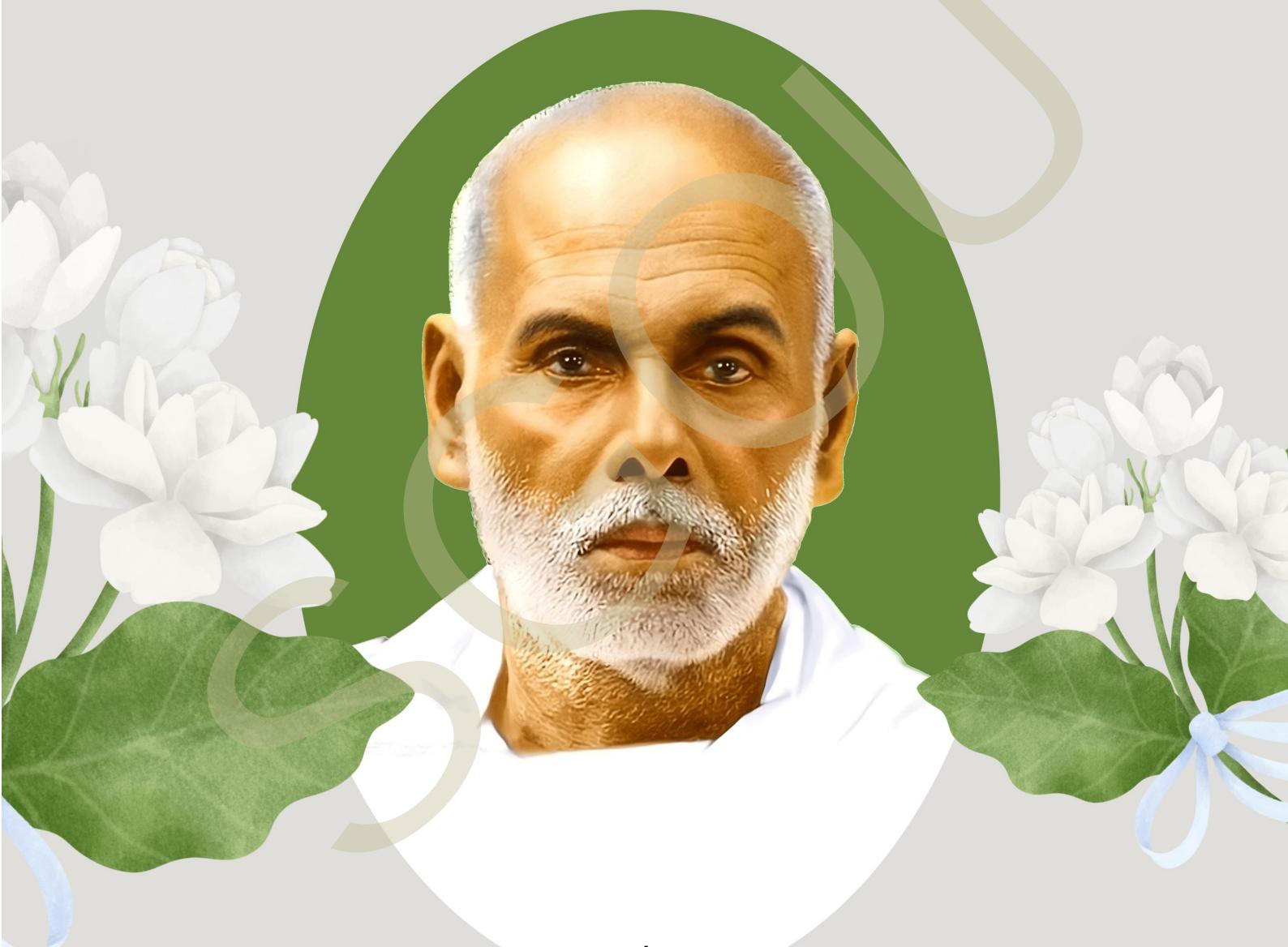


PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU

COURSE CODE: B21PH05DC

Undergraduate Programme in Philosophy
Discipline Core Course
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: B21PH05DC

Semester - V

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



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU

Course Code: B21PH05DC

Semester- V

Discipline Core Course

Undergraduate Programme in Philosophy

Academic Committee

Dr. Muraleedharan Pillai
Dr. M.A. Siddique
Dr. M. Chandra Babu
Dr. P.K. Sabu
Swamy Rithambharananda
Swamy Sukshmananda
Swamy Saradananda
Dr. M.V. Natesan
Dr. Radharani
Dileep Kumar P.I.
Dr. Smitha S.
Dr. Sarath P. Nath
Dr. Omana
Dr. Gasper K.J.
Dr. Lakshmi
Rajendra Babu G.
Suvarna Kumar S.
Dr. Sirajull Muneer
Dr. Sairam R.
Dr. Soumyar V.

Development of the Content

Dr. Vijay Francis,
Dr. Robin Luke Varghese, MDDC

Review and Edit

Rajesh B.R.

Linguistics

Rajesh B.R.

Scrutiny

Dr. Vijay Francis, Feleena C.L.
Dr. Robin Luke Varghese,
Dr. Deepa P., 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
July 2025

Copyright
© Sreenarayanaguru Open University

ISBN 978-81-988933-4-5



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.m



Visit and Subscribe our Social Media Platforms

MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

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

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

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

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



Warm regards.
Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.

01-07-2025

Contents

BLOCK 1: Vedanta as the Background of Guru's Philosophy	1
Unit - 1 Introduction to Vedanta	2
Unit - 2 House of Vedanta	13
Unit - 3 The Search- Individual and the World	24
Unit - 4 Maya	37
BLOCK 2 Structural Key to Guru's Philosophy	45
Unit - 1 Guru's Philosophy reconciles the two rival positions	46
Unit - 2 Guru's Philosophy Based on Personal Experiences	54
Unit - 3 Tree Structure Evidenced in Verse 51 of Ātmopadeśa Śatakam	61
Unit - 4 Other Instances from Guru's Literature Suggesting Structure	69
BLOCK 3 Epistemology in Guru's Philosophy	75
Unit - 1 Origin of knowledge	76
Unit - 2 Methods of Knowledge	84
Unit - 3 Validity of Knowledge	92
Unit - 4 Structure of Knowledge	102
BLOCK 4 Elements of Ananda and Wonder in Guru's Philosophy	111
Unit - 1 Scientific Status of Sankara's Advaita and Revalued Advaita of Guru	112
Unit - 2 Ascent, Wonder and Proof in Guru's Philosophy	119
Unit - 3 The Place of Paradox and Mystery in Guru's Philosophy	126
Unit - 4 The Element of Ananda in Guru's Philosophy	133
BLOCK 5 Mysticism in Guru's Philosophy	140
Unit - 1 Mystical Writings of Sree Narayana Guru - a Brief Study	141
Unit - 2 Reason and Mysticism	153
Unit - 3 Mysticism in Janani Navaratna Manjari	171
Unit - 4 Mysticism in Kali Natakam	191
BLOCK 6 The Self and Non-Self in Spiritual	215
Unit - 1 Guru's Methodology in Finding the Self Atmopadesa Satakam verses 10, 11 & 12	216
Unit - 2 Axiological Field of Interest Analysed in Ātmopadeśa Śatakam Verses 36-42	231
Unit - 3 Dualities Merged into the Neutrality of the Absolute Consciousness Verses – 73 and 89 of Ātmopadeśa Śatakam	258
Unit - 4 Atmas Self-manifestation as 'The Known'	270
Unit - 5 The Science of Sciences	280
Model Question Paper Sets	287



BLOCK

Vedanta as the Background of Guru's Philosophy



UNIT

Introduction to Vedanta

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain the main ideas of Vedānta about the self and ultimate reality
- ◆ describe the steps of Vedānta learning: Śravaṇa, Manana, and Nididhyāsana
- ◆ compare Saguṇa Brahman and Nirguṇa Brahman
- ◆ understand the role of ignorance in bondage and knowledge in liberation
- ◆ explain the unity of Ātman and Brahman using Mahāvākyas

Prerequisites

Indian philosophy deals with some of the most important questions of human life: Who are we? What is the nature of the world around us? Why do we suffer, and how can we become free from suffering? It does not ask us to follow traditions blindly. Instead, it encourages us to understand these questions through reasoning and reflection.

Philosophy in India does not arise out of wonder or curiosity, as it seems to have done in the West. It originated under the pressure of practical needs arising from the presence of the three kinds of pains (Tāpa-traya):

- ◆ Ādhyātmika (physical and mental suffering produced by natural and intra-organic causes),
- ◆ Ādhibhautika (physical and mental sufferings produced by natural and extra-organic causes),

- ◆ Ādhidaivika (physical and mental suffering produced by supernatural and extra-organic causes).

The annihilation of these three pains and the realization of supreme bliss are the main tasks of Indian philosophy. All these evils must be overcome, and for this, wisdom is essential. Therefore, philosophy in India is an attempt to realize the Ultimate Reality through experience.

Vedānta is one of the major schools of Indian philosophy that offers answers to such questions. It also discovers means to get rid of evils and shows the path to self-realization. Rooted in the Upaniṣads and developed through centuries of reflection, Vedānta does not present abstract theories but guides the seeker toward self-realization and inner transformation. Its teachings are meant to be lived, not merely learned.

Vedānta challenges our everyday assumptions about identity and the world, urging us to look beyond the changing surface of experience and search for what is unchanging, eternal, and true.

Keywords

Upaniṣads, Ātman, Brahman, Mokṣa, Sat-Cit-Ānanda, Prasthāna-traya, Sādhana Catuṣṭaya, Vedanta.

Discussion

1.1.1 Introduction

The word ‘Vedanta’ literally means ‘the end of the vedas’. There are four Vedas – Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. Each vedas consist of four parts – Mantras, Brāhmaṇas, Āranyakās and Upanishads. Upanishads are the end portions of Vedas. In this sense Upanishads are called the end of Vedas ‘or vedanta’. But it is an outer meaning. The term ‘veda’ means knowledge or wisdom’. In this sense ‘vedanta’ means ‘the end of knowledge’. This is the inner meaning of the ‘term vedanta’. The teachings in Upanishads focus on questions about the nature of reality, the self, and the ultimate truth. According to Vedānta, the true self of every individual

is called Ātman, and the highest universal reality is called Brahman. Vedānta teaches that by understanding the real nature of Ātman and Brahman, a person can achieve liberation (mokṣa) from the cycle of birth and death. It also speaks about the nature of existence, consciousness, and bliss, using the terms Sat (existence), Cit (consciousness), and Ānanda (bliss). These are not seen as separate qualities but as the essential features of the ultimate reality. In Vedānta tradition, knowledge (jñāna) plays a key role. It is not mere information but deep understanding that transforms one’s view of the self and the world. Vedānta does not reject the world but tries to understand its true nature by going beyond surface appearances. It teaches

that by knowing who we really are, we can overcome ignorance and suffering. The major schools that come under Vedanta tradition are Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita. Each of these schools gives a different explanation of the nature of Ātman, Brahman, and the world, but all accept the authority of the Prasthāna-traya.

1.1.2 Qualifications and Steps to Learning Vedānta

A student of Vedanta must have certain qualities. These are called the four qualifications (sādhana catuṣṭaya sampathi). The first is Nityānitya Vastu viveka, or the ability to know what is permanent and what is temporary. This helps the student focus on the goal of inner freedom. The second is Ila mutratha phala bhoga Viraga or a balanced mind that is not overly attached to physical comforts or pleasures. It helps the student stay steady and not get distracted. The third is sama damadi shatka sampath, a group of mental disciplines such as śama (control of the mind), and dama (control of the senses)

titikṣā (tolerance), uparati (reduce the action), śraddhā (trust in the teacher's words and the scripture), and samādhāna (ability to stay focused). These help the student become calm and ready for serious learning. The fourth qualification is mumukṣutva, which means a strong desire to be free from ignorance and sorrow. When these four qualities are present, the student is considered ready to study Vedānta and understand its deeper meaning.

Vedānta must be learned step-by-step from a qualified teacher. The process of learning Vedānta involves three main steps such as Śravaṇa, Manana, and Nididhyāsana. Śravaṇa means listening carefully to the teachings of Vedānta. The student listens to the teacher who explains ideas from the Upaniṣads and other important texts. The

student must listen with full attention and an open mind, without forming judgments or conclusions too early. The next step is Manana, which means thinking deeply and repeatedly about what was heard. This step involves clearing doubts and using logical reasoning to understand the teaching clearly. The third step is Nididhyāsana, which means self learning meditation or quietly reflecting on the teachings. It helps the student fully absorb the truth and live by it. These three steps together lead the student from just knowing the words to truly understanding the meaning and transforming their view of life.

1.1.3 Major Discussions in Vedānta Philosophy

The central teachings of Advaita is 'Brahman or Ultimate Reality alone is real. Jagat or 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 nā apara).

In Vedānta, Brahman is the central idea that refers to the ultimate, all-pervading reality. It is the unchanging source, support, and end of everything in the universe. Brahman is not an object of the senses and cannot be seen, heard, or touched. It can only be understood through deep self-inquiry and knowledge. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad describes Brahman with the word Tajjalān, which helps to explain its all-encompassing nature. The syllables mean: *Tat* (that) refers to Brahman; *Ja* (from which) shows that the world comes from Brahman; *La* (into which) means the world returns to Brahman; and *An* (by which) indicates Brahman sustains all things. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad also describes Brahman as the origin, support, and end of all living beings. Everything is born from Brahman, lives by it, and finally merges into it. The Upaniṣads present Brahman not only as the source of existence but as the

very essence of all beings. To understand Brahman, one must go beyond words and thoughts. In the state of *turiya*, the fourth level of consciousness beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, the individual merges with Brahman. In this state, there is no division between the one who knows, what is known, and the process of knowing. It is a state of unity and bliss (*ānanda*), which cannot be described through normal thought but can be directly realised.

The *Upaniṣads* also point to two views of Brahman: cosmic and acosmic. The cosmic view sees Brahman as the God with qualities (*Saguṇa Brahman*). From this perspective the Brahman is described as the cause of creation, the ruler of the universe, and the inner controller of all things. This is the personal aspect of God. The acosmic view refers to Brahman without qualities (*Nirguṇa Brahman*). It describes Brahman as indescribable, without distinctions, and beyond thought. According to Śaṅkara and Advaita Vedānta, *Nirguṇa Brahman* is the highest truth. God and the world are only apparent realities, experienced due to ignorance or *māyā*. In contrast, Rāmānuja, the founder of *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, sees the Absolute as personal and immanent. According to him, God is not separate from matter or individual souls but includes them as part of his own being. Rāmānuja calls this theory *Brahmaparināma-vāda*, where Brahman truly transforms into the world. Śaṅkara's view is *Brahmavivarta-vāda*, where the world is only an illusory appearance, not a real transformation of Brahman.

The *Upaniṣads* describe Brahman as the cause of all things, using examples like sparks from fire, pots from clay, and ornaments from gold. These show that all objects in the world are only different forms of one reality called Brahman. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* presents nature as the body of God, with Brahman as its soul. Elements like ether, air, fire, water and earth are seen as parts of

this divine body. As the *Antaryāmin* or inner controller, Brahman exists in all things and directs them from within. However, just as the body cannot fully know its own soul, individuals often fail to realise this inner presence. The acosmic or transcendental Brahman is beyond perception and cannot be known through the senses or even by thought. It is self-luminous and cannot be made into an object of knowledge. The *Kena Upaniṣad* teaches that Brahman is what makes seeing, hearing, thinking, and breathing possible. We cannot define it, but we can realise it by going beyond all descriptions. The method of *neti neti* (not this, not this) in Vedānta helps us understand Brahman by removing all false ideas and pointing toward the unchanging reality that is always present.

To describe this ultimate reality, Vedānta uses the expression *Sat-Cit-Ānanda*. These three terms present Brahman not as something separate from the world or the self, but as the very ground of being, awareness, and fulfilment. *Sat* refers to pure being or existence. It means that Brahman is eternal, unchanging, and not dependent on anything else for its existence. *Cit* means pure consciousness. It is the fundamental awareness that underlies all knowledge and experience. *Ānanda* is bliss, not in the sense of emotional pleasure, but as the deep, unchanging peace and contentment that come from realising one's true nature. Importantly, these three are not attributes or parts of Brahman; they are different ways of referring to one indivisible and infinite reality. Brahman is existence itself (*sat*), it is consciousness itself (*cit*), and it is bliss itself (*ānanda*). These aspects are inseparable and describe the fullness of reality as understood in Vedānta.

In Vedānta philosophy, the term *Ātman* refers to the true self of a person. It is not the body, which changes and ages, or the mind, which is full of thoughts and emotions. Instead, *Ātman* is the unchanging



and eternal reality that exists deep within every individual. The Upaniṣads describe Ātman as pure consciousness. It is the power of knowing and being aware. It is always present, whether a person is awake, dreaming, or asleep. The feelings we go through, like happiness or sadness, do not affect the Ātman because it is beyond such changes. It does not take birth, grow, or die. It is not made of anything physical. In fact, it is the same in all living beings, which means that behind all our different bodies and minds, there is one common self or spirit. This idea shows that all life is connected at a deeper level. The Ātman is also beyond space, time, and form. It does not have a shape or size and cannot be measured. It is the source of life and awareness in every living being. The Ātman gives life to the body and mind but remains separate from them. According to Vedānta, the main problem in human life is ignorance. We think that we are just the body or the mind, and this causes fear, sadness, and attachment. But when a person realises the Ātman, he understands that he is not separate from others or the world. He sees that his true self is part of non-dual reality. This understanding removes ignorance and leads to mokṣa, or liberation; a state of freedom from the cycle of birth and death, and a peaceful state of unity with all existence.

1.1.3.1 Mahāvākyas

Mahāvākyas, meaning ‘great sayings,’ are key statements found in the Upaniṣads, which are ancient Indian philosophical texts. These statements express the core teachings of Vedānta philosophy, especially the relationship between the individual self (Ātman) and the ultimate reality (Brahman). There are four main Mahāvākyas, each from one of the four Vedas.

1. Prjananam Brahma (Brahman is wisdom). It is the Lakshnavakyā. This statement is found in Aitareya Upanishad of the Rigveda,

identified Brahman with pure consciousness. It teaches that the ultimate reality, called Brahman, is not something separate from us, but is the very consciousness or awareness within us. The word ‘Prajñānam’ refers to the deep awareness that allows us to know, feel, and experience. It is not limited to thoughts or ideas but is the basis of all knowing. According to this teaching, Brahman is the one unchanging reality that supports the entire universe. All living beings and the world arise from Brahman and return to it. This Mahāvākyā says that the same consciousness which makes us aware is not different from the supreme Brahman. Realising this unity is the goal of spiritual knowledge. When one truly understands that their own consciousness is the same as the universal Brahman, it leads to liberation from ignorance and the cycle of birth and death.

2. Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman or I am the Absolute). It is called Anubhavavakyā. This statement, from Brhadaranyaka Upanishads of Yajurveda, expresses the identity of the individual self with the Ultimate Reality. It teaches that the individual self, referred to as ‘Aham’ or ‘I,’ is not separate from Brahman, which is the ultimate and eternal reality. This statement explains that the true nature of the self is beyond the physical body and the changing thoughts and emotions. It is the same as Brahman, which is unchanging and present in all things. When a person realises the meaning of Aham Brahmasmi,

they understand that their real self is not just a separate person but a part of the universal truth. This realisation is not only a thought or belief but a direct inner experience. It helps one see the unity between the self and Brahman. Such knowledge frees the person from ignorance and brings the experience of lasting peace and oneness with all existence.

3. Tat Tvam Asi (That Thou Art or 'You are That'). This statement is found in the Chandogya Upanishad of the Sama veda, emphasises the 'Unity of Individual with the 'Universal Principle'. This vakya is known as Upadesa Vakya. It teaches that the true self of an individual is not different from the highest reality, which is Brahman. The word *Tat* stands for Brahman, the universal reality, and *Tvam* stands for the individual self. This statement explains that the essence of the individual is the same as the ultimate reality that exists everywhere. It shows that there is no real separation between the self and Brahman, and the idea of being different from the universal truth is due to ignorance. We often think of ourselves as limited by the body and mind, but according to this teaching, the self is not limited or temporary. It is eternal, without change, and present in everything. Realising this truth leads a person to understand histruie nature, which is the same as the one eternal reality.

4. Ayam Atma Brahma ("This self" is Brahman or this Atman is Brahman') This is called Anusandhana Vakya. This statement, from the Mandukya Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, Identifies the individual self with the Ultimate Reality. It explains the idea that the individual self, or Ātman, is not something separate from the highest reality, known as Brahman. This teaching says that the true self of a person is not just the body or the mind but is the same as the ultimate source of the entire universe. It denies the belief that each person has a completely separate identity and instead says that all beings are connected through one reality. When one reflects deeply on the meaning of Ayam Ātmā Brahma and understands that the self and Brahman are the same, this realisation leads to freedom from ignorance. This understanding is called self-realisation and is the goal of spiritual learning in the Vedanta tradition.

1.1.3.2 Bondage and Liberation

Vedānta explains that human beings live in bondage because they do not know their true self. This ignorance is called Maya or avidyā (In Vedanta, the terms Maya and Avidya are usually used as synonyms. But there is a slight difference in the meaning of these two terms. Maya is the principle that is the cause behind the empirical world, while avidya or ignorance is the cause behind the individual self or Jiva. One can eliminates avidya or ignorance by attaining the true knowledge. But maya cannot be eliminated. It makes us believe that we are

individual beings separate from everything else. Because of Maya or avidyā, a person identifies with the body, the senses, the mind, and the ego (ahamkāra), and becomes part of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This life of repeated birth and death is called samsāra. In contrast, vidyā is the higher knowledge of the self (Ātman) as one with Brahman, the universal reality. This knowledge is not just an idea but a direct inner experience. It removes the illusion of difference and shows that the self is not limited or separate. Even when living in the body, a person who gains this knowledge becomes free. They are no longer tied to worldly identity and do not return to the cycle of birth and death. This state of freedom is called mokṣa, or liberation.

True freedom comes through the practice of vidyā, which is also called self-realisation. This is the goal of Vedānta. It is not achieved through desire for pleasure (preyas), but through the search for the highest good (śreyas). The Kathopaniṣad explains that the highest good is the knowledge of the eternal self. To reach this knowledge, one must live a disciplined and pure life. Self-control, detachment from desires, and concentration are essential. Vedānta does not reject action (karma), but says that actions should be done without selfish motives. Such action helps in purifying the mind and prepares the person for higher knowledge. But action alone does not give liberation. It is only a preparation. Liberation is possible only when the false sense of individuality is removed, and the self is known as non-different from Brahman.

Recap

- ◆ Vedānta means the end of the Vedas and focuses on the Upaniṣads.
- ◆ It explores the nature of self (Ātman) and ultimate reality (Brahman).
- ◆ Liberation (mokṣa) is the goal of knowing Ātman and Brahman.
- ◆ Knowledge (jñāna) in Vedānta is transformative, not just information.
- ◆ Vedānta seeks to understand reality beyond appearances.
- ◆ The three main texts of Vedānta are Upaniṣads, Gītā, and Brahmasūtras.
- ◆ These are known together as the Prasthāna-traya.
- ◆ Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita are the major schools of Vedānta.
- ◆ Ātman is the true, unchanging self within all beings.
- ◆ Ātman is pure consciousness, unaffected by body and mind.
- ◆ The Ātman is eternal and the same in all individuals.
- ◆ Realising the Ātman leads to liberation from ignorance.

- ◆ Brahman is the ultimate, formless, and eternal reality.
- ◆ Brahman is the source, support, and end of all.
- ◆ The term ‘Tajjalān’ shows the world comes from and returns to Brahman.
- ◆ Brahman cannot be known through the senses, only by self-inquiry.
- ◆ Saguṇa Brahman is Brahman with qualities; Nirguṇa is without.
- ◆ Śaṅkara teaches that Nirguṇa Brahman is the highest truth.
- ◆ Rāmānuja teaches that Brahman transforms into the world.
- ◆ Brahman is the soul of nature and all beings.
- ◆ The method ‘neti neti’ helps remove false ideas of reality.
- ◆ Sat-Cit-Ānanda explains Brahman as existence, consciousness, and bliss.
- ◆ Tat tvam asi express the unity of self and Brahma.
- ◆ Prajñānam Brahma - Consciousness is Brahman
- ◆ Ayam Ātmā Brahma - This self is Brahman.
- ◆ Aham Brahmasmi - I am Brahman.
- ◆ Avidyā is ignorance of the true self, which leads to bondage and the cycle of birth and death.
- ◆ Vidyā is the knowledge of the self as one with Brahman, leading to liberation (mokṣa).
- ◆ Self-realisation requires purity, self-control, and desireless action as preparation for higher knowledge.

Objective Questions

1. What does the word ‘Vedānta’ literally mean?
2. What is the true self called in Vedānta?
3. What is the highest universal reality called in Vedānta?

4. What does Sat refer to in the context of Brahman?
5. What does Cit refer to in Vedānta philosophy?
6. What does Ānanda refer to in Vedānta?
7. What is the Prasthāna-traya?
8. Name the three texts included in the Prasthāna-traya.
9. Which Vedānta school teaches qualified non-dualism?
10. What is the key view of Dvaita Vedānta?
11. Which Upaniṣad uses the word Tajjalān to describe Brahman?
12. What is Nirguṇa Brahman according to Advaita Vedānta?
13. What is the theory of Brahmapariṇāma-vāda?
14. What is the theory of Brahmapivarta-vāda?
15. What method is used in Vedānta to point to Brahman as ‘not this, not this’?
16. What is the ultimate goal of Vedānta that leads to liberation from samsāra?

Answers

1. The end of the Vedas
2. Ātman
3. Brahman
4. Pure being or existence
5. Pure consciousness
6. Bliss or deep inner peace
7. The three foundational texts of Vedānta

8. The Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Brahmasūtras
9. Viśiṣṭādvaita
10. Dualism
11. Chāndogya Upaniṣad
12. Brahman without qualities; indescribable and beyond thought
13. The theory that Brahman truly transforms into the world (Rāmānuja)
14. The theory that the world is only an appearance and not a real transformation of Brahman (Śaṅkara)
15. Neti neti (it is known as apavada prakriya)
16. Vidyā

Assignments

1. Explain the meaning of Vedānta and its core teachings as described in the Upaniṣads.
2. How do the concepts of Sat, Cit, and Ānanda describe the nature of Brahman, and why are they considered inseparable aspects of the ultimate reality?
3. Discuss the four qualifications (Sādhana Catuṣṭaya) required for a student to study Vedānta effectively.
4. Compare the concepts of Ātman and Brahman in Vedānta philosophy, using the Mahāvākyas to illustrate their relationship. How does the realization of their unity lead to liberation from saṃsāra?

Suggested Reading

1. Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). Indian Philosophy, Vol. I. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

2. Dasgupta, S.N (2004). A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. I. Delhi: Motilal Publishers.
3. Mahadevan, T.M.P. (1957). Invitation to Indian Philosophy. Motilal Banarsidass.
4. Paul Deussen (1906). The Philosophy of the Upanishads, 7th ed., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

Reference

1. Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). Indian Philosophy, Vol. I. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
2. Radhakrishnan, S., & Moore, C. A. (1957). A Source Book in Indian Philosophy. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
3. Hiriyananda, M. (1994). Outlines of Indian Philosophy. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
4. Sharma, C.D. (1960). A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.



House of Vedanta

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will:

- ◆ understand the key concepts of Vedānta philosophy
- ◆ identify the importance of scriptural texts like the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, and Brahmasūtras in the development of Vedānta philosophy
- ◆ compare the core teachings of major schools of Vedānta such as Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, Dvaitādvaita, and Śuddhādvaita
- ◆ discuss the Bhagavad Gītā's approach to spiritual growth
- ◆ recognise how the Brahmasūtras provide a logical structure for Vedāntic thought

Prerequisites

Vedānta is a school of Indian philosophy that explores the deepest questions about life, the self, and ultimate reality. It teaches that every person has a true self, called Ātman, which is not limited to the body or mind. This true self is not separate from the highest reality, known as Brahman. Realising this unity is considered the goal of human life. This realisation brings liberation (mokṣa), which is freedom from ignorance, suffering, and the cycle of birth and death.

This knowledge of Vedānta is not based on belief alone. It is rooted in careful study, reflection, and direct experience. The tradition offers a clear method for discovering truth through three steps: listening to the teachings (śravaṇa), reflecting on them (manana), and meditating to realise their meaning (nididhyāsana).

To guide this process, Vedānta depends on three main texts: the Upaniṣads,

the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Brahmasūtras. These texts have been studied and interpreted by many philosophers, leading to the formation of various schools within Vedānta.

Keywords

Ātman, Brahman, Mokṣa, Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, Brahmasūtras, Śuddhādvaita, Bhedābheda, Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Advaita

Discussion

1.2.1 Introduction

In the earlier unit, we discussed the fundamental ideas of Vedānta philosophy. The central focus of Vedānta is to understand the nature of the self (Ātman), the highest reality (Brahman), and the ultimate goal of human life, which is liberation (mokṣa). According to Vedānta, Ātman is the true self of an individual, and Brahman is the universal reality that exists in all beings and all things. The Upaniṣads teach that there is no real difference between the individual self and the universal Brahman. When a person understands that their true self is one with Brahman, they overcome ignorance (avidyā) and become free from the cycle of birth and death (samsāra). This freedom is called mokṣa, which means release from all limitations. Liberation is not something that comes after death; it is the state of living with full knowledge of one's real nature. The teachings of Vedānta help people move from a false idea of themselves to a clear understanding of the unchanging and eternal reality within. This is not just a belief but a knowledge that must be realised through proper study, reflection, and experience.

Based on these teachings, this unit will focus on how Vedānta philosophers explain and support these core ideas using proper methods. Vedānta does not simply ask people

to accept its teachings without enquiry. It follows a clear and logical method to arrive at its conclusions. This includes the use of scriptural testimony (śruti), logical reasoning (tarka), and personal experience (anubhava). The process of learning Vedānta involves three important steps: listening to the teachings (śravaṇa), thinking deeply about them (manana), and meditating on them (nididhyāsana). Together, these steps help a seeker of knowledge move from hearing the words to understanding their true meaning and finally to realising them in their own experience.

1.2.2 Foundational Texts of Vedānta philosophy

The foundation of Vedānta philosophy is based on three main texts. These are the ten Upaniṣads (Dasopanishads), the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Brahmasūtras. Together, these texts are called the Prasthāna-traya. Each of these texts plays a special role. The Upaniṣads provide the original philosophical insights. The Bhagavad Gītā gives a more practical and devotional approach to these teachings. The Brahmasūtras present the teachings in a logical and systematic way. Various thinkers interpreted these texts differently, giving rise to different schools of Vedānta.

1.2.2.1 The Upaniṣads

The word Upaniṣad has both an external and an internal meaning.

The external meaning is: ‘The truth learned by sitting near the teacher.’

The internal meaning is: ‘The truth that resides closest (to oneself).’

The Upaniṣads appeared during the later part of the Vedic period, around 1500 BCE to 500 BCE. They mark an important turning point in Indian thought. Earlier Vedic traditions mainly focused on performing rituals for worldly benefits. But the Upaniṣads introduced deep philosophical questions about life, the self, and the universe. These texts are seen as the essence of Vedic wisdom. They were not written by one person or at one time. Instead, they developed over a long period across different parts of ancient India. Many sages and thinkers contributed to their teachings. These thinkers were concerned with questions such as what is the true self? What is the purpose of life? What is the nature of ultimate reality? The Upaniṣads tried to answer such questions by going beyond ritual practice and encouraging a search for truth. They became important sources of knowledge for spiritual seekers who wanted to understand the meaning of life more deeply.

During the time when the Upaniṣads were being composed, many different philosophical ideas were developing in India. The Upaniṣads responded to this climate by offering reflections on the deeper meaning of existence. They moved away from ritual sacrifices and focused more on the inner journey of the individual. People began to ask questions about who they are and what lies beyond life and death. The teachings of the Upaniṣads helped guide those who were no longer satisfied with rituals and were searching for answers within. These texts laid the foundation for later Indian philosophical

schools and these schools interpreted the Upaniṣads in different ways but all treated them as important sources of knowledge. Their reflections on consciousness, freedom, and true knowledge remain meaningful even in modern times.

The word ‘Upaniṣad’ comes from Sanskrit and can be broken into three parts: ‘upa’ (near), ‘ni’ (down), and ‘sad’ (to sit). So, the word means ‘sitting down near’, which refers to a student sitting close to a teacher to receive teachings. This image shows the close and respectful relationship between teacher and student. It also shows how knowledge was passed down through direct conversation and personal guidance. The teachings in the Upaniṣads are about Ātman and Brahman - the individual self and the universal reality. Traditionally, 108 important Upaniṣads are listed, but about ten are considered most important, especially because Śaṅkarācārya, a major Indian philosopher, wrote detailed commentaries on them. These include the Īśā, Kena, Katha, Praśna, Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya, Taittirīya, Aitareya, Chāndogya and Bṛhadāraṇyaka. The oldest Upaniṣads are in prose, while later ones include verse. Some, like the Katha and Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads, also refer to other philosophical systems such as Sāṅkhya and Yoga. These texts remain central to Indian philosophical thought.

1.2.2.2 Bhagavad Gītā

The Bhagavad Gītā is a unique text in Indian philosophical literature because it brings together deep ideas and practical guidance for life. The word ‘Bhagavad Gītā’ means ‘The Song of the Blessed One.’ It is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, set on a battlefield just before the great war of Kurukshetra. Arjuna, a warrior, finds himself in a moral crisis. Though he knows his duty as a soldier, he is disturbed by the thought of killing his relatives, teachers, and friends who are on the opposing side.

He feels torn between his role as a warrior and his concern for justice and love. Arjuna's hesitation represents the conflict faced by every individual when making difficult moral decisions. His questions reflect the inner struggle of a human being who wants to do what is right but is unsure of what that is. This sets the stage for a discussion on duty, self, and the true meaning of life.

In the first chapter of the *Gītā*, Arjuna's sadness goes beyond simple worry or fear. It is a deep inner conflict that makes him question the value of action and the meaning of life. This moment of despair is often compared to what spiritual seekers call the 'dark night of the soul' a phase where one feels completely lost and confused. But this stage is important for self-understanding and transformation. Starting from the second chapter, Lord Krishna begins to answer Arjuna's doubts. He explains that human beings are not just their bodies or minds but are eternal souls. The body changes, grows old, and dies, but the soul is unchanging and everlasting. This knowledge helps Arjuna begin to understand that life has a deeper purpose. The *Gītā* teaches that realising the nature of the soul is the first step toward spiritual growth and freedom from fear, confusion, and sorrow.

As the conversation continues, Arjuna begins to focus on regaining control over himself. The path of spiritual growth involves discipline, patience, and self-control. It is not easy, and many people try to avoid the struggle by making excuses or using clever arguments. Arjuna also tries to escape his duty by saying it is better to renounce action. But Krishna, who represents divine wisdom, reminds Arjuna not to fall into despair. He tells him that avoiding responsibility is not the solution. Instead, Arjuna must rise above his confusion and follow the path of truth and self-realisation. Krishna encourages him to perform his duties without selfish motives. This teaching is known as karma

yoga the path of action. The *Gītā* shows that spiritual growth comes not by avoiding life's duties, but by performing them with understanding, dedication, and detachment from personal gain.

The Bhagavad *Gītā* presents a vision of life that includes knowledge, action, and devotion. It explains that the material world is always changing, and what changes cannot be the ultimate truth. True reality is unchanging and eternal. According to the *Gītā*, this reality is called Brahman the supreme being that exists in everything and beyond everything. The *Gītā* teaches that different people can approach this reality in different ways. Some may seek knowledge and see Brahman as eternal light. Others may follow a moral life and experience Brahman as truth and justice. Some may express devotion and see Brahman as love and beauty. The *Gītā* says that none of these paths is wrong. All sincere efforts lead to the same goal, which is unity with the Supreme. In this journey, knowledge (thinking), feeling (emotion), and will (action) work together. The *Gītā* teaches that the aim of human life is to realise this unity and live in harmony with the whole universe.

1.2.2.3 The *Brahmasūtras*

The Brahma Sutras, compiled by Badarayana are a foundational text of Vedanta philosophy. They aim to systematise the teachings of the Upanishads, which explore the nature of Brahman (ultimate reality), Atman (self), and their relationship. The text consists of 555 aphorisms (sutras), organised into four chapters (adhyayas), each with four sections. These concise statements address key philosophical questions, such as the origin of the universe, the nature of Brahman, and the path to liberation (moksha). The sutras are brief and often ambiguous, requiring commentaries by philosophers like Adi Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhvacharya to clarify their meaning. As part of the

Prasthanatraya the Brahma Sutras provide a structured framework for understanding Vedantic thought and resolving apparent contradictions in the Upanishads.

Each chapter of the Brahma Sutras focuses on a specific aspect of Vedanta. The first chapter (Samanvaya) establishes Brahman as the cause of the universe and reconciles Upanishadic statements about Brahman's nature. The second chapter (Avirodha) refutes objections from rival philosophies, like Samkhya and Buddhism, and clarifies that Brahman is both the material and efficient cause of creation. The third chapter (Sadhana) discusses spiritual practices, such as meditation and devotion, necessary for realising Brahman. The fourth chapter (Phala) explains the nature of moksha, describing it as liberation from the cycle of birth and death through knowledge of Brahman. The sutras emphasise that Brahman is eternal, infinite, and the source of all existence, while the world is a manifestation dependent on Brahman. This logical structure makes the text a guide for philosophical inquiry and spiritual practice.

The Brahma Sutras' importance lies in their role in shaping Vedanta's diverse schools. Different interpretations interpret the text differently, leading to schools like Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita. For example, Shankara's Advaita views the world as an illusion (maya) and liberation as realising the identity of Atman and Brahman. Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita sees the world as real but subordinate to Brahman, emphasising devotion. Madhvacharya's Dvaita maintains a strict distinction between Brahman and the soul. These commentaries highlight the sutras' adaptability, allowing them to address varied spiritual perspectives.

1.2.3 Major Schools of Vedanta Philosophy

As stated above the Brahma Sūtra aimed

to bring together the various teachings of the Upaniṣads into a consistent and systematic philosophical framework. Since the sūtras are written in very brief statements, they allowed for multiple interpretations. This led to the rise of several schools of Vedānta, each with its own understanding of the relationship between the individual self (jīva) and the supreme reality (Brahman). These schools built their doctrines on foundational commentaries written by key philosophers. The Advaita (non-dualism) school was founded by Śaṅkara, who argued that Brahman alone is real and that the world and the individual self are ultimately not separate from it. Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism), founded by Rāmānuja, taught that the self and the world are real but dependent on Brahman. Dvaita (dualism), taught by Madhvā, maintains that the self and Brahman are eternally distinct. Other important schools include Śuddhādvaita (pure non-dualism) of Vallabha and Dvaitādvaita (dual-non-dualism or bhedābheda) of Nimbārka. Each school formed its own community of followers and produced a large number of commentaries and treatises that supported its views and explained its practices.

1.2.3.1 Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta

The non-dualistic school of Śaṅkara teaches the fundamental identity of the individual self (Ātman) and the ultimate reality (Brahman). It is one of the most influential schools of Vedānta and provides a comprehensive philosophical system based on the Prasthānatraya. According to Śaṅkara, Brahman is the only reality, and all distinctions such as subject and object, self and God, or the world and Brahman are due to ignorance (avidyā). The world we perceive is not ultimately real but appears so due to illusion (māyā). Śaṅkara explains that the true self (Ātman) is pure consciousness, without any attributes or form, and is identical with Brahman. Realisation of this

identity leads to liberation (mokṣa). The famous statement ‘Brahma satyam jagat mithyā, jīvo brahmaiva nāparah’ summarises his teaching: ‘Brahman alone is real; the world is illusory; the individual soul is none other than Brahman.’ For Śaṅkara, philosophical inquiry requires preparation that includes discrimination between the eternal and non-eternal, renunciation of worldly desires, moral discipline, and a longing for liberation. Through this disciplined path and self-knowledge, one can overcome ignorance and realise the true nature of the self. This ultimate realisation is not intellectual but experiential, leading to freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

Here, arises an important question. Why Sankara calls his philosophy non-dualism and not Monism. The answer is that the category of number is not applicable to the absolute. That is why Sankara calls his philosophy non-dualism and not monism. Advaita is idealism because the world is ideal in nature.

1.2.3.2 Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita

-The qualified non-dualism of Rāmānuja is a major school of Vedānta that presents a distinct interpretation of the relationship among the individual self, the world and the supreme reality. Rāmānuja integrated the devotional teachings of the Ālvār saints of South India with the scriptural authority of the Prasthānatraya. Rāmānuja’s metaphysical view holds that reality is non-dual, but it is a unity qualified by diversity (Viśiṣṭa). He identifies Brahman with a personal God Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa who possesses qualities like knowledge, power, and bliss. In this system, Brahman is both the material and efficient cause of the universe and includes within itself the individual souls (cit) and matter (acit) as its body. The world and the souls are real and are inseparably connected to God, not illusions or mere appearances.

Thus, the universe and all beings exist as real parts of God, maintaining individuality while depending completely on Him. Rāmānuja’s system offers a foundation for a life of devotion, service, and spiritual fulfilment. Viśiṣṭādvaita is Realism because world is Real in nature. It is also monism because the supreme reality is one principle.

1.2.3.3 Madhva’s Dvaita Vedānta

It is a dualistic school of Indian philosophy that asserts a clear distinction between God and all other forms of existence. Madhva developed this system in response to what he saw as excessive idealism in Śaṅkara’s Advaita and the limitations in Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita. According to Madhva, only God (Vishnu) is independent (svatantra), and everything else such as individual souls, matter, time, and space is dependent (paratantra) on God. He identifies five fundamental and eternal distinctions (pañcabheda): between God and souls, God and matter, souls and matter, one soul and another, and one part of matter and another. These distinctions are real and not caused by ignorance or illusion. The world is a real creation of God, not an appearance or illusion. Vishnu, as the supreme personal God, possesses qualities and governs the world. Individual souls are conscious and have free will, but they remain eternally distinct from God, even in liberation. Thus, Dvaita Vedānta upholds that difference, rather than unity, is the basis of reality. Madhva’s contribution lies in establishing a system grounded in scriptural authority and logical consistency, offering a firm foundation for personal theism in Vedānta. Dvaita is Realistic and pluralistic because in Dvaita philosophy, the world is real and realities are many in number

1.2.3.4 Nimbārka's Dvaitādvaita Vedānta

It is also known as the Dualistic-nondualistic school, presents a unique interpretation of the relationship between Brahman, the individual soul (jīva), and the world (jagat). According to Nimbārka, the ultimate reality is Śrī Kṛṣṇa, identified as Brahman, who is both the material and efficient cause of the universe. Nimbārka's core concept is bhedābheda, meaning difference and non-difference. He holds that jīva and jagat are both distinct from and inseparably connected to Brahman. They depend on Brahman for their existence, but are not identical to it. Nimbārka divides reality into conscious entities like the jīva, and non-conscious entities such as prakṛti (matter), kāla (time), and aprakṛta (non-material substance). Brahman manifests through various forms (vyūhas and avatāras), and can be known only through the Vedas. The jīva is eternal, conscious, atomic in nature, and always dependent on Brahman. Jīvas are of two types bound (baddha) and liberated (mukta). In liberation, jīvas realise their true nature without merging into Brahman. Thus, Nimbārka's philosophy maintains the simultaneous unity and diversity of all existence. Dvaitādvaita is Realistic and Pluralist because the world is real and the realities are many in number.

1.2.3.5 Vallabha's Śuddhādvaita:

Vallabha's philosophy known as Śuddhādvaita or Pure Non-dualism, is a school of Vedānta that identifies Brahman with Śrī Kṛṣṇa and regards the world as a real manifestation of Brahman. Vallabhachārya, the founder of this system, emphasised the concept of Puṣṭi, or divine grace. Unlike Śaṅkara, who viewed the world as an illusion caused by Māyā, Vallabha regarded the world, the individual soul (jīva), and matter as real and as direct expressions of Brahman. According to him, Brahman alone is the independent reality, and everything else exists as His manifestation. He explained this process through Avikṛtapariṇāmavāda, meaning that the world is a transformation of Brahman without altering His essential nature. The jīva, though an integral part of Brahman, lacks bliss (ānanda) due to ignorance but remains inherently pure and conscious. Vallabha divided jīvas into three types based on their spiritual capacities: Pravāhinī, Maryāda, and Puṣṭi, each progressing differently on the path to liberation. Śuddhādvaita is realism because the world according to this philosophy is real, and it is pluralistic because the realities are many in number.

Recap

- ◆ Vedānta seeks to understand the Ātman, Brahman, and mokṣa.
- ◆ Ātman is the true self; Brahman is the universal reality.
- ◆ Realising the unity of Ātman and Brahman leads to liberation.
- ◆ Mokṣa is freedom from ignorance and the cycle of birth and death.

- ◆ Liberation is living with true knowledge of the self.
- ◆ Vedānta uses three steps: śravaṇa, manana, and nididhyāsana.
- ◆ Vedānta relies on śruti, tarka, and anubhava.
- ◆ The three foundational texts are the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, and Brahmasūtras.
- ◆ The Upaniṣads ask deep questions about life and the self.
- ◆ The Upaniṣads moved away from rituals and focused on inner truth.
- ◆ The word ‘Upaniṣad’ means sitting near a teacher.
- ◆ The Bhagavad Gītā is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna.
- ◆ The Gītā promotes karma yoga - doing duty without selfishness.
- ◆ Brahman is the unchanging reality behind all things.
- ◆ The Brahmasūtras systematise the ideas of the Upaniṣads.
- ◆ They explain Brahman, creation, and the path to mokṣa.
- ◆ Shankara’s Advaita says the world is illusion, Brahman alone is real.
- ◆ Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita says the world and souls are real and part of Brahman.
- ◆ Madhva’s Dvaita says God and souls are eternally different.
- ◆ Nimbārka’s Dvaitādvaita says there is both difference and non-difference.
- ◆ Vallabha’s Śuddhādvaita sees the world as a real form of Brahman.
- ◆ Each school developed its own commentaries and practices.

Objective Questions

1. What is the central focus of Vedānta philosophy?
2. According to Vedānta, what is the true self of an individual called?

3. What is the name for the universal reality in Vedānta?
4. What causes ignorance according to Vedānta?
5. What are the three steps involved in the learning process of Vedānta?
6. Which three sources form the *Prasthāna-traya* in Vedānta philosophy?
7. Who wrote commentaries on ten major Upaniṣads?
8. Who delivers the teachings in the Bhagavad Gītā?
9. What is the central teaching of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta?
10. According to Rāmānuja, who is identified as the personal God?
11. In Viśiṣṭādvaita, what are *cit* and *acit* considered to be?
12. What are the five eternal distinctions (pañcabheda) in Madhva's Dvaita Vedānta?
13. What is the core concept of Nimbārka's philosophy?
14. In Nimbārka's system, what is the nature of the jīva?
15. How many types of jīvas are mentioned in Nimbārka's philosophy?
16. What is the name of Vallabha's Vedānta school?

Answers

1. Self-realisation
2. Ātman
3. Brahman
4. Avidyā
5. Śravaṇa, Manana, Nididhyāsana
6. Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, Brahmasūtras

7. Śaṅkara
8. Krishna
9. Ātman–Brahman unity
10. Viṣṇu
11. Body of Brahman
12. God-soul, God-matter, soul-matter, soul-soul, matter-matter
13. Bhedābheda
14. Eternal, atomic
15. Two
16. Śuddhādvaita
17. Unchanged transformation

Assignments

1. What are the Prasthāna-traya texts of Vedānta and what role does each play?
2. What are the major philosophical themes found in the Upaniṣads?
3. Describe the moral and philosophical conflict of Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gītā.
4. What are the key teachings of the Brahmasūtras and how do they organise Vedāntic thought?
5. Compare the views of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja on the relationship between Ātman and Brahman.
6. How does Madhva's concept of pañcabheda differ from Śaṅkara's idea of non-duality?
7. In what way is Vallabha's Śuddhādvaita different from Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta?

Suggested Reading

1. Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
2. Radhakrishnan, S., & Moore, C. A. (1957). *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
3. Hiriyananda, M. (1994) *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass.
4. Sharma, C.D. (1960) *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers.
5. Dasgupta, S.N (2004) *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol.1, Delhi: Motilal Publishers.
6. Mahadevan, T.M.P. (1957). *Invitation to Indian Philosophy*. Motilal Banarsi Dass.
7. Paul Deussen (1906). *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, 7th ed., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

Reference

1. Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
2. Radhakrishnan, S., & Moore, C. A. (1957). *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
3. Sharma, C.D. (1960) *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers.



The Search- Individual and the World

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain the concept of Ātman in Vedānta philosophy as the eternal self, distinct from body and mind
- ◆ evaluate the significance of the four states of consciousness in understanding the nature of the self
- ◆ understand the pañcakośa theory and how it explains the different levels of human existence.
- ◆ compare the views of Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita on the nature of the world and its relation to Brahman
- ◆ recognise the importance of knowledge (jñāna) and reflection in overcoming ignorance and attaining liberation (mokṣa)

Prerequisites

Picture a young person sitting quietly by a river, watching the flowing water and thinking about life. They wonder, “Who am I really? Am I just this body and mind? What is this world around me, and why does it keep changing?” As the sun sets and the sky changes colours, they begin to feel a deep connection with nature. The sound of water, the breeze, and the setting sun seem to speak a silent truth. For a moment, all worries fade, and a calm feeling takes over.

This experience prompts deeper reflection: “Is there something permanent behind all these changes? Is there a truth that connects me with everything around me?” These simple questions are not just personal thoughts—they are the starting point

of a great search explored in Vedānta philosophy. The sages of ancient India also asked these same questions and found answers in the Upaniṣads. Their teachings explain that our true self is not just the body or the mind, but something deeper and eternal. The world may appear separate, but it is ultimately connected to one reality.

Keywords

Ātman, Brahman, Upaniṣads, Māyā, Jñāna, Mokṣa, Tat Tvam Asi, Turiya, Pañcakośa, Sat-Cit-Ānanda

Discussion

1.3.1 Introduction

In Advaita philosophy, the search for truth involves understanding the relationship between the individual (Ātman) and the world, which is a manifestation of Brahman, the ultimate reality. The Upaniṣads, the core texts of Vedānta, teach that the individual is not a separate entity but is deeply connected to the universe. This search begins with questioning who we are and what the world is. Vedānta explains that ignorance makes us see ourselves as limited beings, separate from others and the world. This false sense of separation causes suffering and keeps us trapped in the cycle of birth and death. The journey of self-discovery in Vedānta aims to uncover the true nature of the individual as Ātman, the eternal self, and its unity with Brahman, the source of all existence. By realising this unity, a person achieves liberation, freeing themselves from ignorance and suffering.

The individual's search in Vedānta involves looking beyond the body, mind, and ego to find the Ātman, described as pure consciousness, unchanging and present in all beings. The Upaniṣad, such as Chandogya, use examples like the dialogue between Uddalaka and Shvetaketu or the four states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and turiya) to show that the Ātman

is the witness of all experiences, unaffected by change. The world, meanwhile, appears diverse and temporary due to Maya, the power of illusion that hides Brahman's oneness. The search requires understanding that the world's apparent reality is not ultimate; only Brahman, as Sat (existence), Cit (consciousness), and Ananda (bliss), is real. Through knowledge (jnāna), the individual realises their identity with Brahman, dissolving the illusion of separation. 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.

Cit 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. The Brahman cannot be described by words because Brahman is beyond words and thoughts. To define Brahman is to limit it. Brahman is infinite.

1.3.2 Concept of Ātman in Vedanta Philosophy

In the Upaniṣads, we find a deep inquiry into the true nature of reality, which builds upon the earlier Vedic teachings. The Vedas speak of ‘Ekam Sat’, meaning ‘one reality,’ which appears in various forms in the universe. This idea becomes more focused in the Upaniṣads, where the inquiry shifts from the outer world to the inner self. While the Vedic hymns often describe rituals and cosmic forces, the Upaniṣads introduce a subjective path of knowing, where the human being is seen as a key to understanding the universe. The term Ātman, first used in the Rg-Veda as the vital essence or breath of life, begins to take on a deeper meaning in the Upaniṣads. It becomes the central idea in the search for truth, now understood as the eternal self or soul. The Upaniṣadic thinkers try to define this Ātman not just through belief, but through reflection, reasoning, and dialogue. In this way, they move from external rituals to internal realisation, showing that the foundation of all knowledge lies in knowing the self.

One of the important stories related to the understanding of the self is found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, where the gods and demons send Indra and Virochana to learn the nature of the self from the teacher Prajāpati. Prajāpati agrees to teach them but requires that they live a disciplined life and serve him for thirty-two years. After completing this period, both Indra and Virochana are ready to receive his teachings. Prajāpati first tells them that the self is what one sees in a reflection whether in a mirror, water, or someone’s eyes. Virochana is satisfied with this explanation and returns to his people, believing the self to be the body. Indra, however, is not convinced. He reflects that the body grows old, falls sick, and dies. If the self is only the body, it too must perish, which seems to go against the idea of a permanent and unchanging self. This

thoughtful questioning leads Indra to remain with Prajāpati and ask for further guidance.

Prajāpati then gives Indra a second explanation stating that the self is the one who enjoys experiences in dreams. This dreaming self moves freely, even without the physical body, and seems to be more than the body alone. But Indra again expresses doubt. He observes that the dreamer still suffers from pain, fear, and confusion. These emotions suggest that even this self is limited and affected by external influences. Therefore, it cannot be the final truth. Indra’s search continues, and once again he approaches Prajāpati for a deeper understanding. Prajāpati then introduces a third view: the self is the one who remains in deep, dreamless sleep. In this state, the person is free from the senses, body, and even thoughts. There is no fear or suffering. However, Indra sees a problem here too. He notes that in deep sleep, there is no awareness or experience. If the self is merely this unconscious state, it cannot be the source of knowledge and experience. The self must be something that is always present and aware, even when one is not awake or dreaming.

Finally, impressed by Indra’s willingness to question and learn, Prajāpati reveals the complete teaching. He explains that none of these the body, dream, or deep sleep is the real self. These are only appearances or conditions in which the self functions. The true self is beyond all three states. It is not something that changes or disappears. It is the eternal, unchanging witness of all experiences. This self does not grow old, suffer, or die. It is always present, whether one is awake, dreaming, or asleep. It is the ground on which all experiences arise. Everything in the world exists in relation to this self. According to the Upaniṣads, realising this self is the key to understanding reality. It is not just a theory but a truth that must be discovered through personal insight. The Ātman, once known, reveals that the

individual is not separate from the universe. Instead, the self is identical with Brahman, the highest reality. This teaching is the foundation of much of Indian philosophy and becomes central to later schools of Vedānta tradition.

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad also gives a well-known dialogue between a father, Uddālaka, and his son, Śvetaketu. This conversation is important because it introduces the idea that all beings and things come from one single source. Uddālaka, a learned sage, wanted his son to understand the true nature of reality. Śvetaketu had returned after twelve years of study at a teacher's school, feeling proud of his knowledge. However, his father noticed that he lacked understanding of the essential truth behind all existence. To teach him this, Uddālaka asked questions and gave examples to help him understand that the self (Ātman) is the same in all beings and is one with Brahman, the ultimate reality. Uddālaka begins by explaining that all things in the world come from sat, which means 'being' or 'existence.' He says that before creation, only sat existed. From sat, all forms like fire, water, and food were created. From food came living beings. He teaches that even though things look different, they all come from the same source. He uses several simple examples to help Śvetaketu understand this truth. One example is about clay. Uddālaka says that when you see different clay pots, you may think they are different objects. But they are all made of clay. When you understand clay, you understand all clay pots. Similarly, when you understand the one source, sat, you understand all things.

To explain how the self (Ātman) is present in everything, Uddālaka gives the example of salt and water. He asks Śvetaketu to mix salt in water and then taste the water from different parts. Though the salt is no longer visible, it is present throughout the water. This shows that Ātman is also invisible but present in everything. You cannot see it, but it is always there, just like salt in

water. Uddālaka also compares the self to the juice in a tree. When a tree is cut, the juice flows out, showing that the essence is spread throughout the tree. In the same way, the self is present in every part of a person and in all beings. These examples are used to teach that the self is not something outside or far away. It is within us and also in everything around us. The most famous teaching from this dialogue is the repeated statement: 'Tat Tvam Asi', which means 'That Thou Art' or 'You are That.' Uddālaka repeats this sentence ninetimes to help Śvetaketu realise that his true nature is not separate from the ultimate reality. The self in each person is not different from the universal self, Brahman. Uddālaka wants Śvetaketu to understand that knowing this truth is the highest form of knowledge. When a person realises that their self is the same as the universal self, they go beyond ignorance and reach liberation. This knowledge does not come from reading or listening alone, but from deep reflection and realisation.

This deeper understanding leads to a broader vision of the self as not only the witness of individual experience but also as the universal reality. The Upaniṣads describe this universal self, known as Ātman or Brahman, as both immanent and transcendent. This means it exists within all things and also beyond them. It is not separate from the world but is the source and support of everything. All beings, objects, and experiences exist within this self, and nothing lies outside it. Every form of awareness, whether of the external world or inner thoughts, depends on this self. The self is not just the subject who sees, hears, or feels but is also the reality in which all objects are seen, heard, or felt. Everything in the universe, whether known or unknown, exists in relation to this one self. By understanding this, the seeker begins to see the unity of all existence. This vision of the universal self forms the central message of the Upaniṣads and guides the seeker toward true knowledge.

This universal self cannot be perceived through the senses. It is not like an object that can be touched, seen, or measured. Even though it cannot be seen directly, it is the basis of all seeing, knowing, and experiencing. Śaṅkara, a major teacher in the Advaita Vedānta tradition, describes it as the witness self an inner presence that lights up all experiences without itself being an experience. The Upaniṣads make it clear that the self is not the body, not a collection of mental events, and not just a flow of consciousness. It is not made up of changeable parts. Rather, it is the one unchanging consciousness in which all thoughts, experiences, and actions occur. It is universal and not limited to any individual. This makes it the source of unity among all beings and experiences, forming the single foundation on which all knowledge and existence rest.

Every experience, whether of joy or sorrow, waking or sleeping, depends on this self. Even when one cannot physically sense it, the self is always there as the background of experience. It is not an object, yet it is the most certain reality. Without the self, there can be no experience at all. The Upaniṣads call upon the learner to reflect on this and understand that beneath all changing experiences lies the permanent self. Recognising the Ātman leads to a new understanding of reality, where one sees all beings as connected. This universal consciousness removes the illusion of separateness and shows that the essence of all beings is the same. By realising this truth, the individual overcomes ignorance and sees unity in all things. The self is not an individual possession but a shared essence that links all life. This insight, according to the Upaniṣads, is key to true knowledge and liberation.

The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad also provides a detailed analysis of the self through four states of consciousness. The first state is

waking (jāgrat), where the self is aware of the external world and interacts through the body. In this state, the self experiences the physical world and identifies with the body and senses. The second state is dreaming (svapna), where the self creates inner experiences using impressions from waking life. Though the body rests, the mind remains active, forming a world of its own. The third state is deep sleep (suṣupti), where there are no dreams or desires. In this state, the self is at rest and does not experience duality. The mind becomes inactive, and the self merges in a peaceful, undivided state of being. According to the Upaniṣad, this deep sleep gives a glimpse of bliss and unity with Brahman. But the fourth state, called turiya, goes beyond all these. It is not like waking, dreaming, or deep sleep. It is a state of pure consciousness, free from all duality and experiences. Turiya is not a condition of the mind but a complete awareness of the true self. It is not seen or heard but is the highest reality. It reveals the self as one with Brahman, beyond time and change. Realising turiya is the goal of Upaniṣadic teaching, as it shows the unity of the self with the whole of existence.

1.3.3 Pañcakōṣa Theory

The doctrine of the five sheaths (kōśas) in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad, explains the evolutionary progression of existence from the lowest level of matter to the highest state of non-dual bliss. The first and outermost sheath is the Annamaya kośa, which refers to the physical body made of food or matter. This is the lowest level of existence and includes all physical elements. Matter in itself is lifeless and unconscious. It cannot think, feel, or act. Although important as a starting point, the material body alone cannot reflect the true nature of Brahman, the ultimate reality. The Upaniṣads teach that Brahman is pure consciousness, and such consciousness cannot be fully expressed through inert matter. Hence, the journey

toward the knowledge of the self must move beyond the physical level. The Annamaya kośa forms the base of existence, but it is not the complete expression of human life or reality.

