

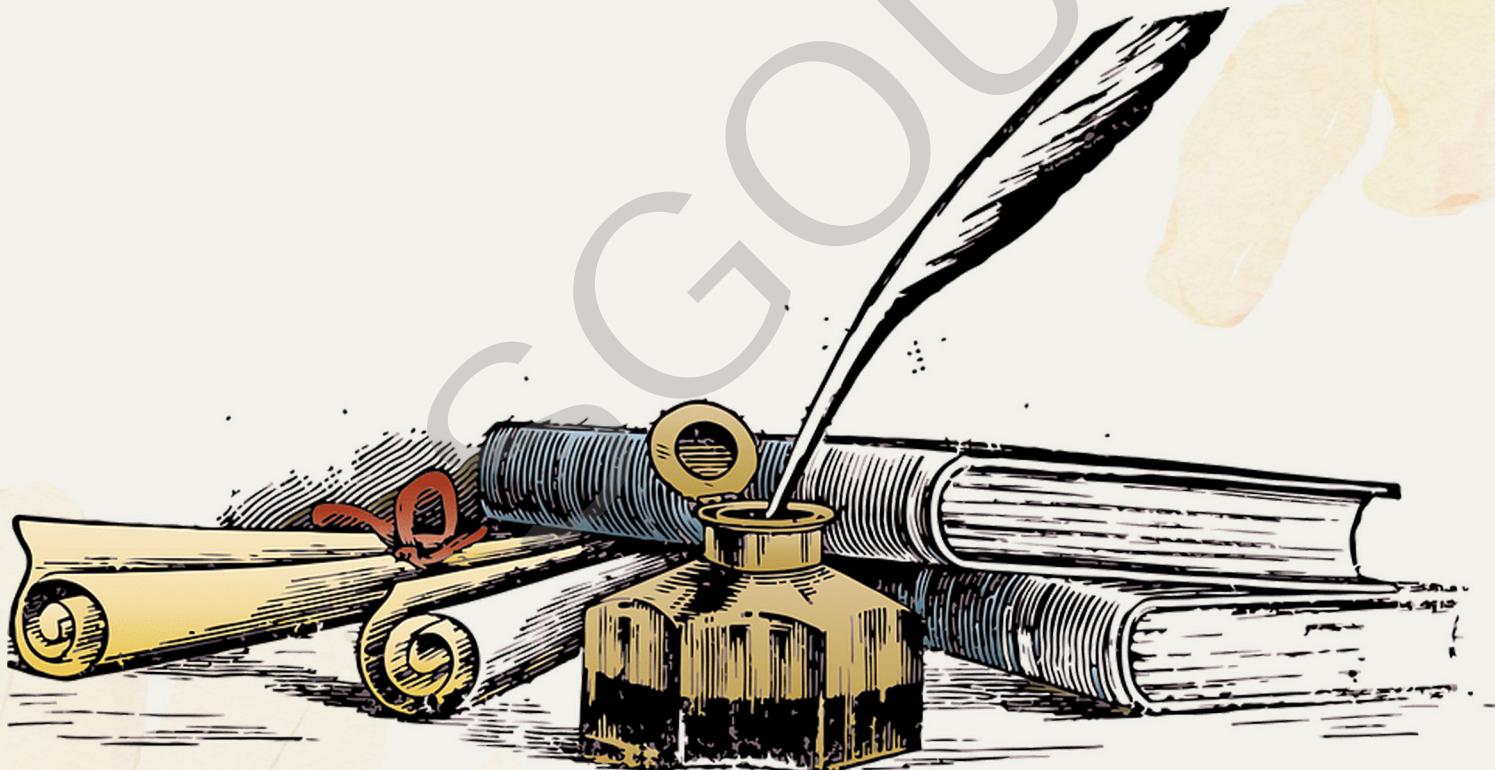
# **Sree Narayananaguru's Philosophy Applied in Education, Religion, Ethics and Social Matters**

**COURSE CODE: B21PH03DE**

**Undergraduate Programme in Philosophy**

**Discipline Specific Elective Course**

**Self Learning Material**



**SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY**

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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# **Sree Narayananaguru's Philosophy Applied in Education, Religion, Ethics and Social Matters**

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Semester - V

**Discipline Specific Elective Course  
Undergraduate Programme in Philosophy  
Self Learning Material  
(With Model Question Paper Sets)**



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OPEN UNIVERSITY

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SREENARAYANAGURU  
OPEN UNIVERSITY

# SREE NARAYANAGURU'S PHILOSOPHY APPLIED IN EDUCATION, RELIGION, ETHICS AND SOCIAL MATTERS

Course Code: B21PH03DE

Semester- V

Discipline Specific Elective Course  
For Undergraduate Programmes

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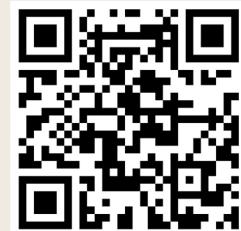
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# MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The programmes offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The undergraduate programme in Philosophy has structured its curriculum based on modern teaching approaches. The course integrates current debates into the chronological development of philosophical ideas and methods. The programme has carefully maintained ongoing discussions about the Guru's teachings within the fundamental framework of philosophy as an academic field. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,  
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-11-2025

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# The Impact of Guru on Society and Religion



# Casteism and Racism in the Context of Kerala

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ know about the intense casteism and racism that exist in Kerala.
- ◆ describe the practices of untouchability and social exclusion faced by lower caste communities.
- ◆ understand how religious beliefs and customs supported caste-based discrimination.
- ◆ recognise the role of Sree Narayana Guru in fighting caste discrimination and promoting equality.
- ◆ reflect on how Guru's teachings are still relevant in today's society for building equality and justice.

### Prerequisites

Swami Vivekananda once described Kerala of the late 19th century as a 'lunatic asylum.' This remark was a sharp social criticism against the extreme casteism, untouchability, and rigid social divisions that prevailed at that time. Kerala's society was deeply stratified, with dozens of sub-castes bound by strict rules on purity, pollution, and social interaction. In Vivekananda's view, such an environment created a society obsessed with meaningless distinctions, ritual superiority, and exclusion, to the point where normal human relations were distorted. By comparing Kerala to a 'lunatic asylum,' he sought to highlight the irrationality of these customs and to awaken a sense of urgency for reform. His comment became a rallying cry for social change, resonating with reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, who worked to dismantle caste barriers and build a more equal, humane society.

Sree Narayana Guru questioned the belief that a person's birth decides their worth. Guru strongly believed that all human beings are equal and should live with dignity. Guru did not fight discrimination with hatred or violence. Instead, he used spirituality, education, and moral strength to uplift the oppressed. He built temples open to all, promoted education among backward communities, and encouraged people to live with self-respect and discipline. His reforms helped people break free from the chains of caste and gave them the courage to stand up for their rights. Here, the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination that existed in Kerala and how Guru's life and work became a turning point in social history are discussed.

## Keywords

Untouchability, Caste Discrimination, Racism, Social Equality, Kerala Renaissance, Human Dignity

## Discussion

### 1.1.1 Casteism and Racism in Kerala

In the earlier centuries, Kerala was a land marked by extreme forms of casteism and social discrimination. The caste system was so deep-rooted that it controlled almost every aspect of a person's life. From birth to death, a person's identity, rights, occupation, and dignity were all decided by their caste. The society was divided into strict caste groups, based on the varna system in Hinduism, which categorises people into four main groups. Among these, Brahmins (priests and scholars) are at the top, followed by Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and farmers), and Shudras (workers and service providers). People belonging to these four castes were known as the Savarnas. However, many communities, such as the Pulayas, Parayas, Kuravas, Ezhavas, and Nayadis, were placed outside this varna system (known as Avarnas) and pushed to the margins of society. These so-called lower castes were denied fundamental human rights and were treated not as equal members of society, but as socially inferior and untouchable.

Untouchability was one of the most dehumanising practices within the caste system, especially in Kerala. It was not just a form of social exclusion but a system that denied basic human dignity to a large section of the population. In traditional Hindu society, untouchability was closely linked to the notion of ritual pollution. The terms 'teendal' in Tamil and 'pula' in Malayalam referred to this concept of impurity. According to ancient scriptures, such as the Dharmashastras, the practice of untouchability was legitimised and deeply ingrained in everyday life. Everyone in society, from the highest to the lowest caste, was expected to follow these rules without question. In Kerala, untouchability reached extremely rigid and oppressive forms. It was believed that not only the touch but even the voice, shadow, or mere presence of a person from a lower caste could pollute someone from a higher caste. This belief led to practices of unapproachability and unseeability.

Lower-caste individuals were required to maintain a certain distance from upper-caste



individuals. In some cases, the required distance was so large that they could not be allowed to walk freely on public roads. If they heard someone from an upper caste approaching, they were expected to move away, hide in the bushes, or step aside. The upper caste people would often shout warning sounds like 'po, po' or 'hoi, hoi' to signal their approach and to demand that the lower castes clear the way. This extreme concern with purity and pollution led to a deeply segregated society. The idea of impurity was so powerful that it dictated social interaction, access to public spaces, and even the layout of villages. Caste rules were not only applied between upper and lower castes, but also among the lower castes themselves. For instance, a Pulaya had to maintain a distance from a Paraya, and both were considered polluting by the upper castes. This prevented any unity among the oppressed castes and made social mobility nearly impossible.

These lower -caste communities lived in separate areas, often on the borders of villages or in the forests. They were not allowed to enter temples, schools, hospitals, markets, or even the main roads. They had to speak in a humiliating manner when addressing upper caste people, using terms like 'your slave' instead of 'I'. They were not allowed to wear good clothes, gold ornaments, or even cover their upper body. Their language, food, clothing, and homes were marked by poverty and social rejection. The children of these communities could not receive an education and were denied any opportunity for personal or professional growth. Their living conditions were deplorable, and many lived in small huts or even in temporary shelters built in the fields. Diseases were common due to a lack of hygiene, and they suffered from hunger, pain, and hopelessness.

The caste system was also closely tied to slavery. In many parts of Kerala, especially in the past, lower caste people were treated as enslaved people. They could be bought,

sold, or gifted like property. Their children were born into the same condition and had no way to escape it. They worked in agriculture, carrying out the most arduous labour without wages. Even their footprints were considered impure. Landlords and upper caste masters had complete control over them and often punished them severely if they disobeyed. It was even reported that some were tied to ploughs and treated like animals. The women of these communities were particularly vulnerable and faced various forms of physical and sexual exploitation. This deeply unjust system also had elements of racism. The fair-skinned Aryans who settled in India looked down upon the dark-skinned native people. They used terms like 'Krishnavarna' or 'Amanushya' to describe them, which means 'dark' or 'non-human'. These ideas were used to justify the low status of many native groups and to keep them out of mainstream society. They were seen as dirty, uncivilised, and unworthy of rights or respect.

Even the justice system was biased. A person from a lower caste was not allowed to enter the courtroom. If they had to make a complaint, they had to stand far away and shout, hoping that someone would listen. Their petitions were often passed on through a lower-caste individual. The punishments were also different for people of other castes. Higher castes usually received lighter punishments for the same crimes for which lower castes received harsher ones. The law was clearly not equal for all. Despite such severe discrimination, change slowly began to take place during the nineteenth century. The arrival of Christian missionaries and colonial officials marked the beginning of a new era. Many lower caste people converted to Christianity to escape the cruelty of the caste system. The missionaries also spoke out against injustices and helped raise awareness among oppressed communities.

Some rulers of Kerala responded to

this pressure and issued proclamations to improve the condition of the lower castes. They banned some of the cruel practices, such as forced labour on Sundays, and began to offer government jobs to people from all castes. With the introduction of English education, plantation agriculture, and public works departments, new job opportunities emerged. For the first time, people from lower castes could earn wages and begin to break free from bonded labour. These changes allowed them to live with more dignity and hope. Social reformers played a vital role in this transformation. Leaders such as Sree Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swamikal, Ayyankali, Vaikunda Swamikal, and Poykayil Yohannan led powerful movements against caste discrimination and worked tirelessly to uplift the lower castes. They believed in the equality of all human beings and encouraged people to fight for their rights through education, self-respect, and unity. Their efforts created a new sense of confidence among the lower castes and gave birth to Kerala's social renaissance.

The caste system in Kerala was once among the most rigid and cruel forms of social organisation. It not only denied fundamental rights to a large section of people but also dehumanised them. The painful history of casteism and racism in Kerala reminds us of how power and privilege can be used to exploit others. However, it also teaches us that change is possible through collective effort, awareness, and compassion. Today, Kerala has made remarkable progress in education, healthcare, and social development, and numerous efforts have been made to reduce caste-based discrimination. However, it would not be accurate to say that Kerala is entirely free from casteism or social divisions. Though the forms of discrimination may have changed or become more subtle, the deep-rooted influence of caste is still present in various aspects of life, be it in social relationships, political alignments, or even matrimonial

advertisements where caste preferences are still openly stated. This reminds us that while upliftment has occurred, the mindset shaped by caste remains yet to be fully transformed. Therefore, it is essential to remember this history and continue working towards a more just and equal society.

### **1.1.2 The Relevance of Sree Narayana Guru in a Caste-Based Society**

Sree Narayana Guru emerged as a powerful force for justice and transformation during one of the most difficult times in Kerala's history. Society then was divided along rigid caste lines. People from lower castes, especially the Ezhavas and other avarna communities, were treated as untouchables. They could not enter temples, walk freely on public roads, or access schools and decent jobs. The idea that a person's birth determines their social status and dignity was widely accepted. In such a situation, Guru stood up with a bold and compassionate message that challenged these unjust norms. Guru's message was not limited to religion or ritual; it addressed the core of human dignity. He declared that all human beings are equal, regardless of their caste, religion, or background.

Guru's well-known words, 'One caste, one religion, one God for mankind,' contain a strong message of unity and humanism. For Guru, true worth came from character, knowledge, and inner purity, not from birth or tradition. His teachings encouraged people to treat one another with respect and to build a society founded on love, peace, and justice. One of the most significant events in Guru's public life was the consecration of a Shiva idol at Aruvippuram in 1888. In those days, it was believed that only Brahmins had the right to install idols in temples and perform religious practices. By breaking such a norm, Guru showed that spiritual rights are not limited to any one group. When



the upper class questioned about Guru's act of consecration, he replied that he had installed 'Our Own Shiva,' making it clear that the divine belongs to everyone.

This bold step inspired others from the lower castes to demand equal spiritual rights and created new spaces for worship and dignity. Guru did not stop the consecration with just one temple. He went on to establish around forty-eight temples across Kerala and nearby regions. These temples were different from traditional ones. Some had no idols at all, but instead featured mirrors, lamps, or inscriptions such as 'Truth' or 'Compassion.' Through this, Guru wanted people to look inward, reflect on their actions, and practice kindness and wisdom. He believed that temples were not places of blind rituals but should promote learning, hygiene, and service. He encouraged temples to establish libraries, schools, and vocational centres and stated that offerings should be used to support the poor, rather than being spent on expensive rituals. To Guru, education was more sacred than ritual, and he often said, 'The school is the real temple.'

Beyond spiritual changes, the Guru worked hard to reform the social customs within his community. He opposed outdated practices like child marriage, animal sacrifice, and the widespread use of alcohol. He promoted modern values, including moral discipline, healthy family life, and respect for gender. His efforts helped people break free from harmful customs and build stronger, more respectful households. Guru believed that social change must be supported by strong institutions. In 1903, he helped form the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) to promote education, equality, and justice. Under his guidance, the SNDP helped Avarna communities gain access to public roads, employment opportunities, and educational institutions. However, when he realised that the organisation was slowly becoming focused on caste-based identity

rather than human unity, he stepped away in 1916. Guru always believed that change must benefit everyone, not just one community.

Later, in 1928, Guru founded the Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham, a monastic order to spread his teachings. Unlike traditional religious centres, which were hierarchical, this Sangham was built on democratic principles where every member had a voice. This shows how deeply Guru valued equality, not just in society but also within spiritual institutions. Guru also believed in using print media to spread awareness. He encouraged the publication of magazines such as Vivekodayam and Dharmam, which helped disseminate his ideas to the general public in simple, accessible language. Guru's teachings were deeply rooted in the Advaita philosophy, which holds that all beings are one. However, his interpretation was more practical and inclusive. He employed spiritual wisdom not to escape from the world, but to transform it. He did not believe in religious superiority or hatred. Instead, he respected all religions and learned from them. He admired the Buddha and drew inspiration from ethical teachings in Christianity and Islam, promoting an inclusive view of religion.

The article, 'Narayana Guru was modern like Ambedkar and anti-caste unlike Gandhi' by Dr. Ajay S. Sekher, compares Narayana Guru and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as visionary reformers who sought to dismantle caste oppression and build an egalitarian society, with Guru's efforts in Kerala prefiguring Ambedkar's national movement. Both rejected Brahmanical texts, such as the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita, for justifying the Varna system. The Guru mocked the Purushasukta's caste origin myth, and Ambedkar condemned scriptures such as the Manusmriti. Their shared emphasis on education and organisation as paths to empowerment is evident, as Guru's advocacy for modern education and community

organisation mirrored Ambedkar's call to 'Educate, Agitate, Organise.' Additionally, both embraced Buddhist principles, with Guru's Panchasudhi reflecting the Buddha's Panchasila and Ambedkar's later conversion to Buddhism, highlighting their commitment to human dignity and social justice over religious dogma, in contrast to Gandhi's less radical stance on caste.

Sree Narayana Guru gave equal importance to both traditional and modern systems of education. While Guru established a Sanskrit school at Aluva, he was also prepared to start an English Medium school at Sivagiri. Even today, Guru's teachings are highly relevant. Though legal steps have been taken to end caste-based discrimination, the mindset

has not entirely changed. We still observe caste identity in daily life, particularly in areas such as marriage, job selection, and social interactions. Guru reminds us that the real solution lies in changing the way we think. Through education, compassion, and awareness, society can overcome hidden forms of exclusion and build true equality. Sree Narayana Guru was not just a social reformer; he was a spiritual teacher, moral leader, and a true builder of modern Kerala. He gave the downtrodden self-respect and created a vision of a society based on love, knowledge, and equality. His life's work continues to inspire us to fight against injustice and to live with dignity, wisdom, and compassion.

## Recap

- ◆ In Kerala, lower castes were treated as untouchables.
- ◆ They were denied entry to temples and schools.
- ◆ The caste system caused profound social injustice.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru was born into an oppressed community.
- ◆ He challenged the caste system through peaceful means.
- ◆ He believed in equality and human dignity.
- ◆ Guru's act of Aruvippuram consecration broke caste barriers in temple worship.
- ◆ Guru promoted education as a way to freedom.
- ◆ He said schools are real temples.
- ◆ He fought against evil customs like child marriage and alcohol use.
- ◆ He formed SNDP Yogam to organize the oppressed.
- ◆ Later, he started the Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham.
- ◆ He valued democracy in spiritual organizations.



- ◆ He respected all religions and promoted harmony.
- ◆ He admired Buddha and followed simple living.
- ◆ His ideas were rooted in love and non-violence.
- ◆ Guru showed that real change begins in the human mind.

## Objective Questions

1. What was the main aim of Sree Narayana Guru's teachings?
2. Which event marked Guru's open challenge to caste-based temple authority?
3. What was Guru's view on education?
4. What major problem did Guru fight within his community?
5. What kind of rule did temples traditionally follow before the Guru's reform?
6. What is Kerala Renaissance known for?
7. Guru's reforms were part of which significant movement in Kerala?
8. Which Indian reformer's slogan is similar to Guru's vision, according to Dr. S Ajay Sekhar?
9. Which practice did Guru see as harmful to true spiritual life?
10. Guru's teachings inspired the formation of which type of organizations?
11. According to Sree Narayana Guru, where should social reform begin?
12. Which fundamental belief was used to uphold the caste system in Kerala?

## Answers

1. Promote equality and human dignity
2. Aruvippuram idol installation
3. A path to upliftment
4. Superstitions and harmful customs
5. Temples were controlled by the upper castes only
6. Social reform and change
7. Kerala Renaissance
8. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar
9. Ritual excess and caste pride
10. Social organizations for equality
11. Education and inner change
12. The belief that a person's birth determined their social status and dignity.

## Assignments

1. Explain the historical background of casteism and untouchability in Kerala and discuss how it affected the social life of the oppressed communities.
2. Analyze the role of Sree Narayana Guru in challenging caste discrimination and promoting social equality in Kerala.

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## Jati Nirnayam and Jati Lakshanam

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the main ideas of Jati Nirnayam and its philosophical and biological arguments against caste.
- ◆ interpret the meaning of Guru's famous slogan 'One caste, one religion, and one God for mankind.'
- ◆ analyse how Jati Lakshanam redefines caste as the natural unity of humanity.
- ◆ identify the scientific and spiritual reasoning used by the Guru to reject caste-based discrimination.
- ◆ reflect on Guru's vision of equality, human dignity, and social reform as presented in Jati Nirnayam and Jati Lakshanam.

### Prerequisites

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kerala was marked by rigid caste divisions that determined every aspect of a person's life, including their status, rights, dignity, and even access to education, public spaces, and religious institutions. This deep hierarchical social order not only created inequality but also denied basic human respect to large sections of the population, particularly those considered 'lower castes' or 'untouchables.' In this oppressive social context, Sree Narayana Guru emerged as a visionary reformer whose works, Jati Nirnayam and Jati Lakshanam, carried a revolutionary message: that caste is neither a natural nor a spiritual reality, but an artificial division created by society to exploit others. By blending scientific reasoning with the non-dual philosophy of Advaita, Guru challenged these man-made distinctions and proclaimed the essential oneness of humanity. His writings became a powerful call for equality, dignity, and social transformation, laying the foundation for a new vision of society based on justice and fraternity.



## Keywords

Mimamsa, Advaita Philosophy, Oneness of Humanity, Caste Hierarchy, Scientific Reasoning, Spiritual Truth

## Discussion

### 1.2.1 Jati Nirnayam

Sree Narayana Guru's Jati Nirnayam is one of his most significant works, written at a time when Kerala was governed by rigid caste rules that influenced every aspect of life. In such a caste-based society, a person's birth determined their social status, dignity, and even their access to education, public spaces, and religious practices. The lower castes, who were treated as untouchables, were excluded from all areas of life and forced to live in humiliation. It was against this background of social injustice that Guru wrote Jati Nirnayam, boldly declaring that caste is not a natural or divine order, but an artificial social construction created by humans.

The poem consists of six verses. The first verse, written in Sanskrit, is addressed to the upper castes who upheld the caste hierarchy. Guru deliberately uses their own language to emphasise that caste distinctions have no legitimate basis. In India, it is believed that moral instructions upholding the caste hierarchy were traditionally composed in Sanskrit. Therefore, Sree Narayana Guru might have thought that, to reject such an irrational and unjust caste order, it was fitting to use the same language, Sanskrit, to challenge and effectively deny it. The remaining five verses of the poem are written in Malayalam, making the message accessible to the ordinary people of Kerala. Through this, Guru combines deep philosophical insight with practical clarity. The poem is written in the Anushtup metre and is also known as Jati Mimamsa, where the

term 'mimamsa' means inquiry or critical examination. In this poem, Guru carefully analyses the concept of caste using logic and reason. The famous statement, 'One caste, one religion, and one God for mankind,' appears in Jati Nirnayam, which was believed to be written in 1914.

Jati Nirnayam written by Sreenarayananaguru is as follows;

1

മനുഷ്യാണാം മനുഷ്യത്വം  
ജാതിർഗോത്രം ഗവാം യമാ  
ന ബ്രാഹ്മണാദിരിസ്ത്യൈസ്യവം  
ഹാ!തത്ത്വം വേത്തി കോ?പി ന.

2

ഒരു ജാതി ഒരു മതം  
ഒരു ദൈവം മനുഷ്യന്  
ഒരു യോനിയെയാരാകാരം  
ഒരു ഭേദവുമില്ലതിൽ.

3

ഒരു ജാതിയിൽ നിന്നെല്ലാ  
പിന്നീടുന്നു സന്തതി  
നരജാതിയിൽതോർക്കുമേപാ-  
ളാരു ജാതിയിലുള്ളതാം.

4

നരജാതിയിൽ നിന്നെത്ര  
പിന്നീടുന്നു വിപ്രനും  
പരിയൻ താനുമെന്തുള്ളത്-  
തത്തരം നരജാതിയിൽ?

5

പരിച്ഛിയിൽ നിന്നു പണ്ണു  
പരാശരമഹാമുനി  
പിന്നു മറ സുത്രിച്ച മുനി  
കൈവർത്തകന്നുയിൽ

6

ഇല്ല ജാതിയിലൊന്നുണ്ടാ  
വല്ലതും ഭേദമോർക്കുകിൽ  
ചൊല്ലേറും വ്യക്തിഭാഗത്തി-  
ലല്ലോ ഭേദമിരുന്നിട്ടും.

Guru's aim was not only to oppose social discrimination prevalent in society, but also to help people understand the true nature of their own humanity. He says that every person is born into one single kind: the human kind. The word *jati* means 'kind' or 'species.' In this poem, Guru begins by showing that just as 'cowness' is the common quality that defines all cows, 'humanity' is the common quality that unites all human beings. Brahmin, Nair, Ezhava, or Pariah are not natural divisions; they are labels intentionally created by the upper-caste society. A person is not born with these differences; they are imposed on them by custom and tradition. By criticising this, Guru said that 'humanity' is the only real caste.

Guru wrote this poem to show that caste is a meaningless social construct, examined from both biological and philosophical perspectives. From a scientific point of view, modern biology confirms that there is only one human species - *homo sapiens*. Physical differences such as skin colour or language are only the result of differences in climate, food, and culture. They do not change the very fact that all human beings are members of one family. Guru even cited the basic biological rule that members of the same species can marry and have children. Since all human beings can do this, they are clearly one kind. He rejects the idea that birth or social position can divide people into superior and inferior groups. Instead, he affirms that all people share the exact origin and the same basic nature.

From a philosophical perspective, Guru drew on the non-dual wisdom of Advaita Vedanta. This philosophy teaches that the Self (Atman) is the same in every person. True knowledge sees no difference between one human being and another. Guru pointed out that the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that the wise see the same reality in a learned Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, or a dog. For Guru, this was not just theory; it was a practical truth

that should transform society.

In *Jati Nirnayam*, Guru also examined how caste became such a powerful force. He explained that it was created by mixing some social differences with false religious ideas. Over time, these ideas turned into rigid customs that served the interests of the powerful while humiliating the poor and the weak. Guru called for the use of reason and truth to remove these false divisions. This biological and philosophical truth is the foundation of his argument; caste is a false label created by society.

Guru further emphasises this idea in his second verse by declaring that there is 'one caste, one religion, and one God for mankind.' This statement is a call for unity and equality. It removes every justification for social division and teaches that the differences people see between one another are superficial. By saying one religion, Guru did not mean that everyone should follow the same rituals or worship in the same way. He suggested that all human beings are equal, that every religion ultimately points to the same ultimate truth, and that God belongs to everyone. His message was meant to remove hatred and build a society based on love, equality, and human dignity. This was a radical message in early twentieth-century Kerala, where caste distinctions governed every social interaction. Through this verse, Guru invites society to move away from birth-based discrimination and recognise the shared humanity of all.

In later verses, Guru gives examples to reinforce his arguments. He explains that every human being, whether called a Brahmin or a Parayan, is born from the same human species. There is no real difference between them in terms of their essential nature. He even points out that many of the most outstanding spiritual teachers and sages in India were not born in the so-called higher castes. Sage Parasara was born to a woman



from a lower social background. His son Vyasa, who compiled the Vedas and wrote the Mahabharata and the Brahma Sutras, and Valmiki, who composed the Ramayana, are examples of this. If caste were real, such greatness would not have been possible. This shows that what truly matters is wisdom and goodness, not social position or family background.

Guru also points out that differences within humanity are individual, not caste based. Any variations in intelligence, character, or skill are personal traits and cannot be used to divide people into permanent social categories. This argument is crucial because it directly rejects the foundation of the caste system, which treats differences of birth as natural and unchangeable. Instead, Guru affirms that what truly matters is the universal essence of humanity shared by everyone. The relevance of *Jati Nirnayam* extends far beyond Guru's time. Even though caste-based discrimination has been legally abolished, its traces remain in social practices, politics, and cultural attitudes. Guru's rational and spiritual critique of caste remains a powerful reminder that social reform must begin in the human mind. His teaching challenges not only social structures but also the deeply rooted beliefs that sustain subtle forms of discrimination.

By combining logical reasoning with spiritual insight, the Guru's poem speaks equally to the intellect and the conscience. This poem shows that true reform does not come from anger or conflict but from a clear understanding of truth and an unwavering commitment to human equality. Through this poem, Guru gave the world a vision of a society where every human being is recognised as equal, not because of custom, but because of the undeniable reality of our shared humanity. *Jati Nirnayam* is therefore more than a social critique. It is a call for inner change. Guru believed that true reform

must begin in the human mind. Laws may stop some practices, but only a change in thought can truly end caste discrimination. His vision combines reason, science, and spirituality to create a society where every person is valued simply for being human.

## 1.2.2 Jati Lakshanam

*Jati Nirnayam* and *Jati Lakshanam* are two of the most significant works of Sree Narayana Guru that emphasise the insignificance of caste both from a biological and philosophical perspective. These works were believed to have been composed in 1914 at the Aluva Advaita Ashram. It is generally held that Guru wrote *Jati Lakshanam* at the request of Sahodaran Ayyappan, one of his close disciples and a social reformer. The poem consists of ten reflective slokas, each of which challenges the very foundation of caste distinctions and affirms the essential unity of humanity. Through these verses, Guru asserts that caste has no basis in nature or reason and that true wisdom lies in realising the oneness of all human beings.

പുണർന്നു പെറുമെല്ലാമൊ-  
രിനമാം പുണ്ണത്തത്ത്  
ഇനമല്ലിനമാമിജേഽാ-  
രിനയാർന്നോത്തു കാണ്മതും

1

ഓരോ ഇനത്തിനും മെയ്യു-  
മോരോ മാതിരിരെയാച്ചയും  
മണവും ചുവയും ചുടും  
തന്നുവും നോക്കുമോർക്കണും

2

തുടർന്നോരോന്നില്ലും വെവ്വേ-  
റയാളമിരിക്കയാൽ  
അരിഞ്ഞീടുന്നു വെവ്വേറു  
പിരിച്ചൊരോന്നുമിങ്ങു നാം

3

പേരുരു തൊഴിലാി മുന്നും  
പോരുമായതു കേൾക്കുക!  
ആരു നീയെന്നു കേൾക്കേണ്ണ  
നേരു മെയ്തനെ ചൊല്കയാൽ

4

ഇനമാർന്നുടൽ താൻ തരുളു-  
രിനമേതെന്നു ചൊൽക്കയാൽ  
ഇനമേതെന്നു കേൾക്കില്ല  
നിനവും കണ്ണുമുള്ളവർ

5

പൊളി ചൊല്ലുന്നിനും ചൊൽവ-  
തിച്ചിവെന്നു നിന്നയ്ക്കേയാൽ ,  
ഇഴിവില്ലിനമൊന്നാണു  
പൊളി ചൊല്ലരുതാരുമേ

6

ആണും പെണ്ണും വേർത്തിരിച്ചു  
കാണുംവണ്ണമിന്നതെയും  
കാണും കുറിക്കാണ്കിമ-  
ടാണു നാമിയേണ്ടത്.

7

അറിവാമാഴിയിൽ നിനു  
വരുമെല്ലാവുടൻപിനും  
കരുവാണിന,മീ നീരിൻ  
നിരതാൻ വേരുമായിട്ടും

8

അറിവാം കരുവാൻ ചെയ്ത  
കരുവാണിനമോർക്കുകിൽ  
കരുവാർന്നിനിയും മാറി  
വരുമീ വന്നതാക്കേയും

9

ഇനമെന്നിതിനേച്ചാല്ലു-  
നിന്നതെന്നരിയിക്കേയാൽ  
ഇനമില്ലക്കിലില്ലാനു-  
മിന്നതെന്നുള്ളതുഴിയിൽ

10

*Jati Lakshanam* is a 10-verse powerful poem that clearly and logically questions the very basis of caste. In this poem, Guru challenges the idea that people are born into superior or inferior castes and shows that all human beings belong to the same species; humanity. The word Jati means caste, and Lakshanam means characteristic or identifying sign. So, *Jati Lakshanam* means ‘the characteristic of caste.’ Through this poem, Guru asks a straightforward yet deep philosophical question: How do we know to which caste someone belongs? Is there any natural or scientific sign that shows a person’s caste? If not, then why do we continue to treat people differently based on this imaginary idea?

Guru starts by explaining that all living beings that reproduce through the union of male and female belong to the same species. For example, all cows belong to the same species because they can reproduce with one another and share common traits. Similarly, ants, birds, and other animals are recognised as belonging to one species based on their

physical and behavioural characteristics, such as body shape, sounds, smells, tastes, temperatures, and movements. Guru points out that this same logic can be applied to human beings. All humans, regardless of their caste or social background, are born the same way, have the same body structure, and possess the same basic physical and mental qualities. Guru uses logical reasoning to show that all human beings, irrespective of their birth, place, or occupation, share the same essential traits. Therefore, it is clear that there is only one human caste: humanity.

In practical and efficient manner, Guru says that the human body itself is proof of one’s caste. He even says it is meaningless to ask someone, ‘What is your caste?’ because the body already shows the truth that we are all human beings. Just ask about the name, occupation and place. That is enough. If someone feels ashamed to say ‘I am a human being’ and instead tries to say ‘I am a Brahmin’ or ‘I am an Ezhava,’ then they are telling a lie. According to Guru, there is no shame in claiming our shared human identity. In fact, it is the only truth. The caste labels we use are not real; they are false ideas created by society. Therefore, we must reject them and accept the truth of our oneness. As the poem progresses, Guru uses nature and everyday examples to illustrate his points. He says that just like we can recognise a mango tree or a type of bird by its features, we can also recognise humans by their shared qualities. We do not need to divide them into castes. He compares all forms in the world to waves in the sea. Though waves may appear different, they are all made of the same water. The external forms may differ, but the inner essence remains one. Likewise, though human beings may look different outwardly or have other social roles, their inner nature, humanness, is the same.

Guru also introduces a deeper philosophical idea in the poem. He says that knowledge or consciousness is the root of all creation.

It is like a potter (karuvan) who makes various vessels using one kind of clay. In the same way, the supreme knowledge gives rise to different forms of life, but all are made from the same essence. When these forms disappear, they return to that one truth. This is Guru's way of saying that spiritual unity is the reality of life, and caste is just a temporary illusion. The poem ends with this strong message. *Jati Lakshanam* is a poetic and philosophical attack on the caste

system prevalent in Kerala. Sree Narayana Guru uses simple observations from nature, logical reasoning, and deep spiritual insight to show that all human beings are equal. He argues that caste has no scientific, rational, or moral basis. The poem encourages us to look beyond external differences and recognise the unity and dignity of all human beings. Through *Jati Lakshanam*, Guru gives us a timeless message of equality, universal brotherhood, and humanity.

## Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru wrote *Jati Nirṇayam* and *Jati Lakshanam* in 1914.
- ◆ Both works reject caste as a natural or spiritual reality.
- ◆ Guru declared that caste is a man-made social division.
- ◆ *Jati Nirṇayam* has six verses, one in Sanskrit and five in Malayalam.
- ◆ The famous slogan 'One caste, one religion, and one God for mankind' appears in *Jati Nirṇayam*.
- ◆ *Jati Nirṇayam* is also known as *Jati Mimamsa*.
- ◆ *Jati Lakshanam* has ten verses explaining the natural unity of humanity.
- ◆ Guru used scientific reasoning to prove that all humans belong to one species.
- ◆ Caste divisions are based on ignorance and tradition, not truth.
- ◆ Guru drew from Advaita Vedanta to affirm the oneness of all beings.
- ◆ Individual differences do not create separate castes.
- ◆ Guru's teachings promote equality and human dignity.
- ◆ The poems challenged untouchability and caste-based discrimination.
- ◆ Guru combined logic, science, and spirituality in his critique of caste.
- ◆ His writings aimed at inner transformation and social change.
- ◆ The poems helped build Kerala's progressive social outlook.

- ◆ Biological evidence supports Guru's view of one human caste.
- ◆ These works continue to inspire unity and harmony in society.

## Objective Questions

1. How many verses are there in Jati Lakshanam?
2. How many verses are there in Jati Nirnayam?
3. Which philosophy influenced Sree Narayana Guru's ideas?
4. Who requested Guru to write Jati Lakshanam?
5. What is the basis of caste according to Guru?
6. Which social evil did Guru reject in Jati Nirnayam and Jati Lakshanam?
7. What is the other name of Jati Nirnayam?
8. In which language did Guru write Jati Nirnayam?

## Answers

1. Ten
2. Six
3. Advaita Vedanta
4. Sahodaran Ayyappan
5. Ignorance
6. Caste discrimination
7. Jati Mimamsa
8. First verse in Sanskrit and the remaining five in Malayalam



## Assignments

1. Examine the scientific and philosophical arguments against caste in Guru's Jati Nirṇayam and Jati Lakshanam.
2. Discuss the significance and continuing relevance of the slogan 'One caste, one religion, and one God for mankind.'
3. Evaluate the impact of Jati Nirnayam and Jati Lakshanam on Kerala's social reform movements.

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SGOU





## One- Religion of Guru

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain Sree Narayana Guru's concept of 'One-Religion'.
- ◆ analyse how Guru redefines religion as a path of self-realisation.
- ◆ interpret the metaphors and philosophical reasoning that the Guru uses to express the unity among all religions.
- ◆ evaluate the social and ethical implications of the 'One-Religion' ideal in society.
- ◆ relate Guru's Advaitic philosophical vision to practical principles of harmony, equality, and mutual respect.
- ◆ apply the insights of Guru's One-Religion philosophy to contemporary issues of religious intolerance.

### Prerequisites

The philosopher and humanitarian Albert Schweitzer once said, 'Any religion or philosophy which is not based on a respect for life is not a true religion or philosophy.' This idea places the value of life at the very heart of ethical and spiritual thought. Schweitzer believed that the ultimate test of any belief system is whether it nurtures care, compassion, and responsibility toward all living beings. Without such respect, religion becomes an empty formality, and philosophy becomes a hollow exercise in words. A true religion or philosophy must awaken in people the understanding that life, in all its forms, is sacred and interconnected. It must guide them away from cruelty, exploitation, and indifference, and lead them toward protecting the weak, preserving the environment, and fostering harmony among all creatures. Schweitzer's statement serves as a reminder that faith and thought

divorced from compassion lose their true purpose. Without respect for life, neither religion nor philosophy can claim to be genuine.

In practical terms, religion is often at the centre of conflicts. Differences in beliefs, practices, and identities have sometimes been used to divide people, create mistrust, and even justify violence. Instead of bringing peace and harmony, religion has, in many cases, been turned into a tool for power struggles and discrimination. Against this backdrop, Sree Narayana Guru sought to counter the misuse of religion through his concept of ‘One-Religion.’ He taught that all religions share the same essence, the search for truth, love, and justice, and that the external differences between them are superficial. By focusing on self-realisation, equality, and compassion for all, the Guru’s vision encouraged people to respect one another and live in unity. His message was simple yet powerful: humanity is one, and true religion is about uplifting and uniting, not dividing and destroying.

## Keywords

One-Religion (Ekamatham), Self-realisation, Equality, Religious Tolerance, Social Reform, Unity of Humanity, Spiritual Essence, Universal Values.

## Discussion

### 1.3.1 Sree Narayana Guru’s Concept of ‘One Religion’

Sree Narayana Guru’s philosophy of ‘One Religion’ stands as a powerful and transformative response to the deep divisions of caste, creed, and religious identity that fragmented Indian society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At a time when religion was often used to justify inequality and exclusion, Guru envisioned a unifying spiritual principle that transcended all sectarian boundaries. His concept was not an attempt to form a new religion or promote a uniform set of rituals, but rather a call to recognise the common spiritual essence that runs through all faiths. This vision, grounded in lived ethical experience and spiritual realisation, remains deeply relevant in a world still struggling with religious intolerance and social discrimination.

Guru’s famous slogan, ‘One Caste, One Religion, One God for Mankind,’

encapsulates this inclusive vision. It is not a slogan of uniformity but a celebration of unity rooted in human dignity and shared values. For Guru, religion was never about rigid dogma, priestly authority, or exclusionary ritual. Instead, it was a path to inner peace, ethical living, and the realisation of one’s true self. He firmly believed that the aim of all religions is the same: to lead human beings toward happiness, truth, and harmony with the divine. While outward practices, symbols, and doctrines may vary across religious traditions, their inner message, such as compassion, love, justice, and wisdom, is universal. Guru coined the term ‘Ekamatham’ to express this idea of ‘One Religion.’ It reflects his conviction that all faiths are expressions of one ultimate truth. In his view, religious conflicts arise when people cling to external forms and fail to grasp the ultimate unity beneath all religions.

Throughout his writings - Daiva Dasakam, Darsanamala, Brahmavidya Pancakam, and

especially Atmopadesa Satakam - Guru redefines religion as a way of life based on ethics, self-awareness, and universal love. He emphasises that religious life is not about mechanical rituals or blind faith, but about inner transformation. He urges people to live with honesty, compassion, and mindfulness, and insists that even those without religious affiliation who embody these values are walking a truly spiritual path. For Guru, religion must elevate human beings; it must not degrade or divide them.

This redefinition of religion had immediate and radical implications in the Kerala of his time, where caste barriers were deeply entrenched. Guru not only preached against these divisions but also actively dismantled them through action. He consecrated temples open to all, founded schools and institutions to uplift marginalized communities, and offered a model of spiritual leadership that was open, inclusive, and rooted in service. His approach challenged traditional religious authority and shifted the focus from birth-based privilege to character and self-realization. Guru's religious vision was deeply grounded in Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy of non-dualism, which teaches that all existence is one. But unlike metaphysical or abstract interpretations of Advaita, Guru's understanding was practical and ethical. He brought the philosophy down to the level of social action, showing that the oneness of existence must manifest in the way we treat one another. Equality, love, and justice were not merely moral values for him; they were the direct expression of the spiritual truth that all beings are united in one consciousness.

Guru also emphasized the importance of education and rational inquiry in spiritual life. He encouraged critical thinking and discouraged blind adherence to tradition. In his view, religion should never be a barrier to intellectual growth. Instead, it should evolve with reason and compassion. He believed

that science and spirituality could coexist and that both should aim at the betterment of humanity. His teachings consistently highlight the need for inner purity, contemplation, and self-discipline, and stress that true worship lies in self-realization, not in temple rituals or caste-based superiority. One of the most striking aspects of Guru's philosophy is his conviction that the sacred is not confined to temples, churches, or mosques, but is within every human being. Thus, spirituality is not the property of any particular community. Everyone, regardless of caste, creed, or gender, has equal access to the divine.

Guru viewed religious identity as secondary to the lived experience of truth and moral conduct. In this way, he not only rejected casteism but also exposed the emptiness of religious systems that failed to practice the values they preached. For him, the real aim of religion was self-realisation; the discovery of one's true nature, which is not different from the divine. He felt that this inner journey was more important than external rituals or sectarian doctrines. Through self-discipline, meditation, and awareness, one could overcome ego, hatred, and ignorance and live in harmony with the world. As religion continues to be used in modern times as a tool for exclusion, fundamentalism, and political control, Sree Narayana Guru's message remains powerfully timely. His philosophy of 'One Religion' reminds us that the real purpose of any religion is to create peace, promote human well-being, and encourage spiritual growth. When religion fails to do this- when it becomes a reason for hatred or conflict- it loses its very essence.

Guru's teachings urge us to move beyond labels and denominations and to see each person as a reflection of the divine. In his later years, Guru distanced himself from even caste-based organisations that had initially supported his mission. He turned instead toward universal humanism, advocating

for the upliftment of all, irrespective of community or religion. He established institutions not to spread a particular faith, but to nurture spiritual inquiry, education, and ethical reform. His life was a continuous example of walking the talk- of living the values he taught. He modelled a religious outlook that was rational, egalitarian, and grounded in the shared humanity of all people.

