

## CHAVARA KURIAKOSE ELIAS : A MISSING PAGE OF KERALA HISTORY

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### Abstract-

Sometimes somehow, history is blind and not capable to restore the contributions of the person. This paper is captivating into account the immense educational contributions that Chavara rendered to society as a champion of education. Also, investigate the spiritual and social life and the assistance that Chavara made for the public. The self-esteem of a man, who is gifted with both body and soul, was the basis for all social actions and compassionate services of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. With his intuitive vision, he set a comprehensive process of spiritual and social rejuvenation in the Church and Kerala's society. For the good of humanity, he discovered the literary potential of the languages that were available to him and expressed himself in his mother tongue in an exclusive manner. An educationist par excellence, Chavara realized that the community members, especially women, would ever remain exploited if they did not move with the times and wanted to share the knowledge they possessed and make arrangements for more. The steps that he took to circulate it were bold and farsighted. As a result, several schools came up, opening their portals to all irrespective of caste and creed. He gave principal importance to the dignity of a human being from his faith that all are created in God's image and likeness.

**Key Words:** Society, Education, Development.

### Objectives of the study

To highlight the works done by Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the social section of the Kerala society and illustrate the distinctive contributions of Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a social reformer in the nineteenth century.

### Methodology

It is an evocative study based on the primary and secondary sources on Kuriakose Elias Chavara. The written works of Chavara collected and published in four volumes – Complete Works of Chavara (CWC), which includes his chronicles, fictional works, spiritual writings and letters, holds a most crucial role in this study. Moreover, various lessons based on his life and offerings, books, and scripts related to the area were used as secondary sources for this study.

### Introduction

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the person behind the Reformation of the Church in Kerala, had made incredible and commendable contributions in Kerala's socio-cultural and educational fields. So he influenced History exceptionally well. The due acknowledgement is still not given for the immense effort this great personality took for the growth of the society, and he is nearly kept out of the memory of a majority. The creative revolutions he did in the land of Kerala still stays unknown to them. The influence he made in the fields of education, literature, culture, social reformations, religious practices, printing, Dalit upliftment etc., is ineradicable

from history.

In a note sent to the Department of Research and Documentation, Chavara Hills, Prof A. Sreedhara Menon, the noted historian and Padma Bhushan awardee, wrote as follows: "I feel sorrow for not having been able to study more deeply about Father Chavara whom I have often met in studying and writing (sic) about Kerala history. This note is meant at least in part to remove that sorrow. People like Father Chavara should be given the place they deserve". Chavara is a man who created history with his creative thinking and efforts. He transformed the socio-cultural traditions of Kerala profoundly. His selfless services to his fellow human beings are indescribable since his works are beyond words. (Cleopatra, 2014)

### The 19<sup>th</sup> century in Kerala

The way of life in Kerala in the 19<sup>th</sup> century will undoubtedly help us understand the importance of the presence and influence of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and his works. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the traditional social structure showed signs of disturbances.

There was a wide gap between the upper castes of society like Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and Nairs, and the lower castes, which became the base for the inequality in that society. The higher classes were given due recognition, but people's so-called lower strata were evaded from the scene. They were

subjected to ongoing injustice and insults. The concepts like Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood had no trace in Kerala. Even the leading group had a high degree of misconceptions, which affected the population's growth in unity. The laws were favourable for the upper strata of the people. They need not pay various taxes, and the penal code dealt well with them. The death penalty was imposed in the lower caste even for ordinary offences like theft, the killing of cows, etc. The lowers were not even allowed to pray in the temples, to walk through the path of the higher castes, and they never got a chance to get into the schools run by the government. And here, it is needless to point out that they were excluded from the community.

