

CHAPTER II

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NARAYANA GURU

Sree Narayana Guru is one of the greatest mystical philosophers of the modern world. The present century has some cross pollination between the analytic and synthetic extremes; they generally remain entrenched as the rival polarized camps of spirituality and materialism. Narayana Guru maintains that the most beneficial attitude is one that combines the best of both in a dynamic conception. The dialectical integration of the conceptual and the practical underlies the entire study of his philosophical teachings (S.Omana *The Epistemological Perspective in the Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 11). Philosophy in the West is mostly meant as an intellectual exercise of an elite group. Different is the case of philosophy in the East, especially in India. More than satisfying the intellectual curiosity, ensuring happiness (*ananda*) in life has always been the goal of the eastern philosophers. In other words, philosophy for them was a value-science. The word equivalent to “philosophy” in India is ‘*darsana*’, meaning ‘vision’, the vision of the Real, of what really exists. Each school of thought is called a *darsana*, and aiming at the happiness of everyone, individually and collectively, is common among all of them. In other words, how can happiness in life be ensured by knowing the Reality that appears as life, is the central theme of all Indian schools of thought (S.Omana *The Epistemological Perspective in the Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 49).

Vedanta, particularly *Advaita Vedanta*, admittedly represents the finality of Indian wisdom in the sense that it is the body of wisdom contained in the *Upanishads*, the concluding section of the *Vedas*. Hence, it is called ‘*Vedanta*’. Sankara is the propounder of *Advaita Vedanta*. According to Sankara, *Brahman* is the only Reality, pure Existence, Consciousness and Bliss (*Sat-Cit-Ananda*) (P.T.Raju 19). There is no distinction between *Atman* and *Brahman* and hence it is non-dual (Hiriyanna 154). Therefore, the denial of plurality, the unity of the *Atman* (soul) and *Brahman* (God), the assertion that when *Brahman* is known, all is known, cannot be explained consistently if one believes in a multiplicity within *Brahman* (S.Chatterjee and D.M.Datta 5). Exemplifying how non-dualism as an applied wisdom, enhances the value of human life and social dimensions, is the crowning touch the Guru gave to this wisdom antiquity.

Narayana Guru accepts *Advaita* as the metaphysical basis for man’s practical concern in the world, devoted his whole life to showing the world that *Advaita* can be translated into action. He attempted to bring the true *Advaitic* teaching into the realm of practical life (Balarama Panicker 29-30). It should be noted that in modern times several Hindu religious leaders have emphasized the practical application of Sankaracharya’s *Advaita Vedanta*. The significance of Sree Narayana Guru may be expressed in the words of Nataraja Guru:

“More than a millennium after Sankara from almost the same part of India, there appears another Guru, the Guru Narayana, who as it were, is a representative of the same direct and vertical line of philosophical re-valuators - recognizable valuers - the line which

can be said also to connect Sankara in his turn with the most ancient phrase of human history” (Nataraja Guru, *Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru* 60).

The essential difference between Sankara and Narayana Guru lies in their application of *Advaita* to the realm of practical life. Sankara propounded the theoretical aspects of *Advaita*, but Narayana Guru demonstrated the relevance of *Vedanta* to the practical life. He combined the *Advaita Vedanta* theory of the oneness of *Brahman* (*ekatma vada*) with the theistic *Vedanta* practice of love and service.

Sankara expounded the *Advaita Vedanta* in the eighth century A.D fully in line with the scientific preciseness and rational integrity familiar then. Re-introducing the same wisdom in the modern age of science, giving full recognition to the scientific mindset of the days in which Narayana Guru lived, was what Guru did. (S.Omana *The Epistemological Perspective in the Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 11). This he accomplished with as many as sixty original works spread out in three languages - Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit.

The Guru’s venture, through his writings, was to propagate eternal truths and ideals among the people and to take the divine message to every heart or hearts. Every feeling or thought that stimulated his mind, provoked his intellect, and blossomed in his heart was given an expression in a simple but powerful gospel form. True to the genius of *Advaita*, the Guru conceived all existence

from various angles beginning with common struggle on the material plane and reaching the highest level of metaphysical experience. He could enter deep into things, for he was a keen observer, endowed with great poetic insight. His soaring genius, enriched through all observations and varied experiences, has found expression in the form of verses. He enshrined his rich experience, deep insight and lofty spiritual realization, in a very simple but profoundly moving language. He was amply succeeded in making every subject, he dealt with, reach the heart of the reader.

To have a proper appreciation of the magnitude of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical teachings, it is necessary to understand his life and achievements because his life itself is his message to humanity.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

Sree Narayana Guru was born on 14th September 1856 (M.E Chingam 1032) in Vayalvaram house at Chempazhanthy, a village in Trivandrum, the capital city of Kerala State (S.Omana *The Epistemological Perspective in the Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 14). His father Madan Asan was a noted teacher as well as a Sanskrit scholar. He was well-versed in astronomy, and in *Ayurveda*. His mother Kutty Amma was a kind-hearted pious woman. The child was named 'Narayanan' and was endearingly called Nanu, became famous as Sree Narayana Guru.

A sense of history is essential to understand the impact and importance of any innovation in any society. Then only it can be properly evaluated and assimilated. In writing the life of Narayana Guru, it is essential to know the background. So before embarking upon the life of Sree Narayana Guru and his philosophical teachings it is imperative to know the background under which the Guru stirred to strengthen social solidarity and human relations.

In the days of Narayana Guru the most vital information everyone wanted to know of another person was his caste. This may look ridiculous to the present generation, but no one thought so in those days. Everybody wanted to know caste and everyone revealed his caste also as a matter of course. (S.Omana *Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 4)

Casteism, inequality, unseeability, untouchability and slavery surfaced in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries A.D. in Kerala. When Swamy Vivekananda visited Kerala in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Kerala was a hot-bed of casteism and untouchability at their worst forms. Hence it is that Vivekananda called the place a ‘lunatic asylum’. Swamy Vivekananda lamented the untouchability and other evil customs prevalent here in the Hindu religion. His words, “Aye, in this country of yours, the very birth place of *Vedanta*, our masses have been hypnotised for ages into that state. To touch them is pollution; to sit with them is pollution. Hopeless they are born, hopeless they must remain. And the result is that they have been sinking, sinking and have come to the last stage to which a human being can come. For what country is there in the world where man has to sleep with the cattle? If anybody is born

of a low caste in our country, he is gone for ever, there is no hope for him, why, what a tyranny. Those thousands of *Brahmanas*, what are they doing for the low, down-trodden masses of India? Don't touchism is a mental disease. Beware! All expansion is life, all contraction is death. All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction. Love is, therefore, the only law of life”.