Verses 43- 49 of Atmopadesa Satakam (One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction) form a significant section in which Sree Narayana Guru directly addresses the idea of ‘One-Religion’ (oru matam), presenting it as a philosophical and spiritual realisation rather than a social slogan. In these verses, Guru speaks from the standpoint of a seer who has understood that all the diverse religious forms and practices are merely different expressions of the same eternal ultimate truth. The imagery and reasoning in these verses convey the essence of religion as the realisation of the unity of the Self and the Absolute, a truth that transcends sectarian boundaries.

### 1.3.2 Athmopadesha Sathakam Verses 43-49

43

പ്രകൃതി പിടിച്ചു ചുഴിട്ടും പ്രകാരം  
സുകൃതികൾ പോലുമോ! ചുഴന്തുനു;  
വികൃതി വിടുന്തിനായി വേല ചെയ്യീ-  
ലകൃതി ഫലാഗ്രഹമററിഞ്ഞിണ്ണേം.

44

പലമതസാരവുമേകമെന്നു പാരാ-  
തുലകിലോരാനയിലന്നരെന്നപോലെ  
പലവിധ യുക്തി പറഞ്ഞു പാമരമാ-  
രലവതു കണ്ടലയാതമർന്നിണ്ണേം.

45

ഒരു മതമന്യുന്ന നിന്ദയൊന്നിലോതും  
കരുവപരരെ കണക്കിനുനമാകും;  
ധരയിലിതിരെ രഹസ്യമാനുതാനേ-  
നനിവളവും ഭേദമെന്നിണ്ണേം.

46



പൊരുതു ജയിപ്പതസാഖ്യമൊന്നിനോടൊ-  
നൊരു മതവും പൊരുതാലെടുങ്ങുവീല  
പരമതവാദിയിതോർത്തിടാതെ പാഴേ  
പൊരുതു പൊലിഞ്ഞിടുമെന്ന ബുദ്ധി വേ  
ണും.

47

ഒരു മതമാകുവതിനുരപ്പതെല്ലാ-  
വരുമിതു വാദികളാരുമോർക്കുവീല;  
പരമതവാദമൊഴിഞ്ഞ പണ്ഡിതമാ-  
രിയുമിതിരെ രഹസ്യമീഞ്ഞേഷേഷം.

48

തനുവിലമർന്ന ശരീരി, തരെ സത്താ-  
തനുവിലതെന്തെന്തിതെന്തെന്തു സർവ്വം  
തനുതയെഴാഴിഞ്ഞു ധരിച്ചിട്ടുനു; സാക്ഷാ-  
ലനുഭവശാലികളാമിതോർക്കിലാരും.

49

അവിലരുമാതമസുവത്തിനായ് പ്രയത്കം  
സകലവുമിങ്ങു സദാപി ചെയ്തിട്ടുനു;  
ജഗതിയിലിമമതമേകമെന്നു ചിതി-  
ച്ചലമണ്ണയാതകതാരമർത്തിണ്ണേം.

In verse 43 of Atmopadesa Satakam, Sree Narayana Guru draws attention to how people, even those engaged in virtuous acts, are often caught in the repetitive cycle of worldly activities. Just as nature works continuously according to its laws, human beings also get swept along by ingrained habits, customs, and desires. Even good deeds, when done without proper understanding, can keep one bound within this cycle. Guru points out that to make real spiritual progress, one must let go of attachment to the results of actions and work with a mind free of selfish desires. The verse encourages an inner awakening in which the seeker acts from pure awareness rather than compulsion or habit. Only by freeing oneself from the restless pull of external forces and focusing on the deeper purpose of life, self-realisation, can one transcend the endless spin of worldly activity.

In verse 44, Sree Narayana

Guru teaches that the essence of all religions is the same, even though they may differ in outward form, practice, and expression. He illustrates this with the parable of the blind men and the elephant. Each blind man touches a different part of the animal and describes it according to his limited perception, believing it to be the whole truth. In the same way, followers of various religions often grasp only a part of the spiritual reality and mistake it for the complete truth. This limited vision leads each group to believe their path is the only correct one, without recognising the unity underlying all paths. Guru further points out that such partial understanding gives rise to endless disputes, as people argue based on incomplete knowledge. These arguments are often driven by ignorance and a refusal to see beyond one's tradition. The wise person, however, realises that these differences are superficial and that the core aim of every religion is identical: the pursuit of truth, love, and justice. Once this is understood, one need not be disturbed or drawn into sectarian quarrels. Instead, one should remain calm, respecting all paths and recognising them as varied expressions of the same ultimate reality.

Verse 45 of Atmopadesa Satakam teaches that when a follower of a particular religion regards another faith as inferior, it stems from the narrowness of his perspective. Guru says that the true worth of a religion lies not in its outward forms, rituals, or cultural differences, but in how effectively it leads a person toward self-realisation and moral living. When people judge another religion

based on partial understanding or prejudice, they fail to grasp the deeper spiritual unity that all religions share. Guru warns that such judgments are a kind of delusion, stemming from ignorance about the true nature of religion. Those who possess real wisdom understand that every religion, at its heart, points toward the same truth. Therefore, the enlightened person will respect other faiths as different expressions of the same ultimate reality.

In verse 46 of Atmopadesa Satakam, Sree Narayana Guru points out that disputes between religions can never truly be resolved through arguments and competition. When one religion tries to prove itself superior to another through conflict, the quarrel only continues without end. Such clashes arise from ignorance, ego, and attachment to one's own religious identity rather than from a genuine search for truth. Guru reminds us that the aim of religion is not to defeat others in debate, but to uplift oneself through self-realisation and moral living. Guru further suggests that the wise person understands the futility of religious quarrels. Instead of wasting time and energy in proving one's faith to be better, one should focus on removing the inner causes of division. True religion promotes peace, compassion, and understanding, not hostility or rivalry. By highlighting the pointlessness of sectarian disputes, Guru reinforces his vision of 'One-Religion,' where mutual respect and the recognition of a shared spiritual essence replace conflict and division.

Verse 47 of Atmopadesa Satakam says that although 'One-Religion' is true, very few people think about

it deeply. Most stay fixed in their faith and never see the unity behind all religions. This lack of reflection is why disputes, prejudices, and divisions persist between followers of different faiths. Only those who rise above sectarian thinking and let go of narrow religious pride can recognise that all religions ultimately aim at the same goal: the removal of ignorance and the attainment of liberation. Guru makes it clear that this understanding is not common among ordinary believers but is known to the wise and learned who have freed themselves from the mindset of religious rivalry. These enlightened people see beyond external forms, recognising that the spiritual essence of all religions is the same. By pointing this out, Guru urges seekers to move away from rigid attachments to labels and doctrines and to embrace a broader, more inclusive vision of faith that fosters unity, compassion, and mutual respect.

In verse 48 of Atmopadesa Satakam, Sree Narayana Guru describes the vision of an enlightened person. Such a person, established in the awareness of the Self, sees all living beings as part of the same existence. For them, the distinctions of 'mine' and 'yours,' or 'my religion' and 'your religion,' lose all meaning. Once the ego and the sense of separateness are removed, the enlightened one recognises the same truth shining equally in everyone, regardless of caste, creed, or faith. Guru's message here is that this state of realisation brings natural respect, love, and compassion for all. The enlightened person does not cling to narrow identities but embraces a universal perspective rooted in the oneness of life. This vision eliminates

prejudice and division, replacing them with harmony and unity. The enlightened one recognises that the same Self exists in all, and therefore, all deserve equal dignity and kindness.

Verse 49 of Atmopadesa Satakam concludes Sree Narayana Guru's reflections on 'One Religion' by pointing out that all human beings, regardless of their religion, work for the same basic aim: happiness and well-being. Every action, in one way or another, is directed toward peace of mind and the fulfillment of life. Recognising this shared goal, Guru says, one should understand that the essence of all religions is the same. He further explains that if people realised this truth, many of the conflicts, divisions, and misunderstandings caused by religious differences would disappear. The enlightened approach is to focus on the common purpose that unites humanity rather than the external differences that separate it. Guru here beautifully sums up the message of 'One-Religion' -the call to rise above sectarianism, embrace the shared spiritual and moral values of all faiths, and work together for the happiness and harmony of all.

In these verses 43–49 of Atmopadesa Satakam, present Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical vision of One-Religion in a precise and poetic form. The Guru sees religion as a path to the realisation of the Self, which is the same in all beings and identical with the Absolute. The apparent diversity of religions is like rivers flowing into the same ocean, highlighting the natural unity beneath their outward differences. The section critiques religious exclusivism and intolerance, which arise from ignorance and attachment



to superficial forms. By shifting the focus from external ritual to internal realisation, Guru redefines religion as an experiential truth rather than an institutional label. His teaching is rooted in the Advaitic understanding of non-duality, yet presented in a way accessible to people of all backgrounds.

The One-Religion ideal is not only a metaphysical truth but also a principle for social harmony. By recognising the unity of all beings, discrimination and division lose their justification. This vision had special social significance in Guru's time, when caste and communal divisions

were strong. It remains relevant today, offering a foundation for mutual respect and peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society. Thus, Atmopadesa Satakam, especially verses 43–49, constitutes a philosophical and ethical statement on the universality of religion, grounded in direct experience of unity, and intended to inspire both personal transformation and social reform. Today, in an era marked by religious extremism, communal tensions, and cultural fragmentation, Sree Narayana Guru's idea of 'One Religion' is a message of hope. It reminds us that the essence of all faiths is the same.

## Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru taught the idea of 'One-Religion' (Ekamatham).
- ◆ All religions share the same essence.
- ◆ Religion should lead to self-realisation, not division.
- ◆ Guru's slogan: 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for Mankind.'
- ◆ Outward differences between religions are superficial.
- ◆ True religion promotes truth, love, justice, and equality.
- ◆ Religious disputes come from ignorance and narrow thinking.
- ◆ Wise people respect all faiths equally.
- ◆ The aim of religion is inner peace and moral living.
- ◆ Guru opposed caste-based discrimination.
- ◆ He consecrated temples open to all.
- ◆ He promoted education for all communities.
- ◆ Guru's vision was based on Advaita Vedanta (non-duality).

- ◆ Spiritual oneness should reflect in social equality.
- ◆ Religion should encourage compassion and service.
- ◆ Science and spirituality can coexist.
- ◆ Self-realisation is more important than rituals.
- ◆ The sacred exists in every human being.
- ◆ All beings have equal access to the divine.
- ◆ Real religion uplifts, not degrades.
- ◆ Enlightened people see unity in diversity.
- ◆ All human beings work for the same goal of happiness.
- ◆ Recognising the unity reduces conflict.
- ◆ Guru promoted universal humanism.

## Objective Questions

1. The concept of ‘One-Religion’ is mainly explained in which work of Sree Narayana Guru?
2. In *Atmopadesa Satakam*, which verses deal with the idea of ‘One-Religion’?
3. Which parable does the Guru use in Verse 44 to explain partial understanding of religions?
4. What does Guru say about the differences between religions?
5. What is the real aim of religion, according to the Guru?
6. What causes disputes between religions, according to the Guru?
7. For Guru, what quality marks an enlightened person?
8. Which practice did the Guru reject as not leading to liberation if done without awareness?
9. What is the core message of ‘One-Religion’?
10. In Guru’s philosophy, what is higher than ritual and doctrine?

## Answers

1. Atmopadesa Satakam
2. Verses 43–49
3. The parable of the blind men and the elephant
4. They are superficial
5. Self-realisation and moral living
6. Ignorance and narrow-mindedness
7. Seeing all beings as one beyond distinctions
8. Blind ritualism
9. Humanity is one, and true religion unites
10. The realisation of the Self.

## Assignments

1. Critically examine Sree Narayana Guru's concept of 'One-Religion' as explained in verses 43- 49 of Atmopadesa Satakam. How does it address religious conflict and promote harmony?
2. Discuss the parable of the blind men and the elephant in Verse 44. How does Guru use this imagery to explain the partial understanding of religions?
3. Evaluate the relevance of Guru's 'One-Religion' philosophy in the context of contemporary issues such as religious intolerance and cultural diversity.

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## UNIT

# Psychology of Religion's Identity

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain how religion shapes personal values and social relationships.
- ◆ describe how religious identity develops and changes over time.
- ◆ analyse Sree Narayana Guru's role in creating an inclusive religious identity.
- ◆ identify key examples from Guru's life and writings that challenged caste-based divisions.
- ◆ recognize the psychological benefits of the Guru's universalist approach to religion.
- ◆ apply Guru's teachings to promote harmony and respect in a diverse society.

## Prerequisites

What is the religious identity of a person? Is it the faith recorded in official documents, the rituals followed since childhood, or the community into which one is born? Or is it something more profound, shaped by personal conviction, moral values, and a sense of connection to the divine? In a world where religion is sometimes linked to disputes and even wars, it is worth asking whether such conflicts arise from a genuine understanding of religion or from the blind adherence to inherited customs. Can a tradition that teaches love, peace, and compassion become a source of hatred and division?

Imagine a society where people of different faiths live side by side. What happens when differences in belief overshadow the shared values that unite humanity?

Can one hold a strong religious identity without creating barriers against others? These questions lead us to enquire into the psychology of religious identity; how it is formed, how it influences behaviour, and how it can be transformed. In this context, the vision of Sree Narayana Guru offers an inspiring example. His life and teachings offer a way of understanding religious identity that transcends narrow boundaries and embraces universal human values, opening a path toward harmony and mutual respect.

## Keywords

Religious Identity, Self-realisation, Inclusivity, Truth (Satya), Compassion (Karuna), Equality (Samatva), Kannadi Prathishta, Temple Reforms, Universalism, Atma-sukham.

## Discussion

The psychology of religion explores how human thoughts, emotions, and behaviours relate to religious beliefs and experiences. It studies the inner dimensions of faith, devotion, and spiritual awareness as part of human consciousness. Sreenarayana Guru's concept of religion also centres on the inner realisation of truth rather than external rituals or dogmas. For Guru, religion is a path to self-purification, moral uplift, and the realisation of oneness. This inward orientation closely aligns with the psychological study of spiritual experience as a transformative process. Guru emphasised that religion should elevate the individual and society through wisdom and compassion. His famous dictum, "One caste, one religion, one God for man," reflects a universal psychological need for unity and belonging. Guru's religion is therefore not institutional but experiential, resonating with modern psychological interpretations of religion as a personal quest for meaning. In both perspectives, religion becomes an instrument of inner harmony and social integration. Thus, the identity of religion in psychology and in Sreenarayana Guru's philosophy converge on the goal of realizing human wholeness

through spiritual understanding.

Religion has a reflective impact on how people perceive themselves and their relationships with others. It shapes personal values, moral choices, relationships, and the way individuals understand the world. From a psychological perspective, the study of religion's identity examines how religious beliefs and practices become part of a person's sense of self and their belonging to a group. It also examines how these identities can change in response to new ideas, reform movements, or personal experiences. Religion has both individual and social dimensions. On the personal side, it influences our values, moral decisions, emotional life, and search for meaning. On the social side, it connects us to a community and provides a shared framework for understanding the world. Thus, religious identity shapes not only how we see ourselves but also how we relate to others and respond to life's challenges.

Religious identity begins when the beliefs, values, and traditions of a religion become part of our self-understanding. This usually starts in childhood, when family, culture, and community introduce us to



certain beliefs and practices. As we grow, our religious identity may develop further through education, personal reflection, and participation in religious activities. For many people, it becomes a deep source of comfort, guidance, and belonging. However, psychology shows that religious identity is not fixed; it can change as a person gains new experiences, meets people from different backgrounds, or reflects critically on their faith. When healthy, it encourages empathy, respect, and openness. When rigid, it can lead to prejudice and conflict.

The way people understand religion and its role in society has undergone significant changes over time. During the colonial period in India, culture was mainly expressed through classical philosophies such as the Upanishads and Vedanta. Later, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Hindu revival movements used religion to strengthen cultural identity and a sense of belonging. By the late 20th century, there was a push toward cultural uniformity in India, where religion and culture were closely tied to national identity. At the same time, modern values from the European Enlightenment influenced the shaping of Hindu identity. However, from the 1990s onwards, critical thinkers from Dalit, Tribal, and Feminist backgrounds began to question traditional religious structures because they often excluded or oppressed some groups. They called for rethinking religion to make it more inclusive and just. This situation has made people rethink what religious pluralism really means. Sree Narayana Guru offers a new way to address these questions. Guru sees religion as a dynamic and living force that promotes truth, compassion, and equality.

In the history of Kerala, Sree Narayana Guru played a decisive role in transforming religious identity from a narrow and divisive system into an inclusive vision. Guru did not view religion as something meant to separate people into exclusive

groups. Instead, he understood it as a path towards self-realisation, inner peace, and harmonious living. Sree Narayana Guru focuses on changing or ‘redimensioning’ the meaning and purpose of religion for human life. His teaching was rooted in universal values such as truth (satya), compassion (karuna), and equality (samatva). These values provide the foundation for a strong, inclusive religious identity. During Guru’s time, identity was often tied to caste and birth. People inherited not only their religion but also strict rules about social behaviour, occupation, and status. This fixed system created deep divisions and inequality.

Religious identity was not a personal choice; it was predetermined by tradition. Guru challenged this by proclaiming that every human being, regardless of birth or caste, was equal in dignity and potential. His famous declaration, ‘One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man,’ was not a call to erase cultural or religious diversity, but an invitation to recognise the unity behind it. This message was not just theory; it was put into practice through his writings and actions. In his poem Jati Nirnayam, Guru questioned the very foundation of caste by declaring that all human beings belong to a single jati- the human race. In Atmopadesa Satakam, he went further, teaching that true religion is not in names or divisions but in self-realisation and the recognition of the same Self in all beings. By writing in simple Malayalam rather than Sanskrit, Guru ensured that these liberating ideas reached ordinary people who were often excluded from traditional learning.

One of the most powerful demonstrations of his vision of ‘One Caste, One Religion and One God for Man’ came in 1888 at Aruvippuram, where Guru installed a Siva idol himself, a role traditionally reserved for Brahmins. This was a direct challenge to caste-based religious authority. When questioned, Guru famously said the deity

he consecrated was 'not the Brahmin's Siva, but our own Siva.' Psychologically, this was an act of empowerment. It helped oppressed communities break free from the internalised belief that they were spiritually inferior. It encouraged them to take responsibility for their own identity and recognise their equal right to approach the divine.

From a psychological perspective, Guru's approach led people away from passively accepting society's labels and towards actively defining themselves in terms of universal human values. This nurtured a mature religious identity, one grounded in personal understanding, dignity, and respect for others. It purified religion by shifting the focus from outer forms and rituals to inner truths, making religious identity more inclusive and life-affirming. For Guru, the essence of religion was found in inner spiritual experience, not in external ceremonies. He believed that all religions shared a common goal, the search for truth, peace, and self-realisation. In his verse 'Whatever be the religion, it suffices if it makes one noble,' Guru expressed his universalist outlook. Different religions may have different names for God, sacred texts, and customs, but these are simply different paths leading to the same ultimate reality.

This perspective has significant psychological benefits. When people focus on the shared spiritual core of religions, they are less likely to see others as enemies or outsiders. Instead, they develop an identity grounded in universal human values, which makes them more open and respectful of diversity. Guru's vision also met a basic human need, the desire to belong to a group without excluding others. While people naturally find comfort in shared beliefs and traditions, Guru taught that these should not become walls of separation. Recognising that all religions point to the same truth allows a person to be secure in their own faith while appreciating others' faith.

Today, where differences in religion often lead to misunderstanding or conflict, Sree Narayana Guru's teachings offer a way to build harmony and mutual respect. His approach encourages people to look beyond surface differences and focus on the shared spiritual truths that unite humanity. One of the most striking examples of this inclusive vision is the Kannadi Prathishta (mirror consecration) at the Kalavancode temple in 1927. Instead of placing an idol in the sanctum, Guru installed a mirror. Below it was the inscription, 'Om Sānti' (Peace be to all). The psychological meaning of this act was profound. When devotees entered the shrine, they saw their reflection, reminding them that the divine is not an external object but the Self within. It was a practical lesson in self-realisation, teaching that worship of God and respect for oneself are inseparable. This consecration liberated worshippers from dependency on external symbols or priestly authority, directing their attention to the inner source of spiritual dignity.

Guru's reforms in temple practice also reflected his psychological insight. He believed that places of worship should not be restricted to ritual activities alone. He envisioned temples as centres of education, moral instruction, and community development. Many of the temples he established included libraries, schools, and meeting halls, making them spaces for both spiritual growth and social empowerment. This transformed the temple's role from a symbol of caste exclusivity to one of collective progress. Such initiatives illustrate how a healthy religious identity can strengthen both the individual and the community. Psychologically, a mature identity is marked by self-awareness, emotional stability, empathy, and the ability to live according to one's values without imposing them on others. Guru's approach encourages precisely these qualities. For him, religion was a means to achieve Atma-sukham, inner happiness, and peaceful living. He saw no contradiction



between personal spiritual development and active social responsibility.

Guru's rejection of caste barriers showed that a strong identity need not exclude others; it becomes stronger through inclusivity. In psychological terms, this reduces prejudice, fosters cooperation, and enables people to adapt to life changes without losing their essential values. An inclusive religious identity benefits both the person and society; it helps people stay true to their beliefs while respecting diversity. His writings deepen this understanding. In Atmopadesa Satakam, Guru teaches that self-realisation is the key to liberation and that all external differences are secondary to the inner truth of the Self. This work invites readers to shift from external identity markers to the discovery of a Self beyond all divisions. In Daiva Dasakam, a simple ten-verse Malayalam prayer, he expresses complete surrender to the Divine while affirming human dignity. The prayer blends humility with inner confidence, showing that dependence on God and self-respect can coexist.

Both these works offer psychological benefits. They encourage humility, trust, compassion, and openness; qualities that enhance emotional well-being and social harmony. They also guide believers to develop an identity that is secure enough to embrace diversity without fear. By combining insights from psychology with Guru's teachings, it becomes clear that the most valuable religious identity is one rooted in truth, compassion, and equality. Such an identity not only promotes personal well-being but also strengthens the bonds of human society. Guru's life and work show that when religious identity is grounded in inner realisation and social responsibility, it becomes a powerful force for unity, justice, and peace. In a modern context, where identities are often shaped by political divisions, consumer culture, or economic competition, Guru's vision offers a timeless reminder that the deepest identity is the one that recognises the same Self in all beings. This recognition not only uplifts the individual but also transforms society into a more compassionate, cooperative, and inclusive community.

## Recap

- ◆ Religion influences how people see themselves and relate to others.
- ◆ Religious identity can change over time through experience and reflection.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru worked to make religious identity inclusive and universal.
- ◆ Guru believed in truth, compassion, and equality as the basis of religion.
- ◆ In Guru's time, identity was tied to caste and birth.
- ◆ Atmopadesa Satakam teaches self-realisation and the unity of all beings.
- ◆ The Aruvippuram installation gave oppressed communities confidence and dignity.
- ◆ All religions, for the Guru, share the same spiritual essence.

- ◆ He taught that religion should make a person noble.
- ◆ Guru consecrated a mirror at Kalavancode temple to teach self-realisation.
- ◆ Mirror installation showed that the divine is found within oneself.
- ◆ Guru built temples as centres of education and social service.
- ◆ His temple reforms turned them into places for learning and community growth.
- ◆ A healthy religious identity is self-aware, balanced, and empathetic.
- ◆ Inclusive identity reduces prejudice and promotes cooperation.
- ◆ Guru's vision united inner spirituality with social responsibility.
- ◆ Guru's teachings promote harmony in a diverse society.
- ◆ The deepest identity is recognising the same Self in all beings.

## Objective Questions

1. From a psychological perspective, what does the study of religious identity examine?
2. What was often tied to identity during Sree Narayana Guru's time?
3. State Guru's famous declaration on religious unity.
4. Which poem of Guru declares that all human beings belong to a single jati?
5. What is the core teaching of *Atmopadesa Satakam* regarding religion?
6. What psychological impact did the Aruvippuram installation have on oppressed communities?
7. What was the symbolic meaning of the mirror consecration (Kannadi Prathishta)?
8. What was inscribed below the mirror in the Kalavancode temple?
9. What did Guru believe should be the role of temples besides ritual activities?
10. What is the deepest identity according to Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy?

## Answers

1. How religious beliefs and practices influence self-perception, relationships, and behaviour, and how identities change over time
2. Caste and birth
3. One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man.
4. Jati Nirnayam
5. True religion is found in self-realisation and in recognising the same Self in all beings
6. It empowered them and gave them confidence in their spiritual equality.
7. To teach that the divine is within oneself and to promote self-realisation
8. Om Śānti (Peace be to all)
9. Centres of education, moral instruction, and community development
10. Recognising the same Self in all beings.

## Assignments

1. Discuss the psychological dimensions of religious identity and explain how Sree Narayana Guru's teachings transform it into an inclusive and life-affirming vision.
2. Analyse the significance of the Aruvippuram installation and the Kan-nadi Prathishta in redefining religious identity in Kerala.
3. Explain how *Atmopadesa Satakam* and *Daiva Dasakam* reflect Sree Narayana Guru's universalist approach to religion and its psychological benefits.
4. Evaluate the role of Sree Narayana Guru's temple reforms in promoting social equality, community development, and a mature religious identity.

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**BLOCK**

**Liberation  
Through  
Education**



# Concept of Educational Philosophy

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the meaning and scope of educational philosophy.
- ◆ identify the relationship between philosophy and education.
- ◆ describe how different branches of philosophy influence education.
- ◆ distinguish between teacher-centred, student-centred, and society-centred educational philosophies.
- ◆ analyse the importance of educational philosophy in curriculum design, teaching methods, and classroom practices.

### Prerequisites

What is the purpose of education? This question is not as simple as it may seem. For some, the primary purpose of education is to prepare for a job and earn a living. They see education as a means to gain the knowledge and skills needed for a career and financial stability. While this is important, it is only one part of the bigger picture. Education also helps people understand the world, solve problems, and adapt to change. It gives individuals the tools they need to participate in society and contribute to its progress. However, education is not just about earning money or building a career. A deeper purpose is to shape a person's overall character. It aims to develop qualities like honesty, respect, empathy, and responsibility, alongside knowledge and skills. A good education helps individuals grow morally, emotionally, and socially, enabling them to live meaningful lives and work for the common good. This is where educational philosophy becomes essential. It guides us in deciding the true aims of education and ensures that learning is directed toward the complete development of individuals and the betterment of society.

## Keywords

Educational Philosophy, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Axiology, Logic, Holistic Development, Character Formation, Critical Thinking, Social Responsibility

## Discussion

Education is not merely the transfer of information from teacher to student, but a purposeful and thoughtful process aimed at shaping an individual's intellectual, moral, emotional, and social development. It is a continuous journey through which people develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to live meaningfully in society. Education is not confined to formal schooling but encompasses all learning experiences that shape a person from birth to death. From the nurturing guidance of parents in early childhood to the complex lessons learned through work, relationships, and community life, education draws on both structured instruction and spontaneous life experiences, making it a powerful tool for personal growth and social development.

At the heart of education lies a set of guiding beliefs about what is worth knowing, how learning should take place, and why education is essential. These beliefs provide the foundation for all educational decisions, from defining aims to selecting teaching methods and designing curricula. The term philosophy comes from the Greek words *philo* (love) and *sophia* (wisdom), meaning 'love of wisdom.' In a broader sense, philosophy is the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and understanding about life, the universe, and human existence. It involves deep reflection and critical thinking about reality, knowledge, and values. When these philosophical principles are applied to education, they help answer essential questions such as: What should be taught? (content), How should it be taught? (methods and approaches), And why should it be

taught? (purposes and aims).

Philosophy and education share a close relationship, as both deal with the nature of human life, values, and growth. Educational philosophy as a field emerged from this shared concern, offering perspectives on how learning can shape society. Philosophy provides the roots, the vision, ideals, and values, while education is the branch that grows from them, bringing those ideas into reality. Philosophy raises the fundamental questions: What is the purpose of life? What is truth? What is worth knowing? Education translates these questions into practical terms, deciding what learners should study, how they should be taught, and why learning is essential. In this way, educational philosophy acts as both a guiding vision and a practical framework, ensuring that education remains purposeful, coherent, and aligned with the broader goals of individual growth and societal progress.

Educational philosophy is therefore both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it explores the goals and meaning of education; practically, it guides classroom decision-making, from lesson planning to assessment. Many educators capture this relationship by saying, 'Philosophy is the foundation, and education is the structure built upon it.' The meaning of education has evolved, shaped by cultural traditions, philosophical thought, and historical contexts. Ancient traditions viewed education as the cultivation of virtue and wisdom, while modern thinkers see it as preparation for participation in an ever-changing, interconnected world. In its

narrow sense, education refers to the formal process of teaching and learning in schools and universities, guided by specific aims and curricula. In its broader sense, it includes the complete development of an individual, encompassing moral, intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Great educators have stressed that education must go beyond mere knowledge accumulation, aiming instead at the harmonious growth of the individual and the welfare of society.

### **2.1.1 Nature and Scope of Educational Philosophy**

The nature of educational philosophy lies in its ability to combine deep philosophical reflection with the practical realities of education. It takes fundamental ideas about truth, knowledge, values, and the purpose of life, and applies them to the processes of teaching and learning. Philosophy is primarily contemplative, dealing with theories, values, and questions about truth and meaning. Educational philosophy is not limited to abstract reflection; it is concerned with how these ideas can shape and improve educational practice. By putting these philosophical principles into action in real learning environments, educational philosophy becomes an applied philosophy. Educational philosophy examines every aspect of education, from defining its aims to addressing the challenges faced by teachers, learners, and institutions. Because philosophy seeks to understand life and its purpose, and education prepares individuals to live meaningfully, educational philosophy serves as a practical application of philosophical thought to the growth and development of learners.

The scope of educational philosophy is broad. It defines the aims and objectives of education, guiding the formation of the kind of individuals that society wishes to nurture. It influences curricular design so that learning remains relevant and purposeful.

It guides the selection of teaching methods, ensuring they meet learners' needs, abilities, and interests. It also shapes approaches to discipline, classroom management, school organisation, and educational policy-making. Educational philosophy provides a clear framework of values and goals, ensuring that education promotes the all-round development of the learner, intellectual, moral, physical, emotional, and social, while contributing to the progress and well-being of society.

### **2.1.2 Branches of Philosophy and Their Relevance to Education**

Different branches of philosophy help to understand human thought and experience, and each guides the shaping of education in meaningful ways. By connecting philosophical insights with educational practice, we can design learning that nurtures intellectual, moral, and social development. Metaphysics examines the nature of reality and human existence. It asks questions such as: What is real? What does it mean to be human? Understanding these concepts helps educators define the ultimate aims of education. For example, if human beings are seen as spiritual beings, education will emphasise moral and character development. If humans are primarily understood in material or scientific terms, education may focus more on technical knowledge and skills. Metaphysics thus shapes how educators view learners and what education should seek to achieve.

Epistemology, the study of knowledge, explores how we know what we know and what counts as valid understanding. It informs curriculum design and teaching methods by clarifying how knowledge should be transmitted, discovered, or constructed. For instance, if knowledge is considered experiential, learning activities will emphasise hands-on projects, experiments,



and problem-solving. Epistemology ensures that education develops critical thinking and the ability to understand truth, rather than just memorising information. Axiology deals with values, including ethics and aesthetics. Education is never neutral; it always conveys values, consciously or unconsciously. Axiology guides the cultivation of virtues such as honesty, compassion, respect, and social responsibility. It also emphasises the appreciation of beauty and creativity through literature, art, and culture. By integrating values into education, axiology ensures that learners develop both character and intellect.

Logic focuses on correct reasoning and sound argumentation. It equips learners to think clearly, analyse information, and evaluate ideas critically. Logic also helps teachers structure lessons so that knowledge builds coherently. In a world filled with misinformation and complex challenges, logical reasoning enables students to make rational decisions and approach problems systematically. Social and Political Philosophy explores questions about society, justice, freedom, rights, and the role of individuals in communities. It informs education on promoting democratic values, equality, and respect for diversity. By understanding these principles, schools can cultivate socially responsible citizens who contribute positively to society. Additionally, it influences educational policies and the ways schools address inclusion and fairness.

Other branches, such as the Philosophy of Religion and Philosophy of Science, further enrich education. The philosophy of religion encourages tolerance, ethical reflection, and respect for diverse beliefs, while the philosophy of science promotes inquiry, rational thinking, and innovation. Together, these branches provide the philosophical foundation for education. Metaphysics helps define educational aims, epistemology guides the acquisition and construction of knowledge, axiology directs

the development of values, logic sharpens reasoning, and social philosophy connects learning to society. By grounding education in these branches, learners are equipped not only with knowledge and skills but also with the moral, intellectual, and social capacities to live meaningful, responsible, and engaged lives.

## 2.1.3 Major Types of Educational Philosophy

Educational philosophies are often grouped into three broad traditions: teacher-centred, student-centred, and society-centred. Each tradition offers a distinct view of what education is for, how teaching should occur, and what kind of learning matters most.

### 2.1.3.1 Teacher-centred philosophies

Teacher-centred approaches place the teacher at the core of the learning process. The teacher is seen as a knowledgeable guide who organises content, sets standards, and directs learning in a structured way. The classroom is orderly, the curriculum is sequenced, and assessment checks whether students have mastered the agreed content. Essentialism is the best-known example. It focuses on building strong skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. It values discipline, effort, and steady progress in mastering essential subjects. Perennialism shares the structured spirit of essentialism but focuses on ideas that are believed to have lasting value. It values timeless ideas and classical works of literature and philosophy, aiming to develop reasoning, moral values, and deep understanding rather than just practical skills. The aim is to cultivate reasoning, humane judgment, and moral character.

Positivism adds a scientific emphasis. It claims that reliable knowledge comes from observation, measurement, and verifiable evidence. In a positivist spirit, teaching

is systematic and staged, with objectives stated in behavioural terms (what learners should be able to do). Here, the assessment focuses on observable outcomes rather than personal opinions. Teacher-centred traditions offer clear benefits. They set aside time for foundational literacies, help students build disciplined study habits, and provide standard benchmarks that support fairness. Their main criticism is that they can become too rigid, leaving less space for creativity, student voice, and diverse ways of knowing.

### **2.1.3.2 Student-centred philosophies**

Student-centred approaches shift attention from teaching to learning. They view the learner as active, capable, and responsible for building understanding. The teacher designs experiences, provides scaffolds, and guides reflection, but students investigate, question, and make meaning for themselves. Progressivism is one such example. It encourages learning through experience. Instead of memorising facts in isolation, students work on real problems, projects, and investigations. The aim is to develop critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and practical problem-solving. Constructivism deepens this stance by emphasising that learners construct knowledge through interaction with ideas, materials, and people. New concepts are built on prior understanding, so teaching begins with what students already think and know. In a constructivist mathematics lesson, for example, students might compare multiple solution methods and explain why one strategy works better in a particular situation.

Existentialism brings a personal dimension. It highlights choice, individuality, and responsibility. Students are encouraged to explore their interests, confront real-life dilemmas, and reflect on values and meaning. Assessment may include journals

and self-evaluations that show growth in understanding and self-awareness. The teacher's role is not to impose answers but to help students examine their choices and live authentically. Humanism seeks to develop the whole person, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral. A humanistic classroom is warm and respectful. Feedback is supportive, mistakes are treated as part of learning, and student well-being matters as much as test scores. Student-centred traditions are praised for promoting motivation, creativity, and deep understanding. They can, however, become vague if not anchored in clear goals and well-designed tasks. Effective student-centred teaching still requires structure: explicit learning targets, thoughtful sequencing, and fair criteria for judging quality.

### **2.1.3.3 Society-centred philosophies**

Society-centred approaches treat education as a force for social improvement. They ask schools to prepare young people not only for personal success but also for responsible participation in a democratic, just, and sustainable society. Social reconstructionism views the classroom as a space to examine social issues, question unfair structures, and imagine better futures. Dialogue, debate, and civic action are part of learning. The aim is to cultivate informed, ethical citizens who can collaborate across differences. One such example is pragmatism. Pragmatism focuses on what works in practice. Knowledge is judged by its usefulness in solving real problems. Learning is hands-on, interdisciplinary, and adaptable. A pragmatic curriculum blends academic content with life skills: financial literacy, digital competence, communication, and teamwork.

Society-centred traditions help schools stay relevant. They connect learning to students' worlds, encourage empathy and civic responsibility, and show how knowledge can improve lives. The common risk is



losing depth in core disciplines if every topic becomes a social project. Strong programmes balance social aims with rigorous subject learning. In real classrooms, the three traditions of educational philosophy, teacher-centred, student-centred, and society-centred, rarely exist in isolation. Instead, they often merge to create a balanced and meaningful learning experience. When these three perspectives come together, education becomes both structured and dynamic. The solid framework provided by the teacher supports deeper exploration, while the student's active role ensures personal relevance, and the societal focus gives learning a larger purpose. This integrated approach not only deepens understanding but also helps learners grow as informed individuals and responsible members of society.

#### **2.1.4 Importance of Educational Philosophy**

Educational philosophy plays a vital role in making education purposeful, relevant, and effective. Without a guiding philosophy, education risks becoming a set of disconnected activities without a clear direction. A well-defined philosophy helps teachers and policymakers decide what truly matters in the learning process. It ensures that all educational decisions, from curriculum design to teaching strategies, are aligned with meaningful goals. One of the key contributions of the educational philosophy is in shaping the curriculum. It helps determine which subjects, topics, and activities best serve students' intellectual, moral, and social development. For example, an institution that values critical thinking and creativity will design a curriculum rich in problem-solving tasks, open-ended discussions, and opportunities for independent exploration. In contrast, an institution that values tradition and cultural continuity may focus more on classical texts and established knowledge.

Educational philosophy also guides the selection of teaching methods. By reflecting on their philosophy, educators can choose strategies that align with both their learning objectives and their students' needs. For some, this may involve structured instruction and clear guidance; for others, it may mean adopting more participatory and experiential methods. In addition, an educational philosophy contributes to teachers' professional growth. When educators reflect regularly on their beliefs about teaching and learning, they become more aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. This reflection helps them adapt to new challenges and respond effectively to their students' changing social and educational needs. Finally, educational philosophy connects the classroom with the broader society, ensuring that education not only supports personal growth but also prepares individuals to participate meaningfully in community life and contribute to social progress.

#### **2.1.5 Contemporary Debates and Challenges**

As educational philosophy deals with fundamental questions about the aims and methods of education, it naturally becomes the subject of debate, especially in today's fast-changing world. Different educators, policymakers, and communities often hold different views about what education should achieve and how it should be delivered. These differences give rise to ongoing discussions and challenges. One central area of debate is the question of standardised testing versus holistic learning. Advocates of standardised testing argue that it provides a clear and measurable way to assess student performance and maintain educational standards. Critics, however, point out that an overemphasis on testing can narrow the curriculum, reduce creativity, and neglect important aspects of personal development such as emotional intelligence and social skills.

Another important debate concerns the role of technology in education. Technology has made learning more accessible and interactive, but excessive reliance on it may weaken face-to-face communication skills and critical thinking. The challenge for educational philosophy is to find a balance between embracing technology as a valuable tool and preserving essential human interaction in learning. Student choice is also widely discussed. Some believe that allowing students to choose what and how they learn fosters motivation, independence, and personal growth. Others argue that too much freedom may leave important subjects neglected, resulting in gaps in essential knowledge and skills. Despite this, globalisation and cultural identity have become central to modern educational debates. In an interconnected world, education must prepare students to engage with global knowledge and perspectives. At the same time, it must preserve and respect values and cultural heritage. Educational philosophy must adapt to these changing conditions while remaining rooted in core human values that serve both the individual and society.

### **2.1.6 Sreenarayana Guru's Declaration: "Educate to be Free"**

Educational philosophy explores the fundamental aims, values, and methods of education in shaping human life and society. It emphasises the development of knowledge, character, and social responsibility through a systematic learning process. In the Indian context, education has always been viewed as a path to self-realisation and social harmony. Sreenarayana Guru's educational thought aligns deeply with this vision, as he regarded education not merely as a means of livelihood but as a process of human liberation. He believed that ignorance was the root of all social evils and that only through proper

education could humanity achieve wisdom, equality, and peace. For Guru, education was both an intellectual and spiritual awakening that led to the realisation of oneness among all beings. His approach integrated moral, scientific, and spiritual learning to uplift individuals and communities. Thus, his educational philosophy represents a synthesis of self-knowledge and social reform through enlightenment.

Sreenarayana Guru's concept of "Liberation through Education" stands as a revolutionary idea in modern educational thought. He envisioned education as the most powerful tool to overcome caste discrimination, poverty, and ignorance. Guru declared, "Educate to be free", highlighting that true freedom lies in mental and social emancipation rather than mere political independence. His educational institutions aimed to promote universal values, scientific temper, and ethical conduct irrespective of caste or creed. By encouraging both men and women to pursue education, Guru initiated a social transformation towards equality and self-respect. He viewed knowledge as a divine force that leads to personal refinement and social progress. In this sense, liberation through education meant the awakening of human consciousness to its divine potential. His vision continues to inspire educational reforms based on justice, equality, and human dignity.

### **2.1.7 Conclusion**

Educational philosophy is the bridge between deep reflection on life, knowledge, and values, and the practical process of shaping how people learn. Philosophy provides the vision, purpose, and guiding principles that give direction to education, while education brings these ideals to life in classrooms and communities. A sound educational philosophy ensures that learning is not simply the memorisation of facts, but the nurturing of thoughtful, capable, and

responsible individuals who can contribute meaningfully to the world.

In today's world, education is both a personal right and a social necessity. It empowers individuals to overcome challenges, adapt to change, and lead fulfilling lives. At the same time, it strengthens communities by promoting cooperation, tolerance, and justice. Modern educational goals aim to strike a balance between personal achievement and the common good. Through

education, individuals discover their identity, broaden their perspectives, and learn to live harmoniously with others. Ultimately, education is not just preparation for life; it is life itself, shaping who we are and how we engage with the world. Educational philosophy, therefore, is essential to ensuring that a clear vision, sound values, and a commitment to the overall well-being of individuals and society guide the educational process.

## Recap

- ◆ Philosophy studies truth, values, and knowledge.
- ◆ Philosophy gives vision to education.
- ◆ Education is the process of shaping individuals and society.
- ◆ Educational philosophy connects philosophy with education.
- ◆ Educational philosophy asks what education is and why it is essential.
- ◆ Educational philosophy is reflective and prescriptive.
- ◆ Educational philosophy helps in selecting the right curriculum and subjects.
- ◆ It gives ideals and goals for education.
- ◆ Without philosophy, education loses meaning.
- ◆ Educational philosophy combines theory and practice.
- ◆ Educational philosophy makes education a tool for justice, equality, and human dignity.
- ◆ Metaphysics defines the aims of education.
- ◆ Epistemology guides teaching and learning methods.
- ◆ Axiology directs value education and character building.
- ◆ Logic trains reasoning and clear thinking.

- ◆ Social philosophy links education to justice and democracy.
- ◆ Teacher-centred philosophy stresses discipline and knowledge.
- ◆ Student-centred philosophy stresses creativity and experience.
- ◆ Society-centred philosophy stresses social responsibility.
- ◆ Technology changes the way education works.
- ◆ Education must balance global knowledge with cultural identity.

## Objective Questions

1. What is the primary process of shaping individuals and society?
2. Which field connects philosophy with education?
3. How do philosophy of education and educational philosophy work together?
4. Which branch of philosophy directs value education?
5. Which branch of philosophy trains reasoning and critical thinking?
6. What does social philosophy link education with?
7. Which type of philosophy stresses discipline and knowledge?
8. Which type of philosophy stresses creativity and experience?
9. Which type of philosophy stresses social responsibility?
10. What does educational philosophy influence most directly?
11. What happens when education is guided by philosophy?

## Answers

1. Education
2. Educational philosophy
3. As theory and practice
4. Axiology
5. Logic
6. Culture and justice
7. Teacher-centred philosophy
8. Student-centred philosophy
9. Society-centred philosophy
10. Curriculum and methods
11. It promotes holistic development

## Assignments

1. Discuss the relationship between philosophy and education. How does philosophy provide direction, meaning, and vision to the process of education?
2. Examine the role of different branches of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and logic, in shaping the aims, curriculum, and methods of education.
3. Evaluate the significance of Educational Philosophy in the modern world. How does it help education respond to social, cultural, and technological changes?

