



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

SREE NARAYANA GURU'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

In the modern world, different kinds of philosophical concepts are existed. As the part of Indian philosophical contributions are inevitable to the world. Sree Narayana Guru and his philosophical contributions are deeply rooted to Indian society especially in Kerala. *Advaita*(non-dualist) is the core compound of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy.

Keywords: Sree Narayana Guru, Philosophy, Temple, Social Reformatons.

INTRODUCTION

Sree Narayana Guru is one of the greatest mystic philosopher of the modern world. The present century has some cross pollination between the analytic and syncretic 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. 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 in 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 Real, of what really exists. Each school of thought is called *darsana* and aiming at the happiness of everyone, individually and collectively, is common among all of them. In other words, how happiness in life can be ensured by knowing the Reality that appears as life, is the central theme of all Indian schools of thought

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 Madhava, 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 *Advaita* philosophy, such as *Brahman*, *Atman*, universe 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 *Bruhadaranyaka*. Sankara is considered as the chief exponent of Advaita Vedanta. Sankara's philosophy has been made practicable and applicable by Sree Narayana Guru. The Guru agreed with the real spirit of Advaitic principle 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 Sankara is the austere vision of the eternal truth.

Sankara has presented the sum and substance of Advaita in the aphoristic half verse, *Brahmasatyam, jagatmithya / jivo brahmaiva naparana*. 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" because of which it is quality-less. This procedure is resting on false knowledge (*advaita*). Advaita, through it is mainly a logical concept in the metaphysics of Sankara, signifies a whole attitude of life.

Social philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru

The Guru's philosophy is to eliminate duality which leads to conflict in the entire range of human activity or interest. Distinctions like race, caste, language, and custom give an appearance of variety, superstitions, illiteracy, etc. 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, laws of defilement, superstitions, illiteracy, economic deprivation & lack of scientific temper impeded the humanistic secular life of the modern man. His first act 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 Aruvipuram, 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 compelled to worship only inferior local deities like Chatan, Yakshi and Marutha etc. The mode of worship was also different. The savarnas conducted their worship in a sober way, with offering fruits, 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 Lord Shiva. This historic act kindled the sense of self-esteem of the discriminated social groups in Kerala. The peaceful revolution launched by the Guru indirectly asserted that all had equal 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 Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Ceylon (Srilanka).

The role of Education

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 to himself. 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 on universal education, especially technical education and the education of the poor and women. 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’ through SNDP Yogam, evoked keen interest and other organizations associated with the Guru and several rich members of the Ezhava community started schools for the deprived. The leader of Ezhava Samajam at Thevalakkara, near Kollam, named Thennoor Kochu Guvindan 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 Ochira. 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. 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. 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 Independence

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 organize agro-industrial exhibitions all over Kerala to enable the people, especially avarnas, to learn about technological progress and its impact on production. This first such exhibition was held during the second Annual General Meeting of the SNDP Yogam in January 1905 at Quilon and the second exhibition during the fourth Annual General Meeting of the SNDP Yogam in March 1907 at Cannanore. Finished products, tools of production, machines for modernizing cottage industries etc. from all the parts of India, Burma and Ceylon were exhibited. By 1921 the Ezhavas had sixty six industries while the Christians had 55 and the Nairs had only 15 in Travancore. 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.

Social Reformations

The Guru raised his voice against superstitions and evil customs. He stopped certain meaningless but expensive social ceremonies, like Talikettu(a mock marriage in childhood), Thirandukuli(celebrations of a girl's puberty), and Pulikudi(custom of drinking a sour concoction by women during the seventh month of the first pregnancy).

Reformations of Marriages

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. Until the Guru entered the social scene, the avarna women had no voice in their marriage, the girl had to accept the man chosen by the elders. She would see her bridegroom for the first time only in the bed-chamber. The Guru changed this. He insisted that the proposed bride and groom should be given the chance to meet and talk to each other and decide by themselves whether they suit each other. He made it the responsibility of the parents to arrange such a meeting in a public place like temple. The marriage can be finalized only after getting the consent of both the bride and the groom. 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.

Dynamism of the Guru

What is most striking about the teachings of Narayana Guru is its dynamism, its mobility, leading inevitably to harmony and heightened consciousness. All through the seventy two years, it seems he refused to stagnate, not only in action but also in thought. That distinguishes him from most other sanyasis. The average person chooses in the mature phase of life a stationary form of existence, spending days in undistributed contemplation, free of worldly worries and cares. Narayana guru's life, on the other hand, was a continuous quest – a sage 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 re-create a "one caste, one religion society" of earlier days of Kerala, which was in course of time, disrepute by the ruinous diversities of castes and religions. In shorts the Guru was, through his messages creating an atmosphere suited for peace and happiness of the modern world.

CONCLUSION

The action phase of the Guru's life, pregnant in achievements and profuse in events and his version germane in cosmopolitanism and elevated 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 hart. As a result, the utterance 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.

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