Even though Kerala is today treated as one ethnic unit, there are many caste groups and local customs in Malabar or North Kerala, which are not known to the people of the South, formerly called Travancore. Hindus, Christians and Muslims live almost as exclusive communities. Hindus had within it *Brahmins* and non- *Brahmins*. In the days of Narayana Guru non-*Brahmins* ranged from the most touchable to the least touchable. The caste in Kerala has nothing or very little to do with what is popularly known as the fourfold division of *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras* (M.N.Sreenivas 66).

The Nairs were baptized by the *Brahmins* with a hocus–pocus ritual of making the ‘Raja designate’ to be symbolically born out of a golden cow. The priest was the golden cow. The Nairs were a martial class. There was also a large community who acted as a buffer group between the touchables and the untouchables. They are known in Travancore as Ezhavas, in Cochin Chovas and in Malabar Thiyas. (N.S. Aiyar 41) Then there came the poorest of the poor, who were real children of the soil - the ‘*Bhumiputras*’. They were branded as untouchables.

In due course, Kerala was transformed into a veritable hell and it is in this cauldron of caste, that Sree Narayana Guru was born and that too in a lower caste family. It is said that once in the desert of life to give solace and shelter to the weary traveller. The *Gita* also says that whenever *dharma* is threatened, God incarnates himself to redeem the victims of *adharma* and restore order in society. Sree Narayana Guru was born to eradicate the evils of caste system and preached and provided a perennial solution to the problems of castes in the form of sermon, “One Caste, One Religion and One God for mankind”.

EDUCATION

Nanu’s first teacher was his own father, Madan Asan. He had formal schooling in the village school of Chempazhanthy Pillai. Apart from Malayalam and Tamil, he learned by heart, Sidharupa, Balaprabodhana and Amarakosa. He was blessed with a penetrating understanding and a sharp memory from the very early childhood. Although there were a few schools in Travancore and Cochin in those days, hence there was no scope for higher education in the villages nearby, so he had to stop his education. In due course he studied Sanskrit from his own father and studied medicine (Ayurveda) from his uncle Krishnan Vaidyar. Nanu’s circumstances were such that he had to satisfy himself with what he received from his father, his uncle and the village school master. (S. Omana *Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 8)

Nanu had a natural ingenuity in discerning the right from the wrong and the essential from the non-essential. When Nanu’s parents or uncles kept fruits

and sweet-meats for the divine offerings, he did not hesitate to partake of it before the *pooja* was performed. When he was called to account for his action, his plea was that God would be happy if he made himself happy. (K.K. Panikkar 76)

When Nanu's uncles were meticulous in enforcing the customary convention of untouchability, the child wanted to show the meaninglessness of it. Nanu did not care for the rules of untouchability, because he did not find any logic in it. He used to mingle freely with the untouchables who worked in their farm and then threaten to touch the elders in the house with his polluted hand. One day he happened to pass an untouchable's hut, he saw that the rice gruel being cooked on the hearth was about to spill over. If it spilled over, the poor family would have to go without food for the day. Without hesitation, he went in and removed the pot from the fire and thus saved the food for the family. The elders found fault with him for doing this, but he did not find anything wrong in being kind and helpful (Sathyabhai Sivadas and Prabhakara Rao 21). There is a touching story of Nanu's childhood reaction to injustice which also reveals his consistency in opposing injustice with passive spiritual force.

One day when Nanu was going to school with other village children, a sannyasin with matted hair and clad in rags was also on the road. The unusual look of the mendicant intrigued the mischievous imps. They started jeering and throwing stones at him. The sannyasin walked on as if he was not aware of what was happening. When Nanu saw this, he burst into tears. The sannyasin turned back and spotted Nanu walking behind him in tears. The kind mendicant asked

Nanu why he was crying. Nanu said that he was crying because of his inability to stop the village urchins from pelting such a good man with stones. Hearing this, the sannyasin lifted the boy to his shoulders and brought him back to his parents. He blessed Nanu and told that he would one day become a great man (*mahatma*) (K.K. Panikkar 78).

This incident symbolizes hundreds of other acts of injustice against which Narayana Guru protested in his life. He always employed a passive dynamism whereby he brought the powers of the heavens to the earth to correct the ills of the world. There is another incident of Nanu's childhood which indicates how he was turned on to what can be described as the via negative (*Nivrthi Marga*) (S. Omana *Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 8).

Once a relative died in the family, and everyone cried. On the very next day, after the cremation, the jolly mood returned. A couple of days after the cremation, the young Nanu found missing. The people searched for him everywhere. Finally they found him sitting in a wood, lost in thought. When he was questioned about his strange behaviour, he said "the other day when a dear one died everyone was crying. I thought now you will be sorrowful for ever. Hardly a day passed and all of you started laughing as if nothing had happened. It looked strange to me". (M.K. Sanoo 42) Of course nobody kept any record of what he said, but he might have said something to this effect. What is important to note is his disgust for relativism and how he preferred to turn away from it as a remedy to correct the iniquities of social behaviour (S. Omana *Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 7).

Nanu in his adolescence experienced restlessness and engaged in beyond pranks which were characteristics of his inner enfoldment and growth. Home and relatives did not attract him. One day his uncle Krishnan Vaidyar received a letter in Sanskrit from Paravur Kesavanasan, a well-known Sanskrit scholar. Krishnan Vaidyar found it difficult to understand the letter. He called his nephew Nanu and asked whether he can explain the meaning of the letter. Nanu read the letter and explained the meaning. He then thought that it was a serious mistake not to allow Nanu to have higher education. . (S. Omana *Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 8)

In 1877 Nanu was sent to the family of Varanapally to be further educated under the guidance of a well-known scholar named Kummampilli Ramanpillai Asan. It was a custom in those days for rich families to arrange for the higher studies of their sons, by honouring guest-teachers who volunteered to teach deserving students and providing them with free boarding and lodging. These teachers had no pecuniary motives. Seeing his amazing ability to grasp and digest the hidden meanings of Sanskrit classics; Raman Pillai Asan gave special permission to Nanu to be present with him when he was teaching other students also (S. Omana *Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 9).

Nanu was both studying and teaching himself. It was not difficult for his teacher to know what was happening within him. Raman Pillai Asan gave special instruction to the chief of the Varanpally household to give Nanu

facilities to be alone and spend time as he liked in deep meditation and self-discipline (S. Omana *Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 9).

