸www.swamiramisukhdasji.net/eBooks/Feeling-of-Oneness-With-God.pdf

²⁹The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 31.

³⁰The Complete Works of Bl Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 31-32.

6. Holy Family: A Christian Model of *Vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*

Holy Family is the family of God on earth, and hence, it can be understood as a typical embodiment and a living model of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*, for human imitation. In the Catholic Church, the month of February is particularly dedicated for the devotion to the Holy Family, and St Chavara who was born on this month (February 10) had a special devotion to the Holy Family as it is very explicit from his name, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the *Holy Family*. In the members of the Holy Family, as Pope Leo XIII teaches, “all men might behold a perfect model of domestic life, and of all virtue and holiness.” The harmony, unity and holiness, which characterized this Holy Family make it the model for all Christian families and so also for all earthly families. We are challenged to make their way of life, our way of life. They are a source of virtue; they enlighten our minds and they show us how to love through sacrifice.

St Chavara, who has been elevated to the venerable status of the sainthood, in his higher level of spiritual awakening, reconciled what is practically meant by the ideals of his Christian faith in the Holy Family with that of the Upanishadic concept of *vasudhaivakuṭumbakam*. For St Chavara, God-experience was basically a state of absolute inclusiveness. In that state of unity, there was no possibility of fragmented perception. It is with that DNA, which is basically Christian, typically Catholic in the sense of embracing all, and characteristically Vedic in consciousness that he brought about landmark changes in the Kerala Church and society. It may be because of this conviction that he became a firm devotee of the Holy Family and modified his name as ‘Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the *Holy Family*.’

7. *Darśana vīṭ*: A Broader Reality of the Broad-Minded

Darśana vīṭ is a broad and enduring reality and it can never be looked upon as an entity in its singularity. As it was originally founded and initiated by St Chavara and the other founding fathers, it was a driving force in the Church and society through which there was a flow of streams that could fertilise all the spheres of human life – rivers of brotherhood, rivers of sisterhood, rivers of cooperation, rivers of knowledge, rivers of charity and rivers of all such ministries, which assured all forms of inclusiveness in the Kerala Church and society. Accordingly, St Chavara and the other founding fathers who built the *Darśana vīṭ*, by it actually built the then Kerala Church and society of

nineteenth century, which was undergoing deterioration and decline. This extended act of renovation and reconstruction can be brilliantly verified from the annals of the Church and the society.

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

8. Conclusion

St Chavara and his companions were not people, who sat at the warm fire-side of *darśana vīt*, and could not think of the shivering and destitute poor persons of outside. *Darśana vīt* was not a chosen and favourite comfortable spot of life for them, which were overloaded with benefits and advantages; instead it reminded them of the regions, which needed sedulous attention and much self-sacrifice. They never degraded the domestic blessings of *darśana vīt* nor did they make it an instrument of selfishness. Instead, thinking of the innumerable destitute children who had no such opportunities of culture and advancement, the members of the *darśana vīt* travelled from place to place in the sanctification of life. They had a spirit of going out, a missionary spirit, and a spirit of distribution that did not rest until the Gospel has been preached to every corner of the world. They appear before us as men who had great thoughts for God and His people. They lifted the *darśana vīt* beyond its mere earthly existence into a broader and more enduring reality.