



NATARAJA GURU AND SOCIAL RENAISSANCE IN KERALA

SUNNY .S

Research Scholar,

Department of History, University College, Thiruvananthapuram.

Abstract

Social reformers have a predominant role in Kerala for the prevention of social atrocities among the society. In these social reformers, Nataraja Guru was an inevitable part of social reform movements. He was one of the foremost disciple of Sree Narayana Guru, who known as the father of Kerala renaissance movements. Nataraja Guru was the founder of Narayana Gurukulam and its ultimate aim is to propagate the ideologies and philosophies of Sree Narayana Guru. This institution activities still going in a successful way and it has a lot of branches in India and abroad.

Keywords: *Nataraja Guru, Sree Narayana Guru, Narayana Gurukulam, Ashrama, Sanyasin*

Introduction

Nataraja Guru was a prominent social reformer, intellect, writer, orator moreover the foremost disciple of Sree Narayana Guru. He was the founder of Narayana Gurukulam and its vital role to propagate the idea of unitive vision among the world.

In his early life

Nataraja Guru was a great social reformer and foremost disciple of Sree Narayana Guru. He born as the third child of Dr. Palpu. Dr. Palpu was a famous doctor and belonged to a family with prestigious background. Dr.Palpu played a predominant role in organizing Ezhava Memorial and is considered as the master brain behind the founding of SNDP Yogam and was one of its active worker. Dr. Palpu dedicated his life to popularise the teaching of Narayana Guru along with lofty principles of unity. At the age of twenty eight Palpu got married to P.K.Bagavathy. He had three sons and two daughters. Nataraja Guru was the second son of Palpu. Nataraja Guru was born in 1895, in Banglore. His father was a well-known

physician and led a luxurious life style. His earliest years were spent in Bangalore and his lived at palatial bungalow called 'Padmalayam'.

Palpu was very keen in providing the best available education possible for his children. Natarajan got his formal education from a private tutor. The private tutor taught him to use English and Sanskrit language efficiently. Later he took admission in the lower secondary school situated in Tipu sultans's palace in the old fort of Bangalore city. Natarajan had frequently changed school due to official transfers of his father, Dr. Palpu. He had to repeat 'first form' class in Thiruvananthapuram. He lived Thiruvananthapuram in his mother's house. The condition in Thiruvananthapuram was such that, the Brahmin boys enjoyed a privileged position in the Maharaja's school in Thiruvananthapuram. In the second form, he was again brought back to Bangalore, where he took admission at St' Joseph School. It was a whites man school where enjoyed a special status. In the fifth form he was again transferred to Thiruvananthapuram. After one year Natarajan and his brothers were sent to Ceylone preparing matriculation examination in London. Meanwhile, Natarajan and his brothers acquired admission in Trinity College, Candy. But after one year he discontinued his studies in Trinity College and returned to Thiruvananthapuram.

In his early youth, he was the character of a hunger for truth. It was based on moral intellect and aesthetic enthusiasm. He had a temptation for hero worship and also deep rooted by him. Later he realized that his temptation was closely related to his ever present urge for a Guru to his early models. Later, Sree Narayana Guru became much influence on his life. Guru's magnetic personality always attracted among the people though who thronged around him. So the personal contact that existed between the two was of no significance. The tremendous polarity enjoyed by the Guru did make much impression in Nataraja. However, Nataraja's curiosity to learn more about Guru grew strong by each meeting. The Guru's charismatic personality and graceful was slowly making an impact in the young mind of Nataraja. He had got many opportunities for talk with Guru and he had opened new vistas of intellectual adventure.

Nataraja graduated in the year 1919 and his post-graduation in 1922. And also he had joined the teacher's training college at Saidepet. While he was in university, Nataraja showed interest in freedom movement and religion.

Beginning his spiritual life

During his stay in the hostel, Nataraja was undergoing a kind of transitions. He started believing in the providential theory and role of faith or chance in life. During that time, he also engaged in some sort of humanistic activities. Soon after his education, Nataraja joined Sree Narayana Guru's *Advaita Ashrama* at Alwyae. At that time, he was like a stranger to his family and showed little inclination for family life. Nataraja went to home, when he learned that he had secured first rank in his M.A. exam. When Nataraja reached at home, he saw Sree Narayana Guru was sitting there. During that visit, he informed a decision to his family members of his joining to the *ashrama*. Sree Narayana Guru blessed him and accepted the discipleship. Nataraja became a *sanyasin* or *tyagi* in August, 1922.

Although, Nataraja was feeling frustrated in his new role as a *sanyasin*. He felt that he had given up his carrier for nothing as spiritual progress remained a distant dream. What tortured him most was the apparent neglect of the Guru. Nataraja also felt that Guru was dissatisfied by his work. He soon came to Varkala to have a chat with the Guru. But the Guru did not respond and sent Nataraja back to Alwya. After sometime Nataraja decided to go to Coornor in Nilgiri, where Swami Bhodananada one of the senior disciple of Sree Narayana Guru lived in seclusion. At last Nataraja found the inner peace and harmony of in the enchanting beauty of Nilgiri and in the inspiring and soothing company of Swami Bhodananada.