Narayana Guru was blessed with a very critical and analytical mind; he was also evenly balanced with a sense of deep devotion. There was intimation of the unreal nature of the world of senses. There were direct experiences of the cruel law of nature that hold perpetual sway over all creatures. Nanu was convinced of the customs that existed even in the world of human beings who prided themselves on their unique mental faculties. Ignorance was the basis of all these evils. Once he was enlightened not only the evil customs but even his lust for sensual fulfilment would appear meaningless to him.

The result of such a perspective taking root in Nanu was obvious in his disinterestedness towards worldly pleasures. Disinterestedness would lead to renunciation. Nanu learnt the primary lessons of renunciation. Yet he couldn't simply dismiss the sufferings in this world as another state of illusion. At this stage the philosopher in him would fail. His mind would grope in the darkness.

Even in the midst of this spiritual unrest, Nanu paid deep attention to his studies. Perhaps studies afforded him a certain measure of peace. Quest for knowledge was ever a strong factor of his make-up. "Ganapathy exhibited unappeasable hunger at the breakfast table of Vaisravana. A similar gargantuan appetite for learning was visible in Nanu when he was a student under Raman Pillai Asan (Moorkth Kumaran 23). The number of books he mastered during his three years with Raman Pillai was a proof of his insatiable appetite. The

influence of Raman Pillai should have been a deciding influence on the Swami's progress to the *Advaita* philosophy.

The lonely flight of a seeker is not only appreciated by the world, but in most cases he is neither recognized as a seeker nor does the world seem to know that there is anything to seek at all. The disinterestedness and spiritual tint seen in Nanu perturbed his elders. He was to maintain the prestige of his house and even enhance it. But he was moving in a totally different direction. They thought of some means to put him on the right road. He should immediately be engaged in some occupation suited to his taste. This was no problem. Teaching had always been to his liking and he had a way with him of conveying his ideas in a clear logical manner. He could, therefore, be employed as a tutor. During the period of a teacher he came to be known as Nanu Asan.

Life as a teacher did not have much impact on Nanu's bent of mind. He continued to be as silent and as uninterested in worldly life as ever. Leisure hours found him poring over religious books, or meditating in solitude or in prayer in the nearby temple. The wanderer in him never gave up. He could never be found in his house. Nanu would visit the huts of untouchables after working hours. Only Ezhava children were admitted to the school. So Nanu could not impart knowledge to the children of the lower castes. They too deserved to be taught. A teacher is obliged to light the lamp in their minds too. If they could not come to him, he had to go to them. That was justification enough for him. Visiting their huts had one more advantage. He could teach the family rudiments of hygiene and cleanliness. They were living in the most

unclean conditions. They had no special affinity towards dirt. They were just ignorant of clean ways.

There comes a time in the life of every seeker that he cannot any longer carry on the transactions of the relativistic pattern of home life without becoming hypocritical. This marked the beginning of his life as a mendicant, which lasted over a decade. Seeking solitude, Nanu Asan carried himself across forests, mountains, hills and valleys and reached the base of Agasthyakodam hills. He spent a few days there in meditation and recitation of stanzas in praise of the Omnipotent. He lived like a recluse. He spent some time in a Tamil book shop. He got enough time to read the spiritual books. Those works included such great ones as *Thirukkural*, *Thiruppukal*, *Thiruppavai*, *Ozhivilodukkam*, *Sivapuramam* and *Thirumandiram*. After wandering for some time he came to live with an old comrade of his called Perunelli Krishnan Vaidyar (Moorkoth Kumaran 100) who was very erudite in Sanskrit. At Perunelli the Guru became friendly with Kunjan Pillai Chattampi. His original name was Ayyappan. Officially he was Shanmughadasan (K.K. Panikkar 111). He was entrusted with the duty of a monitor by his master and so he was called Chattampi. He later became famous as Chattampi Swami. Chattampi was a man of deep insight and penetrating critical accumen. Seeing Nanu Asan's interest in yoga, Chattampi Swami took him to his yoga teacher Thycattu Ayyavu (S.Omana *Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 14).

The yoga lessons which Nanu Asan received from Thaicattu Ayyavu increased his thirst for realization. So he travelled from one place to another.

This ultimately led him to do intense penance in a cave in the Marutvamalai near the southern tip of India, Kanyakumari. Marutvamalai is known as the mountain of medicine. It is believed that in the *Ramayana* when Hanuman carried back the mountain Himalaya into its original place after curing wounded Lakshmana and other warriors, a small portion of the mountain fell down here and it is this fallen part that is known as Marutvamalai. On the top of the hill, there is a cave known as Pillathadam cave. It is presumed that the Guru led his awakening during his solitary penance in the Pillathadam cave of Marutvamalai. He spoke of his realization in poignant words in his *Atmopadesa Satakam*.

*Like the dawn all together of ten thousand solar orbs
Wisdom's function comes; Such verily, is that which
Tears asunder this wisdom-hiding transient
And as the primal Sun prevails.*

(Narayana Guru *A.S* Verse 35)

Narayana Guru left Marutvamalai and became a recluse in the forest of Aruvippuram, on the banks of the Neyyar, a river in south Kerala. At Aruvippuram, ordinary devout people began to visit him and it gradually gained momentum. Some of the people came and told the Guru that they were not permitted to enter and offer worship in the existing orthodox temple for the reason that they belonged to the lower stratum in the caste system. The Guru, realized how serious the problem was, pondered over it and finally decided to start a new temple open to all with no caste discrimination. Narayana Guru

picked up a stone from the river Neyyar and installed it on a pedestal with a silent prayer and it made a landmark in the social and spiritual history of India (K.K. Panikkar 154).

The installation of the Siva temple at Aruvippuram (details of this temple is given in the third chapter) was a milestone in the history of India's spiritual emancipation. Those who held to the caste-ridden heritage of India shuddered at the idea of a common man, who had no claim to priestly tradition, installing a temple. It was always accepted in those days that Brahmin priests alone had the authority to install idols in temples. But here a non-Brahmin, that too from a backward community, showed that he could perform the job, on the strength of his spiritual wisdom. The priestly clan felt uncomfortable and there were a few protests. Undaunted, Narayana Guru responded "it was not a Nambutiri Siva that we installed" (Swami Muni Narayana Prasad xvi).

Near this new temple, he also founded a monastery (*Ashram*) and formed an organization called *Kshetrayoga* for the protection of temple properties and the welfare of the worshippers. The new temple thereafter became a permanent one and was recognized as one of repute, open to all with no discrimination of caste or religious following. This new temple culture was one of the factors which influenced the king to sign the legendary Temple Entry Proclamation in 1934, throwing open the doors of the temples to all Hindus irrespective of caste and creed.

