

Sree Narayana Guru's Perspectives and Advaita Philosophy: A Review of Guru's Selected Works

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ABSTRACT

After Adi Shankara, Sree Narayana Guru was the greatest spiritual philosopher Kerala has ever produced. He offered a way of life that was both materialistic and spiritually balanced. Through his philosophical writings, he imparts knowledge on how to uphold a dialectical union of the conceptual and the practical manner of living. The predominant and best-known school of Indian philosophy, Advaita Vedanta, espouses the unchanging non-dualism between the Universal Soul and the Individual Soul. Narayana Guru dedicated his entire life to demonstrating to the world that Advaita may be put into practice and acknowledges Advaita as the philosophical foundation for man's practical concerns in the world. The key distinction between the Advaita systems of Sankara and Narayana Guru is how they are used in the real world. Advaita Vedanta was synthesized by Narayana Guru. Narayana Guru combined the theistic Vedic practice of love and service with the Advaita Vedanta notion of Brahman's oneness (ekatma vada). Through his works, Narayana Guru spread the holy message to all people and encouraged them to embrace timeless truths and aspirations. This essay attempts to examine a few of Narayana Guru's writings in order to examine how the Advaita philosophy affected him and how he saw Advaita. This study uses the historical research method, and its conclusions show that Advaita philosophy directly influences both the religious teachings he imparts and the motivations for his socio-religious conduct.

Keywords: Advaita, Atmopadesa Satakam, Darsanamala, Advaita Deepika, Universal Religion

INTRODUCTION

Sree Narayana Guru, the multifaceted visionary of modern Kerala, was a philosopher, spiritual leader, educationist and social reformer in India. Like Raja Ram Mohan Roy (the Father of Indian Renaissance), he set forth a silent revolution against the injustice medieval Kerala society and prompted spiritual enlightenment and social equality. Caste hegemony was in extreme in Kerala during the 19th and early 20th centuries. People of lower caste like Ezhavas and others had to suffer inhuman discrimination from the upper castes. It was against this social background that Guru performed his first major socio-religious revolution through the consecration of Siva idol at Aruvippuram in 1888. For the outcastes he consecrated around forty five temples across Kerala and Tamil Nadu. His consecrations were non-conventional deities

like a slab inscribed with enlightened words and a mirror consecration in Kalavamkodam (Alappuzha).

He propagated the ideals of compassion and religious tolerance through his words and actions. His notable work, Anukampadasakam, extols various religious figures such as Krishna, The Buddha, Adi Shankara, and Jesus Christ. He contributed 45 works in different languages including Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil among which Atmopadesa Satakam, a hundred-verse spiritual poem and Daiva Dasakam, a universal prayer in ten verses were got universal acceptance. His philosophical motto, One Caste, One Religion, One God for All (Oru Jathi, Oru Matham, Oru Daivam, Manushyanu), exhibits the cream of his entire philosophy in brief. This concept of social equality and universal brotherhood furthered the non-dualistic philosophy (Advaita) of Adi Sankara by bringing it into practice.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The studies on Narayana Guru and his philosophy form an important sphere in the field of Malayalam literature today. About sixty four works were attributed to the authorship of Narayana Guru and are available with interpretations by many academic and Vedanta scholars. Sri Narayana Guruvinte Sampoorana Krithikal- Vyakhyanam by Dr. T. Bhaskaran, 1985, Sri Narayana Gurudeva Krithikal Sampoorana Vyakhyanam by Prof. G Balakrishnan Nair, Kerala Bhasha Institute, 2003, Sri Narayana Gurudeva Krithikal- 'Guruprasadam' Vyakhyanam by Prof. M.H. Sasthrikal, Sivagiri Madam Publication, 2007 were the major works in this field.

Nadaraja Guru, the disciple of Narayana Guru, has published translation and interpretation all his works in English. He in his book 'The Word of the Guru', published in 2004 reviews the teachings and philosophy of Narayana Guru in a precise form. Religions and philosophies have their sources in such men, and the aim here is to clarify this fact, without being sentimental or sensational. The Word of the Guru provides a quantity of original material for study, including fully annotated and carefully translated writings of Guru Narayana. It describes the physical and psychological conditions of South India with great brilliance. The spirituality of India is set forth here in its clearest terms, unambiguous and shorn of all limiting frontiers, suitable for readers in all parts of the world.