### **Kuriakose Elias Chavara and social reformation**

Chavara is the Social Reformer of the 19th century, who conferred his maximum energy for his people's welfare. The tremendous amount of knowledge and wisdom he acquired from various life experiences was spent on the development of society. He recognized the meaning of his life, and he spent his whole life to attain it. The plans he made and the means he took for it reveal his dedication to the social entity. The result of his farsightedness, being a person of the 19th century, is appreciable and can be considered as a model for the new generation. He introduced the first schools for the Syrian Catholics. The introduction of the Printing Press is an excellent initiative on the part of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. More than 150 years back, Chavara started a 'Dharmasala' for the uncared for, the aged, the sick, and the wandering. (Beccaro L, 2003)

### **Chavara- The man of education**

All his attempts were focusing on educating humankind. He knew that only education could reform society. Father Kuriakose tried to learn different languages like Malayalam, Tamil, and Sanskrit. He wanted to share his knowledge with the people. Becoming aware of the ignorance of the people who stands in the way of progress, he introduced schools in Kerala Church in 1846. The reform paved the way for the high literacy rate in Kerala. "His interest in the field of education, for priesthood other establishment and conduct of seminaries has already been dealt with. He was also concerned with the general education of

the laity. The Protestant Missionaries had by then started and experimented with the running of even English schools. They did so from about 1816. He realized that the community would remain downtrodden if they did not move with the times and decided that his new congregation should concentrate on educational work. So in 1846, the Monastery developed a new organ in the form of a Sanskrit school"(Chacko, 2014.P.98)

### **Introduction of Sanskrit school**

In 1846, Kuriakose Elias Chavara introduced a Sanskrit School adjacent to the Monastery. The English and Malayalam languages were avoided due to various reasons. He not only established the schools but also took measures for their future growth. A 'Vaadhyar' was arranged in order to teach in the school. The successful undertaking in the field of Sanskrit School gave rise to a new plan, this time focusing on the vulnerable section of the society. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the first Indian who took the initiative to teach Sanskrit to the lower class people, the language which was forbidden to them till then. By doing so, he wanted to break away from the class and the caste system in society. Kuriakose Elias Chavara had a strong belief that the knowledge and the Wisdom one acquires through education helps one to understand one's own status and would become a vital component to empower themselves. The schools at Arpukkara and Mannanam are living examples of this.

### **The great circular**

In 1864, he took a firm decision as Vicar General of the Syrians, which is to start schools attached to each of the parish churches. He gave the command to close down the parish churches that failed to start the schools.

"If today the Catholics of Kerala are literate to a high degree, it is largely because of the farsighted policy of Father Kuriakose Elias, in the establishment of a school for each parish! The Syrian Catholics, who were thus guided and led by him, have now to their credit several colleges, High Schools, Middle Schools, Elementary Schools, Industrial Schools, Sanskrit Schools and commercial Schools."(Chacko, 2014.P.99). He became the

powerful influence of the field of education.

Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara implemented free meals, clothes and study materials to the neediest students in the Schools. This idea gives an opportunity to the poor and untouchable students to study well. The creative thinking of Chavara adopted and recommended by Sir C P Ramaswamy Iyer for implementation in all Government Schools. Now, this scheme has been implemented all over the state.

### Printing press

In the beginning itself, Chavara started thinking about the formation and the development of the Printing Press. It was in 1846 that the Printing press was introduced at Mannanam. He started working for the Printing press, though he had to face much opposition. At the time of Chavara, there were two presses in Kerala. One was in Kottayam CMS press, and the other was in Trivandrum, the Government Press. The authorities of the particular institution tried to put down Chavara's efforts when they came to know about his plan to initiate a new Press. He stayed there and studied the structure of the Printing machine and drew the diagram in his mind. He came back to his place and practised making the machine on a Banana tree and later carved the same on the wood. After that, he took measures to make the alphabets for the Press. In spite of all these obstacles, Chavara could attain his goal that is to start a new Press at Mannanam. "St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam was the first to publish prayer books in Malayalam. Prayer books in Tamil only were standard at the time. This Press was the third in Travancore but was the first one to be set up under private ownership in the country.