An organized effort was afoot then, under the dedicated and inspired leadership of Dr. Palpu - serving then in Mysore, having been denied a government job in Travancore, merely on account of caste prejudice - to usher in social justice for the downtrodden. Dr. Palpu, when he had sought Swami Vivekananda, was told that such a movement would succeed only if it had the blessings of a spiritually enlightened person from your own country. Dr. Palpu immediately realized that such a leader could only be Narayana Guru. Dr. Palpu thereafter approached the Guru and placed before him the issue for consideration. The Guru wholeheartedly blessed the proposal and suggested that *Kshetrayoga* set up for the administration of the newly setup temple could be transformed into such a body with a broader base and writ. Thus was born Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P) in 1903, became a powerful mouthpiece to defend the natural and constitutional rights of the socially depressed people of the state (M.K. Sanoo 168) This society for Sree Narayana Dharma propagation with hundreds of branches all over Kerala, the biggest social force in Kerala, and the first such organization in India

The organizers of the S.N.D.P made Sree Narayana Guru as its first President. The first General Secretary of the S.N.D.P Yogam was Kumaran Asan, the peerless pioneer among modern Malayalam poets. He was one of the dedicated disciples of Sree Narayana Guru. In fact the spiritual philosophy and the crusade against caste that illumine Kumaran Asan's poetry were inspired mainly by his association with and inspiration from the great Guru.

After the formation of the S.N.D.P. the Guru left Aruvippuram and came to live in Varkala. In Varkala Sivagiri, Narayana Guru founded a monastery and consecrated a temple and dedicated to Sarada, the goddess of wisdom and learning, bearing ample testimony to the importance given by the Guru to knowledge (Moorkoth Kumaran 225). The new headquarters and the Sarada Temple founded in 1912 implied in it a secret gesture of the Guru that he wanted a more open place and a fertile field for the incubation of global ideals that are worthy of human wisdom and dignity.

In Varkala, the Guru started a model English School. It was his intention to give the people insight into the grass roots of Indian culture and also foresight into the development that was fast taking place in the world. The Guru exhorted people to unite and be strong, educated and free of prejudices. He encouraged them to assert their rights fearlessly with courage.

When Sivagiri became a well established centre he moved to Aluva, on the banks of the river Periyar, where he set up the Advaita Ashramam.

Aluva Advaita Ashramam –Ernakulam – 1913 (M.E 1088)

The Guru built an *ashramam* at Kalady, the birth place of Sankara on 1913. Narayana Guru called his Aluva Ashramam, as “Advaita Ashramam”. The Advaita Ashramam was different from his other consecrations. In this Ashramam no idol was installed and no poojas are performed. The main purpose of this Ashramam is to teach Sanskrit.

The Guru found this to be a flaw in the application of Vedanta in every day life. In this Ashramam he admitted students from all religions and all communities to the Vedanta course that was taught there. Here he established a Sanskrit school to restore the sanctity of the language through which universal spiritual teachings can be grasped and imparted to the dedicated disciples.

Sree Narayana Guru presided over two important conferences in Aluva. The first was the annual meeting of the All Kerala Association of Brotherhood in 1921, when the Guru proclaimed the following message:

"Whatever may be the difference in man's creed, dress, and language etc. because they all belong to the same kind of creation, there is no harm at all in dining together or having marital relations with one another." (Moorkoth Kumaran 171)

This is the first open, definite, forthright statement of the Guru against caste distinctions and its corollary of prohibition of inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriages.

The second historic event at Aluva was the Parliament of All Religions in 1924, under the direct leadership of the Guru. (Details of this conference are given in the next chapter).

He again came back to Sivagiri. It was here at Sivagiri, that the Guru spent a great deal of his time until his mahasamadhi in 1928. Today the body of the Guru lies in state in the Maha Samadhi Mandir on the beautiful peak of

Sivagiri. The beauty and serenity of the location impresses anybody, and Sivagiri gradually got transformed into a place of pilgrimage, worship and meditation. On the New Year Day every year, thousands of pilgrims visit the place and participate in the annual spiritual convention attended by leaders of all religions.

Sree Narayana Guru is one of those rare men whose greatness was recognized even while they were alive. No better testimony is needed for this than the fact that Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi visited the Guru in Sivagiri, and paid respects to him. Tagore, when visited Kerala in 1922, interviewed the Guru and was deeply impressed that he remarked:

“I am on a travelling mission to different parts of the world. During this venture I have had the rare opportunity to visit many saints and sages. But I could not see any one greater than or even equal to, Sree Narayana Guru of Kerala. I will not forget those yoga powered eyes stretching their looks into the unknown far away, and that refulgent face which exuded divinity” (K.R. Bhaskaran 148)

It was in the background of the Vaikom Satyagraha that Gandhi visited the Guru in 1925 (T.K. Ravindran 58). When Gandhi met Narayana Guru at Varkala, the sage of the Sabarmati and the Guru of Varkala had an interesting discussion. Here are Mahatma Gandhi’s words:

“I consider as my greatest fortune to have had the opportunity to visit the richly beautiful land of Travancore and the great saint Sree Narayana Guru Swamikal. I also had the great fortune to stay in the sacred *asrama* of Guru Swamikal (Sivagiri) for a day”. (K.R. Bhaskaran 148).

The Guru’s meeting with Gandhi had considerable impact on Mahatmaji’s future programmes. One of these was the inclusion of the eradication of untouchability in the action programmes of the Indian National Congress. When Mahatmaji attended the first Round Table Conference in London, he became convinced of the Guru’s advice and changed the name of his paper, Navajivan, to ‘Harijan’ and called the neglected masses the “Harijans”, the progeny of Hari or Vishnu.

As the image of Jesus carrying his cross has served as a symbol of his love and service to humanity, so also great masters make even their sickness and sufferings serviceable to their fellow beings. The life of the Guru was in every detail an example of the principle which he enunciated as follows:

Act that one performs
 For one’s own sake,
 Should also aim the good
 Of other men.

(Nataraja Guru *The Word of the Guru* 54)

‘In fact this maxim may be said to form the key-stone of his whole life’.

The seventy third birthday of the Guru was celebrated by a select group of friends, representatives of different nations and religions in September, 1928, in the beautiful city of Geneva. For the first time the Guru's message was proclaimed in the West. Strangers, united in worship, feasted together and discussed informally the significance of the ideals of universal appeal which the Guru's life had symbolized. On the 20th September, 1928, about a week after the event, the Guru entered *Maha-Samadhi* or great silence, peacefully and silently at Varkala (S.Omana *Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru* 45). In one of his last writings he wrote:

That dispenser of mercy could he not be that reality

That proclaiming words of supreme import the chariot drives?