The second sheath is called the Prāṇamaya kośa, which represents the life force or prāṇa that animates the physical body. When life energy enters the physical body, matter becomes active and responsive. The body breathes, moves, and grows. This life energy is not limited to human beings; it is present in all living organisms. It connects all forms of life, from small organisms to large animals and humans. The presence of prāṇa shows that matter is not isolated—it is part of a living universe. This sheath is a higher state than the Annamaya because it gives energy and motion to the physical body. It bridges the gap between lifeless matter and higher mental awareness. The Prāṇamaya kośa also shows that life is not just a physical process but a universal force flowing through all living beings. This force prepares the ground for the next stage of development: the mind, where awareness and thought begin to emerge in conscious life.

The third sheath is the Manomaya kośa, which refers to the mental or psychological level. This is the stage where awareness becomes more developed, and beings start to feel, think, and react to their surroundings. The mind includes thoughts, emotions, desires, and perceptions. In animals, this sheath operates mostly through instinct and reflexes. Animals respond to the world based on immediate needs like hunger, safety, and reproduction. In humans, the Manomaya is more advanced. Though we also have instincts, we can go beyond them. We begin to reflect, ask questions, and seek meaning. This mental sheath is important because it allows us to think about our actions and understand the world around us. However, it is still limited by emotions and changing thoughts. The mind reacts to pleasure and

pain, success and failure, without always understanding the deeper truths. For true self-knowledge, one must move beyond this mental activity and develop reason and self-awareness, which leads to the next sheath.

The fourth sheath is the Vijñānamaya kośa, which means the sheath of knowledge and reason. This level is unique to human beings. It refers to the ability not only to think but also to be aware of one's thoughts. At this stage, humans develop self-consciousness. They can ask questions like 'Who am I?' and 'What is the purpose of life?' They can analyse their beliefs, understand moral values, and explore philosophy and science. The Vijñānamaya kośa is the seat of reflection, discrimination, and wisdom. It helps humans separate right from wrong and truth from illusion. This level marks a major step in human evolution. However, even reason has limits. It works with ideas and words, which cannot fully explain the absolute truth. While this sheath brings one closer to the understanding of the self, it cannot reach the final goal alone. For that, a person must go beyond thought and enter the state of direct experience, which is the next and final sheath.

The fifth and innermost sheath is the Ānandamaya kośa, which means the sheath of bliss. This is the highest state of human development and spiritual evolution. At this level, the difference between the self and the world disappears. The person no longer sees themselves as separate from others or from Brahman. All dualities like knower and known, subject and object are dissolved. What remains is pure consciousness and bliss. This bliss is not like everyday happiness, which comes and goes. It is a constant and deep sense of unity with all existence. In this state, the individual experiences complete peace and freedom from fear, sorrow, and attachment. The Ānandamaya is not a mental feeling but a state of being where the true self is realised. It is the final goal of human life according to the Upaniṣads. By reaching this

stage, one becomes free from the cycle of birth and death and attains liberation (mokṣa), the realisation of one's unity with Brahman.

1.3.4 The concept of the World in Vedanta Philosophy

In Vedanta philosophy, the world is understood as a manifestation of Brahman, the ultimate reality, but its nature and reality are interpreted differently across its schools, such as Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita. The Upanishads, particularly the Chandogya and Taittiriya, describe the world as emerging from Brahman, sustained by it, and ultimately merging back into it, as expressed in the term 'Tajjalān' (from, into, and by Brahman). The world includes all physical and mental phenomena such as objects, beings, and experiences but is not considered the ultimate truth. Vedanta teaches that ignorance (avidya or Maya) causes individuals to see the world as separate from Brahman and themselves, leading to a false sense of individuality and suffering. The world's apparent reality, with its diversity and change, is like waves on the ocean of Brahman: real in one sense but not independent. The goal is to understand the world's true nature through knowledge (jnana), recognising its dependence on Brahman, which leads to liberation (moksha) from the cycle of birth and death (samsara).

In Advaita Vedanta, founded by Adi Shankara, the world is an illusory appearance caused by Maya, a power that projects an illusory reality over Brahman. Maya has two powers Avarana and Vikshepa. Firstly, mayaveils the true and secondly projects the untrue. Maya veils the real nature of truth i.e., non-contradiction and projects world of plurality on the non-dual ground of Brahman. The world is not entirely unreal but lacks independent existence, like a dream or a rope mistaken for a snake. Brahman alone is real, characterised as Sat (existence), Cit (consciousness), and Ananda (bliss), while

the world's forms are transient and relative. Advaita uses the concept of vivarta-vada, meaning the world is an apparent transformation of Brahman, not a real one. In contrast, Vishishtadvaita, proposed by Ramanuja, views the world as real and part of Brahman's being, like a body is part of a person. This school follows Brahmaparinama-vada, where Brahman transforms into the world, which remains real but dependent on Brahman. Dvaita Vedanta, founded by Madhvacharya, sees the world as real but eternally distinct from Brahman, emphasising a dualistic relationship where the world and souls depend on Brahman (Vishnu) as the supreme controller. Each school uses the Upanishads to support its view, but all agree the world is not the ultimate reality.

According to Sankara's Advaita, the theory of causation is Brahma-vivarta-vada, which states the world is an illusory appearance of the Absolute. Sankara Does not support Brahma Parinamavada.

The practical implication of Vedanta's view of the world is to shift one's perspective from attachment to detachment, seeing the world as a temporary manifestation rather than the final truth. Understanding this requires the three-step process of sravana (listening to teachings), manana (reflecting on them), and nididhyasana (meditating on the truth). A student with qualities like viveka (discrimination between permanent and temporary) and vairagya (detachment from worldly desires) can realise the world's dependence on Brahman. This knowledge dissolves the illusion of separation, freeing one from suffering and samsara. For example, the Chandogya Upanishad's teaching that the world arises from and returns to Brahman encourages actions without selfish motives, aligning life with the truth of oneness, whether through Advaita's non-dual unity or Vishishtadvaita's devotional connection to Brahman.

Recap

- ◆ Vedānta explains that the individual is not separate from the world.
- ◆ Atman is the true self, and it is one with Brahman.
- ◆ Ignorance causes the false idea of separation and leads to suffering.
- ◆ Realising the unity of Atman and Brahman brings liberation.
- ◆ Examples from Upaniṣads help show how the self is the witness of all experience.
- ◆ The Upaniṣads focus on knowing the inner self (Ātman).
- ◆ Ātman is eternal and unchanging, beyond the body and mind.
- ◆ The story of Indra and Prajāpati shows how the self is not the body, dreamer, or sleeper.
- ◆ The real self is the witness of all these states.
- ◆ Uddālaka teaches Śvetaketu that all beings come from one source, called sat.
- ◆ ‘Tat Tvam Asi’ means the self is not different from Brahman.
- ◆ The universal self is present in all beings and beyond all experiences.
- ◆ The self is the light behind all knowledge and not an object of sense.
- ◆ Knowing the self removes ignorance and reveals unity with all.
- ◆ Taittirīya Upaniṣad explains five layers (kośas) of human existence.
- ◆ The first is *Annamaya*, the physical body made of food.
- ◆ The second is *Prāṇamaya*, the life force that animates the body.
- ◆ The third is *Manomaya*, the mind, where emotions and thoughts arise.
- ◆ The fourth is *Vijñānamaya*, the power of reason and self-awareness.
- ◆ The fifth is *Ānandamaya*, the state of bliss and unity with Brahman.
- ◆ The journey is from body to bliss, reaching liberation by knowing the self.

- ◆ The world appears real but is rooted in Brahman.
- ◆ In Advaita, the world is an illusion caused by Māyā.
- ◆ In Vishishtadvaita, the world is real and part of Brahman.
- ◆ In Dvaita, the world is real and separate from Brahman.
- ◆ All schools agree the world is not the highest truth.
- ◆ Knowledge of Brahman frees one from suffering and ignorance.
- ◆ Vedānta teaches detachment by understanding the world's true nature.
- ◆ The world is meaningful when seen as dependent on Brahman.

Objective Questions

1. What is the central goal of the search in Vedānta philosophy?
2. According to Vedānta, what causes the illusion of separateness between the individual and the world?
3. What is the result of realising the unity of Ātman and Brahman?
4. What is the name of the fourth state of consciousness in Vedānta?
5. According to Vedānta, what hides the oneness of Brahman?
6. Which Upaniṣad contains the story of Indra and Virochana's quest for self-knowledge?
7. What famous Upaniṣadic statement means 'You are That'?
8. Who teaches Śvetaketu about the unity of all existence?
9. According to Śaṅkara, what kind of reality is the self?
10. What state of consciousness is described in the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad as beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep?
11. In which Upaniṣad is the doctrine of five sheaths found?

12. What is the name of the sheath that represents the physical body?
13. Which sheath represents the life force that animates the physical body?
14. What is the name of the mental sheath that includes thoughts and emotions?
15. Which sheath is associated with reflection and discrimination?
16. What is the innermost sheath in the pañcakośa theory?
17. What is experienced at the level of the Ānandamaya kośa?
18. In Advaita Vedānta, what is the power that creates the illusory appearance of the world?
19. What term is used in Advaita to describe the world as an apparent transformation of Brahman?
20. Which Vedānta school describes the world as the body of Brahman?
21. Who is the founder of Vishishtadvaita Vedānta?
22. What is the view of the world in Dvaita Vedānta?
23. Who is the founder of Dvaita Vedānta?

Answers

1. Realisation of unity between Ātman and Brahman
2. Ignorance
3. Liberation
4. Turiya
5. Māyā
6. Chāndogya Upaniṣad

7. Tat Tvam Asi
8. Uddālaka
9. Unchanging witness consciousness
10. Turīya
11. Taittirīya Upaniṣad
12. Annamaya kośa
13. Prāṇamaya kośa
14. Manomaya kośa
15. Vijñānamaya kośa
16. Ānandamaya kośa
17. Bliss and unity with existence
18. Māyā
19. Vivarta-vāda
20. Vishishtadvaita
21. Rāmānuja
22. Real and eternally distinct from Brahman
23. Madhvacharya

Assignments

1. What is the relationship between the individual self (Ātman) and the world in Vedānta philosophy? Explain with reference to the concept of Brahman.

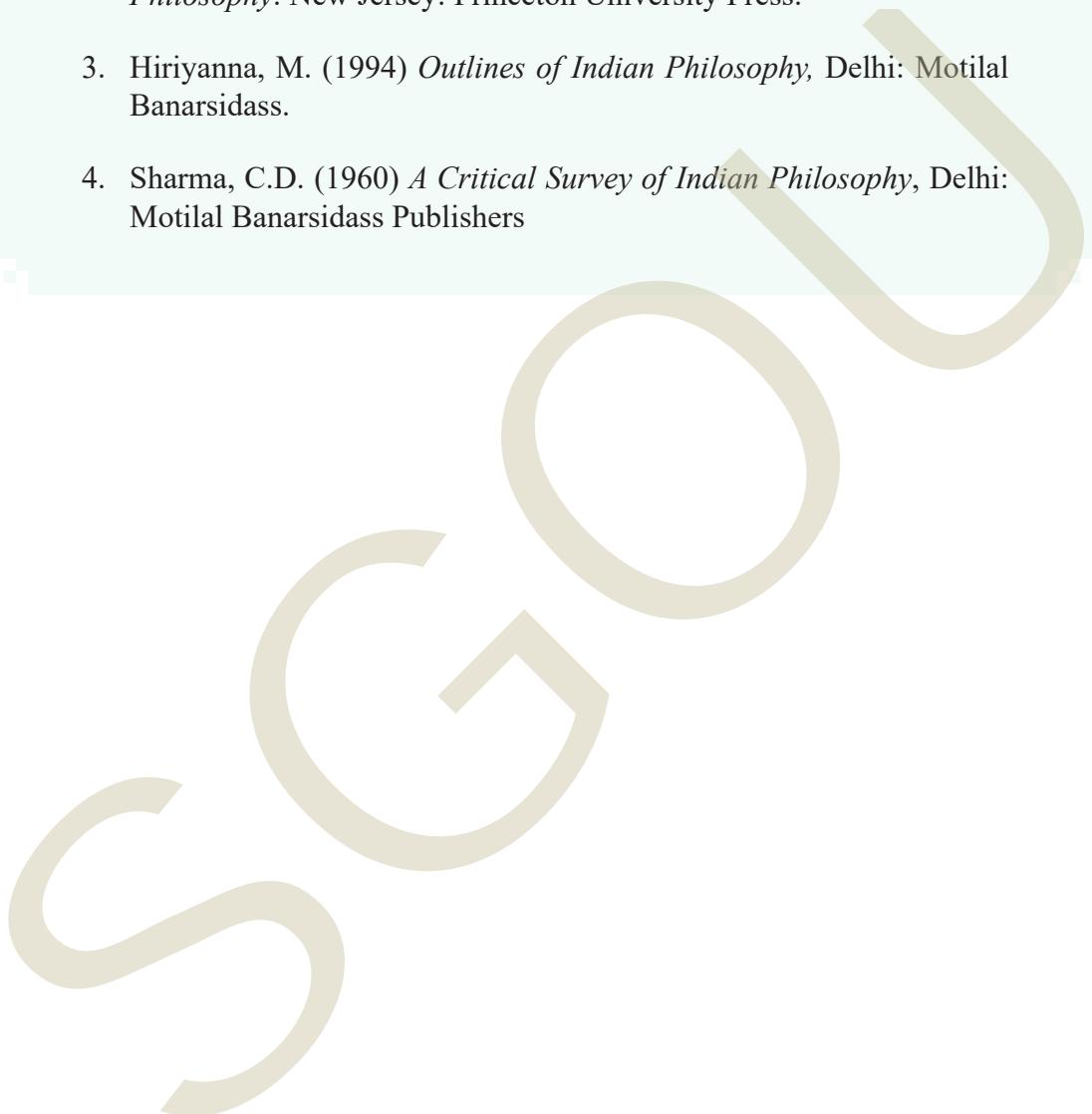
2. Discuss the role of ignorance (avidyā) in creating the false sense of separation between the individual and the world.
3. How does the Chāndogya Upaniṣad explain the nature of the self through the dialogue between Uddālaka and Śvetaketu? Give examples.
4. Explain the teaching method used by Prajāpati to help Indra understand the true self (Ātman). What lessons can be drawn from this story?
5. Describe the four states of consciousness mentioned in the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad. How does each state help us understand the self?
6. What is the significance of the pañcakośa theory in Vedānta philosophy? How do the five sheaths help in the journey of self-knowledge?
7. Compare and contrast the views of Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita on the reality of the world.

Suggested Reading

1. Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
2. Radhakrishnan, S., & Moore, C. A. (1957). *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
3. Hiryanna, M. (1994) *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass.
4. Sharma, C.D. (1960) *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers.
5. Dasgupta, S.N (2004) *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol.1, Delhi: Motilal Publishers.
6. Mahadevan, T.M.P. (1957). *Invitation to Indian Philosophy*. Motilal Banarsi Dass.
7. Paul Deussen (1906). *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, 7th ed., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

Reference

1. Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
2. Radhakrishnan, S., & Moore, C. A. (1957). *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
3. Hiriyanna, M. (1994) *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
4. Sharma, C.D. (1960) *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers





Maya

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain how Māyā veils the true nature of reality
- ◆ discuss the role of ignorance and knowledge in the experience of Māyā
- ◆ distinguish between Māyā, Ātman, and Brahman as explained in Vedānta
- ◆ describe how Māyā is interpreted in key Upaniṣads through metaphors and images

Prerequisites

In daily life, people often experience things that seem real at first but later turn out to be different from what they appeared to be. A dream may feel real until one wakes up, or a rope in dim light may be mistaken for a snake. Such experiences show that what we see or understand is not always the full picture. They raise important questions: Can we always trust what we see and think? Are things always as they appear? These questions are not only part of everyday experience but also form the basis of deeper thinking in philosophy.

Philosophers try to understand why human beings make these errors and what lies behind such experiences. They ask whether there is a difference between appearance and reality and how that difference can be known. Exploring such questions provides a way to understand the relationship between the changing world and the unchanging truth. This idea prepares the ground for reflecting on deeper questions about the self, knowledge, and freedom. It is this idea that will now be explored under the name Māyā.



Keywords

Brahman, Ātman, Avidyā, Vidyā, Duality, Appearance, Relative Reality, Manifestation

Discussion

1.4.1 Introduction

The meaning of the term Maya is: 'Maya is that which is not' (yā mā sā māya). Maya does not mean non-existence, but 'not like this!'

The concept of Māyā in Indian philosophy refers to the illusion that shapes how we perceive the world. It is like a veil that hides the true nature of reality, making us believe that the material world is all that exists. Māyā causes people to focus on temporary things, such as wealth or physical objects, while overlooking the eternal truth. It makes us think we are separate from the divine, leading to confusion and attachment to things that do not last. By understanding Māyā, one can begin to see beyond this illusion and recognise the deeper truth that everything is connected to Brahman, the unchanging reality that underlies all existence. Indian scriptures teach that overcoming Māyā requires self-reflection and knowledge to realise the Atman, the true self within each person, which is one with Brahman. This process involves questioning what seems real and seeking wisdom to understand the unity of all things.

1.4.2 Understanding Māyā in Vedānta

In Vedānta philosophy, the term māyā refers to the mysterious power that causes the appearance of difference and change in a reality. According to Advaita Vedānta, Brahman is the one reality, and everything else appears as different because of māyā. This does not mean that the world is completely unreal, but

neither real nor unreal. It appears to exist and functions with its own rules, but it cannot be understood as separate from Brahman. Māyā is not simply illusion in the ordinary sense; rather, it is the principle that causes the one to appear as many, the changeless to appear as changing, and the eternal to appear as temporary. Dr. Radhakrishnan points out that māyā is used in Vedānta to explain why we experience a world full of change, conflict, and difference even though Brahman is one and unchanging. The world seems real to our senses and mind, but when we deeply inquire into its nature, we realise that it lacks independent reality.

Māyā is not created by the human mind but exists before and beyond it. It is through māyā that Brahman appears as the world of objects and individuals. This appearance is not a mistake but a necessary stage for understanding the deeper reality. Māyā is what makes the eternal appear as the temporary and the infinite appear as the finite. The experience of duality such as subject and object, self and world is possible because of māyā. Our mind, which works with concepts like space, time, and causality, is limited. These categories cannot fully explain the connection between the unchanging Brahman and the changing world. Therefore, philosophers admit that the relation between the one and the many is ultimately inexplicable. This limitation of understanding is acknowledged in Vedānta, and the term māyā is used to mark this boundary.

In Vedānta, terms like Māyā, Avidyā, Bhranti (delusion), Adhyāsa

(superimposition), Vivarta (apparent change), and Ajnāna (ignorance) are used to explain how people misunderstand reality. Among these, Māyā and Avidyā are often discussed in detail. Māyā is the cosmic power that creates the appearance of the universe, while Avidyā is the individual's ignorance that leads to the false belief that the self (Ātman) is separate from Brahman (the ultimate reality). When Brahman is seen through the power of Māyā, it appears as Īshvara, the personal form of God. Māyā, which influences Īshvara, is mainly made of the quality called sattva. Avidyā, which influences the individual soul or Jīva, includes all three qualities or gunas: sattva, rajas, and tamas.

Māyā is not something that exists on its own, but it creates a gap between what things are and what they ought to be. According to Radhakrishnan, things in the world are incomplete and always trying to become something more. This effort comes from their inner lack, which is caused by māyā. The ever-changing world is dependent on the unchanging reality. Without Brahman as the base, the world could not appear at all. Though māyā brings about confusion and separation, it is not a mistake or fault. It is a necessary part of experience. It works as both a challenge and a clue. It veils the truth but also makes the search for truth possible. It is through recognising the limitations of māyā that one begins the journey toward self-realisation.

Thus, māyā plays a central role in shaping our experience of the world. While it creates a gap between appearance and reality, it also sets the stage for deeper understanding. This leads to an important insight: the world is not entirely false. It holds a relative reality and appears as real due to māyā, though it is not ultimately real like Brahman. This means that while we must understand the world as non-ultimate, we should not reject it as meaningless or imaginary. It is through

living in the world and reflecting on it that one can come to realise the deeper truth. So, māyā is not to be condemned but to be understood. Māyā is seen as a power that belongs to Brahman. It is the creative force through which the world appears. In some texts, this power is described as prakṛti or the natural force. Māyā is what allows Brahman to be both the changeless source and the changing world. It is not separate from Brahman but acts as a veil that hides the real nature of things. For those who attain true knowledge, the veil is lifted. The same world is then seen not as a separate reality but as a manifestation of Brahman. The world remains, but the illusion of separation disappears.

In the 36th verse of Ātma-Upadeśa Śatakam, Sri Narayana Guru describes Maya as follows:

Infinite powers reside within indivisible consciousness. These powers can be classified into two categories – ‘Sama’ and ‘Anya’. The power that creates multiple perceptions is called ‘Anya’, while the power that reveals only the One everywhere is called ‘Sama’, according to the Guru.

In the 88th verse, the Guru describes Maya as a great enemy.

1.4.3 Exposition of Māyā in the Major Upanishads

The concept of Māyā in the Upanishads refers to the illusion or veil that conceals the true nature of reality. The Iśa Upaniṣad describes Māyā as a ‘golden cover’ that hides the real. This image shows that Māyā is attractive and holds the attention of the mind, keeping it focused on the outer world. People become engaged with appearances, names, and forms, and lose sight of the deeper reality that lies behind these surface experiences. The Upaniṣad points out that the real is hidden not because it is far away,

but because the mind is distracted by what is temporary. Māyā draws people outward toward what is changing and away from what is unchanging. This movement outward becomes a barrier to inner understanding. The teaching encourages individuals to go beyond appearances and search for the unchanging truth that exists within and behind the world they see.

The Kaṭha Upaniṣad presents Māyā as a condition of ignorance that misleads people into a false understanding of life. It compares the ignorant to blind people being led by other blind people. This suggests that people often think they are wise but continue to live without understanding their true nature. Under the influence of Māyā, people chase temporary pleasures, power, and possessions, believing these to be meaningful. They fail to ask deeper questions about the purpose of life or the nature of the self. The Upaniṣad emphasises that this ignorance causes confusion and leads to a cycle of meaningless action. To break this cycle, one must turn inward, question what seems real, and search for what is eternal. The teaching calls for self-inquiry as a way to move beyond ignorance and discover the truth about one's own self, which is connected to the divine.

The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad explains Māyā through the image of a knot that binds the self. This knot represents the false beliefs and attachments that prevent a person from realising their true nature. These attachments are created by ignorance, and they tie the self to the outer world. The Upaniṣad says that the knot must be untied, not through physical effort, but through knowledge and reflection. Māyā creates a tangle of thoughts and feelings that cover the self. The process of overcoming Māyā is slow and requires patience and discipline. When the knot is untied, the self is revealed as pure and unchanging. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad describes Māyā as the cause of

ignorance, which makes individuals weak and dependent. It says that when people do not know the self, they become lost in the world of external things. They believe that their power comes from money, status, or physical strength. This belief creates a false sense of value and leads to fear, competition, and insecurity. The Upaniṣad teaches that true power lies in the knowledge of the self, which is eternal and free. Māyā veils this truth and causes people to look for strength outside themselves. The teaching encourages people to shift their attention from the changing world to the unchanging self, and to recognise that real freedom comes from self-knowledge.

The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad speaks of Māyā as unreality, which is linked to darkness and death. It describes the material world as something that appears real but is not lasting. Māyā causes people to treat what is temporary as if it were permanent. As a result, they become attached to things that will eventually change or disappear. This attachment leads to sorrow and fear. The Upaniṣad contrasts the unreal with the real, and calls people to seek what is always true and unchanging. It says that Māyā creates shadows that seem real but do not have true substance. By understanding this, a person begins to turn away from what is false and search for what is eternal. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad also explains that Māyā creates the appearance of duality. It teaches that in reality there is no separation, but Māyā makes it seem as if there is a difference between the self and the world, or between the self and God. This illusion creates fear, desire, and confusion. When people see themselves as separate, they act to protect themselves, compete with others, and try to control the world. The Upaniṣad teaches that this separation is not real. The idea of 'as if' is used to describe Māyā; things appear separate as if they are not part of one whole, but in truth, they are. The teaching points to a change

in understanding, where difference is seen as apparent and not absolute.

The Praśna Upaniṣad explains Māyā as falsehood and crookedness in thought and action. It says that these qualities prevent people from reaching the truth. Māyā is not just a mistake in thinking but a tendency to live by what is not true. This includes dishonesty, selfishness, and clinging to wrong ideas. The Upaniṣad teaches that only a mind that is honest and pure can understand the truth of Brahman. Removing Māyā is not only a matter of knowledge, but also of ethical living. A person must let go of wrong habits and choose truth in thought, word, and deed.

The teaching highlights that wisdom and goodness go together. In this view, the fight against Māyā is also a moral discipline, and not just a search for facts or arguments. The Chhāndogya and Shvetāshvatara Upanishads emphasise that Māyā is everything that is not the Atman, which is the only true reality. The Chhāndogya Upanishad states that all else is merely a word, a mode, or a name lacking true substance. The Shvetāshvatara Upanishad describes God as a Māyin, a divine creator who uses Māyā to manifest the world. This suggests that the world, though created by divine power, is not the ultimate reality but a projection shaped by Māyā.

Recap

- ◆ Māyā is the illusion that hides the true nature of reality and keeps people focused on temporary things.
- ◆ Vedānta sees Māyā as the power that makes the one reality appear as many.
- ◆ Māyā is not created by the mind but exists as a principle that limits understanding.
- ◆ Māyā causes ignorance, making people identify with the body and forget their true self.
- ◆ The world is not fully real or fully false.
- ◆ The Iśa Upaniṣad calls Māyā a golden cover that hides the truth.
- ◆ The Katha Upaniṣad shows Māyā leads people away from self-knowledge through false beliefs.
- ◆ The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad says Māyā is like a knot of ignorance that must be untied.
- ◆ The Chhāndogya Upaniṣad teaches that ignorance from Māyā creates dependence on external things.
- ◆ The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad links Māyā to unreality, darkness, and false separation.

- ◆ The Praśna Upaniṣad connects Māyā with falsehood.
- ◆ The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad says God uses Māyā to create the world.

Objective Questions

1. According to the Iśa Upaniṣad, what does the ‘golden cover’ represent?
2. What image is used in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad to describe Māyā?
3. What does the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad associate with unreality?
4. What does the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad call God in relation to Māyā?
5. In Vedānta, Māyā is considered a power that makes the One appear as
6. What role does Māyā play in the appearance of subject-object duality?
7. What is meant by ‘relative reality’ in the context of Māyā?
8. How does one overcome Māyā in the path of liberation?
9. What term does Śaṅkara use to describe the transformation of Brahman into the world?
10. According to the Upaniṣads, what underlies the world of change and plurality?
11. According to Vedānta, Māyā belongs to:
12. Māyā is often linked with what term that represents ignorance?
13. What is the goal of knowledge in overcoming Māyā?

Answers

1. Māyā
2. Knot
3. Darkness and death

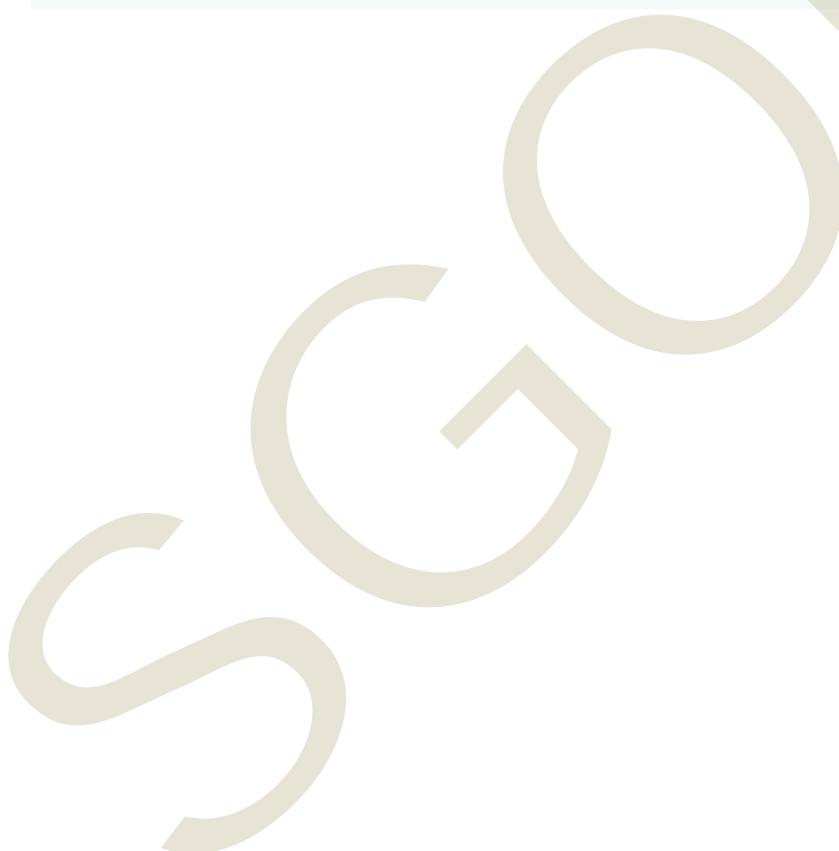
4. Māyin
5. Many
6. Creates appearance
7. Vyāvahārika
8. By attaining true knowledge
9. Vivarta-vāda
10. Brahman
11. Brahman
12. Avidyā
13. Liberation

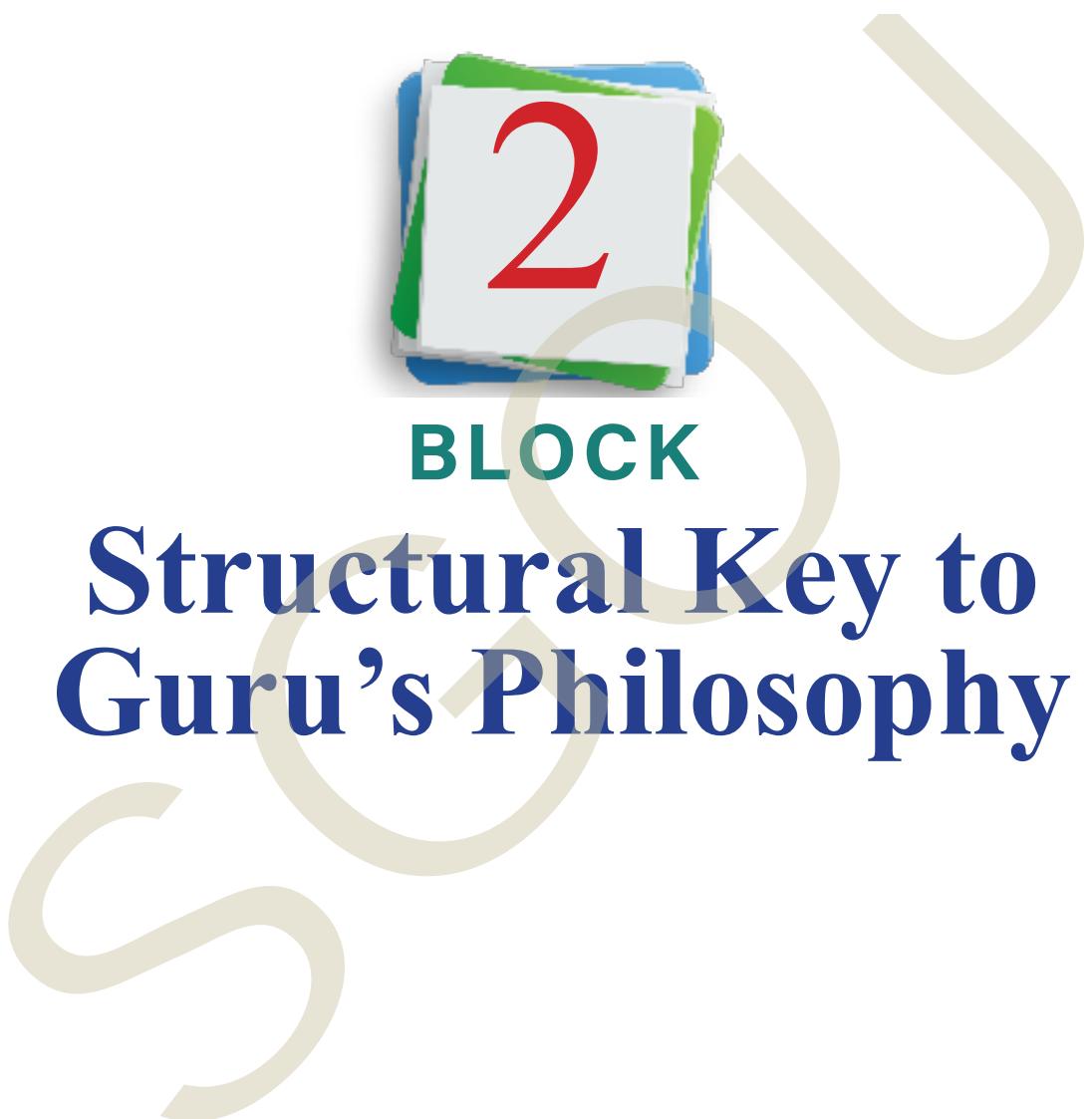
Suggested Reading

1. Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
2. Sharma, C.D. (1960) *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers.
3. Hiriyanna, M. (1994) *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass.
4. Dasgupta, S.N (2004) *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol.1, Delhi: Motilal Publishers.
5. Mahadevan, T.M.P. (1957). *Invitation to Indian Philosophy*. Motilal Banarsi Dass.
6. Paul Deussen (1906). *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, 7th ed., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

Reference

1. Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
2. Sharma, C.D. (1960) *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
3. Hiriyanna, M. (1994) *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
4. Dasgupta, S.N (2004) *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol.1, Delhi: Motilal Publishers.





2

BLOCK

Structural Key to Guru's Philosophy





Guru's Philosophy Reconciles the Two Rival Positions

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Understand the historical context in which Guru's Philosophy emerged.
- ◆ Identify and explain the two rival positions addressed within the Guru's thought.
- ◆ Analyse how Guru's Philosophy synthesizes these positions into a coherent framework.
- ◆ Reflect on the philosophical implications of reconciliation in spiritual traditions.
- ◆ Evaluate the continued relevance of Guru Philosophy in contemporary discourse.

Prerequisites

The philosophical and spiritual landscape in which Sreenarayana Guru's ideas emerged was shaped by multiple traditions which are often seen as opposing each other. On one side, the monistic currents emphasizing non-duality and ultimate unity. On the other, dualistic approaches insisted on a persistent separation between the real and the individual. Guru Philosophy entered into this tension as a reconfiguration of both positions. By integrating lived experience, ethical action, and deep metaphysical insight, Guru's thought became a bridge that allowed dialogue rather than conflict between them.

Keywords

Advaita, Dvaita, Synthesis, Liberation, Bhakti, Jnana

Discussion

2.1.1 Historical Context

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy emerged within a complex cultural and philosophical landscape shaped by centuries of Vedantic discourse and evolving devotional practices. In South India, the classical debate between Advaita and Dvaita had long influenced spiritual thought. Shankara's non-dualism emphasizing the non-difference between the individual soul or *jivatman* and the Supreme Soul or *Paramatman*. According to Sankaracharya, the *jiva* or so-called soul is Brahman itself and no other, while Madhva's dualism stressed the eternal distinction between the soul and God. However, Madhvacharya says that just as an iron needle, when in contact with a magnet, acquires magnetic power, so too when the soul is in union with God, it partakes in divinity. Yet, even then, God and the soul remain two distinct entities. There, dualism exists. Alongside these metaphysical debates, the Bhakti movement had swept across India, highlighting devotion and emotional surrender as a path to liberation. This created a vibrant but polarized spiritual climate, where intellectual Jnana-based approaches and Bhakti-centered practices sometimes stood in tension. Sree Narayana Guru, who neither rejected nor blindly followed these traditions but sought to reinterpret them for a new era.

Kerala, where the Guru lived and taught, added another dimension to this context: There was a deeply entrenched caste

hierarchy that extended into spiritual life. Access to temples, rituals, and education was restricted, making spirituality a privilege of the few rather than the shared heritage of all. At the same time, social reform currents were beginning to stir, questioning caste-based oppression and seeking egalitarian forms of religious practice. Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy responded to all these layers simultaneously. Guru saw the whole community as Brahman itself, because of this his Advaita was not mere abstract metaphysics divorced from society but a lived realization that addressed both spiritual and social inequalities. By engaging with the metaphysical debates of Advaita/Dvaita and the practical tensions of Jnana/Bhakti, while grounding them in a call for social justice, Guru positioned his teaching as both a continuation of and a radical response to the historical forces of his time.

2.1.2 The Two Rival Positions

The first major polarity of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy engages with is the classical Vedantic debate between Advaita and Dvaita. In the Advaita or non-dual tradition, as articulated by Shankara, reality is non-dual. The individual self or *jiva* is Brahman or the Absolute Reality itself. Liberation (*moksha*) is not an attainment of something new but the recognition of the real nature of one's own Self. On the other hand, Dvaita, represented by Madhva and other dualistic schools, affirms the eternal difference between God and the



soul. Here, *moksha* is not self-realization but divine grace. It is a relationship rather than an identity. These two views developed rigorous metaphysical systems and spiritual disciplines that often appeared to stand in opposition to each other.

This rivalry was not only limited to abstract speculation but also influenced spiritual practice. Advaita stressed that wisdom (*Jnana*) is the one and only path and end of liberation. Detachment from the world is needed to realize the Self. Dvaita, in contrast, emphasized devotion (*Bhakti*) and personal relationship with God will lead to Liberation. Emotional surrender and worship were considered as the highest spiritual path within this. The division created two distinct orientations also. One is that sought transcendence through self-knowledge and another that found fulfilment in divine love. For many, choosing one path meant rejecting the other, reinforcing a binary that shaped centuries of Indian philosophy and religious life. Sree Narayana Guru's significance lies in refusing this mutual exclusivity. Guru showed that these positions are complementary dimensions of the same truth. The traditions cast them as opposites; Guru approached as two halves of a greater whole.

2.1.3 Guru's Philosophy of Synthesis

Sree Narayana Guru did not approach the above said long-standing divide between Advaita and Dvaita, as well as between *Jnana* and *Bhakti*, not by choosing one side over the other. He tends to transcend the binary itself. His philosophy does not deny the metaphysical insight of non-duality, nor does it dismiss the experiential reality of difference that devotional traditions emphasize. He reframes the debate by showing that unity and difference are not mutually exclusive but complementary poles of spiritual realization. In this synthesis, the Advaitic recognition of the Self as one with

Brahman provides the ground of being. Guru accepts the *Pratibhasika Satta* (imaginary level of existence) and the *Vyavaharika Satta* (empirical level of existence) as well as *Paramarthika Satta* (Absolute Reality). At the same time, the Dvaitic experience of relationship with the divine offers the field where compassion, love, and ethical action naturally unfold.

In practical terms, this means liberation cannot be reduced to mere intellectual knowledge (*Jnana*) or emotional devotion (*Bhakti*) alone. For Sree Narayana Guru, true realization is a lived unity in action. Within that, insight and love merge into service, compassion, and social responsibility. His Advaita does not withdraw from the world into abstraction but flows into the world as egalitarian ethics, exemplified in his call for universal brotherhood. Likewise, his appreciation of *Bhakti* is not mere emotionalism but devotion grounded in the knowledge of the Self as universal. This synthesis dissolves the rigid boundaries that had divided Indian spiritual practice for centuries. Guru was offering a vision where knowledge becomes love and love matures into wisdom.

2.1.4 Nataraja Guru's Interpretation (Unitive Understanding)

Nataraja Guru, the foremost disciple and philosophical interpreter of Sree Narayana Guru, offers a vital lens for grasping the depth of his master's thought. He interpreted Sree Narayana Guru's Advaita what he calls a "supposition between two rival aspects of the same problem." This reframes Advaita as a living, dynamic standpoint rather than a dogmatic conclusion. The "rival aspects" are the non-dual vision of unity (Advaita) and the empirical experience of difference (Dvaita). Instead of favouring one side over the other, Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy embraces both within a higher synthesis.

For Nataraja Guru, this dynamic vision is what he names Unitive Understanding. It is defined as a way of seeing that holds unity and difference together as complementary expressions of the same truth.

Unitive Understanding goes beyond mere monism. It is “unitive” because it perceives all existence as rooted in the same Self. It is “understanding” or “recognition” because it avoids blind assertion. It is offering a balanced vision where subject and object, self and other, inner and outer are seen as polarities of one continuum. In this view, the Self (*Atman*) and non-Self (*anatman* or *jagat*) are not or opposites but interchangeable aspects of reality. Sree Narayana Guru’s Advaita, therefore, does not reject the world but transfigures it. Guru viewed bliss (*ananda*) and suffering (*dukha*) as twin movements within the same ground of consciousness. By cancelling the prejudices of both subjectivity and objectivity, his philosophy makes room for a radical equality of all beings and gives a profoundly ethical dimension to non-duality.

2.1.4.1 Ethical Consequence: Caring for the Smallest Being

Nataraja Guru illustrates this ethical turn through a striking image. A Vedantin pausing before stepping on an ant. If Self and non-Self are interchangeable, then the suffering of even the tiniest creature becomes the concern of the realized being. In Sree Narayana Guru’s vision, Advaita is not a detached metaphysical speculation; it is a call to compassion and responsibility. To hurt another is to harm the Self; to serve another is to serve the Self. This makes his non-duality the foundation not only of spiritual liberation but also of social justice, non-violence, and universal love. Guru’s celebrated motto “One caste, one religion, one God for man” is not only a social slogan, but the ethical flowering of Unitive Understanding in the human community.

2.1.4.2 Bridging Advaita/ Dvaita and Jnana/Bhakti

With this interpretation, Nataraja Guru demonstrates how Sree Narayana Guru’s philosophy reconciles both the metaphysical and practical polarities. Advaita provides the ground of absolute unity, while Dvaita preserves the field of relational experience where devotion, ethics, and service unfold. Rather than negating difference, Sree Narayana Guru includes difference within unity thus turning his Advaita into the completion. It is not the denial of Dvaita. At the same time, this vision dissolves the tension between *Jnana* and *Bhakti*. True knowledge of the Self naturally blossoms into devotion and service, while genuine devotion ripens into wisdom. This synthesis transforms philosophy into lived compassion and spirituality into active ethics.

2.1.4.3 Bridging Jnana/Bhakti

Sree Narayana Guru’s philosophy carries the same reconciliatory force into the field of spiritual practice, dissolving the long-standing tension between knowledge (*Jnana*) and devotion (*Bhakti*). For him, the realization of the Self is never an isolated intellectual act. It naturally manifests as compassion, worship, and service to all beings. Likewise, authentic devotion does not remain as mere emotional attachment but ripens into the wisdom of unity. This is not a theoretical claim but one which was demonstrated in the Guru’s own life. His profound meditative realizations were never separated from his social mission such as opening temples to all castes, breaking social barriers, and consecrating spaces where devotion and equality could flourish together. Knowledge and love, for Sree Narayana Guru, are two currents of the same river flowing toward liberation. In his philosophical poem *Darsanamala*, Guru says: “bhatiratmanusandhana”, bhakti

means to follow one's own self or Absolute Reality with single hearted devotion.

Nataraja Guru's interpretation highlights this synthesis as a "living bridge." Guru shows that *Jnana* without *Bhakti* risks becoming dry intellectualism, while *Bhakti* without *Jnana* can fall into blind sentiment. Sreenarayananaguru's teaching harmonizes both: knowing becomes loving, and loving becomes knowing. For Guru, true wisdom must love and true love must know.

2.1.5 Philosophical Implications

The implications of this reconciliation are profound. By holding unity and difference together, Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy challenges rigid doctrinal boundaries that have historically divided schools of thought and religious communities. It opens a space for spiritual pluralism where diverse paths

can coexist as complementary expressions of the same Reality. This synthesis also grounds spirituality firmly in ethical praxis. That is, realization is not complete until it transforms how one lives, loves, and serves. In a world of conflict between competing ideologies and traditions, Guru's approach offers a model for dialogue that dissolves opposition without erasing difference, implying harmony without forcing uniformity.

In contemporary context, this vision resonates far beyond its historical setting. It provides a philosophical basis for inter-religious understanding, social equality, and ecological ethics. By showing that unity is not achieved by denying diversity but by embracing it within a higher order of understanding, Sree Narayana Guru's teaching stands as an answer to both metaphysical and practical divisions in human life.

Recap

- ◆ Advaita–Dvaita controversy and Bhakti–Jnana split enriched Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy.
- ◆ Madhva's Dvaita saw eternal separation between Jiva and Brahman, while Shankara's Advaita continued to see their non-dual oneness, influencing a lot of spiritual practices.
- ◆ Jnana stressed liberation through knowledge and detachment, while Bhakti stressed affective devotion and surrender
- ◆ Guru demonstrated difference, unity, dedication, and knowledge are harmonious descriptions of the same reality by not playing favours for any one over the other.
- ◆ Guru's synthetic philosophy combined Advaita's philosophical understanding and experiential aspect in shared reality.
- ◆ Guru argued religious understanding has to be combined with knowledge, devotion, and morality so that it leads to social reform and compassion.

- ◆ Nataraja Guru termed this vision as “Unitive Understanding,” Unitive vision extended kindness and responsibility to even the lowest person because harming another harms oneself as well.
- ◆ The Guru synthesized Jnana and Bhakti to establish that true devotion has to know and true wisdom has to love
- ◆ Guru confirms, “One caste, one religion, one God for man.” He combines metaphysical non-duality with social equality and cosmic ethics.
- ◆ Guru’s synthesis upholds diversity, ends dogmatism, and puts spirituality on solid practical ethics

Objective Questions

1. Who is the central figure of the Guru’s Philosophy discussed in this unit?
2. Which two metaphysical positions are reconciled in the Guru’s philosophy?
3. What does Advaita affirm about reality?
4. According to Dvaita, what is the relationship between God and soul?
5. Which two spiritual paths are harmonized in the Guru’s teaching?
6. Who coined the term “Unitive Understanding” to explain Sree Narayana Guru’s philosophy?
7. What does Unitive Understanding balance in its vision of reality?
8. In the Guru’s Advaita, harming another being is equivalent to harming whom?
9. Which famous social reform motto expresses the ethical dimension of the Guru’s philosophy?
10. In the Guru’s teaching, what should true knowledge (*Jnana*) naturally manifest as?
11. What do bliss (*ananda*) and suffering (*dukha*) share according to the Guru’s Advaita?
12. In the Guru’s synthesis, when does unity become meaningful?



Answers

1. Sree Narayana Guru
2. Advaita and Dvaita
3. Reality is one without a second
4. Eternal difference
5. Jnana and Bhakti
6. Nataraja Guru
7. Unity and difference
8. The Self
9. One caste, one religion, one God for man
10. Compassion and devotion
11. The same ground of consciousness
12. When it embraces difference

Self - Assessment Questions

1. Explain the historical context that shaped the emergence of Guru Philosophy.
2. Compare and contrast the two rival positions discussed in this unit.
3. How does Guru Philosophy reconcile the tension between Advaita and Dvaita?
4. Discuss the role of ethical action in the Guru's synthesis of the rival positions.
5. What are the broader philosophical implications of reconciliation in spiritual traditions?
6. Evaluate whether the Guru's synthesis is more of a compromise or a radical re-interpretation.

Reference

1. Deutsch, E. (1969). *Advaita Vedanta: A philosophical reconstruction*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
2. Nataraja Guru. (1970). *The word of the Guru*. Varkala, India: Narayana Gurukula.
3. Radhakrishnan, S. (1927). *Indian philosophy* (Vol. 2). London: George Allen & Unwin.
4. Sharma, B. N. K. (1981). *Philosophy of Madhva*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Suggested Reading

1. Clooney, F. X. (2001). *Hindu God, Christian God: How reason helps break down the boundaries between religions*. New York: Oxford University Press.



Guru's Philosophy Based on Personal Experiences

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Describe how Sree Narayana Guru's personal life shaped his philosophy.
- ◆ Identify key events from his life that influenced his teachings.
- ◆ Discuss why experience is central to understanding his spiritual method.
- ◆ Analyse how personal realization informed his approach to social and spiritual reform

Prerequisites

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy cannot be separated from his personal experiences. He was born in Chempazhanthy in 1855 to Madan Asan, a farmer and teacher well-versed in Sanskrit, and Kutti Amma and affectionately called as 'Nanu'. His early life was marked by both intellectual curiosity and a deep, natural compassion. His early education under local teachers shaped his intellect. Nanu's home schooling continued under his father and his uncle Krishnan Vaidyan, an Ayurvedic physician and Sanskrit scholar. He learned Tamil and Sanskrit and mastered traditional texts such as *Siddharupam*, *Balaprobhodhanam*, and *Amarakosam*. From childhood, Nanu showed a reflective temperament. But what formed his spiritual foundation were solitary wanderings and encounters with ordinary, marginalized people. He renounced domestic ties and lived as a wandering monk, spending time in forests, riverbanks, and remote villages. These years gave him direct insight into the link between spirituality and social injustice. His long meditation retreat at Maruthwamala, living in a cave for years in silence and austerity, became the crucible of his inner realization. These experiences would later form the backbone of a philosophy where knowledge and justice converge.

Keywords

Nanu Asan, Maruthwamala, Aruvippuram, Personal Realization, Social Reform, Compassion, Advaita, Service

Discussion

2.2.1 Personal Life and Philosophical Formation

Nanu's personal life prepared the ground for his later teaching. His early compassion, natural empathy for animals, and refusal to accept social hierarchies planted the seeds of his inclusive vision. His brief marriage, which he left behind without bitterness, revealed his orientation toward a higher calling beyond conventional tie. The years of wandering, mingling with people of all castes and professions, were not just ascetic exercises. They were his practical lessons in human suffering and dignity. These experiences taught him that philosophy could not remain a mental abstraction. It must arise from life and return to life.

A lesser-known childhood incident speaks volumes: while eating outdoors, he noticed a small dog bullied away from food by a larger one. Without hesitation, he divided his portion and gave it to the weaker animal. This simple act foreshadowed his later philosophy of equal regard for all beings and his conviction that the Self is present in every life.

2.2.2 Key Turning Points

A major turning point in Nanu's life came when, at twenty-one, he was sent to study under the famous scholar Kummampilli Rāman Pillai Asan at Karunagapally. There, he involved himself in Sanskrit grammar, poetry, drama, literary criticism, and logical

rhetoric. His study of the Vedas and the Upanishads during this period gave him deep exposure to the classical debates of Advaita and Dvaita. His mastery earned him the affectionate title "Nanu Asan", marking him as a teacher among his peers even before formal renunciation. This phase combined intellectual discipline with poetic expression. This laid the groundwork for a philosophy that would later bridge knowledge and devotion. Returning home to be with his father in his final days, Nanu briefly ran a small village school where he taught neighbourhood children. At the same time, he would retreat into the quiet of temples, and speaking to villagers on philosophy and moral values. These early acts of teaching and service reveal a pattern: even before his mystical experiences, his search for truth was related to education and social uplift.

At that time, Nanu met Chattampi Swamikal. He took Nanu to Thykkattu Aiyya Guru, who was a Siddhayogi. Aiyya Guru taught both of them the discipline of Siddha Yoga called Sivarajayoga. This became the turning point in the spiritual life of Nanu.

Nanu left home completely and entered his period of wandering, which culminated in the long retreat at Maruthwamala's Pillathadam cave. There, he lived in silence and austerity, meditating deeply. It was here that his inner realization matured into the insight that the Self and the world are not separate, a seed that would define his later Advaitic vision.



This inner transformation found public expression at Aruvippuram in 1888, where he consecrated a Shiva idol carved from the Neyyar river rock. When questioned by orthodox Brahmins, he declared, “This is not a Brahmin Shiva, but an Ezhava Shiva.” With that act, his personal realization merged with social reform. Spiritual authority, according to him, belongs to all human beings equally. This moment tied together the different strands of his life, intellectual discipline, mystical experience, and ethical action, into a single movement that would define the Guru’s philosophy. From scholar to hermit to reformer, each turning point carried the same thread: realization must become service.

2.2.3 Experience as the Core of Philosophy

Sree Narayana Guru’s philosophy was born not in debate halls but in the crucible of lived life. He did not approach Advaita as a concept to be argued, but he discovered it through mingling among ordinary people and observing their suffering. During his years as a wandering monk, he chose to live simply, eating whatever was offered and sleeping under trees or in humble huts. These encounters were more than charity. They taught him that spirituality must engage directly with the realities of hunger, labour, and inequality. For the Guru, experience was not a stepping stone to philosophy; it was philosophy itself in seed form.

At Maruthwamala, his long meditation in the Pillathadam cave provided the complementary inner dimension of this experiential journey. In solitude, he came face to face with the unity of existence as a living, breathing reality. Yet what emerged from that inner silence was not detachment but an overflowing compassion or karuna for all life. When he left the cave, he began teaching, serving, and reforming. For Sree Narayana Guru, Advaita could not remain

in the head or in the heart; it had to move into the hands as service and into the voice as justice. Experience and karuna were the twin pillars of his philosophy; unity became true only when it turned into compassion in action. In short, Sree Narayana Guru taught and practiced Advaita Vedanta in the strict sense without any compromise.

2.2.4 Personal Realization and Social Reform

The trajectory of Sree Narayana Guru’s life shows that his social reforms were not external projects but the natural extension of his personal realization. When he consecrated the Shiva idol at Aruvippuram and declared it to be an “Ezhava Shiva,” it was not a political challenge but a spiritual statement born from his experience of oneness. If all are the Self, then denying divinity to some is denying it to all.

His compassion was not sentimental but grounded in the insight that harming another is harming oneself because there is no “other.” When he opened schools for marginalized children or invited all castes to worship equally in temples, it was not policy but the inevitable expression of seeing the same Self in all. Even his simple acts such as teaching under a tree and so on reflected this union of realization and compassion.

In this way, Sree Narayana Guru dissolved the boundary between mystic and reformer. His philosophy teaches that true spiritual awakening cannot remain private. It must spill over into the world as service. His life becomes a living argument that Advaita without karuna is incomplete and that unity must always flower into compassion. For Guru, realization that does not serve is unrealized. The proof of unity is compassion in action.

Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy was embedded deeply in his life and experiences.
- ◆ Guru's childhood sympathies and denunciation of social castes planted the seeds for his universal vision.
- ◆ Incidents Guru's in childhood demonstrated his inherent sympathy.
- ◆ Guru's training with scholars provided him with sound training in Sanskrit, Vedas, and controversies of Vedant.
- ◆ The designation "Nanu Asan" described his position as a pre-renunciation teacher.
- ◆ Exposure to Chattampi Swamikal and Thykkattu Aiyya Guru opened the doors to deeper spiritual disciplines.
- ◆ Life as a wandering monk taught Guru that spirituality needed to deal with human suffering and dignity.
- ◆ The prolonged practice of meditation at Maruthwamala provided him with first-hand experience of Advaita as living fact.
- ◆ Guru's inner realization always spilled over outward as compassion and social responsibility.
- ◆ The Aruvippuram consecration of 1888 tied Guru's personal realization to social reform.
- ◆ For Guru, experience was not preparation for philosophy—it was philosophy.
- ◆ Guru's teaching reveals that real realization must evolve into service, justice, and compassion.

Objective Questions

1. In which village was Sree Narayana Guru born?
2. What affectionate name was given to him in childhood?
3. Which renowned scholar did Nanu study under at Karunagapally?
4. What title did Nanu earn after his studies under Kummappilli Rāman Pillai Asan?
5. Which cave at Maruthwamala did Nanu meditate in for years?
6. What quality does the Sanskrit word “karuna” signify in the Guru’s philosophy?
7. In which year did the Aruvippuram consecration take place?
8. What famous motto encapsulates the ethical dimension of his realization?
9. For Sree Narayana Guru, what is the practical expression of Advaita?

Answers

1. Chempazhanthi
2. Nanu
3. Kummappilli Rāman Pillai Asan
4. Nanu Asan
5. Pillathadam Cave
6. Compassion
7. 1888
8. One caste, one religion, one God for man
9. Compassion and service

Self - Assessment Questions

1. Discuss the significance of Nanu's period of study under Kummampilli Rāman Pillai Asan in shaping his intellectual and philosophical orientation. How did this phase prepare the ground for his synthesis of knowledge and devotion?
2. Evaluate the role of the Maruthwamala Pillathadam cave meditation in transforming Narayanaguru's understanding of Advaita. How did this inner realization shape his later social and spiritual actions?
3. Explain how the Aruvippuram consecration in 1888 serves as the point where personal realization and social reform converge in Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy.
4. 'Experience and karuna were the twin pillars of his philosophy.' Discuss this statement with reference to Nanu's wandering years and his approach to Advaita as lived compassion.

Reference

1. Nataraja Guru. (1970). *The word of the Guru*. Varkala, India: Narayana Gurukula.
2. Nataraja Guru. (1993). *The life of Sree Narayana Guru*. Varkala, India: Narayana Gurukula.
3. Radhakrishnan, S. (1927). *Indian philosophy* (Vol. 2). London, England: George Allen & Unwin.
4. Sreekantan Nair, P. (1988). *Sree Narayana Guru: A critical study*. Trivandrum, India: Kerala Historical Society.

Suggested Reading

1. Kurup, K. K. N. (1994). *Modern Kerala: Studies in social and agrarian relations*. Delhi, India: Mittal Publications.
2. Sreekantan Nair, P. (2003). *The social philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru*. Thiruvananthapuram, India: University of Kerala Press.





Tree Structure Evidenced in Verse 51 of Ātmopadēśa Śatakam

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Explain the use of the tree and creeper metaphor in Indian philosophical traditions.
- ◆ Describe the concept of the Maya Tree in Verse 51 of Ātmopadēśa Śatakam.
- ◆ Identify the roles of “I”-ness and “This”-ness in the emergence of error according to Sree Narayana Guru.
- ◆ Compare the Maya Tree imagery with similar concepts in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.
- ◆ Discuss the philosophical importance of distinguishing pure awareness from the appearance of duality.

Prerequisites

The Ātmopadēśa Śatakam was written by Sree Narayana Guru. It is an important philosophical text with one hundred verses. These verses help people move from a limited awareness to a deep understanding of the Absolute Self. It is at the crossroads of Advaita Vedanta and experiential spirituality. It uses simple language to explain complex ideas about reality and knowledge. Natural metaphors such as trees, creepers, rivers, and light are important in the text. The tree symbol shows the structure of existence and its link to consciousness. Verse 51 is an important part of the text. It introduces the “Maya Tree,” which symbolises the full structure of illusion and perception. In Vedanta, Maya is seen as not only illusion but also as the misunderstanding that makes the Real appear



different from what it truly is. The term ‘Maya’ means ‘ya ma sa maya’ which means “Maya is that which is not”. In this sense Maya does not mean ‘non-existence’ but ‘not like this’. The verse shows how pure awareness creates the first sense of “I.” This is then joined by “This,” and together they wrap around the Maya Tree like twin creepers. This brief verse shows how duality and error arise from a neutral state of consciousness. Vedanta shows the essence of truth by removing misconceptions. Verse 51 uses this method by showing where error comes from and gives rise to subjectivity and objectivity from awareness. It uses the Maya Tree and creepers as its main metaphor.

Keywords

Maya, Awareness, Ego-sense (Ahamkara), Thisness (Idantā), Maya Tree, Twin Creepers

Discussion

2.3.1 Ātmopadēśa Śatakam

Ātmopadēśa Śatakam, or “One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction,” is an important philosophical work by Sree Narayana Guru. Through a hundred short verses, it shows a journey from conditioned consciousness to understanding the unconditional, the Absolute Self. The content uses Advaita Vedantic ideas while focussing on practical methods. Each verse reflects deep thoughts and helping a person look at their self-identity and recognize the mistakes that obscure clear thinking.

The work contains simple but deep language and strong natural imagery. Guru uses everyday images like light, mirrors, rivers, creepers, and trees to explain complex philosophical ideas instead of using abstract thoughts. These images are not just illustrations; they are key to the method of turning non-dual teachings into symbols that can be visualised and thought about

internally. The tree is an important symbol. It represents how existence branches out from consciousness.

The Ātmopadēśa Śatakam uses metaphors similar to those in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. It also focusses on psychological themes in a unique way. Sree Narayana Guru sees traditional symbols like the tree and creeper as more than just representations of the cosmos. They also reflect deeper layers of consciousness. The focus on introspection gives the text a unique quality. It acts as both a philosophical discussion and a guide for reflection, linking Advaitic metaphysics with real spiritual experience.

