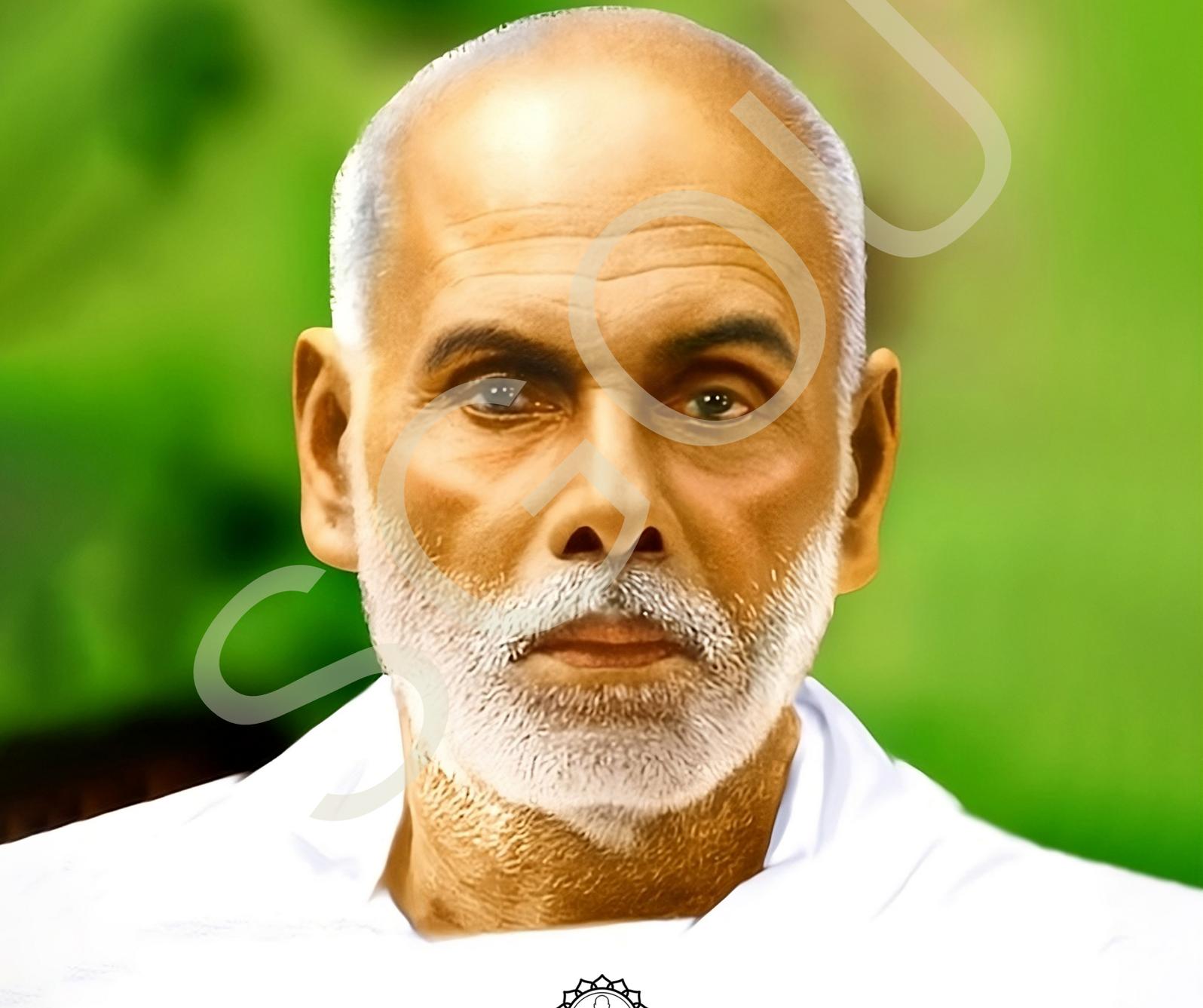


PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU

Course Code: M23PH03DE
Discipline Specific Elective Course
Postgraduate Programme in Philosophy
Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Vision

To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Philosophy of Sreenarayanaguru

Course Code: M23PH03DE

Semester - III

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



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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



PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU

Course Code: M23PH03DE

Semester- III

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Postgraduate Programme in Philosophy

Academic Committee

Prof. Abey Koshy
Dr Sairam R.
Dr.Sirajull Muneer
Dr. Gasper K.J.
Dr. R. Lakshmi
Dr. Soumya R.V.
Dr. Biju K.P.
Chandrababu M.

Development of the Content

MDDC

Review and Edit

Rajesh B.R.

Linguistics

Rajesh B.R.
Dr. Anfal M.

Scrutiny

Rajesh B.R.
Dr. Biju R.I.
Dr. Vijay Francis
Dr. Robin Luke Varghese
Feleena C.L.
Dr. Nisar A.C.

Design Control

Azeem Babu T.A.

Cover Design

Jobin J.

Co-ordination

Director, MDDC :
Dr. I.G. Shibi
Asst. Director, MDDC :
Dr. Sajeevkumar G.
Coordinator, Development:
Dr. Anfal M.
Coordinator, Distribution:
Dr. Sanitha K.K.



Scan this QR Code for reading the SLM
on a digital device.

Edition
June 2025

Copyright
© Sreenarayanaguru Open University

ISBN 978-81-989004-5-6



All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Printed and published on behalf of Sreenarayanaguru Open University by Registrar, SGOU, Kollam.

www.sgou.ac.in



Visit and Subscribe our Social Media Platforms

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 courses 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 is committed to providing high-quality, inclusive, and value-based education. The Discipline Elective Course Philosophy of Sreenarayanaguru, offered under the MA Philosophy Programme, is a significant initiative in this direction. This Self-Learning Material, developed by the Material Development and Distribution Centre, draws from authentic and scholarly sources that explore the Guru’s philosophy and writings. The material has been reviewed and refined by expert, scholars, and faculty members to ensure accuracy, accessibility, and academic integrity. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant explanations 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.

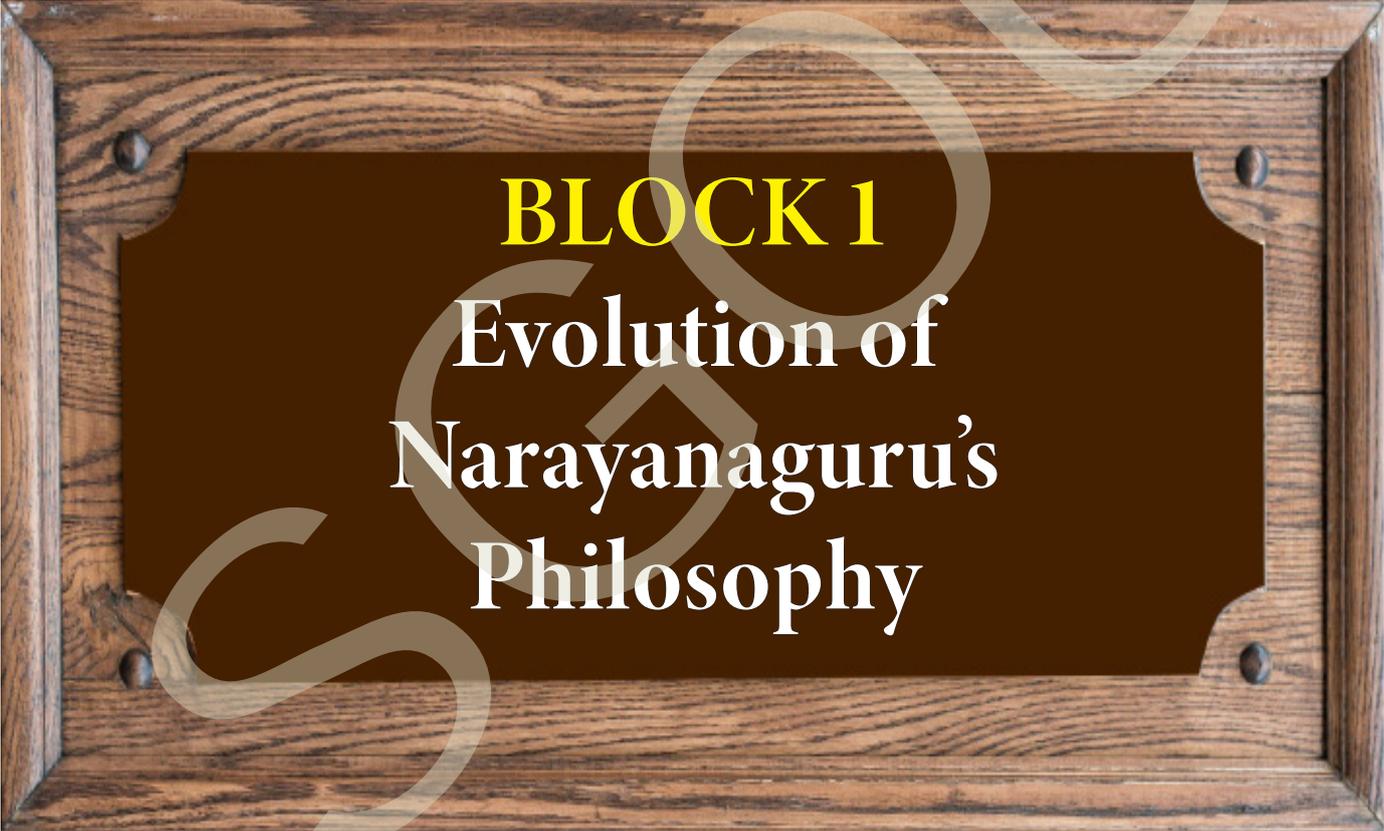


Warm regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.

01-06-2025

Contents

BLOCK 1 EVOLUTION OF NARAYANAGURU'S PHILOSOPHY	1
Unit 1 Philosophical Roots of Sree Narayana Guru	2
Unit 2 Devotional and Mystical Elements in Sree Narayana Guru's Work	21
Unit 3 Philosophical Dream of the One World	45
BLOCK 2 PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS IN DARSANAMALA	64
Unit 1 Methodology of the Discrimination of Real from Unreal Superimposition and Desuperimposition	65
Unit 2 The Concepts of Reality and Self in Darsanamala	97
Unit 3 Analysis of the Ultimate Goal of Human Life in Darsanamala	121
BLOCK 3 PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS IN ATMOPADESASATAKAM	145
Unit 1 Methodology of Discrimination of Seer from the Seen Knowledge and Opinion, knowledge and Cognition	146
Unit 2 Analysis of Three States of Empirical Experience Concept of Reality and Illusion	197
Unit 3 Mystic experience in Liberation	220
BLOCK 4 SREENARAYANAGURU'S SOCIO-POLITICAL IDEOLOGY	241
Unit 1 Logic of the Refutation of Jati, Jati Nirnaya, Jati lakshana and Jati Mimamsa, Universality of Religion	242
Unit 2 Guru's Concept of Education and Organisation	278
Unit 3 Humanism in Sreenarayana Guru	313
Reference	347
Model Question Paper	351

A wooden frame with a dark brown center containing text. The frame is made of dark wood with visible grain and four small dark knobs at the corners. The center is a solid dark brown rectangle. The text is centered within this rectangle.

BLOCK 1

Evolution of
Narayanaguru's
Philosophy

UNIT 1

Philosophical Roots of Sree Narayana Guru

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to;

- explain how Sree Narayana Guru applied the Advaita Vedanta doctrine of ‘Sarvam Brahmamaya’ to promote social justice and dismantle caste-based hierarchies
- articulate how Guru’s slogan, ‘One caste, one religion, one God for humankind,’ reflects the Advaita principle of oneness and its connection with earlier Tamil reformist ideals
- analyse the significance of the Aruvippuram consecration as a challenge to Brahmanical dominance and its role in establishing a new model for spiritual realization based on individual merit and universal brotherhood
- describe Sree Narayana Guru’s ‘applied Vedanta’ as a unique synthesis that integrated diverse spiritual traditions for both individual spiritual transformation and collective social upliftment

Background

Kerala in the late nineteenth century was a land of rich syncretic traditions, yet it also embodied some of the most rigidly enforced caste discrimination in India. The Ezhava community, into which Sree Narayana Guru was born in 1855, endured systemic exclusion from temple entry, education and the public sphere. Under Brahmanical orthodoxy, capped by the Chaturvarṇya scheme, communities deemed ‘avarna’ were segregated through intricate pollution rules, forbidden even from traversing roads used by higher castes. Simultaneously, colonial modernity and missionary-led educational reform were slowly unsettling entrenched hierarchies. Figures such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda at the national level, and Chattampi Swamikal locally, began to counter caste-based indignities by advocating a return to the Upaniṣadic spirit of unity. Sree Narayana Guru stepped into this environment of inherited hierarchy and nascent reformist ferment. His lived experience of being denied basic human

dignity convinced him that distorted interpretations of spiritual truths underlaid the very structures sustaining inequality. From the outset, Guru's interventions, whether philosophical exegesis, poetic compositions or temple consecrations, were less about political agitation and more about purifying tradition by reclaiming Advaita Vedānta's ethical core. By situating his critique within a profound metaphysical framework, he would both challenge caste's theological justifications and offer an alternative paradigm where spiritual realisation and social justice remained inseparable. This fusion of inner transformation with social equity laid the groundwork for Kerala's subsequent reform movements and remains an enduring testament to Guru's visionary synthesis.

Keywords

Advaita Vedanta, Caste, Social Reform, Thycaud Ayyavu, Bhakti, Triputi, Ayya Vaikundar

Discussion

1.1.1 Advaita Vedānta from a new perspective

Advaita Vedānta's non-dualistic vision was systematized by Śaṅkarācārya in the eighth century CE. However, over time, it became confined to scholastic debate and monastic renunciation. Sree Narayana Guru re-appropriated Advaita, not as a world-negating doctrine, but as a potent catalyst for social transformation. He insisted that the Ātman (ആത്മാവ്) and Brahman are identical, and that recognizing this oneness carries an ethical imperative: a lived awareness of a shared divine essence renders caste distinctions inherently false.

- Guru's practical Advaita, oneness for social reform.

His central slogan, 'ഒരു ജാതി, ഒരു മതം, ഒരു ദൈവം മനുഷ്യന്' (One caste, one religion, one God for humankind), was far more than a slogan; it was the practical corollary of Advaita's ontological insight. In 1888, when Guru consecrated a Śiva-liṅga at Aruvippuram, he declared, 'ഇത് നമ്മുടെ ശിവനാണ്' (This is our/my Śiva). This statement shattered Brahminical monopolies over priestly rites and proclaimed that genuine authority derives from self-realisation and ethical conduct, not from birth. What sets Sree Narayana Guru apart from his predecessors is his exceptional ability to harmoniously integrate both the theoretical and practical dimensions of advaita Vedanta. This creative synthesis, often called 'Applied Vedānta', bridged classical non-duality and the lived realities of colonially impacted Kerala, demonstrating that inner unity

- Practical application of Advaita Vedanta, challenging Brahminical authority



inevitably births external equity. By reclaiming Advaita as a living tradition, Guru ensured that spiritual enlightenment would galvanise, rather than bypass, the quest for social justice.

Aruvippuram Inscription and Universal Brotherhood

The Aruvippuram episode marked Guru's inaugural proclamation of a unified vision. When he installed a Śiva-linga on the Chempa-lined hill, sceptics questioned his authority; Guru responded with the revelatory inscription:

‘ജാതിഭേദം മതഭേദമേതുമില്ലാതെ സർവരും
സോദരത്വേന വാഴുന്ന മാതൃകാസ്ഥാനമാണിത്.’

(This is a model place where all live in brotherhood, without caste distinctions or religious animosity)

This verse not only articulated his critique of caste's metaphysical underpinnings but prefigured the ethos later celebrated at the Aluva Religious Parliament of 1924, ‘സഹോദര്യം സർവ്വത്ര’ (Brotherhood everywhere) and ‘വാദിക്കാനും ജയിക്കാനുമല്ല, അറിയാനും അറിയിക്കാനുമാണ്’ (Not to argue and win, but to know and inform). By designating Aruvippuram as a space where social relations were recast on Advaitic unity, Guru offered a living manifesto: if all are expressions of the singular Brahman, then no temple, rite or institution could legitimately enforce exclusion. Delegates from diverse faiths, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist and Parsi, sat as equals, sharing insights on the nature of ultimate reality and practical ethics. By emphasising experiential knowledge (anubhava) over scriptural quibbles, Guru illustrated that metaphysical diversity need not fracture communal bonds. His closing address invoked centuries of Advaita literature to show that all faiths, when authentically lived, converge upon the same non-dual truth. A century later, this Aluva Parliament remains celebrated both in India and internationally as a prophetic model for interfaith dialogue. Its memoranda and resolutions, printed and disseminated in Malayalam, English and Tamil, continue to inspire contemporary movements that champion secular unity grounded in spiritual awareness rather than mere political compromise. Thus, the Aluva 1924 event affirms that practical Advaitā, applied Vedānta, can heal modern divisions, making ‘Brotherhood everywhere’ not merely a lofty aspiration but a lived reality.

- A foundational declaration of unity, challenging caste and religious division.

From 1888 onwards, Guru's forty-year ‘world of action’ unfolded through consecrations, schools and institutions like

- Building institutions and consecrations to assert spiritual authority of the individual over hereditary privilege.

SNDP Yogam, each reinforcing the principle that spiritual authority belongs to the realised individual, not hereditary privilege. In laying this groundwork, Guru proved that ontological unity must inevitably translate into social fraternity, offering Kerala's marginalized communities both spiritual language and institutional avenues to assert dignity and self-respect.

1.1.2 Śāṅkara's System and Guru's Version

The first systematic text of Advaita Vedanta is 'Mandukya Karika', written by Gaudapadacharya, who was the Parama Guru (Teacher's Teacher) of Sree Sankara. Mandukya Karika is the free interpretation of Mandukya Upaniṣad, which is the smallest and end portion of Adharva Veda. This shows, actually, Advaita Vedanta is derived from Adharva Veda. But advaitins accept the four Mahāvākyas. They are:

1. **Prajnanam Braham (Brahman is wisdom):** It is the Lakshana Vakya. This statement, found in Aithareya Upaniṣad of the Ṛgvedaa, identified Brahman with pure consciousness.
2. **Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman or I am the Absolute):** It is called Anubhava Vakya. This statement, from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad of the Yajur Veda, expresses the identity of the individual self with the ultimate reality.
3. **Tat Tvam Asi ('That Thou Art' or 'You are That'):** This statement found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad of the Sama Veda, emphasizes the 'Unity of the individual with the Universal Principle'. This vakya is known as Upadesa Vakya.
4. **Ayam Ātma Brahma ('This self is Brahman' or This Ātman is Brahman):** This is called Anusandhana vakya. This statement, from the Mandukya Upaniṣad of the Adharva Veda, identifies the individual self with the Ultimate Reality.

- Advaita Vedanta, originating from the Adharva Veda's Mandukya Upaniṣad and Gaudapada's Mandukya Karika.

- The four Mahavakyas are profound pointers to Self-Realization

- Vedanta schools' source: Prasthanatraya.

These four Mahavakyas are considered to be profound pointers to the ultimate truth, guiding seekers towards Self-Realisation and liberation. Sree Narayana Guru, in his poem Brahavidya Panchakam, includes these four Mahavakyas.

Sankara's Advaita, Ramanuja's Visishtadvaita and Madhva's Dvaita are the important Uttara Mīmāṃsā Schools, which are together known as Vedanta. The source of Vedanta is Prasthanatraya which contains Dasopanishads (Ten Upaniṣads



– Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitereya, Chāndogya and Bṛhadāraṇyaka), The Bhagavat Gita and the Brahmasutra. It is Sankara, firstly written commendaries on Prasthanatraya.

• Advaita's core: Brahman alone is real. The world is an illusion; the individual soul is Brahman

• Brahman is undefinable: hence Advaita, not Monism

• Gaudapada recognised only Ultimate Reality

• Sree Narayana Guru built upon this, making Advaita'

The central teaching of Advaita is 'Brahman or Ultimate Reality alone is real. Jagat or the empirical world is illusory appearance of Brahman and the so called soul or Jiva is Brahman itself and no other (Brahma Satyam, Jagat Mithya, Jivo Brahmaiva na apara).

Brahman cannot be defined in words. To define Brahman is to limit it. The category of number is not applicable to the Absolute. That is why Sankara calls his Philosophy Non-Dualism or Advaita and not Monism or Ekatva Vada. On the other hand, Sree Narayana Guru accepts Sankara's Advaita Theory as it is.

In Mandukya Karika, Goudapada accepts only Paramarthika Satta (Ultimate Reality). But Sankara, in his Advaita Theory, accepts, Pratibhasika Satta (Imaginary or psychic world) and Vyavaharika Satta (Empirical World) too. Sree Narayana Guru also accepts these three levels of Reality.

Importantly, Śaṅkara did not reject karma or devotion but reinterpreted them: ritual actions cease to bind once one perceives Brahman's self-effulgence, and devotion becomes an aid to dissolving ego-bound perceptions. In this way, Advaita transcends ritualism without discarding its framework entirely, signalling that liberation arises from an inner shift rather than mere external observance. For Guru, these insights served as a foundation to be distilled and democratized. He recognized that without integrating Advaita's metaphysics into everyday life, its transformative power would remain inaccessible to Kerala's oppressed classes.

1.1.3 Lineages of Advaita and Guru's Contribution

Following Śaṅkara's legacy, a succession of exponents, Padmapāda, Hastāmalaka, Trotaka and Sureshvara, among others, elaborated his commentarial lineages. Each emphasised different hermeneutical angles: Padmapāda's Pādapradīpa scrutinised the Brahmasūtrabhāṣya, Hastāmalaka's Hastāmalakīya offered concise Upaniṣadic summaries, and Trotaka's Śāṅkaravārttika sharpened dialectical precision. As these lineages crystallised the 'Three Aspects of Advaita' (Theory, Praxis and Revelation), diverse schools emerged,

- Advaita's development through varied interpretations.

Vivarana (വിവരണപ്രസ്ഥാനം), Bhāmatī (ഭാമതിപ്രസ്ഥാനം) and Śṛṅgāra (ശൃംഗാരപ്രസ്ഥാനം), each staking claims on how best to reconcile śabda (scriptural word) with anubhava (direct experience). It is within this fertile ground of interpretive plurality that Sree Narayana Guru situated his own thought. He distilled these layered commentaries into Malayalam verses, democratizing Śaṅkara's Sanskritic legacy for Kerala's marginalized groups. By framing Advaita's core, Brahman's indivisible unity, in poetic Malayalam, he made non-duality living, accessible truth. In doing so, Guru upheld Advaita's essence while insisting that genuine understanding issues in social solidarity: 'One origin, one form, no difference therein' (ഒരു ഉത്ഭവം, ഒരു രൂപം, അവയിലൊരു വ്യത്യാസമില്ല).

- Sree Narayana Guru's Advaita was shaped by Tamil spiritual and reform movements

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical framework, profoundly rooted in Advaita Vedanta, drew significant inspiration and practical application from diverse spiritual and social reform movements, particularly those originating from the Tamil cultural sphere. To fully appreciate his egalitarian vision and unique reinterpretation of Advaita, it is crucial to examine the contributions of the Tamil Siddha, Tamil Saivism and Bhakti traditions, alongside the pioneering efforts of nineteenth-century Tamil reformists like Ayyā Vaikundar. Although Guru's active period was in early modern Kerala, his intellectual and spiritual development was shaped by influential mentor figures and burgeoning reform currents that transcended the conventional Malayalam-Sanskrit scholarly discourse, fostering a cross-regional synthesis. The inclination to leave home, which began in his adolescence, transformed into the path of an Avadhuta (an ascetic who has renounced worldly concerns) in the prime of his youth. It was during this period that Sree Narayana Guru, accompanied by Chattampi Swamikal, met Thycaud Ayyavu and received initiation (diksha) of Śivarajayoga from him. This is detailed by Omana in her work 'Oru Mahaguru' (A Great Guru), based on the records of Lokanatha Panicker (Thycaud Ayyavu's son). The book 'Brahmasree Thykkattu Ayya Swamikal – Biography' which is compiled and published by Aiyya Mission contains important information about the initiation of Sivarajayoga.

- Sree Narayana Guru's Advaita drew from Tamil spiritual and reform influences.

Under Ayyavu's guidance, Narayana Guru, who had become a devotee of Subrahmanya, travelled to Maruthwamala with Chattampi Swamikal and engaged in severe ascetic practices. Narayanan stayed in Maruthwamala for approximately two years. During this time, he also visited Vaikunda Swamy's Swamithoppu and was deeply attracted to Vaikunda Swamy's ideals.

- Guru's journey: ascetic, Tamil, Aruvippuram.

It is believed that it was during these periods of being an Avadhuta and an ascetic that he became acquainted with Tamil works such as Tirukkural, Pathikangal, and Thevarams. The Shaiva tradition played a significant role in Narayanan, the devotee, transforming into Nanu Yogi and subsequently engaging in the purification of society. After leaving Maruthwamala, Nanu Yogi wandered throughout Tamil Nadu. Eventually, he arrived at a forest area called Aruvippuram. With this, Nanu, the Avadhuta, became widely known and revered as Nanu Yogi. Nanu Yogi likely arrived in Aruvippuram by 1886. He must have performed prolonged penance on Kodithookimala there. It was perhaps then that Nanu Yogi intensely pondered the means to cleanse the inner impurities of humanity.

- Vaikundar's unity paved Guru's path

A pivotal influence on Guru was Ayyā Vaikundar (1809–1851), who founded the Ayyavazhi movement in what is now Kanyakumari. Vaikundar's teachings espoused a universal religion, fundamentally transcending caste and creed, encapsulated in his powerful maxim: 'ഒൻതെ ജാതി, ഒൻതെ മതം, ഒൻതെ ദൈവം, ഒൻതെ ഉലകം, ഒൻതെ അരൾ' (One caste, one religion, one God, one world, one ruler). This slogan remarkably anticipated Guru's own famous declaration, demonstrating a profound philosophical continuity. In fact, even long before Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal, the Tamil Siddha Thirumoolar had said 'One family, One God.' The fact is that all these Gurus derived this idea from a common source, the Upaniṣads. Vaikundar actively challenged Brahmanical ritualism by organizing samapanthi-bhojanam (community feasts where individuals from all castes dined together) and commissioning the digging of muthirikinaru (common wells) to ensure access to water for lower-caste groups. Furthermore, he established Nizhal Thangals ("shadow-halls")—unique, idol-less worship centers where prayers were conducted in Tamil rather than Sanskrit, and which often included community kitchens and schools alongside the simple shrine. These initiatives were groundbreaking in their efforts to democratize spiritual practice and establish an inclusive, anti-caste devotional ethos, setting a precedent for similar reforms in the region. Although Guru and Ayya Vaikundar never met personally, the spiritual and social resonance between their missions is unmistakable. Guru's bold Aruvippuram consecration in 1888, where he installed a Śiva idol, and his defiant retort, "This is our Śiva," directly echoed Vaikundar's earlier dismantling of priestly monopolies. Both spiritual leaders unequivocally upheld the belief that Divinity could reside within any sincere devotee, regardless of their

birth, advocating for a direct, unmediated relationship with the divine. Indeed, Guru's iconic dictum, "One caste, one religion, one God for all human beings," stands as a direct derivation and amplification of the ancient Tamil Saiva-Siddha aphorism, "onre kulam, onre tevan" (one clan, one God), further enriched by the practical, inclusive vision of the Ayyavazhi movement.

- Ayyavu Swamikal mentored Guru in Sivaraja Yoga.

Another critical conduit for the transmission of Tamil mysticism into Guru's intellectual and spiritual development was Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal. Deeply steeped in Sivaraja Yoga, Ayyavu Swamikal served as a pivotal mentor, initiating Guru into the practices of Charya, Kriya, Yoga and Jnana which are four stages of Sivaraja Yoga. Ayyavu Swamikal's mastery of Tamil, Sanskrit, and the yogic sciences enabled him to impart to Guru the core Siddha emphasis on non-sectarian, experiential realization as paramount over external rituals. Through this profound mentorship, Guru assimilated key tenets of Tamil Siddha philosophy, including universal compassion, the principles of non-duality (Advaita), and the transformative power of inner spiritual practice. These ideas were later seamlessly integrated into his own unique re-interpretation of Advaita, which remarkably synthesized philosophical subtlety with potent social activism, moving Advaita from abstract intellectualism to a lived, egalitarian experience.

- Guru's poetry: Tamil Bhakti's influence

Centuries prior to Guru's era, the vibrant Tamil Bhakti movement (6th–12th CE) had already forged a rich literary and spiritual legacy, notably through the Nayinarmar corpus, including luminaries like Appar, Sambandar, and Sundarar. This body of devotional poetry was celebrated for its lyrical fervor, emotional immediacy, and profound ethical egalitarianism. Echoing the spirit of the Nayinarmar, Guru utilized his own poetic works to critique rigid caste hierarchies and the monopolistic control of temples. In his work *Jati Nirnayam*, Guru's verse "Ask not, say not, think not caste" directly mirrored the Tamil Bhakti tradition's unwavering insistence that genuine devotion transcends the accident of birth. Guru's frequent and adept use of Tamil Saiva terms such as arul (grace), pati-pāsu-pāsa (Lord, soul, bondage) within his Malayalam verses clearly demonstrates his deep internalization of Bhakti's metaphysics and poetic diction. He skillfully blended these elements with the philosophical rigour of Advaita to champion a universal, formless grace that was accessible to all, irrespective of their social standing or background. Furthermore, Guru's own Tamil hymns, such as the Thevarappathinkangal, stand as testament to his profound mastery of Tamil Bhakti poetics. By employing the classic first-



person devotional voice, invoking classical epithets for Śiva, and incorporating musical refrains, he effectively replicated the distinctive style of the Nayinarmar. His *Śiva Śatakam* powerfully resonates with the legend of Nandanar, a low-caste devotee whose intense spiritual fervour famously dissolved social barriers to divine communion. This underscores Guru's deep conviction that bhakti (devotion) alone granted access to the divine, unequivocally independent of one's caste status.

- Nanu Yogi's profound spiritual anguish.

In the Subrahmanya Keertanam, the Nanu Yogi of that time encapsulated all his profound mental anguish. One such verse expresses this: 'Oh, precious jewel of the mind's eye, if you do not grant the means to purify the inner fire, did I resolve to burn in the intense, surging flame of inner suffering? Does this dog, afflicted by delirium and madness, babbling endlessly, possess any wisdom? You shall surely forgive all my faults!'

Guru came into contact with the nearby householders in Aruvippuram and became aware of the caste-based inequalities they experienced. He gathered those whose self-respect was wounded by the need to maintain distance from Savarna (upper-caste) temples and started a prayer group in the middle of the forest for worship. Individual interventions, after all, lead to social collectives and the formation of organizations. By then, the monthly Vavootu Yogams (community gatherings) and prayer groups had grown in membership and transformed into an organized body. This is how an unforgettable moment in Kerala's history was born: the Aruvippuram Consecration of 1888. A Śiva temple was established at Aruvippuram, and the Vavootu Yogam transformed into the Aruvippuram Temple. It was also here that Nanu Yogi transitioned from the status of an Avadhuta, then Nanu Yogi, to the revered title of 'Guruswamikal'. He also gained one or two disciples as assistants here. Śivalingaswamikal was Guru's first monastic disciple.

The philosophical and social currents initiated by Ayya Vaikundar in Tamil Nadu and Sree Narayana Guru in Kerala precipitated parallel socio-political movements, demonstrating a powerful cross-regional reformist synergy. The Ayyavazhi's anti-caste agitation in Kanyakumari and Kerala's landmark Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–25) each embodied a shared ethos: the systematic dismantling of ritualistic exclusion, the firm affirmation of universal access to temples for all communities, and the diligent cultivation of genuine community solidarity. Guru's consecration of approximately 45 temples, some of which were idol-less or bore simple inscriptions like 'Truth,' directly replicated and adapted Ayyavazhi's Nizhal Thangal model. This innovative approach effectively broke down rigid

- Vaikundar and Guru's movements drove cross-regional social reform

Brahminical monopolies by creating worship spaces that were open and welcoming to all, regardless of caste. By the 1920s, Guru's foundational phrase, 'One caste, one religion, one God,' had become a pervasive pan-South Indian refrain, widely disseminated through both Malayalam and Tamil print media and actively invoked by various reform leagues across the linguistic and geographical border. This vigorous cross-pollination vividly underscored how the movements led by Guru and Ayyavazhi, while initially rooted in their respective regions, collectively formed an integral part of a broader Dravidian renaissance. This widespread movement fundamentally reshaped social consciousness and culminated in significant legislative changes, such as Kerala's landmark Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936, which extended its transformative impact to both Malayalam and Tamil districts, affirming a shared vision of social justice and spiritual equality.

1.1.4 Philosophical Principles of Sree Narayana Guru

The philosophical thought and practical path of Sree Narayana Guru can be fully seen in the following verse from Atmopadesa Satakam:

“അവനിവനെനരിയുന്നതൊക്കെയോർത്താ-
 ലവനിയിലാദിമമായൊരാത്മരൂപം;
 അവനവനാത്മസുഖത്തിനാചരിക്കു-
 നവയപരന്നു സുഖത്തിനായ് വരേണം”

(ആത്മോപദേശശതകം 25)

- Act for own and others' happiness

‘When one deeply contemplates and understands the truth behind the distinction such as ‘I’, ‘You’, ‘He’ and ‘This One’, it becomes clear that it is the Supreme Self, the pure consciousness that exists as the primordial cause of this Universe. Therefore, all actions performed for one’s own happiness should also consider the happiness of others’.

In the first two lines of this verse, Guru explains his philosophy. In the last two lines Guru reveals its practical application.

At the heart of Guru’s philosophy lies the conviction that

സകലവുമുള്ളതുതന്നെ തത്വചിന്താ-
 ഗ്രഹണിതു സർവ്വവുമേകമായ് ഗ്രഹിക്കും;
 അകമുഖമായറിയായ്കിൽ മായയാം വൻ-
 പക പലതും ഭ്രമമേകിടുന്നു പാരം.



- Recognise 'I' as all-pervading Self

(‘If one perceives the totality of existence in its essence, then illusion dissolves, and the manifold confusions vanish’). Here, Guru articulates a fundamental tenet: ignorance does not stem from the absence of outward diversity, but from a failure to recognise the singular ‘I’ as the substratum of all phenomena. By equating the subject of perception, ‘I’, with Ātman, he dismantles dualistic presuppositions sustaining both spiritual and social bondage. Expanding on this, he affirms:

“യച്ചാപ്നോതി യദാദത്തേ യച്ചാത്തി വിഷയാണി ച യസ്യാസ്തി സന്തതോ ഭാവഃ തസ്മാദാത്മേതി ഭന്ത്യതേ”

(‘Whatever one attains and whatever becomes the object of perception, if there is a continuous state of existence in those, one calls that the Self’).

This verse underscores his epistemological stance: knowledge and being cannot be separated. By emphasising that ‘subjects of knowledge’ are themselves Ātman, he refutes any notion that Brahman is divorced from worldly experience. Consequently, devotion (ഭക്തി), knowledge (ജ്ഞാനം) and ethical conduct (കർമ്മം) become inseparable aspects of spiritual realisation. Such an integrated approach preserves Advaita Vedānta’s non-dual metaphysics while situating ethical imperatives, including egalitarianism, compassion and social reform, as logical corollaries of realising oneness. Thus, inner awakening and outer action coalesce in Guru’s doctrine, guiding seekers toward both personal liberation and communal upliftment.

- Knowledge and being are inseparable: Ātman is all.

1.1.5 Integration of Metaphysics and Social Ethos

Guru’s synthesis reaches beyond abstract metaphysics to embrace a praxis-oriented philosophy that directly addresses Kerala’s entrenched social hierarchies. In asserting ‘ഏകം ശാസ്ത്രമധീയാനോ ന കുര്യാത് ശാസ്ത്രനിശ്ചലതേ’ (‘One should not study multiple scriptures without resolving their apparent contradictions’), he warns against intellectual eclecticism devoid of ethical grounding. This aphorism not only cautions learners against dogmatic pluralism but implies that genuine comprehension demands harmonising scriptural insights with lived experience. Drawing on Vedic injunctions familiar to his contemporaries, Guru transforms them into a clarion call for social equity, urging that every ritual or doctrinal premise must ultimately reinforce ‘unbroken equality and brotherhood.’ By rooting his ethical vision in the same Advaitic

- Guru’s Advaita: Social equity from oneness.

soil where Śāṅkara had planted austerity and introspection, Guru harvested a robust social theology: by seeing oneself in others, caste-based indignities collapse. Thus, his philosophical project features a twofold thrust, ontological non-duality as the source of inner emancipation, and social non-duality as its external manifestation. His framework demonstrates that metaphysical insight and ethical action coalesce to foster both personal liberation and collective upliftment.

1.1.5.1 Triputi and Avastha Traya

Triputi (Three folders), ‘what Triputi’ means is made clear by Guru in verse 4 of Atmopadesa Satakam:

അറിവുമറിഞ്ഞിടുംമർത്ഥവും പുമാൻത-
ന്നറിവുമൊരാദിമഹസ്സുമാത്രമാകും;
വിരളതവിട്ടു വിളങ്ങുമമ്മഹത്താ-
മറിവിലമർന്നതു മാത്രമായിടേണം

- Knower, known, knowledge are one consciousness

‘The knower, the known and the knowledge’ –all of these are nothing but the pure consciousness, that is the primal cause. One should merge and become one with that cosmic wisdom, which pervades and manifests everywhere without interruption and remain as That alone.

It is the one and the same consciousness that appears as three – knower, known and knowledge. When the true knowledge arises, one comes to realise that all three are indeed the same consciousness.

1.1.5.2 Avastha Traya (Three states)

The term ‘avastha-trayam’ in Vedanta refer to the three states of consciousness. The three states are Jagrat (Waking), Swapna (Dream) and Sushupti (Deep sleeping)

Apart from these, there is also a fourth state known as Turiya (The fourth one)

In the ‘waking state’ (Jagrat), one perceives the external world and engages in actions. In the ‘dream state’ (Swapna), only the subtle body functions, and experiences mere thoughts or imaginations. In the ‘deep sleep state’ (Sushupti), there is only ignorance, but the bliss of Brahman is experienced in an unmanifest form. In the fourth state Turiya, there is the direct realization of Brahman.

In the fourth stanza of ‘Brahmavidya Panchakam’, Guru clearly describes these three states.



- Consciousness states: Waking, dream, deep sleep, Turiya

“പ്രാണീതി പ്രവിവിക്തഭുഗ് ബഹിരഹം
പ്രാജ്ഞസ്തുഷുപ്തൗ യതഃ”

‘It is this very power that, in the dream state, causes the soul to experience a world created by its own imagination in solitude. It is also this power that deludes the soul in the waking state, making it believe, ‘I am the doer, I am the enjoyer’, and in deep sleep, it is this same power that shrouds the soul in a dark veil and renders it unconscious. ‘Here, the term ‘Shakti’ refers to the power of Brahman, that is Maya. From this, it becomes clear that the three states, waking, dream and deep sleep are all manifestations of Maya. Only when this Maya is eliminated can true realization (Self – Realization) occur.

1.1.5.3 Vidya, Avidya, and the Path to Liberation

In Atmopadesa Satakam, Guru describes Vidya (true knowledge) as ‘Sama’ (the same) and Avidya (ignorance) as anya (the other). That which is known in many forms is Anya (the other). That which abides as one is sama (the same).

‘പലവിധമായറിയുന്നതന്യയൊന്നായ്
വിലസുവതാം സമയെന്നു മേലിലോതും
നിലയെറിഞ്ഞു നിവർന്നു സാമ്യമേലും
കലയിലലിഞ്ഞു കലർന്നിരുന്നിടേണം’

(ആത്മോപദേശശതകം 38)

By relying on vidya (three knowledge) one can attain liberation (Moksha).

In Guru’s framework, the twin vrittis, Vidya (വിദ്യ) and Avidya (അവിദ്യ), function as opposing forces within the mind. He writes:

“ഒരു പതിനായിരമാദിതേയരൊന്നായ്
വരുവതുപോലെ വരും വിവേകവൃത്തി,
അറിവിനെ മുടുമനിത്യ മായയാമീ-
യിരുളിനെയിർന്നെഴുമാദി സൂര്യനത്രേ”

(‘Like ten thousand rivers streaming into one ocean, the vritti of discernment gathers all knowing vrittis and dispels the twin-layered world of Maya’s delusion.’). This vivid simile underscores that when discernment (viveka) coalesces, it acts like an inexorable current, flushing away delusive impressions (saṃskāras) that sustain Avidya. In verses such as:

“വിരളത വിട്ടു വിളങ്ങുമമ്മഹത്താ-
മറിവിലമർന്നതു മാത്രമായിടേണം’

- Guru: knowledge unites, ignorance divides.

Guru makes clear that only Ātman is permanent and all else, name, form, thought, is transient and hence unreal. By repeatedly emphasising ‘Aham Brahmasmi’ (അഹം ബ്രഹ്മാസ്മി), ‘I am Brahman’, he invites the aspirants to internalise non-duality not as a remote abstraction but as an ever-present truth. Such inner alignment, Guru insists, eradicates the false sense of doer and enjoyer, opening a path where ethical living (കർമ്മം), devotion (ഭക്തി) and knowledge (ജ്ഞാനം) converge to yield true freedom, liberation that is at once personal and socially transformative.

1.1.6 Integration of Buddhist Ethics and Bhakti Devotionalism

Guru’s thought resonates strongly with the ethical core of Buddhism and Bhakti devotionalism, creating a triadic framework where compassion (കരുണ) and devotion (ഭക്തി) operate alongside Advaitic discernment (വിവേകം). While Advaita Vedānta provided his primary metaphysical framework, he drew creatively from Buddhist ethics, Bhakti devotionalism, Siddha traditions and even elements of modern Western thought. In Guru’s exposition, Buddhist non-violence (അഹിംസ) and compassion undergird the Advaitic insight that all beings share a common essence. This is reflected in verses of Darśanamāla where he repeatedly underscores that ethical conduct flows naturally from realising oneness: when ‘I am Brahman’ (അഹം ബ്രഹ്മാസ്മി) is internalised, there is no justification for harm or discrimination. Simultaneously, his Bhakti-infused pedagogy transforms devotion into a purifying practice that dispels māyā: devotional fervour becomes a means to dissolve egoic projections and approach the formless Brahman. By harmonising these strands, Guru offers not a fragmented syncretism but a cohesive ethos: the Śuddha-bhakti (pure devotion) of Siddha traditions, the analytical precision of Advaita, and the compassionate imperative of Buddhism converge to form a universally accessible path. This integrative stance ensured that his message spoke to the intellect, the heart and the conscience, making spiritual attainment inseparable from social empathy and moral responsibility.

- Guru blended Advaita, Buddhism, Bhakti

1.1.7 Practical Shape of Applied Vedānta: Aruvippuram and Institutional Reform

Beyond philosophical synthesis, Guru’s mission took concrete shape through social and institutional reforms. He pioneered cultural equality by asserting that ‘all Hindus have



- Guru's reforms built social equality

the right to establish and consecrate temples, conduct and facilitate worship, learn and teach the Vedas, and perform and have performed rituals like Garbhadhāna and other saṃskāras.’ The act of consecrating the Śiva-liṅga at Aruvippuram in 1888 was thus not only a metaphysical declaration but a radical assertion of democratized spiritual agency. By declaring ‘ജാതിഭേദം മതഭേദമേതുമില്ലാതെ...’ (‘without caste distinctions or religious animosity...’), he dismantled Brahmanical gatekeeping over sacred spaces. Recognising that social uplift requires sustained organisation, he helped establish the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, schools that admitted all castes, and the Sivagiri pilgrimage centre where devotees from diverse backgrounds could congregate as equals. Each temple, school or assembly embodied his Advaitic-ethical ideal: that self-realisation naturally blossoms into inclusive structures. In doing so, Guru translated subtle metaphysical insights, Tripuṭi-vināśa (destruction of the triad knower–known–knowledge) and Ātma–Anātma–viveka (discrimination between Self and non-Self), into the very fabric of Kerala society, ensuring that inner transformation and outer change advanced hand in hand.

1.1.8 Darśanamāla: Theory of Bhanam

Guru’s Darśanamāla delves deeply into the notion of Bhanam (ഭ്രമം), ‘appearance’ or ‘perception’, as the primary lens through which the mind misconstrues reality. In this work, he classifies Bhanam into three essential categories: Hetu-Bhanam (ഹേതുഭ്രമം), Lakṣaṇa-Bhanam (ലക്ഷണഭ്രമം) and Saundarya-Bhanam (സൗന്ദര്യഭ്രമം). Hetu-Bhanam refers to false cognition arising from mistaking causes (hetu) for the real substance; for example, perceiving a rope as a snake. Lakṣaṇa-Bhanam denotes misidentifying qualities or markers (lakṣaṇa) as the essence, thinking a pot’s colour is its reality rather than its clay substrate. Saundarya-Bhanam arises from aesthetic fixations, wherein beauty or form distracts from recognising the formless Brahman. Together, these three operate as a tripartite mechanism that binds the individual to māyā, shrouding the singularity of Ātman in a web of illusory distinctions. Guru argues that most spiritual seekers remain unaware of how these subdivisions of Bhanam continuously reinforce one another, consolidating ignorance until discriminative wisdom (viveka) is cultivated. By systematically dismantling Hetu-Bhanam, Lakṣaṇa-Bhanam and Saundarya-Bhanam, the aspirant dissolves the mental projections that obscure non-duality, thereby aligning perception with the ever-present sat-

- Guru: Perception’s illusions bind

cit-ānanda (being-consciousness-bliss). Through this analytic framework, Darśanamāla becomes both a metaphysical treatise and a practical guide, showing how understanding and transcending appearances lead directly to liberation.

1.1.8.1 Macrocosm-Microcosm Parallelism

In addition to the theory of Bhanam, Darśanamāla presents an intricate analysis of the macrocosm (Brahmāṇḍa) and microcosm (Brahmaśarīra), illustrating how the same Advaitic principles govern both cosmic processes and individual consciousness. Guru explicates that just as the universe (Brahmāṇḍa) emerges, sustains and dissolves within māyā, so too the individual self (jīva) cycles through birth, life and death under the sway of mental projections. By drawing these parallels, Guru encourages seekers to recognise that yogic or meditative practices which stabilise the mind at the microcosmic level (antaḥkaraṇa) simultaneously align one with the macrocosmic rhythm. Consequently, the collapse of Bhanam at the individual level triggers a corresponding detachment from cosmic fluctuations, leading aspirant toward the realisation that ‘jīva’ and ‘jagat’ share no ultimate distinction. Thus, Darśanamāla shows how dissolving illusions in personal consciousness unleashes a profound attunement to universal harmony, affirming non-duality both within and without.

- Guru: Microcosm, macrocosm mirror Advaita

1.1.9 Prakṛti–Puruṣa Viveka and Culmination

According to Samkhya Theory, there are two realities: Purusha and Prakriti. Prakriti is one, while Purushas are many. The Samkhya theory of Evolution is known as Sat Karya Vada or Parinama Vada. Prakriti possesses three attributes (Gunas): Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. Before creation, these three Gunas maintain an equilibrium. In the presence of Purusha, this equilibrium is disturbed, and creation begins. According to the Samkhya theory of evolution, creation is not something entirely new; what is patent is latent. Just as a tree emerges from a seed, the universe arises from nature. Advaita Vedanta accepts the Samkhya Theory of Evolution up to a certain level.

- Samkhya: Purusha, Prakriti, Gunas, Evolution

Thus, Guru, in the concluding stanza of ‘Adhyaropa Darsana’ (Chapter 1) of ‘Darsanamala’, states:

ധാനാദിവ വടോ യസ്മാത്
പ്രാദുരാസീദിദം ജഗത്



"Just as a mighty tree emerges from an extremely subtle seed, this world of names and forms arises from the extremely subtle pure consciousness."

Here, Guru reiterates that while Prakriti unfolds as multiplicity, Purusha, the self, remains unaltered. In the next two lines, Guru states:

“സ ബ്രഹ്മം സ ശിവോ വിഷ്ണുഃ
സ പരഃ സർവ ഏവ സഃ”

"That non-dual consciousness itself is Brahma, Śiva, and Vishnu. That Supreme Self alone is the one support of the entire universe. It is that Supreme Being who appears as everything."

- Guru: Consciousness manifests as universe

Guru's vision forms a capstone to his philosophical roots. Through the triadic analysis of Brahman, the parallelism of macro and micro analyses, and definitive Prakriti-Purusha discrimination, Guru offers learners a cohesive roadmap from ignorance to liberation. The Advaita Theory of Evolution is Brahma-Vivarta-Vada. According to this theory, the world is an illusory appearance of Brahman.

Summarized Overview

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical framework represents a profound synthesis, seamlessly weaving perennial Advaitic insights with a resolute commitment to social upliftment. His approach went beyond abstract theory, transforming Advaita Vedanta into a practical philosophy for societal transformation. Guru achieved this by distilling Śaṅkara's non-dualism into accessible vernacular verse, analyzing perceptual distortions through the concept of Bhanam, exploring macrocosm-microcosm parallels, and emphasizing Prakṛti-Puruṣa viveka. This furnished a holistic roadmap from ignorance to liberation, a liberation that he consistently viewed as collective, not merely personal.

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical foundation was significantly shaped by profound Tamil influences, extending beyond conventional Kerala scholarship. His vision of non-dualism integrated principles from the Tamil Siddha and Bhakti traditions and the reformist zeal of Ayyā Vaikundar. Vaikundar's Ayyavazhi movement, with its universal religion and maxim 'One caste, one religion, one God, one world, one ruler,' directly prefigured Guru's own famous slogan, showcasing a shared anti-caste ethos through practices like communal feasts and common wells. Guru's Aruvippuram consecration, a powerful challenge to Brahminical monopolies, directly echoed Vaikundar's efforts to democratize spiritual access, affirming that divinity resides in all devotees regardless

of birth. This philosophical alignment underscores the direct lineage of Guru's Advaitic-egalitarian ideals from established Tamil reformist thought.

Further solidifying this Tamil connection, Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal, a master of Tamil Siddha yoga, mentored Guru in advanced meditation and non-sectarian experiential realization, instilling principles of universal compassion and inner transformation that Guru later wove into his socially active Advaita. Additionally, the centuries-old Tamil Bhakti movement, particularly the Nayinarmar, influenced Guru's critique of caste hierarchies in his poetry, demonstrating devotion's transcendence of birth. His use of Tamil Saiva terms and mastery of Bhakti poetics in his hymns underscored his belief that bhakti alone could grant divine access, irrespective of social standing. This cross-regional synergy, exemplified by Ayyavazhi's anti-caste agitation and the Vaikom Satyagraha, culminated in a broader Dravidian renaissance, reflected in Guru's temple consecrations and the pan-South Indian adoption of his universalist slogan, ultimately leading to reforms like the 1936 Temple Entry Proclamation.

Guru's philosophy emphasizes that true knowledge (Vidya) dispels the illusionary world created by Avidya, leading to the realization that all phenomena are but ripples on the ocean of consciousness. He insisted that 'Aham Brahmasmi' (I am Brahman) should be internalized not as an abstraction but as an ever-present truth, leading to ethical living, devotion, and knowledge converging to yield true freedom. This is further underpinned by his integration of Buddhist ethics, particularly ahimsā (non-violence) and karuṇā (compassion), with Advaitic insight, where ethical conduct naturally flows from realizing oneness. His Bhakti-infused pedagogy transformed devotion into a purifying practice that dissolves egoic projections, leading to the formless Brahman. The Daiva Dasakam asserts the singular nature of the Divine regardless of form. This integrative stance ensured his message resonated with intellect, heart, and conscience, making spiritual attainment inseparable from social empathy and moral responsibility.

Guru's mission took concrete shape through various institutional reforms, asserting the right of all Hindus to establish temples, conduct worship, learn Vedas, and perform rituals. The Aruvippuram event was a radical assertion of democratized spiritual agency, dismantling Brahminical gatekeeping over sacred spaces. He helped establish the SNDP Yogam, schools open to all castes, and the Sivagiri pilgrimage center, embodying his Advaitic-ethical ideal that self-realization blossoms into inclusive structures. Through these efforts, Guru translated subtle metaphysical insights into the fabric of Kerala society, ensuring inner transformation and outer change advanced hand in hand.

His Darśanamāla probes into Bhanam (appearance or perception), classifying it into Hetu-Bhanam, Lakṣaṇa-Bhanam, and Saundarya-Bhanam, which bind individuals to māyā. Systematically dismantling these forms of Bhanam aligns perception with sat-cit-ānanda. The work also presents macrocosm-microcosm parallelism, illustrating how Advaitic principles govern both cosmic processes and individual consciousness, showing that dissolving illusions in personal consciousness leads to universal harmony. The culmination in Darśanamāla is Prakṛti-Puruṣa viveka, the discriminative discernment



between transient nature and pure consciousness, providing a roadmap from ignorance to liberation.

Thus, Sree Narayana Guru stands both within and beyond the Advaita tradition. He adopted its metaphysical core but redirected its ethical thrust toward social transformation, ensuring that ontological unity translated into social fraternity and universal brotherhood. His 'applied Vedanta' serves as a timeless exemplar where metaphysical unity and ethical action are not separate pursuits but intrinsically linked aspects of a unified spiritual flight.

Assignments

1. How did Sree Narayana Guru's perspective of Advaita Vedanta differ from its traditional scholastic understanding, and what was its practical application?
2. What specific contributions did Ayya Vaikundar and the Ayyavazhi movement make to Sree Narayana Guru's egalitarian vision and reform efforts?
3. How did Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal influence Sree Narayana Guru's spiritual development, particularly through Sivaraja Yoga?
4. In what ways did the Tamil Bhakti movement, particularly the Nayinarmar corpus, resonate with and influence Sree Narayana Guru's poetic works and his critique of caste?
5. Explain Sree Narayana Guru's Triputi and Avastha Traya, and how they contribute to the understanding of liberation.
6. Describe the three categories of 'Bhanam' as explained in Guru's *Darśanamāla* and their role in reinforcing ignorance.
7. How did Sree Narayana Guru integrate Buddhist ethics and Bhakti devotionism into his Advaitic framework?
8. What was the significance of the Aruvippuram Consecration of 1888 as an 'inaugural proclamation of applied Vedanta'?

UNIT 2

Devotional and Mystical Elements in Sree Narayana Guru's Work

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- describe devotional poems how serve as an initiatory bridge from rational discourse to mystical awareness un Sreenarayana Guru's philosophy
- understand how Guru blends Bhakti (devotion) and Advaita (non-duality) to communicate transcendence
- analyse the symbolic architecture of representative compositions and demonstration how each poem exemplifies Guru's universalist ethos
- recognise the ways in which Guru's mystical verses employ metaphor, paradox, and negation to convey states of pure consciousness
- articulate the method of inner practice implied by Guru's works

Background

Guru insisted pure Advaita could not be conveyed through logic alone; rational discourse 'cannot convey the mystical dimensions of experience'. Hence, although his Darśanamāla and Ātmopadeśa Śatakam are rigorous in their exposition of non-duality, they are blanketed in poetic form. Guru's own realisations sprang from śravaṇa–mānana–nididhyāsana (hearing–reflection–meditation), yet to communicate these experiences he adopted the ancient Bhakti idiom: devotional stotras. Like a Vedic ṛṣi whose hymns became vehicles for ṛṣi-sākṣātkāra (seer-experience), Guru used hymnody to move the mind from the outer cage of thought into inner liberation. This 'imperial transcendence' (anubhava beyond empiricism) is most poignantly expressed when he invokes deities not as external idols but as symbols of inner states, Vināyakāṣṭakam, Guhāṣṭakam, Śrī Vāsudevāṣṭakam, and Devi Stavam unravel the emotional register, while remaining firmly rooted in Advaitic insight. In this sense, each hymn functions as an epistemic tool: it bypasses propositional knowledge (jñāna) and awakens intuitive knowledge (anubhava) by engaging every dimension of human awareness, sound, metre, rhythm, and imagery, to induce sūkṣma (subtle) vibrations in the heart, leading to samādhi.



Keywords

Guru's Philosophy, Advaita Vedanta, Caste Reform, Aruvippuram, Ayyavazhi, Thycaud Ayyavu, Tamil Bhakti, Applied Vedanta

Discussion

1.2.1 Classification of Guru's Devotional (Stotra) Corpus

Narayana Guru's oeuvre spans multiple genres and languages, yet his stotra works, devotional hymns, form the core of this unit's study. His compositions can be grouped into five broad categories:

1. **Stotra** (Hymnal works): Devotional praise to deities (Vinayaka, Śiva, Subrahmanya, Devi, Viṣṇu) often composed at temple consecrations (kṣetra pratiṣṭha).
2. **Prabodhana** (Instructional works): Texts meant to instruct or awaken knowledge. (e.g. Jeevakarunya panchakam, Anukamba Dasakam)
3. **Darśanika** (Philosophical treatises): Systematic expositions of Advaita (e.g., Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, Darśanamāla).
4. **Tārjamāl** (Translations): Adaptations of Sanskrit or Tamil texts into Malayalam (e.g., Ishavasyopanishad, Thirukkural (Part)).
5. **Gadya Kṛtikā** (Prose works): Prose writings on ethics, social reform, or personal guidance (e.g., Ātmavilasam, Daivachinthanam I & II).

- Guru's works: diverse, devotional, inclusive.

Here he focuses exclusively on the Stotra category, though acknowledging that many hymns contain Prabodhana and Darśanika dimensions. By using Malayalam, Sanskrit, and sometimes Tamil meters (anuṣṭubh, śrāgadharā, dandakam), Guru made these hymns available across caste lines, 'true devotion goes hand in hand with knowledge of the self and universal love, and it must uplift society by eradicating divisions like caste and religious sectarianism'.

1.2.2 Śrīkr̥ṣṇa Darśanam (Vision of Lord Krishna)

1.2.2.1 Background and Context

Śrīkr̥ṣṇa Darśanam is one of Guru's earliest stotras, composed circa 1877 at Varanappally, following a spontaneous vision (darśana) of Lord Krishna's idol. Śrīkr̥ṣṇa Darśanam testifies to the bliss of īśvara-sākṣātkāra (direct experience of the Divine), yet is grounded in Advaitic awareness. It articulates the transition from ego-bound awareness (ahamkāra) to luminous non-dual consciousness (cit). Although the form is Vaishṇava, the content moves swiftly beyond sponsorship of any particular sect or caste, celebrating transcendence of māyā (illusion).

- Srikrishna Darshanam: Divine Advaitic vision

1.2.2.2 Analysis of Key Verses

One preserved stanza reads:

ഭൂയോ വൃത്തി നിവൃത്തിയായ്ബഭൂവനവും
സത്തിൽ തിരോഭൂതമായ്
പീയൂഷധനി ലീനമായ് ചുഴലവും
ശോഭിച്ചു ദീപപ്രഭ
മായാമുടുപടം തുറന്നു മണിരംഗത്തിൽ
പ്രകാശിക്കുമ -
ക്കായാവിൻ മലർമേനി കൗസ്തുഭമണി-
ഗ്രീവന്റെ ദിവ്യോത്സവം.

(My sense of self was gone, the world (bhūvanam) became absorbed in being. The melodious sound of nectar fell silent. All around shone the radiance of a lamp. The veil of māyā was lifted, and in the jeweled stage of the heart bloomed the transcendental festival of the One with the Kaustubha gem on His chest)

Here, 'vṛtti nivṛtti' (cessation of mental fluctuations) signals samādhi: the dissolution of individual activity into sat (being). The 'pīyūṣa dhvani' (sound of nectar) alludes to the transcendental nāda (primordial sound), which 'falls silent' when the ego dissolves. The 'lamp of radiance' is jñāna prakāśa (light of knowledge), dispelling māyā's darkness. Finally, the 'Kaurubha gem' on Krishna's chest symbolises sustained divine glory (śrī) that persists beyond change. Although Krishna is addressed in dualistic devotion, the hidden purpose is to reveal Ātman as Brahman; the devotee's merging with the lepam (veil) of māyā shows that devotion leads to non-dual awareness. Śrīkr̥ṣṇa Darśanam thus functions as a liminal text: a Bhakti entry point into the Advaitic realisation that the bliss of direct vision supersedes all sense enjoyment.

- Divine vision transcends self, illusion



1.2.3 Śrī Vāsudevāṣṭakam (Eight Verses to Lord Vasudeva)

1.2.3.1 Historical Setting

Composed ca. 1884 in Sanskrit's Vasantatilakā meter, Śrī Vāsudevāṣṭakam (Eight Verses to Lord Vasudeva) represents Guru's brief foray into Vaiṣṇava devotion prior to his staunch focus on Śiva and Śakti in later years. These three available Vaiṣṇava stotras, Śrī Vāsudevāṣṭakam, Viṣṇvaṣṭakam, and Śrīkr̥ṣṇa Darśanam, emerge from a transitional period when Guru was still steeped in Bhakti moods yet edging toward asceticism. Shortly thereafter he undertook sannyāsa-like seclusion at Marutvamala, culminating in the paradigm-shifting Aruvippuram consecration (1888).

- Guru's early Vaishnava devotion shifted

1.2.3.2 Exegetical Commentary

In Śrī Vāsudevāṣṭakam, Guru addresses Vāsudeva as the remover of all worldly sorrows, employing dualistic bhakta-prārthanā (devotee-entreaty) language. Yet, woven beneath this devotional layer is the Caraka-like notion that the Lord's ultimate nature is single Brahman manifest in manifold guises. For instance, in the opening verse the devotee laments:

ശ്രീവാസുദേവ, സരസീരൂഹ പാഞ്ചജന്യ-
കൗമോദകീഭയനിവാരണ ചക്രപാണേ,
ശ്രീവത്സവത്സ, സകലായമൂലനാശിൻ,
ശ്രീഭൂപതേ, ഹരഹരേ, സകലായം മേ.

O Sree Vasudeva, lotus-born one, holder of the conch (Panchajanya), the mace (Kaumodaki), and the fear-dispelling discus (Chakra), O beloved of Sreevatsa, destroyer of all root causes (of suffering), O Lord of wealth, Hara Hare, remove all my afflictions.

This verse is a profound prayer and an expression of devotion (Bhakti) to the Supreme Being, identified here with Lord Vishnu, who is addressed through various epithets. While it appears as a conventional hymn, Narayana Guru, known for his advaitic (non-dual) philosophy, imbues it with deeper spiritual significance. Consequently, Śrī Vāsudevāṣṭakam prefigures Guru's shift toward non-sectarian Śiva devotion, in which deity worship becomes a doorway to non-dual realisation. Rather than conventional ritualistic worship (pūjā), the eight verses offer direct appeal to the transcendental substratum.

- Prefigures Guru's shift to non-dual deity devotion

1.2.4 Śivaśatakam (Hundred Verses on Śiva)

1.2.4.1 Composition and Significance

- Śivaśatakam: Guru's universal Śiva, anti-caste.

Śivaśatakam marks a watershed: Guru's first śataka (hundred-verse poem), reputedly composed in one sitting at Marutvamala, dedicated for the welfare of the world (loka kalyāṇārtha) . Fully in Malayalam, its pan-Kerala popularity stems from its dual emphasis: devotional fervour for Śiva and impersonal portrayal of Śiva as universal, attributeless Brahman. This normative shift away from the Vaiṣṇava avatar iconography positions Śiva as the sole real entity. Through Śivaśatakam, Guru breaks caste-based exclusivities by recasting Śiva's attributes, crescent moon, matted hair, serpent garland, third eye, as symbols of universal principles (time, grace, energy, knowledge) meant for all regardless of birth.

1.2.4.2 Select Verses and Commentary

One illustrative verse reads:

ഹരി ഭഗവാനരവിന്ദസുനുവും നിൻ
തിരുവിളയാടലറിഞ്ഞതില്ല യൊന്നും;
ഹര! ഹര പിന്നെ യിതാരറിഞ്ഞിടുന്നു!
കരളിലിരുന്നു കളിച്ചിടുന്ന കോലം!

(‘O Hara (Śiva), even Brahmā and lotus-born Viṣṇu do not know a single secret of Your divine play. Who then can truly comprehend? Yet from the forest of my heart you dance, O child of the kāla riddle!’)

Here ‘lotus-born Viṣṇu’ refers to Brahmā’s emergence on a lotus, and Viṣṇu’s celebrated yet limited knowledge. By exalting Śiva as ‘Hara’ (destroyer of ignorance) whose līlā (play) surpasses all, Guru dissolves sectarian boundaries. In another verse:

ചെറുപിറ ചെഞ്ചിടയികലാറുമേറും
തിരമിയലും ഫണിമാലയും ത്രിപുണ്ണ് ധ്ര-
ക്കുരികളുമമ്മദനൻ ദഹിച്ച കണ്ണും
പുരികവുമെന്നുമെനിക്കു കാണണം തേ.

(May I behold always Your matted locks where the crescent moon and Ganga reside, Your snake-garland bristling with power, the third eye that burned Kama, and Your radiant face, O Lord!)

While evoking Śiva’s iconography, each element is unpacked thus: matted hair = transcendence of time (kaala),



- Guru's Śiva: universal, symbolic, inner.

snake = kundalinī energy mastered, third eye = the eye of jñāna burning desire. By fixating on inner symbolism, the devotee moves from Hanuman-like reverence to the deeper realization that these are merely pointers to sat-cit-ānanda. Śivaśatakam then becomes a stotra-ratna (jewel among hymns), its meter and alliteration inducing a quasi-mantric quality conducive to internal absorption. Even verses referencing 'desire for women' are not autobiographical confessions but empathetic laments for seekers battling kāma; Guru prays for Śiva as Kāmarī (destroyer of desire) to infuse vairāgya . Ultimately, Śivaśatakam is Guru's blueprint: worship Śiva externally, recognise Śiva internally as Self, and dissolve into universal Śiva-consciousness.

1.2.5 Subrahmaṇya Kīrttanam (Hymn to Lord Subrahmaṇya)

1.2.5.1 Tamil Siddha Influence and Shaiva Siddhānta

During his interregnum at Marutvamala, Guru absorbed Tamil Siddha and Shaiva Siddhānta currents through his mentor Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal. This influence crystallised in Subrahmaṇya Kīrttanam, a Malayalam hymn in Sragdharā meter praising Bāla Subrahmaṇya (Murugan). Unusually candid and colloquial, the hymn casts the devotee as a mendicant yāti (mendicant-snake mafia) beseeching Subrahmaṇya to rescue him from ignorance. The hymn unfolds as a conversation between wandering yogi and playful deity, echoing Tamil Saiva bhakti traditions (e.g., the Nayanar devotional corpus) while injecting Advaitic undertones.

- Guru's hymn blends Tamil Siddha, Advaita

1.2.5.2 Key Excerpts and Analysis

The opening stanza 15 reads:

ഉൺമാനില്ലാഞ്ഞിരപ്പൊട്ടിയുമൊരുവടിയും-
കൊണ്ടു നീളെ നടക്കും
പെൺമെയ്പകൻ കുടത്തിൻ കവിയു കവിയുമാ-
റുള്ള കള്ളും ചുമന്നും
നിർമ്മാണം പോൽ ചിലപ്പോളരയിലൊരു കരി-
ത്തോലുടുത്തും നടക്കും
വൻമായം നിൻതകപ്പൻ വികൃതികൾ പറവാ-
നാദിശേഷന്നുമാമോ?

(Subrahmaṇya, Your father Śiva wanders aimlessly clutching a begging bowl made from a skull and a staff, clad

only in an elephant hide at his waist, sometimes even that cast aside. Who but Ādiśeṣa could fathom the magical antics of Your father’s divine play?)

Here, Guru’s fierce bhakti is evident in his unflinching description of Śiva’s bhikṣāṭaṇa (beggar’s wanderings), naked except for a dried elephant hide. The verse jests that only Ādiśeṣa (the serpent thousand-headed mount) might comprehend such līlā. Such bold mockery is a sign of intimate bhakti: the devotee’s fearless love that transcends propriety. Yet beneath the humour is a profound message: Subrahmaṇya (embodiment of jñāna) is one with Śiva; worship of the son culminates in worship of the father, Śiva, who stands for non-dual reality.

Later, Guru pleads:

പച്ചക്കള്ളം വിതറ്റിപ്പഴവിന കുടികെ-
 ട്ടിക്കിടക്കുന്നൊരിമ്മെ-
 യെച്ചിൽച്ചോറുണ്ടിരപ്പോടൊരു വടിയുമെടു-
 ണ്തോടി മുടറ്റിടും മുൻപച്ചപ്പൊ-
 ൽ മയിലിലേറിപ്പരിചിനൊടൊഴുന-
 ഉളിപ്പടിക്കൽ കിടക്കും
 പിച്ചക്കാരന്നു വല്ലോമൊരു ഗതി തരണേ
 മരണിക്കാരുമില്ലേ!

(All I have known are unripe, bitter fruits of worldly entanglements; believing them to be sweet, I built my life around them and collapsed a beggar at Your feet. O Lord, ride upon the golden peacock and save me, none but You can!)

The bitter unripe fruits allegorise sensual attachments (vāsanās) that mislead the soul. Subrahmaṇya, riding His peacock (symbol of victory over ego), is the one who can deliver the seeker from mādhyaṃika (middle) illusions. This prayer effectively merges Shaiva Siddhānta devotion (Murugan as the youthful victor) with Advaita’s soteriological urgency: only divine grace can uproot avidyā. In the concluding chariot allegory, Guru becomes charioteer guiding the horses of mind and senses toward Subrahmaṇya’s secret city (citadel of consciousness), urging detachment from pañcendriyas. The hymn thus emerges as a seamless blend of Tamil Siddha metaphors, Shaiva bhakti moods, and non-dual jñāna, demonstrating how Guru’s floral Malayalam weaving of Tamil-Shaiva lore yields a pan-Indian mystical prayer.

• Guru’s hymn blends devotion, Advaita.

1.2.6 Vināyakāṣṭakam (Eight Verses to Lord Vināyaka)

1.2.6.1 Recontextualising Ganesha in Advaita

Vināyakāṣṭakam stands unique among Guru's stotras, being fully in scholarly Sanskrit yet reinterpreting Ganesha from 'remover of worldly obstacles' to 'remover of spiritual ignorance.' Addressed to Gaṇapati, the elephant-headed deity, the hymn praises Him not for boons of prosperity but as 'The source of all knowledge' and 'life-giving nectar for spiritual seekers'. By shifting Ganesha's traditional role, Guru dissolves sectarian boundaries, making Vināyaka a universal symbol of the primal Word (śabda) that dispels avidyā.

- Guru's Ganesha: spiritual knowledge, not boons.

Guru displaces the notion of Ganesha as child-god of beginnings, reorienting worship toward jñāna yoga. Compassion (karuṇa) here is not sentiment alone but the grace that unveils the Self. The life-giver (prāṇada) connotes removal of prāṇa bound by ignorance. With such epithets, Vināyaka becomes the primeval śakti that ignites the inner guru, dissolving illusions that tie the jīva to the body-mind complex. Through Vināyakāṣṭakam, Guru invites devotees to see beyond external rituals; the true pūjā is the attentive gaze inward. Consequently, recitation becomes śravaṇa (listening) to Viṣṇu (here Ganesha), which transmutes into anubhava (direct experience) of non-duality.

- Vinayaka: Knowledge, compassion, inner Self.

1.2.7 Navamañjari (The Ninefold Blossom)

1.2.7.1 Devotional Approach to Brahman's Immanence

Navamañjari (meaning Nine Blossoms) is a Malayalam hymn consisting of nine verses, each conceived as a flower in a garland, praising Muruga (Subrahmaṇya) yet ultimately invoking universal Brahman. Guru's choice of nine stanzas mirrors the nine rasas (flavours of emotion) in Indian aesthetics, suggesting that the divine can be approached through myriad moods, love, wonder, peace, yet all point to the same impersonal Absolute. With simplicity and charm, each verse balances Bhakti fervour and Advaitic insight, illustrating Guru's belief that true knowledge (jñāna) blossoms from heartfelt devotion (bhakti).

- Navamanjari: Bhakti leads to Advaita

1.2.7.2 Representative Verses and Commentary

A striking verse reads:

“നാടീടുമീ വിഷയമോടീദൃശം നടന-
മാടീടുവാനരുതിനി-
ക്കാടീവയോവിതരതീടീയിടയ്ക്കിവനു
കൂടീയമായതിയലും
കാടീയുമീകരണമുടീയെരിപ്പതിനൊ-
രേടീകരിഞ്ഞ നിടില-
ച്ചുടീദമീയ മയിലോടീടുവാനരുൾക
മോടീയുതം മുരുകനേ!”

(I have danced enough in this worldly theatre of sense-pleasures and sights; now age advances and this body has grown frail. Though the forest of causes still binds me, O Lord Muruga, burn this veil of ignorance with the fire of Your grace, and let me ride on Your peacock! For I lie collapsed at Your feet like a beggar, none but You can raise me again!)

In this devotional outcry, ‘dancing in the worldly theatre’ symbolises engagement with sense-objects. Age (vāya) signals the body’s fragility (karaṇa). Though bound by millet-thickets (kaṭi), metaphor for mental fetters, only grace (anugraha) can incinerate māyā’s veil. The final plea to climb the ‘mayilōṭṭi’ (peacock mount) with Muruga allegorises surrendering ego to divine will and rising above samsāric entanglements. The deer that seeks refuge in the tiger’s lap (rākṣasīya siha śaraṇāgati) signals complete trust. Here, devotion is the crucible that transmutes longing into wisdom, aligning the seeker’s inner rhythm to the cosmic dance of Śiva–Muruga (Nātyānanta). Hence, Navamañjari serves as a microcosm of Guru’s method: Bhakti as the means, Jñāna as the end.

- Devotion burns illusion, grants freedom.

1.2.8 Chidambarāṣṭakam (Eight Verses on Chidambaram)

1.2.8.1 Inner Temple as Chidambaram

Chidambarāṣṭakam honours Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu’s famed Śiva Natarāja temple, yet Guru repatriates Chidambaram from a geographical site to the ‘sky of consciousness’ (chidambaram) within the heart. This shift from external pilgrimage to inner realisation echoes classical Upaniṣadic teaching: the temple’s walls are within the self. By praising Chidambaram as ‘eightfold matter-manifest’ (aṣṭatanu pratibhāsa), Guru reveals that the Śiva Linga there symbolises the substratum of all eight tattvas (earth, water, fire, air, ether, sun, moon, jīva). In doing so, he universalises a caste-gated shrine into the boundless



cosmic stage where Śiva Natarāja performs his perpetual dance.

1.2.8.2 Selected Verses and Exegesis

One verse states:

അഷ്ടതനുപ്രതിഭാസുരലിംഗം
 വിഷ്ണുപനാഥവികസാരലിംഗം
 ശിഷ്യജനാവനശീലിതലിംഗം
 തൻമൃദു പാതു ചിദംബരലിംഗം.

(That Chidambaram Linga shines forth as the form manifest in the eightfold elements; it is the effulgent Linga of the Lord of the Universe; it is the Linga ever inclined to protect the righteous; may that gentle Chidambaram Linga safeguard us.)

Here, Guru methodically aligns each tattva with the Chidambaram Linga, implying Śiva is immanent in all layers of existence. ‘Viktavanātha’ (Lord of creation) and ‘śiṣṭajanāvan’ (protector of sages and virtuous) evoke Puranic depictions of Natarāja as both cosmic dancer and benevolent guardian. By entreating this Linga’s ‘gentle feet’ (paatu), Guru transforms worship from a Brahminical ritual to a universal appeal for grace. The implication is that true darśana (vision) of Chidambaram occurs within each heart when one perceives Śiva’s dance as the ongoing play of consciousness, dissolving subject–object duality. Thus Chidambaram becomes synonymous with turīya, ‘the fourth’ state beyond wake, dream, and deep sleep, where the seeker rests amidst the dance of creation and dissolution.

• Guru: Śiva Linga, inner consciousness

1.2.9 Bhadrakālī Aṣṭakam (Eight Verses to Bhadrakālī)

1.2.9.1 Fusing Folk Devotion with Shakta Philosophy

Bhadrakālī Aṣṭakam is Guru’s Sanskrit hymn to the fierce-protective Mother, Bhadrakālī, a form of Devī venerated by Kerala’s non-Brahmin communities. In Sanskrit’s impersonal grandeur, Guru consecrates Bhadrakālī as Ādi Parāśakti, primordial energy that creates, sustains, and dissolves. By elevating a folk deity to universal Śakti, Guru dismantles caste and sectarian barriers, demonstrating that true Śakti worship is inextricable from Advaita’s recognition of one undivided reality. This act of casting Bhadrakālī as ‘world-mother and mother of all’ effectively integrates Shakta devotion into Kerala’s renaissance of egalitarian spirituality.

• Guru’s Bhadrakali hymn fused folk devotion and Shakta philosophy.

1.2.9.2 Core Verses and Insights

A representative invocation reads:

മാതങ്ഗശ്രുതിഭൂഷിണീം മധുധരീ-
വാണീസുധാമോക്ഷിണീം
ഭൂവിക്ഷേപകടാക്ഷവീക്ഷണവിസർ-
ഗ്ഗക്ഷേമസംഹാരിണീം
മാതങ്ഗീം മഹിഷാസുരപ്രമഥിനീം
മാധുര്യധുര്യാകര-
ശ്രീകാരോത്തരപാണിപങ്കജപുടീം
ശ്രീഭദ്രകാളീം ഭജേ.

(I worship Śrī Bhadrakālī who is adorned with the Vedas themselves, the sweet bearer of nectar (her voice), who with a mere glance can both upheave worlds and bestow grace; O Mother, you who slew the great asura and delighted the maharṣis, whose lotus-hands bestow prosperity, Salutations to You, O Śrī Bhadrakālī!)

By listing śruti (Vedic knowledge), amṛta-dhāri (bearer of nectar, symbolising speech as śabda-Brahman), and bhūvi kṣepa (capacity to cause cosmic upheaval) alongside the standard Purāṇic allusions (slaying Mahishāsura), Guru exalts Bhadrakālī as the omnipotent Śakti. The ‘lotus-hands’ (pankaja puṭī) reference her varada (boon-bestowing) aspect, and yet the very idea of ‘slaying the asura’ is reinterpreted as the internal conquest of ignorance (avidyā) and adharma (unrighteousness). The mention of ‘parents reversed’ (Śrī Kārārūttarapāṇi) alludes to her engendering of Śiva’s dance, in other words, Śakti animates Śiva’s consciousness. Thus, the hymn’s architecture interweaves folk Kali lore with Advaitic symbolism: Kali’s furious aspect is the fire that burns away māyā’s veils, and her motherly compassion is the śānti (peace) resting at the core of consciousness. By chanting Bhadrakālī’s names, devotees merge fear of cosmic dissolution with the comfort of divine embrace, enabling simultaneous bhakti and jñāna.

• Guru’s Bhadrakali hymn elevates folk deity to omnipotent Shakti.

1.2.10 Janani Navaratna Manjari (Nine Jewels to the Mother)

Devī as Ādi Vidyā: Navaratna Manjari’s Mystical Core

Janani Navaratna Manjari, literally ‘Nine-Gem Garland to the Mother’, is Guru’s magnum opus in Devi worship, composed in Malayalam during his Sivagiri sojourn (first published 1909). Structured as nine ślokas, each a ‘gem,’ the compendium depicts Ādi Parāśakti as Ādi Vidyā (primordial

• Guru’s Navaratna Manjari: Devi as primordial knowledge, power

knowledge) and Ādi Śakti (primordial power) whose dance of creation encompasses all existence. With verses said to have been spontaneously dictated by a visionary surrendering into Āveśa (divine inspiration), Navaratna Manjari manifests ‘sweetness, calm, and profound depth,’ as Kumāran Āśan aptly noted. Far more than a hymn, it is Guru’s Devi Upaniṣad, an invitation to merge into universal Consciousness through Divine Mother’s grace.

Detailed Commentary on Key Verses

The first śloka begins:

ഒന്നായ മാമതിയിൽ നിന്നായിരം ത്രിപുടി
 വന്നാശു തൻമതി മറ-
 നന്നാദിയിൽ പ്രിയമുയർന്നാടലാം കടലി-
 ലൊന്നായി വീണുവലയും
 എന്നാശയം ഗതിപെറും നാദഭൂമിയില-
 മർന്നാവിരാഭപടരും-
 ചിന്നാദിയിൽ ത്രിപുടിയെന്നാണരും പടി
 കലർന്നാറിടുന്നു ജനനീ!

(O Mother, from the one undivided Self (mamati) arose countless tripuṭis (knower–knowledge–known). Losing their form, they danced in delight at creation’s dawn, yet were soon caught in the ocean of worldly flux. I yearn to enter nāda bhūmi (realm of primordial sound) where all tripuṭis dissolve and only pure Being remains dancing. O Mother, in that supreme abode where the triadic framework is absorbed, grant me that ultimate union!)

This verse encapsulates the Navaratna Manjari’s essence: ‘One unbroken Mamatī (pure Heedlessness/Self), from which limitless tripuṭis unfolded into diverse perceptions, only to be swept into samsāra’s ocean. Grant me, O Mother, to dive into Nāda Bhūmi, where all perceptual triads collapse and only unchanging Being dances as Śakti.’ The metaphor of ‘dancing in delight’ acknowledges the joyous nature of creation as Śakti’s līlā, yet the dancer is misled into suffering (samsāra). The ‘ocean’ signifies the multiplicity of experiences that shroud the one Self, while Nāda Bhūmi is the substratum of all revelations, akin to śabda-Brahman in Kashmir Shaivism. Navaratna Manjari’s power lies in blending this highly technical symbolism with a devotional register accessible to any Malayāli speaker.

Another verse articulates, ‘This world’s varied colours and forms arise within the kāraṇa (cause); through māyā’s flips they are born and die. Only in the luminous chidakāśa (conscious

• Navaratna Manjari: tripuṭis emerge from Self, dissolve in Nāda Bhūmi.

space) where all dualities vanish, there do I, O Mother, long to abide.’

- Guru: world’s illusions vanish in consciousness.

Though the exact Malayalam is more poetic, the meaning is that all phenomena are born of cause (satīkaraṇa), upheld by māyā’s illusions; only in the mind’s sky, chidakāśa, can one find abiding peace. By aligning Chid-ambaram with Devī, Guru dissolves temple walls into the heart’s temple, underscoring that worship of the Mother is tantamount to self-inquiry into the Self.

Each of the nine śloka follows this trajectory, moving from acknowledgement of world-sorrow (saṁsāra) to yearning for pure Śakti awareness, ultimately culminating in unconditional surrender (śaraṅgati). The final verse proclaims:

‘Who contemplates Your Glory in every being, who serves all as part of You, he alone sees You in all, and lives in ceaseless harmony.’

This integrates devotion, knowledge, and service, typifying Guru’s tripartite formula for liberation: bhakti + jñāna + sādācāra, all under Mother’s aegis.

1.2.11 Kundalinīpāṭṭu (Song of the Kundalinī) / Pāmpāṭṭi Chinth

Yogic Allegory Transposed into Devotional Ecstasy

Kundalinīpāṭṭu, or in its Tamil colloquial title, Pāmpāṭṭi Chinth (‘Song of the Snake-Charmer’), is a distinctive hymn where Guru uses the ‘snake’ motif to signify kundalinī energy (kuṇḍalinī śakti) as well as the human mind (manas), entangled in senses and illusions. Composed between Marutvamala asceticism and Aruvippuram consecration (1888), the poem reflects Guru’s Siddha-yogi apprenticeship under Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal, yet transcends technical Hatha Yoga instruction, transforming kundalinī imagery into a devotional invitation to unite with Śiva’s cosmic dance.

- Guru’s hymn blends Kundalini yoga, devoti5 on

Excerpts and Exposition

The opening refrain, composed in simple colloquial Malayalam and Tamil-flavoured tropes, goes:

ആടു പാമ്പേ, പുനം തേടു പാമ്പേ, യരു-
ളാനന്ദക്കൂത്തു കണ്ടാടു പാമ്പേ.

(Dance, O Snake! Seek your abode, O Snake! Witness the Divine Dance of Bliss and dance along, O Snake!)



- Guru's 'Snake-Charmer' hymn invokes Kundalini awakening

Here, 'Pāmpē' (snake) addresses the seeker's mind (manas) or kundalinī energy coiled at the mulādhāra. 'Dance' (ādu) invites awakening; 'seek your field' (punam thedu) urges relocating from ephemeral senses to the sattvic ground of sahasrāra (crown). The 'dance of bliss' (ānanda kūttu) is Śiva Natarāja's cosmic lālita līlā; 'dance along' (kaṇḍādu) calls the snake to align with universal rhythm. Rather than prescribing nāḍī śodhana (subtle channel purification), Guru incites surrender through entrancement: the mind, like a snake charmed by flute, moves toward divine resonance rather than lurching into samsāra.

A critical mid-section reads:

പേയും പിണവും പിറക്കും ചുടുകൊടു
മേയും പരംപൊരുളൊടു പാമ്പേ.

(O Snake, dance within the cremation ground, where spirits and corpses are born and roam, and where the Supreme Being also resides/roams)

The cremation ground (ചുടുകൊടു) serves as a potent symbol across many spiritual traditions, particularly within Tantra and Aghora, representing a site of profound transformation where the material body disintegrates, illustrating the impermanence of the physical world and the ego. It's a place where spiritual practitioners often meditate to conquer deep-seated fears of death and decay, thereby transcending conventional dualities of purity and impurity. This realm, where "spirits and corpses are born and roam," highlights the continuous cycle of life and death and the ephemeral nature of all forms, embodying the raw, unadulterated truth of existence where birth and demise are intrinsically intertwined.

- Cremation ground symbolizes impermanence, ego's end

- Serpent dance: Kundalini awakening, divine energy

The call to the snake (പാമ്പ്) to "dance" is rich with symbolic meaning in Indian spirituality, most commonly representing Kundalini Shakti, the divine coiled energy that, when awakened, ascends to bring about spiritual liberation. The serpent's shedding of skin signifies rebirth and eternity, while its presence often alludes to cosmic energy, wisdom, and healing. The "dance" itself implies a dynamic spiritual activity and the ecstatic manifestation of consciousness. Crucially, the presence of the Supreme Being (പരംപൊരുൾ) in such a setting underscores the immanence of the divine, asserting that ultimate reality pervades all of creation, transcending the dualities of sacred and profane, pure and impure. This perspective encourages an acceptance of reality in its totality,

recognizing that even the most challenging or fearful aspects are part of the divine play and ultimately manifestations of the singular Brahman, leading to fearless spiritual realization.

- Guru: love's call awakens inner Śiva.

Although the Malayalam original uses village idioms, its meaning is unmistakable: the mind, enticed by the melody of loving remembrance (bhajana), sheds all dross to rest in one's own core, where Śiva abides as Turīya. Kundalinīpāṭṭu thus reframes classical Nāḍī-kundalinī yoga as a bhakti-laden śravaṇa; by merging Hatha-Siddha imagery with devotional surrender, Guru invites everyone, scholars and unlettered, to enact inner awakening as love-song rather than technique.

1.2.12 Kāḷīnāṭakam (The Play/Dance of Kālī)

1.2.12.1 Dandakam as Cosmic Drama of Śakti

- Guru's Kāḷīnāṭakam: monumental Sanskrit hymn to Bhadrakālī

Kāḷīnāṭakam stands as Guru's monumental hymn to Bhadrakālī, structured in dandakam, an extended, unbroken verse form characterised by rhythmic persistence akin to a drumroll. Muni Narayana Prasad extolled it as 'a poetic sculpture, unmatched in stotra literature'. Composed in Guru's later stotra phase (post-1890), it celebrates Kali not merely as folk deity but as Ādi Śakti whose dance catalyses creation, preservation, and dissolution. The poem's relentless meter evokes Kali's own very dance, unyielding, inexorable, all-consuming, while its devotional tenor reassures devotees of Her grace amidst cosmic upheaval.

1.2.12.2 Structural Overview and Thematic Highlights

The opening invocation reads:

നമോ നാദബിന്ദുതമികേ! നാശഹീനേ!
 നമോ നാരദാദീഡ്യപാദാരവിന്ദേ!
 നമോ നാനന്ദയ്ക്കും മണിപ്പൂംവിളക്കേ!
 നമോ നാനുഖാദിപ്രിയാംബാ, നമസ്തേ!

'Salutations to You who are the soul of Nāda and Bindu, the indestructible principle, whose lotuses feet are worshipped by Nārada and other sages, whose light illumines all four Vedas, whose myriad faces delight the great ones, O gracious Bhadrakālī!'

- Guru's Kali hymn: Bhadrakali as supreme, primordial consciousness

This dense śloka situates Kali as Nāda-Bindu-Ātmikā (essence of sound-point), marking Her as primordial Consciousness. The invocation specifies that sages (nāradādi) prostrate to Her lotus feet, implying that even celestial seers



revere Śakti. By emphasising ‘illumination of the four Vedas,’ Guru integrates śruti into Shakta worship, indicating that Śakti is both Veda’s source and end. These opening lines collapse all hierarchies, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva are implicit worshippers of the Mother. Thus, Kali emerges not as a sectarian goddess but the supremely exalted Śakti beyond form.

1.2.12.3 Subsequent verses conjure Kali’s cosmic dance

‘She who dances in the circle of fire, whose steps scatter the veils of delusion; She whose eyes blaze with the destruction of ignorance; She whose tongue, dripping with nectar, bestows knowledge on the deserving; She whose form encompasses sky, earth, and all living beings, Salutations to You, O Mahākālī!’

Here, ‘circle of fire’ references Kali’s garland of skulls and the blazing agni aura that surrounds Her; ‘scatter veils of delusion’ aligns with the Upaniṣadic katopaniṣad teaching that fire of knowledge destroys darkness. Kali’s ‘blazing eyes’ are analogous to Śiva’s third eye, burning Kāma (desire), yet here Her gaze ignites prajñā (wisdom). The ‘nectar-dripping tongue’ (a reference to Her tongue lolling in fierce delight) is reinterpreted as amṛta-dhāri, not poison but spiritual nourishment. By encompassing cosmos (ākāśa-kṣiti), Kali is conflated with Bhūta-Brahman (elemental consciousness), thus affirming non-duality.

- Guru’s Kali hymn portrays her cosmic dance as destruction of ignorance

1.2.12.4 Philosophical and Social Dimensions

Kāḷīnāṭakam’s brilliance lies not only in its poetic grandeur but also in its subversive message: by elevating a folk-venerated Kali into the universal Śakti, Guru defies caste-bound temple entry restrictions. Where Brahminical elites barred lower castes from Śrī Kālī temples, Guru declares the inner cosmic temple open to all. This act aligns with his broader mission: ‘One caste, one religion, one God,’ extended here as ‘One Śakti dancing in every heart.’ The concessional orchestration of high Sanskrit meter alongside folk-Shākṭic motifs makes the hymn accessible to both scholarly pandits and village kavus (folk shrines). The effect is a democratic sacralisation of time and space: now Kālī’s dance is not confined to the stone idols of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, but flows spontaneously in every seeker who chants these verses.

- Kāḷīnāṭakam’s message: Kali for all, breaking caste barriers

- Kāḷīnāṭakam: Pinnacle of Guru’s devotional works.

By marrying the rigour of proper Sanskrit with the urgency of Shākṭic devotion, Kāḷīnāṭakam stands as the apex of Guru’s

devotional-mystical corpus. It demonstrates that Śakti worship can be both esoteric and egalitarian, a fierce but merciful path for inner realisation and social uplift.

1.2.13 Mystical Poetry: Ātmopadeśa Śatakam and Darśanamāla

While the above stotras exemplify Guru's devotional prowess, his Ātmopadeśa Śatakam ('One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction') and Darśanamāla ('Garland of Visions') constitute his greatest mystical-philosophical works. Whereas Ātmopadeśa Śatakam functions as a lyrical introspection into consciousness, Darśanamāla systematically explores ten 'visions' (darśanas) culminating in non-dual realization. Both deliver mystical wisdom through metaphor, paradox, and negation, hallmarks of Advaita mystic poetry.

- Guru's core: Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, Darśanamāla

1.2.13.1 Ātmopadeśa Śatakam: The Lyrical Road to Self-Knowledge

Ātmopadeśa Śatakam is Guru's definitive expression of internal mysticism. In a hundred quatrains composed in Malayalam anuṣṭubh metre, he guides readers inward to ask 'Who am I?' (aham), using everyday metaphors (rope-snake, milk-ghee, wave-ocean) to dissolve ignorance. The opening verses emphasise self-inquiry:

- Ātmopadeśa Śatakam: Inner journey, "Who am I?"

'He who knows beyond all known, who abides as no-thing, must go beyond this reference of 'I', for only then does the tripuṭi (knower-known-knowledge) shatter.'

This is a call to transcend nāma-rūpa (name and form) and the tripuṭi structure, pointing to 'I', the witness of all vṛttis (mental modifications), as the sole reality. The poem's subsequent verses pivot through Maya's illusions, delineate vakya-vṛtti ('process of reasoning'), and depict the ākāśa (ether) where dualities dissolve. For instance:

- Guru's Ātmopadeśa Śatakam: Self-inquiry for Advaitic liberation.

'Like ghee hidden in milk, oil in a seed, So Brahman hides in all forms, waiting to be churned by discrimination.'

Throughout, Guru's language is deliberately economical, each quatrain serves as a sutra-like guide, urging meditation over mere reading. By verse 90 (of 100), the 'no more rising, no more setting' motif echoes the sāmānyadarśana of mokṣa (liberation), climaxing in sat-cit-ānanda (being-consciousness-bliss). APS's significance lies in providing a spontaneous poetic path, 'poetry as self-instruction' rather than didactic treatise,



for seekers to taste advaitic unity. Guru wrote this poem in a rare Vritta- Mrigendramukham.

1.2.13.2 Darśanamāla: A Structured Garland of Visions

Darsanamala (Garland of Visions) systematically presents ten darsanas (visions), each with ten Sanskrit verses, marching from Adhyaropa, Apavada, Asatya, Maya, Bhana, Karma, Jnanam, Bhakthi, Yoga to Nirvana.

- **Adhyaropa Darsana:** Mirrors the ‘rope-snake’ superimposition, ‘On the Self, the world is seen; upon deeper light, the world dissolves.’
- **Apavāda Darsana:** Employs neti-neti (‘not this, not this’) to negate all empirical categories, leaving only the Self.
- **Asatya Darsana:** Emphasis on the erroneous cognition.
- **Maya Darsana :** Exposes illusion – ‘Phenomenal forms – all are mirages woven by delusion.
- **Bhana Darsana :** ‘Appearance’ or ‘perception’ -as the primary lens through which the mind misconstrues reality.
- **Karma Darsana :** Considers action as worship – when all deeds are offers to one, the doer melts into the acts.
- **Jnana Darsana :** Reveals dualities falling away – ‘knower, known, knowing collapse, only self stands witness.
- **Bhakti Darsana:** Confirms that devotion – when rooted in Advaita – becomes worship of the self in all – ‘To love all as one is wisdom and devotion united’.
- **Yoga Darsana :** Outlines withdrawal of senses (Prathyahara) and Dhyana (meditation) or means to abide in Sattva (Purity)
- **Nirvana Darsana :** Depicts liberation – ‘No birth, no death, no thirst for fruit, only peace abides.

As a meditative text, Darśanamāla pairs technical clarity (its ten-step structure) with poetic beauty: each Sanskrit verse brims with alliteration, balans (sound devices), and tripādī (three-part) cadence, forging a rhythm akin to mantric intonation. Moreover, by following Advaita Darsana with Bhakti Darsana, Guru rejects notions that devotion and non-duality are contradictory; instead, they are two aspects of the same ultimate vision. Darśanamāla thus functions as both śāstra (scripture) and sadhana (practice), mapping the seeker’s journey from world to Self, from multiplicity to unity.