During this time, Nataraja got an idea of starting a residential school named Narayana Gurukulam in Nilgiri. He ran the school overcoming great difficulties. This proved to be the first major educational experiment conducted by Nataraja.

But the experiment could not last long because of internal dissention and financial crises. The failure of the experiment was a great blow of Nataraja and in despair he returned to Sivagiri, to the feet of Sree Narayana Guru. Anyway the Guru took great interest in the career of Nataraja and helped him in cash and blessing for higher studies abroad. He went to Europe in 1928, he joined the institute of Jean Jacques Rousseau. He proposed to write a theses on the subject of personal factor in the educative process. But he soon learned that the University of Sorbonne in Paris, was a freer and open one. Meanwhile, he got a teaching post in the school of Geneva while preparing for a doctorate in education. He spent the next five years without financial difficulties as a result of this job.

Soon he left Geneva and came to Paris in autumn of 1928. 'The Personal Factor in the Educative Process' was the thesis that Nataraja was going to submit in the University of Sorbonne in Paris. The Nataraja's academic career to a close. He became an extra ordinary teacher and was well prepared to continue many innovative experiments in the field of education to propagate the unitive vision as expounded by Sree Narayana Guru. The remaining part of his life was dedicated for spreading the message of Guru and interpreting it to the common folk.

In 1933 Nataraja Guru return to India after the completion of his studies. He faced a lot of problems at Sivagiri mutt. The disciples of Narayana Guru were fighting for the properties of Narayana Guru. Then on Nataraja Guru never stayed there, and he travelled to different places of India in searching of a job, but later he went to Europe.

Foundation of Narayana Gurukulam

Nataraja Guru was the founding father and the foremost head of Narayana Gurukulam. The Gurukulam was first established at Coornor, Nilagiri with the blessings of Narayana Guru, while he was still living in 1923, which was prior to the formation of any other body of disciples of Narayana Guru.

It is the life, desire and intention of the founder of the Narayana Gurukulam, now called Nataraja guru, to preserve and propagate the original teachings of Narayana Guru together with the way of life that the Guru represented in its purest form by the time-honoured method known as the *guru-sisya* (method of

vertical hierarchical succession of teacher by disciple). This method, further, is what may be seen to be envisaged in the will and testament of the Narayana Guru written at Varkala before his passing away. It will be noticed therefrom that by founding the Narayana Gurukulam his disciple Nataraja Guru was only anticipating the desire and intentions of Narayana Guru himself.

The first Gurukulam started at a tea factory situated on Cleave Land Estate and the owner of this property was Mr. Raman Pillai. He was a believer of Sree Narayana Guru. This tea factory was an abandoned and dilapidated building, frequented by snakes and rats and was not at all habitable. This place cleared and repaired with the help of a few labours who worked free of wages for the penniless master. This building was ready but the students were not. Then Swami Bodhananda, a disciple of Narayana Guru, sent some of his disciples and admirers to the school. But the number of students were too few and the institution was facing a lot of financial crisis. The Guru and his disciples had to go to the nearby villages and sing songs with begging bowls in order to sustain themselves. A robbery in the school made things worse. The master and the wards were their wit's end. Now they went around in the villages singing *bhajans* and collecting money. They carried a flag with a slogan, one caste, one religion and one god for men blazoned on it. The first annual meeting of Narayana Gurukulam held on 8 June, 1924. In this function, the honourable education minister of Madras Presidency Divakaran Bahadoor K.S.Ramashastri and other special guests were presented. Next day the daily newspapers reported about the Narayana Gurukulam's annual function. It was much helpful for the popularisation of Gurukulam among the public. From 1923 to 1926 Nataraja Guru ran this school with just twenty students and four teachers. It demanded formidable will power to an institution in such precarious conditions. In his own words it was totally unable to make both ends meet and still wilfully bend, we became absolute mendicants on the street by the sheer necessity of survival. During their free time the students went to bazars, played music and sang songs about the life of Buddha and Sree Narayana Guru. During that time, they heard the shocking news that the owner of the tea estate was going to sell the land. They had to find out a new place for sheltering. Nataraja Guru found a place for permanent site for Gurukulam. It was a four acre land to the western slopes of the bishop's down Ootacamund at Nilgiri. Nataraja Guru took the place from government in lease for Gurukulam.

At the instance of Gurukulam sympathisers, a public meeting organized to explain the aims and objectives of new Gurukulam, as a new educational venture. The foundation stone of the new building of the Narayana Gurukulam was laid on 13 June, 1926 by the Diwan of Travancore Sir.C.P.Ramaswami Iyer presided over the third anniversary of the Gurukulam. Swami Shivananda came with a helping hand, he felt sympathy for the poor inmates and presented an umbrella for each of them. Then help came in the form of a cheque for Rs. Two Hundred from the Maharaja of Jodhpur, which kept them going for a month. Then they decided to stage a play for earning money. In 1927, Sree Narayana Guru visited Nilgiri, during that time he saw the new site of Narayana Gurukulam.