2.3.2 Philosophical Significance of Verse 51

In the Ātmopadēśa Śatakam, verse 51 is very important. It talks about the “Maya Tree,” which stands for the whole idea

of illusion and perception. Maya is more than just an illusion in Vedanta. It is the fundamental source for confusion that makes the Real seem different from what it really is. Sree Narayana Guru agrees with this point of view and links it to consciousness. He explains how early indicators of duality hides what awareness really is. This part of the work shows how it changed from talking about conditioned states to looking closely at the main reasons for mistakes.

The verse highlights two important parts of consciousness: the birth of self-awareness (Ahamkara) and the awareness of the outside world (Idantā), which involves perceiving an objective counterpart. Guru calls them the "twin creepers," which shows how much they need each other. We cannot see things if we do not have a feeling of ourselves. In pure consciousness, both the experience of self and the ability to recognise objects happen at the same moment. This is a crucial finding because it reveals that duality does not arise from outside forces or simple misunderstandings. It comes from the way awareness is built to separate itself.

The verse displays these movements as creepers around the Maya Tree, which shows how mistakes may obscure things. Illusion alone does not affect or cloud reality. It is veiled under layers of identity and misunderstanding. This is a major principle in Vedanta: we do not get the truth by getting new things; we find it by taking away the layers that obscure what is already there. Verse 51 is both an analysis and a solution. It reveals when things go wrong and gives advice about how to become free. This approach means going back to the source of these actions in pure awareness.

Verse 51 of the Ātmopadēśa Śatakam begins to break down delusion. This process goes on in the next verses and helps us understand the Absolute beyond all duality. From a philosophical point of view, it goes

together with traditional Advaitic scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita, which says that the upside-down world-tree must be "cut down" to get to the Real. Sree Narayana Guru's way of looking at things gives the picture an additional psychological depth. It looks at the interior parts of subjectivity and objectivity instead of outer cosmological forces. Verse 51 links comprehension of the metaphysical with practical self-reflection.

2.3.3 The Verse

*From awareness the 'I'-sense first emerged;
Comes then with it 'This'-ness, as counterpart
beside,
These like creepers twain do cover entirely,
The whole of the Maya tree to hide.*

അരിവിലിരുന്നാരഹിതയാദ്യമുണ്ടായ്-
വരുമിതിനോണൊതിഭിത്വാമയായും
വരുമിവരണ്ടുലപങ്ങൾപോരലെ
മായാ-മരമവിലാം മറയെപ്പടർന്നിട്ടുന്നു.

A deep philosophical idea is summed up in this verse in a simple, poetic picture. In this verse, "awareness" refers to the neutral, undivided part of consciousness that comes before there is a subject-object split. The first slight difference comes from this: the "I"-sense (Ahamkara), which shows that there is a subject that is perceiving. After that comes the sense of "This" (Idantā), which is recognising something as an object or a match. Together, they show the start of duality. That is the point at which pure awareness starts to see itself as split.

To understand the text, we need to picture the "twin creepers." "I"-ness and "This"-ness are not seen as separate things by Sree Narayana Guru. Instead, they are seen as actions that happen at the same time. These two things wrap around the Maya Tree like creepers do around a tree and cover it completely. They stand for the whole field of phenomenal experience. The word "cover" in the verse makes a point of showing that



truth is not destroyed but just hidden beneath these layers.

This verse frames the rise of subjectivity and objectivity in a way that both diagnoses Maya's problem and hints at a way to fix it. If the covers are just veils, then the seeker's job is not to find or make the truth, but to see through them and get rid of these sneaky invaders. This makes the verse both a statement of a metaphysical principle and a practical guide for self-inquiry. It sets the stage for the next lines, which start to break down Maya in the text.

2.3.4 The Principle of Maya

In Vedanta, Maya represents the principle of appearance. It creates an impression that the Real is fragmented or distinct from its own essence. It is not an incorrect notion detached from reality. A misunderstanding occurs in the mind of the knower when it processes thoughts in two different directions. Maya transcends mere external illusion. Perception inherently blends truth with error. Sree Narayana Guru adheres to this traditional perspective while incorporating a psychological dimension. He portrays Maya not as an abstract concept but as a dynamic process within consciousness.

In Verse 51, Guru highlights the initial and most delicate aspect of Maya. The verse indicates that in order to discover truth, we must first strip away these initial layers. Freedom is not centred on acquiring new information. It involves grasping and transcending the fundamental actions of differentiation within consciousness.

2.3.5 The Maya Tree

The "Maya Tree" in Verse 51 is a key symbol for grasping the structure of error and phenomenal existence. The tree in Sree Narayana Guru's view is not just a symbol of the outside world or a cosmological idea. It represents the entire field of experience

formed by the body and mind, along with conditioned awareness. Guru chooses a tree to show rootedness and branching. This symbolises how existence grows from a source and spreads into many forms, while still being connected to a solid ground.

This image is based on Indian philosophy. The Katha Upanishad describes the world as an Asvattha tree. Its roots are above, and its branches are below. It encourages the seeker to see its temporary nature and find its source. In Chapter XV, the Bhagavad Gita explains the inverted world-tree. It is supported by ignorance and suggests that one should "cut it down with the sword of knowledge" to achieve liberation. Sree Narayana Guru uses this symbolic heritage and explains it in psychological terms. His Maya Tree represents both the outside world and the inner structure of consciousness formed by the duality of subject and object. The tree, which stands for reality or the body-mind field, stays neutral. The issue arises from how it gets entangled in identification and misunderstanding. This change in focus makes the Maya Tree a strong symbol for self-exploration, guiding the seeker to look within and assess the basis of their own understanding.

Sree Narayana Guru uses the tree-metaphor to connect traditional cosmological images with a modern experience. The Maya Tree is more than a symbol of the world. It is a map of consciousness. The roots, trunk, and branches reflect different levels of experience. The creepers represent the small mistakes that prevent awareness from seeing its own foundation. This layered symbol lets Verse 51 condense a whole philosophical method into one image, merging metaphysics, epistemology, and spiritual practice together.

2.3.6 Cutting the Maya Tree

The concept of "cutting the tree" originates from the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter XV), where

the upside-down Asvattha tree represents the conditioned world upheld by ignorance. The Gita states that liberation involves “severing” this tree to attain the Absolute. Sree Narayana Guru indirectly employs this imagery in the Ātmopadēśa Śatakam. Following Verse 50, the text starts to unravel the intricate foundations of Maya, with Verse 51 commencing this process by revealing the initial source of misunderstanding: the interconnected rise of “I”-ness and “This”-ness from a state of neutral awareness. The term “cutting” in this context signifies an act of discernment rather than any form of physical damage.

It is essential to note that the Guru does not support the idea of dismissing the phenomenal world. Rather, “cutting” represents a change in understanding that goes beyond the surface of Maya. The world and the body-mind structure exist as they do, yet they are no longer perceived as fundamentally real. The process of cutting involves perceiving clearly by lifting the layers of subject-object separation to uncover the constant foundation below. In this context, the blade represents not an external tool, rather the internal sharpness of discerning awareness (viveka), which reveals the illusion of separation.

The following classical illustration can elucidate this. Imagine a rope observed in low light, misidentified as a snake. When a lamp is introduced, the “snake” vanishes, not due to the rope being ruined, but because the misunderstanding has been cleared away. Similarly, the act of “cutting” the Maya Tree does not eliminate Reality; rather, it eliminates the misunderstanding of awareness brought about by the dual influences of “I” and “This.” When these coverings are penetrated, the tree which is the symbol of the foundation of existence persists and its authentic essence as the Absolute is unveiled without any distortion.

Here, ‘cutting the tree’ means to recognize the real nature of the Self from the unreal.

2.3.7 Philosophical Implications

Verse 51 is very important because it changes the way we think about error and liberation. It indicates that duality does not originate from an outside force or a cosmic illusion that affects consciousness. Instead, it comes from small modifications inside consciousness itself. This new idea changes the whole way we think about philosophy: the cause of bondage is not in the outside world, but in how awareness divides itself into “I” and “This.” This point of view stresses that looking inside oneself and analysing oneself is the first step in the search for truth. It puts the responsibility for freedom on the individual's own mind.

The verse is a useful direction for spiritual practice. It says that the first step towards realisation is to see the “I”-sense and the “This”-sense come up and realise that these are not absolute truths but rather veils. Instead of holding on to dogmas or outside rituals, the focus shifts within to find these subtle coverings. The language of creepers enveloping a tree in the verse shows that nothing new needs to be made or gotten. Liberation is the process of discovering the ground of consciousness that has always been there.

Think of a mirror that has a small film of dust on it. The mirror itself is still there and can still reflect, but it is not as clear as it used to be when it was not dusty. Cleaning the mirror does not add anything new; it just brings it back to its natural form. In the same way, following the “I”-sense and “This”-sense back to their source and recognising them as coverings gets rid of Maya's subtle “dust.” The Absolute is subsequently shown as something that has always been shining through the layers of error.



Recap

- ◆ The *Ātmopadēśa Śatakam* uses natural symbols like trees and creepers to explain deep truths.
- ◆ Verse 51 introduces the Maya Tree, which represents illusion and perception.
- ◆ Maya means not absolute non-existence, but “not like this” — a misunderstanding of reality.
- ◆ From pure awareness, the first sense of “I” (Ahamkara) arises.
- ◆ Along with “I” comes the sense of “This” (Idantā), forming subject and object.
- ◆ These two are shown as twin creepers covering the Maya Tree.
- ◆ The covering does not destroy reality but hides it beneath layers of error.
- ◆ The Maya Tree symbol connects Indian philosophy with the Upanishads and the Gita.
- ◆ Like the Gita’s inverted tree, it must be “cut down” with knowledge to reach truth.
- ◆ Cutting the tree means discerning awareness, not destroying the world.
- ◆ Error and bondage arise within consciousness, not from outside forces.
- ◆ Liberation is uncovering pure awareness by removing the veils of “I” and “This.”

Objective Questions

1. Who composed the *Ātmopadēśa Śatakam*?
2. How many verses does the *Ātmopadēśa Śatakam* contain?
3. What does *Maya* represent in Vedanta?
4. In Verse 51, what are described as the “twin creepers”?

5. Which two senses arise first from pure awareness according to Verse 51?
6. Which chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* contains the image of cutting the inverted tree?
7. What does the Maya Tree symbolize in Verse 51?
8. In the verse, what do “I”-ness and “This”-ness cover?
9. What does “cutting the Maya Tree” symbolically represent?
10. Which Indian philosophical tradition heavily influences the *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*?

Answers

1. Sree Narayana Guru.
2. One hundred.
3. The principle of appearance or misapprehension that veils reality.
4. “I”-ness and “This”-ness.
5. The “I”-sense followed by the “This”-sense.
6. Chapter XV.
7. The structure of error and phenomenal existence.
8. The entire Maya Tree.
9. Discriminative awareness that removes the coverings of subject-object duality.
10. Advaita Vedanta.

Self - Assessment Questions

1. Explain the significance of natural metaphors, especially the tree and creepers, in the *Ātmopadēśa Śatakam*.
2. Discuss the philosophical meaning of “I”-ness and “This”-ness as described in Verse 51.
3. How does Sree Narayana Guru reinterpret the concept of *Maya* in psychological and epistemological terms?
4. Analyze the connection between the “cutting of the Maya Tree” in Verse 51 and the image of the inverted tree in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Reference

1. Nataraja Guru. (1970). *The word of the Guru*. Varkala, India: Narayana Gurukula.
2. Nataraja Guru. (1993). *The philosophy of a Guru*. Varkala, India: Narayana Gurukula.
3. Radhakrishnan, S. (1927). *Indian philosophy* (Vol. 2). London, England: George Allen & Unwin.
4. Sreekantan Nair, P. (1988). *Ātmopadēśa Śatakam: A critical study*. Thiruvananthapuram, India: Kerala Historical Society.
5. Deutsch, E. (1969). *Advaita Vedanta: A philosophical reconstruction*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

Suggested Reading

1. Dasgupta, S. (1932). *A history of Indian philosophy* (Vol. 1). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
2. Hiriyananda, M. (1953). *The essentials of Indian philosophy*. London, England: George Allen & Unwin.



Other Instances from Guru's Literature Suggesting Structure

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Point out other places in Guru's writings where structural metaphors are used.
- ◆ Describe how these images show the link between error, awareness, and reality.
- ◆ Understand why Sree Narayana Guru often uses structural metaphors in his philosophy.
- ◆ Evaluate the role of metaphor as a pedagogical tool in Guru's thought.

Prerequisites

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical writings are notable not only for their depth but also for their use of vivid imagery. Rather than relying on abstract conceptual language alone, he frequently employed structural metaphors to communicate complex ideas about the Self, reality, and the process of realization. These metaphors perform a crucial function in his teaching.

In Guru's view, the human mind goes through layers of error and partial awareness before arriving at truth. Structural images provide a way to map this journey. They connect the intangible such as consciousness and illusion to concrete forms the seeker can grasp. This makes his work accessible while retaining philosophical rigor. By studying other instances in his writings where such metaphors occur, we see how Guru consistently frames the path to realization as a movement through, over, or within a structure: from ignorance to awareness, from error to reality.

These structural metaphors also reflect his pedagogy or method of teaching. The Guru believed philosophy must link thought and life. Just as a bridge links two shores, or a house gives shelter to living beings, his metaphors ground lofty ideas in everyday experience. They show that for him, philosophy was not a detached abstraction but a living, experiential journey that must be navigated with both clarity and compassion.

Keywords

Metaphor, Structure, Analogy, Awareness, Reality, Error, Pedagogy, Imagery

Discussion

2.4.1 Structural Metaphors: Definition and Purpose

A structural metaphor is a way of explaining one domain of experience by mapping it onto another. It is usually done by using an image of an organized structure like a bridge, ladder, house, or mirror to give shape to abstract concepts. In philosophy, such metaphors are powerful tools because they help translate subtle ideas about reality, knowledge, and error into forms that can be visually imagined and lived.

In Sree Narayana Guru's writings, structural metaphors are not decorative; they are pedagogical devices that guide the seeker from confusion to clarity. They provide a map of the movement from *avidya* (ignorance) to *vidya* (knowledge) by showing that realization is not an instantaneous leap but a journey of crossing, building, or restructuring awareness.

2.4.2 Structural Metaphors, Error, Awareness, and Reality

Sree Narayana Guru's repeated use of structural metaphors reflects his understanding

of spiritual growth as a movement through clearly defined stages. In his view, the human mind does not jump from ignorance to truth in a single leap. It rather passes through intermediate formations of thought, discipline, and insight. Structural metaphors capture this movement by embodying three key moments: error, awareness, and reality.

In Zen Buddhism, there is an idea of sudden enlightenment, and Guru also supports this. In verse 35 of *Ātmopadeśa Śātakam*, Guru says that enlightenment is like "ten thousand suns entering at once". Similarly, in the first verse of chijjada Chintanam, Guru describes it as, "like a crore suns rising together".

2.4.2.1 Error as Structure:

Avidya may be *prima facie* and/or intuitively understood as a structureless condition. However, Guru does not present ignorance (*avidya*) as chaos but as a provisional structure. If a house is built of mistaken assumptions. Such a house need not be completely lacking a structure. It is rather an erroneous structure. This erroneous structure can inform the builder how to rectify the mistake when she/he gets to realize that it

is erroneous. This shows that error provides an initial framework for consciousness to function. Even illusion has a structure that holds experience together until deeper awareness of reality comes in.

2.4.2.2 Awareness as Reconstruction

Structural metaphors highlight that awakening is a process of re-seeing the structure we inhabit. The seeker recognizes the limitations of the provisional framework and begins to dismantle or cross it. For example, a wrongly constructed ladder is left behind and a new one is being made. Much in the same way, the house of ego crumbles when the knower realizes his or her oneness with the other and the Reality.

2.4.2.3 Reality as Open Space:

Once the structural metaphor has served its purpose, it points beyond itself. When the wrongly constructed house falls or a river bridge is crossed, then the seeker stands in an open field of direct experience. Here, the structure has already done its job of guiding the mind to a place where no structure is needed. Because truth reveals itself as self-luminous in such a space of openness, there is no more a need for a structure or a metaphor or any such mental and linguistic tools.

This dynamic explains why Sree Narayana Guru favoured structural imagery in his writings. It shows that error is not an enemy but a stepping stone. Awareness is the process of restructuring perception, and reality is the ground that remains when the scaffolding of concepts dissolves. It is important to note that his metaphors are not just descriptive but performative as well. They enact the journey they describe and allow the seeker to feel the movement from confinement to freedom.

2.4.3 Guru, Structural Metaphors and Pedagogy

Sree Narayana Guru's choice to use structural metaphors across his writings reflects a deliberate pedagogical method. His philosophy was never intended to remain in the realm of abstract speculation. It was meant to be lived, experienced, and practiced by people from all walks of life. Structural metaphors allow him to translate subtle philosophical insights into images grounded in everyday experience. Examples like bridges, houses, ladders, mirrors are objects that any seeker could understand regardless of scholarly training because they are experienced by almost everyone on a daily basis.

Another reason for his use of these metaphors is the way those metaphors mirror the seeker's inner journey. Spiritual progress requires building, crossing, and sometimes dismantling inner frameworks. A bridge evokes movement and transition; a ladder suggests gradual ascent; a house shows both shelter and confinement. These images are not chosen for poetic effect alone. They are also chosen because they parallel the psychological and existential structures within the seeker's consciousness.

Most importantly, the Guru's structural metaphors show that philosophy is not separate from life. Just as we move through rooms or cross over rivers, we move through layers of awareness. The metaphors embody his conviction that spiritual realization is not a remote idea but a tangible transformation that touches the whole of human experience. Then only they can be put into practise. By using structural metaphors which the common man encounters in daily life, Guru makes philosophy, or knowledge in general, 'walkable', 'climbable', and 'liveable', again to use metaphors! Sreenarayananaguru thereby brings truth down to the ground of daily life.



Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru often used structural metaphors to explain philosophy.
- ◆ A structural metaphor connects abstract truths with concrete images like houses, ladders, or bridges.
- ◆ For Guru, these metaphors were not decoration but teaching tools.
- ◆ They guide the seeker step by step from ignorance to knowledge.
- ◆ Error (*avidyā*) is shown as a provisional structure, not mere chaos.
- ◆ Even illusion has form and coherence, holding life together until truth is seen.
- ◆ Awareness means reconstruction – leaving behind wrong ladders and rebuilding right ones.
- ◆ The “house of ego” crumbles when one realises oneness with Reality.
- ◆ Reality itself is like an open space beyond all structures.
- ◆ Truth shines on its own without need of supports.

Objective Questions

1. What is a structural metaphor?
2. Name one structural metaphor used by Sree Narayana Guru in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*.
3. Which structural image in *Darśanamālā* represents the ego built from assumptions?
4. What does the bridge metaphor in *Daiva Dasakam* signify?
5. In Guru's philosophy, what are the three stages that structural metaphors often connect?
6. Why did Sree Narayana Guru prefer structural metaphors over abstract terms?
7. What everyday quality of structures makes them effective as teaching tools in Guru's writings?

Answers

1. A metaphor where one concept is understood in terms of another structured, sharply defined concept.
2. A ladder.
3. A house.
4. The passage from ignorance to realization; a transition across becoming.
5. Error, awareness, and reality.
6. To make subtle philosophical truths accessible and experiential for everyone.
7. Their familiarity and concreteness, which mirror the seeker's lived experience.

Self - Assessment Questions

1. Explain the pedagogical significance of Sree Narayana Guru's use of structural metaphors. How do these metaphors help bridge the gap between abstract truth and practical understanding?
2. Discuss the idea of error (avidyā) as a "structure" in Guru's philosophy. In what way does this interpretation differ from seeing error as simple illusion or chaos?
3. "Truth, for Guru, is not built but revealed when structures fall." Critically examine this claim with reference to metaphors such as the ladder, house, and bridge.

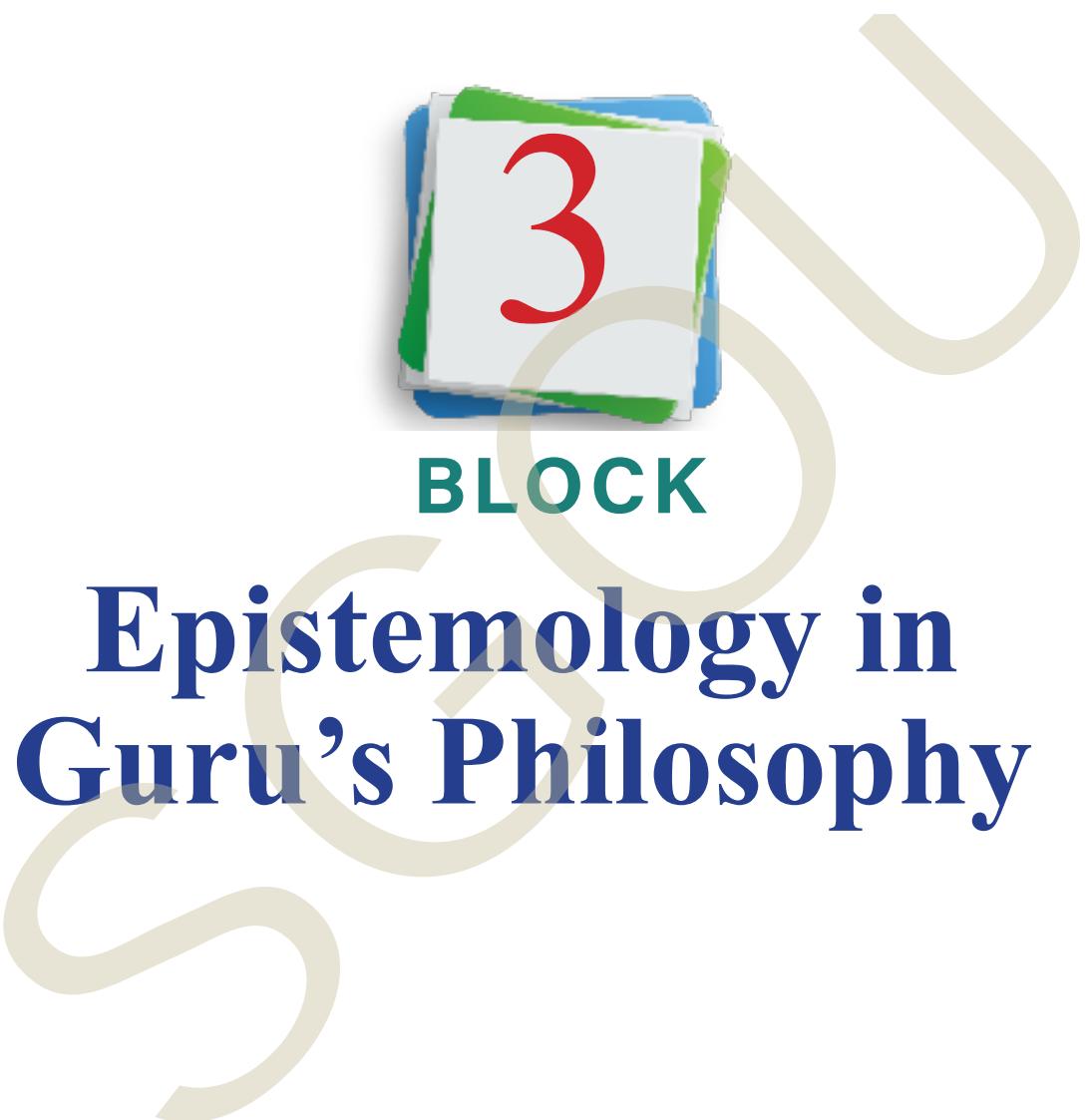


Reference

1. Nataraja Guru. (1991). *The Word of the Guru*. New Delhi: D.K. Print world.
2. Menon, N. G. (2003). *Sree Narayana Guru: The Philosophy and Vision*. Trivandrum: Sree Narayana Philosophy Publications.
3. Raghavan, T. K. (1994). *The Wisdom of Sree Narayana Guru*. Trivandrum: Sree Narayana Mission Press.
4. *Complete Works of Sree Narayana Guru*. (2006). Varkala: Sree Narayana Trusts.

Suggested Reading

1. Nataraja Guru. (2003). *The Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru*. Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
2. Sreekantan Nair, P. K. (1999). *Sree Narayana Guru: Vedanta and Vision*. Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Historical Society.



3

BLOCK

Epistemology in Guru's Philosophy



Origin of knowledge

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ Explain Sree Narayana Guru's idea that knowledge comes from consciousness (Cit)
- ◆ Recognize the unity between subject and object in Guru's thought
- ◆ Describe the role of ignorance (avidya) in blocking true knowledge
- ◆ Reflect on the idea that real knowledge is inner experience

Prerequisites

In Indian philosophy, epistemology is referred to by the Sanskrit term *pramāṇa-sāstra*. It inquires into what knowledge is, when it is derived, and how we can know that things are so and so. Indian traditional schools extensively dealt with these questions. Sree Narayana Guru enters into this terrain with a new approach. For him knowledge is not merely an intellectual or rational issue. It is a deeper experience that stems from our inner awareness, which he terms *Cit* or pure consciousness. Guru's instructions are unique. He does not separate the knower (the object) and the known (the subject). They both, to him, originate from the same consciousness. Guru's *Arivu* (Malayalam and Tamil word for awareness or knowledge) is not about piling up facts. It is the understanding that the world and our thoughts are all originating from the single Consciousness. Sree Narayana Guru lived between 1855 and 1928. He was not just a philosopher but was also a poet, social reformer, and spiritual guru. His main writings such as *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, *Darśanamāla*, and *Arivu* inform us that every knowledge is not from the external world. Knowledge includes something that unfolds within us. This unit examines Guru's understanding of the source of knowledge and how it can be compared to classical Indian theories that consider knowledge as representation of the external world.

Keywords

Consciousness, Arivu, Cit, Subject-Object, Avidya, Karma, Unity

Discussion

3.1.1 Epistemology as the Science of Consciousness

Sree Narayana Guru does not make a distinction between epistemology and metaphysics as two distinct philosophical branches of thought. He brings them together by reasoning. Knowledge (arivu) is less of a vehicle for knowing reality; it is reality itself. To be/exist is to know, as far as Guru is concerned. This notion is a departure from viewing knowledge as a technique or tool to the understanding that knowledge is the very medium through which truth or being or *sat* is revealed. Guru believed that Vedanta is not a religion or spirituality, but more of a science of consciousness. He refers to it as Cit-śāstra or the science of consciousness.

Guru consistently employed the term '**Arivu**' to encompass both empirical and spiritual knowledge. From his philosophical perspective, spiritual and material knowledge are intrinsically linked, representing two facets of the same fundamental reality. The perception of spiritual wisdom as material objects, or the non-dual Absolute as a world of plurality, is attributed to **ignorance** (*avidya*). This constitutes an erroneous cognition. Such ignorance, however, can be dispelled through the attainment of genuine wisdom, which is precisely what 'Arivu' signifies. Whatever we see, think, or know is founded on Cit. Guru's declaration that "Consciousness alone is the ultimate substrate of all phenomena" clearly shows this view. What is unique in Guru is that he brings Vedanta down from the abstract and distant to the immediate, inner, and

experiential realm. Though philosophers such as Shankara would speak of the world as being illusion or *māyā*, Guru instead speak of how the consciousness radiates or manifests itself in everything. Reality for him then becomes a dynamic process of consciousness expressing itself.

Brahman is traditionally considered ineffable, meaning it cannot be fully described or comprehended through words or conventional thought. Given this, the use of terms like **Sat-Chit-Ananda** (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) requires careful understanding. These terms are, in essence, employed in a **negative or apophatic** sense to preclude common misconceptions about the ultimate reality:

- ◆ **Sat** (Existence) serves to indicate that the absolute reality is not non-existent or void, thereby negating nihilistic interpretations.
- ◆ **Chit** (Consciousness) signifies that the absolute reality is not inert or insentient, countering the idea of a lifeless or unconscious ultimate principle.
- ◆ **Ananda** (Bliss) is used to convey that the absolute reality is entirely devoid of sorrow or suffering, dispelling any notion of imperfection or pain within it.

Therefore, these attributes are not exhaustive positive descriptions of Brahman but rather powerful negations of what Brahman is *not*, guiding the seeker away from erroneous conceptualisations.

5.1.2 One Consciousness Underlying All Knowledge

To Sree Narayana Guru, true knowledge is not from outside of ourselves. Knowledge forms within ourselves, because our own nature consists of unadulterated consciousness which is termed as *Cit*. Whether we perceive by means of senses, by thoughts, or in contemplation, all this is from the same inner source. Guru holds that *Cit* is that one foundation of all that exists. All that we can be aware of is only so because this consciousness extends itself in various forms. To illustrate this the following metaphors are useful. Just as gold takes the form of ornaments without ceasing to be gold, or the ocean appears as waves, so too *Cit* appears as diverse forms of knowledge without self-denial. Our experiences, thinking, and outside world are all manifestations of one unbroken consciousness. Guru's philosophy helps to observe that all separations we notice in the world around us possess a hidden unity behind them.

5.1.3 Subject and Object Are Not Really Different

Sree Narayana Guru describes how what we generally consider to be the subject (the one who knows) and the object (the thing that is known) are not actually different realities. Both are merely two different forms of the same pure consciousness, referred to as *Cit*. The subject is the inner, subtle form of *Cit* and the object is its outer, grosser form. That is, what appears as a duality is really the activity of a unit appearing to be double. This concept reflects the Upanishadic truth of individual self (Atman) and universal reality (Brahman) being one. Guru's philosophy avoids the dualism pursued by Western thinkers such as Descartes, who separated mind and matter. Guru conceptualizes the process of knowledge as when *Cit* comes face to face with itself. In this process, it first comes as seer and second as seen. This

is not a division in actuality but a seeming one generated by ignorance or avidya.

According to the Guru, there is no real difference between the subject and the object. The difference exists only in perception. It is due to ignorance that this difference appears. When true knowledge arises, all such distinctions disappear. When we transcend this seeming duality and understand that subject and object are not two, then what we achieve is interior, immediate awareness (*aparoksha jnāna*). It is not a matter of knowing something external to ourselves; it is a matter of being with the truth within ourselves. Then knowing and being are one.

5.1.4 Karma and the Will to Know

According to Sree Narayana Guru that *Cit* is never passive or still. It is always active. It carries an inner urge or movement to express itself. This natural drive within consciousness is referred to as *karma*. Here, karma does not mean moral actions or consequences, but a kind of inner energy that pushes consciousness to become aware of itself through various forms.

We gain knowledge not by accident. It happens because two forms of *Cit*; the knowing subject and the object to be known, are brought into contact through this karmic drive. The subject is the inner, subtle form, and the object is the outer, visible form. Their meeting is not a mechanical event but a meaningful coming together caused by the inner will of consciousness to know itself. Therefore, knowledge is a dynamic process powered by the energy within *Cit*. This means that every act of knowing is actually a self-recognition of consciousness. It is not just about getting information but about the deeper movement of reality recognizing its own presence in different forms.

In his poem 'Brahmavidya Panchakam', Guru states: 'Karma does not exist'

(Karmapyasat). We experience Sanchita (past), Prarabdha (present) and Agami (future) actions or karmas because of ignorance. When one attains the wisdom, he knows all actions were mere illusions.

5.1.5 Avidya and the Veiling of True Knowledge

As a matter of fact, we know that there is ignorance. For example, one cannot know certain things about oneself. At this juncture, there comes an immediate question. If knowledge is so fundamental to the nature of existence, why there is ignorance at all? Guru replies to this with the help of the idea of avidya, or forgetfulness of unity, or ignorance. Avidya for Guru is not merely a lack of knowledge. It is a misperception, which is a confusion in which the knower thinks that the subject and object are really distinct. This mistake makes us consider them as dualities. This conceals the real state of consciousness, which is single and not divided from the beginning.

The function of spiritual wisdom or higher epistemology is to lift this veil erected by avidya. Actual knowledge occurs when ignorance is dispelled and consciousness knows itself to be one. This clearing is not cognitive. It is realization of Cit as the source of knowledge and ‘knowledge’ in general is typically Cit. Guru describes this most poetically in the language of a metaphor: two individuals in a black room utter “I” without knowing each other. When the lights are turned on, they remember the oneness of their utterance. It is a portrait of the human condition; we all say “I,” but we lose sight of the fact that this “I” is one and the same in all of us. It is a light of awareness that we see the truth that we were never separated.

The phenomenal world of plurality is attributed to Maya. Maya possesses two fundamental powers: Avarana Shakti (the veiling power) and Vikshepa Shakti (the

projecting power). Initially, Avarana Shakti obscures the true nature of reality, while Vikshepa Shakti then projects an apparent untruth. Specifically, Maya projects the diverse world of plurality upon the substratum of the non-dual Brahman.

While Maya and Avidya are often used interchangeably, a subtle distinction exists in a strict Advaitic sense. Maya is considered the objective cause underlying the manifestation of the pluralistic world. In contrast, Avidya is understood as the subjective cause inherent within an individual soul or *jiva*.

It is posited that an individual can eliminate Avidya, or ignorance, through the attainment of genuine knowledge. However, Maya, as the cosmic illusory power, cannot be eradicated by any individual. It is transcended through the realisation of Brahman, rather than being actively destroyed.

5.1.6 Consciousness as Experiential

Sree Narayana Guru presents a powerful critique of representationalism. It is the assumption that knowledge is simply a copy or an imitation of the world within our heads. Rather than viewing knowledge as a representation of the outside world, Guru says that genuine knowledge arises from within and rests on immediate experience. He refers to this comprehension as “non-representational” and “non-dual,” that is, it does not divide the known and the knower. Comprehension is not something about the outside.

Guru also challenges conventional Indian methods of knowledge depending considerably on instruments such as perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna), or comparison (upamāna). (There is a detailed discussion of this in unit II). Though these are useful to everyday life, they do not result in the ultimate form of knowledge. For Guru, knowledge is that attained through

the realization of the inner world. It should be something we can refer to as intuitive awareness. It is not acquired through the senses but through direct contact with existence itself. If we realize this, then knowledge turns into something we are, rather than something we possess.

5.1.7 Reversal of the Direction of Knowing

In several philosophical systems, knowledge usually begins with the outside world. The knowing subject gathers sense data, reflects on it, and then moves inward to find meaning or truth. This process is known as vichāra or analysis. But Sree Narayana Guru flips this direction. He says that real knowledge must begin from within, not from objects outside us, but from the shining core of consciousness itself. To Guru, knowledge is not discovered out there; it is revealed from in here.

This inner journey is not merely for thinking more deeply. It brings a change in the knower. As we travel in, we are no longer an independent observer looking out at the world, rather, we are in union with what is genuinely known. Guru terms this a dialectical and ontological occurrence, where all duality disappears in oneness. It is not merely studying. It is sacred awareness. Guru thereby redefines epistemology itself

as spirituality.

5.1.8 Sree Narayana Guru and the Advaita Legacy

In this discussion, Guru is situated within the Advaita (non-dual) school, particularly in comparison to scholars such as Adi Shankara. However, his methodology with respect to Advaita differs. Shankara was concerned with negation the process of elimination of illusions through practice of “neti neti” (not this, not that). Guru, rather describes the power and splendour of consciousness. To him, Cit is not merely the secret background of illusion but a resplendent presence that permeates all experience. He rejoices in its light instead of closing the world out.

This approach makes a difference. Guru's teaching does not require us to treat the world or see it as pure illusion. He invites us to live in the world as a knowingly significant creation. In this manner, knowledge for Guru is an uplifting experience. It is a realization that reality is not merely sacred but radiance itself. His conception of knowledge becoming then is not an escape from the world, but an embracing of its inner light. According to Sreenarayana Guru, advaita is not just a philosophical system, but a deep insight into the ultimate reality.

Recap

- ◆ Ontology and epistemology are inseparable in Guru's system.
- ◆ Everything is an outpouring from a single pure consciousness.
- ◆ To know is encountering consciousness itself
- ◆ The desire to know arises from the energy of consciousness itself.
- ◆ Ignorance is not voidness but illusory perception of separateness.
- ◆ Avidya is the shadow that makes the radiance of Cit seem disjointed.
- ◆ Knowledge is not a reflection of the world but the radiance of awareness itself.
- ◆ True knowledge begins by looking inward, rather than outward.
- ◆ True knowing is a shifting of attention from object to source.
- ◆ Guru places a warm glow on the Advaita vision of unity.
- ◆ Guru interprets Advaita as a philosophy of negation into a vision of affirmation.

Objective Questions

1. What is the Malayalam word Guru uses for knowledge?
2. What is the ultimate source of all knowledge according to Guru?
3. What causes the illusion of separateness in knowledge?
4. What term does Guru use for ignorance or misperception?
5. What inner energy drives consciousness to know itself?
6. What is the nature of true knowledge in Guru's thought?
7. Which direction does Guru suggest for the journey of knowing?
8. What philosophical tradition does Guru reinterpret?
9. What kind of realization is *aparoksha jnāna*?

Answers

1. Arivu
2. *Cit* (Pure Consciousness)
3. *Avidya*
4. *Avidya*
5. Karma
6. Intuitive and experiential
7. Inward
8. Advaita
9. Direct or immediate realization

Assignments

1. Discuss how Sree Narayana Guru connects epistemology and metaphysics in his philosophy.
2. Explain the role of *Cit* as the source of both the subject and the object in Guru's understanding of knowledge.
3. How does Guru's concept of *avidya* help us understand the idea of veiling of true knowledge?
4. Compare and contrast Sree Narayana Guru's interpretation of Advaita with that of Adi Shankara.

Reference

1. Sree Narayana Guru. (1930). *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*. S.N. Trust Publications.
2. Sree Narayana Guru. (1917). *Darśanamāla* (N. Guru, Trans.). The Word Academy.
3. Nataraja Guru. (1968). *The Philosophy of a Guru*. The Cochin Cultural Publications.
4. Radhakrishnan, S. (1957). *Indian Philosophy* (Vol. II). Oxford University Press.
5. Pulickal, J. (Ed.). (2005). *Sree Narayana Philosophy: An Introduction*. Sree Narayana Study Centre, Kerala University.
6. Menon, A. S. (1967). *A Survey of Kerala History*. DC Books.
7. Omana, S. (2016). *Vedanta—The Science of Consciousness: Sree Narayana Guru's Epistemological Perspective*. *International Journal of Advanced Scientific Research and Management*, 1(10), 64–68.

Suggested Reading

1. Menon, A. S. (1967). Sree Narayana philosophy: An introduction. Sree Narayana Study Centre, Kerala University.
2. Kumaran, Moorkoth, (1999). Sree Narayana Swamikalude jeevacharithram. SNDS Trust, Sivagiri Mutt.



Methods of Knowledge

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ Revisit the key pramāṇas (means of knowledge) recognized in classical Indian philosophy.
- ◆ Explain how Sree Narayana Guru critically engages with traditional pramāṇas.
- ◆ Describe Guru's preference for direct experiential knowledge (aparokṣa jñāna).
- ◆ Analyze Guru's view that real knowledge arises from consciousness itself.
- ◆ Reflect on Guru's vision of knowledge as spiritual awakening

Prerequisites

Methods of knowledge or valid sources of knowledge in Indian philosophy were classically termed as pramāṇas. Philosophical schools assume multiple pramāṇas such as pratyakṣa (perception), anumāna (inference), upamāna (analogy), arthāpatti (postulation), anupalabdhi (non-perception), and śabda (testimonial word). These are used to support knowledge in various domains. Sree Narayana Guru provides a reinterpretation of the pramāṇas. This does not mean that Guru rejected these classical techniques, but he questions the ability of those methods to get us to true knowledge. Guru considered knowledge of the self as ultimate truth. Knowledge for him is not acquisition of representations or sense data. It is an instantaneous, unmediated opening of Cit or pure consciousness. Guru therefore picks out the shortcomings of external methods of knowledge acquisition and emphasizes inner realization. Rather than treating epistemology as a purely conceptual or logical

science, Guru makes it a science of the self. His view is that the ultimate method must not be method, but an ontological event which unfolds the overcoming of the illusory experience of duality between the knowledge and the known. What is left after that is not a piece of knowledge but awakened-ness. This unit describes how Guru comes to understand and reinterpret the classical *pramāṇas* in this light.

In the 94th verse of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, the Guru says:

“The state in which the unreal world (prapancha) and the real supreme truth (parama satya) coexist is a major illogical factor. This condition is a kind of transfer that cannot be explained in words. This truth, which is beyond determination and inaccessible to both speech and mind, raises the question — how can epistemology be valid here?”

From this view expressed by the Guru, it may seem that he has rejected all forms of epistemology. However, in accordance with the order of the world (loka-krama), the Guru has accepted epistemology in several of his other works

Keywords

Pramāṇa, Pratyakṣha, Anumāna, Śabda, Aparokṣa jñāna, Self-knowledge, Cit, Direct experience, Yoga-buddhi, Inner realization

Discussion

3.2.1 Pratyakṣha: Sense Perception and Its Limitations

Sense perception or *pratyakṣha* is defined as the primary means of acquiring knowledge in classical Indian philosophy. It is the knowledge derived through the sound we hear, the visuals that we see, the touch that we feel, the taste that we get, or the smell that we smell. It gives practical knowledge that is relevant to everyday life. For instance, when we observe a tree, we realize that there is a tree out there. We rely on our senses to move around. But Sree Narayana Guru alerts us to the fact that such knowledge is limited. To him, our senses can reveal only appearances and nothing beyond that. In *Indiryā Vairagyam*, *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* (v. 10), he states that it is a pity to leave the

body to sense organs that wander without being satisfied with anything. He prays to the Almighty to raise the devotee from that virtual world which the sense organs provide. This shows Guru's take on the non-reliability of sense organs and thus of sense perception. In another famous work, *Brahmavidyapanchakam*, (verse 1) Guru by following Shankara's *Vivekachoodamani* enumerates the prerequisite qualities of a seeker of *Brahmavidya*. He advises to practise six self-imposed disciplines within which the second one is *dama* or restraining the senses. Senses can get in touch with the worldly things which can generate desire and that has to be avoided. This is also evidence for Guru's argument that sense organs prevent the subjects from knowing the true nature of reality.

Take the case of a rainbow. It appears real and colourful to the eye, but we know that it is merely a creation of light and moisture. In the same manner that our experience through the senses can appear real, but it is only superficially real on the surface level. Guru invites us to see beyond the appearances to the really real. He teaches that real seeing has to be interior. Rather than looking outward, one has to look inward. He who sees must become conscious of the light of consciousness upon which seeing is possible. It is just like a lamp illuminates objects but is not same as the object. So also, is consciousness lighting up the world but not within the reach of sense awareness. So, Guru is not dismissing perception as a source of knowledge altogether. He is merely reminding us it is the beginning, not the end. To attain the self, we have to shift from outside in to inside awareness. Perception says something about the world, but not the truth of the world. In verse 62 of Atmopadeshasatakam, Guru clarifies that no knowledge comes to us if we are enslaved by the senses. Bhanadarsana in Darsanamala proves that Guru accepted perception as a valid pramana.

3.2.2 Anumāna: Limits of Inference

Inference or anumāna is accepted by all in the Indian tradition as one of the standard pramāṇas or methods of gaining valid knowledge. It is a mental process where knowledge of an un-seen thing is gained through the relation of something seen. A typical example is concluding fire on observing smoke. This is not a disordered process but is organized with respect to experience in the past and mental connection of patterns which re-occur periodically. The philosophical basis for such reasoning is in Nyāya and Advaita schools and also in texts like Vedāntaparibhāṣā. To Sree Narayana Guru, although such inferential thinking cannot be avoided in the empirical realm, it is

very much beside the point to the awareness of the Self or the ultimate.

All the classical pramāṇas such as the perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna), presumption (arthāpatti), non-apprehension (anupalabdhi), and comparison (upamāna) are relevant only in the background of externalized knowledge, where a subject perceives an object external to itself. These channels of knowledge function in the duality model, with the known being separable from the knower, and knowledge mediated by the senses or through mental concepts like memory, likeness, or necessity. The known is thus separable from the knower in such cases and builds up understanding by filling the present perception and connecting it with past experience and remembered relations.

Anumāna especially depends a great deal on memory. To arrive at the conclusion that there is fire on the hill upon seeing smoke, one must have previously seen that smoke is always accompanied by fire. The remembered association is then the basis of present knowledge. In another example, hearing temple music leads us to conclude there are people, based on stored patterns of past experience. Absent retained information, the conclusion would never be drawn. This dependence on memory ties inference to time and to the world of experience, where knowledge has to be incomplete, indirect, and conditioned. Narayana Guru, nevertheless, draws an uncompromising distinction between this sort of inferential knowledge and the immediate light of the Self. The Self (ātma), or Consciousness, is not an object among objects to be inferred, compared, and speculated upon. It is the foundation of all knowledge, not to be known as an appendage. Therefore, it cannot be accessed by anumāna or any of the pramāṇas based on a subject-object dichotomy. Self-knowledge for Guru is aparokṣānubhūti—a direct, unmediated seeing that is not the outcome of reason, perception, or analogy.

This is done all the more explicitly in the application of analogy itself by Guru. In a verse, he speaks of how a man who has heard what a deer is can, seeing the animal, identify it. This is due to memory and similarity alone. Inference and analogy are possible only when there is recollection of description and ability to project on present perception. However, these actions continue to operate within the web of conceptual thought, language, and worldly relationality. It is in this way then, even though inference is still a mighty and precious tool in our way of dealing with the world, its validity is only relative. It functions in perceiving patterns, grasping cause and effect, and reading experience of the empirical world. But it does not necessarily leap over into realization of self. This is not a line of logical certainty, but one of interior clarity, of turning away from objectification toward awareness of pure being. Guru therefore perceives the employment of inference but refuses to acknowledge that it can possibly figure in the journey to ultimate freedom. The Absolute is not perceived by means of the mind but notwithstanding it—not by implication, but by illumination.

3.2.3 Śabda: The Role of Language and Verbal Testimony

Śabda, or verbal testimony, is accepted by most Indian philosophical schools as a source of knowledge. Śabda is knowledge that originates from trustworthy verbal testimony, specifically verbal testimony from scripture. Vedānta and Mīmāṃsā have a strong faith in śabda for taking the Vedas and other scriptures to be a revelation of the un-knowable truths through sense perception or rational reason. These scriptures are authoritative because they are taken to be from sources which are infallible and possess insight into the eternal.

Sree Narayana Guru recognizes the function of śabda in spiritual life but offers a

more profound critique of its shortcomings. For him, verbal testimony has its place, particularly in offering advice to seekers of truth. But he believes that verbal instruction alone cannot result in immediate experience of the Self. The words of scripture or the teachings of an enlightened individual may direct and stimulate, but they set up enlightenment for themselves.

Of the conventional methods of knowledge, śruti or holy word instruction contains some indirect worth, Guru argues. The reason why is that it passes on the words of already enlightened beings. Even this instruction, however, does not grant instant comprehension. The student of truth needs to listen to these words with care and reflect deeply upon them. Through questioning meditation, the inner sense within the cover words might be made manifest. This is no literal taking of the words, but rather an entry into the inner sense of the words and an enabling of the understanding to arise from within.

Language functions within the boundaries of thought. It bifurcates experience into speaker and hearer, subject and object, knower and known. On account of this, it can always remain in the domain of duality. The truth of the Self is transcendent of all dualistic polarities. It is not something to be talked about as an object. It is the field of all knowledge. That is why Guru insists that language may be the route to the truth but needs to be let go of once realization has been achieved. Even scripture, ultimately, has to be overcome.

To explain this better, Guru provides a day-to-day illustration. Let's assume a person attempts to give the taste of honey. No matter how much they employ graphic or descriptive words, that sweetness can be directly tasted only. In the same way, words can gesture toward the Absolute and even awaken a desire for it, but cannot provide

the experience of it. One has to approach it through an interior transformation that transcends words and logic.

Guru's own words are poetic, but he does not want to be making statements to arrive at truth in words. He wants to point the reader inward instead. The words he employs are intended to bring the reader to the threshold of silence. There, in the space of inner silence, begins understanding. So *śabda* serves a function on the path. It readies, instructs, and assists. It must always follow firsthand experience, however.

In the last line of 14th verse of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* Guru states that 'Upanishadukti rahasyamorthidenam' (Remember the secret reason in the Upanishad). This shows that Guru accepts Upanishad or Sruti as the *Śabda* or verbal testimony.

3.2.4 Aparokṣa Jñāna: The Method Beyond All Methods

Aparokṣa jñāna is "immediate, direct knowledge". It is a knowledge that does not go through the senses or the mind. It is knowledge by the self of itself, independent of any external instrument. It is the final and supreme form of knowledge according to Sree Narayana Guru. Perception, inference, and verbal testimony are steps to the final experience. This type of awareness is like awakening from a dream. In the dream, all things exist; people, places, objects. But the moment we awake, we know none of it existed. Aparokṣa jñāna is this kind of awakening. It is the knowing that all of the dualities such as subject-object, knower-known are due to ignorance. All that is left is pure awareness.

Guru mentions that aparokṣa jñāna cannot be intellectually understood but has to be realized. No one "learns" such knowledge in the normal school-going manner. Instead, it is developed by silence, contemplation, and profound reflection. A good example

is one of tasting sugar. You may be told by someone what sweet sugar tastes like, or have it described to you in writings, but until you taste it for yourself, you don't know what is being referred to. In the same way, aparokṣa jñāna is not hearing or thinking; it is "tasting" the reality of the self for oneself. Hence, Guru considers this approach to be no methodology per se. It is the releasing of the dependency on external forms of knowledge. Proper knowledge is not achieved; it reveals itself upon the relinquishing of everything else.

3.2.5 Yoga-Buddhi: Intuition as Integration

Guru's specific focus on yoga-buddhi or yogic mind brings a pragmatic turn to his approach. Yoga-buddhi is the serene inner intuition cultivated from self-restraint and meditation. Though not a usual *pramāṇa* in regular counting, Guru promotes it to the actual path between stifled knowledge and depth of knowledge. Yoga-buddhi is not abstract thinking, but meditative awareness which peers through the dance of thought. Guru writes about this in his poetic words, where he calls upon the seeker to draw the mind back from the multiplicity of the world and become one with the silent depth of being. There, knowledge is revealed not as conclusion but as natural light. A master musician who does not calculate mentally every note but plays in effortless flow. In the same way in yoga-buddhi, the seeker no longer thinks but rests merely in insight. The mind, which is normally uncontrolled in outer question, now remains quiet and thoughtful, reproducing truth.

Guru feels this vision of integration as a precursor to aparokṣa jñāna. It sharpens the sensitivity, brings the mind in tune with the truth, and loosens the hold of the ego. And through this inner attuning, duality dissolves into oneness, and spiritual maturity becomes more sensitive. Yoga-buddhi is therefore

no substitute for the traditional pramāṇas being are the same. but intra-developmental growth whereby all knowledge becomes realization. Yoga-buddhi is the vision, where knowing and

Recap

- ◆ Pratyakṣa reveals appearances, but not the truth.
- ◆ Anumāna can direct reason, but will not make the self, manifest.
- ◆ Śabda can point the direction, but can never be a substitute for realization.
- ◆ Aparokṣa jñāna is direct inner light.
- ◆ Real knowledge is not taught
- ◆ Yoga-buddhi sharpens awareness into clarity of perception.
- ◆ The way to truth is inward, beyond sense and thought.
- ◆ All the other pramāṇas are steps on the path to inner light.

Objective Questions

1. Name the pramāṇa that refers to direct sense perception.
2. According to Sree Narayana Guru, what is the highest form of knowledge?
3. Which classical pramāṇa deals with verbal testimony or scriptural authority?
4. What term does Guru use to indicate intuitive or meditative intelligence?
5. What does Guru suggest we transcend to realize truth — outer methods or inner realization?
6. Which pramāṇa is said to be based on drawing conclusions from observed signs?
7. In Guru's philosophy, what dissolves with self-realization: duality or unity?

8. Which of Guru's works repeatedly emphasizes silence over logic?
9. Is language capable of conveying the Absolute, according to Guru?

Answers

1. Pratyakṣa
2. Aparokṣa jñāna
3. Śabda
4. Yoga-buddhi
5. Outer methods
6. Anumāna
7. Duality
8. *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*
9. No

Assignments

1. Critically discuss how Sree Narayana Guru reinterprets classical pramāṇas such as *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *śabda*. In what way does he move beyond traditional epistemology?
2. What role does *aparokṣa jñāna* play in Sree Narayana Guru's epistemology? Explain how it differs from mediated forms of knowledge.
3. Explain the concept of *yoga-buddhi* in Guru's philosophy. How does it function as a transformative path toward self-realization?

Reference

1. Muni Narayana Prasad. (2003). *The philosophy of Narayana Guru* (pp. 25–68). D.K. Printworld.
2. Muni Narayana Prasad. (2010). *The shorter philosophical poems of Narayana Guru* (p. 82). D.K. Printworld.
3. Narayana Guru. (1997). *Vedanta sutras* (pp. 1–35). D.K. Printworld.
4. Nataraja Guru. (2001). *An integrated science of the Absolute* (pp. 200–302). D.K. Printworld.
5. Nityachaitanya Yati. (1982). *Neither this nor that but Aum* (pp. 73–87). Vikas Publishing House.
6. Narayana Guru. *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*. (Original work; various editions and translations consulted.)
7. Narayana Guru. *Daśaśloki*. (Original work; various editions and commentaries consulted.)

Suggested Reading

1. Nityachaitanya Yati. (1982). *Neither this nor that but Aum* (pp. 73–87). Vikas Publishing House.
2. Chatterjee, S. C., & Datta, D. M. (2007). *An introduction to Indian philosophy*. Rupa Publications.



Validity of Knowledge

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ Identify the key epistemological concerns in Narayana Guru's philosophical framework.
- ◆ Explain the concept of valid and invalid knowledge in light of Guru's Advaitic orientation.
- ◆ Compare Guru's approach to epistemic validity with classical Indian pramāṇa theories.
- ◆ Analyze the role of ignorance (avidyā) and superimposition (adhyāsa) in producing invalid knowledge.
- ◆ Evaluate the liberative significance of valid knowledge in Guru's metaphysical system.

Prerequisites

In Indian philosophy, it is debated many centuries ago how we know something and how we know that what we know exists. This is the prevailing preoccupation of epistemology. In this tradition, the various schools based their theories on when knowledge must be true (prāmāṇya). Two of the prominent views in these debates are a) that knowledge is self-evident (svataḥ-prāmāṇya), and b) that knowledge is established only when supported by something else (parataḥ-prāmāṇya). While the Nyāya school of thought advocates the second stand and emphasizes logical reasoning and external verification, other schools such as Mīmāṃsā and Advaita Vedānta emphasize the function of inner certainty. These were debates that were not only preoccupied with logic and argument but also addressed the question of how knowledge impacts our experience of reality and freedom from ignorance.

In the Indian context, to be aware is not so much a matter of acquiring facts; it is frequently thought of as a path to self-knowledge and liberation. Narayana Guru writes about these matters in a novel perspective. Even though his philosophy has the influence of Advaita Vedānta, he speaks of a simple and experiential vision. His greatest concern is not whether knowledge obeys the laws of logic but whether it liberates us from ignorance and makes us realize the unity of existence. For him, unless knowledge liberates us from ignorance (avidyā) and manifests wisdom it cannot be said to be genuinely valid. This unit presents at how Narayana Guru's epistemological thoughts fits into these broader philosophical conversations.

Keywords

Pramāṇya, Avidyā, Validity, Superimposition, Aparoksha Jñāna, Sat-Chit-Ananda, Epistemic liberation

Discussion

3.3.1 Traditional Concept of Valid Knowledge

The concept of pramā or valid knowledge is the core of Indian epistemologies. The various schools of philosophy have different explanations of how to assess when an object of knowledge may be regarded as reliable. Not only do they think about truth differently, each of them also has its own ways of detecting and determining it. The Nyāya school believes that knowledge would be true if it properly pertains to the object being referred to. This is called yathārtha jñāna. For instance, if perceiving a tree and identifying it rightly as a tree, then it is right knowledge. However, if, in the dark, one wrongly identifies a rope for a snake, then the cognition is not true. Nyāya philosophers suggest that one must test genuine knowledge through way of further perception, rationalization, or verification by someone else. It is called parataḥ-prāmāṇya, wherein one tests for truth through a following action. It is a common phenomenon in our daily life of “double-checking” or verifying something prior to its being accepted.

By contrast, the Mīmāṃsā tradition embraces that knowledge is svataḥ-prāmāṇya or self-justified unless there is negative proof. If an individual is seeing smoke on a far-off hill and concluding there is fire, Mīmāṃsā holds that this assumption is correct before its proof is established unless we have reason to reject it. This is similar to the way we tend to go about making hypotheses. The Advaita Vedānta school holds that it concurs with svataḥ-prāmāṇya but goes on further that the most solid, trustworthy form of knowledge emerges not from mind or senses but from internal perception. An example is when one experiences the direct intuition “I am,” this consciousness of self does not emerge either from perception or from rational thinking; it emerges immediately and naturally. This is higher-order knowledge since no other knowledge can be contrary to it. Even if we are doubtful about all matters, that “I am aware” cannot be negated.

To establish this hierarchy, Advaita philosophers provide examples of illusions. One might perceive a shell and believe it to be silver, this is false pramā. When they draw near and discover that it is a shell, the previous pramā gets “sublated.” But

the pramā that discloses both perceptions, the false one as well as the true one is not disturbed. That pramā itself turns into the most authentic pramā. These classical views offer some openings for addressing knowledge: as confirmed by reason, as self-evident, and as rooted in awareness. Each model tells us not just how we comprehend truth, but how we come to believe in our experiences.

According to Guru, the knowledge, known and knower are not three separate entities, but one and the same Brahman or absolute.

Narayana Guru's philosophy is deeply preoccupied with these concepts although they are described by him more poetically and in an experience-based way. Instead of arguing out theory of pramāṇa at an abstract level, Guru tries to explain how knowledge can liberate us from ignorance and enable us to live with the world in sympathy.

3.3.2 Traditional Concepts of Pramā

The concept of pramā or true or valid knowledge is the core of Indian epistemologies. The various schools of philosophy have different explanations of how to assess when an object of knowledge may be regarded as reliable. Not only do they think about truth differently, each of them also has its own ways of detecting and determining it.

The Nyāya school believes that knowledge would be true if it properly pertains to the object being referred to yathārtha jñāna. For instance, if perceiving a tree and identifying it rightly as a tree, then it is right knowledge. However, if, in the dark, one wrongly identifies a rope for a snake, then the cognition is not true. Nyāya philosophers suggest that one must test genuine knowledge through way of further perception, rationalization, or verification by someone else. It is called paratah-pramāṇya, wherein one tests for truth

through a following action. It is a common phenomenon in our daily life of “double-checking” or verifying something prior to its being accepted.

In contrast to the other schools, the Mīmāṃsā school believes that knowledge is self-authenticating (svatah-pramāṇa). What we intend to convey by this is that we never have to resort to external testimony to prove some piece of knowledge, except for testimony which can perhaps show that it is false. Suppose someone observes smoke ascending on a distant hill and concludes there must be fire. Mīmāṃsā regards this inference to be valid immediately, except to the extent to which something can refute it. This is how we usually behave in our day-to-day life. For example, if we notice dark clouds over the sky, we presume that it may rain and walk around with an umbrella, even if not a drop of rain has yet fallen. We go on acting this way unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise.

The Advaita Vedānta school holds that it concurs with svatah-pramāṇya but goes on further that the most trustworthy form of knowledge emerges not from mind or senses but from perception within. An example is provided where, when one experiences the direct intuition “I am,” this consciousness of self does not emerge either from perception or from rational thinking; it emerges immediately and naturally. This is higher-order knowledge since no other knowledge can be contrary to it. Even if we are doubtful about all matters, that “I am aware” cannot be negated.

These classical views offer some openings for addressing knowledge: as confirmed by reason, as self-evident, and as rooted in awareness. Each model tells us not just how we comprehend truth, but how we come to believe in our experiences. Narayana Guru's philosophy is deeply preoccupied with these concepts, even if they are described to him

more poetically and in an experience-based way. Instead of arguing theory of pramāṇa at an abstract level, Guru tries to explain how knowledge can liberate us from ignorance and enable us to live with the world in sympathy. His reinterpretation of validity will be discussed in the following subsection.