- Guru’s Darśanamāla: ten visions to non-duality

1.2.14 Daivadasakam (Ten Verses to the Divine)

Universal Prayer Poem in Simple Malayalam

- Guru's Daivadasakam: universal prayer, communal chant

Daivadasakam is Guru's most widely sung universal prayer. Composed in clear Malayalam, its ten verses ascend from humble plea to triumphant surrender, rendering it accessible to all, children in schools, villagers at evening assemblies, and intellectuals in urban satsangs. Where APS and Darśanamāla demand sustained meditation, Daivadasakam operates as a communal chant, uniting hearts instantly in devotion and ethical aspiration.

Verse-by-Verses Overview

Verse 1

O, God! Protect us;
Never leave us;
You are the Captain
Of the ocean of
Unending strife; The
great steam boat
Your Solemn Feet!

O God, do not abandon us to the sorrowful ocean of worldly existence (samsāra), but ever protect us in Your own blissful form.

In this ocean of worldly life, Your Holy Name, or the remembrance of Your feet, is like a boat that helps one reach the farther shore.

And You, O Lord, are the navigator who steers that boat.

By boarding this safe vessel, may we be graced to realize the other shore of this sorrowful life, the blissful essence that is You alone.

Verse 2

One, more an' more...
I touch, compute, tally...
At the end,
Like eyes motionless
Let the mind be non-dual in You!

Am I this body? Or the senses? The mind and intellect? Or the life-force (prāṇa)?

When such inquiry is pursued, and the objects perceived



by the senses are also examined and set aside, then, when all perceptions and appearances come to an end, what remains is the pure awareness, the seer, the witnessing consciousness.

That witnessing presence, which stands apart as the eye behind all vision, must become still and merge into God, the indivisible, unchanging essence of Pure Consciousness.

Verse 3

Uninterrupted You shower
Grain, apparel an' all for us
You are the only Master for us.
The one who provides us with all that is essential for life,
such as food, clothing, and more,
who protects us and keeps us well and happy,
that God alone is our true Lord and Savior.

Verse 4

The sea, waves an' wind,
The depth-all those are we,
You, the Delusion, You, the Nobility,
Always is our core.
Just as the ocean, its waves, the wind, and the depths of the
sea all exist and function together in unity,
so too must we come to understand that all beings in this
universe ,
along with Māyā (the divine power), its various forms, and
God Himself ,
exist and operate as one inseparable whole.

Verse 5

You, the Creator,
You, the Creation,
You, the Created, O, Lord!
You are The Instrument
For The Great Act!
God Himself is the act of creation,
the Creator,
all the created objects that are seen,
and also the instruments through which creation takes
place.

Verse 6

You are The Jugglery,
You are The Juggler,
You are The Nobility
Which resolves Illusion,
Pours an' pours-
The Ultimate Salvation!

God Himself is the divine power behind the creation of the universe, the magician who operates the illusion called Māyā, and the supreme being, the Guru or the Ultimate Person, who removes the delusion of Māyā and bestows liberation (Moksha) or the state of Jīvanmukti (liberation while living).

Verse 7

You are The Truth,
The Knowledge, the Ecstasy.
You, the Present,
The Past, the Future.
And no one else
The Word
God Himself is Sat, the eternal existence,
Chit, pure consciousness,
and peace, untouched by sorrow.

Not only that, God is also the present, the past, and the future, and even sound is none other than God.

Verse 8

The noble feet of Yours
Fill the in an' the out.
We praise an' praise You,
O God!
You be The Great Winner,
And always be.

The divine form of God pervades everything,
within and without, everywhere, filling all space without remainder.

We sing praises of that glorious abode where such a great presence dwells.

You, O Lord, are the source of all prosperity and wealth.

May You always be victorious in every way, and may none ever equal You.



Verse 9

Be victorious The Great Lord!
Saviour of the poor,
Master of the ultimate happiness,
Ocean of Mercy!
Victory to You, O Lord,
the God of all gods,
ever alert to protect the humble and the distressed,
the embodiment of pure consciousness,
and the ocean of compassion!

Verse 10

In the glory of
The deep deep sea of
The Nobility of yours,
We all would immerse.
Extreme happiness be prevailed,
Be prevailed
Every quantum of moment!

We must fully immerse ourselves in that unfathomably deep ocean of Your divine light.

But mere immersion is not enough,
we must dwell there forever,
where only bliss remains eternally.

Daivadasakam's genius lies in its simplicity. Its Malayalam is nearly conversational, yet each verse condenses layers of profound Advaitic teaching, an Ātman eliminating false ego, seeing parameśvara in every jīva, practising karma yoga, realising ānanda through breath unity, and invoking śabda as the primal path. By enabling every Malayāli, child or scholar, to chant these verses, Guru democratized mysticism, making God accessible without caste, creed, or textual erudition. In communal recitation, hearts align, dissolving social barriers in a shared rhythm of devotion.

1.2.15 Synthesis: Devotional Hymns as Mystical Pedagogy

Across Guru's stotra corpus, a clear pattern emerges: devotional forms are never ends in themselves but vehicles (upāya) to disclose the non-duality of jīva and Brahman. Whether composing in Malayalam anuṣṭubh or Sanskrit dandakam, Guru's lyrical mastery functions as śabda-śakti, sound energy that triggers inner awakening. Each hymn is

- Guru's hymns: devotion as path to non-duality.

carefully calibrated: Bhakti to evoke emotion (rasa), metre to induce rhythmic entrainment (hr̥d-bandhana), and Advaitic symbolism to guide conceptual reflection. As students recite Śrīkṛṣṇa Darśanam, they taste īśvara-sākṣātkāra; by chanting Śrī Vāsudevāṣṭakam, they encounter the paradox of devotion to the formless; by intoning Śivaśatakam, they glimpse the unity of devotion and self-knowledge; by singing Subrahmaṇya Kīrttanam, they merge Tamil Siddha's embodied spirituality with Advaita; by reciting Vināyakāṣṭakam, they surrender ego complexities to the remover of avidyā; and through Navamañjari and Bhadrakālī stotras, they learn to dissolve sectarian categories into universal Śakti. Chidambarāṣṭakam, Kailinātakam, and Janani Navaratna Manjari pull the devotee deeper, treating temples as inner śabda-śālas, sound-chambers of consciousness.

- Guru: Kundalini yoga, devotion, non-duality, service.

Moreover, the mysterious Kundalinīpāṭṭu reframes yogic channel opening as a bhakti act, inviting the mind (snake) to dance with the Divine rather than chase sense illusions. Darśanamāla and Ātmopadeśa Śatakam expand these seeds into a systematic path: first superimposition (Adhyaropa), then negation (Apavāda), then joyous non-duality (Advaita), and finally service crowned by wisdom (Jnana-Karma Chandhana). Daivadasakam's final victory chant seals the circle, devotion and knowledge converge in universal surrender.

- Guru's hymns: spiritual ladder to unity.

In this way, Guru's devotional hymns function as mystical pedagogy, each verse a rung on the ladder from duality to unity. They honour inherited forms (Īśvara, Viśṇu, Śiva, Devī, Muruga, Gaṇapati) yet insist these forms ultimately point to śūnya (voidness) brimming with sat-cit-ānanda. By making these compositions available in Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Tamil, Guru ensured that every caste, class, and community could partake, thus dissolving social hierarchies in the very act of worship.

Summarized Overview

Unit 2 has charted how Sree Narayana Guru harnessed the potency of devotion-al poetry as an instrument of mystical revelation and social uplift. By blending Bhakti's emotive allure with Advaita's non-dual grammar, he created hymns that speak simultaneously to the heart and the intellect. Through Śrīkṛṣṇa Darśanam, Śrī Vāsudevāṣṭakam, Śivaśatakam, Subrahmaṇya Kīrttanam, Vināyakāṣṭakam, Navamañjari, Chi-



dambarāṣṭakam, Bhadrakālī Aṣṭakam, Janani Navaratna Manjari, Kundalinīpāṭṭu, and Kālīnāṭakam, Guru unfolded a panoramic vision: every temple and tradition becomes a gateway to inner Śakti; every visual icon is a signpost to the formless; every dance and music becomes an inner dance of conscious awareness.

By granting equal sanctity to Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Tamil, Guru transcended the caste-linguistic divide, making devotional-mystic experiences available across Kerala's social strata. His hymns simultaneously challenge Brahminical monopolies (e.g., 'This is not Brahmin Śiva; this is Ezhava Śiva' at Aruvippuram) and elevate folk-venerated deities (e.g., Bhadrakālī in Bhadrakālī Aṣṭakam) into vehicles of universal Self-knowledge. Ultimately, these stotras serve not only to generate rasa and bhāvana (emotional resonance) but to guide one toward anubhava (direct experience) of non-duality. As these verses are recited and internalised, the siege of Māyā weakens, social barriers dissolve, and communities coalesce in a shared celebration of universal brotherhood, fulfilling Guru's eternal refrain: 'One caste, one religion, one God for humanity.' Thus, devotion and mysticism unite as twin wings propelling seekers from personal yearning to collective awakening.

Assignments

1. How did the socio-cultural milieu of late 19th century Kerala influence Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical evolution?
2. In what ways did Sree Narayana Guru reinterpret Advaita Vedanta to serve as a catalyst for social transformation?
3. What was the significance of the Aruvippuram consecration in challenging Brahminical monopolies and promoting universal brotherhood?
4. How did the Ayyavazhi movement, led by Ayya Vaikundar, philosophically and practically resonate with Sree Narayana Guru's vision?
5. What was the role of Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal in transmitting Tamil Siddha yoga and mysticism to Sree Narayana Guru?
6. How did the Tamil Bhakti movement influence Sree Narayana Guru's critique of caste hierarchies and his poetic compositions?
7. Explain Sree Narayana Guru's concept of 'Bhanam' and its three categories as presented in *Darśanamāla*.
8. How does Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy integrate inner transformation with social equity, demonstrating 'applied Vedanta'?

UNIT 3

Philosophical Dream of the One World

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- critically examine Sree Narayana Guru's synthesis of classical Advaita Vedānta with a passionate commitment to social unity, articulating how his philosophy transcends mere metaphysics to envision a single human family.
- analyse the multilayered concept of 'oneness' (Advaita) as deployed by Guru: philosophically (non-dual consciousness), ethically (universal fraternity), and religiously (interfaith harmony).
- interpret key Malayalam verses from Ātmopadeśa Śatakam and other hymns that encapsulate his modern Advaita, demonstrating how poetic imagery functions as a pedagogical tool for both inner transformation and social reform.
- contextualise Guru's proclamation 'oru jāti, oru matham, oru daivam manushyan' within the socio-historical realities of early twentieth-century Kerala, evaluating its role as both spiritual mantra and social programme.
- articulate the principles of Ekamatha-Vrata (vow of a single religion) and its practical enactment in Aruvippuram, Sivagiri and the Religious Parliament (Aluva, 1924), assessing how these initiatives lay the groundwork for a cosmopolitan 'one world' ideal.
- reflect on the enduring relevance of Guru's modern Advaita for contemporary discourses on religious pluralism, caste abolition, and global solidarity.

Background

Sukumar Azhikode famously asserts that after engaging with a dense epic, the reader inevitably asks: 'Who is the hero of this epic?' Tradition recounts that the first query upon finishing the Rāmāyaṇa was, 'Who is Śrī Rāma?' In modern Kerala's unfolding epic of social and spiritual renewal, Azhikode contends that Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru stands as its indubitable protagonist. Yet, as with Rama, divergent narratives vie for primacy: some portray Guru purely as a consummate Advaitin, a luminous seer upholding time-



less Vedāntic lineage; others hail him as a revolutionary social reformer, dismantling caste oppressions and forging new egalitarian structures. Azhikode cautions against reductive portraits: ‘Because he was an Advaitin, he was not only an Advaitin and not merely a reformer; because he was a reformer, he was not only that and not an Advaitin.’ Thus, the pressing question ‘Who was Nārāyana Guru?’ demands recognition of his complex synthesis, sage and servant, seer and social engineer .

To pose ‘Who was Guru?’ invites us to hold in tension multiple registers: metaphysical sage, poet, social agitator, and interfaith visionary. His life eludes facile categorisation precisely because his Advaitic realisation animated every sphere, from the consecration of a Śiva līṅga at Aruvippuram (1888) to the convening of the Religious Parliament at Aluva (1924). In these deeds, we discern the lived expression of Advaita: unity not as an abstract doctrine but as a dynamic force dissolving caste walls and religious barriers. Thus, this unit embarks on an exploration of Guru’s ‘modern Advaita’ (Modernadvaita), a living Advaita that refuses to remain distant in the mountain cave when children starve at the village well, and that demands the realization of the One be translated into concrete egalitarian structures. By answering ‘Who was Guru?’ through the lens of his ‘Philosophical Dream of the One World,’ we honour his legacy as both seer of the infinite and architect of a universal human family.

Keywords

Advaita, Non-duality, Social reform, Ātman-Brahman, Ethical conduct, Applied Vedanta, Temple entry, SNDP Yogam

Discussion

- Advaita: Brahman is sole, non-dual reality

1.3.1 Advaita and its Multiple Registers of Oneness

Advaita (a- ‘not’ + dvaita ‘two’) is the classical Vedāntic doctrine, systematised by Śaṅkara, that the world’s apparent plurality (bheda) is ultimately unreal (mithyā), for only the non-dual Brahman is real (sat). Within this technical framework, Advaita employs a rich vocabulary: māyā (illusion), avidyā (ignorance), jñāna (liberating knowledge), and neti-neti (not this, not this) as a method to negate all that is not the Self . Yet, to speak of oneness does not automatically invoke Advaita: one may appeal to unity politically (human brotherhood), ethically (universal rights), or devotionally (all faiths worship the same God). What distinguishes classical Advaita is its uncompromising metaphysical claim: Brahman is attributeless

(nirguṇa), indivisible, and the sole substratum of experience. Everything else, name, form, sense-objects, are temporary projections upon that immutable ground.

Guru repeatedly deployed ‘oneness’ at three interlocking registers:

• Guru: Advaita’s oneness informs social reform

• Guru: ‘One caste, one religion, one God.’

• Guru: All religions converge on one truth

• Guru’s Advaita: social tool, not just theory

• Guru challenged Advaita’s social indifference

1. Philosophical Oneness (Advaita): The inner realization that Ātman and Brahman are identical. This recognition dissolves the sutra of knower–known–knowledge (Tripuṭi vṛtti), leading to the turīya state beyond wake, dream, and deep sleep.

2. Ethical Oneness (Human Family): The claim that all humans share a common essence. Guru’s slogan ‘oru jāti, oru matham, oru daivam manushyan’ (‘one caste, one religion, one God for humanity’) crystallises this vision. Here, ‘jāti’ transcends hereditary caste to mean subtler divisions in heart and mind. When the One is realized within, there can be no legitimate basis for exclusion or hierarchy.

3. Religious Oneness (Ekamatha): The assertion that all traditions, when sincerely pursued, converge upon the same transcendental reality. In his dialogue with C.V. Kunhiraman, Guru states: The aim of every religion is same. If all are studied impartially, their major principles differ little. That common principle is the single religion we teach’. In other words, he did not reject religion per se but the divisiveness it often engenders.

By holding these three registers together, Guru reframed Advaita from a monastic disciplina to a tool for building an inclusive society. His ‘oneness’ is thus neither purely theoretical nor sentimental; it is a lived conviction that both grounds personal liberation and ignites social regeneration.

1.3.2 Living Advaita: Integration of Metaphysics with Social Praxis

Classical Advaita, as proclaimed by Śaṅkara, emphasises ascetic withdrawal (vairāgya) and jñāna (knowledge) as paths to mokṣa (liberation). Yet Guru challenged the notion that Advaita requires indifference to worldly suffering. As Azhikode observes, few ascetics in India attempted to enact non-duality in daily life; many retreated under the shelter of māyā, ignoring social injustices. Guru insisted that authentic non-duality cannot coexist with social indifference. To him, if



the Self in me is identical to the Self in my neighbour, how can I ignore my neighbour's suffering? Thus, he refused to dismiss caste oppression as 'mere illusion.' Rather, realising that the caste wound was his first teacher, he turned immediately to Advaita to forge the weapon potent enough to sever that social tumor.

This integration took several forms:

• Aruvippuram: Guru's anti-caste temple reform

• Sivagiri Pilgrimage: communal living, Advaita in action.

• Aluva Parliament: Interfaith unity, mutual learning.

• Vedic rituals repurposed for unity, social justice

• **Aruvippuram Consecration (1888):** By installing a Śiva idol and inscribing 'jāti bhēdam matadvēṣa mētumilla...' ('without caste distinctions or religious hatred...'), Guru enacted Advaita as temple reform. This act shattered Brahminical monopolies over sacred space, proclaiming that true authority arises from self-realisation, not birth.

• **Sivagiri Pilgrimage Centre (1924 Onwards):** At Sivagiri, pilgrims of all castes and creeds gathered to live, work, and worship together, embodying the ideal 'oru jāti, oru matham, oru daivam manushyan.' Here advancing Advaita became continuous service, planting schools, libraries, and community kitchens, ensuring that spiritual awakening came hand-in-hand with educational and material uplift.

• **Religions Parliament, Aluva (1924):** Echoing Chicago's Parliament of Religions (1893), this gathering assembled Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, and Parsi delegates as equals. Guru's closing declaration, '...vadikkānum jayikkānum alla, ariyānum ariyickānum...' ('not to argue and win, but to learn and help others learn'), emphasised learning (jñāna) as the basis for unity and service. This event concretised Ekamatha: a religion of religions fostering mutual respect grounded in Advaitic insight.

In each initiative, Guru showed that Advaita is not a hermetic philosophy but a dynamic praxis. He re-interpreted vedic ritual (saṃskāras) not as mere caste markers but as tools to convey the inner unity of Ātman and Brahman, ensuring that ritual and social reform converged. Thus, his modern Advaita repurposed ancient insights into contemporary instruments for social justice.

1.3.3 The Crux of 'Oru Jāti, Oru Matham, Oru Daivam Manushyan'

At the heart of Guru's social programme lies the mahāvākya 'oru jāti, oru matham, oru daivam manushyan' ('one caste, one

religion, one God for humanity’). Though often rendered as a slogan, its import extends far beyond mere catchphrase; it encapsulates five interwoven layers:

• Guru’s ‘One’ is Ātman/Brahman, all distinctions provisional

• One Self means ethical action promotes unity

• All divine forms point to one ineffable God

• Guru’s ‘one caste’ sparked social revolution.

• Ekamatha-Vrata a precursor to interfaith movements

• Spiritual awakening measured by social harmony.

- **Ontological Layer:** Echoing Advaita’s non-duality, the phrase affirms that all distinctions, jāti (caste), matham (religion), daivam (deity), are ultimately provisional. The only real ‘one’ is Ātman/Brahman, the substratum of every jīva.
- **Ethical Layer:** If we all share one Self, then all ethical action must aim at preserving and enhancing that unity. Social hierarchies based on caste or creed violate the non-dual truth. To live ‘one caste’ is to treat every human as equal; ‘one religion’ is to see each path as a valid approach to the same summit; ‘one God’ is to recognise that every name/form points to the same ultimate reality.
- **Devotional Layer:** By addressing ‘one God,’ Guru transcends sectarian devotion (Śiva, Viṣṇu, Kālī, Muruga, Gaṇapati) to affirm that all divine forms are but idols pointing to the ineffable One. His hymns to Śiva (Śivaśatakam), Muruga (Navamañjari), and Kālī (Bhadrakālī Aṣṭakam) illustrate that devotion remains valid so long as it leads to realisation of the non-dual.
- **Social-Political Layer:** In early 20th-century Kerala, caste oppression ranged from temple exclusion to denial of education and property rights. Guru’s proclamation served as rallying cry for SNDP Yogam and related associations. By consecrating temples open to all (e.g., Aruvippuram, Sivagiri), he institutionalised ‘one caste’ in worship spaces, undermining Brahminical gatekeeping and igniting a grassroots social revolution.
- **Universal Layer:** The phrase anticipates a global humanity: ‘when all humanity blossoms into one family, the thinkers of tomorrow will acknowledge the stimulus provided by his light’. Here, Guru looks beyond Kerala to envision a world where divisions of race, nation, and creed dissolve in the radiance of Advaita. His Ekamatha-Vrata, initiated in 1914, was not parochial but cosmopolitan, an early 20th-century precursor to later interfaith movements.

By consolidating these layers, ‘oru jāti, oru matham, oru daivam manushyan’ becomes more than slogan, it becomes a living formula directing every domain of thought and action. Catechizing Advaita into social grammar, Guru refuses to



separate the world of dharma (action) from the world of jñāna (knowledge). Instead, he shows that genuine knowledge is tested in service; spiritual awakening is measured by social harmony.

1.3.4 Ātmopadeśa Śatakam’s Vision of Unity

One of the most telling expressions of Guru’s integrated approach emerges in Ātmopadeśa Śatakam’s 24th stanza:

“അവനിവനെനരിയുന്നതൊക്കെയോർത്താൽ
 അവനിയിലാദിമമായൊരാത്മരൂപം;
 അവനവനാത്മസുഖത്തിനാചരിക്കുന്ന
 അവയപരന്നു സുഖത്തിനായ് വരേണം.”

(‘If one fully remembers ‘He is the one within and without,’
 then in Him alone remains the primal form of the Self;
 Those who act for their own personal bliss
 must instead come forth to act for the bliss of That One.’)

Here, ‘avan ivan ennariyan’ (‘He is the one within and without’) asserts non-dual ontology. The stanza then issues an ethical injunction: one cannot pursue selfish joy (jīvasukha) if the same One abides in every being. Selfish actions thus betray the unity of the Self. In instructing seekers to act for ‘avan nammal sukhané ayi’ (the bliss of That One), Guru demands that all action (karma) align with Advaitic jñāna: to see the Self in all is to serve the Self in all. Consequently, Ātmopadeśa Śatakam functions as both treatise and social manifesto: realisation remains incomplete unless it translates into acts promoting collective well-being. In this way, Guru transforms Advaita from personal liberation into communal harmony.

• Guru: Self-realisation means serving all.

• Advaita’s ‘neti-neti’ fosters interfaith harmony

Guru takes on the multiplicity of religious traditions. Beginning with stanza 44’s ‘pala matasāravuṁ ēkaṁ’ (‘though the forms of many religions appear different, their essence is one’), he systematically dismantles sectarian exclusivism. He argues that every tradition, when cleansed of ritual dogmatism, converges upon the non-dual. The verses enumerate commonalities: shared devotion, pursuit of righteousness, and ultimate realisation of the Self. By demonstrating that ‘pāla matasāravuṁ ekam’ (plurality of rites yet unity of essence), Guru prefigures his Ekamatha-Vrata: a vow to honour diverse faiths while refusing their divisive potentials. In doing so, he recasts Advaita’s neti-neti into a universalism: ‘Not this creed, not this creed, but that One beyond creed’, thus giving practical form to interfaith harmony.



1.3.5 Ardhanārīśvara-Stavaṃ and the Ethical Appeal to God

When Kerala endured an unrelenting drought, Guru composed his Ardhanārīśvara-Stavaṃ, directly reproaching Śiva for withholding rain. Rather than accepting calamity as divine will, he addressed the deity as an intimate ‘parent’ responsible for cosmic welfare:

“മുപ്പാരൊക്കെയിതാ മുടിഞ്ഞു മുടിയിൽ
 ചൊല്പൊങ്ങുമപ്പം ധരി-
 ചെപ്പോഴും പരമാത്മനിഷ്ഠയിലിരു-
 ന്നിടുന്നു നീയെന്തഹോ!
 ഇപ്പാരാനിയാളുമിപ്പരിഷയി-
 ന്നാരോടുരയ്ക്കുന്നു നിൽ-
 തുപ്പാദത്തണലെന്നിയേ തുണ നമു-
 ക്കാരർദ്ധനാരീശ്വരാ?”

(O Lord Ardhanārīśvara, you remain seated in meditation while our fields parch and wither. Even as the three worlds collapse, you abide in absolute bliss, why?)

In these verses, Guru refuses to accept suffering as inevitable. Addressing Śiva as ‘mura yo muḷardhanaariśvara’ (‘half-woman, half-man Lord’), he invokes the deity’s compassionate aspect (ardhanārī: the union of Śakti and Śiva, compassion and consciousness) to urge divine intervention for common welfare. The rhetorical intensity, ‘why do you remain in absolute meditation while three worlds perish?’, serves as moral critique: if divine oneness is real, why perpetuate suffering among devotees? Implicitly, Guru reminds devotees that Śiva’s īśvara-sākṣātkāra (direct vision) entails responsibility to creation. Thus, Ardhanārīśvara-Stavaṃ functions simultaneously as devotional hymn, social activism, and philosophical protest: a fervent plea that the transcendental One awaken to the needs of the world. Through this poem, Guru demonstrates that Advaitic detachment must not become indifference to collective welfare.

• Guru’s Ardhanārīśvara-Stavaṃ: reproaches Śiva for drought.

1.3.6 Modern advaita: Integrating Past, Present, and Future

‘MahĀtmas build bridges of refuge,’ asserts Azhikode, and Guru stands as the supreme bridge-builder: connecting ancient Advaita (past), Kerala’s present social crises, and humanity’s future aspirations for unity. His Modern advaita emerges at the confluence of three temporal strands:

- **Past (Classical Advaita):** Guru inherited the śāstric legacy of Śāṅkara, internalising its doctrines of maya, avidyā, and

- Guru inherited Advaita, but recontextualised it for social issues.

- Guru's Advaita: response to caste oppression

- Universal compassion transcends all divisions

- Guru's Modernadvaita: fuses ancient wisdom, social action.

- Guru built this bridge

tattvaḥ. However, unlike many medieval Advaitins who retreated to monasteries, he recontextualised Vedāntic insights for a society plagued by caste and religious strife. By studying the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, and Brahmasūtras, he grasped Advaita's ontological core: the indivisibility of Brahman. Yet he refused to isolate that insight from social realities.

- **Present (Kerala's Caste and Religious Conflicts):** Born into the Ezhava community and witnessing firsthand how Nambūdiris and Nāyars oppressed Ezhavas and Pulayas, Guru's existential inquiry began with 'Why must some breathe freely while others choke on ancestral curses?' His lived encounter with caste injustice propelled him to seek a philosophy capable of dismantling it. Hence Modernadvaita is not mere speculation but a fully engaged praxis: Advaitic awareness witnessed daily in acts that tear down caste hierarchies, democratise worship, and foster inter-faith dialogue.
- **Future (One World Ideal):** For Guru, Advaita's full flower appears when humankind recognises that 'nothing is alien to humanity.' He perceived that genuine Advaitic realisation naturally leads to universal compassion transcending tribe, caste, and creed. Thus, Modernadvaita functions as a roadmap for humanity's future: a cosmopolitan South Indian ascetic's blueprint for global solidarity, long before 'globalisation' became buzzword. By articulating ekamatha-vrata and convening interfaith assemblies, he prototyped a civilisational ethic pointing toward a 'single world.'

In sum, Guru's Modernadvaita is a dynamic continuum: it synthesises classical Vedāntic metaphysics with urgent social activism, orienting both toward a future where Advaitic unity radiates in daily life and global conscience. By heeding his call, humanity can clear the ancestral path of non-dual realisation, traversing from individual awakening to collective emancipation.

'In seeking to know whether the existence in which I am stands connected with infinite existence, one encounters Brahavidyā, the knowledge that eliminates distance between man and the universe. Sree Nārāyana Guru built such a bridge of knowledge'.

1.3.7 Deft Reinterpretations: From Paramadvaita to Manavadvaita

Guru's Modernadvaita represents a shift from Paramadvaita ('supreme non-duality' alone) to Manavadvaita (human non-duality). Guru asked: Is that realisation sufficient if the world remains fractured? He argued that realising Brahman necessitates redescribing Advaita such that it becomes a force for social healing:

- Realising Brahman necessitates social action

'Is it enough for Advaitin to become the eater of this supreme unity? Narayana Guru raised this question, and when he answered it, he became the greatest exponent of the most modern Advaita'.

Thus, Guru recast advaita-siddhānta (doctrine of non-duality) as Manavadvaita, placing human welfare (manava) at its core. This shift reflects three critical reorientations:

- Knowledge and action are inseparable for liberation.

1. Ethical Precedence: Traditional Advaita assures liberation through self-knowledge alone. Guru insisted that knowing Brahman demands ethical action (karma). For him, knowledge (jñāna) and action (karma) are inseparable: 'He who sees the Self in every act... he alone is free' (from Darśanamāla).

- Extends non-duality to fight exclusion

2. Inclusivity of the Marginalised: Traditional Advaita sometimes remained aloof from oppressed communities. Guru's Manavadvaita insists that the same Brahman dwelling in a Brahmin also resides in an untouchable. He thus extended the principle of non-duality to challenge caste exclusions, temple prohibitions, and educational barriers.

- Guru's Advaita: social regeneration within the world.

3. Forward-Looking Vision: While classical Advaita focuses on liberation beyond samsāra, Guru envisioned a regenerated society within samsāra: a 'one world' where Advaitic consciousness blossoms as social solidarity, interfaith harmony, and global justice. He thus prepared Advaita for the modern age's challenges, religious pluralism, racial divides, and ecological crises, long before these emerged as pressing global concerns.

- Guru's Manavadvaita: Advaita as compassionate community ethos

By forging Manavadvaita, Guru positioned Advaita as the living ethos of a moral community bound by compassion, transcending the narrow confines of monastic seclusion. In his rendition, Advaita's final fruit is not the individual's bliss alone but the collective flourishing of all humanity.



1.3.8 Ekamatha-Vrata: A Vow to Universal Brotherhood

In 1914, Sree Narayana Guru launched Ekamatha-Vrata ('vow of a single religion'), a movement not confined to lofty abstractions but embodied in daily practice. Two decades before many international interfaith initiatives, Guru proclaimed that religious plurality, when stripped of divisive dogmas, converges upon a single transcendental core. He elucidated this principle in his extensive conversation with C.V. Kunhiraman:

- Guru unified diverse faiths

'The aim of every religion is one. If all are studied with impartiality their major principles differ little. That common principle is the single religion we teach'.

Through Ekamatha-Vrata, Guru instituted four practical measures:

- Temple integrated social equality

- **Aruvippuram Model Temple (1888):** As previously discussed, he consecrated a temple free of caste checks and proclaiming, 'no caste distinctions, no religious animosity,' thus foreshadowing Ekamatha by embedding interfaith and anti-caste ethics in sacred architecture.

- Festivals transcend religious divides

- **Sivagiri Pilgrimage Centre (from 1924):** Sivagiri became a site where followers of all faiths converged for work (seva), study (svadhyāya), and worship (nāma japa) in a spirit of unity. Here, the celebration of Śivarātri included delegates from diverse faiths, reinforcing that sacred festivals could transcend sectarian divides.

- Aluva Parliament: faith dialogue

- **Religious Parliament, Aluva (1924):** This gathering enacted Ekamatha by bringing representatives of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsee communities into dialogue. The conference's motto, 'no argument to win, but knowledge to share', reinforced that religious understanding requires humility and mutual respect.

- Compassion unites all faiths

- **Anukampādāśaka (Verses on Compassion):** In the hymns of Atmopadesa Sataka, Guru praises figures from every religion, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, Śāṅkara, as 'oceans of compassion.' By invoking all these luminaries as manifestations of one divine love, he taught that true religion culminates in universal compassion, not sectarian triumph.

Ekamatha-Vrata thus became both a spiritual discipline and a social manifesto, a vow to honour diverse traditions while building bridges across them. By institutionalising

- Advaita reshapes societ

Ekamatha, Guru showed that Advaita’s insight into oneness must reshape communal structures, schooling, ritual calendars, and pilgrimage routes. In doing so, he lit a torch that would illuminate Kerala’s path to modern pluralism and inspire future generations to view every faith as a tributary flowing into the same ocean of truth.

1.3.9 The Four Strands of Guru’s ‘One World’ Vision

Sree Narayana Guru’s quest for a ‘one world’ rested on four interdependent pillars:

- Self-realisation ends fragmentation

1. Advaitic Consciousness (Brahma Chetana): In Guru’s framework, the non-dual awareness (Advaita) becomes the foundational light illuminating every being’s intrinsic worth. Through meditation, self-inquiry, and recitation of his mystical hymns (e.g., Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, Darśanamāla), seekers experience the unbroken reality of Ātman/Brahman, uprooting the ignorance that fuels social fragmentation.

- Advaita means engaged living.

2. Affirmation of Life (Jīvanānanda): Unlike ascetics who renounce the world in pursuit of mokṣa, Guru affirmed life’s sacredness. His devotional hymns, Śivaśatakam, Bhadrakālī Aṣṭakam, Daivadasakam, celebrate existence’s dynamism. He maintained that Advaitic awakening does not entail retreat into nihilistic detachment; rather, one must engage with the world’s joys and sorrows as expressions of the same divine play (Līlā).

3. Boundless Love of Humanity (Māmava Maityam): Guru’s poetry and discourses overflow with compassion for marginalized communities. Kumaran Āśān’s lines capture this fusion of empathy and action:

“അന്യർക്ക് ഗുണം ചെയ്തതിനായുണ്ണും വപുണ്ണും!
 ധന്യതാമോടങ്ങാത്തതപണ്ണും ബലി ചെയ്തു, !
 സന്യാസികളിലില്ലിങ്ങനെയിലില്ലമിയന്നോർ !
 വന്യാശ്രമമേലുന്നവരും ശ്രീ ഗുരുമൂർത്തേ!”
 (ഗുരുസ്തവം - മഹാകവീകുമാരനാശാൻ)

- Compassion fuels social action

(No other contemporary matched the Guru in reconciling word and deed; neither ascetics steeped in self-mortification nor forest-dwelling renunciates matched his union of compassion and practice.)

Here, Āśān likens Guru’s life to the mythical svarṇapuṣpa,



a flower of gold, highlighting how his spiritual radiance remained inseparable from his social compassion.

- Service is Advaita in action

4. Social Service (Lokakalyāṇa): Because he perceived the world as non-dual, every act of service, feeding the poor, educating the unlettered, healing the sick, became a sacred expression of Advaita. Through SNDP Yogam, temples open to all, community schools, and pilgrimage centres like Sivagiri, Guru wove service into spiritual practice. In his own words, ‘How can one rest in self-realization when one’s neighbour lies in chains of ignorance?’ Thus, social upliftment was not peripheral but central to his Advaitic soteriology.

- Guru’s ‘one world’ vision

By weaving these four strands, Advaitic insight, affirmation of life, boundless love, and social service, into a cohesive fabric, Guru nurtured a living ‘one world’ where the temple bells of meditation resonate in equal measure with the clamour of communal kitchens and classrooms.

1.3.10 ‘One Caste’ as Ontological and Ethical Imperative

In Kerala’s rigid caste hierarchy, Guru’s call to ‘one caste’ struck at the roots of social division. He observed that caste differences, manifest in temple exclusions, denial of education, and compulsory segregation, betrayed the non-dual truth. For him, the caste wound was not an incidental social malfunction but a direct consequence of Ignorance (avidyā) projecting false differences upon the Self. He thus proclaimed:

- Oneness dissolves social hierarchy.

‘When one truly realises that all distinctions are illusory, caste barriers vanish as penumbra dissolves in sunlight. One caste means that all are equal children of the same Self.’ (Paraphrased)

Practically, ‘one caste’ meant:

- Temple entry for all

- **Temple Entry:** At Aruvippuram, Guru’s consecration opened the temple to all communities, including ‘untouchables’ and lower castes. By inscribing, ‘jāti bhēdam mata-dvēṣa mētumilla...’, he instituted the first anti-caste temple in Kerala, setting a precedent for the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936.

- Education united all castes.

- **Educational Access:** Through SNDP Yogam and associated schools, he ensured that children of every caste learned together, undermining notions of ‘untouchable education.’

- Shared water, shared Self

- Oneness: basis for reform.

- Unity transcends faith divisions.

- Religions converge on shared principles

- Compassion unifies diverse faiths

- All faiths shared spiritual aspiration

Education became the crucible forging ‘one caste’ into lived reality.

- **Social Etiquette:** Guru challenged taboos such as separate wells and water vessels. He insisted that drinking from a common pot symbolized the deeper truth: the same Self inhabits all bodies.

By rooting ‘one caste’ in Advaitic ontology, ‘all distinctions are projections of ignorance’, he provided both philosophical justification and moral impetus for social reform. In his vision, ethical action became a direct corollary of metaphysical insight.

1.3.11 ‘One Religion’ as Inclusive Spirituality

In his exploration of ‘oneness,’ Guru addressed not only caste but religious rivalry. Early 20th-century Kerala saw tensions among Hindu sects, rising Christian missions, and growing Muslim communities. Guru’s ‘one religion’ sought to transcend these divisions by uncovering the shared substratum across traditions. He insisted:

‘True religion lies in seeing one’s own joy within the joy of others’.

Rather than syncretism that dilutes distinct practices, Guru’s ‘one religion’ stood on the Advaitic bedrock that all paths, properly understood, lead to the One. Key expressions include:

- **Matamīmāṃsā (Inquiry into Religions):** As discussed, stanzas 44–49 of Ātmopadeśa Śatakam argue that various rites and dogmas are different pathways to the same summit. By demonstrating shared principles, compassion, self-restraint, grace, they diminish the grounds for sectarian hostility.
- **Anukampādāśakam:** In these verses, Guru praises Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Christ, the Prophet, and Śaṅkara as ‘oceans of compassion.’ By focusing on ethical outcomes, mercy, charity, non-violence, he renders theological differences secondary to the ideal of universal compassion.
- **Religious Parliament (Aluva, 1924):** Here, ‘one religion’ became a lived experiment. Representatives of every major faith sat as equals, sharing prayers and discourses under Guru’s guidance. This event prefigured global interfaith gatherings by decades, illustrating that ‘one religion’ is not a bureaucratic compromise but a heartfelt recognition of shared spiritual aspiration.



- Celebrate diverse faiths, united

Through these measures, Guru advanced ‘one religion’ from mere tolerance to active celebration of diverse paths. His teaching encouraged devotees to maintain their specific traditions while honouring the same divine impulse in others. In doing so, he prepared the ground for Kerala’s pluralistic ethos.

1.3.12 ‘One God for Humanity’ as Universal Divinity

Guru’s mahāvākya extends naturally from ‘one caste, one religion’ to ‘one God for humanity.’ However, his notion of ‘God’ transcended narrow anthropomorphic deifications; it encompassed both nirguṇa (formless) and saguṇa (with-form) aspects. He taught:

‘Whether you worship with form or without form, that same divine essence pervades all’ .

He elucidated this principle through several poetic and discursive strategies:

- Deities point to one formless Reality

- Devotion leads to formless truth

- Sincere worship leads to divine realisation

- One God, diverse worship paths

- **Advaitic Affirmation of Nirguṇa:** In many hymns (e.g., Śivaśatakam’s portrayal of Śiva as attributeless Brahman), Guru emphasised that all deities, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śakti, Ganeśha, are symbolic expressions of one formless Reality.
- **Bhakti Affirmation of Saguṇa:** His devotional compositions to various deities acknowledged the saguṇa dimension, validating the emotional and ritual dimensions of worship. Yet each hymn culminated in the recognition that such forms are pointers to nirguṇa Brahman.
- **Ecumenical Recognition:** In Anukampādāśakam and his dialogues with devotees like Ayyappan, Guru affirmed that worshipping Christ, Muhammad, or the Prophet can lead to the same divine Realisation as worshipping Kṛṣṇa or Śiva, provided the worship is sincere and heart-centred.

By upholding both saguṇa and nirguṇa paradigms, Guru’s ‘one God’ transcends exclusive monotheism or polytheism. Instead, he taught a practical monism in which every heartfelt worship, whether to an image, idol, or concept, becomes a valid approach to the single Supreme. In this way, ‘one God for humanity’ becomes the spiritual anchor for interfaith solidarity.

1.3.13 Guru's Modern Advaita in the Guru-Disciple Encounter

The practical unfolding of Guru's Modernadvaita often emerged in his personal dialogues with disciples and devotees. Two exemplary moments:

- All religions share one aim

- Goodness transcends dogma

- Advaita applied to daily life

- Advaita demands compassionate action

- **Dialogue with C.V. Kunhiraman:** When questioned about the proliferation of faiths, Guru elaborated Ekamatha's universal principle: 'The aim of every religion is one... that common principle is the single religion we teach'. This conversation, later circulated widely, became a foundational text for Ekamatha-Vrata. It shows how Guru patiently guided seekers to recognise Advaita's core behind ritual variegations.

- **Exchange with Ayyappan (Devotee):** In discussing the meaning of worship, Guru declared, 'Whatever the religion, it suffices if the person is good'. The simplicity of this dictum belies its radical implications: moral conduct, grounded in Advaitic oneness, transcends doctrinal fidelity. By teaching that goodness (śīla) matters more than dogma, Guru elevated ethical practice above ritual correctness.

In these encounters, Guru's method combined dialogical pedagogy with experiential insight. He did not deliver abstract lectures but engaged interlocutors in frank conversation, using everyday examples, wells and water pots, shared meals, communal worship, to illuminate Advaitic truths. This personalized guidance exemplifies how his Modernadvaita operated not in ivory towers but at ground level, addressing real doubts and social dilemmas.

1.3.14 The Sin of Injustice and the Call to Compassion

In Guru's schema, Advaita without compassion remains incomplete. He warned against those Advaitins who, 'like lotus-born Brahmā and Viṣṇu,' remained passive even as 'fields parch and three worlds decay.' His Ardhanārīśvara-Stavam (previously cited) exemplifies how addressing God demands simultaneous ethical censure and devotional entreaty. For Guru, the 'sin of injustice' arises when one recognises non-duality yet fails to act to alleviate suffering. He thus proclaimed:

'Advaiti must not only chew the honey of supreme unity but also pour that honey to heal the wounds of humanity'.



This ethos of active compassion appears throughout his writings:

• Divine blamed for inaction

• Prayers urge divine service.

• Inner awakening, outer service

• Fight injustice, end suffering.

- **Ardhanārīśvara-Stavam**: Blames the divine for inaction while people starve, a rhetorical device urging collective responsibility.
- **Daivadasakam (prayers for divine intervention)**: While inviting God's grace, it also insists that devotees themselves become instruments of divine compassion, serving the poor and oppressed.
- **Kundalinīpāṭṭu (Song of the Kundalinī)**: By employing yogic metaphors, Guru urges the inward snake of consciousness to dance not for personal ecstasy alone but for the yoga of compassion, aligning inner awakening with outer service.

By equating Advaitic knowledge with compassionate action, Guru crafted a social Advaita: knowledge without works is sterile, and works without knowledge lack root. Consequently, he expected every Advaitin to take political and social stands against injustice, thereby manifesting Advaita as a living force dissolving both personal and systemic forms of suffering.

1.3.15 The Yellow Flag of Sivagiri: Symbol of Modern Advaita

At Sivagiri Pilgrimage, Guru introduced a distinctive saffron-yellow cloth as the pilgrims' emblem, rejecting the black of Sabarimala and the ochre of traditional sanyāsins. He described yellow as the 'colour of new light' similar to the first rays of dawn, neither the darkness of ascetic renunciation nor the standard renunciate's ochre. Kumaran Āśān celebrated this in his poem 'Morning Star':

'Here stands the hero of all the world, bathed in morning's yellow light.'

Yellow thus symbolises Guru's Modernadvaita: an Advaita that affirms life's brightness and hopes for a new society. Pilgrims clad in yellow cloth pledge to embody the four strands, Advaitic insight, affirmation of life, boundless love, and social service, thus making Sivagiri not merely a physical pilgrimage but a spiritual-social laboratory. Sivagiri's annual pilgrimage became a living enactment of Modernadvaita: participants undertook service, study, and worship in equal measure, modelling a 'one world' ethos on Kerala's hills.

• Pilgrimage symbolises fresh dawn.

• Yellow symbolises new Advaita

1.3.16 From Local Pilgrimage to Cosmopolitan Vision

Though Sree Narayana Guru never crossed the seas, his vision traversed continents. He perceived that ‘Advaitic realisation is the culminating intuition of the claim that ‘nothing is alien to humanity.’ It is the longest journey, yet not one millimetre need be travelled’. This paradox, journeying without moving, captures Guru’s cosmopolitan Advaita: one can arrive at the ‘one world’ ideal by clearing the mind’s delusions, thus transcending all distances.

This insight foreshadowed later global interfaith and human rights movements:

- Oneness transcends all distances

- Kerala birthed global interfaith

- Equality shaped modern Kerala

- Compassion includes all beings.

- Inner change fuels global unity.

- Global Interfaith Models: Long before UNESCO’s ‘Dialogue among Civilizations’ or Vatican II’s ecumenical outreach, Guru gathered religious leaders in Aluva, demonstrating Kerala’s capacity to incubate cosmopolitan ideals.
- Human Rights Foundations: His demand that even the lowest castes dine together prefigured universal human rights’ insistence on equality. By institutionalising ‘one caste,’ he contributed to shaping modern Kerala as a social laboratory for egalitarian policies, temple entry, labour laws, and democratic decentralization.
- Ecological Awareness: Though not phrased in modern environmental terms, his affirmation of life, compassion for all beings (human and non-human), and integration of ritual with ecological care (e.g., tree-planting at pilgrimage sites) anticipated ecological dimensions of Advaita long before they entered mainstream discourse.

Thus, Guru’s ‘one world’ was less a political slogan than a spiritual-social experiment whose ripples spread beyond Kerala. Through Modernadvaita, he showed that inner transformation naturally upscales to global solidarity, offering a living template for humanity’s future.



Summarized Overview

Azhikode likens Guru's life to the mythical svarnapuṣpam, a golden flower emitting divine fragrance. This image encapsulates the culmination of his 'Philosophical Dream of the One World'. Just as the golden flower combines rarity (gold) with sweetness (flower), Guru's Modernadvaita merges rigorous metaphysics (Advaita) with down-to-earth social care. His 'Flower of Oneness' blooms at the confluence of personal awakening and collective amelioration.

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical vision of oneness extended far beyond personal spiritual experience, demonstrating that true Advaita cannot remain confined to individual realization. His own life journey, transitioning from the meditative seclusion of Marutvamala to the public proclamation at Aruvippuram, exemplifies this outward radiation of inner non-duality, systematically dissolving artificial barriers of caste, creed, and sect. This profound personal insight formed the bedrock for his conviction that the realization of unity must inherently manifest as fearless compassion and active social equity. For Guru, the ultimate aim of spiritual awakening was not mere individual liberation but a collective blossoming of universal brotherhood, transforming society by bridging the gap between metaphysical truth and lived reality.

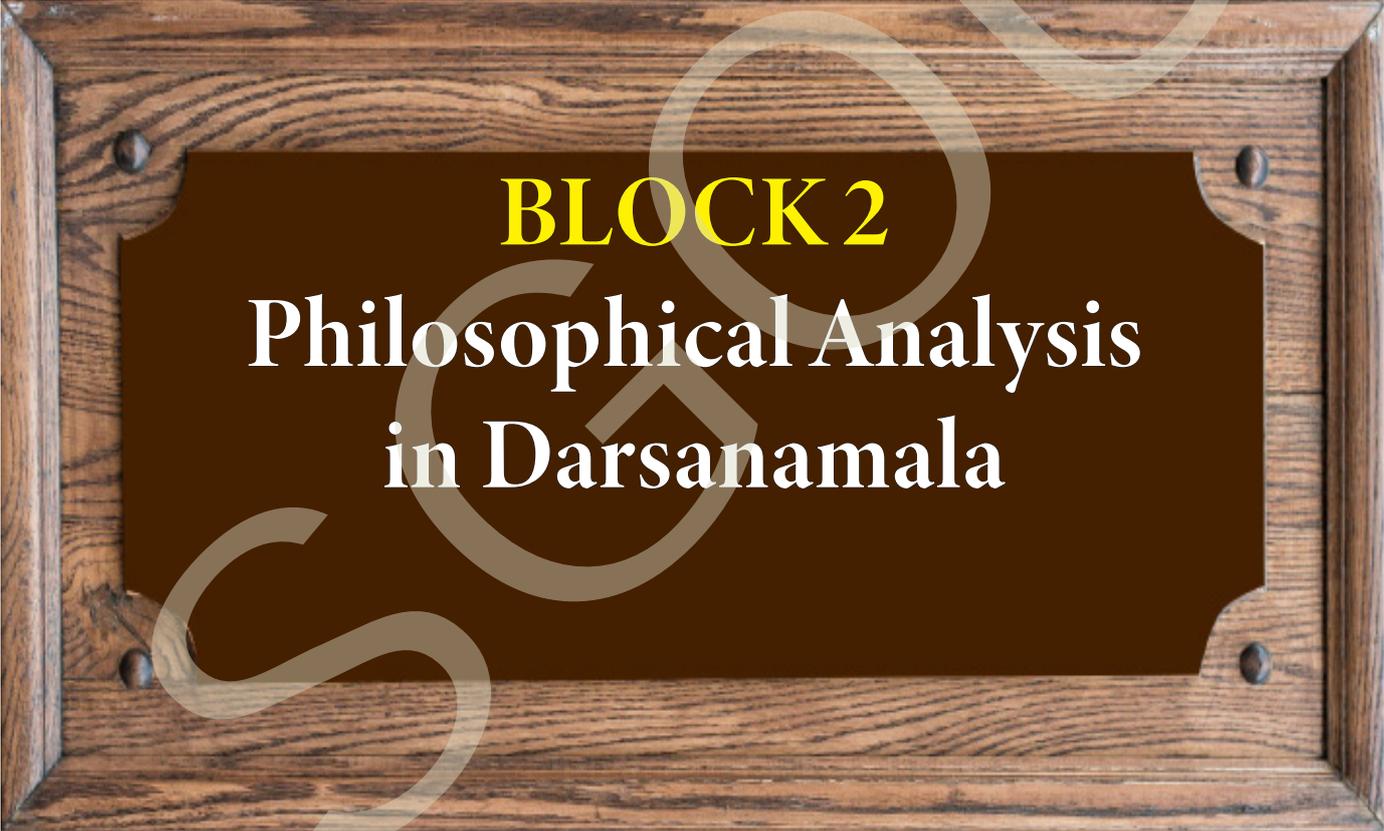
This individual insight catalyzed a powerful collective transformation, with Guru championing Ekamatha (the principle of one religion), spearheading numerous temple consecrations accessible to all, establishing inclusive pilgrimage centers, and fostering vital social institutions. His relentless efforts ensured that profound spiritual wisdom ignited communal renewal, visibly impacting Kerala's societal fabric. The enduring legacy of his 'one world' vision is evident in Kerala's remarkable social indicators, including high literacy rates, vibrant religious pluralism, and robust grassroots democracy. These tangible achievements attest that Guru's dream was not a utopian ideal, but a concrete reality meticulously cultivated through his life's work, providing a compelling model for how deep philosophical understanding can directly foster societal well-being and harmony.

The 'Philosophical Dream of the One World' culminates in the flowering of a society where personal liberation (mokṣa) and communal welfare (lokakalyāṇa) co-emerge. Guru's golden flower continues to perfume the world, inviting each generation to cultivate Advaitic awareness as both inner light and social catalyst.

Assignments

1. How did Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy provide a 'living remedy for modern alienation' in the context of late 19th-century Kerala?
2. In what ways did Guru recontextualize Śāṅkara's non-dualism to address the social and ethical challenges of his time?
3. According to Sree Narayana Guru, what is the relationship between the realization of Ātman-Brahman identity and the promotion of social equality?
4. How did Guru's reinterpretation of traditional concepts like *karma* and devotion contribute to his vision of practical Advaita?
5. What were the key institutional avenues through which Sree Narayana Guru translated his philosophical insights into lived social realities?
6. Explain how Guru's approach to spiritual enlightenment galvanized rather than bypassed the quest for social justice.
7. How did Sree Narayana Guru ensure that Advaita, a complex philosophical system, became accessible to the oppressed classes of Kerala?
8. What is meant by 'applied Vedanta' in the context of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical project?



A wooden frame with a dark brown center containing text. The frame is made of dark wood with visible grain and four dark circular fasteners at the corners. The center is a solid dark brown rectangle. The text is centered within this rectangle. A large, faint watermark is visible across the center of the image.

BLOCK 2

Philosophical Analysis in Darsanamala

UNIT 1

Methodology of the Discrimination of Real from Unreal Superimposition and Desuperimposition

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing the study of this material, learners will be able to:

- distinguish Sreenarayana Guru's methodological approach in Darsanamala from a purely descriptive exposition of Advaita Vedanta.
- differentiate between 'Bhāna' and 'Bhāsyā' within the context of Darsanamala.
- explain the concept of Brahma-vivarta-vāda' as presented by Sreenarayana Guru, distinguishing it from gradual evolutionary theories in biological and cosmological contexts.
- identify and articulate why the Ātman cannot be an object of its own perception within Darsanamala's framework, contrasting this with empirical knowledge.
- analyse how the ultimate Reality, described as a singular source, embodies the functions of Brahma, Vishnu, and Śiva according to Darsanamala, rather than being distinct deities.

Background

Muni Narayana Prasad introduces Darśanamāla as Narayana Guru's most ambitious Sanskrit composition, a work that sets out the whole science of the Absolute, Brahmavidyā or Advaita Vedānta, in a sequence of one-hundred exquisitely ordered verses. He dates the poem to about 1916, a moment when the Guru had already stated his philosophy fully in Malayalam but lacked a Sanskrit text that future Vedāntins could consult. At that point the Guru's disciple, Swami Vidyananda, pressed him to dictate a manual in the classical language. The Guru hesitated, asking who would bother to study it, yet yielded when the disciple insisted that sincere scholars would appear. Vidyananda took down the verses, later wrote a short Malayalam commentary viz. 'Deedhiti'.

Advaita aims to disclose a non-dual reality that the Upaniṣads declare to be beyond words and thought. Narayana Guru confronts the same difficulty. Direct description would fail, so he adopts what Narayana Prasad calls a 'novel method': the ineffable



is allowed to appear through ten distinct viewpoints or darśanas. Each perspective offers a provisional image of the One, and together they guide a serious student to personal realisation. The series is not random. It opens with a vision that accepts the solid appearance of the world and closes with one in which both world and observer are consumed in pure being. Like beads threaded on silk, the ten chapters link one to the next, making a single garland, hence the title A Garland of Visions.

Exactly midway, verse 50 ends with the words sat eva tat ('Existence itself is That'), a variant of the Vedic axiom om tat sat. Join that final tat to the opening word of verse 51, ātma, and an invisible pendant emerges: tat ātma, silently pointing to the dictum aham brahmāsmi, I am the Absolute. When the two ends of the poetic garland are fastened, the non-dual Reality is glimpsed as the unseen thread passing through every jewel.

Guru Narayana Prasad points out that wisdom becomes urgent only in a fleeting universe. The world flows, yet its forms hold an intricate order. Darśanamāla insists that this structured plurality is inseparable from the single foundation, and that foundation is pure consciousness (cit). A true 'science of consciousness' must therefore mirror the same inner architecture; structural harmony links knower, knowing and known. That structuralism, pervades not only each individual chapter but also the grand design of the poem as a whole.

In five hundred measured lines the forward thus maps the purpose and method of Darśanamāla: to lead readers from the familiar sight of a well-ordered world to the intuitive certainty that world and self are one luminous reality. The poem stands as Narayana Guru's final invitation: study the ten visions, internalise their sequence, and discover in lived experience that the Absolute alone is, silent, indivisible and ever-present.

Keywords

Cit (Consciousness/Arivu), Bhāna (Appearance/Manifestation), Bhāsyā (Object of Appearance), Adhyāsa (Erroneous cognition), Ātman (Self/Ultimate Reality), Brahma-vivarta-vāda' (Creation is an illusory manifestation)

Discussion

Darśanamāla (Garland of Visions) is Sree Narayana Guru's brief yet definitive statement of Advaita Vedānta (അദ്വൈത വേദാന്തം). In ten-verse chapters the Guru presents the whole ascent from ordinary perception to non-dual awareness. Every line of the poem rests upon the single axiom 'Brahman alone is real.' To read 'Darśanamāla' with understanding is therefore

- Darśanamāla:
Advaita's core,
condensed

- Poem reveals
Advaita's oneness

- Advaita bridges
tradition and modern
inquiry

- All existence is
consciousness

- Ego binds, spirit
liberates

to grasp the Guru's entire philosophical project. Yet the task is demanding, for the text compresses the technical legacy of classical Vedānta into luminous but highly condensed verse. Students must be prepared to range across elementary, intermediate and advanced treatises if they wish to unfold the poem's layered meaning; acquaintance with related śāstras is indispensable. Nevertheless, the reward is a clear intellectual map of the Guru's spirituality.

2.1.1 Structural Unity

The poem's architecture mirrors its doctrine. The first half moves from tangible plurality towards the mid-point mantra '*sat eva tat*' – Existence alone is That. Join its final word '*tat*' to the opening word of verse 51, '*ātma*', and an implicit pendant forms the equation '*tat ātma*': That is the Self. The reader is meant to sense an unspoken identity shimmering between the two terms, echoing the Upaniṣadic declaration '*aham brahmāsmi*' (I am the Absolute). When the final chapter returns to the status of the world, the two ends of the garland are tied. What looked like a chain of separate insights is revealed as a single thread of non-dual consciousness.

2.1.2 Pedagogical Implications

Because the Guru's verses preserve the rigour of traditional Advaita while employing Malayalam rhythms and images familiar to everyday life, 'Darśanamāla' offers an ideal bridge between inherited doctrine and modern inquiry. For learners it demonstrates how philosophical rigour and poetic intuition can reinforce one another. Careful study of adhyāropa and apavāda trains the intellect to posit, analyse and dissolve conceptual models, while contemplation of the mantra pivots invites a direct, silent apprehension of unity. The text thus addresses cognition, imagination and spiritual practice in one integrated movement.

2.1.3 Darsanamala: A Simple Explanation

In the initial five visions of Sree Narayana Guru's 'Darsanamala,' explains the deepest essence of existence, ultimately discovering that all is consciousness. Following this profound realization, a process of 'renormalization' begins. We gradually ascend, moving back towards and through the world of action.

We learn a crucial lesson: as long as we mistakenly believe our own ego is the one performing actions, will remain entangled in the chains of karma. However, true liberation



comes with the understanding that it is the same spirit, vital principle, or Absolute that acts through everyone. When we grasp this truth, we conquer karma through wisdom (jnana).

The next three visions in 'Darsanamala' illustrate a dualistic connection with Truth. These two poles eventually merge into a unified state through the practice of yoga. Finally, in the state of nirvana, even the very concept of identity vanishes. This overarching framework is a central theme in the teachings of Narayana Guru. It can be summarised as below:

• All is consciousness,
then action

- **First Five Visions:** We go deep into everything and find that all is consciousness.
- **Rising Back Up:** We then slowly come back to the world of action.
- **Breaking Free from Karma:** If we think our ego is the doer, we stay tied to karma. When we realize that the same spirit or Absolute acts through everyone, we overcome karma with wisdom (jnana).
- **Next Three Visions:** These describe a two-part connection with Truth, which becomes one through yoga.
- **Final Vision (Nirvana):** Even the idea of being connected disappears in nirvana (liberation).

The following outline reflects the grand philosophical scheme of Sree Narayana Guru's 'Darsanamala' (Garland of Visions) as explained by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati.

- | | | |
|------|--|---------------|
| I. | Adhyāropa Darśana
Vision by Supposition (Superimposition)
The superimposition on consciousness. | Cosmology |
| II. | Apavāda Darśana
Vision of Non-Supposition
The discipline of removing such a superimposition. | Methodology |
| III. | Asatya Darśana
Vision of Non-Existence
A focusing of our attention on the persisting untruth and the complementary continuity of Realization all through life. | Phenomenology |
| IV. | Māyā Darśana
Vision of Negation
The dynamics of this deluding darkness or 'nescience'. | Negativity |

- V. Bhāna Darśana Normalization
Vision of Consciousness
A close scrutiny of the very stuff of both the light and the darkness (i.e., consciousness).
- VI. Karma Darśana Instrumentalism
Vision of Action
The action element both negatively viewed effect-wise and positively viewed as the Unmoved Mover (the Absolute).
- VII. Jñāna Darśana Reason
Vision by Reason
The vision of how the same consciousness alternates between various states.
- VIII. Bhakti Darśana Contemplation
Vision by Contemplation
The continuous contemplation arrived at of the Absolute reciprocity with your true being.
- IX. Yoga Darśana Meditation
Vision by Meditations
The resultant union in which you know that the world that is seen is homogenous with the seer; the cancellation leading to yoga (union); and the restraints and disciplines necessary for this.
- X. Nirvāṇa Darśana Absorption
Vision by Absorption The final emancipation or state of 'having known what is to be known'; the experience of the true light; the retaining of just a bit of the ego as a frame of reference so as to communicate and help; and then the graded assent to final merger, absorption, reemergence, and dissolution.

2.1.4 Vision of Truth

Sree Narayana Guru's profound philosophical work, Darsanamala (Garland of Visions), meticulously elucidates his vision of truth in Sanskrit. Its creation was primarily at the insistence of his disciple, Vidyananda Swami, who diligently followed the Guru, notebook and pencil in hand. The Guru would dictate verses periodically, and on the final day, he provided a larger collection of stanzas. Upon counting, they totaled 100 verses. The Guru then instructed that these be divided into ten chapters, each containing ten verses, and assigned a distinct

- Ten visions of non-dual truth



title to each decade. These ten chapters represent ten unique philosophical perspectives on the non-dual supreme reality. Collectively, they form the Darsanamala, which was composed in 1916. The work adheres to the Anushtubh meter, a common poetic metre in Sanskrit.

- Realising oneness brings liberation

Sree Narayana Guru, using the framework of Advaita Vedanta, asserts that there is one unified, undivided foundation of consciousness. He then explains how all the diverse things we see in the world emerge, appear vividly, and then disappear back into this fundamental consciousness. To truly grasp his argument is like a journey: you move from the seemingly solid reality of your everyday waking life to the calm certainty that the world and your self are ultimately one. Because of this profound insight, 'Darśanamāla' remains an essential guide for anyone wanting to understand the Guru's perspective or to briefly experience the liberation that comes from realizing non-duality.

- Darsanamala: unique Advaita synthesis

After the Bhagavad Gita, the major effort to synthesize various schools of philosophy within Indian philosophical thought is found in Sree Narayana Guru's Darsanamala. Although both works focus on jñāna (knowledge), Darsanamala presents Advaita Vedanta from a perspective not seen before. Through this work, Guru once again affirms that his Advaita is uncompromising and unwavering.

[This learning material aims to provide an in-depth understanding of Sree Narayana Guru's Darsanamala. Our approach is based on the verbal and philosophical meanings inherent in its verses, as explained and interpreted by various eminent scholars. These include Nataraja Guru, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, Prof. G. Balakrishnan Nair, Muni Narayana Prasad, Anthony Atherton, and others. Most of the content, including direct translations, has been drawn from their extensive studies and acknowledged sources, which are detailed in the reference sections. To facilitate easier assimilation of the ideas, Malayalam meanings are also provided. Furthermore, since the slokas are in Sanskrit, transliterated versions accompanies them.]

2.1.4.1 Adhyāropa Darśanam (Vision by Superimposition)

Verse 1

ആസീദഗ്രേ സദേവദം
ഭുവനം സ്വപ്നവൽ പുനഃ

സസർജ സർവം സങ്കല്പ-
മാത്രേണ പരമേശ്വരഃ.

āsīd‘sad evedam
bhuvanam svapnavat punah
sasarja sarvam samkalpamātreṇa
Parameśvaraḥ

In the beginning there was
Non-existence (of world) indeed;
Dreamwise then again by mere willing
Everything existent created He, the Lord Supreme.

അഭ്യേ	=	ആദിയിൽ (സൃഷ്ടിയിൽ)
ഇദം	=	ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചം
അസത് ഏവ	=	അസത്തായിട്ടുതന്നെ (ഉണയില്ലാത്തതായിട്ടു തന്നെ)
ആസീത്	=	ഇരുന്നു.
പുനഃ	=	പിന്നീട്
പരമേശ്വരഃ	=	പരമേശ്വരൻ
സർവ്വം	=	എല്ലാറ്റിനെയും
സങ്കല്പമാത്രേണ	=	വെറും സങ്കല്പം കൊണ്ട്
സ്വപ്നവത്	=	സ്വപ്നത്തിൽ എന്നപോലെ
സസർജ	=	സർജനം ചെയ്തു (സൃഷ്ടിച്ചു).

ആദിയിൽ ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചം ഉണ്ടെങ്കിൽ ഇല്ലാത്തതായിട്ടുതന്നെ ഇരുന്നു. പിന്നീട് പരമേശ്വരൻ സകലതിനെയും വെറും സങ്കല്പം കൊണ്ട് സ്വപ്നത്തിലെന്നപോലെ സൃഷ്ടിച്ചു.

All these worlds, in the beginning, were non-existent (Non-existence doesn't mean nothingness, because nothing comes out of nothing. The term 'Asat Eva' implies that before creation, Brahman alone exists. Advaita Vedanta is not nihilism, but non-dualism) indeed. The Supreme Controller (Parameśvaraḥ), thereafter caused the emanation of it (from Himself), by virtue of the willful urge inherent in Him, as though dreaming.

• Brahman creates world from self

2.1.4.2 The World's Apparent Existence and Its Origin

Sree Narayana Guru's 'Darśanamālā' commences by addressing a universally shared perception: that we and the world around us exist in the manner they appear. This initial acknowledgement naturally prompts a fundamental inquiry: how did this perceived reality originate? The very first chapter, aptly titled Adhyāropa Darśanam, is dedicated to providing an

- World's perceived reality questioned

answer to this profound question. Within Vedantic philosophy, Adhyāropa is a technical term denoting the superimposition (aropa) of a form, such as the world, onto a fundamental existing reality (adhithāna). A common analogy illustrates this: waves, despite their distinct appearance, are merely forms projected onto water, which is the underlying reality. Similarly, the world is understood as a superimposition upon a singular, foundational substance. While this underlying substance alone holds true reality and the world-form is ultimately illusory, the average individual perceives the world as undeniably real, not as a superimposition. This chapter, therefore, addresses the inquiries that arise from such a common perception, while strictly adhering to the core principles of Advaita Vedānta, subtly affirming the sole existence of a singular Reality, referred to as Parameśvara, even as it discusses creation.

2.1.4.3 Invocation and the Significance of 'āsīt'

- Darśanamāla starts with subtle invocation.

In Indian literary tradition, it is customary for serious scholarly works to commence with an invocation, typically addressed to the divine, a guru, or expressed in a manner favoured by the author. Narayana Guru, in most of his significant compositions including 'Darśanamālā,' chose an indirect form of invocation, differing from his more direct approach in 'Śivaśatakam.' The work notably begins with the word 'Āsīt', meaning 'was' or 'it was so.' This term, though indicative of the past, is not frequently encountered in common literature; its usage is primarily reserved for Vedic texts, where it denotes the state of the world prior to creation. Furthermore, the very first letter of the work, 'A', holds profound symbolic importance in Indian thought, often signifying the Absolute. As Lord Krishna states in the Bhagavad-Gītā, 'Among the letters of the alphabet I am A' (X.33). Consequently, the opening of 'Darśanamālā' with 'A' serves as a subtle yet powerful indirect invocation to the Absolute. The word 'āsīt' also implies the eternality of the causal Reality, which, being unoriginated, inherently persists without cessation. This indication of an eternal Reality further functions as an invocation, setting a timeless tone for the ensuing discourse.

2.1.4.4 The Supreme Being and the Nature of Creation

The first verse of 'Darśanamālā' explicitly introduces the term Parameśvara, meaning 'Supreme God.' This compound word combines 'parama' (supreme) with 'īśvara' (one who controls, of a high order), signifying a transcendent, ultimate

- Parameśvara: the uncaused creator

controller. The concept of God as the world's creator is nearly universal across religions. However, the philosophical challenge of 'who created God?' often leads to an infinite regression (anavasthā dosa in Indian logic). The prefix 'parama' in Parameśvara deftly addresses this by identifying a Supreme, uncaused cause, preventing further inquiry into its origin. This naming convention for the ultimate cause also functions as an invocation, establishing a definitive starting point for understanding existence. Philosophers and scientists alike ponder fundamental questions regarding creation: its agents, motivations, methods, and timing. These inquiries arise because all observable entities are transient; their eventual cessation makes their origin a relevant concern. The inaugural verse of 'Darśanamālā' directly responds to who orchestrated this creation and how it manifested, laying the groundwork for the Guru's nuanced philosophical exposition.

2.1.4.5 Non-Existence Before Creation: A Vedantic Perspective

The opening verse states, 'āsīd agre asat eva idam bhuvanam' – this entire world, in the beginning, was non-existent. It is crucial to clarify that 'non-existent' here refers exclusively to the world-as-it-appears, not to the fundamental Causal Reality. It signifies that the world, in its current manifest form, did not exist prior to the act of creation. This assertion echoes a similar statement found in the Taittiriya Upaniṣad: 'asad va idam agra āsīt, tato vai sad ajāyata' (II.6.1), meaning, 'In the beginning this world was non-existent. Therefrom indeed was this existent (world) born.' Superficially, this might seem to contradict the core Vedantic tenet that 'sat' (Existence) alone prevailed at the outset – this 'sat' being the very essence of Ātmā or Brahman (the Self or the Absolute). Other Upaniṣads, such as the Aitareya (1.1.1) and Chandogya (VI.2.1), explicitly affirm the sole existence of the Self or Existence in the beginning. However, within the specific philosophical context of this chapter, which takes the visible world's existence as given and probes its creation, 'non-existence' pertains to the world, distinguishing it from the inherent 'Existence' of the Ultimate Reality.

- 'Non-existent' refers to world's prior form

2.1.4.6 The Dream-Like Creation and Its Implications

The primary focus of this chapter is on 'bhuvanam', the world, literally meaning 'that in which everything happens.'



- World a dream of Parameśvara

Therefore, the pertinent question becomes: ‘Who causes these happenings?’ The immediate response provided is Parameśvara. It is important to understand that within this framework, Parameśvara is not conceived as a personal deity, but rather as the primordial causal Substance, the ultimate ‘sat’. The mechanism of creation is likened to a dream. Just as all elements within a dream originate from the dreamer’s mind and possess no independent existence beyond it – vanishing upon waking – the world is portrayed as a dream dreamt by Parameśvara, existing solely within His consciousness. This concept implies that when Parameśvara ‘wakes up’ from this cosmic dream, all perceived worlds dissolve back into His being, leaving only His sole existence. This ‘dream-like creation’ narrative seamlessly leads back to the fundamental Vedantic principle that only the Causal Reality possesses true and ultimate existence.

2.1.4.7 Awakening, Actualisation, and the Timeless Beginning

The concept of Parameśvara’s ‘waking up’ is profoundly linked to a seeker’s enlightenment. When a spiritual aspirant achieves enlightenment, they experience the dissolution of the entire world into their own being or into the Ultimate Reality they perceive – a Reality here represented as Parameśvara to fit the creation narrative. Thus, a seeker attaining their spiritual goal and Parameśvara ‘waking up’ fundamentally signify the same realization, underscoring their non-dual nature. The Sanskrit term ‘sasarja,’ used for ‘created,’ differs from Western theological concepts of creation ex nihilo. Instead, it denotes the actualisation of inherent potentials within something already existing, leading to the emanation of new forms from within itself. In this context, Parameśvara is that pre-existing Reality, and the world’s creation is merely the actualisation of His latent potentials, akin to a dream. The word ‘agre’ (in the beginning) thus loses its strictly temporal dimension, referring not to a specific point in time, but to the state before the dream-like emergence, or the infinite potential residing within Parameśvara for this continuous dream experience. Furthermore, while the chapter frequently employs masculine gender terms (e.g., Parameśvaraḥ, Prabhuḥ) for the Ultimate Reality, this aligns with Sanskrit grammatical conventions where word gender does not necessarily denote the gender of the entity, accommodating the necessary anthropomorphised concept of a ‘Creator’ within this philosophical perspective.

- Seeker’s enlightenment mirrors Parameśvara’s awakening.

2.1.4.8 Paramarthika Satta, Pratibhasika Satta and Vyavaharika Satta in the first verse

• Guru acknowledges all levels of existence

In the first verse, the term ‘Agre’ denotes paramartika Satta, the term ‘Swapnavat’ denotes Pratibhasika Sattas and the term ‘Puna- Sasarja’ denotes Vyavaharika Sattas. By indicating these three levels of Reality in the very first verse, Guru reveals that he equally acknowledges ultimate reality (Paramarthika Satta), the imaginary world (Prathibhasika) and the empirical world (Vyavaharika). This is precisely, what Guru also clarifies through the world ‘Sama’ in Atmopadesa Satakam.

2.1.4.9 Verse 2

വാസനാമയമേവാദാ-
 വാസീദിദമഥ പ്രഭുഃ
 അസൃജന്മായയാ സ്വസൃ
 മായാവീവാഖിലം ജഗത്
 vāsanāmayam
 evādāvāsīdidam atha prabhuh
 asrjan māyayā svasya
 māyāvīvā khilam jagat

In the beginning in the form of incipient memory factors,
 All this remained. Then the Lord
 By his own power of false presentiment, like a magician
 Created all this world of change.

വാസനാമയം	ഏവ	=	വാസനകളുടെ രൂപത്തിൽ
ആസീത്			മാത്രമായിരുന്നു
			സ്ഥിതിചെയ്തിരുന്നത്
അഥ		=	അതിനുശേഷം
പ്രഭുഃ		=	സർവ്വശക്തനായ ഈശ്വരൻ
സ്വസൃ മായയാ		=	തന്റെ തന്നെ മായയാൽ
അസൃജത്		=	സൃഷ്ടിച്ചു
മായാവീ ഇവ		=	ഒരു മായാവിയെപ്പോലെ/ ജാലവിദ്യക്കാരനെപ്പോലെ
അഖിലം ജഗത്		=	ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചം മുഴുവനും

ആദിയിൽ ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചം വെറും വാസനാമയമായിട്ടാണ് ഇരുന്നത്. പിന്നീട് പ്രഭുവായ പരമേശ്വരൻ തന്റെ മായകൊണ്ട്, ഇന്ദ്രജാലക്കാരൻ എന്നപോലെ, സമസ്ത ജഗത്തിനെയും സർജ്ജനം ചെയ്തു.

- World originated as latent potential

The entire world, in the beginning, remained in the Lord (Prabhuḥ), as pure vāsanā in essence. He, then, by His power to create illusory visions (māyā) brought it forth as is done by a magician. The second verse of Darsanamala explores the origin of our experienced world. It suggests that all of existence initially resided as incipient memory factors, or latent potentials. Then, like a magician, the Lord, through an inherent power of false presentiment, brought forth this entire, ever-changing world.

- World's origin: science's paradox

This naturally leads to a fundamental question: if the world exists as we perceive it, how did it originate? This is a central problem for both modern science and philosophy. While modern science considers energy-particles as the basic reality, it faces a paradox: how can these non-material particles appear as the visible, material world of minerals, vegetables, and animals? Science acknowledges this as a fact, even if it lacks a complete logical explanation. Essentially, this implies an inherent, hidden potential within invisible energy to become the tangible world. This latent potential, in Sanskrit, is known as vāsanā.

- Ultimate Reality: a mysterious potential

This singular energy, though one, manifests in countless forms. It is the underlying reality in everything, from inert rocks to precious diamonds and even the human body and brain. The world we conceive in our minds, whether internal thoughts or external physical reality, all stem from this one fundamental energy. This concept highlights a mysterious potential within this single energy-reality to create all these diverse worlds. Philosophically, the Ultimate Reality is also considered singular, often referred to as Parameśvara or Prabhu (Lord). Both scientific views of infinite potential in energy and the philosophical concept of the Lord point to a mysterious reality beyond human comprehension. The true nature of this unthinkable reality remains untouched by any name given to it.

- Science avoids, Vedanta embraces mystery

Modern science generally avoids the question of how subtle, unknowable potential transforms into gross, knowable objects, considering it outside its domain. However, Eastern philosophies, particularly Vedanta, embrace the idea that the Ultimate Reality is a profound mystery. Vedanta does not aim to provide a 'clear knowledge' of this reality, but rather helps one realise that they are an inseparable part of this Great Mystery. This perspective encourages living life's short span with the blissful freedom of being part of this inexplicable whole.

• Māyā creates world from Mystery

Vedanta attributes the emanation of everything – physical and mental, internal and external, mind and matter – from this one Mysterious Reality to māyā. Māyā is often compared to a magician’s act: the audience (us) is unaware of the tricks, but the magician (the Prabhu or Lord) fully understands them. Our ignorance of this secret is called ajñāna in Vedanta. We, as spectators, are actually part of the Prabhu’s magical creation and therefore cannot fully grasp its secrets. Just as a child enjoys playing with and transforming objects, the Prabhu manifests the world to express countless latent vāsanās, finding joy in this continuous process of creation and dissolution. This self-expression is described as ānanda (blissful joy) or the joy of witnessing His own true nature.

2.1.4.10 Verse 3

പ്രാഗുത്പത്തേരിദം സ്വസ്മിൻ
 വിലീനമഥ വൈ സ്വതഃ
 ബീജാദങ്കുരവത്സ്യ
 ശക്തീരേവാസ്യജസ്വയം
 prāg utpatter idam svasmin
 vilīnam atha vai svatah
 bījād ankuravat svasya
 śaktir eva’sṛjat svayam

This world before creation was
 Latent within Himself.
 Thereafter like sprout from seed
 From Himself by His power by itself it was created

- പ്രാക് = മുൻപ്, മുന്തിൽ
- ഉത്പത്തേഃ = ഉത്ഭവത്തിന്റെ, ജനനത്തിന്റെ
- ഇദം = ഇത് (ഈ കാണുന്ന പ്രപഞ്ചം)
- സ്വസ്മിൻ = തന്നിൽത്തന്നെ, സ്വന്തത്തിൽ
- വിലീനം = ലയിച്ചത്, ഒടുങ്ങിയത്
- അഥ = പിന്നീട്, അനന്തരം
- വൈ = നിശ്ചയമായും, തീർച്ചയായും (ഒരു ഉന്നത നൽകുന്ന വാക്ക്)
- സ്വതഃ = സ്വയം, താനേ
- ബീജാത് = വിത്തിൽ നിന്ന്
- അങ്കുരവത് = തൈ മുളയ്ക്കുന്നതുപോലെ
- സ്വസ്യ = തന്റെ തന്നെ
- ശക്തീഃ = ശക്തികളെ
- ഏവ = തന്നെ, മാത്രം (ഒരു നിശ്ചയത്തെ സൂചിപ്പിക്കുന്നു)

അസൃജത് = സൃഷ്ടിച്ചു
 സ്വയം = സ്വയം, താനേ

Before creation, this world rested hidden within the Lord. Like a sprout emerging from a seed, it then appeared. From Himself, by His own inherent power, it was brought forth. Thus, by its own nature, the world was created from within Him.

• World as divine magician's play

The third verse of Darsanamala highlights the enduring nature of this perceived world, using the analogy of a seed and a sprout. Sree Narayana Guru explains that just as a massive tree, even one existing for millennia, was entirely latent within its tiny seed, so too was the entire world contained within the Divine before creation. This comparison helps us understand that the apparent solidity and persistence of matter, and our common experiences, should not mislead us. The verse aims to guide us to the fundamental ontological ground of our ignorance, revealing that before its manifestation, the world resided entirely within the Divine, brought forth by its own self-activating power, much like a sprout naturally emerges from its seed.

• Analogies clarify creation's mystery

Each verse in this chapter of Darsanamala employs a distinct simile to enhance the seeker's understanding of how the diverse world originated from a singular Reality or God. Since the world's creation is an intricate mystery, ancient sages used multiple analogies to provide the clearest possible picture. No single analogy can fully encompass this complex truth; instead, various analogies complement each other, compensating for individual shortcomings and reinforcing different aspects of the concept. For instance, the first verse used the analogy of a dream, suggesting the world's insubstantiality. However, unlike a dream, the world persists and remains perceptible to our senses, even after we realise its dream-like unreality, demonstrating that the dream analogy alone is insufficient to fully clarify the nature of creation.

The second verse utilized the metaphor of a magician's act, where illusory visions appear and quickly vanish. Yet, the world's appearance is more substantial and enduring than a mere magical illusion. To address the limitations of these initial analogies, the third verse introduces the seed-sprout simile, emphasising that something real emerges from something already existing and real. Just as a sprout undeniably emerges from a seed, the world unfolds from a pre-existing Divine reality. The tree's potential is inherent in the seed, actualising under

favourable conditions. Similarly, the potential hidden within the Causal Reality, God or Ātman, unfolds and manifests as the world. This unmanifest, seed-like God is termed avyākṛta. Essentially, the world is the concrete, apparent form assumed by the otherwise abstract Divine.

This process, where the one Causal Reality self-manifests as the world, is called sarjana in Sanskrit, a term distinct from 'creation.' Unlike a potter shaping clay, sarjana implies a latent effect actualising from a material cause without an external efficient cause. This process does not require a separate 'creator,' as an inherent, indomitable urge for self-unfoldment lies within the Causal Reality itself. Just as a sprout is not separate from the seed but a new form it attains, the world, though produced from God, has no existence separate from Him. God is the very act of creation, the creator, the myriad created beings, and the substance for creation itself. This self-manifestation of the world from God is continuous, beginninglessly and endlessly, without any external conditioning factor. God, as the Causal Reality, has no actual existence separate from the phenomenal world; like water and waves, they are inseparable. The world's potential to unfold is inherent in God, a power termed śakti.

- World unfolds from Divine seed

In this verse Guru states the Samkhya Theory of evolution as it is. Samkya theory of Evolution is known as Sat-Karya-Vada. Here, creation is not something new. What is patent is latent. The universe was latent in the Absolute before Creation as in a vague state (Avyakta). When creation starts it spurt out like a tree from seed.

- Universe latent in the Absolute

2.1.4.11 Verse 4

ശക്തിസ്തു ദ്വിവിധാ ജ്ഞേയാ
തൈജസീ താമസീതി ച
സഹവാസോഽനയോർ നാസ്തി
തേജസ്തിമിരയോരിവ.

śaktis tu dvividhā jñeyā
tajasī tāmasīti ca
sahavāso 'nayoṛ nāsti
tejas timirayoriva

The power, however, as of two kinds
Is to be known as the bright and the dark.
There is no co-existence between these two
As with light and darkness.



ശക്തിഃ തു	=	ഇപ്പറഞ്ഞ ശക്തിയാകട്ടെ
തൈജസി താമസീ ച	=	തൈജസിയെന്നും താമസിയെന്നും
ഇതി		
ദിവിധാ	=	രണ്ടു വിധമുള്ളതായി
ജേന്തയ	=	അറിയപ്പെടുന്നു.
തേജസ്തിമിരയോ ഇവ	=	വെളിച്ചത്തിനും ഇരുട്ടിനും എന്ന പോലെ
അനയോഃ	=	ഇവയ്ക്കു രണ്ടിനും
സഹവാസി ന അസ്തി	=	ഒന്നിച്ചിരിപ്പ് ഇല്ല

ഇപ്പറഞ്ഞ ശക്തിയാകട്ടെ രണ്ടുവിധത്തിലുള്ളതായി അറിയപ്പെടുന്നു. തൈജസിയെന്നും താമസിയെന്നും. ഇരുട്ടും വെളിച്ചവും ഒരിക്കലും ഒന്നിച്ചിരിക്കുകയില്ല. അതുപോലെ ഈ രണ്ടു ശക്തികളും ഒരിക്കലും ഒന്നിച്ചിരിക്കുകയില്ല.

For anything to live, there must be a pulsation of dual forces. All philosophies recognize this when they speak of yin and yang, matter and energy, body and spirit, plus and minus electrical impulses, systole-diastole, contraction and expansion, etc.

The fourth verse of Darsanamala posits that the divine, self-activating power responsible for creation is fundamentally twofold: bright (taijasi) and dark (tamasi). These two aspects are inherently contradictory and cannot coexist simultaneously, much like light and darkness. This concept arises from observing the constant flux in the perceived world. Every phenomenon, from the daily cycle of day and night to the processes of growth and decay in living beings, demonstrates these alternating bright and dark phases. The vitality that emerges with day and subsides with night, or the simultaneous presence of growth and decline, reflects these two opposing forces.

• Creation driven by dual powers

The analogy of the seed and sprout from the previous verse implicitly supports this duality. A sprouting seed demonstrates two distinct directions of growth: the stem reaching upwards towards light and the roots extending downwards into darkness. Both processes occur concurrently, ensuring the tree's development. This illustrates how the immense power latent within the seed contains the capability to produce these twin, yet opposing, phases. Similarly, the creative power of God, which brings forth the world, inherently possesses these bright and dark faces. Where the bright aspect is predominant, the dark aspect remains dormant, and vice versa. While their simultaneous expression in the world is a logical impossibility, both remain inherent within God, always ready to manifest

• Bright and dark phases alternate

in an alternating fashion, shaping the continuous cycle of phenomena we observe.

Here, we need to understand one thing: even if the simultaneous presence of light and darkness is impossible, they are two sides of the same coin. If light exists, darkness also exists, but not at the same time. The world actually operates upon such dualities, which Buddhists refer to as ‘dependent origination’. Sree Narayana Guru, on the other hand, presents such a dialectical form here to help us understand that we must overcome these dualities to attain enlightenment. Absolute reality lies beyond dualities, which is why it’s called non-dual or Advaita.

2.1.4.12 Verse 5

Dualities sustain worldly existence

മനോമാത്രമിദം ചിത്ര-
മിവാഗ്രേ സർവമീദൃശം
പ്രാപയാമാസ വൈചിത്ര്യം
ഭഗവാംശ്ചിത്രകാരവത്.

manomatram idam citra-
mivāgre sarvam īdrśam
prāpayāmāsa vaicitryam
bhagavāmscitrakaravat

In the beginning this world
Which was in the form of mind-stuff like a picture,
Achieved with all this picturesque variety,
Like an artist, the Lord.

അഗ്രേ	=	തുടക്കത്തിൽ
മനോമാത്രം ഇദം	=	കേവലം മനസ്സു മാത്രമായിരുന്ന ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചത്തെ
ചിത്രം ഇവ	=	ചിത്രത്തെ എന്നപോലെ
ഇദൃശം സർവ്വം	=	ഇക്കാണുന്ന എല്ലാ
വൈചിത്ര്യം	=	വൈചിത്ര്യത്തേയും
ഭഗവാൻ	=	ഭഗവാൻ
ചിത്രകാരവത്	=	ചിത്രകാരൻ എന്നപോലെ
പ്രാപയാമാസ	=	പ്രാപിപ്പിച്ചു.

തുടക്കത്തിൽ ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചം കേവലം മനസ്സുമാത്രമായിരുന്നു. അതിനെ ഇക്കാണുന്ന എല്ലാ വൈചിത്ര്യങ്ങളോടും കൂടി, ചിത്രകാരൻ ചിത്രത്തെ എന്നപോലെ ഭഗവാൻ പ്രാപിപ്പിച്ചു.



- One reality seen as many

This Master Artist can place on an end-less canvas of time and space a ceaseless tapestry of ever-changing colours and forms. With one sun he can create a million sunrises in each day-no two alike. And the sunset and sunrise are not two. One and the same movement of the sun seen at the same moment from two vantage points is a beautiful sunrise to one and to another a beautiful sunset.

- World exists as God's creative imagination

The fifth verse of Darsanamala elaborates on the state of the world within God before creation, describing it as essentially mind-stuff, similar to a picture. It posits that the Lord, like a highly skilled artist, then brought forth all the perceptible marvels of this world. This builds upon the previous idea of latent potential (*vāsanā*), explaining that once this potential gains specificity, it becomes *bhāvanā*, or creative imagination. The world existed in God as this *bhāvanā*, and God, in an indescribable process, expressed this creative imagination in all its intricate detail, leading to the world's emergence. To clarify this profound concept, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati introduces the analogy of a talented artist.

- World is God's expressed creative imagination

An artist, before creating a masterpiece, engages in contemplation, during which a vivid mental image (*bhāvanā*) takes form. Once this imagery becomes clear and detailed, an irresistible inner urge compels the artist to express it on canvas. The artist's focus remains solely on this task until the mental image is fully actualized in the painting. The completed artwork is essentially a visible replica of the artist's inner vision. Similarly, God, acting as the ultimate artist, first formulates the world's detailed construct within His own *bhāvanā*. Since God's creative imagination even encompasses and systematizes the creative imagination of ordinary artists, its greatness is immeasurable. This divine creative imagination, once expressed, manifests as all the worlds, countless living beings, and even the creative minds of artists themselves. In essence, the visible world and God's creative imagination are not separate entities, much like the two sides of a coin are inseparable.

The verse refers to God as *Bhagavān*, a term signifying possession of *bhagas*, which are divine attributes. These can include greatness, firmness, fame, wealth, wisdom, and detachment. For a realized person, these positive qualities are perceived as inherent in God, leading them to call God *Bhagavān*. For a spiritual seeker, *Bhagavān* embodies the qualities that drive their quest, such as the ability to discern

• God and world are not two

between creation and dissolution, coming and going, and knowledge and ignorance – all pairs that pertain to the cosmic system, which is God in manifest form. The fundamental message resonating throughout this verse is the non-duality of God’s mind and the visible world. Even within a context that might imply a creator-creation duality, this verse subtly imparts the wisdom of advaita (non-duality), revealing the intrinsic oneness of all existence.

2.1.4.13 Verse 6

ആസീത് പ്രകൃതിരേവേദം
 യഥാദൗ യോഗവൈഭവഃ
 വൃതനോദഥ യോഗീവ
 സിദ്ധിജാലം ജഗത്പതിഃ.

āsīt prakrtir evedam
 yathā ‘dau yogavaibhavaḥ
 vyatanod atha yogīva
 siddhijalam jagatpatih

Potentially what even as Nature remained
 Like the psychic powers of yoga;
 Like a yogi did He, the Lord of the world, work out
 His varied psychic powers thereafter.

ആദൗ	=	ആദിയിൽ
ഇദം	=	ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചം
യോഗവൈഭവഃ യഥാ	=	യോഗവൈഭവം എന്നപോലെ
പ്രകൃതിഃ ഏവ	=	പ്രകൃതിയായിത്തന്നെ
ആസീത്	=	ഇരുന്നിരുന്നു.
അഥ	=	പിന്നീട്
യോഗീ സിദ്ധിജാലം	=	യോഗി സിദ്ധിജാലത്തെ എന്ന
ഇവ	=	പോലെ
ജഗത്പതിഃ	=	ജഗത്തിന്റെ പതി (ഈശ്വരൻ)
ഇദം	=	ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചത്തെ
വൃതനോത്	=	വിസ്താരമാക്കി ചെയ്തു

ആദിയിൽ ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചം, യോഗിയുടെ യോഗവൈഭവം എന്നപോലെ, പ്രകൃതിയായിത്തന്നെ ഇരുന്നിരുന്നു. പിന്നീട് യോഗി സിദ്ധിജാലത്തെ എന്നപോലെ, ഈശ്വരൻ ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചത്തെ വിസ്താരമാക്കിത്തീർത്തു.

Stand back and enjoy it. Enjoy the dream-like quality, the potency of the seed, the magic of the artist. This creator is like a yogi with psychic powers unchanged by his projections.

- World unfolds from active Prakriti

The sixth verse of Darsanamala asserts that before its manifestation, the world existed as Prakriti, which is comparable to the psychic powers (siddhis) developed through yoga. The Lord of the world (Jagatpati) then unfolded this Prakriti from within Himself, much like a yogi manifests diverse psychic abilities. This verse specifically highlights that Prakriti is defined by the proper specificity of the three gunas – sattva, rajas, and tamas – and is inherently active, as indicated by the word 'krti' within 'Prakriti.' This inherent activity drives the continuous emergence of manifest forms, embodying a cosmic vital urge (viśva-vīrya) within the Jagatpati, another term for God.

- Siddhis are natural self-expression

The manifestation of the world from Prakriti is likened to a yogi's siddhis. These powers are not external but exist within the yogi as the potential for specific manifestations (vaibhava). This cosmic vaibhava is a yoga-vaibhava, meaning it is eternally united with the fundamental substance of existence. It represents both the urge to manifest and the creative process itself. Crucially, a yogi's siddhis are not separate from them; they are merely their inherent Prakriti expressing itself. While those unaware of a yogi's true nature might perceive these manifestations as unworldly attainments, for the yogi, they are simply a part of their normal existence and enlightened self-awareness. Unlike a magician's tricks, which are for entertainment and not part of their daily life, a yogi's siddhis are integral to their being.

- World imagined into form by God

The world's creation was not from nothingness or an external substance; rather, God expanded Himself through His own imagination, assuming the form of the world. Thus, the world is not fundamentally separate from God. We, as observers amazed by this creation, are also not distinct from God. The world, ourselves, and the sense of mystery we experience are all part of the Divine. This world will endure as long as God and His mysterious Prakriti endure, unlike fleeting magical illusions. Therefore, we are essentially not different from our creator. The underlying message encourages understanding this oneness to avoid misery stemming from perceived separation, a theme further explored in subsequent verses using additional analogies.

2.1.4.14 Verse 7

യദാത്മവിദ്യാസങ്കോചസ്-
 തദാവിദ്യാ ഭയങ്കരം
 നാമരൂപാത്മനാത്യർത്ഥം
 വിഭാതീഹ പിശാചവത്

yada 'tmavidyā samkocas
 tadā 'vidyā bhayamkaram
 nāma-rūpātmanā 'tyartham
 vibhātīha piśācavat

When Self-knowledge shrinks,
 Then prevails nescience fearful
 Ghost-like taking name and form
 In most terrible fashion looms here.

യദാ	=	എപ്പോഴാണോ
ആത്മവിദ്യാസങ്കോചഃ	=	ആത്മവിദ്യ (തന്നിന്നു തന്നെപ്പറ്റിത്തന്നെയുള്ള അറിവ്) തീരെ ചുരുങ്ങിപ്പോകുന്നത്
തദാ	=	അപ്പോൾ
നാമരൂപാത്മനാ	=	നാമങ്ങളായിട്ടും രൂപങ്ങളായിട്ടും
പിശാചവത്	=	പിശാചിനെപ്പോലെ
അത്യർത്ഥം ഭയങ്കരം	=	ഏറ്റവും അധികം ഭയം ഉണ്ടാക്കത്തക്കവണ്ണം
അവിദ്യാ	=	അവിദ്യ
ഇഹ വിഭാതി	=	ഇവിടെ പ്രകടരൂപം കൈക്കൊള്ളുന്നു

ഓരോരുത്തർക്കും തന്നെക്കുറിച്ചുതന്നെയുള്ള അറിവ് തീരെ ചുരുങ്ങിപ്പോകുമ്പോൾ നാമങ്ങളായിട്ടും രൂപങ്ങളായിട്ടും രൂപം പകർന്ന്, പിശാചിനെപ്പോലെ ഏറ്റവും വലിയ ഭയം ഉണ്ടാക്കത്തക്കവണ്ണം അവിദ്യ ഇവിടെ പ്രകടരൂപം കൈക്കൊള്ളുന്നു.

When self-knowledge diminishes, ignorance takes over. This ignorance then terrifyingly appears, like a ghost, in various names and forms.

The seventh verse of Darsanamala asserts that when self-knowledge diminishes, a pervasive nescience or ignorance takes hold, manifesting fearfully in various names and forms, akin to a spectral presence. This apprehension fundamentally arises from perceiving the world as inherently real and separate from an underlying absolute substratum, rather than as a transient projection. If this fundamental reality remains concealed, like a mother hidden by a sheet from her child, the

• Fear arises from partial perception

visible projections can induce terror. Conversely, a complete understanding of the truth, which reveals the intrinsic unity of the self and the perceived world, leads to joy and amusement, transforming suffering into equanimity. This highlights that fear is a consequence of partial perception, where fragmentation obscures the underlying oneness.

- Ignorance projects fear onto world

The verse draws an analogy to ghosts, which are only perceived in darkness, to illustrate the nature of ignorance (avidyā). Just as physical darkness obscures vision, the absence of wisdom-light creates a spiritual darkness where the true nature of reality is obscured. Within this state of avidyā, the world, despite being a divine manifestation, appears to be a source of fear and suffering. This fear is rooted in the belief that the perceived world is ultimately real. However, if its impermanent and dream-like quality were fully comprehended, its capacity to instill fear would vanish. Therefore, the inquiry into the origins of fear and suffering becomes a crucial aspect of understanding adhyāropa, or the superimposition of false reality onto the true.