Or compassion's ocean ever impatient for all creation,

Or who in terms clear non- dual wisdom expounds, the Guru?

(Nataraja Guru *The Word of the Guru*, 54-56).

PHILOSOPHY OF NARAYANA GURU

Narayana Guru avowedly is an *advaitin* (non-dualist). Yet his non-dualism is not opposed to any other systems like *Visista Advaita* of Ramanuja, *Dvaita* (Dualism) of Madhva, Buddhism, Jainism, materialism, idealism, physics, metaphysics, and micro-cosmic vision and macro cosmic vision. All such schools will find Narayana Guru's vision fully acceptable, each finding its own room in the all- inclusive mansion of its vision. The main concepts of the

Advaita philosophy, such as *Brahman*, *Atman*, world and *Maya* have been incorporated in Narayana Guru's philosophy.

The earliest sources of information regarding the philosophy of *Advaita* are the canonical Upanishads, namely Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Aitereya, Taittiriya, Chandogya and Brahadaranyaka.

Sankara is considered as the chief exponent of *Advaita Vedanta*. Sankara's philosophy has been made practicable and approachable by Sree Narayana Guru. The Guru agreed with the real spirit of the *Advaitism* of Sankara. But the means he advocated for the realization of the highest ideal and the way in which he applied his wisdom for the welfare of his fellow beings are different. Hence, it is essential here to present the fundamentals of the philosophy of *Advaita* as advocated by Sankara.

Every system of philosophy is more or less dependent on the civilization in which it is born. With penetrating insight, Sankara entered the philosophic heritage of his age and reinterpreted it with unequalled originality and analytical skill. As with Plato, Aristotle, Hegel and other idealistic thinkers, the philosophy of Sanakara is the austere vision of the eternal truth.

Sankara has presented the sum and substance of *Advaita* in the aphoristic half verse, *Brahma satyam, jagatmithya / jivo brahmaiva napara*. The Absolute (*Brahman*) alone is real, world (*jagat*) is unreal, the individual Self (*Jiva*) in its true sense is *Brahman* itself and no other. The Self and the Absolute are non-different. The purport of the entire scripture, according to

Sankara, is the non-duality (*advaita*) of the Absolute and the individual Self. Sankara states that the manifold world of objects existing independent of the subject (*jiva*) is an illusion (*maya*). It is an innate illusion resting on an “illegitimate transference” (*adhyasa*) because of which is qualityless. This procedure is resting on false knowledge (*avidya*). *Avidya*, though it is mainly a logical concept in the metaphysics of Sankara signifies a whole attitude of life.

The relation between Sankara and Sree Narayna Guru is actually one between the theory and practice. Without theory practice is impossible and without practice theory is futile. The Guru is an *Advaitin* in the true sense, yet he deviates from Sankara. To be an *Advaitin* means to realize that all men are equal and the ultimate status of man is equivalent to the status of *Brahman*. When a philosopher establishes ‘truth’ through a cogent system building, he is doing the highest service to mankind, and when a social reformer realizes this truth in his own integral experiences and makes it his firm foundation principle in all activities, he is surpassing the philosopher. Sankara belongs to the former category and Sree Narayna Guru to the latter.

Subscribing to the *Advaita* philosophy of Sankara, the Guru carried to its logical conclusion. Acceptance of the non- duality of the individual Self and the divine Self, according to him, naturally led to the assertion of non-duality of individual selves. By non-duality Narayana Guru mean the non-duality of *bhava* and *sat*, the non-duality of the apparent world and *Brahman* or *atman*, the one Reality just as gold and gold ornament do not and cannot exist separately, the fleeting apparent world and the eternal all-underlying Reality always remain

non-dual. Though what we perceive is gold alone, we take it for ornaments; like wise, though constantly perceive atman, by remaining *atman*, we think we are perceiving the world. This is caused by *avidya*. Even when seen as the world, what really exists remains as *atman*, just as even when a piece of rope is seen as a snake, it still remains a rope. It is our freedom from this *avidya* that leads us to the right kind of perception. It is our liberation from all miseries as well. This is how we become liberated from all dualities and miseries.

The essence of the all underlying *atma* is consciousness or *arivu*, also called *cit* or *samwit*. The *cit* in its functionally manifest form appears as everything, both as mind and matter. This mind is what conducts the search for the all-underlying Reality. That Reality is none other than the substance that has assumed the form of the very same mind. Therefore, what the searching mind has to do know the all-underlying *atma* is interiorize its search and realize “I am that” (*tat tvam asi*).

Atman and Brahman

The Reality, in Vedanta, is known as *atma* or *Atman*, a word derived from the root ‘*at*’, meaning ‘to pervade the being of something’ (*ad vyapane*). It signifies the Substance that pervades the being of all that has come into being. One such being is the knower himself. Therefore, the word ‘*atma*’ denotes ‘the Self’ or ‘oneself as well’ (Swami Muni Narayana Prasad *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru* 10). In the sense of being the Substance that always grows and assumes the form of the ever-changing world, it is called *Brahman*. The word

Brahman is derived from the root ‘*brh*’ meaning to grow. *Brahman* thus literally means that which always grows or the all-encompassing one. The common usage of the word *atma* refers to the Substance in every individuated being, and that of *Brahman* to the universal being. Realizing the essential oneness of *Brahman* and *Atman* (*Brahmatmaikyam*) is the final goal *Vedanta* aim at. By this identification, the apparent externality of *Brahman* the objective ideal as well as the apparent finitude of *atman*, the subjective ideal is driven away by the *Upanishadic* thinkers.

Brahman is the non-dual consciousness and as such in comprehensible. *Brahman* is neither an object, nor a class of object. *Satyam Jnanam Anandam Brahman, Ekam Eva Advitiyam Brahman* (Chandogya Upanishad), these *Vedic* sentences express the essential nature of *Brahman*.

The Guru is always using the term *Arivu* (knowledge) for denoting the Ultimate Reality. The Guru uses the term *Brahman* only in the *Darsanamala* and *Brahmavidya Panchakam*. The Guru gives a clear definition in positive terms as to what *atma* is. The *atma* is defined in the *Upanishad* as *Sacchidananda*. Narayana Guru expresses *atma* or *Brahman* as *Sacchidananda*. Guru says in his *Darsanamala* as:

sarvam hi sacchidanandam

neha nanasti kimca na

(Narayana Guru *D.M* Verse 10)

‘Everything indeed is *sacchidanandam* multiplicity has no existence at all here’.