3.3.3 Narayana Guru's Re-definition of Epistemic Validity

Though thoroughly rooted in Indian philosophy, Narayana Guru neither speaks of epistemology in scholastic terms nor formal argument. Instead, he presents a new knowledge paradigm that resists outer verification and leans toward experiential light and change. To Guru, ultimate proof of actual knowledge is not a matter of adjustment to usual requirements, but a matter of whether it results in emancipation from inner ignorance and dispersion. Guru is taking the instruments of knowledge (pramāṇas) like perception, inference, and testimony on board as being useful for secular life. However, he cautions that this is unilateral and provisional unless it translates into inner integration. For example, one can read some books or attend spiritual lectures, but if this knowledge does not bring about greater awareness and inner peace, its truth is questioned in Guru's system.

Suppose such person is learning philosophy text and egoistic, fearful, or divisive-minded. Such learning in Guru's view is not yet matured as genuine pramāṇa. But one with little book learning but in dwelling consciousness of self, sense of equanimity, and feeling of oneness with fellow human beings is likely to have more knowledge in the deeper sense Guru invites.

In works like Atmopadeśa Śatakam, Guru establishes the fact that actual knowledge is where the knowable and known are not differentiated anymore. That is total rejection

of the old triputi structure (object, subject, and cognition), where the subject and object still remain different. Guru's epistemology is a philosophy of actual knowing as non-dual, not a question of knowing something else than oneself, but a question in which one knows that the character of what is known is no other than the Self. The good analogy is a mirror. In common knowledge, we use the mind as a mirror to reflect outward objects. But for Guru, the mind must become aware of reflecting its own light within. It is only when the knower lets go of the light within rather than outward forms that knowledge is valid in a categorical sense.

Guru thus reformulates epistemology to render it a qualitative construct: validity is not about what one knows but about what knowing does to the self. Knowledge that creates clarity, wholeness, compassion, and understanding is valid. Pride, divisiveness, or confusion are created even if it is logically correct, such knowledge is defective. Accordingly, Narayana Guru combines epistemology and soteriology: the process of knowledge is inseparable from the process of realization of liberation. Knowledge will have to illuminate, equilibrate, and ultimately liberate.

In the 94th verse of Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, the Guru says: "The state in which the unreal world (prapancha) and the real supreme truth (parama satya) coexist is a major illogical factor. This condition is a kind of transfer that cannot be explained in words. This truth, which is beyond determination and inaccessible to both speech and mind, raises the question ;how can epistemology be valid here?"

From this view expressed by the Guru, it may seem that he has rejected all forms of epistemology. However, in accordance with the order of the world (loka-krama), the Guru has accepted epistemology in several of his other works.

3.3.4 The Significance of Avidyā in Illogical Cognition

In Indian philosophy, and particularly in Advaita Vedānta, avidyā, ignorance, is not lack but a positive reality of misconstruction. Avidyā is an intellectual fault that leads one to perceive what is not real and shun that which actually exists. Narayana Guru, in the tradition, provides a simple and unvarnished description of the way in which avidyā exists in the majority of our erroneous knowledge. One of the most common examples of avidyā is taken from the following situation: when in the dark a rope is mistaken for a snake. What one is doing wrongly is not seeing “nothing,” but seeing something else from this one is superimposing the concept of snake on the rope. This is referred to as adhyāsa or superimposition. Avidyā then comes to mean not merely failing to see the rope as rope, but superimposing something else on it wrongly.

Narayana Guru brings this insight to our relationship with the world, self, and even with knowledge. We treat that which is relational, partial, or dynamic as final and absolute. We may confuse our social identity, possessions, or feelings with who we are. These are not mistakes, but mistaken certainties, they are presumed to be ultimately true when they are provisional and contingent in reality.

This is where erroneous cognition (apramā) comes: knowledge that could plausibly or helpfully be true within a limited sphere, but instead leads to disorientation, dualism, and misery. For Guru, avidyā leaves us stuck in dualistic thinking, self and other, good and bad, inner and outer until we catch sight of the single ground behind these oppositions. To put it in a different context: take someone who thinks value only exists in what one does. Perhaps society would celebrate it, and in fact, it would culminate in short-term success. However, long-term, it leads to

anxiety, fear of failure, and separation from inner tranquillity. Guru would call this a case of knowledge generated by avidyā. It appears right but is deceptively inward and existentially unbalancing.

From this perspective, error correction is more than just making facts correct, but in eliminating avidyā by means of internal illumination. True knowledge (pramā) not only has to be correct, but also free from assumptions and projections that arise from ignorance. Guru’s epistemology thus situates avidyā in the middle ground of epistemic failure. Any knowledge that occurs when the mind is veiled by ego, attachment or fear can never be correct. Elimination of avidyā is not intellectual, but spiritual, a gradual divestment of veil from reality as it is.

3.3.5 Empirical-Transcendental Distinction

Knowledge is not a single-level category in Indian philosophy. Instead, it is explained to function at various levels of reality with various levels of truth and knowledge. Narayana Guru owes much to Advaita Vedānta in making a three-level distinction: prātibhāsika (illusory or imaginary), vyāvahārika (empirical or conventional), and pāramārthika (absolute or transcendental). Prātibhāsika knowledge entails such experiences as turn out ultimately false such as dreaming about flight or hallucinating a mirage to be water. These are present actually but are ultimately known to be solely mental constructs.

Vyāvahārika knowledge is social, functional, and pragmatic. It is the world of ordinary experience: perceiving objects, engaging in a conversation etc. It is the type of knowledge applied everyday life, science, and affairs in society. It is uniform in its application, but as offered by Advaita and Guru, it is still duality-conditioned self and other, subject and object. Pāramārthika

knowledge is the direct experience of the non-dual reality. It is immediate and direct. In this state, the process of knowing, the known, and the knower are assimilated into one awareness. It is not a conceptual knowledge but an experiential insight, a kind of knowing wherein division comes to an end and wholeness is achieved.

Narayana Guru has this privilege but puts it in the form of lived, intuitive knowing. He does not write with thick, technical prose, but speaks of inner silence and clarity. Empirical knowledge is required and even useful, he believes but not the goal. One has to transcend the plane of concepts to the depths of awareness itself.

To see this separation in the external world, imagine a scientist researching the brain and knows how thoughts come about. That is *vyāvahārika*: it functions, it makes sense, and it can be stated. The scientist will still be personally conflicted, nervous, or uncertain about the meaning of life, after all. Now imagine the same individual at a time of interior stillness and profound peace and harmony. That understanding unspecifiable in terms though it becomes *pāramārthika*. It goes beyond function and enters into root reality. Guru's teachings relentlessly return to this movement from exterior to interior, from disparate to cohesive, from mutable to immutable. He affirms empiric knowledge, but warns us that ultimately it will have to yield to realization that is beyond thought. This does not invalidate empirical knowledge but puts it in context. True understanding is not in opposition to the world, but in seeing the world from the point of wholeness.

3.3.6 Liberation as the Mark of Validity

To most Indian schools of thought, liberation (*mokṣa*), liberation from ignorance (*avidyā*), suffering, and rebirth and death (*samsāra*) is the highest purpose of human

life. This salvation-directed purpose significantly influences their concept of knowledge. Knowledge is sought not for sheer intellectual satisfaction, but because it can liberate the knower and destroy the very causes of bondage. Narayana Guru commandeers and extremizes this realization utterly: knowledge is tested, he thinks, by whether or not it frees.

Guru considers knowledge to be true not if it is simply correct, or logically correct, or even socially beneficial but if it brings about the vision of oneness, peace, and end of internal strife. Knowledge for him is half-knowledge unless it transforms the knower's life. As he frequently states in his writings, actual knowledge makes a man fearless, non-sectarian, and rooted in the realization of the one Reality.

To simplify this, imagine two types of learning. One reads books, learns concepts, and is very well educated but remains in fear, anger, or fragmentation. Another has perhaps read fewer books but gains a profound understanding through reflection, quietness, or inner questioning release them from fear, enables them to live with kindness, and produces peace. Guru would say that this second type of knowledge is real in the most literal sense. This focus is also apparent in the manner Guru connects knowledge with ego-transcendence. As long as knowledge is ego-based it will be offering an attitude of superiority, control, or pride. Then it is still in the paradigm of *avidyā*. When knowledge takes one beyond the ego, to humility, clear-headedness, and oneness, then it is freeing.

Thus, Guru dodges philosophical or scholarly definitions of "accomplishment." One can be a master of theory or of debating but fragmented within. Whatever knowledge as it is true then has to be judged not just by content, but by impact on consciousness. Liberation, thus, is not necessarily a goal achieved at the culmination of an extended

epistemological journey, it is the ongoing effect of correct knowledge. Guru's perception teaches us that epistemology and liberation are not two topics, but a single process. What

we know shapes who we are and who we are shapes what we can know.

Recap

- ◆ Pramā (valid knowledge) is a central idea referring to knowledge that is true and dependable.
- ◆ The Nyāya school supports *paratah-prāmāṇya* the view that knowledge becomes valid only when confirmed by another act like reasoning or perception.
- ◆ Mīmāṃsā and Advaita Vedānta uphold *svatah-prāmāṇya vada*
- ◆ Narayana Guru accepts classical insights but shifts focus toward the inner transformation that knowledge must bring.
- ◆ Valid knowledge is not only about external facts but about awareness that leads to unity and liberation.
- ◆ The idea of non-contradiction (abādhitatva) helps us understand when one knowledge is corrected or replaced by a deeper one
- ◆ this process is called sublation (bādha).
- ◆ Avidyā (ignorance) leads to invalid knowledge (apramā)
- ◆ Distortion of reality through misperception or superimposition (*adhyāsa*).
- ◆ Guru acknowledges the value of empirical (vyāvahārika) knowledge, but insists that only transcendental (pāramārthika) knowledge is ultimately valid.
- ◆ Triputi distinction remains in lower forms of knowing; true knowledge arises when this separation dissolves.

Objective Questions

1. What is *pramā*?
2. Which school supports *parataḥ-prāmāṇya*?
3. What does *svataḥ-prāmāṇya* mean?
4. What is *avidyā*?
5. What is *bādha* or sublation?
6. What type of knowledge does Guru consider truly valid?
7. What are the three levels of knowledge in Advaita?
8. What does *mokṣa* mean?
9. What is *adhyāsa*?
10. How does Guru connect knowledge with spiritual life?

Answers

1. Valid knowledge.
2. The Nyāya school.
3. Knowledge is valid by itself unless proven otherwise.
4. Ignorance or misapprehension of reality.
5. The cancellation of a lower cognition by a higher one.
6. Knowledge that leads to inner clarity, unity, and liberation.
7. Prātibhāsika (illusory), Vyāvahārika (empirical), and Pāramārthika (absolute).
8. Liberation from ignorance and bondage.
9. Superimposition; mistaking one thing for another.
10. Valid knowledge liberates the knower.

Assignments

1. Explain the concept of *pramā* in Indian epistemology and how it is understood differently by Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā schools.
2. Discuss Narayana Guru's reinterpretation of epistemic validity in relation to inner transformation.
3. How does the idea of *bādha* (sublation) help determine the hierarchy of knowledge in Advaita Vedānta?
4. In what ways does *avidyā* produce invalid knowledge? Illustrate using examples.
5. Compare empirical (*vyāvahārika*) and transcendental (*pāramārthika*) knowledge. Why does Narayana Guru consider the latter to be ultimately valid?
6. Critically examine the relationship between knowledge and *mokṣa* in Narayana Guru's philosophy.

Reference

1. Matilal, B. K. (1986). *Perception: An essay on classical Indian theories of knowledge*. Clarendon Press.
2. Narayana Guru. (1994). *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* (N. Guru, Trans.). Varkala: Narayana Gurukula Foundation.
3. Narayana Prasad, M. (2017). *Philosophy of Narayana Guru* (3rd ed.). New Delhi: D. K. Printworld.
4. Radhakrishnan, S. (1999). *Indian philosophy: Volume II* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1927)
5. Raju, P. T. (1985). *Structural depths of Indian thought*. State University of New York Press.

Suggested Reading

1. Chatterjee, S. C., & Datta, D. M. (2007). *An introduction to Indian philosophy*. Rupa Publications.
2. Mahadevan, T. M. P. (1938). *The philosophy of Advaita*. Luz & Co





Structure of Knowledge

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ Identify the classical model of *tripuṭi* as a foundational concept in Indian epistemology
- ◆ Explain how Narayana Guru reinterprets knowledge as a movement from conditioned duality to unconditioned unity
- ◆ Analyze the role of *nāma* and *rūpa* in shaping everyday cognition
- ◆ Distinguish between *sopādhika* and *nirupādhika* knowledge

Prerequisites

For the question, how knowledge comes to be organized within our experience, Indian Philosophical schools such as Vedānta believe that any act of knowing will inevitably have three necessary features: the subject (knower), object (known), and knowledge that connects them. This threefold term is referred to as *tripuṭi*. It is the floor plan of common-sense perception, in which the world is understood in terms of bifurcated self and other, inner and outer. Sree Narayana Guru contemplates long on this structure. While he accepts it is helpful, he contends that such divisions are not fixed. They occur only subsequent to consciousness having undergone the filtrations of thought, perception, and language. All knowledge, Guru insists, comes from a more primary, unbroken source called pure consciousness. But once entered into interaction with the mind, this consciousness gets framed into name (*nāma*), form (*rūpa*), and distinction. These constructions are useful, but they also condition and limit how things look to us. Guru invites us to pierce through these mental dichotomies. His teachings propose that real knowledge is not about accumulating more ideas, but noticing and transcending the inner separations that prevent us from feeling wholeness. This entails taking a look at the patterns that make up our knowing—and

then discovering how to get beyond them. This unit explores the internal formation of knowledge: how it constructs in the mind, how it accumulates or becomes conditioned, and how it can deconstruct in step-by-step awareness. Guru's methodology offers a new philosophical understanding: that to truly comprehend knowledge, we must comprehend the process of the mind disjoining and conjoining our experience.

Keywords

Triputi, Nāma-rūpa, Sopādhika, Nirupādhika, Unconditioned awareness, Inner structuring, Non-duality

Discussion

3.4.1 The Vedānta Triputi and Dissolution

In Vedānta, every general act of knowing has been observed to have three components: the subject (jñātr), the object (jñeya), and the cognition (jñāna) linking them together. For instance, when someone sees a tree, the subject (knower) is the person, the object (known) is the tree, and seeing is the knowledge that connects them. Though this structure enables us to act in the world, Vedānta instructs us that it is not the ultimate reality. In accordance with Advaita Vedānta principles, triputi exists only in the world of duality's perception, where subject and object seem to be distinct. In the states of higher consciousness like meditation, self-inquiry, or samādhi this duality starts to collapse. What remains is unbroken awareness, that is not fragmented into pieces. There is no longer anyone who knows and the known; there is only knowing, or even beyond knowing, being.

Sree Narayana Guru extends this ancient idea but takes it further. He does not simply deny triputi at the level of reason. He invites us to observe how it functions in our own minds. For Guru, the triputi structure is not a conceptual model, but an

experiential distinction that we habitually form and sustain with thought, perception, and language. He believes that liberation (mokṣa) is only possible as a choice when we are able to perceive the structure and start to erode it from within. In his works, particularly in Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, Guru proposes the mind as the source of creating subject-object differentiation. When the mind is still, this duality vanishes. What is left is not emptiness, but an unbroken clear knowing in which all difference dissolves. This is not the elimination of knowledge, but the use of unstructured knowing, a knowledge that no longer must differentiate in order to know. In the 4th verse of Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, the Guru clearly explains the concept of Triputi (the triad of knower, known, and knowledge):

“The imagination that brings awareness of objects, the object that appears to exist outside as a result of that imagination, and the one who experiences as ‘I’, ‘I’—this experiencer who is ever-present in all—all these are consciousness itself, which is the original cause of them all. One must merge and remain as one with that great consciousness, which is unbroken, all-pervading, and ever-existent.”



This verse emphasizes that all components of experience—the perceiver, the perceived, and the process of perception—are nothing but manifestations of the same pure consciousness. Realization lies in dissolving the sense of separation and abiding as that infinite awareness.

Imagine yourself in front of a lovely mountain. Typically, we would say “I see the mountain,” positioning ourselves outside that which is being seen. Occasionally, though, in times of serene awe, the boundaries disappear. There is no longer any “I” that observes and no longer any “mountain” that is observed there is only the experience itself, pure and whole. Guru cites this as an instance of knowledge transcending *tripuṭi*. Narayana Guru and *Vedānta* agree that *tripuṭi* is the origin of knowledge but do not agree that one needs to go beyond it. True knowing will only begin when the knowable and knower are no longer two.

3.4.2 *Nāma–Rūpa* and the Construction of Knowledge

The terms, *nāma* (name) and *rūpa* (form) are extremely context-dependent in meaning in Indian Philosophy. *Nāma–rūpa* is the effect of *Vikshepa* of *Māyā* in *Advaita Vedānta*, which imposes multiplicity on the non-dual reality of Brahman. *Nāma* is abstract and linguistic names we use, and *rūpa* reveals sensory forms. All of this world, the world of experience (*vyāvahārika satya*), is conditioned by this duality of *dharma* of name and form. Although it assists with the pragmatics of life, ultimately it conceals the unity behind. Liberation (*mokṣa*) is perceiving through this duality and experiencing the unbroken self.

Nāma–rūpa has a different function in Buddhism, especially in *Theravāda* and the early tradition. It is one of the twelve *nidānas* of dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*), which explains how suffering and rebirth come about. *Nāma* consists of

mental factors—feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*).

Rūpa is employed to refer to material form, especially the body. *Nāma–rūpa* in Buddhism is not an illusion, but a genuine agency in the causal and temporary process of becoming (*bhava*). It is the product of past karma and ignorance, and condition the six sense bases (*saññāyatana*). Buddhist intention is not to destroy *nāma–rūpa* as untrue, but to realize its impermanence, non-self character, and function in the round of suffering.

Sree Narayana Guru, in conversation with the *Vedāntic* system, introduces an innovative experiential and reflective interpretation to *nāma–rūpa*’s position. For Guru, *nāma–rūpa* is neither a metaphysical dilemma to be resolved by theory, but a phenomenological occurrence. It is the way the mind structures experience into meaningful patterns. In his such works as *Darśanamāla*, he calls the duality of name and form the first intellectual bifurcation that disrupts the serenity of original awareness. Though not denying its utilitarian functionality, he sees this structuring to be the cause of fragmentation.

For instance, he sees a river and calls it “Ganga,” the process of naming labels the form with memory, history, identity, and meaning. This layering can facilitate connection but it can also isolate us from the direct experience of what is present. Guru’s intention is not to negate *nāma–rūpa*, but to understand how it functions. When awareness withdraws in upon itself and becomes still, *nāma–rūpa* falls away, revealing only unconditioned presence what he calls *Cit*, or pure consciousness.

Advaita Vedānta considers *nāma–rūpa* a cover-up over the real. Buddhism sees it as a turning-point in the causal series of conditionally arisen things. Guru takes it to be a thought-habit which can be detected in experience. All three accounts agree that

freedom consists in transcending or being aware of the structuring role of *nāma-rūpa* through understanding.

In the 78th verse (78-0) of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, Guru says that death, birth, life, human beings, and gods, all these do not truly exist; they are merely names and forms (*nāma-rūpa*).

Similarly, in the *Janani Navaratna Manjari*, Guru says that everything is merely sound (*ālāpam*) or vibration (*śabda*).

This teaching highlights the core Advaita Vedānta idea that all perceived dualities and distinctions, whether profound like birth and death or divine like humans and gods, are just illusory projections (appearances) of name and form over the one formless reality, which is pure consciousness or sound (*Śabda-Brahman*).

3.4.3 Conditioned and Unconditioned Knowledge

Not all knowledge is as profound or transparent. In Indian philosophy in general, and in Advaita Vedānta and in Sree Narayana Guru's works specifically, there is a clear distinction between conditioned knowledge (*sopādhika jñāna*) and unconditioned knowledge (*nirupādhika jñāna*) is drawn. It is not a technical distinction. It is the distinction between knowing that is conditioned by and knowing that is unconditioned by mental constructs.

Conditioned knowledge is any knowledge that is mediated by the senses, words, thoughts, or emotional selves. It depends on limiting adjuncts (*upādhis*) like body, mind, social self, or individual memory. For instance, when we say, "That is my teacher," or "This is my country," we are using categories which enable us to operate but condition what we know of the world. This is relational and fractured knowledge, based on the subject-object model of *tripuṭi*.

Sree Narayana Guru sees the utility of this kind of knowledge in everyday life. It enables communication, judgment, and interaction. But he insists that this kind of knowing cannot be a means of liberation. It is still infected by duality, by the assumption of the independence of the self from the world, and by the incessant stream of thoughts and comparisons.

Conversely, unconditioned knowledge is knowledge that occurs when mind settles and dualities drop away. It is not based on thought or perception. It is immediate, non-dual awareness. Such knowledge is not "about" something. Instead, it is knowing being itself. Guru just refers to it as a state in which the known and the knower are not separate anymore. There is simply undivided consciousness, the source and content of knowledge.

The following illustration will make it clear. You are sitting quietly in nature-not thinking, not naming, merely present. At such a time, if boundaries dissolve and one has simply a quiet presence, you're not imagining reality-you just have awareness of it without separation. This is unconditioned knowledge: not by forms or names, but based on pure consciousness (*Cit*). Guru's understanding of knowledge is shifting from the conditioned to the unconditioned, not by turning away from ordinary knowledge, but by perceiving beyond its limits. As we realize how the mind conditions knowledge, we let it go. And what's left is a fullness that's free, full, and whole

3.4.4 Horizontal and Vertical Forms of Knowing

Sree Narayana Guru's concept of knowledge is not only what we know but also how we know and how we organize what we know. Herein, we can identify two sides or directions of knowing: the horizontal and the vertical. This is not developed as

technical terminology in traditional literature, but it is an existent philosophical argument made in the writings of Guru.

Horizontal knowledge is how we obtain and structure information over space and time. It is comparing, classifying, recalling, and analyzing. Much of our education, communication, and social existence occurs on this horizontal plane. It relies on external objects, linguistic categories, and conceptual schemes. When we study history, do science problems, or debate, we are working on this horizontal plane. This type of knowledge is precious and required but also boundless and migratory. No matter how much we know, we always have more to know. And this build-up has the tendency to reinforce duality: subject/object, self/other, past/future. Guru suggests that such knowing, even useful in the sense that it is, keeps us attached to surface understanding unless paired with something deeper.

Vertical knowledge, conversely, is a movement inward. Thinking that does not move outward into additional categories but into greater depth in the present now and the nature of awareness itself. It is not about increasing the list of what we know but clearing the knowing process. It is a movement of contemplation, not accumulation. It is looking inward, silence, and seeing.

Guru's language can carry the reader from horizontal knowing to vertical awareness. Take, for instance, how he writes in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*. He talks of going inside, watching the movement of the mind, and noticing that the knower and the known are not separate after all. It is in this vertical movement that one starts noticing how all objects of knowledge exist as reflection in awareness and how genuine insight is not generated by having more thoughts but transcending them. To take an example: reading a lot of books on the Self is

a horizontal activity. But holding back to look in and become conscious of the feeling of "I am" without distraction is a vertical activity. The one provides information; the other provides transformation. There is no intent in Guru's philosophy to eliminate horizontal knowledge but to acknowledge its confines and balance it through vertical intuition. It is only when the two are combined that knowledge starts freeing itself.

3.4.5 Māyā and Illusion Architecture

Advaita Vedānta makes one of its greatest contributions in the doctrine of Māyā, the force responsible for creating the illusion of diversity, separation, and multiplicity in a reality that is ultimately nondual. Sree Narayana Guru appropriates this concept, but understands it in a more literal and experiential sense. To Guru, Māyā is neither the mythological trickster, but rather a method of speaking about the psychological processes which construct our image of reality and most often lead us astray.

In classical Advaita, Māyā is said to place nāma-rūpa (name and form) on the unformed state of Brahman. It creates the illusion of subject and object, of variety of things where there is actually one. Māyā is not permanent, it is anādi (beginningless) but not anantha (endless). When there is correct knowledge (jñāna), Māyā is sublated, that is to say, it no longer is able to delude.

Narayana Guru internalizes this logic. Rather than the cosmic illusion, he is concerned with psyche structuring. For Narayana, Māyā works through conditioned thought, words, memory, desire, and fear. It is the structure through which the mind constructs its world by drawing walls of meaning, identity, separation. In this Māyā is not "out there" constructing a false world; it is in us, controlling the way we screen experience. Guru's own texts bring this structure to life

for us. In Darśanamāla, he states that the instant consciousness is dividing itself into knower and known, into self and other it falls under Māyā's spell. When we begin to name things, generate conceptual boxes, and impose upon the present what we find we know of the past, we are no longer connected to pure awareness. We are living in a world that is created, one which seems real but is actually precarious. This illusion is not in fact negative. As a map, it assists us. But when we remember that it is a map, we start to confuse the constructed with the real. We become attached to the shapes, the labels, and the meaning we have created apart from the fact that they are transient, conditioned, and dissolvable.

An example from everyday life could be our concept of "self." We construct a self over time: student, citizen, thinker, achiever. But that is overlayed with roles, memory, and expectation, all Māyā-defined. Guru invites us to investigate this matrix and see beneath it. The deeper we move, the more we see that there is a field of one awareness, free of all names and forms. Thus, Māyā is deceitful when realized as definitive. To transcend it is not to annihilate knowledge, but to dismantle the paradigms that fragment. What is left is not ignorance but penetration; not lack, but fullness.

Recap

- ◆ The knower, the known, and the knowledge is referred to as tripuṭi.
- ◆ This structure is not rigid; it seems so because we are limited in the way we view the world in a binary sense.
- ◆ Nāma-rūpa (name and form) are how we label and classify things but also constrain the way we perceive reality.
- ◆ In Advaita, nāma-rūpa is not real; in Buddhism, it is a way in which our body and mind are co-operating.
- ◆ Knowledge that has been conditioned by language, memory, and thought.
- ◆ Knowledge that is direct, silent, and from pure awareness.
- ◆ Horizontal knowledge enables us to collect facts, but keeps us on the surface.
- ◆ Vertical knowledge takes us inside, enabling us to go deeper.
- ◆ Māyā refers to the state of mind whereby we believe things are distinct when in fact they are one.
- ◆ We need to look beyond the covers to find unity and peace.

Objective Questions

1. What does horizontal knowledge focus on?
2. What do *nāma* and *rūpa* mean, respectively?
3. According to Guru, what creates the illusion of separation in the mind?
4. Which mental factors are included in *nāma* according to Buddhism?
5. In Advaita Vedānta, *nāma–rūpa* is considered a projection of what?
6. What is the term for knowledge that arises from silent awareness beyond duality?
7. Which three elements are part of the *tripuṭi* structure?
8. What kind of knowledge is described as inward, transformative, and silent?
9. What does the term *tripuṭi* refer to in Indian philosophy?
10. According to Guru, where do both the knower and the known originate from?
11. In early Buddhism, *nāma–rūpa* is part of which teaching?
12. What kind of knowledge depends on thought, perception, and labels?

Answers

1. Gathering and organizing information across time and categories.
2. *Nāma* means name or label; *rūpa* means form or shape.
3. Māyā, the structuring force of illusion.
4. Feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*).
5. Māyā.

6. Unconditioned knowledge (*nirupādhika jñāna*).
7. Knower, known, and knowledge.
8. Vertical knowledge.
9. The threefold structure of knowledge involving the knower, the known, and the knowledge.
10. Consciousness or awareness (*Cit*).
11. The twelve links of dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*).
12. Conditioned knowledge (*sopādhika jñāna*).

Assignments

1. Explain the concept of *tripuṭi* and how Sree Narayana Guru critiques its validity in light of non-dual awareness.
2. Compare and contrast the concept of *nāma-rūpa* in Advaita Vedānta and early Buddhism.
3. Define conditioned and unconditioned knowledge. How does Guru interpret their significance in spiritual practice?
4. What is the difference between horizontal and vertical structures of knowledge in Guru's framework?
5. Discuss the role of Māyā in shaping cognition according to Narayana Guru. How does this differ from classical Advaita?
6. How does Narayana Guru's view of the structure of knowledge relate to his idea of liberation?

Reference

1. Narayana Guru. (1994). *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* (Trans. Nataraja Guru). Narayana Gurukula Foundation.
2. Narayana Guru. *Darśanamāla*. Various translations available.
3. Muni Narayana Prasad. (2017). *Philosophy of Narayana Guru*. D.K. Printworld.
4. B.K. Matilal. (1986). *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*. Clarendon Press.
5. Damien Keown. (2005). *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Suggested Reading

1. Hiriyananda, M. (1932). *Outlines of Indian philosophy*. George Allen & Unwin.
2. Radhakrishnan, S., & Moore, C. A. (1957). *A source book in Indian philosophy*. Princeton University Press.



BLOCK

Elements of Ananda and Wonder in Guru's Philosophy



Scientific Status of Sankara's Advaita and Revalued Advaita of Guru

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Identify the metaphysical foundations of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta.
- ◆ Explain how Sreenarayana Guru reinterprets classical Advaita.
- ◆ Assess the significance of rationality and scientific method in Guru's philosophical approach.
- ◆ Compare the ethical and social implications of Advaita in both Sankara and Guru.
- ◆ Analyse the shift from transcendental to immanent conceptions of Brahman in Guru's thought.

Prerequisites

The philosophical heritage of India has been shaped by numerous schools of thought. Sankara's Advaita Vedanta stands as a pinnacle of metaphysical sophistication among them. It presents a non-dualistic view of reality where Brahman alone is real, and the world is an illusory manifestation of that Brahman. Sreenarayana Guru, emerging from the social and spiritual context of Kerala in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, engages with Advaita Vedanta but reorients it through a fresh lens. His reinterpretation retains the metaphysical depth of Sankara while introducing a rational, experience-based, and an ethical dimension. Guru's thought is not a repetition of classical insights. It is a revaluation rooted in lived experience, modern rationality, and social reform. Here, discusses how Guru's Advaita both inherits and diverges from Sankara's by emphasizing its scientific status and practical orientation.

Keywords

Advaita, Brahman, Maya, Empiricism, Rationality, Experience, Science, Revaluation, Modernity

Discussion

4.1.1 Metaphysics in Sankara's Advaita: The Unchanging Reality

Sankara's Advaita Vedanta is an Indian school of thought that instructs non-dualism, i.e., that there is only one ultimate reality namely Brahman. Brahman is formless, immaterial, eternal, and the cause of all things. Sankara's philosophy is that this world that we live with all its objects, individuals, and things is not actually real. It is only temporary or practically real. He called the worldly existence *vyavaharika satta* (empirical existence) while Brahman in itself is *paramarthika satta* (absolute reality). The mistake which holds the world to be real because of ignorance, or *avidya*, which veils the truth.

According to Sankara, the diversity of the world as we experience arises due to *Maya*, a force that makes us perceive difference where there is unity in fact. He gives us a few examples for this concept. The most frequent one among them is the rope-snake illusion. When one sees a rope in the dark and feels that it is a snake, fear comes in. But after possessing the correct information, he/she will know that it was actually a rope. When we incorrectly presume that we are individual selves in a changing world, we are afraid. But once we acquire real knowledge, we come to understand that we are really *Atman*, which is individual self and universal reality are the same.

This knowledge cannot be obtained only

through sensory perception or intellectual thinking. Sankara states it involves study of scriptures, rigorous thinking (*manana*), and self-learning (*nididhyasana*). He also employs the method of *neti neti*, “not this, not this” to eliminate all mistaken notions regarding the self. By negating that the self is the body, thoughts, or feelings, the seeker gradually arrives at the real self, which is pure awareness. Philosophy is not so much the study of ideas for Sankara. It should lead to freedom from suffering and realization of the one eternal reality that underlies the changing world.

4.1.2 Guru's Revaluation: From Abstract to Concrete Experience

Sree Narayana Guru, Modern Indian philosopher and social reformer, strictly followed the wisdom of Advaita. Guru accepted that everything is a single entity and that entity is not separate from the ultimate self. But he gave the idea in a new perspective. Classical Advaita remained in metaphysical abstraction and was typically unconcerned with the actual issues of the world. Guru brought non-duality into social and everyday life. For him, unity with Brahman was also the secret to the establishment of world and society.

Guru did not view the world as something to be discredited, as Sankara had done when he referred to it as *Maya* or illusion. Rather, he viewed the world to be real in some way,

and that we have to accept the oneness already present in society. This is asserted by him in his well-known words, “One caste, one religion, one God for man.”. It implies that genuine realization of non-dualism should also express itself as equality, compassion, and harmony among individuals. It was particularly significant to the Kerala society during his time, which was mostly polarized by caste and religious differences.

Another notable point is regarding Guru’s philosophical praxis. Guru emphasized more on individual personal direct experience (anubhava) and logical thinking, it is different from other classical Advaita scholars who based themselves mainly on scripture and intellectual argumentation,. He wished that others would think for themselves, seek truth in their own lives, and not always accept what was dictated in the previous scriptures. For instance, Guru’s poetry, including *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, uses clear usage of language to inspire individuals towards self-consciousness. In his writings, Guru practicalized Advaita, made it moral, and socially relevant. He also demonstrated that spiritual reality should lead towards social change.

4.1.3 Science, Rationality, and the Verificatory Method

Another major part of Sree Narayana Guru’s re-thinking of Advaita is his strong adherence to rationality and verification. His system therefore deviated from the traditional school. Sankara was dependent upon śruti (revealed scripture) and aparoksha jnana (immediate intuitive knowledge), whereas Guru was moving towards a modern, critical methodology of inquiry. He thought that truth could not be established solely on the basis of received authority or mystical guess work. Scientific truth had to be tested through reason, observation and experimental confirmation. In no sense did Guru dismiss the spiritual dimension; on the contrary, he

sought to free spiritual thought from dogma, superstition and uncritical tradition.

Guru’s works carry this rationalist bent. He avoided highly abstract metaphysical language and instead used simple, concrete analogies and concepts that could be understood through common experience. To cite just one instance, in his work *Jati Nirnnayam* (An inquiry into caste), he poses an extremely simple yet biting question: ‘Within a species, is it not true that offspring breed alike?’ Through this biological analogy, Guru observes that caste distinction have nothing to do with natural reality. In doing so, he adopts a method comparable to scientific research, relying on observable facts and rational inquiry to challenge social ills.

It can be seen that Guru’s method fosters a culture of questioning in contrast to blind conformity. This does not imply that Guru’s reason is reductionist. He did not attempt to explain away spirituality by science, nor did he interpret religious experience as materialistic or mechanical. He encouraged reconciliation between inner spiritual perception and outer critical mind. A real spiritual way, Guru asserted, has to be demonstrated by reason, direct experience, and the good of all. If a belief or practice is causing ignorance, injustice, or fear, it should be discarded without regard to its religious source. As we saw above, his approach is in harmony with the scientific method (verification, observation, questioning) with openness to greater realms of consciousness. By integrating the rational and the spiritual, the Guru built a vision of truth that is both transformative and humanistic.

4.1.4 Transcendence to Immanence: Rethinking Brahman

In classical Advaita Vedanta, particularly in Sankara’s tradition, Brahman has been defined as *nirguna*. It means that brahman

is without attributes, beyond human reason, and transcendent. This results in the idea that this world is not real. If the world is not real, then divine liberation involves a turning away from the world. But Sree Narayana Guru had a different solution. He accepted the concept of unity of existence but disagreed that Brahman is distant and far off. Brahman exists in the world, in the self, and in all living beings. Traditional Vedanta also acknowledges this. ‘*Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*’(All this is indeed Brahman.). Similarly, Guru questions the very existence of the universe. In *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, he says that there is no birth, no death, no life- everything is but names and forms. What makes Guru distinct from other scholars is that he uncompromisingly applied Advaita Vedanta in practical life. This shift from transcendence to immanence is the essence of his reinterpretation of Advaita.

The life of Guru himself demonstrated this thought. A fine example of this is his consecration of Siva idol at Aruvippuram in 1888. Orthodox Brahmins protested to him on how it was possible for one who was not a Brahmin to conduct such a religious act. Guru responded, “But, our own Siva.” On the one hand, this was a disregard for caste-bound religious authority. On the other hand, it was an assertion that divinity is not tied by ritual, caste, or tradition. It was, of course, a completely immanent idea of Brahman.

An important episode of later life related to this is the one at Varkala, where the Sivagiri Ashram was set up by Guru. Instead of withdrawal from the world to meditate alone, Guru set up an institution where spirituality was integrated with education, cleanliness, work, and service to society. He thought that the everyday life, ethical decisions, and sympathy for fellow human beings were equally vital as prayer or meditation. Through such attitude, Guru proved that the divine was not distant. It is present in each

human soul, each service, and each success of knowledge.

In doing so, Guru’s reinterpretation of Brahman as immanent redefined spirituality as active and worldly. He viewed the mundane world as the domain where truth could be realized. His own life testified that final reality is not out somewhere beyond the world, but it is here and now.

4.1.5 Ethical Implications of Advaita: A New Path

Classical Advaita, especially in Sankara’s understanding, is concerned with metaphysical liberation (moksha) through the realisation that Atman is Brahman itself. Sree Narayana Guru, however, developed this interior philosophy into an exterior one. For him, insight of unity was not a personal revelation but had social and ethical implications. His “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity” was not the dilution but the down-to-earth application of Advaita.

The simple example of Guru’s ethical use of Advaita is in his poem *Jati Nirnnayam*, where he bluntly asks, “Of the human species is even a Brahmin born, as is the Pariah too, where is the difference then in caste as between man and man?” He said that as all human beings have the same bodily and mental organs, castes are illusions created by man. In *Anukampadasakam*, too, he speaks of a world in which knowledge must translate into empathy for all living beings. All these demonstrate how Guru linked individual awakening with human honour. It was impossible to distinguish between spiritual awakening and social change. Guru established the Advaita Ashram at Aluva. He cultivated spiritual quest and social empowerment simultaneously there. Advaita to Guru was not a message to retire from the world but a deep reason to change the world.

Recap

- ◆ Sankara's Advaita Vedanta teaches that Brahman alone is real, eternal, and unchanging, while the world is Maya (illusion).
- ◆ Guru distinguished between empirical existence (vyavahārika satta) and absolute reality (paramārthika satta).
- ◆ Ignorance (avidyā) causes false perception of the world, like the rope-snake illusion.
- ◆ True realization comes through scripture, reasoning, meditation, and the neti neti method, leading to liberation (moksha).
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru accepted non-duality but gave it a new, practical perspective relevant to social life.
- ◆ Unlike Sankara, he saw the world as real in experience and insisted that oneness must reflect in society as equality and compassion.
- ◆ Guru's motto "One caste, one religion, one God for man" stressed unity beyond caste and religious divisions.
- ◆ Guru emphasised experience (anubhava) and rational thinking over blind dependence on scriptures.
- ◆ Guru aligned philosophy with rationality and scientific verification, using observation and questioning to challenge social evils like caste.
- ◆ Guru shifted Advaita from transcendence to immanence; Brahman is present in the world, in every being, and in everyday life.
- ◆ Guru's consecration of the Ezhava Shiva idol at Aruvippuram symbolised that divinity is beyond caste and ritual restrictions.
- ◆ Institutions like Sivagiri Ashram showed how spirituality, education, cleanliness, and social service could unite.
- ◆ For Guru, Advaita was not retreat from the world but a call to transform it ethically and socially through equality, empathy, and service.

Objective Questions

1. Who is considered the most prominent exponent of Advaita Vedanta?
2. What concept in Advaita represents illusion or ignorance?
3. What is the term used by Sankara for the apparent world of names and forms?
4. Which Indian philosopher emphasized experience and rationality in interpreting Advaita?
5. What scripture-based term did Sankara prioritize for ultimate knowledge?
6. Which slogan summarizes Guru's ethical and social vision of Advaita?
7. Which text by Guru contains philosophical verses reflecting his non-dualism?
8. How does Guru treat the concept of Brahman differently from Sankara?
9. What is the Sanskrit term for intuitive knowledge in Advaita philosophy?

Answers

1. Sankara
2. Avidya
3. Maya
4. Sreenarayana Guru
5. Sruti
6. One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity
7. *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*
8. Emphasizes immanence
9. Jnana

Self - Assessment Questions

1. Explain the key metaphysical concepts of Sankara's Advaita.
2. Examine the major philosophical differences between Sankara's and Guru's understanding of Advaita.
3. Analyze how Guru introduces scientific temper and rationality into traditional metaphysics.
4. Discuss the ethical and social transformation implicit in Guru's reinterpretation of non-duality.
5. How does the movement from transcendence to immanence in Guru's philosophy redefine spiritual realization?

Reference

1. Prasad, Muni Narayana. (2017). *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld.
2. Natarajaguru. (2005). *Unitive Philosophy*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld.
3. Prasad, Muni Narayana. (2017). *Complete Works of Sree Narayana Guru*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld.
4. Sukshmananda, Swamy. (2008). *Mind the Gap*. New Delhi.
5. Karthikeyan. (2014). *Guru: The Son of Kerala Renaissance*. Varkala: Sivagirimutt.



Ascent, Wonder and Proof in Guru's Philosophy

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Understand the concept of philosophical ascent in Guru's thought.
- ◆ Explore the role of wonder as a metaphysical and spiritual motivator.
- ◆ Recognize the forms of internal and external proof in Guru's reasoning.
- ◆ Examine the experiential grounding of philosophical knowledge.
- ◆ Relate the philosophical journey with aesthetic and spiritual realisation in Guru's works.

Prerequisites

Throughout history, the highest philosophical inquiries have often begun not with answers, but with wonder. In Indian tradition, this sentiment echoes in the Upanishadic inquiry: "Who am I?" Sreenarayana Guru's philosophy is reflective of this spirit by combining rational clarity with an openness to mystery. He does not reject logical proof but insists that its final destination is not mere argument, but transformative insight. The ascent in Guru's philosophy is not only intellectual but also existential, taking one through successive awakenings marked by both clarity and reverence. Here discusses how ascent, wonder, and proof come together as philosophical forces in Guru's philosophy.

Keywords

Ascent, Wonder, Proof, Insight, Experience, Transformation, Anubhava, Consciousness

Discussion

4.2.1 The Philosophical Ascent: From Ignorance to Wisdom

To Sree Narayana Guru, going from ignorance to wisdom is not an intellectual play or revolutionary self-rebirth. In contrast to systems of philosophy known to approach knowledge as outer agglomeration, Guru approaches it as a progressive revelation of inner light, a progression from the darkness of illusion (ajnana). This transition from ignorance to inner wisdom about the real nature of Self is as much philosophical, ethical, and religious.

Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* charts this inner climb. The seeker is confused, trapped in the snare of name, form, and ego, in the initial verses. But towards the later verses, there is an undertone of peace. The seeker comes to understand that the Self is not different from the world, and that everything is one. Verse 25, for instance, states: "Those who grievously hurt others will bring upon themselves the pain of consequential hell-fire." This encapsulates the understanding that ignorance is bad knowledge. It is the misconceiving of disintegration as reality. In the same verse, he says, "What is good for one and might cause disaster to another is opposed to the unity of the Self". Beyond the state of empirical world cannot be achieved by mere intellectual exercise, but through right meditation, righteous living, and immediate inner experience.

Guru's life is a manifestation of this

ascension. His period of isolation at Maruthwamala, the hill in the north of Kanyakumari, was not an escape but phase of intense philosophical training. He fasted there while formulating the vision that would guide his future social and spiritual reforms. This ascension was a movement inward, yet it prepared him to engage with the world more deeply. For Guru, ignorance is not merely a lack of knowledge; it is also an alienation from the oneness of existence.

4.2.2 The Role of Wonder: Philosophical and Spiritual Catalyst

Sree Narayana Guru assigns profound significance to wonder (vismaya) as both the source of philosophical insight and spiritual transformation. For him, wonder is not a sign of confusion or immaturity but the gesture of genuine questioning. When we encounter the vastness of the universe, the rhythm of life, or the stillness within, something deeper than mere thought stirs within us. Verse 13 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* says: 'To become established in the Supreme Being... feel freed of all bondages. Become calm and do not be excited even by the wonder of the Absolute.' These words indicate that Guru encourages the seeker to remain in that mystery—allowing wonder to mature into thought, and thought into wisdom.

Guru's own solitary life at Aruvippuram exemplifies this. When he consecrated the Shiva statue there, it was a radical act born of

inner realization—an insight gained through meditative awe before God, self, and the world. He did not claim to have fully known all truths, but he asserted the right to question, to think, and to act purposefully out of piety. Thus, for Guru, wonder is never passive; it is an active force that inspires the seeker to reflect, inquire, and evolve.

4.2.3 Proof and the Authority of Experience (Anubhava)

For Sree Narayana Guru, conclusive proof was not in scriptures, dogma, or logic. He put anubhava which is direct spiritual experience at the focal point of truth. Anubhava is not a subjective mood state or emotional high. It is self-purifying, reality-revealing, and ethically reformative. For Guru, knowledge exists only insofar as it roots out ignorance and liberates humanity. This concept of proof by inner realization is beautifully reflected in Guru's philosophy and poetry. In verse 5 chapter 6 of Darsanamala, he says: "When things are known as they are, (as in perceiving the truth of the rope beneath the snake appearance,) that awareness is meaningful. What is otherwise is meaningless." This verse reflects his approach. Truth has to be seen, realized, and that makes awareness meaningful. Borrowed belief was not his concern, but rather the perception that arises from discrimination (Viveka) and inner training.

At the Religious Parliament in Aluva in 1924, Guru began the conference with a remark that reflects this very conviction. "Not to argue and win but to know and make known, to experience and help others experience; this is our aim."

This statement is a reflection of his philosophical vision. He never regarded religious and philosophical discussions as a field of argumentation conflict but as a common way of exploration. The honour to discuss the divine or the ultimate was not,

as far as he was concerned, bestowed upon him by tradition or holy books. He reached such an honour through cleanliness of sight and moral self-purification.

4.2.4 Speech and Silence Dialectics

One of the special features of Narayana Guru's philosophy is his balancing of speech and silence. Both were dear to him, depending upon where a seeker was situated along his or her spiritual path. Words, he held, are good tools of communication, instruction, and rationality, but they are not the final truth. They hint at something beyond. In one writing, he wrote, "The word is not the thing," to remind us that definition by the word cannot hold all the depth of being.

Guru utilized words with correctness and precision, particularly in his stanzas and public addresses. He advised, questioned, and addressed injustice, all by using well-selected words. He also understood the boundaries of words. For instance, in the last line of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, his words steer from literal instruction to symbolic and poetic words, finally calling the reader to contemplation and silence. "Be brave with such clear vision, discard all attachment to being and non-being, and gently, merge in that Truth that fills all with enlightenment, and serene joy". He knew that silence is not absence. It is the room where comprehension happens deep within. It is where mind comes to a halt and consciousness grows deeper. Silence, to Guru, is not emptiness but fullness that transcends words.

This concept is very much rooted in Indian spiritual traditions, in which saints (including Buddha and Mahavira) have taught without uttering a word. It was rather done by presence, look, and silence. Guru's own teaching methodology sometimes followed this. He would sit for hours in silence, for example, towards his later years. Visitors



remembered a slow and engrossing silence that said so much more than words ever could say. To that extent, Guru never turned his face from reason or argument. Instead, he viewed them as path-steps. Speech is a ladder, but the silence is the peak. True evidence of wisdom is not just in the words spoken but in the silent quiet that follows after understanding.

4.2.5 Aesthetic Perception and the Inner Eye (Divya Chkshu)

Narayana Guru liked to discover the truth, not merely by reason, but by beauty by poetry in verse, by the quiet nature, and by the consonance of moral living. Formal logic was not for Narayana Guru the method of comprehension; it was a sensitivity to the beauty and order of the universe. Most of his lines he wrote radiate this vision of poetry, in which light, space, and balance are doors to inner understanding.

This element of beauty is not ornamental; it is the kind that transcends. Guru was certain that as the mind becomes purified and awareness becomes subtle, even mundane

experiences start radiating with faint light. This is where the function of the inner or divine eye, familiar from the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, intervenes in his philosophy. The inner eye does not perceive more things, rather, it perceives more deeply. It perceives unity in multiplicity, tranquillity under turmoil, continuity beneath change.

In his poetic style, Guru was predisposed to indicate that evidence of Brahman, the ultimate reality, is not imposed from without but revealed from within. As beauty is experienced prior to being described, truth in Guru's mind glows when the inner instrument is attuned. For this reason, he refers to anubhava (experience) as light, illumination, and brilliance. In the context of such awareness, evidence is self-manifest. In verse 27 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* Guru says; "The Self is that knowledge which brings illumination of one's existence even when placed in the thick of darkness". Aesthetic consciousness in the philosophy of Guru is therefore neither romanticism nor escapism. It is the gentle opening of the inner eye and once opened, to behold Brahman not as a speculative abstraction but as the very basis of all that exists.

Recap

- ◆ For Guru, philosophical ascent is a journey from ignorance (*ajnana*) to wisdom, not by accumulation of knowledge but by inner illumination.
- ◆ Ignorance is both lack of right knowledge and alienation from the unity of existence.
- ◆ In *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, the seeker progresses from confusion to peace, realizing the Self as one with all.
- ◆ Guru's own meditation at Maruthwamala symbolized this inner ascent preparing him for social reform.

- ◆ Wonder (*vismaya*) is central to Guru's thought; it is the root of inquiry and the first step towards wisdom.
- ◆ He saw wonder not as confusion but as a spiritual catalyst that matures into thought, reflection, and realization.
- ◆ For Guru, proof (*pramāṇa*) lies not in scripture or argument but in *anubhava* (direct inner experience).
- ◆ True knowledge must remove ignorance, liberate the self, and serve humanity ethically.
- ◆ At the 1924 Aluva Religious Parliament, he declared: "*Not to argue and win but to know and make known, to experience and help others experience.*"
- ◆ Guru balanced speech and silence—words guide the seeker, but silence conveys the fullness of truth.
- ◆ Silence, for him, was not emptiness but a state of deeper awareness beyond thought and language.
- ◆ Guru valued aesthetic perception—poetry, beauty, and nature—as doors to inner realization.

Objective Questions

1. What begins the philosophical journey in Guru's thought?
2. What term refers to direct, experiential knowledge in Guru's philosophy?
3. How does Guru describe the movement from ignorance to truth?
4. What is the role of wonder in philosophical ascent?
5. What does Guru consider more valid than scriptural authority?
6. What is the final stage of speech in Guru's dialectic approach?
7. What symbolizes the purified awareness in Guru's poetry?
8. Which literary device does Guru frequently use to express the inexpressible?

Answers

1. Wonder
2. Anubhava
3. Ascent
4. It initiates inquiry and reflection
5. Experience
6. Silence
7. Inner Eye (Divya Chakshu)
8. Metaphor

Self - Assessment Questions

1. Explain the significance of ascent in Guru's philosophy as a form of spiritual progress.
2. How does Guru distinguish between ordinary proof and experiential insight?
3. Discuss the philosophical importance of wonder in initiating the journey toward realization.
4. Examine the interplay between silence and speech in Guru's idea of truth.

Reference

1. Swami Muni Narayana Prasad, *Philosophy of Narayana Guru*
2. R. Balakrishnan, *Sreenarayana Guru: The Revolutionary Saint*
3. M. P. Manmathan, *Sree Narayana Guru: A Critical Study*
4. Natarajaguru. (2005). *Unitive Philosophy*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld.
5. Prasad, Muni Narayana. (2017). *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld.
6. Satyanarayana, G. (Ed.). (2006). *The Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru*. Hyderabad.
7. Sivadas, Sathyabhai et al. (2019). *Interfaith Harmony*. Hyderabad.
8. Karthikeyan. (2014). *Guru: The Son of Kerala Renaissance*. Varkala: Sivagirimutt.



The Place of Paradox and Mystery in Guru's Philosophy

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Define the philosophical significance of paradox and mystery in Guru's works.
- ◆ Understand how mystery sustains a continuous spiritual inquiry.
- ◆ Interpret Guru's poetic expressions that hold seemingly contradictory insights.
- ◆ Appreciate the use of paradox as a means to transcend rigid categories of thought.
- ◆ Recognize how mystery deepens experiential wisdom in Guru's philosophy.

Prerequisites

Paradox and mystery have often been treated with suspicion in the realm of philosophy, especially within traditions that prioritize strict logic and clarity. However, in mystical traditions and certain strands of Eastern philosophy, these elements are embraced as gateways to higher understanding. So, they are perceived as a source of higher knowledge and not as a hindrance. Sreenarayana Guru situates paradox and mystery not as obstacles, but as integral aspects of the spiritual path. His use of poetry, metaphor, and contradiction are not aesthetic choices alone. They reflect the limits of reason and the presence of a reality that can be intuited but not entirely captured otherwise. Here discusses the philosophical function of paradox and mystery in Guru's thought.

Keywords

Paradox, Mystery, Silence, Transcendence, Contradiction, Poetry, Non-duality, Intuition

Discussion

4.3.1 Embracing the Unresolvable: The Function of Paradox

A paradox is a sentence that seems to be self-contradictory or logically unsatisfying upon first inspection but upon examination depicts a higher truth. A contradiction, in which two mutually exclusive statements cannot be simultaneously present (for example, “this is red” and “this is not red” simultaneously and in the same way), is different from a paradox, in which there are two opposing factors in contention only to express a larger integrity or solution. Contradictions destroy, whereas paradoxes provoke.

Consider the ancient paradox: “I know that I know nothing.” This is contradictory on the surface. It seems to be begging the question; how can you possibly be aware that you do not know anything? But when more deeply comprehended, it is a humility of philosophy itself: knowledge of one’s own ignorance as wisdom. In Narayana Guru’s philosophy, paradoxes are not figure-of-speech gimmicks but spiritual instruments. “The seen is the seer,” or “truth is silence” are chosen terms that raise puzzlement by intent to trigger meditative awareness. Paradox is used in his metaphysical verse and prose as an antidote for avoiding dichotomous modes of perception such as subject/object, knower/known, word/silence, etc.

Guru does not utilize paradox as a goal,

but as a method of disclosing awareness. In *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, he addresses the reader in verses that gently unsettle everyday vision. The notion that formlessness creates form, or that silence speaks, is an invitation to the inquirer to view oneness behind seeming multiplicity. A striking example is presented in verse 19 of *Arivu*:

“Yourself is what is known as knowledge;
By putting down your own knowledge,
it becomes the known.
The known is thus twofold: one conscious
of knowing, And the other not conscious
of the same.”

At first sight, it looks self-negating because one may think how can knowledge, conscious and not conscious, be equal? But Guru employs this paradox to propel the seeker into a realm of non-duality where all opposing pairs come together in a singularity; That (Tat), the Absolute.

In addition, his use of paradox accompanies his focus on the non-conceptually-describable character of ultimate reality (Brahman), since conceptualization is inherently dualistic. Most ideas usually imply their conceptual opposite. Guru marks nondual truth, such as Brahman, by employing a non-conventional form that lies outside regular affirmation and denial. In *Darsanamala*, chapter 9, verse 6, he states: “The sources of all disasters for man are his willed conceptual formations.” Guru used paradoxes like a mirror, reflecting the limits of discursive thinking.

Apophatic mysticism or the ‘via negativa’ is a mystical way that involves outlining the Divine not by what it is, but by what it is not and declaring that ultimate reality transcends all finite human thinking and speech. Thinkers like Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in Christian tradition are representative of this strategy. Along with apophatic mystics who use ‘unspeaking’ Guru’s paradoxes bring the reader into a meditative space in which words are doors to silence. Paradox, for Guru, is clarity shattering the shell of opposites. It is the doorway through which finite mind goes into infinite awareness.

4.3.2 Beyond Rational Closure: The Limits of Conceptual Thinking

Guru never negated the importance of reason. He appreciated it as a method that could not be evaded in everyday life. He insists to distinguish between truth and lies. But he was always conscious of its limitations. In his work, particularly in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, verse 45, he states; “...confusion born of irrational prejudices continues in the minds of people as long as the unitive secret of universal sameness remains unknown.” However, reason, in the opinion of Guru, is like a raft which is required to carry us over the river, but to be abandoned once one has reached the destination where, unitive secret of universal sameness becomes experiential or known.

He cautions against being caught out by reason. Trusting reason, he implies, leads to mental closure. Real understanding (anubhava) is not achieved through control of the mind but through realization within and cleansing of the heart. The understanding Guru imparts is not reached through argumentation but through inner change, where knowing comes to become being. A line like

“To one well-established in the Self,

the secret of the Word comes as a cosmic sound “ (*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, Verse 16) is a departure from word-thinking to being immersed in reflection. The silence that follows a question, the silence that follows a verse etc, are not gaps but gates.

This is the similar philosophical move as marked in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s great last word in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” For both of these philosophers, the absolute is not refuted but gently hinted at by stepping into the edge of language and into the unsayable.

4.3.3 Logic of the Heart and Poetic Language

Sree Narayana Guru’s use of poetic form is not just stylistic. It is a question of philosophical imperative. Here, poetry is a medium for conveying truths inaccessible to discursive reason. By the use of metaphor, rhythm, and evocative imagery, he conveys aspects of experience that lie outside the scope of abstract logic. This is reminiscent of what we can call the “logic of the heart”, an intuitive mode of understanding in which emotional depth, aesthetic discrimination, and philosophical perception meet.

In *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, to illustrate, lines like: “Knowledge, the object of knowledge, and one’s cognition of both are in fact only variations of a beginningless Being.” (Verse 5) do not offer a dry metaphysical statement but an experience he perceived. They blend the subject-object, self-universe duality, appealing to a meditative and transmutative mode of perception. These lines are not read sequentially; they operate by resonance, not by deduction.

Guru’s poetic idiom converges with the expressive strategies of mystic traditions across cultures, whether in the paradoxes of ecstasy in Rumi or the wordless challenges of Zen koans. In those traditions, as in Guru’s

poetry, the goal is not to solve a riddle but to open a deeper way of seeing. Poetry is therefore employed as a methodology for accessing the unsayable—not through definition, but through gestures toward it with symbolic precision. Guru's poems are thus not merely to be read; they are to be absorbed, reflected upon, and internalized.

4.3.4 Transcendence without Escape: The Mystery Within

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy is contrary to the traditional polarity of the sacred and the profane. Transcendence for him is not an escape from the world but a fierce dive into its unseen depth. The will to transcend is not a call to leave the world but to view it with new eyes, with integrity and wonder. Guru redefines the mystical as not distant or otherworldly, but the very texture of the mundane, seen in its proper way. Guru does not visualize moksha as withdrawal from the world, but as transformation of the world. In verse 42 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* he categorically states, "When one says, "This is knowledge", what comes first as "this" is called sama, the unifying sameness; its distinctive attribute is bodham, "awareness".

For all mentations like discursive cogitation to cease and to gain the path of liberation, one should contemplate on "this", which inheres in the universal identity."

Mystery, as Guru puts it, cannot be solved like a riddle or reduced to superstition. Instead, it is the silence that embodies all wisdom, the horizon that thought cannot breach but can only point to. Despite his poetry tending frequently towards the ineffable, it never lapses into obscurity. In *Daiva Dasakam*, the divine is experienced not in withdrawal, but within the flow of life itself. It starts with "O God, as ever from there keep watch on us here."

This is a commitment spirituality, not escape. So, Guru's vision surpasses sterile rationalism and otherworldly mysticism both. It offers instead a third way: one which sees mystery as not an exclusion of truth, but as the fertile soil in which richer truth thrives. To live in mystery is to stay open, responsive to reality's subtle layers. Transcendence in Guru's mind is not flying away, but proximity: a manner of being more fully engaged present to mystery around and through us.

Recap

- ◆ Paradox in Guru's philosophy is not contradiction but a method to disclose higher truth and unsettle rigid categories of thought.
- ◆ Phrases like "the seen is the seer" or "truth is silence" invite seekers to look beyond dualities of subject/object, knower/known, word/silence.
- ◆ In works like *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* and Arivu, paradox is used to lead seekers into non-duality (Tat), where opposites merge.
- ◆ Guru viewed reason as useful but limited; like a raft, it must be left behind once higher realization (anubhava) is attained.

- ◆ Conceptual thinking, while necessary in daily life, becomes a barrier if mistaken for ultimate truth.
- ◆ Guru used paradoxes to reveal the limits of rational closure and to point toward experiential awareness.
- ◆ This approach resonates with apophatic mysticism (“via negativa”), where truth is revealed not by saying what it is, but by negating what it is not.
- ◆ Guru’s poetic language conveyed truths beyond discursive logic, functioning as a “logic of the heart” that blends feeling, intuition, and insight.
- ◆ His verses operate by resonance rather than deduction, opening deeper vision instead of offering linear arguments.
- ◆ Guru’s poetic paradoxes parallel mystical traditions worldwide
- ◆ Mystery for Guru is not confusion or superstition but the fertile ground for wisdom, inviting openness to reality’s depth.
- ◆ Transcendence is not escape from the world but re-seeing it with integrity, wonder, and spiritual insight.