- Self-knowledge dissolves all fear

Ātma-vidyā, or genuine self-knowledge, involves attaining a clear awareness of one's own identity, answering the profound question, 'Who am I?' This understanding reveals that every entity in the world, including ourselves, is an integral aspect of the Divine's self-manifestation, emanating from its inherent Prakriti. Realising that one's existence is inseparably unified with God's being leads to a profound liberation from fear. Since fear originates from perceiving something as distinct or 'other', and given that even that which causes fear is ultimately a facet of the same God, a full grasp of this non-dual reality dissolves all apprehension. Thus, the vanishing of fear is directly attributable to ātma-vidyā, the liberating knowledge that one is inherently part of God's boundless existence.

- Unawareness of oneness causes fear

Despite the world's complete manifestation from God, human beings frequently remain unaware of this fundamental oneness. This occurs because attention is typically fixated on distinct forms (rūpa), which are mistakenly perceived as ultimate reality, overshadowing the underlying divine substance. The countless different forms, along with the names (nāmas) and ideas assigned to them, create a perception of a fragmented world. Human experience is an inseparable fusion of these names and forms, making it challenging to definitively distinguish between external perceptions and conceptual constructs. This inherent human tendency to differentiate and categorise, combined with the profound ignorance of the basic

unity of all names and forms with God’s self-manifestation, is the primary cause of fear. This perspective further implies that since fear itself is a part of God’s manifestation, the next contemplation addresses why God would create a world that appears to induce fear.

2.1.4.15 Verse 8

ഭയങ്കരമിദം ശൂന്യം
 വേതാളനഗരം യഥാ
 തഥൈവ വിശ്വമഖിലം
 വ്യകരോദ്ഭൂതം വിഭുഃ.

bhayamkaram idam śūnyam
 vetālanagaram yathā
 tathaiva viśvam akhilam
 vyakarod adbhutam vibhuh

Terrible and empty of content
 Like a city infernal
 Even as such a marvel
 Did the Lord make the whole universe.

ഇദം	=	ഈ ദൃശ്യലോകം
യഥാ വേതാളനഗരം	=	വേതാളനഗരം എന്നപോലെ
ഭയങ്കരം ശൂന്യം	=	ഭയത്തെ ഉണ്ടാക്കുന്നതും ശൂന്യവുമാണ്.
അഖിലം വിശ്വം	=	വിശ്വത്തെ മുഴുവൻ
വിഭുഃ	=	വിഭുവായിട്ടുള്ള ഈശ്വരൻ
തഥാ ഏവ	=	അപ്രകാരം തന്നെ
അത്ഭൂതം	=	അത്ഭുതകരമാംവണ്ണം
വ്യകരോത്	=	ചെയ്തു

ഈ ദൃശ്യമായ ലോകം വേതാളനഗരം എന്നപോലെ ഭയത്തെ ഉണ്ടാക്കുന്നതും ശൂന്യവുമാണ്. സർവ്വവ്യാപിയായ ഈശ്വരൻ ഈ വിശ്വത്തെ മുഴുവൻ അപ്രകാരം സൃഷ്ടിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു എന്നത് അത്ഭൂതം തന്നെ.

• Past actions shape present reality

Why is this all so? Guru says simply be-cause it is so. It is our previous memories and actions which are the cause for both the following events and our interpretation of them. The potency and kinetics of the wave which just disappeared forms and sends up the next wave. If you fight with me now, then when you see me around the next corner, you will turn your face. Why? Because of what went before.

- World appears real but is void

The eighth verse of Darsanamala describes the universe as a ‘terrible and empty’ city, an infernal marvel crafted by the Lord. This implies that the world, though appearing real, is fundamentally non-existent on its own. The term Vibhuḥ, used for God here, signifies an all-pervading and omnipotent divine presence, not as a personal deity, but as the underlying substance of all existence. This perspective necessitates that each individual recognise God as the very essence of their own form, a recognition termed ātma-vidyā in the previous verse. The absence of such self-knowledge leads one to perceive the world as a fearful, ghost-like illusion. Consequently, a crucial question arises: why would God create a world where ātma-vidyā naturally diminishes, leaving beings in a state of fear?

- Good and evil are human constructs

The question of why evil exists in a world created by an ostensibly good God is a persistent riddle in many religions, particularly prophetic ones, often lacking a satisfactory theological answer. This difficulty stems from the preconceived notion that God is solely the embodiment of goodness, a premise for which there is no conclusive evidence. Fundamentally, concepts of good and evil are human constructs, not inherent divine attributes. Happenings themselves are neutral; they simply arise from God and only acquire positive or negative appraisals based on human preferences and values. What one individual considers good, another might deem evil, and even for the same person, a perceived good in one context might become bad in another. Thus, all events, as they emerge from God’s creative self-unfoldment, are inherently neutral.

- Brahman includes all dualities

In Indian philosophy, especially the Upaniṣads, Brahman (or Ātman) serves as the ultimate reality, encompassing both what humans classify as good and evil, righteous and unrighteous. The Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad, for instance, explicitly states that the Self (Brahman) comprises understanding, mind, life, and all phenomena, including light and no-light, desire and absence of desire, and importantly, righteousness and its absence. This implies that all these dualities originate from the one underlying substance. It is human beings who categorise actions as good or evil and their doers as meritorious or sinful. Actions, within nature’s ceaseless flow, are devoid of intrinsic moral valence. Therefore, Vedanta does not consider God or Brahman as solely the plenitude of goodness, which negates the aforementioned problem of evil.

The question of how dichotomies emerge from a singular God, or why God created a world that evokes fear in its inhabitants, often remains without a logically convincing

• Reality is an ineffable mystery

answer. The overarching Vedantic response is that all of existence, the world, life, mind, and God Himself, is a profound mystery. Unlike Western philosophical traditions, which generally reject defining reality as an enigma, Advaita Vedanta ultimately concludes that the ultimate reality is unthinkable and ineffable. This philosophical stance aligns with the mystical perspective, blurring the lines between religion and philosophy that are often distinct in Western thought. The previous verse clarified that fear in the world stems from a lack of self-knowledge. It is through attaining this self-knowledge that one perceives Reality as a great mystery, transcending the illusion that all problems can be solved through mere logical reasoning.

• Emptiness stems from ignorance alone

The term *sūnya*, translated as ‘non-existent on its own’ in this verse, does not align with the nihilistic interpretations of some Buddhist schools. Instead, it refers to the sense of valuelessness or vacuity that individuals sometimes experience in life due to incessant miseries and fear. This feeling of emptiness, likened to an infernal city (*vetāla-nagaram*), arises from their ignorance (*avidyā*). It does not signify absolute non-existence, as the consciousness that manifests as this very ignorance undeniably exists. Realising this fundamental Consciousness-Reality leads to the profound understanding that it is God, and all phenomenal existence is merely a construct of that Divine Consciousness. It is only then that one truly comprehends the mysterious nature of everything.

2.1.4.16 Verse 9

അർക്കാദ്യമാക്രമം വിശ്വം
തഥാ നൈവേദമാത്മനഃ
സുപസ്തേരിവ പ്രാദുരാസീ-
ദ്യുഗപത് സ്വസ്യ വിക്ഷയാ. .

arkad yathākramam viśvam
tathā naivedam ātmanah
upter iva prādur asī-
dyugapad svasya vikṣayā

If from a sun in graded succession
This world came, such was not the case at all.
Presented as if out of slumber,
At one stroke all came to be.

ഇദം വിശ്വം = ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചം

അർക്കാത്	=	സൂര്യനിൽ നിന്നും
യഥാക്രമം	=	പടിപടിയായി
പ്രാദുരാസീത് (ഇതി ചേത്)	=	വെളിപ്പെട്ടുവന്നു എന്നാണ് പറയുന്നതെങ്കിൽ
തഥാ നൈവം	=	അങ്ങനെയല്ല തന്നെ.
ഇദം	=	ഈ പ്രപഞ്ചം
ആത്മനഃ	=	തന്നിൽ നിന്നുതന്നെ (ഈശ്വര നിൽനിന്നു തന്നെ അഥവാ ആത്മാവിൽ നിന്നുതന്നെ)
സ്വസ്വ വീക്ഷയാ	=	തന്റെ വീക്ഷണം കൊണ്ട് (തന്റെ തന്നെ സങ്കല്പം കൊണ്ട്)
സുപ്തേഃ ഇവ	=	ഉറക്കത്തിൽ നിന്നും ഉണരുന്ന അവസ്ഥയിൽ എന്നപോലെ
യുഗപത്	=	ഒരേ സമയത്ത്
പ്രാദുരാസീത്	=	വെളിപ്പെട്ടു വന്നു

ഈ വിശ്വം സൂര്യനിൽ നിന്നും പടിപടിയായി വെളിപ്പെട്ടു വന്നു എന്നു പറയുകയാണെങ്കിൽ അങ്ങനെയല്ല തന്നെ. ഈ വിശ്വം ഈശ്വരനിൽ നിന്ന്, അഥവാ ആത്മാവിൽ നിന്ന്, സ്വന്തം സങ്കല്പപത്താൽ വെളിപ്പെട്ടു വന്നതാണ്. ഉറക്കത്തിൽ നിന്നുണർന്നവൻ സകല ദൃശ്യങ്ങളെയും പൊടുന്നനവേ കാണുന്നതുപോലെയാണത്.

This world didn't come from a gradual, sequential unfolding, as if from a sun. Instead, it instantly appeared, fully formed, as though suddenly awaking from slumber.

The ninth verse of Darsanamala asserts that the world did not emerge through a gradual, sequential process, such as a solar evolution, but rather appeared instantaneously. Sree Narayana Guru is not engaging in astrophysical speculation; instead, he focuses on the immediate, experienced world, particularly its capacity to induce fear and the human desire for liberation from its conditioning. He argues that the world we experience is that which springs into being in our minds in this very moment. This perspective aligns with the idea that there is no evolution for Spirit itself, and the cosmos appears to us fully formed each time we awaken, akin to a sudden snap where light instantly dispels prolonged darkness.

This verse addresses the question of whether the world's creation was gradual or instantaneous. While natural phenomena often exhibit gradual evolution, God, as a mystical reality, might operate differently. Modern physics offers a gradual creation theory, where planets splintered from the Sun,

• World springs up in each moment

- World and consciousness emerge instantly

eventually leading to the evolution of life and consciousness. However, the notion that consciousness is merely an after-effect of material evolution remains a hypothesis, not a definitively established truth. Conversely, the ‘Santiago Theory’ in science, which proposes that cognition continually brings forth the world through the process of living, closely mirrors the instantaneous creation theory (yugapat-sṛṣṭi-vāda) supported by the Guru in this verse. Both suggest a simultaneous emergence of the world and consciousness.

- World is Brahman’s illusory appearance

According to Guru World is not real. The world is an illusory appearance of the absolute. In this verse, although guru speaks about the theory of instantaneous creation (Yugapat sristivada), what he ultimately accepts is the Brahma vivarta Vada (the doctrine of the world is an illusory manifestation of Brahman or absolute.)

- Instant creation like sudden awakening

Creation theories are generally categorised into gradual creation (krama-sṛṣṭi-vāda), which posits a step-by-step evolution, and instantaneous creation (yugapat-sṛṣṭi-vāda), which describes simultaneous emergence. The latter is often compared to waking from sleep, where the world instantly appears as a complete whole. According to this view, the ideation or will of God or Ātman leads to the world’s instantaneous appearance within Itself. While evolutionary theories like Darwinism are meaningful within specific domains, such as biology, they do not encompass the cosmic, all-inclusive evolution of the entire cosmos, including the mind, which is the concern here. Some Upaniṣads, like the Taittiriya, describe a creation sequence resembling evolution, while others, like the Aitareya, portray an instantaneous creation of worlds and beings from the Self’s initial thought.

- Creation questioned through self-inquiry

This chapter, by assuming the world’s perceived existence, raises fundamental questions: Who created the world? How was it created? In what state did it exist before creation, and what was the driving force behind it? If the Creator’s will was the cause, how are the Creator’s mind and the world related? The discussion also reiterates that the world is perceived as such only when self-knowledge is diminished, leading to a life filled with fears and a sense of evil. If such a world is a result of creation, this verse asserts that the creation must have been instantaneous. The chapter concludes by emphasising that nothing truly exists apart from the transcendental and causal Substance, paving the way for further exploration in the subsequent chapter.



2.1.4.17 Verse 10

ധാനാദിവ വടോ യസ്മാത്
 പ്രാദുരാസീദിദം ജഗത്
 സ ബ്രഹ്മാ സ ശിവോ വിഷ്ണുഃ
 സ പരഃ സർവ്വ ഏ സഃ

dhānād iva vato yasmāt
 prādur āsīd idam jagat |
 sa brahmā sa śivo viṣṇuh
 sa paraḥ sarva eva sah ||

He from whom like a fig tree as from seed
 Came out this world manifested,
 He is Brahmā, He is Śiva and Viṣṇu;
 He is the ultimate; everything is He indeed.

ധാനാത്	=	വളരെ ചെറിയ ഒരു വിത്തിൽ നിന്ന്
വടഃ ഇവ	=	ഒരു വലിയ ആൽമരം വളർന്നു വരുന്നതുപോലെ
യസ്മാത്	=	യാതൊരുവനിൽ നിന്നാണോ
ഇദം ജഗത്	=	ഈ പറയപ്പെട്ട ജഗത്ത്
പ്രാദുഃ ആസീത്	=	വെളിപ്പെട്ടു വന്നത്
സഃ ബ്രഹ്മാ	=	അവനാണ് ബ്രഹ്മാവ്,
സ വിഷ്ണു	=	അവനാണ് വിഷ്ണു,
സഃ ശിവഃ	=	അവനാണ് ശിവൻ,
സഃ പരഃ	=	അവനാണ് പരൻ
സഃ ഏവ സർവ്വി	=	അവൻ തന്നെയാണ് സകലതും

ഏറ്റവും ചെറിയ ഒരു വിത്തിൽ നിന്ന് വളരെ വലിയ വടവൃക്ഷം വെളിപ്പെട്ടു വരുന്നതുപോലെയാണ്, ഈ ജഗത്ത് ഈശ്വരനിൽ നിന്നും വെളിപ്പെട്ടു വന്നത്. ആ ഈശ്വരൻ തന്നെയാണ് ബ്രഹ്മാവ്. ആ ഈശ്വരൻ തന്നെയാണ് വിഷ്ണു. ആ ഈശ്വരൻ തന്നെയാണ് ശിവൻ. ആ ഈശ്വരൻ തന്നെയാണ് സർവ്വാതീതൻ. ആ ഈശ്വരൻ തന്നെയാണ് സർവ്വവും.

From Him, like a fig tree sprouting from its seed, this entire world emerged. He is truly Brahma, Śiva, and Vishnu; He is the ultimate reality, and indeed, everything is Him.

The tenth verse of Darsanamala posits that the manifest world emerged from a singular source, much like a giant fig tree from a tiny seed. This ultimate source is identified as Brahma (the creator), Śiva (the dissolver), and Vishnu (the sustainer), collectively representing the one fundamental

- One source sustains, creates, dissolves

Reality. Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati emphasises that these names are merely conventions; one can simply refer to this source as ‘That Absolute’ or ‘That which is unfolding itself everywhere as an inner principle.’ This signifies that the single Reality responsible for creation also governs the sustenance and dissolution of the universe, countering any notion of multiple governing entities. The world’s integrity necessitates a singular, all-encompassing force, ultimately asserting that everything is indeed this one Divine principle.

- All beings arise from Samvit

Indian mythology traditionally assigns Brahmā to creation, Vishnu to sustenance, and Śiva to dissolution. However, various Puranas acknowledge that the underlying substance of all gods, demons, humans, and worlds is one, though named differently across traditions. Sree Narayana Guru clarifies this relationship, stating that individual forms, like waves in an ocean, sequentially emerge and merge back into the primeval Source-Consciousness (Samvit or Caitanya). This Samvit is likened to a boundless ocean with an inherent urge for creative self-unfoldment (karma). Just as waves emerge, exist, and disappear, individual beings arise from this Samvit-ocean, live with specific traits, and then merge back into it.

- Life flows through six unfolding stages

The emergence of these wave-like individuals is termed birth, with the creative urge behind it allegorically named Brahmā. The duration of each wave’s existence is considered its lifespan, and the collective existence of all waves constitutes the world. The inner urge sustaining this is called Vishnu, representing omnipresent consciousness that pervades and ensures life’s continuity through six stages: existence, birth, growth, evolution, decline, and dissolution. The merging of these wave-like entities back into the ocean is known as death, and the aspect of the creative urge ensuring this merger is termed Śiva. Śiva, literally meaning ‘that which brings about auspiciousness,’ ensures the auspiciousness of the life system by constantly dissolving older forms to allow new ones to emerge, maintaining the novelty of existence.

- One Reality beyond all functions

Ultimately, the one God or Reality, referred to as Paramēśvara (the Supreme Controller) in earlier verses, is variously called Brahmā, Vishnu, or Śiva based on their respective functions of creation, sustenance, and dissolution. This God is compared to a seed (dhana), which conceals within itself the potential for a giant fig tree. Similarly, this extremely subtle Reality unfolds itself to become all worlds and all beings, including their birth, life, and dissolution. Thus,



Paramēśvara transcends the multiplicity of Brahmā-Vishnu-Śiva, existing beyond the processes of creation, sustenance, and dissolution. This fundamental oneness allows the Reality to be equated with ‘everything’ (sarvam), echoing Upaniṣadic declarations like ‘Everything here indeed is Brahman.’ This overarching Reality, which is beyond all manifestations, will be further explored in the next chapter as caitanya (pure and unconditioned Consciousness). Here, we can see Guru’s effort to synthesise the Brahma Parinama-vada and the Brahma vivarta vada.

Summarized Overview

The world’s appearance is experienced instantaneously, arising, existing, and disappearing in a flash; the ‘moment’ is the sole factual reality. Human minds, however, overlay this with memories, fabricating a fictitious sense of continuous time and vast space, including notions of eternal time. This frames the cosmos as a collective dream or projection, where ‘creator-hood’ itself is a conceptual construct if creation is unreal. Yet, a Creator, as a ‘grand dreamer’ or an ‘inner-controlling principle,’ is tentatively accepted to bridge known to unknown. This is akin to a magician’s illusions, where observers collectively participate in a shared hallucination. Our senses act as individual magicians, with the mind as the master, collectively contributing to this illusion of reality.

The apparent persistence of this dream-like world is explained via the seed and enduring tree analogy. Just as a tree’s full potential resides latent within its tiny seed, the seeming solidity and temporal continuity of matter are merely expressions of what was inherently present in its source. This guides the seeker towards the fundamental ontological ground of human ignorance. It reveals that the world’s manifestations, including its perceived solidity and persistence, are simply the unfolding of an internal consistency, not an external reality. This reinforces the dream-like quality of creation while acknowledging its inherent coherence and the unbroken link to its origin.

All existence necessitates the interplay of dual forces, a principle acknowledged across philosophies as essential for dynamism and change. This fundamental pulsation is evident in phenomena like systole-diastole, driving continuous transformation. The Divine is metaphorically depicted as a ‘Master Artist,’ weaving a ceaseless tapestry of ever-changing colours and forms across an infinite canvas of time and space. This divine artistry is exemplified by unique sunrises, all stemming from one fundamental movement. The perception of a sunrise versus a sunset is merely a subjective interpretation of a single solar motion from different vantage points, highlighting that while creation is a continuous display of diverse manifestations, its inherent dualistic nature is orchestrated by a singular, overarching consciousness.

The Creator is likened to a yogi, whose psychic powers (siddhis) are manifested without altering his fundamental, unchanging being. This analogy clarifies that the world, though a divine projection, does not affect the Creator's essential nature. Just as a yogi's inner self remains unaffected by his displays, the Creator's essence is untouched by the unfolding universe. This prompts the observer to appreciate the world's dream-like quality, the potency within its source, and the artistic magic of creation, without becoming entangled in the illusion of its absolute reality. The yogi's ability to manifest diverse phenomena while retaining true self serves as a powerful metaphor for understanding the Creator's detached yet all-encompassing involvement with the created world.

Fear arises from a restricted perception, specifically from failing to recognise the eternal, absolute substratum underlying all phenomena. When this truth is obscured, only its projections are seen, which can become terrifying, like a child's fear of a mother concealed by a sheet. A comprehensive understanding elicits joy; fragmented vision leads to apprehension. This means realised individuals find joy where others find sorrow, as joy stems from perceiving the true Self, while bitterness arises from identifying with the non-Self. The world's 'terrible and empty' appearance is not inherent but a manifestation of nescience (ignorance) or avidyā, a lack of ātma-vidyā (self-knowledge) preventing seeing our inseparable oneness with the divine.

The question of evil in a world created by a good God is deemed unanswerable, stemming from the flawed premise that God is exclusively good. Good and evil are human ideations, not divine attributes; events are neutral as they emerge from God, becoming 'good' or 'bad' only through human appraisal based on subjective values. This makes morality relative. While Upaniṣads posit Brahman as the source of all phenomena, including righteousness and unrighteousness, Vedanta states God is not solely good, thus dissolving the problem of evil. Ultimately, the origin of dichotomies from one God, and why a fearful world exists, remains a profound mystery, encompassing the world, life, mind, and God Himself.

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati challenges cosmological theories like the Big Bang, urging focus on immediate 'facts of this moment' and individual experience over astrophysical hypotheses. He emphasises his concern is with the world that elicits fear and from which liberation is sought, rather than external cosmological models. The experienced world instantaneously springs into being within the mind at each moment. This contrasts with gradual evolution for Spirit; the cosmos presents itself anew each time we awaken, instantly transforming perception from misery to joy. This yugapat-sṛṣṭi-vāda (instantaneous creation) aligns with modern cognition theories. While Darwinian evolution is valid in biology, it doesn't encompass the all-inclusive cosmic evolution of the entire universe, including the mind, which is the spiritual inquiry's focus.



The final verse asserts that the world, manifesting like a fig tree from a seed, originates from a singular source: Brahma (creator), Śiva (dissolver), and Vishnu (sustainer). These are labels for the ultimate, unfolding Absolute. Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati highlights that this singular Reality governs creation, sustenance, and dissolution, maintaining world order by negating multiple realities. He elaborates via the Source-Consciousness (Samvit) as a boundless ocean, from which beings emerge like waves, exist, and merge back. Brahmā represents the urge for birth, Vishnu the pervasive consciousness sustaining life, and Śiva the auspicious dissolution for renewal. Ultimately, Paramēśvara transcends this multiplicity, embodying the absolute, all-encompassing principle from which everything manifests and returns, affirming that ‘everything is He indeed.’

Assignments

1. What is the primary purpose and unique methodology adopted by Sreenarayana Guru in composing the Darsanamala, and how does it facilitate the understanding of Advaita Vedanta?
2. Discuss the significance of the ‘eye cannot see itself’ analogy in Darsanamala. What does it convey about the nature of the Ātman and its relationship to knowledge?
3. What is ‘Adhyāsa’ (superimposition) according to Sreenarayana Guru, and how is this concept used to explain the reality of manifested forms versus the underlying truth? Provide an example from the text.
4. Elaborate on Sreenarayana Guru’s concept of ‘yugapat-sṛṣṭi-vāda’ (instantaneous creation). How does it differ from traditional evolutionary theories, and what are its implications for understanding the cosmos and the mind?
5. How does Darsanamala reconcile the functions of Brahma, Vishnu, and Śiva with the concept of a single, ultimate Reality? What does this imply about the nature of the Absolute?
6. According to the provided material, how does Sreenarayana Guru address the challenge of describing a non-dual reality that is beyond words and thought, especially in the context of Darsanamala’s structure?

UNIT 2

The Concepts of Reality and Self in Darsanamala

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners should be able to:

- differentiate between the core concepts of 'Bhāna' and 'Bhāsyā' as presented in Bhana Darshanam, illustrating their relationship in the manifestation of subjective and objective reality
- articulate the Darsanamala's perspective on the Ātman's relationship to knowledge and explain the significance of this understanding for self-realisation.
- analyse how Darsanamala conceptualizes Brahma, Vishnu, and Śiva, demonstrating how these roles are unified within the singular, non-dual Absolute.
- identify the essence of 'Cit' (Consciousness) as the underlying reality in Darsanamala and how it manifests as the entire universe without undergoing intrinsic change.

Background

Sreenarayana Guru's Darsanamala (Garland of Visions) is a profound philosophical work that presents a systematic understanding of reality. This treatise, comprising ten chapters, each titled a 'darshana' (vision), guides the seeker through various perspectives to realise the ultimate truth. The Guru's unique approach in Darsanamala allows for a multifaceted exploration of existence, gradually leading the student towards a non-dualistic understanding. The Bhana Darshanam (The Vision of Appearance), holds significant importance within Darsanamala. Bhana Darshanam is a Glimpse into the Nature of Appearance. It builds upon the foundational understanding established in previous chapters, particularly the concept of a singular, conscious reality. While earlier chapters may have introduced the notion of an ultimate truth, Bhana Darshanam specifically addresses how this formless truth manifests as the diverse and dynamic universe we experience. It deals into the very essence of 'bhana', the act of shining, appearing, or becoming manifest. The core idea of Bhana Darshanam is that the entire universe is nothing but a manifestation, an 'appearance' within consciousness. It is through this



chapter that the Guru illuminates the path to realising the very consciousness that gives rise to these appearances. In philosophical discourse, we often consider three fundamental aspects: 'I' (the self), 'the world I perceive', and 'the unknown truth that underlies everything'. Bhana Darshanam uniquely integrates these elements.

Keywords

Cit (Consciousness), Bhāna (Appearance/Manifestation), Bhāśya (Object of Appearance), Ātman (Self/Ultimate Reality), Yugapat-srṣṭi-vāda (Instantaneous Creation), Advaita Vedanta

Discussion

- Understanding self in relation to ultimate reality's emergence of universe

- Universe's origin from causal truth, from divine will to appearances of consciousness

- Categorising manifold manifestations, ultimately revealing unsuperimposed supreme reality

The Darsanamala adopts a distinctive style of exposition. The first half of the work explores the inseparable connection between the causal truth and the world. It examines how the universe emerges from this ultimate reality. The second half, including Bhana Darshanam, then guides the individual on how to perceive themselves in relation to this all-encompassing truth, exploring various levels of understanding.

The central inquiry in the first half of Darsanamala is the problem of how the empirical universe, which is an effect, originated from the causal truth. This contemplation spans a spectrum of thought, from the idea that God created the universe through His own will, to the understanding that all phenomena are merely appearances arising from the vibrant and dynamic 'bhana' of the absolute consciousness.

In Bhana Darshanam, the Guru first categorises and differentiates the infinitely varied manifestations (bhanas) that arise within the causal truth, which is pure consciousness, by considering them as aspects of the comprehensive nature of the universe. Subsequently, it is asserted that all these differentiated appearances are superimposed (adhyasta). The chapter concludes by highlighting that whatever is unsuperimposed (anadhyasta) is indeed the supreme and singular existent reality.

Aum Tat Sat, the existential truth at the end of this Bhāna Darśanam, is like the central pendant hanging from the Garland of Visions (Darśanamālā). In the first vision, we observed both

- Bhana Darsana as the culmination, connecting projected world, substratum, falsehood, and their interrelation

- Consciousness as the omnipresent Absolute, not a moving physical light, avoiding analogy's misinterpretations

- All existence is consciousness

the world and the individual affected by it. Upon inquiry, we were told it was a projection of Parameśvara. The second chapter discusses the substratum behind this superimposition, while the third explains the very structure of falsehood. In the fourth, the investigation focuses on how much of the substratum resides within the superimposition and to what extent it is vitiated.

Here in the fifth chapter we look at consciousness itself, which is also called the Absolute or the Self. In the often used analogy of consciousness as a light, we think of a physical phenomena. In reality consciousness has only a similarity in that in its light knowledge comes. Substantially consciousness is not the light found in nature. Natural light travels; there is movement and motion. There is no movement of consciousness; it is already everywhere. Thus we must avoid these two errors, which are possible from using this analogy, in interpreting both the structure and function of consciousness.

2.2.1 Bhānadarśanam

2.2.1.1 Version 1

അന്തർബഹിർവദാസീനം
സദാ ഭ്രമരചഞ്ചലം
ഭാനം ദിവൈവ സാമാന്യം
വിശേഷ ഇതി ഭിദ്യതേ.

Antarbahirvadāsīnaṃ
Sadā bhramarachancalaṃ
Bhānaṃ dvidhaiva sāmānyam
Viśeṣa iti bhidyate

Present equally within and without,
In constant bee-agitation,
Consciousness is of two kinds:
The generic and the specific

അന്തർവത്	=	ഉള്ളിലെന്നപോലെയും
ബഹിർവത്	=	വെളിയിലെന്നപോലെയും
ആസീനം	=	ഇരിക്കുന്നതും
സദാ ഭ്രമരചഞ്ചലം	=	ചിറകടിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്ന വണ്ടിനെപ്പോലെ സദാ ചഞ്ചല മായിരിക്കുന്നതും ആയ
ഭാനം	=	ഭാനം (അറിവ് പ്രകാശിതമായി ത്തീരുന്നത്)



സാമാന്യം വിശേഷം = സാമാന്യം എന്നും വിശേഷം ഇതി എന്നും
 ദ്വിധാ ഏവ വിദ്യതേ = രണ്ടായി വേർതിരിക്കാവുന്നതാണ്.

അറിവ് പ്രകടഭാവം കൈക്കൊള്ളുന്നത് ആന്തരികമായിട്ടാവാം. ബാഹ്യമായിട്ടാവാം. രണ്ടായാലും അത് പറക്കുന്ന വണ്ടിന്റെ ചിറകുപോലെ ചഞ്ചലമാണ്. സാമാന്യം എന്നും വിശേഷം എന്നും രണ്ടു തരം തിരിവ് അതിനുണ്ട്.

There is a rapid oscillation of the mind back and forth between ‘T’ the subject and ‘this’ the object. Seeing, as when we say, ‘I am seeing this’, is the experiencing of this oscillation within consciousness.

What does not disappear from your experience when you close your eyes (ie., senses) is the ‘inside’ world (antar) as contrasted with the ‘out-side’ world (bahir). This is the first division of consciousness. Here consciousness is not pure, but exists in the form of consciousness of something. Here the subjective experience is made the object matter of our study. Outer and inner each have both specific (viśeṣa) and general (samānya) aspect. Thus now we have four types of consciousness (outer specific, outer general, inner specific, and inner general). When you see a candle burning, you have an idea that a candle is burning. If a candle is burning on your table, you aren’t seeing a candle burning at any point out there. Rather the sight occurs on the ground of consciousness. Bhāna is the ground and bhāntāśrunya is the object of consciousness.

• Consciousness’s inner world, its divisions

The universe, as we perceive it, presents two aspects: an internal and an external dimension. While physics primarily focuses on external, tangible forms, our minds simultaneously create an internal representation mirroring each observed form, or indeed, the entire world. It’s through these mental constructs that we truly experience the universe. The precise fidelity of this internal representation to the external form remains uncertain. Nonetheless, the subjective experience of these internal representations is undeniable. This raises a fundamental philosophical question: which is real, the internal perception or the external object? Materialists posit the external world as reality, while idealists contend that internal experience is the true reality.

• Internal versus external reality debate

Sreenarayana Guru reconciles this dichotomy by asserting that the same consciousness, or ‘Chid Vastu’, manifests as both internal experiences and external phenomena. For Vedantins, the universe encompasses both these aspects. The ultimate



- Consciousness as non-dual, both internal and external

reality is neither exclusively internal nor external, but rather a singular, non-dual consciousness that appears as both. This is encapsulated in the phrase ‘Antarbahirvadāsīnaṃ,’ meaning ‘present equally within and without.’ This singular consciousness is neither material nor spiritual; it is simply absolute.

- Consciousness’s rapid oscillation creates seeming duality

The Guru explains this non-dual consciousness’s manifestation through the analogy of a bee’s wings. Just as a bee’s wings beat so rapidly that their individual movements are imperceptible, consciousness swiftly shifts between internal and external awareness. This rapid oscillation, so fast that we don’t even recognise the transition, creates the illusion of two simultaneously existing worlds: one conceptual and one perceived. This continuous experience can be likened to a film, where individual frames merge to create the perception of seamless motion. Similarly, the rapid ‘flapping’ of consciousness creates internal conceptual worlds and external perceptions, both appearing to have continuity. Regardless of whether an experience is internal or external, it contains both a general (sāmānya) and a specific (viśeṣa) aspect. For instance, a forest viewed as a whole is general, whereas individual trees within it are specific. This applies equally to internal experiences; the concept of ‘human’ is general, while ‘MahĀtma Gandhi’ refers to a specific individual. Ultimately, all these distinct experiences, internal, external, general, and specific, arise within that single, non-dual consciousness, which itself is neither internal, external, general, nor specific, but simply has the nature to appear as all of them.

Here, Guru pictures the Bhana or appearance beautifully. Bhana exists neither in inner nor in outer, when examining.

2.2.1.2 Verse 2

സ്ഥൂലം സൂക്ഷ്മം കാരണം ച
 തൂര്യം ചേതി ചതുർവിധം
 ഭാനാശ്രയം ഹി തന്നാമ
 ഭാനസ്യാപ്യുപചര്യത

Sthūlaṃ sūkṣmaṃ kāraṇaṃ ca
 Turyaṃ ceti caturvidhaṃ
 Bhānāśrayaṃ hi tannāma
 Bhānasyāpyupacaryatā

As the concrete, the subtle, the causal and the Absolute, Basic consciousness is of four kinds.



So these names even of basic Consciousness
Are also applicable to consciousness.

ഭാനാശ്രയം	=	ഈ ഭാനങ്ങൾക്കെല്ലാം ആശ്രയമായിട്ടുള്ളത്
സ്ഥൂലം സൂക്ഷ്മം	=	സ്ഥൂലമെന്നും സൂക്ഷ്മമെന്നും കാരണമെന്നും
തുര്യം ച ഇതി	=	തുര്യമെന്നും
ചതുർവിധം	=	നാലു വിധമുണ്ട്.
തത് നാമ ഹി	=	അതേ പേരുതന്നെ
ഭാനസ്യ അപി	=	ഭാനത്തിനും ഉണ്ടെന്ന്
ഉപചര്യതേ ച	=	ഉപചാരപൂർവ്വം പറഞ്ഞുപോരുന്നു.

ഇപ്പറഞ്ഞ ഭാനങ്ങൾക്കുള്ള ആശ്രയം സ്ഥൂലമെന്നും സൂക്ഷ്മമെന്നും കാരണമെന്നും തുര്യമെന്നും നാലു വിധത്തിൽ ഉണ്ട്. ഇതേ പേരുകൾ തന്നെ അതാതിന്റെ ഭാനത്തിനും ഉപചാരപൂർവ്വം പറഞ്ഞുപോരുന്നു.

Try to imagine a mathematical point which has no physical dimensions and yet at the same time the point is a circle with an infinite dimension. Here infinity shall be defined as a circle with circumference nowhere and center every-where. A dimensionless point and an infinite circle. Cancel these out in your mind, and then imagine a thin vertical parameter which is the cancellation of these two notions.

• Imagining a paradoxical point-circle cancellation

This part clarifies that the universe, including the perceiver, is experienced as the ultimate truth manifesting in four distinct ways, each with its own general and specific aspects. These four modes of manifestation are termed Bhānāśrayas (bases of appearance): Sthūla (concrete), Sūkṣma (subtle), Kāraṇa (causal), and Turya (absolute). In Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta, these are often referred to as ‘Upādhi’ or limiting adjuncts. In that tradition, the physical, subtle, and causal bodies are considered limiting factors that give rise to the gross, subtle, and causal universes, experienced during waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states respectively. Turya, the fourth state, transcends these three and represents pure, non-dual experience.

• Universe manifests through four Bhānāśrayas, also known as Upādhis, with general and specific aspects.

Sreenarayana Guru’s approach differs from Shankara’s in that he does not posit distinct ‘bodies’ but rather considers these as bases of appearance for the ultimate consciousness. For example, instead of stating that a physical universe exists, the Guru emphasises that a gross experience arises within consciousness, or that consciousness appears in a gross form. This perspective aligns more closely with the idea that the singular truth is pure consciousness. Just as water takes the

• Guru’s view: consciousness appearing in forms, not distinct bodies

shape of different containers, the one truth appears in various forms when associated with these different *bhānāśrayas*.

• Bhana is consciousness appearing through diverse bhānāśrayas

Therefore, a ‘bhana’ (appearance) is consciousness manifesting through a particular *bhānāśraya*. The diversity of *bhānāśrayas* leads to a diversity of *bhanas*: Sthūla-bhāna, Sūkṣma-bhāna, Kāraṇa-bhāna, and Turya-bhāna. Since each *bhāna* also possesses a general and specific aspect, there are eight distinct types of *bhānāśrayas* and consequently eight types of *bhanas*. These include general and specific *bhānāśrayas* and *bhanas* for each of the four categories (concrete, subtle, causal, and absolute). Each of these also has internal and external dimensions. This comprehensive framework offers a clear depiction of how the singular, absolute truth or consciousness manifests as the entire internal and external universe.

Here, Guru’s states the cause and effect relations and difference between subtle and crude. These four are the seat of bhana or appearance.

2.2.1.3 Verse 3

ദൃശ്യതാമിഹ കായോളഹം
ഘടോ/യമിതി ദൃശ്യതേ
സ്ഥൂലമാശ്രിത്യ യദ്ഭാനം
സ്ഥൂലം തദിതി മന്യതേ

Dr̥śyatāmiha kāyo’ham
Ghaṭo’yamiti dr̥śyate
Sthūlamāśritya yadbhānam
Sthūlam taditi manyate.

Lo, here 'I am the body; this is the pot',
Depending on the concrete,
What looms as consciousness,
That is known as the concrete.

ഇഹ ദൃശ്യതാം	=	ഉദാഹരണത്തിന് ഇതാ നോക്കുക
അഹം കായഃ	=	ഞാൻ ശരീരമാണ്
അയം ഘടഃ ഇതി	=	‘ഇതു കൂടമാണ്’ എന്നിങ്ങനെ
സ്ഥൂലം ആശ്രിത്യ	=	സ്ഥൂലത്തെ ആശ്രയിക്കുന്നതായിട്ട്
യദ്ഭാനം ദൃശ്യതേ	=	യാതൊരു ഭാനം കാണപ്പെടുന്നുവോ
തത് സ്ഥൂലം ഇതി	=	അതിനെ സ്ഥൂലഭാനം എന്നു
മന്യതേ	=	കരുതിപ്പോരുന്നു

ഉദാഹരണത്തിന് ‘ഞാൻ ശരീരമാണ്’, ‘ഇത് കുടമാണ്’ എന്ന തരത്തിൽ, സ്ഥലരൂപത്തെ ആശ്രയിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നതായി കാണപ്പെടുന്ന ഭാഗത്തെ സ്ഥൂലഭാഗം എന്ന് കരുതിപ്പോരുന്നു.

2.2.1.4 Verse 4

അത്ര കായോ ഘട ഇതി
ഭാഗം യദ്വിശിഷ്യതേ
തഥാ ഹമയമിതി യത്
സാമാന്യമിതി ച സ്മൃതം

Atha kāyō ghaṭa iti
bhānam yad-viśiṣyate
tathā hamayamiti yat
sāmānyamiti ca smṛtam.

Here what is the consciousness of the body
And the pot, that is the specific.
Likewise too, what is the consciousness of ‘I’ and ‘this’
Is known as the generic.

അത്ര	=	ഇവിടെ (ഇതിൽ)
കായഃ ഘടഃ ഇതി	=	ശരീരം എന്നും കുടം എന്നും
ഭാഗം യത്	=	ഉള്ള ഭാഗം യാതൊന്നോ
തത് വിശിഷ്യതേ	=	അതു വിശേഷ സ്ഥൂലഭാഗ
		മാകുന്നു.
തഥാ	=	അതുപോലെതന്നെ
അഹം അയം ഇതി	=	‘ഞാൻ’ എന്നും ‘ഇത്’ എന്നും
ഭാഗം യത്	=	ഉള്ള ഭാഗം യാതൊന്നോ
തത് സാമാന്യം ഇതി	=	അതു സാമാന്യ സ്ഥൂലഭാഗ
ച സ്മൃതം	=	മാണെന്ന് ഓർത്തുകൊള്ളേ
		ണ്ടതാണ്

ഇതിൽ ‘ശരീരം’ എന്നും ‘കുടം’ എന്നും ഉള്ള ഭാഗം വിശേഷ സ്ഥൂലഭാഗമാകുന്നു. അതുപോലെ ‘ഞാൻ’ എന്നും ‘ഇത്’ എന്നും ഉള്ള ഭാഗം സാമാന്യസ്ഥൂലഭാഗമാകുന്നു.

Nitya Chaitanya Yati’s explains as follows: The statement, I am the body implies both the body and the consciousness of the body. The statement, ‘this is a pot’, implies both the pot and the consciousness of the pot. The consciousness is conditioned by the pot, and the pot is illuminated by conscious-ness. In these two statements ‘I’ and ‘this’ are generic, and ‘body’ and ‘pot’ are specific. The former represent the subject and the latter the object. This yields the four subdivisions of ‘wakeful consciousness

- Nitya Chaitanya Yati explains gross wakeful consciousness subdivisions

- (a) Gross general consciousness
- (b) Gross general basic consciousness
- (c) Gross specific consciousness
- (d) Gross specific basic consciousness

- Sthūla-bhāna explained, integrating subjective perception with objective reality

The third verse of the Darsanamala explains the concept of Sthūla-bhāna (concrete appearance) using two examples, while the fourth verse distinguishes its general and specific aspects. While physical science considers the observable world as the universe, a Vedantin's view of the universe includes the observer and their perceptual experience. This perception is internal and subjective, contrasting with the external, objective nature of the observed phenomena. Our experience of the universe is a unified blend of these subjective and objective realities. It is equally true to say that we perceive objective forms by transforming them into subjective experiences, and that we project our subjective, conceptual forms externally, treating them as objective.

- External concrete appearance is consciousness manifesting via specific objects

From an objective standpoint, the universe is a collection of distinct (specific) objects. Taking one such object, 'this pot,' as an example: the pot is a concrete entity. When consciousness manifests by relying on this concrete object, it becomes the external aspect of concrete appearance. It's not the pot itself that is called concrete appearance, but rather the experience 'this is a pot.' This is the external side of concrete appearance, with the external pot serving as its foundation. In the experience 'this is a pot,' both the appearance (*bhāna*) and its basis (*bhānāśraya*) have a general and a specific aspect. Here, the general and specific are viewed more subtly than in ordinary distinctions between objects; they relate to the very acts of manifestation within consciousness.

- Recognising objects involves general 'this' and specific 'pot.'

In everyday objects, like the relationship between a forest and a tree, the forest is general, and the tree is specific. Similarly, 'potness' is general amongst many pots, while an individual pot is specific. However, the general and specific discussed here relate to two aspects of the process of recognising any object or fact as 'this is that.' If someone says 'this' in isolation, it conveys no clear meaning to the listener, only the sense that something is being referred to. For 'this' to gain clarity, the specific object it denotes must be named, for example, 'this pot.' Here, the general experience of 'this' acquires the specific form of 'pot.' The Guru therefore indicates that every



understanding of concrete objects, such as ‘this pot’ or ‘this picture,’ contains both a general concrete appearance (e.g., ‘this’) and a specific concrete appearance (e.g., ‘pot’).

Furthermore, this concrete world is experienced by each individual, each ‘I’. As part of the physical universe, the ‘I’ also takes on a concrete form: ‘I am the body.’ This is often referred to as ‘Dehoham Buddhi’, the notion of identifying oneself with the physical body. The *bhāna* (appearance) that leads to this identification is what is being discussed here. If one merely says ‘I,’ it provides no clear meaning, only a general awareness that the speaker is referring to themselves. Clarity emerges when ‘am the body’ is added. Since ‘body’ provides specificity to the general notion of ‘I,’ the Guru points out that in the concrete appearance related to oneself, ‘I’ is the general aspect, and ‘body’ is the specific aspect. This distinction between general and specific applies even in broader categories. For instance, while a tree is specific and a forest is general in a conventional sense, if one experiences ‘this is a forest,’ then ‘this’ is general and ‘forest’ is specific. Therefore, it is crucial not to confuse the general and specific classifications in formal logic with those pertaining to the ‘bhanas’ (appearances) in Vedantic philosophy.

• ‘I am body’ illustrates general ‘I’ and specific ‘body’.

2.2.1.5 Verse 5

ഇന്ദ്രിയാണി മനോബുദ്ധീ
 വിഷയാൽ പഞ്ചവായഃ
 ഭാസ്യന്തേ യേന തത് സൂക്ഷ്മ-
 മസ്യ സൂക്ഷ്മാശ്രയതാതഃ

Indriyāṇi manobuddhī
 Viṣayāl pañcavāyaḥ
 Bhāsyante yena tat sūkṣma-
 Masya sūkṣmāśrayatvataḥ

The senses, mind, intellect, interest items,
 And the five vitai tendencies,
 By what is made conscious, this is known as the subtle
 Because of dependence on the subtle.

ഇന്ദ്രിയാണി	=	ശ്രോത്രാദി ഇന്ദ്രിയങ്ങളും
മനോബുദ്ധീ	=	മനസ്സും ബുദ്ധിയും
വിഷയാഃ	=	ഇവയുടെയെല്ലാം വിഷയങ്ങളും
പഞ്ചവായഃ	=	പ്രാണാദി പഞ്ചവായുക്കളും

യേന ഭാസ്യന്തേ = യാതൊന്നു മുഖാന്തിരം ഭാനം ചെയ്യുന്നുവോ
 തത് സൂക്ഷ്മം = അതു സൂക്ഷ്മഭാനമാകുന്നു.
 അസ്യ സൂക്ഷ്മാശ്രയ = സൂക്ഷ്മത്തെ ആശ്രയിച്ചുള്ളതാ
 ത്വതഃ = അത് എന്നുള്ളതുകൊണ്ട്.

അന്തഃകരണങ്ങളും, അവയുടെ എല്ലാ വിഷയങ്ങളും, അവയെയെല്ലാം പോഷിപ്പിക്കുന്ന പഞ്ചവായുക്കളും ഒക്കെ യാതൊന്നു മുഖാന്തരം ഭാനം ചെയ്യുന്നുവോ അതാണ് സൂക്ഷ്മഭാനം. കാരണം, അതു സൂക്ഷ്മമായതിനെയാണ് ആശ്രയമാക്കുന്നത്.

As per Nitya Chaitanya Yati's opinion Guru investigates the state of subtle or 'inner' consciousness. Dream is a state which is purely subtle (sūkṣma) without any interference from the gross (sthala), 1 Hence this is referred to as the dream state of consciousness. When we say, 'this is knowledge of a pot', the object of consciousness is no longer gross but subtle, Here Guru distinguishes between the recognition of the tree and the recognition of the awareness of (vriili) the tree. In both cases, though, the recognition itself is bhand (consciousness) as opposed to the bhanaśraya (basic consciousness) of each, which is the concrete tree and the subtle vrtti respectively. If I have a doubt, it is in my mind, not out-side. To that which the doubt pertains, that is the basic ground of it. The doubt itself is the consciousness generated by the ground of it.

• Guru investigates subtle consciousness, like dreams, distinguishing knowledge of object versus awareness.

In the subtle consciousness and the subtle basic consciousness each has a general aspect and a specific aspect. This yields the four subdivisions of 'dram consciousness':

- (a) Subtle general consciousness
- (b) Subtle general basic consciousness
- (c) subtle specific consciousness
- (d) Subtle specific basic consciousness

In the Bhana Darshanam, the universe is essentially perceived as an appearance within a singular consciousness. Having already explored the components of gross universal experience in earlier verses, it becomes clear that the universe isn't just a collection of visible forms. Crucially, each individual generates an internal conceptualisation or impression of these forms, and it is this internal representation that constitutes their personal experience of the universe. The question of

• Subtle consciousness subdivisions, with universe as subjective internal appearance

whether this internal, experiential universe precisely mirrors the external, visible one remains unanswerable, but it is undeniable that one’s subjective experience is an integral part of their understanding of the world. Moreover, there’s no certainty that one person’s experiential universe is identical to another’s.

• Sūkṣma-bhāna:
consciousness
manifesting via
subjective subtle
aspects

This subjective aspect of experience is shaped by the senses, their respective objects (sound, touch, sight, taste, smell), the mind, the intellect, and the five vital breaths (Pranas) that constantly animate them. The mind’s role is to raise questions like ‘What is this?’, while the intellect finds answers, often by drawing on memories stored in the ‘Chitta’ (mind-stuff). Once certainty is achieved, the ‘Ahamkara’ (ego) integrates this knowledge with one’s personal likes and dislikes. Together, the mind, intellect, Chitta, and ego constitute the Antahkaraṇas (internal organs), though here they are simplified to just mind and intellect. The five Pranas (Prana, Apana, Vyana, Udana, Samana), each with varying interpretations among scholars, collectively form the subtle aspect of individual existence. When the singular consciousness manifests by relying on these subtle aspects of the individual self, it is known as Sūkṣma-bhāna (subtle appearance).

2.2.1.6 Verse 6

അജോ/ഹമിതി യദ് ഭാനം
തത് കാരണമുദാഹൃതം
അത്രാഹമിതി സാമാന്യം
വിശേഷോ/ജ്ഞ ഇതി സ്പുരത്.

Ajo’hamiti yad bhānaṃ
Tat kāraṇamudāhṛtaṃ
Atrāhamiti sāmānyaṃ
Viśeṣo’jña iti sphurat.

‘I am ignorant’ - such a consciousness
Is said to be the causal.
Here, that aspect which stands for ‘I’ is the generic,
And ‘ignorant’ is its specific attribute.

അഹം അജ്ഞഃ	=	ഞാൻ അജ്ഞനാണ്
ഇതി ഭാനം യദ്	=	എന്നുള്ള ഭാനം യാതൊന്നാണോ
തത് കാരണം	=	അത് കാരണഭാനം
ഇതി ഉദാഹരണം	=	എന്നു പറയപ്പെടുന്നു.
അത്ര	=	ഇവിടെ (ഇതിൽ)

അഹം ഇതി	=	ഞാൻ എന്ന്
സ്ഫുരൽ യത്	=	സ്ഫുരിക്കുന്നത് യാതൊന്നോ
തത് സാമാന്യം	=	അതു സാമാന്യഭാവമാണ്.
അജ്ഞഃ ഇതി	=	അജ്ഞൻ എന്ന് (ഒന്നും അറിയുന്നില്ല എന്ന്)
സ്ഫുരൽ യത്	=	സ്ഫുരിക്കുന്നത് യാതൊന്നോ
തത് വിശേഷഃ	=	അത് വിശേഷഭാവവും ആണ്.

‘ഞാൻ അജ്ഞനാണ്’ (ഞാൻ ഒന്നും അറിയുന്നില്ല) എന്ന തരത്തിലുള്ള ഭാവം ആണ് കാരണഭാവം. ഇതിൽ ‘ഞാൻ’ എന്ന തരത്തിൽ തെളിയുന്ന ബോധം സാമാന്യഭാവമാണ്. ‘ഒന്നും അറിയുന്നില്ല’ എന്നുള്ളത് വിശേഷഭാവവും ആകുന്നു.

• Unconsciousness: knowledge in seed state, as in deep sleep

The sixth verse deals with that state where you are unaware of what is happening and what is to happen. This describes the unconscious-ness, where knowledge of all things remains in a seed state. In its purest form this state is experienced as deep dreamless sleep.

When things are in a seed state, we cannot know all the elaborations which can come. Thus saying, ‘I do not know’ or ‘I am ignorant’ is representative of this causal consciousness. Here ‘T’ is the general subject, and ‘ignorant’ is the specific attribute. There are four subdivisions of ‘causal consciousness’:

• Causal consciousness: seed state, ignorance, general ‘I’ and specific ‘ignorant’

- (a) Causal general consciousness
- (b) Causal general basic consciousness
- (c) Causal specific consciousness
- (d) Causal specific basic consciousness

• Kāraṇa Bhāna: foundational, unmanifest causal consciousness experienced in deep sleep

When we speak of ‘Kāraṇa Bhāna’ (Causal Appearance), we’re not referring to everyday ignorance, or even the general spiritual ignorance of non-Vedantins. Instead, it denotes a causal consciousness that gives rise to both gross and subtle appearances. This is a foundational awareness whose true nature remains unknown because it itself does not manifest. It is the underlying knowledge from which gross and subtle manifestations emerge. This concept is directly experienced in our state of deep sleep (Sushupti). Upon waking, we often describe having ‘slept soundly without knowing anything.’ Crucially, during deep sleep, we were not aware of being in that state or of knowing nothing. It is only after waking that we realise we were in a state of unknowing, accompanied by an unconscious sense of comfort.

- ‘Ajnjo’ham’ is post-sleep causal consciousness, foundational for experience

The ‘Ajnjo’ham’ (I am ignorant) bhāna, in this context, does not occur during the deep sleep state itself, but rather *after* waking. It is within this core, unknowing consciousness of our own being that new experiences begin to form upon awakening. This state is termed ‘Kāraṇa Bhāna’ because it represents the ignorance that serves as the foundation for all specific experiences. Consider water, which can appear as both subtle steam and gross ice. Similarly, this causal consciousness, though unmanifest, holds the potential for all gross and subtle forms. It’s not entirely devoid of experience either, as implied by the phrase ‘slept soundly,’ suggesting an unconscious comfort, a bliss of unknowing.

- Turīya is luminous consciousness beyond ignorance, dissolving all differentiation

Shankara describes deep sleep as a state where the causal consciousness is veiled by ‘avidya’ (ignorance). When this veil is removed, and the luminous nature of consciousness shines forth, merging with it creates the experience of Turīya (the Absolute). Turīya is not an awareness of differentiation, but rather a state where all distinct experiences dissolve not into darkness, but into a clear, unconditioned light, the pure consciousness or Ātman itself. Within this ‘Kāraṇa Bhāna’, there exists a general aspect (‘I’) and a specific aspect (‘ignorant’). Saying ‘I’ merely hints at a subject, making it general. Adding ‘ignorant’ specifies the nature of that ‘I’, making it particular. Thus, Kāraṇa Bhāna also comprises general causal appearance and specific causal appearance. The underlying basis for both is a profound, unmanifest darkness, often described as ‘the profound darkness of ignorance’, whose true nature remains beyond explicit description.

2.2.1.7 Verse 7

അഹം ബ്രഹ്മേതി യദ് ഭാനം
തദ്യമിതി ശംസ്യതേ
സാമാന്യമഹമിത്യംശോ
ബ്രഹ്മേതത്ര വിശിഷ്യതേ

Ahaṃ brahmeti yad bhānaṃ
Turyamiti śaṃsyate
Sāmānyamahamitīyaṃśo
Brahmetatra viśiṣyate

Where consciousness exists, there the object
Of consciousness exists; where
Consciousness exists not, neither does its Object.
Thus both by agreement and difference certitude comes.

അഹം ബ്രഹ്മ ഇതി	=	ഞാൻ ബ്രഹ്മമാണ് എന്ന തരത്തിലുള്ള
ഭാനം യത്	=	ഭാനം യാതൊന്നാണോ
തത് തുര്യം	=	അത് തുരീയഭാനമാണ് (അതാണ് തുരീയ ഭാനം)
ഇതി ശംസ്യതേ	=	എന്ന് പ്രശംസിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു
അത്ര	=	ഇവിടെ (ഇതിൽ)
അഹം ഇതി അംശഃ	=	ഞാൻ എന്നുള്ള അംശം
സാമാന്യം	=	സാമാന്യ തുരീയ ഭാനമാകുന്നു.
ബ്രഹ്മ ഇതി അംശഃ	=	ബ്രഹ്മം എന്നുള്ള അംശം
വിശേഷ്യതേ	=	വിശേഷതുരീയഭാനം ആകുന്നു

‘ഞാൻ ബ്രഹ്മമാണ്’ എന്ന തരത്തിലുള്ള ഭാനം തുരീയഭാനം എന്ന് പ്രശംസിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. ഇതിൽ ‘ഞാൻ’ എന്നുള്ള അംശം സാമാന്യ തുരീയഭാനവും ‘ബ്രഹ്മം’ എന്നുള്ള അംശം വിശേഷതുരീയഭാനവുമാകുന്നു.

The concept of God is not God-realization. The consciousness of sugar is not itself sweet in your mouth. Similarly consciousness of the Absolute is not the realization of Absolute consciousness. Here the knowledge of the Absolute is not Absolute knowledge in the sense that ultimately Knowing is Being, and Being is Knowing. When we say, ‘I am the Absolute’, ‘T’ remains the general subject, and ‘Absolute’ is its specific attribute. As in the case of the other three states of consciousness, ‘transcendental consciousness’ has four subdivisions:

• Consciousness of Absolute isn't Absolute consciousness, knowing is being

- (a) Transcendental general consciousness
- (b) Transcendental general basic consciousness
- (c) Transcendental specific consciousness
- (d) Transcendental specific basic consciousness

In this verse, the Guru presents the Turīya (Absolute) as a Bhāna (appearance), similar to the concrete, subtle, and causal. This approach differs from typical Vedanta texts, where Turīya is often seen not as an appearance, but as the pure, non-dual experience of unmanifest consciousness. The term ‘Turīya’ simply means ‘the fourth’. In the context of states of consciousness, it follows the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states. In the context of appearances, it comes after the concrete, subtle, and causal appearances. Turīya is ultimately undefinable, yet its existence necessitates some understanding of its nature.

• Guru presents Turīya as appearance, distinct from other Vedantic views

• Turīya: ineffable, non-dual, peaceful Self to be known

• 'I' is general, 'Brahman' is specific in Turīya Bhāna

The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad attempts to describe this ineffable state. It characterises Turīya as beyond internal or external awareness, not a mass of consciousness, nor knowable or unknowable. It is unseen, inexpressible, incomprehensible, without distinguishing marks, unthinkable, and unnamable. Turīya is the essence of the singular Self-consciousness, where all phenomena subside. It is peaceful, auspicious, and non-dual. This is the Self that is to be known.

When one merely says 'I', it creates a general, indistinct awareness in the listener, as it simply indicates an intention to speak about oneself. This is what the Guru refers to as Sāmānya Turīya Bhāna (General Absolute Appearance). However, when 'Brahman' is added, as in 'Ahaṁ Brahma' (I am Brahman), the intended meaning becomes clear. The general 'I' now acquires a specific quality, making 'Brahman' here the Viśeṣa Turīya Bhāna (Specific Absolute Appearance). Both these aspects manifest within the one, ultimate consciousness.

2.2.1.8 Verse 8

യത്ര ഭാനം തത്ര ഭാസ്യം
 ഭാനം യത്ര ന തത്ര
 ന ഭാസ്യമിത്യവയേനാപി
 വ്യതിരേകേണ ബോധ്യതേ

Yatra bhānaṁ tatra bhāsyam
 bhānaṁ yatra na tatra na
 bhāsyāmityanvayanāpi
 vyatirekeṇa bodhyate

'Wherever there is consciousness (or appearance), there indeed is the object of consciousness (or that which appears).

Wherever there is no consciousness, there indeed is no object of consciousness.

This is understood both by positive concomitance and by negative concomitance.'

- യത്ര ഭാനം (വർത്തതേ) = എവിടെയാണോ ഭാനം ഉള്ളത്
- തത്ര ഭാസ്യം (വർത്തതേ) = അവിടെ ഭാസ്യം ഉണ്ടാവും.
- ഭാനം യത്ര ന (വർത്തതേ) = എവിടെയാണോ ഭാനം ഇല്ലാത്തത്
- തത്ര ഭാസ്യം ന (വർത്തതേ) = അവിടെ ഭാസ്യം ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കുകയില്ല.
- ഇതി = ഇപ്രകാരം



അനായേന വ്യതിരേ = അനായബുദ്ധികൊണ്ടും വ്യതി
 കേണ അപി = രേകബുദ്ധികൊണ്ടും
 ബോധ്യതേ = വെളിപ്പെടുന്നു.

എവിടെ ഭാനമുണ്ടോ അവിടെ ഭാസ്യമുണ്ടായിരിക്കും. എവിടെ ഭാനമില്ലയോ അവിടെ ഭാസ്യവുമുണ്ടായിരിക്കയില്ല. ഇക്കാര്യം ഇപ്രകാരം അനായബുദ്ധികൊണ്ടും വ്യതിരേകബുദ്ധികൊണ്ടും വെളിപ്പെട്ടുകിട്ടുന്നു.

• Experience necessitates both experienced and experiencer

Guru gives us a method to apply for discerning the function of bhana (consciousness). When you experience something, there is that which is experienced (bhand), and there is your experience (bhasya). Wherever there is the experienced, there should also be the experience. Where there is no experience, the experienced is also not there.

• Inseparable connection between consciousness and its manifested object.

This verse explores the intimate relationship between bhāna (consciousness or appearance) and bhāsyā (the object of consciousness or that which appears). The Guru posits that the ultimate reality, which is pure consciousness, manifests as experiences in the concrete, subtle, causal, and absolute states. When consciousness manifests, something must inevitably be manifested, and that ‘something’ is the bhāsyā. The central idea here is the inseparable connection between the act of appearing and that which appears.

• Bhāna and bhāsyā’s unwavering connection through presence

The Guru asserts that ‘wherever there is bhāna, there is bhāsyā,’ and conversely, ‘wherever there is no bhāna, there is no bhāsyā.’ This unwavering connection between bhāna and bhāsyā can be confirmed through both positive concomitance (anvaya) and negative concomitance (vyatireka). In logic, positive concomitance refers to the presence of the effect wherever the cause is present. For example, ‘where there is smoke, there is fire’ demonstrates that the presence of smoke (cause) guarantees the presence of fire (effect). However, the converse (fire implying smoke) is not always true, as there can be fire without smoke.

To establish an unequivocal conclusion, both positive and negative concomitance are necessary. Negative concomitance (vyatireka) states that where the effect is absent, the cause is also absent. In our fire and smoke example, ‘where there is no fire, there is no smoke.’ When both ‘where there is bhāna, there is bhāsyā’ (anvaya) and ‘where there is no bhāna, there is no bhāsyā’ (vyatireka) are considered, the conclusion becomes unambiguous. Essentially, whenever the pure, unconditioned

- Bhāna and bhāsyā's inseparable connection, transcending to pure consciousness

truth manifests, the duality of 'bhāna' and 'bhāsyā' will always be present. The bhāsyā is akin to the object of knowledge, while the bhāna is the knowledge arising in the knower. Their relationship is one of inseparable connection; one cannot exist without the other. The subsequent verse will clarify that the absolute nature of pure consciousness, the Ātman, is not an object of knowledge. Whenever anything becomes an object of knowledge, the duality of subject and object (or bhāna and bhāsyā) emerges. Therefore, our path is to perceive these two facets of the activity of consciousness, bhāna and bhāsyā, as superimposed (adhyasta). Through contemplative insight, we can transcend this duality and abide solely in the ultimate, pure consciousness.

2.2.1.9 Verse 9

യഥാ ദൃശ്യശാത്മാനം
സ്വയമാത്മാ ന പശ്യതി
അതോ ന ഭാസ്യതേ ഹ്യാത്മാ
യം പശ്യതി സ ഭാസ്യതേ

Yathā dṛgyathātmānam
Svayamātmā na paśyati
Ato na bhāsyate hyātmā
Yaṁ paśyati sa bhāsyate

As with the eye which cannot see itself, so the Self does not see itself: Therefore indeed, the Self is not the object of Consciousness; That which the Self sees is the object of consciousness.

യഥാ	=	എപ്രകാരമാണോ
ദൃക് ദൃശം	=	ദൃക്ക് ദൃക്കിനെ
സ്വയം ന പശ്യതി	=	സ്വയം കാണാതിരിക്കുന്നത്
തഥാ	=	അതുപോലെ
ആത്മാ	=	ആത്മാവ്
ആത്മാനം	=	ആത്മാവിനെ
സ്വയം ന പശ്യതി	=	സ്വയം കാണുന്നില്ല.
അതഃ	=	അക്കാരണത്താൽ
ന ഭാസ്യതേ ഹി	=	ഭാഗത്തിന് വിഷയമാകുന്നില്ല തന്നെ.
ആത്മാ യം പശ്യതി	=	ആത്മാവ് യാതൊന്നിനെ അറിവിനു വിഷയമാക്കുന്നുവോ?
സ ഭസ്യതേ	=	അതേ ഭാസിക്കുന്നുള്ളൂ.



കണ്ണുകൊണ്ട് കണ്ണിനെത്തന്നെ കാണാൻ സാധിക്കുകയില്ല. അതുപോലെയാണ് ആത്മാവ് ആത്മാവിനെ അറിവിന് വിഷയമാക്കാത്തത്. അതുകൊണ്ട് തീരുമാനിക്കാം, ആത്മാവ് ഒരിക്കലും ഭാഗത്തിന് വിഷയമാകുകയില്ല എന്ന്. ഏതൊന്നാണോ അറിവിന് വിഷയമായിത്തീരുന്നത് അതേ ഭാസ്യമാകുന്നുള്ളൂ.

- Self is not object; all experiences are superimpositions

The eye cannot see the eye. Similarly the Self does not see itself, but the Self is never the object of experience. What is superimposed is *asat* (all six-teen states are superimpositions). When you say, 'I am ignorant, that is a superimposition on consciousness. Even 'I am the Absolute' is a superimposition on consciousness. That is why it is said in the *upaniṣads*, 'He who says he knows does not know'.

- Ātman's manifestation creates objects, but Ātman isn't an object

We have established that where there is *bhāna* (consciousness or appearance), there is *bhāsyā* (the object of consciousness), and where *bhāna* is absent, *bhāsyā* is also absent. All experiences occur within consciousness, specifically when consciousness, or the *Ātman* (Self), manifests. Each experience relates to something, and that 'something' becomes the object of consciousness through the act of manifestation. Thus, all objects are manifested by the *Ātman's* act of appearance. However, can the *Ātman* itself become an object of its own manifestation? No. This verse explores how this is so.

- Self-truth is non-dual, not an object of perception

Just as the eye can see everything but itself, consciousness, or the *Chidmātra-satta* (pure conscious existence), cannot be an object of its own perception. When the eye sees objects, there is a duality of seer and seen. Similarly, when conscious existence is engaged in the act of appearance, there is a distinction between the subject and the object, or the knower and the known. We have already understood that this *Chidmātra-satta* is the ultimate truth. The goal of seeking truth in Vedānta is to realise this *Ātman*. But how is this Self-truth to be known? Is it an object that can be sought out and known? No, it does not manifest as an object. Just as the eye cannot perceive itself, the *Ātman* does not become an object for itself. When we say 'the Self knows itself,' it implies 'I know myself.' While I can directly know myself, there is no duality of a 'knowing I' and a 'known I'. Instead, Self-knowledge is a non-dual experience where the knower and the known merge into pure, singular consciousness.

The next verse will explain how this differs from objects knowable by consciousness. The emphasis here is that the

- Ātman's self-knowledge: non-dual experience, not objectification.

Ātman does not manifest as an object. This does not mean that Self-knowledge is impossible or not a goal. Consciousness does not become an object for itself. Yet, what happens when it is known? The distinction between knowing consciousness and known consciousness vanishes, leaving only the fullness of awareness. This is not mere knowledge but an experience. As the Guru states in his work 'Arivu' (Knowledge), 'Knowledge knows not itself; when known, the two become one.' The Guru further elaborates on the nature of this vision of the Self, which transcends the duality of subject and object, in the subsequent verse.

- Ātman's manifestation creates objects, but Ātman cannot be its own object

In Bhana Darshanam, we learn that all experiences occur within consciousness (bhāna), specifically when the Ātman (Self) manifests. Every experience is about something, and that 'something' becomes the object of consciousness (bhāsyā) through the act of manifestation. Thus, all objects are ultimately manifested by the Ātman's power of appearance. This raises a crucial question: can the Ātman itself become an object of its own perception? The answer, as presented in this verse, is no. This concept is likened to the eye, which can perceive everything external to it but cannot see itself. Similarly, conscious existence (Chidmātra-satta), which is the ultimate reality, cannot be an object of its own awareness. When consciousness engages in the act of perception, a duality of subject and object (or knower and known) is inherently present. However, the Ātman's self-realisation transcends this duality.

- Ātman realisation: non-dual, knowing-being merger

The objective of seeking truth in Vedanta is to realise this Ātman, but it's not something to be sought or known as an external object. Just as the eye cannot perceive itself, the Ātman does not become an object for itself. When we say 'the Self knows itself,' it signifies a direct, non-dual experience where the 'knowing I' and the 'known I' are not separate entities. Instead, the knower and the known merge into pure, singular consciousness, resulting in an Advaita (non-dual) experience. This is distinct from our ordinary knowledge of objects. The emphasis here is that the Ātman, as the ultimate subject, does not manifest as an object of perception. This doesn't suggest that Self-knowledge is impossible or not the goal; rather, it indicates that it is a different kind of knowing, an experience where the distinction between knowing and known dissolves, leaving only the profound fullness of Awareness (Arivu). As Guru himself states, 'Knowledge knows not itself; when known, the two become one,' highlighting a direct, non-dual

realisation that goes beyond the subject-object dichotomy.

In short, Guru denotes the transcendental nature of the Self.

2.2.1.10 Verse 10

യദ് ഭാസ്യതേ തദധ്യസ്തം
 അനധ്യസ്തം ഭാസ്യതേ
 യദധ്യസ്തം തദസദ്-
 പ്യനധ്യസ്തം സദേവ തത്

Yad bhāsyate tadadhyastam
 Anadhyastam na bhāsyate
 Yadadhyastam tadasad-
 Apyanadhyastam sadeva tat

What is the object of consciousness, that is
 Conditioned. What is the unconditioned consciousness
 That is not the object of consciousness. What Is
 conditioned is non-existent:
 But what is Unconditioned, itself the existent is That.

യദ് ഭാസ്യതേ	=	യാതൊന്നു ഭാസ്യമാകുന്നുവോ
തത് അധ്യസ്തം	=	അത് അധ്യസ്തമാണ്.
യദ് അനധ്യസ്തം	=	അധ്യസ്തമല്ലാത്തത് യാതൊന്നോ
തത് ന ഭാസ്യതേ	=	അത് ഭാസ്യമാകുന്നില്ല.
യദ് അധ്യസ്തം	=	യാതൊന്നാണോ അധ്യസ്തമായിട്ടുള്ളത്
തത് അസത്	=	അത് അസത്താണ്.
അപി യദ് അനധ്യസ്തം	=	എന്നാൽ അനധ്യസ്തമായി യാതൊന്നുണ്ടോ
തത് ഏവ സത്	=	അതുതന്നെയാണ് സത് അഥവാ പരമാത്മ സത്യം

യാതൊന്നാണോ ഭാസ്യമാകുന്നത് അത് അധ്യസ്തമാണ്. അധ്യസ്തമല്ലാത്ത യാതൊന്നുണ്ടോ അതു ഭാസ്യമാകുന്നില്ല. അധ്യസ്തമായിട്ടുള്ള ഏതും അസത്താണ്. എന്നാൽ അധ്യസ്തമല്ലാത്തതായി യാതൊരു പരമാത്മസത്യമുണ്ടോ അതു തന്നെയാണ് സത് അഥവാ അതു മാത്രമാണ് ഉള്ളത്.

• Unconditioned Self is the sole existent substratum

What is the substratum that alone is existent? What is seen by the Ātman (Self) we call bhana. It comes under the vision of the Self. The visible world or world of your experience (bhana) is the world superimposed on the pure Self. What is not possible

to be encompassed in the vast realm of bhana that is the Absolute; that is the Self. That alone, which is unconditioned, Existent That Is (Tat Sat).

- Ātman's manifestation as experiences, its unknowable object status, and its self-realisation

We have established that the ultimate truth, or Ātman, is pure consciousness. This fundamental reality, often called Chid Vastu (conscious substance), is the primal cause manifesting everything. Like a bee's ceaseless wing movements, this Chid Vastu is constantly in flux, leading to the appearances (bhānas) of all experiences in the concrete, subtle, causal, and absolute states, along with their general and specific aspects. The previous verse indicated that the Ātman, as pure conscious substance, does not manifest as an object of knowledge. This raises the question: how then can the Ātman be known, or is it unknowable? How does self-realisation occur without the Self becoming an object? This pivotal verse, central to the Darsanamala, addresses precisely this. It inquires into the nature of the ultimate existent, which we can also call Sat Vastu (existent reality), given that Chid Vastu is the absolute truth.

- Superimposition: mistaking temporary form for underlying reality.

The Guru explains this concept using the well-known Vedantic notion of Adhyāsa (superimposition). Shankara defines Adhyāsa as 'Atasmin tad buddhiḥ,' meaning 'the mistaken notion of apprehending something as that which it is not.' To illustrate, consider a lamp. The underlying reality is the metal (e.g., bronze). Only the bronze truly exists. The lamp's form is merely a temporary shape given to the bronze. As a distinct 'lamp' object, it doesn't truly exist; it is asat (non-existent in its own right, yet appears to exist). The bronze, however, is sat (existent). The form of the lamp is superimposed onto the reality of the bronze, leading us to mistakenly perceive the lamp as real while overlooking the bronze. Thus, the lamp is adhyasta (superimposed).

- Unseen bronze is unsuperimposed, fundamental essence, unlike conditioned objects.

The bronze is the underlying reality present in all its forms, like a lamp, a pitcher, or a bowl. Can we perceive the bronze simply as bronze, apart from these specific forms? No, when we see it, it always has some temporary, superimposed form. Although the bronze is unseen in its pure form, it cannot be said to be non-existent; without it, the lamp or pitcher wouldn't exist. This unseen bronze is anadhyasta (unsuperimposed). It is the fundamental essence pervading all superimposed forms. The verse concludes that whatever is an object of consciousness is conditioned and thus superimposed. Conversely, what is unconditioned consciousness is not an object of consciousness. What is conditioned is non-existent (in its ultimate reality), but what is unconditioned is the true existent.

Summarized Overview

Sreenarayana Guru's Darsanamala, a monumental philosophical work composed in Sanskrit in 1916, offers a systematic and profound exploration of ultimate reality across ten distinct chapters, each termed a 'darshana' or vision. The fifth chapter, Bhana Darshanam (The Vision of Appearance), occupies a central position within Darsanamala. It builds upon the foundational understanding that the Ātman (Self) is the singular, all-pervading Reality, essentially Cit (Consciousness) or Arivu (Knowledge). The Guru posits that this consciousness, without undergoing any intrinsic transformation, manifests itself as the entirety of existence. This self-manifestation of the Ātman presents two apparent aspects: the subjective (internal) and the objective (external) worlds. Consequently, both the world of 'knowledge' (our internal experiences) and the world of 'the known' (the external phenomena) are fundamentally manifestations of this same underlying consciousness.

Bhāna, literally meaning 'to become luminous' or 'to shine forth', is defined as a specific conscious experience that arises when the essential consciousness becomes conditioned. The Guru elucidates the structure of this *bhāna* in various contexts throughout his teachings. In the Darsanamala's fifth chapter, it is presented as any discernible aspect of the incessant shining process occurring within Cit. This process is dual: on one hand, consciousness shines inwardly, giving rise to subjective experiences and forming the world of mental images – our internal realm of 'knowledge'.

Conversely, consciousness also shines outwardly, creating the objective world – the realm of 'the known'. While both these internal and external manifestations are crucial to understanding reality, Bhana Darshanam primarily focuses on the objective dimension, exploring how the world of perceivable objects appears to us. Subsequent discussions, particularly in the following chapters, delve deeper into the subjective aspects of consciousness and its relation to the ultimate truth, providing a holistic understanding of how the unconditioned, non-dual reality expresses itself as the diverse universe we experience. In fact, we can say Bhana darsana is exclusive for Sree Narayana Guru. No other Acharyas of Advaita Vedanta gave such importance to Bhana aspect. In Darsanamala Guru included one separate chapter for Bhana itself, because all worldly appearances are caused by bhana.



Assignments

1. What was the historical context and the main motivation behind Sreenarayana Guru's composition of the Darsanamala in Sanskrit, despite having expressed his philosophy in Malayalam earlier?
2. In the context of Bhana Darshanam, explain what 'Bhāna' literally means and how it functions as the self-manifestation of 'Cit' or 'Arivu' (Consciousness).
3. How does Sreenarayana Guru's concept of 'yugapat-sṛṣṭi-vāda' (instantaneous creation) challenge or align with other theories of cosmic and spiritual evolution, as mentioned in the text?
4. According to Darsanamala, why is the Ātman (Self) not considered an 'object of consciousness' that can be perceived in the same way as external phenomena?
5. Discuss how the Darsanamala's unique structure of ten distinct 'darśanas' (viewpoints) addresses the difficulty of directly describing a non-dual reality.
6. How does the Darsanamala reconcile the roles of Brahma, Vishnu, and Śiva within the framework of a singular, non-dual Ultimate Reality?
7. What is the core idea of Bhana Darshanam regarding the relationship between the entire universe and consciousness?
8. How does the text suggest that the Darsanamala guides a serious student towards 'personal realisation' of the ultimate truth?

UNIT 3

Analysis of the Ultimate Goal of Human Life in Darsanamala

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this unit, learners should be able to:

- identify the different classifications of Pure and Impure Nirvāṇa, including the levels of Brahmavit (knower of Brahman) within the Supremely Pure category
- articulate why the Guru considers the pursuit of ‘siddhis’ (spiritual powers) as an impure form of Nirvāṇa and how this perspective contrasts with general understanding
- describe the ultimate state of emancipation as an Advaitic (non-dual) experience, where mental modifications cease and there is no return to duality
- relate the concept of Nirvāṇa in Darsanamala to the Upaniṣadic journey from world creation to the individual’s experiential absorption in Brahman

Background

The Darsanamala, Sreenarayana Guru’s profound philosophical work, systematically guides the spiritual seeker through ten distinct ‘darśanas’ or visions towards the ultimate truth. The second half of this treatise, commencing from the sixth chapter, progressively reveals how an individual can realise their intrinsic unity with the Absolute in a graded manner. This journey begins with understanding oneness at the most concrete level of actions (karma), gradually advancing through more refined and internalised realms of knowledge (jñāna), devotional contemplation (bhakti), and the disciplined practices of yoga. This culminates in the tenth chapter, which focuses on Nirvāṇa, the ultimate state of emancipation.

The term Nirvāṇa literally signifies ‘becoming burned out’ or extinguished. In the context of life, it refers to the cessation of the individual’s existence, akin to a fire burning out upon death. This raises the fundamental question: into where does this ‘life-fire’ disappear? The Darsanamala posits that it dissolves back into the source Reality from which it emerged. This ultimate source has been progressively defined throughout the earlier chapters: it was introduced as Parameśvara (the Supreme God) in Chapter 1, elaborated as Sat-Cit-Ānanda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) in Chapter



2, conceptualised as the unchanging Substance underlying the world's appearance in Chapter 3 (like the stone in a śivalinga), understood as the goal to be attained by negating Māyā and its effects in Chapter 4, and presented as the singular, unconditioned 'Sat' (Existence) in Chapter 5.

For those conversant with the Darsanamala's philosophical journey, the 'problem of the hereafter' does not arise, as birth, life, and death are merely phases of appearance and disappearance. These are seen as analogous to individual waves emerging, rolling, and eventually merging back into the vast ocean of 'Sat' or 'Ātman', terms variously used in the initial chapters to denote the Absolute. No new entity is truly born when a wave appears, and nothing fundamentally perishes when it subsides. Waves are simply transient forms arising from the ocean's inherent creative impulse. Similarly, the Ātman or Brahman possesses an intrinsic creative urge that gives rise to the appearance and disappearance of all specific forms. The Nirvāṇa discussed in this concluding chapter is therefore comparable to the complete re-absorption of these waves into the boundless being of the ocean, signifying the individual's ultimate dissolution back into the universal Brahman.

Keywords

Nirvāṇa, Vāsanās, Śuddham, Aśuddham, Nivṛtti, Brahmavit, Siddhis, Advaitic

Discussion

- Nirvāṇa, as Mokṣa, extinguishes suffering through Advaitic oneness

The concept of Nirvāṇa is synonymous with Mokṣa, or Final Liberation, a common concluding theme in many Vedānta textbooks. Nirvāṇa, in this sense, represents the state where all suffering inherent in phenomenal existence becomes extinguished. Therefore, Sreenarayana Guru, by concluding his work with Nirvāṇa, remains consistent with the customary trajectory of Vedantic philosophy, despite the term 'Nirvāṇa' being more widely associated with Buddhist canons. His usage aligns with the Advaitic goal of extinguishing duality and suffering through the realisation of ultimate oneness with the Absolute.

- Nirvāṇa for Guru means merging with Absolute while living, unlike physical death.

The concept of Nirvāṇa (emancipation), while widely recognised through terms like parinirvāṇa and mahā-parinirvāṇa in Buddhist thought, particularly in reference to the final extinction of the individual or the passing of an enlightened being like Buddha, receives a distinct interpretation in Sreenarayana Guru's Darsanamala. Here, Nirvāṇa is

fundamentally detached from the act of physical death. Instead, it is conceived as a profound experiential state achieved during life – an individual’s conscious merging with the Absolute while still embodied. This distinguishes it from the Vedantic concept of videhamukti (liberation after death), aligning it more closely with jīvanmukti (liberation while living).

- Nirvāṇa: experiential unity, ultimate goal, synonymous with various liberation terms

This state of profound experiential unity, referred to as Nirvāṇa in Darsanamala, resonates with various terms found in the Upaniṣads, such as amṛtatva (immortality), śreyas (final beatitude), and bhūmā (the great). Across Indian philosophy, numerous other terms also describe this ultimate goal of life, including nirvṛtti (full contentment), nivṛtti (complete withdrawal), parama-gati (supreme goal), mukti (liberation), brahma-bhūyas (absolute identity with Brahman), and brahma-nirvāṇa (to become lost in Brahman).

- Guru’s Nirvāṇa: liberation while living, not physical death

In classifying these states of Nirvāṇa, the Guru’s approach is rooted in the concept of jīvan-mukta (liberated while living), a notion prevalent in both Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta and the Yoga-Vasiṣṭha. Crucially, the Darsanamala’s discussion of Nirvāṇa makes no reference to physical death, nor does it necessitate a differentiation between a philosophical ‘death’ attained in life and actual physical demise. Philosophically, the actual death of any being can be viewed as a ‘burning out’ process. However, for the enlightened few, this profound understanding means they do not need to await physical death to experience the absolute contentment of Nirvāṇa. For such individuals, every moment of their existence is a direct actualisation of the Nirvāṇa-experience, embodying a continuous, living state of emancipation.

2.3.1 Nirvāṇadarśanam

2.3.1.1 Verse 1

നിർവാണം ദിവ്യം ശുദ്ധ-
മശുദ്ധം ചേതി തത്ര യത്
ശുദ്ധം നിർവാസനം തദ-
ദശുദ്ധം വാസനാനിതം.

nirvāṇam dvividham śuddham
aśuddham ceti tatra yat
śuddham nirvāsanam tadvad
aśuddham vāsanānvitam



Emancipation is of two kinds, what is pure
 And what is impure. What is without
 Incipient memory factors, that is pure;
 Likewise what is qualified by incipient memory factors is
 impure.

നിർവാണം	=	നിർവാണം (മുക്തി)
ശുദ്ധം ച അശുദ്ധം	=	ശുദ്ധമെന്നും അശുദ്ധമെന്നും
ച ഇതി		
ദിവ്യം	=	രണ്ടു വിധത്തിൽ ഉണ്ട്.
തത്ര	=	അവയിൽ
യത് നിർവാസനം	=	യാതൊരു നിർവാണമാണോ വാസനാസഹിതമല്ലാത്തത്
തത് ശുദ്ധം	=	അതു ശുദ്ധനിർവാണമാണ്.
യത് വാസനാനിതം	=	യാതൊരു നിർവാണമാണോ വാസന യോടുകൂടിയത്
തദത്	=	അതുപോലെ
തത് അശുദ്ധം	=	അത് അശുദ്ധനിർവാണമാകുന്നു.

നിർവാണപ്രാപ്തിയെ ശുദ്ധമെന്നും അശുദ്ധമെന്നും രണ്ടായി തരം തിരിക്കാം. എല്ലാ വാസനകളും അടങ്ങിക്കഴിഞ്ഞിട്ടുള്ള നിർവാണമാണ് ശുദ്ധനിർവാണം. അതുപോലെ വാസനകളോടുകൂടിയിരിക്കുമ്പോഴുള്ള നിർവാണമാണ് അശുദ്ധനിർവാണം.

Emancipation is either pure or impure. Pure emancipation is free from incipient memory factors, while impure emancipation is qualified by them.

2.3.1.1.1 Understanding Pure and Impure Nirvana

The concept of Nirvana is presented with a crucial distinction: it can be either pure (Shuddha Nirvana) or impure (Ashuddha Nirvana). Pure Nirvana signifies a state where all Vasanas, deep-seated latent tendencies or memory factors, have entirely ceased, representing a complete and absolute liberation from ingrained desires. Conversely, impure Nirvana describes a state of liberation where these Vasanas still persist, indicating a less absolute freedom as subtle inclinations remain. Metaphorically, Nirvana is understood as the dissolution of the individual essence ('Vyakti Bhava') into the greater collective ('Samashti'). Just as different types of firewood burn distinctly based on moisture content and other characteristics, an individual's unique qualities and remaining Vasanas influence their experience of Nirvana and how their personal self merges with the universal.

• Nirvana: pure (no vasanas) or impure (vasanas persist)

2.3.1.1.2 The Path to Emancipation and Its Varied Forms

Pure Nirvana is devoid of Vasanas, while impure Nirvana is accompanied by them. Attaining the cessation of manifestation is not instantaneous; it requires a sustained journey along a spiritual path. This journey signifies that once committed, even if one is at the beginning, they are, in principle, already on the way to achieving their longing. Initially, we are seekers, possessing Vasanas, yet it is this same seeker who is destined to become the seer. Every interest revolves around a value rooted in the bliss (ananda) aspect of the Self. While obstructions to this bliss may exist, we sometimes become aware of a value and identify with it, momentarily experiencing joy and transcending the delusion of being an enjoyer. This state of identity, free from 'tri-basic prejudice' (tripuṭi), is known as nivr̥tti.

- Nirvana: pure (vasana-free) or impure (vasana-accompanied), journey to seeker becoming seer.

2.3.1.1.3 Nirvana in Life and After Death

The experience of Nirvana can occur either during one's lifetime or as the total extinction of the individual entity at death. The manner of achieving this state varies greatly among individuals: some require rigorous spiritual practices, others attain it through gentle means, and for a rare few, it seems to occur effortlessly. Despite these differences, the experience of Nirvana remains entirely personal and cannot be fully comprehended or even guessed by another. Some individuals in this state may appear to live normally, participating in worldly affairs, while others might live in complete detachment. When Nirvana is interpreted as the death of the individual, a prevailing belief in India suggests that those who achieve pure Nirvana are not reborn, whereas those who achieve impure Nirvana face rebirth. This aligns with the understanding that a person's Vasanas and actions impact those around them and genetically influence future generations, a concept the ancient seers likely grasped, leading to the theory of reincarnation. Just as receding waves lose their capacity to generate new ones, the state of rebirthless pure Nirvana signifies the complete cessation of such causative factors.

- Nirvana: personal experience, living or at death, influenced by Vasanas and rebirth.

2.3.1.2 Verse 2

അതിശുദ്ധം ശുദ്ധമിതി
ശുദ്ധം ച ദിവീധം തഥാ
അശുദ്ധശുദ്ധം ചാശുദ്ധ-
മശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധമുച്യതേ.



atīśuddham śuddham iti
 śuddham ca dvividham tathā
 aśuddha-śuddham cāśuddham
 aśuddhāśuddham ucyate

As pure and extra-pure, thus
 Are two kinds; likewise
 The impure also as pure-impure
 And impure-impure are spoken of.

• Narayana Guru's Classification of Nirvana

ശുദ്ധം ച	=	ശുദ്ധനിർവാണവും
അതിശുദ്ധം ശുദ്ധം	=	അതിശുദ്ധനിർവാണമെന്നും
ഇതി		ശുദ്ധനിർവാണമെന്നും
ദിവീധം	=	രണ്ടു വിധത്തിലുണ്ട്
തഥാ	=	അതുപോലെ
അശുദ്ധം ച	=	അശുദ്ധനിർവാണവും
അശുദ്ധശുദ്ധം,	=	അശുദ്ധ ശുദ്ധനിർവാണമെ
അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധം ഉച്യ		ന്നും, അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധനിർവാണ
തേ		മെന്നും രണ്ടുപ്രകാരം പറയ
		പ്പെടുന്നു.

ശുദ്ധനിർവാണവും, അതിശുദ്ധനിർവാണമെന്നും ശുദ്ധനിർവാണമെന്നും രണ്ടുവിധത്തിലുണ്ട്. അതുപോലെ തന്നെ, അശുദ്ധനിർവാണവും, അശുദ്ധശുദ്ധമെന്നും അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധമെന്നും രണ്ടുപ്രകാരമുള്ളതായി പറയാം.

Emancipation is categorised as pure and extra-pure. Similarly, the impure kind is divided into pure-impure and impure-impure.

• Guru's unique four-fold Nirvana classification

Narayana Guru's Darsanamala presents a unique and detailed classification of Nirvana (emancipation), expanding beyond the simple pure and impure dichotomy. According to the Guru, Pure Nirvana is further subdivided into two categories: Atishuddha Nirvana (Supremely Pure Nirvana) and Shuddha Nirvana (Pure Nirvana). Similarly, Impure Nirvana is also bifurcated into Ashuddhashuddha Nirvana (Impure-Pure Nirvana) and Ashuddhāshuddha Nirvana (Impure-Impure Nirvana). It's crucial to note that this specific categorisation of liberation, as articulated by Narayana Guru in this philosophical text, is not commonly found in ancient or traditional spiritual scriptures. This suggests a distinctive contribution and interpretation within his unique philosophical system, rather than a direct derivation from established classical Vedantic frameworks like the Yoga Vasistha's Sapta Bhumika (seven stages of knowledge).

- Pure Nirvana: vasana-free; Impure Nirvana: vasanas persist

2.3.1.2.1 The Nature of Pure and Impure States

The fundamental distinction between pure Nirvana and impure Nirvana lies in the presence or absence of Vasanas (incipient memory factors). Pure Nirvana is entirely free from Vasanas, signifying a complete cessation of deep-seated latent tendencies, while impure Nirvana is characterised by their persistence. Achieving the complete cessation of all manifestations is not an immediate process; it requires a prolonged journey along a spiritual path. As seekers, we possess Vasanas, yet it is this same ‘seeker’ who is destined to become the ‘seer’. Our every interest revolves around a value rooted in the bliss (ananda) aspect of the Self. When we identify with such a value, we momentarily experience joy, transcending the delusion of being an enjoyer. This state of identity, free from ‘tri-basic prejudice’ (tripuṭi), is known as nivṛtti.

2.3.1.2.2 Guru’s Original Contribution to Nirvana Classification

The Guru’s detailed classification of Nirvana as ‘pure’ (subdivided into pure and extra-pure) and ‘impure’ (divided into pure-impure and impure-impure) is considered an original conceptualisation. While Indian thought includes various ‘siddhis’ (unworldly attainments) documented in the stories of saints and masters, the Guru’s scheme uniquely integrates these within the broader concept of mukti or Nirvana. This novel categorisation differs from traditional Vedantic classifications, such as Śaṅkara’s distinction between jīvana-mukti (liberation while living) and videha-mukti (liberation upon death), or Yoga’s stages of samādhi (savikalpa and nirvikalpa). The Guru’s subdivisions of Nirvana, likely based on the intensity of remaining Vasanas, signify a methodical approach to detailing the various stages of liberation, each of which will be further elaborated in the subsequent verses of the Darsanamala.

- Guru’s unique Nirvana classification integrates siddhis into mukti.

2.3.1.3 Verse 3

അതിശുദ്ധം ത്രിധാ പശ്ചാ-
ദ്വരേ ചൈകം വരീയസി
ഏകമേകം വരിഷ്ഠേഥ
ശുദ്ധം ബ്രഹ്മവിദി സ്ഥിതം

atiśuddham tridhā paścād
vare caikam varīyasi
ekam ekam variṣṭhe ftha
śuddham brahmavidi sthitam



The extra-pure is again of three kinds.
 One is the elect; one is the more elect;
 One is the most elect. While the pure
 Exists in the simple knower of the Absolute.

അതിശുദ്ധം	=	അതിശുദ്ധ നിർവാണം
പശ്ചാത് ത്രിധാ	=	വീണ്ടും മൂന്നു പ്രകാരമുണ്ട്
ഏകം വരേ	=	ഒന്നു ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്വരനിൽ കാണുന്നതാണ്
ഏകം വരീയസി	=	ഒന്നു ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്വരീയനിൽ കാണുന്നതാണ്
ഏകം വരിഷ്ഠേ	=	ഒന്ന് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ് വരിഷ്ഠനിൽ കാണുന്നതാണ്
അഥ	=	ഇനി
ശുദ്ധം	=	ശുദ്ധനിർവാണം
ബ്രഹ്മവിദി സ്ഥിതം	=	ബ്രഹ്മവിത്തിൽ ഉള്ളതാകുന്നു

അതിശുദ്ധനിർവാണം വീണ്ടും മൂന്ന് പ്രകാരമുണ്ട്. ഒന്ന് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്വരനിൽ ഉള്ളത്; മറ്റൊന്ന് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്വരീയാനിൽ ഉള്ളത്. ഇനിയൊന്ന് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്വരിഷ്ഠനിൽ ഉള്ളത്. ശുദ്ധനിർവാണമാകട്ടെ ബ്രഹ്മവിത്തിൽ കാണപ്പെടുന്നതാണ്.

The extra-pure state of emancipation is threefold: the elect, the more elect, and the most elect. Meanwhile, the pure state resides in the simple knower of the Absolute.

2.3.1.3.1 Subdivisions of Pure Nirvana

The ninth verse of Darsanamala elaborates on the classification of Nirvana, specifically detailing the subdivisions within the ‘pure’ category. It states that the extra-pure (atisuddha) state of emancipation is further divided into three distinct kinds: ‘the elect’, ‘the more elect’, and ‘the most elect’. Concurrently, the simpler pure (śuddha) Nirvana resides in the ‘simple knower of the Absolute’. Narayana Guru refines the concept of Pure Nirvana into Shuddha Nirvana and Atishuddha Nirvana (Supremely Pure Nirvana). Atishuddha Nirvana, reflecting higher spiritual attainment, is delineated into three stages: Brahmaividvara (superior knower), Brahmaividvariyan (more excellent knower), and Brahmaividvarishtha (most excellent knower of Brahman). In contrast, the foundational Pure Nirvana is associated with the Brahmavit, who is a fundamental knower of Brahman.

- Pure Nirvana: Brahmavit, Atishuddha Nirvana: Brahmaividvara, Brahmaividvariyan, Brahmaividvarishtha.

2.3.1.3.2 Connection to Traditional Wisdom

This hierarchical progression, moving from Brahmavit to Brahmavidvara, Brahmavidvariyan, and Brahmavidvarishtha, resonates with principles found in the Nirvana Prakarana section of the Yoga Vasistha. This ancient text traditionally outlines seven stages of knowledge, with these terms representing progressively advanced states of spiritual realisation. However, while Narayana Guru acknowledges this established framework, it's vital to recognise that he defines the specific characteristics of each of these stages through his unique interpretation within the Darsanamala. This approach highlights his method of building upon traditional wisdom while simultaneously imprinting it with his original insights. The overall scheme of gradation conceived by the Guru, though drawing from established concepts, presents an entirely distinct classification, emphasising his singular contribution to philosophical thought.

- Pure Nirvana:
Brahmavit,
Atishuddha Nirvana:
Brahmavidvara,
Brahmavidvariyan,
Brahmavidvarishtha.