The first chapter of Gurukulam came to its end with an unexpected and cruel attack of a small pox by the students. The last episode was a crime committed by a quasi-inmate of Gurukulam. This incident brought disgrace the image of Gurukulam and the disciple was lost. In this incident which happened in result in a split of inmates into two rival groups. As a result, many of Nataraja's disciples and true friends left him. This atmosphere degenerated into such an extent that Gurukulam could not continue on the same lines any more, as in the part. The failure of initial attempts to create a discouragement in the mind of Nataraja Guru. Like a haunted animal with a troubled consciousness, he went back to Sivagiri to seek consolidation and strength in the feet of Sree Narayana Guru.

Later Nataraja Guru went to Europe for his higher education with the blessings and helping hand of Nataraja Guru. During that period Narayana guru died in 1928. In 1933 Nataraja Guru return to India after the completion of his studies. He faced a lot of problems at Sivagiri mutt. But later he went to Europe. In 1951 Nataraja Guru went to Varkala and he again restarted the Narayana Gurukulam Foundation. This Gurukulam Foundation was officially released by Nataraja Guru at Varkala on 1 January, 1956.

After the new release by Nataraja Guru, there were a lot of structured arrangements and rules introduced by him. It could be more helpful for the development and gradual progress of Narayana Gurukulam Foundation.

A declaration of Nataraja Guru made on 1st January 1953 at Varkala.

"I Dr. Natarajan head and founder of the Narayana Gurukulam, Varkala do hereby make known to whom it may concern:

That having now returned from my travels and engagement in other parts in furtherance of the case of the Guru Narayana. I now personally assume full charge of the Gurukulam Movement at its Varkala Centre, where I now intend to continue at least till the centenary the Guru in 1954 is over.

I wish to remain all concerned that I remain a primary and original disciple of the Guru, recognised by him while living and as envisaged in his Will and Testament. This discipleship has so far not suffered from any complications legal or otherwise, as may be pointed out in most other cases but; on the other hand its validity and directness have only been enhanced and confirmed by fully thirty years to day of single-hearted and unbroken service in the Guru's cause. This fact has been openly Srecognised all round as is evident in the numerous address presented to me in recent months.

The Guru himself sanctioned the Gurukulam Movement even as early as 1923 and put me in charge and direction of all his educational work sending me to Europe in 1928 to prepare me better for such work with his personal blessings and financial support. My gratitude to the one hand and expectations from me in a position of responsibility with certain rights that go with it, which it would be wrong on my part to overlook.

Further I have been painfully obliged to take cognizance of the fact that interested persons with questionable claims have through lack of proper leadership interfered in regular ways with the normal course of expansion of the guru's work in such a manner as compromise, frustrate and even jeopardize the high original aims of the Guru. They have been claiming to have rights do not properly belong to them.

The Guru when living assigned to me the work of writing recognizing in me his biographer and expounder of his teachings and prepared me consciously for this work which I began to fulfil in some measure even then and have now after three decades of further study brought into mature expression. This qualifies me to speak with some authority on matters of doctrine importance. I therefore, hereby reserve all rights that accrue in my favour which come in to me directly from the Guru.

Another matter of importance is the memorial building at the Guru's *samadi*. Having been with the Guru during his last years his wishes in regard to a memorial to him have been grasped by me more clearly than most others seem to have done. As it is of importance that disciples should respect the personal wishes of the Guru in such a matter even exclusive of mere majority opinions of closed groups, it is to be deplored that uniformed persons with unholy haste started tampering with the *samadi* place, in a matter not in-keeping with the Guru's wishes nor philosophy, without proper consultation with original disciples. I have already signified to those concerned the objections which I allude to here in order to clarify my positions sufficiently early.

Finally as per provisions of the Will of the Guru in its last clause, I do declare supported as I am by a sufficient number of disciples of the Guru that I reserve all rights that naturally and by law inalienably accrue in my favour. Those who wrongly hold or misuse positions which do not belong to them rightly must know that the validity of their actions is being now questioned. With the support of all concerned with the Guru's cause I intend to fulfil my responsibilities in a correct, orderly and peace loving manner with the continued blessing of the Guru and the support of all".

Conclusion

Nataraja Guru was a great social reformer and the foremost disciple of Sree Narayana Guru. His spiritual institution called Narayana Gurukulam played a vital role in the social upliftment among the society. Sree Narayana Guru's unitive vision is still propagating through the channel of Narayana Gurukulam Foundation. So Nataraja guru's sacrificing life is an inevitable part of social renaissance chapter in the history of Kerala.

REFERENCE:

1. Building Inauguration Souvenir, Varkala, 1994.
2. Chaithanya Yathi Nitya, *Sree Nrayana institution and their unification*, Varkala.
3. East West Universe of Brahmailydia Prospects, Varkala, 1984.
4. Guru Nataraja, *Autobiography of an Absolutist*, Varkala, 1989.
5. Guru Nataraja, *Guruvarul*, Varkala, 2010.
6. Guru Nataraja, *The Philosophy of Guru*, Varkala, 1986.
7. Guru Nataraja, *The word of Guru*, New Delhi, 1952.
8. M.K. Sanu, *Narayanaguruswami*, Varkala, 1994.