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## Education during the period of Sree Narayana Guru

### UNIT

#### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ realise how caste and social divisions restricted access to education in 19th and early 20th-century Kerala.
- ◆ recognise the role of Christian missionaries and colonial policies in opening new education opportunities.
- ◆ explain how reformers challenged caste-based exclusion in education.
- ◆ identify the contribution of organisations like the SNDP Yogam in spreading schools and literacy.
- ◆ connect Guru's message of 'Educate to be free' with the idea of education as a tool for dignity, equality, and social change.

#### Prerequisites

Many of our ancestors could not access education. Do you know why? In 19th-century Kerala, education was closely tied to caste and social status. The dominant groups restricted access to learning to preserve their authority, leaving large sections of society in ignorance and dependence. Education was not merely a means of acquiring knowledge; it functioned as a symbol of power that determined who could advance and who was forced to remain suppressed. As Francis Bacon reminds us, knowledge is power. Those who controlled access to knowledge also controlled society itself. Denied the opportunity to learn, the oppressed could not question exploitation, for ignorance kept them submissive. This shows how deeply education shapes social structures and human dignity. Against this background, it becomes clear why Sree Narayana Guru regarded education as the precious wealth and the most potent instrument of liberation. The present discussion in this unit focuses on Kerala's educational background during his time to understand the context in which his reformist vision emerged.

## Keywords

Knowledge as Power, Christian Missionary Education, Colonial Educational Policies, Macaulay's Minute, Wood's Despatch, Women's Education, Reform Movement, Liberation through Education.

## Discussion

### 2.2.1 Socio-Cultural Background of Education in Kerala

The educational background of Kerala during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was deeply connected to its rigid caste system, traditional institutions, and religious practices. Knowledge was not shared equally but distributed along lines of social hierarchy. The Brahmins and other upper castes had almost exclusive access to centres of learning such as gurukulas, pathasalas, and temple schools. These institutions were primarily designed to preserve religious knowledge, including Sanskrit scriptures, ritual practices, and philosophical thought. Education was considered sacred and closely linked to ritual purity, meaning that entry into these learning spaces was strictly controlled. Lower castes were often barred not only from studying but even from entering the premises, and any violation of this boundary could result in severe punishment. Thus, education became a symbol of privilege and exclusion, reinforcing social divisions instead of bridging them.

For the vast majority of people in Kerala, especially Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas, and other marginalised communities, formal education was practically unavailable. They were confined to hereditary occupations such as farming, toddy tapping, or manual labour, with no opportunity to pursue learning that could open new possibilities. The denial of education was a deliberate mechanism for maintaining social control, ensuring that

lower castes remained dependent on the dominant groups. Illiteracy was widespread, and many communities lived with the stigma of being considered 'unfit' for learning. This exclusion not only denied intellectual growth but also suppressed dignity and self-confidence, keeping the majority of people away from society's cultural and political life.

Another dimension of exclusion was gender-based. Girls were rarely given opportunities to study, regardless of caste. In upper-caste households, women were expected to remain within the domestic sphere, while in lower-caste families, survival needs forced children, especially girls, into labour. Education for women was often dismissed as unnecessary or even harmful, as it was feared that educated women would challenge existing gender roles. As a result, female literacy remained extremely low, and women's voices were largely absent from public life.

Amidst these restrictions, new influences began to change Kerala's educational landscape. The arrival of Christian missionaries, particularly from the Church Mission Society (CMS) and the Basel Mission, brought new opportunities. Missionary schools welcomed students from diverse backgrounds, sometimes even breaking caste barriers by allowing children of different communities to sit together in classrooms. They introduced modern subjects such as English, mathematics, geography, and science, which contrasted with the traditional focus on Sanskrit learning. These schools



also promoted literacy among women by establishing institutions specifically for girls, an idea that was revolutionary at that time. Although missionary education was often tied to conversion efforts and faced resistance from conservative groups, it played a decisive role in expanding access to knowledge. For many marginalised communities, these schools were the first real gateway to education.

The influence of colonial administration also affected it. The British, motivated by administrative needs, introduced modern systems of education that emphasised English and practical subjects. Government schools gradually spread across the region, though caste discrimination often persisted within them. Access was not equal, but compared to the rigid exclusivity of traditional systems, they offered new avenues for upward mobility. The introduction of printing presses and the growth of newspapers further widened the intellectual environment, making knowledge more accessible to those who could gain literacy.

At the same time, Kerala witnessed the rise of reform movements that saw education as a tool of social transformation. Leaders like Chattampi Swamikal and later Sree Narayana Guru emphasised that knowledge was essential for liberation. They argued that without access to learning, oppressed communities would remain powerless and unable to challenge injustice. Guru in particular highlighted the need for education that was not limited to book knowledge but also encouraged moral, social, and spiritual growth. His famous call, 'Educate to be free,' reflected this conviction that education was central to personal dignity and collective progress.

Therefore, the socio-cultural background of education in Kerala during Guru's time was marked by a sharp tension between exclusion and awakening. On one side stood

deeply entrenched traditions that restricted learning to a privileged few; on the other side emerged new forces, missionary initiatives, government policies, and reform movements that opened the doors of education to wider sections of society. This transitional period laid the groundwork for the remarkable progress Kerala would later achieve in literacy and social development. It was within this context that Sree Narayana Guru advanced his vision of education as an instrument of equality, empowerment, and social harmony.

## 2.2.2 Colonial Educational Policies and Their Impact

The advent of colonial rule brought a significant shift in the educational system of Kerala. Before this, learning was closely tied to religion and caste, with Sanskrit schools (pathashalas) mainly for the upper castes, and Ezhuthupallis for basic literacy among ordinary people. The colonial state, however, sought to establish a new type of education that would serve administrative, social, and cultural purposes. With the famous Macaulay's Minute (1835) and Wood's Despatch (1854), English education became the dominant model. The stated aim was to spread Western knowledge and create a class of intermediaries who would act as 'interpreters between the rulers and the ruled.' In practice, this meant producing clerks, translators, and lower officials to serve the colonial administration.

One of the earliest institutions to reflect this policy in Kerala was the CMS College, Kottayam (1817), established by Christian missionaries even before Macaulay's policy. It became a centre of modern English education, attracting students from various communities, though initially from upper castes and Christian groups. The introduction of printing presses by missionaries further spread literacy and access to books, particularly the Bible and later secular texts. Missionary schools opened across Travancore

and Cochin, promoting not only literacy but also the idea that education could be a tool of social mobility. The colonial policy also encouraged the establishment of state-supported schools. In Travancore, under rulers such as Swathi Thirunal and Ayilyam Thirunal, significant steps were taken to expand education.

The state issued regulations to bring education under government control, expanded vernacular schools, and supported English-medium institutions. However, access remained unequal. The upper castes were the primary beneficiaries in the early decades, while lower castes like the Ezhavas, Pulayas, and Parayas were excluded due to social prejudice. The 'avaranas' were often denied admission to schools or allowed only in separate sections, highlighting the caste barriers in colonial education. Women's education also slowly gained momentum during this period. Missionaries played an essential role in opening schools for girls, challenging conservative norms that considered education inappropriate for women. The establishment of girls' schools in Travancore, often run by missionaries and later by the state, opened new opportunities for women. However, progress was uneven and initially restricted to the upper classes and Christian communities.

The impact of colonial educational policies was therefore mixed. On the one hand, they broke the monopoly of traditional institutions and expanded access to new subjects such as science, mathematics, and history. On the other hand, colonial education often remained elitist, privileging English over vernacular languages and favouring urban centres over rural areas. Indigenous systems of learning, such as Sanskrit pathashalas and gurukulas, gradually declined as students shifted to government or missionary schools that promised better career prospects. For communities like the Ezhavas and Dalits, the barriers remained severe despite the growing

network of schools. It was only through persistent struggles, petitions, and social reform movements that access to education slowly opened. Leaders like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and Chattampi Swamikal strongly criticised these inequalities. They recognised that while colonial education offered new opportunities, it was still tied to caste dominance and exclusion. For instance, Ayyankali organised struggles in Travancore demanding the right of Dalit children to enter schools, while Guru promoted the establishment of schools under community initiatives to bypass caste restrictions.

Another impact of colonial education was the growth of a new educated middle class in Kerala. This class, consisting of English-educated Nairs, Christians, and later Ezhavas, began to occupy jobs in administration, law, and teaching. They became the backbone of social reform movements, newspapers, and literary societies. The spread of print culture fostered critical discussions of caste, religion, and social justice, directly influencing the reformist activities of Guru and his contemporaries. In short, colonial educational policies transformed the educational landscape in Kerala. They introduced modern institutions, new curricula, and fresh ideas, but also deepened social divisions by restricting access to specific groups. Yet, paradoxically, the very spread of literacy and new knowledge gave marginalised communities the tools to challenge their exclusion. Thus, colonial education posed both a challenge and an opportunity; it privileged some but also planted the seeds of a more egalitarian vision of learning that Guru and others sought to realise.

### 2.2.3 Reform Movements and Educational Awakening

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were also a time of transition in Kerala. Rigid caste hierarchies, temple



restrictions, and limited access to learning still dominated society. Education was confined mainly to upper-caste men, while large sections of the population, women, lower castes, and marginalised groups, remained excluded. However, this situation began to change with the rise of social and religious reform movements that placed education at the heart of their struggle. Reformers realised that without education, no community could overcome social backwardness or participate in modern society. Thus, the call for learning became the central message of Kerala's social awakening.

Among the leading voices of this awakening was Sree Narayana Guru. Guru understood that social progress could not be achieved merely through spiritual reform but required the spread of modern education. He encouraged his community to open schools, libraries, and reading rooms, believing that knowledge was the path to dignity and equality. By combining his spiritual message with the practical need for education, Guru transformed the way marginalised groups viewed learning. He reminded them that education was not a privilege of the few but a right of all. His famous call, 'Educate to be free, Organise to be strong, and Industrialise to prosper', symbolised this awakening and inspired generations to see education as a tool of liberation.

Another influential reformer, Ayyankali, fought against the exclusion of Dalits from schools. At a time when children from the Pulaya community were denied entry into government institutions, Ayyankali launched struggles demanding equal access to education. His School Entry Movement in Travancore was a landmark step in breaking caste barriers. Defining moment came in 1910, when Ayyankali escorted Panchami, a young Pulaya girl, to a government school in Ooruttambalam. The move triggered violent opposition from upper-caste groups, who even set fire to the school in protest. Yet,

this act became a symbol of resistance and marked a turning point in the Dalit struggle for educational rights. Even when authorities resisted, Ayyankali established schools within his community, ensuring that Dalit children had an opportunity to learn. His efforts not only expanded literacy but also instilled a sense of self-respect among oppressed groups, showing that education was essential for dignity and citizenship.

The contributions of Chattampi Swamikal also shaped the intellectual climate of this awakening. Swamikal questioned religious orthodoxy and caste restrictions that limited access to learning. His writings promoted rational inquiry and equality, encouraging people to think beyond traditional barriers. Though not directly associated with the founding of schools, his influence fostered a spirit of questioning and openness, helping spread education. Community organisations strengthened these efforts through reformers. The founding of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam in 1903 marked a turning point. The Yogam actively promoted education among the Ezhavas by setting up schools, hostels, and scholarships. This collective effort gave the community an institutional framework to pursue learning and modern professions. Similar initiatives were taken by Christian missions and Muslim reformers, who expanded schools for their communities. These movements created a sense of competition that further accelerated educational progress.

A particularly significant change brought by these reform movements was in the field of women's education. Inspired by these reformist ideas, schools for girls gradually came up, leading to a slow but steady change in attitudes. Women's education began to be seen as essential for family welfare, social progress, and the empowerment of future generations. The reform movements also broadened the purpose of education. Colonial education often aimed at producing clerks

and lower-level officials for administrative work. Reformers, on the other hand, linked education with moral improvement, social equality, and economic progress. They encouraged people to see knowledge as a means to self-respect and freedom, rather than just a path to employment. This change of perspective gave education a new meaning in Kerala, turning it into a force for social transformation.

The educational awakening created by these reform movements had long-lasting effects. It spread literacy among previously neglected groups, opened opportunities for women, and fostered a culture of equality and self-respect. It also prepared the ground for Kerala's later achievements in education, which are today recognised as among the highest in India. More importantly, it changed the social imagination: education was no longer seen as the privilege of a few, but as the birthright of all. By linking knowledge with dignity, reform movements ensured that schools and learning became instruments of liberation, laying the foundation for Kerala's democratic and egalitarian traditions.

#### **2.2.4 Guru's Educational Interventions in the Contemporary Context**

Sree Narayana Guru's interventions in education did not end with his lifetime. His vision and actions continue to guide discussions about the role of education in building just, equal, and progressive societies. At a time when education was restricted by caste, class, and gender barriers, Guru insisted that knowledge should be open to all. His slogan, 'Seek freedom through education,' was not just a call to learn but a powerful declaration that education could be the greatest weapon against social inequality. In the contemporary world, where access to quality education is still shaped by poverty, marginalisation, and discrimination, Guru's approach remains profoundly relevant. Current initiatives like

India's Right to Education Act, inclusive schooling policies, and global campaigns such as UNESCO's 'Education for All' echo Guru's dream of universal education.

Another essential feature of Guru's educational thought was his belief that education should not be limited to the transfer of information. He envisioned learning as a process that should nurture a person's intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual aspects. This idea is strongly reflected today in the demand for holistic education, which encourages creativity, critical thinking, emotional well-being, and ethical responsibility. International frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which promotes inclusive and quality education with an emphasis on life-long learning, are aligned with Guru's view that education must prepare individuals for meaningful participation in life and society.

Guru's interventions were also revolutionary in their emphasis on empowering the marginalised. By establishing schools, libraries, and institutions under the SNDP Yogam, he created pathways for oppressed communities to rise above social exclusion. His idea that education should provide the tools to challenge injustice finds parallels in today's concept of education for empowerment. For example, movements for Dalit education, programmes for tribal students, and community-based schools for rural learners all carry forward the principle Guru championed; that education is not only for personal progress but also for collective liberation.

Sree Narayana Guru gave equal importance to traditional and modern education. Just as he established a Sanskrit school at Aluva, Guru also founded an English medium school at Sivagiri. He believed that ultimate freedom can be attained only through spiritual knowledge (Atmavidya). Equally forward-looking was Guru's insistence on



women's education. In an era when women were often excluded from formal learning, Guru stressed that no society could progress without the uplift of women. This vision is particularly relevant today, when women's education is seen as central to social and economic development. Campaigns such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao in India, or global initiatives led by organisations such as UN Women reflect the same principle Guru advocated: educating women transforms families and societies by breaking cycles of poverty and dependence. Guru also linked education with economic self-reliance and social progress. His call, 'Educate to be free, Organise to be strong, Industrialise to prosper', highlights the relationship between knowledge, social unity, and material well-being. In the present context of globalisation, rapid technological change, and the need for skill development, his message speaks with renewed urgency. Skill-based education, vocational training programmes, and the push towards entrepreneurship in modern India are very much in line with Guru's call for education that prepares individuals not only to survive but also to prosper.

Furthermore, Guru's educational ideas had a strong ethical and spiritual dimension. He did not see education as a narrow,

career-focused activity but as a path towards cultivating self-discipline, harmony, and respect for all. His famous saying, 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man', shows that, for him, education was also about breaking down barriers to prejudice and fostering unity. Today, as education systems worldwide face communal divisions, cultural intolerance, and identity-based conflicts, Guru's emphasis on value-based learning and universal humanism remains of lasting importance.

Sree Narayana Guru's educational interventions continue to hold profound relevance in today's world. His advocacy of universal access, holistic development, empowerment of the marginalised, women's education, and the integration of education with social and economic progress makes his thought timeless. Modern educational systems, policies, and global goals echo many of the principles he articulated more than a century ago. As societies seek ways to make education inclusive, meaningful, and socially responsible, the vision of Sree Narayana Guru serves as both an inspiration and a practical guide.

## Recap

- ◆ In 19th-century Kerala, education was controlled by caste.
- ◆ Only the upper castes had access to temple schools and Sanskrit learning.
- ◆ Lower castes and women were mostly denied education.
- ◆ Education was used as a tool of power and authority.
- ◆ Christian missionaries opened schools for different communities.
- ◆ Missionary schools introduced English, science, and modern subjects.
- ◆ CMS College, Kottayam, was an early modern institution.
- ◆ Colonial policies promoted English education.
- ◆ Wood's Despatch encouraged state-supported schools.
- ◆ A new educated middle class grew in Kerala.
- ◆ Printing presses and newspapers spread literacy.
- ◆ Chattampi Swamikal questioned caste restrictions and rituals.
- ◆ Ayyankali fought for Dalit children's right to education.
- ◆ The Panchami case showed the resistance to Dalit education.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru declared that education is the supreme wealth.
- ◆ Guru linked education with social equality and dignity.
- ◆ Guru promoted schools, libraries, and reading rooms.
- ◆ The SNDP Yogam worked for spreading education.
- ◆ Reform movements connected education with social reform.
- ◆ Education became a tool for liberation and empowerment.
- ◆ The reform movements paved the way for Kerala's later achievements in literacy.

## Objective Questions

1. Which colonial policy promoted English as the medium of education in India?
2. Who established the School Entry Movement in Travancore?
3. Which organisation, formed in 1903 under the Guru's guidance, spread schools and colleges?
4. Name the Dalit girl who became the centre of the 1910 school entry struggle.
5. Which group had exclusive access to Sanskrit pathasalas and temple schools?
6. Who stressed that education should combine science, rationality, and moral discipline?
7. How did the rise of newspapers and printing in Kerala impact society?
8. What was the aim of colonial English education according to Macaulay?
9. Why was women's education initially discouraged in Kerala?

## Answers

1. Macaulay's Minute
2. Ayyankali
3. SNDP Yogam
4. Panchami
5. Brahmins
6. Sree Narayana Guru
7. It spread literacy and awareness
8. To create a class of interpreters between rulers and ruled
9. Belief that education was unnecessary or harmful.

## Assignments

1. Analyse the social condition of Kerala in the 19th and early 20th centuries with special reference to caste and gender-based restrictions on education. How did these barriers impact the dignity, opportunities, and social progress of marginalized communities?
2. Examine the role of Christian missionaries and colonial policies in transforming the educational landscape of Kerala. What were the positive impacts and the limitations of these interventions?
3. In the contemporary context, how does Sri Narayana Guru's vision of 'Educate to be free' resonate with modern educational policies such as the Right to Education Act or Sustainable Development Goal 4? Discuss with examples.

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## UNIT

# Sree Narayana Guru as a Philosopher and Educationist

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain Sree Narayana Guru's reinterpretation of Advaita Vedānta as a philosophy of equality.
- ◆ describe Guru's vision of universal, value-based, and scientific education.
- ◆ identify the main institutions founded or inspired by Guru and their impact.
- ◆ analyse Guru's role as both a philosopher and an educationist.
- ◆ discuss how Guru promoted social reform through education, including women's learning.
- ◆ relate Guru's philosophy of education to present-day issues of inclusivity and ethics.

### Prerequisites

In 19th-century Kerala, people faced deep inequalities, such as schools being restricted by caste, women being discouraged from learning, and knowledge often remaining in the hands of the privileged. At the same time, Indian philosophy, especially Advaita Vedānta, taught that all human beings share the same ultimate reality. Yet this great truth of human unity remained confined only to scriptures, while society continued to live in ignorance and inequality. Knowledge, instead of serving as a source of dignity and empowerment, was often turned into an instrument of control. This sharp contrast between philosophical ideals and social practices forms the essential background for understanding Sree Narayana Guru's work. It was in this setting that Guru emerged as both a philosopher and an educationist. He insisted that philosophy must not remain abstract but should guide everyday



life. For him, education was the most powerful tool for breaking down barriers and creating equality. Thus, Guru is remembered not only as a profound thinker but also as one of the most outstanding educationists and reformers of modern India.

## Keywords

Advaita Vedānta, Universalism, Ātma-jñāna, Jeevitotkarsha, Aruvippuram Sanskrit School, Sivagiri Mutt, Advaita Ashram, Sharada Temple, Mirror Consecration, Interfaith Harmony.

## Discussion

Sree Narayana Guru was one of the most profound philosophers of modern India, whose vision was deeply rooted in the principles of Advaita Vedanta. Guru reinterpreted the ancient philosophy of oneness in a practical and humanistic way, emphasising the unity of all beings beyond caste, creed, and religion. His philosophy centred on the idea that true spirituality is expressed through equality, compassion, and social reform. Guru believed that knowledge and self-realisation were the means to attain liberation, not ritual or birth-based privileges. By linking metaphysical truth to social transformation, he brought philosophy down from the realm of metaphysics to the realities of human life. His concept of “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man” reflected a universal and inclusive approach to life. Guru’s writings, such as Atmopadesa Satakam and Darsanamala, revealed his deep philosophical insight into the nature of the self and reality. He transformed the spiritual consciousness of Kerala by interpreting Vedantic truth in the light of modern social needs. In this way, Sree Narayana Guru emerged as a philosopher who blended metaphysical wisdom with ethical and social reform. His thought continues to inspire scholars and seekers of truth across the world.

As an educationist, Sree Narayana Guru recognised that education is the foundation

of individual growth and social progress. He emphasised that true education must aim at moral, intellectual, and spiritual development, not mere literacy. Guru established schools and educational institutions for marginalised communities, believing that education was the most effective tool for social upliftment. He encouraged the study of both traditional and modern knowledge systems, integrating spiritual values with scientific understanding. Guru viewed education as a means to awaken human dignity and self-respect among the oppressed. His educational vision aimed at creating enlightened citizens who could think critically and act ethically. He also inspired the formation of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam to spread education and social awareness. By democratizing access to education, he broke down barriers of caste and inequality in society. His educational philosophy remains a guiding light for modern educators seeking to harmonise knowledge and values. Thus, Sree Narayana Guru stands not only as a spiritual philosopher but also as a visionary educationist who reshaped the intellectual landscape of Kerala and India.

### 2.3.1 Philosophical Foundations of Guru’s Thought

The thought of Sree Narayana Guru is grounded in firm philosophical foundations

that blend the depth of Indian metaphysical traditions with acute sensitivity to the social realities of his time. His philosophy does not remain within the walls of abstract speculation but flows into life as a guiding principle for individual transformation and social reconstruction. At the heart of his worldview is the idea of oneness. Guru perceived reality as an indivisible whole, transcending artificial boundaries created by human society. His famous dictum, 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man', captures this vision in straightforward terms. It reflects not only a social message against the caste system but also a metaphysical insight rooted in Advaita Vedānta, where all distinctions of caste, creed, and class dissolve into the non-dual reality of the Self.

While Guru drew upon the Vedāntic tradition, his understanding of non-duality was not confined to abstract metaphysics. He insisted that the recognition of unity must be lived out in practice. For him, philosophy was not an intellectual luxury but a necessity for guiding life. He reinterpreted the truths of Vedānta in the context of social discrimination, poverty, and ignorance that prevailed in Kerala during his time. By applying the wisdom of the Upanishads to real-life problems, Guru made philosophy a force for emancipation, justice, and equality. This practical orientation distinguished his thought from mere scholasticism, giving it both spiritual depth and social relevance.

A key element in the philosophical foundations of Guru's thought is his holistic vision of human existence. In works like Atmopadesa Satakam, he emphasised the inner journey of self-realisation, guiding individuals to discover the eternal Self beyond the fleeting experiences of life. At the same time, in writings such as Daiva Dasakam, he expressed devotion, humility, and faith in the divine, demonstrating that his philosophy embraced both rational reflection and spiritual surrender. This integration of

knowledge (jnana), devotion (bhakti), and action (karma) reflects his belief that true philosophy addresses all aspects of human life: mind, heart, and society.

Another striking feature of Guru's philosophy is its universalism. While deeply rooted in Indian traditions, he was open to wisdom from all religions and cultures. He respected the compassion of Buddhism, the non-violence of Jainism, the ethical universalism of Christianity, and the humanist concerns of modern thought. He saw all religions as diverse expressions of the same truth, like different rivers flowing into the same ocean. This universalist foundation gave rise to his teachings on religious tolerance and interfaith harmony. Unlike exclusivist philosophies, Guru's vision promoted dialogue, coexistence, and mutual respect; the values that make his thought profoundly relevant in today's multicultural and conflict-ridden world.

The ethical dimension of his philosophy is equally important. Guru repeatedly stressed that philosophy is not complete without proper conduct. For him, self-realisation demanded inner discipline, simplicity of life, control over desires, and compassion for others. He urged people to cultivate purity of thought and deed, and he himself lived a life of austerity and service. Yet his ethics went beyond personal morality to embrace social responsibility. He saw injustice, inequality, and caste oppression as obstacles to human progress, and he believed that philosophy must challenge and transform such conditions. In this sense, his thought harmonised the spiritual quest for liberation (moksha) with the social struggle for equality and justice.

Guru's philosophy can also be seen as an attempt to redefine the relationship between tradition and modernity. While he upheld the spiritual insights of Indian philosophy, he rejected superstition, ritualism, and



blind adherence to outdated customs. He valued science, rationality, and education as essential tools for human progress. By doing so, he bridged the gap between the timeless wisdom of the past and the practical needs of a changing society. This dynamic character of his philosophy makes it enduring, as it adapts ancient insights to modern challenges.

In short, the philosophical foundations of Guru's thought rest upon four interwoven pillars: non-duality, universality, ethical responsibility, and practical application. He affirmed the oneness of reality, embraced the universality of truth, emphasised ethical living and social responsibility, and applied philosophical wisdom to real-life struggles. Thus, his philosophy is both eternal and contemporary, eternal in its metaphysical insight, and modern in its application to social reform. It remains a living philosophy that inspires personal transformation, social harmony, and the pursuit of truth in every age.

### **2.3.2 Guru's Educational Vision and Principles**

Sree Narayana Guru's educational vision emerged from his profound philosophical insight and his lifelong dedication to social reform. He lived in the society of Kerala, marked by deep divisions of caste and gender, where access to knowledge was confined to a privileged few. Guru understood that denying education was the most effective tool of oppression, and he argued that true liberation could come only through knowledge. To him, education was not a privilege of the few but the birthright of all, the highest form of wealth that empowers individuals and transforms society. A central principle in Guru's vision was universal access to education. He strongly opposed the caste-based restrictions that kept learning within the boundaries of the so-called 'higher' castes. Guru declared that knowledge must be open to all, regardless of caste, creed, or gender. This principle was revolutionary in

his time, when even the idea of a woman or a member of a lower caste receiving formal education was considered radical. By insisting on inclusivity, Guru placed education at the heart of his broader mission of social equality and human dignity.

Another vital dimension of his vision was the integration of moral and spiritual values into education. Guru rejected the view that education should merely sharpen the intellect or provide vocational skills. Instead, he insisted that proper education must build character and cultivate inner virtues. He stressed qualities such as self-discipline, compassion, humility, and service to others. In his philosophical poem Atmopadesa Satakam, Guru taught that the highest form of knowledge is self-knowledge and that education should lead individuals to a deeper understanding of themselves and the world. For him, learning was not just an external process but a path that must nurture the student's inner life. Guru also gave education a distinct philosophical goal through the idea of jeevitotkarsha, or the uplift and progress of life. In his work Narayana Smriti, he explained that progress should not be measured by wealth, power, or social position, but rather by the refinement of mind, the cultivation of values, and freedom through wisdom.

Education was to be seen as a process of inner enrichment that led to personal growth and collective advancement. Through education, an individual could overcome ignorance, cultivate moral and spiritual depth, and contribute to building a just society. While deeply rooted in Indian traditions, Guru had a forward-looking approach to modern education. He appreciated the importance of science, rational inquiry, and practical skills for social advancement. For him, a truly modern education combined cultural and spiritual wisdom with modern scientific knowledge. He admired the ancient gurukula system, in which students lived

close to their guru and absorbed discipline, humility, and service. Still, he adapted it for his time by envisioning institutions where traditional knowledge and modern skills could coexist. His balanced outlook ensured that education addressed both the preservation of cultural identity and the demands of a rapidly changing world.

A significant contribution of Guru was his attention to educational psychology and child development. In Narayana Smriti, he highlighted the crucial role of parents in shaping a child's character. He believed that the earliest years of life were decisive in instilling values, and he placed particular emphasis on mothers' responsibility. Children, he said, must be nurtured in an atmosphere of love, discipline, and exposure to good examples. Guru urged parents to cultivate virtues such as truth, purity, and non-violence in their children's minds, teaching them to harmonise their thoughts, words, and actions. In this way, he extended the meaning of education beyond the walls of schools to include the family and home environment.

Another cornerstone of his vision was education as a social responsibility. Guru repeatedly stressed that knowledge was not meant for personal benefit alone but must serve the uplift of society as a whole. The educated individual, in his view, carried a duty to fight social evils, reduce inequality, and promote cooperation and justice. He applied this principle especially to the question of women's education. Declaring that the education of a woman meant the education of an entire family and community, he called on his followers to ensure that girls had equal access to schooling. This emphasis was groundbreaking in a society where women were often denied even basic literacy.

Guru also redefined the purpose of education. For him, it was not a narrow pursuit of material gain or career success,

but a holistic process aimed at the all-round development of the human being. Education, in his view, had to empower individuals to think critically, cultivate virtues, live harmoniously with others, and recognise their deeper spiritual nature. By linking education with social reform, he turned learning into an instrument for collective transformation and nation-building. In short, Guru's educational vision combined universal access, value-based learning, self-knowledge, modern scientific understanding, cultural refinement, and social responsibility. He saw education as the key to overcoming ignorance and oppression, as well as the means to shape character and promote justice. His insights remain deeply relevant today: in an age where education is often reduced to competition and economic gain, Guru's call for a balanced model, where intellectual growth is harmonised with ethical and spiritual formation, offers a profound reminder of the true purpose of learning.

### 2.3.3 Educational Institutions Founded by Guru

Sree Narayana Guru was not only a visionary thinker but also a practical reformer who worked actively to establish institutions that embodied his ideals. For him, the spread of education could not remain an abstract principle; it had to be translated into concrete spaces where learning became accessible to all. The institutions he founded or inspired were the living expressions of his philosophy, combining equality, inclusiveness, and service with intellectual and moral development. One of the earliest initiatives was linked to the Aruvippuram Temple, consecrated in 1888. While the temple itself was a symbol of social equality, Guru used its premises to begin a Sanskrit school. This move was radical because Sanskrit learning had traditionally been restricted to the upper castes. By opening a path for children from all backgrounds to



study the classical language, Guru broke one of the most substantial barriers in Kerala's education system. The Aruvippuram school demonstrated how a temple could serve not only as a place of worship but also as a centre of education and cultural renewal.

A more organised phase of his educational work began with the establishment of the Sivagiri Mutt at Varkala. While Sivagiri is remembered as a centre of spiritual practice and social reform, Guru also envisioned it as a hub of modern, practical education. Schools associated with the mutt taught subjects such as hygiene, agriculture, vocational skills, and moral instruction. Guru also supported the establishment of an English-medium 'model school' at Sivagiri, which reflected his conviction that modern education in science and language should go hand in hand with traditional learning. The mutt thus became a centre where both intellectual training and character formation were cultivated. Another landmark was the Advaita Ashram at Aluva, founded in 1913. This ashram served as a centre for higher learning in philosophy, Vedantic studies, and Sanskrit, while also providing a platform for publishing and disseminating the Guru's writings. The Aluva ashram played an essential role in training young teachers, scholars, and reformers who carried forward the Guru's message. Its gurukula-style environment encouraged close interaction between teacher and student, blending academic pursuit with disciplined living. The ashram demonstrated Guru's belief that education must be anchored in both intellectual study and spiritual practice.

Guru's influence extended further through the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, founded in 1903 under his guidance. While Guru did not personally manage the Yogam's activities, his inspiration was central to its founding mission. The SNDP became one of the most important educational organisations in Kerala, establishing schools, colleges, and hostels

across the state. These institutions introduced modern curricula in science, mathematics, and medicine, while also nurturing cultural identity and social responsibility. Although Guru later distanced himself from the Yogam when he felt its activities strayed from his ideals, the educational network it created under his initial guidance remains one of the most significant legacies of his reform movement.

Guru also transformed temples into centres of learning and culture. A notable example was the consecration of the Sharada Temple at Sivagiri, which symbolised wisdom (vidya) as the essence of true worship. Similarly, the Mirror Consecration at Kalavankode conveyed the message that self-reflection and knowledge are the highest forms of light. Guru encouraged that temples should have libraries and spaces for discussion, turning them into informal schools for the community. These measures blurred the boundary between religious and educational spaces, showing that sacred institutions could serve as centres of intellectual and social development. Significantly, Guru extended educational opportunities to women and marginalised communities through the institutions he inspired. Schools for girls were established at a time when female education was still resisted by orthodox opinion. Guru openly declared that the education of women was essential for the progress of society, and he supported initiatives that ensured girls could attend schools without fear of social stigma. In this way, his institutions not only challenged caste barriers but also contributed to breaking gender restrictions in education.

The legacy of these institutions continues to resonate in Kerala's educational landscape. Many of the schools, colleges, and training centres established under his influence still thrive today, serving students from all castes and communities. They carry forward Guru's principles of inclusivity, equality, and

social responsibility. By integrating temples, ashrams, mutts, and schools into a unified network of educational activity, Guru created an enduring model of community-based learning. His institutions were more than centres of literacy: they were laboratories of social change, where education became a tool for dismantling oppression and fostering human dignity.

The institutions founded by Sree Narayana Guru stand as concrete embodiments of his vision. From the Sanskrit school at Aruvippuram to the modern school at Sivagiri, from the Advaita Ashram at Aluva to the educational network of the SNDP Yogam, his efforts transformed Kerala's intellectual and social landscape. By making education accessible to women, children of marginalised castes, and the poor, Guru ensured that knowledge was no longer a privilege of the few but a shared wealth for all. These institutions remain enduring pillars of Kerala's progress, demonstrating that education can be the most potent instrument of social transformation.

### **2.3.4 Guru as a Philosopher and Educationist**

Sree Narayana Guru stands out as a philosopher and educationist whose legacy continues to shape both the philosophical discourse and educational practice in India. He was not merely a speculative thinker nor simply a reformer establishing schools, but someone who wove philosophy and education into a single vision of life. For Guru, philosophy offered guiding principles, while education served as the means to translate them into social reality. His reinterpretation of Advaita Vedānta moved beyond abstract metaphysical unity to affirm that knowledge and learning should be open to all, since every human being shares the same ultimate reality. Recognising that ignorance and the denial of education were the strongest chains

of oppression, Guru worked to democratize knowledge. He encouraged the establishment of schools attached to temples. He founded institutions such as the Sivagiri Mutt and the Advaita Ashram, thereby redefining sacred spaces as centres of worship, learning, and social progress.

By doing so, Guru dismantled caste-based monopolies over education and opened the path of knowledge to historically excluded communities, including women. His initiatives inspired the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam to spread schools and colleges across Kerala, transforming education into a collective wealth of society. At the heart of his educational vision was a holistic approach. Guru believed that learning should develop both the intellect and the character. He valued modern science, rational inquiry, and practical skills, but equally stressed the cultivation of ethical living, compassion, and self-discipline. Works such as Atmopadesa Satakam guided seekers towards self-realisation, while his social interventions revealed how education could uplift entire communities. Thus, his educational mission embodied his philosophical insights, demonstrating that reflection and action, spirituality and reform, must go hand in hand.

Even beyond Kerala, Guru's model of education, rooted in equality, justice, and self-realisation, influenced leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Dr B.R. Ambedkar. His message of social unity - 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity' - became a practical philosophy that challenged discrimination and promoted inclusivity. Today, his legacy resonates in policies that emphasise universal access, value-based education, and the integration of science with ethics. Sree Narayana Guru's contribution as a philosopher and educationist lies in his ability to harmonise tradition with modernity and spirituality with social reform. By making education



both an instrument of personal liberation and a foundation for social equality, he left behind a timeless model that continues to inspire individuals and societies towards dignity, justice, and peace.

## Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru was both a philosopher and an educationist.
- ◆ Guru believed reality is one and indivisible.
- ◆ Guru connected philosophy with real life and social reform.
- ◆ Guru taught that knowledge must be open to all.
- ◆ For him, education was the highest form of wealth.
- ◆ He wanted education to combine knowledge, values, and discipline.
- ◆ He stressed moral values like compassion, humility, and self-control.
- ◆ Guru highlighted self-knowledge as the highest knowledge.
- ◆ He introduced the idea of jeevitotkarsha (progress of life).
- ◆ Progress for Guru meant refinement of mind, not wealth or power.
- ◆ He valued both spiritual wisdom and modern science.
- ◆ Guru admired the gurukula system but adapted it to modern needs.
- ◆ He wanted education to build character and society together.
- ◆ Education for him meant both personal growth and social reform.
- ◆ He opened a Sanskrit school at Aruvippuram.
- ◆ Sivagiri Mutt became a centre for modern and practical education.
- ◆ He founded the Advaita Ashram at Aluva for philosophy and Vedānta.
- ◆ The SNDP Yogam spread schools and colleges.
- ◆ Guru turned temples into centres of knowledge and libraries.
- ◆ The Sharada Temple symbolised wisdom as true worship.
- ◆ The Mirror Consecration taught self-reflection and knowledge.

- ◆ His institutions welcomed women and marginalised communities.
- ◆ Education, for Guru, meant breaking caste and gender barriers.
- ◆ Guru harmonised tradition with modernity.
- ◆ He valued rationality and scientific learning.
- ◆ Guru's philosophy joined *jñāna* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotion), and *karma* (action).
- ◆ He respected all religions and cultures and promoted interfaith harmony.
- ◆ Guru believed ethics must go with philosophy.
- ◆ His vision made education democratic and inclusive.
- ◆ Guru's philosophy combined liberation with social equality.
- ◆ His teachings remain relevant for modern education.

## Objective Questions

1. Which temple consecration symbolised wisdom (vidya) as true worship?
2. What did the Mirror Consecration at Kalavankode symbolise?
3. Where did Guru start a Sanskrit school to break caste barriers?
4. Which Mutt was envisioned by Guru as a centre for modern and practical education?
5. What was Guru's idea of jeevitotkarsha in education?
6. What did Guru believe was the true purpose of education?
7. How did Guru use temples in his reform movement?
8. Which principle did Guru stress in both philosophy and education?
9. What did Guru emphasise in Narayana Smriti about progress?
10. Which three paths did Guru integrate into his philosophy?

## Answers

1. Sharada Temple, Sivagiri
2. Self-reflection and Knowledge
3. Aruvippuram
4. Sivagiri Mutt
5. Uplift and progress of life
6. All-round human development
7. As centres of worship, learning, and cultural renewal
8. Oneness and inclusivity
9. Refinement of mind and values
10. Jñāna, Bhakti, Karma

## Assignments

1. Critically analyse how Sree Narayana Guru reinterpreted *Advaita Vedānta* as a philosophy of social equality, citing examples from his life and works.
2. Explain Guru's vision of education as both a personal and social responsibility. How does his concept of jeevitotkarsha remain relevant for contemporary education?
3. Discuss the role of the institutions founded or inspired by Sree Narayana Guru in democratizing knowledge and breaking caste and gender barriers.

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# The Relation Between Philosophy and Education

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the close relationship between philosophy and education.
- ◆ describe how philosophy influences the aims, curriculum, teaching methods, and discipline.
- ◆ distinguish between philosophy of education and educational philosophy.
- ◆ evaluate the contemporary relevance of philosophy in solving modern educational challenges.
- ◆ apply Guru's teachings to promote harmony and respect in a diverse society.

### Prerequisites

Multiple influences, including family, community, culture, religion, and personal experiences, shape an individual's character. Among these, education holds a particularly significant place, as it not only imparts knowledge and skills but also moulds a person's attitudes, behaviour, and outlook on life. Through the curriculum, teaching methods, classroom environment, and overall educational experience, learners are guided toward the development of good habits, moral strength, and social responsibility. This underscores the necessity of designing the curriculum and syllabus with the utmost care, ensuring that they foster not only intellectual growth but also the holistic formation of character. It is therefore essential that a sound philosophy underpins educational philosophy, providing the guiding vision and principles for shaping education in its true sense.

## Keywords

Philosophy of Education, Educational Philosophy, Curriculum, Teaching Methods, Discipline, Role of the Teacher, Holistic Development.

## Discussion

Philosophy and education are deeply interrelated, as philosophy provides the foundation of values and vision, while education becomes the practical means to realise them. According to Sreenarayana Guru, education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge but a process of self-purification and social transformation. His philosophy, rooted in Advaitic oneness, emphasises the unity of all beings and the need for education to liberate individuals from ignorance, superstition, and social inequality. Guru viewed education as a means to awaken the inner light of wisdom and to promote moral, spiritual, and intellectual development. In his view, proper education must lead to self-realisation and the service of humanity. Thus, Guru's philosophy establishes education as a pathway to both personal enlightenment and social progress.

Sreenarayana Guru's educational ideas reflect his philosophical principles of equality, universal brotherhood, and self-awareness. He advocated education for all, irrespective of caste, creed, or gender, as a means to achieve social justice and human dignity. Guru believed that philosophy must guide education towards the realisation of truth and the betterment of society. The schools and institutions he inspired were meant to nurture character, discipline, and a sense of unity among people. In this sense, his concept of education was both spiritual and practical, linking knowledge with ethical living. Therefore, the relationship between philosophy and education in Guru's thought is one of harmony, in which philosophy provides direction and education brings it

into social reality.

Philosophy and education have always been closely connected, like two sides of the same coin. Philosophy provides the guiding vision of life, while education acts as the means through which that vision is put into practice. In other words, philosophy asks the fundamental questions about what is true, what is valuable, and what is good for human beings, while education takes these answers and uses them to shape individuals and society. The relationship is so strong that many scholars describe philosophy as the theory and education as its practical application. From the earliest times, great philosophers have also been educationists. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, and later Indian thinkers like Yajnavalkya, Shankara, and Sree Narayana Guru all understood that education is the process through which philosophy comes alive in people's lives. Plato's famous idea of the philosopher-king was not only a political theory but also an educational vision of how leaders must be trained. Similarly, Indian philosophy, with its emphasis on self-realisation and ethical living, shaped ancient systems of learning such as the gurukula. These examples show that education cannot be separated from a culture's or society's philosophical beliefs.

Philosophy influences education in several ways. It defines the aims of education, that is, what kind of human being and society education should produce. It guides the curriculum by deciding which subjects, skills, and values are most important. It shapes



teaching methods by asking whether learning should be based on memorization, discussion, activity, or discovery. Even matters such as school discipline, textbook preparation, and the role of teachers are deeply influenced by philosophical principles. Thus, education becomes the laboratory where philosophical ideas are tested and realized.

At the same time, education also influences philosophy. As society changes, education brings new needs, new experiences, and new questions, which in turn challenge philosophers to rethink and refine their ideas. For example, modern education's focus on democracy, equality, and scientific knowledge has led philosophers to frame new theories about human freedom, social justice, and progress. The relationship between philosophy and education is therefore dynamic and interactive. Philosophy gives education its foundation and direction, while education provides philosophy its practical expression and social meaning. Together, they ensure that learning is not just a mechanical process of acquiring knowledge, but a meaningful journey toward truth, values, and human development.

### 2.4.1 How Philosophy Determines Education

Education is not an isolated activity; it is always guided by certain ideas about life, knowledge, and values. These guiding ideas come from philosophy. Philosophy provides education with its foundation, shaping not only the broad aims but also the finer details, such as curriculum, teaching methods, discipline, textbooks, and the role of the teacher. In this sense, philosophy acts as the blueprint, while education provides the actual construction. The aims of education are directly influenced by a society's philosophical outlook. Idealists, for example, emphasize the development of moral character, self-realisation, and spiritual growth. Realists stress preparation for practical life,

while pragmatists highlight problem-solving, creativity, and adaptation to changing circumstances. In Indian thought, the aim of education was often linked to self-knowledge and liberation (moksha), while in modern democratic societies, it is linked to equality, citizenship, and scientific progress. Thus, the philosophical vision determines whether education should focus more on character, skill, freedom, or social responsibility.

School curricula are shaped by philosophical understandings of what knowledge is most valuable. For instance, idealist philosophies emphasise literature, philosophy, and the arts because they cultivate the inner life. Realists place greater value on science, mathematics, and the study of nature because they bring learners into contact with reality. Pragmatists advocate activity-based subjects such as crafts, vocational studies, and social projects that prepare learners for real-life problem-solving. In Indian philosophy, the inclusion of moral education, yoga, and spiritual texts has been central. Therefore, every curriculum reflects an underlying philosophy of life and learning.