‘*Sat*’ means ‘existence’ or that which has existence unaffected by spatial and temporal limitations. It comprises the truth of the dictum ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ of Cartesianism and the ‘*esse est percipi*’ of Berkely and holds them both together by means of the ultimate notion of the Absolute (Nataraja Guru *Vedanta Revalued and Restated* 19). ‘*Cit*’ means consciousness or *Arivu* and is most intimately experienced as the Self’s consciousness or one’s self consciousness. The contentment of having found the meaning content of life and thus the contentment of living meaningfully as freedom embodied. This ultimate contentment is referred to as ananda. It is an experience that buds in the being of cit, that fills the being of cit. that is ‘sat’ is ‘cit’ in essence, ananda also is cit in essence. Thus the atma or Brahman, in essence is ‘Sacchidananda’ (Swami Muni Narayana Prasad *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru* 11).

Jiva

An individual being is designated in Sanskrit by the word *jiva*. The word ‘*jiva*’ is derived from the root ‘*jiv*’ meaning ‘to survive through breathing’ (*jiva-pranadharane*), it is the Sanskrit equivalent to the modern word ‘organism’ (Swami Muni Narayana Prasad *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru* 28) The word is mixed up in common usage with the theological concept ‘soul’, the Guru in his philosophical works avoids the use of the word.

How does the individual (*jiva*) originate? It is a fact that the scientific knowledge reveals that an individual's birth is from the sexual union of the parents. Religious people call that source mind God. The Guru, while not disagreeing with the religious people, thinks of it, as the *Upanishadic rsis* also did, as *atma* of which nothing can be predicated. *Atma*, therefore, is the original source, the material cause as well as the efficient cause, of the individual.

World

Sankara said that the world is *mithya*, what he meant is that it will be sublimated by true knowledge. The knowledge of *Brahman* contradicts the world of experience and hence from the absolute point of view the world is not Real; this duality is mere illusion. Non-duality is the Supreme Reality. This is in accordance with the idea that the world is an illusory experience. There is a highest standpoint from which empirical things are only appearance. It is in this sense that the Sankara maintains that the world is illusory (*maya*).

According to Narayana Guru, the world is the apparent concrete form assumed by the one abstract Reality, *atma* or *arivu*. This apparent form includes both physical and mental factors. The existence of the world conceived in philosophy, particularly in *Advaita Vedanta* as Narayana Guru revisualised it, is bipolar one – the objective phenomena perceptible to the senses forming the one pole, and the corresponding ideas or percepts formulated in the mind of the perceiver forming the other (Swami Muni Narayana Prasad *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru* 8). *Maya*, a mysterious factor (that which has no existence of

its own) inherent in *Brahman* causes the wrong notion that the world has its own existence. According to Sankara, *maya* and *avidya* are almost synonymous, the only difference being that *maya* is related to total beingness and *avidya* to individual beingness. The vision of *maya* represented by Narayana Guru, on the other hand, conceives both *vidya* and *avidya* as dualities that become manifest as the effect of *maya* (S.Omana *The Epistemological Perspective in the Philosophy of Narayana Guru* 26).

The most fundamental categories into which the world is analysed in the *Upanishads* are *nama* and *rupa* (names and forms). Narayana Guru describes the world as constituted of countless names, countless percepts and concepts and countless corresponding perceptible objects (Swami Muni Narayana Prasad *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru* 8). Narayana Guru in this sense defines the world thus:

*Names in their thousands,
concepts in their thousands,
and the externally existing
objects in their thousands
corresponding to each of them –
these together form the world*

(Narayana Guru *Advaita Deepika* Verse 1)

Names and forms could well be fused together; then the world can be thought of as having the subjective realm of concepts and the objective realm of

perceived as two sides of the same coin. The Reality we are in search of is the one that underlies both the subjective experience as well as the objective phenomena.

Causality wise the world is an effect. *Atma*, being the only Substance that has real existence, necessarily has to be the material cause of the world. As there is nothing else existing to serve as the efficient cause, *atma* has to be the world's efficient cause as well. *Atma* then is the material-cum-efficient cause of the world.

Maya

Maya is a mysterious factor that has no existence of its own, yet is inherent in *Brahman*. Its effects appear as dualities like *vidya* and *avidya* (science and nescience), *para* and *apara* (the transcendental and non-transcendental), and *tamas*(darkness), *pradhana*(potential), *prakrti*(nature or creative self-unfoldment) and the like. *Maya* being non-existent, its effects, though seemingly existent, are also to be understood as really non-existent.

Maya, as a methodological device to explain the mysteriousness of what is ultimately Real, was first formulated by Sankara. According to Sankara, *maya* and *avidya* are almost synonymous, the only difference being that *maya* is related to total beingness and *avidya* to individual beingness. The vision of *maya* represented by Narayana Guru, on the other hand, conceives both *vidya* and *avidya* as dualities that become manifest as the effects of *maya*. Knowledge

can become right or wrong, *vidya* or *avidya*, only when consciousness functionally unfolds itself in the form of knowing. Both *vidya* and *avidya*, as two different functional modes of one and the same consciousness- Reality, are unreal, and thus the effects of *maya*. (Swami Muni Narayana Prasad *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru* 14)

Narayana Guru in his Darsanamala defines *vidya* and *avidya* as:

Manaso nanaya sarvam kalpyate vidyaye jagat

Vidya sau layam yati tadakhyam iva khilam

(Narayana Guru *D.M Asatya Darsanam Verse.2.*)

All the worlds are imagined to be existed by nescience (*avidya*) that has no being beside the imaginative mind. This nescience in its turn just vanishes upon attaining proper knowledge (*vidya*). The entire world thus, has being only like that of a drawn picture.

Sankara conceived *maya* as having two powers, namely, *avarana* (putting a veil on what really exists) and *viksepa* (projecting something unreal on the real). This differentiation is not made by Narayana Guru. He conceives the entire power of *maya* as *avarana*. Unveiling the *avarana* and directly perceiving what is hidden behind, is part and parcel of the spiritual discipline of the seeker.

Maya is the root cause of the appearance and experience of the world. If *maya* is the cause of the world, is it the material cause or the efficient cause? The answer is neither. Both these causes are *Brahman* or *atma*. *Maya* then, is

the mysterious cause that differentiates cause and effect. *Maya* being the cause of the world is meaningful in an epistemological context - the context of knowledge going wrong, in not seeing the Real and mistaking the unreal (the world) as the Real. This ignorance creates the impression that the world exists; in its absence no world is there. In this sense alone, *maya* is the source of the world; *maya* is not the ontological cause of the world.