Nitya Chaitanya Yati in his work 'Sree Narayana Guru' in 2013 detailed the proper biography of Guru and made elaborate interpretation on the major works of Narayana Guru. He made the explanation of Guru's versas like 'It is the one and the same Absolute that shines and formulates the universe within and the multiverse without'. Muni Naarayana Prasad also gave significant interpretation to Guru's works.

In the following years, there are more than fifty biographies of Narayana Guru are available beginning from Guru's beloved disciple Kumaranasan and then Moorkothu Kumaran, Prof. M K Sanu and many others also published the biography of Narayana Guru. Apart from biographies, many creative works about the life and ideologies of Guru are also available. It includes Guru Narayaneeyam comprises of 243 poems each written by various poets like Kumaran Asan, Vallathol, Sahodharan Ayappan, P Kunjiraman Nair, vaillopilly, G Sankara Kurup, Akitham, ONV Kurup, Attoor Ravi Varma, K G Sankara Pillai, Sachidanathan, Kuripuzha Srikumar etc.

Sitaram Yechury, CPI(M) general secretary in 2016 published excerpts of his Sree Narayana Guru Memorial Lecture titled 'Sree Narayana Guru's Philosophy Has a Strong Relevance Today'. Dr. Dileep. R, in his article 'Life as Philosophy: An Essay on Sreenarayana Guru's Integrity' (2018) placed Sreenarayana Guru in the context of Kerala modernity. It presented Guru's relation with the historical context is complex as the sources of his original thinking were non-modern.

Mr. Sunil Joseph and Ajith Kumar. M. P in their study titled 'Sreenarayana Guru – Teachings, Caste, Religion and God' (2020) explains about the social philosophy of SreeNarayana Guru. Through this article

they clear the social views and opinions of SreeNarayana Guru. Through this introduction one can understand the social history and social activities of SreeNarayana Guru. Moreover the philosophy and works of Narayana Guru is a subject to the studies for the degree of Master of Philosophy in different universities in India.

METHODOLOGY

A blended method of social science and literature is followed in this study. Both history and philosophy have to be simultaneously analyzed for analysis, whereas the study of any one element, either historical or philosophical, will not bear full fruit. Here also incorporated the methodology of history, criticism and comparison in analyzing Vedāntasūtras and its interpretations.

Advaita Philosophy of Shankara

Advaita Vedanta is the dominant and most well-known school of Indian philosophy which receives the attention of modern western philosophy. Sankara was the founder of Advaita Vedanta. He wrote several works on Upanishads and Vedanta, established monasteries in different centers, and spread the doctrine of Advaita. According to Sankara, the absolute reality is spirit which he referred as Brahman and Atman. But this is not dualistic reality; we perceive it as so because of ignorance. Thus the fundamental teaching of Sankara is the non-dualism of spirit. Sankara puts the entire philosophy of Advaita in half a verse where he says: ‘Brahman is real; the world is an illusory appearance; the individual soul (jiva) is Brahman alone, not other (Brahma Satyam Jagan mithya jivo-Brahmaiva napara). Brahman remains in its true nature as non-dual, infinite awareness at the higher level of reality known as pāramārthika-sattā.

He says that ‘atma’ or individual soul is the true nature that makes an individual complete. This inner reality is the manifestation of the single reality, the Brahman or universal soul. So, there is no reality beyond the self, and this self can be realized through the teachings of the Advaita Vedanta. But individuals, in normal situation, were fails to identify the ultimate unity between Atman and Brahman. This is due to Maya or ignorance. Ignorance is giving importance to the outer world and hiding the inner world, Atman. Maya is the thought process that makes individuals stick with the physical or material world. Thus, to avoid the cycles of Maya, one should pay attention to the inner self and gain true knowledge on Advaita.

Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru – the Practical Advaita

According to Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta, Brahman (Universal Soul) is the only Reality, pure Existence, Consciousness and Bliss –*Sat-Cit-Ananda* (P.T.Raju, The Philosophical Traditions of India, 1972). In this system, there is no distinction between Atman and Brahman and hence it is non-dual (Hiriyanna, The Essentials of Indian Philosophy, 1980). Therefore, the denial of plurality, the unity of the Atman (Individual Soul) and Brahman (Universal Soul), 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, An Introduction to Indian Philosophy, 1950). 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.