Objective Questions

1. What literary device does Guru often use to express higher truths?
2. How does Guru treat paradox in his philosophy?
3. What attitude does mystery cultivate in philosophical inquiry?
4. What is limited according to Guru in approaching the Absolute?
5. What kind of insight replaces logical closure in Guru’s thought?
6. How does Guru describe truth in poetic paradoxes?
7. What genre does Guru favor for philosophical communication?
8. Where does Guru locate transcendence?

Answers

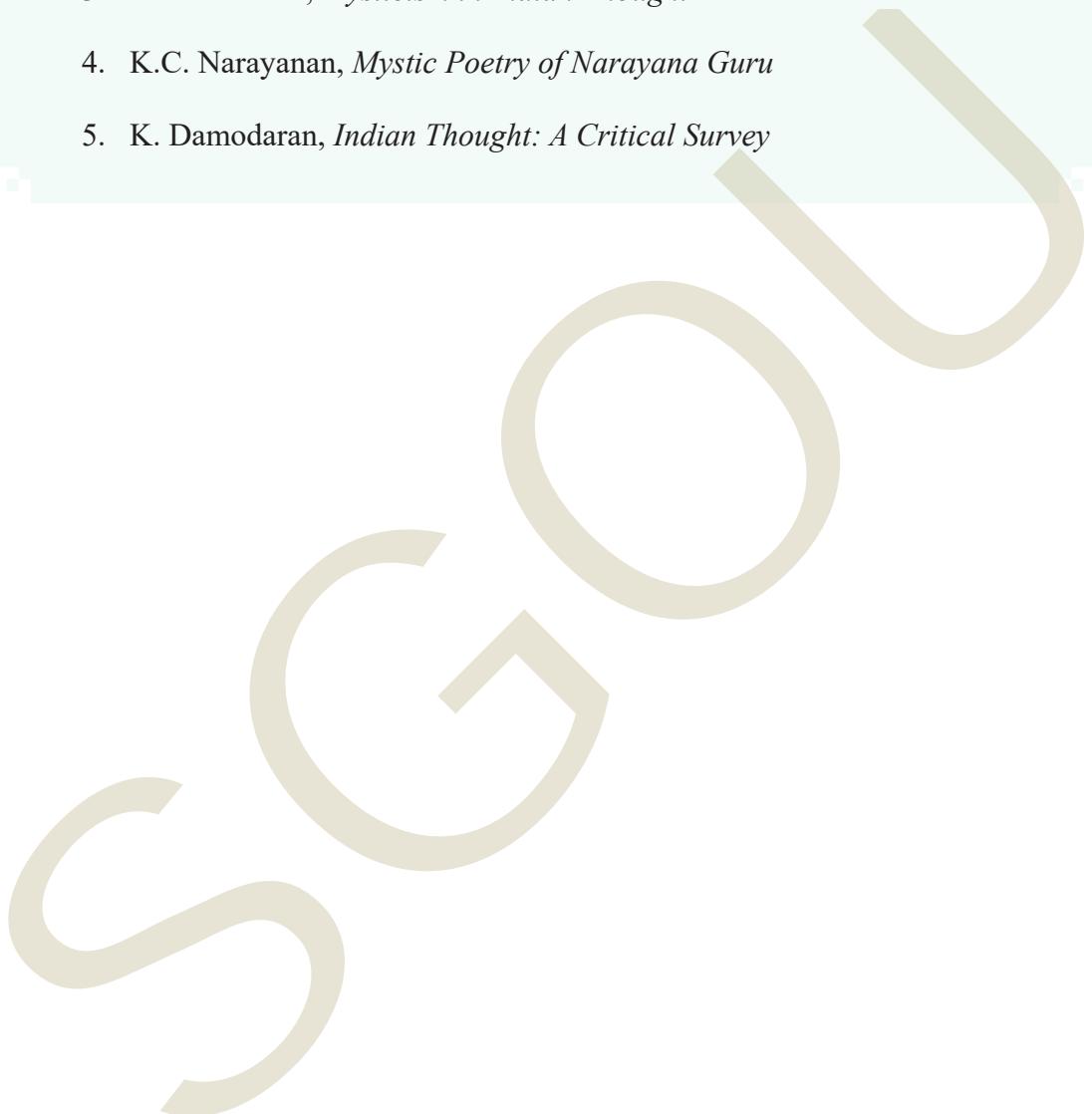
1. Paradox
2. As a means to deeper insight
3. Humility
4. Conceptual thinking
5. Intuition
6. As silence or stillness
7. Poetry
8. Within experience

Self - Assessment Questions

1. Discuss the philosophical role of paradox in Sreenarayana Guru's writings.
2. How does Guru's notion of mystery differ from the Western concept of the unknown?
3. In what ways does poetic expression allow Guru to transcend conceptual limitations?
4. Analyze the relation between reason and intuition in Guru's engagement with transcendence.

Reference

1. Swami Muni Narayana Prasad, *Philosophy of Narayana Guru*
2. P. Govinda Pillai, *Sree Narayana Guru: Renaissance and Beyond*
3. T.S. Rukmani, *Mysticism in Indian Thought*
4. K.C. Narayanan, *Mystic Poetry of Narayana Guru*
5. K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought: A Critical Survey*





The Element of Ananda in Guru's Philosophy

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ Define the concept of Ananda in Indian philosophical traditions.
- ◆ Understand how Guru reinterprets Ananda in a non-dual context.
- ◆ Explore the ethical and spiritual dimensions of bliss in Guru's thought.
- ◆ Identify poetic and philosophical expressions of Ananda in Guru's writings.
- ◆ Reflect on the connection between realization, unity, and Ananda.

Prerequisites

Ananda or bliss or joy may be usually considered as mere emotional elation. Contrary to this, in Indian philosophy it is conceived as the deepest mark of reality realized. It appears at the core of the Upanishadic formula "Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam Brahma". It stands for the fullness that arises when being and knowing culminate in self-realization. Sreenarayana Guru, steeped in this tradition yet turning it through his unique lens, treats Ananda not as a distant metaphysical ideal but as an experiential affirmation of unity, truth, and clarity. Here discusses how Ananda, far from being escapist or hedonistic, becomes a structural and existential element in Guru's Advaita philosophy.

Keywords

Ananda, Bliss, Realization, Unity, Fulfilment, Brahman, Peace, Joy, Experience

Discussion

4.4.1 Ananda as Nature of Brahman

In Advaita Vedanta, the Absolute Brahman is classically characterized as Sat-Chit-Ananda: that is, ultimate existence (Sat), ultimate consciousness (Chit), and ultimate bliss (Ananda). They are not Brahman's attributes but Brahman's very nature. Sree Narayana Guru upholds this original position but redistributes its accessibility. Ananda is not for him an idea to comprehend. It is an ontic condition to realize. It is the immediate flavour of the Real.

Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, particularly such passages as "I am neither this nor that nor the content of what is perceived as being. Know it to be pure existence, all embracing consciousness and the joy immortal." (v.100), gives a descriptive assertion of joy as self-manifest. These passages are not poetic hyperbole; they are spiritual affirmations based on meditative wisdom. Rhetorical iteration of "Ānanda" is not practiced here, it is rhythmic joining in the state of self-awareness.

For Guru, the denial of the subject-object distinction is Ananda. With ego-self established as a mirage and the mind stilled, the joy of unbroken awareness erupts spontaneously. *Ananda* is not the happiness we feel through the senses like enjoying a good meal or hearing pleasant music. It is a deep and steady inner joy that arises when one understands the true nature of the self

and the world. It is the serenity of a Self that has come to understand itself as one with everything. Guru's vision of Ananda is an immanent wisdom. Bliss is not to be found somewhere else. It is already present within the web of this very world if seen without illusion. Ananda is therefore both the fruit and proof of freedom (moksha).

4.4.2 The Moral Form of Joy

For Narayana Guru, Ananda (bliss) is not a fixed state limited to interior quietude or individual perception. It is energizing and expansive, and it shapes the manner of living and behavior towards others. For Guru, genuine Ananda cannot be divorced from ethical awareness. Perceiving the Self through observing one's own self is insufficient; this awareness must express itself in a life of pity, justice, and kindness towards all. Ananda, then, is an intensely ethical text. It demands that the person who has had a vision of unity lives in unity. *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* verse 100 advises; "gently, merge in that Truth that fills all with enlightenment, and serene joy – AUM".

Time and again, Guru stressed that true happiness can never coexist with inequality or exploitation. In *Jati Nirnnayam*, he condemns casteism, affirming that all human beings are one in nature. This insight carries ethical implications: if the same Atman or consciousness resides in all, then to injure another is to harm oneself. Happy living, therefore, cannot be reconciled with social

injustice. *Ananda*, as imparted by Guru, must manifest outwardly in the form of non-violence (*ahimsa*), compassion (*karuna*), and equality (*samat*).

A proof of such an ethical outlook can be generally seen in his participation in the temple entry reform movements. Guru not just taught realization within but called to revise social institutions that brought suffering and loneliness. He consecrated temples in different locations which all castes were welcome. As many scholars observed, this was a revolutionary thing to do in the early decades of the 20th century in Kerala. It was an instantaneous moral imperative of his spiritual experience. The joy of the realization of the One should seek expression in making it possible for everyone to live with dignity.

Even his oft-quoted iconic maxim “One caste, one religion, one God for all men” can be interpreted as a moral slogan and appeal to be an epitome of harmony in daily life. Bliss, to Guru, overflows into social concern. It is not personal pleasure but an inwardly felt duty to eliminate the very causes of conflict and misery. In his book “*Ātmopadeśa Śātakam*,” he speaks of happiness as a radiant state where agelessness and love of the other. In this state, gentleness is not a responsibility but an innate flowering of inner understanding. Ananda gives rise to moral spontaneity, where one no longer has to be commanded to do good but it becomes in terms of realization, one’s own nature.

4.4.3. Everyday Life and the Sacred

For Narayana Guru, Ananda is not a state of mystical state restricted to solitary meditation or cultic piety. Rather, it can occur in the midst of daily life. Guru resists the classical dyad of profane and sacred, of worldly activity and spiritual enlightenment. He advocates a method of awareness where

the sacred is not otherworldly or remote but truly experienced by right vision even in mundane activities. Breathing, speaking, seeing, and even little gestures of affection, when performed with clarity and inner peace, are not distractions towards the divine but real expressions of it. In this perspective, Ananda is not something we expect to pursue after death or pursue after life, it is living within it.

Guru’s own life demonstrates this integration of the holy and the profane. He adopted a way of living that was characterized by simplicity and everyday involvement instead of withdrawal. In Sivagiri Ashram, he lived simply, taking care of the garden, cooking for himself, and communing with seekers in quiet. He did not show himself as an ascetic or insist on elaborate rituals. Even the temples he sanctified departed from orthodoxy and insisted on universal accessibility and moral behaviour instead of inherited privilege or symbolic cleanliness. His life, in short, was a demonstration of the truth that one need not retire from the world in order to be religiously in it; instead, one needs to look properly within it.

This realization has ethical consequences of great reach. If Ananda is to be found in the midst of everyday life, then any individual is a possible bearer of the sacred. Guru’s stress on social equalitarianism, his rejection of the caste system, and his demand for education for everyone can be regarded as a direct outcome of such an understanding. The sacred cannot be limited to ritual grounds or privileged castes. It is there where life is there. Thus, the farmer’s work, the washer’s work, the seeker’s contemplation, and the mother’s love are all realizations of the divine, if they occur in awareness and moral relation. The joy here is not merely a state of mind but a recognition of justice, equality, and respect in common life.

4.4.4 Ananda and the Poetic Vision

Narayana Guru's poetry is not just beautiful words. It is an instrument for conveying profound inner peace and happiness. His poems convey a peaceful and tranquil mind. They do not attempt to contend or persuade; rather, they guide the reader softly towards a quieter and happier perspective of life. His words are plain yet aptly selected, and they guide us toward experiencing something beyond normal joy.

Guru used to write in Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Tamil, not just in Sanskrit. This indicates that he wanted his message of bliss (Ananda) to reach all classes of society through vernacular language. He felt that authentic bliss and insight into life were not for scholars or saints alone but for everyone. Through simple, modest poetry, he made the experience of the divine within reach of a wider world.

His poems do not merely speak of joy they take people to it. The slowness, the whispering tone, and the serene atmosphere in his poetry take the reader inside. To read his poetry is to step into a quiet chamber, where we can pause, slow down, and touch something greater than ourselves. We can place Narayana Guru alongside other similar

great mystical poets like Kabir, Tukaram, and Rabindranath Tagore. Kabir used short, sharp verses to question religious divisions and show the deeper unity behind them. Guru's poems also challenge outer differences and focus on the one truth behind everything. Guru's style is quieter and still, but they both speak of deep love for the truth. Tukaram, Maharashtrian Bhakti saint-poet, has explained love and surrender to God similar to Guru, who also used to regard God as being near to us and within our reach in day-to-day life. Tagore had also envisioned the idea that beauty and bliss really do exist in the soul, and bliss is possible in our relationship with nature, human beings, and God.

What is important about Narayana Guru is the balance of his poetry. His poems are deep-thinking, yet easy to feel and grasp. He does not speak of spiritual truth only interpreting it himself in the way we live and treat humanity. His poetry fuses heavy thinking and gentle living. In *Daiva Dasakam*, life's ocean journey is portrayed as a walk with God as the navigator. This metaphor gently reminds us to have faith, cast away fear, and remain steadfast on our path. The poem does not argue through reason; rather, it invites us to feel and to dwell in greater consciousness and faith. Guru's poems speak from the heart and reach the heart, reminding us that true happiness is already within us.

Recap

- ◆ Guru taught that Ananda means true bliss.
- ◆ Bliss comes when the self is free from limits.
- ◆ Ananda is not just private joy but shared with all.
- ◆ Social unity is part of real bliss.

- ◆ Guru's poems show inner peace and outer harmony.
- ◆ Bliss grows when caste and ego drop away.
- ◆ Ananda is linked to love and compassion.
- ◆ It is both spiritual and social in meaning.
- ◆ True bliss comes from self-knowledge.
- ◆ Guru saw bliss as the goal of life.
- ◆ Guru's vision combines personal joy with social reform.

Objective Questions

1. What is the Sanskrit term for bliss in Indian philosophy?
2. Which Upanishadic formula includes Ananda?
3. How does Guru treat Ananda in relation to realization?
4. What ethical values emerge from Guru's idea of bliss?
5. What poetic elements express Ananda in Guru's writings?
6. Where does Guru locate the source of true joy?
7. What dualities must dissolve for Ananda to emerge?
8. How does Guru's view of bliss differ from escapism?

Answers

1. Ananda
2. Satyam, Jnana, Anantam Brahma
3. As realization itself

4. Compassion, non-violence, love
5. Light, calmness, serenity
6. Everyday awareness
7. Pain and pleasure
8. It is realized through engagement, not withdrawal

Self - Assessment Questions

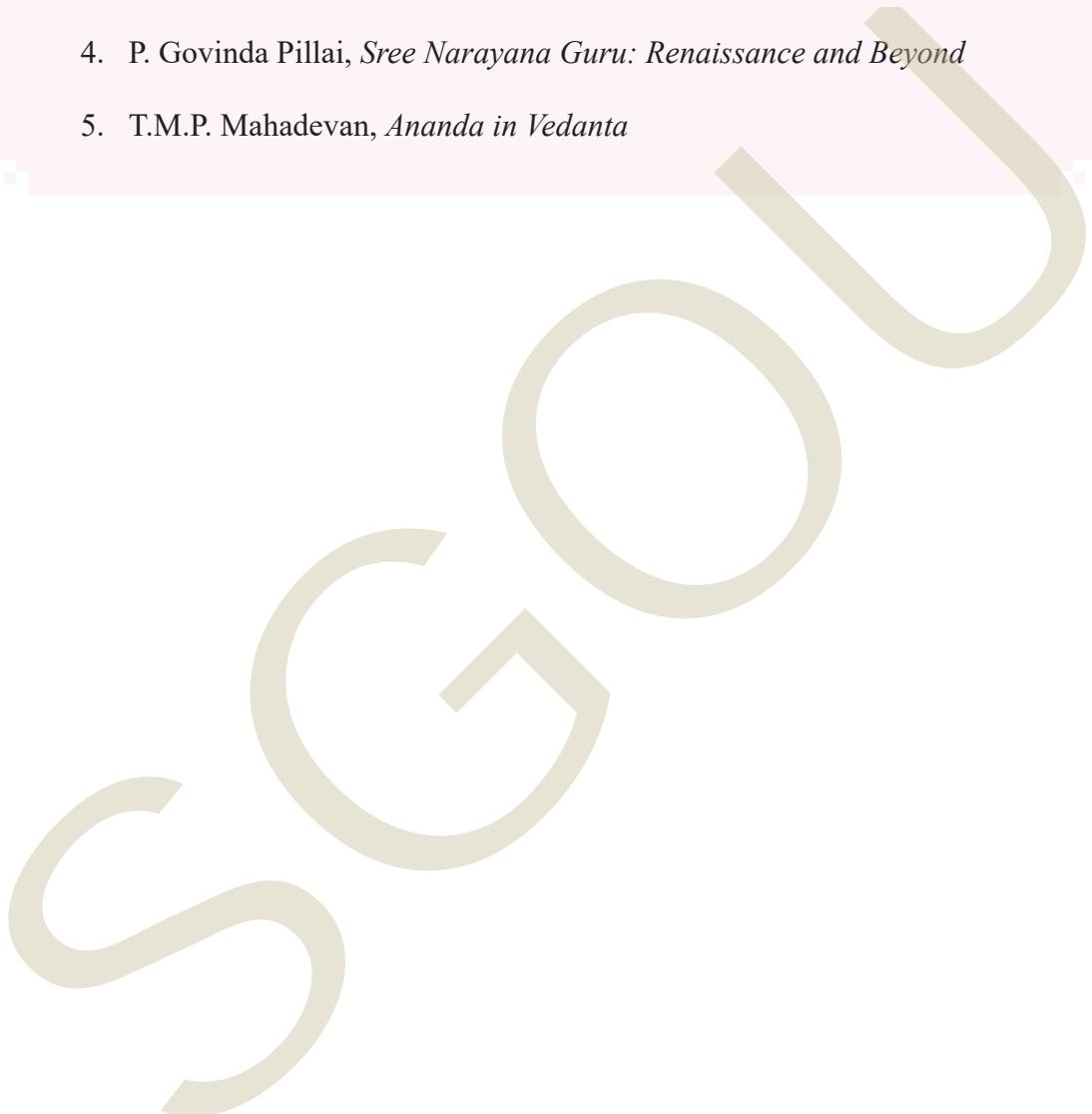
1. Explain how Guru reinterprets the concept of Ananda in his philosophical and poetic works.
2. Analyze the social and ethical dimensions of Ananda in Guru's thought.
3. How does Guru locate the experience of bliss in everyday life?
4. Compare Guru's vision of Ananda with traditional Advaitic notions.

Reference

1. Sreenarayana Guru, *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*
2. Sreenarayana Guru, *Daiva Dasakam*
3. Sreenarayana Guru, *Jnana Darsanam*
4. Sreenarayana Guru, *Vedantic Works (Selected Poems)*
5. Upanishads (Chandogya and Taittiriya)

Suggested Reading

1. Swami Muni Narayana Prasad, *Bliss in the Philosophy of Narayana Guru*
2. R. Balakrishnan, *Sreenarayana Guru: The Revolutionary Saint*
3. K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought: A Critical Survey*
4. P. Govinda Pillai, *Sree Narayana Guru: Renaissance and Beyond*
5. T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Ananda in Vedanta*





BLOCK

Mysticism in Guru's
Philosophy



Mystical Writings of Sree Narayana Guru - a Brief Study

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ familiarise Sree Narayana Guru's identity as a profound mystic whose direct spiritual experiences formed the basis of his teachings and writings.
- ◆ explain the core tenets of Indian mystical tradition, including Advaita Vedanta, Bhakti movements, and Yoga philosophy, and how Guru seamlessly integrated them.
- ◆ reflect on the mystical concepts presented in "*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*" and "*Darsana Mala*," such as the unity of Self and the illusory world, Triputi, and Avastha Traya.
- ◆ recognize the significance of poetry as a vehicle for expressing ineffable mystical experiences in Sree Narayana Guru's works and his integration of spiritual liberation with social reform.

Prerequisites

Sree Narayana Guru was a beacon of universal wisdom and compassion, primarily a profound mystic whose direct spiritual experiences were the bedrock of his teachings and literary output. His writings transcend mere intellectual exercises, eloquently articulating transcendent truths realized through intense spiritual practice (tapasya). This study delves into Guru's mystical writings, exploring his unique integration of Advaita Vedanta with ethical living and societal transformation. In the Indian context, mysticism denotes a direct, unmediated experience of the divine or ultimate reality, often beyond sensory perception. Guru's literary corpus, including works like "*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*" and "*Darsana Mala*," systematically lays out his Advaitic mystical philosophy, emphasizing the oneness of the individual Self with the Universal Self. This exploration will highlight how his profound insights, expressed through unparalleled poetic genius, aimed to guide humanity towards ultimate liberation and universal brotherhood.

Keywords

Mysticism, Transcendent, Advaita Vedanta, Tapasya, Atman, Brahman, Maya, *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, Darsana Mala.

Discussion

Sree Narayana Guru (1855-1928), stands as a beacon of universal wisdom and compassion. More than a social reformer or a philosopher, Guru was, at his core, a profound mystic whose direct spiritual experiences formed the bedrock of his teachings and literary output. His writings are not merely intellectual exercises; they are the eloquent articulation of transcendent truths realized through intense spiritual practice (tapasya). In a tradition rich with mystic poets, Guru carved a unique niche, seamlessly merging the profound insights of Advaita Vedanta with an unwavering commitment to ethical living and societal transformation. His literary corpus, though often philosophical in nature, is filled with a deep devotional dedication, presenting complex spiritual realities in accessible and poetically sublime forms. This unit is a brief exploration of Sree Narayana Guru's mystical writings, aiming to elucidate the core tenets of his spiritual vision as expressed through his unparalleled poetic genius.

In the Indian context, mysticism transcends mere intellectual understanding; it refers to the direct, unmediated experience of the divine or ultimate reality. For mystic poets, language becomes both a covering and a revelation - a tool to express what lies beyond ordinary perception. This experience is often described as being beyond the senses and the ordinary mind, leading to a profound communion with the absolute. Indian literary traditions, drawing deeply

from the Upanishads, Vedanta, Bhakti poetry, and Yoga philosophy, have always provided fertile ground for expressing such transcendent truths. Mystics like Kabir, Meerabai, Ramana Maharshi, and Ramakrishna Paramahansa have articulated their mystical experiences through diverse mediums - be it poetry, silence, selfless service, or rigorous non-dualistic thought. For these Indian mystics, God or Brahman is not a distant, anthropomorphic deity but the divine presence dwelling within oneself, the very ground of all being. The ultimate goal of human existence, as per mystical thought, is to transcend the confines of the ego, the veil of illusion (Maya), and the darkness of ignorance (Avidya), leading to the realization of the Self (Atman) - a realization that reveals its non-difference from the universal reality (Brahman or Param Atman). Sree Narayana Guru, steeped in this rich tradition, exemplifies the pinnacle of such mystical realization, articulating his insights not for literary accolades but as a means to guide humanity towards ultimate liberation.

Indian Mystical Tradition and Guru's Place

The tradition of Indian mysticism is related to profound spiritual inquiry and direct experiential knowledge. At its heart lies the pursuit of moksha (liberation) or *mukti* (freedom) from the cycle of birth and death, achieved through the realization of

one's true nature as non-different from the Absolute. The Upanishads, foundational texts of Indian philosophy, are replete with mystical insights, most notably the *Mahavakyas* (Great Sayings) like "Aham Brahmasmi" (I am Brahman) and "Tat Tvaṁ Asi" (That thou art), which encapsulate the non-dual identity of the individual Self with the Universal Self. These texts emphasize introspection and meditative inquiry as pathways to direct realization, moving beyond ritualistic practices to an inner spiritual quest.

Vedanta, particularly the Advaita (non-dual) school championed by Adi Shankara, provides the philosophical framework for much of Indian mysticism. Advaita posits that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is the sole existent truth, and the world is an appearance due to Maya, an inexplicable power that veils the Absolute and projects the multiplicity. The individual soul, Atman, is identical with Brahman. The path to realization involves discerning the real from the unreal (*Viveka*) and cultivating dispassion (*Vairagya*), leading to direct knowledge (*Jnana*). Mystics operating within this framework often describe the experience as a dissolution of individuality into an oceanic consciousness, a profound sense of unity where subject and object merge.

Bhakti movements, while often emphasizing devotion to a personal God, frequently culminate in mystical union. Poets like Kabir and Meerabai expressed an intense longing for and eventual merging with the Divine Beloved, transcending the boundaries of religious dogma and social structures. Their ecstatic poetry reflects a deeply personal and experiential relationship with the divine, which, in its highest forms, becomes non-dualistic in essence, where the lover and the beloved become one.

Yoga philosophy, particularly Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, provides a systematic

methodology for stilling the mind (*Chitta Vritti Nirodha*) to achieve the state of Samadhi, a superconscious state where the true Self is realized. The various limbs of Yoga-ethical observances (*Yama*), self-discipline (*Niyama*), postures (*Asana*), breath control (*Pranayama*), sense withdrawal (*Pratyahara*), concentration (*Dharana*), and meditation (*Dhyana*)-are all designed to purify the mind and senses, making them fit instruments for mystical perception.

Sree Narayana Guru seamlessly integrated these diverse streams of Indian mystical thought. While deeply rooted in Advaita Vedanta, his approach was practical and experiential. He did not engage in mere intellectual debates; the truth he imparted was that which he had realized through rigorous *tapasya*. His mysticism was not an escape from the world but a profound realization that allowed him to see the inherent divinity in all beings, thereby fueling his tireless efforts for social upliftment and universal brotherhood. He demonstrated that the realization of Brahman leads to compassion and selfless service, effectively bridging the perceived gap between spiritual liberation and worldly engagement.

Sree Narayana Guru's Mystical Path

Through sustained contemplation and the purification of mind and senses, Guru transcended the limitations of ordinary consciousness and directly perceived the ultimate reality-the very essence of mystical experience.

To fully appreciate the mysticism in his poetry, it is helpful to understand a few core concepts. Mysticism is a profound, direct engagement with the ultimate reality or divine, going beyond intellectual reasoning and ordinary senses. It is an inner journey of transformation, moving from the superficiality of external appearances to the depths of pure consciousness. This state is

often described as blissful silence and an all-encompassing unity. This spiritual quest isn't about external rituals but a personal, experiential connection with the Absolute, a shared thread among mystics across various traditions, pointing to a universal truth beyond sectarian distinctions.

His mystical path can be characterized by several key aspects:

- 1. Direct Realization (*Pratyaksha Anubhuti*):** Guru's teachings stem from his own direct, unmediated experience of the Absolute. He did not simply transmit doctrines but shared insights born of profound realization. This emphasis on direct experience is a hallmark of true mysticism, where truth is not intellectualized but known experientially. His confidence in asserting the non-dual reality stemmed from this unshakable inner conviction.
- 2. Advaitic Foundation:** At the core of Guru's mysticism is Advaita Vedanta. He consistently pointed to the oneness of the individual Self (*Atman*) with the Universal Self (*Brahman*). All apparent multiplicity, duality (such as knower-known-knowledge), and the phenomenal world itself are understood as manifestations or projections of this singular, ultimate Consciousness, or as mere appearances due to Maya. His aim was always to guide the seeker beyond these appearances to the underlying unity.
- 3. Synthesis of Knowledge (*Jnana*) and Devotion (*Bhakti*):** While Guru was a staunch Advaitin emphasizing the path of knowledge, his writings are

infused with deep devotion. This is not the devotion of a dualist worshipping a separate God, but *jñāna-bhakti*, where devotion itself becomes a means to realize the non-dual truth. The love for the Divine Mother in "Janani Navaratna Manjari" is simultaneously a yearning for ultimate merger with the supreme Knowledge. This blend makes his mysticism accessible and appealing to a wider audience, as it combines the intellectual rigor of Advaita with the emotional fulfillment of devotion.

- 4. Universalism and Inclusivity:** Guru's mystical realization transcended sectarian boundaries. He saw the same divine truth manifesting in various forms and names across religions. This profound universalism, born of his Advaitic vision, informed his social reform efforts, advocating for "one caste, one religion, one God for man." His mystical understanding eliminated all distinctions based on creed, class, or gender, emphasizing the inherent divinity within all beings.
- 5. Poetry as a Vehicle for the Ineffable:** Guru's choice of poetry as a primary medium for expressing his mystical insights is significant. Mystical experience is inherently ineffable, lying beyond the grasp of ordinary language and conceptual thought. Yet, poetry, with its capacity for metaphor, symbolism, rhythm, and evocation, can gesture towards the inexpressible. Guru's poetic genius allowed him to articulate

complex philosophical truths and profound mystical states in a way that resonated deeply, making the path of realization intuitive and deeply moving. His compositions are not dry philosophical treatises but living expressions of his direct communion with the Absolute.

Key Mystical Expressions in Guru's Writings

Sree Narayana Guru's literary output is a vast ocean of mystical insights, each work a gem reflecting different facets of the ultimate truth. While "Janani Navaratna Manjari" focuses on the Divine Mother, other works like "*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*" (One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction) and "Darsana Mala" (Garland of Visions) systematically lay out his Advaitic mystical philosophy.

Ātmopadeśa Śatakam: The Path to Self-Realization

"*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*" is arguably Guru's magnum opus, a concise yet comprehensive treatise on Advaita Vedanta and the path to Self-realization. It is a profound exploration of mystical truths, guiding the seeker through logical inquiry and contemplative insights. '*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*' is a prime example of mystical poetry, directly addressing the path to liberation through Self-realisation. His work emphasizes that the ultimate reality, Brahman, isn't a distant deity but the divine presence dwelling within oneself—the Atman. Guru's mystical vision, rooted in Advaita, is deeply experiential and ethical, where true liberation is realised as ananda (bliss) derived from the profound unity of the individual self with pure consciousness (Param Atma/ Brahman) pervades all existence. By pointing inward to a reality beyond name and form, '*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*' guides the seeker to transcend the ego, Maya (illusion), and Avidya (ignorance), ultimately leading to the realisation 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.'

Mysticism refers to a deep, inner experience of the divine or the ultimate reality, often beyond the reach of the logical mind or senses. It is a form of spiritual understanding where the person feels a direct connection or unity with God, the Absolute, or the universal spirit. Mysticism is not just about religious belief—it is about a personal, inner experience that cannot always be explained in words. Unlike organised religious practices, which may focus on rituals, traditions, or doctrines, mysticism focuses on the inner transformation of the soul. It is a journey from the outer world of appearances to the inner world of truth and consciousness.

Ātmopadeśa Śatakam 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:

അവിലുമേരിയിൽക്കിടുന്നവർ-
നുരുവിലുമൊത്തു പൂരത്തുമുജ്ജലിക്കും
കരുവിനു കണ്ണുകളില്ലവുമുള്ളടക്കി-
തെരുതെരെ വിഞ്ഞവണങ്ങിയോതിഡേണോ

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, *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*)



It can be understood that Sree Narayana Guru's 'Atmopadesha Satakam' offers a profound entry into the realm of mysticism, where the divine is directly experienced beyond rational thought. The very first verse, "Rising even above knowledge...", highlights a "knowledge beyond knowledge"-an intuitive realisation that transcends mere intellectual understanding. This primal 'Core' (karu), radiant within and without, symbolises the ultimate truth, reminding us that true liberation lies in apprehending a reality beyond mental categories and dualistic thought. Guru's poetic simplicity in Malayalam belies a deep Vedantic insight, guiding the seeker towards an inner communion with the Absolute, emphasizing a blissful unity with all existence rather than external rituals.

The poem intricately details the mystical journey, starting with the nature of ordinary knowledge. According to Vedantic doctrine, our mind, through the senses, forms mental modifications (vritti) that reflect supreme consciousness (paramatma chaitanyam), creating worldly perception. However, this knowledge is transient. Guru's poetry beautifully articulates that the Supreme Self (Paramatma), the immutable "radiant Core" (ujjwailkkum karu), constantly shines within both this ephemeral knowledge and the individual possessing it. The path to this realisation, as poetically conveyed, necessitates a deliberate withdrawal of the senses. The seeker must restrain the five senses, turning them inward to focus on the Paramatma, thereby escaping the pervasive delusion of Maya, which is powerfully described as a seductive adversary.

In verse 2, Guru says:

കരണവുമിന്തയവും ക്ഷേമവരും തോ-
ട്ടിയുമനേകജഗത്തുമോർക്കിലെല്ലാം
പരവളിതനിലുയർന്ന ഭാനുമാൻ തന്നെ
തിരുവുരുവാണു തിരഞ്ഞെ തേരിഡേം.

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.

Sree Narayana Guru's 'Atmopadesha Satakam' offers a profound exploration into mysticism, where reality is directly experienced beyond intellectual constructs. Verse 2, "The inner organ, the senses, and counting from the body...", powerfully illustrates the Advaitic principle that all existence is fundamentally consciousness (Chaitanya). The Guru poetically reveals that everything-from our inner faculties and senses to the vast external worlds-are but manifestations of a single, radiant consciousness, akin to a 'supreme Sun' (Bhanuman) rising in the void. This verse isn't just a philosophical statement; it is a call to action, prescribing "relentless cogitation" to pierce the veil of apparent multiplicity and realise the inherent oneness of all existence, moving from intellectual understanding to direct, unitive vision.

The mystical journey elaborated in the poem begins by dissecting perceived reality, distinguishing between our inner organ (intellect, mind, ego) and external senses, leading to the understanding of our body and the multitude of worlds. Through profound contemplation, these are revealed not as separate entities but as the divine form of the 'supreme Sun risen in the void beyond.' This 'supreme Sun' signifies ultimate consciousness (Chidākāsham).

The apparent diversity of the universe, with its countless objects, is ultimately unified within this supreme consciousness. Guru's philosophy, expressed through his poetry, asserts an inductive approach where the inner organ and the supreme Sun represent two poles of reality, unifying all seemingly disparate elements along a vertical axis of

graded value-systems. Here, one thing is the most important: to attain Brahman, one should practice the techniques of withdrawal of the five senses from the empirical world and how to meditate on Brahman alone through knowledge.

Darsana Mala: A Garland of Visions

"Darsana Mala" (Garland of Visions) is another significant mystical text by Guru, offering a systematic exposition of spiritual realization through ten "visions" or chapters. Each chapter presents a different philosophical perspective or stage of realization, culminating in the Advaitic vision of ultimate unity. From the *Adhyāropa* Darsanam (Vision by Super Imposition) to the Nirvana Darsanam (Vision of Liberation), Guru guides the seeker through the mystical journey. The work progressively dismantles the layers of ignorance and illusion, leading the contemplative mind towards the direct perception of Brahman. It's a structured mystical treatise, where each vision builds upon the last, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the path to liberation. It is a testament to Guru's ability to present complex spiritual philosophy in a highly organized yet deeply experiential manner.

The Vision of Superimposition and Negation

Adhyāropa Darśanam (Vision by Superimposition)

Verse 1

அதைப்பெற்றுவேத
தெவதோ ஸப்தவத் புதோ
ஸஸ்ரை ஸதவா ஸகல்ப-
மாதேதை பதமேஷாத.

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

Sree Narayana Guru's 'Darśanamālā' immediately plunges into mysticism by tackling the ultimate origin of existence, revealing the world as a dream-like creation of the Supreme Lord (*Parameśvara*). The very first verse, "In the beginning there was Non-existence indeed; Dreamwise then again by mere willing Everything existent created He, the Lord Supreme," posits that the universe, in its manifest form, was non-existent before creation, a state only transcended by the Lord's mere will (*sankalpa*). This radical idea, mirroring Upaniṣadic thought, establishes a cosmic dream narrative: just as a dream arises from and dissolves into the dreamer's mind, so too does the entire cosmos emanate from and ultimately dissolve into the consciousness of *Parameśvara*. This is not about a personal deity but about the primordial causal Substance, emphasizing that true reality lies solely in the ultimate, uncaused 'sat', a core mystical insight.

The poem's mystical depth is further emphasized by its method of understanding this creation. The concept of *Adhyāropa*-the superimposition of form onto a fundamental reality-is central. Like waves on water, the world, though appearing distinct, is merely a form projected onto the singular underlying substance of *Parameśvara*. This perspective directly challenges the common perception of the world as undeniably real, guiding the seeker towards the profound realisation that everything we perceive is ultimately an illusion (*Maya*), existing only within the divine consciousness. When a spiritual aspirant achieves enlightenment, they experience the world's dissolution into their own being, mirroring *Parameśvara*'s 'waking up' from the cosmic dream, thus underscoring the non-dual nature of the seeker and the Supreme Reality.

வாஸ்ராமயமேவாத
வாஸீஸ்ரமம் பிரே
அஸுஜமாயயா ஸபா
மாயாவீவாவிலா ஜத.



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.

This verse (verse 2,) poetically asserts that, in the beginning, "All this remained" merely as latent potentials or "incipient memory factors" (*vāsanā*). Then, the Lord (*Prabhu*), through an inherent, mysterious power akin to "false presentiment" or illusion (*māyā*), brought forth this entire, ever-changing world, "like a magician." This evokes a central tenet of Advaita Vedanta: the universe is not a creation *ex nihilo* but an emanation from an ultimate reality, manifested through an inexplicable divine power, thus blurring the lines between creation, illusion, and consciousness itself.

The poem's mystical core lies in its depiction of the Lord as a cosmic magician (*māyāvī*), who, by His own *māyā*, conjures the entirety of existence. This metaphor is deeply mystical because it implies that the perceived world, with all its diversity, is fundamentally an illusory manifestation from a singular, ultimate reality. We, as observers, are part of this grand magic trick, and our inability to fully grasp its secret is termed *ajñāna* (ignorance) in Vedanta. The Guru's mystical insight encourages us not to seek a rational explanation for creation, but to realise that we are an inseparable part of this "Great Mystery," allowing us to live with the "blissful freedom of being part of this inexplicable whole." This deepens the mystical experience from an intellectual concept to an experiential realisation of

cosmic oneness and divine play.

Thus, Darshanamala is a manual of applied mysticism. Its beauty lies not only in its profound content but also in the symmetry of its structure and the evocative power of its verses.

Daiva Dasakam: The Universal Prayer

"Daiva Dasakam" (Ten Verses to God) is a universal prayer that embodies a deep mystical longing for divine union. While seemingly a simple devotional hymn, it contains profound Advaitic undertones. It addresses God as the "Ocean of Mercy," the ultimate reality, and prays for guidance and liberation from suffering. The mystical element lies in the yearning for dissolution into the divine, to be absorbed into the ocean of existence. It reflects the understanding that the individual self is a part of the greater Whole and seeks to return to its source. The prayer is accessible to all, irrespective of religious background, making it a truly universal mystical appeal for unity and peace.

The Ineffable and Language in Guru's Mystical Writings

A defining characteristic of mystical experience is its inherent ineffability-it lies beyond the descriptive capacity of language. Yet, mystics throughout history have striven to articulate their experiences, often resorting to poetry, paradox, and metaphor. Sree Narayana Guru, as a master poet and profound mystic, adeptly navigates this challenge. He "did not write for literary accolades," implying that his compositions were not crafted primarily for aesthetic pleasure but as vehicles for transmitting realized truth. This makes his poetry a unique instance where philosophical depth and spiritual experience converge with artistic mastery.

His use of rich symbolism, analogies (like the wave and sea), and direct invocations to the ultimate reality serves to transcend

the limitations of ordinary discourse. The rhythmic patterns and elegant structures of his verses create a meditative atmosphere, allowing the reader to intuit the deeper meanings that words alone cannot convey. For instance, in "Janani Navaratna Manjari," the concluding lines of a verse, "Who can truly comprehend its ultimate grandeur! Mother, my words, powerless to extol you, subside into silence!" powerfully express this ineffability. The silence here is not an absence of meaning but a state of profound knowing that transcends verbal expression, a characteristic feature of mystical states.

Thus, Sree Narayana Guru's poetic journey was never merely literary - it was a path of profound spiritual realisation, a channel for philosophical clarity, and a transformative medium for social upliftment. As a mystic poet, he fused the inner vision of self-realisation with outer compassion and action. His poems are not simply to be read, but to be meditated upon - they are experiences encoded in verse.

Across works like *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, *Darshanamala*, and *Daivadasakam*, Guru consistently demonstrates that mysticism is not esoteric or inaccessible. Rather, it is the most natural state of the human being - when the mind quietens, when ego recedes, and when awareness opens to the unity of all existence. His mystic path is democratic, inclusive, and deeply ethical. There are no barriers of caste, class, or creed. The only requirement is sincerity, introspection, and a willingness to look within.

What distinguishes Guru's mystic poetry is its seamless integration of Advaita Vedanta

with lyrical beauty. He draws from classical Sanskrit traditions, Tamil bhakti impulses, and Malayalam folk rhythms, but filters them through his unique vision - one that is rooted in direct experience rather than doctrinal allegiance. His voice resonates with both the rigour of the philosopher and the tenderness of the bhakta.

Sree Narayana Guru's mystical writings thus represent a pinnacle of Indian spiritual thought and poetic expression. Rooted deeply in the Advaitic tradition, his works offer a direct path to the realization of ultimate unity, transcending the dualities that ordinarily bind human consciousness.

His unique contribution lies not only in articulating profound mystical truths but also in demonstrating their practical implications for a harmonious and enlightened society. Guru's mysticism was never detached from the lived reality of humanity; rather, his deep spiritual insights fuelled his tireless efforts for social reform, emphasizing equality, universal brotherhood, and education. He proved that true spiritual liberation is inextricably linked to compassion and selfless action.

In essence, Sree Narayana Guru's mystical writings serve as invaluable guides for those seeking liberation. They invite us to an inner journey of self-discovery, to look beyond the superficial distinctions of the world, and to realize the inherent divinity within ourselves and all beings. His legacy continues to inspire millions to seek the ultimate truth, reminding us that the deepest spiritual experiences lead not to withdrawal, but to a profound sense of unity and universal love.



Recap

- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru: mystic, philosopher, social reformer
- ◆ Mysticism: direct experience of divine
- ◆ Guru's writings: transcendent truths, spiritual practice
- ◆ Advaita Vedanta: core of Guru's mysticism
- ◆ Brahman/Atman: non-dual identity
- ◆ Maya: veil of illusion
- ◆ *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*: magnum opus, self-realization
- ◆ Wave-sea analogy: unity of self, illusory world
- ◆ Triputi: knower, known, knowledge dissolve
- ◆ Darsana Mala: garland of visions, systematic exposition
- ◆ Nirvana: liberation, cessation of suffering
- ◆ Poetry: vehicle for ineffable, profound meaning

Objective Questions

1. What was the bedrock of Guru's teachings?
2. What is the ultimate goal of human existence in mystical thought?
3. Which philosophical framework underpins much of Indian mysticism?
4. What is the state of superconscious realization in Yoga philosophy?
5. What is the core of Guru's mysticism?
6. What concept signifies the illusory nature of the world?
7. What is the name of Guru's magnum opus on Self-realization?

8. What analogy in “*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*” illustrates the unity of self and the world?
9. What triad dissolves in ultimate mystical experience?
10. What is the name of Guru’s text offering a systematic exposition of spiritual realization?
11. What is Nirvana synonymous with in the Vedantic context?
12. What characteristic describes mystical experience as beyond language?

Answers

1. Experiences
2. Liberation
3. Vedanta
4. Samadhi
5. Advaita
6. Maya
7. *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*
8. Wave-sea
9. Triputi
10. Darsana Mala
11. Moksha
12. Ineffability

Self - Assessment Questions

1. Discuss how Sree Narayana Guru's mystical experiences influenced his role as both a philosopher and a social reformer.
2. Explain the concept of "direct realization" (Pratyaksha Anubhuti) in Sree Narayana Guru's mystical path and its significance.
3. How does Sree Narayana Guru synthesize Jnana (Knowledge) and Bhakti (Devotion) in his mystical approach, and what is the outcome of this blend?
4. Analyze the wave and sea analogy from "*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*" to explain the Advaitic concept of the unity of Self and the illusory nature of the world.
5. Describe how Sree Narayana Guru addresses the "Triputi" (knower, known, and knowledge) and "Avastha Traya" (waking, dream, deep sleep states) in his mystical writings.
6. Explain the concept of "Adhyāropa" (superimposition) as presented in "Darsana Mala" and its implications for understanding the nature of reality.
7. How does the "cosmic magician" metaphor in "Darsana Mala" illustrate the role of Maya in the creation of the world?
8. Discuss the significance of Sree Narayana Guru's use of "Nirvana" as a concluding theme in his works, particularly in relation to Vedantic philosophy.
9. Elaborate on why poetry was a suitable medium for Sree Narayana Guru to express his ineffable mystical insights.
10. How does Sree Narayana Guru's mysticism promote universalism and inclusivity, and what practical implications did this have for his social reform efforts?
11. Compare and contrast the approach to liberation presented in "*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*" with the "Visions" described in "Darsana Mala."
12. How does Sree Narayana Guru's legacy demonstrate the connection between spiritual liberation and selfless action?



Reason and Mysticism

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will:

- ◆ explain how Guru's philosophy employs rigorous reason to explore and ultimately transcend the limitations of conventional thought, leading to mystical realization.
- ◆ familiarise the role of 'Arivu' (Knowledge/Consciousness) as the unifying principle that bridges rational inquiry and mystical experience in Guru's teachings.
- ◆ identify specific instances within the verses where logical deduction directly informs and paves the way for a non-dualistic, mystical understanding of reality.
- ◆ articulate how the Guru's approach reconciles the seemingly disparate domains of intellectual analysis and direct, unitive spiritual insight.

Prerequisites

The philosophy of the Guru, particularly as encapsulated in 'Arivu', offers a compelling model for understanding the profound interplay between reason and mysticism. Far from being antithetical, these two seemingly distinct approaches to truth are meticulously woven together in his teachings. The Guru employs a powerful, almost forensic, logical inquiry to dissect the nature of reality, meticulously demonstrating the inherent limitations of dualistic thought and sensory perception. This rigorous rational process does not negate reason but, rather, pushes it to its ultimate boundaries, thereby creating the intellectual space necessary for the emergence of a deeper, mystical insight into the all-pervading Arivu – the fundamental Consciousness. We will explore how this philosophical journey transforms intellectual understanding into direct, unitive experience, revealing a path where logic illuminates the way to the ineffable.

Keywords

Reason, Mysticism, Arivu, Non-duality, Logic, Consciousness, Transcendence, Realization

Discussion

The Apparent Dichotomy

The domains of reason and mysticism often appear to occupy opposite ends of the spectrum of human understanding. Reason, characterized by its reliance on logical inference, empirical observation, and analytical dissection, seeks to construct coherent and verifiable models of reality. It operates through categorization, differentiation, and the establishment of causal relationships, striving for clarity and objective knowledge. In stark contrast, mysticism pertains to a direct, unmediated experience of ultimate reality or the divine, frequently described as ineffable, intuitive, and beyond the grasp of ordinary intellectual faculties. Mystical knowledge is typically presented as a profound, unified insight that transcends the subject-object divide inherent in rational thought.

This perceived opposition has led to a long-standing debate: can the rigorous, dissecting nature of reason truly accommodate the holistic, unifying embrace of mystical experience? Or are they mutually exclusive paths to understanding? This study will go deeper into this intricate relationship, exploring the inherent capabilities and limitations of reason, defining the essence of mystical experience, and ultimately examining how these two seemingly disparate modes of knowing can converge. We will pay particular attention to how a figure like Sree Narayana Guru masterfully synthesizes intellectual inquiry with profound spiritual realization, demonstrating that reason can

serve as a vital precursor to mystical insight, and that mystical experience can, in turn, deeply inform and elevate rational thought. This holistic approach posits that for a complete understanding of existence, both analytical intellect and unitive experience are essential, leading to a richer, more profound apprehension of reality.

The Landscape of Reason: Capacity and Constraints

Reason, as the faculty of the human mind that forms conclusions and judgments from facts or premises, is fundamental to our interaction with the world. It is the engine of science, the backbone of philosophy, and the guiding principle for practical decision-making. Through rationality, humanity has developed complex languages, intricate social structures, advanced technologies, and systematic bodies of knowledge that explain and predict phenomena. In philosophical discourse, reason enables the construction of elaborate metaphysical systems, epistemological theories, and ethical frameworks. Ancient Greek philosophy, the Enlightenment, and various schools of Indian logic (Nyaya, Vaisheshika, even aspects of Vedanta) all highlight the power of reason to discern truth through structured thought processes.

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’ (ujjwailkkum karu), residing equally within the knower’s body and externally. This immutable Paramatma is the ultimate reality that the seeker must apprehend.

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 Māya. 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. Māya 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 Māya and achieve clarity of inner vision.

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 bahyābhyantrō hyajah’ (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 avidya, thereby allowing the individual to fully merge into the undifferentiated reality of Brahman.

However, the very strengths of reason – its analytical precision, its reliance on discrete categories, and its grounding in sensory perception – also define its inherent limitations, especially when confronted with realities described by mystics.

1. Categorization and the Undifferentiated: Reason operates by classifying and differentiating. It requires distinct concepts to analyze. When faced with an ‘undifferentiated unity’ – a common descriptor of ultimate reality in mystical traditions – reason struggles. How can one logically define something that has no boundaries, no parts, no distinct qualities that can be isolated and examined? Logic relies on distinctions, but the Absolute is often described as *advaita* (non-dual), meaning ‘not two.’

2. Language and the Ineffable: The pinnacle of mystical experience is frequently characterized as ineffable – incapable of being expressed in words. Reason, by

contrast, is inextricably linked to language and conceptual thought. Any attempt to verbalize a direct, non-conceptual experience inevitably falls short, resorting to metaphors, paradoxes, and allegories that hint at the truth rather than explicitly defining it. For example, describing the infinite expanse of consciousness (*Chidakasha*) using finite terms is inherently limiting.

3. **Transcendence beyond Empirical Grasp:** Many mystical traditions posit that ultimate reality is transcendent, existing beyond the confines of ordinary space, time, and causation – the very dimensions within which rational inquiry typically operates. Reason is well-equipped to analyze phenomena *within* these parameters, but struggles to conceive of something that is ‘beyond’ them, as it lacks the empirical data or logical analogues necessary for such a conception.
4. **The Subject-Object Divide:** At its most fundamental level, reason operates by distinguishing a subject (the observer/knower) from an object (the observed/known). Mystical experiences, especially in non-dual traditions, often describe a complete collapse of this duality, where the individual consciousness merges with the universal. This unitive state is paradoxical to a mind accustomed to the inherent separation of subject and object.
5. **Inference vs. Direct Knowledge:** Rational understanding largely

proceeds through inference, deduction, and induction based on existing knowledge or empirical data. Mysticism, conversely, speaks of direct perception (*Pratyaksha Anubhuti*) – an immediate, unmediated apprehension of truth that bypasses the step-by-step process of logical thought. While reason can logically deduce the existence of a higher reality, it cannot *experience* it directly in the same way a mystic claims to.

Therefore, while reason is an indispensable tool for navigating the empirical world and for philosophical preparation, it inherently reaches a boundary when seeking to grasp the Absolute. The very mechanisms that make it effective in the realm of multiplicity become inadequate when confronted with undifferentiated unity.

The Nature of Mystical Experience: A Glimpse of the Absolute

Mysticism (from the Greek *mystikos*, ‘an initiate’) refers to the experience of a direct, intuitive, and often transformative communion with ultimate reality, God, or the Absolute. It is not merely a belief system or a philosophical school, but a profound state of consciousness that transcends ordinary sensory perception and intellectual cognition. The essence of mystical experience is marked by several recurring characteristics across diverse traditions:

1. **Unitive Consciousness:** Perhaps the most defining feature is the dissolution of the sense of individual separateness. The ego boundary melts, leading to a profound feeling of oneness with all existence, the divine, or the universal consciousness. This is the realization of the

interconnectedness of all things, where the apparent distinctions of the world vanish into a singular, all-encompassing reality.

- 2. Intuitive Insight (Gnosis/ Prajna):** Mystics claim access to a form of knowledge that is not gained through reasoning or empirical study, but through a sudden, immediate flash of insight or intuition. This direct apprehension of truth is often described as gnosis or prajna, a knowing that is non-conceptual and directly experienced.
- 3. Transcendence of Conventional Reality:** Mystical states involve transcending the usual parameters of space, time, and personal identity. The ordinary world may appear dream-like or illusory, while a deeper, more profound reality is revealed. Dualities like good/evil, pain/pleasure, life/death often resolve into a larger unity.
- 4. Ineffability and Paradoxical Expression:** As previously noted, the experience itself is almost impossible to describe using conventional language. Mystics often resort to paradox, allegory, and highly symbolic language to convey glimpses of their experience, suggesting that the truth lies beyond literal interpretation. The use of contradictory terms (e.g., 'darkness visible,' 'full emptiness') is common.
- 5. Profound Transformation:** Encountering ultimate reality typically leads to deep personal transformation. This can manifest as radical shifts in values, a profound sense of peace and joy, heightened compassion, reduced fear, and a sustained feeling of interconnectedness with all life. The individual's understanding of their own identity and purpose is fundamentally altered.
- 6. Ecstasy and Bliss:** Many mystical accounts speak of states of profound ecstasy, bliss (*Ananda*), or unalloyed joy. This is not mere happiness, but a deep, pervasive sense of well-being that arises from the dissolution of self and union with the divine. This *Akhandanubhuti* (unbroken experience) is a state of ceaseless beatitude.
- 7. States of Absorption (Samadhi/ Fana):** In contemplative traditions, mystical experience often culminates in states of deep meditative absorption, such as *Samadhi* in Yoga or *Fana* in Sufism. These are states where the mind is completely absorbed in the object of meditation, leading to a temporary or permanent dissolution of the ego and a direct experience of ultimate reality.

Indian mysticism, particularly Advaita Vedanta, focuses on the realization of the *Atman* (individual self) as identical with *Brahman* (universal absolute), and the transcendence of *Māya* (the cosmic illusion) through direct spiritual experience. This journey from multiplicity to unity, from ignorance to enlightened awareness, defines the mystical quest.

The Interplay: Reason as a Precursor to Mystical Insight

Despite their apparent differences, reason and mysticism are not necessarily antithetical. Indeed, in many profound spiritual traditions,

particularly within Indian philosophy, reason serves as a crucial, preparatory instrument for the mystical journey. It clears the path, removes obstacles, and prepares the mind for the leap into direct, unmediated experience.

1. Dismantling Falsehoods:

Rational inquiry is invaluable in systematically dismantling erroneous beliefs and misconceptions about reality. Through rigorous logical analysis (*vichara*), philosophical reason can expose the inherent inconsistencies and limitations of dualistic or materialistic worldviews. This intellectual purification helps to clear the mental landscape, making the mind more receptive to non-dual truths. For instance, the systematic arguments of Advaita Vedanta against the ultimate reality of the phenomenal world, using analogies like the dream state or the rope mistaken for a snake, intellectually prime the mind to accept the possibility of *Māya*.

2. Intellectual Discernment

(*Viveka*): Reason cultivates *Viveka*, the faculty of discrimination, which is essential for distinguishing between the Real (Brahman) and the unreal (*Māya*). A sharp intellect is capable of discerning subtle truths and recognizing the impermanence of the phenomenal world, thereby fostering detachment (*Vairagya*). This intellectual clarity provides the necessary groundwork for deeper contemplative practices.

3. Cultivating Conviction

(*Nischaya*): Through reasoned

reflection (*Manana*), one can develop a profound intellectual conviction (*Nischaya*) about the nature of ultimate reality and the possibility of liberation. This conviction is not mere belief, but a logically founded understanding that strengthens one's resolve and provides motivation for sustained spiritual practice (*Nididhyasana*). It helps to stabilize the mind and prevent doubts from arising.

4. Moral and Ethical Foundation:

Many mystical traditions emphasize the importance of ethical living and moral purity as prerequisites for higher states of consciousness. Reason can help in understanding the rational basis for ethical principles, such as universal compassion, non-violence, and truthfulness. This moral clarity cleanses the mind and heart, creating an internal environment conducive to mystical experience.

5. Framing the Unspeakable:

While reason cannot *grasp* the ineffable, it can *frame* it. Philosophical concepts and logical structures can create a conceptual space that points towards the non-conceptual. They can articulate the philosophical implications of mystical experience, providing a map that guides the seeker towards the territory that ultimately transcends the map.

In this sense, reason is not an end in itself for the mystic, but a powerful means to an end. It leads the aspirant to the very threshold of the ineffable, providing the intellectual scaffolding necessary before

the direct experience takes over, dissolving the need for such structures.

Mysticism's Reciprocal Influence on Reason

The relationship is not unidirectional; profound mystical experiences can significantly influence and reshape rational understanding, leading to expanded philosophical frameworks and a deeper apprehension of reality that transcends prior intellectual limits. When a mystic undergoes a direct realization of unity or transcendence, it is not merely an emotional or psychological event. It carries profound cognitive content that recalibrates one's entire worldview.

1. New Foundational Premises:

Mystical insights can introduce entirely new fundamental premises into philosophical thought, premises that were inaccessible through purely intellectual derivation. For instance, the direct, unitive experience of Brahman can serve as a new axiom, compelling reason to construct alternative logical systems that can accommodate this unity, rather than being confined by dualistic assumptions.

2. Reinterpreting Empirical Reality:

A profound mystical experience often leads to a radical reinterpretation of the phenomenal world. What was previously considered solid, independently real, and objectively existing might now be perceived as an appearance, a projection (*Māya*), or a dynamic play (*Lila*) of consciousness. Reason then endeavors to articulate this new understanding, developing sophisticated concepts to explain

how multiplicity can arise from unity without fundamentally altering its nature.

3. Holistic and Interconnected Perspectives:

Mystical experiences inherently reveal the interconnectedness of all things. This holistic understanding can inspire rational thought to move beyond reductionist analyses and develop more integrated philosophical systems that emphasize the interdependence and underlying unity of all phenomena. This leads to a more comprehensive and less fragmented view of existence.

4. Enriching Symbolic and Metaphorical Language:

While direct description remains elusive, mystical experience compels the use of rich symbolism, paradoxes, and metaphors to convey profound truths. Reason, when informed by mystical insight, can analyze these linguistic forms, not to demystify them, but to appreciate their capacity to point beyond literal meaning, enriching philosophical language itself.

5. Informing Ethical Systems:

Direct realization of universal unity often becomes the wellspring of profound ethical principles. The experiential understanding that all beings are fundamentally one can rationally lead to unwavering commitment to principles of universal compassion, non-violence, and selfless service. Here, mystical realization provides the deep experiential ground for rational ethical imperatives.

In essence, mystical experience provides the raw ‘data’ or the profound ‘revelation,’ and reason then works to process, synthesize, and articulate this understanding into a coherent, albeit inherently limited, intellectual framework. This creates a dynamic feedback loop where deepened experience continually informs and refines rational thought, pushing the boundaries of what can be intellectually conceived and expressed.

Sree Narayana Guru: The Embodiment of Synthesis

Sree Narayana Guru stands as a luminous example of the perfect synthesis between rigorous philosophical reason and profound mystical realization. His life and teachings demonstrate that these two powerful faculties, when harmonized, lead to not only individual liberation but also a comprehensive vision for societal harmony and universal well-being.

Guru’s philosophical bedrock was Advaita Vedanta, a highly rational and internally consistent system of non-dualism. His magnum opuses, such as *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* (One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction) and *Darśanamālā* (Garland of Visions), are prime examples of his intellectual prowess. He systematically dissected the nature of reality, meticulously addressing philosophical concepts like *Triputi* (the triad of knower, known, and knowledge) and *Avastha Traya* (the three states of consciousness – waking, dream, deep sleep). His logical deconstruction of duality was not an abstract academic exercise but a direct consequence of his profound mystical *anubhava* (experience). He used reason to show that all perceived distinctions are ultimately mere appearances, arising from or dissolving into the singular, underlying consciousness.