Karma

Karma is apparent in the realms of both the universal and the particular. *Prakriti* is an incessantly changing state. Every change involves an event taking place. Every event is an outcome of an action (*karma*) that takes place in that context. *Karma*, individually seen, is the inner urge in an entity to transform itself from one state of existence into another. This urge is there in everything; therefore events take place everywhere. Universally seen, *karma* is the inner urge in the ultimate Reality, *atma*, to cause specific entities to emerge from itself, as is well-defined as follows in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

bhuta-bhavodbhava-karo

visrgah karma-samjnitah.

(*Bhagavad Gita* VIII 3)

‘This is to be understood by the word *karma*: the specific creative urge that causes the coming into being of all that has come into being’.

Karmas by themselves, are unreal (*asat*). Reality (*sat*) is that which underlies all *karmas*, all individuals and the entire world. That is what *jnanins* find themselves fully identified with. In the words of Narayana Guru:

Prarabdham kva nu sancitam tava

Kim agami kva asat

Tvayi adyastam ato 'khilam tvam asi

Saccin matram ekam vibhuh.

(Narayana Guru *Brahmavidya Pancakam Verse 5*)

How can you have *prarabdha-karma*? How can you have *sancita-karma*? How can you have *agami-karma*? *Karma* itself is unreal. All such notions are simply superimposed on you. You simply are the one manifesting as all *sat-cit*.

Rebirth

Another problem, also understood as closely related to an individual's *karma* is that of rebirth. Rebirth becomes meaningful only where birth and death also so. The latter two are seen to be real only because of *avidya*, for the Reality in every apparent being was never born and it never dies. *Avidya* makes one identify oneself with one's evanescent apparent form and mistake its emerging as birth and re-merger as death.

Released from *avidya*, one finds both birth and death as unreal. Therefore rebirth is meaningful only in the realm of *avidya*. Narayan Guru categorically says:

*Neither is there death nor birth nor life duration here,
Nor men or gods nor others of that order; all is name and form!
Like a mirage based on desert sands, is this thing that stands,
Nor is it a thing at all with any content, note.*

(Narayana Guru *A.S* Verse 78)

These names and forms become configured in the one *arivu* owing to the *karma* inherent in it. Seen as that *arivu* or *atma*, I was never born and I will never die. For the one all underlying substance is birthless and deathless. This vision, this enlightenment, makes me immortal (*amrta*), one who transcends death. (Swami Muni Narayana Prasad *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru* 8).

Liberation or Moksa

The Guru does not insist on a single path to attain the goal of Self-realisation. All the four paths of Hinduism, the way of action (*karma-marga*), the way of knowledge (*jnana-marga*), the pathway of devotion (*bhakti-marga*), the way of *yoga* (*yoga-marga*) find their place in his philosophy. In fact the concept of liberation and pathways leading to it are described by him beautifully in his works especially *Darsanamala*, *Attmopadesa Satakam* and *Municarya Panchakam*. According to the Guru, Self-realisation can be achieved in this life

(*jivanmukti*), in these states though the *Atman* remains in the body, it knows nothing about the attachment of the world. A *jivanmukta* is described as a *Muni*, *Stitaprajna*, *Atmajnani*, *Avadhutan* etc. and a very fine description of the characteristics of *Muni* is given in the *Atmopadesa Satakam*.

Of these silent ones whoever dwell awake to Aum

Absolved from birth, steadily fix the form.

(Narayana Guru *A.S* Verse 7).

Such *jivanmukta* who live to be the high values called the Absolute Self, lead an undisturbed life of peace and understanding. They lead a life doing positive service to others. Although they may remain active, for such persons the world has no Ultimate Reality.

Ekam eva dvitiam brahmasti nanyan na samsayah

Iti vidvan nivartteta dvaitan navartate punahI

(Narayana Guru *D.M Nirvana Darsanam* Verse 10)

“The one and non-dual *Brahman* alone exists. Nothing else does exist; no doubt is there. This enlightenment having been attained, the wise one should liberate himself from duality. Henceforth no turning back occurs”.

The first six verses of *Nirvana Darsanam* of *Darsanamala* give a clear picture of the Guru’s concept of liberation from a practical and philosophical point of view. The Guru says: “*Moksa* is of two kinds; the pure and the impure.

That which is the pure is devoid of incipient memory factors; similarly that is impure which is conjoined with the incipient memory factors. Even the pure *moksa* is classified into pure and most pure. Similarly the impure *moksa* is classified into impure-pure and impure-impure. The most pure is again of three kinds; one in the more superior; one in the most superior; and thus the pure is established in the knower of the *Brahman*. The impure-pure is devoid of *rajas* and *tamas* and the other is with *rajas* and *tamas*. The knower of the *Brahman* exists as *Brahman*. Having burnt everything impure, aiming at the good of the world, he performs actions according to what is considered right. Renouncing all actions and establishing the Absolute, he continues the course of his life in wandering". (Narayana Guru *D.M Nirvana Darsanam* Verse 1-6) In the last verse of the *Atmopadesa Satakam* (verse 100) one finds the finest expression of the Guru's concept of realization in terms of Self-knowledge.

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF NARAYANA GURU

The central objective of the Guru's philosophy is to eliminate duality which leads to conflict in the entire range of human activity or interest. (Nataraja Guru *The Word of the Guru* 62) Distinctions like race, caste, language and custom give an appearance of variety to the species, but they are only superficial factors of no importance intrinsically to human beings. The Guru realized that the denial of religious freedom, unequal enjoyment of social status, pollution laws, superstitions, illiteracy, economical deprivation & lack of scientific temper impeded the humanistic secular life of the modern man. One

of his first acts in his efforts to achieve a humanistic secular society was the consecration of Sivalingam, followed by the establishment of a temple for the entire humanity at Aruvippuram, in 1888 A.D. In the temple is inscribed in Malayalam the following ideal, which epitomizes the Sree Narayana creed. “This is the ideal place where all live in full harmony without distinction of caste or prejudice of creed”.

To worship Siva, Ganesha, Subrahmanya, etc. of the Aryan pantheon, was the prerogative of the *savarnas* and the *avarnas* were not allowed to worship these deities. They were allowed to worship only inferior local deities like Chatan, Madan, and Yakshi etc. The mode of worship was also different. The *savarnas* conducted their worship in a sober way, with offerings of flower and fruits and delicious food items. The *avarnas* offered crude items like animal blood, roasted bran, liquor and other intoxicating substances. This was certainly an instrument to keep their morals at a low level.