The teaching method is another area where philosophy leaves a strong imprint. If philosophy values authority and discipline, teaching methods will rely heavily on lectures, memorization, and repetition. If philosophy emphasises freedom and self-expression, methods such as discussion, group work, and project-based learning will be emphasised. For example, Socratic dialogue shows how philosophy can shape questioning as a teaching method, while pragmatism supports 'learning by doing.' In India, the gurukula system encouraged close interaction with the teacher, stressing observation, reflection, and personal guidance. Thus, the teaching method is always a reflection of philosophical principles.

The philosophy of life also determines how discipline is maintained in educational

institutions. A strict and authoritarian philosophy may support rigid discipline and punishment to ensure order. On the other hand, philosophies that value freedom and democracy prefer self-discipline, cooperation, and mutual respect. Modern educational thought emphasizes discipline through responsibility rather than fear, reflecting philosophical beliefs in human dignity and autonomy. The preparation of textbooks is guided by the philosophy of education, since textbooks reflect what knowledge is considered most important. A curriculum influenced by spiritual and moral philosophy will include texts that highlight values, ethical stories, and scriptures. A curriculum influenced by scientific realism will prepare textbooks that focus on facts, experiments, and objective knowledge. Pragmatism, in turn, will demand textbooks with activities, case studies, and problem-based exercises. Thus, textbooks are not neutral documents but are deeply shaped by the philosophical outlook of the time.

Perhaps the most important influence of philosophy is on the role of the teacher. An idealist philosophy sees the teacher as a moral guide and a model of character. A realist considers the teacher to be an expert who can transmit knowledge accurately. Pragmatists view the teacher as a facilitator or guide who helps learners discover knowledge through experience. In the Indian tradition, the guru was not only an instructor but also a role model, shaping the student's character and spiritual growth. Even today, whether the teacher is seen as an authority, a friend, or a guide depends on the underlying philosophy of education. In sum, philosophy shapes education at every level, from its ultimate goals to the smallest details of classroom practice. It determines the kind of human beings and society that education should foster, the knowledge and skills that should be taught, the instructional methods, and the qualities that teachers should embody. Without philosophy, education would be

directionless; with philosophy, it becomes a purposeful process that connects learning with life, values, and human development.

## 2.4.2 The Relationship between Philosophy of Education and Educational Philosophy

Although the terms Philosophy of Education and Educational Philosophy are often used interchangeably, they are not identical. Both are deeply connected to the relationship between philosophy and education, but they differ in scope, orientation, and application. Philosophy of Education is a formal branch of philosophy that studies education in a broad, systematic, and theoretical way. It deals with fundamental questions such as: What is the ultimate purpose of education in human life? What kind of knowledge is worth teaching? How should education balance the needs of the individual with those of society? These questions demand deep reflection on human nature, values, truth, and social life. By developing general principles and theories, Philosophy of Education provides a universal framework that can guide decisions on curriculum, teaching methods, school organisation, and educational policy.

Educational Philosophy, on the other hand, is more personal, specific, and practical. It reflects the beliefs, values, and guiding principles that shape how education is carried out in a particular classroom, school, or institution. For a teacher, an educational philosophy determines their approach to learning, classroom management, curriculum design, and the role they play in students' lives. For an institution, it is expressed in the subjects they prioritise, the environment they create, and the methods of instruction they promote. Unlike Philosophy of Education, which works at a highly abstract level, Educational Philosophy adapts broad principles to suit the needs, culture, and goals



of a specific educational context.

The key difference, therefore, lies in their scope and orientation. Philosophy of Education is broader and more abstract, focusing on the ‘why’ and ‘what’ of education. In contrast, Educational Philosophy is narrower and more concrete, dealing with the ‘how’ of teaching and learning. Yet, despite these differences, both are complementary. Philosophy of Education can be compared to the roots of a tree, nourishing deep philosophical reflection and universal principles. Educational Philosophy, like the branches and leaves, grows out of those roots to shape classroom practices, learning experiences, and institutional aims. Without Philosophy of Education, Educational Philosophy would lack depth and direction; without Educational Philosophy, Philosophy of Education would remain too detached from the real-world challenges of education.

Together, they form a balanced relationship of theory and practice. Philosophy of Education provides the vision of what education ought to be, while Educational Philosophy ensures that this vision is translated into effective teaching, meaningful learning, and the holistic development of learners. In this way, the two work hand in hand to make education both intellectually sound and practically relevant.

### 2.4.3 Contemporary Implications

The relationship between philosophy and education is not just a matter of theory or history; it has very real implications for contemporary society. Modern education systems worldwide face complex challenges, including inequality, erosion of values, technological dominance, environmental crises, ethical issues related to data, and heightened pressures from competition and globalisation. In this context, philosophy continues to serve as a guiding force, ensuring that

education does not become merely a tool for earning a livelihood but remains a process of nurturing wise, compassionate, and socially responsible human beings.

One important implication is the way philosophy shapes the aims of education today. In the past, education was often limited to producing efficient workers or loyal citizens. But contemporary philosophy insists that education must also aim at holistic development, cultivating critical thinking, creativity, moral responsibility, and global awareness. For instance, the emphasis on peace, human rights, and environmental education shows how philosophy provides new aims that respond to the needs of modern society.

Philosophy also influences the curriculum of modern schools and universities. In an age where science and technology dominate, philosophy reminds us that knowledge is not only about utility but also about meaning and values. Therefore, educational systems are now encouraged to include subjects such as ethics, philosophy, cultural studies, and environmental studies along with technical and professional training. This balance ensures that learners not only gain skills but also develop the wisdom to use them responsibly. In terms of teaching methods, philosophy emphasises the importance of freedom, dialogue, and learner participation. Instead of rote memorisation, today’s education stresses critical inquiry, problem-solving, and collaborative learning. Thinkers like John Dewey, who connected pragmatism with education, continue to inspire approaches that treat the classroom as a place of active experimentation and democratic participation. These methods reflect the philosophical belief that students learn best when engaged in meaningful, practical activities.

Philosophy further guides the role of teachers in the contemporary world. Teachers are no longer seen as mere transmitters of

information but as facilitators, mentors, and moral guides. In this sense, the philosophical foundation ensures that teachers remain role models who inspire learners by example and nurture their intellectual and emotional growth. Another contemporary implication is evident in debates over discipline and freedom. With growing concerns about student rights, individuality, and mental health, educational philosophy stresses that discipline should not mean harsh punishment but self-control, respect, and responsibility. Modern schools and universities are adopting practices that combine freedom with guidance, reflecting the philosophical idea that proper education is self-directed yet socially conscious.

In today's globalised and multicultural world, philosophy helps education to remain

inclusive and humane. The philosophy of equality and justice urges education to reach every child regardless of caste, class, gender, or ability. It reminds us that education is a fundamental human right and not a privilege. At the same time, contemporary educational thought is deeply influenced by philosophies that emphasise sustainability, intercultural dialogue, and respect for diversity, making education a force for building a more just and peaceful world. The contemporary implications of the relation between philosophy and education are clear: philosophy provides the vision and direction that keep education human-centred, value-based, and socially relevant. It ensures that education does not merely serve the economy but contributes to the growth of individuals and the progress of society as a whole.

## Recap

- ◆ Philosophy gives direction to education.
- ◆ Education shapes both knowledge and character.
- ◆ Educational philosophy studies the aims of education.
- ◆ The curriculum reflects philosophical values.
- ◆ Teaching methods differ according to philosophy.
- ◆ Educational ideals guide discipline.
- ◆ Philosophy of education is theoretical and broad.
- ◆ Educational philosophy is practical and personal.
- ◆ Education should develop the whole person.
- ◆ Moral and social values are part of education.
- ◆ Family and society also influence character building.
- ◆ Education prepares people for life and society.

- ◆ Aims of education vary with culture and time.
- ◆ Realism stresses science and facts in education.
- ◆ Idealism gives importance to ethics and spirit.
- ◆ Pragmatism promotes learning by doing.
- ◆ Existentialism values freedom and choice.
- ◆ Philosophy of education asks ‘why’ and ‘what.’
- ◆ Educational philosophy answers ‘how’ in practice.
- ◆ Education bridges tradition and modern needs.
- ◆ Philosophy makes education meaningful, not mechanical.
- ◆ Teachers’ philosophy shapes classroom practice.
- ◆ Students benefit from holistic education.
- ◆ Policymakers need a philosophy for planning education.
- ◆ Education should prepare individuals for society and humanity.

## Objective Questions

1. Which branch of study deals with the theoretical foundations of education?
2. Why is curriculum design considered important in education?
3. What does educational philosophy mainly deal with?
4. What does existentialist philosophy emphasise in education?
5. Why is philosophy called the foundation of education?
6. Which educational philosophy gives importance to spiritual and moral values?
7. How does education contribute to character formation?
8. How is educational philosophy different from philosophy of education?

## Answers

1. Philosophy of education
2. It guides what and how students learn
3. Day-to-day teaching and learning practices
4. Freedom and personal choice
5. Because it provides ideals, aims, and guiding principles
6. Idealism
7. By shaping values, habits, and social responsibility
8. It is personal, practical, and context-based

## Assignments

1. Discuss the relationship between philosophy of education and educational philosophy. In your answer, highlight their differences in scope and nature, and explain how they complement each other in shaping both theory and practice of education.
2. Examine the significance of educational philosophy in curriculum design and character formation. Support your answer with suitable examples to show how philosophical principles influence the aims, methods, and values of education.

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# Aims of Education in Sree Narayana Guru's Vision



## UNIT

# Sree Narayana Guru's vision on the significance of education in perfecting man to a harmonious, Integral growth and Right living

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ understand Sree Narayana Guru's vision of education as a path to human dignity and freedom.
- ◆ explain how education functions as a fundamental human right beyond caste and gender barriers.
- ◆ identify the role of education in achieving the holistic growth of an individual.
- ◆ recognise the importance of values in education.
- ◆ analyse Guru's idea of education as a means for self-perfection and lifelong learning.
- ◆ relate Guru's educational philosophy to the creation of social equality and harmony.

## Prerequisites

When a person is rich in book knowledge but poor in educated actions, the very meaning of education comes into question. The true purpose of learning is not limited to acquiring information or clearing examinations, but to fostering the holistic development of the individual. Genuine education refines the body, mind, and spirit, enabling one to live with harmony and compassion. Its true worth is realised only when virtues such as truthfulness, kindness, and self-control are reflected in everyday conduct and relationships. Knowledge that remains confined to textbooks is incomplete; it becomes complete only when it shapes behaviour, strengthens character, and nurtures responsibility toward society. In this way, education emerges

as a transformative force that enables individuals to live meaningfully and contribute to the development of a just and humane community.

## Keywords

Avidya (ignorance), Vidya (knowledge), Holistic education, Integral growth, Self-perfection, Five purities, Apara Vidyā, Para Vidyā, Ethical living, Pancha Dharma, Samyak jīvitam.

## Discussion

Sreenarayana Guru viewed education as the most potent means for human liberation and social transformation. According to him, the ultimate aim of education is the development of wisdom that enables an individual to realise the unity of all existence. He emphasised that education should go beyond mere literacy or vocational skill; it must cultivate moral, spiritual, and intellectual refinement. Guru believed that ignorance (avidya) is the root cause of social evils such as caste discrimination and superstition. Hence, true education should remove ignorance and awaken the light of knowledge (vidya) that promotes equality, compassion, and truth. For Guru, education was not a privilege of a few but a universal right essential for the uplift of all human beings.

In Sreenarayana Guru's vision, education aims to harmonise material progress with spiritual realisation. He advocated an education that integrates science and spirituality, reason and faith, individual growth and social responsibility. Guru's educational ideal sought to prepare individuals who would work for the welfare of society through self-discipline, ethical conduct, and service to humanity. He also stressed the importance of education for women and the underprivileged as a means to achieve social justice and equality. Thus,

the Guru's vision of education is holistic- it aims at the all-round development of the human personality and the creation of a just, enlightened, and harmonious society.

Sree Narayana Guru emerged as a great philosopher and reformer in Kerala, a society weighed down by caste discrimination, inequality, and ignorance. At a time when education was denied to large sections of people, he declared that knowledge is the highest and surest path to liberation. For Guru, education was not merely the ability to read and write but a process of awakening that frees individuals from bondage and leads them towards dignity and equality. He emphasised that proper education should shape the whole person: body, mind, and spirit; so that one lives with purity, discipline, and harmony. The aim of learning, in his view, was not just worldly advancement but the practice of 'right living,' where wisdom guides action, compassion overcomes divisions, and unity among human beings is realised.

### 3.1.1 Education as Liberation and Human Rights

In nineteenth-century Kerala, education was not a shared resource but a privilege reserved for a select few. Access to learning



was controlled by rigid caste hierarchies, which ensured that Brahmins and other dominant groups monopolised institutions such as gurukulas, pathshalas, and Sanskrit schools. The vast majority of people, Ezhavas, Pulayas, Parayas, Nayadis, and other marginalised castes, were systematically excluded from these centres of knowledge. For them, even walking on public roads or entering temples was restricted, let alone entering schools. Education was deliberately denied so that these communities remained dependent on the upper castes, thereby reinforcing the deeply unjust social order. The situation of women was even more difficult. Patriarchal traditions forced them into household duties, deprived them of literacy, and silenced their voices in public life. In such a context, the denial of education became the sharpest tool of oppression.

Sree Narayana Guru recognised this harsh truth with great clarity. To him, the ignorance of the masses was not natural but the product of deliberate social engineering designed to keep people submissive. He therefore declared that education was the means of liberation. A person without knowledge was like an animal, lacking dignity, freedom, and the ability to shape life. By placing education at the centre of his reformist vision, he offered a radical solution to centuries of oppression. His famous call, ‘Educate to be free, Organise to be strong, and Industrialise to prosper’ summarised the liberative function of knowledge.

Guru treated education as a birthright rather than a privilege. In his speeches and writings, he repeatedly emphasised that no man or woman should remain uneducated. He was one of the first reformers to connect the spread of literacy with the idea of human rights. At a time when education was tied to caste identity, he declared that every child, regardless of community or gender, deserved the same opportunity to learn. This principle was revolutionary in an era when

even progressive policies of the Travancore state continued to favour the upper castes. For example, government scholarships for technical and professional education were reserved mainly for savarna Hindus and Christians, while communities like the Ezhavas were excluded. Such exclusion confirmed Guru’s view that an independent educational movement was essential for liberation.

His interventions were both practical and visionary. By establishing schools alongside temples, Guru redefined the purpose of religious institutions. Instead of being centres of ritual exclusivity, temples became places where children could gather, study, and interact across caste barriers. By doing this, Guru sent a symbolic message; knowledge is as sacred as worship, and schools are the real temples of society. This idea blurred the artificial division between the spiritual and the social, making learning an act of dignity and devotion. Through organisations such as the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, he encouraged communities to take collective responsibility for building schools, libraries, and hostels. These institutions provided marginalised groups with new opportunities for literacy, employment, and self-respect.

Education, however, was not to be understood narrowly as a means of getting jobs. Guru’s vision went far deeper. He believed that liberation through education had both an outer and an inner dimension. On the outside, education freed people from caste restrictions, opened doors to new professions, and gave them the confidence to claim their equality. On the inner side, education was a process of awakening the mind, cultivating moral discipline, and nurturing values of truth, compassion, and self-respect. In works like *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, Guru described ignorance (avidya) as the root of human suffering and knowledge (vidya) as the path to harmony and freedom. Thus, true education

was not just literacy but the refinement of the entire human personality.

Guru also connected education with gender justice. He firmly opposed customs that prevented women from learning, and he declared that women had the same right to knowledge and spiritual discipline as men. He supported the establishment of schools and hostels for girls and encouraged simple marriages, enabling families to allocate their resources to education rather than wasteful ceremonies. He even affirmed that women were capable of embracing sannyasa, a radical declaration at a time when the highest forms of spiritual life were considered out of their reach. In this way, Guru connected the idea of education as a human right not only to caste equality but also to gender equality.

The liberative power of education, according to Guru, also lies in its capacity to build collective strength. He realised that the oppressed could not overcome centuries of humiliation merely as individuals; they needed organisation, solidarity, and shared confidence. By insisting on education for all, Guru was laying the foundation for communities to come together, demand rights, and participate in public life. In this sense, his idea of education anticipated modern democratic thought, where learning is the basis of citizenship and empowerment. Even today, Guru's vision remains powerful. He reminds us that true liberation does not come through violence or privilege, but through knowledge - knowledge that enlightens the mind, frees the individual, and empowers society. For him, education was more than a tool; it was the right of every human being and the cornerstone of human dignity.

### **3.1.2 Education for Integral Growth and Self-Perfection**

Sree Narayana Guru's vision of education was not confined to the ability to read

and write or the acquisition of skills for livelihood. He believed that true education must be a process of refining the entire human personality and guiding it toward integral growth and self-perfection. For him, learning was the means through which a person could discipline the body, clarify the mind, and awaken spiritual awareness. Education, therefore, was not simply an external activity carried out in schools or institutions but a lifelong inner and outer process of transformation. It was this holistic outlook that gave Guru's educational philosophy its depth and timeless relevance. The guru explained that the purpose of education was to harmonise all aspects of life, physical, mental, and spiritual.

A human being who develops only intellectual ability without discipline or ethics, Guru said, would become incomplete and potentially harmful to society. By contrast, education that shapes both thought and conduct produces individuals who are balanced, compassionate, and socially responsible. He often expressed this idea through the teaching of the five purities: purity of the body, purity of speech, purity of mind, purity of the senses, and purity of the home. These purities demonstrate that education must not remain confined to abstract knowledge but should influence every detail of daily life, guiding people to live with health, self-control, harmony, and dignity. In this way, education was meant to cultivate a lifestyle where learning and living became inseparable.

Another essential dimension of Guru's vision of integral growth was the distinction between Apara Vidyā, or worldly knowledge, and Para Vidyā, the higher knowledge of the Self. Apara Vidyā prepared individuals to live in the world, giving them literacy, skills, and the means to overcome poverty and social exclusion. Para Vidyā, on the other hand, revealed the more profound unity of the self with the universal truth, leading to



inner peace and liberation. Guru insisted that a complete education must combine both, for material learning without higher wisdom leads to arrogance and emptiness, while spiritual insight without practical knowledge cannot transform society. By teaching in simple Malayalam and consecrating mirrors rather than idols in temples to remind people that the divine is within them, he made this higher knowledge accessible to all, regardless of caste or gender. Thus, education became not only a tool for survival but also a path of self-realisation and perfection.

Integral education, for Guru, was also inseparable from ethical living. He believed that knowledge must form character and train people to live truthfully, non-violently, honestly, and with self-restraint. His emphasis on the Pancha Dharma: ahimsa, satya, asteya, avyabhichāra, and maddya varjanam, shows that education was to be rooted in universal values that purify the individual and sustain society. Self-perfection was not a selfish pursuit of personal excellence but a disciplined journey where the growth of the self automatically contributed to the growth of the community. In this sense, Guru made moral and spiritual development an integral part of education, turning it into a process of cultivating both inner discipline and social responsibility.

He also saw education as a continuous, lifelong endeavour. True learning did not end with formal schooling but continued through reflection, self-inquiry, and the practice of values in daily life. Self-perfection, in his vision, was the gradual refinement of thoughts, habits, and actions through sustained awareness and discipline. In his *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, he described knowledge as the power that guides a person from states of conflict and confusion to harmony and balance. This description reveals that, for Guru, education was not a static achievement

but a dynamic, ongoing journey that shaped the very core of human existence. Modern systems of education often reduce learning to examinations, technical skills, and career preparation, leaving aside the moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. This has resulted in stress, competition, and alienation. Guru's holistic approach offers an alternative model in which education nurtures the whole person and helps build a society based on harmony and justice. His emphasis on purity, self-knowledge, moral discipline, and spiritual awakening demonstrates that education must not merely produce efficient workers but must also form wise and compassionate human beings capable of living meaningfully and responsibly. In this way, Sree Narayana Guru redefined the purpose of education as the path to integral growth and self-perfection.

### 3.1.3 Conclusion

Sree Narayana Guru's vision of education brings together three inseparable dimensions: liberation, integral growth, and right living. He understood that education was the most incredible wealth because it freed people from ignorance and oppression, restored their dignity, and affirmed it as the birthright of every human being. Yet, liberation alone was not enough; education had to nurture the whole person- body, mind, and spirit- so that individuals could grow in harmony with themselves and the world. Finally, this inner refinement had to find expression in society through right living, where knowledge guided conduct, removed divisions, and built lasting social harmony. By combining these ideals, Guru gave education a purpose that went beyond mere literacy or employment: he transformed it into a lifelong journey of self-perfection and a collective path to justice, peace, and human unity.

## Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru saw education as the surest path to freedom.
- ◆ Guru said ignorance is not natural but socially imposed.
- ◆ Education frees individuals from caste and social restrictions.
- ◆ Education should lead to discipline, harmony, and compassion.
- ◆ Guru linked education with human rights and dignity.
- ◆ Guru promoted education through the SNDP Yogam.
- ◆ Guru established schools alongside temples.
- ◆ Temples became centres of both worship and learning.
- ◆ Guru's slogan was 'Educate to be free, Organise to be strong, Industrialise to prosper.'
- ◆ Ignorance (avidya) is bondage; knowledge (vidya) is liberation.
- ◆ Women, he said, had the same right to education as men.
- ◆ Guru supported schools and hostels for girls.
- ◆ Guru affirmed that women can also embrace sannyasa.
- ◆ Education must shape conduct, not just intellect.
- ◆ Knowledge without ethics becomes harmful.
- ◆ The five purities show education should guide daily life.
- ◆ Guru distinguished between Apara Vidyā and Para Vidyā.
- ◆ Apara Vidyā is worldly knowledge for survival.
- ◆ Para Vidyā is higher knowledge of the Self.
- ◆ Education must lead to self-perfection.
- ◆ Learning continues through reflection and self-inquiry.
- ◆ The Pancha Dharma shaped the Guru's vision of right living.
- ◆ Right living is education applied in action.

- ◆ Guru opened temples to all castes as symbols of equality.
- ◆ Social harmony was the goal of proper education.
- ◆ Guru combined spirituality with social reform through education.
- ◆ Guru transformed education into a lifelong journey.

## Objective Questions

1. What did Sree Narayana Guru declare as the surest means of liberation?
2. What slogan did Guru give to summarise his vision of social uplift?
3. Which institution did Guru establish alongside temples to promote education?
4. What does Apara Vidyā mean according to the Guru's vision?
5. What does Para Vidyā refer to?
6. What ethical code did Guru connect with education and right living?
7. What is the ultimate aim of education according to the Guru?
8. Which knowledge leads to harmony and freedom according to the Guru?
9. What was Guru's view of education for women?
10. Which custom did Guru oppose because it blocked resources for education?

## Answers

1. Education
2. Educate to be free, Organise to be strong, Industrialise to prosper
3. Schools
4. Worldly and practical knowledge
5. Higher knowledge of the Self
6. Pancha Dharma
7. Right living and social harmony
8. Para Vidyā
9. Women have equal rights to education as men
10. Costly marriage ceremonies

## Assignments

1. Critically examine Sree Narayana Guru's vision of education as a tool for liberation and human rights, with special reference to the social context of 19th-century Kerala.
2. Discuss how Guru's concept of holistic education contributes to the integral growth of the individual and the creation of social harmony.

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## UNIT

# Para Vidhya & Apara Vidhya

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the meaning of Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā.
- ◆ describe how Indian philosophy distinguishes between higher and lower knowledge.
- ◆ discuss Sree Narayana Guru's reinterpretation of Para Vidyā as self-realisation.
- ◆ analyse Guru's view of Apara Vidyā as a tool for social empowerment.
- ◆ compare the traditional Upanishadic view with the Guru's practical application of these concepts.
- ◆ evaluate the relevance of combining Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā for both personal growth and social progress.

### Prerequisites

What is the true purpose of education? Is it merely the transfer of information from one generation to the next, or does it serve a deeper role in shaping character, nurturing values, and uplifting entire communities? Should education be seen only as preparation for employment and social responsibilities, or does it also empower individuals to question injustice, overcome limitations, and work toward a more just and equal society? This leads us to a further question: What is the highest form of knowledge? Is it the practical knowledge that equips us to live and function in the world, or is it the more profound wisdom that helps us understand ourselves and our role in the universe? Indian philosophy, especially the Upanishads, addresses these questions by distinguishing between two types of knowledge: Apara Vidyā, the knowledge of the outer, changing world, and Para Vidyā, the higher knowledge that reveals the eternal and imperishable truth.



## Keywords

Para Vidyā (Higher Knowledge), Apara Vidyā (Lower Knowledge), Brahman, Ātman, Self-realisation, Liberation (Mokṣa), Imperishable truth, Spiritual wisdom, Worldly knowledge, Rituals, Mirror installation.

## Discussion

In *Athmopadesa Satakam*, Sreenarayana Guru presents a profound philosophical distinction between Para Vidya and Apara Vidya. Para Vidya refers to the higher knowledge that leads to Self-realisation and the understanding of the ultimate truth. Apara Vidya, on the other hand, signifies lower or empirical knowledge related to worldly learning and sensory experience. Guru emphasises that while Apara Vidya is essential for practical life, it remains incomplete without the realisation of the Self. True liberation, according to Guru, comes only through Para Vidya, which removes ignorance and reveals the unity of existence. The Guru reinterprets the Upanishadic classification of knowledge to suit the modern context of social and spiritual reform. For him, Para Vidya is not mere intellectual understanding but the inner experience of oneness with the Divine. Apara Vidya helps prepare the mind, but Para Vidya transforms it. Thus, the synthesis of both forms of knowledge is necessary for complete human development. Guru's vision harmoniously integrates the spiritual and rational dimensions of life.

The concepts of Sama and Anya in *Athmopadesa Satakam* represent the Guru's non-dualistic insight into reality. Sama denotes sameness or equality, while Anya implies difference or otherness. Guru teaches that ignorance (Avidya) makes one perceive Anya, the illusion of separation among beings. In truth, everything is Sama

- the same consciousness manifesting in diverse forms. This vision of equality forms the ethical and social foundation of Guru's philosophy. When one realises Sama, discrimination, ego, and conflict disappear. Anya, being the product of false perception, leads to bondage and suffering. The Guru urges seekers to move from the perception of Anya to the realisation of Sama through self-knowledge. Such realisation is the essence of Advaita - the understanding that all existence is one. Therefore, Guru's teaching of Sama and Anya is not merely metaphysical but also moral and practical, guiding humanity toward unity, compassion, and peace.

### 3.2.1 Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā in Indian Philosophy

In Indian philosophy, knowledge is viewed profoundly. The sages of the Upanishads observed that people consistently seek knowledge to understand themselves and the world around them. They also realised that not all knowledge is the same. Certain types of knowledge enable us to understand the world around us, fulfill our duties, interact with society, and achieve material success. Other kinds of knowledge go deeper, leading us to self-realisation and the discovery of the highest truth. To explain this difference, in the *Mundaka Upanishads*, where the sage Angiras instructs the seeker Shaunaka that knowledge is of two kinds: the lower, or Apara, and the higher, or Para.

### 3.2.1.1 Para Vidya- The knowledge of the Absolute

Para Vidyā, which means ‘higher knowledge,’ is one of the most essential ideas in Indian philosophy. The Upanishads, particularly the *Muṇḍaka Upanishad*, draw a clear distinction between two types of knowledge: Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā. While Apara Vidyā refers to all worldly and ritual knowledge, Para Vidyā is described as the wisdom that enables one to realise the ultimate truth, Brahman. This higher knowledge is not about learning texts, performing rituals, or gaining intellectual skills; instead, it is about knowing the eternal Self and experiencing the oneness of all existence.

The sages explained that Para Vidyā is the knowledge that enables a seeker to transcend the changing and temporary world. It reveals Brahman, the imperishable and unchanging reality that is the source of everything. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* clearly states that all studies of the Vedas, sciences, and rituals fall under Apara Vidyā. Still, Para Vidyā is ‘that by which the Imperishable is known.’ This means that higher knowledge is not information but realisation. It is an awakening where the seeker directly experiences that the Self (Ātman) within is the same as Brahman, the ground of the universe.

Para Vidyā is reached not through ordinary study or reasoning but through deep spiritual practice. The Upanishads describe three essential steps for this realisation: Sravaṇa (listening to the teacher and scriptures), Manana (reflecting on the meaning to remove doubts), and Nididhyāsana (meditating deeply until the truth becomes one’s own direct experience). The guidance of a guru, or realised teacher, is considered essential because this knowledge is subtle and cannot be fully grasped by the intellect alone. The practice of Para Vidyā also requires inner purity. A person must be truthful, disciplined,

detached from selfish desires, and devoted to the search for truth. The Upanishads often stress that only one with a calm and pure mind can truly understand Brahman. Thus, Para Vidyā is not only about knowing but also about transforming one’s life and character. It is both a spiritual discipline and an inner realisation.

The result of Para Vidyā is liberation (mokṣa). When the Self is realised as one with Brahman, ignorance disappears, and with it the cycle of birth and death comes to an end. The seeker sees all beings as part of the same eternal reality. Fear, sorrow, and confusion vanish, and the person attains peace, wisdom, and freedom. In this sense, Para Vidyā is the ultimate goal of human life, leading to eternal fulfilment and surpassing the reach of worldly achievements. In short, Para Vidyā is the crown of Indian philosophy. It is the path that takes the seeker from the outer surface of life to the innermost reality. While Apara Vidyā prepares and disciplines the mind, Para Vidyā opens the door to the eternal truth. It is higher knowledge not because it rejects other forms of learning, but because it goes beyond them to reveal the unchanging Self. Para Vidyā, therefore, is not just knowledge; it is realisation, liberation, and the discovery of ultimate unity.

### 3.2.1.2 Apara Vidya- The Knowledge of the World

Apara Vidyā, which means ‘lower knowledge,’ is the second part of the twofold division of knowledge explained in the *Muṇḍaka Upanishad*. While Para Vidyā is the higher wisdom that leads to the realisation of Brahman, Apara Vidyā refers to the understanding of the changing world, rituals, and all forms of learning that belong to material and intellectual life. This type of learning enables a person to perform religious duties, understand traditions, and live successfully in society. In the modern sense, Apara Vidyā can be compared to all



forms of secular education, including the arts, science, technology, and literature, which provide the skills necessary for worldly life. This distinction does not mean that Apara Vidyā is unimportant. On the contrary, the sages valued it as the essential foundation for discipline, culture, and the preparation of the mind. However, they also stressed that it is limited and cannot by itself give liberation. The Upanishads describe Apara Vidyā as encompassing the four Vedas: Rg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva.

Beyond these, it also encompasses all sciences, arts, and intellectual studies that enable human beings to live and organise their lives. In simple words, Apara Vidyā is knowledge of the outer world. It provides skills for action, social order, and the ability to achieve material progress. Ritual knowledge, or the karma-kāṇḍa of the Vedas, teaches how to perform sacrifices for prosperity and heavenly rewards. The Upanishads acknowledge that such actions do bring results when performed with faith and discipline. However, Apara Vidyā has its limits. The results it brings, whether wealth, success, or heavenly enjoyments, are temporary. They belong to the realm of what changes and passes away. Even the highest ritual rewards cannot free a person from the cycle of birth and death. For this reason, the sages often compared Apara Vidyā to knowing only the branches of a tree without knowing its root. It is valuable and necessary, but incomplete, because it does not lead to the knowledge of the eternal Self.

At the same time, Apara Vidyā is not dismissed as worthless. The Upanishads present it as a stage that prepares the seeker for higher knowledge. By studying texts, practising rituals, and engaging in intellectual pursuits, the mind becomes sharper, more disciplined, and better equipped for deeper inquiry. Even though it does not reveal Brahman directly, Apara Vidyā helps refine

the seeker's life and character, creating the right conditions for the pursuit of Para Vidyā. The *Muṇḍaka Upanishad* also uses the example of rituals to show both the value and the limitations of Apara Vidyā. It describes sacrifices like Agnihotra in great detail, emphasising that they must be performed correctly to achieve the desired results. However, it also warns that those who view rituals as the ultimate truth are like blind men leading the blind. Without turning toward the higher wisdom of Para Vidyā, they remain bound to the world of change and impermanence.

In short, Apara Vidyā encompasses all knowledge of the outer, material world. It is essential for human growth, social order, and intellectual development. It disciplines the mind and body, preparing the seeker for the higher journey. But its fruits are limited and temporary. It cannot bring liberation on its own. Only when Apara Vidyā is completed by Para Vidyā does knowledge become whole. Together, they form the complete vision of wisdom in Indian philosophy, where the lower serves as a stepping stone to the higher, and the higher fulfills the true aim of life.

In other schools of Indian philosophy, Para Vidyā is also considered the highest goal. It may be understood as becoming one with the divine, realising the true self, or attaining freedom from ignorance. Śaṅkara explained that the study of scriptures and philosophy, which belongs to Apara Vidyā, is only a preparation for the ultimate realisation of non-duality, which is Para Vidyā. Without higher wisdom, all forms of learning remain caught in illusion (māyā). At the same time, without a foundation of lower knowledge, higher wisdom, or Para Vidyā cannot be explained or shared. For this reason, Indian philosophy treats both kinds of knowledge as necessary stages of human growth; one outward and preparatory, the other inward and liberating.

In this way, Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā are not merely two kinds of knowledge, but rather two steps on the spiritual journey. They demonstrate that real education must extend beyond the outer, practical aspects of life to the inner, eternal truth. They say that worldly success, intellectual skill, and ritual practice have actual value only when they lead toward the higher realisation of truth. By making this distinction, the Upanishads gave Indian philosophy its unique vision of knowledge, not only as a tool for worldly use but as a path to liberation.

### 3.2.2 Sree Narayana Guru's Vision on Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā

Sree Narayana Guru was not only a social reformer but also a profound philosopher who drew inspiration from the Upanishads. He accepted the classical distinction between Para Vidyā (higher knowledge) and Apara Vidyā (lower knowledge). Still, he reinterpreted these concepts in light of the social, cultural, and spiritual needs of his own time. For Guru, knowledge was never an abstract pursuit confined to scholars or ascetics. Instead, it was the very foundation of human dignity, social justice, and spiritual liberation. His vision harmonised the worldly and the spiritual, showing that both forms of knowledge are essential for the uplift of individuals and the progress of society.

#### 3.2.2.1 Sree Narayana Guru's Concept of Para Vidyā

Sree Narayana Guru was deeply rooted in the wisdom of the Upanishads, where Para Vidyā is described as the higher knowledge that reveals the eternal and imperishable truth. He accepted this classical idea but gave it a unique meaning that was relevant to the lives of ordinary people in Kerala. For the Guru, Para Vidyā was not a subject reserved for scholars or ascetics; it was the highest wisdom that every human being could and

should aspire to attain. In the Upanishads, Para Vidyā is the knowledge by which one realises Brahman, the ultimate reality. Narayana Guru explained this in simple and practical terms. In his philosophical works, especially *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* and *Darśanamālā*, he said that the highest knowledge is the realisation that the individual self (Ātman) and the universal self (Brahman) are not different. He called this truth Arivu (knowledge or consciousness). According to him, everything, subject and object, inner and outer, appears in consciousness, and true knowledge is the awareness of this unity.

Guru often used simple examples to clarify this idea. In *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, Guru describes two people sitting in the dark, each saying 'I.' This indicates that, beyond all external differences, there is a shared experience of self-awareness. That pure 'I,' which is the light of consciousness, is the authentic Self. To recognise this is to attain Para Vidyā. To make this truth even clearer to ordinary devotees, Guru used symbolic temple installations. In later temple installations, instead of placing an idol, the Guru installed a polished mirror, so that every worshipper would see their own reflection and realise that the Self within is divine. This was intended to remind people that Ātman and Brahman are the same, and that true worship is the recognition of this unity. The Guru emphasised that Para Vidyā was superior to rituals, caste rules, or external religious practices. He criticised the belief that liberation could be achieved through temple rituals, blind faith, or strict caste divisions. For him, these were only outer forms.

The true essence of religion lies in self-realisation, which is the direct experience of truth within oneself. This is why he taught that God should be realised not only in temples or texts but also in one's own self and in every living being. His famous saying, 'One caste, one religion, one God

for humanity,' reflects this vision of Para Vidyā. It is not just a social slogan but also a spiritual truth: when one realises the unity of existence, all divisions disappear. One of the most remarkable aspects of Guru's thought was his making Para Vidyā accessible to all. In his time, spiritual wisdom was considered the monopoly of upper-caste men, while women and lower castes were excluded. Guru rejected this inequality. He declared that every human being has the same right to know the highest truth. The Guru taught that women are equally eligible to embrace sannyāsa, a bold and progressive affirmation at the time. By doing this, he proved that spiritual liberation was not limited by caste, class, or gender. This inclusiveness is a hallmark of his interpretation of Para Vidyā.

Guru repeatedly reminded seekers that Para Vidyā is not merely book knowledge, but rather inner realisation. It cannot be gained by reading scriptures alone, nor by blindly following rituals. It requires meditation, contemplation, and mental purification. He encouraged people to practice self-inquiry, to ask who they truly are, and to transcend the ego and its desires. In his works, Guru often spoke of cit (pure consciousness) as the ultimate reality. He explained that this consciousness shines forth as both the subjective experience of the self and the objective experience of the world. But behind these changing appearances lies one unchanging reality. To experience that directly is Para Vidyā.

Though Para Vidyā is about spiritual realisation, the Guru did not see it as disconnected from everyday life. He believed that those who attained this higher wisdom would naturally live with compassion, equality, and peace. Such a realisation would remove hatred, caste arrogance, and selfishness. It would foster harmony in society and peace in the individual's mind. For Guru, Para Vidyā was not about escaping the world but about seeing the world in the

light of truth. When one realises that the same divine essence is present in all beings, one cannot harm or hate others. This was the spiritual foundation for his social reform.

Sree Narayana Guru's concept of Para Vidyā is both philosophical and practical. Rooted in the Upanishads, it teaches that the highest knowledge is self-realisation, the awareness of the unity of the individual self with the universal truth. At the same time, he made this wisdom accessible to all, rejecting barriers of caste and gender. Para Vidyā, in his thought, was not an abstract philosophy but a path to liberation, peace, and social harmony. It is this blend of deep spirituality and social relevance that makes Guru's idea of Para Vidyā unique and timeless.

### **3.2.2.2 Sree Narayana Guru's Concept of Apara Vidyā**

In the Upanishads, Apara Vidyā is described as the lower knowledge, which includes the study of the Vedas, rituals, grammar, sciences, and other worldly disciplines. Sree Narayana Guru fully accepted this distinction but gave it a new meaning by linking it to the social realities of Kerala. For him, Apara Vidyā was not to be dismissed as unimportant or inferior. Instead, it was intended to serve as a practical tool for social empowerment, equality, and human dignity. According to Guru, Apara Vidyā refers to all forms of external and practical knowledge, including reading, writing, arithmetic, science, the arts, and skills necessary for life in society. It also includes religious rituals, cultural practices, and systems of learning that help human beings to organise their lives. While this knowledge concerns only the changing, temporary world, the Guru saw it as essential to human progress. Without it, people would remain trapped in ignorance, poverty, and social slavery.

During Guru's time, Kerala society was

deeply divided along caste lines. Education was denied to large sections of people, especially the so-called lower castes and women. Guru realised that without access to basic literacy and worldly learning, these groups could never break free from oppression. Therefore, he insisted that Apara Vidyā be spread as the first step toward social transformation. Through the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (S.N.D.P.) Yogam instructed that no man or woman from the Ezhava community should remain without at least a primary education. This directive was revolutionary because it gave people the courage to claim education as their right and to reject centuries of exclusion. Guru's stress on education anticipated Kerala's later achievements in literacy and social development.

The guru explained that worldly knowledge would enable people to secure jobs, earn a living, and achieve a sense of dignity. For communities pushed to the margins, Apara Vidyā was a weapon against inequality. It helped them gain confidence, self-respect, and social recognition. It was also necessary to understand modern scientific concepts, democratic principles, and human rights. By promoting schools, libraries, and education centres, Guru turned Apara Vidyā into a tool of empowerment. He was clear that ritual learning or scriptural recitation alone could not bring equality. Only modern education, combined with practical skills, can transform society.

At the same time, Guru recognised the limits of Apara Vidyā. He warned that

material education, by itself, could not bring complete freedom. A person may become wealthy, skilled, or socially respected, but without higher wisdom, life would still be filled with desires, fears, and suffering. Therefore, Apara Vidyā must be seen as the foundation, while Para Vidyā remains the ultimate goal. Guru did not separate the two forms of knowledge into rigid compartments. He saw them as complementary. Apara Vidyā was necessary to fight social injustice, create opportunities, and promote equality, while Para Vidyā was necessary to transcend material life and realise spiritual truth. For him, proper education was complete only when it combined Apara Vidyā with Para Vidyā.

Sree Narayana Guru's concept of Apara Vidyā shows his practical wisdom and social vision. He understood that without literacy and worldly education, oppressed people could never rise. By making Apara Vidyā the foundation of social reform, he laid the path for equality, dignity, and self-reliance. At the same time, he reminded people that Apara Vidyā must lead to Para Vidyā, the higher realisation of truth. In this way, Guru transformed Apara Vidyā from 'lower knowledge' into a powerful instrument of liberation, both social and spiritual. In Indian philosophy, Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā are primarily viewed as abstract categories of higher and lower knowledge. However, Sree Narayana Guru redefined them, utilising Apara Vidyā for social uplift and Para Vidyā for spiritual liberation.

## Recap

- ◆ The Upanishads speak of two kinds of knowledge.
- ◆ Para Vidyā is higher knowledge, and Apara Vidyā is lower knowledge.
- ◆ Para Vidyā reveals Brahman, and Apara Vidyā is knowledge of the world.
- ◆ Para Vidyā is the knowledge of Self and Truth.
- ◆ Apara Vidyā includes rituals and sciences.
- ◆ Para Vidyā leads to liberation.
- ◆ Para Vidyā removes ignorance and suffering.
- ◆ Para Vidyā reveals the unity of Ātman and Brahman.
- ◆ Apara Vidyā prepares the mind, and Para Vidyā transforms the self.
- ◆ Śaṅkara saw Apara as preparatory and Para as non-dual realisation.
- ◆ Guru gave social and spiritual meaning to Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā.
- ◆ Apara Vidyā brings social empowerment.
- ◆ Guru insisted on education for all.
- ◆ Apara Vidyā gave self-respect to the oppressed.
- ◆ Para Vidyā was inner realisation for the Guru.
- ◆ Guru taught that God is within all beings.
- ◆ ‘One caste, one religion, one God for humanity’ reflects Para Vidyā.
- ◆ Guru made Para Vidyā accessible to all.
- ◆ Para Vidyā requires meditation and inquiry.
- ◆ Apara Vidyā alone is incomplete.
- ◆ Para Vidyā alone is not enough for society.
- ◆ Both knowledge systems complement each other.
- ◆ Apara Vidyā builds equality, and Para Vidyā builds inner freedom.
- ◆ Guru’s vision was practical and transcendental.

## Objective Questions

1. What are the two kinds of knowledge mentioned in the Upanishads?
2. Which Upanishad clearly distinguishes Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā?
3. What does Para Vidyā mean?
4. What does Apara Vidyā mean?
5. What is the ultimate aim of Para Vidyā?
6. Which knowledge helps us understand the outer and changing world?
7. What does Para Vidyā reveal?
8. What is the symbol Guru used in temples to show the unity of Self and Brahman?
9. Which knowledge did Guru promote through SNDP Yogam for social uplift?
10. Why did Guru stress Apara Vidyā for the oppressed communities?
11. What does Para Vidyā require according to the Guru?
12. Which knowledge alone cannot bring liberation?
13. What happens when one attains Para Vidyā?
14. How did Guru make Para Vidyā accessible?

## Answers

1. Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā
2. Mundaka Upanishad
3. Higher knowledge
4. Knowledge of rituals and texts

5. Liberation (mokṣa)
6. Apara Vidyā
7. The unity of Ātman and Brahman
8. A mirror
9. Apara Vidyā
10. To achieve dignity and equality
11. Meditation, contemplation, self-inquiry
12. Apara Vidyā
13. One realises unity with Brahman
14. By teaching it in simple Malayalam

## Assignments

1. Critically examine the distinction between Para Vidyā and Apara Vidyā in the Upanishads. How did Sree Narayana Guru reinterpret these concepts to address both spiritual realisation and social uplift?
2. Discuss the role of Apara Vidyā in Sree Narayana Guru's social reform movement. How did he employ worldly education as a tool for equality, dignity, and empowerment of marginalised communities?
3. Analyse Sree Narayana Guru's concept of Para Vidyā as self-realisation. How did he make higher knowledge accessible to all, transcending barriers of caste, class, and gender?