Narayana Guru’s philosophy is best reflected through his poetic ventures which mingle aesthetically the principles of ethics, logics and metaphysics. The words of Guru, one caste, one religion and one god for man denotes the neo declaration of universal brotherhood and worked as a fresh life principle in the socio-cultural realm of the then Kerala. In his renowned work Atmopadesa Satakam, which consists of one hundred verses of self-instruction, the Guru proposes his philosophy of egalitarianism. His Advaita philosophy emphasized the consistency between true existence of the “common reality” on Earth and one

Divine behind the creation and sustenance of the Universe, dismissing any concepts of illusory worlds.

Let's check the philosophy and vision of Narayana Guru explicated and embedded in his major writings.

- **One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction –‘Atmopadesa – Satakam’**

Narayana Guru composed the hundred verses, Atmopadesa Satakam, in Malayalam in the year 1897. For about many decades it was only read by a few scholars as there was no translation it into any other language. But after Nataraja Guru who published an English translation in 1969, this work of Narayana Guru has attracted many scholars, and new translations and commentaries are appearing year after year. In the Atmopadesa satakam, the polarizing of the Self and the non-Self is therefore presented with one hundred variations.

The verses present a philosophical context of Self-realization rather than adoration of any deity. Like the dynamic style of Upanishads, the teaching of this work centers around the absolute world reality called 'self'. The 'self' reflect the universe even though as innumerable in name or forms. The luminous and illuminating 'self' conceived its non-duality when it resembles the universe itself. Knowledge and the Self becomes one for those whom the veil of ignorance is removed. Then he can perceive the inherent equity in the world. The culmination of wisdom has to take place in the individual which culminates into thoughtful analysis or synthesis which brings equilibrium or unity which is never before feels to understood. Here we can assimilate the Vedanta at-tvam-asi (Thou art That).

- **Advaita Deepika (Lamp of Non-dual Wisdom)**

Advaita Deepika states that even if all the distinctions has eliminated within the material reality, human senses may experience the distinctions because of the illusion of ignorance. A mistake may persist for some time after it is recognized as a mistake solely due to the force of habit. It states that, similar to Atmopadesa Satakam, all things are essential and sufficiently one but that only a man of enlightenment can comprehend the unity underlying all things. Though Narayana Guru accepts Advaita as the metaphysical foundation of world of creation, its practical side in the world was his most concern. Practice is impossible without theory, and theory is meaningless without practice. Being an Advaitin entails accepting that all men are equal and that man's ultimate status is equivalent to that of Brahman. In a very simple but profoundly moving language, he enshrined his vast experience, profound insight, and lofty spiritual realization.

- **Darsana Mala (Garland of Visions)**

In Darsanamala, Narayana Guru asserts that Atman (self) is the non-dual reality and there are no distinctions between the will and the mind. What is referred to as nescience or darkness is nothing more than the mind, which is an 'Indra Jala' or wonder. He then substantiates Advaita's view that duality is only 'maya' or illusion in appearance and that non-duality alone is real. Through this work, he elaborates the vision that the world is an effect (appearance) that lacks self-awareness. So the world is not the ultimate reality; only Atman (Sat or self) is the ultimate reality (asat). In other words, the Jiva's (organism's) true nature is the single ultimate reality, atman (sat). His Advaita vision is best revealed in the Advaita Deepika, Darsanamala and Atmopadesha-Satakam which spelt the ultimate unity in diversity or non-duality of Jiva, i.e., Brahman. Thus, in the scheme of the entire creation, he recognized the fundamental oneness of all humanity. This is presented in his theory of one caste, one religion, and one God to humanity in perfect formality and in accordance with non-dual knowledge of the universe.

Darsanamala is the result of Guru's realization of the Advaita from the three perceptions of the theology, psychology and cosmology. It occupies a prominent place in Advaitic literature since it abbreviates all the

Advaitic doctrines and aspects in the darshanas;

- Adhyaropadarsanam- Vision of superimposition
- Apavadadarsanam- Vision of negation
- Asatyadarsanam- vision of non-truth
- Mayadarsanam- Vision of illusive reality
- Bhanadarsanam- Vision of consciousness
- Karmadarsanam-Vision of action
- Jnanadarsanam- Vision of wisdom
- Bhaktidarsanam-Vision of adoration
- Yogadarsanam-Vision of unification.
- Nirvanadarsanam-Vision of emancipation

Among this, Adyaropa Darsanam — Suppositional Vision needs special mention as it elaborate the principle of creation and the nature of ultimate reality. In this section, Narayana Guru details his robust, imaginative, and logical concept of the universe's creation.