The Guru valiantly and peacefully changed the centuries-old taboos on religious worship, heralding freedom to the *avarnas* to worship God Siva. This historic act kindled the sense of self esteem of the discriminated social groups in Kerala. The peaceful revolution inaugurated by the Guru indirectly asserted that all had equal right to enter any place of worship and that the *avarnas* had the right to enjoy the resources and religious literature hitherto monopolized by the caste Hindus. The Guru established several temples scattered throughout the length and breadth of Kerala and also a few in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Ceylon (P.Parameswaran 80).

The Guru's innovations regarding temples and temple practices were aimed at both spiritual and material advancement of the people concerned. (His concept of temple is given in the next chapter). He insisted on the simple form of worship that could be followed even by the poorest in society. In the holy precincts at the temples established by him, he made provision for gardens, reading rooms and schools with facility for teaching technical skills. The Guru also reached a stage when he sought to dissuade idol worship. In Murukumpuzha Temple near Thiruvananthapuram, the Guru installed a lighted lamp, with the words, Truth, Duty, Compassion and Love, displayed in the background. At Kalavamkodam near Cherthala, the Guru installed a mirror with the sacred symbol "AUM" made palpable by scraping away part of the mercury. The Guru's reforms regarding temples gave a new meaning to the process of modernization in Kerala. The *Brahmin* and the *Pariah*, the master and the slave became conscious of their folly of actions, the ignorance and irrationalism they carried along with their religious practices.

The Guru believed that only through education people could imbibe the right perspective about good life. He stated that a man must educate himself to be true. A study of his concept of education reveals that it was aimed at the realization of certain objectives, like freedom of the individual occupational mobility, equality of status and of opportunity, and general social progress reflecting an appreciable degree of material and spiritual development of man. He emphasized universal education, especially technical education and the education of the poor and women. (*Vivekodayam*)

The Guru called upon the rich to start schools for the weaker sections and motivated his disciples to influence public policy on education. In the context of denial of educational opportunities to the deprived masses, the Guru's concept of 'collective endeavour' regarding education evoked keen interest in education on the part of the SNDP Yogam, other organizations associated with the Guru and several rich members of the Ezhava community and that they started schools for the deprived. The leader of Ezhava Samajam at Thevalakkara, near Kollam, named Thennoor Kochu Govindan was a landlord who was inspired by the Guru to start a Girls School in 1897, a Pulaya School in 1905, a school for Muslims in 1907 and a primary school at Oachira. (Vivekodayam M.E 1082) There were hundreds of persons, like him. Responding to the call of the Guru, the SNDP Yogam raised an "Education Fund" in 1906 with the avowed objective to encourage higher and technical education among the *avarnas*' (Vivekodayam M.E 1081:3) As a result of this collective endeavour, the *avarnas* and other marginalized social groups began to go in for modern education and there was a considerable increase in the number of educated among the deprived. (Somarajan and S. Sivadasan 53) Thus the introduction of the western education marked the beginning of modernization in Cochin and Travancore. The Guru's humanistic and egalitarian ideas gave a new dimension to the process of modernization in the field of education.

Economic development was another major concern of the Guru. He found that the traditional feudal system of production with its limited output was hardly sufficient for society and the majority had to struggle for their survival.

Moreover, the increase in population, rise in literacy and the growing expectations of the people demanded more production, occupational morality, capital, skilled labour and new technology. Quite naturally, the Guru's attention was concentrated on these.

The Guru inspired his followers to organise agro-industrial exhibitions all over Kerala to enable the people, especially the *avarnas*, to learn the technological progress and its impact on production. The first such exhibition was held along with the second annual general meeting of the SNDP Yogam in January 1905 at Quilon (*Vivekodayam* M.E 1081:6) and the second exhibition along with the fourth annual general meeting of the SNDP Yogam in March 1907 at Cannanore (*Vivekodayam* M.E 1082:11)

Finished products, tools of production, machines for modernizing cottage industries etc., from all parts of India, Burma and Ceylon were exhibited (*Vivekodayam* M.E 1082:18) By 1921 the Ezhavas had sixty six industries while the Christians had 55 and the Nairs had only 15 in Travancore (P.K. Michael Tharakan 118-136) The increase in the entrepreneurial ability of the *avarnas* were the result of the Guru's emphasis on science and technology, occupational mobility and industrialization.

The Guru raised his voice against superstitions and evil customs. He stopped certain meaningless but expensive social ceremonies, like *Talikettu* (child marriage), *Thirandukuli* (public announcement of a girl attaining puberty) and *Pulikudi* (a primitive custom of drinking concoction during the seventh

month of the first pregnancy) (Nataraja Guru *Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru* 78) The Guru formulated a new and simple way of marriage ceremony which was less expensive with simple affordable rituals so that even the poorest could observe it. He was in favour of inter-dining and inter-marriages. His messages on monogamy, widow marriage, property rights for spouse and children etc. had tremendous impact on all communities.

What is most striking about the teachings of Narayana Guru is its dynamism, its mobility, leading inevitably to harmony and heightened consciousness. All through his seventy two years, it seems he refused to stagnate, not only in action but also in thought. That distinguishes him from most other sannyasins. The average person chooses in the mature phase of life a sedentary form of existence, spending days in undisturbed contemplation, free of worldly worries and cares. Narayana Guru's life, on the other hand, was a continuous quest - a sage of persistent exploration and a related cycle of action, movement and change, intended to strengthen the bridges of understanding. He was a *Jnanayogi* and a *Karmayogi* rolled into one. Hence, he was beholden to indulge in ceaseless, purposeful activity.

The Guru's motive was to create a one caste, one religion society from the Kerala society of earlier days, already disrepute by the ruinous diversities of castes and religions. In short the Guru was through his messages creating an atmosphere suited to the peace and happiness of the modern world.

What is simple, desirable for us is to evaluate in the context of its unbroken character, the action phase of the Guru's life, pregnant in achievements and profuse in events and his version germane in cosmopolitanism and rise in international appropriateness. To reach its depth, diversity and amplitude, is not a smooth sailing. That is why varied analysis and appraisements of the Guru and his visions are taking place continuously. His message impregnated with the instinct of human love and equality, took his metaphysical articulations to the deepest recesses of the human heart. As a result, the utterances of Narayana Guru have transcended all narrow boundaries and lie stamped upon the wide passages of universality. His rich philosophy and ideology-based messages cut out for social reorientation have settled down as integral parts of the ordinary people's lives.

The Guru could bring about a sense of self-respect and a desire for equality in the deprived sections. Evolving a philosophy of freedom and equality, he unleashed a social revolution in Kerala. Those who had faith in his words and actions volunteered themselves to work for the ideals of the Guru.

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