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## Pancha Dharma

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the meaning and significance of the Pancha Dharma in Indian philosophy.
- ◆ describe Sree Narayana Guru's reinterpretation of Ahimsa, Satyam, Astheyam, Avyabhicharam, and Maddyam Varjanam.
- ◆ analyse how the Pancha Dharma connects personal ethics with social reform.
- ◆ identify the spiritual, moral, and social dimensions of each of the five virtues.
- ◆ evaluate the relevance of Pancha Dharma in addressing modern social and personal challenges.
- ◆ apply the principles of Pancha Dharma to promote harmony, dignity, and self-discipline in everyday life.

### Prerequisites

Sree Narayana Guru's ethical vision was not presented as abstract moralising but as a practical path to regenerate a society burdened by poverty, addiction, exploitation, and social inequality. His teachings aimed to discipline the individual while simultaneously healing the community, emphasising that true freedom could only be realised through inner strength and collective harmony. By urging people to cultivate Pancha Dharma, he laid the foundation for dignity, unity, and progress, enabling individuals to rise above ignorance and weakness while guiding society toward harmony, equality, and spiritual awakening. For Guru, these values were not ends in themselves but instruments to uplift society, to break the chains of

ignorance and degradation, and to prepare people for a life of self-respect, equality, and spiritual awakening.

## Keywords

Pancha Dharma, Non-violence, Truth, Non-stealing, Chastity, Maddya Varjanam, Self-control, Inner discipline, Community uplift, Spiritual awakening, Harmony, Contentment

## Discussion

Sreenarayana Guru's concept of Pancha Dharma (Fivefold Duties) forms a vital part of his ethical and social philosophy. It provides a moral framework for individuals and society to attain spiritual growth and social harmony. The five Dharmas- Manushya Dharma, Samoohya Dharma, Desha Dharma, Dharma towards Religion, and Dharma towards God- represent a progressive path from personal discipline to universal realisation. Through Manushya Dharma, Guru emphasised moral conduct, compassion, and self-control as the foundation of human life. Samoohya Dharma urged individuals to work for the welfare of society and to eliminate inequalities. Desha Dharma focused on patriotism, civic responsibility, and national development, free from narrow sectarianism. Thus, Guru's Pancha Dharma offers a holistic ethical vision connecting the individual, society, nation, religion, and the divine.

In Sreenarayana Guru's vision, Pancha Dharma serves as a practical guide to achieve peace and unity among humankind. He believed that true religion should not divide people but uplift them through righteousness and love. By practising the fivefold duties, one attains balance between spiritual enlightenment and social responsibility. Guru's emphasis on equality, education, and moral living is reflected in every aspect of his Dharma teachings. His interpretation of duty transcends ritualism and points toward self-realisation through service and compassion. The Pancha Dharma

thus transforms religious life into an ethical and humanitarian endeavour. It promotes the integration of inner purity and outer action, which leads to universal brotherhood. Through this philosophy, Guru laid the foundation for a new moral order rooted in justice, tolerance, and the unity of all beings.

### 3.3.1 Philosophical Background of Pancha Dharma

The concept of Pancha Dharma, or the five fundamental virtues, holds an important place in Indian philosophical traditions. Though the exact expression 'Pancha Dharma' is not uniformly used across all schools, the ethical framework of the fivefold discipline is deeply rooted in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Dharma here is not a rigid law but the principle of righteousness, harmony, and order that sustains both the individual and society. These five values- ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, and aparigraha- represent the foundation of a moral and spiritual life.

#### Ahimsa

Ahimsa, or non-violence, is regarded as the highest dharma, as the Mahabharata declares that 'ahimsa paramo dharmah,' non-violence is the supreme duty. This virtue is not confined to abstaining from physical injury but extends to words, thoughts, and intentions. Jainism elevates ahimsa as the



very basis of spiritual practice, insisting on strict observance, while Buddhism extends it into universal compassion, making kindness and empathy central to spiritual growth. In Vedantic philosophy, ahimsa arises from the realisation that the identical Atman, or self, exists in all beings; therefore, harming another is equivalent to hurting oneself.

### Truth

The second virtue is satya, or truthfulness. The Upanishads affirm that satyam eva jayate, truth alone triumphs. In Indian thought, truth is not merely factual accuracy but living in accordance with *rta*, the cosmic order. Speaking the truth, acting truthfully, and cultivating inner integrity build social trust and moral strength. At a spiritual level, truth connects the human being with Brahman, which is itself identified as pure reality and truth. Thus, satya becomes both an ethical and a metaphysical principle, guiding conduct and shaping inner character.

### Asteya

Asteya, or non-stealing, forms the third of the five virtues. It signifies not only refraining from theft but also freedom from greed, exploitation, and dishonesty. A person who practices asteya learns to cultivate contentment, avoids taking advantage of others, and contributes to fairness in social life. It is a principle that safeguards both personal integrity and social harmony. Indian philosophy often warns that greed and dishonesty disturb the balance of society and bind the individual to further suffering. By practising asteya, one strengthens trust in human relationships and creates the conditions for justice and equity.

### Brahmacarya

The fourth virtue is brahmacharya, which is often translated as chastity, but in a broader sense, it refers to self-restraint and moderation. In the stage of student life,

brahmacharya signifies dedication to study and discipline, while for ascetics it means complete celibacy and control over desires. For householders, it indicates moderation, fidelity, and purity in thought and conduct. The common thread is the responsible channelling of energy, the preservation of inner strength, and the cultivation of dignity. By practising brahmacharya, individuals regulate their passions, avoid excess, and contribute to social stability and harmony.

### Aparigraha

The final virtue is aparigraha, or non-possessiveness. It teaches detachment from excessive attachment to wealth, property, and material possessions. Jainism emphasises this principle strongly, seeing greed as a form of subtle violence because it leads to exploitation and harm. Hindu and Yogic traditions interpret aparigraha as a means to simplicity and inner freedom, for the more one clings to possessions, the more one is bound by desire and fear of loss. By practising aparigraha, individuals cultivate simplicity, reduce suffering, and prepare the mind for higher spiritual realisation. It is also a principle of social ethics, reminding one that hoarding deprives others of fair access to resources.

Thus, the fivefold discipline of ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, and aparigraha forms a comprehensive framework of ethics and spirituality. Hinduism integrates these values into the yamas of Yoga philosophy and the broader dharmic code of the epics and smritis. Buddhism incorporates them into the *pañca-sīla*, or five precepts, emphasising non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, right conduct, and freedom from harmful desires. Jainism enshrines them as the Pancha Mahavrata, the great vows of ascetics, and as Anuvratas, or smaller vows, for householders. In each tradition, these five principles are understood as restraints that purify the self, sustain social order,

and guide the seeker towards liberation. Pancha Dharma represents the essence of moral life in Indian philosophy. By practising non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, self-restraint, and non-possessiveness, individuals align themselves with the cosmic order, strengthen social bonds, and move toward inner freedom. These virtues are not mere prohibitions but positive disciplines that harmonise the individual with society and the universe. They embody the timeless vision of dharma as both personal responsibility and universal law, leading humanity toward liberation and lasting peace.

### **3.3.2 Sree Narayana Guru's Contribution to Pancha Dharma**

Sree Narayana Guru (1856–1928) lived during a period of intense social inequality and moral decline in Kerala. Caste oppression, alcoholism, superstitions, and lack of education had crippled communities. Guru's reform was not merely spiritual but deeply social. By reviving the ethical essence of Indian philosophy and presenting it in simple language, he aimed to uplift both individuals and society. His articulation of Pancha Dharma was both practical and transformative.

#### **3.3.2.1 Ahimsa**

Ahimsa, or non-violence, is the first and foremost among the Pancha Dharma that Sree Narayana Guru instructed his followers to practice, and it holds a very special place in the moral and spiritual heritage of Indian philosophy. The word 'ahimsa' means not causing harm, injury, or suffering to any living being through one's thoughts, words, or actions. While this principle is often understood in the physical sense of not killing or hurting, the interpretation made by the Guru was much deeper. He extended its meaning to cover mental and verbal violence as well. A person who speaks

harsh words that wound another's heart, or one who harbours ill-will and hatred, is as guilty of violating ahimsa as one who inflicts bodily harm. Guru therefore taught that the practice of ahimsa must be holistic, encompassing the entire sphere of human conduct.

The philosophical background of ahimsa in India stretches back to the Upanishads, Jainism, and Buddhism, where it was regarded as the supreme virtue. Narayana Guru drew inspiration from these traditions, but he made them practical and socially transformative. He insisted that non-violence should not remain an abstract ideal or an ascetic's vow; rather, it should be lived out in the everyday lives of people. He explained that if one sincerely practices ahimsa, even creatures that are naturally cruel or wild will begin to trust such a person, just as a child trusts its mother. This striking image illustrates how Guru perceived ahimsa as a powerful force of universal attraction, capable of dissolving enmity and fostering bonds of love.

The ethical depth of ahimsa lies in its capacity to transform both the self and society. When a person trains their mind to let go of anger, resentment, and the urge to harm, they become calm, compassionate, and trustworthy. This inner transformation naturally extends to relationships in the family and community. Conflicts decrease, harmony increases, and people begin to trust one another. Guru's teaching on ahimsa was particularly revolutionary in a society fractured by caste discrimination, untouchability, and social oppression. He understood that violence was not limited to physical acts but was also embedded in social customs, prejudices, and humiliations. By urging the oppressed to adopt ahimsa, he provided them with a means to resist oppression without surrendering to cycles of hatred or revenge, and by encouraging the privileged to practice ahimsa, he called upon them to abandon the violence of caste

arrogance and embrace equality.

Another essential dimension of ahimsa, as taught by the Guru, was its connection to spiritual practice. The human mind, he said, is a flow of thoughts, often poisoned by negative memories, fears, and desires stored in the subconscious. If these are not purified, they become the basis for violent actions and words. Therefore, Guru recommended daily prayer, meditation, and awareness as tools to cleanse the mind of harmful tendencies and fill it with thoughts of love, kindness, and compassion. In this way, ahimsa was not just an ethical rule but a spiritual discipline that guided the seeker towards inner peace and ultimately towards the realisation of the self. Ahimsa, as taught by the Guru, also carried a universal vision. It was not limited to human beings alone but extended to all living beings. He reminded his followers that birds, animals, plants, and every part of nature deserve respect and care. Non-violence, in this sense, meant harmony with the entire cosmos.

By promoting kindness and gentleness towards all creatures, Guru was cultivating ecological awareness long before environmental issues became global concerns. His ahimsa was therefore not only social and spiritual but also cosmic in its scope. In today's world, the Guru's teachings on ahimsa remain profoundly relevant. Violence continues in many forms: wars between nations, communal conflicts, domestic abuse, environmental destruction, and even the subtle violence of harsh words and social exclusion. By practising ahimsa as Guru envisioned it, individuals can learn to restrain harmful impulses, cultivate compassion, and build a culture of peace. The principle of non-violence is not passive; it is an active force of transformation. It requires courage to respond to hatred with love, to return harshness with gentleness, and to refuse to let anger dictate one's actions. Guru's call to practice ahimsa was, therefore, a call to

build a society based on trust, harmony, and the dignity of every being.

Thus, ahimsa as part of the Pancha Dharma represents both the inner purification of the self and the outer transformation of society. By embracing it, individuals align themselves with truth and compassion; families experience unity, communities overcome divisions, and humanity moves closer to realising universal brotherhood. In this way, Guru made ahimsa not only the highest ideal but also the most practical path for human progress.

### 3.3.2.2 Satyam (Truthfulness)

Truth, or Satyam, is the second of the Pancha Dharma taught by Sree Narayana Guru, and he considered it sacred as God itself. In Indian philosophy, truth has always been regarded as eternal and unchanging, the foundation upon which the universe is said to rest. Narayana Guru reminds people that truth is not merely a virtue but the very essence of existence. For Guru, to speak truth was to align oneself with the divine order, while to lie was to move against the will of God. He explained that truth is permanent, while lies are temporary; therefore, a person who practices truth is standing on the firmest ground possible. In his time, the concept of truth held significant social meaning. Kerala was bound by caste discrimination, rituals, and false hierarchies that denied people their dignity. Guru saw these as forms of untruth; social lies that had to be overcome by proclaiming and living in truth.

Guru was uncompromising in his teaching that truth is the real God, and any society that builds itself on lies, hypocrisy, or injustice is bound to collapse. Truthfulness for him was not just about speaking facts correctly, but also about living with integrity, honesty, and moral courage. He insisted that words, actions, and thoughts must all be truthful and

that silence was better than speaking words that cause harm or deviate from righteousness. Guru's teaching on truth also had a spiritual depth. He observed that illusions, desires, and false appearances often trap the human mind. To practice truth meant to see beyond these appearances and realise the reality of the self, which is changeless and eternal. A truthful person does not merely speak honestly but also strives to live in harmony with the higher reality. By telling the truth, one gains the power of words that come true and earns respect and trust from others. In this way, truth becomes a force that uplifts both the individual and the community.

In daily life, Guru's insistence on truth was deeply practical. A truthful person wins the confidence of family, neighbours, and society, while a liar loses credibility and creates suspicion around himself. Lies may bring short-term benefits, but eventually lead to disgrace and loss of peace. Guru reminded people that one who speaks the truth, however difficult it may be, ultimately finds victory, because truth always has the strength to prevail. In a society seeking to free itself from centuries of ignorance and inequality, truthfulness was both a weapon of reform and a virtue of spiritual growth.

Even today, Guru's message about truth remains relevant. In a world where dishonesty, false promises, and hypocrisy often prevail in public and private life, his teachings remind us that truth is the foundation of justice, trust, and peace. Without truth, no relationship, institution, or society can survive for long. Narayana Guru's call to see truth as God encourages us to make truthfulness not just a moral choice, but a way of life, guiding our speech, actions, and innermost thoughts. In this sense, Satyam is not only an ethical principle but the very light that illuminates the path of human progress and spiritual fulfillment.

### 3.3.2.3 Astheyam (Non-stealing)

Asteyam, or non-stealing, is the third of the Pancha Dharma laid down by Sree Narayana Guru, and it holds a profound significance both as an ethical principle and as a practical guideline for life. The word 'Asteyam' means refraining from taking what does not belong to oneself, but the Guru's teaching went deeper than the narrow sense of theft. He explained that Asteyam is also a state of mind, characterised by a freedom from the desire for the property or possessions of others. In other words, it is not enough merely to avoid stealing; one must also cleanse the mind of greed, envy, and covetousness. For Guru, a person who has no interest in others' belongings is the one who truly practices Asteyam, and such a person naturally attracts prosperity, peace, and the trust of society.

In the cultural and social context of Guru's time, this teaching was significant. Many people lived in conditions of poverty and oppression, where stealing might have seemed like an easy or necessary escape. But Guru taught that theft, however minor, corrupts the heart, destroys one's reputation, and distances the individual from divine grace. He emphasised that wealth obtained through dishonest means cannot bring lasting happiness; instead, it poisons relationships and weakens one's character. A community built on theft, dishonesty, or exploitation cannot progress, for its foundation rests on falsehood. In contrast, a community guided by Asteyam, where people respect one another's rights and property, develops trust, cooperation, and harmony.

Asteyam, as Guru understood it, also connects to a more profound philosophy of contentment. The desire to steal arises from a restless mind that is never satisfied with what it has. Guru pointed out that when a person cultivates inner satisfaction



and learns to accept life's provisions with gratitude, the temptation to steal disappears. In this sense, Asteyam is not only about external action but also about cultivating a state of self-sufficiency and inner wealth. When people practice honesty in thought, word, and deed, they become reliable and trustworthy, and others naturally entrust them with responsibility. A person free from theft, in mind as well as in behaviour, will be so trusted by others that they may surrender all they have before him without fear.

On a spiritual level, Asteyam protects the purity of the soul. To take what is not one's own creates karmic bondage, tying the soul further to the cycle of desires and consequences. Non-stealing, on the other hand, lightens the soul and makes it receptive to higher wisdom and divine grace. It helps in cultivating simplicity, humility, and a spirit of service rather than exploitation. For Guru, Asteyam was therefore not merely a social law, but a step toward the realisation of truth and freedom. Guru's message of Asteyam remains relevant. Stealing in modern life may not always take the form of breaking into someone's house; it can manifest as corruption, fraud, misuse of power, or the exploitation of others' labour. To follow Asteyam in this age means rejecting all these forms of dishonesty and striving to live with transparency and fairness. It means being content with what one earns through honest effort and refusing to covet the wealth, position, or success of others. By doing so, individuals can create a culture of trust and justice, thereby strengthening families, institutions, and nations.

Thus, Asteyam, as explained by Sree Narayana Guru, is both a moral safeguard and a spiritual discipline. It purifies the mind of greed, strengthens society through trust, and uplifts the soul by freeing it from the bonds of dishonesty. By practising this virtue, one contributes not only to personal integrity but also to the collective well-being of the

world, thereby fulfilling the Guru's vision of a society founded on truth, justice, and compassion.

### **3.3.2.4 Avyabhicharam (Chastity)**

Avyabhicharam, the fourth of the Pancha Dharma, refers to chastity and the discipline of passion. For Sree Narayana Guru, it was not merely about external conduct but about purity in thought, word, and action. He defined it as avoiding lustful looks, suggestive speech, and illicit relationships, all of which corrupt personal character and undermine the stability of family and society. Indulgence in such behaviour, Guru warned, often results in the loss of dignity, respect, wealth, and harmony, leading in extreme cases to the ruin of one's family and life. Thus, Avyabhicharam is both a personal virtue and a social responsibility. This teaching has its roots deeply ingrained in Indian philosophy. Unchecked desire is regarded as a powerful obstacle to self-mastery and spiritual growth, a theme echoed in the Upanishads, Buddhism, and Jainism. Guru inherited this wisdom but gave it a practical orientation. His emphasis on restraint was not ascetic denial but a call for balance, enabling individuals to live responsibly within families and communities without being enslaved by passion.

At the heart of Avyabhicharam lies mental discipline. Guru observed that true chastity begins in the mind; avoiding outward misconduct is insufficient if one secretly entertains lustful thoughts. Purity of intention is essential. By cultivating thoughts rooted in love, compassion, and responsibility, individuals can redirect their energy toward learning, creativity, and service rather than dissipating it in destructive indulgence. On the social level, Avyabhicharam safeguards trust, loyalty, and stability in relationships. Families flourish when respect and fidelity are maintained, whereas infidelity erodes love

and creates suffering. For the Guru, chastity was not the suppression of natural affection, but its elevation into bonds of dignity and mutual respect. In this way, relationships contribute to both personal well-being and the honour of future generations.

Spiritually, Guru saw chastity as a means of conserving inner strength. Passion scatters the mind and ties it to fleeting pleasures, while restraint brings clarity, peace, and focus. A chaste life enables one to transcend bodily urges, focus on higher truths, and progress toward self-realisation. In the modern world, where consumerism and unregulated desires often dominate, Guru's message retains its force. Avyabhicharam reminds us that discipline in relationships is not a denial of joy but the foundation of trust, dignity, and spiritual freedom. By practising it, individuals protect their integrity, families preserve harmony, and society nurtures respect and stability.

### **3.3.2.5 Maddya Varjanam (Prohibition of intoxicants)**

Maddya Varjanam, or abstinence from intoxicants, is one of the five essential virtues (Pancha Dharma) laid down by Sree Narayana Guru. Far from being a minor instruction, it was a central commandment aimed at reshaping both individual character and social destiny. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Kerala, widespread use of toddy and liquor was devastating communities; intensifying poverty, breaking families, and draining physical and mental health. Guru saw that the first step toward dignity and progress for the oppressed was total renunciation of intoxicants. To Guru, alcohol was not merely a drink but poison; it clouded judgment, weakened intellect, and stripped individuals of self-control. An intoxicated mind, he taught, could never pursue truth, cultivate compassion, or rise to wisdom. Addiction not only enslaves individuals but also keeps whole communities

in ignorance and dependency. Rejecting intoxicants, therefore, became for him both an act of self-respect and a form of social resistance.

Guru described the consequences of indulgence with striking clarity. Addiction shatters family life by breeding quarrels, violence, and neglect, turning love into resentment. A drunkard loses the trust of spouse, parents, children, and society. Beyond the home, intoxicants fuel crime, waste wealth, and destroy character. For Guru, this was not a private weakness but a public danger that spread moral decay across the community. At the same time, Maddya Varjanam was also a spiritual discipline. Guru emphasised that the human mind is the instrument for realising the self. Intoxicants, by clouding awareness, separate one from meditation, prayer, and higher knowledge. By preserving temperance, the seeker protects clarity of mind, inner strength, and the possibility of liberation. Thus, abstinence united health, morality, and spirituality in a single practice.

Even today, Guru's insight remains relevant. Despite high literacy and social development, Kerala continues to face the grave problem of alcoholism, with its familiar consequences of broken families, wasted resources, and social unrest. Legal restrictions alone cannot solve this; what is needed is a moral awakening and inner strength, as the Guru demanded. His teaching shows that prohibition is not merely about denial but about affirming life, discipline, and dignity. Maddya Varjanam also reflects the Guru's broader reformist mission. His call for 'one caste, one religion, one God for humankind' presupposed a society strong, united, and free from enslavement to destructive habits. Intoxicants divide and weaken, while abstinence fosters equality and collective progress.

For him, rejecting intoxicants was the first

doorway to self-respect and liberation, both individually and socially. In essence, Maddyava Varjanam is not a negative prohibition but a positive path. It purifies body and mind, strengthens families, uplifts communities, and prepares the seeker for spiritual growth. By declaring intoxicants to be poison, the Guru offered a timeless reminder: actual progress is possible only through clarity, discipline, and the wise use of one's human potential.

### 3.3.3 Conclusion

Sree Narayana Guru's interpretation of Pancha Dharma is remarkable for its clarity, simplicity, and universality. Ancient dharma texts often remained the preserve of scholars and priests, implied in language inaccessible to ordinary people. Guru broke this barrier by translating profound ethical concepts into simple words, practical examples, and everyday guidance that anyone could follow. A distinctive feature of his teaching was the integration of personal ethics with social reform. For Guru, virtues such as truth, non-violence, honesty, chastity, and abstinence from intoxicants were not merely pathways to individual salvation but also instruments for building a just and harmonious society. By insisting that ethical living was inseparable from social progress, he gave dharma a collective dimension.

Guru also offered a universal ethic that transcended caste, religion, and sectarian divisions. By presenting the Pancha Dharma as values common to all humanity, he made moral discipline a shared responsibility rather than a privilege or duty restricted to the privileged or the duty-bound. This universal outlook reflected his vision of equality and unity. Equally important was his emphasis on inner transformation. Guru reminded his followers that dharma is not about external compliance or ritual observance but about purifying thought, word, and action. Inner discipline, he taught, is the proper foundation of outer harmony.

In this way, the Pancha Dharma became more than abstract ideals; they emerged as a living moral framework that combined compassion, truthfulness, honesty, purity, and self-control. By relating these virtues to the everyday struggles of people and the larger need for social reform, Guru gave them renewed relevance in modern times. Ultimately, Narayana Guru redefined dharma as a set of universal values that elevate individuals and unite communities. His message of Ahimsa, Satyam, Astheyam, Avyabhicharam, and Maddyava Varjanam remains a timeless guide for personal integrity, social harmony, and spiritual progress.

## Recap

- ◆ Pancha Dharma is a fivefold code of virtue in Indian philosophy.
- ◆ The five values form the foundation of moral and spiritual life.
- ◆ Non-violence means not harming through thought, word, or action.
- ◆ Truth is eternal and the basis of justice and trust.
- ◆ Non-stealing teaches honesty, fairness, and contentment.
- ◆ Chastity means purity, moderation, and self-restraint.
- ◆ Non-possessiveness promotes simplicity and detachment.
- ◆ These values are found in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.
- ◆ The Pancha Dharma is part of the Yoga philosophy as yamas.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru reinterpreted Pancha Dharma for his society.
- ◆ Non-violence was for personal peace and social harmony.
- ◆ Truth challenged social lies and upheld equality.
- ◆ Non-stealing fostered trust and discouraged exploitation.
- ◆ Chastity safeguarded families and directed energy constructively.
- ◆ Abstinence from intoxicants strengthened individuals and communities.
- ◆ Guru made these values practical and accessible to ordinary people.
- ◆ Guru showed that ethics is inseparable from social progress.
- ◆ The five virtues are both personal duties and universal laws of life.
- ◆ They purify the self and sustain social order.
- ◆ Pancha Dharma guides humanity towards liberation and lasting peace.

## Objective Questions

1. What does the term Pancha Dharma mean in Indian philosophy?
2. Which Indian epic declares ahimsa paramo dharmah (non-violence is the highest duty)?
3. Which principle connects human beings with Brahman as pure reality?
4. What does Asteya mainly discourage?
5. What does Aparigraha teach?
6. Who reinterpreted Pancha Dharma in the context of Kerala society?
7. Which virtue did Guru describe as ‘the real God’?
8. What did Guru teach about non-violence in relation to words?
9. Which virtue safeguards trust and harmony in relationships?
10. Which practice did Guru call ‘poison’ that destroys body and mind?
11. What is the ultimate aim of practising Pancha Dharma?
12. What does Aparigraha prepare the mind for?
13. Who benefits when individuals practice honesty in thought, word, and deed?

## Answers

1. Five virtues
2. Mahabharata
3. Satya
4. Greed
5. Detachment from possessions
6. Sree Narayana Guru

7. Satya
8. Harsh words can wound like violence
9. Avyabhicharam
10. Alcohol
11. Liberation and peace
12. Spiritual realisation
13. Families and society

## Assignments

1. Critically examine Sree Narayana Guru's reinterpretation of Pancha Dharma as a practical framework for social reform. How did he connect personal ethics with the uplift of oppressed communities?
2. Discuss the philosophical background of Pancha Dharma in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, and analyse how Sree Narayana Guru made these values accessible and relevant to ordinary people.

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## UNIT

# Women Education

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the condition of women's education in Kerala before reforms
- ◆ describe the role of missionaries in starting women's education
- ◆ identify Sree Narayana Guru's efforts to promote education for women
- ◆ explain the social reforms made by Guru to support women's education
- ◆ understand Guru's view of equality and his spiritual vision about women

### Prerequisites

For a long time, women were treated as subordinate to men because of deep-rooted social and cultural practices. Patriarchal traditions, religious restrictions, and caste-based inequalities denied them access to knowledge. Women were confined to household roles and made dependent on fathers, husbands, or sons, which created the false belief that they were weaker and less capable than men. The denial of education was the strongest tool of oppression, keeping women away from dignity, freedom, and equality. Education is the most powerful means to overcome this inequality. It gives women dignity, self-confidence, and the ability to participate equally with men in all spheres of life. Education enables women to secure employment, achieve financial independence, and contribute to economic growth. It also makes them aware of their rights, allowing them to fight against exploitation, child marriage, and social injustices. Beyond family and community, women's education benefits society as a whole. When women are educated, health and hygiene improve, poverty is reduced, and democratic participation becomes stronger. Education empowers women to participate in decision-making processes and challenge discriminatory practices. Thus, the progress of a nation is directly connected to the education of

its women. As Sree Narayana Guru and many other reformers taught, a society can never move forward if women are kept in ignorance. Women's education is therefore not just a personal right but also a social necessity, essential for building a just, equal, and progressive society.

## Keywords

Child marriage, Denial of property rights, Christian missionaries, Early missionary schools, Sree Narayana Vidyarthini Sadanam, Narayani Amma, Dharma Paripalana Madam, Gender equality

## Discussion

Sree Narayana Guru viewed education as the most powerful tool for human liberation and social transformation. He emphasised that women's education is equally important as men's, since the ignorance of women leads to the ignorance of the entire society. Guru believed that true progress of a nation depends upon the enlightenment of its women, who are the first teachers of the next generation. He challenged the traditional customs that restricted women's access to learning and encouraged social reformers to promote female literacy. According to him, education should not merely aim at worldly success but also at spiritual and moral growth. Guru's idea of education was based on equality, compassion, and self-knowledge. By promoting schools and learning centers accessible to all genders, he attempted to remove caste and gender barriers. His teachings inspired several movements for women's empowerment in Kerala. Guru's vision thus laid the foundation for modern social change in Kerala society. He saw educated women as the torchbearers of knowledge and ethical living.

In Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy, women's education was not just a right but a duty essential for social harmony. He observed that when women are educated, the entire family and community benefit from

their wisdom and values. Guru's message, "Educate to be free," applied equally to women, urging them to rise above social discrimination. He wanted women to develop intellectual independence and moral courage to participate in public life. Through his teachings and institutions, he demonstrated that education should promote dignity, self-respect, and self-realization among women. Guru also linked education with economic empowerment, enabling women to achieve self-sufficiency and respect in society. His followers established schools and centres in line with his ideals, creating opportunities for women across communities. The Guru's concept thus went beyond literacy; it aimed at complete human development. His vision continues to influence gender equality and social justice movements even today. Sree Narayana Guru remains a pioneer of inclusive and holistic education.

### 3.4.1 Education of Women in Kerala

The history of women's education in Kerala must be understood against the backdrop of centuries of neglect, social prejudice, and cultural restrictions imposed on women. Although men and women together form the two halves of humanity, society in practice rarely recognizes this

equality. In the early Indian tradition, women had some access to learning, particularly during the Vedic age, when figures like Gargi and Maitreyi were honored as seekers of wisdom. However, over time, with the strengthening of patriarchal structures and the dominance of Brahmanical orthodoxy, women were gradually excluded from centers of learning. Education came to be seen as a privilege reserved for men, while women were confined to domestic roles. They were considered dependent on fathers, husbands, or sons throughout their lives, with little scope for independent growth.

In Kerala, this broader Indian tendency acquired an exceptionally rigid form. The society was heavily stratified by caste, and patriarchal practices further intensified women's subordination. A girl was often not seen as a bearer of dignity or potential, but rather as a burden on the family. The very birth of a girl child was treated with sorrow. While the birth of a son was celebrated with joyous cries and rituals of happiness, the birth of a daughter was lamented with gestures of grief. In some communities, mothers or elderly women would beat the ground with a mat three times to mark their disappointment at the arrival of a girl. This cultural practice symbolized a worldview in which women were regarded as weak, dependent, and of little value, destined to live under the shadow of men.

The position of women was further worsened by deeply rooted customs such as child marriage and the denial of property rights. Girls were married off at a very early age, often by the age of six or seven, and by the time they were ten, many were already wives, some even mothers. With lives dictated by domestic responsibilities from such an early stage, there was no possibility for them to pursue education. They were denied the freedom of thought and the opportunity to develop skills beyond household duties. Society widely believed that women needed

neither letters nor learning, since their roles were limited to cooking, childbearing, and serving the family. The lack of education kept them dependent on men, reinforcing the cycle of inequality. It was into this setting of neglect and discrimination that the first impulses of modern education entered Kerala, mainly through the efforts of Christian missionaries.

Among them, the Protestant missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) played a pioneering role in championing female education. They viewed women not only as homemakers but also as individuals deserving dignity and knowledge. To them, educating women was a sacred duty because it could transform both the family and society. They argued that without women's education, no society could achieve genuine progress. Education would enable women to be better; it would also empower them to stand independently, overcome exploitation, and claim an equal position with men in social life. The earliest experiments in female education were modest but significant. In 1818, Elizabeth Ella, the wife of Reverend Benjamin Bailey, began teaching four girls in her home at Kottayam. Within a year, the number grew to twelve. Soon, other missionary wives such as Mrs Fenn and Mrs Baker followed her example, opening their homes to young girls and teaching them basic reading, writing, sewing, and simple crafts. These were not yet formal schools in the modern sense, but they represented a revolutionary beginning. For the first time, girls were being systematically taught literacy and skills outside the domestic sphere.

Despite such beginnings, resistance was strong. The missionaries faced far greater challenges in starting schools for girls than for boys. Parents were reluctant to send daughters to school, even when free food, clothing, books, and small allowances were provided. Deeply ingrained cultural attitudes made people suspicious of female education. Many women believed that learning was



unnecessary to them, having internalised the idea that education was the domain of men alone. To break these mental barriers required years of patient work and persuasion. Another formidable obstacle was the system of early marriage. Since girls were married off at a very young age, they had little or no time to attend school. The burden of child marriage cut across caste and religion, leaving no community untouched. This practice not only robbed girls of their childhood but also made sustained education impossible. The missionaries recognized this as a significant stumbling block, but they could do little in the face of powerful social norms. Still, their persistent advocacy gradually sowed seeds of reform.

In the following decades, several missionary schools for girls emerged. In 1819, Anne Norton, the wife of Reverend Thomas Norton, established a boarding school for girls in Alappuzha. Here, subjects such as Malayalam, English, arithmetic, and needlework were taught. By 1828, the school had been upgraded to a seminary, reflecting its success and growing importance. Around the same time, Amelia Dorothy Baker, wife of Reverend Henry Baker, began another school at Kottayam. Girls educated there stood out from other women in society by their dress, speech, and manners, providing living proof of the transformative impact of education. Later, in 1847, Mrs Baker and her daughter, Mrs Johnson, founded the Normal Girls' School in Kottayam, which trained girls to become teachers. In 1854, three women from this school were formally employed as teachers, marking a milestone in the history of female employment in Kerala.

Although these schools were small and often limited in scope, they carried immense symbolic significance. They broke the iron curtain of prejudice and showed that women, too, were capable of learning, reasoning, and contributing. They opened the doors of knowledge to half of society that had

been shut out for centuries. Initially, the missionary approach often linked women's education to domestic roles, preparing them to be better wives and mothers. However, in the long run, the act of teaching girls literacy itself became revolutionary, creating a new generation of women who could read, write, and think for themselves. The progress was slow, and challenges remained. Many girls still dropped out because of early marriage or family opposition. Yet, the seeds of change had been sown.

By the mid-nineteenth century, women's education was no longer unheard of but was gradually becoming accepted, at least in specific communities. The social attitude towards daughters began to shift, however slightly, from viewing them as burdens to recognising them as individuals with potential. The foundations laid by the missionaries provided the platform upon which later reformers, most notably Sree Narayana Guru, could build. Thus, the background of women's education in Kerala is a story of struggle against prejudice and of gradual awakening to the value of equality. It is a story of darkness giving way to light, in which missionary women in humble households began the battle for girls' education amid ridicule and resistance. It is also a story of slow but steady transformation, which eventually reshaped society's perception of its daughters. By the late nineteenth century, women's education had gained enough momentum to become a central theme in Kerala's social reform movements, proving that no society can progress when half its members are kept in ignorance.

It was in this background that Sree Narayana Guru emerged as a reformer who gave new direction and meaning to women's education in Kerala. While missionaries had sown the seeds, Guru made education central to his social philosophy. He believed that men and women were equal partners in the progress of any community. For him, it

was unthinkable that half of society should remain in darkness while the other half pursued knowledge. Guru recognised that the upliftment of women was not only a moral duty but also a practical necessity for Kerala's progress. He firmly declared that no man or woman in the Ezhava community should remain without at least a primary education. His words and actions gave a new sense of urgency to women's education.

### **3.4.2 Sree Narayana Guru's Contribution to Women's Education**

Sree Narayana Guru was a reformer who looked at education as the true path to freedom and equality. While most leaders of his time spoke about social uplift, Guru gave special importance to women's education. He believed that a community could not progress if half its population remained in ignorance, and so he insisted that education must be open to both men and women alike. For Guru, women's education was not only about literacy but also about building confidence, dignity, and the ability to participate fully in social and spiritual life. By promoting women's learning, establishing institutions for their growth, and reforming customs that stood in their way, Guru laid the foundation for a new society in which women were no longer dependents but equal partners in every field of life.

#### **3.4.2.1 Educational and Social Interventions for Women**

Sree Narayana Guru was not only a spiritual teacher but also a social reformer who recognised the importance of education in achieving progress. In his time, women were considered unfit for education, and many believed that sending girls to school would corrupt their morals. Against this background, Guru declared that education must be given equally to men and women. Guru's first step was to encourage primary

education for girls, especially among the oppressed Ezhava community. He advised the members of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam that no one should remain without at least a basic education, including women. At a time when such ideas were radical, Guru insisted that both boys and girls attend school. He knew people would hesitate, so he used a practical approach: he persuaded influential, well-to-do families to send their daughters to school first. When ordinary people saw this, they began to follow the example, and soon primary education spread widely among the poor and lower-caste communities.

As girls began seeking higher education, new barriers emerged. Caste restrictions-controlled hostels and colleges in cities like Thiruvananthapuram. Separate kitchens, dining halls, and bathrooms were set up for different castes, and girls from self-respecting Ezhava families often dropped out of education to avoid humiliation. Guru understood this problem and created a solution. In 1921, he inspired the establishment of the Sree Narayana Vidyarthini Sadanam in Thiruvananthapuram, a hostel for girl students from marginalised communities. He entrusted the organisation's founding to his disciple, Narayani Amma, who began the work in a rented house. This institution grew steadily and became a secure residence for hundreds of female students. What made it unique was its refusal to discriminate on the basis of caste or religion. It symbolised Guru's message that education should be open to all, and that women must have safe spaces to pursue learning.

Guru also had a broader vision of education. At Aluva, within his Advaita Ashram, he planned a special institution for girls called the Dharma Paripalana Madam. It was designed like a convent, where girls could be trained not only in academics but also in everyday skills. The curriculum included home management,



childcare, nursing, handicrafts, and moral education. Guru wanted women to be self-reliant, capable of managing households with dignity, and at the same time strong in character and spirituality. His approach demonstrates that he viewed education as more than just book knowledge; it was a preparation for life, empowering women with confidence, independence, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to society.

Apart from building institutions, Guru also worked to remove social practices that prevented women's education. In his time, the birth of a girl was considered a financial curse because of the many expensive ceremonies attached to a woman's life. Families were forced to spend heavily on rituals like the puberty ceremony, wedding ceremonies, and celebrations during pregnancy. This wasteful expenditure often pushed families into debt, and many parents preferred to marry off their daughters early rather than spend on their education. Guru strongly opposed these customs. He strictly prohibited all ceremonies except the main marriage and demanded that weddings should be simple and inexpensive. He even suggested that the money saved from lavish functions should be given directly to the bride and groom to support their new life. By reducing social extravagance, Guru made it easier for families to send their daughters to school and invest in their education.

In addition to financial reforms, Guru also brought change in the status of women in marriage and family life. He gave women the right to choose their partners, an idea unheard of in his time. He insisted on monogamy, condemning both polygamy and polyandry, and thus protected women from being treated as mere objects of desire. These reforms gave women a new sense of identity and independence. When women were seen as partners rather than possessions, it became easier for society to accept their right to education and personal growth. Through

these interventions, Guru laid a strong foundation for women's empowerment. He combined practical steps, such as establishing institutions, with social reforms that removed obstacles. His work was not limited to a particular caste or community, but extended to all women, emphasising equality and dignity. In doing so, he opened doors of opportunity that had been shut for centuries.

### **3.4.2.2 Guru's Vision of Equality and Empowerment**

Sree Narayana Guru's contribution to women's education cannot be separated from his larger vision of equality and empowerment. He did not view education merely as the ability to read and write, but as a tool to restore dignity, freedom, and self-respect to women who had been denied their rightful place in society. For Guru, women were not secondary beings; they were equal partners in the journey of life, both in worldly and spiritual matters. His vision was revolutionary at a time when women were treated as dependents, when Hindu texts like the *Manusmriti* proclaimed that a woman must always live under the control of a man, and when many believed that women had no right to pursue knowledge or spiritual liberation. Guru directly challenged these deeply rooted beliefs. He declared that women, like men, were capable of self-realisation and spiritual understanding.

In Guru's view, the soul had no gender, and therefore to deny women access to truth was to deny half of humanity the chance to discover the ultimate reality. He went even further by stating that women, if disciplined and spiritually awakened, were eligible to take up sanyasa (ascetic life). This marked a radical departure from centuries of tradition, which had previously excluded women from the highest spiritual path. By granting women the same spiritual rights as men, the Guru not only uplifted them socially but also affirmed their place in the cosmic

order as equals. His reforms also touched the most intimate aspects of women's lives, especially marriage and family. For Guru, the practice of polygamy and polyandry degraded women by treating them as objects rather than individuals with dignity. By insisting on monogamy, Guru affirmed the principle of equality in relationships.

More importantly, by giving women the right to choose their partner- a freedom unheard of in his time- he transformed marriage into a union of consent rather than compulsion, marking a significant step towards recognising women as independent human beings capable of making their own choices. Through these interventions, Guru's vision of empowerment went beyond the material and social realms to embrace the spiritual. He believed that true liberation could not be achieved by men alone, and that a society which kept women in ignorance could never progress. By promoting women's education, securing their rights in marriage, reducing the economic burdens they face, and affirming their spiritual equality, he worked to transform women from passive dependents into active participants in society.

Guru's vision continues to inspire contemporary discussions on gender equality. Long before the global community formally recognised women's right to education and equal opportunities, he had already proclaimed it in practice. His teachings remind us that empowerment is not limited to opening schools or offering employment, but requires a more profound transformation of attitudes, the removal of discriminatory customs, and the affirmation of the inherent dignity of every woman. In this way, Guru's vision of equality and empowerment remains timeless, offering guidance not only to his own generation but also to ours. His contribution to women's education was both practical and visionary. At a time when society regarded women as unfit for learning, he boldly declared that education must be universal, cutting across barriers of caste and gender. By uniting education, social reform, and spiritual equality, Guru created a robust framework for women's empowerment. His message continues to resonate in modern movements for justice, reminding us that actual progress is possible only when men and women walk together as equals in every sphere of life.

## Recap

- ◆ In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were denied education in Kerala.
- ◆ Patriarchy and the caste system kept women subordinate.
- ◆ Child marriage stopped girls from learning.
- ◆ Women were seen as dependents of men.
- ◆ Christian missionaries began early steps in women's education.
- ◆ Elizabeth Ella taught the first group of girls in 1818.
- ◆ Mrs Fenn and Mrs Baker also started teaching girls.
- ◆ Anne Norton started a girls' boarding school in Alappuzha.

- ◆ Amelia Dorothy Baker opened another school in Kottayam.
- ◆ In 1847, the Normal Girls' School was founded in Kottayam.
- ◆ By 1854, women became teachers for the first time.
- ◆ Missionaries faced resistance from parents and society.
- ◆ Child marriage and prejudice blocked progress.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru gave new meaning to women's education.
- ◆ Guru insisted on primary education for boys and girls alike.
- ◆ He used SNDP Yogam to promote literacy.
- ◆ Influential families were encouraged to send daughters to school.
- ◆ In 1921, Guru inspired the Sree Narayana Vidyarthini Sadanam hostel in Thiruvananthapuram.
- ◆ Narayani Amma led this hostel for girl students.
- ◆ Guru planned the Dharma Paripalana Madam at Aluva.
- ◆ Those girls learned academics and life skills.
- ◆ Guru opposed wasteful ceremonies that burdened families.
- ◆ He promoted simple marriages.
- ◆ He gave women the right to choose their partners.
- ◆ Guru condemned polygamy and polyandry.
- ◆ He stood for monogamy and equality in family life.
- ◆ He declared that the soul has no gender.
- ◆ Women, like men, can reach self-realisation, thus allowing women to take sanyasa.
- ◆ Women's education helped social progress.
- ◆ Guru combined education with social reform.
- ◆ He saw education as the key to equality.
- ◆ Without women's education, society cannot progress.

## Objective Questions

1. Who taught the first group of girls in Kottayam in 1818?
2. Who started a boarding school for girls at Alappuzha in 1819?
3. When did women from Kerala first become teachers formally?
4. Who inspired the establishment of Sree Narayana Vidyarthini Sadanam in 1921?
5. Who led the Vidyarthini Sadanam hostel for girl students?
6. Which institution did Guru plan at Aluva for girls' training?
7. What did Guru promote in marriage customs to support women's education?
8. Which practice did Guru strongly oppose related to marriage?
9. Which was considered a financial burden for families in Guru's time?
10. Who believed that women, like men, were capable of sanyasa?