Guru's Nirvana hierarchy builds on Yoga Vasistha, with unique interpretations

2.3.1.4 Verse 4

അശുദ്ധശുദ്ധം വിരജ-
സ്തമോന്യത് സരജസ്തമഃ
മുമുക്ഷൗ പ്രഥമം വിദ്യാദ്
ദ്വിതീയം സിദ്ധികാമിഷു.

aśuddha-śuddham virajas
tamo 'nyat sarajas tamah
mumukṣau prathamam vidyāt
dvitīyam siddhi-kāmiṣu

The impure-pure is without passion and inertia.
The other is with passion and inertia.
The former as in one who desires liberation.
While the latter as in those who desire psychic powers is to be known.

- അശുദ്ധശുദ്ധം = അശുദ്ധങ്ങളിൽ വെച്ച് ശുദ്ധമായ നിർവാണം
- വിരജസ്തമ = രജോഗുണത്തിന്റെയും തമോഗുണത്തിന്റെയും പ്രഭാവം ഇല്ലാതായിക്കഴിഞ്ഞ അവസ്ഥയിലുള്ളതാണ്
- അന്യത് = മറ്റേത് (അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധനിർവാണം)

സരജസ്തമഃ	=	രജോഗുണത്തോടും തമോഗുണത്തോടും കൂടിയതാണ്.
പ്രഥമം	=	ആദ്യത്തേത് (അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധനിർവാണം)
വിദ്യാത്	=	ആണ് ഉള്ളത്
മുമുക്ഷൗ	=	മുമുക്ഷുവിൽ
ദിതീയം	=	രണ്ടാമത്തേത് (അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധനിർവാണം)
സിദ്ധികാമിഷു	=	സിദ്ധികാമികളിൽ ആണുള്ളത്
വിദ്യാത്		

അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധനിർവാണം അനുഭവിക്കുന്നവരിൽ രജോഗുണത്തിന്റെയും തമോഗുണത്തിന്റെയും പ്രഭാവം ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കുകയില്ല. അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധനിർവാണം അനുഭവിക്കുന്നവരിലാകട്ടെ ഈ രണ്ട് ഗുണങ്ങളുടെയും പ്രഭാവം ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കും. അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധനിർവാണം കാണപ്പെടുന്നത് മുമുക്ഷുവിലാണ്. അശുദ്ധാശുദ്ധനിർവാണം സിദ്ധികാമന്മാരിലും.

The impure-pure state is free from passion and inertia, seen in those desiring liberation. Conversely, the impure-impure state is marked by passion and inertia, found in those who seek psychic powers.

2.3.1.4.1 Classifying Impure Nirvana

Narayana Guru further categorises Impure Nirvana based on the influence of the Gunas (qualities of nature) and individual aspirations. The first category, Ashuddhashuddha Nirvana (Impure-Pure Nirvana), is experienced by those who have transcended the dominance of Rajas Guna (passion/activity) and Tamas Guna (inertia/darkness). This state is typically observed in a Mumukshu, an individual intensely desirous of liberation. Essentially, those earnestly engaged in spiritual practices to achieve ultimate freedom exemplify Ashuddhashuddha Nirvana, signifying a progression where overcoming Rajas and Tamas is a prerequisite for a more elevated spiritual path.

• Impure-Pure Nirvana: transcending Rajas and Tamas for liberation

2.3.1.4.2 Impure Nirvana and Psychic Powers

In contrast, Ashuddhāshuddha Nirvana (Impure-Impure Nirvana) characterises individuals still influenced by both Rajas Guna and Tamas Guna. This type of Nirvana is found among Siddhikamans, who primarily seek supernatural powers or Siddhis rather than ultimate liberation. The text positions this state as a lower tier compared to Ashuddhashuddha Nirvana, as those at this level have not yet overcome the influence of Rajas and Tamas. The desire for such unworldly psychic powers, although common among laypeople and some

- Patanjali's Yoga system considers Siddhis as obstacles

scholars, is considered by the Guru as the lowest grade of spiritual aspiration. Patanjali's Yoga system also acknowledges the possibility of such attainments but deems them obstacles to the true spiritual goals of samadhi or kaivalya, a warning the Guru implicitly echoes by classifying them as the 'most impure amongst the impure'.

2.3.1.5 Verse 5

ദഗ്ദ്ധാ അനാനാഗ്നിനാ സർവ-
മുദ്രിശ്യ ജഗതാം ഹിതം
കരോതി വിധിവത് കർമ്മ
ബ്രഹ്മവിദ് ബ്രഹ്മണി സ്ഥിതഃ.

dagdhvā jñānāgninā sarvam
uddiśya jagatām hitam
karoti vidhivat karma
brahmavid brahmaṇi sthitah

Established in the Absolute, a knower of the Absolute,
By the fire of wisdom having burnt every thing up
Aiming at the good of the world,
Performs action according to what is considered right.

സർവ്വം അനാനാഗ്നിനാ	=	സകലതിനെയും അനാനമാ
ദഗ്ദ്ധാ		കുന്ന അഗ്നികൊണ്ട് ദഹി
		പ്പിച്ചിട്ട്
ബ്രഹ്മണി സ്ഥിതഃ	=	ബ്രഹ്മത്തിൽ തന്റെ സ്ഥിതിയെ
		കണ്ടെത്തിയിരിക്കുന്ന
ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്	=	ബ്രഹ്മവിത്ത്
ജഗതാം ഹിതം ഉദ്രിശ്യ	=	ജഗത്തിന്റെ ഹിതത്തെ മാത്രം
		ഉദ്ദേശിച്ചുകൊണ്ട്
വിധിവത് കർമ്മ കരോതി	=	വിധിപ്രകാരമുള്ള കർമ്മങ്ങൾ
		ചെയ്തുകൊണ്ട് ജീവിക്കുന്നു.

അനാനമാകുന്ന അഗ്നിയിൽ സകലതും ദഹിപ്പിച്ചു കഴിഞ്ഞിട്ട്, ബ്രഹ്മത്തിൽ സ്ഥിതി ചെയ്യുന്നതായി സ്വയം കണ്ടുകൊണ്ട് ജീവിക്കുന്നവനാണ് ബ്രഹ്മവിത്ത്. ജഗത്തിന്റെ ഹിതത്തെ ഉദ്ദേശിച്ചുകൊണ്ടുമാത്രം അദ്ദേഹം വിധിപ്രകാരമുള്ള കർമ്മങ്ങൾ ചെയ്തുകൊണ്ടു ജീവിക്കും.

A knower of the Absolute, established in ultimate reality, burns away all attachments with the fire of wisdom. Such a person acts for the world's well-being, always doing what's right.



2.3.1.5.1 The Nature of a Brahmavit

A Brahmavit is an individual who has realised their being as firmly established in Brahman, the ultimate reality. This profound realisation involves ‘burning away’ all illusions and perceived duality in the fire of knowledge, understanding that only Brahman truly exists. A Brahmavit is no longer a mere seeker but a seer, unbound by Vasanas (latent tendencies) or Sankalpas (intentions). Their knowledge is uncontaminated and self-aware, transcending the reflections and distortions caused by the three Gunas (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas). For a Brahmavit, there is no longer a state of ‘becoming’; only the pure ‘Being’ of knowledge itself remains. Their actions are solely driven by the welfare of the world, performed with detachment and without personal desire, always prioritising the good of all beings.

- Brahmavit: seer, unbound by Vasanas/Sankalpas, acting for universal welfare

2.3.1.5.2 The Brahmavit’s Experience of Nirvana

The Nirvana experienced by a Brahmavit is unique. As a true knower of truth, they intuitively perceive the inseparable oneness of the absolute Reality (Brahman) and the multifarious worldly appearances. For them, all diverse manifestations are contained within this single, unified truth, consuming the ‘many’ in the fire of wisdom. A Brahmavit perceives nothing but Brahman everywhere, experiencing everything as being consumed by their knowledge. They recognise Brahman unfolding as the entire universe and see themselves as an inseparable part of this cosmic manifestation, constantly abiding directly within Brahman. This state, described as a ‘pure’ type of Nirvana, is the ideal life-pattern recommended in the Bhagavad-Gita, where action is performed in conformity with prescribed rules for the world’s good, without attachment.

- Brahmavit’s Nirvana: intuitive oneness of Brahman and world

2.3.1.5.3 Brahmavit’s Role in Cosmic Coherence

Established in this profound awareness, the Brahman-knower understands that Brahman, unfolding as this world, possesses a coherent structural system. No individual, including the Brahmavit, can disrupt this inherent order. Recognizing their specific role within this holistic system, the Brahman-knower continuously engages in actions natural to them. As these actions occur as part of nature’s eternal flow, there is no sense of personal attachment to the outcomes. This way of life embodies a deep understanding: even though they are untouched by worldly desires (preṣṭi), a slight trace of memory connects them with fellow beings, compelling them to act for

- Brahmavit: understands and acts within Brahman’s order

universal well-being. For instance, like waking someone from a nightmare, a Brahman aids others still suffering under the illusion of duality, demonstrating compassion rooted in their detached perception of ultimate oneness.

2.3.1.6 Verse 6

സംന്യസ്യ സർവകർമ്മാണി
 സതതം ബ്രഹ്മനിഷ്ഠയാ
 യശ്ചരത്യവനൗ ദേഹ-
 യാത്രായൈ ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്രഃ.

samnyasya sarva-karmāṇi
 satatam brahmaniṣṭhayā
 yaś caraty avanau deha-
 yātrāyai brahma-vid-varah

He who renouncing all action,
 Always established in the Absolute,
 Continues the course of the bodily life, wandering
 In the world, he is the elect knower of the Absolute.

യഃ	=	യാതൊരുത്തനാണോ
സർവ്വ കർമ്മാണി	=	സകല കർമ്മങ്ങളെയും
സംന്യസ്യ	=	സമ്യക്ക്കായി ന്യസിച്ചിട്ട് (വേണ്ടവണ്ണം ഉപേക്ഷിച്ചിട്ട്)
സതതം ബ്രഹ്മനിഷ്ഠയാ	=	ഇടമുറിയാതെയുള്ള ബ്രഹ്മനിഷ്ഠയോടു കൂടി
ദേഹയാത്രായൈ	=	ശാരീരികമായ നിലനില്പിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി മാത്രം
അവനൗ ചരതി	=	ലോകത്തിൽ സഞ്ചരിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നത്
സഃ ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്രഃ	=	അദ്ദേഹമാണ് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്വരൻ.

സകല കർമ്മങ്ങളെയും ഉപേക്ഷിച്ചിട്ട്, ഇടമുറിയാതെയുള്ള ബ്രഹ്മനിഷ്ഠയോടു കൂടി, ശാരീരികമായ നിലനില്പിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി മാത്രം ലോകത്തിൽ സഞ്ചരിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നത് ആരാണോ അദ്ദേഹമാണ് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ്രൻ.

The elect knower of the Absolute is one who has renounced all action and remains always established in the Absolute. Such a person continues their bodily life, wandering freely in the world.

2.3.1.6.1 The Elect Knower of the Absolute (Brahmavidvara)

The Brahmavidvara represents a profound stage of spiritual realization: ‘He who renouncing all action, / Always established in the Absolute, / Continues the course of the bodily life, wandering / In the world, he is the elect knower of the Absolute.’ This individual has reached a point where all personal motivations for action have ceased, transforming into a vessel for the divine. They are no longer driven by desires for worldly gain, recognition, or subtle attachments. Their unwavering devotion to Brahman, the ultimate reality, defines their existence, making their life a living testament to complete spiritual liberation. This constant absorption in the Absolute signifies a profound and uninterrupted connection to the supreme truth, transcending the ordinary modes of human engagement and establishing them firmly in a state of continuous inner peace and divine alignment.

- Brahmavidvara: renounces all personal action, lives as a divine vessel, utterly devoted to Brahman, in continuous inner peace

2.3.1.6.2 Detachment and Worldly Existence

A Brahmavidvara’s continued presence in the world is not a choice stemming from personal will, but rather the natural continuation of their physical form. They ‘wander in the world’ not due to any personal agenda, but because their body, having been set in motion by past karma, simply continues its inherent course. Their actions, though outwardly normal, are devoid of personal desire or attachment to outcomes. They have transcended the need to engage in any action for personal gain or worldly connection, remaining in a perpetual state of absorption in ultimate reality. This highlights a form of living liberation where the individual self has merged seamlessly with the Universal Self. Such a state is likened to being a referee in a game; one is within the field, observing rules impartially, but not actively playing or having any personal favouritism, signifying profound detachment amidst engagement.

- Brahmavidvara: lives liberated, acts without personal will/desire, body following past karma.

2.3.1.7 Verse 7

അന്യേന വേദിതോ വേത്തി
ന വേത്തി സ്വയമേവ യഃ
സ വരീയാൻ സദാ ബ്രഹ്മ-
നിർവാണമയമശ്നുതേ.

anyena vedito vetti
na vetti svayam eva yah
sa varīyān sadā brahma-
nirvāṇam ayam aśnute

He, being informed by another is able to know,
 But he himself does not know,
 He is the more elect, who always
 Enjoys absorption in the Absolute.

യഃ	=	യാതൊരുവനാണോ
അന്യേന വേദിതഃ	=	അന്യരാൽ അറിയിക്കപ്പെട്ടാൽ മാത്രം
വേത്തി	=	അറിയുകയും
സ്വയം ഏവ	=	തന്നെത്താനെ
ന വേത്തി	=	അറിയാതിരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നത്
സഃ വരീയാൻ	=	അദ്ദേഹമാണ് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ് വരീയാൻ
അയം	=	ഇദ്ദേഹം
സദാ	=	എല്ലായ്പ്പോഴും
ബ്രഹ്മനിർവാണം	=	ബ്രഹ്മനിർവാണത്തെ
അശ്നുതേ	=	അനുഭവിച്ചുകൊണ്ടേയിരിക്കുന്നു

മറ്റൊരാൾ അറിയിച്ചാൽ മാത്രം അറിയുകയും, സ്വയം ഒന്നും അറിയാതിരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നത് ആരാണോ അദ്ദേഹമാണ് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ് വരീയാൻ. ഇദ്ദേഹം സദാ ബ്രഹ്മനിർവാണം അനുഭവിച്ചുകൊണ്ടേയിരിക്കുന്നു.

The more elect knower of the Absolute consistently experiences absorption in the Absolute. While another's input can inform them, they do not inherently know without it.

2.3.1.7.1 The Superior Knower of Brahman (Brahmavidvariyan)

The Darsanamala defines the Brahmavidvariyan, or the 'more elect' knower, as one who can only gain knowledge when informed by another, not independently. This individual embodies a fascinating and advanced stage of spiritual realisation, primarily characterised by their complete dissolution into the state of Brahma-nirvana, a profound and continuous absorption in Brahman. At this level, their individual consciousness or ego has become so attenuated that it no longer independently initiates knowledge or perception. Their awareness is fully immersed in the ultimate reality, transcending the conventional mode of knowing and the need for individual mental constructs or active seeking of knowledge. This state signifies not ignorance, but a transcendence of fragmented, acquired knowledge, replaced by an unbroken, intuitive experience of unified reality.

• Brahmavidvariyan: intuitive, unified reality experience



2.3.1.7.2 Perpetual Absorption and Transcendent Knowledge

- Brahmaividvariyan: unbroken absorption in Absolute, direct unified knowledge.

The defining feature of a Brahmaividvariyan is their constant, unbroken communion with the Absolute, signifying a perpetual state of supreme bliss and knowledge. Unlike earlier stages where effort might be necessary to maintain such a state, the Brahmaividvariyan exists continuously within this profound absorption. Their individual ‘self’ has merged so completely with Brahman that no separate entity remains to ‘know’ in the ordinary sense. Their knowledge is not fragmented or acquired through sensory input or mental processes; instead, it is a direct, intuitive, and unbroken experience of the unified reality. This state exemplifies the ultimate culmination of spiritual practice, where the individual becomes indistinguishable from the divine, having cultivated a clear vision that discriminates true values from false ones, leading to indifference towards worldly pleasures.

2.3.1.8 Verse 8

സ്വയം ന വേത്തി കിഞ്ചിന്ന
വേദിതോപി തഥൈവ യഃ
സ വരിഷ്ഠഃ സദാ വൃത്തി-
ശൂന്യോയം ബ്രഹ്മ കേവലം.

svayam na veti kiñcin
na vedito ‘pi tathaiva yah
sa varisthaḥ sadā vṛtti-
śūnyo ‘yam brahma kevalam

He, who by himself does not know anything
And even when made to know, knows not,
Such a one, always void of activity,
The most elect is the Absolute alone in itself.

യഃ	=	യാതൊരുവനാണോ
സ്വയം കിഞ്ചിത് ന	=	തന്നെത്താൻ ഒന്നും
വേത്തി	=	അറിയാതിരിക്കുന്നത്
തഥാ ഏവ	=	അതുപോലെ തന്നെ
വേദിതഃ അപി	=	മറ്റുള്ളവർ അറിയിച്ചാലും
ന വേത്തി	=	ഒന്നും അറിയാതെയിരിക്കുന്നത്
സഃ വരിഷ്ഠഃ	=	അദ്ദേഹമാണ് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ് വരിഷ്ഠൻ
അയം	=	ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള ആൾ

സദാ വൃത്തിശൂന്യ = ഒരു വൃത്തിയുമില്ലാത്തവനായി
 എപ്പോഴും കഴിയും
 ബ്രഹ്മകേവലം = കേവലം ബ്രഹ്മമായിട്ട്

തന്നെത്താനെ ഒന്നും അറിയാതിരിക്കുകയും, മറ്റുള്ളവർ അറിയിച്ചാൽപോരും ഒന്നും അറിയാതിരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന ആരോ അദ്ദേഹമാണ് ബ്രഹ്മവിദ് വരിഷ്ഠൻ. അദ്ദേഹം കേവലം ബ്രഹ്മമായിരുന്നുകൊണ്ട് ഒരു വൃത്തിയുമില്ലാതെ സദാ കഴിയുന്നു.

The most elect knower of the Absolute is one who knows nothing independently and cannot be made to know, perpetually void of activity. Such an individual is the Absolute itself.

The Darsanamala describes the Brahmavidvarishtha as the absolute pinnacle of spiritual realisation: an individual who ‘knows nothing by himself, and who knows nothing even if others make him know,’ simply remaining as Brahman perpetually without any mental activity. This state signifies a complete and utter absorption in the Absolute, where all individual mental faculties, including the very capacity for ordinary knowing, have ceased. The dissolution of the ego and its independent cognitive functions is so profound that such an individual transcends all external stimuli or conventional teaching. Their being is entirely one with the ultimate reality, rendering the mind’s active processing of information irrelevant. This level represents the most supreme knower of Brahman, beyond the superior and elect knowers previously discussed.

• Brahmavidvarishtha: complete absorption in Brahman, beyond all knowing.

• Brahmavidvarishtha: ultimate absorption in Brahman, beyond all mental activity or worldly concern.

In this ultimate state, the Brahmavidvarishtha embodies a continuous, unceasing identity with the Absolute. There is no separate consciousness or mental activity; they are Brahman, devoid of internal fluctuations or external distinctions. This state marks the culmination of the spiritual journey, where the individual self has fully merged and become indistinguishable from the Universal Self. Such a being is completely unconcerned, lacking even a thought of devaluation, and exhibits no reaction even when addressed. This extreme detachment is illustrated by accounts of individuals who remain utterly functionless, requiring external care, signifying a profound cessation of engagement with the phenomenal world. While not necessarily superior in a practical sense, this state is presented as a final theoretical possibility of emancipation.

• Nirvana stages
deepen Absolute
connection

Narayana Guru’s classification of Nirvana provides a unique hierarchical framework for understanding spiritual liberation, with the Brahmaidvarishtha at its apex within the ‘extra-pure’ category. While the Guru himself exemplifies the ‘simple knower’ (Brahmavit), the depiction of the Brahmaidvarishtha serves as a conceptual extreme of absorption. Before attaining such a final stage, the spiritual path often involves a concern not only for one’s own salvation but also for the liberation of all beings, highlighting a broader perspective. The profound difference in degrees of realization across these stages primarily relates to the depth of felt togetherness with the Absolute, emphasising a spectrum of spiritual attainment from active engagement to ultimate dissolution into pure being.

2.3.1.9 Verse 9

ഹേയോപാദേയതാ ന ഹ്യ-
സ്യുത്ഥാ വാ സ്വപ്രകാശകഃ
ഇതി മത്വാ നിവർത്തേത
വൃത്തിർനാവർത്തതേ പുനഃ

heyopadeyatā na hy
asyā ‘tmā vā svaprakāśakah
itī matvā nivarteta
vrttir nāvarttate punah

Of this world there is certainly nothing to
Be rejected or accepted. As for the
Self, it is Self-luminous. Having understood this, one
Should withdraw from all functionings.
Thereafter function does not repeat itself.

- അസ്യ = ഈ നിർവാണസുഖം അനുഭവിക്കുന്ന ആളിനു
- ഹേയോപാദേയതാ = ഹേയമായോ ഉപാദേയമായോ (തള്ളേണ്ടതായോ കൊള്ളേണ്ടതായോ)
- ന ഹി = ഒന്നും ഇല്ല തന്നെ.
- ആത്മാ വൈ = ആത്മാവാകട്ടെ
- സ്വപ്രകാശകഃ = സ്വയം പ്രകാശമാണ്.
- ഇതി മത്വാ = ഇപ്രകാരമറിഞ്ഞുകൊണ്ട്
- നിവർത്തേത = സർവ്വവൃത്തികളിൽ നിന്നും പ്രവൃത്തികളിൽ നിന്നും നിവർത്തിച്ച് നിർവാണത്തെ പ്രാപിക്കണം

പുനഃ	=	പിന്നീട്
വൃത്തിഃ	=	ഒരു വൃത്തിയും
ന ആവർത്തതേ	=	ആവർത്തിക്കുകയില്ല

ഇപ്രകാരമുള്ള നിർവാണമനുഭവിക്കുന്നവനെ സംബന്ധിച്ചിടത്തോളം തള്ളേണ്ടതായോ കൊള്ളേണ്ടതായോ ജീവിതത്തിൽ ഒന്നുമില്ല. സ്വയം പ്രകാശമായ ആത്മാവുമാത്രം ഉള്ളതായി അദ്ദേഹം സദാ അനുഭവിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. അപ്രകാരം അറിഞ്ഞുകൊണ്ട് സകല വൃത്തികളിൽനിന്നും പ്രവൃത്തികളിൽനിന്നും സ്വയം നിവർത്തിച്ച് നിർവാണം പ്രാപിച്ചുകൊള്ളുക. പിന്നീട് ഒരു വൃത്തിയും ആവർത്തിക്കുകയില്ല.

Realizing the world offers nothing to reject or accept, and that the Self is self-luminous, one should cease all actions. This cessation then becomes permanent.

2.3.1.9.1 The State of the Awakened

For the awakened individual, there's nothing in this world to either reject or accept. Such a person constantly experiences only the Self-luminous Ātman as existent. With this profound understanding, one should cease all mental activities and actions to attain Nirvana, a state where no mental activity will ever repeat. Narayana Guru, in these final verses, emphasizes the actionless nature of Nirvana and highlights the necessity of intentionally ceasing all mental functions as a spiritual practice. For someone who perpetually perceives everything as merely the manifested Ātman, their mind achieves perfect equanimity, free from the desire to possess or relinquish anything to enhance happiness. This conviction in Ātman's sole existence naturally dissolves the urge for wish-fulfilling activities, both physical and mental.

• Ātman realisation ends all mental action.

2.3.1.9.2 The Path to Functionlessness

The understanding that the captivating or threatening dramas of life are merely mental projections on the apparent flux of phenomenal reality leads to the realisation that the mind, which creates the world, can also resolve it. When this certainty is attained, one awakens to the reality of the Self, ceasing world-fascination and confusion. The Ātman is described as boundless radiance, a single light without inside or outside, the self-luminous light of the Self, identical with one's true being. This concept aligns with the Bhagavad Gita's teaching of establishing the mind reflexively in the Self. This natural

• Mind dissolves world, reveals Ātman.

tendency towards contentment and neutrality can be cultivated through the intentional practice of withdrawing external and internal faculties from desire-motivated activities, known as nivr̥tti-mārga in Vedānta. This confluence of proper awareness and guided self-withdrawal leads one to the competent state of Nirvana.

2.3.1.9.3 Enduring Liberation

The phrase ‘vrttir na avartate punah’ (no functioning repeats in such a person) in the Darsanamala echoes the Upaniṣadic dictum ‘na ca punar avartate’ (he does not return hither any more), often interpreted as the liberated soul not being reborn after death. However, for one who has realised the oneness of Ātman, there’s no perception of oneself as an individual born to die. Instead, they see themselves as part of the everlasting self-unfoldment of the birthless and deathless Ātman, becoming one with this immortal Self. Having realised their own immortality, the concern for after-death ceases. This passage implies that upon attaining Nirvana in the self-effulgent Ātman, all individual functions and activities cease to be, becoming absorbed into the functions of Ātman itself. A liberated person transcends notions of what to accept or reject in life, no longer returning to a world where such dualities hold meaning.

• Ātman oneness ends rebirth concern.

2.3.1.10 Verse 10

ഏകമേവാദിതീയം ബ്രഹ്മം
 ഫാസ്തി നാന്യസംശയഃ
 ഇതി വിദ്വാൻ നിവർത്തേത
 ദ്വൈതാനാവർത്തതേ പുനഃ.

ekam eva ‘dviṭīyam brahmāsti
 nānyan na samśayaḥ
 iti vidvān nivartteta
 dvaitān nāvartate punah

The one Absolute alone there is without a second.
 Nothing else there is-no doubt herein.
 Having thus understood, the well instructed one
 From duality should withdraw; he does not return again.

അദിതീയം	=	അദിതീയമായിരിക്കുന്ന
ബ്രഹ്മ ഏകം ഏവ	=	ബ്രഹ്മം ഒന്നു മാത്രം
അസ്തി	=	ആണുള്ളത്.

ന അന്യത് അസ്തി (അത്ര) ന സംശയഃ	= ഉള്ളതായി മറ്റൊന്നും ഇല്ല. = ഇക്കാര്യത്തിൽ യാതൊരു സംശയവും ഇല്ല
ഇതി (മതാ)	= ഇപ്രകാരം മനനം ചെയ്തു തീരുമാനത്തിലെത്തി
വിദ്വാൻ	= അറിവുള്ളവൻ
ദൈതാത്	= ദൈതത്തിൽ നിന്ന്
നിവർത്തേത	= നിവർത്തിക്കേണ്ടതാണ്
പുനഃ ന ആവർത്തതേ	= ദൈതത്തിലേക്കു പിന്നെ അവൻ തിരിയെ വരുന്നില്ല.

ഏകവും അദിതീയവുമായ ബ്രഹ്മം മാത്രമാണ് ഉള്ളത്. ഉള്ളതായി മറ്റൊന്നില്ല. ഇതിൽ യാതൊരു സംശയവും ഇല്ല. ഇങ്ങനെ മനനം ചെയ്തു തീരുമാനത്തിലെത്തിയ വിദ്വാൻ എല്ലാ ദൈതഭാവങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നും നിവർത്തിക്കേണ്ടതാണ്. ദൈതത്തിലേക്ക് പിന്നെ അവനു പുനരാവർത്തിയില്ല.

Only the one, non-dual Absolute truly exists, with nothing else besides it. Realising this, a wise person should withdraw from duality and will not return to it again.

2.3.1.10.1 The Nature of Ultimate Reality

The Darsanamala concludes by asserting that the one Absolute alone exists, without a second; there is nothing else. This unequivocal statement, 'ekam advitīyam' (one, non-dual), forms the bedrock of Advaita Vedānta and Sree Narayana Guru's teachings, eliminating any doubt about the singular nature of reality. It implies that no separate God, world, or individual soul exists independently of Brahman. This profound truth is not merely a belief but a definitive conclusion achieved through deep meditation and contemplation by a wise individual. Once this ultimate truth is firmly understood, the individual is enjoined to withdraw completely from all dualistic notions. This withdrawal signifies a total transcendence of perceived distinctions like good and bad, pleasure and pain, subject and object, which for the wise become mere illusions.

• Absolute alone exists, non-dual.

2.3.1.10.2 Withdrawal from Duality and Permanent Liberation

This withdrawal from duality represents a complete transcendence of all perceived distinctions and separations in the world. For the wise individual who has realised the non-dual nature of reality, these distinctions, including fundamental pairs like birth and death, pleasure and sorrow, and knower

• Non-duality: permanent escape from illusion.

and known, become mere illusions. The crucial point is that once this state of non-duality is attained, there is 'no return to duality' for that individual. This highlights the irreversible and permanent nature of this liberation, implying that the individual's consciousness is irrevocably merged with the non-dual Brahman, never again to be trapped by the illusions of a divided reality. This active disengagement from the mind's tendency to operate within dualistic frameworks is a vital spiritual practice (sādhana).

2.3.1.10.3 Attaining Non-Dual Bliss

Narayana Guru concludes his Darsanamala by pointing towards the non-dual essence of Nirvana-rasa (the bliss of Nirvana), a state devoid of all mental activities. To experience this bliss, one must first attain a firm conviction in the non-dual truth and then actively withdraw from the entire world of dualities. This includes fundamental pairs that define human existence: birth and death, pleasure and sorrow, good and evil, internal and external, and the distinction between the knower and the known. This withdrawal is a crucial, self-undertaken spiritual practice, an active disengagement from the mind's tendency to create and operate within dualistic frameworks. The Guru underscores that once this withdrawal is successfully accomplished, the individual will never again return to the world of distinctions. This ultimate state signifies complete liberation, where individual consciousness transcends all limitations and merges into the undifferentiated, non-dual reality of Brahman, experiencing perpetual peace.

- Nirvana: non-dual bliss, cease duality.

2.3.1.10.4 The Garland of Visions: From Creation to Absorption

The Darsanamala, a 'garland' of philosophical visions, began by examining the nature of world creation from an Upaniṣadic perspective. It concludes, also following Upaniṣadic lines, by depicting how an individual, as part of the created world, becomes experientially absorbed in the being of the non-dual Brahman. This final verse, a reiteration of the Chandogya Upaniṣad's 'ekam eva advitīyam' (the one and non-dual), encapsulates the journey from perceived duality to ultimate non-duality. The spiritual seeker, by conceptually tying these ends together and embracing this wisdom, realises the value of this 'garland' as non-dual ananda (bliss). This integration of the world's apparent reality into the underlying non-dual Absolute marks the pinnacle of understanding.

- World merges into non-dual Brahman.

Summarized Overview

Nirvāṇa literally signifies ‘to be extinguished.’ In this context, it refers to the experience an individual has of themselves being extinguished within the Supreme Reality (Paramātmā Satya). It can be considered a more subtle experience than that of Yoga. In a yogic experience, the visible world is perceived as inherent to the seer; however, in Nirvāṇa, the seer (Dṛk) itself is extinguished. This state is ultimately ineffable and indescribable. Nevertheless, based on the spiritual maturity (adhikāri-bheda) of the practitioner and the nature of their spiritual practice (sādhana), certain variations in this experience may arise. The Guru systematically points out these distinctions. Initially, he categorises Nirvāṇa into two primary types: Pure (Śuddham) and Impure (Aśuddham). Pure Nirvāṇa itself can be further subdivided into Pure and Supremely Pure (Atiśuddham). Similarly, Impure Nirvāṇa can be divided into Pure-Impure (Aśuddha-Śuddham) and Impure-Impure (Aśuddhāśuddham).

Those who have attained Pure Nirvāṇa are referred to as Brahmavit (knowers of Brahman). Within the Supremely Pure category, there can be three levels: Brahmaividvara (superior knower of Brahman), Brahmaividvariṅyān (more superior knower of Brahman), and Brahmaividvariṅtha (most superior knower of Brahman). It is common for some to regard the manifestation of extraordinary phenomena as spiritual powers or siddhis. Even in the Guru’s own life, biographers have recorded many incidents as supernatural accomplishments. However, the Guru considers the state of those who crave siddhis as merely an impure form of Nirvāṇa, specifically the impure-impure category. Nirvāṇa Darśanam concludes by presenting the ultimate state of emancipation as an Advaitic (non-dual) experience, where all mental modifications (vṛttis) cease, leading to a state beyond their recurrence. It signifies a complete withdrawal from all dualistic notions, representing the pinnacle of Nirvāṇa.

One point mentioned in the commentary on Darsanamala by Prof. G. Balakrishnan Nair deserves special attention:

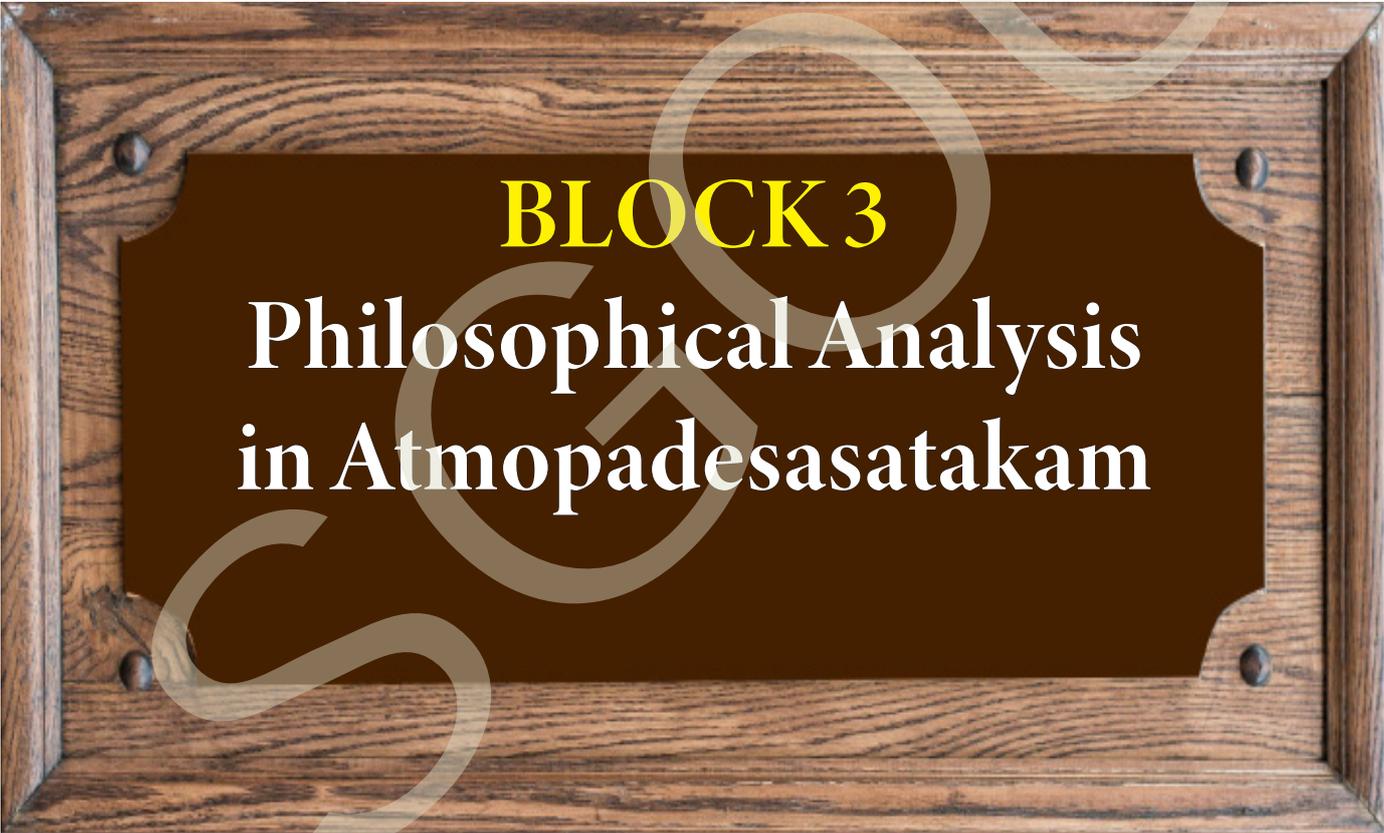
‘The distinctions of vara, vareeya, and varishtha (higher, superior, and supreme among the knowers of Brahman) are determined in relation to the state of nirvikalpa samadhi.

It can be seen in Yoga Darsana that even a yogi engaged in worldly activities can, outwardly, practice nirvikalpa samadhi. Therefore, it must be remembered that determining the gradations among knowers of Brahman (vara-vareeya-varishtha) based solely on bodily movements or external activity is not a reliable or ultimate criterion for measuring the firmness of one’s realization of Brahman.’



Assignments

1. What are the two primary classifications of Nirvāṇa in Darsanamala, and what distinguishes them based on 'vāsanās'?
2. Explain the concept of 'nivr̥tti' (withdrawal) as a spiritual practice towards ultimate liberation, detailing the dualistic frameworks it aims to transcend.
3. How does Sreenarayana Guru further subdivide Pure Nirvāṇa, and what are the specific levels of 'Brahmavit' mentioned within the Supremely Pure category?
4. Why does the Guru consider the manifestation of extraordinary phenomena or 'siddhis' as an 'impure' form of Nirvāṇa?
5. Describe the ultimate state of emancipation presented in Nirvāṇa Darśanam, emphasizing its 'Advaitic' (non-dual) nature.
6. According to the text, what happens to individual 'mental modifications (vr̥ttis)' upon attaining the highest form of Nirvāṇa?
7. How does this unit connect the Darsanamala's beginning (world creation) to its culmination in the individual's absorption in non-dual Brahman?
8. What is the literal meaning of 'Nirvāṇa' in the context of Darsanamala, and how is it presented as an individual's 'experience'?

A wooden frame with a dark brown center containing text. The frame is made of dark wood with visible grain and four dark circular fasteners at the corners. The center is a solid dark brown rectangle with a decorative, slightly irregular border. The text is centered within this rectangle. A large, faint, light-colored watermark is visible across the center of the image.

BLOCK 3

Philosophical Analysis in Atmopadesasatakam

UNIT 1

Methodology of Discrimination of Seer from the Seen Knowledge and Opinion, knowledge and Cognition

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing the study of this material, learners will be able to:

- distinguish between genuine knowledge and mere opinion or cognition as expounded in *Atmopadesa Satakam*
- comprehend Sree Narayana Guru's introspective methodology for self-realisation, moving beyond sensory and ego-driven perceptions
- grasp the Advaitic principle of non-duality between the knower and knowledge, recognising its implication for ultimate reality
- understand how the transient nature of the body and external phenomena points to the eternity and supreme value of the Atman

Background

Across millennia, Indian philosophical thought has wrestled with fundamental questions about reality, knowledge, and the very nature of human existence. While some traditions meticulously described the world as it appears, others critically engaged with lived experience, seeking paths to liberation and a more fulfilling life. Yet, interwoven through this rich fabric of thought, a profound distinction often emerges: that between the 'seer' and the 'seen' – the observing consciousness and the observed world. How do we truly discern between what is merely perceived and what constitutes genuine knowledge? This enduring challenge, central to both ancient wisdom and modern inquiry, forms the bedrock of our exploration.

This journey into the depths of perception and knowledge brings us to a pivotal figure in Indian philosophy: Sree Narayana Guru. At a time when traditional distinctions often led to societal stratification and a narrowing of philosophical inquiry, Guru emerged as a beacon of universalism and critical thought. His work, particularly the *Atmopadesa Satakam* (One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction), offers a unique and profound methodology for distinguishing between the true 'seer' – the essential self – and the transient 'seen' – the phenomenal world of appearances and near cognition.

This unit analyse the intricate layers of Sree Narayana Guru’s insights, dissecting his profound wisdom on the nature of knowledge, cognition, and the crucial process of discrimination. How does one arrive at authentic knowledge, free from the distortions of opinion or limited perception? What does it mean to truly ‘know’ rather than merely ‘cognize’? Through a meticulous philosophical analysis of the *Atmopadesa Satakam*, this module promises to equip you with a robust framework for discerning truth from illusion, paving the way for a deeper understanding of both the self and the cosmos.

Across millennia, Indian philosophical thought has wrestled with fundamental questions about reality, knowledge, and the very nature of human existence. While some traditions meticulously described the world as it appears, others critically engaged with lived experience, seeking paths to liberation and a more fulfilling life. Yet, interwoven through this rich fabric of thought, a profound distinction often emerges: that between the ‘seer’ and the ‘seen’ – the observing consciousness and the observed world. How do we truly discern between what is merely perceived and what constitutes genuine knowledge? This enduring challenge, central to both ancient wisdom and modern inquiry, forms the bedrock of our exploration.

This journey into the depths of perception and knowledge brings us to a pivotal figure in Indian philosophy: Sree Narayana Guru. At a time when traditional distinctions often led to societal stratification and a narrowing of philosophical inquiry, Guru emerged as a beacon of universalism and critical thought.

The unit analysis the intricate layers of Sree Narayana Guru’s insights, dissecting his profound wisdom on the nature of knowledge, cognition, and the crucial process of discrimination. How does one arrive at authentic knowledge, free from the distortions of opinion or limited perception? What does it mean to truly ‘know’ rather than merely ‘cognize’? Through a meticulous philosophical analysis of the *Atmopadesa Satakam*, this module promises to equip you with a robust framework for discerning truth from illusion, paving the way for a deeper understanding of both the self and the cosmos.

Keywords

Atman, Seer-Seen Discrimination, Advaita Vedanta, Knowledge, Opinion, Cognition

Discussion

- Indian philosophy: discernment between known and perceived crucial for insight

Indian philosophical traditions have historically explored the intricate relationship between the subject and the object, the ‘seer’ and the ‘seen.’ While various schools have offered diverse interpretations of reality and the path to liberation, a recurring theme involves the critical discernment between what is truly known and what constitutes mere perception or opinion. This inquiry into the nature of knowledge and cognition has been



central to understanding the human condition and achieving a state of profound insight.

- Guru's philosophy: Self-realisation through engaged, unifying experience

Sree Narayana Guru provides a unique and compelling framework for this discrimination in his seminal work, the *Atmopadesa Satakam*. Unlike some earlier traditions that, in their pursuit of absolute knowledge, occasionally alienated humanity from the empirical world or reinforced social hierarchies, Guru's philosophy seeks to unify and uplift. He challenges the notion that absolute truth necessitates a withdrawal from worldly engagement or a perpetuation of divisive social structures. Instead, Guru's *Atmopadesa Satakam* presents a methodology rooted in direct experience and rational inquiry, aiming to guide the individual towards self-realization through a clear understanding of the self's relationship with the universe.

- Guru's Advaita philosophy in Malayalam, practical wisdom

Atmopadesa Satakam is a work that simply explains Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical system. Its unique feature is that it elaborates the secret of Advaita in the Malayalam language. *Atmopadesa Satakam* is a revelation of truth presented in the form of counsel. It is also an excellent composition that reveals the practical wisdom of Advaita thought.

- hundred simple verses, spiritual advice for self-realisation.

Atmopadesa Satakam, a philosophical exposition in extremely simple language, consists of one hundred verses. This work should be regarded as advice given to someone seeking spiritual knowledge. It offers a complete answer to the doubts that arise in the mind of an individual seeking self-realisation about their relationship with the universe.

- "Other" central to self, happiness, and knowledge transitions.

In this work by Guru, who created models of dynamic poetry, movement extends as transition. A famous verse in *Atmopadesa Satakam* emphasizes the importance of the 'other'. Terms like 'he,' 'this one,' 'oneself,' and 'the other' are connected at the very beginning. The transition of the other's self into the self's essence leads to the subsequent transition of self-happiness into the happiness of the other. The transition of self-knowledge into self-happiness is crucial. The term 'for oneself' is also significant in the description of this transitional process. There is no 'oneself' without the 'other'. The idea Guru intended to convey subtly implies profound meanings through his unique word arrangement.

This section will deal with philosophical analysis of the *Atmopadesa Satakam* to elucidate Guru's distinctive approach to distinguishing the 'seer' from the 'seen.' We will critically examine how his teachings illuminate the differences between

- Guru's unique distinction of seer/seen, leading to universal unity

- Guru's Atmopadesa Satakam: Practical Advaita, all is real and unified truth

- Guru's 'Arivu': Unified reality, all is one essence

- Redefines concepts through language harmony, sculpting poetic philosophy

genuine knowledge and subjective opinion, and between true knowledge and mere cognitive processes. By analysing into the verses of this profound text, learners will gain insights into a transformative methodology that not only aims for individual enlightenment but also fosters a universal sense of unity and equality, challenging preconceived notions and inviting a deeper, more authentic engagement with reality.

In short, Guru's spiritual poem 'Atmopadesa Satakam' is written on the basis of Advaita Vedanta. The central teaching of advaita is "Brahman or the Absolute alone is real; world is illusory appearance of that Brahman; the so called soul or Jiva is Brahman itself and no other". On the other hand, Guru writes in Atmopadesa Satakam "All is real, but a real Philosopher (Advaitin) will realise all is one and the same truth". Guru's Advaita is more practical than the traditional Advaita.

3.1.1 Atman

In *Atmopadesa Satakam*, Guru refers to the sole reality, or God, as 'Atman' (In Vedanta. Atman is subjective and Brahman is objective. The term 'Atman' stands for 'the Soul' or 'Jiva' and the term 'Brahman' stands for 'Ultimate Reality'. But Guru used these two terms as synonyms). The work elucidates the paths to realising this Atman. Although the term 'Atman' isn't explicitly used in his work 'Arivu' (Knowledge), Guru intends 'Arivu' to signify the ultimate truth or God. All that is perceived, whether subtle or gross, are but different manifestations of the same essence, and this essence is what Guru calls 'Arivu'. The creator, the creation, and the created universe are all one and the same. There is no distinction between them; any perceived difference is merely an illusion. A wave, for instance, is nothing but water itself; there's no inherent difference between the wave and the water. The wind that causes the wave is also just another manifestation of the same essence. Thus, the same essence manifests as the creator, the creation, and the created universe. This profound concept is expressed in 'Arivu' through deep and esoteric language, accessible only through poetic expression, ensuring its timeless relevance. Narayana Guru has also penned several works comprising short, concise sentences, among which 'Arivu' stands out.

In 'Arivu', Guru redefines familiar concepts like 'knowledge', 'happiness', 'love', 'self', and 'other', elevating them to a higher plane. As stated in 'Daivadasakam' ('One by one, counting each...') and 'Subrahmanyakirtanam' ('Having stacked and multiplied...'), Guru meticulously attends to each aspect, harmonising them. This is how he sought to know



and impart knowledge of the self. Here, in the interplay and harmony of language, words, concepts, self, other, form, emotion, thought, and experience, Guru sculpts his vision. It is within the satisfaction derived from this interplay that Guru's philosophy itself is defined as poetry.

- Universe is illusory Maya, only 'Arivu' (consciousness/ Brahman) is real

According to the Advaita tradition, Brahman alone is real, and the empirical universe is an illusion (Maya). The existence of the universe is merely an appearance; only consciousness or knowledge (Arivu) is real. Just as a snake perceived in a rope is not real, nothing perceived in the phenomenal world is real. The universe is the illusion of a snake superimposed on the rope of Brahman. When the illusion vanishes, Maya recedes, and one attains consciousness. Everything is then experienced as merely consciousness or knowledge. When one understands each name and form, one by one, through observation, they all ultimately resolve into consciousness alone. This is 'Arivu'. The power that sustains this 'Arivu' can be regarded as God, the mass of consciousness (Chidghana), or the primordial light (Adi Mahas). This is further elaborated.

- Knowledge, known, and knower are its operations

The universe, as it unfolds, is also 'Arivu'. The attempts to understand its mystery are likewise operations of 'Arivu'. Within the structure of this entire universe, knowledge (Jnana), the known (Jñeya), and the knower (Jñata) all exist.

- Atman is unified knowledge; self, objects, God are knowledge manifestations

Each verse offers a Yoga-infused answer from an Advaitic perspective. Truth is one; it is the Atman. The Atman is knowledge itself. Knowledge is God itself. Advaita thought is complete when it states that knowledge, the knower, and the known object are all God. One should understand that the self, objects, and God are all phenomena manifested in the dynamics of knowledge.

- Guru's poetic, simple guide to abandoning the "I"

Dr. T. Bhaskaran surmises that the *Atmopadesa Satakam* was completed in 1897. In 1904, Kumaran Asan wrote a commentary on it. Asan mentions that devotees had already begun reciting the verses even before the work was published as a book. Asan described the *Atmopadesa Satakam* as an eminent poetic work that presents philosophical teachings with poetic sweetness. When one studies each verse, understanding its meaning and grammatical structure, it becomes clear just how simply Guru explains profound subjects. This work provides answers to inquiries such as, 'What is 'I'?' and 'What is 'I' a part of?' The very first verse clearly states that the most fundamental lesson for understanding 'I' is to abandon the notion of 'I' itself.

3.1.2 Discrimination of seer from the seen

3.1.2.1 The Quest for Inner Essence

- Discrimination of Seer from Seen leads to consciousness, true life

The fundamental philosophical pursuit, central to Sreenarayana Guru's teachings, is the 'Discrimination of Seer from the Seen.' This concept addresses humanity's unique capacity to transcend the superficial and identify the underlying cause of existence – consciousness itself. While the universe is governed by causality, only humans possess the intellect to search for and discover this ultimate truth. Those who succeed, the revered sages, realize that the word 'Atman' signifies 'one's own' true self. Guru emphatically states, 'One who possesses 'arul' (divine knowledge) is truly alive,' highlighting that genuine life emerges from the discovery of this inner essence. Conversely, a life lived without this awareness is likened to a state of being 'as if dead.'

3.1.2.2 Embracing Inner Vision

- Guru: Inward 'eye of knowledge' reveals true self

Ordinary human perception mistakenly prioritizes the physical body, believing it to be the true self. However, a profound reflection reveals that when consciousness withdraws, the body becomes lifeless, prompting thoughtful individuals to question the nature of true existence. Sreenarayana Guru's philosophy, particularly as encapsulated in *Atmopadesa Satakam*, guides us away from futile external searches for immeasurable knowledge. Instead, it directs us inward. The path to singular knowledge, or truth, involves closing the physical eyes and engaging the 'eye of knowledge' (Jnana Chakshus). This inward journey traverses the seven stages of sensory experience – sound, touch, form, taste, smell, intellect, and ego – ultimately leading to the perception of the light of knowledge, which is true existence (tattva). This internal discrimination between the transient 'seen' and the eternal 'seer' is the essence of Guru's practical spirituality.

3.1.2.3 From Self-Realization to Universal Empathy

- Inward journey leads to ego dissolution, Brahma/Atma-realisation, compelling altruistic upliftment.

The inward journey culminates in a profound merging into 'the deep ocean of your glory,' as described in *Daivadasakam*. At this elevated state, the individual 'I' dissolves, giving way to a collective 'we,' signifying a transcendence of individual ego. This is the moment of supreme truth realization for the divine self: the profound understanding that everything, 'from a grain of sand to a blossoming garden,' is permeated



by the same divine light. This state is recognized as Brahma-realization in Vedanta, signifying the realization of the vast, all-encompassing truth. Our personal merging with this universal light is termed Atma-realization, the ultimate act of ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen.’ Those who attain this profound understanding, having discovered their own Atman, are then compelled to uplift others from the shackles of ignorance. This altruistic purpose underpins all of Guru’s poetic works, reminding us that true understanding goes beyond mere memorization, urging us to grasp the essence of his transformative philosophy.

- Atman-realised are independent, blissful, and mercifully uplift others

3.1.2.4 The Grandeur of Self-Realisation

Life is a blend of joys and sorrows. We depend on others, and thus, we are not truly free. Those who have attained the ‘Atman’ are independent. They live absorbed in that singular Atman. Neither pleasure nor pain, rise nor fall, affects them. They remain in a state of equipoise. They stand strong and peaceful, having tasted the bliss of the Atman. Furthermore, they impart happiness to those who approach them, acting mercifully, and exist in the supreme state of conscious truth, having crossed the ocean of birth and death.

- Guru’s pivotal, unique philosophical explanation of ‘Brahmavidya’

Atmopadesa Satakam stands as a pivotal work, offering a clear and concise explanation of Sree Narayana Guru’s profound philosophical system. The text entitled Atma-Upadesa which means ‘teaching about or of the Self’. The subject of Atmopadesa Stakam is ‘Brahmavidya’ or the knowledge of Absolute. Guru wrote this poem in a unique perspective.

- Introspective journey to true knowledge

The methodology Guru adopts in *Atmopadesa Satakam* for the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen’ is inherently experiential and introspective. Each verse serves as a direct address, offering advice to an individual earnestly seeking spiritual knowledge. It meticulously addresses the doubts that inevitably arise in the mind of someone pursuing self-realisation regarding their relationship with the universe. Guru’s approach systematically dismantles the false identification with the ‘seen’ – the empirical world, the senses, the intellect, and even the ego – by subtly redirecting the inquirer’s focus inward. This process distinguishes between mere opinion or sensory perception and true knowledge or ultimate cognition, meticulously revealing the illusory nature of the perceived reality.

- Guides self-inquiry to realise inner, liberating Advaita

Essentially, *Atmopadesa Satakam* guides the seeker to discern between transient appearances (the seen) and the unchanging, eternal consciousness (the seer). Guru’s verses employ a direct, dialogic method, compelling the reader to engage in self-inquiry rather than passive acceptance. This progressive methodology fosters a deep understanding that true knowledge is not an external acquisition but an internal realization of one’s own essential nature, which is identical with the universal consciousness. By methodically peeling back layers of misconception, *Atmopadesa Satakam* empowers the individual to move beyond superficial cognition and attain the profound, liberating knowledge of Advaita, where the ‘seer’ is recognized as the sole reality, distinct from all that is ‘seen’.

Version 59

അറിവിനെ വിട്ടു ഞാനുമില്ലയെന്നെ-
 പ്രിയുകിലല്ലറിവും, പ്രകാശമാത്രം;
 അറിവറിയുന്നവനെനും രണ്ടുമോർത്താ-
 ലൊരു പൊരുളാമതിലില്ല വാദമേതും

*Apart from awareness I have no being;
 As distinct from me awareness cannot remain
 As mere light; both knowledge and knower, contemplation
 Reveals beyond doubt as of one substance alone.*

- ‘I’ and universe: ultimately pure consciousness

If the consciousness of the universe is let go of, then the sense of ‘I’ as a living being will also cease to exist. If the sense of ‘I’ as a living being separates, then the imagined universal consciousness will also vanish. Both will merge into the self-luminous pure consciousness. Upon reflection, it becomes clear that the universal consciousness and the individual consciousness are in fact the same. There is absolutely no doubt about this.

- Knower, known, knowledge: all merge into pure consciousness

This profound statement highlights that the knower (the individual ‘I’), the objects perceived (the ‘seen’), and knowledge itself are fundamentally inseparable and ultimately one. True existence, or Arivu (knowledge), is a singular, undifferentiated essence. If one abandons the illusion of a separate ‘Arivu’ – the limited, conceptual understanding of the world – then the individual ‘I’ also ceases to exist as a distinct entity. Subsequently, if this individual ‘I’ dissolves, then even the conceptual cosmic consciousness disappears, leaving only pure, self-effulgent consciousness. This implies a radical unity where the individual self and the cosmic consciousness merge

into this ultimate pure awareness. Contemplation, therefore, reveals beyond any doubt that knowledge and the knower are of a single, indivisible substance, a universally accepted truth within this philosophical framework.

3.1.2.5 The Dialectical Interdependence of Self and Non-Self

According to Anthony Atherton, the relationship between the ‘subject-matter’ (the knower) and the ‘object-matter’ (the known) of consciousness is a subtle and dialectical one. There exists an inherent ambivalence between the self as the knower and the self as the known. However, both are interconnected by pure knowledge, a neutral abstraction recognised across various Eastern and Western philosophical traditions under different terminologies. Philosophers like Fichte, with his division between the self and the non-self, and Kant, with his distinction between ‘pure reason’ and ‘practical reason’, both acknowledged this inherent duality. While thinkers from Descartes to Leibniz explored the connection between mind and matter through concepts like ‘occasionalism,’ ‘substance that thinks,’ or ‘monads,’ rationalist philosophy consistently recognised a common, neutral ground underlying these seemingly dual aspects. This demonstrates a shared methodology across diverse schools, viewing the relationship between the self and the non-self in varying degrees of unity or duality.

- Knower-known relationship: Subtle, dialectical, unified by pure knowledge

3.1.2.6 Transcending Dualities for Absolute Consciousness

Human consciousness typically oscillates between the poles of the Self and the non-Self. However, when we observe this alternation from the deepest core of consciousness itself, this alternating process dissolves into the unitive light of absolute consciousness, thereby abolishing all forms of duality. While the pragmatic reality of mental and bodily phases succeeding each other in daily life is undeniable, the Guru, in this verse, points to the ambivalent interdependence between the self and its dialectical counterpart, the non-self. This initial enunciation serves as a foundational ‘solipsistic regulative principle,’ providing the basis for further elaboration on the operational mechanism of the self in later verses of *Atmopadesa Satakam*. Indeed, Shankara himself divided consciousness into ‘drik’ (the seer) and ‘drisya’ (the seen) to facilitate an analysis of self-consciousness, ultimately revealing the inner structure of

- Consciousness: Self and non-Self duality dissolves into absolute unity

absolute consciousness. This analytical approach is crucial for students to navigate the common philosophical perplexities and confusions.

3.1.3 Knowledge (Jnana) and Specific Wisdom (Vijnana) in Self-Realisation

The Bhagavad Gita distinguishes between 'jnana' (knowledge) and 'jneya' (the known), with the latter pertaining to 'vijnana' (specific wisdom) rather than mere 'jnana'. 'Jnana' primarily involves the elimination of errors or misconceptions about reality, a crucial initial step. The subsequent stage, 'vijnana', involves constructing positive doctrines and understandings about reality. Wisdom ultimately culminates in its own neutral glory when the self and the non-self become unified at the end of the spiritual quest. While a form of solipsism might appear as an objection to this perspective, where the individual self seems to be the sole reality, it is methodologically legitimate within contemplative reasoning, especially in higher wisdom traditions. Just as pantheism might emerge in describing God's omnipresence, an absolutist philosophy, based on a unitive foundation, naturally leads to such a position. The Guru, however, carefully avoids mechanistic adherence to solipsism, presenting it as a basic epistemological law before methodically developing its theorems and corollaries, thereby guiding the seeker beyond a limited understanding to the profound realisation of the non-dual truth.

• Wisdom: Self and non-self unify into non-dual truth

Version 60

അറിവിനെയും മമതക്കധീനമാക്കി
പറയുമിതിൻ പരമാർത്ഥമോർത്തിടാതെ,
പറകിലുമ്പ്പുരത്തൊന്നെന്നപോലീ-
യറിവറിയുന്നവനനുമാകുവീല.

*Even when knowledge to egoism is subject in any predication,
And one is unmindful of the ultimate verity of what is said,
Yet as with the truth, however ultimate, such knowledge
Can never fall outside the scope of the knowing self.*

• Ignorance views 'my consciousness,' but consciousness and self are always one

Without realizing the truth that consciousness and the self are one and the same, the ignorant speak of it with possessiveness, saying things like "my consciousness." Even though they speak this way due to ignorance, in the realization



of the Supreme Self (Paramatma), consciousness never exists separately from the living being, who is of the very nature of consciousness.

This passage addresses a fundamental misconception: the belief that ‘my knowledge’ implies a separation between the knower and knowledge itself. Guru explains that this arises from a failure to grasp the ultimate truth that the knower and knowledge are non-dual. Even when an individual, swayed by egoism and heedless of the supreme reality, speaks of ‘my knowledge,’ knowledge, which is pure consciousness, remains inherently inseparable from the knower. Just as in the realisation of the Supreme Principle, where all distinctions vanish, knowledge cannot exist apart from the one who knows. The individual ‘I’ (the jiva) that shines within everyone is the universal knower, and its essence is identical to the Supreme Atman. Therefore, the expression ‘my knowledge’ is rooted in ignorance, stemming from a lack of proper discernment, as extensively discussed by Advaita philosophers like Adi Shankara.

- ‘My knowledge’ is illusion: Knower and knowledge are non-dual

3.1.3.1 Truth as an Equilibrium between Self and Non-Self

The profound truth of existence can be approached from either pole of its inherent ambivalence: the self (knower) or the non-self (known). Importantly, truth is not a separate entity that exists independently of the knower or the known. When this is accepted, it becomes clear that an individual’s perception of truth is the outcome of these two interacting aspects, which imbue that truth with meaning and value for them. In essence, truth represents an equilibrium point between the poles of the self and the non-self. Imagine a vertical spectrum stretching between the self and the non-self; each individual, in their sincere pursuit of truth, places it somewhere along this continuum of values. Every truth carries a personal or ultimate significance, becoming meaningful only to the extent that it occupies a position on the line connecting the Self with the non-Self. This is a direct consequence of the axiomatic relationship between these two fundamental counterparts. As the conception of truth becomes more disinterested and impersonal, its appeal to instinctive dispositions diminishes, while its transcendental glory may intensify.

- Truth: Equilibrium between self and non-self, gaining meaning through their interaction

3.1.3.2 The Reciprocity of Subject and Object in Realisation

- Ultimate truth: Accessible to all, its value constant, uniting faith and reason

The value and accessibility of an ultimate truth are not restricted to advanced philosophical thinkers. For any truth to hold genuine value, it must be intellectually or emotionally reachable by individuals at various stages of understanding. This highlights a crucial bipolarity where the object of knowledge is limited by the subject, and vice-versa, ensuring that the effective value remains constant for genuine, wholehearted truth. An ordinary devotee might conceptualise God with personal attributes, while a more abstract thinker might conceive of a scientific Absolute. This demonstrates a 'law of inverse squares' in the reciprocity between faith and reason. All forms of genuine faith, provided they align unitively on this spiritual scale, are equally valid. This resonates with the Bhagavad Gita's teaching: 'Whatever be the manner in which a person might approach me, even accordingly do I accept him; it is my own path that all mankind do tread in their different ways' (IV.11). This principle resolves theological debates, such as the Christian controversy over 'grace' versus 'works,' by showing that faith and works must operate in unity.

3.1.3.3 Diverse Paths to the Same Truth: Faith and Reason United

- Sincere faith and sound reasoning are equivalent paths to truth

This reciprocal principle is beautifully illustrated in hagiographies, such as the Tamil legend of Kannappa Nayanar. Despite being a simple peasant, his profound faith in Śiva, willing to offer his own eye to mend an image's damaged eye, was deemed canonically equivalent in merit to the devotion of intellectually superior saints. This echoes the sentiment in Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, affirming that no sincere faith can be strictly labelled false, and no sound reasoning unfaithful. Truth and faith are mutually supportive. The philosophical concept of solipsism, which might seem like an objection to this view of reality, is methodologically legitimate within the contemplative reasoning central to higher wisdom. Just as pantheism might naturally arise when describing God's omnipresence, the unitive basis of absolutist philosophy inherently incorporates such positions, and it is not a weakness of the teaching. The Guru, in his systematic exposition, lays down this fundamental law of reciprocal interdependence between the knower and the known, proceeding to explain its corollaries in a methodical fashion, ensuring that the seeker progresses without getting mechanistically fixated on any



single doctrine.

Version 63

അറിവിലിരുന്നപരത്മാർന്നിടാതീ-
യറിവിനെങ്ങിങ്ങിയുന്നതെന്നിയേ താൻ
പരവശനായറിവില പണ്ഡിതൻ തൻ-
പരമരഹസ്യമിതാരൂ പാർത്തിടുന്നു!

*This wisdom that ever remains non-other to the Wisdom
Than the knowing of which just as such, here, what
By heterodox disadoption one can never come to know,
Such, the supreme secret of the pundit, who is here to see?*

Abiding always in the undivided consciousness, without assuming any sense of otherness, to perceive and experience that very undivided consciousness in everything in this world—that alone is true experience. Otherwise, being controlled by the senses, one comes to know only trivial, fleeting objects. The inner secret of this experience of a person established in Brahman (Brahma-nishta) is not something that an ordinary worldly person can easily grasp or perceive.

- Perceiving undivided consciousness in everything, unlike fleeting sensory knowledge

It explains that for one who consistently abides in the experience of indivisible, pure consciousness (Arivu), without perceiving themselves as separate from it, their experience is simply the direct knowing of Arivu itself. This means recognising that they and Arivu are one and the same undivided consciousness. Such an individual does not operate within the dualistic framework of ‘knower’ and ‘known’ and is not subservient to the senses. The Guru then poses a poignant question: ‘Who truly comprehends this supreme secret of the wise (Panditan)?’ This alludes to the inner, profoundly subtle reality of the self-realised being, which remains inaccessible to ordinary individuals engrossed in worldly affairs.

- Abiding in Arivu: Direct experience of unified consciousness, beyond duality and senses

3.1.4 Transcending Dualism: The Path of True Wisdom

As long as an individual remains subservient to their senses and clings to the dualistic notion of a separate knower and knowledge, true comprehension remains elusive. An ordinary, worldly person lacks the capacity to grasp this profound secret of the self-abiding individual. Here, the term ‘Panditan’ refers to someone who has attained Atmajnana (self-knowledge), a self-realised individual, or one steadfast in Brahman. A truly wise person understands that knowledge and the knower are an inseparable unity; they possess no dualistic perception but

- True wisdom: Non-dual perception, transcending senses and duality, seeing Brahman in all.

constantly shine as non-dual bliss-consciousness. It is only when caught in the state of duality that one remains subservient and experiences the three kinds of suffering. This perspective aligns with the Bhagavad Gita's description of a wise person (Panditan) as one who perceives all beings with equanimity, seeing Brahman as flawless and equal in everything. Thus, a Panditan is essentially one who perceives Brahman in all things, transcending conventional distinctions between the seer and the seen.

3.1.4.1 Navigating Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy on the Path to Self-Realisation

This verse should be understood in conjunction with the preceding one, serving to refine and correct any deviation from the strictly neutral position necessary for contemplative wisdom. The self and non-self, which can appear as either subject or object within the contexts of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, possess a subtle middle ground where true knowledge progresses towards Self-realisation. This represents the domain of pure wisdom, which is neither objective nor subjective, but a direct, effortless inner knowing. Most prevailing religions and philosophies tend to err by leaning too heavily on one side or the other, often leading to excesses. The Guru subtly warns against such extremes, whether they be the subtle mental reservations of excessive orthodoxy or the exaggeration of extraneous aspects in heterodoxy. Both are detrimental to pure wisdom. The two verses (62 and 63) are intended to define the precise context of Absolute Wisdom, urging a balanced approach between opposing forces rather than succumbing to dullness or disinterest.

- A neutral middle ground between subject and object, avoiding religious/philosophical extremes

3.1.4.2 The Pundit's Penetrating Insight and the Sadness of Misdirection

The process of Self-realisation necessitates the penetrating insight of the 'pundit' – not merely a learned person, but one with true understanding in these profound matters. The Bhagavad Gita employs 'panditah' in this laudatory sense, signifying someone who holds a balanced perspective, neither overly orthodox nor excessively heterodox. Only those with the deepest learning and most acute insight truly find this right path. The Guru's concluding note of sadness stems from the observation that the majority of spiritual or wisdom seekers often lose their balance, failing to maintain the necessary equilibrium between these tendencies. The way of wisdom

- Achieved by balanced "pundit" through wisdom's neutral, effortless unfolding



remains still, taking no sides, firmly established within its own neutral core. The profound establishment of wisdom occurs intrinsically within wisdom itself, uninfluenced by anything external, whether it pertains to the Self or the non-Self. Thus, Self-realisation is described as a ‘simple event’ – not a gross, mechanistic occurrence, but an effortless unfolding of inherent truth.

Verse 66

ഈ മുതലായവയെന്നുപ്രകാരം
 വരുമിനിയും; വരവറ്റുനില്പതേകം;
 അറിവതു നാമതു തന്നെ മറ്റുമെല്ലാ-
 വരുമതുതൻ വടിവാർന്നു നിന്നിടുന്നു.

*Earthy factors shall come to be evermore;
 One alone remains not subject to becoming;
 What we know, what it is, what we are, are that same;
 And all others too remain conforming to its form.*

• Universe: Transient appearance; undivided consciousness is the sole, eternal truth

• All phenomena are fleeting; ‘Arivu’ is the sole, unified, eternal truth

The entire universe, which appears to be divided as the object (what is enjoyed) and the subject (the enjoyer), will always continue to appear just as it does today—rising and passing away. But there is only one truth that remains constant, without coming or going: that is the undivided (akhanda) consciousness. All the other elements of the universe that seem to appear separately are nothing but various forms taken by that one and same eternal truth.

The poem posits that all phenomena we observe, like prey, the experiencer, and the five elements, will perpetually arise and dissolve, reflecting an endless cycle of creation and destruction. However, amidst this ceaseless becoming, there exists only one entity that remains constant, uncreated, and eternal. This singular truth is identified as ‘Arivu’ (knowledge) or indivisible pure consciousness. The verse then makes a crucial statement: ‘What we know, what it is, what we are, are that same,’ implying that our true essence is identical to this pure consciousness. Furthermore, all other worldly phenomena are merely diverse manifestations or forms of this very same Supreme Truth. This highlights that while dualities like ‘experiencer’ and ‘experienced’ persist due to ignorance, the underlying reality is a unified, non-dual consciousness.

3.1.4.3 The Illusory Nature of Manifested Reality

The text further clarifies that all constituents of the

- 'Arivu' (pure consciousness) is the sole, eternal reality, manifesting all

universe, including the experienced, the experiencer, and the five elements, are continually created and dissolved across time. They are inherently non-eternal. In contrast, the one entity that endures perpetually, uncreated and imperishable, is 'Arivu' – pure, indivisible consciousness. This reinforces the central Advaitic tenet that 'we are all that pure consciousness.' Every aspect of the phenomenal world, encompassing all individuals and objects, is merely an assumed form of this indivisible consciousness. Thus, everything, at its core, is pure consciousness, signifying that the Supreme Truth manifests itself in an array of diverse forms. When pure consciousness becomes associated with the body, senses, and mind, it is perceived as the 'experiencer'. However, since the body, senses, and mind are products of Maya (illusion), their existence ceases upon the realisation of pure consciousness. Both the experiencer and the experienced are merely apparent phenomena within that consciousness, arising due to avidya (ignorance); they are ultimately unreal. The sole reality is the non-dual, pure, indivisible consciousness, underscoring why all worldly phenomena are said to embody the form of this knowledge.

3.1.4.4 The Unchanging Absolute amidst Phenomenal Flux

- Transient 'seen' and unchanging 'seer' unify into a subtle, constant Absolute

This verse highlights an inherent duality within nature: a phenomenal aspect subjected to perpetual flux, constituting the multiplicity of existing things (the 'seen'), and a central, neutral reality that remains unchanging (the 'seer'). The 'knower' is the self, and the 'known' belongs to the non-self. When these two seemingly dual aspects are unified, a central, unchangeable reality emerges, the Absolute. This Absolute is constant, possessing a finalised form as pure, ineffable awareness, subtler than the subtle, akin to an abstract mathematical truth. It is upon this subtle, all-inclusive foundation that phenomenal existence traces its changing phases. The unchanging one and the many that form causal chains are intrinsically linked to this neutral core of the Absolute, existing without inherent contradiction. However, in the manifested world, they appear as contraries or contradictories depending on their level of actuality. This dynamic interplay between the static and the dynamic is central to discriminating the unchanging seer from the ever-changing seen.



3.1.4.5 The Tri-Basic Aspects of Truth and Unitive Vision

• jneya, objective, and self, all ultimately merge into the Absolute's unified knowledge

The Guru identifies three ways of knowing from a relativistic perspective, leading towards the highest, all-inclusive absolute abstraction. Firstly, there is 'jneya' (that which is to be known) or 'vijñanam' (specified knowledge), referring to the object-matter of knowledge in pure epistemology. Secondly, there is 'objective' knowledge of tangible items perceived through inner organs like mind, intelligence, relational mind, and ego, forming the 'what it is' aspect of the non-self. Thirdly, there is the self itself, which, though seemingly within the body, transcends spatial confinement. While these three aspects are distinguishable from a relativistic viewpoint, they ultimately merge into the unity of the Absolute upon philosophical finalisation. In the unitive vision of the Absolute, the knowledge, knower, and known – the tri-basic aspects of truth from a relativistic perspective – are transcended. This unitive knowledge combines the 'it' or 'that' (non-self) with the self-aspect. When these tri-basic aspects are thus holistically reduced and reconstructed, as the final line of the verse suggests, we realise that all other perceived individuals also conform to the archetype of the global, neutral, and normal notion of the Absolute. This means all distinctions, even between first, second, and third person pronouns, ultimately fall under the aegis of the singular Absolute Self.

Verse 67

ഗണനയിൽ നിന്നു കവിഞ്ഞതൊന്നു സാധാ-
 രണമിവ രുമൊഴിഞ്ഞൊരന്യരൂപം
 നിനവിലുമില്ലതു നിദ്രയിങ്കലും മേ-
 ലിനനഗരത്തിലുമെങ്ങുമില്ല നൂനം.

*That which is beyond count, on the one hand,
 And what is ordinary and of the workaday world;
 Other than these two, there is no other form at all
 Either in memory, in sleep, or in the city on high.*

• Unknowable cause and knowable forms are the only two realities

On one side is the ultimate cause of the universe, which cannot be grasped by logical reasoning; on the other side are the knowable forms and objects of the universe. Apart from these two, there is absolutely no third entity — not in the waking state, not in sleep, and not even after death in any other world. This is certain.

- Seer (transcendent) and Seen (empirical) are the only two categories of existence

This verse, categorises all universal phenomena into two fundamental groups. The first category encompasses that which transcends all calculation, logic, and sensory perception – representing the ‘Seer’. The second category comprises the ordinary, worldly phenomena, the empirical objects comprehensible through everyday experience and reasoning – representing the ‘Seen’. A crucial implication of this verse for the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen’ is its definitive statement: beyond these two categories, no other form of existence is found. This means that all reality can be systematically understood by discerning between these two fundamental aspects, simplifying the quest for ultimate truth by eliminating the possibility of any third, distinct ontological realm.

3.1.4.6 The Nature of the Uncountable (The Seer)

- Pure Consciousness (Arivu), the transcendent, ineffable ‘Seer’, beyond logic and senses

The first category, ‘that which transcends all calculation,’ refers to Pure Consciousness (Arivu), the ultimate cause of the universe. This is the Absolute, which, in its purest connotation, lies beyond all plurality and computation. It is not subject to numerical concepts or the distinctions of ‘one’ and ‘many’ in a conventional sense. As a concept, it is akin to a highly abstract mathematical truth, existing independently of specific, tangible items or empirical observation. This signifies the ‘Seer’ – an unchanging, uncreated, and eternal Supreme Truth that cannot be grasped by limited logical thought or sensory experience. Its nature is pure awareness, ineffable and supremely subtle. Understanding this transcendent aspect is central to spiritual realisation, as it represents the non-phenomenal ground from which all perceived reality arises, yet upon which it leaves no trace of change.

3.1.5 The Pervasiveness of the Ordinary (The Seen) and the Absence of a Third Realm

- Second category: Ordinary, perceptible ‘Seen’; only ‘Seer’ and ‘Seen’ exist

Conversely, the second category encompasses ‘what is ordinary and of the workaday world.’ This refers to all empirical objects and phenomena that constitute our daily experience and are comprehensible through conventional reasoning. These are the ‘Seen’ aspects of reality, existing within the realm of creation and destruction. The verse’s potent assertion, ‘Other than these two, there is no other form at all,’ profoundly impacts the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen.’ It unequivocally states that no third ‘substance’ or form exists anywhere – not in conscious thought, in the dream state, in deep sleep, in the realm of past memories, or even in any envisioned afterlife



or ‘city on high’ (heaven). This comprehensive exclusion reinforces that all experience, whether mundane or spiritual, past, present, or future, falls exclusively within these two primary axes: the transcendent, unquantifiable ‘Seer’ and the perceptible, ordinary ‘Seen’.

3.1.5.1 Unifying Reality: A Priori Justification for Two Categories

This categorical generalisation is justified by *a priori* considerations: an Absolute that leaves anything outside its scope is inconceivable. By this same reasoning, reality must fundamentally be either perceptual or conceptual, or comprise ‘relata’ or ‘relations’, as some philosophers describe. All forms of reality, whether phenomenal or noumenal, are encompassed within these two archetypal categories. This provides a clear framework for the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen,’ simplifying the philosophical landscape. The ‘vertical’ axis represents the pure, unchanging Absolute (the Seer), while the ‘horizontal’ axis represents the practical, ever-changing phenomenal world (the Seen). All human aspirations, including the idealised ‘City on High,’ are comprehensively included within these two reference frames. By understanding that everything is fundamentally one of these two, the seeker can move towards a unitive vision where the perceived contradictions between the unchanging and the changing are resolved, leading to a profound, non-dual apprehension of reality.

- All phenomena fit into two categories—transcendent Seer and changing Seen—leading to non-dual understanding

Verse 68

അരവവടാകൃതിപോലഹന്ത രാ-
 യറിവിലുമുണ്ടിയിലും കടക്കയാലേ,
 ഒരു കുറിയാര്യയിതിങ്ങനാര്യയാകു-
 ന്നൊരുകുറിയെന്നുണരേണമുഹശാലി.

As the ego sense enters into the double snake-rope-like scheme

*Now as knowledge and now as the limited body agent,
 It becomes sacred at one time or profane again
 Thus, should he understand, the intuitive man.*

- “I, I” consciousness, appears divided, exalted in self-awareness, degraded in object-awareness

Just as the same rope appears both as a rope and as a snake, the same “I, I” consciousness appears divided in two — externally as object-consciousness and internally as self-consciousness. Because of this, in the state of self-awareness, it becomes exalted, and in the state of object-awareness within

the world, this very ego-consciousness becomes degraded. The thoughtful person, understanding this, should strive to abide in self-awareness.

- Ego: 'I, I' thought, either aligns with 'seen' (ignoble) or 'seer' (noble)

Guru explains that the ego permeates both the boundless, unquantifiable 'Arivu' (knowledge) and perishable objects (the physical body or 'angi'), manifesting in two distinct ways, much like a single rope can be mistakenly perceived as both a serpent and a stick. This highlights how the ego, as the constant 'I, I' thought, extends its influence. When the ego identifies with external objects or the physical body, it becomes 'Anarya' (ignoble or profane), leading to a limited, dualistic perception of the 'seen'. Conversely, when it aligns with self-consciousness, the unquantifiable subject, it becomes 'Arya' (noble or sacred), pointing towards the 'seer'. The discerning individual, skilled in logical and intuitive reasoning, must awaken to this understanding.

3.1.5.2 The Ego's Polarity: Noble and Ignoble Aspects

- Ego's dual nature: ignoble with 'seen', noble with 'seer'

The ego, in its association with external object-knowledge, is considered ignoble, entangling consciousness in the realm of the 'seen'. However, when this same ego aligns with the unquantifiable, ineffable subject – that which transcends all calculation and is beyond speech and mind, essentially, self-consciousness – it becomes noble. The ego that manifests in pure self-consciousness is thus divine, facilitating the direct experience of the 'seer', whereas the ego immersed in external, object-oriented knowledge is seen as ignoble, hindering this spiritual discernment. A thoughtful seeker on the spiritual path must clearly comprehend that the noble ego leads towards liberation by aiding the discrimination of the 'seer' from the 'seen', while the ignoble ego fosters bondage by strengthening the illusion of a separate 'seen' reality. Ultimately, all that becomes an object of knowledge is perishable, while the unquantifiable self-consciousness (Atma Bodha), the 'seer', is the eternal truth.

3.1.5.3 Beyond Duality: The Intuitive Path to Unity

The verse, along with its analysis, details the subtle dichotomy to which the individual 'I' sense is subjected. Like a magnet with two poles, consciousness presents an elusive, ambivalent phenomenon when viewed from the side of appearance rather than ultimate reality. The ego oscillates between two poles: one as a mere mental presentation



- Ego oscillates: knowledge and embodiment alternate

(like the illusory snake on the rope), and the other tending towards ontological existence (like the rope itself). The pole of ‘knowledge’ (Arivu) represents subsistence, while the ego-sense conditioned by the physical body (‘angi’ or ‘limbed agent’) represents existence. These alternating states correspond to the psychic and physical aspects of reality, both having their common ground in individual consciousness. To transcend these two-sided limitations and merge into the non-dual Absolute, the contemplative must fully grasp this subtle polarity.

3.1.5.4 The Pundit’s Wisdom: Seeing Unity in Duality

Here, the term Arya stands for para (higher) and the term Anarya stands for apara (lower). When one attains wisdom the ego becomes higher and when one stay turned with empirical world the same ego becomes lower. The implication of this verse is that Arya and Anarya are the two sides of the same coin. The same consciousness is seen as the empirical world in the outer plane and as self in the inner plane.

- Ego shifts: higher with wisdom, lower otherwise

Verse 81

പ്രകൃതി പിരിഞ്ഞൊരു കൂറു ഭോക്തൃരൂപം
 സകലവുമായ് വെളിയേ സമുല്പസിക്കും
 ഇഹപരമാമൊരു കുരിദന്തയാലേ
 വികസിതമാമിതു ഭോഗ്യവിശ്വമാകും.

*Nature, dividing, at one time as the enjoyer of everything
 Outside, immanent as transcendent, it shining looms;
 At another time again by ‘this-ness’ expanded
 It spreads out before as the enjoyable universe.*

The core of Sree Narayana Guru’s philosophy, particularly concerning the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen,’ lies in distinguishing between the ephemeral nature of the body and the eternal essence of the Atman. The physical body, as an aspect of the ‘seen,’ is inherently impermanent, undergoing continuous cycles of destruction, rebirth, and transformation. Its very nature is defined by states of birth, existence, and dissolution. In stark contrast, the Atman, representing the ‘Seer,’ is pure consciousness that transcends all visible phenomena. It remains the unaffected witness to these three states of all perceived objects, including the body. As the all-witnessing Atman, it is inherently free from suffering, indestructible, and thus eternal. It stands untouched by

- Atman eternal body perishable witness unchange

any changes affecting the ‘seen,’ maintaining an eternally unmoving state. As the Bhagavad Gita affirms, ‘Nityo’yam niravadyo’yamavikāro’yamucyate’ – this Atman is perpetual, flawless, and utterly unchangeable, serving as the ultimate ground for distinguishing the unchanging observer from the mutable observed.

• Discriminate inner essence outer interest carefully

Human existence is fundamentally intertwined with nature in two primary ways, a relationship shaped by one’s subjective and objective engagement with life. This establishes a ‘value-world’ that is here termed ‘Nature,’ understood contemplatively in its complete, two-fold aspect. Considering humanity as the core of this situation, two distinct facets of Nature emerge, crucial for the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen.’ Firstly, there is a vertical aspect: this signifies the pure world of ‘things-in-themselves,’ encompassing ontological, teleological, immanent, and transcendental realities. This realm is intrinsically linked to the mind, spirit, or inner consciousness, representing the ‘Seer’. Secondly, there is a horizontal aspect: this refers to the graded series of interests and items of enjoyment that are spread out before an individual, symbolising the ‘Seen’. Recognising and meticulously differentiating these two aspects of Nature is fundamental for systematic self-realisation, as intermixing them can obscure the ultimate vision of the Absolute.

• Seer and seen converge in self

These two distinct value-worlds of Nature ultimately converge within the central self, which functions as the enjoyer. Much like the Sun and its sunlight, the enjoyer (aligned with the ‘Seer’) and the enjoyed aspects of nature (the ‘Seen’) belong unitively to a central reality, here termed ‘Nature’ (with a capital N), understood under the aegis of the Absolute. This ‘Nature’ serves as the crucial intersection point where the actual (phenomenal) and the perceptual (experiential) realms meet. This correlation is paramount for developing a normative understanding of the Absolute within the context of self-realisation. Thus, ‘Nature’, when grasped neutrally, becomes the precise point where the vertical (transcendent, ‘Seer’) and horizontal (immanent, ‘Seen’) aspects intersect within the framework of the Absolute itself, facilitating the profound discrimination necessary for ultimate truth.

Verse 99

അറിവഹമെന്നതു രണ്ടുമേകമാമാ-
 വരണമൊഴിഞ്ഞവനന്യനുണ്ടു വാദം
 അറിവിനെ വിട്ടഹമന്യമാകുമെന്നാ-
 ലറിവിനെയിങ്ങറിയാനുമരുമില്ല.

*Knowledge and 'I' are both one, for one divest of all veiling curtains;
Another might have reason to argue still;
If the 'I' could be taken as other than knowledge
None there is to know knowledge here at all!*

For the one steadfast in truth, in whom the veil of Maya has been lifted, the undivided consciousness of the Supreme Self (Paramatma) and the sense of 'I' (Jiva-bodha) are one and the same. But for the ignorant one whose covering has not been removed, there remains doubt. If the sense of 'I' is seen as separate from the undivided consciousness, then it would imply that there is no one in this world capable of realizing the Supreme Self.

3.1.5.5 The Oneness of Knower and Knowledge: Transcending the Veil of Maya

Sree Narayana Guru's verse, 'Knowledge and 'I' are both one, for one divest of all veiling curtains presents the ultimate truth of Advaita Vedanta: the oneness of the individual self ('I') and pure consciousness (Arivu). This realisation is accessible to the wise, those from whom the veil of Maya, or ignorance, has been lifted. For such self-realised individuals, the 'I' and 'Arivu' are indistinguishable, embodying the profound experiential truth of 'Aham Brahmasmi' (I am Brahman). The Guru acknowledges that the ignorant, still enveloped by the veil of illusion, may dispute this non-duality, perceiving a separation. However, the verse poses a crucial logical challenge: if the 'I' were truly separate from 'Arivu', then there would be no cogniser left to know or realise that pure consciousness, rendering the very act of knowing impossible.

- Knowledge and self merge in oneness

3.1.5.6 Liberation as Self-Realisation: The Unimpeded Dawn of Truth

The text explains that when ignorance (avidya) is dispelled through the light of knowledge attained via self-realisation, the covering of Maya instantly vanishes. At this pivotal moment, 'Arivu' (indivisible, pure consciousness) and the 'I' (the individual self) become one, dissolving all dualistic perception. For those still under Maya's sway, doubt and arguments regarding their distinctness persist. Yet, the logical implication is profound: if the individual self were genuinely separate from pure consciousness, there would literally be no entity capable of

- Liberation is knowledge of inherent self

realising or knowing that ultimate knowledge. The experiential realisation of 'Aham Brahmasmi' is thus synonymous with liberation (moksha). This liberation is not an acquisition but a 'labdhalabha' (a gain of what is already possessed), meaning it is inherent and self-accomplished, simply awaiting the removal of the veil of ignorance. This aligns with the analogy of a necklace already around one's neck; its 'discovery' is merely the removal of the mistaken belief of its loss.

3.1.5.7 The Eternal Liberation of the Jiva and the Role of Discrimination

Just as the necklace was never truly lost, the individual self (jiva) is eternally liberated. It merely imagines itself bound due to the obscuring power of ignorance and consequently strives for liberation. Once this ignorance is dispelled, the direct experience, 'I am liberated,' dawns unimpeded, revealing the true nature, the identity of the individual self and Brahman. Scriptures like 'Vimuktaśca vimucyate' (The liberated one becomes liberated) underscore this inherent freedom. Therefore, the wise person realises they are pure consciousness itself. From the perspective of 'Discrimination of Seer from the Seen,' this verse represents the ultimate conclusion: the 'seer' (the 'I' or Atman) is revealed to be non-different from the ultimate 'seen' (Pure Consciousness or Brahman) once the illusory distinctions imposed by Maya are removed. The painstaking process of discriminating the seer from the seen culminates in this non-dual understanding, where the apparent duality dissolves into a singular, self-luminous reality.

- Self always free
ignorance creates
false bondage

Verse 32

അറിവതു ധർമ്മിയെയല്ല, ധർമ്മമാമീ-
യരുളിയ ധർമ്മിയദൃശ്യമാകയാലേ
ധരമുതലായവയൊന്നുമില്ല താങ്ങു-
ന്നൊരു വടിവാമറിവുള്ളതോർത്തീടേണം

*It is not the inner agent but the expression
That we know; since the said agent of expression remains
unseen,
Do remember the earth and all else is naught:
While the supporting outline of awareness is all there is.
Discerning Reality: Knowledge as the Unseen
Substratum*



- Knowledge is substratum world merely appearance

The verse, details into the methodology of discriminating Knowledge from mere cognition. It suggests that in instances like ‘pot-knowledge’ or ‘cloth-knowledge,’ knowledge serves as the substratum (dharmi), while the pot or cloth are merely attributes (dharma). The Guru clarifies that the universe, as the object of our knowledge, is not the pure consciousness (the true dharmi) but an attribute superimposed upon it. When we speak of ‘knowledge of the universe,’ knowledge itself is the underlying substratum, which remains imperceptible to the senses and cannot be objectified. What is actually known is the attribute – the perceived universe. This aligns with Vedantic philosophy, where the universe is an appearance on pure conscious substratum; upon realising the substratum, the superimposed universe vanishes, akin to recognising a rope, which dispels the illusion of a snake.

3.1.5.8 The Primacy of Cause Over Effect: Unveiling the Real

- Pure consciousness remains all else superimposed

This reasoning aligns with ‘sad-karya-vada’, a philosophical approach that prioritises the cause over the effect. According to this methodology, the multitude of effects (like the earth and other elements) are deemed philosophically unreal, mere superimpositions on the ultimate cause: pure consciousness. If one were to give primacy to effects, the endless chain of phenomena would lead to an absurd and impossible multiplicity, making a definitive understanding of reality unattainable. Instead, the quest for truth necessitates moving from effects back to their fundamental cause, seeking a firmer basis for reality. The verse emphasises that just as a snake is unreal when superimposed on a rope, all elements like earth are superimpositions on pure consciousness and are, therefore, fundamentally non-existent or unreal. What remains as the sole reality is the ‘supporting outline of awareness’ – the pure consciousness itself. This methodology of discriminating knowledge from mere opinion dictates that true knowledge resides in understanding the unchanging, unmanifest cause, rather than mistaking the transient, manifested effects for ultimate reality.

3.1.5.9 The Unseen Foundation of Awareness: Beyond Mental and Material

The ‘supporting outline of awareness’ mentioned in the verse is the outcome of the confluence of subjective and objective consciousness, understood neutrally, without psychic

- Awareness arises from subject object convergence

or physical bias. This ‘outline’ can be conceived geometrically, like a point without space or a line representing only length, ultimately existing as a result of consciousness where pure events unfold. The very ‘stuff’ of these events transcends both mental and material categories, belonging to an unitive, absolute order, thereby highlighting the subtle nature of the ultimate knowledge. The Guru illustrates this by noting that a seemingly simple notion, like the dimensions of a table, arises from the meeting of pure reasoning (‘two plus two equals four’) and sensory input. Both these aspects converge in the meaningful perception of the table as it becomes part of our lived reality. This demonstrates the correct methodology inherent in all knowledge: true understanding involves recognising the underlying unity that integrates diverse aspects of perception and conception.

3.1.6 Methodological Clarity in Self-Knowledge

- True knowledge reveals unchanging conscious substratum

By emphasising the unperceivable, unchangeable substratum (Knowledge/Consciousness) over its perceptible, transient attributes (Opinion/Phenomena), the Guru provides a clear methodological framework for self-realisation. The ultimate knowledge is not about cataloguing attributes but about realising the underlying ‘dharmi’ that supports them, which is pure consciousness. This approach encourages the seeker to move beyond superficial appearances and the endless particularities of the ‘seen’ (the empirical world, objects, and attributes) towards the fundamental, unmanifest ‘Seer’ (the unchanging substratum of awareness). The distinctions between ontological and teleological, immanent and transcendent, phenomenal and noumenal, though from different philosophical contexts, all point to a similar attempt to classify reality into distinct sets. Here, this classification is fundamental for a methodic approach to self-realisation, ensuring that the vertical (transcendent) and horizontal (immanent) aspects of reality are not confused, ultimately leading to the profound discrimination of what is truly real from what is merely apparent.

Verse 60

അറിവിനെയും മമതക്കധീനമാക്കി-
 പ്പായുമിതിൻ പരമാർത്ഥമോർത്തിടാതെ,
 പരകിലുമ്പുരത്തൊന്നെന്നപോലീ-
 യറിവറിയുന്നവനന്യമാകുവീല.



*Even when knowledge to egoism is subject in any predication,
And one is unmindful of the ultimate verity of what is said,
Yet as with the truth, however ultimate, such knowledge
Can never fall outside the scope of the knowing self.*

- Discriminate egoic opinion from intrinsic knowledge

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical system, notably articulated in *Atmopadesa Satakam*, fundamentally centres on the discrimination of the seer from the seen. This core principle suggests that while the phenomenal universe operates under causal laws, humanity uniquely possesses the faculty to apprehend its ultimate cause: pure consciousness. The verse directly addresses the methodology of discriminating Knowledge from mere cognition. It highlights that the common assertion 'my knowledge,' driven by egoism, is an opinion born from a fundamental misunderstanding of reality. True Knowledge, in contrast, is intrinsic and non-separate from the knowing self, the Atman. This sets the stage for the crucial insight that all possessive claims over knowledge represent a limited, ego-bound opinion, distinct from the boundless, inherent Knowledge that is ultimately identical with the knower.

- Eye of knowledge transcends sensory illusion

The *Atmopadesa Satakam* offers a profound, introspective methodology for distinguishing this intrinsic Knowledge from mere Opinion, which often arises from identifying with the 'seen'. Ordinary individuals typically prioritise the physical body and sensory perceptions, mistakenly equating them with the true self, leading to transient opinions about reality. Guru's guidance redirects the seeker away from these external, superficial quests. Instead, the pursuit of truth necessitates an inward journey, accessed not through physical sight but through the 'eye of knowledge' (Jnana Chakshus). This internal discernment involves meticulously navigating and transcending the seven layers of perception – sound, touch, form, taste, smell, intellect, and ego. This systematic process progressively dismantles erroneous identifications with the 'seen' (the material world, sensory inputs, intellect, and ego), compelling the aspirant towards self-inquiry. By doing so, it facilitates a crucial distinction between ephemeral sensory perceptions or subjective opinions and profound, ultimate Knowledge, thereby unveiling the illusory nature of perceived reality.

A central tenet for this discrimination is the non-duality of knowledge and the knower. The belief in 'my knowledge,'

- Knowledge and knower are never truly separate

implying a separation between knowledge as an external entity and the individual possessing it, is identified as a fundamental misunderstanding. This erroneous distinction, often reflected in possessive language, leads to the deluded opinion that knowledge can be owned, rather than being an intrinsic aspect of the conscious self. Despite such common misapprehensions, Guru asserts that pure consciousness (Knowledge) remains inherently non-separate from the knower, mirroring the indivisible nature realised during Paramatma-realisation. The individual 'Jiva' (individual soul), manifesting as the constant 'I' in all beings, is universally the knower, and its essence is not distinct from the Paramatma. Consequently, the very notion of 'my knowledge' is seen as a product of ignorance (avidya), an opinion that arises from the precise lack of discrimination that *Atmopadesa Satakam* aims to impart.

- Truth balances self and non-self awareness

Furthermore, Guru's methodology for distinguishing Knowledge from Opinion encompasses a holistic view of truth, acknowledging its ambivalent poles of Self and non-Self. Truth is not an independent third factor, but an equilibrium between these two, giving meaning and value to an individual's reality. While some might pursue truth through abstract philosophical reasoning (leading to 'Knowledge'), others might approach it through heartfelt devotion (potentially seen as 'Opinion'). Guru's philosophy, however, validates that all forms of genuine faith, if they align unitively on a vertical spiritual scale, are equally respectable paths to the ultimate truth, as echoed in the Bhagavad Gita. The example of Kannappa Nayanar illustrates that simple, heartfelt faith can hold equal merit to intellectual understanding. Therefore, the methodology of discrimination is not about rejecting one approach over another, but about moving beyond the superficial opinions of separation and possessiveness towards a unified, non-dual understanding where Knowledge is realised as inherent and inseparable from the knowing Self.