Indeed, there was Non-existence in the beginning! Then again, by sheer will power, dream wise everything that exists was created by He, the Supreme Lord. There was non-existence in the beginning (i.e., at its upper limit, which must be distinguished from other similar limits). Prior to this (in pure time), when creation was to begin, the Supreme Lord (Paramesvara) created all of this (i.e., gave it a conceptual status distinct from what was merely nominals), just as in the case of a dream (having its own virtuality within consciousness). Dreams are admittedly unreal in the sense that they exist in the world of ideas. Similarly, the world can be said to be unreal to the extent that its material corresponds to His will.

He ascribed the original creation to the Supreme Lord or Parameswara. It is similar to the notion of Taittiriya Upanishad in this dual perspective of creation. From a state of non-existence or absence the Supreme Lord created the existence out of his will, dream and essence. Being a dream, the materials in the world of reality has no existence apart from Lord's dream. Or in otherwise, it is unreal and has only existence along with the essence of Lord (Brahman and the self). Apart from the Lord, the world as objectively manifested was equated to nothing, implying a tentative acceptance of the principle of contradiction between existence and non-existence.

Socio-Religious Philosophy of Narayana Guru

Narayana Guru had the vision of creating a society beyond caste and religious thought, devoid of all kind of discriminations. His powerful message of 'one caste one religion and one god for man' explicitly proclaimed his practical Advaita. It was a message, a slogan as well as his social philosophy. To understand it, one has to know about the ideological universe in which the Guru's Caste Index is revealed. The caste of one is determined by its characteristics. Those symptoms must be consistent with philosophy, science and logic. Human beings are a nation because the origin, birth and appearance of all the people in the world are irreversible. The body shape, appearance, sound, smell, appearance, food and temperature of each breed of breed are different, each of which is a different species. This is the revelation of the biological, philosophical and universal guru of the nation.

In the essence of the concept religion, they can never beat each other, because there is no conflict as all believes in love and compassion to reach salvation. But it is not the real situation. If the war over the issues of religions is to settle, all religions must be taught with proper value and judgment. Then it will be revealed that there is no distinction among them. The religion that emerged as a world religion of all, that is, the

religion of humanity based on equality of individual souls.

Sree Narayana Guru's dream was of a world where all human beings are united. The Guru tried to eradicate whatever was preventing that from the society and the human mind. Thus his view of the universal religion is identical with the Advaitic concept of the world. According to this, there is nothing besides Brahman for the creation of the world is just as the spider which is both an efficient and material cause of the web. So also, Brahman itself must be the source of all. Narayana Guru says that god is the bliss that is consciousness. Brahman is described as the 'real of the real'. It is also defined as the plenum from which whatever is taken out does not affect its infinitude in the least. The religion of the guru tolerates all forms of worship as an alternative approach to reality.

Narayana Guru's Famous Words or Slogans

- "Discretion is not automatic; you have to read a lot."
- "Vidya is not to argue or win, but to know and convey."
- "Religion is only a means of becoming God, the religion is not God."
- "This world is in the truth, so don't lie. Only tell the truth."
- "Everyone worships Ishwar not idol".
- "It is not right to be lazy."
- "Start with cleanliness in the kitchen".
- "It is not possible to make a fortune without industry."
- "Farming is the backbone of life."
- "One in kind, one in faith, One in God is man of one same womb, one there is at all."
- "Ask not, Say not Think not caste"
- "Love of others is my happiness, Love that is mine is happiness for others. And so, truly, deeds that benefit a man must be a cause for other's happiness too."

CONCLUSION

Narayana Guru's philosophy of Universal Oneness has special relevance in the contemporary global context where the social fabric of many countries and communities are being eroded by hatred, violence, bigotry, sectarianism and other divisive tendencies. He taught equality but felt the inequalities in society due to ill practices in the name of God. Thus, to eradicate discrimination and create a sense of oneness he promoted Education, Cleanliness, Devotion to God, Organization, and Service to Man. As a strong step to preach his philosophy of universal religion, he organized an All-Region Conference in 1923 at Alwaye Advaita Ashram. Like Adi Sankara, he regarded Brahman as *Sat-Cit-Ananda*. But Sankara's scheme propounded the theoretical and philosophical aspects of Advaita, whereas Narayana Guru demonstrated the relevance of Advaita in to the practical social life.

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