Mind, Metaphor, and Liberation in Sree Narayana Guru’s Mystical Poetry

Mystical awakening requires the dropping

of identification with body and mind. Guru’s verses gently lead the reader toward detachment and equanimity:

മനമലർ കൊയ്തു മഹേശപൂജ ചെയ്യും
മനുജനു മറ്റാരു വേല ചെയ്തിരേണ;
വനമലർ കൊയ്തുമതല്ലയായ്ക്കിൽ മായാ-
മനുവാരുവിട്ടുമിരിക്കിൽ മായ മാറ്റും

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 Māya spell let him repeat; the Māya goes. (Verse 29)

Sree Narayana Guru’s ‘*Ātmopadesha Śatakam*’ provides a profound exposition on mystical awakening through its evocative poetry, fundamentally guiding the seeker towards a state of detachment and equanimity. Verse 29, ‘The mind-blossom plucking, who offers to the Great Master...’, brilliantly encapsulates this process. It highlights the paramount importance of mind control (manoniyantana) as the origin of all sensory activity and desires, asserting that its subjugation leads to inner transformation. The verse poetically equates the ultimate goal of amaneebhava (the state of being beyond mind) with liberation, outlining a progressive path that culminates in the dissolution of Māya (illusion) and the realisation of the Self’s true, unblemished nature.

The core teaching of this verse revolves around the powerful metaphor of offering the ‘mind-blossom’ (manamalar) to the Great Master (Maheshwara), symbolising supreme consciousness. The mind, as the seat of desires and false notions, must be detached from its worldly engagements and dissolved into the divine. The poetry suggests that 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). This profound surrender, a key mystical act, allows the individual to transcend their distinct identity and merge with Brahman, leading to the direct experience of 'I am Brahman.' Consequently, the Māya that veiled the Self's true nature poetically dissipates, revealing the inherent self-luminous reality.

Darśanamālā: Systematic Progression towards Revelation: His *Darśanamālā* (Garland of Visions) further exemplifies this synthesis. It is structured as a series of ten 'visions' or philosophical perspectives, each building logically upon the last, systematically dismantling layers of ignorance and illusion. From the *Advaitha Darśanam* (Vision of Non-Duality) to the *Nirvana Darśanam* (Vision of Liberation), the work guides the mind through a progressive intellectual understanding that culminates in the direct, mystical perception of Brahman. This systematic and rational approach prepares the contemplative mind for a profound experiential shift, demonstrating how a well-structured intellectual path can lead to ultimate spiritual revelation.

Nirvana and the Synthesis

The culmination comes in *Nirvana Darśanam*. Here, Guru celebrates the mystical state of complete liberation.

Sree Narayana Guru's use of Nirvāṇa as a concluding theme in his works, though more commonly associated with Buddhist canons, perfectly aligns with the ultimate goal of Vedantic philosophy. In this context, Nirvāṇa is synonymous with Mokṣa, or Final Liberation. It signifies the extinguishing of all suffering inherent in phenomenal existence, leading to a state beyond duality.

By emphasizing Nirvāṇa, Guru remains consistent with the customary trajectory of Advaita Vedanta, which seeks to extinguish the illusion of separateness and suffering through the realisation of ultimate oneness with the Absolute. This strategic choice

of terminology underscores the universal nature of liberation, transcending sectarian distinctions while deeply rooting the concept within the Advaitic framework of non-duality.

This liberation is not a place or a time-bound event. It is a condition of being - or rather, of pure, non-dual awareness. It is mukti, not merely an end, but a beginning of true seeing.

Finally, in Jnana-Karma-Samuchchaya Darśanam, Guru affirms that wisdom and action must go hand in hand. The mystic is not an escapist but a realised being living in the world.

The profound state of Nirvana can be experienced in two fundamental ways: as a living realisation during one's lifetime, often termed Jivanmukti, or as the complete cessation of the individual entity at the moment of death, referred to as Videhamukti.

When Nirvana is understood as the dissolution of the individual at death, a significant belief in Indian traditions posits a distinction between pure and impure Nirvana. Those who achieve pure Nirvana are believed to transcend the cycle of rebirth entirely, attaining ultimate freedom.

Thus, *Darshanamāla* is a manual of applied mysticism. Its beauty lies not only in its profound content but also in the symmetry of its structure and the evocative power of its verses.

Daivadasakam and Universal Mystical Prayer

Among Sree Narayana Guru's mystical works, *Daivadasakam* (Ten Verses to God) occupies a unique and beloved position. Unlike the structurally philosophical *Darshanamala* or the introspective depth of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, *Daivadasakam* is a compact prayer-poem composed in simple Malayalam, accessible to all, and

yet infused with profound mystic insight. Its universal appeal lies in how it gently guides readers - regardless of background or faith belief - into a contemplative awareness of the Divine as both personal protector and impersonal presence.

This prayer has been widely accepted across Kerala and beyond, sung in schools, gatherings, and spiritual centres as invocation. Its simplicity is deceptive - beneath the childlike appeal lies a mystic structure grounded in Advaita Vedanta, subtly affirming non-dualism, divine immanence, and surrender.

Structure and Thematic Flow of Daivadasakam

The prayer is composed in ten verses, each building upon the last in a thematic sequence:

Surrender to God as the supreme protector
Recognition of divine providence in daily life
Acknowledgment of life's journey through change
Understanding God as the guide and source
Identification with the cosmic scheme
Submission of all action to God's will
Renunciation of self-will and ego
Desire for unity with the Divine
Call for the grace to serve all beings
Celebration of victory of the God's mercy

The movement is from the outer to the inner, from seeking help to surrender, and finally to identification with the universal Self. It mirrors the inner transformation described in Guru's other mystical works, but in a more emotive, prayerful tone.

God as the Guide Through the Ocean of Change

One of the central mystical metaphors in *Daivadasakam* is that of life as a voyage

across an ocean, with God as the captain of a steamship. This modern image captures the constant flux of the world (*samsara*) and the need for divine guidance:

'Through the ocean of change and becoming, You are the greatest Captain, Guiding us safely to the other shore, Where all becomes still and free.'

Here, the world is transient and ever-moving, but within this change, the devotee seeks stability. The mystic understanding is that change is not to be feared, but navigated with inner awareness - the divine being the centre of stillness amid the storm.

This image is not only poetic but profoundly philosophical. Guru implies that moksha (liberation) is not escape from the world, but arriving at inner equanimity amid life's journey. The Captain is not just external - the deeper reading sees the Divine as the inner Self-guiding the ship of body and mind.

Mystic Vision of the Divine in All Things

Verse 5 presents a panoramic mystical vision where all elements of existence are identified with God:

'As ocean, wave, wind and depth - Let us within see the scheme: Of us, nescience, You, glory and You - All moving as one flowing stream.'

This verse compresses the core of non-dualism (*Advaita*). The world of appearances (waves and wind) and the unseen depth (the divine glory) are not separate — they form a continuous whole. Guru points to a vision of interconnectedness — a hallmark of mysticism. The 'scheme' here is not logical, but experiential: to see the One moving in all forms, including the illusory (*nescience*), is the mystic's gift.

The Ineffability and Poetic Expression: Guru, recognizing the limits of reason and

language in conveying the ultimate mystical experience, adeptly employed poetry as a vehicle for the ineffable. His compositions are not mere academic treatises; they are infused with a devotional fervor that arises from direct realization.

Crucially, Guru's profound mystical insights did not lead him to withdraw from the world into reclusive contemplation. Instead, his direct experience of universal unity fueled his tireless and rational efforts for social reform. His vision of 'one caste, one religion, one God for man' was not born from abstract philosophy alone, but from the experiential understanding that all beings are inherently divine and interconnected. This demonstrates how a deep mystical realization can provide the ethical imperative for rational action in the world, effectively bridging the gap between spiritual liberation and compassionate societal engagement. His life serves as an ultimate testament to the transformative power when the discerning mind of reason is infused with the unifying light of mysticism.

The poetic use of repetition and rhythm here evokes the rhythm of waves and breath. Aesthetically, it brings serenity; philosophically, it imparts insight.

Surrender, Service, and Non-Dual Fulfilment

As the prayer progresses, Guru shifts tone from description to deepening surrender. In verses 6–8, the devotee lets go of personal striving:

'May our every action be Your work, Our life lived as Your own will, And all our joy and pain accepted, With the calm of one who is still.'

This is karma yoga in poetic form — offering every action to the divine. This act of surrender dissolves ego, which Guru later identifies as the source of bondage.

The tone is neither fearful nor helpless. It is the gentle peace of one who has seen the futility of control and now flows with the Divine rhythm.

Verse 9 introduces a beautiful ethical-mystic vision:

'May we, in Your name, serve all, Loving each being as part of You. Let no selfish wish veil our hearts — Only the One, shining through.'

This is the fruition of mysticism — not withdrawal, but compassionate service. Guru reiterates here that true mystic vision sees God in all. Hence, *Daivadasakam* is not escapist; it is a call to live as a mystic in the world — acting with selflessness, love, and clarity.

The journey into ultimate truth is often described as both an intellectual quest and an experiential plunge. The relationship between reason and mysticism is not one of opposition, but rather a dynamic interplay where each enriches and completes the other. Reason, with its analytical prowess, acts as an indispensable precursor, meticulously clearing away conceptual illusions and refining the intellect to grasp subtle philosophical truths. It guides the seeker to the very frontier of the ineffable, providing a logical framework for understanding reality up to the point where logic itself must yield.

Mysticism, then, takes over at this frontier, offering direct, intuitive apprehension of ultimate reality. This unitive experience transcends the limitations of language and dualistic thought, providing profound insights that cannot be arrived at through rational deduction alone. However, these mystical insights, while ineffable in their raw form, can then profoundly inform and reshape rational understanding, leading to a more comprehensive and holistic worldview. They provide new premises, inspire new

interpretations, and infuse intellectual pursuits with a deeper, experiential meaning.

Sree Narayana Guru's profound insights, particularly on the concept of 'Arivu' (Knowledge/Consciousness), offer a compelling lens through which to understand the intricate relationship between reason and mysticism. While these two domains often appear diametrically opposed – reason seeking verifiable models through analysis, and mysticism pursuing direct, ineffable experience – Guru's teachings, as elucidated in texts like '*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*', demonstrate a masterful synthesis where reason becomes a vital precursor to mystical insight, and mystical experience elevates rational thought.

The verses from Guru's 'Arivu' present a profound philosophical exploration of the nature of 'Arivu' (Knowledge/Consciousness/ Self). While seemingly leaning into mysticism, a careful, logical analysis reveals a deep connectivity between reason and mysticism, where reason acts as a pathway to, and ultimately transcends into, mystical insight.

Here's how this connectivity is established through the verses:

1. Reason's Limitation and Transcendence (Verse 3):

அனிவினாக்கலிலுமாதே-
தரியா, மரியாததூங் விழங்குங்;
அனிவிலெழுங் கிளாவி-
அனிவாயீடுங்கவள்ளுமானாலும்.

The verse begins by stating, 'Without measure, knowledge / That which is unknown, shines forth as knowledge.' This immediately sets up a challenge to conventional reason. Reason, by its very nature, operates with measures, categories, and distinctions. It relies on sensory input and intellectual constructs. However, the Guru speaks of a knowledge that is *beyond* such measurements. This is where reason

hits its first limit.

The explanation clarifies this as 'knowledge that can be known without the measuring stick of sensory or other forms of knowledge.' This is not an irrational rejection of reason, but a logical deduction that if true knowledge is fundamental, it cannot be contingent on the very tools (sensory perception, intellect) that arise within it.

The mystical element enters with the analogy: 'As the dream arising in knowledge / Becomes knowledge itself, so it is everywhere.' A dream, though seemingly real within its context, is fundamentally a product of the dreamer's consciousness. When one awakens, the dream merges back into the knowing mind. Reason allows us to analyze the nature of a dream – its unreality outside the mind. This rational understanding then becomes a stepping stone to the mystical insight: if our waking reality is also a manifestation *within* this fundamental knowledge, then it too is not separate from it. Reason, by analyzing the dream analogy, helps to *apprehend* this mystical unity, even if it cannot fully *explain* it in dualistic terms.

2. The Logical Impossibility of Non-Knowledge (Verse 4):

அனிவினு நிறவுஞ்சனங்-
லாவிலூதுஞ்சதெண்டிருநீடுங்?
அனிவேதெனிஞ்சது வே-
யனியுங்கண்சிதெண்டிருநீடுங்?

This verse employs a powerful logical argument: 'If knowledge is fullness, / Then where could anything other than knowledge reside?' If knowledge is truly all-pervading ('நிறவு' - fullness, completeness), then by logical necessity, there can be no space or existence for anything *outside* of it. This is a deductive argument – if Premise A (Knowledge is fullness) is true, then Conclusion B (Nothing other than knowledge exists) must follow. Reason compels us to

acknowledge this.

The explanation states, ‘Only knowledge (the Self)... has an all-pervading existence. In that case, where could that which is not knowledge (the non-Self) exist? The non-Self has no existence.’ This is a purely logical consequence. If something occupies all space, nothing else can exist. This logical conclusion leads directly to a mystical understanding of non-duality (Advaita).

The second part, ‘Which is knowledge, and how can it go / And be known, where could it reside?’, further deepens this. Reason seeks to identify, categorize, and locate. But if knowledge is the fundamental reality, the seeker is the sought. This is a paradox that reason encounters when pushed to its limits. It is like asking where the ‘eye’ can see itself. The logical conclusion is that the ‘knower’ cannot be an ‘object’ to be known in the conventional sense. This logical impasse forces reason to transcend its own operational framework and embrace a mystical realization of identity.

3. The Inability to ‘Descend’ and the Unification (Verse 5):

അഡിവിലിരുന്നു കെടുന്നീ-
ലറിവാമെന്നാലിതെങ്ങിനോടും?
അഡിവിനേയറിയുന്നീലി-
അഡിയുനേരത്തു രണ്ടുമൊന്നായി.

Here, the Guru asserts, ‘Residing in knowledge, it does not perish; / If it is knowledge, then how can it descend?’ This is a logical consistency argument. If knowledge is fundamental and all-pervading, it cannot diminish or transform into something other than itself. If the world seems distinct from knowledge, it cannot have ‘descended’ out of knowledge to become something fundamentally different, because that would imply knowledge is not ‘fullness’ or is not unchanging. Reason would struggle to explain how ‘being’ could arise from ‘non-being’ or how pure knowledge could

spontaneously become its opposite.

The explanation reinforces this: ‘Knowledge is the all-pervading reality. It cannot descend from its status as knowledge and become something else.’ This reinforces the logical consistency of knowledge as the sole reality.

The mystical leap occurs with, ‘We don’t know knowledge (in this way), / But when known, the two become one.’ Our conventional reasoning perceives a world separate from the observer. This dualistic perception is a product of our limited rational framework. However, the verse proposes that when knowledge is ‘directly known,’ the perceived duality collapses. This direct knowing is not a result of intellectual dissection but an experiential, intuitive realization. Reason can prepare the ground by showing the inconsistencies of a dualistic worldview, leading the practitioner to seek this deeper, unifying understanding, which is inherently mystical. The logical journey, in a way, forces the individual to confront the limitations of their initial premise (duality) and look for a more encompassing truth.

4. The Pre-rational and Post-rational State (Verse 6):

അഡിയും മുൻപേതെന്നോ-
ലറിവല്ലാതൊന്നുമിങ്ങിരിപ്പീല;
അഡിവതിനേതത്തിരു-
ണ്ണിവെന്നാലോന്നുമിങ്ങു കാണ്ണമീല.

This verse challenges reason’s chronological framework: ‘Before knowing, what was there? / Nothing but knowledge exists here.’ Reason typically thinks in terms of cause and effect, origin and evolution. But if knowledge is fundamental, then before any ‘knowing’ (in the conventional sense of subject-object interaction), there was still only knowledge. This is a logical deduction that pre-empts any notion of a prior state or a creation *ex nihilo*.

The explanation states, ‘Since only knowledge exists before and after knowing, that knowledge is without attributes (lit. unknowing). That which is without attributes is also without limits.’ This is a logical conclusion: if it is all-encompassing and prior to any distinctions, it cannot possess specific attributes or limits.

The final line encapsulates the mystical culmination: ‘If it is knowledge, nothing is seen here.’ If everything is truly knowledge, then the distinct objects and subjects that our senses and intellect perceive as ‘something’ (different from ourselves) lose their independent reality. This is not a nihilistic statement but a profound non-dual realization. Reason, by dismantling the categories and distinctions that define our phenomenal world, logically leads to a state where such distinctions are no longer perceived as ultimately real. This ‘seeing nothing’ is not an absence but an experience of undifferentiated unity, a truly mystical insight achieved through the relentless application of logical inquiry into the nature of reality.

Guru’s ‘Arivu’ does not reject reason; rather, it uses a rigorous, almost mathematical, logical progression to demonstrate the limitations of conventional, dualistic reasoning. By pushing rational thought to its boundaries, it reveals inconsistencies in our ordinary perception and understanding. This logical process then opens the door to a mystical experience – a direct, non-dual realization where the distinction between the knower, the known, and knowledge itself dissolves. The connectivity lies in reason serving as the essential, disciplined path that, when followed diligently, transcends itself into the intuitive, all-encompassing realization of the mystical truth of ‘Arivu.’ It is a journey where logic, rather than being an antagonist, becomes a crucial guide to the realm of profound spiritual insight.

The text quickly transitions from observation to inquiry, posing a series of profound questions that reason alone struggles to answer. ‘What is this Arivu?’ ‘How are Arivu and known subjects related?’ ‘Is Arivu one or many?’ ‘Would this world exist without Arivu?’ ‘How can we know the nature of Arivu?’ These questions push the boundaries of empirical observation and analytical dissection. They delve into the very essence of existence and the nature of knowledge itself, hinting at a reality that transcends the subject-object divide inherent in rational thought. The text’s rhetorical query, ‘Does Arivu cease to exist like a decaying object?’ underscores the limitations of perceiving ‘Arivu’ through the same materialistic lens applied to the phenomenal world.

The pivotal shift occurs when the text declares that Guru’s answers to these questions are not ‘logical’ (yuktiyuktamāya) but ‘yogic’ (yogayuktamāya). This distinction is crucial. ‘Yogic’ implies an answer derived from direct, unmediated experience and a unified insight, characteristic of mysticism, rather than purely intellectual reasoning. Guru’s fundamental stance, as stated, is that ‘truth is one, and that is the Atman’. Furthermore, ‘the Guru has clarified in ‘Ātmopadeśa Śatakam’ that Atman is Arivu itself’. This directly connects ‘Arivu’ to Brahman or the ultimate reality, asserting that ‘Arivu’ is the foundational truth upon which everything else is based, and there is no other truth.

Here, the convergence becomes clear. Reason, through its relentless questioning and inability to find definitive answers within its own framework, leads the inquirer to the precipice of mystical understanding. The analytical process reveals the inherent paradoxes and uncertainties of the perceived world, prompting a shift from external observation to internal realization. Guru’s

‘yogic’ response, rooted in Advaita Vedanta, offers a holistic solution: the apparent problems and dualities are merely phenomena manifesting within the operations of this singular, underlying ‘Arivu’. The journey begins with reason’s exploration, exposing its limits, and culminates in the mystical realization of oneness, where the knower,

the known, and the act of knowing merge into the all-encompassing, non-dual ‘Arivu’. Thus, for Sree Narayana Guru, reason is not dismissed but is essential for preparing the ground, ultimately leading the seeker to the profound, unified embrace of mystical experience.

Recap

- ◆ Reason’s limits explored.
- ◆ Mystical insights revealed.
- ◆ Arivu: ultimate reality.
- ◆ Conventional knowledge: insufficient.
- ◆ Dream analogy: internal reality.
- ◆ Non-duality: logical outcome.
- ◆ Knower-known unity.
- ◆ Arivu: immutable, pervasive.
- ◆ Inquiry leads to unity.
- ◆ Pre-existence: pure Arivu.
- ◆ Attributeless: limitless.
- ◆ Perception of “nothing”: profound insight.

Objective Questions

1. What faculty explores knowledge beyond measure?
2. What kind of insight does reason ultimately lead to?
3. What is the fundamental, all-pervading reality?

4. What type of knowing operates without sensory input?
5. What state are dream experiences within?
6. What term describes the absence of the non-Self?
7. What happens to the seeker and the sought?
8. What is the nature of Arivu's transformation?
9. What state is achieved when two become one?
10. What existed before any conventional knowing?
11. What quality lacks attributes?
12. What dissolves upon ultimate realization?

Answers

1. Reason
2. Mystical
3. Arivu
4. Pure
5. Consciousness
6. Non-existence
7. Unify
8. Immutable
9. Unity
10. Arivu
11. Attributeless
12. Duality

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How does the Guru use rational questioning in Verse 3 to highlight the limitations of conventional knowledge and point towards a mystical understanding of ‘Arivu’?
2. Discuss the interplay between rational analysis and mystical insight when the Guru describes ‘Arivu’ as “without measure” and simultaneously shining forth as ‘unknown’ knowledge.
3. Analyze the logical argument presented in Verse 4 (“If knowledge is fullness, then where could anything other than knowledge reside?”) and explain how this rational deduction leads to a core mystical principle of non-duality.
4. How does the Guru use reason to challenge the dualistic perception of a separate ‘knower’ and ‘known’ in Verse 4, thereby opening the door to a mystical experience of identity?
5. Explain how the logical assertion that ‘Arivu’ cannot “descend” (Verse 5) forces a reconsideration of the world’s apparent separation from consciousness, bridging reason with a unitive vision.
6. In what ways does the concept of “when known, the two become one” (Verse 5) represent a mystical realization that transcends purely rational understanding, yet is informed by it?
7. How does Guru’s exploration of what existed “before knowing” (Verse 6) demonstrate a rational deconstruction of temporal causality, paving the way for a mystical insight into the timeless nature of ‘Arivu’?
8. Discuss how the logical conclusion that ‘Arivu’ is “without attributes” and “without limits” leads to the mystical perception of “nothing is seen here,” as described in Verse 6.
9. In Guru’s philosophy, how does the rigorous application of logical inquiry serve as a necessary precursor or pathway to the ultimate mystical realization of ‘Arivu’?
10. How does the poem ‘Arivu’ reconcile the intellectual demands of philosophical reason with the intuitive, experiential nature of mysticism?

11. Consider how Guru's emphasis on 'Arivu' as the fundamental reality provides a coherent framework for understanding both the rational and the mystical dimensions of existence.
12. Based on the verses, what role does a questioning mind play in the journey towards profound spiritual awakening in Guru's philosophy?





Mysticism in Janani Navaratna Manjari

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ analyze the Advaitic and mystical philosophy of “Janani Navaratna Manjari”:
- ◆ evaluate the poem’s unique blend of devotion, philosophy, and poetic form.
- ◆ identify the practical and transformative aspects of Guru’s mystical teachings
- ◆ discuss the social and historical significance of “Janani Navaratna Manjari”:

Prerequisites

Sree Narayana Guru’s “Janani Navaratna Manjari” is a beautiful hymn dedicated to the Divine Mother, a core figure in many spiritual traditions. Imagine it as a “Nine-Gem Garland” of verses, each a sparkling insight into the nature of reality. Composed by Guru at a sacred site, it overflows with a deep sense of divine inspiration. This poem is not just about praising a goddess; it is a profound exploration of mysticism. Guru sees the Mother not as a separate being, but as the ultimate, all-pervading Knowledge and Power from which everything originates. The poem invites us to realize that the world we see is like a dream or a shadow, and the true reality is this Divine Mother, pure consciousness. It is a prayer for inner merger, to dissolve our individual selves into this vast, joyous ocean of ultimate wisdom. Despite its deep philosophy, it is written with poetic grace, making complex ideas feel intuitive and deeply moving. It guides us to look beyond appearances and discover the divine within and as everything.

Among the Devi (Goddess) stotras of Sree Narayana Guru, *Janani Navaratna*

Manjari holds a very special significance. The title means “Nine-Gem Garland to the Mother,” and indeed the work consists of nine ślokas, each a jewel-like verse in praise of the Divine Mother (*Janani*). Guru perceives the Mother here as Ādi Parāśakti – the primordial power and primordial knowledge underlying all existence. The composition is known for its sweetness, calm, and profound depth, a characterization famously given by the poet-disciple Kumaran Asan. It was first published in 1909 in the journal *Vivekodaya*, Prof. G.Balakrishnan Nair wrote, it was composed on Chingam 26, 1084, on his birth day, after laying the foundation stone for Sivagiri Sarada Mutt.

The circumstances of its origin add charm to the work: it is believed that while Guru was resting at the spot where the Sarada (Saraswati) Temple in Sivagiri was later built, he was moved to compose these verses. He dictated the verses to his disciple Karuṇa Krishnanasan, who wrote them down (as recorded by Sri Kavila G. Gangadharan). This image of the Guru on a hill, spontaneously pouring out devotion to the Mother of Knowledge, gives the *Navaratna Manjari* an aura of Āveśa (divine inspiration). Indeed, the *poetic beauty flows effortlessly*, as if it sprang from the “inner lotus” of the Guru’s heart.

Keywords

Mysticism, Advaita Vedanta, Divine Mother, Maya, Chidakasha, Nada, Akhandanubhuti, Jñāna-Bhakti

Discussion

Janani Navaratna Manjari (Nine Jewels to the Mother)

Throughout *Janani Navaratna Manjari*, the devotee (Guru) envisions the Goddess as the supreme knowledge (Para Vidyā) and the supreme power (Para Śakti). There is a yearning expressed in these verses – the devotee longs to merge into the Mother, to dissolve into the original wisdom from which everything arises.

This is a highly philosophical prayer couched in devotional language. Guru refers to the concept of *tripuṭi* – the triad of subject, object, and process of knowing, which in Vedanta represents dualistic experience. He

says that from the One (Brahman) arose the many (the *tripuṭis*) and they became caught in *samsāra* (the ocean of worldly life). The devotee prays for the blessing to reach the *nāda bhūmi* (the realm of primal sound or vibration), a mystical state where the mind dissolves into the original *śabda Brahman* (sound-form of Brahman) and all dualities vanish. In that ultimate absorption, there is only *Janani* (the Mother as pure consciousness) dancing. The imagery of dance and ocean here is noteworthy – even as unity is achieved, it is portrayed as a joyous dance of consciousness rather than a static silence. This aligns with a dynamic view of the ultimate reality: the Mother’s play

continues, but it is understood as non-dual.

Throughout the *Navaratna Manjari*, Guru emphasizes that everything in this world, including the elements, are insubstantial – mere appearances in consciousness. He extols the Goddess as the sole reality upholding existence. One verse elaborates that all experiences related to the sense organs (sound, touch, form, taste, smell, and even speech) originate and end in Her, the chidākāśa (the luminous space of consciousness). He asks rhetorically: “Her greatness, O Mother, who can fully know it? Who can adequately praise it?” – implying the ineffability of the Supreme Mother.

Guru drives home a profound Vedantic point: *in reality, nothing in this world truly exists on its own*. Upon close inquiry, every object is just a form of knowledge in awareness, and the only true existence is the Goddess as Knowledge itself. All else is Māyā – appearances. Knowledge (consciousness) is pure radiance (prakāśa), and no words suffice to describe its glory. In declaring the Goddess as “*the vast, all-encompassing luminous space itself*”, Guru is identifying Her with Brahman (which in Vedanta is often described as ananta ākāśa, infinite space of consciousness).

The tone of *Janani Navaratna Manjari* is devotional yet contemplative. The devotee’s voice is full of longing – not for worldly boons, but for liberation and union with the Divine Mother. It exemplifies the concept of jñāna-bhakti (devotion informed by knowledge). Each verse can be seen as a meditation on some aspect of the Mother’s role as the ultimate reality and the devotee’s aspiration to transcend duality. In terms of poetic form, the work uses classical Sanskrit meter (likely a different meter for each verse, as is common in such garlands) and weaves together long, flowing compounds – giving it a scholarly flair. As Guru’s own heart was immersed in these ideas, the verses do not

come off as dry philosophy; instead, they have an almost hypnotic beauty. Kumaran Asan’s description “sweet, calm, and profoundly deep” is apt – *Navaratna Manjari* does not have dramatic or violent imagery but flows like a gentle, deep river of nectar. The calmness likely reflects the śānta rasa (peaceful flavour) which is considered the highest aesthetic mood, appropriate for depicting the experience of the Infinite.

This hymn also had a social message by virtue of its content and usage. Dedicated to the Divine Mother of all, it could be sung by anyone irrespective of caste or gender.

This study, drawing heavily from the insightful interpretations of Muni Narayana Prasad, aims to facilitate an easier assimilation of the profound content within “*Janani Navaratna Manjari*.”

ഒന്നായ മാമതിയിൽ നിന്നായിരും ത്രിപുടി
വന്നായു തരു മതി മറ-
ന്നനാഡിയിൽ പ്രിയമുയർന്നാഡലും കടലി-
ലുംനായി വീണു വലയും
എന്നായെങ്ങും ഗതി പെരും നാദഭൂമിയില-
മർന്നാവിരാഡ പടരും
പ്രിനാഡിയിൽ ത്രിപുടിയെന്നാണും പടി
കലർന്നാറിടുന്നു ജനനീ?

Mother, you are the singular, supreme Knowledge, the primordial cause of this entire cosmos, including myself. From you, countless triads (tripudis) first emerged. I am but one facet within a single such triad. Upon the immediate emergence of these triads, I forgot my true, ultimate nature. This forgetfulness led me to seek pleasure in objects of desire such as food, immersing myself in them, which has consequently plunged me into a sea of suffering. This describes my current predicament.

My mind yearns for liberation from this state, aspiring to attain the highest spiritual realm. This ultimate state of liberation manifests as the ground where you yourself

become the form of primordial sound (Nada). It is there that I wish to abide eternally. By dwelling in that state, I will perceive you, the embodiment of effulgent light, pervading everywhere. This light, ever-present, is also the central Knowledge, the very core (navel) of all existence. When shall I be able to melt into that core of consciousness, where all triads dissolve, and find ultimate peace and coolness, freeing myself from all sorrows?

This verse of Narayana Guru's "Janani Navaratna Manjari" is a profound mystical prayer that encapsulates the human condition, the nature of reality, and the path to liberation, all addressed to the Divine Mother as supreme Knowledge.

This verse is a concise yet comprehensive summary of Advaita Vedanta and the Bhakti (devotional) path to liberation, presented as a deeply personal plea.

The Divine as Singular, Supreme Knowledge (Advaita Foundation): The opening lines "Mother, you are the singular, supreme Knowledge, the primordial cause of this entire cosmos, including myself" immediately establish the non-dualistic (Advaitic) premise. The ultimate reality is identified not as a personal God distinct from creation, but as pure, unified Knowledge or Consciousness (Brahman/Atman). This "singular, supreme Knowledge" is the *adi karana* (primordial cause) of everything, emphasizing its immanence and transcendence. For the mystic, recognizing this oneness is the fundamental insight that dissolves the illusion of separation.

The Emergence of Triads (Tripudis) and the Fall into Maya: The concept of "countless triads (tripudis)" emerging from this singular Knowledge is crucial. A "tripudi" typically refers to the triad of knower, known, and knowing (Jnata, Jneya, Jnana), or experiencer, experienced, and experience (Bhokta, Bhogya, Bhoga). This signifies the

very act of manifestation and differentiation from the non-dual. The moment these distinctions arise, the individual 'I' (the facet of a triad) "forgot my true, ultimate nature." This "forgetfulness" is the onset of spiritual ignorance (avidya/maya), leading to identification with the limited, differentiated self and the pursuit of external pleasures ("objects of desire such as food"). This then "plunged me into a sea of suffering," directly linking ignorance and attachment to sorrow (dukkha). This mystical narrative explains the cosmic "fall" from unity to duality and suffering.

Liberation through Nada and Absorption into Light: The yearning for liberation and the aspiration to "attain the highest spiritual realm" is central. The path is explicitly defined: it is the "ground where you yourself become the form of primordial sound (Nada)." Nada, in esoteric traditions, is the subtle, primal vibration from which all creation proceeds. Abiding eternally in this Nada state is a mystical practice, often associated with Kundalini Yoga or Laya Yoga, where the mind dissolves into the cosmic sound. This leads to perceiving the Mother as "the embodiment of effulgent light, pervading everywhere." Light is a universal mystical symbol for pure consciousness, illumination, and truth. This experience signifies the dissolution of the ego and the realization of omnipresent, non-dual consciousness.

The "Chin-nabhi" and Dissolution of Triads: The ultimate goal is to "melt into that core of consciousness, where all triads dissolve, and find ultimate peace and coolness, freeing myself from all sorrows." This "Chin-nabhi" (Chin = consciousness, Nabhi = navel/core) is the central pivot or source of all consciousness. It is the point of complete return to the non-dual. Here, the "tripudis" (all dualistic distinctions of knower/known, experiencer/experienced) are transcended and dissolved. This dissolution

brings “ultimate peace and coolness,” representing the cessation of all mental agitation, suffering, and the burning desires of the ego. This is the mystical state of moksha or nirvana, a merging back into the source, free from the cycle of suffering. The prayer is a fervent longing for this ultimate union.

2. ഇല്ലാത മായയിടുമുല്ലാസമാനുമറി-
വല്ലാതെയില്ലനിലനും
കല്ലാഴിയും കനല്ലുമല്ലാതെ ശുന്നമതു-
മെല്ലാമൊരാദിയിരിവാം;
തല്ലായലവം പരകിലില്ലാരണം ക്രിയകൾ
മല്ലാടുകില്ല മതിയീ-
സല്ലാഭമാനുമതിയെല്ലാവരും തിരയു-
മുല്ലായലബ്രോധജനനാം!

Mother, you are the ultimate goal for all truth-seekers, a pure embodiment of consciousness untouched by any blemish. In ultimate reality, this entire universe, which appears as if it truly exists, is merely an emanation from you, caused by the inherently non-existent power of Maya. The sole truth within this cosmos is you, in your form as pure knowledge. Though the universe is conventionally considered to be composed of the five elements – earth, water, fire, air, and ether – these fundamental elements are, in essence, nothing but manifestations of that single, primordial Knowledge.

When the simplicity of this Knowledge and the ease with which it can be apprehended are fully realized and explained, the rituals prescribed in the Vedas will be understood as having no intrinsic value. Furthermore, the intellect will cease its oscillation between ‘this is right’ and ‘that is right.’ Such pure Consciousness is indeed the ultimate reality (Satvastu); that is you. For me, there is no other goal than to attain you.

This verse focuses on discerning the real from the unreal, a core pursuit in many mystical traditions, particularly Advaita Vedanta.

The Nature of Maya and the Illusory Universe:

The verse explicitly states that the universe, despite its appearance, is “merely an emanation from you, caused by the inherently non-existent power of Maya.” This is a fundamental mystical concept. Maya is not a separate entity but the creative, illusive power of Brahman (the ultimate reality). It is “inherently non-existent” in the sense that it has no independent reality apart from Brahman; it is a superimposition. For the mystic, understanding Maya is crucial to prevent mistaking the ephemeral, phenomenal world for the ultimate truth. The universe is a *pratibhasa* (appearance) that seems real due to Maya, but its “sole truth” is “pure knowledge” (the Mother). This encourages the seeker to look beyond superficial appearances to the underlying reality.

The Five Elements as Manifestations of Knowledge:

The text clarifies that even the fundamental building blocks of the universe, the “five elements – earth, water, fire, air, and ether,” are “nothing but manifestations of that single, primordial Knowledge.” This reinforces the principle of monism or non-dualism (Advaita). It means that there is no fundamental division between matter and spirit; all material existence ultimately arises from and is permeated by the same singular consciousness. For the mystic, this dissolves the perceived dichotomy between the physical world and the divine, leading to the realization that everything is sacred and interconnected.

Transcendence of Rituals and Mental Oscillation:

A powerful mystical insight is conveyed by the statement: “When the simplicity of this Knowledge and the ease with which it can be apprehended are fully realized and explained, the rituals prescribed in the Vedas will be understood as having no intrinsic value. Furthermore, the intellect will cease its oscillation between ‘this is right’ and ‘that is right.’” This emphasizes

that true spiritual realization transcends outward observances and intellectual debates. Once the simple, foundational truth of pure Knowledge is intuitively grasped, the elaborate external practices, though potentially useful at earlier stages, become redundant. The “oscillation” of the intellect, characterized by doubt and dualistic thinking, also ceases, leading to a state of mental clarity, peace, and unwavering certainty—a hallmark of mystical realization.

The Divine as Ultimate Goal and Unblemished Consciousness: The verse begins by identifying the Mother as “the ultimate goal for all truth-seekers” and a “pure embodiment of consciousness untouched by any blemish.” This reiterates the divine as the supreme aspiration for anyone on a spiritual path. The “unblemished consciousness” signifies its purity, immutability, and freedom from all limitations and imperfections that characterize the phenomenal world. The concluding declaration, “Such pure Consciousness is indeed the ultimate reality (Satvastu); that is you. For me, there is no other goal than to attain you,” encapsulates the profound devotion and singular focus of the mystic, where the entire spiritual journey is directed towards realizing this ultimate, blemishless truth.

3. ഉണ്ടായി മാറുമരിവുണ്ടായി മുന്നമിതു-
കണ്ണാടുമണ്ണഗമകവും-
കൊണ്ടായിരംതരമിരുണ്ടാശയം പ്രതി ചു-
രുണ്ടാ മഹാസ്തിൽ മറയും;
കണ്ണാലുമീനിലയിലുണ്ടാകയില്ലിവ-
വബന്ധാനുഭൂതിയിലെഴും
തണ്ടാരിൽ വീണ്ടും മധുവുണ്ടാരമിക്കുമൊരു
വണ്ണാണും സുരി സുകൃതി.

Mother, within you, the singular Knowledge, countless experiences arise, transform, and then dissolve, manifesting as the variegated cosmos. It is through this process that we, too, come into being. Among these manifested forms, the ‘experiencer’

(bhokta) perceives another manifested form, the ‘experienced’ (bhogya), mistaking it for truth and the source of happiness. This delusion leads to a relentless striving, both physically and mentally, to possess these objects of desire. Each such desire and subsequent effort, however, further obscures the pure, inherent nature of the Knowledge that is our true reality. Every new sensory experience, and the impressions (samskaras) it creates, progressively conditions this Knowledge. Yet, ultimately, all these conditioned manifestations will return to their source – the pure, unconditioned Knowledge – and dissolve into that causal truth.

Merely intellectually comprehending that such is the nature of life does not, however, bring about the profound fulfilment of knowing what truly needs to be known. That fulfilment is reserved for the truly blessed sage (suri sukrti), who, like a bee, enters the calyx of a lotus blossom blooming in the pond of unbroken experience (akhandanubhuti), partaking of its nectar and experiencing ceaseless bliss.

This verse articulates the Advaitic perspective on creation, the nature of suffering, and the path to ultimate liberation, emphasizing the crucial distinction between conceptual understanding and direct, unitive experience.

The Play of Knowledge and the Illusion of Duality: The verse begins by reiterating the core premise: “within you, the singular Knowledge, countless experiences arise, transform, and then dissolve, manifesting as the variegated cosmos.” This describes the Lila (divine play) of Brahman, where the unmanifested singular Knowledge (Mother) seemingly differentiates itself into the diverse universe. The emergence of the ‘experiencer’ (bhokta) and ‘experienced’ (bhogya) signifies the birth of duality and the individual ego (Ahamkara). Mystically,

this ‘play’ is a spontaneous emanation of the divine, but for the deluded individual, it becomes a source of entanglement.

The Cycle of Desire, Obscuration, and Suffering: The core of human suffering is intricately laid out: the bhokta “mistak[es] it [the bhogya] for truth and the source of happiness,” leading to “relentless striving” and “further obscur[ing] the pure, inherent nature of the Knowledge.” This describes the cycle of samsara, driven by ignorance (avidya) and desire (kama). Each desire and action creates new impressions (samskaras) that “progressively condition this Knowledge,” meaning they veil the true, unconditioned Self, deepening the illusion of individuality and separateness. This is a crucial mystical insight: our actions driven by attachment don’t just affect our outer life but fundamentally obscure our inner reality, trapping us in suffering.

Return to Source and the Limits of Intellect: The verse offers hope by stating that “all these conditioned manifestations will return to their source – the pure, unconditioned Knowledge – and dissolve into that causal truth.” This reaffirms the ultimate non-duality and the inevitability of dissolution back into Brahman, akin to waves returning to the ocean. However, a critical distinction is then made: “Merely intellectually comprehending that such is the nature of life does not, however, bring about the profound fulfilment of knowing what truly needs to be known.” This is a central point of mystical philosophy. Intellectual understanding (jnana) can outline the path, but it cannot deliver the direct experience of liberation. True knowing transcends conceptualization; it is a state of being, not just knowing about.

Akhandanubhuti: The Unbroken Experience of Bliss: The verse then describes who truly achieves this fulfilment: “the truly blessed sage (suri sukriti), who, like

a bee, enters the calyx of a lotus blossom blooming in the pond of unbroken experience (akhandanubhuti), partaking of its nectar and experiencing ceaseless bliss.”

- ◆ “**Akhandanubhuti**” (unbroken experience): This is the key mystical term, referring to a non-dual, continuous, and boundless experience of reality, free from all fragmentation, duality, and interruption. It is not an experience of *something* but a state of being in pure consciousness.
- ◆ **Lotus and Bee Metaphor:** The metaphor of the bee (the sage) entering the lotus (akhandanubhuti) and partaking of nectar (bliss) beautifully conveys the direct, immersive, and blissful nature of this realization. The bee does not just observe the lotus; it becomes one with its essence to extract its very life-force (nectar). This signifies the ultimate goal of mysticism: a complete, unitive absorption into the divine, resulting in “ceaseless bliss” (Ananda) that is not transient but eternal. This final image powerfully contrasts the cycle of desire and suffering with the ultimate freedom and joy found in direct, unbroken experience.

- 4 ആരാധകിൽ തിരകൾ നീരയിടുന്നു, ഫണി-
നാരാധകിലുന്നു, കുടവും
പാരാധകിലുന്നതിനു നേരാധകിലുന്നുലക-
മോരായ്ക്കിലുണ്ടവിലവും,
വേരായ നിർക്കണ്ണലിലാരാധനം തരണ-
മാരാലിതിനൊരു വരു
നേരാധി വന്നിടുക, വേരാരുമെല്ല ഗതി
ഹോ! രാജയോഗജനനീ!

Mother, when one truly contemplates, it becomes clear that the truth in a wave is merely water. Similarly, the snake perceived in a rope is not real; only the rope itself is. And the form of a pot is ultimately nothing

but clay. The state of this world is precisely analogous: what is seen is not the ultimate reality; you alone are the truth. As long as one fails to understand this truth through inquiry, the world will continue to appear as it is.

Oh Mother, the progenitor of Raja Yoga, you are indeed the fundamental cause of all existence. My deepest desire is to approach you intimately and offer worship at your feet. The boon I seek from you is precisely this ability. To grant it, you need do nothing more than reveal yourself to me directly. I have no other goal than to attain you, and there is no path to achieving this save for you yourself.

This verse is a classic Advaitic exposition, using well-known analogies to illustrate the concept of Maya and the non-dual nature of reality, transitioning into a plea for divine grace for direct perception.

Illustrating Maya through Analogies:
The verse employs three classic Advaita Vedanta analogies:

- ◆ **Wave and Water:** “The truth in a wave is merely water.” The wave has a name and form, appears distinct, and seems to move independently, but its essential reality is nothing but water. This symbolizes that the diverse, changing universe (wave) is ultimately identical with the unchanging, singular Brahman (water).
- ◆ **Rope and Snake:** “The snake perceived in a rope is not real; only the rope itself is.” This illustrates superimposition (adhyasa) – mistaking one thing for another due to ignorance. The fear and actions related to the “snake” are real, but the snake itself is illusory. Similarly, the world appears real due to

ignorance, but its underlying reality is Brahman.

- ◆ **Pot and Clay:** “The form of a pot is ultimately nothing but clay.” The pot, with its specific function and form, is temporary; its fundamental substance is clay. This highlights that all forms in the universe are transient manifestations of a singular, enduring substance – the Divine Mother, or pure Knowledge. Mystically, these analogies serve to dismantle the illusion of a separate, independently existing world, guiding the mind to discern the underlying truth.

The Divine Mother as the Sole Reality:

The culmination of these analogies is the assertion: “The state of this world is precisely analogous: what is seen is not the ultimate reality; you alone are the truth.” This is the central Advaitic tenet: Brahman (here, the Divine Mother as pure Knowledge) is the only reality. The world’s appearance is due to Maya, and “As long as one fails to understand this truth through inquiry, the world will continue to appear as it is.” This emphasizes the role of *vichara* (inquiry/ discernment) in spiritual awakening. Without this inquiry, the illusion persists.

The Mother as Progenitor of Raja Yoga and Source of Existence: Addressing the Mother as “the progenitor of Raja Yoga” links her to a path focused on mental control, meditation, and direct realization. Raja Yoga aims to still the mind to perceive reality as it is, and here, the Mother is its very origin and guiding force. By stating “you are indeed the fundamental cause of all existence,” the verse reinforces her role as Brahman, the *adi karana* (primordial cause).

Prayer for Direct Revelation and Exclusive Devotion: The concluding lines articulate a deeply mystical aspiration: “My

deepest desire is to approach you intimately and offer worship at your feet. The boon I seek from you is precisely this ability. To grant it, you need do nothing more than reveal yourself to me directly. I have no other goal than to attain you, and there is no path to achieving this save for you yourself."

- ◆ **Intimate Worship:** This is a plea for profound, unmediated connection, beyond ritual.
- ◆ **Direct Revelation (Pratyaksha Anubhuti):** The seeker asks for the Mother to "reveal yourself to me directly." This is the highest form of mystical experience – a direct, unmediated vision or realization of the divine, not dependent on external means or intermediaries.
- ◆ **Exclusive Path:** "I have no other goal than to attain you, and there is no path to achieving this save for you yourself" expresses supreme devotion (Para Bhakti) and surrender. It implies that the Divine itself is the goal, the means, and the path, reiterating the non-dual truth that the seeker's ultimate reality is identical with the Divine. It is a powerful statement of ultimate dependence on divine grace for enlightenment.

5. മേലായ മുലമതിയാലാവൃതം ജനനി!
നീ ലാസ്യമാടി വിടുമോ-
കീലാലവായനലകോലാഹലം ഭുവന-
മാലാപമാത്രമവിലോ;
കാലാദിയായ മൃദുനൃലാലെ നേരുമേരാര
ലീലാപടം ഭവതിമെയ്-
മേലാകെ മുട്ടുമതിനാലാരുമുള്ളതിരി-
വീലാഗമാത്രനിലയേ!

Mother, this cosmos, composed of various combinations of the five elements, is but a visible manifestation, a part of the expressive light emanating from your

graceful, dance-like movements (lasya). When one comprehends that all this is merely the creative prowess (nrutta-vaibhavam) of you, the primordial Knowledge, the entire world dissolves into that very Knowledge. Subsequently, the reality of the universe exists solely as a conceptual construct, in mere utterance. Your true nature, however, remains veiled by a dancer's costume woven from the incredibly subtle threads of time and space, which are themselves the very conditions for cosmic manifestation. Oh, you who have the Upanishads as your dwelling place, because the universe resides within you, and you, in turn, are concealed within the very conditions through which the universe is known, no one perceives the ultimate, non-dual truth.

This verse employs the powerful metaphor of divine dance to articulate the relationship between Brahman (Knowledge), Maya, and the manifested universe, highlighting the inherent non-duality that remains unperceived due to the veiling power.

The Universe as Divine Dance (Lasya Lila): The opening lines "this cosmos... is but a visible manifestation, a part of the expressive light emanating from your graceful, dance-like movements (lasya)" present the universe as the Mother's Lila or divine play. 'Lasya' denotes a soft, graceful dance, suggesting that creation is not a strenuous effort but a joyful, spontaneous emanation of the divine. The "expressive light" (bhavaprakasha) implies that the universe is a manifestation of divine consciousness and its inherent qualities. Mystically, this perspective transforms the mundane into the sacred, seeing all phenomena as movements in a grand cosmic dance of the Divine.

Dissolution into Primordial Knowledge:

The verse states, "When one comprehends that all this is merely the creative prowess (nrutta-vaibhavam) of you, the primordial Knowledge, the entire world dissolves into

that very Knowledge." This highlights the liberating power of Jnana (knowledge/wisdom). Upon realizing the true nature of reality as the "creative prowess" of the primordial Knowledge, the perceived solidity and independent existence of the world dissipate. This is not a physical dissolution but a cognitive one – the illusion of a separate universe ceases to hold sway for the enlightened. "The reality of the universe exists solely as a conceptual construct, in mere utterance," meaning its empirical reality becomes merely a name and form (nama-rupa), lacking ultimate truth.

Maya as the Veiling Costume: A central mystical point is the concept of Maya as a "dancer's costume woven from the incredibly subtle threads of time and space."

- ◆ **"Dancer's costume":** This metaphor extends the Lila theme. Just as a costume obscures the dancer's true identity while enabling the performance, Maya creates the illusion of a separate, temporal, and spatial universe, thereby veiling the true, timeless, and spaceless nature of the Divine Mother.
- ◆ **"Threads of time and space":** Time (Kala) and Space (Desha) are presented as the fundamental constituents of this illusory costume. They are not absolute realities but subtle constructs of Maya, which condition our perception of the universe. Mystically, this implies that transcending the limitations of time and space is key to perceiving the unconditioned reality.

The Unperceived Non-Dual Truth and Upanishadic Dwelling: The verse concludes by stating that "no one perceives the ultimate, non-dual truth" because "the universe resides

within you, and you, in turn, are concealed within the very conditions through which the universe is known." This is the paradox of Maya: the divine is both the substratum of the universe and hidden by the very framework (time, space, perception) that makes the universe comprehensible. The phrase "Oh, you who have the Upanishads as your dwelling place" reinforces that the ultimate, non-dual truth is revealed in the profound philosophical insights of the Upanishads, yet even there, it points beyond mere words to a direct, unitive experience that transcends the dualistic perception inherent in ordinary knowledge. The ultimate non-dual truth (Advaita) remains unperceived due to the powerful veiling effect of Maya.

6. മീനായതും ഭവതി മാനായതും ഒന്നി
 നീ നാഗവും നഗവഗം-
 താനായതും ധര തദി നാരിയും നരങ്ങ-
 മാ നാകവും നരകവും
 നീ നാമരൂപമതിൽ നാനാവിധപ്രക്യതി-
 മാനായി നിന്മിയുമീ-
 നാനായതും ഭവതി ഫേ നാദരൂപിനിയ
 ഫോ! നാടകം നിബിലവും!

Mother, you who embody the pure essence of Knowledge as primordial sound (Nada), it is your very being that has assumed the forms of the fish and the deer. You have likewise manifested as the snake, the mountains, and the birds. This entire Earth, and all the rivers flowing within it, are also none other than you. You exist as both woman and man; you are both heaven and hell. Indeed, everything is you. You are also the names and forms that enable us to differentiate between all things. I possess an inner nature that allows me to continuously perceive these diverse cosmic phenomena, with their myriad names and forms, in their distinct ways. Yet, this very 'I' is also you. You alone have unfolded as this entire universe and as myself. What an astonishment this is! Everything is merely a facet of the expressive dance you perform!

This verse is a profound articulation of the Advaitic principle of Brahman being the sole reality, manifested as the entire universe and the individual self, emphasizing the concept of Lila (divine play).

Divine Immanence and All-Pervasiveness (Panentheism): The repeated affirmation "it is your very being that has assumed the forms of..." and "You are also..." followed by an exhaustive list of disparate entities (fish, deer, snake, mountains, birds, Earth, rivers, woman, man, heaven, hell) powerfully conveys the concept of divine immanence. The Mother, as primordial Knowledge (Nada), is not just the creator but is *constituent* of all creation. This is a panentheistic view where God is both in everything and transcends everything. For the mystic, this dissolves the sacred-profane dichotomy; every aspect of existence, from the lowest to the highest, is seen as a direct manifestation of the divine. This vision cultivates reverence for all life and phenomena.

The Divine as Nada (Primordial Sound): The address "Mother, you who embody the pure essence of Knowledge as primordial sound (Nada)" highlights the esoteric significance of Nada. In many mystical traditions, Nada is the unmanifested, subtle vibration from which all manifest creation proceeds. It is the first stirring of consciousness into form. Identifying the Mother with Nada means she is the fundamental, vibrational reality underlying all names and forms, accessible through inner listening and meditative practices.

Unity in Diversity (Nama-Rupa): The verse acknowledges the world of "names and forms that enable us to differentiate between all things." This points to the empirical reality of differentiation. However, it immediately transcends this by stating, "You are also the names and forms..." This means that even the categories and distinctions we perceive

are ultimately the Divine's own expression. The mystic seeks to see beyond the apparent distinctions to the underlying unity.

The Oneness of Self and Cosmos with the Divine: The crucial mystical realization culminates in the lines: "I possess an inner nature that allows me to continuously perceive these diverse cosmic phenomena... Yet, this very 'I' is also you. You alone have unfolded as this entire universe and as myself." This is the core Advaitic realization of "Tat Tvam Asi" (That Thou Art). The individual 'I' (the perceiver) and the entire perceived universe are ultimately identical with the Divine Mother. The "astonishment" expressed conveys the wonder and awe of this profound recognition, shattering the illusion of a separate ego and a separate world.

Everything as Divine Play (Lila): The concluding declaration, "Everything is merely a facet of the expressive dance you perform!" reaffirms the concept of Lila. The entire universe, with all its diversity, interactions, and even the existence of the individual self, is not a serious, karmic burden but a joyful, spontaneous "dance" or "drama" of the Divine. For the mystic, understanding life as Lila alleviates suffering, fosters detachment, and allows for joyful participation in existence, recognizing the inherent playfulness of the ultimate reality. This perspective transforms the seeker's relationship with the world from one of struggle to one of participation in a divine performance.

7. എൻപാപമെ

അവിനൊരോബായിട്ടുന്നറിവു
നിന്റപാദതാരിലെഴുമെ-
സ്ത്രപാണ്ണു മാർവിയോരിരുംപാം മനം ധനുത-
ഹംഭാവിയാണു വിജയി
അംബാ തരുന്നു വിജയം പാപപകിലമ-
ഹം ഭാനമാകുമതിനൊൽ
വർണ്ണാരമാർന്ന തനുവും ഭാനമാമുലക-
വും ഭാനമാകുമവിലു

Mother, I am tainted by the sin of ignorance. The arrow required to pierce and destroy this sin is Knowledge itself. My deep love and devotion for your lotus feet constitute the bowstring. My mind, as firm as iron, serves as the bow for this spiritual battle. One who constantly contemplates the principle of ‘Aham’ (the Self) emerges victorious in this conflict. Mother, it is you who grants this victory and bestows your blessings.

Thus, when Knowledge becomes accessible to me through your grace, I will discover that what I perceived as myself, tainted by sin, is in reality nothing but pure Knowledge. Simultaneously, I will realize that this gross body, which seemed to be the limiting condition of my individual existence, is also merely a manifest expression of that same Knowledge. Furthermore, I will comprehend that this entire universe is nothing but a radiant manifestation (Chidvilasa) of that singular Knowledge.

This verse employs the metaphor of a spiritual war to describe the process of liberation, where the devotee's internal faculties are weaponized by devotion and blessed by divine grace to achieve the ultimate non-dual realization.

Sin as Ignorance and Knowledge as the Weapon: The verse immediately identifies “sin” (papa) not as a moral transgression in a conventional sense, but fundamentally as “ignorance” (ajnana). This is a core mystical insight: the root of all suffering and perceived impurity is the lack of true knowledge of one's real nature. Consequently, “The arrow required to pierce and destroy this sin is Knowledge itself.” This means that intellectual understanding alone, or external rituals, are insufficient; it is the penetrating power of true, experiential Knowledge (Jnana) that obliterates ignorance. This positions knowledge as the ultimate purifying and liberating force.

◆ **Devotion, Mind, and Self-Inquiry as Instruments of Battle:** The metaphor continues by describing the components of this spiritual archery: “My deep love and devotion for your lotus feet constitute the bowstring. My mind, as firm as iron, serves as the bow for this spiritual battle.”

◆ **Devotion (Prema/Bhakti):** Intense love and devotion for the divine (symbolized by the lotus feet) provide the power and tension to propel the arrow of Knowledge. This emphasizes that knowledge without devotion can be dry; devotion infuses it with spiritual energy.

◆ **Firm Mind:** A mind “as firm as iron” signifies a disciplined, unwavering intellect and will, capable of focusing intensely on the target. This points to the importance of concentration and mental mastery, often developed through yogic practices, in the spiritual journey.

‘Aham’ Contemplation: “One who constantly contemplates the principle of ‘Aham’ (the Self) emerges victorious in this conflict.” ‘Aham’ here refers to the inquiry into the nature of the ‘I’ – the fundamental principle of self-inquiry (Atma Vichara), a cornerstone of Advaita Vedanta. This practice directly probes the source of the ego and transcends its limitations. The battle is internal, against the false identification with the limited self.

Divine Grace as the Grantor of Victory: Crucially, even with these potent instruments, “Mother, it is you who grants this victory and bestows your blessings.” This highlights the indispensable role of divine grace (Anugraha/Kripa) in achieving liberation. While the seeker must make effort, the ultimate breakthrough is a gift from the

divine. It implies that true knowledge is not merely an intellectual acquisition but a divine revelation.

The Ultimate Non-Dual Realization (Chidvilasa): The fruits of this victory, granted by grace, are profoundly mystical: “when Knowledge becomes accessible to me through your grace, I will discover that what I perceived as myself, tainted by sin, is in reality nothing but pure Knowledge. Simultaneously, I will realize that this gross body... is also merely a manifest expression of that same Knowledge. Furthermore, I will comprehend that this entire universe is nothing but a radiant manifestation (Chidvilasa) of that singular Knowledge.”

- ◆ **Dissolution of False Self:** The realization that the “tainted” individual self is “nothing but pure Knowledge” is the direct experience of Atman-Brahman identity – the core of Advaita. The illusion of a separate, sinful ego vanishes.
- ◆ **Body as Divine Manifestation:** The body, previously seen as a limiting factor, is now recognized as “merely a manifest expression of that same Knowledge,” elevating it to sacred status as part of the divine play.
- ◆ **Universe as ‘Chidvilasa’:** The ultimate expansion of this realization is that “this entire universe is nothing but a radiant manifestation (Chidvilasa) of that singular Knowledge.” ‘Chidvilasa’ means the joyful play or expansion of consciousness. This is a unitive vision where all of existence, in its myriad forms, is seen as the dynamic expression of the one, supreme consciousness, free from the duality of self/other, pure/impure, and matter/spirit.

This vision liberates the mystic from all suffering, as everything is recognized as the divine’s own radiant self.

8. സത്തായി നിന്നുപരി ചിത്തായി രഭു-
മൊരു മുത്തായി മുന്നുമറിയും
ഹൃത്തായി നിന്നതിനു വിത്തായി വിശ്വാസു മ-
രുത്തായി ദ്യുഷ്ടി മുതലായ്
കൊത്തായിട്ടും വിഷയവിസ്താരമന്നതി-
ന്താവുമായി വിലസ്യും
സിഖാനുഭൂതിയിലുമെത്താതെയാമതി മ-
ഹത്തായിട്ടും ജനനി നീ.

Mother, you possess a glory that is unattainable even for the enlightened (Siddhanubhuti). As such, you are the fundamental reality, the *Satvastu*, supporting all existence. Furthermore, you are the *Chit*, the pure Consciousness that serves as the primal impulse for all manifestations. Your radiant manifestation (Chidvilasam), born of your *Sat* nature, brings the experience of *Ananda* (Bliss) into reality. That very Bliss is also you. Thus, you are also the heart that rejoices by perceiving *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda* as identical with yourself. You are, moreover, the fundamental cause of all these.

You are the five elements – such as ether and air – and the entire universe, which is their composite. You are all the myriad phenomena within the cosmos, and the senses that perceive them, such as sight. You extend boundlessly as sound, touch, form, taste, and smell – the objects that are perceptible to the senses. These very objects constitute our sustenance, our experienced reality. And you are also the experiencer of all these. Indeed, how immeasurable is the way you manifest with countless distinctive forms!

This verse articulates the Advaitic concept of Brahman as *Sat-Chit-Ananda* and expands on the Mother’s all-encompassing immanence, revealing her as the essence of all being, knowing, and experiencing.