Verse 62

പരവശനായ്പുരതത്വമെന്തെനോർ
കരുതരുതെന്നു കമിപ്പതൊന്നിനാലേ
വരുമറിവേതു വരാ കമിപ്പതാലേ
പരമപദം പരിചിന്ത ചെയ്തിടേണം.

Mere orthodoxy, which keeps saying that one should not adopt

As one's own a doctrine belonging to another side, how can it True knowledge bring? Lip service does not avail -

One has earnestly to contemplate the state supreme.



- True knowledge demands contemplation not orthodoxy

The verse, addresses the profound limitations of superficial adherence in the pursuit of self-realisation. The verse cautions against the narrow mindset of orthodoxy, which often rejects doctrines or practices not traditionally ‘one’s own’. Such a stance, driven by ignorance and externally-oriented senses, mistakenly claims the Supreme Principle (Pure Consciousness) as a personal possession (‘mine’). This possessive notion, indicative of a divisive intellect, fundamentally misrepresents the non-dual nature of truth. The Guru asserts that simply being told ‘not to think that way’ will not lead to genuine knowledge; true understanding cannot arise from mere words or verbal repetition. Instead, authentic knowledge, which is the very nature of realisation, demands continuous and earnest contemplation of the Supreme State – the ultimate truth of the Atman.

3.1.6.1 Beyond Lip Service: The Path of Listening, Reflection, and Meditation

- Atman not possessed realised through contemplation

The text emphasises that humans, swayed by ignorance, often mistakenly believe the Supreme Atman to be ‘theirs,’ a divisive notion that contradicts its all-encompassing nature. However, merely refraining from this thought, or relying on knowledge derived solely from external words or sensory inputs, is insufficient for profound spiritual progress. Such knowledge is fleeting and insignificant. The Supreme State cannot be attained through verbal repetition alone, just as speaking the name of sugar does not convey its sweetness. Instead, the Guru prescribes a direct and experiential methodology for achieving self-realisation: it must be grasped through continuous contemplation. This involves a three-fold process of listening (shravana) to scriptural truths, reflection (manana) upon those truths to clarify doubts, and deep meditation (nididhyasana) to internalise the realisation. This methodical journey, moving beyond superficial adherence and sensory dependence, is crucial for discriminating genuine spiritual knowledge from mere intellectual opinions or conventional beliefs.

3.1.6.2 Overcoming Extremes: The Golden Mean of Spiritual Research

This verse, read in conjunction with subsequent ones, highlights a fundamental dichotomy in religious and spiritual life: the tendency towards rigid orthodoxy (exaggerating the value of one’s own conditioning) or extreme heterodoxy

• Avoid extremes seek contemplative middle path

(vehemently adopting what is alien). Both tendencies, rooted in subtle spiritual suffering, prevent the attainment of genuine knowledge. The Guru points towards a ‘golden mean,’ advocating earnest research for a correct middle path. Mere conservatism, like ‘lip-service’ spirituality, is as detrimental as its heterodox counterpart. The ultimate cure for both these ‘doxies’ is the calm contemplation of the absolutist or finalised standpoint, referred to as the ‘supreme state.’ Particular ‘isms’ or creeds represent only partial aspects of this all-comprehensive Truth, which encompasses existence, subsistence, and values. This ‘supreme state’ is a neutral and normative standpoint with respect to the Absolute, guiding the seeker away from sectarian opinions towards a unified understanding.

3.1.6.3 Cultivating Heartfelt Spirituality for Absolute Wisdom

• Outer religiosity hinders true spiritual growth

Many who identify as religious often focus on the outer forms of religious life, such as doctrines and social behaviours, which can unfortunately foster rivalries and exclusive attitudes. The Guru critiques this superficiality, echoing complaints against ‘Lord-lordism’ in Christianity and pointing to the inadequacy of mere formulaic repetitions. True spiritual progress, leading to absolute wisdom, cannot be achieved through intellectual correctness or doctrinal adherence alone. It demands a religion of the heart, a deep spirituality or contemplation that is cultivated deliberately, with reference to the finalised wisdom of the Absolute, rather than being swayed by the sentiments of the masses at a superficial level. This emphasizes that discrimination of knowledge from opinion is not just an intellectual exercise but a profound internal transformation. It requires moving beyond external, conventional ‘opinions’ to an inner, experiential ‘knowledge’ that integrates diverse perspectives within the unitive vision of the Supreme State.

Verse 65

ഒരു കുറി നാമറിയാത്തതൊന്നുമിങ്ങി-
 ല്ലൂരുമറവാലറിവീലുണർന്നിതെല്ലാം
 അറിവവരില്ലതിരറ്റതാകയാലി-
 യരുമയെയാരറിയുന്നഹോ വിചിത്രം!

*There is not one thing here that we have not already once known;
 Veiled by form, knowledge fails: wakefully to know all
 There is none here boundless as it is;
 O, who can know at all this wonder dear!*

- Truth veiled by Maya remains a wonder

If one truly reflects, there is nothing in this world that cannot be known. But because of the veil of Maya, not everyone is able to realize this. Once the clear experience of Truth arises, such individuals will no longer perceive this dualistic world in so many fragmented ways. Since the Supreme Truth is without beginning or end, and is a treasure-house of bliss, who can fully comprehend it while remaining separate from it? One can only call it a wonder.

- Supreme truth known through seer-seen unity

This aligns with the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen’ by asserting that the Seer (our true consciousness) inherently contains all knowledge. However, due to a ‘great veil of ignorance’ or ‘great darkness’ (urumaravāl), this boundless knowledge remains unrecognised. The verse suggests that if one truly ‘awakens to knowledge’ (uṇarnn-aṛivīla), the perception of the dualistic universe would cease to be multiple, implying a unification of the ‘seer’ and the ‘seen’. The ‘wonder’ referred to is the boundless Supreme Truth itself, which, being without beginning or end, cannot be ‘known’ in the conventional sense by a separate ‘knower’ but is rather experienced through a merger with it.

- Perception shaped by memory and conditioning

The analysis further elaborates on the Vedantic concept of ‘adhyasa’ (superimposition), where our vision of the manifested world is fundamentally based on memory. This is crucial for understanding the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen’ because it explains how the ‘seen’ is often a misapprehension. The reality we attribute to objects is often due to past conditionings or ‘samskaras’ and ‘vasanas’ (tendencies), which colour our present perception and give it a ‘reality’ that is not truly there. This suggests that much of what we ‘see’ and ‘know’ is filtered through a veil of stored experiences, hindering direct perception of the underlying reality. The text emphasizes that perception and conception interact, often influenced by emotive factors, highlighting the complexity beyond simple stimulus-response mechanisms. This perspective encourages a vertical, rather than merely horizontal, view of reality, allowing us to grasp that our consciousness, individual or collective, implicitly contains all past experiences, implying that nothing is truly ‘new’ or ‘unknown’ to the fundamental ‘Seer’.

The verse’s second line, ‘Veiled by form, knowledge fails,’ points to a deeper philosophical verity concerning the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen.’ Form, shape, or colour, being mere appearances or attributes (dharma), can obscure the substantial basis or thing-in-itself (dharmi). The ‘dharmi’

- Forms obscure seer discernment requires inward turn

is the basic, unseen reality, the cause or agent that produces the effects ('dharma'). What hinders our reasoning and direct knowing of the 'dharma' is the visual aspect and other sensory perceptions, which belong to the order of appearances. By getting misled by these extraneous impediments of form, our knowledge of the objects in themselves becomes obstructed. Therefore, for effective discrimination, these superficial forms must be brushed aside to allow the basic reality – the 'Seer' – to dawn in our minds. The inherent boundlessness of the universe further implies the impossibility of a fully 'objectified' knowledge of all particulars, guiding the seeker away from an exhaustive external pursuit towards the essential, inner reality.

- Absolute wonder lies beyond memory's veil

The 'dear wonder' in the last line signifies that aspect of the Absolute that is untouched by the influences of memory – the very enemy of spiritual progress. This refers to the 'adrishta' (the unseen) or 'apurva' (the never-known before) aspects of the Absolute Truth, which provide a crowning character to the notion of the Absolute itself. This 'unseen' is the ultimate object of our spiritual quest, whether conceived as God in theology, the embodiment of 'dharma' in ethics, or artistic perfection in aesthetics. It represents a supreme, absolute value accessible only to the boldest adventurer in the realm of the spirit. The verse concludes with a note of sadness, acknowledging how rare it is to attain this positive, direct wisdom. This implies that while the Seer inherently knows all, the process of consciously discriminating it from the Seen (veiled by memory and form) and truly realising this boundless wonder is a challenging, profound, and ultimately rare achievement for the human spirit.

Verse 33

അറിവു നിജസ്ഥിതിയിങ്ങറിഞ്ഞിടാനായ്-
 ഭ്രമര മുതലായ വിഭൂതിയായി താനേ
 മറിയുമവസ്ഥയിലേറിമാറി വട്ടം-
 തിരിയുമലാതസമം തിരിഞ്ഞിടുന്നു.

*Awareness, in order to find its proper state,
 Itself the earth and other manifestations became;
 In inverted state thus, now mounting, now changing over
 Like a circulating fire-faggot it keeps turning round.*

The verse addresses the Methodology of discrimination of Knowledge and Cognition by explaining the apparent multiplicity of the universe. Guru Devan posits that there is



- Multiplicity illusion conceals one pure consciousness

only one true, pure consciousness, 'Arivu'. In order to manifest its inherent, indivisible essence, this pure consciousness itself seemingly transforms into the diverse forms of divine manifestations (vibhutis) like earth, water, fire, air, and space. This constant transformation and change is likened to a 'rotating firebrand' – a swiftly whirled faggot that creates the illusion of a continuous fiery wheel. This analogy is key to understanding how Cognition (the perception of diverse forms) arises from Knowledge (pure consciousness). The perceived multiplicity is an illusion, a dynamic appearance, which conceals the singular, unchanging reality.

3.1.6.4 Discriminating Knowledge from Cognition: Unveiling the True Nature

The firebrand analogy serves as a powerful methodological tool for discriminating between ultimate Knowledge and mere Cognition. Just as the perceived fiery wheel is an illusion created by the firebrand's motion, the diverse phenomena of the universe (Cognition) are an apparent manifestation of pure consciousness (Knowledge). The 'constant spinning' of pure consciousness is the cause of these various forms and appearances. The inherent truth is that when this 'motion' ceases, the true, indivisible nature of pure consciousness is experienced. This 'cessation' implies a cessation of the mind's tendency to create distinctions and perceive multiplicity, leading to the direct realisation of unified Knowledge. The Bhagavad Gita's concept of divine manifestations (vibhutis) supports this, stating that the entire universe exists through these vibhutis, which are ultimately identified with Atman-consciousness. These vibhutis are like sparks from the firebrand, emerging from and merging back into the singular truth, reinforcing that Cognition is merely an illusory appearance of underlying Knowledge.

- Motion creates illusion stillness reveals pure knowledge

3.1.6.5 Reflexive Self-Knowledge: The Central Witness

From a methodological standpoint, the text highlights that all manifested phenomena are events within consciousness, with both psychic and physical origins. For discriminating Knowledge from Cognition, this duality must be reduced into vertical self-awareness. This reflexive Self-knowledge operates as a neutral awareness, neither subjective nor objective, centrally witnessing both perceptions (Cognition) and conceptions (Cognition as understood mentally). The processes of a priori

- All phenomena arise within pure consciousness

(innate) and a posteriori (experiential) thinking are viewed as unified events within pure contemplative consciousness. The ‘alata’ (fire-faggot) analogy for the phenomenological chain of events vividly portrays the dynamic pulsations of thought processes, which, though appearing as continuous chains, are fundamentally momentary units. This reinforces that what we perceive as continuous Cognition is often a mental construction from discontinuous elements, and the true Knowledge lies in discerning this underlying mechanism.

Verse 61

വെളിവിഷയം വിലസുന്നു വേറുവേറാ-
യളവിടുമിന്ദ്രിയമാർന്ന തന്റെ ധർമ്മം
ജ്ഞതയതിങ്ങു ദിഗംബരാദി നാമാ
വലിയൊടുയർന്നറിവായി മാറിടുന്നു

*Outside objects hold the field, each distinct from each,
With the sense that measures, whose function is nescience,
And these in turn with many sets of names, such as that
of directions,
Or the sky, keep rising up and into awareness change.*

The verse examines the Methodology of discrimination of Knowledge and Cognition. It highlights that external objects, appearing as distinct entities like forms and colours, interact with our senses, making them perceptible. However, the Guru asserts that these sensory objects and the very function of the senses (eyes, ears, etc.) are fundamentally inert (jaḍatā) and are products of nescience or ignorance (avidya). This means that our initial perception, or cognition, of the world as a collection of separate, named entities (e.g., ‘direction,’ ‘space’) is not a direct apprehension of ultimate reality but an illusion arising from the senses’ inherent limitations. What we perceive as ‘knowledge’ of these external entities is, in fact, merely a transformation of these inert objects, dressed up with names and forms, into our awareness.

- Senses deceive transforming inert into apparent knowledge

3.1.6.6 The Role of Senses in Creating Distorted Cognition

The text further elaborates on how the senses contribute to this distorted cognition. Each sense organ, when apprehending its specific object – the eye seeing form, the ear hearing sound, and so forth – creates a distinct object of experience. The critical insight here for discriminating Knowledge from



- Sensory knowledge arises from ignorance not truth

Cognition is that the function of these senses and their objects is fundamentally tied to inertness (jaḍatā) or ignorance. This implies that the ‘knowledge’ we gain through sensory perception is not ultimate truth but a form of cognition arising from a limited, dualistic engagement with the world. All phenomena in this world, from concrete objects to abstract concepts like ‘direction’ and ‘space,’ are given names and then seemingly ‘transformed into knowledge’. This process gives us the impression of their real existence, but it is a perception built on the foundation of the senses, which, by their very nature, are described as functioning on the side of ignorance rather than true science or ultimate awareness.

3.1.6.7 Ascending from Outer Cognition to Deeper Awareness

The verse vividly portrays the continuous flux within psycho-physical consciousness, where external objects act as focal points, engaging our attention successively in time and space. This is the world of multiple interests where the self operates, driven by varied satisfactions. The ‘measuring-rod’ for these interests originates in the five senses, but since they provide only a partial picture of reality, they lead to the world of appearance, functioning under the sway of ignorance. For discriminating Knowledge from Cognition, the methodology involves moving beyond these outer objects of interest to deeper-seated conceptual factors. These conceptual factors belong to a psycho-physical framework, transcending purely physical or mental categorisations. Modern mathematical notions of space and direction, for instance, demonstrate how concepts can grade into imperceptibles, hinting at a purer notion of reality that moves beyond mere sensory-derived cognition towards a more abstract and unified awareness.

- Senses measure interests but distort true reality

3.1.6.8 The Flux of Consciousness and the Primacy of Knowledge

The dynamic change and becoming within psycho-physical consciousness, likened to a ‘circulating fire-faggot,’ illustrates how events continuously ascend, change, and circulate between poles of ‘matter’ and ‘mind’. This conceptualisation, rooted in Vedantic thought, resonates with modern physics’ view of a universe in constant flux. For the methodology of discriminating Knowledge from Cognition, this implies that what we perceive as continuous, coherent ‘cognition’ of external reality is actually a dynamic, often illusory, process. The ‘changing over’ and ‘turning round’ suggests that our

- Cognition flux illusion knowledge reveals stable reality

conventional understanding of reality is a complex interplay of appearances rather than a direct grasp of ultimate truth. The Guru's perspective, aligning with philosophies that merge pragmatism and mysticism, asserts that Knowledge gains primacy above all material or practical considerations. This underscores that true Knowledge lies in understanding the fundamental, unchanging reality that underpins all fleeting cognitions, requiring a shift in perspective from the perceived effects to the ultimate cause.

Verse 66

ഇര മുതലായവയെന്നുപ്രകാരം
 വരുമിനിയും; വരവറ്റുനില്പുകേകം;
 അറിവതു നാമതു തന്നെ മറ്റുമെല്ലാ-
 വരുമതുതൻ വടിവാർന്നു നിന്നിടുന്നു.

*Earthy factors shall come to be evermore;
 One alone remains not subject to becoming;
 What we know, what it is, what we are, are that same;
 And all others too remain conforming to its form.*

The verse unpacks the continuous flux of the phenomenal world versus the unchanging essence of ultimate reality. The poem posits that all phenomena we observe – such as prey, the experiencer, and the five elements – will perpetually arise and dissolve in an endless cycle of creation and destruction. However, amidst this ceaseless process of ‘becoming,’ there exists only one entity that remains constant, uncreated, and eternal. This singular truth is identified as ‘Arivu’ (knowledge) or indivisible pure consciousness. The verse makes a pivotal statement: ‘What we know, what it is, what we are, are that same,’ implying that our true essence is identical to this pure consciousness. Furthermore, all other worldly phenomena are merely diverse manifestations or forms of this very same Supreme Truth. This highlights that while dualities like ‘experiencer’ and ‘experienced’ persist due to ignorance, the underlying reality is a unified, non-dual consciousness.

• Phenomena change
 pure consciousness
 alone remains

3.1.6.9 The Illusory Nature of Manifested Reality and the Seer

The text clarifies that all constituents of the universe, including the experienced, the experiencer, and the five elements, are continually created and dissolved across time. They are inherently non-eternal. In stark contrast, the one entity that endures perpetually, uncreated and imperishable, is

- All forms arise dissolve in pure consciousness

‘Arivu’ – pure, indivisible consciousness. This reinforces the central Advaitic tenet that ‘we are all that pure consciousness.’ Every aspect of the phenomenal world, encompassing all individuals and objects, is merely an assumed form of this indivisible consciousness. Thus, everything, at its core, is pure consciousness, signifying that the Supreme Truth manifests itself in an array of diverse forms. When pure consciousness becomes associated with the body, senses, and mind, it is perceived as the ‘experiencer’ or the ‘seer’ as limited by Maya (illusion). However, because the body, senses, and mind are products of Maya, their perceived existence ceases upon the realisation of pure consciousness. Both the experiencer (limited seer) and the experienced (seen) are merely apparent phenomena within that consciousness, arising due to avidya (ignorance); they are ultimately unreal. The sole reality is the non-dual, pure, indivisible consciousness, underscoring why all worldly phenomena are described as embodying the form of that ultimate knowledge.

3.1.6.10 The Unchanging Absolute amidst Phenomenal Flux: Discriminating Seer from Seen

This verse articulates an inherent duality within nature: a phenomenal aspect subject to perpetual flux and becoming, constituting the multiplicity of existing things (the ‘seen’), and a central, neutral reality that remains unchanging (the ‘seer’). The ‘knower’ is the self, and the ‘known’ belongs to the side of the non-self. When these two seemingly dual aspects are viewed unitively, a central, unchangeable reality emerges, the Absolute. This Absolute is constant, possessing a finalised form as pure, ineffable awareness, subtler than the subtle, akin to an abstract mathematical truth. It is upon such a subtle and all-inclusive foundation that phenomenal existence traces its changing phases. The unchanging one and the many that form causal chains are intrinsically linked to this neutral core of the Absolute, existing without inherent contradiction. However, in the manifested world, they appear as contraries or contradictories, highlighting the need for discrimination to realise their underlying unity.

- Phenomena change seer remains pure unchanging

3.1.7 The Tri-Basic Aspects of Truth and the Unitive Vision of the Absolute

The Guru identifies three ways of knowing from a relativistic perspective, all ultimately pointing towards the all-inclusive absolute abstraction. Firstly, ‘jneya’ (that which is to

- Knower known knowledge unite in Absolute Self

be known), referring to the object-matter of knowledge in pure epistemology. Secondly, ‘objective’ knowledge of tangible items perceived through inner organs like mind, intelligence, and ego, forming the ‘what it is’ aspect of the non-self. Thirdly, there is the self itself, which, though seemingly within the body, transcends spatial confinement. While these three aspects are distinguishable from the relativistic side, they ultimately merge into the unity of the Absolute when philosophical understanding is finalised. In the unitive vision of the Absolute, the knowledge, knower, and known – the tri-basic aspects of truth from a relativistic perspective – are transcended. This unitive knowledge combines the ‘it’ or ‘that’ aspect with the self aspect. When these tri-basic aspects are thus unitively and globally reduced and reconstructed, as the final line of the verse states, we come to see all others too, previously perceived as separate individuals, as also conforming to the prototype of the global, neutral, and normal notion of the Absolute. This means all distinctions, even between pronouns, ultimately fall under the aegis of the singular Absolute Self, representing the ultimate success in discriminating the Seer from the Seen by recognising their non-dual identity.

Verse 84

അറിവതിനാലവനീ നാലവനീവികാരമുണ്ട്-
അരുളുമിതോർക്കിലസത്യമുള്ളതുർവീ;
നിരവധിയായ് നിലയറ്റു നിൽപതെല്ലാ-
മറിവിലെഴും പ്രകൃതിസ്വരൂപമാകും.

*Because of cognition, if one should say there is
Earthiness as a reality, that is not true; what there is, is
sod.*

*Without stable content all the limitless entities that stand
Are but Nature, configurations abiding within awareness.*

The verse illuminates the Methodology of discrimination of Knowledge and Cognition. It challenges the notion that ‘earthiness as a reality’ exists merely because of our cognition of it. Instead, it asserts that only the underlying cause, like the ‘sod’ (Prithvi or earth element), is truly real, while its modifications, such as pots or jars, are unreal appearances. This is a fundamental principle: the cause is truth, and its effects are untruth. The Guru points out a common philosophical error: mistaking superficial modifications (which form our everyday cognition) for ultimate reality. This means that our cognitions

- Cause alone real effects are mere appearances



of the world's myriad, impermanent phenomena are merely manifestations of Prakriti (the power of avidya, or ignorance), existing as configurations within pure consciousness, much like an illusory serpent appearing on a rope.

3.1.7.1 Erroneous Cognition – Cause of all Manifestation

One experiences the empirical world due to erroneous cognition. Here, the Guru provides an example to prove how this erroneous cognition occurs. On Earth, we see plants, animals, and other objects. However, they are actually the erroneous expression of the Earth. Really, only the Earth has existence. All other things on Earth are mere illusions. A potter makes pots, pitchers, etc., out of mud. Here, mud is real, and all other things made of mud are mere forms, not the real source. Similarly, all objects in the world are illusory appearances of the Absolute. The cause of this illusion is erroneous cognition.

- Erroneous cognition creates illusion from reality

3.1.7.2 Differentiating Horizontal and Vertical Aspects of Truth

The text implicitly employs the distinction between the horizontal and vertical aspects of truth to clarify the methodology of discrimination. In contrast, the abstract 'idea of earthiness' doesn't fit into this scheme as it operates on a different, more conceptual or vertical plane. All the 'Nature-configurations' mentioned in the verse are understood as divisions within Nature, but they ultimately derive from a pure, subjective status within awareness. This implies that while these configurations exist as objects of our cognition, their ultimate truth or knowledge resides in their being manifestations within awareness, rather than independent external realities. Just as one must distinguish 'Caesar's' from 'God's,' or the 'Field' from the 'Knower of the Field,' the vertical aspect of truth (underlying awareness, the Seer) must be understood as distinct from the horizontal aspect (phenomenal manifestations, the Seen, which are objects of cognition/opinion).

- Vertical awareness transcends horizontal appearances

3.1.7.3 The Nature of All Phenomena as Awareness Configurations

Ultimately, the verse asserts that all the innumerable, boundless, and fathomless worldly phenomena that appear to exist are merely manifestations of Prakriti (the power of avidya or ignorance), appearing as configurations within pure consciousness. This means that these perceived realities are

- All phenomena unreal configurations within consciousness

essentially unreal, analogous to an illusory serpent appearing on a rope. Our cognition of these phenomena, while seemingly real, is a product of Maya. As Maya recedes, these perceived phenomena within pure consciousness will vanish, and pure consciousness itself will shine forth as the sole truth. Therefore, the methodology of discriminating Knowledge from Cognition involves recognising that all objects and experiences are not independent entities but configurations abiding within awareness. True knowledge lies in realising the underlying pure consciousness, which is the cause, and understanding that all perceived modifications are merely effects, ultimately lacking stable content and thus being fundamentally unreal appearances within that very awareness.

Verse 89

അരിവിലിരുന്നസദസ്തിയെന്നസംഖ്യം
 പൊരിയിളകിബ്ഭുവനം സ്ഫുരിക്കയാലേ
 അറിവിനെ വിട്ടൊരു വസ്തുവന്യമില്ല-
 നരിയണമീയറിവൈകരുപ്യമേകും

*As out of knowledge sparks innumerable arise,
 Asserting the being of non-being to make the world appear;
 Know, that outside of knowledge not a thing exists;
 Such knowledge global awareness shall yield.*

The verse profoundly addresses the discrimination of the Seer from the Seen by explaining the universe as a manifestation of Pure Consciousness. The core teaching posits that from ‘Arivu’ (Pure Consciousness), countless subtle sparks of awareness, like tiny fire-sparks, arise as ‘Sat Asti’ (being exists) and even ‘Asat Asti’ (non-being exists). This fundamental process is how the entire universe comes into manifestation and continually shines forth. Consequently, the Guru asserts that Knowledge (Arivu) alone is the ultimate truth; everything else is merely an appearance or an illusion. This highlights that the ‘seen’ world is not separate from the ‘Seer’ (Pure Consciousness), but an emanation from it, fundamentally dependent on it for its apparent existence.

- Universe manifests from pure consciousness alone

3.1.7.4 Bridging Dualities: The Subtle Relation of Absolute and Relative

The verse, through its analogy of fire and sparks, masterfully addresses the subtle relationship between the absolute and relative aspects of the same reality, crucial for discriminating



- Sparks transient effects rooted in consciousness

the Seer from the Seen. The innumerable sparks arising from pure knowledge represent the diverse and transient phenomena of the ‘seen’ world. While these sparks, when seen collectively, might appear real and lasting due to their continuous emanation from the central ‘fire’ of Consciousness, individually they have an ‘ontological poverty’ – they are transient and partake in both ‘being’ and ‘non-being’. This directly confronts the Advaitic debate on Maya, which is described as both ‘sat’ (existent) and ‘asat’ (not real). The Guru’s analogy bridges the gap between different Vedantic schools by showing that the ‘sparks’ (effects/manifestations) are rooted in the ‘fire’ (cause/ Pure Consciousness), yet possess an inherent impermanence. The ultimate knowledge lies in seeing that these diverse sparks are not separate from the singular, underlying fire.

3.1.7.5 Global Awareness: The Non-Existence of Anything Outside Knowledge

The verse emphatically states, ‘Know, that outside of knowledge not a thing exists; / Such knowledge global awareness shall yield.’ This is a direct methodological instruction for the discrimination of the Seer from the Seen. It compels the seeker to understand that the entire universe, with all its visible phenomena, is solely Pure Consciousness. There is no external entity or distinct reality apart from Knowledge itself. All perceptions and understandings, all forms of ‘existence’ – whether ‘Sat’ or ‘Asat’ – ultimately resolve into a single, unified form: Pure, Indivisible Consciousness. This means that true global awareness is the realisation of ‘Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma’ (All this verily is Brahman). This unitive vision leaves no residue or remainder, providing a complete and satisfactory philosophical answer to the fundamental problem of reality, where the apparent duality of the Seer and the Seen is transcended in the seamless unity of Pure Consciousness.

- Nothing exists apart from pure knowledge

3.1.7.6 The Unitive Vision: Certitude Through Self-Enquiry

Philosophy, as presented here, aims for a finalised, unitive, and satisfactory answer to life’s profound questions. Such ‘wholesale knowledge’ – whether of the self, the universe, or both – brings a definitive degree of certainty. The analogy of the Sun and its light further illustrates the two aspects of knowledge: an inner subjective aspect (the Seer) and its outer objective manifestation (the Seen). The Guru’s unique use of the fire-and-sparks analogy addresses the elusive nature of Maya and the relationship between the absolute (the central

- True philosophy yields unitive, global certitude

fire, Pure Consciousness) and the relative (the sparks, the phenomenal world). The ‘phenomenal world,’ as the result of two-sided Maya, is a secondary aspect of this full Absolute. Its emergence into our experience as something cognisable is due to the inherent ‘indigence’ of the sparks – their nature of being both real and unreal, lasting and transient. The methodology, therefore, involves embracing the fire and the sparks together to achieve a total, global, or unitive vision of reality, leading to the ultimate certitude of non-dual truth.

Verse 90

അന്യതമൊരസ്തിതയേ മറയ്ക്കുകില്ലെ-
 നനുഭവമുണ്ടു സദസ്തിയെന്നിവണ്ണം
 അനുപദമസ്തിതയാലിതാവൃതം സദ്-
 ഘനമതിനാലെ കളേബരാദികാര്യം

*Even when knowledge to egoism is subject in any predication,
 And one is unmindful of the ultimate verity of what is said,
 Yet as with the truth, however ultimate, such knowledge
 Can never fall outside the scope of the knowing self.*

- Ignorance cannot obscure the persistence of being

The verse addresses the profound relationship between Ignorance and the Persistence of Being within the Advaitic framework. Guru Devan clarifies that while ignorance (avidya) creates the illusion of a diverse universe, it fundamentally cannot completely obscure the true nature of reality (Satyaswaroopa). This is because ‘Astitā’ (being or existence) is none other than Brahman itself. The text states that ‘unreality’ (anyatam), despite its pervasive influence, can never fully hide the state of ‘is, is’ (existence). Just as darkness, being non-existent in its essence, cannot utterly extinguish light, so too, ignorance cannot entirely conceal the luminous essence of Knowledge (Sat). This highlights that all perceived phenomena, including the body, are always experienced as having ‘being’ or ‘existence’, which is a direct reflection of the underlying Brahman-nature, a solidified presence that ignorance can never entirely mask.

3.1.7.7 The Pervasive Nature of Being: All Effects as ‘Sadghana’

The passage explains that the entire universe is enveloped by ‘being’, meaning that ‘being’ permeates everything, expressed as ‘Sat asti’ (being exists). Consequently, all effects, such as the body and other visible objects (kalēbarādīgāryam),



- All forms are transformations of Brahman's being

are considered 'Sadghana' (solidified being). They are not independent realities but 'vivartas' (transformations without actual change) of knowledge or Brahman. Just as a rope appearing as a serpent is a vivarta of the rope, the universe is a vivarta of Brahman. The existence perceived in the universe, therefore, belongs to the underlying Brahman, not to the illusory forms. This points to a crucial aspect of discrimination: recognising that while forms created by ignorance (Maya) appear real, their fundamental 'being' is derived solely from Brahman. Those under the sway of illusion chase these apparent realities, while truth-seers discover the pure consciousness that is the true, pervasive Being.

3.1.7.8 Ignorance's Powers and the Unobscured Existential Aspect of Brahman

Ignorance (avidya) operates through two powers: concealment (āvaraṇa) and projection (vikṣepa). While the concealing power might obscure the conscious (citamsha) and blissful (anandamsha) aspects of Brahman, it is crucially incapable of completely hiding its existential aspect (sadamsha). This is why Guru Devan asserts that all effects, including the body, are 'Sadghana', solidified being. The Upanishadic saying, 'Sanmūlāḥ saumya imāḥ sarvāḥ prajāḥ sadāyatanaḥ sat pratiṣṭhāḥ' (Chh. 6.8.4), further corroborates this by stating that all beings have their roots in Being, abide in Being, and are established in Being. This emphasises that despite the illusions projected by ignorance, the fundamental 'existence' of all phenomena ultimately points back to Brahman as their root cause, sustenance, and support. The methodology here involves discerning that the persistent experience of 'being' in all perceived objects is a subtle but undeniable indicator of the underlying, unobscured reality of Brahman.

- Being persists even when knowledge is veiled

3.1.7.9 Diverse Paths to the Unitive Truth: Bridging Personal and Impersonal

The larger philosophical context provided reiterates that Truth is one, unitive, and not a third factor independent of the knower or the known. Each individual's truth emerges from an equilibrium between the Self and the non-Self, existing on a vertical scale of values. This understanding is critical for discriminating true Knowledge from limited perspectives. An ultimate truth, even if intellectually complex, must remain within one's intellectual or emotional reach to have value. This allows for diverse approaches to truth, where an ordinary

• Truth is unitive and not externally separate

devotee’s personal God can hold equal merit to a philosopher’s scientific Absolute. As the Bhagavad Gita states, ‘Whatever be the manner in which a person might approach me, even accordingly do I accept him.’ This ‘law of reciprocal or ambivalent values’ settles theological debates like grace versus works, asserting that faith and works must go hand in hand. The example of Kannappa Nayanar underscores that sincere faith, regardless of intellectual sophistication, can lead to the same spiritual merit. Thus, for the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen,’ this broader view affirms that while the ultimate Being (the Seer) remains obscured by ignorance’s projections, its pervasive ‘existence’ is always subtly perceivable, allowing varied personal experiences (the Seen) to serve as valid, though perhaps less direct, paths to realising the same unitive truth.

Verse 91

പ്രിയവിഷയംപ്രതി ചെയ്തിടും പ്രയത്നം
 നിയതവുമങ്ങനെ തന്നെ നിൽക്കയാലേ
 പ്രിയമജമവ്യയമപ്രമേയമേകാ-
 ദ്രയമിതുതാൻ സുഖമാർന്നു നിന്നിടുന്നു.

*The effort that is made in view of something dear to one
 As ordained too, remaining always constant and same
 There is a dear value, unborn, unspent, unpredicable,
 One and secondless, which ever endures as one’s
 happiness.*

The verse profoundly links the universal human pursuit of joy to the ultimate nature of reality. The verse clarifies that the intense and consistent effort directed towards attaining and possessing ‘dear’ objects has been ceaseless throughout time. This unwavering pursuit implies that the true object of this ‘dearness’ (priyam) is not a fleeting external entity but something unborn (aja), beginningless (anadi), imperishable (avyayam), and immeasurable (aprameyam). This singular, non-dual entity, which transcends words and mind, is the source of all happiness and inherently exists as Bliss (sukham). The fundamental principle is that Sat (Existence), Chit (Consciousness), and Ananda (Bliss) are not mere attributes but are Brahman itself. This constant human striving for joy intrinsically points towards the ultimate reality as being of the very nature of bliss.

• True joy sought is unborn, eternal, and bliss

3.1.7.10 The Inner Quest for True Happiness: Beyond External Pursuits

- All happiness fundamentally one, rooted in Atman

The text highlights a crucial distinction for the ‘Discrimination of Seer from the Seen’: while the instruments of happiness may vary, all forms of happiness are fundamentally one and the same, not manifold. For all beings, the most cherished object is the Atman (Self), which is inherently blissful and resides within. Consequently, the external pursuit of ‘dear objects’ (priyam) is ultimately futile. True joy, or the Seer’s intrinsic nature, lies in discovering this inner bliss – the Atman. This concept is vividly illustrated by the analogy of someone wandering in a desert seeking water, unaware that clear, blissful truth already fills their inner being, their eyes bewildered by the darkness of ignorance. This powerful imagery conveys that individuals, blinded by ignorance, mistakenly seek the ‘Seen’ in external mirages of the world, when true happiness, the ‘Seer’s’ inherent nature, is an internal, non-dual reality. This underscores the methodological shift required from external seeking to inward self-discovery.

3.1.7.11 Constant Effort: A Mathematical Constant Towards the Absolute

- Human striving is a universal, constant activity

This verse, along with the subsequent ones (92 and 93), establishes a profound link between the highest human values and the ontological aspect of the Self. All human beings are engaged in a constant, uniform effort to improve their circumstances within their environment, whether pursuing material goods or higher values. This inherent striving or constant activity is an inevitable necessity of human life, akin to a mathematical constant. While individual efforts may seem limited by biological constraints, as a general law applicable to humanity, there is a never-ending effort that represents a universal constant. This constant effort finds its dialectical counterpart in the Absolute, which embodies the finalised and supreme value for humanity. The Guru’s apodictic approach consistently aligns with this, using both *a priori* and *a posteriori* reasoning to support the ultimate human-value status of the Absolute. The epithets used in the verse – unborn, unspent, unpredictable, one and secondless – align with descriptions of the Absolute in texts like the *Mandukya Upanishad*, particularly concerning the *turiya* state.

3.1.7.12 Unitive Self: The Convergence of Action, Thought, and Absolute Aim

The Guru's philosophy brings action, even pure action (karma), and contemplation into this unitive Self. Thinking and contemplation themselves are considered actions in this pure instrumentalist sense, with the Absolute as their ultimate aim or goal. This perspective suggests that all human endeavours, whether overtly spiritual or seemingly mundane, are ultimately directed towards realising this 'dear value' that is the Absolute. The pursuit of what is 'dear' to one is not merely a psychological drive but an inherent force that inevitably leads to the experience of the unborn, unspent, and unpredictable One, which is profound happiness. This aligns the individual's inherent striving for joy with the very nature of the supreme reality, indicating that the 'Seer's' intrinsic desire for happiness is satisfied only by the realisation of its own non-dual nature. The methodological implication is that by understanding the constant and unified nature of this effort, one can transcend the fragmented pursuit of external pleasures and recognise the singular source of true happiness within, leading to a direct and unitive experience of the Absolute.

- All actions and thoughts aim towards the Absolute

Verse 92

വ്യയമനയാതെ വെളിക്കു വേലചെയ്യും
നിയമമിരിപ്പതുകൊണ്ടു നിത്യമാകും
പ്രിയമകമേ പിരിയാതെയുണ്ടിതിന്നീ
ക്രിയയൊരു കേവലബാഹ്യലിംഗമാകും

*As there is the law of energy remaining ever unspent
By outwardly directed action, there must needs be inwardly
A dear value that is inseparable from it, for which here
The action, is merely a symbol of outer recognition.*

Sree Narayana Guru's verse, 'As there is the law of energy remaining ever unspent/By outwardly directed action, there must needs be inwardly / A dear value that is inseparable from it, for which here /The action, is merely a symbol of outer recognition,' offers a profound insight into the Methodology of discrimination of Knowledge and Cognition. It posits that humanity's ceaseless external effort to attain happiness and acquire objects is driven by an inherent, often unconscious, understanding that true contentment lies within. This constant, unspent external activity ('വ്യയമനയാതെ വെളിക്കു വേലചെയ്യും നിയമമിരിപ്പതുകൊണ്ടു') is not an end in itself, but merely

- Outward actions symbolise inner eternal value



a ‘കേവലബാഹ്യലിംഗം’ (a mere external sign) pointing to an eternal and imperishable ‘dear object’ (priyam) that resides inextricably within us (‘നിത്യമാകും പ്രിയം അകമേ പിരിയാതെയുണ്ട്’). The term ‘lingam’ signifies something that reveals what is hidden, much like smoke indicates a hidden fire. Our systematic external actions for happiness are thus a symbolic indicator of an inherent, blissful, and indivisible consciousness residing within, which is the ultimate object of dearness.

3.1.7.13 The Law of Unspent Energy: Bridging Physics and Metaphysics

The Guru’s reference to the ‘law of energy remaining ever unspent’ draws a parallel between the physical principle of energy conservation and a metaphysical truth. This highlights his unitive approach, where physics and metaphysics belong to a single ‘Science of sciences’. Just as energy in the physical world approaches perpetual activity (despite the ideal of perpetual motion), the unceasing effort of human beings points to a continuous, unchanging force. This ‘constant effort’ has a dialectical counterpart in the Absolute, which represents the supreme and finalised value for humanity. The Guru’s method is both ontological (concerning being) and teleological (concerning purpose). It suggests that the inherent drive for action and happiness in the external world is a manifestation of an internal, unspent source, the ‘karu’ or ‘core’ of being, which reconciles matter and spirit. This implies that even seemingly mechanistic external actions (cognitions) are symbolic expressions of a deeper, unspent Knowledge within.

• Human effort reflects unchanging inner force

3.1.7.14 Psychological and Cosmological Dimensions of the Absolute Value

The text elaborates on this concept by shifting from a cosmological view of the Absolute (as discussed in earlier verses) to a psychological one. The constant human effort to attain a ‘dear value’ is now understood in terms of the inner self. Modern phenomenology, for instance, treats the inner self and its ‘eidetic counterpart’ as unitively comprising a single ‘epoché’ or event in consciousness. This means that the individual’s psychological striving is not isolated but is an aspect of the overarching Absolute. Analogies like the Sun and sunlight, fire and sparks, or the sea and its waves, are used to illustrate that while appearances (cognitions) may differ, their essence or substance (knowledge) is the same. The wave and the

• Inner self’s striving mirrors Absolute’s unity

ocean, though distinct in form, are one in reality when viewed by the contemplative inner eye. This methodological approach guides one to see the reality from within appearances, thereby dissolving the perceived separation between the individual's inner experience and the vast cosmos, unifying them within the context of the Absolute.

3.1.7.15 Action as a Symbol: The Unitive Vision of Reality

The Guru's philosophical outlook suggests that the source of action and the action itself are inseparable. The 'brute action' we mechanistically perceive externally, representing the non-self, ultimately reduces to a mathematical symbol. This aligns with advanced philosophies of science, where physics itself is considered a science of symbols, emphasizing that 'conceptions' are what truly matter. The external actions we perform (cognitions) are merely symbolic representations of an underlying conceptual reality. Therefore, our persistent external striving for happiness is not a pursuit of external gratification in isolation but a 'symbol of outer recognition' for the 'dear value' that is perpetually and inseparably present within. The methodology of discrimination here is to recognise this symbolic nature: all external action and cognition point to an inner, unspent, and unitive Knowledge – the inherent bliss of the Self. This understanding allows one to move beyond the superficial pursuit of external objects to the realisation of the Absolute, which encompasses and unifies all experiences.

• External actions symbolise inner unitive knowledge

Verse 93

ചലമുടലറ്റ തനിക്കു തന്റേയാത്മാ-
 വിലുമധികം പ്രിയവസ്തുവില്ലയന്യം;
 വിലസിടുമാത്മാഗതപ്രിയം വിടാതീ
 നിലയിലിരിപ്പതുകൊണ്ടു നിത്യമാത്മാ

*To one who has cut connection with the changeful body
 There is nothing which surpasses in value his own Self:
 As the interest that prevails in respect of oneself, as
 ordained also,
 Never-ceasingly endures, the Self, eternal it is.*

• External actions symbolise inner unitive knowledge

The verse directly addresses the Impermanence of the Body and the Eternality of the Atman. The verse asserts that for an individual who has successfully relinquished possessive attachment to the transient physical form, nothing becomes

dearer than the Atman (Self). The Guru underscores that the Atman is both eternal (nityam) and inherently dear (priyam), contrasting it with the impermanent (anityam) and changeable (chanchalam) nature of the human body.

3.1.7.16 The Atman as the Supreme Value: Beyond Bodily Attachment

The passage clarifies that once identification with the mutable body, which undergoes constant transformation, is shed, the Atman becomes the supreme value. The persistent presence of this profound, self-abiding dearness (atmagatapriyam), which never diminishes, firmly establishes the Atman's eternality. An individual who has renounced attachment to the body will find no greater affection for any other object than for their own Atman. This intrinsic love for the Atman remains unwavering and constant, confirming its eternal nature. This inner 'dearness' is not a fleeting emotion but a fundamental aspect of our being, revealing the eternal nature of the Self.

- Shedding body-identification reveals Atman's supreme value

3.1.7.17 Self-Preservation as Evidence of the Atman's Eternality

The text further supports this principle by referencing the instinct for self-preservation. Even in dire situations, an individual will readily sacrifice spouse, children, and wealth to save their own life, demonstrating the supreme importance attached to the Atman. The common belief, 'Ātmānaṁ satatam rakṣed dārairapi dhanairapi' (one should always protect the self, even by sacrificing wives and wealth), reflects this inherent prioritization of the Atman. The constancy and eternality of this self-love (atmapriti) suggest that if the dearness for the Atman is eternal, then the Atman itself must also be eternal. This inherent drive for self-preservation is presented as empirical evidence for the Atman's timeless nature.

- Eternal self-love (atmapriti) evidences Atman's timelessness

3.1.7.18 Distinguishing Self-Love from Selfishness: The Vertical Aspect of the Self

The Guru establishes the absolute status of the Self by building upon the reasoning from previous verses. The 'dear object' to which all human effort is directed is not an external entity but the Self itself. However, it's crucial to distinguish this 'love of self' from mere selfishness. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (IV. V. 6) illustrates this point in the context of the love between husband and wife, stating that they are dear to

- All values ultimately derive from the Atman

each other not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the Soul (Atman). This principle extends to all values: their ultimate source is the Atman, not outward items. By eliminating the peripheral, changeful aspects of the self (the horizontal aspects, influenced by Maya), what remains is the pure, vertical aspect of the self, representing the highest human value. This pure Self, free from the transient nature of the body, is the eternal Atman. The methodology here involves stripping away the impermanent aspects of our being to reveal the unchanging, eternal core.

Summarized Overview

The core of Sree Narayana Guru's *Atmopadesa Satakam* lies in a profound methodology for discriminating the 'seer' (true consciousness) from the 'seen' (the phenomenal world of appearances). This philosophical framework, rooted in Advaita Vedanta, asserts that while the universe appears as a multiplicity, it is fundamentally an emanation of a singular, pure consciousness. The text meticulously dismantles the erroneous identification of the self with the transient physical body, sensory perceptions, and ego-driven opinions, advocating instead an inward journey through the 'eye of knowledge' (Jnana Chakshus). This introspective approach reveals that what often passes for 'knowledge' in daily life is merely 'cognition' or 'opinion', a product of limited sensory input and avidya (ignorance), which veils the inherent non-duality of the knower and knowledge itself.

The Guru employs powerful analogies, such as the rotating firebrand and the unspent energy, to illustrate how the seemingly diverse and dynamic world of 'seen' phenomena are merely illusory transformations or symbolic representations of the unchanging, unified 'Seer'. The constant human striving for happiness is presented as an intrinsic indicator of an eternal, blissful Atman residing within, rather than a pursuit of external gratification. By urging the seeker to move beyond superficial external quests and the limitations of sensory-derived knowledge, the *Atmopadesa Satakam* guides towards a direct, unitive experience of the Absolute. This involves recognising that all existence, including the self, is ultimately 'solidified being' (Sadghana), permeating everything and remaining unobscured by ignorance.

The ultimate aim of this methodology is to achieve a 'global awareness' or 'unitive vision' where there is no object outside of pure knowledge. This comprehensive understanding transcends the tri-basic aspects of knower, knowledge, and known, reducing them to the non-dual unity of Brahman. By systematically discriminating the ephemeral 'seen' from the eternal 'seer', and recognising that all apparent distinctions are products of avidya, the seeker arrives at the profound realisation that true existence is synonymous with Atman-realisation, yielding an ultimate certainty and liberation from the illusion of separation.



Assignments

1. How does Sree Narayana Guru differentiate between 'knowledge' and 'mere cognition' in *Atmopadesa Satakam*?
2. What is the significance of the 'eye of knowledge' (Jnana Chakshus) in Guru's methodology for self-realisation?
3. Explain the concept of non-duality between knowledge and the knower as presented in the text.
4. How does the analogy of the 'rotating firebrand' illustrate the relationship between pure consciousness and the manifested universe?
5. What does the text imply about the role of human effort and the pursuit of happiness in revealing the nature of the Atman?
6. How does Guru explain that unreality (ignorance) cannot completely conceal ultimate existence or 'Being'?
7. Discuss the philosophical error of mistaking phenomenal 'effects' for ultimate 'causes' according to the provided material.
8. In what ways does the *Atmopadesa Satakam* bridge cosmological and psychological perspectives in understanding the Absolute?

UNIT 2

Analysis of Three States of Empirical Experience Concept of Reality and Illusion

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing the study of this material, learners will be able to:

- analyse the three empirical states, waking (*jāgrat*), dreaming (*svapna*), and deep sleep (*suṣupti*), as presented in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, and interpret their metaphysical significance
- demonstrate understanding of the distinction between transactional and absolute reality, using Vedantic categories such as *prātibhāsika*, *vyāvahārika*, and *pāramārthika sattā*
- evaluate the concepts of illusion (*māyā*) and superimposition (*adhyāsa*), using classical metaphors such as the rope-snake and mirage, as employed by Sree Narayana Guru
- explain the non-dual vision of *Ātman* as *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*, recognising the limitations of discursive thought and the necessity of direct experiential knowledge

Background

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadesa Satakam* (One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction) represents a profound philosophical treatise aimed at guiding individuals towards the realisation of ultimate truth, or *Atmasatyam* – the self-existent reality. Recognising the inherent human tendency to seek this truth, albeit often unknowingly, Guru meticulously lays out a structured approach to self-inquiry, emphasising the necessity of a disciplined spiritual practice. This seminal work initiates its exploration by elucidating the nature of *Atmasatyam*, describing it as the fundamental 'core' (*karu*) that simultaneously illuminates as the 'knower' within and as the external material world. The introductory sections of the *Ātmopadesa Satakam* not only clarify the non-dual essence of this 'karu' but also highlight that its apprehension is solely a matter of direct, empirical experience, the very essence of true knowledge, thereby setting the stage for a deep dive into the nature of reality and illusion.



Keywords

Empirical States, Turiya, Māyā, Illusion, Non-Duality, Consciousness, Superimposition

Discussion

3.2.1 Analysis of Three States of Empirical Experience: Concept of Reality and Illusion

The philosophical journey within *Atmopadesa Satakam* delves into the very fabric of human experience, particularly focusing on the three states that characterise our empirical reality: waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, though not explicitly named in this excerpt, they are implicitly addressed through the analysis of 'I' and the phenomenal world. The Guru begins the profound self-inquiry by dissecting the nature of the 'knower' or the 'I'. He presents a thought experiment: two individuals in a dark room, each identifying themselves as "I" when questioned. This simple scenario profoundly illustrates that despite individual experiences, there exists a common, singular 'I' underlying all perceived multiplicity. This 'I' is revealed to possess both a singular and a pluralistic aspect, yet in its ultimate truth, it transcends both, existing as an undivided non-duality. This non-dual 'I' is further described as a luminous, boundless 'light', inherently distinct from mere darkness, demonstrating that the Self is pure consciousness illuminating the entire cosmos, challenging the notion of a separate reality for the world.

- Self transcends waking, dream, and sleep states

Furthermore, the *Atmopadesa Satakam* extends its analysis to the ethical implications arising from this understanding of the 'I'. When individuals perceive themselves as distinct 'I's interacting with other 'I's, questions of morality and ethics naturally emerge. Guru introduces a novel normative principle for discerning right from wrong: since all beings are manifestations of the one Truth (Atman), actions undertaken for one's own happiness must simultaneously ensure the happiness of others. Conversely, any action that brings good to one while causing distress to another is deemed 'Atma-विरिधी' (contrary to the Self), as it contradicts the fundamental unity of the Atman. This ethical framework, expounded in verses 21 to 26, is unique in its derivation from a metaphysical understanding of the indivisible Self, providing a universal moral compass rooted in the non-dual nature of reality, transcending conventional ethical reasoning.

- Actions harming others oppose the true Self

- Atman is self-luminous awareness in all states

The text then returns to defining the Atman, offering a distinctive interpretation. Traditionally, definitions of Atman often relied on what it is not (neti-neti). However, Guru defines the Atman as "that which knows even when in darkness; that is knowledge itself." This highlights that the Atman is self-luminous consciousness, perpetually aware even in states of apparent obscurity. This direct, experiential apprehension of the Atman's true nature is termed 'Turya Bodham' (the fourth state of consciousness), which Guru defines as "clearly knowing that which has no beginning or end, from beginning to end." This profound experience signifies a comprehensive, unitive inner awareness, where the subject and object of knowledge become one. Subsequently, the analysis shifts to the 'seen' world, the 'outer manifestation', elucidating that our understanding of objects is based on their attributes (dharmas), not their inherent reality (dharmi). The Guru concludes through pure logical reasoning that the substratum of the entire visible universe is solely consciousness, accessible through an analytical process that reveals the ultimate reality of any object to be its underlying presence in awareness.

- All phenomena are manifestations of consciousness

3.2.1.1 The Unifying Principle: All is Consciousness

All that is perceived and known, whether internal or external, gross or subtle, atomic or undivided, is fundamentally nothing other than the singular existent Reality – Consciousness itself. This implies that ultimate reality resides solely in Consciousness, which is synonymous with the Atman or Self. Consequently, the apparent reality of the world is understood as a manifestation of the underlying reality of Consciousness. This philosophical stance, central to Advaita Vedanta, asserts that the diverse phenomena of existence, from the microscopic to the macroscopic, are not separate from the fundamental nature of awareness.

3.2.1.2 Sat-Chit-Ananda: The Triune Nature of the Absolute

Brahman cannot be described using words. Then how is it referred to as Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss)? In reality, this is expressed in a negative sense:

Sat or Existence is said to indicate that the absolute reality should not be mistaken as non-existent.

Chit or Consciousness is said to indicate that the absolute reality is not inert or insentient.



Ananda or Bliss is said to indicate that there is no sorrow at all in the absolute reality. In other words, these terms are not full positive descriptions but are used to negate misconceptions about Brahman.

• Consciousness is existence and bliss itself

This ultimate Consciousness is designated as ‘Chit’ in Sanskrit. Furthermore, that which possesses ultimate existence or being is termed ‘Sat’. Thus, Chit is also Sat, signifying that Consciousness is inherently existent. Verses 89 and 90 of Atmopadesa Satakam are dedicated to illuminating this aspect, presenting Consciousness as Being itself. Expanding on this, verses 91, 92, and 93 highlight that this very Atman, which is both Sat and Chit, is the most cherished entity for every individual. This inherent ‘self-dearness’ (atmagatapriyam) transforms into all the varied experiences of pleasure and pain within life. In Vedanta, this experience of pleasure or happiness is termed ‘Ananda’ (Bliss). Therefore, the Atman is intrinsically Sat, Chit, and Ananda – Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss. The profound realisation that “That [Sat-Chit-Ananda] am I,” “That is everything,” and “Everything is myself,” encapsulates the non-dual truth.

3.2.1.3 The Experiential Nature of Non-Dual Realisation

• Non-duality realised only through direct experience

Crucially, this non-dual experience (advaitanubhuti) cannot be attained through mere logical reasoning or intellectual प्रमाण (proofs/authoritative texts). Guru warns that "Without direct experience, the indivisible, solidified Consciousness cannot be known; it is an ocean of silent, solidified nectar." This serves as a critical caveat, emphasising that intellectual understanding, while foundational, is insufficient for true realisation. The ultimate truth of Sat-Chit-Ananda is not a conceptual construct to be grasped by the mind, but a profound, direct, and non-discursive experience. It necessitates a transcendence of the ordinary modes of cognition and a deep, immersive plunge into the silence of one's own being, where the boundaries between observer and observed dissolve, revealing the seamless unity of all existence. This underscores that the journey towards understanding reality is ultimately an experiential one, culminating in a silent, blissful awareness.

Verse 28

അടിമുടിയറ്റുടൊട്ടു മൗലിയന്തം
 സ്ഫുടമറിയുന്നതു തുര്യബോധമാകും
 ജഡമറിവീലതു ചിന്ത ചെയ്തു ചൊല്ലു-
 നിടയിലിരുന്നറിവല്ലറിഞ്ഞിടേണമ്

*Bereft of bottom as of top, from bottom to the crest
What transparent awareness has, that is turiya-
consciousness;
The inert no knowledge has: what it cogitating tells
From in between, is no knowledge at all, do mark!*

- Knowledge limited to objects, leading to mental conflict

Sree Narayana Guru's "Atmopadesasatakam" delves deeply into the nature of consciousness and reality, offering a profound analysis of empirical experience that transcends conventional understanding. The verse "Adimudiyattadi thottu..." and its commentary illuminate three distinct stages or concepts of reality, moving from the limitations of ordinary perception to the boundless expanse of Turiya Bodham. The initial stage of empirical experience is characterised by a fragmented, dualistic perception, where the universe is seen as a collection of separate objects and phenomena. This is the realm of "this man or that," where desires appear varied and often conflicting. This fragmented view is inherently linked to "ignorance" (ajnanam) and its manifestations, including the identification with the individual soul (Jivatma bhava) and all conceptual differentiations (sankalpa-vikalpangal). Knowledge at this stage is object-oriented, limited by thought processes and sensory input, leading to "puzzlement" and "mental troubles" as individuals navigate conflicting interests. This is the common, waking state (Jagrat) where consciousness is bound by the psycho-physical apparatus and its inherent limitations.

- Dream and sleep states still bound by duality

The second stage of empirical experience, as implied in the Guru's nuanced discussion, encompasses the states of dreaming (Swapna) and deep sleep (Sushupti), which are not explicitly detailed in the presented verse but are part of the traditional Mandukya Upanishad classification to which Guru alludes elsewhere. While these states offer a different quality of experience from the waking state, they still fall short of true knowledge. The "inert" or physiological aspect of consciousness, which functions reflexively and uses "halting syllogistic reasonings," represents a limited form of awareness. This kind of knowledge, arising from deliberation and conceptualisation, or expressed through words, is deemed "no knowledge at all" by Guru. It's confined by the very mechanisms of thought and speech ("Naiva vacā na manasā śakyo vāptumuprayataḥ"), unable to grasp ultimate reality. This intermediate understanding, still steeped in duality and conceptual frameworks, remains a source of potential confusion and fails to provide genuine, unitive insight.



• Transcends thought, language, and dual experience

• Atma Bodham transcends states bound by thought

The ultimate stage presented is Turiya Bodham, or Turiya-consciousness, which stands as the apex of empirical experience and the realization of true reality. Described as “bereft of bottom as of top, from bottom to the crest,” this boundless and transparent awareness signifies the transcendence of all dualities and limitations inherent in the previous stages. Upon the dissolution of ignorance and its effects, the Supreme Self (Paramatma), which is pure consciousness, shines forth. This is not knowledge gained through inert matter, conceptual thought, or linguistic expression; it is a direct, unmediated Self-knowledge (Atma Bodham). Turiya is the cessation of the phenomenal world, tranquil, benevolent, non-dual, the ultimate truth that is immutable and free from all differentiations. This total, unitive vision is distinct from any partial or physiological awareness, representing a direct and fully real experience of Absolute Awareness, beyond the fragmented perceptions of ordinary existence.

Guru’s philosophy asserts that with Self-realisation, all manifestations of ignorance, including the individual soul concept and dualistic conceptualisations, dissolve, allowing the Supreme Self to shine forth as pure consciousness. This ‘Atma Bodham’ (Self-knowledge) is fundamentally distinct from the object-oriented knowledge prevalent in the waking (Jagrat), dreaming (Swapna), and deep sleep (Sushupti) states, which are all subject to the limitations of thought and inert matter.

Verse 54

ഉണരുവസ്ഥയുറക്കിലിട്ടുറക്കം
 പുനരുണരുമ്പൊഴുതും സ്ഫുരിക്കുവില
 അനുദിനയിലോനെ രുമാദിമായാ-
 വനിതയിൽ നിന്നു പുറന്നു മാറിടുന്നു.

*The waking state, it obtains not in sleep
 And sleep again does not attain consciousness
 When awake: day by day these twain are born
 Of Maya’s womb and keep alternating on.*

The verse critically examines the 'Analysis of three states of empirical experience' by highlighting the impermanent and mutually exclusive nature of the waking (jagrat) and deep sleep (sushupti) states. The Guru states that the waking experience, with its phenomenal objects, completely vanishes during deep sleep, and similarly, the deep sleep state does not manifest



- Both states negate each other, thus not eternal

when one is awake. This constant alternation, where one state negates the other, underscores their impermanence (nashwara) and non-eternality (anityam). By asserting that both states are "born of Maya's womb," Guru classifies them as illusory (mayikam) and products of delusion. This perspective compels a seeker of truth to recognise that these fundamental empirical experiences, which define our daily reality, are not ultimate but are rather transient creations of the principle of nescience or ignorance.

3.2.2 Maya as the Governing Principle of Alternating States

The meaning of the term 'Maya' is: 'Maya' is that which is not –ya ma sa maya. Maya has two powers: Avarana and Vikshepa. Firstly, Maya veils the true and secondly projects the untrue. Maya veils the Truth and projects the world of duality onto the non-dual ground of Brahman or the Absolute.

The text further elaborates on the concept of 'Maya' as the generative and governing principle behind these alternating states of empirical experience. Maya is presented not as a separate entity but as a "convenient term or mathematical factor" that dialectically relates the two co-existing aspects of the Absolute. Like the positive and negative counterparts in mathematical calculations, Maya admits contradiction horizontally (as seen in the mutual exclusiveness of waking and sleep) but maintains unity vertically. This concept, akin to Hegel's 'Negativität', signifies the negative principle of creative manifoldness in nature, figuratively depicted as a 'female' that gives birth to the phenomenal world. This 'negative potentiality of the Absolute' encompasses the created multiplicity of both the waking and dream worlds, serving as the central axis common to these asymmetrical states when viewed independently. Therefore, for the 'Analysis of three states of empirical experience', understanding Maya is crucial, as it explains why these states arise, disappear, and possess an illusory quality.

- Alternating states arise from Maya's dialectical play

3.2.2.1 Transcending the Duality: Towards Pure Awareness

The Guru's analysis guides the seeker towards a state of pure awareness that transcends the limitations of waking and deep sleep. While these two states are mutually exclusive horizontally, the underlying 'subject' or consciousness witnesses objects in both, be they waking objects or dream objects. This



- Neutral consciousness witnesses all empirical states

common witnessing activity, despite the contrasting nature of the states, points towards a neutral vertical axis that subsists between them. This neutral ground is where pure awareness resides, described elsewhere as a state midway between waking and sleeping. The philosophical implication for the 'Analysis of three states of empirical experience' is profound: to move beyond the illusory play of Maya, one must transcend the alternating duality of these empirical states. By meditating at the point where the Maya-function inserts itself into the pure Absolute, one can dissolve the 'Maya-content of names and forms', revealing pure consciousness that is identical with the Absolute. This ultimate unity resolves the apparent differences and contradictions inherent in the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep experiences into a final, non-dual Truth.

Verse 55

നെടിയ കിനാവിതു നിദ്രം പോലെ നിത്യം
കെടുമിതുപോലെ കിനാവുമിപ്രകാരം
ചര്യ കെടുമതി കാണുകയില്ല, കേവലത്തിൽ
പ്പെടുവതിനാലനിശം ഭ്രമിച്ചിടുന്നു

A long-drawn-out dream is this, and like sleep each day,
It gets extinguished: dream too likewise!
We can never see extinction thus to this: as it is
Hitched on to the pure aloneness, it goes round for ever.

Sree Narayana Guru's "Atmopadesasatakam" offers a profound deconstruction of empirical reality, particularly through the lens of illusion, with the verse "Nediya kinavitu nidram pole nityam..." serving as a central point. The first stage of this analysis focuses on the illusory nature of the waking state (jagrat), comparing it directly to a "long-drawn-out dream." Guru states that just as sleep and dreams dissipate upon waking, so too does this seemingly solid worldly existence ultimately dissolve. This perspective challenges the common human tendency to ascribe ultimate reality to waking experiences, which are perceived through limited sensory and cognitive faculties. The commentary emphasizes that the "unintelligent person," deluded by Maya, mistakenly believes these ephemeral waking experiences to be truly real. This misapprehension, born of ignorance (avidya), traps individuals in a perpetual state of delusion, causing unnecessary suffering by clinging to what is ultimately transient and unsubstantial.

- Mistaking waking state as real causes suffering

- All three states are equally impermanent illusions

The second stage of Guru’s analysis extends this concept of illusion to the dream (swapna) and deep sleep (sushupti) states, establishing a fundamental parity between them and the waking state. The verse explicitly states, “like sleep each day, / It gets extinguished: dream too likewise!” This highlights that all three states, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, are equally impermanent and subject to dissolution. The commentary elaborates that the “dull-witted,” swayed by Maya, incorrectly differentiate between these states, dismissing dreams and deep sleep as unreal while clinging to waking perceptions as truth. Guru’s teaching reveals that the experiences and their objects in all these states are mere appearances, comparable to mistaking a rope for a snake. They are not ultimately real and dissolve with the dawning of pure consciousness. This systematic dismantling of the perceived reality of all phenomenal states, whether waking, dreaming, or sleeping, is crucial for understanding the true nature of existence.

- Kevala is eternal unlike changing states

The ultimate aim of this analysis of reality and illusion is to guide the aspirant towards the transcendent state of pure consciousness, or Kevala (aloneness), which is the only true reality. Guru’s statement, “We can never see extinction thus to this: as it is / Hitched on to the pure aloneness, it goes round for ever,” points to the eternal and unchanging nature of this Absolute. Unlike the transient waking, dream, and deep sleep states that “get extinguished” daily, the underlying reality, the “pure aloneness” (kevala), remains. This pure consciousness is beyond the dualistic operations of the mind and the limitations of the psycho-physical apparatus. The “long-drawn-out dream” of existence, driven by Maya, is seen in relation to this vertical axis of becoming in pure time, which belongs to the context of the Absolute. Realizing this ultimate truth, synonymous with “moksha” or “nirvana,” involves transcending all forms of bondage and illusion, leading to the ultimate release of the Self from the cycles of phenomenal experience.

Verse 3

വെളിയിലിരുന്നു വിവർത്തമിങ്ങു കാണും
 വെളി മുതലായ വിദ്യുതിയഞ്ചുമോർത്താൽ
 ജലനിധിതന്നിലുയർന്നിടും തരങ്ഗാ
 വലിയതുപോലെയാദേദമായ് വരേണം.

*These phenomenal aspects five such as the sky
 Which as emergent from outside is here seen to be,
 By contemplation one should bring to non-difference
 As the sea is to the waves that rise in rows thereon.*



- Body and senses are divine, not separate

This stanza elaborates on the concept introduced in the second verse, which posited that the senses and the body are divine manifestations, indeed the very essence, of the Supreme Consciousness. This verse further elucidates this truth, aiming to solidify the understanding that all is one.

- No real transformation occurs in creation

The five cosmic elements – space (ākāśa), air, fire, water, and earth – perceived in this universe are manifestations (vivarta) of the Supreme Self, or Brahman, residing within. Advaita Vedanta espouses the theory of Vivarta (apparent modification), where an effect appears to arise from a cause without the cause itself undergoing a real transformation. For instance, while a pot is a real modification (parinama) of clay, and a cloth of threads, in both cases, the effect shares the same transactional reality (vyavahārika sattā) as its material cause. Therefore, the pot is considered a transformation of clay, and their existence during the transactional period is concurrent.

- Five elements are illusory appearances due to ignorance

However, in the case of mistaking a rope for a snake, the rope is the material cause, possessing transactional reality. The perceived snake, conversely, exists only as an appearance (prātibhāsika sattā) during the moment of perception; it lacks transactional reality. Thus, the existence of the cause (rope) and the effect (snake) are not analogous; this is a ‘rajju-vivarta’ (illusory appearance of a snake on a rope). The appearance of the snake is due to ignorance regarding the rope, and this illusion vanishes when the ignorance is dispelled. Just as the serpent superimposed on the rope disappears with the realisation of the underlying rope, the phenomenal world, comprising the five elements (akasha and others), is superimposed on the Supreme Self due to ignorance about Brahman. These elements are referred to as ‘Vibhūtis’ (divine manifestations) because each appears in manifold forms, echoing the Bhagavad Gita’s declaration, “Nānto’sti mama divyānām vibhūtīnām paramtapa” (O scorcher of foes, there is no end to My divine manifestations).

- Real is Brahman, world is only name and form

Just as the snake is superimposed on the rope, the universe is superimposed on Brahman, which is ultimately real (pāramārthika sattā). The existence of the superimposed universe is not ultimately real; it is not pāramārthika. Therefore, the ultimate reality of Brahman (the substratum) and the transactional reality of the world (composed of the five great elements) are not commensurate; they are disparate. In essence, the universe is a vivarta of Brahman. With the realisation of Brahman, the substratum, the superimposed universe is sublated (nivarttate). This gives rise to the non-

dual awareness that the apparent world and Brahman are one and the same. This is clarified by analogies: just as a multitude of waves appearing on water are fundamentally water, the universe, comprising the great elements appearing to rise from Brahman, should be understood as Brahman itself. Similarly, pots and other objects made from clay are essentially clay, as stated in the Chandogya Upanishad: “Mrittiketyevasatyam” (Only the clay is real). The names like pot, dish, and jug are merely verbal distinctions, modifications that are unreal. Therefore, only the clay, the material cause, is declared as real. Likewise, the realisation that the universe and Brahman are one and the same must dawn, as the Upanishads proclaim, “Sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahma” (All this is indeed Brahman).

• Elemental world holds only transactional reality

In this verse, the term ‘veli’ (വെളി) is used in two senses: as one of the five elements, 'bhutakasha' (elemental space), and as the Supreme Self (Brahman). The word 'vibhuti' (വിഭൂതി) denotes prosperity or divine power. Here, it is specifically used to mean the manifestation or emanation in various forms, as the elements like akasha and others have manifested diversely in form and nature from the Supreme Self, making them the five 'Vibhūtis'. Advaita Vedantins accept three types of reality: 'Pāramārthika Sattā' (absolute reality), which belongs only to Brahman. The existence of the elemental universe is 'Vyavahārika Sattā' (transactional reality), valid only during the period of transaction. With the direct experience of "all is Brahman," the reality of the universe is sublated. The existence of objects like the rope-snake is 'Prātibhāsika Sattā' (apparent reality); they exist only as long as they are perceived. With the direct experience of "this is a rope, not a snake," their existence vanishes; it is sublated. Our experience is "it was not a snake, it is not a snake, and it will not be a snake."

Verse 12

തൊലിയുമെലുന്മുലം ദുരന്തമന്തഃ
കലകളുമേന്തുമഹന്തയൊന്നു കാൺക!
പൊലിയുമിതന്തു പൊലിത്തു പൂർണ്ണമാകും
വലിയൊരഹന്ത വരാ വരം തരേണം.

With skin, bone, refuse, and many an inner factor of evil end,
Wielding these, lo! One ego looms: this which passes,
Is the other: that Self which grows to perfection,
O grant the boon that it may not the ego swell!



- Brahman is one, Jīvātmās are many through avidyā

The Absolute Reality, Brahman, is singular, while the individual soul (Jīvātmā), conditioned by the body, senses, and other adjuncts, is manifold and perishable. This is due to ‘avidyā’ (ignorance), which veils the true nature of the Self. The phenomenal world, characterised by names and forms, is also a creation of ‘avidyā’.

- Realisation of ‘I am Brahman’ needs grace

The ‘I-sense’ (Ahaṃ) manifests in two forms: the small and the great. The small ‘I-sense’ is transient and ought to dissolve into the great ‘Ahaṃ’ to attain completeness, which is the desired state. Guru explicitly states that to achieve this exalted, great ‘Ahaṃ’ – the ‘Ahaṃ Brahmāsmi’ (I am Brahman) consciousness – one must seek the blessings of great souls (Mahātmās).

- All is ‘I’ reveals non-dual Self fully

The body, with its skin, bones, and waste matter, along with the inner faculties (antahkaraṇas) such as intellect (buddhi), mind (chitta), thought (manas), and ego (ahaṅkāra), and their various aspects like desire (kāma), conceptualisation (saṅkalpa), doubt (saṃśaya), determination (niścaya), perseverance (dhr̥ti), lack of perseverance (adhyati), shame (hr̥ī), wisdom (dhī), and fear (bhī), lead to extremely sorrowful and destructive experiences. This truth must be directly understood. The limited ‘I-sense’ that identifies with the physical body and senses is the small ‘Ahaṃ’. This small ‘Ahaṃ’ is a product of the manifestation of ignorance and leads to undesirable outcomes, hence it is termed ‘disastrous’. This small ‘Ahaṃ’ must dissolve through the experience of the Self’s true nature – the ‘Ahaṃ Brahmāsmi’ experience. As the veil of ignorance is removed, this small ‘Ahaṃ’ merges into the great ‘Ahaṃ’, where everything is perceived as ‘I’, attaining completeness. This great ‘Ahaṃ’ is supreme. Ezhuthachan, in Harināmakīrtanam, extols that the ‘I-sense’ arising from ignorance and identifying with the body should cease, and instead, “if it appears, let it appear that all is I” – meaning the small ‘Ahaṃ’ should dissolve into the great ‘Ahaṃ’ where “all is I” (‘Ahaṃ Brahmāsmi’, ‘Sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ Brahma’).

- Small ‘I’ ends through realised sages’ blessings

This small ‘Ahaṃ’ will persist if it does not dissolve. Such an experience of the unity of the individual soul (Jīva) and Brahman (Brahman) is rare. It must be attained through serving and pleasing sages (munijana) who have realised ‘praṇava’ (Om) and transcended rebirth, thereby receiving their blessings. The disciple must strive to seek their blessings. Guru clarifies that Brahman-abiding masters should bless the disciple so that the small, disastrous ‘Ahaṃ’ is entirely extinguished and never

recurs, and the great ‘Ahaṃ’ (the sense of ‘all is I’) becomes firmly established.

• Strive on to attain the great ‘Ahaṃ’

This verse contains the exhortation to continue striving to attain the great ‘Ahaṃ’. Regarding the phrase “toliyumelumpumalam” – a common interpretation sees ‘elumpu’ (bone) and ‘malam’ (waste/impurity) as separate terms. However, it is customary to add ‘um’ (and) between them. Therefore, it is more appropriate to parse it as “elumpu alam” (bone intensely), interpreting ‘alam’ as ‘extremely’, leading to the meaning “extremely disastrous.”

Verse 15

പരയുടെ പാലു നുകർന്ന ഭാഗ്യവാൻമാർ
 ക്കൊരു പതിനായിരമാണ്ടൊരല്പനേരം
 അറിവപരപ്രകൃതിക്കധീനമായാ
 ലരനൊടിയായിരമാണ്ടുപോലെ തോന്നും

*Ten thousand years do a moment make for the favoured ones
 Suckled in the milk of the Absolute beyond; but when
 knowledge
 Is caught in the power of the nature that is relative here,
 Half a second, ten thousand years long would seem.*

• Time shrinks for the enlightened through Para Vidya

For the enlightened ones who have attained Self-realization through Para Vidya (higher knowledge), even ten thousand years will pass by like a single moment. But when consciousness is bound by ignorance through Aparā Vidya (lower knowledge), even half a moment will seem like a thousand years.

• Supreme Consciousness transcends time and space

Time, as a phenomenon, is a human construct, subjectively conceived based on the movements of the universe, and therefore, it is not ultimately real. Distinctions such as past, present, and future are likewise conceptual and conditional. The indivisible Supreme Consciousness (Paramātma Chaitanya) is the very substratum of the concept of time. The realm of experience within Brahma-vidyā (the knowledge of Brahman) transcends both time and space. This verse clarifies that it is not circumscribed by time, space, or any object.

• Lower knowledge deals with impermanent rituals

Knowledge is classified into two types: Parā (higher) and Aparā (lower). The Vedas, Itihāsas, and Purāṇas all fall under Aparā Vidyā. Aparā Vidyā bestows knowledge of rituals like Yajñas, which yield impermanent results. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad states that Parā Vidyā is the means to attaining knowledge of the imperishable Brahman. The nature of this imperishable Brahman is further described:

Yattadaḍṣyamagrāhyamagoṭramavarṇa
machakṣuḥśrotram t
adpāṇipādaṃ nityaṃ vibhuṃ sarvagaṃ susūkṣmaṃ
tadavyayaṃ yadbhūtayoniṃ paripaśyanti dhīrāḥ”

(Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad - 6).

This refers to that which is invisible, ungraspable by the senses, without origin (gotra), colourless, without eyes or ears, hands or feet; eternal, pervasive in various forms, omnipresent, extremely subtle, imperishable, and the source of all beings, that which the wise realise through knowledge. The ‘milk of Parā’ refers to the bliss (Ātmānanda) experienced by fortunate individuals, the wise, who attain knowledge of the Supreme Self through Parā Vidyā.

- The Supreme Self is subtle, formless, imperishable

For these enlightened beings, even an immensely long duration, ten thousand years, or an infinite, immeasurable expanse of time, passes in what feels like a mere moment, an instant. Conversely, if consciousness (bodha) becomes subservient to ‘aparā prakṛti’ (lower nature), meaning if it becomes enslaved by Aparā Vidyā, which deals with rituals yielding impermanent results and empowering inert matter, then even half a second can feel like a thousand years. This is because the ignorant perceive time as an extension of suffering.

- Enlightened perceive eternity as a fleeting instant

The wise, immersed in the bliss of the Self, are unaware of the passage of time. The Bhagavad Purana states, “Anyakrāmada-vijñātaḥ kālaḥ paramadustaraḥ” (The exceedingly difficult-to-cross time passed by unnoticed). This highlights that for the ignorant, time is a source of suffering, making every moment seem prolonged. The experience of joy compresses time, while the experience of sorrow elongates it. This is a universally observed phenomenon.

- Sorrow lengthens time for the ignorant

Verse 18

അഹമിരുളല്ലിരുളാകിലന്ധരായ് നാ
മഹമഹമെന്നറിയാതിരുന്നിടേണം
അറിവതിനാലഹമന്ധകാരമല്ലെ
ന്നറിവതിനിങ്ങനെയാർക്കുമോതിടേണം.

*The ‘I’ is not darkness; were it so blind
And unaware of this ‘I’, ‘I’ we should have remained;
Because of such awareness, in order to know
Thus (as such) to one and all declare.*

- The Self shines as the undoubted “I am”

The revolving wheel of birth and death (janma-mṛtyu-cakra) is illumined by the discourse-lamp (saṁsāra-dīpa) through the fire of the vital breath (vāyu-agni) that is the Self (Ātman). This Self ever pulses within all beings as the awareness of “I, I”. Everyone is aware of the fact of their own existence, *aham asmi* (“I am”). No one doubts whether “I exist or not” (*aham asmi vā na vā, aham nāsmi*); nor is there any erroneous knowledge to the contrary, namely, that “I do not exist”. The present verse seeks to clarify the true nature (*svarūpa*) of that Self which is so directly and universally experienced.

- The “I” is self-luminous, not inert matter

This “I” is not darkness. That which shines forth in every person’s experience as “I, I” is not of the nature of darkness (*tamas*), not mere shadow, not inert matter (*jaḍa*). It is self-luminous (*svayam-prakāśa*). If it were darkness, if it were like inert material substances such as pots or walls, it would not shine forth by itself. Then, we, all of us, would remain blind, as it were, like insentient lumps of matter, incapable of self-awareness, unable to know or experience “I, I”. But since each one invariably experiences “I exist, I am”, it follows that the Self, the “I” (*aham*), is not darkness, not inert matter. It is luminous by its very nature.

- Teach that the “I” is pure consciousness

Inert objects such as pots cannot illumine themselves. They are *para-prakāśya*, they require external light to be seen. They need sources such as lamps in order to be illumined. But the Self, which is the substance designated by “I”, is *svayam-prakāśa*, it shines by itself. It is *brahma-caitanya*, the pure consciousness of Brahman. Therefore, this truth must be known, understood through reason, and taught. One must guide others accordingly, through rational instruction. Thus, the Guru directs the disciple to realise and to teach others that the Self is of the nature of self-luminous consciousness.

- Brahman-consciousness illumines all shining things

The sun, moon, and fire, although they illumine the world, do not shine at all times. The sun shines by day, the moon by night, and fire requires external fuels such as wood in order to burn. The Vedic injunction, “*tameva bhāntam anubhāti sarvaṁ, tasya bhāsā sarvaṁ idaṁ vibhāti*” (Kāṭha Upaniṣad), clearly affirms that it is the Consciousness of Brahman (*brahma-caitanya*) that illumines all these sources of light. In this way, it becomes evident that the “I” (*aham*), which is both the universal and self-luminous light, is neither darkness nor inert matter. If its light were not present, the entire universe would be plunged into darkness.



- Brahman is the seer behind all seeing

The supreme goal of life, then, is to realise that Brahman is the very “eye of the eye”, the luminous principle that enables the eye to see external light, and also the “eye of the mind”, the one that grants cognition and awareness. That blissful Brahman, the source of all light, is the true Self. Realising this truth is what makes life meaningful and fulfilment of human birth possible.

Versse 19

അടിമുടിയറ്റമതുണ്ടിതുണ്ടതുണ്ട്.
നടിയിടുമാദിമസത്തയുള്ളതെല്ലാം
ജഡമിതു സർവ്വമനിത്യമാം; ജലത്തിൻ-
വടിവിനെ വിട്ടു തരൻഗമന്യമാമോ?

*‘Bottom, top or tip, reality here, there or that’ -
So do conflicts come: Prime Substance is all there is:
The inert here, all change and pass: How could a wave
Apart from the water’s form, another reality have?*

- Self is luminous, non-Self is inert

Reality is understood as twofold: the Self (*Ātman*) and the non-Self (*anātman*). That which is self-luminous (*svayam-jyotiḥ*), the principle denoted by the word “I” (*aham*), is the *Ātman*. Everything other than the Self is inert matter (*jada*), dependent upon external illumination (*para-prakāśya*), and hence impermanent (*anitya*). This fundamental distinction is clearly affirmed here. Simultaneously, Gurudevān upholds the non-dual truth that all is, in essence, the Self itself, *sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ brahma* (“all this is indeed Brahman”), and demonstrates this with illustrative examples.

- Fragmented reality veils undivided Consciousness

Foot (*aṭi*), head (*muṭi*), bottom (*pādam*), top (*śiras*), all these are said to be present. “That exists, this exists” (repeating *that* and *this*), such objects, which appear measurable and delimited, form the content of conventional discourse. All such objects, which appear to possess bottom and top, edges and contours, are in truth nothing but the primal Reality (*ādima-sattā*), the undivided ground of all existence, *brahma-sattā*. That which appears multiple, fragmented in space, time, and substance (*deśa-kāla-vastu-paricchinna*), is ultimately inert and impermanent. In reality, all this is the primal Being, the Supreme Consciousness, Brahman itself.

- All objects are appearances on Brahman

A wave arises in water and dissolves back into it. Therefore, the wave is not other than the water; it is water itself. Likewise, all inert objects are merely appearances (*dr̥śya*), temporary phenomena like waves. The apparent “existence” perceived in

pots, walls, and the like, expressed through metaphors such as *saṅghaṭi* (a vessel of existence) and *saṃpataḥ* (a garment of existence), belongs not to the objects themselves, but to the substratum of Brahman that underlies them.

• Dream and waking objects lack independent reality

In dreams, we see chariots, horses, forests, and so on. But the “existence” that appears in those dream-objects is also rooted in Brahman, the substratum. In reality, dream-chariots have no independent existence. Similarly, the apparent “being” in all objects of the material world is ultimately the primal *sattā*, Brahman itself. The universe is superimposed (*āropa*) upon Brahman. The being of that which is superimposed does not differ from the being of its substratum. Just as a wave born in water is not separate from the water, all phenomenal entities that appear in Brahman in manifold forms are not distinct from Brahman. They are Brahman itself.

• Nāma-rūpa distinctions arise from ignorance

All *nāma-rūpa* (name-and-form) distinctions are products of ignorance (*avidyā-kalpita*). They appear to exist for a moment, only to vanish the next. This is why it is said: *jagad-rūpaṃ tato dayam*, the world-form arises from ignorance. Therefore, *nāma-rūpa* pertains to the world born of *avidyā*, and hence does not possess ultimate (paramārthika) reality. The wise (*vidvān*) assert that the qualities of “being” (*asti*), “shining” (*bhāti*), and “dearness” (*priyam*), which seem to be found in worldly objects, truly belong only to Brahman, the substratum.

Gurudevan has beautifully and profoundly conveyed this metaphysical truth in this verse.

Verse 20

ഉലകിനു വേറൊരു സത്തയില്ലതുണ്ടെ-
 ന്നുലകരുരപ്പതു സർവ്വമുഹൂഹീനം;
 ജളനു വിലേശയമെന്നു തോന്നിയാലും
 നലമിയലും മലർമാല നാഗമാമോ?

*Another reality this world has none; contrary assertions
 Made in this world, understanding all do lack;
 Though an ignorant person could mistake it for a reptile.
 Could a flower-garland, beneficial, ever a snake become?*

All *nāma-rūpa* (name-and-form) phenomena observable in the world, every manifest object, emerge from and dissolve back into Brahman, the ultimate causal principle (*mūla-kāraṇa*). They are appearances, or transformations (*vivarta*) of Brahman. The phenomenal world (*prapañca*) exists with

- Illusion of separateness belongs to the ignorant

a transactional reality (*vyāvahārika-sattā*), which is distinct from the absolute reality (*pāramārthika-sattā*) of Brahman. It is not that the world possesses an independent being apart from Brahman; rather, it is Brahman itself that *appears* as the world. Hence, the world has no existence separate from Brahman. The illusion that the world is other than Brahman arises only in the minds of the ignorant (*ajñānins*).

- Mistaking Brahman as world is ignorance

The world, therefore, has no ontological status independent of Brahman. Common people assert that it possesses a reality distinct from Brahman, but such a view does not withstand logical scrutiny, it is irrational, devoid of inference. In the *Amarakośa*, the term *ūhaḥ* is glossed as “tarka” (reasoning), and inference is accepted as a valid means of knowledge (*anumāna-pramāṇa*). A dull-witted person (*manda-buddhi, jaḍa*) may mistake a flower garland (*malar-māla*) for a snake (*bileśayaḥ*, “that which lies coiled in a hole”). But the garland does not thereby become a snake, it never turns into one in reality. Similarly, even if those who are bound to the phenomenal world (*prāpanchikas*) erroneously perceive Brahman, the indivisible consciousness (*akhaṇḍa-bodha*), as the world, Brahman does not become the world. Thus, the world has no reality distinct from Brahman, which is its substratum (*adhiṣṭhāna*). To claim otherwise is both illogical and contrary to scriptural authority (*pramāṇa*).

An illustration from Bhāsa’s *Svapnavāsavadatta* reinforces this. In the verse:

‘ഋജായതാം ച മുഖതോരണലോ ലമാലാം,
ഭ്രഷ്ടാംക്ഷിതൗതമവഗച്ഛസി മുർഖ സർവം.
മന്ദാന്തിലേന തിശിസാ പരിവർത്തമാനാ,
കിഞ്ചിത് കരോതി ഭുജഗസ്യവിചേഷിതാനി’

"*ṛjāyatām ca mukha-toraṇa-lola-mālām,
bhraṣṭām kṣitau tvam avagacchasi mūrkhā sarvam.
mandānilena tiśiśā parivartamānā,
kiñcit karoti bhujagasya viceṣītāni*"

(O fool! A gently swaying garland, fallen from a face-arch, is lying on the ground. Because it sways in the breeze, you mistake it for a serpent and imagine its movements.)

(Act V, Verse 3), the deluded person misinterprets a harmless garland as a snake. Likewise, Kālidāsa in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* notes:

‘സജ മപി ശിരഃ ക്ഷിപ്തതാം അന്ധഃ ധുനോത്യഹിശങ്കയാ’
“*sajam api śiraḥ kṣiptatām andhaḥ dhunoty ahi-śaṅkayā*”,

(Though it lies upon his own head, the blind man flings off the garland, mistaking it for a snake.)

This celebrated example illustrates the error of superimposition (*adhyāsa*). The well-known analogies of the rope-snake (*rajju-sarpa*) and the mother-of-pearl mistaken for silver (*śukṭikā-rajata*) also point to this principle.

• Effects are mere names, cause alone is real

The core Vedāntic teaching is that the world (*kārya*, effect) does not possess a reality separate from its cause (*kāraṇa*), Brahman. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* declares: “*mṛttikā eva satyam*”, “only clay is real”; the transformations are merely names beginning with speech (*vācārambhaṇa*), and thus, the effect is unreal. It is only the cause, Brahman, that is ultimately real. The manifest world, composed of modifications (*vikāra*), is *mithyā*, neither absolutely real nor entirely non-existent, but illusory.

Verse 78

മരണവുമില്ല പുറപ്പുമില്ല വാഴ്വരും
നരസുരരാദിയുമില്ല നാമരൂപം
മരുവിലമർന്ന മരീചിനീരുപോൽ നി-
ല്പൊരു പൊരുളാം പൊരുളല്ലിതോർത്തിടേണം

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

• Paramātma is changeless, blissful, beyond birth-death

It is affirmed, through apt illustration, that the Supreme Consciousness (*Paramātma-caitanya*) is beyond birth and death (*janma-mṛti-rahita*), is ever-blissful (*sadānanda*), and unchanging (*aparīṇāmī*). The names and forms (*nāma-rūpa*) that appear within it, such as gods and humans, are ultimately unreal, like a mirage in the desert.

• No beginning, no end, no intermediate state

There is no death in the Absolute. Death is the process whereby that which arises ceases to exist. But *Paramātma-caitanya* has no death, it is not subject to destruction. Nor is there any origination (*janma*), for to be born is to come into being after not having existed. The supreme principle is eternal (*nitya*), without beginning or end. It is not “living” in the conventional sense, life, which is the intermediate condition between birth and death, does not apply to it. Since this reality is free of both birth and death, it cannot be said to have an intermediate state either.

- Names and forms are illusions born of ignorance

There is neither man nor god, nor birds or animals, no distinctions of names or forms. These arise only due to ignorance (*avidyā*). That reality is without name or form. Such names and forms are like a mirage in a desert, an illusory vision of water, shimmering in the sunlight rising from heated sands. The appearance of water caused by sun rays is merely a deception; in reality, there is no water there. Similarly, birth and death, life, humanity, divinity, all such names and forms are mental constructions (*vikāra-s*) supported by speech (*vācālabhāna*). As such, they are ultimately false like mirage-water, *asatya*, and not the true reality. Discerning individuals (*vivekī-s*) must remain firmly aware of this truth.

- All worldly forms are speech-based appearances

Just as pots and earthen vessels are nothing but modifications (*vikāra-s*) of clay, and have only nominal existence supported by language, so too are all such forms mere appearances. Only the clay, the cause, is real. This is clearly stated in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*: “*mṛttikā eva satyam*”, “only clay is real.” All transformations are merely names, verbal designations that begin with speech. In the same way, the entire world (*jagat*) is a phenomenon supported by the substratum, which is the supreme Self (*Paramātma-caitanya*). All experiences of birth, death, life, gods, and humans are superimpositions (*āropa*) on that ultimate reality, and are thus mere appearances sustained by language.

- Paramātma-caitanya alone is true reality

Like mirage-water, they are *asatya*, not real. The only true reality (*satya-vastu*) is the Supreme Consciousness (*Paramātma-caitanya*). This essential philosophical principle must always be remembered by those endowed with discernment.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* declares:

’ന ജായതേ മ്രിയതേ വാ കദാചിന്നായം ഭൂതാ
ഭവിതാവാ ന ഭൂയഃ’

“*na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin nāyam bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ*”

(“This Self is never born, nor does it ever die. Having once come into being, it does not cease to be.”)

This scriptural statement reveals the uncreated, indestructible nature of the Supreme Self. It has neither origination nor cessation. It was never born, and it never ceases to be. This teaching of the *Gītā* should be earnestly contemplated and internalised.

Summarized Overview

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* unfolds a Vedāntic understanding of empirical experience through three foundational states: waking (*jāgrat*), dreaming (*svapna*), and deep sleep (*susupti*). In the waking state, the mind engages with an apparently objective world governed by the sensory apparatus. This perception is dualistic, rooted in the assumption of a world 'out there', and the knowledge it yields is fragmentary and inert-bound. Guru critiques this horizontal vision of reality, reminiscent of pre-Socratic hylozoism, as confined to elemental differentiations. However, he invites the seeker toward a vertical or contemplative re-evaluation, wherein these sensory phenomena become transparent to their ontological unity with the Absolute. The waking state is thus not to be dismissed, but surpassed in depth by a recognition that all multiplicity is a surface illusion. The elements, earth, water, fire, air, and space, when understood through meditative introspection, reveal not separateness but continuity with the substratum of pure consciousness. This stage marks the starting point of spiritual discernment: the need to deconstruct empirical reality in favour of ontological insight.

The dream state (*svapna*), though not always thematised as an autonomous stage by the Guru, plays a significant epistemological role in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*. In dreams, the mind constructs its own world independent of the senses, thus illustrating how perception does not require external stimuli to generate experience. The Guru employs analogies like the mistaken snake, here innovatively substituted with a flower-garland, to exemplify illusion born from conditioned reflex and inner projection. The garland, imbued with fragrance and symbolic value, signifies a substratum of spiritual significance, even as the snake-image (illusion) evokes fear and aversion. This suggests that the basis of illusion is not inherently negative or unreal in itself, but that the misidentification arises from ignorance (*avidyā*). The dream thus becomes a transitional metaphor: it bridges the sensory orientation of waking with the unconditioned consciousness glimpsed in deep sleep. Guru's reworking of Vedantic imagery thus encourages the seeker to see dreams not as frivolous but as revelatory, offering insight into the mind's capacity to both obscure and reflect the Self. This state reveals the inner mechanics of illusion and affirms the importance of *viveka* (discernment).

In the third stage, deep sleep (*susupti*), Guru identifies the most proximate empirical experience of non-duality. Here, the ego-sense, object-cognition, and name-form distinctions dissolve, and what remains is an undifferentiated awareness. Though unarticulated in common memory, this state is metaphysically rich: it signals a temporary cessation of *māyā* (illusion) and the emergence of *Ātman* as unmediated presence. Guru's insight aligns with the Upaniṣadic formulation of *turiya*, the 'fourth' state that transcends the triad and reveals pure being. In this context, metaphors like the mirage illustrate the ephemerality of appearances: just as desert light appears as water but quenches no thirst, the world appears real until tested by deeper inquiry. The Guru thus affirms that *nāma-rūpa* (name and form) are residual constructs, and that true liberation involves going beyond both the content and the condition of experience. This stage, while empirically experienced as sleep, is spiritually significant: it offers



a glimpse into the groundless ground of reality, the *Paramātman*, which is ever-free, ever-blissful, and untouched by the triadic limitations of birth, death, and individuality.

The *Atmopadesa Satakam*, as explained by the Guru, meticulously unpacks the concept of reality and illusion by challenging conventional dualistic thinking. The central tenet is that the perceived world of multiplicity is not ultimately real, but an appearance. This is eloquently illustrated through the analogy of the “flower-garland” mistakenly seen as a “snake.” The illusion of the snake arises from a misperception, a lack of “understanding,” or what Shankara calls *uha-apoha* (speculation). The flower-garland represents the underlying beneficial and spiritual reality, while the snake symbolizes the fearful and false illusion projected onto it. Unlike the traditional rope-snake example, the Guru’s modification highlights that reality, even in its existential aspect, possesses inherent value, and the illusion, though seemingly dangerous, is fundamentally baseless.

The text further clarifies that the perceived distinctions and ‘plurality’ in the world are rooted in “name and form” (*nama-rupa*). These are not independent realities but rather “aspects of thought or mentation” that persist even after grosser elements of consciousness are analyzed and found empty through contemplation. The Guru uses the powerful metaphor of a mirage, where the appearance of water, though visually present, lacks any “thirst-quenching value-content.” This exemplifies how something can appear to exist to our senses (illusion) but be utterly devoid of true value or ultimate reality. For the Advaitin, the “dry sand” is the existential basis for the imagined water, signifying that the empirical world is superimposed on the formless, valueless Absolute.

Ultimately, the Guru’s teaching in *Atmopadesa Satakam* aims to guide the seeker beyond the illusion of separate realities to the non-dual reality of the “Prime Substance” or Absolute. He critiques philosophical schools that fail to adopt a “unitive or dialectical approach to wisdom,” thereby perpetuating dualistic conceptions of reality. While acknowledging the perspective of empiricists who validate reality based on sensory perception, the Guru asserts that true reality must possess ultimate “value-content” and lead to “final happiness.” The “being” that is independent of becoming, the “noumenon” behind the “phenomena,” is the only true reality, and the goal is to transcend the “transparency to dualistic refraction” that our minds produce, thereby realizing the Absolute as the sole existence, subsistence, and value.

Assignments

1. What are the three states of empirical experience analysed in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*?
2. How does Sree Narayana Guru describe the nature of the Self in relation to the waking, dream, and deep sleep states?