## Answers

1. Elizabeth Ella
2. Anne Norton
3. 1854
4. Sree Narayana Guru
5. Narayani Amma
6. Dharma Paripalana Madam
7. Simple marriage
8. Polygamy and polyandry
9. Ceremonies and rituals
10. Sree Narayana Guru

## Assignments

1. Describe the social and cultural conditions that denied education to women in Kerala before the reform movements. Why was women's education considered unnecessary at that time?
2. Explain the role of Christian missionaries in starting women's education in Kerala. What challenges did they face in their efforts?
3. Discuss Sree Narayana Guru's contribution to women's education. How did his reforms in education, marriage, and social customs help in empowering women?

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**BLOCK**

**Education  
for National  
Development**



# Sreenarayanaguru's Vision for Cultural and Economic Development

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the various dimensions of caste discrimination in Kerala during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- ◆ analyze Sreenarayana Guru's approach to dismantling caste barriers through social reform, education, and economic empowerment.
- ◆ understand Guru's motivations for vocational training, agriculture, and industry for the upliftment of marginalized communities.
- ◆ assess the link between material progress and spiritual well-being in Guru's philosophy.

### Prerequisites

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kerala (then divided into the princely states of Travancore, Cochin, and the Malabar district under the Madras Presidency) witnessed rigid caste stratification, economic inequality, and deep-rooted social discrimination. Upper-caste dominance dictated not only access to land, education, and temple worship but also everyday social interactions, with severe restrictions imposed on lower castes and outcastes, including untouchability, unapproachability, and bans on public road use in certain areas. At the same time, waves of modern education, Christian missionary activity, and colonial legal reforms were beginning to unsettle traditional hierarchies. This sparked reformist impulses across communities. This period saw the emergence of visionary leaders like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Chattampi Swamikal, and others, who challenged entrenched norms and advocated for equality, dignity, and social justice, laying the foundation for Kerala's later transformation into a socially progressive society.



## Keywords

Education, Empowerment, Economic Independence, Development, Social Unity

## Discussion

Sreenarayana Guru's vision for cultural and economic development was deeply rooted in the idea of human equality and spiritual unity. He believed that true development could not be achieved without eradicating social evils such as caste discrimination, ignorance, and superstition. According to Guru, culture is not merely a matter of rituals or traditions, but a dynamic force that refines human conduct and social relationships. His cultural reform movements emphasized education, moral purity, and the upliftment of marginalized communities. By promoting the motto "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man," Guru aimed to establish a culture of universal brotherhood. He founded temples open to all castes, thereby transforming Kerala's spiritual and cultural landscape. Guru also encouraged the use of one's mother tongue in worship and education, reflecting his progressive cultural outlook. His approach combined ethical living with rational thinking, leading to a renaissance in Kerala society. Through his teachings, art, and institutions, Guru inspired a new cultural identity based on equality, tolerance, and self-respect.

Economically, Sreenarayana Guru advocated self-reliance and productive labor as the foundation of social progress. He believed that economic independence was essential for both individual dignity and collective advancement. Guru emphasized the dignity of labor, urging people to engage in agriculture, handicrafts, and small-scale industries. His establishment of educational institutions and industrial training centers reflected his practical approach to economic

development. Guru's message to "gain freedom through education and strength through organization" highlighted the link between economic empowerment and social unity. He rejected dependence on charity or external aid, insisting on hard work and cooperation as the means to prosperity. By promoting cooperative movements and community initiatives, he encouraged sustainable development rooted in ethical principles. His economic philosophy integrated spirituality with practicality, making development a holistic process. Guru's vision thus laid the foundation for Kerala's later achievements in social justice and human development. Even today, his ideas remain relevant in guiding inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

### 4.1.1 Historical Context: Caste System in Kerala

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kerala was rooted in a caste system that placed people in hierarchies. The 'untouchables' like ezhavas, pulayas and parayas were placed in the lowest order, and the Brahmins in the highest order. The caste system was not just about untouchability. It extended to extreme and inhuman forms of customs and practices.

The Dalit castes were required to maintain specific distances from upper-caste individuals. For example, an Ezhava had to stay thirty-six paces away from a Nambudiri, while a Pulayan was required to maintain a distance of ninety-six steps. There was also severe restriction for the lower castes

from accessing to public places. Lower-caste persons were barred from walking on public roads near temples. This prohibition was challenged during the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–25), which protested for access to those roads. They also faced bans on using public wells, entering schools, and worshipping in temples, and the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 formally ended prohibitions on temple entry in Travancore.

The lower castes faced more cultural and social deprivations and discrimination. The women of lower castes were prohibited from covering the upper body, while upper-caste women enjoyed that privilege. This was a powerful tool of caste-based humiliation. Many such dehumanizing norms reinforced through social customs such as separate utensils, restrictions in personal interactions, and even taxes levied for physical features were common.

The upper-caste women, such as Namboodiri Brahmins and Nairs, were allowed to cover their breasts, but lower-caste women were prohibited from doing so unless they paid this special tax. This tax was collected per woman and was calculated not as a fixed amount, but according to the size of her breasts. A government official was assigned to measure the size of the breasts. The bigger the breasts, the higher the tax. A poor woman at Cherthala got so agitated on this insulting practice that she cut off her breasts and threw them in front of the official. The men had to pay tax according to the size of their heads, known as talakkaram (head tax for men). These practices represented both caste and gender oppression and added layers of humiliation and objectification. In these times, it was Sree Narayana Guru who brought dignity back to the Ezhavas.

#### 4.1.2 Caste System and Hereditary Occupations

The caste system was strongly associated with hereditary occupations. Individuals were

born into a specific caste (varna) and were expected to follow the traditional occupation related to that caste. The occupations, social roles and duties specific to the castes are pre-determined at birth. While the Pulayas were primarily agricultural labourers and were often treated as landless serfs, the Ezhavas were primarily associated with toddy tapping and agriculture. They also faced significant social restrictions and limitations on their opportunities. Sreenarayananaguru's interventions and efforts for the cultural and economic development of lower castes through agriculture and industry must be seen in this context.

The caste system insists on the strict division of labour and labourers. It places people into rigid, inherited groups, where one's work, social position and dignity were determined by birth, not by ability or choice. This created watertight compartments in society, where mobility was nearly impossible, and each caste was ranked in a hierarchy of higher and lower status. It was mainly about fixing people into unequal positions and denying them opportunities to rise. Thus, the caste system prevented the free exchange of talent and effort that a truly civilized society requires.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kerala's agrarian economy was deeply entwined with social stratification. The lower castes, especially the Ezhavas and other backward communities, were excluded from land ownership, temple entry, and education. Travancore, then a princely state, reflected these rigid social structures. Guru's philosophy emerged as a countercurrent to this entrenched inequality. He not only critiqued the caste system but also proposed structural alternatives that emphasized dignity, self-reliance, economic self-reliance and unity.

Sree Narayana Guru understood that the lower castes were trapped in poverty mainly



because the caste system restricted them from moving to other occupations and entering many trades and industries. He therefore encouraged economic self-reliance by urging communities to learn skills, start industries, and engage in productive labour. For Guru, this was not only about earning a living but also about breaking the social barriers that kept people dependent on the upper castes. Through this, his vision was to challenge both the economic and the social foundations of caste discrimination, which, according to Ambedkar, is a system of graded inequality.

In this line, Guru made critical interventions on productive education through vocational training and practical knowledge. He promoted agriculture and local industries through educational means and sought to create economic independence and community spirit among oppressed communities. Guru aimed for a holistic development of the marginalized communities.

#### 4.1.3 Economic Development through Agriculture and Industries

Sreenarayanaguru, the social and spiritual reformist fought in social and spiritual levels against the caste system and its practices. He also considered education, the formation of collectives and community platforms, economic empowerment, and the establishment of industries by lower castes as unavoidable methods to uplift lower castes and communities.

Sree Narayana Guru emphasised the importance of vocational training as an essential complement to formal education, advocating an industry-oriented approach to learning. Guided by this vision, he motivated his followers to establish schools that combined academic instruction with practical skill development. Recognising that industrial progress was vital to social

advancement, Guru established a weaving school at Varkala, where students received free elementary instruction in weaving, thereby equipping them with industry-relevant skills that enhanced self-reliance and economic empowerment. He firmly believed that “after education, industry is the next important thing for the uplift of the community” and asserted that “industrial progress is an important thing for social advancement and elevation of the country. Our children should get training in industrial institutions” (Ravindran, 1906, p. XX). This initiative reflected his broader commitment to aligning education with the material and socio-economic needs of society.

In *The Unitive Life: Conversations with and Selected Works of Nārāyaṇa Guru*, Vinaya Chaitanya, a disciple of Natarāja Guru explains the strong blend of spiritual and material well-being in Guru’s philosophy: All human beings seek lasting happiness, beyond fleeting pleasures. Such fulfillment arises when inner transformation and outer progress go hand in hand. Guru taught that the material and the spiritual are not separate but complementary, both serving the same ultimate aim of human well-being. The places of worship can nurture moral and spiritual growth, while economic progress, through agriculture, industry, and education, ensures stability and dignity. Just as the body thrives when all its organs work in harmony, society attains the ultimate goal of happiness only when both its material and spiritual faculties work together in unity.

In “Self, body and inner sense: Some reflections on Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan,” Udaya Kumar also highlights the importance of economic empowerment in Sreenarayanaguru. He quotes Sreenarayanaguru: “For a community to achieve prosperity of all sorts-related to the body, the mind and the soul-the religious and moral rectitude of its members can be a source of great help. Temples and places of worship

can be useful in developing these qualities in everybody in the community. However, the economic prosperity of the members of the community is equally essential. For this,

we need to reform agriculture, trade and technical education, among other things."

## Recap

1. Kerala's caste system enforced rigid hierarchies with Brahmins at the top and communities like Ezhavas, Pulayas, and Parayas at the bottom.
2. Untouchability extended to inhuman practices such as mandatory distances between castes and bans on road use near temples.
3. Lower-caste women faced humiliating dress restrictions, including a breast-covering tax.
4. Caste was tied to hereditary occupations, limiting mobility and opportunity.
5. Ezhavas were largely toddy tappers and agricultural workers; Pulayas mainly were landless laborers.
6. Guru saw caste oppression as both social and economic and sought to break occupational restrictions.
7. He promoted vocational training, agriculture, and local industries for self-reliance.
8. A weaving school was established at Varkala to impart industry-relevant skills.
9. Guru's philosophy united material progress and spiritual growth as complementary forces.
10. Economic reform in agriculture, trade, and technical education was central to Guru's vision for community prosperity.

## Objective Questions

1. Which caste had to maintain ninety-six steps from a Nambudiri?
2. Which tax was levied on lower-caste women for covering their breasts?

3. Which occupation was traditionally linked to Ezhavas?
4. In which year did the Temple Entry Proclamation occur in Travancore?
5. Where did Sree Narayana Guru establish a weaving school?
6. Who described Guru's philosophy as blending spiritual and material well-being in The Unitive Life?
7. Which satyagraha protested road restrictions near temples in 1924–25?
8. Which community was historically barred from land ownership in Kerala?
9. Who called caste discrimination a “system of graded inequality”?

## Answers

1. Pulayan
2. Breast-tax
3. Toddy-tapping
4. 1936
5. Varkala
6. Vinaya Chaitanya
7. Vaikom
8. Dalit
9. Ambedkar

## Assignments

1. Explain how caste discrimination in late 19th and early 20th century Kerala affected access to education, land, and temple worship. Support your answer with historical examples.
2. How did Sreenarayana Guru combine social reform with economic empowerment to uplift marginalized communities? Discuss with reference to his efforts in education, vocational training, and industrial development.
3. Sreenarayana Guru believed that spiritual well-being and material progress are interconnected. Critically examine this aspect of his philosophy, citing relevant ideas and initiatives.

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## Emancipation of Women and Gender Equality

### UNIT

#### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain Guru's vision of women's education and its role in social transformation.
- ◆ analyze the strategies Guru employed to overcome caste and gender-based prejudices against women's education.
- ◆ evaluate Guru's reforms in marriage customs and their impact on reducing the financial burdens of low-income families.
- ◆ interpret Guru's insistence on women's right to choice as a revolutionary intervention in patriarchal society.
- ◆ connect Guru's ideas on women's emancipation with contemporary debates on gender equality and human rights.

#### Prerequisites

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kerala's society was shaped by rigid caste hierarchies that denied dignity and equality to large sections of people. Women bore a double burden in this order. Literacy for them was often condemned as sinful, while marriage customs imposed huge financial obligations on families. These social realities not only curtailed women's opportunities but also reinforced cycles of poverty and exclusion. Situating these conditions into a broader frame, it is important to note that global debates on human rights and gender justice such as the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1967) would emerge only much later. Against this background, reformist interventions by Sreenarayanaguru addressed both caste and gender inequalities and revealed how local struggles anticipated and paralleled universal movements for equality.

## Keywords

Women's rights, Education, Empowerment, Right to Choice, Justice

## Discussion

### 4.2.1 Introduction: Guru and the Question of Women's Emancipation

The question of women's education and equality has been at the heart of international discussions and deliberations on human rights. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1967, called for universal access to education and the recognition of women as equal individuals in society. Notably, sixty years before this declaration, Sree Narayana Guru had already articulated these principles within the specific social realities of Kerala. He insisted to the workers of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) that no man or woman from the Ezhava community should live without at least a primary education.

Guru's commitment to women's education was a central pillar of his reformist vision. In a letter to the Vijnana Vardhini Sabha, a leading socio-cultural and literary organisation of the time, he stressed that the responsibility for education did not belong solely to men but also to women. This position was radical in an era when prevailing social attitudes dismissed women's education as unnecessary, sinful, or even dangerous. By openly challenging these prejudices, Guru made women's literacy and empowerment a matter of collective responsibility. The historian P K Sabu observes: "The two schools founded by him (Guru), the Sanskrit school at Aluva in central Kerala and the English school at Varkala in south Kerala, show the perfect

manifestation of his philosophy where mind and matter find a neutral meeting point."

As Sathyabhai Sivadas has argued, Guru's insistence on women's education carried three key implications: first, that men and women are fundamentally equal; second, that no society can claim progress if half its population is denied empowerment; and third, that the education of women is the surest path to the uplift of society as a whole. Guru's approach combined vision with strategy. He personally encouraged certain upper-caste and affluent families to send their daughters to school. Once this became a visible trend, he reminded Avarna communities, especially the Ezhavas, that their women too deserved the same opportunities. This pragmatic strategy slowly broke the resistance of a society deeply bound by prejudice and fear.

The establishment of schools by the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam included deliberate efforts to ensure women's participation. His insistence on co-education in certain institutions was a strong critique of the dominant Brahmanical model that often denied or severely limited women's access to learning. According to P. K. Sabu (2025), Guru's strategy combined community empowerment with gender inclusion, a rare synthesis in the early 20th-century Indian reform landscape.

Thus, Guru's interventions in women's education laid the groundwork for social change in Kerala by linking women's empowerment with broader cultural and community development. Guru's thought



demonstrates how the struggle for gender justice in India was rooted not only in global movements but also in indigenous reformist traditions that challenged caste, patriarchy, and ignorance.

## 4.2.2 Guru's Vision on Women's Education and Empowerment

Sree Narayana Guru was deeply aware that true social reform required the emancipation of women alongside men. His repeated call for acquiring knowledge as the path to liberation from ignorance and dogma was addressed equally to women, as they were among the worst victims of caste oppression, social exclusion, and denial of education. While the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the beginnings of women's education in Travancore, opportunities were still limited, and access was confined mainly to upper-caste women. The barriers of caste and gender combined to exclude women from marginalized communities, especially when it came to safe spaces such as hostels, which were crucial for pursuing higher studies in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram.

It was in this context that Guru initiated one of his most practical interventions in the field of women's empowerment, the founding of Sree Narayana Vidyarthini Sadanam (SNV Sadanam) in 1924. Recognizing the struggles of women who came from distant regions to study at the Maharaja's College for Women (now the Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram), Guru entrusted his disciple T.V. Narayani Amma to establish a hostel without discrimination of caste, creed, or religion.

To lay its foundation, Guru personally handed Narayani Amma a gold sovereign, representing both his spiritual blessing and material support. The hostel, first housed in a rented building near the Women's College, quickly filled up as women from diverse

social backgrounds sought admission. For many students, particularly from backward and marginalized communities, the SNV Sadanam became a sanctuary enabling them to access education that had long been denied to their mothers and grandmothers.

The initiative expanded rapidly. By 1935, three hostels were being run under the Sadanam, and the administration was handed over to the Sree Narayana Vanitha Samajam. This women-led organization continued Guru's legacy of service. Under the stewardship of Gourikutty Amma, herself an early inmate of the hostel, efforts were made to construct a permanent building. Despite bureaucratic delays, the Vanitha Samajam raised funds and, in 1955, completed construction of a dedicated hostel complex in Thiruvananthapuram. Over the decades, the institution nurtured generations of women who went on to become pioneers in different fields. Luminaries such as K.R. Gouri Amma, Justice Fathima Beevi, Justice Sreedevi, and Dr C.K. Revamma were among its early residents.

The legacy of the Sadanam also extended beyond education to broader forms of empowerment. The Vanitha Samajam, inspired by Guru's ideals, went on to establish working women's hostels, a crèche for children, and skill-based programmes that enabled women to achieve economic independence. A democratic culture was fostered within the hostel, with elected student representatives participating in its governance. Thus, what began with Guru's single act of entrusting Narayani Amma in 1924 grew into a century-long movement of women's empowerment rooted in his vision of social equality and self-reliance.

Sree Narayana Guru's intervention in establishing the SNV Sadanam illustrates how his philosophy was not confined to abstract ideals but translated into institutional practices that directly addressed the lived

realities of women. By creating inclusive educational spaces and enabling women's access to higher learning, Guru challenged both caste and gender hierarchies, laying the foundation for a more egalitarian social order.

### **4.2.3 Guru's Reform of Marriage Customs and Women's Right to Choice**

Guru worked tirelessly for women's education, aiming for the larger transformation and reformation of society. While working on women's education, he also turned his attention to another crucial issue: the overwhelming financial burden of marriage customs on poor families. In early 20th-century Kerala, the birth of a girl was often seen as a curse because families feared the huge expenses associated with her marriage.

Among the Ezhavas and other avarna communities, marriage involved multiple ceremonies: minnu kettu kalyanam (tying of a gold ornament before puberty), thirandu kuli kalyanam (after puberty), pudava kalyanam (the wedding proper), and pulikudi kalyanam (at the time of first delivery). Each occasion demanded jewellery, feasts and display of wealth. Even impoverished families borrowed heavily, sold property, or lived in debt for generations to meet these obligations.

Guru saw these customs as destructive, especially when his community was beginning to rise socially through education. He openly denounced such "devilish practices" and urged people to abolish all these stages except the marriage itself. This reform saved countless families from ruin and allowed them to invest in education and economic improvement instead. The resolutions of the SNDP Yogam, inspired by Guru's vision,

frequently highlighted this need for social and economic reform.

Equally revolutionary was Guru's stand on women's right to choose their partners. In his time, women were denied any voice in marriage decisions. Families arranged everything, and girls were not even permitted to meet their future spouses before marriage. Women were seen as dependent bodies, not as individuals with a will of their own. Guru challenged this practice, insisting that women should have the freedom to see and decide about their life partners. This was a radical intervention in a patriarchal society where women's autonomy was denied. It reflected Guru's broader conviction that women were not secondary beings but complete individuals, capable of decision-making and deserving of dignity.

By linking education and marriage reform, Guru gave women back what he described as their "soul", their right to their own body, choices, and future. His reforms ensured that a girl's birth was no longer seen as a financial curse but as a source of pride and promise. Families who once feared the economic burden of a daughter now saw new opportunities through her education and an empowered life.

Thus, Guru's vision of women's emancipation extended far beyond literacy or vocational skills. It was a social and cultural revolution. By reducing the economic weight of outdated customs and defending women's right to choice, Guru not only uplifted the avarna communities but also laid the groundwork for gender equality and social justice in modern Kerala. He showed how education, when tied to reform in social practices, can transform an entire community's moral and cultural imagination.



## Recap

1. Sree Narayana Guru emphasized women's education decades before international human rights declarations recognized its importance.
2. He considered women's literacy a collective responsibility and challenged prejudices that dismissed women's education as unnecessary or sinful.
3. Guru's schools at Aluva and Varkala embodied his philosophy of uniting mind and matter through inclusive education.
4. He pragmatically encouraged upper-caste families to educate daughters, creating a model later extended to marginalized communities.
5. Guru founded the Sree Narayana Vidyarthini Sadanam in 1924 to provide safe hostel facilities for women pursuing higher studies.
6. This hostel, later run by the Sree Narayana Vanitha Samajam, nurtured pioneers such as K.R. Gouri Amma and Justice Fathima Beevi.
7. The Vanitha Samajam expanded Guru's legacy by establishing women's hostels, crèches, and skill-based programs for economic independence.
8. Guru condemned costly and exploitative marriage customs that forced poor families into debt, urging their abolition.
9. He insisted that women must have the right to choose their marriage partners, challenging patriarchal norms of his time.
10. By linking education with marriage reform, Guru transformed the status of women from financial burdens to empowered individuals, driving social progress

## Objective Questions

1. Which UN resolution on women's rights was adopted in 1967?
2. Which organization did Guru write to, insisting on women's education?
3. Which community did Guru especially urge to educate women?

4. In which year was the SNV Sadanam established?
5. Who established the SNV Sadanam under Guru's guidance?
6. Which women's organization later managed the SNV Sadanam?
7. Which practice involved tying gold before puberty?
8. Which marriage ritual was abolished by Guru, except the wedding itself?
9. Which community body passed resolutions supporting Guru's reforms?

## Answers

1. Declaration On The Elimination Of Discrimination Against Women
2. Vijnana Vardhini Sabha
3. Ezhava
4. 1924
5. Narayani Amma
6. Vanitha Samajam
7. Minnu Kettu
8. Thirandu Kuli
9. SNDP Yogam

## Assignments

1. Explain Sreenarayana Guru's vision on women's education and discuss why it was considered revolutionary in the socio-historical context of late 19th and early 20th century Kerala.
2. Analyze how the establishment of the Sreenarayana Vidyarthini Sadanam (SNV Sadanam) contributed to dismantling caste and gender barriers in women's access to higher education. Provide suitable examples.
3. Discuss Guru's reform of marriage customs among marginalized communities and evaluate how these reforms relieved the economic burdens of low-income families.
4. Critically examine Guru's assertion of women's right to choose their marriage partners. How does this idea connect with contemporary debates on gender equality and human rights?

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## Temples as Educational Centres

### UNIT

#### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain Sree Narayana Guru's reinterpretation of temple spaces as symbols of equality and reform.
- ◆ analyze the educational message behind the Aruvippuram consecration of 1888.
- ◆ describe the significance of the Vaikom Satyagraha and its link to Guru's vision of education and social uplift.
- ◆ discuss Guru's idea of transforming temples into schools, libraries, and centers of learning.
- ◆ evaluate how Guru's temple reform movements contributed to social equality and the democratization of knowledge in Kerala.

#### Prerequisites

Temples in Kerala were traditionally associated with ritual worship and caste-based hierarchies, but Sree Narayana Guru reimagined them as spaces for equality, dignity, and learning. His initiatives at places like Sivagiri and Aruvippuram demonstrate how temple spaces can transcend mere rituals and customs to become centres of education, dialogue, and community development. Guru linked spiritual practice with practical training in areas such as hygiene, agriculture, and livelihood skills and laid the foundation for temples to function as institutions of social reform and enlightenment.

## Keywords

Worship, Education, Transformation, Liberation, Justice

## Discussion

### 4.3.1 Guru's Transformation of the Temple Spaces

The consecration of the Shiva idol at Aruvippuram on Shivaratri in 1888 was one of the most defining moments in modern Kerala's social and religious history. By performing this act, Sree Narayana Guru challenged the entrenched caste-based hierarchies that permitted only Brahmins to consecrate idols. This was the first time in Kerala's history that a non-Brahmin claimed both the spiritual authority and social legitimacy to establish a temple.

The event was not just a religious act but a radical re-reading of what temple spaces could mean. K. P. Joseph notes in *The Gospel of Guru Sree Narayana*: thousands of devotees watched in shock as Guru entered the Neyyar river at midnight, emerged with a stone, and installed it on an altar with flowers. The people arrived in crowds and began to pray before the idol. Thus, Aruvippuram became a significant centre of pilgrimage. "It was blasphemy. Only Brahmins were allowed to install idols" observes Joseph.

When Brahmins objected the next day, Guru famously replied: "This is not a Brahmin Shiva but an Ezhava Shiva." Sree Narayana Guru belonged to the lower caste Ezhava community, which had been oppressed for centuries. In that brief statement, Guru shifted the meaning of temples from an exclusive domain of ritual to an inclusive symbol of equality and dignity.

### 4.3.2 The Aruvippuram Consecration and Its Educational Message

The Aruvippuram consecration was not only a challenge to caste orthodoxy but also an education lesson. By taking a simple stone from the river and declaring it to be a Shiva idol, Guru was teaching that divinity was not the property of any caste or priesthood. It could be realized through knowledge, awareness, and inner discipline. The act itself was an example of how education can liberate people from ignorance and fear. His reply about the "Ezhava Shiva" showed that social dignity and self-respect could be claimed by the oppressed themselves. The temples associated with Sree Narayana Guru's movement had abandoned the questionable customs and practices.

This event also pointed to a new understanding of temples. For Guru, temples were not merely sites of ritual but spaces where people could learn the values of equality, self-confidence, and reform. As K. P. Joseph observed, Guru gave the most powerful formula for social development: "Get educated. The way forward is not by receiving free rations and soaps. It is knowledge that liberates the human being." By linking worship to learning, Guru transformed temples into centres of social education. The Aruvippuram Act, therefore, became both a spiritual declaration and an educational message, reminding society that true liberation comes through knowledge.

Guru nurtured world-renowned disciples such as Nataraja Guru and Kumaran Asan not only by imparting knowledge but also by extending material support whenever needed. While establishing the Sivagiri Mutt in 1904, Guru also ensured the establishment of a night school in its neighbourhood. These night classes were specifically organised for children from socially and economically marginalised communities, including the ‘Harijans’, who attended after completing their daily labour. Guru’s vision of education was not confined to literacy alone; instead, he emphasised both knowledge and practical skills to empower learners to improve their material lives.

### 4.3.3 Vaikom Satyagraha and the Educational Meaning of Temple Entry

The Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–1925) was the first major organised struggle in Kerala, demanding the right of all castes to use public roads around a temple and making a lasting impact on Kerala’s socio-political landscape. The agitation arose in the Kingdom of Travancore, where rigid caste rules barred the “untouchables” from walking on the four streets surrounding the Vaikom Mahadevar Temple. For more than 600 days, leaders and ordinary people stood in nonviolent protest, demanding equal access. The satyagraha marked a turning point, not only in Kerala’s history but also in India’s wider fight for social equality.

The background of this movement was the oppressive caste system that denied access to schools, temples, wells, and even public roads. Leaders like T. K. Madhavan, Kesava Menon, and K. Kelappan played a central role. As early as 1917, T. K. Madhavan raised the demand for temple entry and later persuaded the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, the socio-religious movement initiated by Sri Narayana Guru, to pass a resolution calling

for public temples to be opened to all Hindus. In May 1920, Yogam resolved that “All public temples belonging to the Government should be open to all Hindus regardless of Caste”. The agitation was further strengthened when Periyar E. V. Ramasamy from Tamil Nadu joined the movement, and Mahatma Gandhi, Chattampi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, and Mannath Padmanabhan extended moral support.

For Sree Narayana Guru, the issue of temple entry was always connected with education and social uplift. Like Gandhi, he recognised the symbolic importance of opening temples to marginalised people. Yet he went further, suggesting that new temples could be built as open spaces for all, rather than fighting over access to the old ones. In a similar way, as public education was denied for Ezhavas, Guru promoted building schools for his community members. As early as 1917, Guru had declared that “the time had come to build schools and libraries as the real temples.” This shift reveals his insight into the need for education. Guru believed and propagated that true liberation could not come from ritual access alone but from knowledge, education, and economic competence.

Guru’s advice to the lower sections was always practical and forward-looking. In conversations with Gandhi and in his addresses to oppressed communities like the Pulayas, he insisted that education was the key. He told them that poverty and exclusion were rooted in a lack of learning, and urged them to acquire both wealth and education. He believed that education was the most important. If one has education, wealth, and cleanliness will follow.

In his 1925 meeting with Gandhi, Guru emphasized that the empowerment of the oppressed castes required not only the abolition of the caste system but also access to both knowledge and economic resources.

For Guru, temples, schools, and wells were not separate spheres, rather all represented the rights of the lower castes. He also affirmed that removing untouchability meant ensuring equal rights in all these spaces of daily life.

Thus, the Vaikom Satyagraha was not only a social protest but also an educational moment. It forced Kerala to rethink the meaning of temples. They no longer could stand as symbols of exclusion. With Guru's vision, temples could become spaces of

fraternity, where the values of equality and self-respect are taught and practised. By linking temple reform with the call for schools and libraries, Guru transformed the very idea of worship. In this sense, the Vaikom struggle and consecration of idols fit into his larger project of transforming temples into educational centres, places where society itself could be taught the principles of justice, dignity, and oneness.

## Recap

- ◆ Guru's consecration at Aruvippuram in 1888 challenged caste-based restrictions on temple authority.
- ◆ The act demonstrated that divinity and spiritual authority were not the monopoly of any caste.
- ◆ The phrase "Ezhava Shiva" signified dignity, equality, and self-respect for oppressed communities.
- ◆ Guru envisioned temples as sites for social reform rather than mere ritual.
- ◆ The Aruvippuram act symbolized education as the path to liberation from ignorance and fear.
- ◆ The Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–1925) was Kerala's first major organized struggle for temple access and public rights.
- ◆ Leaders like T. K. Madhavan, Periyar, and Gandhi supported the agitation alongside Guru.
- ◆ Guru insisted that the oppressed needed not only temple entry but also schools, libraries, and economic competence.
- ◆ For Guru, true liberation meant transforming worship spaces into educational and social spaces.
- ◆ Temples, in Guru's vision, became symbols of equality, fraternity, and enlightenment through education.

## Objective Questions

1. In which year did Sree Narayana Guru consecrate the idol at Aruvippuram?
2. What did Guru mean by calling the idol “Ezhava Shiva”?
3. The Vaikom Satyagraha took place between:
4. Who among the following played a key role in initiating the Temple Entry movement?
5. Which socio-religious organization passed a resolution in 1920 for opening public temples to all Hindus?
6. Which leader from Tamil Nadu gave new momentum to the Vaikom Satyagraha?
7. According to Guru, what should replace temples as the new centers of progress?
8. Guru’s dictum for social development emphasized:
9. What did Guru fundamentally advise the Pulaya community?
10. What was the central educational meaning of Guru’s temple reform?

## Answers

1. 1888
2. That divinity and worship were accessible to all castes
3. 1924–1925
4. T. K. Madhavan
5. SNDP Yogam
6. Periyar E. V. Ramasamy
7. Schools and libraries
8. Education, organization, and industry
9. To acquire wealth and education, prioritizing education
10. Knowledge and education are the true path to liberation.

## Assignments

1. Explain how Sreenarayana Guru reinterpreted temple spaces as symbols of equality and education. Discuss with reference to the Aruvippuram consecration of 1888.
2. Analyze the Aruvippuram consecration as a social and educational intervention. How did this act challenge caste hierarchy and redefine the meaning of temple worship?
3. Discuss the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–1925) as a movement for democratizing access to public spaces. How does it reflect Sreenarayana Guru's broader vision of social uplift through education?
4. Evaluate Sreenarayana Guru's proposal to transform temples into schools, libraries, and centres of learning. How did this idea contribute to the democratization of knowledge in Kerala?

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# Guru's Views on Environmental Education

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain how Sree Narayana Guru integrated environmental consciousness into his philosophy and practices.
- ◆ analyze the ecological and ethical dimensions of the Sivagiri pilgrimage as a model of lived environmental education.
- ◆ evaluate Guru's reinterpretation of Advaita Vedanta as a framework for both social reform and environmental ethics.

### Prerequisites

Environmental education broadly refers to developing knowledge, awareness, and responsibility to foster ecological awareness and promote sustainable practices. To understand Guru's approach, one needs a basic grasp of Advaita Vedanta, especially the principle of oneness (non-duality), which identifies the self (Atman) with the universe (Brahman). Sree Narayana Guru's social reform movement, his emphasis on equality, and his redefinition of religious and cultural practices in Kerala can also be understood in relation to his environmental vision and ecological harmony.

### Keywords

Environmental consciousness, Non-duality, Otherness, Oneness

## Discussion

Environmental education cultivates knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes that encourage responsible living in response to environmental challenges. It examines how ecosystems function, highlights ecological problems, and inspires individuals and communities to take action to protect nature, ensuring sustainability for future generations.

Sree Narayana Guru's environmental vision grew directly from his spiritual philosophy of oneness (Advaita). For Guru, nature was not a mere setting for human life but an inseparable part of the universal Self. All beings, living and non-living, are interconnected, and human well-being cannot be separated from the well-being of nature. His philosophy thus nurtures a worldview in which spirituality, society, and the environment form a single continuum.

This insight was not confined to theory but expressed through practice. A clear example can be found in the context of the Sivagiri pilgrimage initiated by Guru in 1928. Unlike many traditional pilgrimages, which often result in environmental degradation through waste accumulation and ritual excess, the Sivagiri pilgrimage was conceived and practised as a transformative, ecologically sensitive practice. Guru emphasised values such as cleanliness, discipline, simplicity, and responsible conduct so that pilgrimage would become a form of lived environmental ethics rather than a mere ritual journey.

Pilgrims were encouraged to travel lightly, avoid extravagance, and observe personal and collective discipline. The pilgrimage also included activities such as planting trees, participating in educational and vocational sessions, and engaging in self-purification. Guru outlined the pilgrimage's core focus as education, cleanliness, piety, organization,

agriculture, trade, handicrafts, and technical training. This reflected his holistic vision, in which ecology, economy, and spirituality are inseparable. Through such initiatives, Guru demonstrated that environmental education is not merely about abstract ideas but about lived practice, cultivating the habits of simplicity, responsibility, and harmony with nature in everyday life.

### 4.4.1 Environmental Consciousness in Guru's Teachings

Sree Narayana Guru's writings reflect his deep respect for nature as an expression of the divine. In his devotional poem *Anukampa Dasakam*, the first verse appeals for compassion even toward the smallest creatures: "Oh Sea of Mercy! Grant us such compassion that even to an ant no harm be caused, and grant us minds that never wander from your Divine Form" (അരുപീഡയെരുപിന്നും വരുത്തരുതെ നുള്ളനുകപ്പയും സദാ കരുണാകര! നല്കുകുകുള്ളിൽ നിൻ- തിരുമെയ് വിടകലാതെ ചിന്തയും). This illustrates his belief that all life forms are sacred and deserving of empathy, a foundational environmental ethic rooted in spiritual awareness.

More broadly, Guru's non-dual philosophy denied the notion of "otherness" in nature. He taught that compassion should extend beyond human concerns: "What brings joy to one's soul should be extended universally"

അവനവനാത്മസുവത്തിനാചരിക്കു -  
നവയപരമു സുവത്തിനായ് വരേണ്ണ

Thus, respect for the environment became part of moral and spiritual refinement. His Advaita-based worldview, the unity of Atman

(self) and Brahman (universe), declares an ecological harmony. In leading a simple life and honoring the natural world, according to Guru, one embodies the divinity and the integrity of harmony with all life.

Guru's philosophy of compassion is also about all forms of life on the earth, rather than merely about human beings. Guru states about the lack of compassion in human beings: "Devoid of kindness, he is just a foul body of bones, skin, veins, etc. and fruitless like the water flowing in the desert (mirage) and a flower without fragrance."

അരുളില്ലയതെങ്കിലെന്നമിതി തോൽ  
സിര നാറുനോരുടെവു താനവൻ  
മരുവിൽ പ്രവഹിക്കുമംബുവ -  
പ്ലുതുഷൻ നിഷ്കാമല ഗന്ധപുഷ്പമാം ..

#### 4.4.2 Ecological Harmony in Guru's Philosophy

Guru's philosophical grounding in Advaita's non-dualism has played a central role in shaping his environmental philosophy and ecological vision. In classical Advaita Vedanta, ultimate reality is described as Brahman, the one, infinite, and attributeless consciousness and the individual self (Atman) is held to be identical with the Brahman. Yet, over time, many followers of Shankara's Advaita came to see it mainly

as world-denying, treating the material world as an illusion and liberation (moksha) as turning away from everyday life.

Sree Narayana Guru reinterpreted this vision of oneness in a new direction. He applied it to Indian society and culture, arguing that if all beings are expressions of the same reality, then caste and other social divisions are nothing but ignorance (avidya). For him, Advaita was not just a theory for the saints who renounce the world, but a principle for people to guide life in the world. His disciple Nataraja Guru explained this shift clearly: Guru's work was to bring the "Absolute value of the Vedanta from its sterile high regions of abstraction into the workaday world of life."

In short, Guru reinterpreted the classical non-dualism to negate any superiority or hierarchy in existence and to promote a respectful, non-exploitative relationship with nature. He propagated the social and spiritual non-dualism. In this framework, the distinction between the human and the natural also collapses. Environmental degradation, then, is not just a material concern but a spiritual one, a violation of the unity that sustains existence. In other words, Guru's reimagination of Advaita must be seen not only as a social praxis but also as an environmental praxis.



## Recap

- ◆ Environmental education fosters knowledge, awareness, skills, and responsibility to live sustainably.
- ◆ Guru's philosophy of Advaita emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings, human and non-human.
- ◆ Guru promoted values like simplicity, discipline, and respect for nature in daily life and spiritual practice.
- ◆ The Sivagiri pilgrimage was designed as a model of ecological ethics and collective learning.
- ◆ Guru's poems, especially *Anukampa Dasakam*, express compassion for all living beings, even the smallest creatures.
- ◆ He reinterpreted Advaita Vedanta, applying it to both social equality and ecological oneness.
- ◆ Environmental degradation, for Guru, is not just material but also spiritual.

## Objective Questions

1. What is the primary aim of environmental education?
2. What philosophical principle formed the basis of Guru's environmental vision?
3. In which year was the Sivagiri pilgrimage initiated?
4. What were the key values emphasized during the Sivagiri pilgrimage?
5. Which devotional work of Guru appeals for compassion even toward the smallest creatures?
6. What did Guru mean by "What brings joy to one's soul should be extended universally"?
7. How did Guru reinterpret Advaita Vedanta compared to Shankara's version?

8. Who described Guru's philosophy as bringing Vedanta "from sterile abstraction into the workaday world"?
9. Name two practical activities promoted during the Sivagiri pilgrimage.

## Answers

1. To develop knowledge, awareness, and responsibility for sustainable living
2. Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism)
3. 1928
4. Cleanliness, discipline, simplicity, and communal improvement
5. Anukampa Dasakam
6. Compassion and well-being must include all beings, not just humans
7. He applied it to social reform and ecological harmony, not just renunciation
8. Nataraja Guru
9. Planting trees and participating in educational/vocational sessions.

## Assignments

1. Explain how Sreenarayana Guru integrated environmental consciousness into his philosophy. Discuss with reference to his teachings on compassion and non-duality.
2. Evaluate the Sivagiri pilgrimage as a model of lived environmental education. How did its practices reflect ecological ethics, social reform, and sustainable living?
3. Critically analyze Sreenarayana Guru's reinterpretation of Advaita Vedanta as a foundation for environmental ethics. In what ways does this reinterpretation challenge anthropocentrism and promote ecological harmony?

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# Sivagiri Pilgrimage: A Vehicle for Mass Education



# Background and the Origin of Sivagiri Pilgrimage

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the origin, vision and development of the Sivagiri Pilgrimage
- ◆ describe how Guru transformed pilgrimage into a method of ethical and social reform.
- ◆ explain how Sivagiri Pilgrimage differed from conventional religious pilgrimages
- ◆ explain how publications like Dharmam and Vivekodayam, and other reformist platforms played a common role in spiritual and social awakening.

### Prerequisites

The term *pilgrimage*, or *Tīrthātana* or *Tirtha Yatra*, in India is commonly understood as a journey to a sacred or holy place in religion. Usually, it is seen and practised by religious believers as a ritualistic act. However, true pilgrimage involves not only physical travel but also an inner journey toward freedom, self-realisation, and spiritual liberation, aiming at the purification of body, mind, and intellect. There are countless pilgrimage centers in India and abroad for believers in Christian, Islamic and Hindu traditions. They include churches, masjids, temples, ashrams, shrines, meditation centers, rivers, and other sacred places. Most of these are visited by believers in the hope of attaining liberation from sin. However, Sree Narayana Guru's conception of pilgrimage is unique. The Sivagiri Pilgrimage, as envisioned by Sree Narayana Guru, is neither confined to an external journey nor limited to an inner quest. It is a fusion of both the spiritual and the material, meant to shape the complete human being. More than a ritual, the pilgrimage reflects a holistic vision that embraces every dimension of life: social, material, educational, scientific, technical, and spiritual.

## Keywords

Sivagiri, Pilgrimage, Purification of Mind, Knowledge, Skill, Livelihood

## Discussion

Sreenarayanaguru shifted his abode to Varkala in 1904, marking an important step in extending his spiritual and social message beyond Aruvippuram. A significant event in Sivagiri was the consecration of Shri Sarada (Goddess of Knowledge) in April 1912. Known as Sarada Mutt, dedicated to Saraswati, the deity of knowledge, represented as seated on a white lotus. Moving away from a conventional ‘temple’, the Sarada Mutt was envisioned as an abode where Guru and his disciples resided together. Unlike conventional temples, this mutt symbolized knowledge, learning, and spiritual realization, with Sarada envisioned as the teacher and disciples as her worshippers.

The Sivagiri shrine is best understood as an extension of Guru’s vision first proclaimed at Aruvippuram. While the Aruvippuram consecration (1888) upheld the principle of “one caste, one religion, one God for human,” the Sivagiri Sarada Mutt and the Aluva Advaita Ashram carried the same message of Advaita, the oneness of the world. At Sivagiri, this vision was clarified through the realization of truth: the experiential knowledge that Esvaran (God), Jeevan (individual self), and Jagath (world) are ultimately the same. In short, Guru’s shift to Sivagiri in 1904 and the establishment of Sarada Mutt in 1912 were a continuation of his one-world vision, transforming religious worship into the pursuit of knowledge and truth.

### 5.1.1 Background, Origin, and Vision of the Sivagiri Pilgrimage

The Sivagiri Pilgrimage is essentially a pilgrimage to knowledge. It is also a pilgrimage to skill, technical skills, education and a better life. It is a gateway to Guru’s vision and teachings, spreading comprehensive philosophical, scientific, and practical knowledge for all aspects of life. Unlike ordinary pilgrimages, Sivagiri pilgrimage seeks the holistic development of every human being, beyond caste, creed, religion, language, or nationality. In that sense, the Sivagiri Pilgrimage represents the harmonious union of spirituality and material progress, with the universal aim of human upliftment.

On January 16, 1928, Sree Narayana Guru was approached by his two devoted disciples, Vallabhasseri Govindan Vaidyar and T. K. Kittan, with the idea of organising a pilgrimage to Sivagiri. Guru sought clarity on its method, purpose, and goals, and agreed with it, insisting that it should not be like a religious procession. On January 16, 1928, Guru granted permission for the Sivagiri pilgrimage, and Guru had his samadhi on September 20 in the same year.

Although the Sivagiri pilgrimage was originally conceived by Guru’s two disciples, it was Sree Narayana Guru who

laid down the guiding norms for it. Guru said that the pilgrims should congregate at the beginning of the European New Year and that they are asked to observe a 10-day purification. Inspired by Buddha's principles of five purities, Guru also insisted that the purification process should be based on the five purities (pañcha-śuddhi) put forth by Buddha: purities of body, food, mind, word, and deed.

The Sivagiri pilgrimage is the result of an interesting and philosophically insightful conversation held between Sreenarayananaguru and his two beloved disciples, Vallabhasseri Govindan Vaidyar and T. K. Kittan, on January 16, 1928. Mangad Balachandran explains this conversation in his book *Sree Narayana Guru- A Comprehensive Study* and shows Guru's clear mission, vision and ideals of the pilgrimage. On the date mentioned above, Vallabhasseri Govindan Vaidyar approached Guru with T. K. Kittan writer to get his approval for the pilgrimage.