The first wooden Press Father Kuriakose got built preserved today as a precious relic and a tribute to his skill, foresight, perseverance and patience. The St. Joseph's Press itself, more than a century and a half old, rises today as a glorious monument to its indefatigable founder and beacon light, in the total sense of the phrase, to Kerala. There is no Christian house in Kerala where some books printed at the St. Joseph's Press is not to be found. The Malayalam translation of The Holy Bible, the innumerable prayer books of the monthly Flower of Carmel and the Daily Deepika, now published from a branch house Kottayam,

were all perhaps in the dreams of the saintly founder. The Press stands for just one thing above all, to preach the gospel of Christ and to help the social life of those amidst whom it works." (Chacko 2014)

The achievements of other printing Press like those at Elthuruth and Thevara are no less significant. The influence it had upon society is remarkable. The newspaper "Nazraani Deepika" was printed, and later it took attention on a national level. (Panthaplackal, T. 2005)

### The field of literature

Chavara is a good poet too. He is the author of three major creative works that is Aathmanuthapam, Anasthasiyude Rakthasakshyam, maranaveetil padunnathinulla pana. 'Anasthasiyude Rakthasakshyam' is considered the first Malayalam Narrative poem. Besides this, his 'Letters' are very important. It gives awareness to the socio-economic conditions of Kerala. 'Chronicles' are one of the means to get to know the past of Kerala. 'Biography of Rev. Fr. Thomas Palackal' is the first of its kind in Malayalam. 'Eccologues' (edayanadakangal)- they are first of its kind Indian Languages. He wrote many spiritual books like Dhyanasallapangal, Kudumba chattam (oru nalla appente Chaavarul) etc. They are accommodating both for the religious and the laity. He is an innovator of the Divine Office, Liturgical Rubrics and calendar in the Malabar Church. (Kadankavil, T, 2004)

### The lighthouse for the women empowerment

When society was facing so many big problems like untouchability, inequality etc., there is less chance to think about the improvement or the reformation of the women of that time. The condition of women was very pathetic. The women of that time were not allowed to take the decision over their own matters. They were not even allowed to go for the studies. They were supposed to be extra submissive to the findings of male dominance. She was not only bounded in society but also in her home even. The equality of males and females were not at all practised. There were certain attitudes concerning the female group on which the life of a girl was decided. No one was allowed to cross the boundary. (CWC, Vol. IV, IX/2, 1982)

It was at this time that Chavara came to the scene with respectful convictions concerning the so-

called weaker generation. He tried all the means to teach girls, with the vision that, when a girl has educated the whole family; thereby, the entire Nation gets educated and gets reformed in actions and behaviour. He spread out this vision in the religious area, too, and so he started a congregation for the women of Kerala ( Kadankavil T, 2004) One of the most significant contributions of the Catholic Church to the modern world is the formation of religious life. Members of these religious institutions became globally recognized for charitable and social work. They are running all types of schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, home for the week, nursing homes etc. Chavara is the one who started the first religious congregation both for men and women in Kerala for the development of society. Now, these congregations are working all over the world, doing good for men and women. He started the first Catholic Charitable Organization to help them for a peaceful death (1843). Chavara is the man who founded the First Home of Charity and 'Confraternity of St. Joseph' for the Sick and Destitute of Kerala. (1869) (Moozhoor Z.M. (Ed), 1989).

All achievements are remembered when they prosper. But the labours or the struggles, or the disappointments behind them are hardly reflected. At the same time, the growth of the convents is noted with the ratification by all who derive immeasurable benefits from them (Chacko, 2014). Nobody ever keeps in mind the revolutionary efforts of the heroic souls like father Kuriakose, who brought the first of their kind into existence. He worked hard on this, even at significant personal risks. We should acknowledge that if the women in Kerala are educated, it is the efforts that Chavara took in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that lies behind. (Ramachandran, P.2004)

### Conclusion

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a very holy man and a successful founder and builder of many institutions. He dedicated himself to the love and services of men. It is an indisputable fact that he has started that many activities for the religious, social, cultural, educational, the advancement of his fellow-men. He was a man of dynamic personality with a broad vision and a powerful push. We, the people of Kerala, are immensely indebted to him for the richly

rewarding intuition undertaken primarily in the field of education. Even today, the educational institutions Started by him are highly esteemed and appreciated. His hand-outs are entirely down to earth, public-oriented, outstandingly visionary, and eventually devout. We cannot but marvel at that golden personality that stands out ever brilliant and distinctive in educational and social history.

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