3. What is the philosophical significance of *turiya bodham* (the fourth state) in Guru's thought?
4. How is the illusion of the snake and the flower-garland used to explain *adhyāsa* or superimposition?
5. What are the different levels of reality in Advaita Vedānta, and how are they reflected in the text?
6. How does Guru critique conventional notions of time and space through experiential awareness?
7. In what way does the concept of *nāma-rūpa* (name and form) relate to the understanding of illusion?
8. Why does the Guru assert that true knowledge cannot be obtained through thought and speech alone?



UNIT 3

Mystic experience in Liberation

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing the study of this material, learners will be able to:

- understand Sree Narayana Guru's Advaitic vision of mystical liberation as a direct, unitive experience transcending dualistic thought and sensory perception.
- analyze how the *Atmopadesha Shatakam* employs self-inquiry (*Atma Vichara*) and various metaphors to dismantle the illusion of individual ego and perceived multiplicity, revealing the underlying unity of all existence.
- examine the Guru's progressive path to detachment, emphasizing mind control and the sublimation of desires as essential steps toward realizing the true, unconditioned Self.
- appreciate the *Atmopadesha Shatakam* as a spiritual manual that guides the seeker from the perception of duality to the bliss of unity, advocating for universal oneness beyond sectarian divisions.

Background

Mysticism, at its core, represents a profound, direct engagement with the ultimate reality or divine, transcending the confines of intellectual reasoning and ordinary sensory perception. It is a journey of inner transformation, moving from the superficiality of external appearances to the depths of pure consciousness, often described as a state of blissful silence and an all-encompassing unity. This spiritual quest is not tied to external rituals or rigid doctrines but emphasizes a personal, experiential connection with the Absolute. Across diverse traditions, including Christianity, Islam (Sufism), Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, mystics share a common thread of experiencing inner light, divine love, and a profound sense of oneness, pointing to a universal truth beyond sectarian distinctions.

In the Indian tradition, this mystical impulse finds rich expression in poetic forms, from the ancient Upanishads to the devotional Bhakti movements. Mystic poets like Sree Narayana Guru uniquely blend profound Advaita Vedanta insights – the philosophy of non-duality that posits all beings as expressions of the same ultimate

reality (Brahman) – with a deep sense of social responsibility. Their poetry serves as both a ‘veil and a revelation,’ employing symbols, paradoxes, and evocative language to hint at experiences that defy ordinary articulation. For Guru, his poetic output was not merely an intellectual exercise but a spontaneous outpouring of realized truth, born from intense spiritual practice and intuition. This aligns him with the legacy of the Rishis, whose visions of the universe crystallized into sublime poetic metaphors.

Sree Narayana Guru’s ‘Atmopadesa Satakam’ stands as a prime example of such mystical poetry, directly addressing the path to liberation through Self-realization. His work emphasizes that the ultimate reality, Brahman, is not a distant deity but the divine presence dwelling within oneself – the Atman. The Guru’s ‘mystical vision,’ rooted in Advaita, is not an abstract metaphysical concept but a deeply experiential and ethical one, where true liberation is realized as *ananda* (bliss) derived from the profound unity of the individual self with all existence. By pointing inward to a reality beyond name and form, ‘Atmopadesa Satakam’ guides the seeker to transcend the ego, *Maya* (illusion), and *Avidya* (ignorance), ultimately leading to the realization of the non-dual Self and a vision of universal oneness, as encapsulated in his famous dictum: ‘One caste, one religion, one God for humankind.’

Keywords

Advaita Vedanta, Maya, Atma Vichara, Self-realization, Detachment, Unitive Vision

Discussion

3.3.1 Guru’s Mystical Vision in Atmopadesha Shatakam

The Atmopadesha Shatakam is the definitive mystical work of Narayana Guru. In a hundred verses, it charts a deeply introspective path toward spiritual self-realisation. It begins with the exhortation to seek the inner ‘karu’ (core), the unchanging essence within all beings. Mystical experience, particularly within the framework of liberation, represents a profound direct communion with the absolute, transcending the conventional boundaries of rational thought and sensory perception. In the very first verse, Guru writes:

- Mystical self-realisation transcends rational understanding

അറിവിലുമേറിയറിഞ്ഞിരുന്നവൻത-
ന്നുരുവിലുമൊത്തു പുറത്തുമുജ്ജ്വലിക്കും
കരുവിനു കണ്ണുകളുണ്ടുമുടക്കി-
ത്തെരുവതെരെ വീണുവണിയോതിടേണം



*Rising even above knowledge, what within the form
Of the one who knows, as equally without, radiant shines,
To that Core, with the eyes five restrained within,
Again and again prostrating in adoration, one should
chant.*

(Verse 1, Atmopadesha Shatakam)

It points to a ‘knowledge beyond knowledge’, an intuitive realisation that surpasses mere intellectual understanding. This primal ‘Core’ (karu), likened to an embryo or a functional nucleus, signifies the ultimate truth that permeates both the inner and outer realms, remaining perpetually radiant. The Guru’s simple Malayalam articulates a profound Vedantic insight: true liberation lies in apprehending a reality beyond mental categories and dualistic thought.

- Intuition reveals the ever-radiant primal core

The initial stage of understanding in this mystical quest involves recognizing the nature of ordinary, empirical knowledge. As per Vedantic doctrine, the mind (antahkaranam), through the senses, engages with external objects, assuming their form. This mental modification (vritti) reflects the supreme consciousness (paramātma chaitanyam), giving rise to worldly knowledge. However, this knowledge is transient; when attention shifts to a new object, the previous mental modification and its reflection of consciousness vanish, replaced by a new one. The profound insight here is that the Supreme Self, or Paramatma, pervades both this ephemeral knowledge and the individual possessing it. It constantly shines forth as the ‘radiant Core’ (ujjwaikkum karu), residing equally within the knower’s body and externally. This immutable Paramatma is the ultimate reality that the seeker must apprehend.

- Ordinary knowledge arises through shifting mental forms

The path to this realization necessitates a deliberate withdrawal of the senses. The Guru instructs the seeker to restrain the five senses, which are naturally inclined to engage with external objects, and to direct them inwards, fixing them upon the Paramatma itself. This inward focus (antarmukhamāy) is crucial, as external perception leads to the vast delusion of Maya. As the Kathopanishad states, the senses, being outwardly directed, fail to perceive the inner Self; only a wise individual, by turning their gaze inward, can behold it. Maya is described as a powerful deceit, a great adversary that, like a seductress, beguiles individuals with illusory notions, leading them into suffering. Thus, the emphasis is on transcending external engagement to escape the pervasive influence of Maya and achieve clarity of inner vision.

- Restrain senses to overcome Maya’s illusion

- Worshipper and worshipped are not truly separate

The true philosopher or knower (jnani), unlike the ordinary person who accepts all phenomena as real, comprehends the underlying unity of existence. Such an enlightened being is liberated from delusion by realizing that all is one, embodying the state of pure, undivided consciousness (shuddhādyā khaṇḍachaitanyam). This unitive understanding contrasts sharply with the dualistic perception that prevails when one is outward-bound. Although the realized Guru may still appear to engage in worldly affairs, there remains a subtle trace of avidyā (ignorance) for the sake of interaction, causing a conceptual distinction between the worshipper (the Self) and the worshipped (the Paramatma). However, the Guru understands this distinction is merely an illusion, similar to a person with jaundice knowing sugar is sweet but experiencing bitterness. The ultimate truth is that the worshipper and the worshipped are one, and all distinctions exist only on the transactional level, not in ultimate reality.

- Universe arises from and is consciousness alone

The mystical experience culminating in liberation reveals that all perceptions of existence, whether of ‘being’ (sat) or ‘non-being’ (asat), arise from consciousness, akin to sparks emanating from a fire. This renders the universe as a manifestation of consciousness itself, asserting consciousness as the sole reality, while everything else is merely an appearance. The Paramatma Chaitanyam (Supreme Consciousness) transcends all aspects of duality, existing eternally without origin or end, permeating both the subjective experience ‘within’ and the objective world ‘without.’ The Upanishadic statement ‘Sa bahyābhyantaro hyajāḥ’ (He is external and internal, indeed unborn) affirms this omnipresence. The pinnacle of this mystical journey is the realization of identity with Brahman, as articulated by the Shruti: ‘Brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati’ (The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman). This liberation, however, fully manifests when the accumulated prarabdha karma (destined actions) are exhausted and the physical body is shed, dissolving the final vestiges of avidyā, thereby allowing the individual to fully merge into the undifferentiated reality of Brahman.

In verse 2, Guru says:

കരുണവുമിന്ദ്രിയവും കളേബരം തൊ-
ട്ടരിയുമനേകജഗത്തുമോർക്കിലെല്ലാം
പരവെളിതന്നിലുയർന്ന ഭാനുമാൻ തൻ
തിരുവുരുവാണു തിരഞ്ഞു തേരിടേണം.

*The inner organ, the senses, and counting from the body
The many worlds we know, are all, on thought, the sacred*



form

Of the supreme Sun risen in the void beyond;

By relentless cogitation one should attain to this.

This verse beautifully illustrates the Advaitic idea that there is no reality apart from consciousness (Chaitanya). The outer world, and the tools of perception, are all manifestations of that inner light, often described by Guru as ‘Bhanuman’ (luminous sun).

- True vision comes through relentless inner contemplation

Mystical experience in the context of liberation, as elucidated by Sree Narayana Guru in *Atmopadesha Shatakam*, transcends mere intellectual understanding to attain a direct, unitive vision of reality. Verse 2 of the text, serves as a profound entry point into this spiritual journey. It reveals that everything, from our internal faculties to the vast external universe, is a manifestation of an ultimate, radiant consciousness, the ‘supreme Sun.’ This verse not only highlights the Advaitic principle that all reality is ultimately consciousness but also prescribes a rigorous contemplative method for its realisation, urging a ‘relentless cogitation’ to penetrate the veil of apparent multiplicity and experience the inherent oneness of all existence.

- Inner and outer are one luminous consciousness

The Guru’s teaching begins by dissecting the perceived reality, distinguishing between the inner organ (encompassing intellect, mind, consciousness, and ego) and the external senses, leading to the understanding of the body and the multitude of worlds. These, when subjected to profound contemplation, are revealed not as separate entities but as the divine form of the ‘supreme Sun risen in the void beyond.’ This ‘supreme Sun’ signifies the ultimate consciousness (Chidākāsham), an all-pervading, luminous principle. The ‘void beyond’ (paraveli) alludes to the supreme space or the Heart-Cave, a concept found in Upanishads like the Taittiriya, indicating the ultimate abode of the Satchidananda Brahman. The imperative to ‘attain to this’ by ‘relentless cogitation’ underscores that this profound understanding is not passively received but actively discovered through dedicated, introspective inquiry, mirroring the Upanishadic call to ‘seek and know.’

- Inner organ and Sun are poles of same truth

The apparent diversity of the universe, with its countless objects and phenomena, is thus fundamentally unified within this supreme consciousness. The Guru’s philosophy asserts an inductive equation, where the inner organ and the supreme Sun in the void represent the two poles of reality. Between these two, various graded value-systems, encompassing material, psychological, and cosmological aspects of human experience,

can be arranged along a vertical axis. All these seemingly disparate elements, whether positive or negative, can ultimately be equated and understood in terms of each other, pointing to a neutral underlying reality. This contemplative approach requires transcending the empirical, physiological understandings of both the 'inner organ' and the 'physical sun,' replacing them with psychic and transcendental counterparts to engage in pure, philosophical reasoning.

- Apparent duality resolved through higher reasoning

The 'many worlds we know' as mentioned in the verse, are not to be confused with a doctrinal pluralism. Instead, this seemingly diverse experience serves a methodological purpose in the Advaitic journey towards non-duality. While initially appearing as separate entities, these 'worlds', from our immediate bodily experience to the realms of food, social interactions, ethics, aesthetics, and even the Platonic world of intelligibles, are to be dialectically brought together. The goal is to resolve them into unitive terms within the supreme consciousness. This method acknowledges the apparent duality in the process of thought but aims for its ultimate abolition through higher reasoning, leading to the understanding that all these diverse experiences are merely different facets of the single, underlying reality of the Brahman.

- Relentless cogitation demands vertical inner discipline

The command to attain this vision 'by relentless cogitation' implies a rigorous, disciplined intellectual effort, akin to tapas or 'burning oneself up.' This is not passive contemplation but an active, vertical ascent of consciousness, resembling the intense mental operations of a pure mathematician. It demands a detachment from the empirical world and its distractions, as genuine contemplative attention to the Self, the neutral Absolute, cannot be swayed by external passions. This internal discipline, often misinterpreted as escapism by Western philosophy, is in fact a profound engagement with the vertical values of life. It requires the contemplative to 'restrain the five eyes' or senses, not in a literal sense, but by directing afferent impulses inwards, ceasing the normal outward flow of thought to access the deepest levels of consciousness and attain the state of liberation.

3.3.2 Mystic Experience in Liberation: Mastering the Chariot of Being

In another verse, he compares the senses and ego to horses driven by the charioteer (intellect), echoing the Katho Upanishad. But he challenges the reader to look beyond the senses:



ശ്രുതി മുതലായം തുരഗം തൊടുത്തൊരാത്മ-
 പ്രതിമയെഴും കരണപ്രവീണനാളും
 രതിരഥമേറിയഹന്ത രമ്യരൂപം
 പ്രതി പുറമേ പെരുമാറിടുന്നജസ്രം

*With hearing and such as horses linked, carrying within
 The Self-image, and ruled over by the master of thinking
 powers*

*Such is the libido chariot, mounted whereon the 'I' sense
 Unceasing deals outward with each form of beauty as it
 proceeds. (Verse 69)*

The solution, he says, lies in detachment from illusion and identification with the unmoving, unchanging self, an idea reinforced throughout the Shatakam using natural metaphors: the sea and wave, the snake and rope, the circle of fire. Mystical experience, leading to liberation, fundamentally involves transcending the limitations of our perceived reality and identifying with the unchanging, unmoving Self. Sree Narayana Guru's Atmopadesha Shatakam offers profound insights into this journey, often employing rich metaphors to convey complex Advaitic truths. This verse, echoing the ancient Kathopanishad, depicts the senses as wild horses, the intellect as the charioteer, and the 'I'-sense as the rider on the chariot of desire. It challenges the seeker to look beyond these transient external engagements to discover the enduring, pure Self, reinforcing a central theme of detachment from illusion that runs throughout the Shatakam.

- Self is beyond wave, snake, fire illusion

The verse meticulously delineates the intricate relationship between the Self, senses, intellect, mind, external objects, and the body. The five senses of knowledge – hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell – are likened to horses tethered to a chariot. This chariot, described as the 'libido chariot' (ratiratham), is driven by the intellect (buddhi), the adept master of the inner instruments (karana-pravānan). Mounted upon this chariot is the 'I'-sense (ahanta), the ego, which ceaselessly moves outwards, pursuing beautiful forms and objects of pleasure (ramyarūpam prati). This imagery powerfully illustrates how the human being, driven by sensory desires and egoic identification, remains caught in the endless cycle of worldly engagement. The verse paints a clear picture of a person constantly captivated and controlled by external attractions, emphasizing the predicament of one enslaved by the pursuit of sensory gratification.

- Intellect drives senses toward external allurements

The Guru's imagery finds a direct parallel in the Kathopanishad, which presents the classic chariot analogy for

- Intellect must rein in mind and senses

the spiritual journey. In this analogy, the Atman (Self) is the lord of the chariot, the body is the chariot itself, intellect is the charioteer, the mind is the reins, and the senses are the horses. The objects of the senses are the roads. This comparison underscores that the ego-bound individual (jīvātmā), propelled by the senses and mind, remains entangled in the transactional world. The solution lies in the intellect, acting as a discerning charioteer, firmly grasping the reins of the mind (manas) to control the sensory horses. By disciplining the mind and senses, the jīvātmā can navigate the tumultuous ocean of samsara and reach its ultimate destination: the all-pervading, undivided, pure consciousness. This calls for mental control (manonigraham) leading to sensory control (indriyanigraham), echoing the Kathopanishad's teaching that 'the one who has knowledge as his charioteer, and reins the mind, reaches the end of the road, that highest place of Vishnu.'

- Self is neutral witness beyond mind and matter

The text highlights the Self-image (atma-pratima) as the central reality, a concept that aligns with Spinoza's 'thinking substance', a psycho-physical entity neutral between mind and matter. This Self-image does not directly participate in external action but acts as the 'unmoved mover' or the 'agent of pure act,' serving as the most direct representation of the Absolute. The elaborate imagery of the chariot procession, though rooted in ancient Indian cultural practices (like the Puri Jagannath car festival), serves a profound philosophical purpose. It signifies the inevitability of cosmic force and the need to perceive beyond the literal. The chariot, its horses, and the rider are not to be understood as mere material or psychological entities but as parameters for accommodating graded spiritual factors. The distinction between 'thinking' and 'substance,' as aspects of the neutral Absolute, helps to locate this neutral Self-image, leading ultimately to the recognition of pure consciousness that remains aloof and unaffected by worldly pursuits.

- Desire operates outwardly Self remains neutral within

The philosophical essence of this verse lies in recognizing the perfect aloofness and neutrality of the pure thinking substance that corresponds to the highest Absolute Self. The 'libido' (rati), understood as the basis of the body and its sensory engagements, represents the negative aspect of the Self's participation in the world. However, this is balanced by its linkage to the intellect, the 'ruler of the instruments of knowing,' which represents the positive aspect. The text underlines that spiritual purity is maintained through this intricate balance. The 'I'-sense, with its aesthetic involvement in forms of beauty, operates on a slightly asymmetrical, negative



side of the graded spiritual scale. Ultimately, the horizontal forces of desire and aversion operate on a different plane, leaving the core Self-image entirely intact and unaffected. This demonstrates that true liberation is found not in extinguishing experience, but in recognizing the unchanging, witness consciousness at the heart of all activity, unblemished by the transient dance of the senses and ego.

3.3.2.1 The Undifferentiated Reality: Merging Worlds in Mystic Liberation

The Atmopadesha Shatakam stands as Sree Narayana Guru's greatest contribution to mystical literature. It is not merely a poetic text but a spiritual manual, a scripture of inner transformation. Written in lyrical Malayalam and accessible yet profound in tone, this work uses the mystical language of Advaita Vedanta to guide the reader through stages of self-inquiry, awareness, detachment, and the bliss of unity.

- A scripture of inner transformation through self-inquiry

- Thematic guide from ignorance to self-knowledge

The core structure of the Shatakam can be read as a progression, from perception of duality to the realisation of unity, from bondage in ignorance to freedom in self-knowledge. Guru structures his mystical teachings thematically, guiding the reader on an inward journey.

Many verses in the early part of the Shatakam urge the reader to turn inward and ask fundamental questions. For example:

വെളിയിലിരുന്നു വിവർത്തമിങ്ങു കാണും
 വെളി മുതലായ വിദ്യതിയങ്ങുമോർത്താൽ
 ജലനിധിതന്നിലുയർന്നിടും തരങ്ഗം
 വലിയതുപോലെയാദേശമായ് വരണം.

*These phenomenal aspects five such as the sky
 Which as emergent from outside is here seen to be,
 By contemplation one should bring to non-difference
 As the sea is to the waves that rise in rows thereon.
 (Verse 3)*

- Self-inquiry begins by questioning the self

This is the classic method of Atma Vichara, or self-inquiry. Guru's mysticism does not begin with worship of a deity, but with questioning the nature of the self. The language is simple, but the implications are radical: when you truly ask who you are, the ego vanishes and what remains is pure awareness.

It directly follows earlier verses that establish the supreme consciousness as the ultimate reality. The verse introduces the concept of Atma Vichara (self-inquiry), a radical approach

- Five elements are not separate from the Absolute

that doesn't begin with deity worship but with questioning the very nature of the Self. Guru's simple yet potent language guides the seeker to understand that the perceived multiplicity of the universe, represented by the five great elements, is fundamentally non-different from the underlying Absolute, just as waves are intrinsically one with the ocean.

- Universe is a superimposition upon Brahman

The verse elaborates on how the seemingly distinct five great elements – sky (space), air, fire, water, and earth – are not independent entities but emergent phenomenal aspects (vibhūti) arising from the supreme consciousness (Paramatma). This aligns with the Advaita Vedanta concept of Vivarta (superimposition or apparent modification), where an effect appears different from its cause but does not have a separate substantial reality. Unlike parinama (transformation), where cause and effect share the same existential status (e.g., clay transforming into a pot), vivarta posits that the effect has a merely illusory or phenomenal existence, as in the classic example of a rope appearing as a snake. Just as the snake is an illusion superimposed on the rope due to ignorance, the universe is a superimposition on Brahman. Realizing Brahman, the underlying substratum, dissolves the perceived reality of the universe, revealing its non-difference from the Absolute.

- Non-difference seen through contemplative insight

The Guru employs the classic Vedantic analogy of the sea and its waves to illuminate this concept of non-difference (abheda). Waves, though appearing distinct with their own names and forms, are fundamentally non-different from the water of the ocean. Similarly, the entire universe, with its diverse elements, is not separate from Brahman but is merely an appearance of that singular reality. This unitive vision is attained through contemplation, which allows one to perceive the vertical, causal relationship between phenomena and the Absolute, rather than merely their horizontal, apparent distinctions. While Indian logic distinguishes between material causes (like clay for a pot) and incidental causes (like the potter's work), the contemplative view prioritises the material cause, revealing the non-difference between cause and effect when seen from a higher perspective.

- Phenomena are illusions projected by ignorance

The Vedantic doctrine, particularly as expounded by Shankaracharya, famously states that the visible world of phenomena is a mere appearance or 'passing show' – encapsulated by terms like Maya-vada (doctrine of illusion) and ajata-vada (doctrine of emergent appearance). This 'seeming to be' is attributed to nescience (ignorance), which dims the human mind's transparency, leading to superimposed



realities. Examples like a rope mistaken for a snake or silver imagined in mother-of-pearl illustrate how perceived realities can be mere mental projections, lacking substantial existence. Even the blueness of the sky, often considered a fundamental external reality, is merely an optical effect. The Guru implies that as one descends from the subtle element of the sky through the progressively grosser elements, what one experiences are merely degrees of differentiation within a single, underlying substance, consciousness itself.

• All distinctions dissolve in the sea of consciousness

The process of Panchikarana, where elements interpenetrate to form individual entities, further highlights this idea of non-difference, even though the Guru’s verse doesn’t explicitly detail it. Regardless of the specific mechanism, the core message remains that all material distinctions are ultimately illusory. The ‘sea’ in the analogy is not the ‘sea of samsara’ (phenomenal existence) but the ‘sea of consciousness’ (Samvit Sagara), the fundamental ground of all being. Name and form merely provide specificity to this general consciousness. Just as a scientist understands wave mechanics through constants that unify seemingly disparate particles, the philosopher is asked to perceive the successive grades of phenomenal manifestation as being substantially the same as the stuff of consciousness itself. Through contemplative effort, the apparent differences in the ‘rows’ of waves vanish, revealing the profound, undifferentiated reality where all is one.

3.3.3 Seeing Through Illusion (Maya): The Lamp of Consciousness in Liberation – A metaphor

Another key theme in the text is Maya, or illusion. Guru uses traditional metaphors to explain how reality is obscured by false perception. For instance:

അഴലേശുമഞ്ചിതളാർന്നു രു തട്ടായ്
 ചൂഴലുമനാദിവിളക്കു തൂക്കിയാത്മാ
 നിഴലുരുവായെരിയുന്നനു നെയ്യതോ മുൻ-
 പഴകിയ വാസന, വർത്തി വൃത്തിയത്രേ

*Suffering-filled, with petals five and tiers two
 Rotating beginningless, such a lamp hanging
 The Self in shadow form, it burns, with prior habit traits
 For oil, and function verily for wick. (Verse 17)*

In this verse Guru Picturises a beautiful metaphor of a Lamp, which has five beautiful petals. Through this metaphor,

Guru draws a picture of sthula and sukshma sariras, ignorance, the inner vasanas and inner actions or images.

The Guru uses the 'suffering-filled lamp' to illustrate the psycho-physical reality of the Self as it appears under the sway of avidya (ignorance). The three bodies, causal (karana), subtle (sūkshma), and gross (sthūla), are intricately linked to avidya, which is the cause of the subtle and gross bodies. The subtle body, composed of the five vital airs, mind, intellect, and ten senses, follows the Self until liberation. The gross body serves as the locus for experiences of pleasure and pain. However, the true Self, unbound by these bodies, is beyond duality and exists as Satchidananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute). Caught by avidya, the Self enters the cycle of birth and death, propelled by prior habit traits (vasanas) and engaging in worldly functions (vritti) that arise from these predispositions. The lamp's 'two tiers' symbolize the gross and subtle bodies, constantly rotating in the endless cycle of samsara.

- Two tiers represent gross and subtle bodies

The 'five petals' or 'five flames' of the lamp are interpreted as the five sense organs (jnanendriyas), which act as the active channels of perception. The 'oil' that fuels this lamp is the prior habit traits (vasanas), accumulated karmic tendencies that sustain the cycle of experience. The 'wick' of the lamp is identified with mental functions (vrittis) or worldly knowledge, which continuously ignite as long as vasanas persist. The 'Self' is depicted as burning in a 'shadow form' (nizhal-uruvāy) because it is obscured by the causal body of ignorance. This paradoxical imagery highlights that the Self's pure light is veiled by avidya, appearing as a localized, suffering entity. Only when vasanas are exhausted and mental functions cease through spiritual discipline does the 'wick' burn out, allowing the pure, unconditioned light of Brahman to shine forth, which is inherently blissful and beginningless.

- Five petals symbolise sense organs of perception

The analogy of the lamp, particularly its 'two tiers' and 'five petals,' schematizes the complex interplay of the Self with its phenomenal conditioning. The two tiers represent the inherent ambivalence in the concept of the Self, where its positive, luminous aspect (pure consciousness) is often overshadowed by its negative, 'shadow' form (the conditioned Self). The five petals correspond to the five senses of perception, indicating the avenues through which the Self interacts with the world and accumulates vasanas. The 'beginningless rotation' of the lamp refers to the cyclical nature of samsara, an eternal motion within the unitive domain where physics and metaphysics converge. This perpetual motion, sustained by vasanas and

- Lamp's rotation symbolises endless cycle of samsara



vrittis, defines the conditioned existence until these energies are transcended.

The central philosophical truth extracted from this verse is the perfect aloofness and neutrality of the pure thinking substance, the highest Absolute Self, from the suffering and activities of the conditioned existence. The ‘suffering-filled’ aspect refers to life viewed from a pragmatic, empirical standpoint, where the necessities and struggles of existence are undeniable. However, this is distinct from the inherent joy of the Absolute. The Guru’s portrayal of the Self burning in ‘shadow form’ is a paradox emphasizing that pure, absolute light is invisible; what we perceive as visible must belong to the ‘shadow’ side of reality, where specific forms are created by the refraction or partial reflection of pure light. Ultimately, this verse serves as a profound call to understand the Self’s true nature by recognizing the illusory, suffering-filled aspects of conditioned existence and striving for liberation through the cessation of vasanas and vrittis, thereby unveiling the unconditioned, blissful radiance of the true Self.

- Suffering belongs to shadow, not true Self

3.3.3.1 Detachment and the End of the Ego

Mystical awakening requires the dropping of identification with body and mind. Guru’s verses gently lead the reader toward detachment and equanimity:

മനമലർകൊയ്തു മഹേശപൂജ ചെയ്യും
മനുജനു മറ്റൊരു വേല ചെയ്തിടേണ്ട;
വനമലർകൊയ്തു മതല്ലയായ്കിൽമായാ-
മനുവുരുവിട്ടുമിരിക്കിൽമായ മാറും

*The mind-blossom plucking, who offers to the Great Master,
No need has he, other works to perform;
Else, let him pluck blossom wild, and if none is there,
The Maya spell let him repeat; the Maya goes. (Verse 29)*

Mystical awakening in Sree Narayana Guru’s Atmopadesha Shatakam fundamentally necessitates the dropping of identification with the body and mind, gently guiding the reader towards a state of profound detachment and equanimity. Verse 29 encapsulates this process. This verse underscores the paramount importance of mind control (manoniyantana) in the spiritual journey. It explains that the mind is the origin of sensory activity and desires, and therefore, its subjugation leads to inner transformation. The ultimate goal is amaneebhava (the state of being mindless or beyond mind), which is equated with liberation. The Guru outlines a progressive path to achieve this

- Mind control essential for spiritual awakening

state, leading to the dissolution of Maya (illusion) and the realization of the Self's true nature.

- Surrender dissolves ego and reveals Brahman

The core teaching of this verse revolves around the offering of the 'mind-blossom' (manamalar) to the Great Master (Maheshwara), symbolizing the supreme consciousness. The mind, being the seat of desires, thoughts, and false notions, must be detached from its worldly engagements and dissolved into the divine. A person who constantly offers their liberated mind to the Divine has no need for other spiritual practices to attain Turiya (the fourth state of consciousness, beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep). This profound surrender allows the individual to transcend their distinct identity and merge with Brahman, leading to the direct experience of 'I am Brahman.' Consequently, the Maya that veiled the Self's true nature dissipates, revealing the inherent self-luminous reality.

- Simple practices lead to gradual inner awakening

For those unable to offer the 'mind-blossom' directly through such profound mental mastery, the Guru presents alternative, more accessible spiritual disciplines. The first alternative is to 'pluck blossom wild' (vanamalar koytu), signifying engagement in external acts of worship, such as offering flowers gathered from nature. This implies that even while continuing to live in the world and perform ordinary duties, one can engage in devotional practices that foster spiritual purity. If even this is not feasible, the Guru suggests repeating the 'Maya spell' (maya manu), which refers to a mantra capable of conquering illusion or a never-failing divine name. Engaging in constant chanting or recitation of sacred names, even amidst worldly activities, purifies the mind, leading to the dawn of jnana (knowledge). This gradual purification ultimately eradicates avidya (ignorance or Maya) forever.

- Devotion purifies mind for Brahman realisation

The practices of flower offering (pushparchana) and mantra recitation (mantra japa) are considered saguna upasana (worship of God with attributes), serving as preliminary steps for ordinary individuals who may not yet be capable of realizing the formless, nirguna Brahman. These devotional practices help to purify and control the mind, gradually preparing it for the unconditioned experience of Brahman. As Shankaracharya eloquently states in Sivanandalahari, it is foolish for one to wander through deep ponds, forests, and mountains searching for flowers to offer when the 'lotus of the mind' (chetah-kusumam) can be offered with devotion, leading to inner peace and freedom from desires. The Guru thus presents three progressive paths: the highest involves



direct mental offering, followed by external ritualistic worship, and finally, simple mantra recitation, all leading to the same ultimate goal of liberation.

- Inner detachment replaces outer ritual acts

This verse offers a powerful contemplative image: the self as the open sky, vast, unchanging, and free, with emotions, thoughts, and even suffering being merely passing clouds. It implies a journey of self-discipline, where mental impediments are gradually sublimated. The ‘flowers’ represent the mind’s various ‘blossomings,’ which, when offered, signify the renunciation of desires and wrong resolves (sankalpa-vikalpas). As one progresses in detachment, the need for external ritualistic practices diminishes. The analogy of the aspirant moving from garden flowers to wild flowers, and finally to mere mental repetition of wisdom-filled words, illustrates this progressive withdrawal from external engagement. This rigorous introspective effort leads to the conquering of illusion, allowing the seeker to abide in the tranquil sky of pure awareness, free from the ego’s entanglements and the ceaseless rotation of Maya.

3.3.3.2 The Illusion of Existence: Unveiling Liberation in Sree Narayana Guru’s Atmopadesha Shatakam

- Simple words express deep mystical truths

Mystical poetry often walks a delicate balance between expressing the ineffable and maintaining poetic beauty. The challenge for mystic poets like Sree Narayana Guru lies in communicating states of awareness that lie beyond the ordinary mind and senses. To achieve this, Guru employs a range of linguistic strategies: symbols drawn from nature, metaphors of light, darkness, and the sea, and succinct yet resonant expressions that suggest deep truths rather than explain them outright. His language is economical but profound, using simple Malayalam to reveal complex Vedantic truths.

One of Guru’s most effective symbols is that of light. The light represents knowledge, consciousness, and the divine presence. In verse 55 of Atmopadesha Shatakam, he writes:

നെടിയ കിനാവിതു നിദ്രം പോലെ നിത്യം
കെടുമിതുപോലെ കിനാവുമിപ്രകാരം
ചര്യ കെടുമതി കാണുകയില്ല, കേവലത്തിൽ
പ്പെടുവതിനാലനിശം ഭ്രമിച്ചിടുന്നു

*A long-drawn-out dream is this, and like sleep each day,
It gets extinguished: dream too likewise!*

*We can never see extinction thus to this: as it is
Hitched on to the pure aloneness, it goes round for ever.*

- Jnana dispels ignorance like sunlight darkness

Here, the sun is not merely a celestial body; it stands for jnana (spiritual knowledge), the light that dispels avidya (ignorance). The mystic sees this light not just outside, but within. This dual perception reflects the Advaitic insight that the self and the cosmos are one radiant reality.

- Self and cosmos are one radiant reality

Sree Narayana Guru, in *Atmopadesha Shatakam*, profoundly addresses the ephemeral nature of perceived reality, guiding the seeker towards liberation through a realization of life's illusory quality. Verse 7, encapsulates this core Advaitic insight. This verse suggests that our entire waking existence is akin to a protracted dream, just as dreams themselves are extinguished upon waking. The sun in Guru's philosophy is not merely a celestial body, but a symbol of jnana (spiritual knowledge), the radiant light that dispels avidya (ignorance). The mystic perceives this light both externally and, crucially, within, reflecting the Advaitic truth that the Self and the cosmos are intrinsically unified, part of one radiant reality.

- Worldly life a dream understand its impermanence for liberation.

The Guru elucidates that our worldly life, encompassing both waking (*jagrat*) and dream (*swapna*) states, is a protracted, ever-unfolding dream. Just as sleep is extinguished daily, and dreams vanish upon waking, so too is this dream-like existence ultimately perishable. The key to liberation lies in comprehending the true nature of these alternating states. An individual caught in the illusions of *Maya*, lacking the discerning intellect (*vivekabuddhi*), fails to grasp that these waking and dream experiences are transient. Such a person, entangled in the *samsaric* cycle, the 'pure aloneness' (*kevala*) that nonetheless appears to perpetuate endless cycles, constantly mistakes the unreal for the real, leading to perpetual delusion and suffering. The inability to see the impermanence of these states prevents release from *Maya's* bondage.

- Waking, dream states: a long *Maya* dream, ultimately leading to liberation.

The text highlights a crucial parity between waking and dream states, asserting that both are subject to daily extinction. When one mode of conscious activity ceases, another takes over, creating a continuous, 'long-drawn-out dream' that belongs to *Maya*. This phenomenon is to be understood in psycho-dynamic and neutral psycho-physical terms, aligning with the neutral monism inherent in Vedantic contemplative absolutism. *Maya* itself is conceived in relation to the vertical axis of becoming within pure time, which fundamentally exists



within the context of the Absolute. This Absolute is referred to as 'kevala' (aloneness), signifying its unique and singular status. This concept resonates with Plotinus's description of spiritual progress as 'the flight of the alone to the Alone,' and is synonymous with terms like Kaivalya, Nirvana, Apavarga, Moksha, and Nissreyasa, all pointing to ultimate release from all forms of bondage.

- Ignorant cling to illusions; pure consciousness ends suffering

The 'ignorant' individual, swayed by desires like kama (lust) and krodha (anger), mistakenly believes that what they perceive in the waking state is true, while dreams and deep sleep are mere illusions. However, the Guru asserts that just as the rope-snake illusion is dispelled by realizing the rope, and dream objects vanish upon waking, so too are the waking state and its enjoyments ultimately resolved and negated by the realization of pure consciousness. This truth is often incomprehensible to the limited intellect, leading to persistent clinging and consequent suffering. The text underscores that the entire phenomenal world, including the jagrat, swapna, and sushupti states, is an appearance superimposed on pure consciousness, destined to be resolved through Self-realization.

- Universe is dream; recognising impermanence brings liberation.

Ultimately, the understanding that the universe is a perpetual 'dream' aims to liberate the seeker from attachment to its transient forms. By recognizing the equal impermanence of waking and dream states, the contemplative mind begins to transcend their limitations. The Guru's teaching guides us to see beyond the constant 'coming and going' of experiences and realize the underlying, unchanging reality that underpins them all. This relentless cogitation allows the seeker to step out of the endless cycle of delusion and suffering. When one clearly perceives that all of this is simply the manifestation of the 'pure aloneness' – the unchanging kevala or Absolute – then true liberation is attained, marking an end to the ceaseless cycle of becoming and dissolving within the grand illusion.

3.3.4 The Unitive Vision: Dispelling Delusion in Mystical Liberation

The metaphor of the ocean is also frequently used. In Atmopadesha Shatakam (verse 44), he writes:

പലമതസാരവുമേകമെന്നു പാരാ-
 തുലകിലൊരാന്തയിലന്യരെന്നപോലെ
 പലവിധ യുക്തി പറഞ്ഞു പാമരൻമാ-
 രലവതു കലയാതമർന്നീടേണം

*Not seeing that the various religions in the world
Are essentially the same, advancing various arguments
Like the blind men and the elephant, roam not like fools,
But stop wandering, and calmly settle down.*

- All paths are one; seek truth calmly, avoid ignorant arguments.

Through this verse, Guru is making a declaration of oneness of all paths. Understanding that the ultimate goal of all religions is indeed the same, one should not be like the blind men who saw the elephant and returned with different opinions, raising all sorts of arguments without true knowledge. Seeing such fools wander in confusion with doubts, one must instead seek the truth calmly and without agitation.

- All religions share one truth; cease disputes, embrace unity.

The path to mystical liberation, as articulated by Sree Narayana Guru in *Atmopadesha Shatakam*, involves discerning the fundamental unity that underlies all apparent diversity. Verse 43 serves as a direct admonition against sectarian strife and intellectual arrogance. This verse highlights a core mystic vision: that what appears as manifold is, in truth, one unified being. Just as the sea and its waves are not separate entities, or a rope is mistaken for a snake, the world's various religions, despite their differing external forms and arguments, share a single essential truth and a common ultimate goal. The Guru implores humanity to cease its futile disputes and settle into the serene understanding of this universal spiritual unity.

- Religious conflict arises from fragmented understanding; seek calm, unitive truth

The verse elaborates on the pervasive misunderstanding that fuels religious conflict. While the essence of all religions is singular, humanity, failing to grasp this ultimate truth through proper contemplation, engages in incessant quarrels. This is vividly illustrated by the classic analogy of the blind men and the elephant: each blind man, encountering only a part of the elephant, claims their partial experience to be the complete truth, leading to heated arguments. Similarly, those lacking a deep, scientific understanding of Vedantic principles – the ‘fools’ (*pamaranmār*) – advance superficial arguments, boastfully displaying their limited intellect. The Guru urges the seeker to observe this deluded wandering and, instead of joining it, to remain steadfast and calm. This underscores that true spiritual wisdom requires moving beyond fragmented perceptions to embrace a holistic, unitive reality.

The supreme truth, the Guru asserts, is one and has been definitively established through scientific philosophical discourse, particularly in Vedanta. Deities, rituals, and practices across various religions are merely means to discover this singular Self-truth. The fundamental question, ‘Who am



- Religions lead to 'I am Brahman' via Guru's guidance

I?', lies at the heart of all religious inquiry. Just as the blind men, fixated on a single part of the elephant, will endlessly dispute without ever reaching the whole truth, so too will those who cling to partial understandings of the Self. Guidance from a Brahmanishtha (one established in Brahman) and Jīvanmukta (a liberated soul) Guru is essential. Upon receiving and contemplating the Guru's teaching, such as 'Tat Tvam Asi' (Thou Art That), the seeker realizes their inherent oneness with Brahman, culminating in a direct, experiential understanding of 'I am Brahman.'

- Guru's technique, Negation and metaphors reveal non-local Self through direct experience

The Guru's technique of employing negation and paradox further clarifies the limitations of conceptual thought and the profundity of direct experience. The verse 'Neither inside nor outside, Nor any direction known, That which remains ever shining Is the self, alone, alone' dismisses spatial categories, affirming the non-local, eternal presence of the Self. This mystic voice points to a direct knowing that transcends sensory, mental, or spatial frameworks. Moreover, the Guru effectively uses metaphors from daily life to make mystical truths accessible. Analogies such as 'ghee hidden in milk' or 'oil within the seed' illustrate the immanence of the divine, present but often unperceived. These metaphors, drawn from agrarian life, philosophically convey that the divine, like the hidden substance, must be 'churned' or 'pressed out' through dedicated spiritual discipline, leading to Self-realization.

- Guru's symbolic language guides intuitive, unifying self-realisation

The Guru's linguistic strategy is thus suggestive, symbolic, and transformative, inviting intuitive understanding rather than mere intellectual analysis. He does not define the mystical state but rather gestures towards it, evokes it, and points beyond the limitations of words. The rich imagery of the sun, sea, fire, oil, and milk serves to guide the reader away from purely conceptual knowledge towards a lived, experiential insight. The aphoristic nature of these verses, akin to sutras or Upanishadic mantras, encourages meditation rather than just analysis. By understanding that all paths ultimately lead to the same supreme Self, the devotee transcends superficial differences, ending sectarian strife and realizing that the highest truth of all religions is indeed one. This profound comprehension brings peace, dissolving the illusion of separation and leading to a state of unwavering calm and liberation.

Summarized Overview

Sree Narayana Guru's *Atmopadesha Shatakam* is a definitive mystical work that charts a deeply introspective path towards spiritual self-realization, transcending intellectual reasoning and ordinary sensory perception to engage directly with ultimate reality. The Guru's vision, rooted in Advaita Vedanta, posits that all beings are expressions of the same ultimate reality (Brahman), which is not a distant deity but the divine presence within oneself (Atman). Through profound contemplation and 'relentless cogitation,' the seeker is urged to turn inward and apprehend a 'knowledge beyond knowledge,' recognizing the fundamental unity of the subjective self and the objective cosmos as one radiant reality. This journey involves discerning between transient empirical knowledge, which is a mere reflection of supreme consciousness, and the immutable Paramatma that pervades all existence, leading to a state of pure, undivided consciousness where all is understood as one. The text emphasizes that true liberation is an experiential *ananda* (bliss) derived from this profound unity, guiding the seeker to transcend the ego, *Maya*, and *Avidya* to realize the non-dual Self.

The *Atmopadesha Shatakam* frequently employs rich metaphors to elucidate complex Advaitic truths, such as the 'long-drawn-out dream' of waking life, which, like sleep and dreams, is ultimately perishable. This analogy reveals that existence is an illusion (*Maya*), and the 'sun' symbolizes *jnana* (spiritual knowledge), the light that dispels *avidya* (ignorance) and allows the mystic to perceive the inner and outer unity of reality. The 'suffering-filled lamp' symbolizes the Self caught in the cycle of *samsara*, with its 'five petals' representing the senses and its 'oil' being past *vasanas* (habit traits) that fuel mental functions. This paradoxical imagery shows the Self burning in 'shadow form' due to the causal body of ignorance, highlighting that true, unconditioned light is invisible, and what is perceived as visible belongs to the 'shadow' side of reality. Liberation requires the cessation of *vasanas* and *vrittis*, unveiling the Self's inherent blissful radiance.

Guru's verses gently lead the reader towards detachment and equanimity, emphasizing the paramount importance of mind control (*manoniyantana*) to achieve *amaneebhava* (beyond mind). The verse metaphorically instructs one to 'pluck the mind-blossom' and offer it to the 'Great Master' (supreme consciousness), implying that the mind, as the seat of desires, must be detached from worldly engagements and dissolved into the divine. For those unable to achieve this direct mental mastery, alternative paths are offered: engaging in external acts of worship like plucking 'wild blossoms' or repeating a 'Maya spell' (mantra) to conquer illusion. These *saguna upasana* (worship of God with attributes) practices serve as preliminary steps to purify and control the mind, gradually preparing it for the unconditioned experience of *nirguna Brahman*. The ultimate aim is to realize that all paths lead to the same supreme Self, fostering universal understanding and ending sectarian strife.

The Guru's linguistic strategy is suggestive, symbolic, and transformative, using simple Malayalam to convey complex Vedantic truths. His use of metaphors from nature, light, darkness, and the sea, along with aphoristic expressions, encourages intuitive



understanding over mere intellectual analysis. The analogy of the sea and its waves, for instance, illustrates that the perceived multiplicity of the universe, represented by the five great elements, is fundamentally non-different from the underlying Absolute. This unitive vision is attained through contemplation, which allows one to perceive the vertical, causal relationship between phenomena and the Absolute, dissolving apparent distinctions. The *Atmopadesha Shatakam* ultimately serves as a spiritual manual, guiding the reader from the perception of duality to the realization of unity and the bliss of self-knowledge, thereby embodying Guru's dictum of 'One caste, one religion, one God for humankind'.

Assignments

1. How does Sree Narayana Guru's *Atmopadesha Shatakam* define mystical experience, and what role does it play in achieving liberation?
2. Explain the concept of *Atma Vichara* (self-inquiry) as presented in the *Atmopadesha Shatakam*, and how does it lead to the vanishing of the ego and the realization of pure awareness?
3. Discuss the significance of *Maya* (illusion) in Guru's philosophy, utilizing the analogies of the 'long-drawn-out dream' and the 'suffering-filled lamp' to illustrate how it obscures reality.
4. Elaborate on the metaphor of the 'mind-blossom' and the 'Great Master' in *Atmopadesha Shatakam*, outlining the progressive spiritual disciplines suggested by Guru for achieving mind control (*manoniyantana*) and dissolving *Maya*.
5. How does Sree Narayana Guru reconcile the apparent diversity of religions with a singular ultimate truth, drawing parallels with the analogy of the blind men and the elephant?
6. Analyze the Advaitic concept of 'non-difference' (*abheda*) as explained by Guru in the context of the five great elements and the analogy of the sea and its waves.
7. What is the significance of *jnana* (spiritual knowledge) in dispelling *avidya* (ignorance) according to Guru, and how does this relate to the mystic's ability to perceive inner and outer light?
8. How does the *Atmopadesha Shatakam* guide the seeker towards detachment and equanimity, ultimately leading to the understanding that true liberation lies in recognizing the unchanging witness consciousness?



BLOCK 4

**Sreenarayanaguru's
Socio-political Ideology**

UNIT 1

Logic of the Refutation of Jati, Jati Nirnaya, Jati lakshana and Jati Mimamsa, Universality of Religion

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing the study of this material, learners will be able to:

- deconstruct Sreenarayana Guru's philosophical and logical refutation of the caste system, including his arguments against its existence based on shared human characteristics.
- articulate Guru's concept of 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for Mankind' and its role in promoting universal humanism and equality.
- analyse the socio-political context of Kerala during Guru's era, including prevalent discriminatory customs (anacharam, duracharam) and their impact on various communities.
- interpret Guru's critical stance on traditional Vedic interpretations and how they were used to justify caste distinctions, contrasting them with his Advaitic understanding.
- evaluate the practical implications of Guru's philosophy in advocating for inter-dining, inter-caste marriages, and universal acceptance of human dignity.

Background

Kerala was once a land of numerous pernicious customs (anacharam-അനാചാരങ്ങൾ), evil practices (duracharam - ദുരാചാരങ്ങൾ), depraved activities, and servitude, all emerging from the darkness of ignorance. It was a society akin to the blind leading the blind. The great poet Kumaran Asan vividly depicted the prevailing social structure of the time:

തൊട്ടുകുടാത്തവർ തീണ്ടിക്കുടാത്തവർ
ദൃഷ്ടിയിൽപെട്ടാലും ദോഷമുള്ളോർ
കെട്ടില്ലാത്തോർ തമ്മിലുണ്ണാത്തോരിങ്ങനെ-
യൊട്ടല്ലഹോ ജാതിക്കോമരങ്ങൾ!

ഭേദങ്ങളുറ്റു പൊരുളിനെക്കാഹള-
മുതി വാഴ്ത്തീടുന്നു വേദംനാലും
വൈദികമാനികൾ മർത്യരിൽ
ഭേദവും ഭേദത്തിൽ ഭേദവും ജല്പിക്കുന്നു!

നരനു നരനശുദ്ധവസ്തുപോലും
ധരയിൽ നടപ്പത് തീണ്ടലാണുപോലും
നരകമിവിടമാണുഹന്തകഷ്ടം!
ഹരഹരയിങ്ങനെ വല്ലനാടുമുണ്ടോ?

(Those untouchable, those unapproachable, Those whose mere sight is polluting,
Those who cannot marry, those who cannot dine together— Ah, there are countless
such caste-ridden spirits!

The four Vedas proclaim the one, undifferentiated Reality with clarion calls, Yet
those who pride themselves as Vedic scholars Declare differences among humans, And
further divisions within those differences!

Man to man is an impure object, His very walk on earth is considered pollution!
Alas, this is hell itself! Good Heavens, is there any other land like this?)

The traditional Cāturvarṇyam (ചാതുർവർണ്യം), the fourfold classification of
humans—Brahmin, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra—based on qualities and actions as
outlined in the Smritis (സ്മൃതികൾ), was interpreted and enforced as a birth-based
system. Alongside this, numerous other castes and sub-castes were created, leading
to the prevalence of abhorrent and despicable exploitative practices. Society was
bifurcated into Savarṇas (സവർണ്ണർ - upper castes) and Avarṇas (അവർണ്ണർ - lower
castes). The Savarṇas selfishly monopolised all wealth and lived comfortably with
complete freedom, while the Avarṇas, denied even the basic liberties enjoyed by other
living beings, suffered in ignorance and servitude.

In Plato’s Republic, we can see a classification of humans similar to Chaturvarṇya.
Plato’s ideal state, often called “Kallipolis,” is structured around a strict class system
based on individuals’ innate abilities and virtues, rather than birth. While not identical
to the hereditary nature of the Indian caste system as it evolved, the functional division
bears a striking resemblance. Based on qualities and actions, Plato classified humans
into three groups: the Ruling Class, the Military Class, and the Working Class. We
can say the Ruling Class is similar to the Brahmin, the Military Class is similar to the
Kṣatriya, and the Working Class is similar to the Vaiśya and Śūdra together.

The Avarṇas were denied various freedoms, including freedom of education,
employment, movement, speech, the right to choose a proper name, and freedom
of worship. Women were denied the right to cover their breasts and wear garments
below their knees. While Savarṇas worshipped benevolent deities such as Vishnu,
Maheswara, and Devi, Avarṇas were only permitted to worship malevolent deities



like Madan, Marutha, Chudalamaan, Kali, Karinkali, Rakthapurneshwari, Arukola, Kollippey, and Pey. If an Avarna wished to worship a benevolent deity, they had to stand at a prescribed distance outside the temple wall and offer obeisance. They would then place an offering on a banana leaf and loudly call out 'Thambraane' (തമ്പ്രാനേ - 'Oh Lord,' a respectful address used by lower castes to upper castes). After retreating the same prescribed distance, the priest would come from inside with a ceremonial pot (kindi - കിണ്ടി) and water, pour water over the money offered to purify it, take it, and then place some burnt ashes (kothumberinja charam - കൊതുവെരിഞ്ഞ ചാരം) as sacred offering (prasadam - പ്രസാദം) on the leaf. Touch between Savarnas and Avarnas was considered polluting, and even sight was deemed so.

Even while chanting hymns of divine praise, the reality was:

നായ്ക്കു നമ്പൂരിതൻ മുറ്റത്തു ചെല്ലാമെന്നാൽ
 നാശമപ്പലയനു പടിയ്ക്കൽപോലും വയ്ക്ക
 ആടുമാടുകൾക്കെല്ലാമടുത്തുചെല്ലാമെന്നാൽ
 ആടചാർത്തിയോൻ ചെന്നാൽ അയിത്തമായ് അബദ്ധമായ്

(A dog can enter the Namboothiri's courtyard, But a Pulayan faces ruin even at the gate; All cattle and goats can approach, But if one adorned in a garland (a lower caste person) approaches, it becomes pollution, a blunder.)

The prevailing evil customs were beyond description, even for the thousand-tongued Ananta. It was as if even the waves of the Arabian Sea were crying out, "No! No!" against these injustices. Due to the inequality, injustice, and evil practices perpetuated within Hinduism out of ignorance, many new religions emerged, and numerous individuals converted to foreign religions. This was because converting offered them the opportunity to experience the freedoms previously denied to them.

The Savarnas, claiming exclusive rights to study and experience the Vedas and Shastras, and denying them to others, while paradoxically not studying or understanding them themselves, created evil customs and traditions in their name, causing immense suffering to others. In doing so, they created hell for themselves. Meanwhile, the Avarnas, ignorant of the truth, endured a life of hell in this world. Indeed, in their ignorance, people believed everything was divinely ordained, thereby creating and experiencing hell. The Savarnas, thinking themselves wise, committed sins out of ignorance, while the Avarnas suffered the consequences of sin due to their own ignorance.

The Ishavasya Upaniṣad (ഈശാവസ്യോപനിഷത്ത്) states:

അന്ധം തമഃ പ്രവിശന്തി യേ അവിദ്യാമുപാസതേ തതോ ഭൂയ ഇവ തേ തമോ
 യ ഉ വിദ്യായാം രതാഃ
 (അവിദ്യയെ യുപാസിക്കു- നവരന്ധതമസ്സിലും പോകുന്നു വിദ്യാരതര-
 ണ്ങതേക്കാൾ കൂരിരുട്ടിലും)

(Into blinding darkness they enter who worship Avidya (ignorance); Into still greater darkness they enter who delight in Vidya (knowledge). Those who worship Avidya enter blinding darkness; Those who delight in Vidya enter an even deeper darkness.)

According to the Upaniṣadic principle, if the ignorant Avarṇas receive hell, then the Savarṇas, who display ignorance in the name of knowledge, receive an even greater hell. Witnessing and hearing about the social system prevalent in Kerala, Swami Vivekananda, who propagated the Kathopaniṣad (കഠോപനിഷത്) message "ഉത്തിഷ്ഠതാ! ജാഗ്രതാ പ്രാപ്യവരാൻ നിബോധത" (Arise! Awake! And follow the virtuous Gurus!) throughout India to awaken its people from the servitude of ignorance and lead them to freedom, described Kerala as a 'lunatic asylum' (Bhrantalaḥ - ഭ്രാന്താലയം).

At a time when awful social injustices, reminiscent of the primitive, prevailed—with misinterpretations and written injunctions ruling that a Śūdra's hand should be cut off if he touched the Vedas, his eyes gouged out if he looked at them, and his tongue cut off if he chanted Vedic mantras—Sree Narayana Guru appeared as "the primordial sun splitting the darkness" (irulineyeernnedum adisuryanayi Narayana Guru - ഇരുളിനെയിർന്നെഴും ആദിസൂര്യനായി നാരായണഗുരു), proclaiming the great mantra: "Knowledge should be imparted to all."

Keywords

Caste Refutation, One Caste, Universal Humanism, Jati Mīmāsā, Anacharam, Advaita Vedānta, Equality, Human Dignity

Discussion

After visiting Sree Narayana Guruswami, the great poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote in English words that, rendered here in free translation, read as follows:

“I have travelled through many parts of the world and, during these journeys, have been fortunate to meet a great number of monks and seers. Yet I can say without hesitation that nowhere have I encountered a sage who surpasses Narayana Guruswami of Malayalam in spiritual attainment—indeed, I have met none who can even be compared with him. I shall never forget that radiant face, aglow with its own divine lustre, nor the yogi’s eyes that were fixed on some infinite point beyond the distant horizon.”

- Tagore: Narayana Guruswami’s spiritual attainment is unparalleled



4.1.1 Guru's Writings as a Key to Understanding Him

Guru did not compose poetry merely to entertain readers, as ordinary poets often do. For him, verse was a medium for conveying profound convictions in the fewest possible words. While still formally a Hindu, he produced many stotra-hymns. During advanced studies under Kumaranpilla Raman Pillaashan, he created the “Gajendramoksham” vanchippattu (boat-song). At the request of Kunjukunju Panikkar of Varanappally he wrote Navamanjari. While residing at Aruvippuram he composed his most important philosophical work, Ātmōpadēśasatakam. His Darśanamāla, a detailed Sanskrit exposition of Advaita Vedānta, appeared in 1916.

- Guru's poetry conveyed profound convictions, not just entertainment

In 1920 Guru proclaimed the birthday message “oru jāti, oru matham, oru daivam manushyanu”—“One caste, one religion, one God, for humanity.” Guru announced only two birthday messages in total; the other, earlier, dealt with temperance. The substance of the 1920 pronouncement had already been set out in the 1914 treatise Jātinirṇayam and was clarified further at the All-Faiths Conference he convened between 1924 and 1928.

- Guru: one caste, religion, God for humanity.

Caste division was a cruel custom that prevailed not only in Kerala but throughout India. The *chaturvarṇya* system placed Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras in a rigid hierarchy of power, and below even that an extra category, *Chandālan*, was imagined. Society was broken into many layers, each kept apart from the others. The divisions forced by caste, and the bad customs that grew from them, made social relations complicated. Caste stood at the very centre of social power. The *Śrutis* and *Smṛtis* of the time were written in that spirit. The system was said to be based on birth and occupation. Texts such as the *Puruṣasūkta* explain that the four varṇas came from different parts of Brahmā's body. Such stories were told to prove that caste was ordained by God. At the same time people believed that the deeds of one's previous birth fixed one's place in the hierarchy. Because this faith lasted for millennia, one section of society profited from caste and therefore defended it. Those who suffered under the system opposed it in every age. Poets of the *bhakti* movement spoke against the uselessness of caste in their works. Yet they could not defeat the powerful hold of the *Smṛtis*, rituals and beliefs, for those who benefited from caste still held power. The vast, unorganised majority, with no power, continued to bear the misery of caste.

- Caste: a cruel, divinely-ordained hierarchy causing suffering

What is Caste?

Keralites, who are troubled by caste thoughts, usually do not even remember what caste really means, and the meaning of caste is given in the 'shabda taravali' as follows: "A society of individuals with the same dharma, such as gauva, humanity, etc. For example, the human race." Another meaning is "birth." The other words given by 'Amarakosham' as synonymous with 'jati' are jatam and sambharam. (Jaatir Jatascha is common). Here, caste means 'to be predestined', and jatam means the same. The expression of similarities is common. For example, the Ghatatwadi caste. There are certain general expressions that distinguish man from other species, which are not man-made; Humanity is the sum total of all such traits. That is, all those who have the caste character of humanity are to be called human beings. What distinguishes the pot from other things is the general sign of its constituency. This is what caste means. It is the general sign of cowhood that distinguishes cows from all others. Those who do not know this principle are the others who do not know this principle. It was ordered to have. In short, it does not mean that man has no caste, but that man belongs to a single caste.

What is not Caste?

The Hindu community in India has been regarded as belonging to many castes since ancient times. The peculiarity of such a concept of caste is that they do not have universality. In each country, caste distinctions are prescribed in different ways. Tamils do not know the caste differences in circulation in Kerala. No Malayalee knows how many castes there are in Kerala itself. If we look at the gazettes published by the government, etc., we have not yet heard of. It can be seen that there are many people in Kerala who have caste names. The same is the case in other parts of India. No one knows the basis for such caste discrimination. Not only has this wrong practice continued for generations, but a cultural attitude has taken root in the people that refuses to escape from it, which is why people of one caste refuse to marry another, refuse to eat in one pandal, and many other discriminations have been practiced and practiced. No matter how rooted such cultural expressions may be, as long as they are based on error and do not fit man's dignity, man must strive to discard them.

Natarajan (Nataraja Guru), a disciple of Narayana Guru, once asked: "If the romantic or realistic classes within the human race exist and each class specializes in a separate occupation, will it not be possible to cultivate a healthy sense of competition among the people? Will it not pave the way for man's well-being?" The Guru's answer to this was very simple, "There is no difference in truth between man and man" the Guru meant: If we are trying to foster a healthy competition between human beings, then it should not be based on any untruth, but the truth itself. The truth is that there is no difference between man and man. One should not even try for well-being in the face of the falsehood that there is a difference.

In short, the Iyer, Potti, Namboothiri, Nambiathiri, Nambiar, Moosath, Warriar, Nair, Pisha Radi, Menon, Kurup, Kaimal, Ezhava, Pulayar, What is known by the names of Hunter, Thandan, Kuzhar and Parayar does not, in principle, refer to caste.



- Guru fought caste, uniting communities through education and dialogue

Sreenarayana Guru was born at a time when ideas of untouchability, pollution and exclusion were very strong in Kerala. The Guru himself said, “If one thinks of me as an incarnation, it is enough to believe that I came to destroy caste.” He made many practical interventions to wipe out caste. In his āśram he housed children from different communities, educated them, and helped them rise in life. He brought leaders who still held caste ideas—Ulloor among them—to his āśram, spoke with them, seated them to dine with people of every community, and worked to remove caste thinking from their minds. Many such incidents are recorded in books about him. Two short works by the Guru that show the meaninglessness of caste are *Jāti-Nirṇayam* and *Jāti-Lakṣaṇam*.

“Has everything gone?”

Kuttippuzha Kṛiṣṇapilla writes:

“Born and brought up in an orthodox family, I too could not help feeling a little anxious about eating with others, an act the world had never allowed me before.”

At the Aluva boarding-school the Guru arranged a feast for the students. Kutti-puzha, though uneasy, obeyed the invitation and attended. He writes again:

“I sat down without the least hesitation, on a plantain-leaf line where everyone—*Paṛayans, Pulayans, Nāyars, every community except Brahmins*—was seated, while Swāmī sat at the head. When serving began he looked at me gravely and asked, ‘*Poyō?*’ (Has it gone?) I did not grasp him. Seeing my confusion he smiled and asked again, ‘*Ellām poyō?*’ (Has everything gone?) Then I understood: he was asking whether all feelings of caste-difference had left me. It is not easy to wash away the ingrained soot of caste in a day, yet that was my first mixed meal. In the Guru’s noble presence I discovered humanity for the first time.” (*Smarāṇa-mañjarī, Kuttippuzha Kṛiṣṇapilla, Current Books, Thrissur, 1969, pp. 10-11.*)

4.1.2 Jāti-Nirṇayam

Jāti-Nirṇayam is the Guru’s brief work that rejects the mistaken caste distinctions among human beings and defines true caste with clear signs. The caste that people normally carry about is not the caste the Guru upholds; he insists that all humans have only one caste. There is caste among living beings: each species is a caste. Because each species bears

- Guru’s Jāti-Nirṇayam defines humanity’s single true caste

precise signs by which it can be distinguished, caste exists. When the identical signs of human beings come together, that humanity itself becomes their single caste. The poem is the poetic unfolding of the saying, “There is no difference between one human being and another.” It was probably composed in 1914. The first verse is in Sanskrit; the rest are in Malayalam. Perhaps the Guru chose Sanskrit for the opening because Hindu law-codes were written in Sanskrit, and so he refutes them in their own language. Sanskrit also allows great brevity and clarity, a quality that all the Malayalam verses here equally display. Through this work the Guru shows that concision is not the privilege of Sanskrit alone.

The text proceeds verse by verse

Verse I

മനുഷ്യാണാം മനുഷ്യത്വം
ജാതിർ ഗോത്വം ഗവാം
യഥാ ന ബ്രാഹ്മണാദിരസ്യവം
ഹാ! തത്ത്വം വേത്തി കേഠ്വി ന

Manuṣyāṇām manuṣyatvaṁ
jātir gotvaṁ gavām
yathā na brāhmaṇādirasaivaṁ
hā! tattvaṁ vetti ko ‘pi na.

The humanity of humans is their species,
just as ‘cowness’ is the species of cows.
There is no Brahmin or other such (caste) as species.
Alas! No one truly comprehends this truth.

ഗവാം	=	പശുക്കൾക്ക്
ഗോത്വം യഥാ തഥാ	=	ഗോത്വം എപ്രകാരമാണോ അപ്രകാരം
മനുഷ്യാണാം	=	മനുഷ്യർക്ക്
മനുഷ്യത്വം	=	മനുഷ്യത്വം ആണ്
ജാതിഃ	=	ജാതി
അസ്യ	=	ഇക്കാര്യത്തെ സംബന്ധിച്ച് (ജാതിയെ സംബന്ധിച്ച്)
ഏവം	=	ഇപ്രകാരം നോക്കിയാൽ
ബ്രാഹ്മണാദി: ന	=	ബ്രാഹ്മണൻ തുടങ്ങിയ ജാതിയെയല്ല സൂചിപ്പിക്കുന്നത്.
ഹാ!	=	എന്തു കഷ്ടമാണ്!
തത്ത്വം	=	ഈ തത്ത്വത്തെ



കഃ അപി = ആരും
ന വേത്തി = അറിയുന്നില്ലല്ലോ!

പശുക്കൾക്ക് പശുതമാണ് ജാതി. അതേപ്രകാരം മനുഷ്യർക്ക് മനുഷ്യതമാണ് ജാതി. ഇങ്ങനെ നോക്കുമ്പോൾ ബ്രഹ്മണൻ തുടങ്ങിയുള്ളവ ജാതി അല്ല. എന്തു കഷ്ടമാണ്, ഈ തത്ത്വം ആരുമറിയുന്നില്ലല്ലോ.

In terms of language, it is a style of writing which has not been adopted in any other work. All of Guru's works have been adopted either in pure Malayalam, or pure Māyā Sanskrit, or in ancient style of Tamil. This work is an exception. One shloka is written in Sanskrit and the remaining five shlokas are written in Malayalam. During Guru's time, education in Kerala was mainly sanskrit. Therefore, sanskrit language was then familiar to all those who were educated. As a result, the Manipravala language became popular. Poets such as Ezhuthachan and Unnai Warriar used to include Sanskrit shlokas within Malayalam poems itself, but it is not necessary to assume that the Guru used both the languages in this work as an imitation of it. Given the specificity of the theme dealt with in this work, there is a different kind of justification for it.

- Guru's unique bilingual style for specific themes

The greatest part in making caste thought and caste discrimination an irreversible blot on the social life of India is played by the spiritual and non-spiritual texts in the Sanskrit language, so that those in the context of that Sanskrit language can understand the futility of caste in the social sense. In that language the Guru touches its essence. The feeling that whatever is written in Sanskrit language has authenticity has been there for a long time. Those who know the Sanskrit language do not ask how much philosophical basis there is for all this. Those who don't know that language don't have the ability to ask. Therefore, the Guru has written this one book in both the languages in such a way that it can lead both parties to enlightenment.

- Guru uses Sanskrit to challenge caste's false authority

Culturally speaking, there is also a slightly deeper relevance to it. It is the Brahmin who stands at the top of the caste system, and the language of the Brahmin is Sanskrit. The lowest strata of the caste system is Chandala, or Parayan. The name given to Parayan in Sanskrit is Chandala. The name given to the parayan is Chandala. Or Damaru. According to historians, the concept of Śiva originated from the Prague Vedic culture. Dravidian culture is the remnant of that ancient culture with a Shaiva background. The main language of that culture is

- Caste: Sanskrit (Brahmin) and Malayalam (Parayan) unify

Tamil. Malayalam is a new language that originated from Tamil. Therefore, it is also a Dravidian language. In short, this is a context in which the Sanskrit language representing the Brahmin and the Malayalam language representing the Parian have been brought together in a work, indicating that the composition of this work is written with yogic ism in the context of caste at its foremost.

Jati Nirnayam begins by explaining what caste means. According to the Guru, the caste of humans is the humanity that arises from the common qualities and dispositions they share from birth. Six verses are explained in the study. Man's humanity marks out the human kind, Even as bovinity proclaims a cow. Brāhminhood and such are not thus-wise; None do see this truth, alas!

This verse in aphoristic Sanskrit, while the remaining four verses are in Malayalam, conveys its own meaning, which can only be appreciated in the light of the Word-dialectics and the interplay between the two main Word-formulations as we have described them. Sanskrit is the language in which the idea of caste in the hereditary social sense came about; hence there is a kind of poetic justice in crowning this set of verses with a summary in the classical language. Malayalam itself has a large proportion of Sanskrit in its composition, grafted on to an early Tamil framework, but Malayālam belongs structurally to the non-Vedic Dravidian context. So here in this poem there is an implied ambivalence in putting the inquiry in the two languages which belong, as it were, to the group representing the Brahmin and the group representing the Pariah respectively, out of whose interactions the false notion of caste has arisen.

- Poetic interplay of Sanskrit and Malayalam

- Caste distinctions have no biological reality

Here the opening line provides the key to the main approach and method of dealing with the subject. First it is essential to know the truth about caste and then, whatever sociological system there is to be, can have a sure foundation. Caste distinctions have no basis in actuality. Subjected to the most drastic of scientific tests, homo sapiens falls within the human species. Racial distinctions do not amount to distinctions in the species in any strict terms. Like languages and customs, these may give an appearance of variety to the species, but they are only superficial factors of no importance intrinsically to biology.

In this first stanza, the Guru clearly and scientifically explains what caste really is and what it is not.



Verse II

ഒരു ജാതി ഒരു മതം ഒരു ദൈവം മനുഷ്യൻ
ഒരു യോനിയൊരാകാരം ഒരു ഭേദവുമില്ലതിൽ

Oru jāti oru mataṁ oru daivam̐ manuṣyanu
oru yōniyorākāraṁ oru bhēdavumillatīl.

One of kind, one of faith, and one in God is man;
Of one womb, of one form; difference herein none.

മനുഷ്യൻ ഒരു ജാതിയാണുള്ളത്, അവൻ ഒരു മതമാണുള്ളത്, അവൻ ഒരു ദൈവമാണുള്ളത്. എല്ലാ മനുഷ്യരുടെയും ജനനം ഒരേ മാതിരിയാണ്. എല്ലാ മനുഷ്യരുടെയും ആകാരവും ഒന്നാണ്, ഇതിലൊന്നും മനുഷ്യർ തമ്മിൽ ഒരു ഭേദവുമില്ല..

All human beings are born the same. The shape of all men is the same, and there is no difference between human beings.

The first half of this verse is known as Narayana Guru's most famous verse: whether seen from the side of caste, from the side of religion, or from the side of faith in God, the Guru underlines the equality between human beings.

Racial equality means that mankind, one of the countless species that have formed part of the entire cosmic system, has some common characteristics, and is equality in all respects, such as birth, life, and death. And by resorting to the spiritual philosophy of truth and its language. Its scientific aspects will be explained in more detail in the next verse. It has already been explained in the book 'Jati Lakshana', which has already been said that humanity is the caste trait of all human beings, and it goes into a few details of itself, "One yoni, one shape, no difference". The law of reproduction is one that ensures the harmony of the lives of all of the human race. The human race has a common shape. People in certain territories are often seen to have certain physical characteristics. For example, the skin and lips of people in hot countries such as Africa are thick, which does not indicate caste differences, but modern science has found that these characteristics are caused by the action of hormones that have evolved to help them adapt to that particular climate for many generations, as evidenced by the fact that none of these characteristics are related to caste. It has been found that if the male and the female of these two races mate, they will have good healthy offspring, and those descendants will have more offspring in the future. We have

- Humanity: One race, shared traits, climate adaptations, no caste

seen in the commentary of the previous shloka a picture of how in this one caste, there was a delusion about the caste by studying the many castes that did not exist.

4.1.2.1 A Caste

- Chaturvarnya:
Psychological types,
not social caste

- Guru's 'one caste':
humanity; others:
social evil

Those who tried to understand the meaning of the phrase 'one caste, one religion, one God mankind have also changed it to 'no caste, no religion, no God, no man'. When the Guru says 'one caste', he means that man belongs to a caste, and that one caste is such that no one can deny it. Humanity is the hallmark of that caste, that is, there is a caste called humanity. No caste, in fact, refers to the system that exists in society, which is instilled in man, and which has led to various kinds of injustices and exploitations. The Guru speaks a philosophical truth, which resists a social evil.

4.1.2.2 A Religion

- Guru: Many
religions are
philosophically one

For those who are not familiar with the Guru's thoughts, it may be confusing to hear the Guru's word 'one religion', in the context of the fact that there exist many religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, etc., and they are all preaching to believers in different ways. Where is the place of the ideal of 'one religion'? Is this how they ask? In verses 43 to 49 of 'Ātmopadeśa Śatakam', the Guru scientifically presents his philosophical thinking about religion. The Guru here explains the principle that "many religions are one".

- Self-happiness
is humanity's
common, unifying
religion

Whether a believer in God, an atheist, or a person of any particular religion, they all strive to achieve self-happiness with a single goal. The hope given by all religions is the self-happiness of life, and what everyone desires is self-happiness. According to each person's personality trait, according to the way of thinking he has been acquainted, and according to the way of life he has developed. Depending on the cultural background, the nature of this effort may vary, but in any case, it is the self-happiness that everyone aims at, so that this element, which is common to believers of all religions, is what the Guru calls man's 'a religion'.

4.1.2.3 A God

- Humans: Believers
and atheists seek
well-being

Among human beings there are believers and atheists. Both parties aim at self-well-being. It is an unquestionable belief that believers have God. Even when they believe in God, they do not know what God is. For them, the concept of God in their



imagination is undeniable. They see God as the primordial cause of all cosmic phenomena.

The atheists also did not fulfill the concept of God without the concept of God, because they must assert that there is no such thing as God, and if they want to assert that there is no such thing, they must know what it is. The same is the case with God. Those who have no idea of what God is cannot say with certainty that there is no God. There is a God to be denied in the imagination of those who assert that there is no God. This means that there is a concept of God in their knowledge. They also think that God, whom believers think exists, is also in knowledge. Within both groups there is the concept of God—the concept of God that must be rejected by one group; The concept of God to be accepted by others.

- God/Nature:
Both point to
one immutable,
unknown truth.

When atheists reject God, they take nature as the root cause of all cosmic phenomena, and do they know the total nature of that nature and all the laws that govern it? I don't know. Although certain laws of physics have been discovered, nature remains immaterial, that is, they do not know what nature is, which atheists and modern scientists see as the basis of everything, and they do not know what God is, which believers regard as the cause of the universe. In short, god is the name given by a group to something immaterial. The name given by the other group is nature. How can we say that both parties mean a truth that no one knows, and the truth that no one knows, is two? The immutable can only be one, and the thematic can be many. That immutable truth is what the Guru here means by 'one God'. No matter how many names we call brahman, soul, god, god, god, yahweh, etc., this truth does not change. It's not coming.

4.1.2.4 A Philosophical Consideration

We should also be aware of the philosophical oneness hidden in the verse "One caste, one religion, one God, one man".

We have seen what caste means, and in what sense man belongs to a caste. The caste of man includes all human beings. Animality is another race that is wider than humanity, and man is also a kind of animal. In biology, mankind is characterized by the thinking animal (*Homo sapiens*). Then when animals are said, man is also included in it. Animals include both animals and non-animals. The human being will also be included. The caste trait of being is more widespread than animality. The past is more widespread than life itself. It includes the living and the

- One caste:
Humanity to God,
all is one

lifeless. Thus, if we take this spread of caste to its maximum, we must reach 'a caste' which encompasses all things, and there should be nothing outside it. What is that caste? That is God. It is in this sense that the Guru defined the Eternal Spirit as God (the genus of all genera). Thus, if the context of caste is seen as an axis with two poles, God has his place at the pole at the extreme end of it. On the pole at the far end of it stands every man of the human race, and his quest is for the pleasure of the soul. Every human race will discover the truth that in a supreme caste, in God, there is no other entity that is alien to God. All religions are proposing in different ways the way to find this self-happiness, i.e., by uniting every person of the human race with the one nation of God. By doing so, it can be said that 'the essence of many religions is one'. Thus, it makes great sense to give place to 'one religion' between 'one caste' and 'one god'. This is the final position of vedanta as well. In that sense a 'caste is one god'. The verse "Religion is a God, a Man" is a practical form of advaita philosophy with contemporary relevance.

Verse III

ഒരു ജാതിയിൽ നിന്നല്ലോ പിറന്നീടുന്നു
സന്തതി നരജാതിയിതോർക്കുമ്പോളൊരു ജാതിയിലുള്ളതാം

Oru jātiyil ninnallō piṛannīṭunnu
santati narajātiyitōrkumpōloru jātiyilullatām.

From one species alone are born all progeny.
Considering this human species, it belongs to one species.

ഒരു ജാതിയിലുള്ള ആണും പെണ്ണും ഇണചേരുമ്പോഴാണ് സന്തതിയുണ്ടാകുന്നത്. ഈ നിയമം മനസ്സിലാക്കുമ്പോൾ മനുഷ്യജാതി ഒരു ജാതിയിലുള്ളതാണെന്നു കാണാൻ പ്രയാസമില്ല.

It is only when a male and a female of a caste mate that a progeny is born. When this law is understood, it is not difficult to see that the human race belongs to one caste.

In the first stanza, the main place was given to the philosophical aspect of the fact that man belonged to a caste.

In the second stanza, the mystery of the subject is presented. In this verse, the unity of the human race is established from the point of view of modern science, and it is nothing more than the fact that the male and the female of a caste mate only when they mate. In cases it may seem as if there is an exception

- One race, proven
by successful
reproduction



to this rule. For example, when a horse and a donkey mate, they produce a child, which is called a mule, but the mule does not have a child.

• Spiritual and scientific views align on its falsehood

The social caste system in India has existed since time immemorial, on the strength of it, by giving the impression that it has the backing of spirituality, but in the first stanza, it is seen in the first stanza that if one looks at a pure spiritual point of view, it is evident how wrong that assumption is. This verse is to show that the insight from the spiritual point of view has the consent of modern science. It cannot be said whether science supports spirituality, and it can be said that the two come together from two different spheres of thought and together give certainty to an impartial truth. In other words, this is a good example of how the yogic unity of spirituality and modern thought takes place in the Guru's thought. The same can be seen in the context of the search to find out what the spirit is in the 'self-teaching century'.

Verse IV

നരജാതിയിൽ നിന്നത്രേ പിറന്നീടുന്നു വിപ്രനും
പരയൻ താനുമെന്തുളളതന്തരം നരജാതിയിൽ?

Narajātiyil ninnatrē piṛannīṭunnu vipranum
paṛayan tānumentuḷḷatantaram naraajātiyil?

Indeed, from the human species are born the
Brahmin and also the Parayan.
What difference then exists in the human species?

ബ്രാഹ്മണനും പരയനും ജന്മമെടുക്കുന്നത് ഒരൊറ്റ ജാതിയിൽ നിന്നു തന്നെയാണ്. അപ്പോൾ പിന്നെ നരജാതിക്കുള്ളിൽ എന്ത് അന്തരമാണുള്ളത്?

The Brahmin and the Parayan are born out of a single caste, so what is the difference within the genus?

Caste is the theme of this work. The purpose of this work is to assert that the caste distinction that exists in Indian society, with the Brahmin at the top and the Chandala at the bottom, is unprincipled and meaningless, and that all of them belong to a single caste, man. The superior position of the Brahmin depends on the degeneration of the Chandala. When there are no depressed classes, there can be no higher ones. Similarly, the chandala's adhesti principle depends on the superiority of the Brahmin. This superiority and subordination are not natural; It

• All humans are one; Brahmin-Chandala division false



is not in line with any principle, and it has already been seen. Chandala and Brahmanism are only attributed to humanity, and the truth can be found only by disregarding what is alleged to be taught. This principled approach of Vedānta has been adopted by the Guru here in the matter of caste distinction.

- Pure/impure notions are cultural; humanity unites Brahmin and Chandala

From the Vedic point of view, everything that is concerned with the Brahmin is sacred and pure. Everything associated with the Chandala is vile and unclean. That does not mean that the person who is called Chandala does not have any kind of purity and sanctity. The Chandalas, also known as the Parayas, have notions and notions about some of the sacred maya. The Ārya Brahmins are also worshipped as Mangalaswarupi. The word Śiva itself means mangalsuroopi. The historians have concluded that Śiva, the parakottu (the damaru found in one hand of Lord Śiva in the form of Nataraja, is the sacred place of origin of all languages.) does not belong to the ĀryaĀryan culture, but belongs to the Prague-vedic Dravidian culture. It really comes in the series of the Adi Dravidians, the Paranas or the Chandalas.

- Atheists deny God, implying a concept of God

It is mostly certain customs and ways of life that find a place in the caste hierarchies such as chandala, etc., for example, eating habits, monogamy, comfortable accommodation, good dresses, and rituals following the Vedas. In Chandala, his love for non-vegetarian food, his reluctance to live in unclean surroundings, and his worship of evil deities can be seen in Chandala. When a Chandala worships a deity, he does not do so with the impression that he is worshipping something that should not be worshipped. Rather, in his eyes, both the deity and his worship are sacred. However, if the manifestation of these so-called 'romantic castes' is at the level of such customs, then it can be highlighted as a sign of a homogeneous nation called humanity. This demonstrates the irrefutable truth: the desire to recognize good and evil through the power of thought (it is the power of thought that constitutes all rituals) and the desire to stand firm in goodness, as well as love and compassion. There are many such aspects. Needless to say, these expressions have an equal place in those who call themselves Brahmins and Parayans. In that sense also the Brahmin and the Parayan are united in being human. In other words, man is a similar authority that encompasses both the Brahmin and the Parayan, just as in Vedānta Brahman is a similar authority consisting of chitta and the flesh.

Thus, from the point of view of modern science or from the point of view of the pedagogy, the casteism that exists in



• A persistent, unacceptable Indian blot; defies logic, requires rejection

India is never acceptable, but with the support of spirituality it exists in India and remains a blot that cannot be erased from Indian culture. It must have been at least 2,500 years since the resistance to this practice began. We know that we have taken a tough stand against casteism. Since then, there have been many class struggles in the name of it. We know that even Śaṅkarācārya, who thinks purely critically, evaluates it rationally, categorizes the dialectical and the metaphysical, and ensures that Shruti agrees with all the doctrinal positions he takes, has left unexplained many of the things he saw in discourse, such as casteism, by pretending not to see and explain, as part of the inevitable flow of life, beyond our control. Many things may happen. But it is not right to accept what does not fit a principle or a logic by treating it as a justification. That is what Narayana Guru points to here. For example, speaking is essential, so it is not necessary to lie, and the help of science, or the aid of knowledge, is to determine what is to be accepted as necessary. Spiritual thinking and knowledge are not meant to negate common sense, but to help and support common sense. As such, there must be two aspects of the awareness of truth.

Verse V

പറച്ചിയിൽ നിന്നു പണ്ടു പരാശര മഹാമുനി
പിറന്നു മര സൂത്രിച്ച മുനി കൈവർത്തകന്യയിൽ

Paracciyil ninnu paṅṭu parāśara mahāmuni
piṛannu maṛa sūtriccha muni kaivarttakanyayil.

From a ‘Paracci’ (a woman of lower caste) long ago,
the great sage Parāśara was born.
The sage who composed the
Vedas was born of a fisherwoman.

- പറച്ചിയിൽ നിന്ന് = ഒരു പറയിയായ അദ്യുശ്യന്തി എന്ന സ്ത്രീയുടെ മകനായിട്ടാണ്
- പു പരാശര മഹാമുനി = പു പരാശരൻ എന്ന മഹാമുനി ജനിച്ചത്.
- പിറന്നു = വേദങ്ങളെ നാലായി പകുത്ത് വ്യവ സ്ഥപ്പെടുത്തിവച്ച മുനിയായ വ്യാസഭഗവാൻ ജനിച്ചതാകട്ടെ
- മര സൂത്രിച്ച മുനി = മൂക്കുവ കന്യകയായ മത്സ്യ ഗന്ധിയുടെ മകനായിട്ടുമാണ്.
- കൈവർത്തകന്യയിൽ

പണ്ട് പ്രസിദ്ധനായ പരാശരമഹാമുനി ജനിച്ചത് അദ്യ ശൃതി എന്ന പറയ സ്ത്രീയുടെ മകനായിട്ടാണ്. വേദങ്ങളെ നാലായി പകുത്ത് വ്യവസ്ഥപ്പെടുത്തിയ വ്യാസഭഗവാന്മാ കട്ടെ മത്സ്യഗന്ധി എന്ന മുക്കുവ സ്ത്രീയുടെ മകനായിട്ടാണ് ജന്മമെടുത്തത്.

Parashara Mahamuni, who was famous in the past, was born as the son of a woman named Adrishanthi. Lord Vyasa, who divided the Vedas into four, was born as the son of matsyagandhi, a fisherwoman.

The meaninglessness of the socially existing caste system in India has already been exposed. Tests have been carried out in principle, scientifically and in line with common sense. While this is meaningless, it is a surprising irony that the caste system has existed in India since ancient times. In almost all the metaphysical texts in India, casteism is treated as a naturally homogeneous social system. The Brahmin is considered to be at the highest level of that system. Therefore, a Brahmin is worthy of worship for all other castes. Brahmin worship therefore became a part of the religious culture of India.

In spite of all this, all this has been written by the systematic texts of metaphysics.

Are they Brahmins? The fact of the matter is that it was Vedavyasa who divided the Vedas, which should be considered the first book in the history of the world, not only in India, but also in the history of the world into four parts. These Vedas include not only the Samhita part but also the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads. That is to say, the entire vast Vedic literature is available to us today in the form in which it has come through the medha of Vedavyasa.

In the Mahabharata story Chaturvarna is recognized as a social system, but in the Bhagavad-gita within it itself, it is not seen as a social system. Chaturvarna in the Gita refers to personality traits that are clearly visible by the qualitative and karmic differences between human beings. Vyasa is also the author of this Mahabharata. In short, the Ramayana is the only spiritual book in India that does not belong to Vyasa. Valmiki is its author. The story is well known that Valmiki was a savage named Ratnakaran when he was young. Vyasa, the author of everything except the Ramayana, was the son of matsyagandhi, a fisherwoman, who is considered to be the same Vyasa who is the author of the Vedānta Sutra. With all this in mind, the Guru refers here only to the story of Parasaram muni and Vyasamuni.

• Despite its proven baselessness, it persists in India

• Chaturvarna in Gita means traits not caste



- Metaphysical texts often authored by non-Brahmins

Just as all the metaphysics in the Sanskrit context are created by non-Brahmins, so in Tamil the 'Thirukkural', which is as prominent as the Vedas, can be said to be caste-based. All these sages are more revered than the Brahmins. In principle, the revered Brahmin is not a Brahmin born of a Brahmin woman, but a Brahmin born in knowledge and action. Brahmajnani. In that sense, there has never been a Brahmin greater than Vyasa, Parashara and Thiruvalluvar.

Verse VI

ഇല്ല ജാതിയിലൊന്നുണ്ടോ വല്ലതും ഭേദമോർക്കുകിൽ
ചൊല്ലേറും വ്യക്തിഭാഗത്തിലല്ലേ ഭേദമിരുന്നിടു?

Illa jātiyil onnuṅṭō vallatum bhēdamōrkkil
collērum vyaktibhāgattillallē bhēdamirunniṭu?

Is there any difference at all in caste, if one considers it?
Is it not in the individual aspect, which is spoken of
highly, that difference resides?

ഓർക്കുകിൽ	=	ചിന്തിച്ചു നോക്കിയാൽ
ഇല്ല ജാതിയിലൊ ന്നുണ്ടോ വല്ലതും ഭേദം	=	ഏതെങ്കിലും തരത്തിലുള്ള ഭേ ദത്തിന് ജാതിക്കുള്ളിൽ അൽപ മെങ്കിലും സ്ഥാനമുണ്ടോ? ഇല്ല.
ചൊല്ലേറും വ്യക്തി ഭാഗത്തിലല്ലേ ഭേദമി രുന്നിടു	=	വ്യക്തിപരമായ സവിശേഷതക ളുടെ അംശത്തിൽ മാത്രമേ ഭേ ദത്തിന് സ്ഥാനമുള്ളൂ എന്നത് പ്രസിദ്ധവുമാണ്

ചിന്തിച്ചു നോക്കിയാൽ ഏതെങ്കിലും തരത്തിലുള്ള ഭേദത്തിന് ജാതിക്കുള്ളിൽ അൽപമെങ്കിലും സ്ഥാനമുണ്ടോ? ഇല്ല. വ്യക്തിപരമായ സവിശേഷതകളുടെ അംശത്തിൽ മാത്രമേ ഭേദത്തിന് സ്ഥാനമുള്ളൂ എന്നത് പ്രസിദ്ധവുമാണ്. (ഈ ശ്ലോകം നാരായണഗുരുവിന്റെ സമ്പൂർണ്ണകൃതികളുടെ ആദ്യകാല പതിപ്പുകളിൽ കാണുന്നില്ല. ഗുരു ഉള്ളപ്പോൾ തന്നെ ശിവഗിരി മാത്തിലെ അന്തേവാസിയായിരുന്ന വി. കുഞ്ഞികൃഷ്ണൻ ശാസ്ത്രീകളുടെ (ശാസ്ത്രീവൈദ്യൻ) ഓർമ്മയിൽ നിന്ന് ലഭിച്ചതാണ് ഈ പദ്യം)

If you think about it, is there at least some place for any kind of difference within caste? No. It is well-known that the distinction has its place only in the fraction of personal characteristics.

(This shloka is not found in the earliest editions of Narayana Guru's complete works. It is derived from the memory of Sri V. Kunjikkrishnan Sastri (Shastri Vaidyan), an inmate of Sivagiri mutt while the Guru was still there)

This verse explains what is the final conclusion that comes from the study of the question of caste so far. There is a difference between human beings, it is not caste distinction, it is a difference in the level of individual characteristics. In the first shlokas it has been said that the symptoms which make one caste distinguished from another. It is repeated in a different way in 'Caste Ism', which is unscientific to regard individual differences between human beings as racially corrected. The way in which the individual characteristics of human beings are discriminated is found in ancient Indian psychology, and in modern Western psychology, western psychology calls it type psychology. Introvert and extrovert, introvert extrovert, extrovert introvert are the most popular divisions in the western world. The Bhagavad Gita highlights that Indians have made the classification of 'Rajasan' and 'Vaasana', and that their mixed expressions can also be seen in personality characteristics. The Gita says that human beings fall into two categories, namely, asura-rich and god-possessed, based on the interests of human life and actions accordingly. The Gita takes into account yajna, jnana and tapas as pratinidhis) and asserts that the three gunas will be coloured. Finally, the personality patterns that the Gita presents are brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Śūdras. None of these characteristics are related to caste. They correspond to the peculiarity of each individual. The colour of the skin, certain kinds of facial sticks, whether the lip is thick or thin are not found only in individuals. We know that it is commonly found in some genealogical parts. On the basis of this, human beings are compelled to consider particular peoples to belong to each caste. But the proof that such characteristics are also not caste-based is that if males and females of particular races mate, they produce offspring.

- Individual traits define true human difference

- Caste has no legitimacy based on birth

Thus Sree Narayana Guru's 'Jathi Nirnayam' (Determination of Caste) stands as one of his most powerful poetic works, offering a scathing critique of the caste system. Written in a simple yet profound style, this poem challenges the very foundation of caste discrimination and questions the legitimacy of dividing people based on birth. The title 'Jathi Nirnayam' translates to 'An inquiry into caste'. True to its name, the poem adopts a rational and philosophical approach to examine the origins and consequences of caste.



- Rational inquiry reveals caste as social construct

Guru poses critical questions that dismantle the logic behind caste distinctions. He even uses sharp sarcasm to highlight the absurdity of assigning caste to individuals at birth. Through this, he prompts the reader to contemplate the arbitrary nature of the caste system. For example, he questions whether a child is born with any physical mark that identifies their caste. Guru effectively emphasises that caste is not an inherent trait but a social construct imposed by society.

One of the central themes of ‘Jathi Nirnayam’ is the idea that all human beings are equal in their essence, and any form of discrimination based on caste goes against the fundamental principles of humanity and spirituality. Guru believed that a person’s true worth lies in their knowledge, wisdom, and moral character, not in the caste they were born into. This poem aligns perfectly with his broader message of “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity,” advocating for a society free from caste-based divisions.

- Spirituality is universal, not caste-bound

‘Jathi Nirnayam’ also scrutinizes the hypocrisy of religious leaders and the Brahminical dominance in spiritual practices. Guru uses this poem to attack the notion that only certain castes have the right to perform religious rituals or attain spiritual enlightenment. He emphasizes that spirituality is universal and accessible to everyone, regardless of their social standing. In doing so, he not only criticizes the caste system but also redefines spirituality as an inclusive and egalitarian pursuit.

4.1.3 Jati Lakshanam

The concept of a rigid caste system has long been a deeply ingrained, yet often mystified and exaggerated social belief within the Indian community. This false prejudice, which has historically divided people into major social strata, stands in stark contrast to the fundamental truth that humanity belongs to a single, unified type.

Narayana Guru, in his profound short poem ‘Jati Lakshana’, directly confronts and shatters the allegiance many show to others based on the caste privileges derived from birth. He meticulously roots out the unscientific categorization of human beings into rigid compartments, exposing the irrationality and injustice inherent in such divisions. The ridicule and aversion faced by individuals belonging to so-called ‘lower castes’ is not merely a social inconvenience; it is a profound shame and a societal taboo that urgently needs to be eradicated.

Through ‘Jati Lakshana’, we analyse the foundational thoughts and profound wisdom that Guru carried in his mind and boldly proclaimed, all with the singular aim of eradicating this pervasive social evil. This poem serves as a powerful testament to his vision of a society where all are equal, recognizing the shared essence of humanity above all superficial distinctions.

In the context of Sree Narayana Guru’s poem ‘Jati Lakshana’, the term primarily refers to the characteristics or true definition of “Jati” as in humanity or species, rather than the artificial, birth-based divisions of caste.

Guru uses this title to challenge the prevailing understanding of jati as a rigid, hereditary social construct (caste) and to re-establish the notion that the true jati of all living beings, especially humans, is fundamentally one, based on shared universal qualities like consciousness, love, and compassion, rather than superficial distinctions of birth or social status. He seeks to redefine what truly defines a human being.

Gandhi the ritualist and the Guru who broke ritual

Because Mahatma Gandhi saw no flaw in the varṇa-āśrama order, he had no clear idea of untouchability or caste in his early days. He came into contact with the Guru during the Vaikom Satyagraha. Gandhi did not find fault with many customs called sanātana-dharma and often tried to satisfy orthodox believers. In their discussion on untouchability the Guru said that the depressed classes needed education and wealth; they must be given a chance to improve. The Guru added that Gandhi would have to return again to root out caste rigidity from Hinduism. The Guru disagreed with Gandhi’s view that the varṇa-āśrama system was good. He asked, “How can Gandhi say so? He has not thought it through.” The Guru told him plainly that caste brought only harm, never benefit: “Caste blocks freedom and destroys intelligence. Without freedom or reason, how can work be good?” Occupation must rest on aptitude, not on caste, and that thought smashes the very idea of chaturvarṇya.

Verse 1

പുണർന്നു പെരുമെല്ലാമൊ-
രിനമാം പുണരാത്തത്
ഇനമല്ലിനമാമിങ്ങൊ-
രിനയാർന്നൊത്തു കാൺമതും

Puṇarṇnu perumellāmō-
rinamām puṇarāttat
inamallinamāmingo-
riṇayārnnottu kāṇmatum



All that are born of union are of one species.
 What is not born of union is not a species.
 Here, a species is also that which is seen together in pairs.

- പുണർന്ന് പെറും = ആണും പെണ്ണും ഇണ ചേർന്ന് സന്തതിയെ ജനിപ്പിക്കുന്ന
- എല്ലാം ഒരിനമാം = എല്ലാ ജീവികളും ഒരു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണ്.
- പുണരാത്തത് = തമ്മിൽ ഇണചേരുന്ന സ്വഭാവമില്ലാത്ത ജീവികൾ
- ഇനമല്ല = ഒരു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതല്ല.
- ഇങ്ങൊരിണയാർന്ന് = ഇണകളായോ കൂട്ടം കൂടിയോ ഒന്നിച്ചു
- ഒത്തു കാണതും = ജീവിക്കുന്നതും
- ഇനമാം = ഒരിനത്തിൽ പെട്ടതു മാത്രമാണ്.