After seeking permission from Guru, T. K Kittan, the writer put forth their proposal: "Just as Kashi and Rameswaram are sacred places for Hindus, Rome, Antioch, and Canterbury for Christians, and Mecca and Medina for Muslims, it is requested that Sivagiri be recognized as the sacred place for the Ezhavas (Thiyyas) of Kerala." Guru asked back: "Isn't Varkala Janardhana (Dakshina Kashi) already a sacred place? Could Sivagiri nearby also become a sacred place?" Kittan Writer: "We have no access to the sacred places of the caste Hindus. If we attempt to go, we usually face physical punishment, humiliation, and even financial loss." In this conversation, after giving his approval for the pilgrimage, the Guru himself explicitly lays down its methods, forms, and purposes, along with the specific date, time, and dress code for its observance. When Kittan Writer asked if there was any particular dress code for the pilgrims, Guru responded: "White is for grihastha, ochre (saffron) for renunciates, and

black cloth or garments for the Sabarimala devotees. Let Sivagiri pilgrims wear yellow clothes. It is the garment associated with Sri Krishna and the Buddha." It is also in this conversation that Guru insisted the pilgrims observe Buddha's pancha Shuddhi: purity of body, food, mind, words and deeds.

Guru also emphasized that the observance of the Sivagiri pilgrimage should be marked by simplicity, humility, and purity of conduct. According to Guru, the prescribed yellow attire did not mean that devotees should purchase yellow silk or new clothes. Instead, ordinary white garments already in use could be dipped in turmeric, worn for the pilgrimage, and later washed and reused, he said. The journey should avoid extravagance, noisy displays, and rituals, and must remain a humble spiritual practice. He also asked the disciples to avoid unnecessary expenses. He warned that although the Ezhava community earned money, it often wasted resources and even fell into debt. Instead, he insisted that the members must learn to save. Finally, in the conversation, he stressed that the community was lagging in education, financial stability, and cleanliness, and that such habits must change for true progress. It is this progress that was visualised by Guru through the Sivagiri pilgrimage.

Guru viewed the pilgrimage as the dissemination of deep knowledge among the people, leading to their holistic development and prosperity. Along with the intellectual engagement and intellectual growth of the people, Guru also aimed at the spiritual and material engagement and material growth of the people through the Sivagiri pilgrimage. Thus, Guru set the goals of the pilgrimage as Education, Cleanliness, Devotion to God, Organisation, Agriculture, Trade, Handicrafts and Technical training.

Although approved in 1928, the first pilgrimage took place in 1932, which started from Elavumthitta, a small village in

Pathanamthitta district. Five young devotees were P. K. Divakara Panicker, P. K. Kesavan, P. V. Raghavan, M. K. Raghavan, and S. Sankunni, who set out wearing bright yellow, reciting Swathanthra Gatha (Freedom Song) written by Kumaran Asan. As he aimed the pilgrimage at intellectual engagement, Guru asked these devotees to organise a series of lectures and to put into practice the principles derived from these expert lectures. Through spiritual upliftment and intellectual, social, and material development, Guru wanted the pilgrims to overcome the darkness of ignorance and attain a higher level of spirituality and enlightenment.

### **5.1.2 Fundraising and Publicity for the Construction of Sivagiri Mutt**

In *Sreenarayanaguru: Historical Facts* (*Sreenarayanaguru: Charithra Yadharthyangal*), G. Priyadarsanan notes that, for building the Sivagiri Mutt, Guru sent his faithful disciples to different villages to collect one rupee from each household. The disciples issued receipts for every contribution. In the public notice, Guru clearly stated that anyone wishing to contribute more than a rupee should specifically mention it in writing. Guru also kept the public informed by regularly publishing updates on the progress of Sivagiri Mutt in *Vivekodayam*, the official mouthpiece of SNDP. Kochappi Vaidyan, a local resident, gifted the land for the mutt to Guru. Later, Guru purchased adjacent plots to expand the Sivagiri Mutt's premises.

During his travels across India to fundraise for the establishment of Visva-Bharati University, the poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore visited Sivagiri Mutt on November 15, 1922. Mahatma Gandhi visited the Mutt three times, with his first visit on March 12, 1925. On these occasions, leaders

such as C.V. Kunhuraman, K. Ayyappan, Keshavappanikkar, and N. Kumaran interacted with Gandhi and discussed Guru's ideas and ideals.

From October 8, 1927, a weekly journal titled Dharmam was published from Sivagiri as the official mouthpiece of the Mutt. It sought to impart Guru's teachings - Gurudeva Dharmam - with clarity and authority to the wider public. The journal was, in many ways, comparable to Gandhi's English-language weekly, *Young India*, which ran from 1919 to 1931. The launch of Dharmam took place alongside other publications such as the SNDP's official magazine *Vivekodayam* (1904) and C. Krishnan's *Mithavadhi* (1913).

### **5.1.3 Distinctiveness of Sivagiri Pilgrimage**

Guru was inspired by other faith traditions. While Guru's initiative did not explicitly derive from Islam or Christianity, its inspiration drew heavily on Buddhist and humanist principles, such as the five purities and compassion for all beings. His emphasis on universal values over religions and castes echoes the humanist ideals common to different faith traditions. Through the Sivagiri pilgrimage, he demonstrated an inclusive, humanitarian approach rooted in core ethical principles rather than ritual dogmas.

Guru's vision was against the typical patterns of pilgrimage. Rather than rituals, the emphasis was on simplicity, ethical conduct, and transformative learning and knowing. Pilgrims were encouraged to wear modest, yellow-dyed clothes. The pilgrimage ethos Guru upheld was not just spiritual ascent but social education and development. By combining lectures with practical engagement, pilgrims were urged to internalise values and implement them. In short, Sivagiri became a living embodiment of Guru's call for education, organisation, and humanism as pillars for societal progress.



Sivigiri mutt is a symbol of global peace and harmony. Guru established it by collecting money from the general public. He affirmed that he was building the mutt for

public use and welfare. He built a Sanskrit school and provided free education to the lower castes.

## Recap

- ◆ Sivagiri Pilgrimage (1928) was conceived by disciples Vallabhasseri Govindan Vaidyar and T. K. Kittan
- ◆ The pilgrimage was approved by Guru, who laid down guiding principles inspired by Buddha's five purities.
- ◆ Guru envisioned the Sivagiri pilgrimage as a movement for intellectual, social, spiritual, and material upliftment
- ◆ Guru emphasized education, cleanliness, devotion, organization, agriculture, trade, handicrafts, and technical training.
- ◆ The first Pilgrimage happened in 1932 with the five devotees who set out from Elavumthitta, Pathanamthitta
- ◆ The pilgrimage combined lectures with practice-based engagement.
- ◆ Guru collected contributions of one rupee from households, publicized progress through *Vivekodayam*, and secured land from Kochappi Vaidyan. Later,
- ◆ Guru purchased adjacent lands and developed educational institutions, including a Sanskrit school.
- ◆ Sivagiri emphasized ethical conduct, simplicity, knowledge-sharing, and humanitarian ideals, making it a model of spiritual and social reform.

## Objective Questions

1. Who proposed the initial idea of the Sivagiri Pilgrimage to Sree Narayana Guru?
2. Which principle from Buddhism inspired the Sivagiri Pilgrimage?
3. When was the first Sivagiri Pilgrimage held, and from where did it begin?

4. What was the official journal of Sivagiri Mutt, launched in 1927?
5. Which poet-philosopher visited Sivagiri Mutt on November 15, 1922, during his fundraising for Visva-Bharati University?
6. On which date did the conversation about the Sivagiri pilgrimage take place?
7. What dress code did Sree Narayana Guru prescribe for Sivagiri pilgrims?
8. Which five purities did Guru insist upon for pilgrims?
9. What broader reforms did Guru envision through the Sivagiri pilgrimage?

## Answers

1. Vallabhasseri Govindan Vaidyar and T. K. Kittan
2. Five Purities (Pañcha-Śuddhi)
3. 1932, Elavumthitta
4. Dharmam
5. Rabindranath Tagore
6. JANUARY 16, 1928
7. Guru prescribed yellow clothes for Sivagiri pilgrims, symbolizing Sri Krishna and the Buddha
8. Buddha's pañcha-śuddhi: purity of body, food, mind, word, and deed
9. Guru envisioned reforms in education, financial discipline, cleanliness, and overall progress of the community

## Assignments

1. Explain the origin and vision of the sivagiri pilgrimage as conceived by Sreenarayana Guru. How does it reflect his holistic approach to human development beyond ritualistic religion?
2. Discuss how Sreenarayana Guru transformed pilgrimage into a method of ethical, social, and educational reform. Refer to his ideas on pañcha-suddhi, simplicity, and the goals of the pilgrimage.
3. Analyze the role of publications such as vivekodayam and dharmam in shaping spiritual and social awakening during the establishment of sivagiri mutt and the development of the pilgrimage

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## Panchasudhi (Five Purities)

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the importance of the five purities (Panchasudhi) in the Guru's philosophy and their significance in the Sivagiri pilgrimage.
- ◆ identify the Buddhist influence on Guru's idea of purity.
- ◆ describe the purpose of Vratha (ten-day observance) before the pilgrimage.
- ◆ analyse the social message of equality and simplicity in the dress code and practices of the Sivagiri pilgrimage.

### Prerequisites

The caste system dominant in India has always upheld the conceptions of purity and pollution. It has been expressed in different ways through rituals, food habits, conduct, and modes of worship. In the caste system, purity was tied to ideas of caste and social hierarchy, creating divisions rather than harmony. Against this background, Sree Narayana Guru redefined purity as a universal discipline open to all, irrespective of caste, creed, or social position. Drawing inspiration from Buddhist ethical codes and everyday human conduct, Guru formulated the five-fold purities, or *Panchasudhi*, as the foundation of the Sivagiri pilgrimage.

### Keywords

Five-fold Purities, Pilgrimage, Buddhism, Observance, Moral preparation

# Discussion

Sreenarayanaguru insisted that the pilgrims should reach Sivagiri after observing ten days of purification based on the five purities of Body, Word, Mind, Food and Deed. Guru drew these five principles from Buddhist philosophy. Guru also maintained a dress code for the Sivagiri Pilgrimage as a message of equality. He suggested that all pilgrims should wear yellow garments during the pilgrimage. The choice of yellow conveyed the meanings of purity and simplicity, equality and unity. The uniform dress code was intended to serve as a visible marker of the pilgrims' collective identity.

## 5.2.1 The Five-fold Purities

Sree Narayana Guru insisted on five levels of purity as a personal discipline of purification, and this is popularly known as Panchasudhi.

- Purity of the Body (Shareera Shuddhi):** Guru insisted that devotees maintain the cleanliness of their bodies by bathing daily in clean water. The purity of the body is ensured by breathing clean air and consuming clean food and water. Guru considered the body as important as the soul and prohibited indulging in intoxication and excesses that endanger physical health.
- Purity of the Food (Ahara Shuddhi):** Guru stressed the importance of eating simple and non-harmful food. Purity of food was not only a matter of physical health but also of moral responsibility. Food prepared in a spirit of honesty and non-violence was thought to nourish both the body and mind.
- Purity of the Mind (Manas Shuddhi):** Pilgrims were encouraged to cultivate a mind free from hatred, prejudice, or selfish

desire. As is clear in Guru's different works, such as Atmopadesa Satakam and Daiva Dasakam, meditation, prayer, and contemplation were encouraged to achieve calmness and concentration. For Guru, this purity is essential to receive the true spirit of pilgrimage.

- Purity of the Word (Vāk Shuddhi):** Speech was to be disciplined by truthfulness, non-offensiveness, and kindness. This principle urges us to avoid lies or harsh words. The spoken words could inspire or destroy one; hence, it required careful restraint. Even while pursuing social and spiritual reform, Guru refrained from using harsh words.
- Purity of the Deed (Karma Shuddhi):** Pilgrims were asked to perform pure deeds, such as helping others, serving the needy, and practising honesty in all dealings. Negative actions such as exploitation, violence, and injustice were to be avoided.

Scholars have different views on the five-fold purities. Some include 'purity of residence' among them, rather than purity of food. The five-fold purities were seen as a holistic framework in which the body, food, thought, speech, and action were harmonised to prepare the individual for a journey that was both inward and outward.

## 5.2.2 Five Purities in Buddhism and Guru's Adaptation

The idea of Panchasudhi has a strong resemblance to the Five Purities (pañcaśuddhi) observed in Buddhism. The Buddhist traditions view purification as a preliminary step to enlightenment. The Buddhist practices emphasized the purity of conduct (right

action, right speech, right livelihood), purity of mind (through meditation and mindfulness), purity of wisdom (removal of ignorance), purity of faith (trust in Dharma) and purity of livelihood (ethical survival).

While not identical, Guru's five-fold purities can be read as a reformulation of this Buddhist principle into the practical and social context of Kerala. Inspired by Buddhist ethical codes, Guru translated purity into everyday practices accessible to all sections of society, beyond caste or sectarian restrictions. He vehemently rejected the concepts of caste-purity and pollution and affirmed that there is only one caste for all humans, that is, humanness. By establishing five-fold purities, Guru transformed and refined the concept of purity and propagated his version of it as a

universal human discipline that resonated with multiple spiritual traditions, including Buddhism.

### 5.2.3 Observance (Vratha) for Pilgrimage

Guru insisted on a Vratha, a vow of observance, for at least ten days before beginning the journey. The Vratha required pilgrims to practice Panchasudhi, adopt simplicity, engage in service, study and reflection and avoid vices. The Vratha is meant to transform the pilgrimage into a moral preparation rather than a mere physical journey. In short, Guru turned the pilgrimage into a social and spiritual school where every participant underwent training in both material and spiritual living.

## Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru prescribed Panchasudhi (Five Purities) Body, Food, Mind, Word, and Deed as the preparatory discipline for Sivagiri Pilgrimage.
- ◆ The purities emphasized clean living, ethical food, mental discipline, truthful speech, and righteous action as essential for spiritual and social reform
- ◆ Guru's emphasis on purity extended to a dress code of yellow garments, symbolizing purity, equality, and unity among pilgrims.
- ◆ Panchasudhi resonates with Buddhist concepts of purification, though Guru reformulated them into a practical framework.
- ◆ Guru replaced the idea of caste-purity and pollution with universal human discipline, affirming the equality of all human beings.
- ◆ Guru insisted on a ten-day Vratha (observance) before the pilgrimage, transforming it into a school of moral, spiritual, and social preparation rather than mere physical travel.

## Objective Questions

1. What are the five purities (Panchasudhi) suggested by Sree Narayana Guru?
2. Which religion inspired Guru's idea of Panchasudhi?
3. What color dress did Guru prescribe for Sivagiri pilgrims?
4. What does the yellow dress symbolize?
5. What is the minimum number of days for Vratha before the pilgrimage?
6. What does the purity of food mean according to the Guru?
7. How should pilgrims maintain the purity of the body?
8. What does purity of speech (Vak Shuddhi) demand?
9. What was the primary purpose of the Vratha?
10. What humanistic message did Guru convey through Panchasudhi?

## Answers

1. Body, Food, Mind, Word, and Deed.
2. Buddhism
3. Yellow
4. Purity, simplicity, and equality
5. Ten days
6. Eating simple, non-violent, and honest food
7. A: By bathing daily, avoiding intoxication, and keeping clean
8. Speaking truthfully, kindly, and without harsh words
9. To prepare pilgrims morally and spiritually for the journey
10. That all humans are equal and true purity is universal

## Assignments

1. Explain the concept of Panchasudhi in Sreenarayana Guru's philosophy. How do the five purities prepare individuals for the Sivagiri pilgrimage?
2. Discuss the Buddhist influence on Guru's formulation of the five-fold purities. In what ways did Guru adapt these principles to the social context of Kerala?
3. Critically analyze the role of the ten-day Vratha and yellow dress code in conveying Guru's message of equality and simplicity during the Sivagiri pilgrimage.

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## UNIT

# Sree Narayana Guru as a Philosopher and Educationist

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the dual role of the Sivagiri pilgrimage as a spiritual journey and a reformative social movement.
- ◆ identify the Ashta Lakshyas (eight-fold goals) and their significance in linking spiritual awakening with education, livelihood, and social development.
- ◆ Understand Guru's philosophy-in-action envisioned in Sivagiri pilgrimage

### Prerequisites

Across cultures, pilgrimages have been seen as opportunities for both inner awakening and collective renewal. Sree Narayana Guru gave this age-old practice a unique turn by linking spiritual discipline with human development. For him, true enlightenment could not be separated from education, livelihood, cleanliness, and cooperation. The Sivagiri pilgrimage was therefore not limited to prayer and inner awakening, but envisioned as a platform where individuals and communities could prepare for a balanced life of material well-being and moral responsibility. Guru placed human progress and spiritual growth side by side and redefined pilgrimage as a living experiment in reform, learning, and collective uplift.

### Keywords

Spiritual Journey, Reformation, Knowledge, Skill, Holistic Development

## Discussion

Sivagiri Pilgrimage for Guru was far more than a religious journey or ritual. Guru viewed it as a deliberate social, educational, and reformative movement. Its deep vision, known as the Ashta Lakshyas, or eightfold, inspired people to engage in philosophical reflection and social action. Through the pilgrimage, Guru aimed at empowering both individuals and communities. He insisted the pilgrimage must disseminate knowledge, which builds the foundation for holistic development and prosperity. The pilgrimage was intended as a harmonious blend of spiritual aspiration and social progress by bringing both moral elevation and a practical livelihood.

Insisting on a ten-day purification based on Buddha's five purities and suggesting yellow garments for all devotees, Guru symbolised the purity and equality. According to Guru, the spiritual enlightenment involves simplicity, non-harming and self-discipline.

### 5. 3.1 The Ashta Lakshyas: Eight Pillars of Human Development

Guru outlined eight core goals to guide the pilgrimage, which are called Ashta Lakshyas:

1. Education – Fostering knowledge and critical awareness.
2. Cleanliness – Cultivating purity, both outwardly and inwardly.
3. Piety (Devotion to God) – Encouraging spiritual depth and ethical commitment.
4. Organization (Organised Endeavour) – Promoting collective effort and cooperation.
5. Agriculture – Valuing sustenance and livelihood rooted in land.

6. Trade – Focusing on commerce as a means to self-reliance.
7. Handicrafts – Honouring indigenous skills and craftsmanship.
8. Technical Training – Encouraging modern skills to lead a quality life.

By implementing these principles through pilgrimage, Guru conveyed the message that spiritual awakening and social development must go hand in hand. That both education and wealth, material well-being and spiritual growth are necessary for human life. In sum, Guru associated Sivagiri with education, cleanliness, the power of truth, unity, knowledge, and farming, and gave it a modern sense.

### 5.3.2 Guru's Holistic Human Development

Sree Narayana Guru's vision of the Sivagiri pilgrimage, expressed through the *Ashta Lakshyas*, represents nothing but a philosophy of holistic human development. For Guru, the eight goals, education, cleanliness, piety, organization, agriculture, trade, handicrafts, and technical training, were not mere isolated ideas or abstract ideals. They were concrete, practical tools through which the human person could be strengthened and empowered in all aspects of life: spiritual, intellectual, social, economic, institutional, agricultural and industrial. Guru firmly believed that true progress could never be one-sided. It had to be comprehensive, touching both the inner and outer dimensions of human existence. In that sense, Guru strived to develop an actually enlightened society with material progress and spiritual awakening.

At the spiritual and intellectual levels, Guru emphasized education, purity of life,

and devotion to truth as essential foundations for building human dignity and moral strength. It must be noted that all three were denied for the lower sections of society in the caste system. Education was not just about literacy but about cultivating awareness, critical thinking, and self-respect among marginalized communities. Cleanliness symbolized both outward hygiene and inward purity of thought, while piety anchored life in ethical and spiritual values.

At the social, institutional, and economic levels, Guru highlighted organization, agriculture, trade, handicrafts, and technical training. These aims reflected his understanding that social transformation required not only spiritual reform but also material empowerment and institutional strength. He encouraged collective organization and cooperative enterprises and thus provided communities with tools to resist exploitation and build solidarity. He advocated agriculture, trade, and handicrafts, and rooted development in indigenous skills and livelihoods, while also striving for technical training aimed at modernity, industry, and self-reliance.

### **5.3.2.1 Trade, Handicrafts, and Technical Training**

While Guru's contributions to education and spirituality are well-studied, his efforts in trade, handicrafts, and technical training are often underemphasized. He understood that self-reliance and dignity depend not only on knowledge but also on one's skills, ability to work, create, and produce. For instance, among coir labourers in Alappuzha, who were historically exploited and marginalized, Guru organized cooperative efforts and supported union-like structures.

Guru-sponsored speakers like Sathyavrtha Swamikal raised awareness of labour rights and economic justice and helped establish a tradition of organised labour among

tradespeople. He also encouraged handicrafts and technical training and sought to preserve indigenous skills while enabling people to compete in changing or emerging economic conditions.

### **5.3.2.2 Cleanliness and Piety**

Among the Ashta Lakshyas, Cleanliness (both external and internal) and Piety (Devotion to God) often receive less detailed attention than education or trade, yet they are central to the Guru's integrated vision of human development. Cleanliness, for Guru, is not only about hygiene or social decorum—it's symbolic of purity in intent, honesty, and transparency in one's life. He preached that inner impurity—ignorance, prejudice, selfishness—is as corrosive to society as outward dirt. Piety, similarly, for Guru, was not ritualistic orthodoxy but devotion imbued with ethical commitment: a devotion that manifests in kindness, service, and truthfulness. These two Lakshyas support the spiritual infrastructure of his model—without inner transformation (cleanliness and piety), economic gains or education risk becoming hollow. Works like Experiencing One-World (Nataraja Guru) and Essays on Guru's Teachings (PK Balakrishnan) describe how Guru insisted on festivals, daily prayer, and ritual cleansings not as ends in themselves, but as means to cultivate a moral character that sustains social justice.

### **5.3.2.3 Organization and Agriculture**

Guru did not believe that progress comes only from individual effort. Rather, he saw the need for collective organization as key. His role in founding cooperative societies, labour groups, and community associations among coir workers and agricultural labourers shows that he lived his call to organise and empower one another. He encouraged the people to come together to negotiate, share resources, and protect their rights.

Agriculture, the fifth Lakshya, underscores his recognition that many livelihoods in Kerala and India depend on the land, and food security is foundational to dignity and freedom. He encouraged farming practices, equitable land use, and respect for agricultural workers often marginalized by caste systems. In that sense, the pilgrimage was not only spiritual but deeply grounded in sustainable material existence, encouraging those who cultivate land, form associations, and organise to seek both dignity and justice.

### 5. 3.3 Philosophy and Action in Sivagiri Pilgrimage

Guru's philosophy in general and his philosophy of pilgrimage in specific always combined thought with practice. Guru's greatest relevance lies in social and spiritual transformation through philosophy, by

reinterpreting the non-dualism of Advaita in a worldly sense. In that line, Sivagiri was designed not just for introspection but for action. This is clear in Guru's invitation of experts to deliver lectures on these eight themes during the pilgrimage and his expectations from pilgrims to apply the learning in daily life. The lectures, followed by practice, transformed the pilgrimage into a platform for reflective living.

As he emphasized in his various poems and writings, there is a clear intersection of spiritual elevation, moral responsibility, and social purpose (philosophy-in-action) in his idea of the Sivagiri pilgrimage. Guru transcended mere doctrinal traditions and made philosophy a living practice for personal and social transformation and community service.

## Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru was both a philosopher and an educationist.
- ◆ Guru believed reality is one and indivisible.
- ◆ Guru connected philosophy with real life and social reform.
- ◆ Guru taught that knowledge must be open to all.
- ◆ For him, education was the highest form of wealth.
- ◆ He wanted education to combine knowledge, values, and discipline.
- ◆ He stressed moral values like compassion, humility, and self-control.
- ◆ Guru highlighted self-knowledge as the highest knowledge.
- ◆ He introduced the idea of jeevitotkarsha (progress of life).
- ◆ Progress for Guru meant refinement of mind, not wealth or power.
- ◆ He valued both spiritual wisdom and modern science.

- ◆ Guru admired the gurukula system but adapted it to modern needs.
- ◆ He wanted education to build character and society together.
- ◆ Education for him meant both personal growth and social reform.
- ◆ He opened a Sanskrit school at Aruvippuram.
- ◆ Sivagiri Mutt became a centre for modern and practical education.
- ◆ He founded the Advaita Ashram at Aluva for philosophy and Vedānta.
- ◆ The SNDP Yogam spread schools and colleges.
- ◆ Guru turned temples into centres of knowledge and libraries.
- ◆ The Sharada Temple symbolised wisdom as true worship.
- ◆ The Mirror Consecration taught self-reflection and knowledge.
- ◆ His institutions welcomed women and marginalised communities.
- ◆ Education, for Guru, meant breaking caste and gender barriers.
- ◆ Guru harmonised tradition with modernity.
- ◆ He valued rationality and scientific learning.
- ◆ Guru's philosophy joined jñāna (knowledge), bhakti (devotion), and karma (action).
- ◆ He respected all religions and cultures and promoted interfaith harmony.
- ◆ Guru believed ethics must go with philosophy.
- ◆ His vision made education democratic and inclusive.
- ◆ Guru's philosophy combined liberation with social equality.
- ◆ His teachings remain relevant for modern education.

## Objective Questions

1. In which year did Sree Narayana Guru shift his abode to Sivagiri, Varkala?
2. The consecration of Sarada at Sivagiri Mutt took place in which year?
3. What does the term *Ashta Lakshyas* refer to in the Sivagiri pilgrimage?
4. Name any two of the Ashta Lakshyas.
5. Which Ashta Lakshya did Guru emphasize as symbolic of both outward hygiene and inward purity?
6. Who was sent by Guru to address the coir labourers in Alappuzha?
7. Which Ashta Lakshya reflects Guru's concern for self-reliance through commerce?
8. According to Guru, which two Lakshyas form the spiritual foundation of holistic development?
9. The Sivagiri pilgrimage combines which two dimensions of human life?
10. What colour garment did Guru suggest for devotees during the Sivagiri pilgrimage?
11. Which philosophical idea did Guru reinterpret in worldly terms through the Sivagiri pilgrimage?
12. What practice did Guru insist pilgrims follow before the Sivagiri pilgrimage, inspired by Buddha's teaching?

## Answers

1. 1904
2. 1912
3. The eight-fold goals of human development
4. Education and Cleanliness

5. Cleanliness
6. Sathyavrtha Swamikal
7. Trade
8. Cleanliness and Piety
9. Spiritual awakening and social/material development
10. Yellow
11. Advaita (non-dualism)
12. Ten-day purification based on the five purities

## Assignments

1. Explain how the Sivagiri pilgrimage functions both as a spiritual journey and as a reformative social movement. How does this dual role reflect Sreenarayana Guru's broader philosophy-in-action?
2. Discuss the significance of the Ashta Lakshyas (Eight Goals) in the Sivagiri pilgrimage. How do these goals integrate spiritual awakening with education, livelihood, and holistic human development?
3. Critically evaluate the role of organization, agriculture, trade, and technical training in Guru's vision for empowering marginalized communities through the Sivagiri pilgrimage.
4. Analyze the importance of cleanliness and piety in Guru's model of human progress. How do these values balance and sustain the social and economic aspects of development?

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# Sivagiri Pilgrimage Today

## UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the significance of the Sivagiri pilgrimage in the present social and cultural context.
- ◆ identify how Guru's ideals of humanism, unity, and reform are kept alive through the pilgrimage.
- ◆ analyze how Sivagiri functions as both a spiritual and socio-educational platform in contemporary society.

### Prerequisites

In the modern world, pilgrimages are often seen as occasions of rituals, blind worship, devotion, and cultural gathering. Yet, Sree Narayana Guru envisioned Sivagiri pilgrimage as something more enduring. He envisioned it as a way to harmonize spiritual progress with material and social development. The ideals of simplicity, purity, equality, and education that Guru attached to the pilgrimage still echo in contemporary society, where communities continue to struggle with inequality, intolerance, and the divisions of modern life. Sivagiri today stands as a living reminder that spiritual practice is not an escape from the world but a means of renewing it, where personal discipline and collective uplift move together.

### Keywords

Spiritual education, Social Education, Philosophy as Practice, Humanism, Reformation

## Discussion

Today, the Sivagiri pilgrimage embodies Guru's ideal of integral humanism, that is, the blending of spiritual discipline with socio-economic development. Guru never encouraged ascetic withdrawal from the world. Instead, he emphasized the value of living within society while practicing discipline, simplicity, and reform. His pilgrimage model bridges tradition and modernity, ritual and reform, and contemplation and action.

Sivagiri remains a powerful symbol of Guru's legacy. From December 30 to January 1, thousands of pilgrims clad in yellow converge at the Sivagiri Mutt, the site of Guru's samadhi. The annual event includes discussions, seminars, spiritual gatherings, and cultural programs on Guru's guiding themes such as unity, equality, education, and social progress. Pilgrims undertake the journey not merely as a ritual but as a means of self-purification, introspection, and social commitment. They keep alive Guru's philosophy of spiritual enlightenment, paired with human and social development.

The pilgrimage remains global in its vision, outreach and impact. In 2024, the Pope inaugurated an interreligious conference at the Vatican, organised by Sivagiri Mutt, to commemorate the centenary of Guru's historic "All Religions Conference" of 1924. The Pope highlighted the urgency of Guru's message in today's world divided by intolerance, hatred, discrimination, and violence. He reaffirmed Guru's conviction that all religions teach compassion, peace, and oneness, values necessary for harmonious living across cultures and nations.

### 5.4.1 Philosophy as Practice, Pilgrimage as Social Education

അവനിവനനറിയുന്നതാക്കേ  
യോർത്താ -

ലവനിയിലാദിമമായൊരാത്മരൂപം

അവനവനാത്മസുവത്തിനാ  
പരിക്കു -

നവയപരന്മു സുവത്തിനായ  
വരേണ്ണം.

(ആത്മാപദ്ധതി ശതകം -24 )

"The distinctions we ordinarily make—such as "I," "you," "he," and "this person"—when examined through reflective thought, ultimately point to the Supreme Self, the consciousness-absolute that functions as the primordial cause of the universe. Therefore, every action performed for one's own happiness must be undertaken with the welfare of others in mind."

It is from this philosophical standpoint that Sreenarayana Guru shaped not only the idea of pilgrimage but also all his modes of action. To evaluate any of Guru's undertakings, including pilgrimage, by setting aside this profound vision—which embodies the essence of Advaita Vedānta—would be an act of sheer ignorance.

The core of the Sivagiri pilgrimage rests on Guru's concept of the Eight Aims of Human Development: education, cleanliness, spirituality, organisation, agriculture, trade, craftsmanship, and technical skill. These elements embedded in the pilgrimage convey their significance to lower castes

and communities. They also remind us that spiritual progress must go hand in hand with social and economic upliftment. Also, Guru's insistence on the Five-fold Purities demands a moral and spiritual discipline of the pilgrims.

Through the pilgrimage, Guru extended his lifelong practice of blending philosophy with social reform. By uniting thought and action, he transformed pilgrimage from a mere ritual into an experience of social learning and collective uplift.

### 5.4.2 The Spirit of Aruvippuram and Sivagiri

The Sivagiri pilgrimage must be seen in the light of Guru's earlier reform at Aruvippuram in 1888, where he consecrated a Shiva idol, rejecting the monopoly of Brahmanical priesthood. This act was not just religious

but a social revolution and challenged caste barriers and redefined divinity and worship. On the temple wall at Aruvippuram, Guru inscribed:

*"Without differences of caste,  
Nor enmities of creed,  
All live like brothers at heart,  
Here in this ideal place."*

The above message forms the heart of Sivagiri's pilgrimage even today. It reminds us that the ultimate goal is not ritual, but brotherhood, unity, compassion and social equality. Every year, the Sivagiri pilgrimage spreads this message to thousands and continues to inspire individuals and society at large.

## Recap

- ◆ Sivagiri pilgrimage combines spirituality with social and economic uplift.
- ◆ It remains a living legacy of Guru's philosophy of integral humanism.
- ◆ Pilgrims gather annually at Sivagiri Mutt from December 30 to January 1.
- ◆ The pilgrimage is based on the ideals of Panchasudhi and Ashta Lakshyas.
- ◆ In 2024, Sivagiri Mutt organized an interreligious conference at the Vatican inaugurated by the Pope.
- ◆ Guru's reformatory act at Aruvippuram laid the foundation for Sivagiri's inclusive philosophy.
- ◆ The essential message of Sivagiri is unity, equality, education, and brotherhood

## Objective Questions

1. When is the Sivagiri pilgrimage held every year?
2. What attire do Sivagiri pilgrims traditionally wear?
3. Which two principles form the foundation of the Sivagiri pilgrimage?
4. Who inaugurated the interreligious conference at the Vatican in 2024, organised by Sivagiri Mutt?
5. Where did Guru consecrate a Shiva idol in 1888, challenging caste restrictions?
6. Name any three of the Ashta Lakshyas.
7. What is the central message inscribed by Guru on the Aruvippuram temple wall?

## Answers

1. From December 30 to January 1
2. Yellow dress
3. Panchasudhi and Ashta Lakshyas
4. The Pope
5. Aruvippuram
6. Education, cleanliness, spirituality
7. Brotherhood beyond caste and creed

## Assignments

1. Examine the contemporary relevance of the Sivagiri pilgrimage. How does it continue to uphold Sreenarayana Guru's ideals of humanism, equality, and reform in the present social and cultural context?
2. Discuss how Sivagiri functions today as both a spiritual and socio-educational platform. In what ways do seminars, community engagements, and cultural activities reflect Guru's vision of philosophy-as-practice?
3. Analyze the connection between the spirit of Aruvippuram and the modern Sivagiri pilgrimage. How does the pilgrimage continue Guru's legacy of challenging caste barriers and fostering unity and collective uplift?

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# Sree Narayana Guru's One World Vision and World Peace



## UNIT

# Sree Narayana Guru's One-world Vision on Humanitarianism and Spirituality

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain how Sree Narayana Guru reinterpreted Advaita Vedānta into a philosophy of *Practical Advaita* that integrates spiritual realization with social transformation.
- ◆ analyze the forms of oneness, philosophical, ethical, and religious, in Guru's thought and their implications for a one-world vision
- ◆ evaluate Guru's emphasis on divinity in all beings and his principle of compassion as foundational to the universal humanism.
- ◆ assess how Guru's motto "One Caste, One Religion, One God" serve as a philosophical and practical tool for overcoming casteism and social inequality.

## Prerequisites

Founded on Vedantic philosophy and extending the principle of non-dualism, Guru envisioned that the dream of a one-world community could become a reality if humanity learned to cultivate a unitive vision. Building on this, Guru's revered disciple, Nataraja Guru, developed the idea of a one-world vision as a global educational program, centred on nurturing "one-world consciousness." For Nataraja Guru, one-world consciousness meant enabling human beings to look beyond narrow divisions and to cultivate a sense of world fraternity. It called for refining perception through the arts, knowledge, literature, architecture, and music, avenues through which humanity could discover its shared language of beauty and harmony. His vision of one-world embraced wide-ranging perspectives: a one-world government, one-world economy, world education, a universal religion, unified sciences, and even a common language of the sciences.

## Keywords

Religions, Spirituality, Forms of oneness, Compassion, One-world

## Discussion

Sreenarayana Guru's One World Vision is rooted in the idea that humanity constitutes a single universal family bound by shared moral values. He emphasized that true civilization emerges only when individuals rise above narrow identities based on caste, creed, and nationality. Guru's humanitarian thought promotes equality, compassion, and cooperative living as the foundations for global harmony. According to him, social progress becomes meaningful only when it uplifts the marginalized and ensures justice for all. His teachings on ethical living encourage people to recognize the inherent dignity of every human being. This moral awareness, he believed, is essential for building peaceful and inclusive societies. Guru also highlighted the need for education that cultivates rational thinking and humanistic values. By encouraging intercultural respect and mutual understanding, his vision directly addresses contemporary global conflicts. His message resonates strongly in multicultural contexts where unity is threatened by prejudice. Ultimately, Guru's One World Vision offers a transformative framework for establishing enduring world peace through humanitarian principles.

Sreenarayana Guru's approach to world peace is deeply connected to his spiritual insight into the oneness of existence. He taught that spirituality must guide ethical action, and not remain confined to ritualistic or sectarian boundaries. For him, inner purification and self-realization enable individuals to perceive the unity that underlies all forms of life. This spiritual worldview reduces hostility because it encourages people to treat others

as extensions of their own selves. Guru argued that peace arises naturally when the mind becomes free from ego, hatred, and divisive tendencies. His spiritual philosophy promotes universal love, tolerance, and non-violence as essential components of global coexistence. He also stressed that religions must function as instruments of harmony rather than sources of conflict. Through the idea of "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity," Guru sought to minimize social fragmentation and encourage spiritual inclusiveness. His vision inspires societies to replace competition with cooperation at both local and global levels. Thus, Guru's synthesis of humanitarianism and spirituality provides a meaningful pathway for achieving sustainable world peace.

Guru was not an ascetic who stayed away from people, but a mystic who believed that divinity exists in every person and in every part of the universe. His spirituality was inseparable from his commitment to worldly life, human dignity and social justice. He actively engaged with the struggles of his time, stood against caste discrimination and social oppression, and worked tirelessly to bring about grassroots transformation.

Guru sought to empower the marginalized, particularly the lower-caste communities, by guiding them towards self-assertion and self-respect. For him, true upliftment was not limited to one dimension of life; it was a harmonious blend of education, farming, trade, technical skills, social development, material well-being, spiritual growth, and inner purification. Through this holistic vision, he sought to make oppressed

communities self-reliant and confident members of society.

In Kerala's caste-bound society, the Ezhavas, were among the most marginalized. They were untouchables, excluded from schools and public spaces, denied government employment, kept out of Hindu temples. They were often reduced to slaves either under feudal lords or within the rigid caste order. Against this background, Guru's message carried extraordinary force. He affirmed that every aspect of life, social, economic, educational, and spiritual, was crucial for liberation and equality. His efforts helped transform the Ezhavas from a socially excluded group into a self-assertive community that could participate with dignity in civil society. Guru's divine motto to bring in this revolution was 'oneness of humanity' or 'one-world vision'.

### 6.1.1 Forms of Oneness in Guru: Philosophical, Ethical and Religious

According to classical Advaita of Sankara, the world's apparent pluralities and differences are ultimately unreal because only a non-dual Brahman is the real. Here, Advaita employs rich concepts such as liberating knowledge (jnana), ignorance (avidya), and illusion (maya). Reinterpreting and giving Advaita a new orientation away from its pure metaphysical sense to social space, Guru embraced the spirit of oneness (non-duality) from this and invoked the same dominantly in three spheres, combined with philosophy, religion and politics. This combination of oneness in three spheres was one of the important aspects of Guru's devotion.

Guru invoked the philosophical oneness to state the inner-realization that Atman and Brahman are identical. This oneness aims at dissolving the difference between knower, known and knowledge. The ethical oneness aims at creating a human family.

It wants to assert that all humans share a common essence. The famous slogan by Guru 'one caste, one religion and one God for human beings' transcend all caste-communal divisions and indicates the ethical oneness by placing the human beings in one single family. The religious oneness (ekamatham) is clear in his words: : "Pala matha saaravum ekam" meaning that the essence of all religions is one.

Needless to say, Guru expresses the very essence of oneness in elevating and glorifying the oneness of God in devotion, as in various verses of Daivadasakam:

"Counting repeatedly one by one  
And when all countable vanish  
Then what remains is the noble eye  
Let me become throb less dissolving in it." (verse -2)  
And  
"In the deep sea of your glory  
Let all of us be immersed  
And live forever  
Exist and live in peace" (verse 10).

#### 6.1.1.1 Guru on Religions and One-world Vision

PK. Balakrishnan says, Guru views Hinduism as a sangamam, a confluence of diverse and even contradictory philosophical streams. Morally, it keeps a clear distance from Charvaka materialism, which celebrates food, drink, and sensual pleasures, and moves to sanyasa, which advocates complete renunciation of worldly life. This vast breadth of thought is reflected in Guru's life, words, and teachings. His core message was profound: "Pala matha saaravum ekam" meaning that the essence of all religions is one.

One important point to understand Guru's social praxis is that Guru did not dismiss

or reject the religions as stupidity. Because he was much aware of the social context in which he was living. He has realization that dismissing religions in India will not bring him to the aim of spiritual reformation and social revolution for justice. Thus, he acted as a wise social engineer and strategist in the form of a saint and spiritual Guru.

Guru read widely and gained knowledge of all major religions, and encouraged his disciples to do the same. Because Guru believed that only through deep readings of all religions that people will have a mutual understanding. Guru learned several scriptures, especially those that comment on Advaita, throughout the years. This practice made him sit for meditation, leading to his enlightenment. After constant, deep readings, study and meditation, he became a Guru, the enlightened. He then started seeing the presence of the divine everywhere.

Sree Narayana Guru studied the major religions intensely and encouraged his disciples to do the same. He believed that mutual understanding among people could grow only when they read and understood different religions. Over the years, Guru carefully studied the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the philosophy of Saivism. He gave prime importance to spiritual illumination and built his teachings on the principles of dynamism, harmony, mobility, and consciousness. These studies, along with his long periods of meditation, eventually led him to enlightenment. Through this journey of reading, analysis, and meditation, he attained the vision of the divine as present everywhere.

### **6.1.2 Divinity in Everything and Compassion to Everything**

Guru embraced the idea that divinity is present everywhere and reflected it in his own life. He saw the divine in himself, others and

in all beings across the world. He also stressed the importance of compassion towards every living being, however small, as they have some divine spark. These two ideals, omnipresent divinity and unconditional compassion, are evident in his writings.

His famous lyrics, “One Caste, One Religion, One God for humankind,” “whatever you do for the sake of your own happiness should also bring happiness to others,” and the opening verses of Anukamba Dashakam (1920), where he prays to cause no harm even to an ant, clearly express this vision. These ideas formed the foundation of his one-world vision, where humanity is united through divinity and compassion.

In her book Sreenarayananaguru’s Poetic World (Sreenarayananaguruvinte Kavyalokam), Kavitha Raman observes: “A close reading of Guru’s four poetic works, Daivadasakam, Anukamba Dasakam, Jathi Nirnnayam, and Jeevakarunya Panchakam, reveals three central ideals that run through them all. Two of these had marked Guru’s thought from early times: deep devotion to God and a strong opposition to caste. The third is his principle of Ahimsa (non-violence). Guru’s immense concern for the “Other” naturally culminated in this ideal of Ahimsa. Thus, his philosophy brought together three interwoven principles: devotion to God, rejection of caste, and compassion expressed through non-violence. Through that, Guru could present Ahimsa as a social and political project.” She also notes that Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1914, upholding Ahimsa as a political weapon.

PK. Balakrishnan observes that “Guru’s philosophy of oneness, expressed through universal humanism and universal religion, was not a mere concept but an experienced spiritual truth. For Guru, it was a lived reality rather than a theoretical idea.” He embodied and propagated the oneness of all religions, a central tenet of his universal humanism. The



consecration of the Siva idol at Aruvippuram was a landmark event, an act that broke Brahminical monopoly and symbolised the unity of humanity beyond caste and religion. Through such acts, Guru made spiritual reformation possible on the foundation of oneness and universal humanism.

It must also be noted that on his path toward a one-world vision and peace, Guru did not lead violent struggles, revolutions, or upheavals. Instead, he became a guiding light, working to melt away the strong chains of social evils. His light spread into the darkness of society, slowly eroding it. It was through this divinity and light that Guru laid the foundation for his vision of one world, where humanity could live in unity and dignity. When the divine embraced him, all forms of ignorance and inequality were destroyed. His mission then became twofold: first, to spread the divine message, and second, to work for the eradication of inequality and injustice on earth.

### 6.1.3 Guru's 'Practical Advaita' as One-world Vision

Śaṅkara's Advaita emphasizes ascetic withdrawal from the world. While drawing from the essence of Advaita, Guru challenged its detachment from worldly suffering. For him, real liberation (mokṣa) was not merely the attainment of knowledge (jñāna) and withdrawal from the world (vairāgya). He insisted that non-duality must be lived out in daily life rather than confined to a purely metaphysical plane. Refusing to retreat into the shelter of illusion (māyā), he confronted social injustice directly, affirming that true non-duality cannot coexist with social indifference.