The Divine Mother as Sat-Chit-Ananda

Ananda: The verse begins by declaring the Mother's "glory that is unattainable even for the enlightened (Siddhanubhuti)," immediately placing her beyond conventional comprehension and even advanced spiritual experiences, signifying her transcendental nature. She is then identified as the "fundamental reality, the Satvastu, supporting all existence." *Sat* denotes absolute existence, truth, and reality, the substratum of all that is. Beyond mere existence, she is "the Chit, the pure Consciousness that serves as the primal impulse for all manifestations." *Chit* is pure, unconditioned consciousness, the knowing principle. Furthermore, her "radiant manifestation (Chidvilasam), born of your Sat nature, brings the experience of Ananda (Bliss) into reality. That very Bliss is also you." *Ananda* is supreme, unadulterated bliss, inherent in the nature of reality. The verse then states, "Thus, you are also the heart that rejoices by perceiving Sat, Chit, and Ananda as identical with yourself." This indicates that the ultimate experience of non-dual bliss involves recognizing the unity of these three aspects within the Divine, and indeed, the enlightened heart itself becomes a manifestation of this realization. This triune nature of Brahman (Sat-Chit-Ananda) is a cornerstone of Vedanta, portraying the divine as infinitely existent, conscious, and blissful.

Immanence as the Universe and Its Constituents

Constituents: The verse profoundly extends the Mother's immanence to encompass the entirety of creation: "You are the five elements... and the entire universe, which is their composite." This is a powerful declaration of panentheism, where God is not only the creator but also the very substance and essence of the cosmos. This means that every particle of existence, every natural phenomenon, is a direct manifestation of the Divine Mother. For the mystic, this vision transforms the mundane world into a sacred presence, fostering deep reverence for all life.

The Divine as Senses, Sense Objects, and Experiencer: The immanence is further deepened by stating: "You are all the myriad phenomena within the cosmos, and the senses that perceive them, such as sight. You extend boundlessly as sound, touch, form, taste, and smell – the objects that are perceptible to the senses." This is a highly significant mystical insight. Not only is the Divine the "stuff" of the universe, but also the very faculties (senses) by which we perceive it, and the objects (sense data) that are perceived. This dissolves the subject-object duality at its root, revealing that the entire act of perception—the perceiver, the process of perception, and the perceived—is a play of the one Divine Consciousness.

The Divine as Sustenance and Experiencer

The Divine as Sustenance and Experiencer: The verse concludes this comprehensive description of immanence: "These very objects constitute our sustenance, our experienced reality. And you are also the experiencer of all these. Indeed, how immeasurable is the way you manifest with countless distinctive forms!" This reinforces the idea that what sustains us, our "food" or "bhogya vastu," is the divine itself. And critically, the Divine Mother is also the *bhokta* (experiencer). This is the ultimate non-dual vision: the one Consciousness is playing all roles – the enjoyer, the enjoyed, and the act of enjoyment. The final exclamation of "how immeasurable" emphasizes the boundless, incomprehensible nature of the Divine's manifestations, inviting awe and profound reverence for the infinite forms of the One. This comprehensive understanding liberates the mystic from the limitations of dualistic perception, leading to a state of profound unity and wonder.

9. ഭൂവാദി ഭൂതമതിനാവാസമില്ല വെറു-
മാഭാസമാമിതരിവി-
നാഭാവിശേഷമതിനാവാസമിങ്ങുലകി -
ലാപാദിതം വെതിയാൽ,
നാവാദി തൻ വിഷയിതാവാസമറ വെ-
ദാവാസമാകെ വിലസും

ദേഹാണ്ടിരു മഹിമാവാരിഞ്ഞു ജന്തി! വാഴ്ത്തുവാനുമരുതേ!

Mother, the five elements, beginning with Earth, and this entire universe, which is their composite, possess no independent existence. They are all merely like shadows. This cosmos, and its apparent existence, are nothing but various modalities arising within you – the singular, ultimate Knowledge. It is you, as pure Knowledge, who bestows upon it its seeming reality. No sense organ or mind can make you, Mother, an object of perception.

Your dwelling place is the all-illuminating sky, the very expanse of consciousness (Chidakasha). Who can truly comprehend its ultimate grandeur! Mother, my words, powerless to extol you, subside into silence!

The core assertion, “The five elements, beginning with Earth, and this entire universe... possess no independent existence. They are all merely like shadows,” directly challenges the common perception of reality. This is a fundamental mystical tenet – the phenomenal world, with all its solidity and diversity, is not ultimately real in itself. It is an appearance, a projection, likened to “shadows.”

The verse then identifies the true substratum of this apparent reality: “This cosmos, and its apparent existence, are nothing but various modalities arising within you – the singular, ultimate Knowledge.” Here, “you” refers to Janani, the Divine Mother, who is equated with “ultimate Knowledge” (Brahman/Consciousness). This is a crucial mystical insight: the universe is not separate from the Divine; it is an emanation, a manifestation, *within* the Divine. The world is not an illusion in the sense of being non-existent, but rather an illusion in the sense of being non-ultimately-real, dependent entirely on the underlying reality of the Divine Mother. This collapses the subject-object duality,

as the perceived world is not external to consciousness but internal to it.

The lines “No sense organ or mind can make you, Mother, an object of perception” further emphasize the transcendent nature of the Divine Mother. She is beyond the grasp of empirical knowledge and intellectual comprehension. This points to the mystical experience as being supra-rational, accessible not through ordinary cognitive faculties but through a deeper, intuitive realization. The “all-illuminating sky, the very expanse of consciousness (Chidakasha)” is described as her dwelling place. Chidakasha is not a physical sky but the infinite, luminous expanse of pure consciousness, a common metaphor in spiritual traditions for the ultimate reality. This signifies that the Divine is not localized but all-pervading, the very ground of being. The poet’s concluding confession, “Who can truly comprehend its ultimate grandeur! Mother, my words, powerless to extol you, subside into silence!” is a powerful expression of mystical awe and the inadequacy of language to describe the ineffable. This humility before the ungraspable vastness of the Divine is a hallmark of genuine mystical experience, where intellectual understanding gives way to reverent silence and profound realization.

The nine verses of the hymn are likened to nine precious gems, beautifully strung together to form an exquisite bouquet (‘Manjari’).

The first verse initiates a contemplation on humanity’s predicament in the ocean of suffering, questioning the reason for our birth from the primal, knowing Mother, and seeking the path to merge back into her.

The second verse posits that nothing truly exists apart from the primal knowledge embodied by the Goddess. What appears to exist are merely fleeting perceptions conjured by the non-existent power of Maya.



Upon realizing this simple truth, the devotee understands the futility of Vedic rituals and finds liberation from mental fluctuations. This verse highlights the universal quest for this divine Mother.

The third verse, brimming with experiential feeling, delves into the single underlying truth beneath all cosmic changes. When this truth is realized, everything dissolves into a singular, inexpressible magnificence. This ineffable experience is beautifully compared to a bee delighting in the nectar within a lotus.

The fourth verse offers a philosophical devotional insight, likening the world's existence to ocean waves, where water is the underlying reality. The Goddess embodies this underlying reality, and the most cherished boon is the grace to worship her.

The fifth verse presents a beautiful poetic vision: all universal phenomena are merely the expressions illuminated by the Goddess's dance. Since it is the dance of the Goddess of Speech (Vagdevi), these dance-forms are purely linguistic expressions. However, veiled by the dance-costume woven from time and space, her true form remains hidden to most. This essential nature resides within the culmination of the Agamas, or Vedanta.

The sixth verse's meditative core lies in the realization that the Goddess, in her form as primordial sound (Nada Rupini), has transformed herself into everything that exists, and into the "I" that perceives it all. It declares the entire universe to be a mere drama.

The seventh verse depicts the devotee as a sinner who, through a process of self-inquiry, symbolically "shoots down" all sins. The Goddess empowers this act of liberation. The very awareness that the ego, steeped in sin, is but a part of the Goddess's essence, constitutes this victory. Thus, this verse views the spiritual discipline of truth-seeking from the devotee's perspective.

The eighth verse extols the glory of truth-realization without bestowing a halo of divinity or miraculous powers. It asserts that the Mother, who is Sat (Existence), Chit (Consciousness), and Ananda (Bliss), manifests as all experiences of being, knowing, and feeling joy and sorrow. Her grandeur is such that even the experience of the Siddhas cannot fully grasp it.

The final verse concludes by stating that no material entity has an independent abode; all forms are mere expressions revealed within the Mother—within Knowledge. The Mother's abode, in turn, is the all-pervading luminosity of the heavens. Thus, the hymn culminates in the tranquility of silence, a state beyond the praise of words.

Typically, philosophical poems often lack poetic grace, but 'Janani Navaratna Manjari' is a notable exception where profound philosophical thought itself reaches poetic heights. The 'Mattēbham' metre, though rhythmic, is particularly challenging and demanding for poetic composition, yet Narayana Guru chose it, indicating his fondness, as evidenced by other hymns like 'Navamanjari', 'Shanmatura Stavam', and 'Visakhashashti' composed in the same metre.

In his insightful interpretations of Sree Narayana Guru's "Janani Navaratna Manjari," Muni Narayana Prasad emphasizes a crucial point: "Only those who can merge the delight of poetic appreciation with the contemplation of philosophical thought into a singular spiritual practice can fully savour this work." He humbly presents his commentary not as the definitive word, but as a guide on this profound path. With deep reverence, Muni Narayana Prasad offers salutations at the lotus feet of Narayana Guru, acknowledging his unparalleled poetic genius, and to Nataraja Guru, who provided the essential inner illumination for this endeavor. It is to these great Gurus that he reverently dedicates his simple interpretation.

Recap

- ◆ Nine-verse hymn to Divine Mother.
- ◆ Praised for sweetness, calm, profound depth.
- ◆ Mother seen as ultimate Knowledge and Power.
- ◆ Universe as mere appearances or “shadows”.
- ◆ World arises within singular, ultimate Knowledge.
- ◆ Devotee yearns for inner merger with Mother.
- ◆ Dissolving self into original wisdom.
- ◆ “Sin” defined as ignorance.
- ◆ True Knowledge, the arrow to destroy sin.
- ◆ Devotion, the bowstring for spiritual battle.
- ◆ Firm mind, the bow for self-inquiry.
- ◆ Ultimate state: *nāda bhūmi*.
- ◆ Mind dissolves into *śabda Brahman*.
- ◆ Mother (pure consciousness) dances as duality vanishes.
- ◆ Mother’s dwelling: all-illuminating *Chidakasha*.
- ◆ *Chidakasha*: infinite, luminous consciousness.
- ◆ Direct, unmediated realization (*Pratyaksha Anubhuti*) sought.
- ◆ Mother beyond sensory and intellectual grasp.
- ◆ Analogies illustrate world’s non-ultimate reality.
- ◆ Wave/water, rope/snake, pot/clay examples given.
- ◆ *Akhandanubhuti*: unbroken experience of bliss.
- ◆ Sage as bee in lotus, experiencing ceaseless bliss.
- ◆ Poem transcends dry philosophy, showing hypnotic beauty.
- ◆ Promotes peaceful aesthetic mood (*sānta rasa*).

Objective Questions

1. What is the main subject of “Janani Navaratna Manjari”? Mother
2. How many verses are in the hymn? Nine
3. What does Guru equate the universe to in the first verse? Shadows
4. What is the ultimate Knowledge called in the poem? Janani
5. What is the mind’s desired state of dissolution? Nada
6. What represents the infinite expanse of consciousness? Chidakasha
7. What is the ultimate reality identified as, besides Janani? Brahman
8. What is the term for devotion informed by knowledge? Jnana-bhakti

Answers

1. Mother
2. Nine
3. Shadows
4. Janani
5. Nada
6. Chidakasha
7. Brahman
8. Jnana-bhakti

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain how Narayana Guru presents the concept of Maya in “Janani Navaratna Manjari” and provide specific examples or metaphors used in the poem to illustrate this idea.
2. Discuss the significance of *Chidakasha* as the Divine Mother’s dwelling place and how this concept contributes to the mystical understanding of her all-pervading nature.
3. How does the poem differentiate between intellectual understanding and direct mystical experience (*Akhandanubhuti*)? Use the metaphor of the bee and the lotus to elaborate.
4. Analyze the role of devotion (*Bhakti*) in achieving liberation according to the hymn, particularly how it is intertwined with Knowledge (*Jnana*) in the concept of *jñāna-bhakti*.
5. Describe the mystical state of *nāda bhūmi* and its connection to the dissolution of dualities, as portrayed in the verses.
6. Explain how the “sin of ignorance” is overcome through the process described in the seventh verse, identifying the “weapons” and the ultimate realization.
7. Discuss the concept of *Lila* (divine play) as it applies to the universe’s manifestation in “Janani Navaratna Manjari,” particularly referencing the Mother’s “dance.”
8. How does the hymn present the Divine Mother as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, and what does this triune nature signify in the Advaitic philosophy conveyed?
9. Beyond its spiritual message, what social significance did “Janani Navaratna Manjari” hold during Guru’s time, especially regarding caste and gender?
10. Reflect on Muni Narayana Prasad’s perspective that only those who can merge poetic appreciation with philosophical contemplation can truly savor this work. How does this statement inform your approach to studying the poem?



Mysticism in Kali Natakam

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ familiarise the fundamental characteristics of mysticism and its manifestation in Narayana Guru's 'Kaali Naatakam' as a pursuit of direct, ineffable experience of the divine.
- ◆ interpret the symbolic language of 'Kaali Naatakam' to understand concepts like divine immanence, Lila (divine play), the imperishable nature of the divine, and the role of divine grace in alleviating human suffering and leading to liberation.
- ◆ evaluate the supreme transcendence of the divine principle over all cosmic forces, including desires, dualities, and even the highest deities, through the pervasive power of Maya as depicted in 'Kaali Naatakam'.
- ◆ appreciate the unparalleled poetic and structural genius of 'Kaali Naatakam', as a vehicle for profound philosophical and spiritual insights.

Prerequisites

Mysticism, at its core, refers to the pursuit of a direct, intimate, and often ineffable experience of ultimate reality or the divine. It typically involves a profound internal journey, transcending ordinary sensory and intellectual perception to achieve a state of union, oneness, or profound insight into the nature of existence. Key characteristics often include:

- ◆ **Experiential Knowledge:** Mysticism prioritises direct experience over intellectual understanding or dogma. The truth is not merely known but felt, seen, or merged with.

- ◆ **Transcendence:** Mystical experiences often involve moving beyond the limitations of the ego, time, space, and dualistic thinking.
- ◆ **Unity/Oneness:** A common theme is the dissolution of boundaries between the self and the divine, or between individual consciousness and cosmic consciousness. This can be expressed as **Advaita** (non-duality) in the Indian context.
- ◆ **Ineffability:** The profound nature of mystical experience often renders it difficult, if not impossible, to articulate fully in conventional language.
- ◆ **Inner Transformation:** The mystical journey typically leads to significant personal transformation, altering one's perception of self, others, and the world.
- ◆ **Symbolism and Metaphor:** Due to its ineffable nature, mystical literature frequently relies on rich symbolism, metaphors, and allegories to convey insights.

Narayana Guru's 'Kaali Naatakam' is a profound philosophical and poetic work that, through its devotional verses and symbolic language, offers a rich ground for exploring mystical elements. The poem's central theme of the divine Mother (Kaali) as the ultimate reality, and the universe as her dance, inherently leans towards a mystical interpretation, inviting the seeker to perceive the transcendent within the immanent.

This is a hymn of praise to the Goddess, composed in the style of *prose poetry* found in *Manipravalam Champu* works, but written with melody so that it may be sung with delight. In most of the lines, the metrical pattern of the Sanskrit metre *Bhujangaprayātam* can be observed, though a few lines do not strictly follow its rules. The resemblance to the devotional *chatupattu* songs of the Dravidian mode of worship, as well as to *Kali-nataka* (ritual performance traditions), is particularly noteworthy.

Keywords

Mysticism, Kaali Naatakam, Narayana Guru, Divine Mother, Maya, Liberation, Lila

Discussion

Kaali Naatakam (The Play of Kaali)

Among the devotional literature of India, Narayana Guru's 'Kaali Naatakam' stands as a poetic masterpiece, shining brightly without parallel. Muni Narayana Prasad identifies the

core philosophy as envisioning the Supreme Reality as the Goddess, with "this universe, ourselves, and our experiences of joy and sorrow as expressions of her dance." He draws an apt parallel, noting that "Just as a performer's countenance continuously shifts



with emotions, so too does the nature of the universe." This ceaseless flow of emotions, he explains, is "eloquently portray[ed] as a rhythmic progression of words."

Further elaborating on the dramatic essence, Muni Narayana Prasad highlights that "expressions of the nine classical aesthetic sentiments (Nava Rasas)—namely, Shringara (love), Karuna (compassion), Veera (heroism), Raudra (fury), Haasya (humour), Bhayanaka (terror), Beebhatsa (disgust), Adbhuta (wonder), and Shaanta (peace)—are conveyed through performance." He observes that "Within the lines of 'Kaali Naatakam', one can discern these nine sentiments fleetingly manifested in the Goddess's cosmic drama."

Muni Narayana Prasad describes the Guru's unique structural approach, stating that he "initially presents a condensed version of the cosmic drama, enacted by the Goddess." Subsequently, "he portrays the drama of life through a 'Keshaadipaadavarnana' (description from hair to foot) of the Goddess." Critically, "even in this depiction, the style adopted does not involve describing each limb separately. Instead, just as each emotion in a performance naturally transitions into the next, so too does each anatomical description flow seamlessly into the subsequent one. Consequently, the work becomes a continuous flow, devoid of full stops or semicolons."

Muni Narayana Prasad identifies into the work's unique metrical structure, identifying it as a 'Dandakam' – a 'Samavrutta' (uniform metre) where "each line contains more than twenty-six syllables." He specifically points out "a continuous flow of 'Yaganas' (a metrical foot consisting of one short syllable followed by two long syllables) in the sequence of one short and two long." He clarifies that "It cannot be strictly divided into lines with a specific number of metrical feet or into stanzas composed of four lines," while

simultaneously possessing "the quality of a musical and rhythmic flow, clearly not prose." He identifies its metre as 'Simhavikraantam', "a Dandakam that exclusively employs 'Yaganas,'" citing the metrical definition: 'യമേഷ്ടം യകാരാജാഭൈത്താന്തുടർന്നങ്ങളും പെയ്തിട്ടുമദ്ദണ്ഡങ്ങൾ സിംഹവിക്രാന്തമാക്കും.'

He cautions against definitive interpretations, stating that "The antecedents and future possibilities embedded within every minute detail of the cosmic flow are indeed infinite." Consequently, "the profound semantic richness contained within each rhythmic phrase of this 'Kaali Naatakam' is not amenable to a singular interpretation. It is intrinsically interwoven with the entire essence of the drama and the past and forthcoming expressions of emotion." Thus, he humbly asserts that "this commentary should not be considered an exhaustive interpretation; indeed, a comprehensive interpretation of this work would perhaps be impossible to produce."

A key insight offered by Muni Narayana Prasad is that "One aspect is clear: the Guru composed this drama by immersing himself completely in the holistic form of the Goddess's dance. Should such an experiential fullness manifest within us, that would constitute its complete interpretation."

Concluding his prelude, Muni Narayana Prasad offers this interpretation "Prostrating at the lotus feet of Narayana Guru, Nataraja Guru, and Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati," presenting it "humbly... to the hearts of those discerning individuals who are adept at appreciating the essence of the drama of life."

This analysis of 'Kalinatakam' utilizes the original Malayalam verses alongside their English translations and direct interpretations, as provided by Muni Narayana Prasad. Building upon this authoritative foundation, the mystical elements inherent in each quoted

line are explored and explained, aiming to enhance learners' understanding of these profound Malayalam poetic expressions.

നമോ നാദവിജ്ഞാത്മികേ! നാശഹീനേ!
നമോ നാദവാദീഡ്യ പാദാരവിനേ!
നമോ നാമിക്കും മണിപ്പും വിളക്കേ!
നമോ നാമുവാദിപ്രിയാംബു നമസ്തേ!

Salutations to you, Mother! You whose essence is the union of Naada (primordial sound) and Bindu (cosmic point), the imperishable one, whose lotus feet are worshipped by divine sages such as Narada, you who are the lamp illuminating the four Vedas (that lamp is beautiful as if a gem and a flower are combined), and you who are the beloved Mother of Brahma and other deities, salutations to you!

These opening lines of 'Kaali Naatakam' immediately plunge the reader into a deeply mystical conceptual framework. The invocation of the Divine Mother as 'Naada Bindvaatmike' (whose essence is the union of Naada and Bindu) is central to tantric and yogic mystical traditions, particularly within Hinduism. Naada represents the primordial cosmic vibration, the unmanifest sound from which all creation emerges, while Bindu signifies the cosmic point or seed from which the universe unfolds. Their union symbolises the ultimate undifferentiated state, the singularity from which duality arises, and the source of all existence. This concept transcends mere intellectual understanding; it points to a profound intuitive grasp of the universe's origin, a state of pre-creation or pure potentiality that can only be apprehended mystically, through meditation or profound contemplation, rather than empirical observation.

Furthermore, describing the Mother as 'Naashahīne' (the imperishable one) emphasizes her transcendent nature, beyond the cycles of birth and death, decay, and transformation that characterise the phenomenal world. This aligns with the

mystical pursuit of the eternal and unchanging reality behind transient appearances. The mention of her lotus feet being worshipped by divine sages like Narada suggests an archetype of profound spiritual reverence and the ultimate goal of devotion for even the most elevated beings, hinting at the ineffable purity and sanctity of the divine presence. The metaphor of the Mother as 'the lamp illuminating the four Vedas' is particularly evocative. The Vedas are considered the repository of ancient wisdom and spiritual knowledge. By stating that the Mother illuminates them, Guru implies that she is not merely a subject of Vedic study but the ultimate source and embodiment of the wisdom they contain. This suggests that true understanding of sacred texts comes not from intellectual analysis alone, but from a direct, illuminating experience of the divine essence—a hallmark of mystical insight. The beauty of this lamp, described as a combination of a gem and a flower, points to the aesthetic and harmonising aspects of this ultimate reality, suggesting that the divine is not just pure being but also supreme beauty and perfection. Finally, her being the 'beloved Mother of Brahma and other deities' underscores her supreme position as the progenitor and sustainer of the entire cosmos, revered even by the highest gods. This reinforces the idea of a singular, all-encompassing divine feminine principle as the ultimate ground of being, a concept often explored in mystical experiences of the Divine Mother or Shakti. The salutations are not merely formal greetings but acts of profound surrender and acknowledgment of this transcendent, yet immanent, mystical reality.

സമസ്തപവന്മാം സൃജിച്ചും ഭരിച്ചും
മുദാ സംഹരിച്ചും രസിച്ചും രമിച്ചും
കളിച്ചും പുളച്ചും മഹാജോലാരജോലാരം
വിളിച്ചും മമാനുദേശേ വസിച്ചും
തെളിത്തും മരിത്തും തുളുന്തും പ്രപഠ്യും
തുളിത്തുളിലെപ്പേളാളമുളളായിരുന്നും
തിരിത്തും പിരിത്തും മഹാനുദയാരാം

ചൊരിഞ്ഞും പദാംഭോജക്കെതർക്കു നിത്യം
വരുന്നോരു തുസ്വാജൈല്ലുമരിഞ്ഞും
കരിഞ്ഞീടുമാരാവിരാതകബിജം
കുറേതൊരുനേരം നിനയ്ക്കുന്ന കെതർ
കരിഞ്ഞീല മറ്റുള്ള കെകവല്യുരുപം.

By manifesting the entire universe from within yourself, by duly sustaining it, by withdrawing everything back into yourself as part of the experience of bliss, delighting in these acts of creation, sustenance, and dissolution, transforming them into self-blissful experience, perceiving all this as a divine play and reveling in it, dwelling within me as part of this play, making a terrifying sound, manifesting in a clear state for the wise, and residing in a hidden state as blissful experience for the ignorant; by permeating the inner core of this overflowing universe and becoming its most subtle essence; by turning and separating, by continuously showering a great stream of bliss; by knowing all the difficulties that constantly befall the devotees of your lotus feet; by making the seed of all potential sorrow wither away – those devotees who contemplate you, knowing you for even a short while, know of no other form of ultimate liberation beyond you.

These verses present a highly personal and immanent view of the divine, moving beyond a transcendent, distant God to one deeply intertwined with existence and individual experience. The core mystical elements here revolve around:

Divine Immanence and Panentheism: The lines “By manifesting the entire universe from within yourself,” “by permeating the inner core of this overflowing universe and becoming its most subtle essence,” and “dwelling within me as part of this play” powerfully articulate the concept of divine immanence. The universe is not merely created *by* God but *from* God, and God *is* within it. This aligns with panentheistic thought, where God is greater than the

universe but the universe is contained within God. Mystically, this dissolves the separation between the sacred and the profane, suggesting that divinity can be found in every atom of existence. The practitioner’s goal then becomes not to reach God in a faraway heaven, but to recognize the divine presence *within* themselves and the world. The “overflowing universe” points to an inexhaustible divine creative energy.

Lila (Divine Play): The recurring theme of “divine play” (lila) is central to Hindu mysticism and is explicitly mentioned: “delighting in these acts of creation, sustenance, and dissolution, transforming them into self-blissful experience, perceiving all this as a divine play and reveling in it.” This concept reframes the seemingly chaotic or suffering aspects of existence not as divine punishment or a struggle, but as a spontaneous, joyful, and purposeful expression of the divine’s own being. For the mystic, understanding life as lila can lead to a profound sense of liberation from the anxieties of success and failure, fostering an attitude of playful engagement with the world. It suggests that even the “terrifying sound” is part of this grand cosmic drama, a manifestation of divine power.

Dual Manifestation: Clear for the Wise, Hidden for the Ignorant: The verse “manifesting in a clear state for the wise, and residing in a hidden state as blissful experience for the ignorant” highlights a key mystical insight: the divine is always present, but its perception depends on the individual’s spiritual state. For those with wisdom (jnana), the divine is clear and directly experienced. For the ignorant, the same divine presence might be perceived as mere worldly experience, or perhaps even suffering, yet it still holds the potential for “blissful experience” if one can transcend their ignorance. This points to the need for spiritual discipline and discernment to unveil

the true nature of reality. Mystical practices often aim to remove the veils of ignorance (maya) that obscure this inherent clarity.

Grace, Compassion, and Liberation:

The lines “by continuously showering a great stream of bliss; by knowing all the difficulties that constantly befall the devotees of your lotus feet; by making the seed of all potential sorrow wither away” emphasize the compassionate aspect of the divine. This is not a detached, indifferent creator, but one who actively engages with and alleviates the suffering of devotees. The “great stream of bliss” (ananda dhara) signifies the ever-present flow of divine grace available to those who turn towards it. The promise of “making the seed of all potential sorrow wither away” is a powerful statement about liberation (moksha). For Narayana Guru, this liberation is not a post-mortem state but a present reality for those who truly know and contemplate the divine. “Knowing you for even a short while, know of no other form of ultimate liberation beyond you” underscores that this intimate understanding of the divine, even fleetingly, is the ultimate fulfillment and end of all striving, transcending all other forms of salvation or spiritual attainment. The “lotus feet” symbolize humble devotion and surrender, a common pathway in mystical traditions to receive divine grace.

In essence, these verses from “Kalinatakam” invite the reader into a direct, experiential relationship with a dynamic, immanent, playful, and compassionate divine. The path to liberation lies not in external rituals alone, but in an internal realization of this all-pervading, blissful reality, leading to the dissolution of sorrow and the experience of ultimate freedom.

നിരിഞ്ഞെന്നു വിശ്വമെല്ലാമൊരുപ്പോ-
ലറു ചെറുമില്ലാതെ വാണ്ണു ചിരിന്നാൻ
കഴിഞ്ഞാലുമില്ലാരു നാശം; കുറഞ്ഞാ-
നന്നിരിഞ്ഞീരായിന്നോ! ദേഹരുപം
മരിഞ്ഞീടുമോ; വിശ്വമെല്ലാമിതെനോർ-
തരിഞ്ഞീടുവാൻ ശക്തരായാള്ളു ലോകേ?

You, who permeate all things uniformly and reside without the slightest flaw, never experience destruction, no matter how much time passes. Indeed, those who have come to know even a little of your true nature will already be absorbed in you. How astonishing! Will not even your seemingly terrifying form then vanish? Who in this world possesses the power to contemplate and realise that this entire universe is nothing but you?

These verses deepen the mystical exploration of the divine, focusing on its eternal, all-pervading nature and the transformative power of its realization.

Transcendence of Time and Imper-

shability: The lines “You, who permeate all things uniformly and reside without the slightest flaw, never experience destruction, no matter how much time passes” speak directly to the timeless and eternal nature of the divine. This is a fundamental mystical concept – the ultimate reality (Brahman in Vedanta) is beyond the limitations of birth, death, and change that characterize the phenomenal world. The “uniform permeation” suggests an omnipresence that is consistent and flawless, implying that divine essence is equally present in all forms, without any inherent defect or hierarchy in its manifestation. For the mystic, this realization offers profound comfort and stability, anchoring consciousness in an imperishable truth amidst the transient flow of existence.

Absorption and Non-Duality: The most striking mystical statement here is, “Indeed, those who have come to know even a little of your true nature will already be absorbed in you.” This speaks to the concept of *moksha* or *mukti* (liberation) as an experience of dissolution of the individual self into the divine. It implies that even a glimpse, a partial understanding (“even a little”), is sufficient to initiate this process of absorption. This is a core tenet of Advaita Vedanta, where true knowledge (*jnana*) of the Self



(Atman) as identical with Brahman leads to immediate liberation. The “absorption” is not a future event but a present reality for the enlightened, signifying the collapse of the perceived dualism between the individual and the ultimate reality. The “terrifying form” vanishing suggests that fear and awe, born of perceived separation, dissolve into pure bliss and unity when true knowledge dawns.

The Challenge of Realization and Universal Oneness: The concluding rhetorical question, “Who in this world possesses the power to contemplate and realise that this entire universe is nothing but you?” highlights the profound difficulty and rarity of achieving this highest mystical insight – the realization of universal non-duality. It acknowledges that while the divine pervades everything, truly comprehending and experiencing “this entire universe is nothing but you” (Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma – All this indeed is Brahman) is an extraordinary feat. It requires immense spiritual discipline, inner purification, and direct intuitive experience that transcends intellectual understanding. This question serves as both a challenge and an aspiration for the spiritual seeker, pointing towards the ultimate goal of mystical practice: to perceive the seamless, unified reality of the divine in all of creation, thereby transcending all illusions of separation.

ஓஹாஹிவு வேவேத! ராதீஸு ஶாங்கோ!
மாராமாய! நின்கெவேவோ சித்தநீயா!

Oh Great Divine Lord of Devas, Lord of Gauri, Shambho (He from whom well-being arises)! Oh Great Maya (cosmic illusion)! Your splendour, or prowess, is indeed profound and worthy of contemplation!

These short yet potent lines serve as an invocation, immediately plunging into the paradoxical nature of the divine as understood in mystical traditions.

Invoking the Paradoxical Divine: The verses begin with a direct address to the divine using multiple epithets: “Great Divine Lord of Devas, Lord of Gauri, Shambho.” These names typically refer to **Lord Shiva**, a central deity in Hinduism associated with both destruction and benevolence, asceticism and cosmic dance. “Shambho” specifically emphasizes the aspect of **well-being and auspiciousness**, highlighting the divine’s role as a bestower of grace and ultimate good. This immediate invocation sets a tone of reverence and surrender, a prerequisite for mystical experience. The choice of Shiva, often depicted as a renunciate yet also the master of cosmic play, hints at the dualities inherent in the divine.

The Mystical Role of Maya: The introduction of “Oh Great Maya (cosmic illusion)! Your splendour, or prowess, is indeed profound and worthy of contemplation!” is pivotal for understanding the mystical element. In Advaita Vedanta and many Indian mystical traditions, Maya is not mere illusion in the sense of something unreal, but rather the power of the divine (Brahman) to manifest the phenomenal world. It is the creative energy that makes the one appear as many, the unmanifest appear as manifest. The term “splendour” or “prowess” (vaibhavam) suggests that Maya is not a negative force to be overcome, but an awe-inspiring, inherent power of the divine itself. Contemplating Maya mystically means seeking to understand how the Absolute (Brahman) simultaneously remains undifferentiated yet manifests as the diverse universe. This contemplation aims to transcend the apparent duality created by Maya, realizing the underlying unity. For the mystic, discerning the nature of Maya is crucial for distinguishing between the ultimate reality and its temporary, manifested forms, leading to liberation from the illusions of the material world.

അടിക്കുള്ള തോണ്ടിപ്പറിച്ചുംവരാന്തം നടക്കം കൊടക്കുന്ന മനാകിനിക്കി-അടക്കം കൊടക്കുന്ന പെട്ടിരിക്കും ജടയ്ക്കുവിളിത്തെല്ലുമെല്ലും വിലോല-ചലംഗമനാരമാണിക്കുമാലാ-വിലയ്ക്കപ്പുറത്തുള്ള രത്നം പതിച്ചു-ജാലിച്ചുതരംഗീകൃതം പൊൻകിരിടം.

Below, stirring and overturning everything down to the netherworld, and causing tremors across the entire sky, the Ganga (celestial river) which descended from heaven finds a place of containment in your matted locks. Adorned within these locks are the crescent moon and a skull. Above the exquisitely delicate, wave-like, swaying garlands of Mandara flowers and rubies, shining as if they are one, a jewel of inestimable value is embedded, illuminating a golden crown that radiates light as if its waves surge upwards (or perhaps, that gleams by pushing up the waves of the Ganga).

These lines paint a vivid, symbolic image of the divine, specifically invoking the iconography of Lord Shiva. The mysticism here lies in the rich symbolism, illustrating the divine's paradoxical nature, cosmic power, and ultimate transcendence.

Cosmic Control and Containment (Ganga in Matted Locks): The description of the mighty Ganga – “stirring and overturning everything down to the netherworld, and causing tremors across the entire sky” – yet finding “a place of containment in your matted locks” is profoundly mystical. The Ganga symbolizes the chaotic, powerful, and often destructive forces of the cosmos, representing the flow of creation, preservation, and dissolution (Prakriti). By containing it effortlessly, the divine (Shiva) demonstrates absolute mastery over all cosmic energies and processes. This imagery signifies that the divine principle is the ultimate controller and absorber of all phenomena, even those that appear overwhelming or destructive. For the mystic, this symbolizes the possibility

of finding peace and stillness amidst life’s turmoil by recognizing the underlying divine order and control. It suggests that even the most formidable forces of existence are ultimately held and managed by the supreme consciousness.

Transcendence of Dualities (Moon and Skull): The adornments within the matted locks – “the crescent moon and a skull” – are classic Shiva symbols that embody profound mystical paradoxes. The crescent moon represents coolness, tranquility, and regeneration, symbolizing the ever-renewing cycle of time and the life-giving aspect of the divine. Conversely, the skull (often representing the severed head of Brahma or simply mortality) signifies death, decay, and the transient nature of all existence. By holding both simultaneously, the divine is depicted as transcending all dualities: life and death, beauty and decay, creation and destruction. For the mystic, this symbolizes the realization that ultimate reality encompasses and integrates all apparent opposites. True wisdom lies in perceiving the unity beyond these dualistic perceptions, recognizing that even death is part of the divine play, not an end in itself.

Ultimate Value and Radiant Consciousness (Jewel and Crown): The “jewel of inestimable value... illuminating a golden crown that radiates light” represents the ultimate truth, consciousness, or the Self (Atman/Brahman) that resides above all manifestations. This jewel is beyond price, signifying that true spiritual realization is of supreme worth, far surpassing any material or worldly attainment. The “golden crown” symbolizes sovereignty, majesty, and divine kingship, indicating the supreme authority and glory of the divine. Its radiance, described as if “its waves surge upwards,” further emphasizes the boundless, overflowing nature of divine light and consciousness. Mystically, this jewel represents the luminous core of reality, the inner light that, once

realized, illuminates all aspects of existence and confers true spiritual sovereignty upon the awakened individual. The imagery here points to the highest state of consciousness, brilliant and all-encompassing.

பரத பறவுமிகுப்பிரங்கும் தோரூபோயித்திரத்தைப்பூரம் கூருமிரல்லான் தேவித்திரிம் விடு கப்பு கொடுக்கும் ஏற்றிகூரிக்கூத்துதித் வீணாஷியேஶாமரத்தாஸைய்க்கைநாமா பார்த்துமுழுவிமணால்ல மஹாதேவங்கும் ஸூபமங்கும் முயற்சாயோரவோ! மாயத்தில் பெடுகிறக்குமான் சிடுதா!

Even the crescent moon of the fifth lunar day, considered the epitome of beauty in enchanting vistas, having conceded defeat in a beauty contest, retreats behind the theatrical curtain. Convinced that there is no fault in admitting defeat there, as dramatic rules do not apply, it abandons its prowess and offers tribute to your forehead. Within the mark on such a forehead, Vishnu, the consort of the Earth, who daily adorns his waist with the seven oceans as his girdle, has fallen. Similarly, Mahadeva (Shiva), Brahma, and other deities have astonishingly become ensnared in your Maya (cosmic illusion). This is truly a great wonder!

These verses powerfully convey the supreme transcendence and ultimate reality of the addressed divine (Brahman/Adi Shakti, the primordial divine feminine power, given the context of Maya and the subjugation of even the Trimurti). The mysticism here revolves around:

Subordination of all Created Beauty to the Divine (Crescent Moon): The initial imagery of the “crescent moon of the fifth lunar day” – a traditional symbol of exquisite beauty and enchantment – conceding defeat and offering “tribute to your forehead” is deeply symbolic. Mystically, it signifies that *all* forms of beauty and allure in the created universe, no matter how captivating, are ultimately inferior to and derive their essence from the divine. The divine is the source

and ultimate standard of all beauty, and any created form is merely a faint reflection. The “retreat behind the theatrical curtain” suggests that the beauty of the phenomenal world is itself part of a divine drama, and its perceived supremacy is only within that play. True beauty, for the mystic, resides beyond form in the unmanifest divine.

The Overarching Power of Maya and the Hierarchy of Deities: The most profound mystical statement is the assertion that even the highest deities of the Hindu pantheon – Vishnu (the preserver, depicted here as the consort of Earth and master of the oceans), Mahadeva (Shiva, the destroyer), and Brahma (the creator) – have “astonishingly become ensnared in your Maya (cosmic illusion).” This is a radical declaration of the absolute supremacy of the addressed divine, placing it beyond even the Trimurti (the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva), who are typically considered the cosmic operators. Mystically, this emphasizes that Maya is not just a concept but the very power of the Supreme Being that manifests all existence, including the divine forms themselves.

மஹாதமாக்கலையூத்துவர்க்கூம் நினஷுால் மஹாமாய நில் வைவேவ கின்றனங்கும்?

Translation: Oh Great Maya (cosmic illusion), how can even the great souls, upon contemplation, overcome your prowess of illusion?

These lines highlight the formidable power of Maya, even for those on advanced spiritual paths, underscoring a critical challenge in mystical realization.

The Overpowering Nature of Maya: The central mystical theme here is the immense difficulty in transcending Maya’s “prowess of illusion,” even for “great souls” (Mahatmas). This is not a casual question but a rhetorical one, implying that overcoming Maya is an extraordinarily arduous task, almost insurmountable through mere intellectual

contemplation (“ninachal” - upon thinking/contemplating). Maya, as the cosmic power of illusion, is depicted as so pervasive and compelling that it can ensnare even advanced spiritual practitioners, blurring the lines between reality and illusion.

Beyond Intellectual Understanding: The phrase “how can... overcome your prowess of illusion?” suggests that intellectual contemplation alone is insufficient to pierce Maya’s veil. Mystically, this points to the necessity of a deeper, experiential realization that transcends the mind’s grasp. It implies that true liberation from Maya requires more than philosophical thought; it demands direct intuition, intense spiritual practice (such as meditation, devotion, or self-inquiry), and ultimately, divine grace to fully overcome the illusion of separation and duality. This realization is the ultimate goal of many mystical paths.

അനംഗരെ പുവില്ലിനല്ലത്തെപ്പട്ടത്തും
കുനുച്ചില്ലിവല്ലിക്കാടിത്തല്ലു തെലി-
അനംഗനുമാനത്തിലേറ്റാലോഴിച്ചു-
നന്നാതെ പോയങ്ങങ്ങുനിതെ, നൽ-
പ്പടത്താർ ജീകുന്നവർക്കുജൈള്ളാരത്താർ-
പ്പടത്തെക്കടപ്പാനതേ ചില്ലി രണ്ടും
വശത്താകി വച്ചെപ്പാഴും മിനിമിനു-
നതും കണ്ണിനപ്പക്കജ്ജപ്പുവിലോലും
കുപ്പത്താൻ കണക്കാൻകണം മരിക്കേരത്താർ-
ത്തി പോക്കും കടക്കണ്ണു രണ്ടികളും
വിമിവിമിത്തിട്ടുക്കെന്നു പായുന
കല്ലോലിനിക്കും പട്ടത്തുകൊടുക്കുനേനാ-
രാനുവാരിക്കടൽക്കെരെ
പ്പാദക്കത്പ്രയുക്തത്രുതസ്തോത്ര-
സംഗ്രിതനുതങ്ങളും തുച്ഛവിക്കാണ്ങ
നിലക്കുന്ന കർണ്ണങ്ങളിൽ പോൻമണി-
ക്കുണ്ണിലും
കൊണ്ണാളിപ്പുട്ടു പെമങ്ങും ഇല്ലണിക്കെതിര
ഗണ്യകണ്ണാടിയും നമനിച്ചുവരത്തി പ്ര-
സുനം നമിക്കും മണിച്ചുണ്ടു
രണ്ടിനുമുള്ളായ് വിളങ്ങും
പള്ളക്കാത്ത പല്പത്തി മുത്തുപ്പടത്തി-
നിളിഡ്യും കൊടുക്കുന്നതിനെന്നതു ബന്ധം!

The playful flick of your arched eyebrows, which afflicts or envies Kamadeva's (the god

of love) flower-bow, causes Ananga (the bodiless god of love) to retreat and vanish, unable to escape if even slightly touched on this stage. Yet, the same eyebrows, held to either side, constantly quiver like lightning, serving to dispel the sorrowful state of devotees who worship your benevolent lotus feet. From your lotus-like eyes, imbued with that quiver, flows the nectar of compassion, manifesting as tears that cleanse away all the sorrows of devotees like a torrential downpour, emanating from your two sidelong glances. Within those sidelong glances lies an ocean of supreme bliss, which bestows upon even rapidly surging, tumultuous rivers the power to flow and create waves. Beyond that expansive ocean of bliss, your ears affectionately listen to the chanted hymns, music, and dances performed by your devoted followers. In those ears, golden jewelled earrings shimmer, reflecting light onto your mirror-like cheeks, which are marked by the rising rays of light from the earrings. The colour of your beautiful coral-like lips, which appear to make even a splendid hibiscus flower bow in reverence, arises from the radiant glow of your cheeks. Within these crimson lips, your pearl-like teeth, arranged like crystal, shine brightly. To say that these teeth cause embarrassment to a string of pearls is simply absurd!

This elaborate physical description of the divine is not mere poetic embellishment; it is a profound mystical exercise in envisioning the form of the formless, endowing each feature with cosmic significance and spiritual function. The primary mystical elements are:

Transcendence of Kama and Control over Desire: The initial imagery of the eyebrows “afflicting or envying Kamadeva’s flower-bow” and causing “Ananga to retreat and vanish” is highly significant. Kamadeva represents desire, worldly allure, and the forces that bind beings to samsara (the cycle of birth and death). By overpowering

Kamadeva, the divine demonstrates absolute transcendence over sensual desires and illusions. Mystically, this implies that true spiritual liberation lies in mastering or transcending the impulses of the mind and senses, which are represented by Kamadeva. The divine's mere "playful flick" or "slight touch" is enough to disarm the god of love, signifying effortless control over the very forces that entrap humanity. For the devotee, meditating on this aspect helps to cultivate detachment and inner purity, essential for higher mystical states.

Divine Compassion and Grace as Manifested Attributes: The description of the eyebrows dispelling "the sorrowful state of devotees" and the "nectar of compassion" flowing as "tears that cleanse away all the sorrows" from the "lotus-like eyes" is a powerful portrayal of divine grace (Anugraha). This emphasizes the active, merciful nature of the divine, which responds directly to the suffering of its devotees. The "torrential downpour" of tears signifies an overwhelming, abundant flow of grace. Mystically, this reinforces the idea that devotion (Bhakti) is a direct pathway to experience divine compassion. The eyes, often considered windows to the soul, here become conduits of divine empathy and transformative healing, alleviating the suffering that binds individuals to the material world. It suggests that liberation is not solely an individual effort but also a gift of divine mercy.

The Ocean of Bliss and the Source of Cosmic Dynamism: The statement "Within those sidelong glances lies an ocean of supreme bliss, which bestows upon even rapidly surging, tumultuous rivers the power to flow and create waves" connects divine perception directly to ultimate bliss (Ananda) and cosmic energy. The "ocean of supreme bliss" is a metaphor for the infinite, boundless joy that constitutes the very nature of the divine. This bliss is not static; it is

dynamic, providing the underlying energy for all activity in the universe, symbolized by the "tumultuous rivers" gaining their power from this source. Mystically, this means that all creation and all motion arise from the overflowing joy of the divine. When a devotee experiences even a glimpse of this bliss, they tap into the fundamental energy that sustains existence, leading to profound insights into the interconnectedness of all things.

Embodiment of All Perfections and Symbolic Iconography: The intricate details of the ears listening to hymns, the golden jeweled earrings reflecting light onto mirror-like cheeks, and the coral-like lips with pearl-like teeth serve multiple mystical purposes. The divine's attentive ears symbolize responsiveness to prayer and devotion, reinforcing the efficacy of chanting and spiritual practices. The radiant beauty of the face, with its shining jewels and perfect teeth, is not mere aesthetic; it represents the ultimate perfection and purity of the divine form, which inspires awe and devotion. The idea that "a splendid hibiscus flower bow in reverence" to the lips and that the teeth embarrass pearls is hyperbole used to emphasize the unparalleled, transcendental beauty of the divine, which surpasses even the most exquisite natural creations. Mystically, meditating on such a perfect and radiant form is a means of spiritual absorption, allowing the devotee to purify their own consciousness by reflecting upon and aspiring towards this divine ideal. The entire description serves as a powerful yantra (a visual tool for meditation), inviting the mind to dwell on the glory and all-encompassing nature of the Supreme.

തെളിത്തങ്ങനെ പുർണ്ണചന്ദനമല്ലൽ-
കളങ്ങം കൊടുക്കുന്നതിൽ
ദയവശാഭാങ്കരം
വസ്ത്രവിംബം കരാളാന്ത ശൈകരം
ഹേബാരദംശൂദ്ധാദയം ഭീഷണിയം
കരേ കക്കണം കികിണി സകുലം

കികരീഭൂതവേതാള കൂളീപ്പവാഹം
 പിന്നടഹാസങ്ഗളിട്ടു കുന്തം
 കടമ്പുള്ള ശംഖം കൃപാം കപാലം
 ഭമാരതിർത്തേതാടി മണ്ഡുന
 കണ്ഠസ്പന്ദം
 സിംഹനാഭത്തിനും ക്ഷീണമുണ്ഡാ-
 മിടക്കും പട്ടതും കൊടുക്കുന്ന പൊട്ടി-
 ശ്വിരിക്കെട്ടു ദിക്കും
 പൊടിയ്ക്കായ്ക്കൊടുക്കും
 കടും പത്ര കൊക്കത്തും താളമേളും
 പിടിച്ചുംബരിജാലസംഗിതനുത്തം
 തുടക്കിക്കിണിവേണ്ണവിണാപ്രയോഗം
 ചെപ്പിക്കൊണ്ടു തകക്കുടക്കൊക്കും രണ്ടും
 കളം കുക്കുമീപകമാലേയ ലേപം.

Thus, your radiant, circular face (like a orb), which gives distress to the full moon by making it appear blemished in comparison, and causes it to develop a contrasting beauty, appears formidable to those who fear you. To those who comprehend your true nature, nothing appears more superior. To your devotees, it bestows prosperity. The two fierce tusks visible on your face (fierce, in the sense of being destructive) are terrifying. In your hands, bracelets jingle with clusters of small bells, and there is a continuous flow of Vetal (a type of ghost) and Kula (a type of female ghost) who have become your servants. You leap up as if flying, roaring with laughter. In your hands, you hold a spear, a conch that has been churned (or spun), a sword, and a skull. The sound from your throat is such that even the roar of a lion would be diminished, causing opposing soldiers to flee in terror. Your thunderous laughter seems to empower the sound of thunder itself. As you burst into laughter, your firm, spherical breasts, which are like hard balls, are pressed against each other, causing the eight directions to turn to dust. They sway rhythmically, as if keeping time and beat, accompanied by the celestial women (Devanganas) who perform music and dance in multitudes. You affectionately listen to the various instruments played by these Devanganas, such as the Thudi (a

small drum), Kinkini (bells), Venu (flute), and Veena. Your two breasts, beautiful as golden pitchers, are smeared with saffron paste and sandal paste.

This passage vividly illustrates the concept of the divine as both ‘Ugra’ (fierce) and ‘Saumya’ (gentle/beautiful), a hallmark of Devi worship and Tantric mysticism.

The Paradoxical Nature of Divine Appearance and Perception: The opening lines, describing the face as “radiant, circular” yet “giving distress to the full moon” and appearing “formidable to those who fear you,” while simultaneously bestowing prosperity on devotees, encapsulate a profound mystical truth. The divine form is not static; its perception depends entirely on the beholder’s internal state and spiritual understanding. For the uninitiated or the ego-bound, the divine’s raw power can be terrifying, a force of destruction that challenges their limited reality. For those who “comprehend your true nature,” it is utterly superior and non-threatening. And for devotees (Bhakta), this same form is the source of “prosperity” – not just material wealth, but spiritual well-being and liberation. This highlights the subjective nature of divine experience in mysticism; the same ultimate reality can manifest as fear, awe, or bliss based on one’s level of spiritual evolution.

Destructive Power as a Manifestation of Divine Action (Tusks, Weapons, Laughter): The imagery of “fierce tusks,” holding a “spear, a conch, a sword, and a skull,” the “roar of a lion... diminished,” and “thunderous laughter” that “empowers the sound of thunder itself” is classic iconography of fierce deities like Kali or Durga. Mystically, these elements symbolize the divine’s capacity for destruction – not as a malevolent act, but as a necessary process of cosmic dissolution, purification, and the annihilation of ignorance, ego, and evil (negative forces).

The “conch” can symbolize the primordial sound (Om) from which creation arises, but here, “churned” or “spun,” it might signify the divine’s active engagement in the cosmic cycles. The “skull” represents the triumph over mortality and the transient nature of life, showing that even death is under divine control. The “Vetala and Kula” as servants signify the divine’s dominion over even the most fearsome supernatural entities, further emphasizing absolute power. This destruction is ultimately a creative act, clearing the ground for new beginnings and the liberation of souls.

Cosmic Dance and Universal Control (Breasts causing directions to turn to dust, rhythmic sway): The description of the “firm, spherical breasts” swaying rhythmically and “causing the eight directions to turn to dust” as the divine bursts into laughter, followed by celestial music and dance, evokes the concept of cosmic dance (Tandava). This is a powerful mystical metaphor for the continuous process of creation, preservation, and dissolution, driven by the divine’s spontaneous joy and energy. The breasts, typically symbols of nourishment and creation, here are also associated with a destructive force (“eight directions to turn to dust”) when combined with the fierce laughter. This reinforces the idea of the divine as the unified source of all forces – creation and destruction emanating from the same blissful being. The entire cosmos, including the celestial beings and their music, is depicted as an extension of the divine’s rhythmic movement and delight.

Embodiment of Nurturing and Aesthetic Bliss: Amidst the fierce imagery, the verses revert to “golden jewelled earrings,” “mirror-like cheeks,” and breasts “smeared with saffron paste and sandal paste.” This reintroduces the ‘Saumya’ aspect, emphasizing the divine as the epitome of beauty, nourishment, and aesthetic pleasure. The divine “affectionately listen[ing] to the

various instruments” highlights the divine’s role as the enjoyer of creation and the patron of arts, music, and dance. Mystically, this suggests that the divine is both the terrifying force that breaks down illusions and the beautiful, nurturing mother who sustains and delights in her creation. For the devotee, this dual nature allows for worship both through awe and reverence for power, and through love and surrender to beauty and compassion, leading to a complete and holistic mystical experience.

പാളക്കാത്ത മുത്തുപ്പടം കല്പവ്യൂക്തി-
തലപ്പുകുലക്കാത്തു കോർത്തിട്ടു
മാലാ കളക്കാവിഹീനം കലാപിച്ചു-
മേതാനലക്കാര പ്രസാദങ്ങളും മറ്റു-
മുള്ളാരലം ശക്തരല്ലരുമോതാനിതൊന്നു!

You are adorned with an upper garment inlaid with crystal-like pearls and a garland strung with clusters of blossoms from the wish-fulfilling tree, all arranged flawlessly and appropriately. Indeed, no one alive possesses sufficient skill to describe these garments, ornaments, their harmonious arrangement, and other such details!

These verses, while seemingly focused on external adornments, carry profound mystical weight by emphasizing the ineffability and transcendental nature of the divine.

Symbolism of Divine Adornments (Perfection and Wish-Fulfillment): The description of the divine adorned with an “upper garment inlaid with crystal-like pearls” and a “garland strung with clusters of blossoms from the wish-fulfilling tree” is deeply symbolic. “Crystal-like pearls” represent purity, luminosity, and ultimate perfection, suggesting that the divine form itself is composed of the purest essence of existence. The “wish-fulfilling tree” (Kalpavriksha) is a mythological symbol of abundance, generosity, and the fulfillment of all desires. When the divine is adorned with its blossoms, it mystically signifies that the divine is the ultimate source of all abundance,

prosperity (both material and spiritual), and the granter of liberation. This imagery reinforces the concept that approaching the divine leads to the realization of all aspirations, not merely worldly ones. The “flawlessly and appropriately” arrangement speaks to the inherent order, harmony, and perfection of the divine manifestation.

The Ineffability of the Divine: The most significant mystical element in these lines is the emphatic declaration: “Indeed, no one alive possesses sufficient skill to describe these garments, ornaments, their harmonious arrangement, and other such details!” This is a powerful statement of ineffability – the concept that the ultimate reality (Brahman, or the Supreme Being) transcends all conceptualization, language, and human description. While the preceding verses vividly attempt to describe the divine’s attributes and form, these lines acknowledge the inherent limitation of human language and intellect in fully grasping the divine.

Mystically, this serves several purposes:

- ◆ It prevents reductionism: It cautions against confining the boundless divine within limited human categories or descriptions.
- ◆ It points to direct experience: If words cannot describe it, then true understanding must come through direct, non-conceptual, intuitive experience – the very essence of mystical realization.
- ◆ It cultivates awe and humility: Acknowledging the indescribable nature of the divine fosters a sense of profound awe and humility in the seeker, which are crucial attitudes for spiritual progress.
- ◆ It implies Transcendence: It reiterates that the divine is beyond all manifest forms and qualities, even those beautifully

described, emphasizing its ultimate transcendental nature. The detailed description served its purpose of invoking the divine’s power and beauty, but the true essence remains beyond words.

In essence, these lines, through their very admission of descriptive inadequacy, point towards a deeper, unspeakable truth that lies at the heart of mystical inquiry.

പിടിക്കുള്ളടക്കിരക്കാടുക്കും വയറി-
നടിക്കോമന്പുമണിപ്പട്ടുടുത്ത
മുടിച്ചിക്കു കച്ചപ്പറിം വച്ചിരുക്കി-
കടിക്കാമവണ്ടിക്കുടത്തീനിശിഞ്ഞ-
ത്തുടക്കാമ്പു തുനിക്കരശീ നമിക്കും.

Your waist is so slender that it can be grasped within a single palm. Below it, you wear a charming, jewelled silk garment. Over this, a girdle is tightly fastened, securing the ends of your twisted hair. Your hip region is indeed the very hub of Kamadeva’s chariot wheel. From it, your thigh, which descends like the spokes of a wheel, is such that the beauty of an elephant’s trunk would bow in reverence before it.

These verses offer a highly sensual and idealized description of the divine feminine form, yet their mystical significance lies beyond mere aesthetic appreciation. They symbolize divine perfection, the source of creative power, and the magnetic pull of the ultimate reality.

Idealized Form as a Mystical Symbol: The description of the divine’s form, particularly the “slender waist that can be grasped within a single palm,” the “charming, jewelled silk garment,” and the “tightly fastened girdle,” serves to create an image of absolute perfection and divine beauty. In mystical traditions, an idealized physical form of the deity is not to be taken literally as a corporeal being, but as a symbolic representation of the ultimate reality’s inherent beauty, harmony, and perfection. Meditating upon

such a perfect form can elevate the consciousness, drawing the devotee's mind away from imperfections and towards the divine ideal. This aesthetic appreciation becomes a pathway to spiritual absorption, leading to an experience of divine bliss.

The Hip as the Hub of Kamadeva's Chariot Wheel (Source of Creation and Desire): The profound mystical statement here is: "Your hip region is indeed the very hub of Kamadeva's chariot wheel." Kamadeva, the god of love and desire, represents the force of attraction, procreation, and the perpetuation of the phenomenal world (samsara). By identifying the divine hip region as the "hub" of Kamadeva's chariot wheel, Narayana Guru is mystically asserting that the divine feminine is the *source* and *controller* of all cosmic desire and creative energy. It implies that the very power that drives creation and perpetuates cycles of life and desire emanates from the divine. For the mystic, this means that even worldly desires, when understood deeply, point back to their divine origin. It also suggests that true mastery over desire comes not from suppression but from recognizing its divine source and transforming it into a longing for the ultimate.

Transcendence of Earthly Beauty (Elephant's Trunk): The comparison of the thigh's beauty, before which "the beauty of an elephant's trunk would bow in reverence," continues the theme of divine transcendence over all earthly perfections. The elephant's trunk is often admired for its strength, grace, and unique form. By stating that even this impressive natural beauty pales in comparison to the divine thigh, the verse elevates the divine form to a realm beyond ordinary human comprehension or comparison. Mystically, this reinforces the idea that the divine is the supreme standard of all beauty and perfection, and all manifest beauty is but a pale reflection. This further encourages the devotee to fix their gaze and

mind on the divine, knowing that ultimate aesthetic and spiritual fulfillment lies there.

അനംഗൻ തുണിരമോട്ടു തമ്മിൽ
പിനകം തുടങ്ങിജയിക്കുന്ന പൊന്തു-
കണകാലടിക്കച്ചുപാ തോറു തോയേ
തപസ്സിനു പോകുന്ന പാദാഗ്രശോഭം
കണകാലടിത്താമരപുവിലോലം
കളിക്കുന്ന പുത്രേൻ നുകർന്നാത്തമോദം
വിളങ്ങുന്ന ദേവാംഗനാഗാനമേളം
കളം വീണ നാനാവിധിം വാദ്യഭേദം
ശവിച്ചും സവീചാരുനര്യാണി തനിൽ
യണ്ട്‌കാരപുരം വഹിച്ചും നടന്നും
മുദാ ശ്രോദ കൈലാസസ്വംഗേ ലസിച്ചും
തദാ ദേവനാരീസമക്ഷം വഹിച്ചും
നമിച്ചും സൃഷ്ടാർ വഹിച്ചും കടക്ഷം
ഗമിച്ചും നിജാനന്മോടാവിരാഹം-
വയിക്കുള്ള കാമം ലഭിച്ചും പദാനേ
ജീച്ചും
തദാവാസദേശേ വനിച്ചും സുവിച്ചും
രമിച്ചും സ്വകാര്യേഷ്യലം സംഭ്രമി-
ചകുരിച്ചതലും മുലമാക്കീ വിള-
ങ്ങനിവണ്ണം ഭവതക്കെടക്കണം
ചുളിച്ചാനു
നോക്കായ്‌ക്കുമുലം കൃപാലോ! ന
മന്ത്രതേ! നമസ്തേ!