ആണും പെണ്ണും ഇണചേർന്നു സന്തതിയെ ജനിപ്പിക്കുന്ന സ്വഭാവമുള്ള എല്ലാ ജീവികളും ഒരു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണ്. അങ്ങനെ ഇണചേരുന്ന സ്വഭാവമില്ലാത്തത് ഒരു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതല്ല. ഇണകളായോ കൂട്ടമായോ ഒന്നിച്ചു കാണപ്പെടുന്നതും ഒരു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ട ജീവികൾ തമ്മിൽ മാത്രമാണ്!

All creatures with the characteristic of mating males and females to produce offspring belong to one species. Those who do not have the habit of mating does not belong to a single caste. It is only between creatures belonging to one species that they are found together in pairs or in groups!

What has been highlighted here as a sign of deciding that organisms belong to a species is that the male and female of that species mate to produce a progeny, and all the scientific aspects of this are the 'offspring born out of the genus' in 'The Determination of Caste'. The shloka that begins with will be discussed when examined. Thus, non-domesticated organisms should not be regarded as belonging to one species. It is always asserted. The first is an annexal justice, and the second is a different kind of justification. The caste characteristic referred to here is that the male and the female live and move together between those belonging to one caste, and many species are seen to live and travel in groups. Some particular species of birds can also be seen roaming together. They see it in groups. Ants are a good example of living together. A herd of thousands of ants can be seen laying eggs together and hatching them all

• Species distinction lies in reproductive compatibility

in a single cage. This kind of natural association is also seen only between creatures of a single caste.

Verse 2

ഓരോയിനത്തിനും മെയ്യു-
മോരോ മാതിരിയൊച്ചയും
മണവും ചുവയും ചൂടു
തണുവും നോക്കുമോർക്കണം.

Ōrōyinattinum meyyu-
mōrō mātiriyocchayum
maṇavum cuvayum cūḍum
taṇuvum nōkkumōrkaṇam.

For each species, the body,
a distinct type of sound,
smell, taste, warmth, and
coolness should be observed.

- ഓരോയിനത്തിനും = ഓരോ ജാതിയിൽപ്പെട്ട ജീവികൾ
- മെയ്യും ഓരോ = ഓരോ പ്രത്യേക തരത്തിലുള്ള
- മാതിരിയൊച്ചയും = ശരീരാകൃതി ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കുകയും,
ഓരോ പ്രത്യേക തരം ശബ്ദം പുറ
പ്പെടു വിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നതു
കാണാം.
- മണവും = അതുപോലെ ഓരോ ജാതി ജീവി
കൾ ഓരോ തരം മണമാണ്.
- ചുവയും = അതുപോലെ ഓരോ ജീവിവർഗ്ഗത്തി
നും നാവിന്റെ രുചിഭേദവുമാണ്
- ചൂടും തണുവും = അതുപോലെ ശരീരത്തിന്റെ ചൂടും
തണുപ്പും ഓരോ ജാതി ജീവികൾ
ഓരോന്നാണ്
- നോക്കും = അതുപോലെ തന്നെയാണ് ഓരോ
ജാതി ജീവിയുടെയും നോട്ടത്തി
ന്റെ രീതിയും.
- ഓർക്കണം = ജാതിയെപ്പറ്റി ശാസ്ത്രീയമായി ചി
ന്തിക്കുന്നവർ ഇതെല്ലാം ഓർത്തിരി
ക്കേണ്ടതാണ്

• True distinction lies in personal qualities only

ഓരോ ഇനത്തിലുള്ള ജീവികൾ അതാതിനു മാത്രമുള്ള പ്രത്യേക ബാഹ്യാകാരമാണ്. അതുപോലെ ഓരോ ജീവി വർഗ്ഗത്തിനും അതാതിന്റേതായ ശബ്ദമാണ്. അതാതിന്റേതായ രുചിയുമാണ്. അതാതിന്റേതായ രുചിഭേദമാണ്.

അതുപോലെ ശരീരത്തിന്റെ ചുടും തണുപ്പും ഓരോ ജീവികൾക്കും ഓരോന്നാണ്. ഓരോ ജീവിവർഗ്ഗത്തിനും അതാതിന്റേതായ നോട്ടരീതിയുമുണ്ട്. ജാതിലക്ഷണത്തെപ്പറ്റി ശാസ്ത്രീയമായി ചിന്തിക്കുന്നവർ ഇതെല്ലാം ഓർത്തിരിക്കേണ്ടതാണ്. ഈ ശ്ലോകത്തിൽ വ്യക്തമാക്കിയിരിക്കുന്ന കാര്യങ്ങൾ വിശദമാക്കാതെ തന്നെ ഏവർക്കും അറിവുള്ളതാണ്.

The same is true of the way every caste creature looks.

Those who think scientifically about caste should remember all this.

• Scientific view demands deeper understanding of difference

Each species of organism has its own unique external appearance. Similarly, each species has its own sound. It has its own scent. It has its own taste. Similarly, the heat and cold of the body are different for every living being. Each species has its own way of looking. Those who think scientifically about the caste trait should keep all this in mind.

What is specified in this verse is known to all without detail.

Verse 3

തുടർന്നോരോന്നിലും വെവ്വേ-
 റടയാളമിരിക്കയാൽ
 അറിഞ്ഞീടുന്നു വെവ്വേറെ
 പിരിച്ചോരോന്നുമിങ്ങു നാം.

Tuṭarnnōrōnnilum̐ vevve-
 raṭayāḷamirikayāl
 Aṟiññīṭunnu vevveṛe
 piriccōrōnnumiñṇu nām.
 Furthermore, as distinct
 marks exist in each,
 we here discern and
 separate each one distinctly.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| ഓരോന്നിലും | = | ഓരോ ജീവിവർഗ്ഗത്തിലും |
| തുടർന്ന് വെവ്വേറെ
അടയാളമിരിക്കയാൽ | = | മേൽപറഞ്ഞതു കൂടാതെ മറ്റു
പല ലക്ഷണങ്ങളും വെവ്വേറെ
ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കുക കാരണമാണ് |
| അറിഞ്ഞീടുന്നു
വെവ്വേറെ | = | ഓരോന്നിനേയും വെവ്വേറെ
വകതിരിച്ച് |
| പിരിച്ചോരോന്നുമിങ്ങു
നാം | = | മനസ്സിലാക്കാൻ ഇടവരുന്നത്.
= നമ്മൾ |

മേൽപറഞ്ഞതുപോലെയുള്ള ഇനിയും പല ലക്ഷണ

ങ്ങൾ ഇനങ്ങളെ വേർതിരിച്ചറിയത്തക്കവണ്ണം ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കുക കാരണമാണ്, ഈ ലോകത്തിലുള്ള എല്ലാറ്റിനെയും നമുക്ക് വകതിരിച്ചു വച്ചു മനസ്സിലാക്കാൻ സാധിക്കുന്നത്.

It is only because there are many more symptoms like the above that can distinguish the species, that we are able to distinguish everything in the world.

It is the nature of man to distinguish whatever he encounters, and this characteristic seems to be present to some other creatures, let's say that the tree in front of it is said to be 'Malgoa' mango. Then the tree is distinguished from the animals. The variety of flour is distinguished from the trees itself, and in the mango itself there is a special species called malgoa flour. It's a common concept. The malgoa mango is a speciality that belongs to this samana nya, or a caste. If the mango is treated as a common or subspecies, the malgoa mango is a special species or subspecies that falls within its scope. If the malgoa flour itself is treated as a commonality, it is a special feature of it. I can tell you today. Generalities are classified separately by certain characteristics. Those symptoms are called signs here. That is, each item is distinguished by the use of signs.

• Human nature: distinguishing everything through unique characteristics.

Verse 4

പേരുരു തൊഴിലീ മൂന്നും
പോരുമായതു കേൾക്കുക!
ആരു നീയെന്നു കേൾക്കേണ്ടാ
നേരു മെയ് തന്നെ ചൊല്കയാൽ

Pērūru toḷilī mūnnum
pōrumāyatu kēḷkkuka!
Āru nīyennu kēḷkkēṅṅā
nēru meyytanne colkayāl.

Listen! Name, place, and occupation – these three are sufficient (for identification). One need not ask, “Who are you?” as the truth is revealed by the body itself.

പേര് ഉൾ തൊഴില് ഈ = പേരെന്ന്, നാടേത്. തൊഴിലെ
മൂന്നും = ന്ത് എന്നീ മൂന്നു ചോദ്യങ്ങൾ
മാത്രം
പോരും = ചോദിച്ചാൽ മതി.
ആയത് കേൾക്കുക = ആരെക്കണ്ടാലും ഈ ചോദ്യ
ങ്ങൾ ചോദിക്കാവുന്നതാണ്.

ആർ നീയെന്നു കേൾ കേണ്ട = നിങ്ങൾ ഏത് ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണ് എന്ന് ചോദിക്കേണ്ട
 നേർ മെയ് തന്നെചൊൽ കയാൽ = ഏതു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടവനാണ് എന്ന സത്യം ശരീരാകൃതി തന്നെ വിളിച്ചു പറയുന്നുണ്ട്

ആരെ കണ്ടാലും പേര് എന്താണ്? നാട് എവിടെയാണ്? എന്താണ് തൊഴിൽ? ഈ മൂന്നു ചോദ്യങ്ങൾ ചോദിച്ചാൽ മതി. അതു ചോദിച്ചു കൊള്ളുക. നിങ്ങൾ ഏതു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണ് എന്നു ചോദിക്കേണ്ട. കാരണം, മനുഷ്യന്റെ ശരീരാകൃതി തന്നെ വിളിച്ചു പറയുന്നുണ്ട് 'ഇവൻ മനുഷ്യനാണ്' എന്ന സത്യം.

What's the name of anyone you see? Where's the country? What is employment? Just ask these three questions, and ask them, and don't ask which caste you belong to, for the very shape of a man's body calls out, 'He is a man.'

Verse 5

ഇനമാർന്നുടൽ താൻ തന്റെ-
 യിനമേതെന്നു ചൊൽകയാൽ
 ഇനമേതെന്നു കേൾക്കില്ല
 നിനവും കണ്ണുമുള്ളവർ.

Inamārnnuṭal tān tanrē-
 yinampettenu colkayāl
 inamētennu kēlkkilla
 ninavum kannumullavar.

As the body, belonging to a species,
 itself proclaims its species,
 those with discernment and
 sight will not ask, "Which species?"

ഉടൽ താൻ = ശരീരം തന്നെ
 ഇനമാർന്ന് = ഓരോ ഇനത്തിനും സഹജമായ ബാഹ്യ രൂപം സ്വീകരിച്ച്
 തന്റെ ഇനമേതെന്ന് = താൻ ഏതു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണെന്ന സത്യം
 ചൊൽകയാൽ = പ്രകടമാക്കുകയാൽ
 ഇനം ഏതെന്ന് = നീ ഏതു ഇനത്തിൽ പെട്ടതാണ് എന്ന്
 നിനവും = ആലോചനാശക്തിയും
 കണ്ണം ഉള്ളവർ = നിരീക്ഷണശക്തിയും ഉള്ളവർ

കേൾക്കില്ല = ഒരിക്കലും ചോദിക്കുകയില്ല.

ശരീരം തന്നെ അതാതിന്റെ ഇനത്തിന് സഹജമായ രൂപം സ്വീകരിച്ച്, താൻ ഏതു ഇനത്തിൽ പെട്ടതാണ് എന്ന് പ്രകടമാക്കുക കാരണം, ആലോചനാശക്തിയും നിരീക്ഷണ ശക്തിയും ഉള്ള ആരും ആരോടും, നീ ഏതു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണ്, എന്ന് ചോദിക്കുകയില്ല.

Let the body itself take its natural form to its species and show what species it belongs to, because no one with the power of thinking and the power of observation will ask anyone, what caste do you belong to?

Verse 6

പൊളി ചൊല്ലുന്നിനം ചൊല്വ-
തിഴിവെന്നു നിനയ്ക്കയാൽ,
ഇഴിവില്ലിനമൊന്നാണു
പൊളി ചൊല്ലരുതാരുമേ!

Poḷi collunninam colva-
tilivennu ninakkāyāl,
iḷivillinamaonnāṇu
poḷi collarutārume.

If you think that speaking of
caste is a lie and a degradation,
know that there is no degradation,
the species is one. Let no one speak a lie.

ഇനം ചൊല്വത് = താൻ ഏതു ഇനത്തിൽ പെട്ടതാണ് എന്നു പറയുന്നത് (ഞാൻ മനുഷ്യജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണ് എന്നു പറയുന്നത്)

ഇഴിവെന്നു നിനയ്ക്കയാൽ = മോശത്തരമാണ് എന്ന തോന്നൽ ഉള്ളതു കൊണ്ടാണ്

പൊളി ചൊല്ലുന്നു = ആളുകൾ അസത്യം പറയാനിടയാകുന്നത് (ഞാൻ ബ്രാഹ്മണനാണ്, ഞാൻ നായരാണ്, ഞാൻ ഇഴുഴവനാണ് എന്നിങ്ങനെയുള്ള അസത്യങ്ങൾ പറയാനിടയാകുന്നത്.)

ഇഴിവില്ല = ഞാൻ മനുഷ്യജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണ് എന്നു തുറന്നു പറയുന്നതിൽ ഒരു കുറവും ഇല്ല.

ഇനം ഒന്നാണ് = എല്ലാ മനുഷ്യരും ഒരിനത്തിൽ അഥവാ ഒരു ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണ്.



ആരുമേ പൊളി = അതുകൊണ്ട് ആരും തന്നെ ജാ
 ചൊല്ലരുത് തിയെ സംബന്ധിച്ച് അസത്യമായ
 പ്രസ്താവങ്ങൾ നടത്തരുത്

ഞാൻ ജാതിയിൽ മനുഷ്യനാണ് എന്ന സത്യം പറയുന്നതിൽ എന്തോ മോശത്തരമുണ്ടെന്ന തോന്നലാണ്, ഞാൻ ബ്രാഹ്മണനാണ്, ഞാൻ ഈഴവനാണ് എന്നിങ്ങനെയുള്ള കള്ളത്തരങ്ങൾ പറയാൻ ഇടയാക്കുന്നത്. ഞാൻ മനുഷ്യനാണ് എന്നു പറയുന്നതിൽ ആർക്കും ഒരു കുറവും തോന്നേണ്ടതില്ല. എല്ലാ മനുഷ്യരും ഒരു ഇനത്തിൽ പെട്ടതാണ്. അതുകൊണ്ട് ആരും തന്നെ ജാതിയെ സംബന്ധിച്ച് അസത്യ പ്രസ്താവങ്ങൾ നടത്തരുത്.

It is the feeling that there is something bad in telling the truth that I am a human being in caste, which leads to false statements like I am a Brahmin, I am an Ezhava, etc. No one should feel any lack of saying that I am a human being. All human beings belong to one type, so no one should make false statements about caste.

Verse 7

ആണും പെണ്ണും വേർതിരിച്ചു
 കാണും വണ്ണമിനത്തെയും
 കാണണം കുറികൊണ്ടിമ്മ-
 ട്താണു നാമറിയേണ്ടത്.

Āṇum peṇṇum vērtiricchu
 kāṇum vaṅṅaminattheyum
 kāṇaṇam kurikoṅṭimma-
 ṭṭāṇu nāmariyēṅṭat.

Just as male and female are distinguished,
 so too should the species be observed
 by its distinguishing marks.
 This is how we should understand.

കുറികൊണ്ട്	=	ലക്ഷണങ്ങൾ വച്ചുകൊണ്ട്
ആണും പെണ്ണും	=	ആണിനെയും പെണ്ണിനെയും
വേർതിരിച്ചുകാണും	=	വേർതിരിച്ചു നാം മനസ്സിലാക്കാ
വണ്ണം	=	റുണ്ട്. തുപോലെ തന്നെയാണ്
ഇനത്തെയും	=	ജാതിയെയും
കാണണം	=	വകതിരിച്ചു മനസ്സിലാക്കേണ്ടത്.
ഇമ്മട്ടാണു നാം	=	ഇത്തരത്തിലാണ് നാം ശാസ്ത്രീ
അറിയേണ്ടത്	=	യമായി എല്ലാറ്റിനേയും അറിയേ
		ണ്ടത്.

ലക്ഷണങ്ങൾ വെച്ചുകൊണ്ടാണല്ലോ നാം ആണിനെയും പെണ്ണിനെയും തിരിച്ചറിയുന്നത്. അതുപോലെതന്നെ ലക്ഷണങ്ങൾ വെച്ചുകൊണ്ടു വേണം ഇനങ്ങളെയും വകതിരിച്ചു മനസ്സിലാക്കേണ്ടത്. എല്ലാറ്റിനെയും ശാസ്ത്രീയമായി മനസ്സിലാക്കുന്ന രീതി ഇത്തരത്തിലുള്ളതാണ്.

We identify males and females by their symptoms. In the same way, items should be distinguished by the characteristics. This is the way everything is scientifically minded.

Verse 8

അറിവാമാഴിയിൽ നിന്നു
 വരുമെല്ലാവുടമ്പിനും
 കരുവാനിന, മീ നീരിൻ
 നിര താൻ വേരുമായിടും.

Arivāmāḷiyil ninnu
 varumellāvūṭampinum
 karuvāṇina, mī nīrin
 nira tān vērumāyitum.

For all bodies that emerge
 from the ocean of consciousness (Arivu),
 the species is the essence.
 This flow of water itself becomes the root.

- അറിവാം ആഴിയിൽ = അറിവാകുന്ന മഹാ സമുദ്ര
- നിന്ന് വരും = ത്തിൽ നിന്ന് രൂപപ്പെട്ടു വരുന്ന
- എല്ലാ ഉടമ്പിനും = എണ്ണിയാലൊടുങ്ങാത്ത വൈ
- = ജാത്യമുള്ള എല്ലാ ശരീരങ്ങളും
- = അഥവാ രൂപങ്ങളും ഉണ്ടാകുന്ന
- തിനുള്ള
- കരുവാണ് ഇനം = മുശയാണ് ഇനം എന്നത്, അഥ
- = വാ ജാതി എന്നത്.
- ഈ നീരിൻ നിര = കടലിൽ നിരനിരയായി പ്രത്യ
- താൻ വേരുമായിടും = ക്ഷപ്പെടുന്ന തിരകളിലെല്ലാം
- = കാരണസത്യമായിരിക്കുന്നത്
- = വെള്ളം തന്നെയാണ്. അതു
- = പോലെ തന്നെ അറിവാകുന്ന
- = കടലിൽ രൂപം കൊള്ളുന്ന തി
- = രകളായ സകല ശരീരങ്ങളിലും
- = കാരണസത്യമായിരിക്കുന്നത്
- = അറിവാ കുന്ന വെള്ളം തന്നെ
- = യാണ്.

അറിവാകുന്ന മഹാസമുദ്രത്തിൽ നിന്നു രൂപപ്പെട്ടു വരുന്ന എല്ലാ രൂപങ്ങളും ഉണ്ടാകുന്നതിനുള്ള മുഴയായാണ് ഇനം എന്നത്. ഇക്കാരണത്താൽ തിരകളിലെല്ലാം കാരണസത്യമായിരിക്കുന്നത് ഒരൊറ്റ വെള്ളം തന്നെയാണല്ലോ.

The species is the mole for the formation of all the forms formed from the ocean of knowledge. In all these waves, there is only one water that is the truth of the cause.

The basic principle of Vedānta and Narayana Guru's philosophy is that each of the objects in the visible universe is identified as 'this is what it is today', that the truth underlying the whole visible universe is only one, that it is called Brahman and the Soul, and that the truth is, in essence, mere and unique knowledge.

If the absolute truth of knowledge is regarded as a sea, then all visible forms are waves formed in the sea without beginning and end, and every wave will roll for a while and play and press into the sea, that is to say, all waves are infinity, and in all of them is eternal truth water. Similarly, in the eternal truth of knowledge, it existed for a while. All the visible scenes in a clear form disappear into that knowledge itself. Each one of us is such a wave. When the wave is in search, it is actually water. In the same way, we are each and every individual knowledge.

- All forms are waves, returning to eternal knowledge's sea.

The knowledge truth has the ability to constantly stir up the waves, as well as the miraculous ability to constantly reveal individual forms, which is called 'karma'. Thus the karmic vigor inherent in the sea of knowledge is evident, and when the individual forms are revealed, all of these personal forms are seen as belonging to different kinds. All personal forms are like molten forms. Karu is the moustache used by those who make metal vessels to make them. Therefore, it can be said that it is the species that is responsible for the formation of the forms of the body belonging to different castes within the knowledge itself.

- Knowledge's power, 'karma', creates diverse individual forms.

Water is truth even before the wave comes into being, water is the truth when it is in the form of a wave, and water is the truth when the wave disappears. Similarly, before each one of us comes out, it is also knowledge. Even when we sit in various forms, it is all knowledge. Even if individual forms are destroyed, there is knowledge. This is what the Guru says, "This water will have its root."

- Knowledge is constant: before, during, and after individual forms

Verse 9

അറിവാം കരുവാൻ ചെയ്ത
കരുവാണിനമോർക്കുകിൽ
കരുവാർന്നിനിയും മാറി
വരുമീ വന്നതൊക്കെയും

Aṛivām karuvān ceyta
karuvāṇinammōrkkil
karuvārnniniyum māri
varumī vannatōkkēyum.

If we consider the species
as the essence made by consciousness
as the essence, then infused with essence,
all that has come will yet change and come again.

ഓർക്കുകിൽ	=	ചിന്തിച്ചു നോക്കിയാൽ
അറിവാം കരുവാൻ	=	അറിവാകുന്ന കരുവാൻ
ചെയ്ത	=	ഉണ്ടാക്കിയ
കരുവാൻ	=	മുശയാൻ
ഇനം	=	ഇനം എന്ന്, അഥവാ ജാതി എന്ന്.
കരുവാർന്ന്	=	ഇങ്ങനെ ഓരോ ജാതിയിൽപ്പെട്ട രൂപത്തോടുകൂടി
ഈ വന്നതൊക്കെയും	=	ഇങ്ങനെ വന്നുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്ന സകലതും
ഇനിയും മാറി വരും	=	ഇനിയും മാറി മാറി ഉണ്ടായിക്കൊണ്ടേയിരിക്കും

ചിന്തിച്ചു നോക്കിയാൽ മനസ്സിലാകും അറിവാകുന്ന കരുവാൻ രൂപം നൽകിയ ഒരു മുശയാൻ ഇനം അഥവാ ജാതി എന്ന്. ഇങ്ങനെ നാനാജാതികളിൽപ്പെടുന്നതായി രൂപം പകർന്നു വരുന്ന സകലതും ഇല്ലാതായിത്തീരുകയും അതേ ജാതിയിൽത്തന്നെ പെടുന്ന പുതിയവ ഉണ്ടായിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യും.

• Knowledge's 'karuvan' moulds castes; old forms vanish, new ones emerge

If you think about it, you will see that the item or caste is a mould created by the knowledgeable karuvan. Thus everything that takes shape as belonging to different castes will cease to exist, and new ones belonging to the same caste will continue to emerge.

It has been made clear in the last verse that the species are moulded by the truth itself, which is the knowledge, so that different kinds of personal forms can be formed in the sea of

- Knowledge, the 'karuan', shapes individual forms and categories

- Knowledge, the 'karuvan', continually creates new forms and worlds

knowledge. In this case the ultimate truth that is known can be conceived as a karan. The karavans are the workers who make vessels and other things. Thus, the items are the moushes designed by the knowledgeable karuan.

The Karuvans will continue to make new and new vessels of each type, creating new vessels, and the same metal is being formed into new ones, and the moulds may remain in their old form, and may have undergone metamorphoses. Similarly, the knowledge, or the Supreme Truth, is constantly coming through the mould of the items and creating new pasts and worlds, and new pasts and worlds are being created. The phenomenon that modern science calls evolution occurs when it makes a little changes to the need for the mould it makes. Sometimes the old species disappear and new ones are formed in the universe. Thus life is called the eternal and infinite process that takes place in knowledge. In trying to understand the truth of life, the species is not fulfilled without a place. As if it weren't possible to cook.

Verse 10

ഇനമെന്നിതിനെച്ചൊല്ലു-
ന്നിനതെന്നറിയിക്കയാൽ
ഇനമില്ലെങ്കിലില്ലൊന്നു-
മിനതെന്നുള്ളതുഴിയിൽ.

Inamennitinecollu-
minnatennariyikkavāḷ
inamilleṅkilillonnu-
minnatennallaṭūḷiyil.

This is called species because it indicates 'what it is'.
If there were no species, then nothing on earth would be 'what it is'.

- ഇനതെന്നറിയിക്കയാൽ = ഇത് ഇനത് എന്നു അറിയിക്കുവാൻ സഹായിക്കുക കാരണമാണ്
- ഇനം എന്നു ഇതിനെ ചൊല്ലുന്നു = ഇനം എന്നു ഇതിനെ വിളിച്ചുപോരുന്നത്.
- ഇനം ഇല്ലെങ്കിൽ = ഇനം എന്ന സാമാന്യത്തിന് സ്ഥാനം നൽകാതെ വന്നാൽ
- ഊഴിയിൽ = ഈ ലോകത്തിൽ

ഒന്നും ഇന്നതെന്തുള്ളത് = ഒന്നിനെയും ഇത് ഇന്നത് ഇല്ല എന്ന് തിരിച്ചറിയുവാൻ സാധ്യമാവുകയില്ല.

ഇവിടെ ചിന്താവിഷയമായ ജാതിയെ ഇന്നം എന്നു വിളിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത് 'ഇത് ഇന്നത്' എന്ന് ഓരോന്നിനെയും തിരിച്ചറിയുവാൻ ഇത് സാഹായിക്കുന്നു എന്നുള്ളതുകൊണ്ടാണ്. ഈ ഇന്നം എന്ന അറിവിന് സ്ഥാനമില്ലാതെ വന്നാൽ ഈ ലോകത്തിൽ ഒന്നിനെയും 'ഇത് ഇന്നത്' എന്നു തിരിച്ചറിയുവാൻ സാധ്യമാവുകയില്ല.

The caste of thought here is called an item because it helps us to distinguish each one as 'this is today', and if there is no place for the knowledge of this species, nothing in the world can be identified as 'it is today'.

The theme of thought here is 'caste'. It is called 'item' in this work. Why is it called so? The Guru concludes this work by answering this question: "It is called the item because it helps to identify each one as it is today."

Everything in the universe is shaped by a single knowledge, and therefore the sight of that knowledge in all things is called wisdom, but the same knowledge also has the ability to see the infinitely diverse variations of the same knowledge as many. The sight of a single knowledge in all things is called the 'equal' cleanliness of knowledge, and the purity of knowledge, which sees the various forms of one knowledge as many. The Guru has also called himself in 'Atmapadesa Shataka'. Knowledge cannot sit only with timely cleanliness. Therefore, in that context the Guru describes it as 'alien identical, malluru', in which diversity is seen only when knowledge is clean, and that is where caste has its place. This is the pot, this is the garment, this is the flour, this is the animal. Mangoes and animals are all species, and nothing can be distinguished without a concept of such species, and without a mention of the species, it is not possible to say 'This is what it is today'. In short, the species or caste is one that forms itself in knowledge itself in such a way that it cannot be excluded from the realm of infinite cleanliness of knowledge.

• Knowledge shapes everything; wisdom sees its unity and diversity

Summarized Overview

In his work *Jatinirnayam* he asserts that the 'caste of man is manhood' and caste differentiation like Brahmin, Kṣatriya, Vysya and Sudra are not tenable. Sree NarayanaGuru says that cowhood is the caste of the cows just like manhood is the only caste/genus of the man. All human beings belong to a single caste which is manhood. He adds that all human beings are born in similar manner. The anatomy of all human beings is similar. There is no difference between two beings in these respects. A child is born by means of intercourse between the male and female of the same species. Brahmin and Sudra belong to manhood; there is no place for any vanity of superiority.

Jatilakshanam is an extended description of the idea brought forth in *Jatinirnayam*. In the first sloka, Guru says that all living beings which are capable to bring forth progenies by means of sexual intercourse belong to the same species. Two beings which cannot reproduce like this belong to different species. We also find the beings of the same species in a class or group joining together. Each species is assigned their own physique, sound, smell, etc. The temperature and smell of these beings are common to that species. Their appearance would also be similar. We can recognise a species by means of all these characteristics. Applying this method we can come to the conclusion that all human beings, irrespective of their place and race, fall under a single category. In this way Sree NarayanaGuru introduces a universal humanism on the basis of one species-theory.

He says that it is irrelevant to ask the caste of another man because her body itself is a perfect proof of the caste to which she belongs. So the ascertainment of name, place and occupation are the only matters that we are supposed to take consideration when we meet a stranger. In the fifth sloka of the *Jatilakshana* Sree NarayanaGuru emphasises this idea unequivocally. As the body of a living being is enough to tell the type to which she belongs to, a reasonable and perceptible person will not resort to ascertaining her caste. He scorns that some people believe it is an inferior thing to admit that they belong to mankind. They believe it is superior to state that they belong to Brahminhood or Kshathriyahood. NarayanaGuru says that admitting the fact that we belong to mankind is not an inferior thing. All people are expected to acclaim the manhood.

Assignments

1. How did Sreenarayana Guru logically refute the concept of caste in texts like *Jati Lakshana*?
2. Explain the core tenets of Guru's philosophy encapsulated in the phrase "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Mankind."
3. Discuss the social evils and discriminatory practices prevalent in Kerala that prompted Sreenarayana Guru's radical reforms against caste.
4. What was Guru's argument against distinguishing humans based on caste, drawing parallels with how species are identified in nature?
5. How did Guru challenge the interpretation of Vedic scriptures by "Vedic scholars" who used them to justify caste differences?
6. Describe the significance of Guru's assertion that "it is irrelevant to ask the caste of another man."
7. In what ways did Sreenarayana Guru's philosophy advocate for a universal humanism, transcending traditional social divisions?
8. Discuss the practical actions or recommendations made by Guru to foster a society free from caste distinctions, such as inter-dining and inter-caste marriages.
9. According to Guru, what is the true characteristic that defines humankind, distinguishing it from other species?
10. How did Guru perceive the act of pridefully stating one's caste (e.g., Brahminhood) versus acknowledging belonging to mankind?
11. What is the central message of the *Jati Nirnaya* in challenging the notion of multiple human castes?
12. How does the document describe the society of Kerala prior to Guru's interventions, highlighting its "darkness of ignorance"?



UNIT 2

Guru's Concept of Education and Organisation

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing the study of this material, learners will be able to:

- explain Guru's vision for education, universal Sanskrit, English, technical education, industry, self-reliance.
- Summarise Guru's holistic education philosophy, inner refinement, material progress, "for life and living," spirituality, financial prosperity.
- evaluate Guru's role in the Kerala Renaissance, Cultural Revolution, social justice, leadership for progressive movements.
- recognise the significance of specific events, Mezhuvelli incident, temple to school transformation, Pallipuram temple consecration, Pulaya conference.
- acknowledge R.Shankar's contributions, spreading higher education, university access for the poor, "Emancipate yourselves through education."

Background

During Sreenarayana Guru's era, Brahminical hegemony was a deeply entrenched social reality, where traditional authority over sacred knowledge, particularly the Vedas, was exclusively vested in the Brahmin caste. This systemic denial of access to education, including Vedic and Upanishadic studies, severely oppressed the 'avarnas' (those outside the four-fold caste system) and other marginalised communities. Consequently, these groups were deliberately prevented from developing the cultural and intellectual refinement necessary for self-advancement and liberation.

As the traditional social order began to shift, the Brahmins themselves faced changing circumstances, leading to a decline in their exclusive authority and a need to seek alternative livelihoods. This necessitated a descent from their formerly privileged positions, often into occupations associated with commerce or service. Concurrently, Guru critically observed the nature of modern education that was emerging. He noted with concern that while it provided new avenues, it often paradoxically led individuals

to surrender their autonomy, fostering a mentality of servitude and dependence. This, he argued, created a ‘modern Śūdra-ness’ – a state of intellectual and personal subservience – rather than promoting genuine freedom through knowledge. He saw this as a profound cultural impoverishment, resulting in lives consumed by sorrow and inner conflict, irrespective of one’s traditional social standing.

In stark contrast to this prevailing scenario, Sreenarayana Guru’s fundamental aim was to elevate all people to a state of true ‘Brahmin-ness’, which he redefined as a condition of profound freedom attained through comprehensive knowledge and self-realisation. It is vital to clarify that Guru’s use of ‘Brahmin-ness’ and ‘Śūdra-ness’ completely disavowed birth-based caste distinctions and the oppressive varna hierarchy. For him, these terms solely described inherent character traits: ‘Brahmin-ness’ represented intellectual and spiritual liberation, while ‘Śūdra-ness’ denoted a state of dependence or lack of agency.

Recognising that the historical barriers to knowledge were slowly eroding – with Vedic texts now accessible through print and various teaching resources – Guru identified a more subtle, yet pervasive, obstacle: cultural and experiential poverty. He understood that simply making scriptures available was insufficient; true empowerment required a deep-seated cultural transformation. This profound growth, he asserted, could not be achieved overnight but demanded a conscious and sustained process of refinement across generations. This insight underpinned his strategic focus on education and organisation as the primary tools to liberate people from this systemic cultural deprivation, enabling them to courageously reclaim their intellectual authority and realise their inherent capacity for freedom and spiritual elevation.

Keywords

Educational Philosophy, Caste Barriers, Holistic Education, Self-Reliance, Kerala Renaissance, Social Justice, Emancipate yourselves through education

Discussion

4.2.1 Equal Importance to Traditional and Modern Education

Guru gave equal importance to both traditional and modern education. Guru established a Sanskrit school at Aluva at the same time Guru established an English school too at Sivagiri. This shows Guru’s attempts to bridge heritage and progress



4.2.1.1 The Advaita Ashram Model

- True Brahminhood through intellectual self-realisation

Sreenarayana Guru's profound educational vision is concretely exemplified through the establishment of institutions like the Advaita Ashram. This Ashram was conceived as a distinctive educational space that purposefully excluded all forms of ritualistic worship, focusing instead on the pursuit of pure knowledge. The Sanskrit school, founded alongside it, served as a testament to this commitment, actively promoting the study of Sanskrit – the traditional language of philosophical and spiritual inquiry. This model clearly reflected Guru's fundamental belief that true liberation stemmed from intellectual enlightenment, rather than mere adherence to custom or ritual. Through such initiatives, Guru aimed to foster a culture where individuals could transcend conventional limitations and ascend to what he termed 'true Brahminhood', a state of profound freedom achieved through the cultivation of knowledge and intellectual autonomy, accessible to all, irrespective of birth. This approach deliberately challenged existing societal norms by creating an inclusive environment for genuine intellectual and spiritual growth.

- Intellectual freedom over sophisticated slavery

Guru critically observed that modern education, despite its apparent advancements, often failed to achieve this pinnacle of intellectual liberation. He contended that contemporary schooling frequently led not to the 'heights of freedom through knowledge', but rather to an 'excellence in servitude'. In his view, education, as it was commonly practised, inadvertently prepared individuals for a 'modern Śūdra-hood' – a condition characterised by intellectual dependence and a lack of self-direction. He pointed out that people often became proficient in what could be described as 'sophisticated slavery', rather than genuinely achieving intellectual emancipation. Therefore, Guru's educational philosophy, as embodied by the Advaita Ashram, sought to counter these perceived deficiencies, advocating for a holistic development that would truly empower individuals to think critically, attain spiritual insight, and ultimately realise their innate capacity for freedom and self-mastery.

4.2.1.2 Temples as Educational and Transformative Centres in Sreenarayana Guru's Vision

Historically, following the decline of Buddhism in India, temples assumed a central role as cultural hubs, shaping societal norms and practices. However, this function became inherently contradictory when the majority of the population

- Model temples reshaped cultural and moral norms

was systematically denied entry, thereby transforming these institutions into symbols of inequality that contravened the fundamental principle of universal equality, a core essence of Indian culture. Sreenarayana Guru, rather than adopting a confrontational stance by directly pressuring authorities to open existing temples, chose an extraordinarily insightful and constructive approach. He strategically established model temples that were explicitly open to everyone, irrespective of their traditional caste affiliations. Simultaneously, he actively discouraged the worship of 'lower deities' associated with degrading or superstitious practices, thereby elevating the spiritual discourse. This innovative methodology, seemingly indirect, proved remarkably effective in yielding positive societal changes and challenging entrenched discriminatory practices.

- Guru's movement reshaped religious power dynamics

There is strong reason to believe that the Travancore Maharaja's historic Temple Entry Proclamation was not solely motivated by benevolence towards the disenfranchised. Guru's burgeoning movement of establishing new, inclusive temples began to draw significant numbers of devotees, causing a plausible and substantial decrease in the income generated by traditional temples. It is crucial to note that historically, even those denied entry into these temples contributed significantly through offerings and donations, forming a major source of their revenue. Thus, it is highly conceivable that the Temple Entry Proclamation was a pragmatic response, a strategic move by the traditional establishment, as the continued ban on temple entry increasingly threatened the very economic viability and existence of their institutions in the face of Guru's successful alternative models. This highlights Guru's profound socio-economic leverage achieved through organised spiritual reform.

- Spiritual practice linked with intellectual growth

Beyond merely establishing accessible places of worship, Sreenarayana Guru fundamentally reimagined the role of temples, transforming them into vital centres of knowledge and contemplation. He not only consecrated deities in accordance with devotees' wishes but also meticulously composed hymns (stotras), serving as clear instructional guides on how to truly understand and properly worship the installed deity, thereby elevating spiritual practice beyond mere ritualism. Furthermore, Guru insisted that these temple complexes should incorporate open spaces where people could gather in the evenings to engage in purifying thoughts within a serene atmosphere. Critically, he also mandated the inclusion of libraries, furnished with books



specifically curated to inspire such profound contemplation and intellectual inquiry. In essence, Guru's entire temple consecration initiative functioned as a practical, living lesson on how to evolve traditional places of worship into dynamic hubs for spiritual education and intellectual enlightenment.

Two seminal examples brilliantly encapsulate this transformative vision: the Sarada Pratishta (consecration of Sarada) at Sivagiri and the Kannadi Pratishta (mirror consecration) at Kalavankode. The Sarada Temple, consecrated at Guru's specific request, presented a groundbreaking architectural model characterized by its beautiful simplicity. It notably replaced the traditionally dark 'sreekovil' (sanctum sanctorum), which Guru believed could obscure truth, with innovative mirror windows on all sides, ensuring the inner shrine was perpetually bathed in light. This design carried profound symbolism: it represented the human 'body-temple' that, instead of concealing ignorance, should have its 'windows opened' to allow inner light, leading to the clarity of self-illumination or the brilliance of the soul's awakening. The Kalavankode mirror consecration, widely believed to be an unpre-planned, extraordinary solution to a local dispute, further exemplifies Guru's genius. He skillfully transformed even ego-driven conflicts into opportunities for gaining knowledge and fostering self-transcendence among local leaders.

- Temples symbolised light, knowledge, self-realisation

Sree Narayana Guru believed in universalising Sanskrit language education. He held the opinion that children should learn English, Malayalam, and Sanskrit. In all his Ashrams (ആശ്രമം), arrangements were made to teach Sanskrit irrespective of caste or religion. A Sanskrit school was run in Varkala without government assistance. It was sustained by fees collected from students and financial aid provided by the Yogam. The financial difficulties faced by the Sanskrit school were often reported in the Yogam's reports. The Sanskrit school, which had been operating in Thiruvananthapuram, was relocated to Sivagiri in November 1906.

- Sanskrit education made accessible to all

"Swami expressed the opinion that a public temple and a higher-grade Sanskrit Vidyalaya (വിദ്യാലയം - school) should be established at Sivagiri Mutt." On 13th Chingam 1089, the Swami publicly published a small notice requesting financial assistance from his own people for this purpose. By 1910, "the Sanskrit school at Sivagiri Mutt was further strengthened, and in addition to the Sanskrit language, subjects like mathematics and English were also introduced. The number of students has exceeded fifty."

- Swami sought funds for temple, school; school later expanded

- Demands grew to open Sanskrit school, eventually allowing exams

From the year the Yogam was established, Kumaran Asan, M. Govindan, Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panicker, and others consistently demanded both within and outside the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha that admission be granted to the Sanskrit school located within the fort. As a result of these pressures, in 1908, permission was granted to appear for the Shastri (ശാസ്ത്രീ) examination conducted by the Sanskrit school. Again, the demand for opening the Sanskrit school to everyone grew stronger in society.

- Sanskrit education expanded with inclusive vision

In 1914-15, the Sanskrit school was upgraded to a college, and in 1916-17, the Sanskrit College was relocated from East Fort and opened to all communities. In 1912, Sree Narayana Guru established the Advaita Ashram in Aluva. The Guru wished to have a well-equipped Sanskrit school with a hostel there. Due to financial constraints, it took years to realise this. The inauguration of the Sanskrit Vidyalaya of the Aluva Advaita Ashram could finally take place on 2nd Chingam 1090 (1914). A news report in Deshabhimani in 1918 stated: "Currently, a temporary building has been constructed in the Mutt directly west of the railway station, where a Sanskrit school is being run. It currently has six classes and seven teachers. The curriculum is based on that of the Thiruvananthapuram Sanskrit College. Of the six classes, the highest, the sixth class, is the Shastri class. This year, 12 students from here are appearing for the Shastri examination in Thiruvananthapuram. Malayalam and English are also taught as subsidiary languages." In April 1918, Diwan Krishnan Nair inaugurated the Aluva Advaita Ashram Sanskrit School. The Diwan had also promised in the Praja Sabha that a grant would be provided to the school. In 1919, Kumaran Asan, who resigned as the Yogam Secretary, was appointed manager of the Sanskrit school.

- Hymns guided deeper spiritual understanding

Guru's intervention did not stop with temple consecration. He also composed hymns that clearly articulated the nature of the deity or principle to be contemplated. Furthermore, he insisted that temples include clean, open spaces for quiet evening reflection, and libraries containing inspirational works. His aim was to transform centres of worship into centres of knowledge.

- Temples symbolised clarity over ritual darkness

The Śāradā [ശാരദാ] consecration at Śivagiri and the kannāḍi-pratiṣṭha [കണ്ണാടിപ്രതിഷ്ഠ] at Kalavankode stand as luminous examples. The latter was not planned in advance but emerged as a creative resolution to disputes among trustees. Guru managed not only to mediate the conflict but also to



convert it into a learning moment. In designing the Śāradā temple, Guru demanded a structure free from inner darkness—symbolised architecturally with glass windows on all sides of the sanctum. The spiritual insight is clear: when the inner temple of the body is illuminated from within, true ātma-prakāśa (light of the Self) can be experienced.

However, Guru also saw the need for formal education for the younger generation. With the aim of nurturing the deep roots of Indic culture and offering inspiration for its sustenance, Guru himself established and ran a Sanskrit pāṭhaśālā [പാഠശാല]...

Sreenarayana Guru's Message: "You Must Truly Become Literate"

(This message, encouraging "education and progress," was issued in 1910. Sreenarayana Guru delivered it as a response to a felicitation address presented by the Vijnanavardhini Sabha of Cherai.)

- Community urged to embrace learning fully

Sreenarayana Guru stated that at that time, very few individuals in their community possessed a high level of education. He observed that over the past few years, members of their community had developed an inclination towards education, which he found gratifying. Since education elevates any community to higher paths, he urged that if they desired the community's progress, they should strive to widely promote education among themselves.

He acknowledged that not everyone might be able to pass high-level examinations. Therefore, he encouraged those with some financial means to generously support poor yet academically inclined students, sending them to other regions for their studies. He believed this would be beneficial to their community in many ways. Guru also noted the decreasing importance attributed to Sanskrit education, highlighting that English was then the predominant language. Consequently, he advised them to focus their attention on English. Furthermore, he stressed that education should be available not only to men but also to women within the community, urging that women should not be held back in such matters.

- Women's education deemed equally essential

- Education followed by enterprise ensured growth

Guru then asserted that after education, industry was essential for the community's progress, as their financial situation was very poor. He stated that financial prosperity could not be achieved without engaging in industries. In this regard too, he believed that the attention of the wealthy was crucial. He suggested that only the affluent would largely be able to procure

various machinery and engage in or facilitate handicrafts. If one individual found it difficult, he advised several people to form a company and boldly undertake such ventures.

He observed that although paths to prosperity lay directly before them, members of their community hesitated to embark upon them. He cited the example of large quantities of copra and coir produced in their region being sent to other countries, where they were processed and then bought back at significantly higher prices. He explained that this situation arose because they lacked the knowledge of how to process these materials themselves. To remedy this, he recommended that their children should be sent to industrial establishments for training, again noting this as a responsibility for the wealthy. Additionally, he insisted that everyone should at least receive primary education. He also remarked that, in terms of financial standing within their community, those from Karthikappally taluk were considered the most prosperous.

- Education and industry linked for progress

Guru further advised that literary organisations and libraries should be established in every locality, as these would significantly contribute to the community's advancement in education. He urged every member of the community to appropriately strive for the strengthening of these literary organisations and libraries, stating that it was entirely insufficient for the wealthy to remain silent in such matters. He acknowledged that the Ezhava community in Kochi had received considerable freedom from the then Maharaja, and emphasized that it was their duty to utilise this freedom properly. He noted that the Maharaja's actions demonstrated great affection towards the lower castes.

- Libraries vital for educational advancement

Guru concluded by expressing his belief that their endeavour would progressively prosper and that they would remain enthusiastic in their efforts, trusting that their aspirations would be fulfilled in the near future.

This message, dating back to 1910, reveals an interesting tension. While Sreenarayana Guru advocated for “education and progress,” particularly encouraging higher education for both men and women and promoting industries for financial prosperity, some might interpret the emphasis on “doing business” as reflecting capitalist interests. Similarly, the suggestion that oppressed communities should “get a little more education” rather than loudly demanding rights could be seen as having a bourgeois undertone. It is suggested that when Guru offered this well-intentioned advice, with a heart

- Industrial push echoed emerging bourgeois values



brimming with affection, he might not have realised he was venturing into what could be seen as the ‘dualistic’ bourgeois nationalism prevalent in Kerala at the time.

Sreenarayana Guru’s educational philosophy transcended the conventional scope of establishing mere schools and colleges, aiming instead for a profound cultural transformation of society. At its core, his vision stipulated that education should foster complete human development, extending far beyond mere economic advancement. He posited that cultural refinement was as crucial as academic knowledge, advocating for a holistic approach to learning. A cornerstone of his philosophy was the unwavering commitment to universal access to all forms of knowledge, including historically restricted sacred texts that were traditionally denied to large sections of society. This comprehensive outlook sought to liberate individuals through knowledge, contrasting sharply with systems that merely prepared them for employment. His vision emphasised that spiritual centres should inherently become learning centres, actively breaking down cultural barriers through enlightened understanding.

- Spiritual centres transformed into knowledge hubs

Furthermore, Guru envisioned an educational ecosystem that integrated worship and learning, transforming temples into dynamic educational hubs. He championed a model built on collective effort combined with individual striving, ensuring that societal progress was a shared responsibility while nurturing personal intellectual growth. Crucially, he advocated for freedom from sectarian limitations within educational institutions, promoting an inclusive environment for all seekers of knowledge. Guru critically observed that modern education, regrettably, often prepared individuals not for genuine freedom, but for an ‘excellence in servitude’, making them ‘sophisticated servants’ rather than intellectually liberated beings. His philosophy thus underscored the necessity of imparting practical wisdom alongside theoretical knowledge, ensuring education led to tangible self-improvement and societal benefit.

- Worship and learning merged in education vision

Sreenarayana Guru’s answer to the enduring question – “Does education truly free us, or does it merely make us sophisticated servants?” – was unequivocal: true education must lead to *jīvitotkarṣa*, the complete upliftment of human life in all its dimensions. This holistic vision permeates his teachings and actions. He personally exemplified this commitment, believing that every moment could be utilised to guide people towards self-improvement. He consistently

- Education must uplift all aspects of life

ensured that even his simplest actions served to illuminate the path of knowledge for those around him, reflecting his profound and intense desire for every individual to become truly knowledgeable and self-reliant. His comprehensive educational model therefore remains profoundly relevant today, offering insights into fostering genuine liberation and integral human development through enlightened learning.

4.2.2 Key Principles of Guru's Educational Philosophy

1. Education should aim for complete human development, not merely economic advancement
2. Cultural refinement is as important as academic knowledge
3. Universal access to all forms of knowledge, including traditionally restricted texts
4. Integration of worship and learning - temples as educational centres
5. Collective effort combined with individual striving
6. Freedom from sectarian limitations in educational institutions
7. Practical wisdom alongside theoretical knowledge

Sree Narayana Guru's educational vision was far more comprehensive than establishing schools and colleges. He sought to create a complete cultural transformation where:

- Education liberates rather than merely employs
- Spiritual centres become learning centres
- Cultural barriers are broken through knowledge
- Human organisations transcend narrow sectarian interests

Guru believed that every moment could be used to guide people towards self-improvement. He insisted that even his simplest actions should illuminate the path of knowledge for those around him. This shows his intense desire for everyone to become knowledgeable.

However, Guru also had a clear vision for how to provide formal education to the younger generation. We've already seen how he established and ran a Sanskrit school to nurture



Eastern culture, which he saw as the root sustaining life. Nataraja Guru couldn't describe it without emotion how Guru himself cooked and served payasam (a sweet dish) to the children studying there.

- Western and traditional learning seen as complementary

Understanding that Western-style education, with its emphasis on universal knowledge, helps life flourish, Guru also encouraged it. He set up an English school at Sivagiri, named 'Model School'. Guru viewed these two institutions as symbols of two complementary cultures that should be embraced together. Unfortunately, his followers weren't able to grasp Guru's profound insight or advance these educational initiatives as he intended. In fact, the model institutions he started even declined into mere third-rate schools. Nevertheless, Guru's educational vision remains a valuable resource for future possibilities.

- Schools and ashrams meant as replicable models

Guru didn't intend for his educational efforts to end with just one Advaita Ashram school and one Model School. Instead, he envisioned these as models. He proposed that branches of the Advaita Ashram, along with their associated assemblies (sabhas) and schools, should be established in every region. He also specified that these should be led by individuals who are learned, sage-like, generous, impartial, calmly profound, self-controlled, benevolent, compassionate, truthful, capable, and virtuous.

When a lawyer failed to draft a code of conduct for the Aluva Advaita Ashram, Guru himself penned five verses titled "Ashramam" (The Ashram), saying, "We can make the Ashram rules ourselves."

- Guru penned "Ashramam" rules, advocating selfless leadership

Just as it is here, schools, ashrams, and assemblies should be established for women and men separately in every direction. In each of these, there should be a discerning leader. These should always be affiliated with the Advaita Ashram.

Here, we see Guru's perspective on how schools should be run. It's clear that Guru was adamant that the administration of schools should never fall into the hands of those greedy for wealth, but rather be a sphere of service for selfless individuals.

4.2.2.1 Educational Psychology and Child Rearing

Guru was also acutely aware of educational methods and related psychological issues, as seen in his work, 'Narayana Smriti'. Instead of writing it himself, he had his disciple, Atmananda Swami, pen this text in the form of smriti (recollections). Guru considered the Gurukula system to be the

- Gurukula system upheld as ideal education model

most ideal method of education. By suggesting that students live and learn in a Gurukula, dedicated to serving their Guru, he highlighted the importance of the Guru-disciple relationship in acquiring knowledge. Guru himself ran the Aluva Advaita Ashram as a model Gurukula, where Gurus and disciples lived and learned together. He didn't just preach these principles; he put them into practice. Guru wished for this type of education to become universal. He also suggested that local assemblies (desasabhas) should bear the educational expenses of students from impoverished families. If the parents of a brahmachari are poor, the local assembly itself must duly uphold his vow of brahmacharya.

4.2.2.2 The Role of Parents and Caregivers

The role of parents in education is well-known. To ensure a child grows into a cultured and mentally strong individual, Guru specifically advised that the mother should observe brahmacharya (chastity/celebrity) during pregnancy, as soon as the child is conceived. The child, once it has appeared in the womb, should observe brahmacharya. For that purpose, the mother should live in brahmacharya during pregnancy. A woman who is endowed with good character and conduct, free from illness, compassionate, and possessing grace and humility, should care for the child. When the mother herself directly cares for the child, she is obliged to embody these virtues. The child should be laid on a clean and soft bed, well-spread, in a beautiful inner part of the house, surrounded by pure objects. Undesirable words or things, inauspicious news, insults, or arrogance should not be displayed in front of the child. We should reflect on whether parents today pay even a little attention to these matters.

- Mother's character seen as child's first lesson

Until the age of five, the wet nurse herself should raise the child. She should caress him, give him encouragement, and attend to his wishes. She should tell stories of great people, speak with clear pronunciation, give pure food, dress him in clean clothes and ornaments, and raise him carefully.

- Parental affection prioritised over material display

Here, Guru makes it clear how meticulously a mother or wet nurse should shape the young mind. Sadly, many parents today lack the time to even give their children a little affection, let alone pay attention to these guidelines. Perhaps they compensate for these shortcomings by unnecessarily dressing their children in extravagant clothes. Guru also reminds parents and caregivers that they should remember the child's brahmacharya until the child reaches the Gurukula for education.



- Guru warned against outsourcing early upbringing

Until the child reaches the Gurukula, the caregiver and the parents should remember his vow of brahmacharya. While creating an environment for the child to grow, ensuring their mental and physical health, Guru also advised that children up to the age of five should not be treated as subordinates but as divine beings. At the same time, the mother herself should make a conscious effort to cultivate their intellect. Until the age of five, the child should be treated with love, like a deity. Until then, the mother herself should cultivate his intellect. When parents hand over the right to cultivate this unique maternal attitude, love, and intellectual development to nurseries and preschools, they might gain more freedom, but they unknowingly raise children who lack a sense of independence. These represent a selection of the significant philosophies expounded by the Guru, articulated through his extensive writings and direct verbal exchanges with disciples on various occasions.

4.2.2.3 The Importance of the Guru-Disciple Relationship

The profound concentration required in the Guru-disciple relationship during the period of brahmacharya is highlighted by the directive that a brahmachari, if visiting home, should only go with the Guru. Otherwise, even a single home visit could uproot the good tendencies nurtured in the mind through long and dedicated training.

- Education linked with ethical discipline

A brahmachari residing in the Gurukula, if desiring to visit his home, should, being devoted to the Guru, go with the Guru at the appointed time. Guru also stipulated that the knowledge gained should be beneficial both in this world and the next. Along with learning, students should practice virtuous conduct and observances. He emphasized strict adherence to the Five Virtues (Dharma Panchakam): non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satyam), non-stealing (asteyam), fidelity (avyabhicharam), and abstinence from alcohol (madhyavarjanam). He also stressed the Five Purities (Shuddhi Panchakam): bodily purity (deha shuddhi), speech purity (vak shuddhi), mental purity (mana shuddhi), sensory purity (indriya shuddhi), and domestic purity (griha shuddhi).

4.2.3 The Essence of Guru's Educational Philosophy

Education is primarily aimed at the cultivation of knowledge. In verses 36 to 42 of 'Ātmopadeśa Śatakamm',

- Knowledge has transformative and organising power

Guru elaborates on the infinite power of knowledge, how it can lead us to both difficult and balanced states, and how to organize it to achieve one's goals. Going into the intricate details of these verses would constitute a lengthy study, so we won't delve into them here. However, it's worth noting that these very verses from 'Ātmopadeśa Śatakamm' formed the basis for the educational psychology text that led to Nataraja Guru being honoured with a doctorate by the Sorbonne University in Paris. This gives us an idea of the profound educational psychological principles hidden within Narayana Guru's work. Those interested are recommended to read Nataraja Guru's book, 'The World Education Manifesto'.

- Narayana Guru's philosophy integrated education as lifelong learning

It's clear that Narayana Guru's unique educational philosophy, which meticulously considered everything from the subtle workings of knowledge to the practical aspects of teaching and school administration, and demonstrated how to bring them into reality, was an integral part of his comprehensive life philosophy. Guru didn't just view education as a formal, planned system. His educational vision was expansive, encompassing the entire process of life as a continuous learning experience.

In the article 'Education from Guru's Perspective' by Dr. T.K. Raveendran We observe in Guru's teachings a continuation of the ancient Indian concept that the paramount goal of education is inner purification and the attainment of human perfection. His very acceptance of the Guru's position was a realisation of this educational ideal. The syllable 'Gu' (ഗു) is said to represent darkness, and 'Ru' (രു) light. The Guru Gita (ഗുരു ഗീത) defines the word 'Guru' as "the Brahman that consumes ignorance." It was in this very sense that the great poet Kumaran Asan extolled Gurudeva:

- Guru's teachings align with ancient Indian education goals

ആരായുകിലന്യതമൊഴിച്ചാദിമഹസ്സിൻ
 നേരാംവഴികാട്ടും ഗുരുവല്ലോ പരദൈവം
 ആരാധ്യനതോർത്തീടുകിൽ ഞങ്ങൾക്കവിടുന്നാം
 നാരായണമൂർത്തേ ഗുരുനാരായണമൂർത്തേ

Upon contemplation, is not the Guru, who removes blindness and shows the true path to the primordial light, indeed the Supreme Deity? Realising this, for us, you are the revered Narayana Murthi, Guru Narayana Murthi.

Sreenarayana Guru's philosophy profoundly redefined the term 'Guru' as an individual dedicated to global upliftment through direct instruction. He himself exemplified this role,



- True Guru uplifts humanity through lived spiritual wisdom

serving as a revered preceptor who consecrated his life, body, and spiritual austerities for the benefit of humanity. His literary contributions, such as *Daiva Dashakam* and *Atmopadesha Shatakam*, gained recognition as profound Upaniṣadic wisdom, precisely because they emanated from a true spiritual master, a giver of knowledge. Echoing the ancient dictum that spiritual transformation can occur through mere proximity to a Guru, as stated by Shankara Acharya regarding the ability to transmute base metal into gold, Guru's profound spiritual power was evident. This transformative influence enabled the writings of his devoted disciple, Kumaran Asan, to attain enduring renown and lasting impact.

- Spiritual education for world service through renunciants.

Guru's comprehensive educational philosophy championed the flourishing of both spiritual and material education. He meticulously devised a unique strategy for imparting knowledge of the Absolute (*Brahmavidya*). Central to this plan was the cultivation of a dedicated cadre of renunciants, individuals committed to serving the world as their life's vow. Guru recognised that conventional communal and political organisations often lacked the capacity to work for or effectively propagate universal, eternal ideas and enduring values. To address this void, he sought to establish a lineage of individuals possessing a deep understanding of and fervent interest in spiritual matters. His message clearly articulated this vision: "Select enthusiastic young men, accept them as celibate students, educate them, and then grant renunciation to those with the right mindset and qualifications, sending them forth to strive for the welfare of others." Through this distinct initiative, Guru consciously separated the branch of spiritual wisdom (*Brahmavidya*) from the mainstream of general education, establishing a specialised path for spiritual leadership.

- Guru championed education for all, urging support for women

Sreenarayana Guru also functioned as a material preceptor, instrumental in awakening a large, historically downtrodden, and suffering segment of Kerala's population. He guided them towards progress with the potent mantra, "Knowledge is Power." His commitment to education was so profound that even during temple consecrations, he conspicuously ignited the lamp of knowledge before the people. In 1912, following a consecration ceremony at the Pallipuram temple in Kochi, Guru delivered a pivotal message. He declared that while there were few highly educated individuals in their community, he was gratified to observe a burgeoning interest in education over recent years. He asserted that since education guides any community towards upliftment, efforts must be made to widely

promote it for the community's advancement. Recognising that not everyone could achieve high-level academic success, he urged the affluent to support poor, academically inclined students, even by sending them to other regions for studies, deeming this highly beneficial. He also noted the diminishing importance of Sanskrit, advocating for a focus on English as the then-prevalent language, and critically stressed the importance of education for women, urging that they should not be held back.

- Education, especially for women, combats ignorance and elevates society.

This address served as a clarion call against the pervasive absence of education. Guru viewed ignorance as a calamity akin to caste, perpetually keeping communities downtrodden and suffering. He believed that inner refinement, achieved through education, would empower the deprived, making them eligible for wealth acquisition and higher-status employment, thereby also enabling their participation in governance. Consequently, Guru advised families to educate their own children and, if feasible, even poor children from their neighbourhood, emphasizing that no sacrifice was too great for this cause. Significantly, he placed particular emphasis on women's education, recognising it as an indispensable foundation for the creation of a truly virtuous and equitable society.

- Guru prioritised schools over temples, transforming tradition

Sreenarayana Guru, in his transformative vision for societal progress, challenged conventional approaches to education and religious practice. He notably rejected traditional educational institutions and, on certain occasions, even existing centres of religious worship. A compelling illustration of this stance occurred when the Ezhava community of Mezhuveli invited Guru for a temple consecration. Upon observing the stone idol in a phallic form intended for consecration, he famously inquired, "Is this good to eat?" When the organisers regretfully clarified its purpose, Guru firmly asserted, "Temples are no longer needed; schools are." He then directly instructed them to clear a nearby traditional serpent grove and establish an English school there, which later evolved into the Moothoor Memorial High School. The profound revolutionary significance of converting a site of revered local tradition into a modern educational institution, by severing the roots of blind custom, marked a pivotal moment in the Kerala Renaissance.

Guru's emphasis on English education and technical training stemmed from his acute understanding that these were indispensable for accelerating material progress. He recognised these as distinguishing features of those in positions of power, asserting that acquiring such knowledge was crucial for gaining



- English, technical skills, and industry drive community prosperity

influence and initiating new industrial ventures for prosperity. This conviction was clearly articulated during the Pallipuram temple consecration, where he stated: "After education, what is most essential for community advancement is industry. Without industry, financial prosperity is impossible. In this matter too, the attention of the wealthy should be focused. Only the wealthy can largely bring in various machinery and facilitate handicrafts. If an individual cannot do so, companies should be established to courageously undertake the necessary actions in this regard." He lamented that despite clear paths to prosperity, members of his community often hesitated to pursue them, highlighting the practice of exporting abundant local produce like copra and coir, only to re-import the processed goods at a significantly higher cost due to a lack of indigenous manufacturing knowledge.

- Send children to factories, provide primary education, establish libraries

To remedy this economic disparity, Guru advised: "To address this, we must send our children to industrial factories to learn. This too is the duty of the wealthy." Beyond this specific focus on technical skills and industrial development, he insisted that everyone should receive at least primary education. Furthermore, he advocated for the establishment of literary associations and libraries in every locality, underscoring their vital role in fostering educational progress within the community. This holistic approach underscored his belief that intellectual and vocational development, supported by accessible learning resources, was fundamental to collective societal upliftment and empowerment.

- Education for inner refinement and material, practical progress

From these pronouncements, Sreenarayana Guru's comprehensive educational philosophy clearly emerges, defining its goals as encompassing not only the inner refinement of human beings but also their external, material progress. His perspective was that education is not merely 'for life' in a spiritual sense, but equally 'for living' in a practical, worldly context. While ancient preceptors primarily aimed for mental refinement and the liberation of the soul through education, and figures like Vivekananda focused on cultivating good human beings, Guru's integrated view held that education achieves its completeness only when both self-upliftment and physical upliftment are attained. He posited that while spiritual values such as religious devotion, morality, and belief in human dignity are fundamental, acting as the foundation, financial prosperity forms the crucial superstructure necessary for a fulfilling material existence.

Guru eloquently illustrated this by stating that a building

- Spirituality, productivity, and skill development for a complete life

with only a foundation cannot support essential activities like eating, sleeping, and raising a family. Therefore, his educational aim was to cultivate a material life solidly built upon a robust foundation of spirituality. This forward-thinking approach finds resonance with modern educational thinkers, including the principles espoused in India's new National Education Policy (NEP). The NEP considers education as the primary means of human resource development, asserting that while incorporating modern technology, education must unequivocally emphasise productivity. Thus, contemporary educational thought aligns with Guru's vision that the standard of education should be measured by the learner's productivity, advocating for an approach that is both value-based and focused on skill development. It is striking how Sreenarayana Guru, with his farsighted vision, conceptualised the essence of such modern educational policies over 85 years ago, a testament to his enduring relevance and foresight.

4.2.4 Education as a Human Right

Dr. L. Vinayakumar, in his article 'Sree Narayana Guru and the Creation of Modern Kerala,' extensively discusses the pivotal role of education as a fundamental human right. For three-quarters of a century, despite various policy formulations by the Travancore government in the education sector, the majority of government schools systematically denied admission to those outside the traditional four-fold caste system. The government frequently cited shifting justifications for this exclusion. Initially, a derogatory stance claimed that the Ezhava community, a prominent non-upper caste group, was primarily interested in occupations like toddy tapping, not education, and was therefore deemed undeserving of government positions that conferred honour and status, as evidenced by a reply to the 'Malayali Memorial.' Subsequently, the government prioritised caste customs, arguing that admitting Ezhava students would disrupt the established social relations sustained by the privileges and traditions of upper-caste communities.

- Government denied education to lower castes, citing various excuses

- Government made excuses to deny education to lower caste girls

Later, the government adopted the rather weak justification that state schools were inaccessible to non-upper caste communities due to unfavourable opinions from upper-caste groups. Another reason frequently invoked for denying admission was the 'proximity' of tens of thousands of upper-caste temples, sacred groves, and palaces scattered across the region. Furthermore, the government rigidly maintained for an extended period that girls from non-upper caste communities



would under no circumstances be admitted to schools attended by upper-caste girls. The specific rationale for this particular discrimination against girls was never explicitly stated by the government. However, the underlying reason was likely the abhorrent notion that the body and menstruation of a non-upper caste girl could somehow pollute upper-caste girls and, by extension, their families.

During this period when access to government schools was severely restricted, Christian missionary schools emerged as a crucial avenue for non-upper caste communities to receive education.

By 1904, the LMS Mission alone operated 384 schools, enrolling 15,641 students. The CMS Mission similarly ran 290 schools with 13,148 students, while Catholic missionaries managed 35 English vernacular schools and an additional 285 schools specifically for converts. Statistical data from the early 20th century further highlights the educational disparities. In 1901, out of 491,774 individuals in the Ezhava community, only 35,920 were literate. In stark contrast, among the Nair community, numbering 520,941, literacy stood significantly higher at 112,710. Enrollment figures for 1903-04 further illustrate the divide: Ezhavas had 23,496 students, Nairs 60,417, and Christians led with 62,937. Other communities also showed limited enrollment: Pulayas 1,538, Parayas 2,200, Channars 6,732, and Muslims 7,862. During this period, the educational infrastructure in Travancore comprised 25 high schools, 35 middle schools, 92 upper primary schools, and 3,525 lower primary schools. Additionally, 4 high schools, 40 middle schools, 22 upper primary schools, and 116 lower primary schools operated exclusively for girls.

By 1903-04, the number of schools operating with special grants and fee concessions for historically disadvantaged communities, initiated in 1894-95, had grown to 480. The majority of these were established by missionaries primarily for backward communities who had converted. However, a significant restriction was imposed in 1904, narrowing the 'backward communities' category to include only the Pulayan, Parayan, Pallan, Kuravan, Paravan, Thandan, Maraykkan, Mukkavan, Kammalan, and Kanikkanmar groups, explicitly excluding Ezhavas, Muslims, Channars, and converts from these special benefits. Subsequently, a more inclusive order in 1914 granted special fee concessions to Muslims and stipulated that the government would provide full salaries to teachers in Muslim primary schools. In 1902, the curriculum in Travancore underwent a reform, establishing a four-tiered system: Lower Primary, Upper Primary, Middle School, and

- Travancore education policy evolved, restricting some groups

High School. While the local language served as the medium of instruction at the primary levels, English could be introduced as a second language from the third grade upwards, eventually becoming the main medium of instruction in High School, with Malayalam as the second language.

- Guru initiated Kerala's educational reform, inspiring lasting change

Sreenarayana Guru emerged as a singularly instrumental figure in driving profound educational changes across Kerala's socio-political landscape during the early 20th century. His visionary leadership and strategic interventions sparked a surge of reform movements and innovations, fundamentally reshaping access to knowledge and societal structures. The significant impact of numerous legendary reformers and scholars who followed, and indeed collaborated with him, can be directly traced to the enduring lineage of Guru's insightful musings and transformative teachings. His work laid the intellectual and practical groundwork for a new era, dismantling traditional barriers and fostering an environment where education became a powerful tool for social justice and human emancipation.

- SNDP Yogam championed universal primary education for Ezhavas

The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam) was formally registered as a charitable institution on 22 May 1903. The first issue of its magazine, 'Vivekodayam', was released in April-May 1904. At the Yogam's inaugural annual conference in February 1904, the General Secretary, Kumaran Asan, read an essay by Dr. Palpu, the Vice-President, which forcefully underscored the transformative power of education. Dr. Palpu declared, "No community achieves lasting progress or civilisation without education. There should be no man or woman in our community who lacks at least a primary education. For this, we, through the Yogam, and each individual in their respective localities, must strive. An 'Ezhava man' or an 'Ezhava woman' should mean someone who can at least read and write."

4.2.4.1 Advocacy for Educational Rights

From the very inception of 'Vivekodayam', Kumaran Asan, in his editorial notes, consistently and forcefully addressed the systemic issues faced by Ezhavas, particularly concerning their educational rights. In the June 1904 issue, he drew the government's attention to the malicious attempts by certain officials to deny Ezhavas school admissions. He explicitly noted that it was due to officials, like a particular inspector, who believed that Ezhavas could study only if local people desired it, or else be damned, that other castes expressed reluctance when

- Asan fought for Ezhava school admission, especially girls



Ezhavas were eventually admitted in places like Haripad and Paravoor. In an editorial titled ‘The Grievances of the Ezhava Community’ in the October-November 1904 issue, Kumaran Asan acknowledged that while the government’s 1904 decision to exclude Ezhavas from the backward communities’ special grant (which had covered primary education costs since 1894-95) resulted in a loss of three-quarters of the grant for Ezhava schools, he would welcome such a measure if its purpose was to facilitate universal admission for Ezhavas into all government schools. He lamented, “However, it is a great misfortune that our children are still denied admission to most Malayalam schools. It can be said that they are not admitted to any government girls’ schools... An order should be issued to admit Ezhavas to all government schools without any distinction.”

- Praja Sabha empowered non-upper castes

With the establishment of the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, non-upper caste communities gained a platform to voice their concerns. Kumaran Asan powerfully articulated the demands of the Ezhava community, with efforts expanding to include Pulaya representatives from 1912.

- Asan demanded Ezhava school admission

In his inaugural address to the Praja Sabha, Kumaran Asan demanded admission for Ezhavas to all government schools. Despite a promising response from the Diwan, district administrators’ replies were largely unfavorable, often recommending separate schools based on “tradition.” Kumaran Asan, through ‘Vivekodayam’, sharply criticized this stance, reminding officials that they “should be rulers of the people, not of caste.”

- Diwan allowed Ezhava boys, denied girls

In 1907, M. Govindan, representing the Yogam, eloquently argued that public-funded schools must be open to all castes without discrimination. He submitted a petition co-signed by 64 members, demanding universal admission. Diwan S. Rajagopalachari eventually agreed to admit Ezhava boys to most vernacular schools, but denied entry for girls. Kumaran Asan accused Travancore of consistent reluctance, highlighting “proximity to temples and palaces” as a pretext. Though the Diwan agreed to relocate some schools, Asan criticized the cost and injustice of such measures, asserting that public funds should not cater to caste animosity.

- Ezhava boys gained school access, some exceptions

By 1908, an order allowed Ezhava boys into most vernacular schools, with 51 exceptions slated for relocation. The Yogam then petitioned for free primary education and reduced fees in higher schools, seeking similar grants to those received by

Muslim schools. The government, however, deemed Ezhavas too “advanced” for special assistance. In 1909, Kumaran Asan continued to demand equal rights, advocating for special schools for Ezhava girls if they remained excluded from existing ones.

- Education open to all, but access limited

By 1910, an education regulation theoretically allowed admission regardless of caste, yet girls’ schools and those near sacred sites often remained inaccessible. A government order permitting Pulaya admission sparked both community interest and upper-caste resentment.

The Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, established in October 1904, initially comprised entirely government-nominated members and met annually, serving as a platform for discussing local affairs. By May 1905, a new order expanded the assembly to 100 members, incorporating 66 elected representatives from constituencies, 5 from municipalities, 19 from various traders, planters, and organizations, and 10 government-nominated members. The government maintained the ability to nominate representatives from communities lacking elected representation, with such appointments varying over time. Despite an assembly largely dominated by the wealthy and landlords, the Praja Sabha marked a significant shift, allowing non-upper caste voices, notably Kumaran Asan from 1905 and Pulaya representatives from 1912, to articulate their concerns and influence public policy, thereby broadening the assembly’s popular character. Initially, Kumaran Asan was the sole representative of the Yogam, though Ezhava representation later expanded to up to 7 members, with occasional periods where the Yogam had no nominated representative. For the Pulaya community, representation, starting with Ayyankali, sometimes increased to up to 4 members. In 1905, constituency voters needed to meet specific property and income criteria, possess a degree, and own a house. Although some Ezhava landlords were present, their limited voter strength often hindered their election, though some received direct government nomination. From 1907, members’ speeches were restricted to two topics annually with prior permission, and community representatives were limited to their designated scope. Each session commenced with the Diwan’s introductory speech, with V.P. Madhava Rao serving as Diwan in 1905. While three Ezhava landlords were nominated to the Praja Sabha in 1904, the Yogam initially lacked a representative, a point Kumaran Asan highlighted through ‘Vivekodayam’, leading to his nomination as the Yogam’s representative in the 1905 Praja Sabha.



In his inaugural address to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha in 1905, Kumaran Asan unequivocally demanded the admission of Ezhavas to all government schools. The Diwan promised action, leading four Ezhava representatives to jointly petition him, outlining their community's concerns. These petitions were forwarded to the district administrators of all three districts for their opinions, whose replies were overwhelmingly unfavorable to Ezhavas. This response highlighted the deep intertwining of bureaucracy and caste dominance, with public servants largely serving upper-caste interests. The Thiruvananthapuram district administrator, for instance, obscured the widespread denial of admission, claiming Ezhava access to public schools while conceding Sanskrit schools were inaccessible. He suggested that obstacles should be removed only according to "tradition and custom" and recommended separate schools for non-upper caste Hindus. In an October-November 1905 editorial in 'Vivekodayam', Kumaran Asan expressed astonishment at officials' "despicable policy of imposing various taxes... while clinging to 'tradition' when discussing our rights," powerfully reminding them that "officials should be rulers of the people, not of caste."

The struggle continued into 1907 when M. Govindan, representing the Yogam in the Praja Sabha, eloquently argued that public-funded government schools should not be reserved for a few castes but open to all without discrimination. He submitted a petition, co-signed by 64 respected members from various communities, demanding universal Ezhava admission. Diwan S. Rajagopalachari responded by confirming Ezhava boys' access to all government English schools and most vernacular boys' schools (excluding those near temples or palaces), but deemed admission for Ezhava girls to vernacular girls' schools infeasible. Kumaran Asan, through 'Vivekodayam', vehemently criticized Travancore's reluctance, labelling "proximity to temples and palaces" as a pretext. Though the Diwan eventually agreed to relocate some denying schools, Asan critically observed in 'Vivekodayam' that "no government school in Travancore [is] located in 'sacred' places where Ezhavas cannot enter" and that such costly relocations would waste public funds to "honour caste animosity." The government maintained that compulsory admission of Ezhavas to 'high-caste' girls' schools was impossible, offering assistance if Ezhavas established their own. On April 30, 1908, an order allowed Ezhava boys into all state vernacular boys' schools, except for 51 specified schools whose buildings would be relocated. On May 14, 1908, the Yogam petitioned for free primary education, full grants for primary schools, 50% fee reductions in middle and high schools, and extended grants for hostels and education similar to those for Muslims. The government replied that Ezhavas had progressed beyond needing such special assistance, a consideration reserved for "educationally backward" communities like Muslims. In 1909, Kumaran Asan, as the Yogam representative, demanded equal taxpayer rights and advocated for separate, fully-funded schools for the "five hundred thousand Ezhavas" as long as they were denied entry to existing girls' schools. By 1910, an education regulation theoretically permitted admission to any school regardless of caste or religion, yet girls' schools and those near sacred sites largely remained closed to non-upper caste individuals. A subsequent government order permitting Pulaya boys and girls into government schools simultaneously generated interest within the Pulaya community and resentment among upper-caste individuals.

4.2.4.2 The Fight for Access and Rights

Diwan Rajagopalachari controversially accused Ezhavas of being as intensely casteist as other Hindus. As an illustration, he claimed that when attempts were made to admit a few Pulaya children to the Neyyattinkara school, most of the opposition came from Ezhavas. 'Vivekodayam' vehemently refuted this accusation with an editorial note, reporting: "When Pulayas gained admission to the Neyyattinkara school, Ezhava children remained in the school, but all other upper-caste children got up and rushed out. However, the inspector became angry with the Ezhavas. He said, 'Ezhavas are not casteist, are they? Let them hereafter study in another building with the Pulayas,' and ordered that it be done. That 'punishment' lasted for a month." Following the order for Pulayas to be admitted to government schools, Ayyankali (1863-1941) famously attempted to secure admission for a young girl named Panchami at the Ooruttambalam school in Balaramapuram. This action incited severe violence from upper-caste Hindus against him and his followers, culminating in the school being set on fire and Pulayas being forced to flee en masse. As was common, the Pulayas were then implicated in government cases. During this turbulent period, caste clashes erupted in various parts of the state, including Neyyattinkara and its surrounding areas, Kanyakumari, Vaikom, and Thalayolaparambu, between Pulayas and upper-caste Hindus. The government also used a heavy hand to suppress the Pulayas' attempts at asserting their rights, including their fight for educational access.

- School integration attempts led to widespread caste violence

Ayyankali responded to the human rights violations perpetrated by the casteist landlords, who suppressed educational rights, by strategically employing the strike as a weapon of protest. This marked a pivotal moment, writing a golden chapter in the history of struggles by subaltern classes. Pulayas collectively withdrew their labour from the paddy fields of those who denied them the opportunity to study. The attempts by upper-caste Hindus to suppress this non-cooperation movement, spearheaded by Ayyankali in Venganur and its surrounding areas, proved unsuccessful. When the strike persisted for months, fundamentally challenging the supremacy of caste-based landlordism, upper-caste Hindus became alarmed. Many realised that the subaltern class was an indispensable component of their prosperity and that, in the changing circumstances, these communities also possessed civic rights. Consequently, a compromise was eventually reached, agreeing to no opposition regarding their freedom of

- Labour strike secured school access, despite ongoing challenges



movement and right to school admission, alongside provisions for higher wages. Although that particular struggle temporarily subsided, the systemic denial of educational rights to Pulayyas continued in many parts of the country.

Acquire Wealth and Knowledge – Narayana Guru

Under the esteemed presidency of Sree Narayana Guruswamithrippad, a large gathering of Pulayyas was convened at Muttathara in Thiruvananthapuram. During this assembly, the revered Swami imparted the following counsel: “All human beings belong to a single caste. Among them, there exists no distinction based on caste, only variations in socio-economic status. Such differences cannot, in fact, genuinely exist. Some individuals may possess greater wealth, education, cleanliness, and other attributes, whilst others may have less. The complexion of one person may differ from another’s. Aside from these superficial distinctions, there is no caste difference amongst human beings. Currently, the Pulayyas experience a significant deficit in both wealth and education. It is imperative that both these aspects are cultivated. Education is of paramount importance. With education, wealth and cleanliness will naturally follow. It is incorrect to claim that you lack money. Indeed, you yourselves are wealth embodied. There is not a single person among you who does not earn money through daily labour. However, at present, that income is squandered through alcohol consumption and other vices. If, from that income, each of you contributes even a single anna to a common fund every month, you can use those funds to educate your children. Without relying on external assistance, you are capable of achieving a great deal yourselves. Furthermore, everyone should gather in a public place each month to hold meetings, deliberate, and act upon necessary matters. Alcohol consumption should be ceased as far as possible. Children must no longer be permitted to drink alcohol, and even adults should endeavour to quit as much as they can. The primary purpose of such gatherings should be to discuss and implement measures to halt alcohol consumption and similar detrimental habits. Others will undoubtedly assist you. I look forward to meeting you frequently in the future.” – *Vivekodayam*, Chingam Issue 1096 ME (approximately August-September 1921).

It was in 1907 that Ayyankali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam (Association for the Protection of the Poor). His activities had been directly influenced by Sree Narayana Guru’s work since the Aruvippuram consecration in 1888, and later, a fraternal bond was established through personal acquaintance between the two leaders. Ayyankali received crucial assistance from the Yogam leaders, particularly M. Govindan, in organising the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam and drafting its constitution. Kumaran Asan also actively highlighted the representation of Pulayyas in the Praja Sabha. In 1911, the government granted permission for Pulayyas to send a representative to the Praja Sabha, and Ayyankali officially became a member in 1912. The government likely preferred a more contained Ayyankali within the assembly, who would articulate his views and engage in dialogue, rather than a rebellious and agitated figure outside. Ayyankali fully leveraged

- Ayyankali secured Pulaya representation and educational concessions

his legislative assembly membership to seek solutions for the Pulaya community's problems through established channels. In 1912, when Ayyankali convinced the Praja Sabha that only seven schools in South Travancore currently admitted Pulayas, the Diwan assured him that "Pulayas can join all schools where Ezhavas are allowed admission." When he pointed out that impoverished Pulayas were not receiving fee concessions, and even the concessions granted to the more advanced Muslims were denied to Pulayas, the Diwan gave a reassuring reply, stating that such concessions could also be extended to Pulayas.

- Government intervention opened schools, but caste attitudes persisted

The persistent pressure from non-upper caste Praja Sabha members actively prompted the government to intervene significantly in educational matters. Numerous schools that had previously denied admission to non-upper caste individuals, often citing proximity to temples and palaces as a pretext, were subsequently opened to Ezhavas and other backward castes following strong government intervention. An order was even issued to admit Ezhava girls to schools where upper-caste girls studied. However, the deeply ingrained attitudes of upper-caste Hindus continued to create problems in many localities. They were nominally included as Brahmins in their caste hierarchy. It was as if barbers and washers were detached from the local population by granting them special status for their own needs. Ayurvedic physicians maintained for Brahmins came to be known in history as 'Ashtavaidyans'.

4.2.4.3 Land and Education Denial

- Selfless Ezhava Ayurvedic practitioners provided free healthcare

Ezhava Ayurvedic families possessed the richest Ayurvedic tradition and Sanskrit language proficiency. Those who destroyed all traces of the Buddhist period could not eradicate the Ayurvedic scholarship and Sanskrit language proficiency among Ezhavas. S.N. Sadasivan notes that between AD 1860 and 1870, there were 21,000 Ezhava Ayurvedic practitioners. They were selfless healthcare providers who did not charge for their services.

- Historically, Ezhavas maintained Ayurvedic knowledge despite barriers

Kollatt Itti Achuthan Vaidyar, an Ezhava and Buddhist follower who lived in the 17th century, epitomised the Ayurvedic tradition of the Ezhavas. In the 19th and 20th centuries, there was a long line of Ezhava families who held prominent positions in the practice of Ayurveda. Most of them were also householder disciples of the Guru. As in ancient times, a section of Savarnas and the governments they controlled strenuously endeavoured to prevent Avarnas from accessing any process or institution that could provide intellectual development and



social status, even in the twentieth century.

Although the government started an Ayurvedic school in 1890, it did not provide opportunities for non-Savarna communities to study. It was only with the establishment of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam that Ezhavas were able to raise their voice demanding admission for all to the Ayurvedic school. Yogam leaders attempted to change government policy by raising their voices in conferences, submitting petitions to the government, writing editorials in *Vivekodayam*, and consistently raising the issue in the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha.

- SNDP Yogam championed inclusive Ayurvedic education access

In the June 1906 issue of *Vivekodayam*, Kumaran Asan's editorial note stated: "The Travancore government has already established and is operating an Ayurvedic school. Census reports and other documents state that Ezhavas are very respectable and proficient in medicine, astrology, Sanskrit studies, etc. Our government is not doing anything special to encourage their traditional talent and make it beneficial for them and the people. We pray that the authorities will now show kindness in this matter and permit Ezhava students to enter the Ayurvedic school."

- Asan urged government to admit Ezhavas to Ayurvedic school.

A note in *Vivekodayam* in October 1907 read: "Those who were denied admission to the Ayurvedic College are not allowed to study at other Ayurvedic schools and then appear for the government-conducted Ayurvedic examination. A young man from Kollam sent an application and money to appear for the Ayurvedic examination. His money was returned, and admission was denied, citing the reason that the application was not found."

- Ezhavas denied Ayurvedic exam; applications rejected unfairly

In February 1908, the Yogam representative, High Court lawyer M. Govindan, informed the government that Ezhavas were unable to graduate from the Ayurvedic school and expressed fear that Ezhavas might be driven out of the medical profession. He argued that due to government policy, the number of Ezhava physicians receiving grants for dispensaries had significantly decreased, and if the current situation continued, the lineage of Ezhava physicians would become extinct.

- Ezhava lawyer warned government: policies threaten Ezhava doctors' existence

Govindan also submitted a petition to the government, signed by 64 legislative members from various communities present in the assembly. The petition demanded that all government schools be opened to Ezhavas. The Diwan replied that since the Ayurvedic school was located in a place within the

- Government schools denied Ezhavas entry

fort that Ezhavas were not allowed to enter, it was impossible to admit Ezhava students there. However, the Diwan added that steps could be taken to allow them to appear for the Ayurvedic examination.

- 1908: Ezhavas allowed medical exams, causing venue “inconvenience.”

In 1908, an order was issued allowing Ezhava students to appear for the Travancore government’s medical examination. A note in the October 1908 issue of Vivekodayam stated: “The Travancore government’s medical examination will be held from Vrishika 24 to 29 at the Ayurvedic school and, if necessary, at a place to be determined then. This latter inconvenience arises because Ezhavas will also be appearing for the examination.”

- Asan urged relocating rented schools, accessible to Ezhavas

In November 1909, Kumaran Asan stated in the Praja Sabha: “It is not true that the Ayurvedic school and Sanskrit school are currently located in places where Ezhavas are not allowed to enter. The buildings they are currently in are not government property. The government is paying 60 rupees per month as rent for those buildings. Both schools should be relocated.”

In February 1913, Kumaran Asan stated in the Praja Sabha: “It is in no way justifiable that indigenous Ezhavas from Travancore should spend money and suffer to go to Madras or Kolkata or elsewhere to study Ayurveda, while other communities are given scholarships and taught Ayurveda here at government expense by establishing schools for them. He clarified that it was difficult for Ezhavas to be eligible for grants given to local dispensaries unless they studied at the Ayurvedic school and obtained a certificate”. In 1915, the Ayurvedic school was relocated and opened to Ezhavas. Kumaran Asan thanked the Praja Sabha for admitting all castes to the Ayurvedic school.

- Despite school entry, college access remained elusive for Avarṇas

4.2.4.4 Higher Education and Discrimination

For Avarṇas, who had fought to open one closed door after another in school education and entered the world of learning, higher education remained an insurmountable challenge. Between 1900 and 1930, there were a government college for girls in Thiruvananthapuram (His Highness Maharaja’s College Grade B), His Highness Maharaja’s College (Arts & Science College), and private colleges such as Aluva UC College, Changanassery St. Berchman’s College, Kottayam CMS College, and Nagercoil Scott Christian College.



- Higher education aid favoured upper castes, excluding Ezhavas

Even middle-class Ezhava families found it difficult to find the necessary funds to study far away or live in hostels. One had to sell or mortgage property to enable at least one family member to pursue higher education. Most families could not afford this luxury for even one person. From 1900 onwards, the Travancore government regularly provided scholarships and financial aid for higher education and foreign university education. However, most beneficiaries were Savarna castes, with a few Christians. Ezhavas were completely excluded. In 1900-01, the Travancore government provided three scholarships for advanced technical studies at European universities. The first was given to a caste Hindu to study medicine at Edinburgh University, and the other two scholarships were awarded to two Christian youths for further studies at Royal Colleges in London. The following year, another Savarna caste Hindu was given a government scholarship to study medicine in London. In 1902-03, a Savarna Hindu was sent to London at government expense to study advanced chemistry. In 1903-04, a Savarna Hindu youth also received financial assistance for further studies in Bombay.

- Petition demanded Ezhava school access; Diwan denied entry, allowed exams

In 1906, a note in Vivekodayam highlighted a stark disparity: “The government granted over 10,000 rupees for the son of a high official to study for the Indian Medical Service. Yet, P. Palpu, despite completing his Madras M.B.C.M. class, was denied his request for a six-month study period in England.”

Driven by his ambitious and clear vision, Sree Narayana Guru established numerous ashrams, temples, and educational institutions. From these centers, he effectively spread his ideals, offering his followers a three-point formula for societal development:

- Government denied Palpu’s study abroad request

- Freedom through Education
- Strength through Organization
- Economic Independence through Industries

- Guru consecrated Sivalingam, defying caste and religious prejudice

Sree Narayana Guru ignited a socio-cultural revolt in 1888 with his rebellious act of consecrating a Sivalingam at Aruvippuram. On the temple walls, he inscribed, “Here is a model abode, where we live like brothers, bereft of the prejudices of caste, or the rancour of religious differences.” This consecration by an individual considered “untouchable” was a revolutionary challenge to Brahminical privilege.

The greatest contribution of Narayana Guru was that he inculcated a sense of confidence and self-respect among the so

- Asan argued for Ezhava Ayurvedic education access

- Recap
Guru built temples for untouchables, aiming for knowledge centres

- Temples should be simple, communal, and educational centres

- SNDP Yogam founded for Ezhava education and industry

called low caste people and dispelled their sense of inferiority and backwardness. He challenged the monopoly of Brahmins over temples, their divine right to officiate as priests and perform pujas, by creating a parallel system of temples. He trained low caste men in priest-craft and appointed them as temple priests, and thus violated the caste culture. Within a decade, the Guru had established more than a hundred places of worship on the west coast of India. The important temples are at Cannanore, Tellecherry, Calicut, Mangalore, and Varkala. In all his temples people of all castes can worship without any restrictions.

He built temples to enable the untouchables to worship as it was denied to them. But the real purpose of building temples was to make them temples of knowledge. He and his followers went from door to door to propagate the need for education, to convince and coax parents to send their wards to school.

A Gurukulam and a Sanskrit school were also started at Aruvippuram to give religious training to young men of lower strata of the society through lessons in scriptures. The Guru made it clear that strict austerity should be maintained by avoiding expensive ornamental works in constructing temples, and expensive rituals in maintaining them. He also desired that besides the sanctum sanctorum, temples should have spacious ventilated rooms for the devotees to assemble for worship and to hold meetings. There should be gardens, bathing facilities, schools and space to impart industrial training to children and adults. He also desired that temples should conduct or arrange for talks, lectures and discourses on the need for education and other topics.

The birth of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (S.N.D.P.) Yogam is a milestone in the progress of Ezhavas. The Association for maintaining Aruvippuram temple was elevated to this status. An application for registering SNDP was made in Trivandrum on 8th January 1903 by P. Parameswaran and the license was granted by the Dewan in March. The main objective of SNDP was “to promote and encourage religious and secular education and industrious habits among the Ezhava community.” (In the application for the registration of SNDP it was mentioned as an organisation for all castes. The Govt. rejected it on the grounds that castes should not be brought together. Hence the word “Ezhava” had to be substituted in the place of “all castes”.)



- Guided by Guru, SNDP enlightened people on various matters

SNDP became a great social force. Though it was not caste based in nature, the whole community of Ezhavas was united under its banner. Thereupon SNDP took up the formal and informal education of the people, and struggle for social justice. The spiritual guidance of Sree Narayana Guru was always there. Eminent scholars and social workers like Kumaran Aasaan, Dr. Palpu, T.K. Madhavan, Sahodaran Ayyappan, C.V. Kunhiraman, C. Krishnan, M. Govindan etc. lined up behind the Guru to lead SNDP, in the name of the Guru. On the advice of the Guru, SNDP conducted regular lecture tours and enlightened the people on matters of religion, morality, health and industry.

- Ambedkar and Guru championed education for social liberation

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, unlike Narayana Guru, was exposed to western education and its influence. He too believed that there is no alternative to education for breaking the shackles of suppression. Like Narayana Guru, he established an organization, Bahiskrit Hitakarini Sabha, to mitigate the evils of the society and to promote the development of untouchables. Another organization, People's Education Society, was formed later for spreading education among the untouchables. An important aspect of the Guru's ideology and that of Dr. Ambedkar is the stress on modern education. Both of them had the firm faith that only through proper education and knowledge, the lower sections of Kerala and Maharashtra could liberate themselves from slavery. The Guru gave the people the slogan "Freedom through Education." He looked upon education not only as a means of getting jobs, but also as a tool to free the individual from the bonds of traditionalism, and as a weapon to fight social injustice. Ambedkar also held that intellectual emancipation will pave the way for economic progress, social elevation and political power. Both of them had the idea of conducting evening classes for the benefit of the toiling masses.

- Established inclusive temples, training lower-caste priests

- Leaders' methods differed due to varying socio-political contexts

Sree Narayana Guru's emphasis on organization positioned him as a precursor to Dr. Ambedkar in advocating for social change. Both leaders believed that organized effort was crucial for success in public endeavors. The Guru's mantra was "Educate, Organize, and Industrialize," while Ambedkar's was "Educate, Organize, and Agitate." This divergence in their final directive reflects the nearly thirty-year gap and the significant socio-political transformations that occurred between their times. When Narayana Guru urged industrialization, the "untouchables" in Kerala, under the Maharaja's rule, faced severe restrictions. They were denied entry to government

offices, let alone employment. Their meager earnings from agricultural labor barely sustained them, making economic development through industrialization their only viable path to independence. At this nascent stage, the concept of “agitation” was not yet prevalent. It was a time for learning to stand, not yet for running.

Summarized Overview

Sree Narayana Guru’s overarching ambition was the creation of a new world order where all individuals could coexist fraternally, free from the divisions of caste and the animosity of religion. This benevolent visionary identified two principal pathways to achieve this noble objective: spirituality and materialism. Guru’s philosophy represents a profound confluence where these two dimensions harmoniously intertwine. The essence of his vision, articulated through his teaching that all humans belong to one caste, lies in its practical application. The singular, unparalleled distinction of Guru’s philosophy on a global scale is its successful implementation, translating this profound ideal into tangible reality. It is fitting that the French philosopher Romain Rolland characterised this supremely pure and compassionate great Guru as an ascetic driven by action and knowledge. Guru unequivocally opposed all forms of discrimination, diligently formulating and implementing action plans designed to foster human betterment.

Knowledge, for Guru, was power. He profoundly understood that the absence of knowledge was the root cause of all forms of unfreedom, inequality, and oppressive practices prevalent in the world. This conviction led him to accord paramount importance to education. Guru was a veritable messenger of God, tirelessly travelling among the people, directly observing and understanding their suffering. He made it a point to inquire about children’s studies, lovingly encouraging them to pursue their education diligently with affectionate words and a gentle kiss on their forehead. He also consistently advised parents to ensure their children received a good education. The ancient axiom that knowledge is the path to liberation was not unfamiliar to Guru; however, he broadened its scope, revealing that education was indispensable not only for spiritual emancipation but also for achieving economic and social freedom in the material world. This fundamental insight is encapsulated in his famous aphorism, “Emancipate yourselves through education.” He often counselled people to provide financial assistance to poor students and would personally offer such aid. It is noteworthy that he once told his disciple Sahodaran Ayyappan, “Wealth is knowledge; knowledge becomes service.” His direct financial support for Sahodaran Ayyappan to complete his studies is unforgettable. Similarly, Guru himself escorted Kumaran Asan to Bengaluru for higher studies, entrusting him to the care of Dr. Palpu, and it was Guru who encouraged C. Kesavan to pursue legal education, demonstrating his active patronage of education for deserving individuals.