In *Not Many, But One*, G. K Sasidharan states about Guru's inspiration from Advaita Vedanta as below: "Basically, Sreenarayanguru's life is the life that was

dedicated to the promotion of Advaita, the philosophy of oneness. He had no life separated from the spirit of Advaita. This can be seen in his literacy works and the social activities...In all his literacy works and social reformation activities, one can see his ardent closeness with Advaita Vedanta."

Guru's integration of metaphysics with social praxis found concrete expression in several historical initiatives, including the consecration of the Śiva idol at Aruvippuram in 1888, the institution of the Sivagiri pilgrimage in 1924, and the All-Religions Conference at Aluva in 1924. In consecrating the idol at Aruvippuram, Guru transcended caste- and religion-based restrictions on worship. Through the Sivagiri pilgrimage, he invited people of all castes and communities to join under the ideal of a "human caste," and established schools, libraries, and service centers for all. At the All-Religions Conference, he affirmed the essential unity of all religions.

This "Practical Advaita" finds its most profound expression in Guru's magnum opus, *Atmopadesa Satakam*. In this work, he employs the logic of non-duality to dismantle the very foundations of social hierarchy: "The 'other person' is the bearer of my own form. Thinking thus, one should do for him what is for one's own good." This verse stands as an ethical injunction directly derived from Advaitic metaphysics. It dissolves the self-other dichotomy and establishes compassion (karuṇa) not as a sentiment but as the rational consequence of realizing non-duality. If the "other" is an extension of oneself, harming or degrading another amounts to self-harm, while uplifting others becomes the highest form of self-interest.

In another verse, Guru directly confronts casteism: "One in kind, one in faith, one in God is man; Of one womb, of one form, difference there is none." Here, he affirms the biological and

spiritual unity of humankind (one-world vision in biological and spiritual sphere) as an undeniable truth, declaring caste-based divisions both philosophically absurd and morally untenable. As scholar S. Omana notes, Guru's vision was a "humanistic Advaita" that sought "the liberation of man in this world and in this life," uniting social harmony and ethical responsibility with spiritual realization. He democratized the wisdom of the Upaniṣads, which is distant from the world and the people, and transformed it into a means for social equality. Thus, Guru reoriented a philosophy

of transcendence into an immanent social justice.

Guru challenged the caste-structure by proclaiming Anukampa (kindness and compassion) as the true basis of human relations. He extended this compassion not only to people of all castes but to the entire universe. He thus broke the hierarchical structure and offered his vision of oneness, in which humanity is united in dignity, equality, and mutual respect. This formed the foundation of his one-world vision and peace.

## Recap

- ◆ Guru's thought was not confined to metaphysics but reinterpreted Advaita Vedanta as a social philosophy
- ◆ Guru applied the principle of non-duality to dismantle caste barriers and affirm the equal dignity of all beings.
- ◆ Guru's one-world vision extended the Vedantic insight of oneness into an ethical imperative
- ◆ Nataraja Guru universalized Guru's insights by articulating "one-world consciousness."
- ◆ One-world consciousness /one-world vision is a global educational vision that connected philosophy, science, religion, and culture under a unitive framework.
- ◆ For Guru, divinity was immanent in every human being, and therefore denying education, dignity, or justice to anyone was a form of spiritual blindness.
- ◆ Guru's reinterpretation of Advaita made compassion not a sentimental virtue but a rational consequence of metaphysical oneness
- ◆ Harming another was identical to harming oneself.
- ◆ The slogan "One Caste, One Religion, One God for humankind" condensed his radical rejection of sectarianism and casteism
- ◆ Guru upheld an inclusive humanism.

- ◆ Guru transformed the Ezhavas from a socially oppressed community into a collective with dignity, self-respect, and organizational strength.
- ◆ Guru redefined moksa as not otherworldly withdrawal but the creation of a just and harmonious society in this life.
- ◆ Aruvippuram consecration and the All-Religions Conference demonstrated his Practical Advaita and turned abstract principles into socially transformative events.

## Objective Questions

1. What was the philosophical foundation of guru's one-world vision?
2. Who expanded guru's idea into a global educational program of "one-world consciousness"?
3. What was guru's famous slogan expressing ethical oneness?
4. Which community was most transformed by guru's reform efforts?
5. Which year did guru consecrate the śiva idol at aruvippuram?
6. Which event in 1924 symbolized guru's call for interfaith unity?
7. In which poetic work does guru declare, "the 'other person' is the bearer of my own form"?
8. Which principle, along with devotion to god and anti-caste stance, formed guru's third hallmark?
9. According to P. K. Balakrishnan, what was guru's idea of oneness?
10. What kind of advaita did S. Omana describe guru's philosophy as?

## Answers

1. Advaita vedanta
2. Nataraja Guru
3. “one caste, one religion, one god for humankind.”
4. Ezhava community
5. 1888
6. all-religions conference at aluva
7. Atmopadesa śatakam
8. Ahimsa (non-violence)
9. A lived spiritual truth, not just a concept
10. Humanistic Advaita

## Assignments

1. Explain how Sreenarayana Guru transformed classical Advaita Vedānta into a philosophy of Practical Advaita. Discuss how his reinterpretation connects spiritual realization with social transformation.
2. Analyze the three forms of oneness—philosophical, ethical, and religious—in Guru’s teachings. How do these ideas contribute to his one-world vision and universal humanism?
3. Evaluate Guru’s understanding of divinity and compassion as central to his universal humanitarianism. Illustrate your answer with references to his poetic works and social initiatives.
4. Discuss how Guru’s motto “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity” serves as both a philosophical principle and a practical program for eradicating casteism and advancing social equality. Provide relevant historical examples from his reform movements.

## Reference

1. Sasidharan, G.K (2020), *Not Many, But One: Sreenarayanaguru's Philosophy of Universal Oneness. Volume 1&2*, Penguin Random House India.
2. Nataraja Guru (2009), *Experiencing One-World*, D.K. Print World Ltd

## Suggested Reading

1. P. K. Balakrishnan (1954), *Narayanaguru; Anthology* (Malayalam), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur.



## Need for One World Government

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain Nataraja Guru's interpretation of Sree Narayana Guru's Practical Advaita in the sphere of politics and geopolitics.
- ◆ differentiate between conventional nation-state politics and Nataraja Guru's concept of world government.
- ◆ analyze how the principles of "General Good" and "Good of All" serve as ethical foundations of world governance.
- ◆ discuss Nataraja Guru's reinterpretation of Rousseau's social contract in universal terms.
- ◆ evaluate the features of world government in contrast to existing international organizations and systems

### Prerequisites

Sree Narayana Guru's vision forms the essential foundation for Nataraja Guru's later reflections on one-world politics and governance. His firm belief in the indivisible unity of all human beings, expressed in his famous dictum "one caste, one religion, one God for man," represents more than a spiritual teaching. It is a universal social ethic. He challenged blind rituals and sectarian divisions, and advocated for rational and spiritual inquiry as the path to truth. His practical approach to social, educational, and economic uplift aimed to dismantle entrenched inequalities and empower the marginalized, providing a path for human progress grounded in justice and dignity. For Sree Narayana Guru, liberation was not merely individual or spiritual but collective and social, requiring the reorganization of human relations on the basis of equality, fraternity, and mutual respect. This unitive philosophy attends to human virtues and vices, inner beauty and ugliness, combining reason,

compassion, and practical reform. It provides the necessary step toward Nataraja Guru's larger project of envisioning a world order where politics itself is redefined in the light of unity, justice, and the common good of humanity.

## Keywords

Territory, Universal principle, Unity, Solidarity, One-world

## Discussion

### 6.1.1 World-Government and The *General Good* and the *Good of All*

In *Experiencing One-World*, Nataraja Guru interprets Sree Narayana Guru's principle of *Practical Advaita* by extending it from the sphere of society to the sphere of politics, where the actual power and fight for power exist. Nataraja Guru shows that Guru's doctrine of unitive understanding provides the philosophical foundation for a new mode of political organisation: the actualisation of a one-world government and a just world order. The politics/government here is not to be confused with local or national politics/government in the conventional sense. Rather, Nataraja Guru's concern is the realm of geopolitics and the structural re-organization of humanity as a whole. According to Nataraja Guru, it is a contemplative way of looking at politics, daily affairs and sufferings in the world, founded on the idea of Guru's unitive understanding.

In other words, Nataraja Guru says that politics, when seen through Guru's unitive vision, is not about gaining power or defending narrow group or sectarian interests. Instead, it becomes a way of thinking deeply about the struggles, conflicts, and hopes of all human beings together. To explain this, he uses a dialectical method

in world politics or geopolitics. This means trying to bring balance and unity between geo-forces that often seem opposed. Such politics, he argues, becomes real only when two ethical principles, the *General Good* and the *Good of All*, guide world governance. Contemplative politics means a world order that seeks balance and integration between seemingly opposing tendencies.

Here, Nataraja Guru gives a new meaning to Rousseau's social contract. The social contract refers to a hypothetical stage in history that gave legitimacy to the nation-state. The idea is that, at some point in history, people handed over their will and sovereignty to a government in return for protection of their life, wealth and dignity. But for Nataraja Guru, the true meaning of the social contract goes beyond nation-states. It becomes a universal principle and that principle is fully realized only when all humanity lives under one framework of justice, equality, and cooperation. It is only in such situations that the two fundamental ethical imperatives, the *General Good* and the *Good of All*, are placed at the very center of world governance. It is only then that the social contract is truly fulfilled and humanity as a whole is brought under a single framework of justice, equality, and cooperation.

Nataraja Guru's "geo-dialectical" approach to world government is not opposed

to a contemplative or spiritual life. On the contrary, it is the natural extension of Sree Narayana Guru's insight that "humanity is one" or "one caste, one religion and one God for men." The unquestioned basis of the world government is the indivisible unity of humankind, the universal truth in the Guru's philosophy. Nataraja Guru makes this point clear:

"The recognition of the unity and solidarity of mankind follows from the correct application of the scientific or unitive approach to the problems of humanity. Just as belief in many gods is incorrect, so when humanity is considered relativistically as consisting of closed groups, however big, or justified in the name of power or practicability, such a view violates this first and fundamental principle of the indivisible unit of Man. Humanity is one by its common origin, one in its common interests and motives of happiness here on earth in everyday living, and one in its relation to the aspirations and ideals which bind human beings together by bonds of sympathy for each other."

Nataraja Guru makes an important point about human nature while envisioning one-world politics or government. He argues that a clear and balanced understanding of human nature is necessary for such a world order to take shape. In doing so, he rejects the assumption behind the social contract theory, which claims that human beings in the state of nature, before the nation-state, are "selfish, brutish, and nasty." For Nataraja Guru, this view is one-sided and misleading. He explains that human nature is neither wholly bad nor wholly good; both extremes are unrealistic. The challenge is to resolve these conflicting tendencies in human life. The way forward, he suggests, is to recognize that just as there is one humanity, so too there must be one absolute justice for all people, one universal goodness, and one shared ideal of human happiness. "One God

or ideal of human happiness could be stated as the basis of common human existence." This, he says, should form the true basis of everyday human existence.

In that sense, the one-world government upheld by Nataraja Guru is not a mere utopian dream but a philosophical necessity that grows out of the recognition of humanity's common origin, shared destiny, and universal moral responsibilities. It reflects the political dimension of Guru's unitive vision, in which spirituality and world politics come together to lay the foundation for lasting world peace.

## 6.2.2 What the World-Government Is Not

Nataraja Guru is clear in explaining what a world government does not mean. He writes: "The world government has no territory other than the surface of the globe. It is not conceived as a rival to any existing government. It does not intend to duplicate any of their functions. Neither does it wish to be a parallel government, nor does it have ambitions to be a superstate. On the other hand, it has no wish to occupy a second place among nation states. It has an absolute status of its own as understood in the light of geo-politics."

The world government, according to Nataraja Guru, has no program of action or territorial ambitions either. As modern governments, "it does not rule by threat, force or the power of the magistrate or the police." Instead, its power is knowledge, and it works by persuasion and unitive vision integrated into humans rather than coercion. Its principle rests on the old dictum that "a word to the wise will suffice." The world government, therefore, seeks to influence humanity through humanity itself, for the sake of humankind.

To make us understand the world government which does not rule by 'enforcement' of law and order, Nataraja

Guru brings a metaphor of spiritual heat or electricity. He says, the world government applies “a subtle form of vertical pressure corresponding to spiritual heat or electricity.” Just as order arises when iron filings fall into place under a magnetic field, so too can global order emerge from human chaos when inspired by unitive understanding and unitive vision.

### 6.2.3 What the World-Government Is

Nataraja Guru uses different terms to explain the idea of a world government. He points out that “all attempts hitherto in this regard... are either negative or relativistic.” They are negative because most proposals for peace and disarmament are motivated by regret for the wars already fought or by fear of the wars expected. They are relativistic because such efforts tend to divide nations into categories such as those considered free and those that are not. This method does not embrace a truly unitive vision. For Guru, these international organizations are therefore not “unitively conceived.”

In contrast, the world government Nataraja Guru envisions is not passive. It must function actively and positively, applying what he calls “positive pressure” and aiming at the vertical ascent of humanity. One of its unique

features is the practice of world politics at multiple levels:

- ◆ From below: addressing the concerns of ordinary people, especially those caught between national borders and frontiers. Every common person should be able to register as a “world citizen.”
- ◆ From within and above: guiding nations and individuals alike with a unitive and spiritual outlook that transcends narrow political interests.

Practical measures are also central to this vision of the World-Government. Guru speaks of the issuance of world passports, recognition of universal human rights as declared in international charters, and the establishment of world law that serves “the General Good and the Good of All.” He summarizes what is the World-Government founded on Sreenarayanaguru’s concept of ‘unitive understanding’: “The world government actually proposes to bring a new and total world outlook upon world problems. It will help to turn out more and more world citizens. They will be human beings who have attained the full status of persons who represent the General Good and the Good of All.” It is founded on the idea that unity and absolute value are at the basis of human life

## Recap

- ◆ Nataraja Guru extends Practical Advaita into politics, aiming at the structural reorganization of humanity.
- ◆ His concept of politics is contemplative, not power-seeking, and focuses on the struggles of all humanity.
- ◆ He reinterprets Rousseau's social contract as a universal principle fulfilled only under global justice and cooperation.
- ◆ The ethical principles of "General Good" and "Good of All" form the foundation of world governance.
- ◆ Human nature, according to Guru, is neither wholly good nor wholly bad but a balance of both tendencies.
- ◆ The one-world government is not utopian but a philosophical necessity rooted in humanity's unity.
- ◆ Nataraja Guru clarifies what world government is *not*: it has no territory, rivalry, or coercive force.
- ◆ Instead, its power is knowledge and persuasion, symbolized as "spiritual heat" or "vertical pressure."
- ◆ The world government functions actively and positively, practicing politics from below, within, and above.
- ◆ Its practical measures include world passports, universal human rights, and world law for the common good.

## Objective Questions

1. Who extends Sree Narayana Guru's Practical Advaita into the sphere of politics?
2. What is the primary ethical foundation of world governance according to Nataraja Guru?
3. Whose concept of the social contract does Nataraja Guru reinterpret?
4. What does the social contract mean for Nataraja Guru?
5. How does Nataraja Guru describe human nature?
6. What metaphor does he use to explain the subtle power of world government?
7. What does the world government not rely on?
8. What practical measure of world citizenship does Nataraja Guru propose?
9. What does Nataraja Guru call existing international organizations?
10. What is the ultimate goal of the world government according to Nataraja Guru?

## Answers

1. Nataraja guru
2. The general good and the good of all
3. Rousseau
4. A universal principle of justice, equality, and cooperation for all humanity
5. Neither wholly good nor wholly bad, but a balance of both
6. Spiritual heat or electricity
7. Threat, force, or police power

8. Issuance of world passports
9. Negative or relativistic
10. To form world citizens who embody the general good and the good of all

## Assignments

1. Explain how Nataraja guru extends Sreenarayana Guru's Practical Advaita into the political domain to justify the idea of a one-world government. How does this shift redefine politics beyond the framework of nation-states?
2. Differentiate between conventional nation-state politics and Nataraja Guru's conception of a world government. In your answer, evaluate the ethical role of the "general good" and the "good of all" in restructuring global governance.
3. Critically analyze Nataraja Guru's reinterpretation of Rousseau's social contract as a universal principle. To what extent can this reinterpretation resolve global conflicts and promote lasting world peace?

## Reference

1. Sasidharan, G.K. (2020), *Not Many, But One: Sreenarayananaguru's Philosophy of Universal Oneness. Volume 1 & 2*, Penguin Random House India.
2. Nataraja Guru (2009), *Experiencing One-World*, D.K. Print World Ltd

## Suggested Reading

1. P. K. Balakrishnan (1954), *Narayananaguru; Anthology* (Malayalam), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur.



## Need for One-World Economy

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain Nataraja Guru's critique of fragmentary and nationalistic approaches in modern economics.
- ◆ describe his call for a dialectical and unitive approach to money, wealth, and value.
- ◆ distinguish between present-day economic practices and the vision of a one-world economy based on human welfare.
- ◆ analyze the philosophical dictum "Economics is for man, not man for economics" in the context of ethics and economics.
- ◆ evaluate how Nataraja Guru's vision of one-world economics extends Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy of holistic human liberation.

### Prerequisites

The story of the National Monument in Geneva features two women figures, one representing Geneva and the other representing Switzerland, standing together in friendship. Their embrace represents the Swiss motto, "One for all, all for one." This image teaches us that peace and progress come only through unity, cooperation, and shared responsibility. Just as Geneva could not stand alone but became part of a larger federation, Nataraja Guru, while explaining his one-world economy, says that no nation today can remain isolated in economic matters. His idea of a one-world economy is based on the same truth that by joining hands, crossing boundaries, and treating wealth as a value for all, humanity can achieve real progress. Just as Geneva could not remain isolated but had to be integrated into a wider federation, Nataraja Guru reminds us that individual nations cannot sustain themselves in economic

isolation. His call for a one-world economy is built on the same insight that only through embracing one another, transcending boundaries, and seeing wealth as a shared human value can we achieve actual progress for humanity.

## Keywords

Present economy, Self-interest, Money, Value, Unitive approach

## Discussion

Sree Narayana Guru put forward a synergistic model for holistic human liberation, built on three strong pillars: castelessness, education, and economic enterprise. According to him, these three together form a strong foundation for societal progress. Building on this foundation, Nataraja Guru, in *Experiencing One-World*, extends Guru's vision into the field of economics. He begins by affirming that economy or wealth is not merely a technical category but a value in life. For him, a true world order cannot be achieved without a proper rethinking of economics in the light of humanity's unitive understanding, vision and destiny.

### 6.3.1 Present Economics: Criticism of Fragmentary, Closed, or Static Approaches

Nataraja Guru strongly criticises the present state of economics as a discipline, rejects how it is only about the accumulation of material benefits, criticises the present state of economics as a discipline and rejects how it is only about the accumulation of material benefits and the wealth of this or that sect or nation. He rejects the present economics as it is about 'economically defeating' the neighbour/other. This directly goes against Guru's embrace and integration of the other into oneself.

Nataraja Guru observes: "There is no textbook of World-economics, though economics as a science. If it really is a science, it should necessarily be most directly concerned with the happiness of humanity as a whole. Instead, economists visualise a world consisting of differently coloured Hitlerish patches of territories from within which each man is thinking hard economically so as to defeat his neighbour." Here, Guru exposes the fragmentary, closed and nationalistic bias that dominates economic thought/science today. Instead of being a science of values concerned with the welfare of all humanity, economics has been reduced to the art of strengthening one nation against another.

He critiques vague theories and questionable practices in economics, of which no concrete understanding is possible, such as inflation, scarcity economics, production statistics, and exchange theories. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, he notes, was not a book about the science of wealth as such, but rather about the wealth of particular nations such as England, where monarchs and statesmen applied economic policies only in their own national interest. It was about their economic interests versus those of other nations.

Guru further highlights the confusion between capital and wealth, the contradictions between scarcity economics and the economy of abundance, and the overlapping but ill-understood relation between gold and capital.



Classical utopias such as Plato's *Republic* or More's *Utopia* reveal that economic ideals have always shaped visions of possible worlds of value. Still, economics has rarely been treated as a science rooted in human welfare.

The crucial problem, he argues, is that economics often becomes more important than man himself. As he writes: "Economics must be for man at least as much as man is for economics. When economics becomes more important than man, it ends in absurdities." In modern capitalist society, the notions of value, wealth, and money have been vaguely understood, without reference to human dignity, human value, and human welfare.

Notably, he critiques the way economics has treated the value of the human being. During the days of slavery, human beings were reduced to marketable goods with price tags. With the abolition of slavery and the recognition of equality, the opposite tendency arose: human beings themselves, except as laboring forces, were treated as redundancies. For Nataraja Guru, this illustrates how economic reasoning has remained incomplete and distorted throughout human history, despite claims of rational progress and scientific advancement. The point he raises here is that whatever has marketable value has often been treated as a kind of God in history. At one time, human beings were bought and sold as commodities; today, it is gold and capital that dominate. In this way, he exposes the absurdities of the existing economic system.

### 6.3.2 Different Perspectives of Money and Wealth

Nataraja Guru compares the value of spirituality and gold throughout human history. He notes how saints and spiritual figures often despised gold as "filthy lucre" and considered the worship of gold as nothing less than the "worship of false gods." This

shows a moral-spiritual critique of wealth that runs counter to purely materialistic valuations.

### 6.3.2.1 Possible Worlds of Value

Guru explains possible worlds of value to reject the absolutist value of gold. In Guru's vision, "gold" and "goodness" are often seen as interchangeable symbols of value under the one-world economy built on the foundation of unitive vision. But such an approach, he insists, requires a dialectical method. Just as he argued for a dialectical approach to geopolitics, he stresses that a "dialectical approach to economics" is the need of the hour. Economics, too, must be approached in a "unitive way," transcending fragmented perspectives of wealth, value, money and human beings.

Given that gold is a central symbol of wealth and the most determining and enduring notion of value, Guru raises a simple yet profound question from the standpoint of a layperson: "Why should gold not be left in the mines, if it is only brought out to be reserved in the banking areas of the great capitals, buried again in vaults, as an elusive presence? Could not hoarded gold elsewhere be treated as equally respectable and justified?" With this, Guru raises the absurdity of existing economic practices.

### 6.3.3 One-World Economics

For Nataraja Guru, "economics is the modern substitute for religion." Whereas religion promises rewards in the hereafter, economics claims to ensure the betterment of life here. However, it has "questionable enthusiasts" as leaders, or "blind believers in outmoded ideologies," as much as the religion does. He warns that the "mass-mind" can be swayed in the name of either religion or economics into distorted notions that act

against the “General Good and the Good of All.”

Guru further observes that economic creeds can become as fanatical as religious dogmas and can claim as much of a toll on human life during crises. Moreover, economics, like religion, can easily join hands with politics and “work havoc among peaceful inhabitants.” For Guru, a truly valid economic science must be seen as “value-wisdom,” dealing with wealth in a way that aims at “human welfare,” beginning from the basic realities of scarcity, poverty, and want.

### 6.3.4 Economics is for Man and Not Man for Economics

At the heart of Guru’s economic vision is the dictum: “Economics is for man, not

man for economics.” Here, “man is the veritable measuring rod,” a principle that echoes philosophical traditions as far back as Plato. According to Guru, modern thought has failed to uphold this view because ethics and economics have been treated as separate and even antagonistic domains. Instead of enriching each other, they have often ‘spoiled’ one another.

To illustrate this, Guru once again poses the simple question of a layman: “Why should gold not be left in the mines, if it is only brought out to be reserved in the banking areas of the great capitals?” This question reveals his unitive approach to economics, a vision that resists artificial practices of wealth accumulation. It also points toward a system rooted in human welfare.

## Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru laid the foundation for progress through castelessness, education, and economic enterprise.
- ◆ Nataraja Guru extended this vision into the field of economics with his idea of a one-world economy.
- ◆ Nataraja Guru criticizes modern economics for being fragmentary, nationalistic, and based on defeating the “other.”
- ◆ Economics, if truly a science, must focus on the happiness of humanity as a whole.
- ◆ The dominance of national interests, as seen since Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, undermines universal human welfare.
- ◆ Nataraja Guru critiques the confusion between wealth, capital, gold, and human value.
- ◆ He exposes absurdities such as hoarding gold in vaults instead of using it for human benefit.

- ◆ Economics often replaces religion but can become equally dogmatic and destructive.
- ◆ Nataraja Guru's central dictum is: "Economics is for man, not man for economics"
- ◆ A valid economic science must be "value-wisdom" directed toward human dignity and welfare.

## Objective Questions

1. Who extended Sree Narayana Guru's vision into economics?
2. What does Nataraja Guru criticize about modern economics?
3. What does Guru say is the true concern of economics if it is a science?
4. Which classical economist's work is criticized for focusing on national rather than global wealth?
5. What does Guru identify as the contradiction in modern economics regarding wealth?
6. What absurdity does Guru highlight about gold?
7. What does Guru compare economics with, calling it its modern substitute?
8. What danger does Guru point out about economics and religion alike?
9. What is meant by "value-wisdom" in Guru's economic philosophy?
10. What is Guru's central dictum about economics?

## Answers

1. Nataraja Guru.
2. Its fragmentary, nationalistic, and competitive nature.
3. The happiness of humanity as a whole.
4. Adam Smith.
5. The confusion between scarcity economics and the economy of abundance.
6. That gold is mined only to be hoarded again in bank vaults
7. Religion.
8. Both can become dogmatic and destructive when misused.
9. An approach where wealth is understood in relation to human welfare.
10. “Economics is for man, not man for economics.”

## Assignments

1. Critically explain Nataraja Guru’s critique of present-day economics as fragmentary and nationalistic. How does his argument challenge conventional ideas of money, wealth, and economic success?
2. Discuss the statement “Economics is for man, not man for economics” in the context of ethical and unitive approaches to economic organization. How does this principle contribute to the concept of a one-world economy based on human welfare?
3. Analyze how Nataraja Guru applies a dialectical and unitive method to economics in *Experiencing One-World*. In what way does this extend Sree Narayana Guru’s vision of holistic human liberation into the domain of global economic governance?

## Reference

1. Sasidharan, G.K (2020), *Not Many, But One: Sreenarayanaguru's Philosophy of Universal Oneness. Volume 1&2*, Penguin Random House India.
2. Nataraja Guru (2009), *Experiencing One-World*, D.K. Print World Ltd

## Suggested Reading

1. P. K. Balakrishnan (1954), *Narayanaguru; Anthology* (Malayalam), Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur.



## Need for One-World Education

# UNIT

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain Nataraja Guru's concept of World-Education and its holistic nature.
- ◆ describe the bipolar relation between teacher and learner in the educational process.
- ◆ identify the major characteristics of world-education, such as polarity, personal factor, and educability of all.
- ◆ analyse the contradiction between the citizen and the human being in modern education.
- ◆ evaluate the need for integral education that harmonizes means and ends, individuality and universality.

### Prerequisites

The idea of education has always carried within it a tension between what society expects from individuals and what individuals seek for themselves. In most modern systems, education is often reduced to training for professions, preparation for citizenship, or the mere acquisition of information. Yet, philosophers from Rousseau to Gandhi have insisted that education is more than this. It shapes not only skills but the very character and destiny of human beings. To engage with Nataraja Guru's vision of World-Education, the learner must think of education in a larger, more philosophical sense: as a process that involves both personal growth and universal values, both the inner self and the outer world. It is this broadened understanding of education, beyond the limits of narrow utilitarian goals, that lays the groundwork for Guru's concept of an unitive and integrated approach to education.

## Keywords

Bi-polar education, Personal factor, Contradiction, Unitive approach, Values

## Discussion

Guru presents his concept of World-Education as a critique of the existing theories of education. While critiquing the modern concept of education, he conceives education as a bipolar process, involving a dynamic relationship between the teacher and the taught, the educator and the educand. Education is delivered through a unified vision, and in this process both the teacher's and the learner's personalities play equally important roles.

According to Guru, education must be sensitive to the different stages of human life. A child, an adolescent, an adult, a person in middle age, and a person in old age each has distinct needs, tastes, and capacities, and their education must be customised accordingly. Similarly, education must address the particular requirements of both men and women while integrating them within a unitive framework. Guru primarily speaks of the education of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, as well as the education of the "man of affairs", those actively engaged in society.

### 6.4.1 Bipolar Relation of Education

Guru begins the discussion of World-education by stating the bipolar relation of education. A bipolar relation in education is when the teacher and the learner function as dialectical counterparts in the educational process. Each person's personality, along with the specific context of the situation, plays a crucial role in shaping the process. Education, therefore, must take into account both the personal factor and the larger goal

of human happiness.

Guru emphasizes that education should aim to "enhance the value of the person along scientific, open and dynamic lines, without closed or static dogmatisms." In this vision, the individuality of both the educator and the educand must be recognised while pursuing a synthetic, integrative approach. Guru also highlights a key aspect of this process as the unity of means and ends. The innate and outward aspects of personality must be harmonized, and the methods (means) of education should align with its ultimate purpose (ends). For Guru, this meeting of means and ends takes place not merely within immediate contexts but also in the larger horizons of infinity and eternity.

### 6.4.2 World-Education: Major Characteristics

According to Nataraja Guru, education is not merely the transfer of information, knowledge or training of skills, but a holistic and organic process that attends to the total growth of the human person. It must begin with the simplest sensations and extend toward the attainment of the highest values of truth, justice, love, and morality. Education, therefore, is not a mechanistic but a living and creative process accommodating both the vertical ascent to eternal values and the horizontal integration of everyday human experiences.

As mentioned, it recognises the paradoxes, polarities, and contradictions of each stage of human life and seeks to harmonise them through balance and synthesis. One of the

foundational aspects of this vision is the conviction that every individual is educable, for no nature is beyond transformation. Education must thus attend to the personal factor, the inner self as well as the outer world, and aim ultimately at the abolition of all dualities in pure consciousness, thereby realising an integral education of the human being as a whole.

Guru discusses the specific characteristics and aspects of the World-education, such as the content of education, the vertical and horizontal worlds of values, the law of polarity and the unitive treatment of values, the educability of all, the personal factor, and the final abolition of all dualities and differences in pure consciousness.

**a. Content of Education:** The content of education, according to Guru, must range from the most elementary sensations to the highest human values. He says: "If a simple sensation reaching the organism may be said to mark the alpha of the educative process, the omega of the series may be said to be marked by the appreciation of high human values." Here, Guru critiques the modern concept of education, which is a mechanistic transmission of information. In contrast, education is a living, creative, and organic process that progressively transforms personal tendencies toward higher ideals.

**b. Vertical and Horizontal Worlds of Values:** To illustrate the dual nature of man, Guru refers to Rousseau's *Social Contract*, where Rousseau speaks of two opposing principles: "As I meditated on the nature of man, it seemed that I discovered therein two distinct principles; one of them rose to the study of eternal verities, towards love, justice, and true morality... the other lowered, rendered it slave of the senses and of passion, which are its instruments." Also, the sensation itself can be seen as a value-idea, according

to Guru, and thus education must account for the dialectical interplay between higher and lower tendencies.

- c. The Law of Polarity and Unitive Treatment of Values:** Guru emphasizes that education must recognize the paradoxes of human life, the tragic conflicts, ambivalences, and polarities that shape human existence. From the principle of polarity, he derives two further laws: the law of compensation of interests and the law of equilibrium, both of which call for balance and synthesis in human development.
- d. Content of Positive Education:** In positive education, the learner's interests are directed toward things that can be related intelligibly and actively, and through this process, one learns self-comparison with others. Education, therefore, is not passive reception but an active engagement with life and value.
- e. Educability of All:** A cornerstone of Guru's world-education is his conviction that "no nature exists which cannot be changed." This stands in opposition to the common belief that true character cannot be altered. He cites Voltaire's extreme skepticism, who remarked: "Would you insist absolutely on changing the character of a man? Then purge him every day with diluents till you have him dead." Against this, Guru invokes the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad's saying: "If the mountain would not come to him, he would go to the mountain." The core point is that education is transformative, and every human being is educable.
- f. The Personal Factor:** Guru highlights the personal factor as central to education. It has two sides: a subjective dimension and a non-self dimension. As he writes: "Knowledge

is what education connotes primarily. There is the synthetic knowledge of the subjective self that we can know when we contemplate it in silence or in seclusion, minimizing external impressions that reach us.” Yet, this must be complemented by the knowledge of the non-self. A proper educational process integrates both these aspects.

g. **Integral Education:** Guru calls for the final abolition of all dualities in pure consciousness. His concept of world-education is ultimately a case for integral education of the human being as a whole, where subjective and objective, means and ends, sensation and value, individuality and universality are recognized and harmonized.

### 6.4.3 Contradiction at the Core of the Problem

Guru emphasises a philosophical contradiction at the very core of every educational problem. Modern theories and practices of teacher education often fail to acknowledge this paradox. There exists a fundamental conflict in the principles of human nature that cannot be ignored. Guru highlights Rousseau’s observation in *Emile*, where he writes: “Forced to combat Nature or social institutions, one has to choose between making a man or a citizen; for one cannot make the one and the other at the same time.”

According to Rousseau, the citizen or patriot is bound by duty to defend the frontiers of a political unit to which he belongs. He must be ready to kill or to die, an imperative necessity that even a contemplative such as Socrates could not escape. Guru points out that in the modern world, this necessity has only become stronger and harsher. As he remarks, “The generality of men are just citizens for wartime, and are mostly treated in the educational world to be so, if not already so.”

This contradiction (citizen versus man) reveals a deep dilemma in education in modern times, one of the most fundamental by-products of which is the nation-state. To educate for citizenship alone is to subordinate the individual to the needs of the state and to shape him/her primarily as a defender of political frontiers and social institutions. To educate for manhood, on the other hand, is to nurture the universal human being who aspires toward truth, justice, and moral autonomy beyond political boundaries.

The paradox, therefore, lies in whether education should prepare individuals to serve narrow sectarian (national) interests or to realize their fuller humanity. Guru insists that a genuine philosophy of education must recognise this tension and seek a synthesis in which the claims of society do not compromise the individuality and universality of the human person, or, to say, the particular and universal aspects of human persons.

## Recap

- ◆ Education, for Guru, is not mechanical but living, creative, and organic.
- ◆ It involves a bi-polar relation between teacher and learner.
- ◆ Education must be sensitive to different stages of human life.
- ◆ Men and women require distinct yet unitive education.
- ◆ The content of education ranges from sensations to high human values.
- ◆ Education must balance the vertical world of eternal values with the horizontal world of lived experiences.
- ◆ Guru accepts the law of polarity and the need to resolve paradoxes of life.
- ◆ Positive education is active and participatory, not passive.
- ◆ Guru insists that every person is educable, no nature is beyond change.
- ◆ He critiques the idea that character cannot be changed.
- ◆ The personal factor (subjective self and non-self) is central in education.
- ◆ Education must aim at the final abolition of dualities in pure consciousness.
- ◆ There is a philosophical contradiction at the heart of education, as Rousseau emphasised: “one cannot make a man and a citizen at the same time.”
- ◆ Guru calls for an integral education of man as a whole.

## Objective Questions

1. Who introduced the concept of world-education?
2. What is meant by the bipolar relation of education?
3. What should be the starting point of education, according to Guru?
4. What marks the omega of the educative process?
5. Which philosopher does Guru quote to show human paradoxes in education?
6. What law states that human life involves opposites like conflict and paradox?
7. What are the two sides of the personal factor in education?
8. What contradiction does Rousseau highlight in Emile?
9. What is the ultimate goal of world-education, according to Guru?

## Answers

1. Nataraja guru
2. The dynamic relationship between teacher and learner as counterparts in education.
3. Simple sensations.
4. Appreciation of high human values.
5. Rousseau
6. Law of polarity.
7. Subjective self and the non-self.
8. Conflict between making a man or a citizen.
9. Integral education of man as a whole, ending all dualities.

## Assignments

1. Explain the bipolar nature of education in Nataraja Guru's concept of World-Education. How does this model emphasize the personal factor and the unitive relation between teacher and learner?
2. Modern education often focuses on creating citizens rather than complete human beings. Analyze the contradiction between the "citizen" and the "human being" in modern education with reference to Nataraja Guru's critique and Rousseau's philosophical insights.
3. Describe the major characteristics of World-Education according to Nataraja Guru. In what ways does this holistic and integrative vision seek to harmonize individuality and universality, means and ends, and the inner and outer dimensions of human growth?

## Reference

1. Sasidharan, G.K. (2020), *Not Many, But One: Sreenarayanaguru's Philosophy of Universal Oneness. Volume 1&2*, Penguin Random House India.
2. Nataraja Guru (2009), *Experiencing One-World*, D.K. Print World Ltd

## Suggested Reading

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# **MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS**

SGG



## SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE: .....

Reg. No. : .....

Name: .....

### FIFTH SEMESTER B.A. PHILOSOPHY EXAMINATION DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE (B21PH03DE)

#### Sree Narayana Guru's Philosophy Applied in Education, Religion, Ethics And Social Matters (CBCS - UG)

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

#### MODEL QUESTION PAPER- SET A

Time: 3 Hour

Max Marks: 70

#### SECTION A

I Answer any **ten** questions of the following. Each question carries **one** mark.

**(10 × 1 = 10 Marks)**

1. What does the slogan 'Pala matha saaravum ekam' mean?
2. What does Guru's motto 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man' signify?
3. What reply did Guru give when questioned about the Aruvippuram consecration?
4. Which text of Guru contains teachings on self-instruction?
5. Which training institution did Guru establish for weaving?
6. What does 'Apara Vidyā' refer to?
7. Which organisation was founded by Guru in 1903 for social uplift?
8. What is the primary aim of education according to Guru?
9. What is the meaning of Pañcha-śuddhi?
10. Which deity was consecrated at Sivagiri in 1912?
11. What is the aim of vocational education in Guru's vision?
12. Which Buddhist principle inspired the Pancha-śuddhi?
13. Name the poem in which Guru expresses compassion for all living beings.

14. What does social reconstructionism emphasise?
15. Which philosophical school did Guru reinterpret into Practical Advaita?

## SECTION B

II *Answer any ten questions of the following. Each question carries two marks.*

**(10×2 =20 Marks)**

16. What were the main features of caste discrimination in Kerala?
17. How did Guru challenge hereditary occupation systems?
18. Define educational philosophy.
19. What is the role of values (axiology) in education?
20. What is the teacher-centred approach?
21. Explain the significance of Apara Vidyā and Para Vidyā.
22. How does education act as a means of liberation according to Guru?
23. Why did Guru establish temples without idols?
24. State the aim of Guru's SNDP Yogam.
25. What is the central vision of Sivagiri Pilgrimage?
26. Explain 'One-world consciousness' as taught by Nataraja Guru.
27. What is meant by religious oneness (Ekamatham)?
28. How did Guru interpret Advaita for social transformation?
29. What is the significance of compassion in the Guru's ethics?
30. Mention any two goals of the Sivagiri Pilgrimage.

## SECTION C

III *Write a short note on any five questions of the following. Each question carries four marks.*

**(5×4 = 20 Marks)**

31. Explain the concepts of unapproachability and unseeability with examples from Kerala's caste system.

32. Discuss the relationship between philosophy and education.
33. Write a short note on student-centred educational philosophies.
34. Describe Guru's interpretation of education as a human right.
35. How did Guru connect economic progress with morality?
36. Examine the relevance of vocational training in Guru's economic vision.
37. Describe the origin of the Sivagiri Pilgrimage.
38. Write a short note on Guru's ethical oneness.
39. Discuss the idea of divinity in all beings.
40. Write a note on Guru's emphasis on women's education.

#### **SECTION D**

IV *Answer any two questions of the following. Each question carries ten marks.*

**(2×10 =20 Marks)**

41. Discuss in detail the extreme caste discrimination that existed in Kerala, and analyse how 19th-century reformers such as Ayyankali and Chattampi Swamikal, along with Sree Narayana Guru, contributed to transforming the social order.
42. Elaborate on Guru's vision of holistic and integral education with reference to Apara Vidyā, Para Vidyā, and ethical living.
43. Critically examine teacher-centred, student-centred, and society-centred educational philosophies. Discuss how a balanced educational approach can be developed by integrating these three traditions.
44. Discuss the role of Sarada Mutt in advancing Guru's vision of knowledge, purity, and right living. How did it differ from traditional temples?



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2022-23 - Admission Onwards

#### MODEL QUESTION PAPER- SET A

Time: 3 Hour

Max Marks: 70

#### SECTION A

I Answer any **ten** questions of the following. Each question carries **one** mark.

**(10 × 1 = 10 Marks)**

1. What does teental refer to in caste practices?
2. Which educational philosophy focuses on learning through experience?
3. Who is regarded as the father of pragmatism?
4. Which branch of philosophy deals with values?
5. Which educational philosophy emphasises scientific, observable knowledge?
6. What does Para Vidyā signify?
7. What was the aim of promoting cooperative efforts?
8. What did Guru consider the essence of all religions?
9. Who said 'After education, industry is the next important thing'?
10. Who first proposed the idea of the Sivagiri Pilgrimage to Guru?
11. Which principle includes purity of body, food, mind, word, and deed?
12. What was the main aim of establishing Sarada Mutt?
13. What was the traditional head tax imposed on lower caste men?

14. Which poem emphasises kindness toward all beings?
15. Which poetic work of Guru emphasises compassion towards all beings?

### **SECTION B**

*II Answer any **ten** questions of the following. Each question carries **two** marks.*

**(10×2 =20 Marks)**

16. What was the significance of Guru's Aruvippuram consecration?
17. State two key contributions of Chattampi Swamikal to Kerala's social reform.
18. Define metaphysics and its role in education.
19. What is the main idea of progressivism in education?
20. What are the two levels of knowledge identified by Guru?
21. What is the role of values in Guru's idea of education?
22. Why did Guru establish temples without idols?
23. Why is holistic development important in education?
24. What is the cultural significance of Guru's motto "One Caste, One Religion, One God"?
25. Mention two goals of the Sivagiri Pilgrimage.
26. Define philosophical oneness in Guru's Practical Advaita.
27. What is the relevance of compassion in Guru's ethical thought?
28. Give two reasons why Guru emphasised vocational training.
29. What does Nataraja Guru mean by "world education"?
30. Why did Guru promote agriculture and small industries?

### **SECTION C**

*III Write a short note on any **five** questions of the following. Each question carries **four** marks.*

**(5×4 = 20 Marks)**

31. Discuss the role of women in the caste hierarchy and the additional layers of discrimination they faced.

32. How did education contribute to weakening caste restrictions?
33. Discuss the relationship between philosophy and curriculum design.
34. What is the significance of existentialism in education?
35. Explain the concept of holistic education in Guru's philosophy.
36. Write a short note on the Five Purities (pañcha-śuddhi).
37. Describe the role of vocational training in Guru's economic vision.
38. Explain the historical background of the origin of the Sivagiri Pilgrimage.
39. What is the symbolic significance of Sarada Mutt?
40. Explain ethical oneness in Guru's worldview.

#### **SECTION D**

IV *Answer any two questions of the following. Each question carries ten marks.*

**(2×10 =20 Marks)**

41. Examine the major types of educational philosophy- teacher-centred, student-centred, and society-centred- and evaluate their relevance today.
42. Explain Sree Narayana Guru's vision of education as a means of liberation, integral growth, and right living, with reference to Para Vidyā, Apara Vidyā, and Pancha Dharma.
43. Critically analyse Guru's reinterpretation of Advaita Vedanta into Practical Advaita, explaining how he transformed metaphysical non-dualism into a philosophy for social justice.
44. Discuss Guru's critique of knowledge without ethical grounding, and analyse how his Five Purities and Pancha Dharma aim to produce a morally responsible individual.

**DON'T LET IT  
BE TOO LATE**

**SAY  
NO  
TO  
DRUGS**

**LOVE YOURSELF  
AND ALWAYS BE  
HEALTHY**



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## സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യയാൽ സ്വത്തുരാക്കണം  
വിശ്വപാരരായി മാറണം  
ഗവർപ്പസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം  
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

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സുരൂവാിമിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം  
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നീതിവെജയത്തി പാറണം

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ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം  
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ  
ജനാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്യലിക്കണേ

കുർജ്ജിപ്പും ശ്രീകുമാർ

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# **Sree Narayananaguru's Philosophy Applied in Education, Religion, Ethics and Social Matters**

COURSE CODE: B21PH03DE



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