Guru's educational initiatives commenced very early, right in Aruvippuram, the site of his initial spiritual consecrations. Significantly, the head teacher of the Sanskrit school established there was a Brahmin scholar, underscoring Guru's commitment to inclusivity and transcending traditional caste barriers in learning. Alongside this Sanskrit institution, a weaving workshop was also established, serving as a vocational training centre. This practical education enabled many individuals to become skilled weavers, gaining economic independence. In 1916, a large conference took place in Muttathara, Thiruvananthapuram, attended by over a thousand individuals from the Pulaya community, a highly marginalised group. Addressing them, Guru articulated his vision of equality: "Some may have more wealth and education, others may have less. The complexion of some may not be the same as others. Apart from these kinds of differences, humans have no caste distinctions." He then pinpointed their immediate challenges, stating, "Pulayas currently suffer greatly from a lack of wealth and education. Both should be acquired. Education is primarily needed. If that happens, wealth and cleanliness will follow." He further empowered them by asserting, "It is not true that you do not have money; are you not the labourers? Is not money for those who labour?" Through such profound messages, Guru aimed to instil a spirit of self-reliance among the populace.

Earlier, in 1912, the Vijnanavardhini Sabha of Cherai had honoured Sree Narayana Guru with a felicitation address. In his eloquent reply, Guru meticulously outlined all the crucial elements necessary for human progress, with education taking paramount priority. He declared: "Education is what guides any community towards higher paths. Therefore, we must strive to widely promote education." Recognising that not everyone might be able to pass high-level examinations, he advised: "Therefore, those with some means should assist poor and academically inclined students as much as possible, sending them to other regions to acquire knowledge." He also noted the diminishing importance of Sanskrit education, stating that English was then the most widely prevalent language, and thus, "We should focus our attention on it." Crucially, he emphasised the necessity of education for both men and women within the community: "In the community, not only men but also women should be educated." The boundless insight and foresight of Guru are perfectly exemplified by such directives. It is also significant to remember that Guru had consecrated the deity of learning, Sarada Devi, at Sivagiri five years before this event, further symbolising his profound commitment to education.

In 1917, five years after the Sarada consecration, Guru issued another powerful message, firmly declaring that the construction of new temples should no longer be encouraged. He stated explicitly: "The main temple should be a school. Efforts should be made to collect money to build schools. Temples increase caste differences." He further exhorted, "Now, efforts should be made to educate the people. Let the people gain knowledge. That alone is the medicine to improve them." He also suggested that existing temples should establish reading rooms, libraries, and vocational training centres, integrating practical skills as an essential component of literary education. It is noteworthy that Guru had already comprehended and actively worked towards

promoting the importance of technical education even in the second decade of the twentieth century. In sum, Sree Narayana Guru's extensive contributions to the field of education represent unparalleled contributions to the cultural revolution that swept across Kerala. It is clear to any student of history that these cultural activities primarily paved the way and provided leadership for all progressive movements in Kerala. The invaluable contributions of R. Shankar in the field of education, both as a leader of the Sree Narayana movement and as the Chief Minister of Kerala, are highly significant and worthy of study. The guiding principle for Shankar was Guru's aphorism: "Emancipate yourselves through education!" His most commendable service was extending higher education, previously concentrated in urban centers, to villages and making university education accessible even to the poor, embodying Guru's vision of universal knowledge.

Assignments

1. How did Sreenarayana Guru challenge both traditional Brahminical educational hegemony and the paradoxical outcomes of modern education during his era?
2. Elaborate on Guru's multi-faceted vision for universal education, specifically detailing his advocacy for Sanskrit, English, and technical skills.
3. Describe the operational and financial challenges faced by the Sanskrit schools initiated by Guru at Varkala, Sivagiri, and Aluva.
4. To what extent did Guru's educational reforms impact the accessibility of higher education for historically marginalised communities in Kerala?
5. Analyse the systemic discrimination faced by Avarṇas in accessing scholarships and financial aid for higher and foreign education during the early 20th century.
6. Discuss Sreenarayana Guru's holistic philosophy of education, explaining his concept of education "for life and living" and the interrelationship between spiritual and material well-being.
7. How do Sreenarayana Guru's educational principles, particularly regarding human resource development and skill acquisition, anticipate aspects of modern educational policies like India's National Education Policy (NEP)?
8. Examine the significance of the Mezhuveli incident and Guru's declaration "Temples are no longer needed; schools are" as a pivotal moment in the Kerala Renaissance.



9. What specific advice did Sreenarayana Guru offer the Pulaya community at the Muttathara conference regarding their socio-economic upliftment, and what was its underlying aim?
10. Evaluate the contributions of R. Shankar in expanding higher education in Kerala, specifically linking his efforts to Sreenarayana Guru's core educational philosophy.

SGOU

UNIT 3

Humanism in Sreenarayana Guru

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing the study of this material, learners will be able to:

- analyze the experiential and philosophical foundations of Sree Narayana Guru's humanism, contrasting it with Western secular humanism.
- evaluate how Guru's social reforms, including temple consecrations and educational initiatives, served as pragmatic manifestations of his humanistic vision for human dignity and equality.
- examine Guru's concept of universal brotherhood and non-violence as central to his ethical framework, tracing its emphasis on compassion towards all sentient beings.
- discuss the contemporary relevance of Sree Narayana Guru's humanism in addressing issues like social polarization, religious conflict, and the need for ethical responsibility in modern society.

Background

ഒരു പീഡയെറുമിനും വരു-
ത്തരുതെന്നുള്ളനുകമ്പയും സദാ
കരുണാകര! നൽകുകുള്ളിൽ നിൻ
തിരുമെയ് വിട്ടകലാതെ ചിന്തയും.
(Anukampa Dasakam)

Oh God, the merciful one, please bless me always with compassion so that I do not hurt even an ant, and with thoughts that never stray from your divine form.

Sree Narayana Guru's humanism is not abstract or speculative. It emerged from his deep concern for human suffering, social injustice, and the moral degeneration of society. His work is an extraordinary synthesis of ethical activism, spiritual inquiry, and a transformative vision that uplifts human dignity, particularly for the oppressed. The pages that follow trace the evolution of humanist ideas from global traditions and contextualise Guru's humanist legacy within Indian society and Kerala's socio-



religious environment. The aim is to examine how Guru's life and teachings embody a uniquely Indian humanism, one that blends rational thought, spiritual ethics, and active compassion.

Keywords

Humanism, Compassion, Equality, Social Reform, Universal Brotherhood, Ethical Action, Self-realization, Non-violence

Discussion

4.3.1 The Essence and Evolution of Humanism

- Humanism rooted in dignity and rational ethics

Humanism, as a philosophical framework, positions human beings and their well-being at the core of philosophical, ethical, and cultural discourse. It upholds the intrinsic value of human life and advocates for human dignity, rationality, freedom, and ethical responsibility. The contemporary term 'humanism' derives from the Latin 'humanitas', which itself originated from 'homo' (meaning 'man' or 'human'). While the word 'humanism' (appearing as humanisme in French or humanismus in German) became prominent during the European Renaissance, the principles it represents, namely compassion, respect for others, and rational ethical living, have much earlier origins in Eastern philosophical and spiritual traditions.

In India, early manifestations of a humanist ethos are discernible in the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and more explicitly within the teachings of the Buddha, who dismissed ritualism in favour of emphasising human effort as fundamental to liberation. Likewise, the Chinese philosopher Confucius exemplified a pragmatic moral humanism, focusing on human relationships, governance, and ethical conduct.

- Spiritual unity beyond caste and religion

Against this global and historical backdrop, Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy and life stand as a unique expression of a deeply rooted humanism, articulated through Advaita Vedānta, but grounded in lived social reform. Guru's contribution transcends the boundaries of caste and religion, advocating for a universal human community based on equality, compassion, and rational spiritual practice. His movement was not only a

social reformation but also a cultural and spiritual awakening for the marginalised. In Kerala, at a time when caste hierarchy governed every aspect of life, from access to education and temples to the right to walk on roads, Guru proclaimed that ‘one caste, one religion, one God for man’ (oru jāti, oru matham, oru daivam manushyanu), a message that distilled the ethical essence of humanism in the most practical terms.

4.3.1.1 The Humanist Ground of Guru’s Early Life and Thought

Sree Narayana Guru’s humanism was not acquired from textbooks or abstract speculation; rather, it arose from his lived experience as a child and adult in a deeply caste-stratified society. Born in 1856 in Chempazhanthi, near Thiruvananthapuram, into an Ezhava household, a community denied access to temples, education, and public spaces, Guru grew up observing the daily humiliation of people deemed ‘untouchable’. Yet, even as a boy, his moral compass leaned not towards rebellion through rage, but towards deep ethical introspection. The stories from his childhood, such as feeding himself with temple offerings before rituals or saving a pot of rice from boiling over in a poor household, are not anecdotes of defiance alone, but of an intuitive sense of justice, empathy, and egalitarianism. He questioned inherited customs, not by argument but by action, showing in miniature the seeds of what would later become a powerful spiritual humanism. For Guru, the human being was not defined by caste, ritual, or religious superiority, but by ethical action and self-awareness. He did not need to be told that all humans were equal; he felt it as self-evident truth. His humanism, thus, was experiential before it became doctrinal. It was nurtured by observing human suffering and by a natural sensitivity that refused to accept unjust boundaries.

- Justice and empathy shaped early ethical vision

4.3.1.2 Spiritual Humanism Beyond Ritual and Religion

At the heart of Sree Narayana Guru’s humanist vision was a rejection of ritualistic religiosity that segregated people and dehumanised them. Unlike the reformers who negotiated within the caste order, Guru’s approach was radically transformative. He did not merely question Brahmanical supremacy but created alternative spiritual spaces that embodied human equality. The Aruvippuram Pratishta of 1888 was a seminal moment in Indian religious history. By installing a Śiva Linga on his own, as an Ezhava and non-Brahmin, Guru symbolically

- Created inclusive spaces beyond priestly monopoly



shattered the monopoly of the priestly caste over divine access. But he did more than an act of protest, he offered a vision. When questioned on the legitimacy of his action, he replied, 'I have installed an Ezhava Śiva.' This was not a declaration of sectarianism but a revelation of the hypocrisy in caste-based theology. His humanism was not against religion per se but against religion corrupted by hierarchy. He saw divinity as immanent in all and hence proclaimed

‘Jati bhedam, matha dwesham,
ethumillathe sarvarum
sodaratvena vazhunna
mathrukasthanam ithu’

(This is a model abode where people live like brothers without caste difference or religious hatred). Thus, Guru’s humanism was not secular in the Western sense of being anti-religious, but deeply spiritual, inclusive, and radically egalitarian.

4.3.1.3 Humanism as Liberation: From Self to Society

Guru’s concept of liberation (moksha) was not about escaping the world but transforming it. His humanism was liberationist, not only of the soul but also of society. He observed that spirituality divorced from ethical and social responsibility had led to stagnation. Hence, his Advaita was not limited to metaphysics but was a call to ethical action. To realise non-duality meant recognising that no human is inferior, and that the distinctions based on caste, wealth, or knowledge are illusory. For Guru, human dignity was rooted in awareness (bodham), and it was through education, self-respect, and moral discipline that people could rise above ignorance and bondage. He launched temple reforms, promoted education, and encouraged industries not merely for economic gain, but as means of human empowerment. He believed that each person, regardless of caste, had the potential to become a moral, rational, and spiritually awakened being. His trust in human capability is echoed in his verse ‘Anukoolamallellam sahajamalle’ (Not all that is convenient is natural). His educational initiatives, particularly through the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), were motivated not only by a desire for literacy but for dignity and self-realisation. Thus, Guru’s humanism bridged the personal and collective, the spiritual and the material, the inner and outer worlds.

- Advaita as dignity, education, and empowerment

4.3.1.4 Universal Brotherhood and the Vision of One Humanity

- Universal brotherhood as lived spiritual practice

Among the most resonant expressions of Guru's humanism is his insistence on universal brotherhood. His vision of humanity was expansive and non-sectarian. The All-Religions Conference (Sarva Matha Sammelanam) held in Aluva in 1924 was not a symbolic event but the culmination of decades of lived practice. Its slogan, 'Vaadikkaanum Jayikkaanumalla, Ariyanuum Ariyikkaanum' (Not to argue and win, but to know and to inform), reflects the essence of Guru's humanist engagement: to seek knowledge, foster dialogue, and cultivate mutual respect. He rejected conversions and religious rivalries. Instead, he argued that if all religions claimed to lead to truth, then the competition between them was meaningless. His emphasis was on purification of the heart and realisation of truth through ethical conduct. For Guru, humanity was not divided into sects but united in spirit. His worldview aligns with the finest ideals of humanism, valuing every person not for their birth but for their capacity to seek truth, live ethically, and contribute to the collective well-being. His was a *viswa manavata*, a universal humanism that was at once spiritual, rational, and practical. In a caste-ridden society, to affirm brotherhood was revolutionary. To institutionalise it through temples, schools, and social organisations was transformative.

4.3.1.5 Guru's Social Humanism and Reform Practice

- Institutions as tools for dignity and equality

Sree Narayana Guru's humanism was not confined to spiritual declarations or literary articulations; it was deeply social in its orientation. His philosophical convictions were always tethered to the realities of the common people, especially the marginalised. Unlike many reformers of his time who engaged from within the upper echelons of society or under the patronage of colonial administrators, Guru emerged from the grassroots. His reformative acts, temple consecration, educational propagation, and the formation of the *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam* (SNDP), were not symbolic gestures, but pragmatic efforts to reconstitute society on ethical and egalitarian foundations. The temple he established at Aruvippuram in 1888 marked the beginning of a cultural revolution. By installing a *Śivalinga* on a public rock platform without Brahmin mediation, Guru redefined religious access, thereby reinterpreting divine legitimacy as something rooted in ethical conduct rather than ritual birthright. Through the SNDP, he advocated education, industry, and social responsibility as the three pillars for transforming the oppressed



into dignified citizens. His instructions to the Yogam to address caste injustices, promote inter-caste dining and temple entry, and resist untouchability were manifestations of his belief that humanism meant concrete change. For Guru, devotion without social reform was meaningless. His humanism, thus, was neither passive sympathy nor theoretical idealism, but lived ethics, articulated through institutions, community networks, and individual transformation.

4.3.1.6 Human Dignity and the Question of Caste

Guru's unwavering commitment to human dignity made him one of the foremost critics of the caste system, not merely as an unjust social order, but as an outright denial of human worth. He exposed caste not only as a source of hierarchical discrimination but also as an epistemic violence that invalidated a person's capacity for self-realisation. His critique was not limited to Brahmanical supremacy. He also addressed the internalised casteism among the oppressed. He was particularly firm in addressing the hypocrisy of those Ezhavas who demanded upper-caste privileges while continuing to discriminate against Pulayas and other so-called 'lower castes'. Guru's statement, *'In human terms, there is no caste; if distinctions remain, they are only positional,'* reveals his Advaitic understanding of difference, not as essential, but contingent. This understanding enabled him to dismantle caste from both a spiritual and social perspective. His emphasis on temple entry for all, and his insistence that all children, irrespective of caste, must be allowed access to education, were extensions of his humanist principle that all beings are worthy of self-improvement and salvation. He challenged not only the discriminatory logic of *varna* but also the social apathy that allowed such systems to continue. His poetry, prayers, and teachings, particularly in works like *Atmopadesa Satakam*, were suffused with the idea that the divine resides in every human heart, and thus any form of dehumanisation is a denial of the divine itself.

- Caste as denial of human and divine worth

4.3.1.7 Rationality, Simplicity, and Ethical Living

Guru's humanism was equally a celebration of rationality and simplicity. He did not promote blind activism or aggressive agitation, but instead demonstrated how ethical reform could emerge from calm reasoning and reflective conduct. His life was a living sermon on simplicity, his speech, dress, diet, and daily routine mirrored his philosophy. In an age when reformers were often caught between religious traditionalism

- True humanism aligns reason with compassion

and colonial modernity, Guru struck a unique balance. He accepted neither the superiority of the West nor the infallibility of Indian traditions. He rejected the metaphysical excesses of ritualistic Hinduism and the materialistic reductions of Western utilitarianism. His path was a third way: to develop human potential through inner discipline and outer responsibility. He believed that social transformation required moral clarity and not violent rupture. His dietary habits, poetic style, and daily ascetic practices, all reflected his ideal that life must be led in a spirit of balance (*samatvam*). He warned against both spiritual dogma and material greed. As he once observed, ‘The human animal is more dangerous than any other; no other creature on earth destroys its surroundings as man does.’ This observation is not merely ecological, but moral. It implies that human rationality without ethical grounding leads to destruction. For Guru, true humanism meant aligning reason with compassion, self-awareness with collective good.

4.3.1.8 Guru and Global Humanist Traditions

Although Sree Narayana Guru’s humanism emerged from the specific historical and cultural context of Kerala, it resonates remarkably with the global currents of humanist thought. His emphasis on reason, ethical living, and the unity of humanity finds echoes in Confucian pragmatism, Buddhist compassion, and the Renaissance humanists of Europe. In many ways, his approach was akin to thinkers like Erasmus, who upheld religion without bigotry, or to the radical Enlightenment figures who balanced faith with critique. Unlike Western secular humanists who often rejected religion as oppressive, Guru reformed religion from within. He did not discard spirituality but instead reimagined it as a vehicle for social justice. This made his position comparable to spiritual humanists like Rabindranath Tagore or Leo Tolstoy, who also saw divinity as immanent in ethical action and brotherhood. What makes Guru unique, however, is the synthesis of *Advaita Vedānta*, a traditionally metaphysical philosophy, with a pragmatic commitment to human equality. His method of integrating the transcendent with the imminent, the spiritual with the social, makes his humanism not only holistic but also contextually grounded. He neither glorified suffering nor justified inequality in the name of karma or dharma. Instead, he advocated for active transformation, which places him in conversation with radical humanists like M.N. Roy and socialist reformers like Marx, while maintaining a spiritual anchoring that kept his movement rooted in Indian ethos.

- Advaita fused with pragmatic social equality



4.3.1.9 Guru's Relevance to Contemporary Humanism

In our current age, where social polarisation, ecological crisis, and spiritual disillusionment continue to plague humanity, the humanism of Sree Narayana Guru offers a profound model for ethical and spiritual renewal. His teachings are not relics of a past reform movement, but living philosophies with urgent contemporary relevance. Guru showed that the root of all human progress lies in recognising the inherent dignity of each individual, irrespective of caste, religion, or nationality. He believed that no transformation, political, economic, or spiritual, could be authentic unless it was rooted in compassion and ethical responsibility. His life exemplified a non-violent resistance to inequality, a peaceful revolution that redefined Kerala's social structure without bloodshed. Guru's message, *'Not to argue and win, but to know and to inform'*, continues to challenge the culture of debate without dialogue. His vision of 'one caste, one religion, one God for mankind' remains not only a radical call for equality but also a reminder of the shared moral and spiritual destiny of the human race. In placing *manushyatvam* (humanness) at the core of philosophy and practice, Sree Narayana Guru gifted India, and the world, a vision of humanism that transcends binaries of secular and spiritual, East and West, tradition and modernity. It is this vision that remains our best hope for a truly inclusive future.

- Guru's humanism bridges spiritual and secular futures

An Encounter in Silence: Gurudevan and Ramana Maharshi

Sometimes, the most profound connections are forged not through words, but in the quietude of shared presence. Consider the remarkable meeting between Gurudevan and Ramana Maharshi in 1916, a testament to how silence can speak volumes.

Following his engagements at the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Āśramam in Kanchipuram, Gurudevan accepted the warm invitation of Palani Swāmi, a figure deeply respected by both spiritual masters, and journeyed to Rāmanaśramam in Tiruvannamalai. Upon Gurudevan's arrival, an extraordinary scene unfolded: neither he nor Ramana Maharshi exchanged a single word. Perhaps weary from his journey, Gurudevan simply sat beneath a mango tree to the right of the ashram. Ramana Maharshi, in turn, entered the ashram to his left and joined his disciples in silent contemplation.

Yet, this silence was far from idle. At one point, Gurudevan called over a sannyasi disciple who had accompanied him and began to dictate verses. The disciple, with profound attention and reverence, diligently transcribed them. Later, at mealtime, it was Ramana Maharshi himself who personally came to escort Gurudevan to the dining hall. They shared the meal together, once again, in complete silence.

After the meal, Gurudevan returned to his spot under the mango tree. He then handed his newly composed verses, titled Nirvṛti Pañcakam (a work often mistakenly identified as Munikārya Pañcakam, which was composed years prior), to his disciple, intending for them to be read aloud to Ramana Maharshi.

The reaction was immediate and powerful. Upon hearing the Nirvṛti Pañcakam, Ramana Maharshi reportedly leapt with joy, danced in delight, and exclaimed loudly, 'Bale!' (Well done!). He then spontaneously declared, 'Avar periyōr; avar ellām teriñcōr!' (He is a great one, a knower of all things!). Gurudevan remained at the ashram for approximately six hours, departing by evening.

This extraordinary encounter beautifully illustrates that true understanding and profound recognition can transcend the need for spoken language, finding their fullest expression in shared spiritual depth.

This deeply symbolic encounter serves as a reminder that silence can be as meaningful as speech. And so it is with the meeting between Gurudevan and Gurudev: though few words may have been exchanged, the resonance of their shared presence was no less profound. It is the task of our time to seek out and interpret that resonance with all the tools of scholarship, devotion, and ethical clarity.

4.3.1.10 Poetic Expression of Humanist Philosophy

Sree Narayana Guru's humanism is also beautifully articulated through his poetry. His verses, composed in Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Tamil, reflect a refined blend of devotion, philosophical inquiry, and moral instruction. Unlike traditional devotional literature that often reinforces caste-based theology, Guru's poetry breaks barriers and speaks to the universal human experience. In *Daiva Dasakam*, he prays for the well-being of all, not just a particular community. In *Jeevakarunya Panchakam*, he extols compassion towards all beings as the highest form of worship. In *Anukampa Dasakam*, he calls for divine grace not to gain worldly pleasures, but to cultivate self-awareness and kindness. His *Atmopadesa Śatakam* is perhaps the most powerful expression of inner liberation as the key to universal peace. He writes, 'The world appears in the light of the mind; purify the mind and the world becomes pure.' These poems are not mere literary works but moral instruments, inviting readers to reflect, reform, and act. Guru used poetry not to mystify but to clarify. His poetic humanism is thus accessible, practical, and deeply rooted in lived values. In a society where scripture had long been used to justify oppression, Guru reclaimed the poetic form to spread messages of unity, dignity, and moral clarity. Let

- Poetry as a tool for moral awakening



us now explore profound examples from Guru’s poetic world to exemplify the humanistic approach that he consistently professed and proclaimed.

4.3.2 Five Verses of Kindness to Life (ജീവകാരുണ്യപഞ്ചകം)

Sree Narayana Guru’s “Five Verses of Kindness to Life” (Jīvakāruṇya Pañcakam) stands as a masterful exposition on the profound meaning of being human, distinguishing our existence from that of other living beings. Unlike animals, whose actions are largely driven by instinct, humans possess the unique capacity for conscious thought, moral reasoning, and the ability to cherish life. This seminal work isn’t just a philosophical treatise; it’s a moral compass, emphasizing the ethical qualities and responsibilities that define our humanity. Guru meticulously argues that true wisdom, the ultimate knowledge that liberates, isn’t found in external pursuits or material acquisitions. Instead, it emerges from a deep and sincere inquiry into one’s inner self. This introspection reveals the interconnectedness of all existence and the inherent divinity within. The verses powerfully convey that harming or taking the life of any creature is fundamentally antithetical to this awakened understanding. This principle, that non-violence and compassion are direct consequences of self-realization, is presented not as a mere commandment but as a living secret, a profound truth waiting to be uncovered through one’s own spiritual journey. Guru’s simple yet profound verses thus guide us towards a life steeped in empathy, reminding us that our elevated consciousness demands a greater responsibility towards all living beings.

The brilliance of Sree Narayana Guru’s “Five Verses of Kindness to Life” lies in its seamless integration of spiritual philosophy with practical ethics. The text serves as a powerful reminder that our human existence, unlike that of animals who merely live out their instincts, carries a deeper purpose, to embody and express compassion. Guru firmly asserts that the highest form of ultimate knowledge isn’t abstract intellectualism but rather a profound understanding born from probing one’s inner self. This self-discovery naturally leads to the realization of oneness with all creation. From this enlightened perspective, the idea that we possess the right to harm or kill any living creature becomes fundamentally illogical and morally reprehensible. The verses beautifully articulate that an inherent, moral compass should guide our

actions, leading us away from violence and towards universal kindness. This isn't just about avoiding physical harm; it extends to fostering an empathetic outlook that recognizes the sanctity of all life. Guru's insights, presented in these five renowned verses, reveal that the secret to a truly meaningful and liberated life lies in embracing boundless compassion, making it an indispensable component of spiritual evolution and a testament to our true human potential.

Verse 1

എല്ലാവരുമാത്മസഹോദരരേ-
 നല്ലേ പറയേണ്ടതിതോർക്കുകിൽ നാം
 കൊല്ലുന്നതുമെങ്ങനെ ജീവിക്കളെ-
 തെല്ലും കൃപയറ്റു ഭുജിക്കയെന്നതും.

All are of one Self-fraternity.
 Such being the dictum to avow,
 In such a light how can we take life,
 And devoid of least pity go on to eat?

‘Shouldn't we declare that everyone is a sibling of the soul? When we reflect on this, how can we kill living beings? And how can we eat them without even a shred of compassion?’

This profound reflection underscores a core humanistic tenet: the inherent interconnectedness and shared dignity of all sentient life. From a humanistic perspective, the questioning of violence towards living beings, and the consumption of them without empathy, directly challenges anthropocentric views that might devalue non-human life. It champions the expansion of human compassion and ethical responsibility beyond our species, advocating for a broader sense of kinship that respects the well-being of all creatures. Ultimately, these lines encourage a consistent application of humanistic values – empathy, respect, and a commitment to reducing suffering – across all interactions, fostering a more compassionate and just world.

• True humanism reduces suffering for every being

Verse 2

കൊല്ലാവ്രതമുത്തമമാമതിലും
 തിന്നാവ്രതമെത്രയുമുത്തമമാം,
 എല്ലാ മതസാരവുമോർക്കിലിതെ-
 നല്ലേ പറയേണ്ടതു ധർമ്മികരേ!

The non-killing vow is great indeed,
 And, greater still, non-eating to observe;
 All in all. should we not say, Oh men of righteousness,
 Even to this amounts the essence of all religions?

‘It’s excellent to observe a vow of not killing anything. Even more excellent is the vow of not eating what has been killed. Oh righteous ones, consider and speak: shouldn’t it be said that this is the essence of all religious teachings?’

This passage deeply resonates with humanistic principles by extending ethical consideration beyond mere abstention from direct harm.

A core humanistic principle is the reduction of suffering, and the text elevates this by suggesting that actively choosing not to consume animal products (avoiding the ‘eating of what has been killed’) is a higher ethical standard than merely refraining from killing directly. It champions a broader circle of compassion, urging individuals to reflect on their choices and their impact on other sentient beings, which aligns with humanism’s focus on empathy and interconnectedness. The call to consider this as the ‘essence of all religious teachings’ underscores humanism’s ability to find universal ethical truths that transcend specific dogmas, focusing instead on shared values like non-violence and mercy. Ultimately, this perspective encourages a consistent application of ethical reasoning in daily life, promoting a lifestyle that minimizes harm and fosters a more compassionate world for all, a key aspiration of humanistic thought.

• Ethical living through non-violence in daily choices

Verse 3

കൊല്ലുന്നതു തങ്കൽ വരിൽ പ്രിയമാ-
 മല്ലീവിധിയാർക്കു ഹിതപ്രദമാം?
 ചൊല്ലേണ്ടതു ധർമ്മമിതാരിലുമൊ-
 തല്ലേ മരുവേണ്ടതു സുരികളേ!

If killing were applied to oneself,
 Who, as a favour, would treat such a dire destiny?
 As touching all in equality, Oh ye wise ones,
 Should that not be our declaration for a regulated life?

‘Being killed would not be dear to anyone themselves. Would such a fate seem pleasing to anyone? When we speak of what is righteous, shouldn’t it apply equally to everyone? Oh, wise ones, speak!’

• Moral actions judged by shared human experience

This passage profoundly articulates a universal ethical principle that lies at the heart of humanism: the Golden Rule.

The fundamental question, ‘Being killed would not be dear to anyone themselves,’ directly evokes the humanistic principle of empathy and perspective-taking, urging us to consider the impact of our actions from the viewpoint of the one affected. By asking, ‘Would such a fate seem pleasing to anyone?’, the text challenges the ethical legitimacy of inflicting harm by appealing to a shared human aversion to suffering, a cornerstone of humanistic ethics. The assertion that ‘When we speak of what is righteous, shouldn’t it apply equally to everyone?’ encapsulates humanism’s commitment to universal ethics and fairness, advocating for moral principles that transcend individual biases or group interests. Ultimately, this passage serves as a powerful call for rational and consistent ethical application, encouraging us, as thinking beings, to build a moral framework based on reciprocal respect and the inherent worth of all, which is central to a humanistic worldview.

Verse 4

കൊല്ലുന്നവനില്ല ഭുജിപ്പതിനാ-
 ഉല്ലെങ്കിലശിക്കുകതന്നെ ദൃഢം,
 കൊല്ലിക്കുകകൊണ്ടു ഭുജിക്കുകയാം
 കൊല്ലുന്നതിൽ നിന്നുമുരത്താരഘം

No killer would there be if no other to eat there was
 Perforce, himself must eat!
 In eating thus abides the cruder ill than in killing
 In that it killing makes.

‘If there’s no one to eat what has been killed, then there will be no one to kill. If there’s no one to eat it, the one who killed it would have to eat it themselves. Causing others to kill, and then eating what’s killed, is a greater sin than the act of killing itself.’

This passage presents a powerful ethical argument that aligns closely with humanistic principles by emphasizing accountability and the far-reaching consequences of our choices.

It highlights humanism’s focus on individual responsibility by asserting that demand (for meat) drives supply (killing), making consumers implicitly accountable for the act of

- Ethical living demands awareness of consequences

taking a life. The text champions a holistic view of ethical conduct, suggesting that indirect participation in harm, such as commissioning others to kill for one's consumption, can carry greater moral weight than the direct act itself. By stating that 'eating what's killed is a greater sin than the act of killing itself,' the passage encourages a deeper humanistic reflection on our complicity in suffering and the ethical implications of our dietary choices. Ultimately, it advocates for a more consistent and compassionate ethical framework, urging individuals to consider the entire chain of cause and effect in their actions, a core tenet of applied humanism.

Verse 5

കൊല്ലാതുകിലിവിൻ ഗുണമുള്ള പുമാ-
നല്ലായ്കിൽ മൃഗത്തൊടു തുല്യനവൻ,
കൊല്ലുന്നവനില്ല ശരണ്യത മ-
റ്റല്ലാ വക നന്മയുമാർന്നിടിലും.

Not killing makes a human good -
Else an animal's equal he becomes.
No refuge has the taker of life,
Although to him all other goods accrue.

'One who observes the vow of not killing anything is a virtuous person. Anyone who does not, is equal to an animal. Even if a person possesses all other good qualities, if they have the habit of killing, no one and nothing can save them.'

This passage strongly asserts the foundational role of non-violence in defining human virtue, a concept deeply aligned with humanistic thought.

The text establishes non-killing as a cardinal virtue, reflecting a humanistic emphasis on compassion and the intrinsic value of life, positing it as essential for true human dignity. By equating those who disregard this vow to 'animals,' the passage employs a stark contrast to underscore the ethical responsibility unique to humanity, the capacity for conscious choice and empathy. It highlights the humanistic idea that even a multitude of other good qualities cannot compensate for the absence of fundamental non-maleficence, suggesting that the habit of killing undermines a person's entire moral standing. Ultimately, this perspective champions a holistic and uncompromising view of ethical living, where actively refraining from violence is not merely a choice, but a defining characteristic of a truly virtuous and fully realized human being, central to humanistic ideals.

- Ethical living demands awareness of consequences

4.3.3 Ten verses on Compassion

(അനുകമ്പാദശകം)

Anukampa Dashakam (Ten verses on Compassion) is a poem by Sree Narayana Guru written in Malayalam language. It is among the works used for regular recitation by followers of Sree Narayana Guru. The eminence of compassion is extolled and advocated beautifully in this work. These ten verses are composed in the 'Viyogini' meter and there is an additional verse as envoy in the end.

The first verse is a prayer to the Lord to bless us with compassion towards all beings and also a mind which ever contemplates on Him. The next 4 verses describe the glory of compassion while the last 5 verses are a tribute to the embodiments of this compassion. Lord Krishna, The Buddha, Adi Shankara, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammad, some Saivite saints, etc. are mentioned in those verses.

Verse 1

ഒരു പീഡയെറുവിനും വരു-
ത്തരുതെന്നുള്ളനുകമ്പയും സദാ
കരുണാകര! നൽകുകുള്ളിൽ നിൻ
തിരുമെയ് വിട്ടകലാതെ ചിന്തയും.

Oh Sea of Mercy! Grant us such Compassion that even to an ant no harm be caused and also (grant) within us a mind which never wanders away from your Divine Form.

This prayer, while traditionally spiritual, can be interpreted through a humanistic lens by focusing on the aspiration for ethical living and profound empathy. The plea for 'compassion so that I do not hurt even an ant' highlights humanism's emphasis on universal empathy and the extension of ethical consideration to all sentient beings, however small. While referring to a 'divine form,' a humanistic reading could interpret 'thoughts that never stray from your divine form' as a commitment to consistently uphold the highest ethical ideals and virtues in one's life. This aspiration reflects a humanistic desire for inner moral consistency and the constant cultivation of a compassionate mindset that guides all actions and thoughts. Ultimately, the prayer, when viewed humanistically, becomes a profound request for the personal strength and continuous self-development needed to embody deep kindness and ethical awareness in everyday existence.

The poem's choice of the ant, one of nature's smallest and seemingly most insignificant creatures, serves as a powerful

- Compassion as highest ethical aspiration



rhetorical device, profoundly expanding the scope of mercy and compassion. This isn't merely about extending kindness to our equals or those who can reciprocate; rather, it underscores a deeper, more radical ethical stance.

- True compassion includes even the smallest beings

By specifically mentioning the ant, the Guru emphasizes that true compassion must reach the downtrodden, the helpless, and even the seemingly negligible elements of nature. This deliberate focus reveals that the measure of human wisdom and ethical development isn't just in how we treat the powerful, but in our approach to the most vulnerable. Such an all-encompassing compassionate outlook elevates the value and wisdom of human life, demonstrating a profound understanding of interconnectedness and universal well-being. It suggests that our capacity for empathy is truly tested and enriched when extended without expectation, even to those who appear to have no claim on our consideration. This expansive view of compassion ultimately enriches the human experience, reflecting a highly evolved moral consciousness.

Verse 2

അറുളാൽ വരുമിമ്പമൻപക-
ന്നൊരു നെഞ്ചാൽ വരുമല്ലലൊക്കെയും
ഇരുളൻപിനെ മാറ്റുമല്ലലിൻ
കരുവാകും കരുവാമിതേതിനും.

By kindness comes joy.
To a heart devoid of love comes all sorrows.
Darkness (of heart) expels love and is the core of sorrow
and seed to everything (all sufferings)

'When life becomes full of 'Arul' (grace/compassion), there will be joy in life. In the lives of those who lack 'Anpu' (love/affection) in their hearts, all kinds of miseries will befall them. It is the darkness of ignorance (ajnana) that eradicates 'Anpu'. That is the cause of all sorrows in life. Moreover, it can cause all types of suffering in life.'

This passage powerfully asserts the direct link between compassion and well-being, while identifying ignorance as the root of suffering, resonating deeply with humanistic principles that emphasize self-actualization through ethical understanding.

The text underscores humanism's belief that joy and fulfillment are intrinsically linked to cultivating compassion

- Ignorance, not divine will, causes misery and moral failure

and grace within one's life, rather than external factors or divine intervention. By stating that 'all kinds of miseries will befall' those lacking love, it highlights humanism's recognition of the tangible, negative consequences of an absence of empathy on individual and collective well-being. Identifying 'the darkness of ignorance' as the eradicator of love and the cause of suffering aligns with humanism's reliance on reason, knowledge, and ethical education to overcome detrimental ways of thinking and behaving. Ultimately, this passage advocates for a humanistic path to a meaningful life, where enlightened self-awareness and the deliberate cultivation of compassion are seen as the primary means to alleviate sorrow and achieve enduring happiness.

Verse 3

അരുളൻപനുകമ്പ മൂന്നിനും
പൊരുളൊന്നാണിതു ജീവതാരകം
'അരുളുള്ളവനാണു ജീവി'യെ-
ന്നുരുവിട്ടീടുകയീ നവാക്ഷരീ

Kindliness, Love, Compassion –
these three in essence are one.

It is life's (guiding) star.

'Only those with kindness are (really) living'.

May these words be chanted (remembered)

'The essence in 'Arul', 'Anpu', and 'Anukampa' (Grace, Love, and Compassion) is one and the same. That essence is the Polaris (Dhruva Nakshatra), the guiding star capable of helping the vehicle of life cross the ocean of sorrow and reach the other shore. Always chant the new Navakshari mantra (nine-letter mantra): 'Aruḷuḷavanāṅ Jīvi' (He in whom 'Arul' or love is naturally present, he truly lives).'

This passage beautifully synthesizes the concepts of grace, love, and compassion, elevating them to the guiding principles of a meaningful life, a perspective deeply aligned with humanistic values.

- The mantra 'Aruḷuḷavanāṅ Jīvi' becomes a humanistic affirmation: to live is to love, to care, and to uplift

By stating that 'Arul', 'Anpu', and 'Anukampa' share a single essence, the text highlights humanism's pursuit of universal ethical principles that unify various expressions of human goodness, focusing on shared core values. The metaphor of this essence as a 'Polaris' guiding the 'vehicle of life across the ocean of sorrow' powerfully illustrates humanism's belief in human agency and resilience, suggesting



that these intrinsic qualities are our most reliable guides through life’s challenges. The emphasis on constantly chanting “Aruḷḷavanāṅ Jīvi” (He in whom ‘Arul’ or love is naturally present, he truly lives) underscores humanism’s focus on lived ethics and the embodiment of virtues, suggesting that true existence is defined by compassionate action. Ultimately, this passage serves as a humanistic call to cultivate and prioritize compassion, love, and grace as the foundational elements for a purposeful, meaningful, and effectively guided life, fostering individual well-being and collective flourishing

Verse 4

അരുളില്ലയതെങ്കിലസ്ഥി തോൽ
 സിര നാനുനൊരുടമ്പു താനവൻ;
 മരുവിൽ പ്രവഹിക്കുമംബുവ-
 പ്പുരുഷൻ നിഷ്ഫലഗന്ധപുഷ്പമാം

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.

‘The essence of one who lives without grace (arul) is merely a foul-smelling corpse, composed of bone, skin, and veins. Such a life will be as meaningless as a mirage of water in a desert, or a tree that neither flowers nor bears fruit.’

This passage starkly contrasts a life lived without compassion or grace with one of meaning, aligning powerfully with humanistic perspectives on purpose and human value. The text suggests that a life devoid of ‘arul’ (grace/compassion) is reduced to mere biological existence, underscoring humanism’s emphasis on qualitative aspects of life beyond just survival. By comparing such a life to a ‘foul-smelling corpse’ or a ‘mirage,’ it highlights humanism’s view that meaning and value are actively created through our actions and connections, rather than being inherent in mere physical presence. The imagery of a barren tree directly correlates with the humanistic belief that a fulfilling life involves growth, contribution, and positive impact on the world, much like a tree that bears fruit. Ultimately, this passage serves as a potent humanistic call to cultivate compassion and grace, positing them as essential for a life of purpose, significance, and genuine human flourishing, transcending a purely material existence.

• Without compassion life becomes hollow and fruitless



Verse 5

വരുമാറു വിധം വികാരവും
വരുമാരില്ലരിവിനിതിനു നേർ;
ഉരുവാമുടൽ വിട്ടു കീർത്തിയാ-
മുരുവാർന്നിങ്ങനുകമ്പ നിന്നിടും.

There comes the six vikaras (bodily manifestations – existence, birth, growth, change, decay and death) but not to the (underlying) Awareness.

On leaving the form of human body, Compassion continues to stay in the form of glory.

‘Though the six transformations (Shad-Bhavas) – existence, birth, growth, change, decay, and destruction – are observed in our gross, physical existence, these changes do not occur in knowledge (Arivu). Just as knowledge is unchanging and eternal, so too is the life and eternity of the compassionate one. Even after their physical life ends, they attain eternity in the form of good renown (virtuous fame).’

This verse draws a powerful parallel between the eternal nature of knowledge and the enduring impact of a compassionate life, a concept deeply resonant with humanistic ideals of legacy and meaning.

It highlights a core humanistic belief that while the physical body is transient, the impact of one’s actions, particularly compassion, can achieve a form of immortality through collective memory and influence. By equating the ‘unchanging and eternal’ quality of knowledge with the ‘eternity of the compassionate one,’ the text elevates ethical conduct and empathy to a fundamental and enduring aspect of human existence, rather than merely a temporary state. The concept of attaining ‘eternity in the form of good renown’ underscores humanism’s focus on terrestrial legacy and the tangible, positive mark individuals leave on the world, emphasizing reputation and influence within the human community. Ultimately, this passage encourages a life dedicated to virtue and compassion, suggesting that such a life offers profound meaning and a lasting contribution to humanity, thereby achieving a form of secular immortality through the perpetuation of one’s positive influence.

- Good deeds create lasting human remembrance



Verse 6

പരമാർത്ഥമുരച്ചു തേർവിടും
പൊരുളോ, ഭൃതദയാക്ഷമാബ്ധിയോ?
സരളാദയഭാഷ്യകാരനാം
ഗുരുവോയീയനുകമ്പയാണ്ടവൻ?

Is the Reality that drives the chariot proclaiming the Supreme Truth (Lord Krishna),
Or the Ocean of Compassion and patience (The Buddha),
Or the Guru who wrote lucid bhashyas (commentaries) on Advaita (Adi Shankara),
this Compassion embodied one?

‘Is this compassionate one not the Supreme Essence (Lord Sree Krishna) who, as Arjuna’s charioteer, imparted the ultimate meaning of life? Is this compassionate one not Śaṅkarācārya, the commentator who simply revealed the secret of Advaita?’

This passage continues the pattern of rhetorical questions, now linking the concept of ultimate compassion to pivotal figures in Indian spiritual and philosophical traditions. From a humanistic perspective, these figures represent the pinnacle of human intellectual and ethical development.

By referencing Lord Sree Krishna as the impartor of life’s ultimate meaning, the text highlights humanism’s appreciation for profound philosophical insights that guide human conduct and understanding, regardless of their origin. The inclusion of Śaṅkarācārya, who simplified the complex secret of Advaita, underscores the humanistic value of clarity, reason, and accessibility of wisdom, making profound truths understandable to a broader audience. These figures, within a humanistic framework, are seen as exemplars of human intellectual and moral capacity, demonstrating the extraordinary potential of individuals to shape thought and inspire ethical living through their wisdom and compassion. Ultimately, the passage suggests that the highest forms of wisdom and spiritual understanding are intrinsically linked with profound compassion, arguing that true enlightenment leads to a deep concern for the well-being of all, a central tenet of humanistic ethics.

- Enlightenment and empathy are deeply intertwined

Verse 7

പുരുഷാകൃതി പുണ്ട ദൈവമോ?
നരദിവ്യാകൃതി പുണ്ട ധർമ്മമോ?
പരമേശപവിത്ര പുത്രനോ?
കരുണാവാൻ നബി മുത്തുരത്നമോ?

Is he (this Compassion embodied one)
the Almighty appearing in human form
Or righteousness manifesting in divine human form
Or the holy Son of God (Jesus Christ)
Or the merciful (Prophet) Nabi, the pearl, the gem?

‘Is this person, living full of compassion, not God himself, having taken human form? Or is it eternal Dharma (righteousness) that has taken on a divine human form? Is this compassionate one not Jesus, considered the Holy Spirit as the Son of God? Is this compassionate one not Prophet Muhammad, famous as the embodiment of compassion and precious like a pearl?’

This passage culminates in a powerful series of rhetorical questions, suggesting that profound compassion is so extraordinary it might be considered divine, a concept that humanism interprets through the lens of human potential and ethical excellence.

The questions about God taking human form or eternal Dharma embodying a divine human shape underscore humanism’s appreciation for the highest ideals of humanity – that ultimate goodness and righteousness are found within human expression. By invoking revered figures like Jesus and Prophet Muhammad, the text highlights how various traditions pinpoint compassion as a pinnacle of spiritual and ethical attainment, a quality humanism identifies as central to human flourishing. Humanism interprets these figures not necessarily as supernatural beings, but as exemplars of human moral excellence who, through their lives of profound empathy and love, inspire others to cultivate similar virtues. Ultimately, the passage suggests that compassion is the most sacred and transformative force, recognizing it as the defining characteristic of a truly evolved being, whether understood in a spiritual or purely humanistic context.

• Compassion is the highest expression of humanity

Verse 8

ജര മാറ്റി വിഭൂതികൊണ്ടു മു-
ന്നരിതാം വേലകൾ ചെയ്ത മുർത്തിയോ?
അരുതാതെ വലഞ്ഞു പാടിയു-
ദരമാം നോവു കെടുത്ത സിദ്ധനോ?

Is he (this Compassion embodied one)
the divinity who removed fever with holy ashes and
performed wonderful deeds (Tirujnana Sambandhar),



- True greatness lies in healing through empathy

Or the Perfected One who wandering in agony and singing abated the abdominal pain (Appar/Tirunavukkarasar)

‘Is this compassionate one Tirujnanasambandar, the great Shaivite Siddha who, in ancient times, performed impossible feats like curing severe fever merely with the help of sacred ash? Or is this compassionate one Appar, the great Siddha who, while suffering from unbearable stomach pain, made that pain disappear simply by chanting praises of Śiva and through the greatness of those hymns?’

This passage continues the exploration of whether revered spiritual figures embody ultimate compassion, allowing for a humanistic interpretation that focuses on the qualities and impact of these individuals rather than their miraculous attributes.

From a humanistic perspective, Tirujnanasambandar and Appar serve as powerful exemplars of individuals who brought comfort and relief to suffering humanity, demonstrating the profound impact one person’s compassionate actions can have. The emphasis on their ability to alleviate pain and distress, regardless of the method, aligns with humanism’s focus on practical good and the improvement of human well-being in the material world. These figures can be seen as embodying the human potential for extraordinary empathy and dedication, inspiring others to cultivate similar qualities and to act as sources of healing and solace within their communities. Ultimately, the passage encourages us to consider compassion as a transformative force that manifests through individuals, irrespective of their perceived divine connections, and to recognize that the greatest ‘miracles’ often lie in acts of profound human kindness and care.

- Saints as models of human care and kindness

Verse 9

ഹരനന്നെഴുതി പ്രസിദ്ധമാം
മരയാനോതിയ മാമുനീന്ദ്രനോ?
മരിയാതുടലോടു പോയാര-
പ്പരമേശ്വരൻ പരാർത്ഥ്യ ഭക്തനോ?

Is he (this Compassion embodied one)
the great king of sages who once dictated the renowned
scripture (Tiruvachakam) taken down by Hara (Lord
Śiva) himself (Manikkavacakar),
Or the great devotee of the Supreme Lord who vanished
physically before death (Sundarar)?

‘Is this compassionate one Manikkavacakar, who was fortunate enough to dictate the Vedas (Tiruvacakam) that Lord ParamaŚiva himself came and wrote down? Is this compassionate one Sundaramurthy Nayanar, the foremost devotee who reached the feet of Śiva in Kailash with his physical body, without dying?’

This passage poses a profound question, exploring whether the ultimate embodiment of compassion resides in revered spiritual figures, a concept that can be interpreted through a humanistic lens by focusing on the qualities these figures represent. Rather than directly affirming supernatural claims, a humanistic interpretation would view Manikkavacakar and Sundaramurthy Nayanar as exemplars of human potential for deep spiritual insight, devotion, and profound compassion. The questions highlight the aspirational qualities of humanity – the capacity for such intense empathy and wisdom that one might be seen as divinely inspired or capable of transcending ordinary human limitations. Humanism often looks to such figures not for their miraculous deeds, but for the ethical and emotional depths they plumbed, recognizing their lives as testaments to the power of human spirit and dedication. Ultimately, the passage invites us to consider if compassion itself is the most divine quality, manifest through human beings who live lives of exceptional empathy and devotion, serving as beacons for others to cultivate similar virtues.

• True divinity lies in lived empathy and devotion

Verse 10

നരരൂപമെടുത്തു ഭൂമിയിൽ
 പെരുമാറീടിന കാമധേനുവോ?
 പരമാത്മതുദാനദേവതാ-
 തരുവോയീതനുകമ്പയാണ്ടവൻ!

Is the Kamadhenu (the wishfulfilling cow) functioning on earth taking on human form,
 Or the great astonishing tree (Kalpa Taru) who is the deity of charity, -
 this Compassion embodied one?

‘Is this compassionate one not the Kamadhenu (wish-fulfilling divine cow) who takes human form and lives alongside everyone on this earth? Or rather, is this compassionate one not the Kalpavriksha (wish-fulfilling divine tree) from the heavens, who miraculously grants all desires?’

These lines use rich metaphorical language to describe a compassionate individual, aligning with humanistic ideals that

• Altruism transforms ordinary lives into sacred forces

celebrate the potential for extraordinary good within humanity.

By likening a compassionate person to mythical wish-fulfilling entities (Kamadhenu and Kalpavriksha), the text emphasizes humanism’s belief in the immense, positive transformative power inherent within human beings. It subtly suggests that true divinity or miraculous capability is not solely found in external, supernatural forces, but can be manifested through profound human virtues like compassion lived out in daily life. The imagery reinforces a humanistic focus on altruism and benevolence, portraying the compassionate individual as a source of fulfillment and well-being for all around them, rather than a recipient of divine favour. Ultimately, this perspective elevates the ethical and empathetic human being as the ultimate embodiment of a force for good in the world, capable of bringing about positive change and fulfilling collective aspirations, which is a central theme in humanistic thought.

ഫലശ്രുതി

അരുമാമറയോതുമർത്ഥവും
 ഗുരുവോതും മുനിയോതുമർത്ഥവും
 ഒരു ജാതിയിലുള്ളതൊന്നു താൻ
 പൊരുളോർത്താലവിലാഗമത്തിനും.

The Truth conveyed by the great scriptures and the truth taught by the Guru or Muni is one in nature.

On reflection, the essence of all scriptures is found to be one.

‘The meaning conveyed in the most excellent Vedas, the meaning in the words spoken by Gurus who impart wisdom, and the meaning revealed by sages through their silence, all are of the same kind. If one reflects, it will become clear that the essence of all spiritual traditions is one and the same.’

This passage beautifully articulates the concept of a singular, underlying truth accessible through diverse avenues of wisdom, a notion that resonates strongly with humanistic principles.

It highlights a humanistic appreciation for the unity of profound truths across various spiritual and philosophical traditions, suggesting that despite differing forms of expression (scriptures, spoken words, silence), a universal essence prevails. The emphasis on ‘reflection’ (ചിന്തിച്ചു നോക്കിയാൽ) aligns with humanism’s reliance on reason

• All wisdom traditions share a common essence

and critical inquiry as pathways to understanding, rather than blind adherence to dogma. By asserting that the ‘essence of all spiritual traditions is one and the same,’ the passage promotes a universalistic ethical framework, implying that fundamental values like compassion and truth are common to humanity, transcending specific cultural or religious boundaries. Ultimately, this perspective encourages an inclusive approach to wisdom, valuing insights from diverse sources and fostering a sense of shared human striving for understanding and ethical living, central to a comprehensive humanistic outlook.

• Ethical wisdom as a path to liberation

4.3.4 Ātmopadeśa Śatakamm (ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം)

Narayana Guru’s Ātmopadeśa Śatakamm (One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction) stands as a beacon of his philosophical depth and profound humanistic vision. This seminal work, a distillation of spiritual and ethical wisdom, guides individuals towards self-realization through an understanding of universal principles. Across its verses, Guru meticulously lays out a path for humanity to achieve both individual liberation and collective harmony.

Let’s now explore profound examples from Guru’s poetic world to exemplify the humanistic approach that he consistently professed and proclaimed.

Verse 21

പ്രിയമൊരു ജാതി,യിതെൻ പ്രിയം താദീയ-
പ്രിയ, മപരപ്രിയമെന്നനേകമായി
പ്രിയവിഷയം പ്രതി വന്നിടും ഭ്രമം, തൻ-
പ്രിയമപരപ്രിയമെന്നറിഞ്ഞിടേണം.

A certain kind is dear, that is dear to me; what is one’s own desire
And what is to another, so variously thus puzzlement prevails
Round each object of desire: what to oneself is dear
That verily know to be another’s desire also.

പ്രിയം എന്നുള്ളത് എല്ലാവരെയും സംബന്ധിച്ച് ഒരൊറ്റ ജാതിയിൽ പെട്ടതാണ്. ഇതാണ് എന്റെ പ്രിയം, അതു നിന്റെ പ്രിയം, അതു മറ്റൊരുവന്റെ പ്രിയം, എന്നിങ്ങനെ ഒരേ പ്രിയം തന്നെ പലതായിത്തീർന്നു ഭ്രമമുണ്ടാകുന്നത് ഓരോ പ്രിയവിഷയത്തെയും ആശ്രയിച്ചാണ്. വാസ്തവത്തിൽ തന്റെ പ്രിയം (ആനന്ദം) തന്നെയാണ് മറ്റൊരുവന്റെയും പ്രിയം എന്നുള്ള സത്യം മനസ്സിലാക്കണം.

This verse has to be read with the next one, which together complete the plus and minus aspects of the same unitive thought. In this verse it is the negative aspect of complication which is touched upon, while in the next the positively dialectical resolution is brought into evidence.

- Negative complexities precede positive resolution

Life expresses itself through attractions and repulsions, likes or dislikes, preferences or rejections, strong or weak. When we come to examine the different kinds of interests or value-appreciations that human beings generally are capable of having, we can think of them in four different kinds of combinations.

There is:

1. The self that relates itself to outside objects or
2. to a certain specific quality outside itself, as when we say, 'I like a rose', or 'I like beauty'.
3. When we say 'this is my preference' we have a personal and subjectively directed movement of interest.

As against this self-directed kind of interest there are

4. interests which have their accent on the opposite pole of the non-self.

In all four cases we have the field or seeds of confusion, puzzlement, or discontent. In fact all mental troubles may be said to have their origin in such possible confusions.

These lines of Ātmopadeśa Śatakamm eloquently articulate a foundational humanistic principle: the inherent oneness of "dearness" or "preference" across all beings. Guru posits that while individual objects of desire may appear diverse ("my preference," "your preference," "another's preference"), leading to confusion, the underlying nature of "what is dear" (ആനന്ദം - bliss/joy) is universally uniform. This isn't a call for uniformity in tastes, but a profound insight into shared human experience.

- All preferences share a common human core

From a humanistic perspective, this emphasizes that the fundamental pursuit of well-being, happiness, or fulfillment is a common thread binding all humanity. The "puzzlement" arises from focusing on the superficial differences of desire, rather than recognizing the deep-seated, shared aspiration for positive states. Guru's assertion "what to oneself is dear / That verily know to be another's desire also" forms the bedrock for universal ethics. It implores us to transcend egocentric views

- True ethics arise from recognising common desires

and understand that empathy, compassion, and moral conduct stem from recognizing this commonality of inner experience. This wisdom encourages a harmonious, non-conflicting approach to life, where individual well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of others.

Verse 22

പ്രിയമപരന്റെയതെൻപ്രിയം, സ്വകീയ-
 പ്രിയമപരപ്രിയമിപ്രകാരമാകും
 നയ, മതിനാലെ നരന്നു നന്മ നല്കും
 ക്രിയയപരപ്രിയഹേതുവായ് വരേണം.

The other man’s interest, that is even mine; what to oneself
 Is beneficial is so for the other man also; such is the course of
 Discrete conduct; all acts aiming each man’s Self-happiness
 Must spell at once the happiness of the other fellow-man.

മറ്റൊരുവന്റെ പ്രിയം ഏതൊന്നോ അത് എന്റെ പ്രിയമാണ്. എന്റെ പ്രിയം തന്നെയാണ് മറ്റൊരുവന്റെ പ്രിയം. ഇപ്രകാരമുള്ള നയം അനുസരിക്കുക വഴി, ഒരു മനുഷ്യനു നന്മ വരുത്തുന്ന പ്രവൃത്തി മറ്റുള്ളവർക്കു പ്രിയത്തെ ഉണ്ടാക്കുന്നതായിത്തീരണം.

This verse from Ātmopadeśa Śatakamm, building on the previous one, offers a profound humanistic resolution to the apparent conflicts of individual desire. Guru’s core insight is that “the other man’s interest, that is even mine” and “what to oneself is beneficial is so for the other man also.” This isn’t merely a nice sentiment; it’s presented as the fundamental “course of discrete conduct” and the bedrock of genuine morality.

From a humanistic perspective, this highlights the interconnectedness of human well-being. It asserts that true individual happiness (Self-happiness) is not an isolated pursuit, but rather must “spell at once the happiness of the other fellow-man.” This principle moves beyond self-interest to a universal ethics where actions promoting one’s own good are inherently beneficial for others. It dismisses the notion of an isolated “self” in conflict with an “other,” advocating instead for a holistic understanding of human flourishing. This view suggests that genuine human flourishing and societal harmony arise when individuals recognize their fundamental unity in the pursuit of well-being, fostering a compassionate approach to life where the good of one is inextricably linked to the good of all.

• True happiness includes the well-being of others

Verse 23

അപരനുവേണ്ടിയഹർന്നിശം പ്രയത്നം
കൃപണത വിട്ടു കൃപാലു ചെയ്തിടുന്നു;
കൃപണനയോമുഖനായ്ക്കിടന്നു ചെയ്യു-
അപജയകർമ്മമവന്നു വേണ്ടി മാത്രം.

For the sake of fellow-man, unceasing, day and night
Unstinting strives the kindly man;
The niggard lying prone, what frustration's toil undertakes,
That is for his own sake alone.

കൃപാലുവായിട്ടുള്ളവൻ മറ്റുള്ളവർക്കുവേണ്ടി പകലും രാത്രിയും എന്ന വ്യത്യസ്തമില്ലാതെ ഒട്ടും കൃപണത കൂടാതെ പ്രയത്നം ചെയ്തുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കും. കൃപണനാകട്ടെ താഴെ കിടയിലുള്ള മുല്യങ്ങളിൽ മാത്രം കണ്ണുവച്ചുകൊണ്ട് താഴെ കിടന്ന് തനിക്കുവേണ്ടി മാത്രമുള്ളതും തോൽവിമാത്രം ഉണ്ടാക്കുന്നതുമായ കർമ്മങ്ങൾ ചെയ്തു കൊണ്ടിരിക്കും.

This verse from Ātmopadeśa Śatakamm vividly contrasts the compassionate individual with the niggardly person, highlighting a core humanistic principle: the profound difference in outcomes between selfless action and self-centered effort.

The Guru explains that the kindly person (കൃപാലുവായിട്ടുള്ളവൻ) works tirelessly, day and night, for the sake of others, completely without stinginess. This continuous, open-hearted effort, driven by empathy, inherently contributes to a broader good, and in doing so, ultimately enriches the life of the giver.

Conversely, the niggardly person (കൃപണനാകട്ടെ) is depicted as clinging to "lower values," remaining "prone" and engaged in toil solely for their own sake. Crucially, this self-serving effort, despite its exertion, leads only to "frustration's toil" and "failure."

From a humanistic perspective, this illustrates that a life lived in closed, egocentric isolation is inherently self-defeating. True abundance and fulfillment, for oneself and for all, arise from an open, inclusive, and generous approach to human relations. The Guru articulates that ethical conduct isn't merely about following rules or internal compulsions, but stems from a deep, dialectical understanding that one's own well-being is inextricably linked to the well-being of others. This powerful distinction underscores the humanistic belief that altruism

• Altruism is practical, not just moral idea



and interconnectedness are not just moral ideals but practical pathways to a meaningful and joyful existence, while self-absorption leads paradoxically to emptiness and failure.

Verse 24

അവനിവനെനരിയുന്നതൊക്കെയോർത്താ-
ലവനിയിലാദിമമായൊരാത്മരൂപം;
അവനവനാത്മസുഖത്തിനാചരിക്കു-
ന്നവയപരന്നു സുഖത്തിനായ് വരേണം.

What here we view as this man or that
Reflection reveals to be the Self's prime form;
That conduct adopted for one's Self-happiness
Another's happiness must also secure at once.

ഈ ലോകത്തിൽ അവൻ എന്നും ഇവൻ എന്നും നാം കരുതിപ്പോരാറുള്ളതൊക്കെ, ചിന്തിച്ചു നോക്കിയാൽ, സകല തിനും ആദികാരണമായിരിക്കുന്ന ഒരേ ആത്മസത്യത്തിന്റെ രൂപഭേദങ്ങൾ മാത്രമാണ്. അതുകൊണ്ട്, ഓരോരുത്തരും സ്വന്തം സുഖത്തിനുവേണ്ടി ചെയ്യാറുള്ള പ്രവൃത്തികൾ മറ്റുള്ളവർക്കുകൂടി സുഖം വരുത്തുന്നവയായിരിക്കണം.

This verse from *Ātmopadeśa Śatakamm* profoundly articulates a central humanistic insight: that what we perceive as distinct individuals, “this man or that”, is, upon reflection, merely a “prime form” of the single, underlying Self. This philosophical truth has direct and powerful implications for ethical conduct.

Guru asserts that because all beings are ultimately expressions of this same fundamental Self, actions undertaken for one's “Self-happiness” must simultaneously “secure the happiness of the other fellow-man.” This is not a moral suggestion but a logical consequence of recognizing our shared essence. From a humanistic standpoint, this concept forms the bedrock of universal compassion and ethical responsibility. It dismantles the illusion of absolute separation between individuals, fostering a deep understanding that the pursuit of one's own well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of the collective. This unitive vision inspires a practical morality where individual actions are naturally aligned with the greater good, promoting harmony and mutual flourishing within the human community.

• Individual joy depends on mutual flourishing

The phrase “*Atmasahodarar*” (ആത്മസഹോദരർ), meaning “siblings of the soul” or “spiritual siblings,” encapsulates a

- “Atmasahodara” signifies all beings share a fundamental spiritual essence.

- “Atmasahodara” underpins universal compassion, linking personal and collective happiness

profoundly humanistic perception within Guru's philosophy. It transcends mere biological or social kinship, proposing that all beings share a fundamental, intrinsic spiritual essence. This concept directly underpins the humanistic values and ethics that have been proclaimed across diverse cultures and by great humanitarians throughout history.

If all are "siblings of the soul," then the commonality of our "dearness" or "preference" for happiness and aversion to suffering becomes immediately apparent. This isn't just a philosophical abstraction; it's the very foundation for empathy, compassion, and the Golden Rule found in virtually every major religion and ethical system. From the Christian tenet of "love thy neighbor as thyself" to Islam's emphasis on brotherhood and Hinduism's "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family), the core message is the recognition of a shared humanity and interconnectedness. Great humanitarians like Florence Nightingale, Mahatma Gandhi, or Nelson Mandela, though perhaps not using the exact term "Atmasahodara," lived by its spirit, demonstrating that compassion and justice extend universally, recognizing the inherent dignity and shared experience of all individuals, regardless of their background or perceived differences. This profound sense of spiritual kinship compels a holistic approach to well-being, where one's own happiness is inextricably linked to the happiness of all others.

Verse 25

ഒരുവനു നല്ലതുമനുമല്ലലും ചേർ-
 പ്പൊരു തൊഴിലാത്മവിരോധിയോർത്തിടേണം;
 പരനു പരം പരിതാപമേകിടുന്നോ-
 രരരിനരകാബ്ധിയിൽ വീണെരിഞ്ഞിടുന്നു

What spells benefit to one, while to another distress brings,
 Such conduct is one that violates the Self; beware!
 That spark of pain intense to another given
 Into inferno’s ocean it falls, there to burn its flames.

ഒരാൾക്കു നന്മയും മറ്റൊരുവനു ദുഃഖവും ഉണ്ടാക്കി തീർക്കുന്ന തരം പ്രവൃത്തികൾ ആത്മതത്ത്വത്തിനു നിരക്കാത്തതാണ് എന്നുള്ളത് ഓർത്തിരിക്കേണ്ടതാണ്. അന്യനു വലിയ ദുഃഖം വരുത്തി വെയ്ക്കുന്നവർ എരിഞ്ഞുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്ന നരകക്കടലിൽ വീണ് കത്തിപ്പോകും.

This verse from Ātmopadeśa Śatakamm delivers a potent warning, articulating a core humanistic principle: “What spells

- Actions causing both benefit and distress violate the unified Self

benefit to one, while to another distress brings, / Such conduct is one that violates the Self; beware!” It underscores that actions creating a duality of positive and negative outcomes, benefit for one, suffering for another, are not just morally wrong but fundamentally an affront to the unified Self that underpins existence.

- Causing suffering creates a collective inferno, violating shared humanity

Guru emphasizes the severe consequences of such duality, stating that “That spark of pain intense to another given / Into inferno’s ocean it falls, there to burn its flames.” This powerful imagery highlights the principle of cosmic reciprocity: even a small act of causing suffering to another is not isolated. Instead, it contributes to a larger, self-inflicted “inferno”, a collective realm of suffering. From a humanistic perspective, this signifies that favouring one’s own interest at the expense of another is not merely a social misstep but a violation of our shared humanity. It creates discord and ultimately diminishes the well-being of the entire human fabric. This perspective urges us to transcend partiality and embrace an ethics of universal well-being, recognizing that genuine human flourishing can only arise when the benefit extends to all, and harm to one reverberates throughout the interconnected web of existence.

Summarized Overview

The teachings of Sree Narayana Guru remain astonishingly relevant in the contemporary world. As we face growing inequalities, religious extremism, environmental degradation, and erosion of ethical values, Guru’s vision offers a path of hope rooted in simplicity, clarity, and compassion. His insistence on education as a moral imperative, his belief in dialogue over conflict, and his unwavering emphasis on dignity over dogma are urgently needed today. In the age of information overload, Guru reminds us of the value of inner awareness. In the face of caste atrocities that still persist, his message of equality is a call to action. In a time of divisive politics, his emphasis on universal brotherhood is a reminder of shared humanity. His teachings are not confined to Kerala or to any one religion; they are global in spirit and practical in method. If secular humanism today struggles to reconnect with the ethical depth of tradition, and religious thought struggles to shake off its exclusivism, Sree Narayana Guru’s humanism offers a middle way, one that unites the heart and mind, the individual and society, the spiritual and the rational. His humanism is not a past achievement but a living challenge to the present.

K.P. Appan’s reflections on Sree Narayana Guru underscore the enduring relevance of Guru’s humanism and ethical principles, positioning him as a timeless beacon for



humanity. Appan contends that Guru's spiritual teachings (*mahābodhanangal*) at Sivagiri were so exhaustive and comprehensive that they essentially rendered other doctrines superfluous. Guru's philosophy of liberation (*mokṣaṃ*) was deeply aligned with the human condition, serving as both a piercing critique of a present devoid of compassion and a profound source of consolation for the future. Central to these teachings was the unwavering emphasis on *dharmā*, not as a rigid dogma, but as a living principle to be deeply contemplated and actively practiced. Guru's unique contribution lay in offering a vast, all-encompassing worldview that addressed every facet of human existence, ensuring its continued resonance through history.

Guru's core inquiry revolved around the essential nature of humanity: its inherent goodness and how this goodness could be eternally sustained. His holistic vision transcended all artificial divisions of caste, religion, and people, perceiving humanity as a singular, unified entity. This foundational unity was upheld by the sustaining forces of justice, love, and compassion – principles that lie at the very heart of humanistic thought. These profound teachings aimed to liberate every individual from the oppressive limitations imposed by caste, embodying a *lokavīkṣaṇam* (worldview) that vehemently opposed all forms of hatred. Appan highlights that such a compassionate vision possesses the transformative power to elevate humanity itself, especially when directed with intense empathy towards those marginalized and crushed by historical injustices. This profound, inclusive compassion is what ultimately transformed an ordinary human being into the revered sage that was Sree Narayana Guru.

Appan further dissects *kāḍattham* (stubborn clinging to a static, backward-looking past) as the antithesis of human progress, contrasting it with Guru's call for individuals to shed hatred and recognize the universal human beyond religious or social labels. While acknowledging humanity's inherent goodness, Guru also confronted its capacity for corruption and cruelty. The Sage of Sivagiri's teachings were a powerful catalyst, reawakening fundamental moral sensibilities and gifting history with a philosophy deeply rooted in human goodness. This practical application of ethics, focused on cultivating innate human potential and confronting societal ills, demonstrates the vibrant, actionable humanism that Guru embodied. His philosophy was not merely theoretical; it actively sought to elevate the moral consciousness of individuals and society.

Appan critically examines the role of organized religion, asserting that it often becomes a vehicle for hatred and deviates from its sacred mission of upholding human values. Guru's radical response to this degeneration – replacing idols with mirrors, and temples with schools – was a subtle yet profound critique. His aim was not to reject sincere devotion but to challenge historical conditions that allowed organized religions to foster division and prejudice. Guru's declaration of renouncing caste and religion resonated through history, echoing a universal humanistic aspiration for unity. His profound anxiety about history veering towards falsehood and religious hatred, which he saw as both individual madness and a societal sickness, led him to envision a *mātykāsthānam* (model space) free from such divisions, where humanity could truly live as brothers and sisters, transcending all man-made barriers.

Assignments

1. How did Sree Narayana Guru's lived experiences influence the development of his humanistic philosophy?
2. In what ways did Guru's Aruvippuram Pratishta challenge existing caste hierarchies and religious monopolies?
3. Explain Guru's concept of "liberation" (moksha) as a transformation of society, rather than an escape from it.
4. What was the significance of the All-Religions Conference (Sarva Matha Sammelanam) organized by Guru in Aluva?
5. How did Guru's humanism bridge the personal and collective, and the spiritual and material worlds?
6. Discuss how Guru's critique of the caste system extended beyond external discrimination to internalised casteism among the oppressed.
7. What did Sree Narayana Guru mean by "manushyatvam" (humanness) and how did he place it at the core of his philosophy?
8. How does Guru's emphasis on non-killing and non-eating in "Jeevakarunya Panchakam" reflect a higher ethical standard?
9. Explain the concept of "Atmasahodarar" (siblings of the soul) and its implications for universal brotherhood in Guru's philosophy.
10. In what ways does Guru's humanism offer a relevant model for ethical and spiritual renewal in the contemporary world?



This Self Learning Material for M23PH03DE Philosophy of Sreenarayanaguru is developed by the Material Development and Distribution Centre. This material is organised into four blocks, each containing three units. To avoid repetition, we've combined the reference sections into one comprehensive list. We've made every effort to include accurate explanations, seeking help from various scholars to ensure validity. Our reviewer provided valuable feedback, refining the material to be truly learner-friendly. Our own faculty members have scrutinised all the material.

We based our material on thorough reading, drawing from numerous books, articles, and websites that offer in-depth explanations of Sreenarayana Guru's profound philosophy and extensive works. We carefully studied these resources to present Guru's thoughts, vision, and literature. We've included most of Guru's relevant poems, in both Malayalam and Sanskrit, for your direct benefit. Wherever possible, we've also provided Malayalam meanings and explanations.

Sreenarayana Guru's literature and philosophy are sacred, divine, and intellectually profound. We have diligently compiled relevant insights, observations, and explanations from various scholarly works, to which we extend our sincere gratitude.

Reference

1. എം.കെ.സാനു, നാരായണഗുരുസ്വാമി, (2021), സാഹിത്യ പ്രവർത്തക കോ-ഓപ്പറേറ്റീവ് സൊസൈറ്റി ലി., കോട്ടയം.
2. വി.ഭാർഗ്ഗവൻ വൈദ്യർ, ശ്രീ ഗുരുദേവ സ്മരണകൾ, (2018), സ്വാമി ഗീതാനന്ദ ഗായത്രി ആശ്രമം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, എസ്.എൻ.നഗർ, ചാലക്കുടി.
3. സജീവ് കൃഷ്ണൻ, ഗുരുസാഗരം പത്രാധിപകുറിപ്പുകൾ, (2024), ഗുരുസാഗരം, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
4. സച്ചിദാനന്ദസ്വാമി, ശ്രീനാരായണദർശനം 21-ാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിൽ, (2014), സ്വാമി ഗീതാനന്ദ ഗായത്രി ആശ്രമം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, എസ്.എൻ.നഗർ, ചാലക്കുടി.
5. ഗീതാ സുരാജ്, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു അറിയേണ്ടതും അനുഷ്ഠിക്കേണ്ടതും, (2010), ശിവഗിരിമഠം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മസംഘം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ശിവഗിരി മഠം, വർക്കല.
6. ആർ.വാസുദേവൻ പോറ്റി, ആത്മാപദേശക ശതകം ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുദേവൻ (വ്യാഖ്യാനം) (2008), ശിവഗിരിമഠം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മസംഘം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ശിവഗിരി മഠം, വർക്കല.
7. മങ്ങാട് ബാലചന്ദ്രൻ, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു അറിയേണ്ടതെല്ലാം, (2015), ശിവഗിരിമഠം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മസംഘം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ശിവഗിരി മഠം, വർക്കല.
8. മുർക്കോത്ത് കുമാരൻ, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുസ്വാമികളുടെ ജീവചരിത്രം, (2023), ശിവഗിരിമഠം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മസംഘം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ശിവഗിരി മഠം, വർക്കല.
9. പി.കെ.ബാലകൃഷ്ണൻ, നാരായണഗുരു, (2020), ഡി.സി.ബുക്സ്, കോട്ടയം.
10. സുകുമാർ അഴീക്കോട്, ഗുരുവിന്റെ ദുഃഖം, എഡിറ്റർ. പോൾ മണലിൽ, (2019), സാഹിത്യ പ്രവർത്തക കോ-ഓപ്പറേറ്റീവ് സൊസൈറ്റി ലി., കോട്ടയം.
11. ടി.ഭാസ്കരൻ, ശ്രീനാരായണദർശനം, (2017), മാതൃഭൂമി ബുക്സ്, കോഴിക്കോട്.
12. മുനി നാരായണപ്രസാദ്, നാരായണഗുരുവിന്റെ അദ്വൈത ദർശനം, (2014), നാരായണഗുരുകുലം, ശ്രീനിവാസപുരം പി.ഒ., വർക്കല.
13. എസ്.ജയപ്രകാശ് (എഡിറ്റർ), ജ്ഞിപ്രസാദം, (2024), ദി അസോസിയേഷൻ ഓഫ് റിട്ടയേർഡ് ടീച്ചേഴ്സ് ഓഫ് ശ്രീനാരായണകോളേജ്, കൊല്ലം.
14. ടി. ഭാസ്കരൻ (എഡിറ്റർ), ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവും മാനവികതയും, (2022), ശിവഗിരിമഠം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മസംഘം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ശിവഗിരി മഠം, വർക്കല.
15. നിത്യചൈതന്യയതി, ആത്മാപദേശശതകം അർത്ഥവും വിവരണവും, (2019), നാരായണഗുരുകുലം, ശ്രീനിവാസപുരം പി.ഒ., വർക്കല.
16. എം.എച്ച്. ശാസ്ത്രികൾ, ഗുരുദേവകൃതികൾ ദൈവദശകം വിനായകാഷ്ടകം (വ്യാഖ്യാനം) (2016), ശിവഗിരിമഠം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മസംഘം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ശിവഗിരി മഠം, വർക്കല.



17. Josh S Channar (Editor & Translator), Kumaran Asan, Sree Narayana Gurudevan (2021), Channar Books, Vaduthala P.O., Ernakulam.
18. Nitya Chaitanya Yati, An Introduction to Narayana Guru's Garland of Mystical Visions Darsanamala, (1972), An East West Universe of Unitive Sciences, Nilgiris, Tamilnadu.
19. കവിതാ രാമൻ, ഉഴവുകാരനായ കവി, (2021), ശിവഗിരിമഠം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മസംഘം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ശിവഗിരി മഠം, വർക്കല.
20. എസ്. വിജയാനന്ദ് (രചന, സമാഹരണം), ശ്രീനാരായണലീലാമൃതം ഒന്നാം ഭാഗം, (2012), ശ്രീനാരായണ ധർമ്മപരിപാലനയോഗം, കൊല്ലം.
21. മുനി നാരായണപ്രസാദ്, നാരായണഗുരു ലഘുകൃതികൾ ഒന്ന് (വ്യാഖ്യാനം) (2015), നാരായണഗുരുകുലം, ശ്രീനിവാസപുരം പി.ഒ., വർക്കല.
22. മുനി നാരായണപ്രസാദ്, നാരായണഗുരു ലഘുകൃതികൾ രണ്ട് (വ്യാഖ്യാനം), (2018), നാരായണഗുരുകുലം, ശ്രീനിവാസപുരം പി.ഒ., വർക്കല.
23. Narayana Prasad, Muni, The Philoosphy of Narayana Guru, (2017), D K Printworld (P) Ltd., ESI Metro Station, New Delhi.
24. മുനി നാരായണപ്രസാദ്, നാരായണഗുരു സമ്പൂർണ്ണകൃതികൾ, (2022), നാഷണൽ ബുക്ക് ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ഇന്ത്യ.
25. മുനി നാരായണപ്രസാദ്, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുകൃതികൾ, സമ്പൂർണ്ണം വാല്യം 1, (വ്യാഖ്യാനം) (2019), ഡി.സി. ബുക്ക്സ്, കോട്ടയം.
26. മുനി നാരായണപ്രസാദ്, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുകൃതികൾ, സമ്പൂർണ്ണം വാല്യം 2, (വ്യാഖ്യാനം) (2019), ഡി.സി. ബുക്ക്സ്, കോട്ടയം.
27. മുനി നാരായണപ്രസാദ്, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുകൃതികൾ, സമ്പൂർണ്ണം വാല്യം 3, (വ്യാഖ്യാനം) (2019), ഡി.സി. ബുക്ക്സ്, കോട്ടയം.
28. ഗുരുദർശന രഘുന (സമ്പാദക), ഗുരുപ്രഭാവം പ്രഭാഷണങ്ങളിലൂടെ (സച്ചിദാനന്ദസ്വാമിയുടെ പ്രഭാഷണങ്ങൾ) ഭാഗം 1, (2021), ഗുരുപ്രണാമം ബുക്ക്സ്, ഗായത്രി ആശ്രാമം, ചാലക്കുടി.
29. മുനി നാരായണപ്രസാദ്, നാരായണഗുരു അറിവ് (വ്യാഖ്യാനം), (2016), നാരായണഗുരു കുലം, ശ്രീനിവാസപുരം പി.ഒ., വർക്കല.
30. ഗീതാസുരാജ്, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവിന്റെ സ്തോത്രങ്ങൾ ഒരു പഠനം, (1997), സ്കൂൾ ഓഫ് ശ്രീനാരായണ ഫിലോസഫി, വൈപ്പിൻ.
31. മുനിനാരായണപ്രസാദ്, നാരായണഗുരു തേവാരപ്പതികങ്ങൾ (വ്യാഖ്യാനം), (2003), നാരായണഗുരുകുലം, ശ്രീനിവാസപുരം പി.ഒ., വർക്കല.
32. കവിതാ രാമൻ (എഡിറ്റർ), ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവിന്റെ കാവ്യലോകം (പഠനസമാഹാരം), (2022), ശിവഗിരിമഠം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മസംഘം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ശിവഗിരി മഠം, വർക്കല.

33. ഗോകുലം ഗോപാലൻ (ചീഫ് എഡിറ്റർ), ഗുരുദേവൻ ഗുരുധർമ്മ പ്രചാരണ മാസിക, ഫെബ്രുവരി (2025), ഗുരുദേവൻ, ഗുരുദേവ ഭവൻ, ടാസ് റോഡ്, ആലുവ.
34. പി.എൻ. ഗോപീകൃഷ്ണൻ, ഗുരുവും ആശാനും പിൻഗാമികളും (2024), മാതൃഭൂമി ബുക്സ്, കോഴിക്കോട്.
35. മയ്യനാട് കെ.ദാമോദരൻ, ശ്രീനാരായണ ഗുരുസ്വാമി ജീവചരിത്രം, (2024), ആത്മ ബുക്സ്, കോഴിക്കോട്.
36. നിത്യ ചൈതന്യ യതി, നാരായണഗുരു ദൈവദശകം (വ്യാഖ്യാനം) (2021), നാരായണഗുരുകുലം, ശ്രീനിവാസപുരം പി.ഒ., വർക്കല.
37. നാരായണഗുരുപാഠം, സെമസ്റ്റർ 4, പോസ്റ്റ് ഗ്രാജുവേറ്റ് പ്രോഗ്രാം ഇൻ മലയാളം ലാഗേജ് ആന്റ് ലിറ്ററേച്ചർ, (2024), ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു ഓപ്പൺ യൂണിവേഴ്സിറ്റി, കൊല്ലം.
38. എൽ വിനയകുമാർ, ശ്രീനാരായണ ഗുരുവും ആധുനിക കേരളസൂഷ്മിയും, (2024), മൈത്രി ബുക്സ്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
39. ജി. പ്രിയദർശനൻ (എഡിറ്റർ), ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു ആന്തോളജി (2022), കലാപൂർണ്ണ പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, വർക്കല.
40. രാജേഷ് പൊൻമല, ഗുരുമഹിമ ഗുരുസ്തവത്തിൽ (2018), കോട്ടയം.
41. ബ്രഹ്മചാരി പ്രസാദ്, ഗുരുസ്തവവും ഇതരകൃതികളും ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവും കുമാരനാശാനും (2024), മൈത്രി ബുക്സ്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
42. എം.കെ. ഹരികുമാർ, ശ്രീനാരായണയ (ചരിത്രത്തിലാദ്യമായി ഗുരുദർശനത്തിന് പുതിയൊരു പാഠം നിർമ്മിക്കുന്ന നോവൽ) (2018), ബി ഫോർഎവർ ബുക്സ്, തൃപ്പൂണിത്തുറ.
43. ചമ്പാടൻ വിജയൻ, വടക്കേ മലബാറിലെ ഗുരുദേവ ശിഷ്യന്മാർ (2022), മൈത്രി ബുക്സ്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
44. വെള്ളായണി അർജ്ജുനൻ, മലയാളം ഗുരുവിന്റെ തിരുമുമ്പിൽ (2016), ടാഗോർ എഡ്യൂക്കേഷണൽ ട്രസ്റ്റ്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
45. എം.എ. സിദ്ധിക്ക്, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു ചരിത്രത്തന്റെ ദീർഘദർശനം: പലകയും ചുണ്ണാമ്പും (2020), മൈത്രി ബുക്സ്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
46. കെ.സുരേന്ദ്രൻ, ഗുരു (നോവൽ), 2007, ഡി.സി. ബുക്സ്, കോട്ടയം.
47. ഷാജി നായരമ്പലം, ഗുരുദേവഗീത (കവിത) (2014), ഓർക്കിഡ് ബുക്സ്, കല്ലുവാതുക്കൽ, കൊല്ലം.
48. എം.ശാർങ്ഗധരൻ (എഡിറ്റർ), ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവും സർവ്വമത സമ്മേളനവും, (2023), മൈത്രി ബുക്സ്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
49. ബ്രഹ്മചാരി പ്രസാദ്, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു പരിഭാഷപ്പെടുത്തിയ തിരുക്കുറുൾ - തിരുവുള്ളവർ (വ്യാഖ്യാനം) (വിവർത്തനം -ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു), (2022), മൈത്രി ബുക്സ്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
50. Potti Sri. Ramulu Telugu University, The Legacy of Sree Narayana Guru (Seminar Papers), 2010.

51. S. Omana, The Philoosphy of Narayana Guru, (2018), Narayana Gurukulam, Sreenivasapuram, Varkala.
52. Nataraja Guru, The Word of Guru, The Life and Teaching of Guru, (2017), D K Printworld (P) Ltd., ESI Metro Station, New Delhi.
53. സ്വാമി ചിദംബരതീർത്ഥ, ഗുരുവും വചനവും, (2005), നാരായണഗുരുകുലം, ശ്രീനിവാസപുരം പി.ഒ., വർക്കല.
54. മുനി നാരായണപ്രസാദ്, നാരായണഗുരു ദർശനമാല, (2004), നാരായണഗുരുകുലം, ശ്രീനിവാസപുരം പി.ഒ., വർക്കല.
55. കെ. പ്രശോഭൻ, ശ്രീനാരായണ ഗുരുവിന്റെ സ്വാധീനത മലയാളകവിതയിൽ, (2013), കേരള ഭാഷാ ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ട്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
56. കെ.ബാലരാമപ്പണിക്കർ, ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു പ്രബന്ധങ്ങളിലൂടെ, ശിവഗിരിമഠം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, ശ്രീനാരായണധർമ്മസംഘം ട്രസ്റ്റ്, ശിവഗിരി മഠം, വർക്കല.
57. ജി.ബാലകൃഷ്ണൻ നായർ, ശ്രീനാരായണ ഗുരുദേവ കൃതികൾ- സമ്പൂർണ്ണ വ്യാഖ്യാനം 1 (2003), കേരള ഭാഷാ ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ട്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
58. ജി.ബാലകൃഷ്ണൻ നായർ, ശ്രീനാരായണ ഗുരുദേവ കൃതികൾ- സമ്പൂർണ്ണ വ്യാഖ്യാനം 2 (2003), കേരള ഭാഷാ ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ട്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
59. ടി. ഭാസ്കരൻ, ശ്രീനാരായണ ഗുരുവിന്റെ സമ്പൂർണ്ണ കൃതികൾ (സമാഹരണം, വ്യാഖ്യാനം), (2015) മാതൃഭൂമി ബുക്സ്, കോഴിക്കോട്.
60. ജെ.ഡാർവിൻ, വൈകുണ്ഠസ്വാമികൾ: നവോത്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ പെരുന്തച്ഛൻ (2021), മൈത്രി ബുക്സ്, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.
61. <http://www.vedantasadhana.org/p/blog-page.html>
62. <http://www.advaita-vedanta.co.uk/index.php/component/content/article/281>
63. <https://www.sndp.org/html/atmopadesaSatakam.html>
64. <https://srinarayanagurucompleteworks.blogspot.com/>
65. <https://sandyanamam.blogspot.com/>

MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS





QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

**THIRD SEMESTER MA PHILOSOPHY EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE
M23PH03DE - PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU
(CBCS - PG)**

2023-24 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Objective Type Questions; Answer any Ten (10 × 1=10)

1. Which community faced systemic exclusion in late 19th-century Kerala, into which Sree Narayana Guru was born?
2. What is Sree Narayana Guru's central slogan regarding caste, religion, and God?
3. Name one of the four Mahavakyas accepted by Advaitins.
4. Who was Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal's primary influence on Sree Narayana Guru?
5. What is the literal meaning of 'Bhanam' in Guru's Darśanamāla?
6. What is 'Adhyāsa' according to Sree Narayana Guru?
7. Which concept in Darśanamāla suggests instantaneous creation?
8. What is the ultimate goal of human life as described in the culminating chapter of Darśanamāla?
9. What is the literal meaning of 'Nirvāṇa' in Darśanamāla?
10. What is the significance of the 'eye of knowledge' (Jnana Chakshus) in Guru's self-realisation methodology?
11. Which analogy does Guru use in Atmopadesa Satakam to illustrate the relationship between pure consciousness and the manifested universe?
12. What are the two primary classifications of Nirvāṇa in Darśanamāla based on 'vāsanās'?
13. What is the core message of Guru's "Five Verses of Kindness to Life" regarding living beings?
14. What did Kumaran Asan demand for Ezhavas in his inaugural address to the Praja Sabha?
15. What was the central message of the Jati Nirnaya?

SECTION B

Very Short Answer Questions; Answer any Five (5×2=10)

16. Briefly explain how Sree Narayana Guru re-appropriated Advaita Vedanta.
17. What was the significance of the Aruvippuram Consecration of 1888 as an 'inaugural proclamation of applied Vedanta'?
18. State the ethical layer of Guru's mahāvākya: 'oru jāti, oru matham, oru daivam manushyanu'.



19. Differentiate between 'Bhāna' and 'Bhāsyā' within the context of Darśanamāla.
20. Why did Guru include a separate chapter for 'Bhāna' in Darśanamāla?
21. Briefly explain why Sree Narayana Guru considers the manifestation of 'siddhis' as an 'impure' form of Nirvāṇa.
22. How does Atmopadesa Satakam differentiate between genuine 'knowledge' and mere 'cognition'?
23. What does Guru mean by 'Atmasatyam' in Atmopadesa Satakam?
24. What spiritual disciplines are suggested by Guru in the Atmopadesha Shatakam using the metaphor of the 'mind-blossom'?
25. How did Guru perceive the act of pridefully stating one's caste versus acknowledging one's belonging to mankind?

SECTION C

Short Answer Questions; Answer any Five (5×4=20)

26. Describe the central teaching of Advaita regarding Brahman, Jagat, and Jiva.
27. Explain how Guru's 'applied Vedanta' integrates inner spiritual transformation with social equity.
28. List the three critical reorientations that define Guru's 'Manavadvaita'.
29. How does Darśanamāla reconcile the functions of Brahma, Vishnu, and Śiva with the concept of a single, ultimate Reality?
30. Explain the concept of 'nivṛtti' (withdrawal) as a spiritual practice towards ultimate liberation in Darsanamala.
31. How does Sree Narayana Guru use the analogy of the 'rotating firebrand' to illustrate the relationship between pure consciousness and the manifested universe?
32. Discuss the significance of 'Maya' (illusion) in Guru's philosophy, using one of the analogies mentioned in the text.
33. How did Guru's social reforms, such as temple consecrations, serve as practical manifestations of his humanistic vision for human dignity?

SECTION D

Long Answer Questions; Answer any Three (3×10=30)

34. Discuss the influence of Ayyā Vaikundar's teachings and the Ayyavazhi movement on Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy and social reforms.
35. Analyze Sree Narayana Guru's 'modern Advaita' and how it addresses social and ethical challenges, transcending mere metaphysics.
36. Elaborate on Sree Narayana Guru's concept of 'yugapat-sṛṣṭi-vāda' (instantaneous creation) and its implications for understanding the cosmos and the mind.
37. Explain the Advaitic principle of non-duality between the knower and knowledge as presented in Atmopadesa Satakam, and its implications for ultimate reality.
38. Discuss Sree Narayana Guru's core argument against distinguishing humans based on caste, drawing parallels with how different species are identified in nature, as seen in his philosophical and logical refutation.
39. Explain Sree Narayana Guru's concept of universal brotherhood and non-violence as central to his ethical framework, including its emphasis on compassion towards all sentient beings.





QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

**THIRD SEMESTER MA PHILOSOPHY EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE
M23PH03DE - PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU
(CBCS - PG)**

2023-24 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Objective Type Questions; Answer any Ten (10 × 1=10)

1. What was the significance of the Aruvippuram Inscription?
2. Which movement's poetic corpus was celebrated for its lyrical fervor and ethical egalitarianism, influencing Guru?
3. What is 'Ekamatha-Vrata'?
4. What is the primary purpose of Sree Narayana Guru's Darśanamāla?
5. What is the essence of 'Cit' (Consciousness) as the underlying reality in Darśanamāla?
6. Which specific level of 'Brahmavit' is mentioned within the 'Supremely Pure' category of Nirvāṇa?
7. What is the philosophical significance of 'turiya bodham' in Guru's thought?
8. Which concept in Atmopadesa Satakam relates to the understanding of illusion through 'name and form'?
9. What is the core nature of mysticism as described in Guru's philosophy?
10. What did Sree Narayana Guru mean by "manushyatvam"?
11. What was the pivotal declaration made by Guru at the Mezhuveli incident?
12. Who was M. Govindan, and what did he represent in the context of school admissions?
13. What did the government order of 1910 theoretically allow regarding caste and education?
14. What was the central teaching of Advaita regarding Brahman, Jagat, and Jiva?
15. What is 'Triputi' in Guru's philosophy?

SECTION B

Very Short Answer Questions; Answer any Five (5 × 2=10)

16. According to Guru, what happens when one deeply contemplates the truth behind distinctions like 'I', 'You', 'He', and 'This One'?
17. How did Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal contribute to Sree Narayana Guru's spiritual development?
18. Name two practical measures instituted by Guru through Ekamatha-Vrata.
19. How does Sree Narayana Guru address the challenge of describing a non-dual reality in Darśanamāla?



20. How does Darśanamāla guide a seeker towards a direct experience of non-duality?
21. What is the significance of the tenth chapter of Darsanamala?
22. What does the text imply about the role of human effort in revealing the true nature of the Ātman?
23. What two key characteristics must true reality possess according to Guru, beyond mere sensory perception?
24. What practical actions did Sree Narayana Guru advocate for fostering a society free from caste distinctions?
25. What specific advice did Sree Narayana Guru offer the Pulaya community at the Muttathara conference?

SECTION C

Short Answer Questions; Answer any Five (5×4=20)

26. How did Sree Narayana Guru's interpretation of Advaita Vedanta differ from traditional scholastic understandings?
27. What was the primary purpose of the Religions Parliament convened by Guru in Aluva in 1924?
28. How does the Bhana Darshanam conceptualize the relationship between the entire universe and consciousness?
29. Describe the ultimate state of emancipation presented in Nirvāṇa Darśanam, emphasizing its 'Advaitic' nature.
30. How is the illusion of the snake and the flower-garland used to explain 'adhyāsa' or superimposition in Atmopadesa Satakam?
31. Explain the process of 'Atma Vichara' (self-inquiry) as presented in the Atmopadesha Shatakam.
32. Describe Guru's holistic philosophy of education, explaining his concept of education "for life and living."
33. What is the contemporary relevance of Sree Narayana Guru's humanism in addressing issues like social polarization and religious conflict?

SECTION D

Long Answer Questions; Answer any Three (3 × 10 = 30)

34. Analyze the influence of the Tamil Bhakti movement on Sree Narayana Guru's poetic works and his critique of caste.
35. Discuss the unique methodology adopted by Sree Narayana Guru in composing the Darśanamāla and its significance in presenting the science of the Absolute.
36. Explain how Darsanamala conceptually links its beginning (world creation) to its culmination in the individual's absorption in non-dual Brahman.
37. Analyze the three empirical states of experience (waking, dreaming, and deep sleep) as presented in Sree Narayana Guru's Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, and interpret their metaphysical significance.
38. Discuss the role Sree Narayana Guru played in the Kerala Renaissance and Cultural Revolution, particularly concerning social justice and educational reforms.
39. Explain the concept of "Atmasahodarar" (siblings of the soul) and its implications for universal brotherhood in Guru's philosophy.



സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ശ്രദ്ധപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുതിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

കുറുപ്പുഴ ശ്രീകുമാർ

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Regional Centres

Kozhikode

Govt. Arts and Science College
Meenchantha, Kozhikode,
Kerala, Pin: 673002
Ph: 04952920228
email: rckdirector@sgou.ac.in

Thalassery

Govt. Brennen College
Dharmadam, Thalassery,
Kannur, Pin: 670106
Ph: 04902990494
email: rctdirector@sgou.ac.in

Tripunithura

Govt. College
Tripunithura, Ernakulam,
Kerala, Pin: 682301
Ph: 04842927436
email: rcedirector@sgou.ac.in

Pattambi

Sree Neelakanta Govt. Sanskrit College
Pattambi, Palakkad,
Kerala, Pin: 679303
Ph: 04662912009
email: rcpdirector@sgou.ac.in

NO TO DRUGS തിരിച്ചിറങ്ങാൻ പ്രയാസമാണ്



PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU

COURSE CODE: M23PH03DE



YouTube



Sreenarayanaguru Open University

Kollam, Kerala Pin- 691601, email: info@sgou.ac.in, www.sgou.ac.in Ph: +91 474 2966841

ISBN 978-81-989004-5-6



9 788198 900456