When Kamadeva's quiver contends with your golden ankle, it is your ankle that triumphs. The beauty of the front of your foot is such that a turtle, defeated, appears to retreat into the water under the guise of performing austerities. Celestial maidens, full of joy, shine brightly as they partake of the nectar that gently ripples from your lotus-like ankle. Accompanying this, they perform musical concerts. You listen to the melodious, indistinct sounds of various instruments, including the Veena. As a companion to these celestial maidens, as a clear manifestation of your enjoyment of this musical harmony, you walk, letting the flow of a 'Jhanat-tanat' sound emanate from your exquisite Narayani (the bone in the ankle region) into their beautiful Narayanas. Thus, you radiate joy and brilliance on the peak of Kailash, your consort's abode. At that moment, all the celestial maidens dance with joy, accompanying you. Seeing this, all

the deities bow to you. They receive your benevolent glance and proceed with their inherent joy, their every desire fulfilled as it arises. Besides those who accompany your graceful stroll, there are others who worship at your feet. They reside in the abode of your feet, that is, on this very Earth created by your graceful footwork in dance. Yet, they remain unaware that they reside in a place created by the Goddess's footwork. They too experience pleasure and delight. Unaware that their very existence and the joys within it are solely due to the greatness of your feet, they remain perpetually engaged in their own affairs and those of their relatives, never satiated. Thus, they endure here, making their sorrow the very basis of their lives. The sole reason for this is that you, merciful Mother, have not cast even a slight, compassionate glance upon them. Salutations to you, O Mother of boundless compassion! Salutations! Salutations!

This passage offers a profound exposition on the nature of divine supremacy, grace, and the human condition caught in the cycle of samsara, contrasting it with the path of devotion.

Divine Transcendence Over Desire and Worldly Allure: The opening lines, where the “golden ankle” triumphs over “Kamadeva’s quiver,” and the “turtle, defeated, appears to retreat into the water under the guise of performing austerities,” are rich in mystical symbolism. As discussed before, Kamadeva represents worldly desire and infatuation. The ankle’s victory signifies the divine’s absolute transcendence over all forces of desire that bind beings to the material plane. The “turtle retreating into water under the guise of austerities” is a metaphor for the futility of even great efforts (like austerities) when undertaken without true understanding or surrender to the supreme divine. It implies that ordinary spiritual practices, if not imbued with devotion to the ultimate reality, cannot truly defeat the allure of Maya. The divine’s

sheer presence effortlessly overcomes these binding forces, setting the stage for true liberation.

The Divine as the Source of Cosmic Bliss and Harmony (Celestial Maidens, Music, Kailash): The imagery of “celestial maidens, full of joy, shine brightly as they partake of the nectar that gently ripples from your lotus-like ankle,” accompanied by “musical concerts” and the harmonious “Jhanat-tanat sound,” portrays the divine as the very fount of cosmic bliss and aesthetic harmony. The “nectar” from the ankle symbolizes divine grace and the overflowing joy (Ananda) that emanates from the divine’s being, sustaining all celestial realms and beings. The celestial music and dance, which the divine “enjoys” and participates in, represent the cosmic play (Lila) of creation and manifestation, where all existence vibrates in harmony with the divine will. The divine radiating “joy and brilliance on the peak of Kailash” (Shiva’s abode, here used to denote the divine feminine’s consort’s realm) reinforces the idea of the divine as the supreme enjoyer and master of the universe, whose presence imbues all with delight and splendor. This signifies that true bliss is not found in external pursuits but in aligning with the divine’s inherent joy.

Divine Grace, Fulfillment of Desires, and the State of Awakened Beings: The description of “all the deities bow[ing] to you,” receiving “your benevolent glance,” and proceeding “with their inherent joy, their every desire fulfilled as it arises” highlights the profound power of divine grace (Kripa). For those who are attuned to the divine (like the deities and celestial maidens), a mere glance is enough to fulfill all desires and grant inherent joy. This points to a mystical state of liberation where desires are not suppressed but naturally fulfilled as they arise, because the individual’s will is perfectly aligned with the divine will. It suggests a state of effortless existence where the flow of grace ensures complete contentment and

joy, transcending the cycle of wanting and striving.

The Delusion of Maya and the Role of Divine Glance (Kataksha): The most poignant mystical element, and a central theme in Narayana Guru's philosophy, is the stark contrast drawn between the awakened beings and the ordinary human condition. "Others who worship at your feet... reside in the abode of your feet, that is, on this very Earth created by your graceful footwork in dance. Yet, they remain unaware... They too experience pleasure and delight. Unaware that their very existence and the joys within it are solely due to the greatness of your feet, they remain perpetually engaged in their own affairs and those of their relatives, never satiated. Thus, they endure here, making their sorrow the very basis of their lives. The sole reason for this is that you, merciful Mother, have not cast even a slight, compassionate glance upon them." This passage beautifully articulates the concept of Maya (cosmic illusion). Humanity lives in the divine's very creation, experiences its pleasures, and is sustained by its power, yet remains "unaware" of this fundamental truth. This unawareness, perpetuated by Maya, leads to attachment to "own affairs and those of their relatives," resulting in a state of "never satiated" longing and ultimately, "sorrow the very basis of their lives." The ultimate cause of this ignorance and suffering is attributed to the "merciful Mother" not casting "even a slight, compassionate glance upon them." This emphasizes that divine grace (Kataksha) is the sole catalyst for awakening. Without that liberating glance, beings remain trapped in the illusion of individuality and the cycle of suffering, even amidst apparent worldly pleasures. The repeated "Salutations to you, O Mother of boundless compassion!" serves as an earnest plea for this very glance, the ultimate mystical key to liberation.

നമസ്തേ മഹാഗോലാരസംസാരവാരാ-
നിയിക്കക്കരക്കേരുവാൻ തൃപ്തത്വാ-

രിനക്കപ്പലല്ലാതൊരാലംവന്നു മ-
ററ്റിക്കൊന്നുമില്ലംവൈ, കാരുണ്യരാശേ!

Translation: Salutations to you, Mother!

To cross the great and terrifying ocean of worldly existence, I have no other support than the ship of your two divine lotus feet, O ocean of compassion!

These lines articulate a fundamental mystical tenet: absolute surrender and the exclusive reliance on divine grace for liberation (moksha).

Samsara as a "Terrifying Ocean":

The metaphor of "the great and terrifying ocean of worldly existence (samsara)" is a classic image in Indian mystical traditions. It represents the endless cycle of birth, death, suffering, and rebirth, driven by karma and ignorance. The "terrifying" aspect highlights the inherent anxieties, impermanence, and suffering encountered in material existence. For the mystic, recognizing samsara as an inescapable trap is the first step towards seeking liberation.

Divine Lotus Feet as the Sole Means of Salvation ("Ship"):

The declaration "I have no other support than the ship of your two divine lotus feet" encapsulates the essence of Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion). The "lotus feet" symbolize the most accessible and humble point of contact with the divine, representing divine grace, protection, and unconditional love. The "ship" metaphor implies that individual effort or worldly means are insufficient to navigate the treacherous waters of samsara; only the divine's saving power can transport the soul across. This is a complete surrender to divine will, emphasizing that ultimate liberation is achieved not through self-reliance, but through the compassionate intervention of the divine. The address "O ocean of compassion" further reinforces the source of this saving grace.

നിന്ത്യക്കുന്നതെല്ലാം കൊടുക്കുന്ന തൃക്ക-

ഓമിതേര കടാക്ഷം ലഭിപ്പാനണ്ണത്തൻ
പദാംഭാജ വൈമുവ്യമന്നിൽ പിണ്ണത്തീ-
കൊലാ തേ നമസ്തേ! നമസ്തേ! നമസ്തേ!

Mother, you are the one who grants everything that is desired to everyone. I have approached you to receive the nectarine glance from your divine eyes. May your lotus feet never turn away from me, and may I never turn away from your lotus feet. Salutations to you! Salutations! Salutations!

These verses serve as a fervent plea and a testament to the core of devotional mysticism, emphasizing the power of divine grace and the crucial role of unwavering devotion for spiritual fulfillment.

Divine as the Granter of All Desires (Spiritual Fulfillment): The opening declaration, “Mother, you are the one who grants everything that is desired to everyone,” sets the stage for a mystical understanding of the divine as the ultimate fulfiller. While this might initially sound like a worldly promise, in a mystical context, “everything that is desired” often extends beyond material wants to encompass spiritual aspirations – liberation, knowledge, bliss, and union with the divine. It implies that all true fulfillment, even seemingly mundane joys, ultimately emanates from the divine source. For the devotee, this instills deep trust and strengthens faith, knowing that the divine is responsive to all sincere prayers and inner longings.

The Significance of the “Nectarine Glance” (Kataksha): The seeker’s primary aspiration is to “receive the nectarine glance from your divine eyes.” This “nectarine glance” (Kataksha) is a potent mystical symbol. It represents divine grace (Anugraha), a transformative spiritual energy bestowed by the deity through a look. “Nectarine” suggests that this glance bestows immortality, removes spiritual ignorance, and fills the devotee with divine bliss. In many mystical traditions, a mere glance from an

enlightened being or the divine is believed to transmit spiritual power, purify the mind, and lead to profound inner awakening. It is a non-verbal, direct communication of grace that transcends intellectual understanding and personal effort, highlighting the role of divine intervention in the spiritual journey.

Mutual Non-Turning Away: The Essence of Unwavering Devotion: The powerful plea, “May your lotus feet never turn away from me, and may I never turn away from your lotus feet,” captures the essence of unwavering, reciprocal devotion (Bhakti). The “lotus feet” symbolize humble surrender and complete dedication to the divine. This is not just a one-sided request for grace; it is a commitment from the devotee as well. “May your lotus feet never turn away from me” is a prayer for continuous divine presence and grace, fearing spiritual abandonment. Simultaneously, “may I never turn away from your lotus feet” is a pledge of eternal loyalty, focus, and unwavering faith, signifying the devotee’s resolve to remain constantly aligned with the divine. This mutual bond, where both the divine and the devotee remain steadfast, is the highest ideal of devotional mysticism, leading to ultimate union and liberation. The triple “Salutations to you!” reinforces this profound reverence and surrender, marking the culmination of the fervent prayer.

വണ്ണ പെണ്ണിലും മണ്ണിലും ചെന്നു വു-
ക്കാശസിച്ചാതമോഡം ഗുണം കെട്ടു
ദുഃഖിച്ചുപോവാനയയ്ക്കൊല്ലുഹം
ദേഹമനോർത്തു സത്ത്വാദിയാം മുക്കു
ണം കെട്ടു
പെട്ടാരു മായാവിലാസം കഷണം കഷിണ-
ലോകപ്രപഞ്ചപവാഹം കഷണങ്ങ്യാതിരാ
ചരംതാരം
നമസ്തേ ശിവാംബാ, നമസ്തേ! നമസ്തേ!

Do not allow me to become entangled in the desire for wealth, women, and land, finding false comfort in them and thereby losing my virtues and sinking into sorrow!

Understanding that this body, which gives me individual existence, has no inherent reality and is merely a borrowed form, one must realise that this body is nothing but a performance of Sattva (goodness), Rajas (passion), and Tamas (darkness) combined. Realise that the play of your Maya (cosmic illusion) is momentary. The continuous flow of this world, consisting of all ephemeral bodies that pass away, not just the body, but this entire universe, including all celestial bodies, is but a fleeting glimpse of your divine light. Salutations to you, O Mother of auspiciousness! Salutations! Salutations!

These verses represent a pivotal shift from devotional adoration of the divine form to a profound philosophical and experiential understanding of Maya, the nature of reality, and the path to liberation through discernment and detachment.

Renunciation of Worldly Attachment and the Source of Sorrow: The initial plea, “Do not allow me to become entangled in the desire for wealth, women, and land, finding false comfort in them and thereby losing my virtues and sinking into sorrow!” is a classic mystical prayer for detachment (vairagya). “Wealth, women, and land” are symbolic of all worldly attachments, representing the primary sources of egoic gratification and, consequently, suffering (dukkha). The term “false comfort” highlights the illusory nature of happiness derived from external pursuits. Mystically, true and lasting happiness is internal and derived from connection with the divine, not from transient worldly possessions or relationships. This plea acknowledges the powerful pull of Maya in the form of worldly desires and seeks divine grace to overcome them, recognizing them as obstacles to spiritual progress and the root of sorrow.

The Illusory Nature of the Body and the Gunas: The realization that “this body, which gives me individual existence, has no inherent reality and is merely a borrowed

form,” and is “nothing but a performance of Sattva (goodness), Rajas (passion), and Tamas (darkness) combined,” is a fundamental mystical insight from Samkhya and Vedanta philosophies. This is a direct challenge to the common identification with the physical self. Mystically, the body is seen as an ephemeral vehicle, composed of the three Gunas (qualities of Prakriti – nature). Realizing its lack of “inherent reality” (i.e., it is not the true, eternal Self) is crucial for transcending ego and the limitations of physical existence. This understanding is key to unlocking the true, eternal self (Atman). The body is merely a “performance,” a temporary manifestation, implying that its joys and sorrows are also transient and not reflective of the true, immutable nature of consciousness.

The Momentary Nature of Maya and the Fleeting Universe: The most profound mystical statements are: “Realise that the play of your Maya (cosmic illusion) is momentary. The continuous flow of this world, consisting of all ephemeral bodies that pass away, not just the body, but this entire universe, including all celestial bodies, is but a fleeting glimpse of your divine light.” This is a powerful articulation of the impermanence (anicca in Buddhism, anitya in Hinduism) and illusory nature of the entire manifested cosmos.

◆ **“Play of your Maya is momentary”:** This emphasizes that the entire phenomenal universe, created by divine Maya, is transient and temporary, like a dream or a drama. Mystically, this calls for a shift in perspective from identifying with the fleeting manifest world to recognizing the eternal, unchanging reality that underlies it.

◆ **“Continuous flow of this world... ephemeral bodies... entire**

universe... fleeting glimpse of your divine light": This expands the concept of impermanence beyond the individual body to encompass the entire cosmos, including stars and celestial bodies. Everything that appears solid and real is actually in a constant state of flux. Crucially, this flux is not random but "a fleeting glimpse of your divine light." This means that the entire universe, with all its transient forms, is ultimately a manifestation of the divine. It is a "glimpse" – a partial and momentary revelation of the infinite and eternal light of Brahman. For the mystic, this

insight leads to non-attachment to the world while simultaneously recognizing the divine immanence within it. It fosters a deep understanding of unity – that even what seems to decay and pass away is part of the eternal divine play. The ultimate goal is to see through the "fleeting glimpse" to the full "divine light" that gives it existence. The final salutations to "Mother of auspiciousness" (Shivamba) re-establish the personal devotion to the divine as the path to gaining such profound realization and liberation from sorrow.

Recap

- ◆ Mysticism is the direct, ineffable experience of ultimate reality.
- ◆ 'Kaali Naatakam' depicts Supreme Reality as the Goddess, with the universe as her divine dance.
- ◆ The poem subtly manifests the nine classical aesthetic sentiments (Nava Rasas) through the Goddess's cosmic drama.
- ◆ Its unique structure features continuous, seamless anatomical descriptions without punctuation breaks.
- ◆ 'Kaali Naatakam' is an unparalleled poetic blend of meaning and sound figures, rivaling 'Soundarya Lahari' and Kalidasa's works.
- ◆ The work's metre is 'Simhavikraantam', a Dandakam consistently employing 'Yaganas'.
- ◆ 'Kaali Naatakam's' profound semantic richness makes comprehensive interpretation impossible, requiring experiential understanding.
- ◆ The divine Mother is invoked as 'Naada Bindvaatmike', representing primordial sound and cosmic origin.
- ◆ The text highlights divine immanence, showing God as both universe's creator and its subtle essence.
- ◆ Even high deities like Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma are ensnared in Maya, underscoring the addressed divine's supreme transcendence.

Objective Questions

1. What is the core pursuit of mysticism?
2. How many classical aesthetic sentiments are mentioned?
3. What type of poetic creation is 'Kaali Naatakam' considered?
4. What is the metre of 'Kaali Naatakam'?
5. What does Naada represent?
6. What is the theme of 'Lila'?
7. Which cosmic power can ensnare even great souls?
8. Which specific aspect of the divine is 'Kaali Naatakam' centered on?
9. How many 'Rasas' are subtly manifested in the cosmic drama?
10. What type of metre, characterized by 'Yaganas', is used throughout the work?
11. What cosmic power creates the illusion that ensnares even deities?
12. What does the divine's 'Kataksha' (glance) symbolize for devotees?
13. Which concept describes the universe as a spontaneous divine act?
14. What part of the divine form is said to contain the 'ocean of supreme bliss'?

Answers

1. Reality
2. Nine
3. Unparalleled
4. Dandakam
5. Sound

6. Play
7. Maya
8. Goddess
9. Nine
10. Dandakam
11. Maya
12. Grace
13. Lila
14. Glances

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Discuss the key characteristics of mysticism as outlined in the text and how 'Kaali Naatakam' exemplifies these characteristics.
2. Explain how Muni Narayana Prasad's analysis positions 'Kaali Naatakam' as a unique poetic masterpiece in Indian devotional literature.
3. Describe the significance of the 'Keshaadipaadavarnana' and the continuous flow structure in 'Kaali Naatakam', contrasting it with typical poetic descriptions.
4. Analyze the mystical concept of 'Naada Bindvaatmike' in the opening verses and its implications for understanding the origin of the universe.
5. How do the verses express divine immanence and the concept of 'Lila' (divine play)? Provide specific examples from the text.
6. Discuss the dual manifestation of the divine, being clear for the wise and hidden for the ignorant, and what this implies for spiritual seekers.
7. Explain how the verses portray divine compassion and grace as the means to liberation from sorrow.
8. Elaborate on the transcendence of time and imperishability of the divine as presented in the poem, and its effect on the mystic.

9. Analyze the role of Maya in 'Kaali Naatakam', specifically how it ensnares even the highest deities and what this implies for liberation.
10. How does the text describe the overwhelming nature of Maya and why intellectual contemplation alone is insufficient to overcome its illusion?
11. Discuss the symbolism of the Ganga in the divine's matted locks and the presence of the moon and skull, explaining their mystical significance.
12. Explain how the description of the divine's physical attributes, such as the eyebrows, eyes, and lips, is used to convey mystical concepts like transcendence of desire, compassion, and cosmic bliss.





BLOCK

The Self and Non-Self in Spiritual





Guru's Methodology in Finding the Self *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* verses 10, 11 & 12

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ describe the concept of Brahman and Atman within Advaita Vedanta and explain their essential identity
- ◆ understand the three intrinsic attributes of Brahman: Sat, Cit, and Ananda
- ◆ explain the concept of Maya and its role in the apparent manifestation of the world and individual consciousness
- ◆ identify the ultimate goal of human life as self-realisation and understand its ethical implications according to Sree Narayana Guru

Prerequisites

To fully grasp the profound concepts presented in this unit on Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy, a foundational understanding of key Indian philosophical tenets is needed. This includes familiarity with major schools of thought, particularly the concepts of Brahman and Atman, which are central to Guru's teachings. Additionally, an introduction to Vedanta, especially Advaita Vedanta, and its core principles like non-duality, Maya, and the idea of a singular ultimate reality, will be significantly beneficial as this unit builds upon these established Vedantic frameworks.

Furthermore, it helps to have an appreciation for how consciousness is understood across various spiritual traditions, moving beyond mere intellectual awareness. This will aid in comprehending Guru's emphasis on experiential realization. A basic understanding of the human perceptual process and its limitations is also useful for understanding Guru's discussions on the constraints of empirical knowledge.

Finally, familiarity with the concept of liberation (moksha), the ultimate goal of spiritual inquiry in Indian traditions, provides a crucial framework for appreciating the practical implications of Guru's philosophy.

Beyond theoretical knowledge, an open mind and a willingness to engage in self-inquiry are paramount. This material encourages introspection and direct engagement with the concepts rather than passive intellectual assimilation. A receptive and inquisitive attitude will unlock deeper understanding. Moreover, a basic understanding of symbolism in spiritual texts is valuable, as many of Guru's profound ideas are conveyed through analogies and metaphors. Lastly, an interest in the intersection of spirituality and social reform will enrich your learning experience, as Sree Narayana Guru uniquely blends metaphysical insights with practical social change.

Keywords

Self-realisation, Dialectical Reasoning, Thought Experiment, Unitive Understanding, Egoity, Non-duality, Ātman, Self-substance

Discussion

Guru's Methodology in Finding the Self: Ātmopadeśa Śatakam Verses 10, 11 & 12

Sree Narayana Guru, a preeminent philosopher and social reformer, masterfully employs a unique methodology in his seminal work, *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* (One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction), to guide the seeker towards self-realisation (ആത്മസാക്ഷാത്കാരം). His approach, particularly evident in verses 10, 11, and 12, transcends conventional philosophical and scientific paradigms, offering a dialectical and experimental framework for understanding the Self (Ātman - ആത്മാവ്). This exposition will critically analyse Guru's methodology as presented in these verses and their accompanying explanations, integrating insights from renowned philosophers to illuminate the profundity of his approach.

Verse 10: The Dialectic of Self-Inquiry in Darkness

‘ഇരുളിലിരിപ്പവനാർ? ചൊല്ലക നീ’ യെ-
നോരുവനുരപ്പതു കേട്ടു താനുമേഖല
അവിവതിനായവനോടു ‘നീയുമാരെ’-
നന്നളുമിതിൻ പ്രതിവാക്യമേകമാകും.

‘Who sits there in the dark? Declare!’ says one;

Whereupon another, himself intent to find, in turn

Asks, hearing the first: ‘who may you even be?’

For both the word of response is but One. This seemingly simple four-line verse sets the stage for a profound philosophical inquiry into the nature of the Self. It depicts a

ഇരുളിൽ ഇരിപ്പൻ ആർ? = ഇരുളിൽ മരന്തിരിക്കുന്ന നീ ആർ? (Who are you, hidden in the dark?)

എന്ന് ഒരുവൻ ഉരപ്പത് കേടു = എന്ന് ഒരുവൻ ചോദിക്കുന്നത് കേട്ടിട്ട് (hearing one person ask)

താനും ഏവം = അതുപോലെ ഇരുട്ടിലിരിക്കുന്ന താനും (similarly, the one in the dark too)

അവിവതിനായ് = ഈ ചോദിച്ചതാർ എന്നറിയുന്നതിനായി (to know who asked this)

അവനോട് = ചോദിച്ചവനോട് (to the one who asked)

നീയും ആർ? = 'ചോദിക്കുന്ന നീ ആർ?' (who are you, the one asking?)

എന്ന് അരുളും = എന്ന് ചോദിച്ചുപോകും. (will ask)

ഇതിൽ പ്രതിവാക്യം = രണ്ടുപേരുടെയും ചോദ്യങ്ങൾക്കുള്ള ഉത്തരം (the answer to both questions)

എക്കമാകും = ഒന്നു മാത്രമാണ്. 'ഈൻ' എന്നു മാത്രമായിരിക്കും (is but one. It will be 'I' alone).

hypothetical scenario, a thought experiment, designed to isolate and identify the essence of individual consciousness.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer two distinct yet complementary philosophical perspectives on this verse, highlighting its scientific and introspective dimensions.

1. The Dialectical-Experimental Interpretation:

This interpretation views the verse as representing a dialectical situation where two individuals, in a state of darkness, question each other about their identity. The darkness indicates the ignorance of each person. The two individuals are seen as 'dialectically interchangeable factors', signifying an equality of status between the observer and the observed.

The concept of 'darkness' is crucial here. It symbolizes the elimination of the 'outward-going eye' which perceives external objects

(the non-self). By restricting sensory input, Guru directs the inquiry inward, towards the 'inner world' of consciousness. This distinction between the observable world and the introspective world is implicitly drawn. The 'word of response is but One' at the conclusion of this dialectic, suggesting a singular, unifying reality that transcends individual distinctions.

2. The Thought Experiment and Unitive Understanding:

This verse also has another vedantic and symbolic meaning. The 'darkness' here is further elucidated as ignorance (അവിഡ്യ - avidya), a conventional Vedantic concept. We exist within this darkness of avidya, asking fundamental questions about ourselves and others. The dissipation of this avidya reveals the singular 'I.' The introspective nature of self-awareness, even in darkness, is emphasized, reinforcing Guru's earlier directive to direct inquiry inward.

The core insight from this experiment

is the unifying 'I'. When one asks 'Who are you?' and the other replies 'I,' the roles of knower (jñātā - ജ്ഞാതാവാൻ) and known (jñeya - ജ്ഞായാവാൻ) become interchangeable. Yet, the underlying response, the 'I,' remains constant. This 'I' is neither solely the knower nor the known but encompasses both, and the darkness dissolves the distinction between subject and object. This 'I' is explicitly identified with the Ātman in verse 27, which states, 'The Ātman is that which knows in the darkness.'

The unitive understanding derived from this experiment is crucial. It signifies the abolition of duality, not merely in a theological sense (e.g., the separation of God and Man in some religious doctrines), but in a profound dialectical sense. Non-duality (അനബന്ധം), in Guru's context, transcends simplistic monism or monotheism; it represents a reduction of all duality – self and non-self, one and many – into a singular unity. This 'unitive way' leads to the central core of consciousness, a 'liquid central flux of eternal becoming,' which can be envisioned as a vertical axis within a clear crystal, representing pure contemplative consciousness.

Critical Analysis of Guru's Methodology in Verse 10

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, as exemplified in verse 10, is remarkably sophisticated and forward-thinking, especially considering his historical context. His approach showcases a blend of ancient wisdom traditions and a nascent scientific spirit, offering a compelling path to self-realisation.

1. The Integration of Science and Spirituality:

One of Guru's most significant innovations is his attempt to bridge the gap between scientific inquiry and spiritual realization. He frames the quest for self-knowledge not as a

purely mystical endeavour, but as a systematic 'experiment.' By introducing the concept of a 'laboratory experiment' in darkness with two 'control elements' (the two individuals), he employs a vocabulary and framework that resonate with scientific methodology. This makes the abstract concept of the Self more accessible and verifiable, even if it is a thought experiment. His recognition of 'free criticism based on equality of status between the counterparts' reflects a truly modern, scientific outlook, where assumptions are challenged and insights are arrived at through a process of mutual exploration rather than dogmatic assertion.

2. Dialectical Reasoning as a Core Tool:

The 'dialectical situation' is central to Guru's methodology. The back-and-forth questioning between the two individuals in the dark represents a dynamic process of inquiry where opposing perspectives (questioner and questioned) ultimately converge on a unified truth. This resonates with the philosophical tradition of dialectics, where truth emerges from the tension and resolution of contradictions. Unlike the linear, often one-sided, proofs of empirical science or rationalistic philosophy, Guru's dialectical method embraces the interplay of subject and object, leading to a more holistic and robust understanding of reality. The insistence on 'active seeking of wisdom' and the 'thirst for knowledge' underscores the transformative power of this dialectical engagement.

3. The Power of Thought Experiments:

Guru's use of a thought experiment is a brilliant pedagogical and philosophical device. It allows for the exploration of complex metaphysical concepts without the limitations of physical experimentation. By presenting a scenario that is 'accessible and verifiable by all' and whose 'veracity can be apprehended even without explicit experimentation,' Guru democratizes the



pursuit of self-knowledge. This mirrors the sophisticated thought experiments employed in theoretical physics, demonstrating that profound truths can be uncovered through rigorous mental contemplation. The progression from ‘data’ (the consistent ‘I’ response) to ‘contemplation’ and finally to a precise ‘definition of the Ātman’ (in verse 27) mirrors the scientific process of observation, analysis, and conclusion.

4. Introspection and the Elimination of Distractions:

The choice of ‘darkness’ is profoundly symbolic and methodologically significant. It represents the deliberate elimination of external stimuli and distractions, allowing for a deep dive into introspection. The ‘outward-going eye,’ which ordinarily perceives the non-self, is rendered ineffective, forcing attention inward. This aligns with contemplative practices across various spiritual traditions, where a quiet, undisturbed environment is often sought to facilitate inner vision. Guru thus establishes the necessity of a focused, undistracted mind for the pursuit of self-knowledge, moving from the realm of extraspection (outward observation) to introspection (inward observation).

5. The Unitive Nature of Reality:

The ultimate outcome of Guru’s

methodology in this verse is the realization of unitive understanding – the abolition of duality and the recognition of a singular, underlying reality. The repeated ‘I’ from both individuals, despite their apparent separation, points to a fundamental commonality, the Ātman. This is not a mere intellectual conclusion but an experiential one, arrived at through the process of the thought experiment. The concept of non-duality is a cornerstone of Vedantic philosophy, and Guru’s method provides a practical and relatable way to approach this profound truth, moving beyond mere theological or scholastic interpretations to a lived, dialectical experience of unity.

Verse 11: Resolving the Paradox of the One and the Many

അഹമഹമനരുളുനതൊക്കെയാരാ-
യുകിലകമേ പലതല്ലുതേകമാകും,
അകലുമഹത്യനേകമാകയാലീ-
രുകയിലാറം പൊരുളും തുടർന്നിട്ടുന്നു.

The repeated ‘I, I’ contemplated from within

Is not many but remains One; divergent egoity

Being multiple, with the totality of such

The Self-substance too continuity assumes

Meaning of words in Malayalam:

അഹം അഹം എന്ന് = തൊൻ, തൊൻ എന്ന് (I, I, referring to the repeated utterance)

അരുളുനതൊക്കെ = രണ്ടു പേരും പറയുന്നതും, എല്ലാരും പറയുന്നതും (what both say, and what everyone says)

അതായുകിൽ = സ്വകഷ്മമായി അനോഷ്ടിച്ചു നോക്കുന്നോൾ (when deeply inquired into)

അകമേ = അതിൻ്റെ ഉള്ളിലെ സാരമായിരിക്കുന്നത് (what is essential within it)

പലതല്ല = പലതല്ല (is not many)

അത് എകമാകും = അത് എകമാണ്. (it is one)

അകല്യം = ഓരോരുത്തരും വേറേ വേറേയെന്ന തത്തിൽ തോന്തുന്തായ (that which appears as separate for each individual)

അഹിത = തോൻ എന ഭാവം (the sense of 'I', egoity)

അനേകം = അനേകവ്യമാണ് (is also multiple)

ആകയാൽ = അതു കാരണം (therefore)

ഇ തുകയിൽ = ഏകതയുടെയും അനേകതയുടെയും ആകെത്തുകയെന്ന തത്തിലാണ് (in this sum of unity and multiplicity)

അഹിം പൊരുള്ളം = പരമാർത്ഥത്തിലുള്ള 'തോൻ' എന പൊരുൾ അമവാ ആത്മസത്യം (the true 'I' or the truth of the Self)

തുടർന്നിട്ടും = ഉണ്ടയുള്ളതായിരിക്കുന്നത്. (continues to exist, maintains continuity).

Building upon the experimental groundwork laid in earlier verses, Guru meticulously addresses one of the most enduring paradoxes in philosophy: the relationship between the one and the many. Through a sophisticated dialectical methodology, he offers a unique framework for understanding how the individual 'I' relates to the universal Self (Ātman - ആത്മാം). The following exposition will critically analyse Guru's methodology in resolving this paradox, drawing on the provided verse and its accompanying explanations, and integrating further insights from philosophical discourse.

The Verse and Its Core Proposition

The verse under consideration directly confronts the apparent contradiction between the individual experiences of a distinct 'I' and the philosophical assertion of a universal, singular Self. It posits that despite the multiplicity of individual 'I's (divergent egoity - വിവിധ അഹിതകൾ), when contemplated deeply, this 'I' reveals itself not as many, but as fundamentally One. Furthermore, it suggests a continuity between these multiple individual manifestations and the overarching 'Self-substance.'

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a multi-faceted interpretation of this verse, highlighting its philosophical significance and placing it within both Eastern and Western intellectual traditions.

1. The Enduring Paradox and the Dialectical Solution:

The interpretation immediately situates the verse within the historical context of the paradox of the one and the many, a problem that has puzzled philosophers from the pre-Socratics to Indian schools like Vaisesika and Samkhya. It asserts that this paradox persists even within 'unitively-understood metaphysics,' distinguishing a genuine unitive understanding from mere philosophical monism or theological monotheism. The 'truly wise man' is one who achieves a non-dual, unitive understanding of the Absolute, which necessitates a dialectical approach that transcends 'mechanistic reasoning.'

The text alludes to the *Bhagavad Gita* (IX.15) to demonstrate the historical persistence of this problem and the occasional glimpses of a dialectical resolution in philosophical discourse. The Gita verse,

where the Absolute is worshipped ‘unitively, dualistically, as also many-sidedly,’ particularly underscores the possibility of embracing multiple perspectives within a unified reality.

2. The Quagmire of Contradictory Appearances:

The second philosophical explanation reiterates that the initial ‘data’ from the ‘experiment’ – the universal ‘I’ response – forms the basis for this contemplation. While each individual identifies as ‘I’ (vyakti-satta - വ്യക്തിസ്തത), implying multiplicity, there is also a ‘singular, pervasive entity’ of ‘I-ness’ (samashthi-gata - സമാശ്തിഗത) that permeates all beings. The critical conclusion is that ‘unless we transcend these contradictory appearances and move beyond them, we will fail to apprehend the truth.’ This sets the imperative for Guru’s subsequent teachings, which must show how this transcendence is achieved.

Critical Analysis of Guru’s Methodology in Verse 11

Sree Narayana Guru’s methodology in addressing the paradox of the one and the many in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* demonstrates a intellectual and spiritual rigor. His approach is characterized by a systematic progression from experiential observation to deep philosophical analysis, culminating in a call for transformative understanding.

1. From Empirical Datum to Metaphysical Principle:

Guru’s methodology begins with an ‘empirical datum,’ albeit one derived from a thought experiment: the universal affirmation of ‘I’ by apparently distinct individuals. He then uses this simple observation as the launch pad for a profound metaphysical inquiry. The verse explicitly states that the ‘repeated ‘I, I’ contemplated from within’ reveals its singular nature, underscoring

the experiential, inward-directed nature of this verification.

2. The Nuance of Dialectical Resolution:

Guru does not deny the reality of multiplicity (‘divergent egoity being multiple’) nor does he simply assert a simplistic monism. Instead, he proposes a dialectical resolution where the One and the many are not mutually exclusive but find continuity within the ‘Self-substance (അത്മാരൂപം).’ This is a crucial aspect of his methodology. It acknowledges the phenomenal world of diversity while simultaneously pointing towards an underlying unity. The ‘ascending and descending movements’ of dialectics suggest a process of moving from the phenomenal to the essential and back, ensuring that the unitive understanding is holistic and integrated.

3. The Imperative of Transcendence:

The most significant methodological imperative highlighted by the explanation is the need to ‘transcend these contradictory appearances.’ Guru’s methodology is not satisfied with merely identifying the paradox; it demands a pathway out of it. This implies that the entire *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* is designed as a progressive guide, each verse building upon the last to facilitate this transcendence. The goal is not just intellectual assent but a transformative shift in perception that resolves the duality experientially. This makes Guru’s work not just an academic text but a practical manual for spiritual progress.

4. Focus on Inner Contemplation and Elimination of Extraneous Factors:

The recurring emphasis on ‘contemplated from within’ and the reference to the ‘dark room’ where ‘pure dialectics operates best when outer or extraneous factors are minimized’ reinforces the introspective nature

of Guru's methodology. The 'problems of contemplative wisdom concern the inner rather than the outer.' This deliberate exclusion of external distractions allows for a clearer perception of the fundamental relations between the Self and the not-Self, ultimately leading to the realization of 'equality, sameness, homogeneity or continuity' between the one and the many selves. This purification of the contemplative environment is key to accessing the subtle truths that lie beyond superficial appearances.

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* offers a meticulous exploration of the Self, progressively building upon insights from previous verses. Following the establishment of the singular nature of 'I' despite its manifold appearances, Guru, in the verse under analysis, addresses a critical practical and existential challenge: distinguishing between a genuine understanding of the Self and the insidious

pitfalls of egoism. The following discussion will critically analyze Guru's methodology in this context, drawing on the provided verse and its comprehensive explanations.

Verse 12: Discerning the True Self from the Transient Ego

തൊലിയുമെലും മലം ദുരന്തമതഃ-
കലകളുമെന്തുമഹിതയോന്തു കാണിക,
പൊലിയുമിതന്യു പൊലിഞ്ഞു പുർണ്ണമാകും
വലിയോരഹിത വരാവരം തരേണോ.

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,

grant the boon that it may not the ego
swell!

Meaning of words in Malayalam:

തൊലിയും = തക്ക (skin)

എലുമ്പ് = അസ്ഥികൾ (bones)

മലം = മലം (excrement/refuse)

ദുരന്തം അന്തഃകലകളും = ദുഷ്പങ്ങളിലേക്കു തള്ളിക്കൊണ്ടു പോകുന്ന
അന്തരികാംശങ്ങൾ (inner factors that lead to sorrow, inner impurities/vices)

എനിവയെയാകെ എന്തും = തനിൽ കയറിവച്ചിരിക്കുന്ന (all these, which one holds
within oneself)

അഹിത = അഹിതയാണ് (is ego)

ങ്ങു = ഒരു തരത്തിലുള്ളത് (അനേകമായി പിരിഞ്ഞുനില്ക്കുന്നത്) (one kind,
appearing as multiple manifestations)

കാണിക = എന്നുള്ളതു കണ്ടുകൊള്ളുക. (understand this)

പൊലിയും ഇത് = ഇതു നശിച്ചപോകുന്ന സ്വഭാവമുള്ളതാണ്. (this is perishable,
subject to decay)

പൊലിഞ്ഞു പുർണ്ണമാകും = അനേകമായ അഹിതയ്ക്ക് രൂപം നല്കുന്ന
ഉപാധികളുടെ നാശത്തിലാണ് പുർണ്ണത കണ്ടത്തുന്നത്. (perfection is found in the
destruction of the conditions that give rise to the manifold ego)

അന്യ = മറ്റൊരു അഹന്തയാക്കട (പ്രകമായ അഹന്തയാക്കട) (the other ego, or the unified ego)

വലിയൊരഹന്ത = വലിയതായ ഒരു അഹന്ത ('ഈൻ ജ്ഞാനിയാണ്', 'ഈൻ ഭേദവതുല്യ നാണ് എന്നിങ്ങനെയുള്ള വലിയ അഹന്ത) (a great ego, like 'I am a knower,' 'I am god-like')

വരം വരം തരേണോ = വരാതിരിക്കാനുള്ള വരം തന്ന് അനുഗ്രഹിക്കേണമേ! (grant the boon that it may not arise/swell!)

The Verse and Its Crucial Distinction

The verse under consideration makes a stark distinction between two forms of 'I' or 'ego.' One is identified with perishable, physical, and morally compromising elements ('skin, bone, refuse, and many an inner factor of evil end'). This is the 'ego which passes (നശിച്ചുപോകുന്ന അഹന്ത).' The other is the 'Self which grows to perfection (പൂർണ്ണതയിലേക്ക് വളരുന്ന ആത്മാം),' an intrinsic, higher aspect of being. The verse concludes with a poignant prayer, a plea for divine grace to prevent this perfecting Self from inflating into a harmful ego.

Philosophical Interpretations

The explanations provided offer a multi-layered interpretation of this verse, highlighting its practical wisdom and deep psychological insight into the spiritual journey.

1. The Dual Manifestations of the 'I' and the Path to Happiness:

The interpretation immediately clarifies that the 'repeated 'I, I' of the previous verse' refers to two distinct manifestations, even though their essence is one. The first is the 'I-as-ego (അഹന്താ രൂപത്തിലുള്ള ഈൻ),' described as a bundle of physical and mental impurities, including 'skin, bone, refuse, and many an inner factor of evil end' (ഇത്തോം അക്കാക്കലകൾ - durantam anthakkalakal). This ego is inherently transient and perishable,

leading to unhappiness and a false sense of self. The happiness derived from such an ego is fleeting and ultimately unsustainable. Guru highlights that the very elements associated with this ego are those that cause suffering and impermanence.

The second manifestation is the 'Self that grows to perfection,' or the true 'I.' This is the Atman, the inner reality that, when realized, transcends the limitations and impurities of the ego. The verse emphasizes that true and lasting happiness (Atma Sukham) arises when this higher Self blossoms. The inherent danger, however, is that even this process of spiritual growth can be corrupted by the re-emergence of a subtle, spiritual ego, a 'great ego' (valiyōrahantha), characterized by pride in one's spiritual attainments. This is a crucial warning against spiritual arrogance, which can derail the path to genuine liberation.

2. The Prayer for Humility and the Subtlety of Ego:

The concluding prayer, "O grant the boon that it may not the ego swell!" (വലിയൊരഹന്ത വരാവാം തരേണോ!), is profoundly significant. It acknowledges the persistent challenge of ego, even on advanced spiritual paths. This is not a request for worldly boons but for divine assistance in cultivating humility, which is essential for true self-realization. Guru implicitly understands that the ego is a pervasive force, capable of re-manifesting

in subtle and sophisticated ways, even in the guise of spiritual accomplishment.

3. The Transient Ego vs. The Eternal Self:

The analysis further elaborates on the distinction between the transient ego and the eternal Self. The ego, being tied to the physical body and mental constructs, is subject to decay and dissolution. Its characteristics are impermanence and a constant state of flux. In contrast, the true Self is described as that which 'grows to perfection,' implying its inherent potential for ultimate liberation and an eternal, unchanging nature. The perfection is achieved when the perishable aspects of the ego (the upadhis or limiting adjuncts) are transcended. This aligns with Vedantic principles that view the individual ego as an illusory superimposition on the true Ātman.

The verse serves as a reminder that the path to self-knowledge is not merely about intellectual understanding but about a transformative process of purification. It warns against clinging to any sense of individual accomplishment, even spiritual, as such attachment can become an obstacle. The ultimate goal is the complete absorption into the Universal Self, where even the "I" of the realized being merges into the boundless Consciousness.

Critical Analysis of Guru's Methodology in Verse 12

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in *Ātmopadeśa Śātakam*, as demonstrated in verse 12, is marked by its psychological realism and ethical grounding. Having guided the seeker through the initial stages of self-inquiry and the realization of underlying unity, he now addresses the practical challenges of sustaining spiritual progress without succumbing to egoic traps.

1. Psychological Insight into the Spiritual Journey:

Guru's acknowledgment of the 'great ego' that can arise even in spiritual aspirants reveals a profound psychological insight into the human condition. He understands that simply gaining knowledge is not enough; the mind's inherent tendency to identify and attach can extend even to spiritual achievements. This caution is a crucial methodological step, preventing seekers from falling into the trap of spiritual pride or a false sense of superiority. It implicitly advocates for continuous self-awareness and humility as integral parts of the spiritual path. This practical wisdom makes his philosophy highly relevant for genuine spiritual practice, transcending mere intellectual discourse.

2. Ethical Imperative as Integral to Realization:

The verse connects the philosophical understanding of the Self directly to an ethical imperative. The prayer to be free from the 'great ego' is an ethical plea for egolessness, which is fundamental to Guru's vision of Applied Vedanta. For Guru, true self-realization is not an isolated mystical experience but one that naturally manifests as ethical conduct and social harmony. A swelled ego, even if spiritually refined, would contradict the unitive understanding of the Self, which posits the same Self in all beings. Therefore, the dissolution of this subtle ego is not just a spiritual goal but also an ethical one, ensuring that inner transformation leads to selfless action.

3. Discerning Between the Transitory and the Eternal:

Guru's methodology uses sharp distinctions to guide understanding. By explicitly contrasting the 'ego which passes' (associated with perishable elements and 'evil

end' inner factors) with the 'Self which grows to perfection,' he provides a clear framework for discerning between the illusory and the real. This didactic approach helps the seeker to identify and detach from the transient aspects of their identity and to align with the eternal, unblemished Self. This distinction is crucial for understanding the nature of Maya and the path to liberation, emphasizing the importance of viveka or discrimination.

4. The Role of Grace and Persistent Effort:

The concluding prayer is significant. While Guru emphasizes self-effort and systematic inquiry throughout *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, he also acknowledges the need for grace or a higher intervention to overcome the most deeply ingrained egoic tendencies. This blend of self-effort and reliance on grace is a hallmark of many spiritual traditions and adds a dimension of humility to his practical methodology. It suggests that even after profound intellectual and experiential insights, constant vigilance and perhaps divine assistance are required to completely eradicate the ego.

5. Practical Application in Spiritual Practice:

This verse serves as a crucial practical guide for spiritual aspirants. It warns against the common pitfall of mistaking spiritual achievements for the ultimate reality of the Self. The methodology here is preventative – it teaches how to avoid a potential derailment on the spiritual journey. By articulating the nature of the 'great ego,' Guru offers a tool for self-assessment, encouraging seekers to continuously examine their motivations and their sense of self, ensuring that their growth is genuinely leading towards non-duality and not merely a more refined form of egoism.

A Dynamic Path to Unitive Knowledge

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology

in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, particularly as illuminated by verses 10, 11, and 12, offers a powerful and enduring paradigm for self-inquiry. His dialectical and experimental approach, rooted in a thought experiment conducted in 'darkness,' is not merely an intellectual exercise but a pathway to unitive understanding. By:

1. Starting from direct experiential observation and systematically building towards profound metaphysical insights.
2. Employing sophisticated dialectical reasoning as the primary tool for resolving apparent contradictions.
3. Drawing extensively from both Eastern and Western philosophical and scientific traditions to create a universal framework for understanding.
4. Highlighting the limitations of conventional thought and suggesting the need for higher, more subtle forms of cognition.
5. Stressing the imperative of actively transcending contradictory appearances for true realization.
6. Emphasizing the importance of inner contemplation and the minimization of external distractions.

Guru provides a comprehensive and practical methodology. His genius lies in offering a pathway where the individual 'I' is not annihilated but understood as a continuous expression of the One Self-substance. This leads to a unitive understanding that encompasses both singularity and multiplicity,

offering a holistic and transformative vision of reality that remains profoundly relevant for contemporary seekers of truth. Moreover, his discerning guidance in verse 12 ensures that

this quest for the Self is tempered by humility, guarding against the subtle pitfalls of ego and paving the way for a truly integrated and ethical realization.

Recap

- ◆ Brahman is the absolute reality.
- ◆ Atman is the individual Self.
- ◆ Atman and Brahman are ultimately identical.
- ◆ Brahman's nature is Sat-Cit-Ananda.
- ◆ The world is a manifestation of Brahman.
- ◆ Maya causes apparent distinctions.
- ◆ Suffering stems from identifying with the non-self.
- ◆ True knowledge (*jñāna*) brings liberation.
- ◆ Guru emphasized direct experience (*anubhava*).
- ◆ Guru made Advaita accessible.
- ◆ Self-realisation is life's ultimate goal.
- ◆ *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* is a text of self-instruction.
- ◆ Guru's method uses analogies and thought experiments.
- ◆ Darkness means ignorance.
- ◆ The observer and observed are same.
- ◆ This shows unity beyond subject and object.
- ◆ Verse 11 deals with the paradox of one and many.
- ◆ The ego appears many, but the Self is one.
- ◆ Multiplicity is real but grounded in unity.
- ◆ The Self is continuous "Self-substance."

- ◆ Dialectical method resolves contradictions.
- ◆ Ego is tied to body and impurities.
- ◆ True Self grows to perfection.
- ◆ Happiness lies in Self-realisation, not ego.
- ◆ Spiritual pride is a danger.
- ◆ His method blends science and spirituality.
- ◆ He uses thought experiments like scientists.
- ◆ Introspection replaces outward vision.
- ◆ The final aim is non-duality.

Objective Questions

1. What is the ultimate reality?
2. What is the identity of Atman and Brahman called?
3. What attribute means pure existence?
4. What attribute means pure consciousness?
5. What attribute means pure bliss?
6. What creates apparent multiplicity?
7. What is the cause of suffering?
8. What leads to liberation?
9. What is the main theme of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*?
10. What does “darkness” symbolize in Guru’s method?
11. What does the repeated “I” signify?
12. Which Vedantic term is used for ignorance?
13. How does Guru resolve the paradox of one and many?

14. What is meant by “Self-substance” in verse 11?
15. What is the difference between ego and true Self?
16. What kind of happiness is linked to ego?
17. What is the true source of lasting happiness?
18. What method does Guru use that is similar to science?
19. What is the final outcome of Guru’s methodology?
20. Why is humility important in spiritual progress according to Guru?

Answers

1. Brahman
2. Non-duality
3. Sat
4. Cit
5. Ananda
6. Maya
7. Ignorance
8. Knowledge
9. Self-realisation (Ātmasākṣātkāra)
10. Ignorance (Avidyā)
11. The unity of Self (Ātman)
12. Avidyā (ignorance)
13. By showing multiplicity rests on unity
14. The underlying continuous Self

15. Ego is transient; Self is eternal
16. Transient and unsustainable happiness
17. Realisation of the true Self (Ātman)
18. Dialectical and experimental method
19. Realisation of non-duality (Advaita)
20. Because ego obstructs true self-realisation

Assignment Questions

1. Discuss how the *mahāvākyas* contribute to the understanding of Brahman and Atman's identity.
2. Elaborate on the concept of *Sat-cit-ānanda* as the definition of Brahman, explaining each component.
3. Explain why Maya is considered neither real nor unreal within Advaita Vedanta.
4. How does Sree Narayana Guru's approach make the complex ideas of Advaita Vedanta accessible and experiential?
5. Describe the process through which individuals experience suffering, according to this philosophical framework.
6. What is the role of ignorance (*avidyā*) in obscuring the true nature of the Self?
7. How does the realization of the unity between Atman and Brahman lead to liberation?
8. Discuss the ethical implications of understanding the oneness of reality as presented in this unit.
9. Why does Sree Narayana Guru advocate for *anubhava* (direct experience) over mere intellectual understanding?
10. In what way does Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy synthesise elements of philosophy, religion, and science?



Axiological Field of Interest Analysed in *Ātmopadeśa* Śatakam Verses 36-42

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will:

- ◆ explain how Advaita Vedanta perceives the world as a manifestation of Brahman rather than an independent reality
- ◆ describe the concept of *vivartavāda* as the theory of the world's appearance from Brahman
- ◆ analyse the role of *māyā* in the apparent creation and experience of multiplicity within the unitary Brahman
- ◆ understand the distinction between the empirical reality (*vyāvahārika*) and ultimate reality (*pāramārthika*) as applied to the world's existence

Prerequisites

To effectively engage with the axiological insights presented in this unit, a solid grounding in certain philosophical concepts is highly beneficial. A fundamental requirement is familiarity with the Advaita Vedanta concept of Brahman as the ultimate, non-dual reality, which is posited as the supreme value or ultimate truth to be realised. Equally essential is understanding Atman as the individual Self's intrinsic identity with this Brahman, thereby highlighting the value of self-realisation and liberation.

Furthermore, an understanding of how Maya operates to create the illusion of multiplicity is crucial, as discerning reality from illusion is a key step in apprehending true value. It would also be helpful to recall earlier lessons on Guru's dialectical methodology and his emphasis on introspection as a valuable means to uncover deeper truths and inherent values. A basic grasp of the distinction between the empirical ego and the transcendent Self, as discussed in previous verses, will provide vital context for appreciating the hierarchies of value implied in these philosophical

distinctions. Ultimately, an open mind, willing to embrace philosophical paradoxes and engage in contemplative thought, is crucial for appreciating Guru's subtle yet precise approach to understanding existence and its ultimate significance.

Keywords

Sama, Anya, Consciousness, Self-realization, Non-duality, Bhrama-kala, Mahendrajala, Viveka, Sadhana

Discussion

What do we mean when we say something is 'good', 'right', 'beautiful', or 'worthwhile'? And how do we determine these judgments? In our daily lives, we constantly engage with axiology, often without realising it. Every decision we make, from choosing to be honest with a friend, to prioritising our health, or appreciating a piece of art, is informed by our underlying values. When we assert that kindness is important, or that injustice is wrong, we are making axiological claims. It is the framework through which we assign significance to ideas, objects, experiences, and actions, shaping our personal conduct and societal norms. Axiology, at its core, is the philosophical study of value. It is a fundamental branch of philosophy dedicated to exploring the nature, types, and criteria of values.

Within philosophy, axiology primarily branches into two major fields:

- ◆ **Ethics (Moral Philosophy):** This concerns itself with moral values. It probes into questions of right and wrong, good and bad, exploring concepts like duty, virtue, justice, and human flourishing. For example, ethical axiology asks why we consider honesty a virtue, or what makes

an action morally permissible.

- ◆ **Aesthetics (Philosophy of Art and Beauty):** This branch investigates values related to beauty, art, and taste. It examines what makes something beautiful, what constitutes a work of art, and how we form judgments about aesthetic merit. For instance, aesthetic axiology explores why a particular piece of music moves us, or what criteria we use to deem a landscape stunning.

Ultimately, axiology provides the intellectual tools to understand how values arise, how they are justified, and how they profoundly influence human thought, behaviour, and the very intrinsic nature of our cultural and philosophical traditions.

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* continues its profound journey of self-discovery, progressing from a foundational understanding of the Self to a detailed examination of its inherent qualities and challenges. In analysis given below, we explore Guru's axiological framework as presented in verses 36 and 37. Here, Guru introduces the essential categories of 'same' (Sama) and 'other' (Anya) as fundamental

divisions of the 'powers of wisdom.' This provides a comprehensive way to understand consciousness and navigate the path to liberation. This unit will thoroughly analyze Guru's method in articulating this framework and its implications for spiritual practice.

Verse 36: Taxonomy of Consciousness: The 'Same' and the 'Other'

"അരിവിനു ശക്തിയന്നതമുണ്ടി, തെല്ലാ-
മറുതിയിടാം സമയന്നരെനിവണ്ണം
ഇരുപിരിവാ, തിതിലന്നസാമ്യമാർന്നു-
ഇള്ളരുവിലമർന്നു തെളിഞ്ഞുണർന്നിട്ടേം."

"The powers of wisdom are many; all of them under two divisions The 'same' and the 'other' could conclusively be brought; Merging into that form which makes for 'other-sameness' To clarity of vision one should awake."

This verse introduces a fundamental taxonomy for understanding the myriad 'powers of wisdom' or manifestations of

consciousness. All these diverse powers, regardless of their complexity, can be categorized under two overarching divisions: 'same (Sama)' and 'other (Any'a). The ultimate goal, as stated, is to 'merge into that form which makes for 'other-sameness' to attain 'clarity of vision,' signifying a profound, unitive understanding.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a meticulous unpacking of Guru's axiological framework, elucidating its significance within the broader context of his non-dual philosophy.

1. Taxonomy of Consciousness: 'Same' and 'Other':

The explanation highlights that this section (verses 36-42) provides a 'very valuable analysis of the structure of consciousness,' using the 'taxonomic nomenclature of two symbolic expressions which are the words 'same' and 'other'. Central to this axiological

Meaning of words in Malayalam:

അരിവിനു : ധർമ്മിയായിരിക്കുന്ന അരിവിന് (To knowledge, which is the substratum)

ശക്തി അനന്തമുണ്ട് : അനന്തമായ ശക്തിയുണ്ട്. (has infinite power/potency)

ഇതെല്ലാം : ഈ ശക്തികളെയെല്ലാം (All these powers)

'സമ', 'അന്യ' എന്നിവണ്ണം : 'സമ' എന്നും 'അന്യ' എന്നും ഉള്ള (as 'Same' and 'Other')

ഇരു പിരിവായ : രണ്ടു പിരിവുകളിൽ (into two divisions)

അരുതിയിടാം : ഉൾപ്പെടുത്താവുന്നതാണ്. (can be classified/brought)

ഇതിൽ : ഇങ്ങനെ രണ്ടു പിരിവുകളുള്ളതിൽ (Among these two divisions)

അന്യസാമ്യമാർന്നുള്ള ഉരുവിൽ : അന്യയും സമയും ചേർന്ന കലർന്ന് ഘുകമായിരിക്കുന്ന സ്വരൂപത്തിൽ (in that form which embodies the blend of 'other' and 'same' in a unified essence)

അമർന്ന് : അനേഷകൾ സ്വയം അമർന്ന (the seeker, submerging oneself)

തെളിഞ്ഞ് : അങ്ങനെയുണ്ടാകുന്ന അരിവിൽ തെളിമയിൽ (in the clarity of knowledge thus arising)

ഉണർന്നിട്ടേം : ഉണർന്നിരിക്കുകയാണ് വേണ്ടത്. (should awaken).

field is the inherent tension, or "conflict," between the "individual selves of each member of humanity" (representing divergence and quantitative aspects) and the "same Self conceived unitively and contemplatively as participating qualitatively in the unity of the Absolute Self (പ്രമാതമ വൈക്യം)" (representing convergence and qualitative aspects). This fundamental distinction, which underscores what is ultimately deemed more valuable or real within this philosophy, is further reinforced by the Bhagavad Gita's emphasis on the kshetra (field/manifestation) and kshetrajna (knower of the field/underlying consciounsess) in Chapter 13. The Gita affirms that "Knowledge in respect of the field and the Knower of the field... constitutes (veritable) wisdom (ജ്ഞാനം)," thereby highlighting the supreme value placed on discerning this core axiological distinction.

2. Transcending Dichotomy: 'Anya-Samya' (Other-Sameness):

A pivotal aspect of Guru's methodology is his directive not to prioritize either the 'same' or the 'other' aspect, but to 'transcend them both through the neutral point of intersection of the two axes of reference, which he names as 'anya-samya' (the other-sameness) aspect.' This concept of 'other-sameness' is the axiological culmination, signifying a state where the seemingly contradictory nature of unity and multiplicity is resolved.

3. Knowledge as Substratum and its Manifestations (Dharmi and Dharmas):

The 'infinite powers' of Knowledge are detailed - from doubt and inquiry to memory, imagination, creation, and even emotions like desire, anger, and envy. All 'branches of science are but expansions of this same fundamental Knowledge.' The analogy of a stone, whose qualities (weight, size, color) are perceived as experiences of Knowledge, leads to the profound conclusion that 'the entire universe can be understood as various manifestations of Knowledge.'

4. The 'Sama' and 'Anya' as Inseparable Polarities:

Guru's unique insight is the categorization of these infinite powers into 'Sama' and 'Anya'. The explanation uses the analogy of a magnet with its inseparable North and South Poles to illustrate how Knowledge 'simultaneously embodies both Sama and Anya powers.' Just as a magnet cannot exist with only one pole, the 'essence or nature (svarूപa) of Knowledge is characterized by the coexistence of both the 'other' and the 'similar.' The crucial realization is that "I am this Knowledge, an entity that inherently encompasses both Anya and Sama simultaneously.' This requires one's 'I'-consciounsess to merge into that fundamental essence,' leading to a 'new awakening (പുതിയ ഉണ്ടാവ്യ)-our own awakening to our true Self.'

Analysis of Guru's Methodology in Verse 36

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in analyzing the axiological field of interest within *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* is exceptionally systematic, insightful, and profoundly unitive. It transcends a simplistic dichotomy, aiming for a holistic understanding of consciounsess.

1. Axiological Taxonomy of Consciounsess:

Guru's introduction of 'Sama' and 'Anya' as the fundamental divisions of 'powers of wisdom' is a masterstroke of axiological taxonomy. This classification is not arbitrary; it represents the two fundamental orientations of consciounsess: the tendency towards differentiation and externalization ('other'), and the tendency towards internalization and unity ('same').

2. The Dialectical Synthesis of Opposites:

The core of Guru's methodology lies in his dialectical synthesis of the 'same' and the 'other' through the concept of 'anya-samya' (other-sameness). He rejects the common

philosophical pitfall of prioritizing one aspect over the other, recognizing that true clarity of vision arises from transcending both. This is not about negating either pole but about integrating them into a higher, non-contradictory understanding. The magnet analogy powerfully illustrates this: the opposing forces (poles) are essential and inherent to the single entity. This unitive approach reflects a deep Advaitic insight, demonstrating how the singular Self is not alienated from its manifold expressions; rather, its very nature is the coexistence of both. This challenges the mechanistic mind that struggles with paradox, offering a pathway to a more fluid and inclusive understanding of reality.

3. Knowledge as Both Substratum and Manifestation:

Guru's methodology uniquely treats Knowledge (Arivu) as both the ultimate substratum (dharmi) and the source of all its

diverse attributes (dharmas). This addresses a critical philosophical problem: how can a singular, unchanging reality give rise to a dynamic, ever-changing universe? By asserting that all phenomena, from doubt to anger to scientific principles, are merely 'diverse manifestations (prak \ddot{a} ra-bhedas) of Knowledge,' he provides a coherent explanation for the apparent duality of existence and consciousness. The shift from sad \ddot{a} tmaka (pure existence) to cid \ddot{a} tmaka (consciousness) in the analysis of Knowledge highlights Guru's comprehensive understanding of reality as both static ground and dynamic manifestation, thus offering a complete picture of the Self in its full scope.

Verse 37: Subduing the 'Other' through Unfragmented Wisdom

വിഷമതയാർന്നെന്നുമന്തു വെന്നുകൊൾവാൻ
വിഷമമവണ്യവിവേകശക്തിയെന്നു;
വിഷമയെ വെന്നതിനാൽ വിവേകമാകും
വിഷയവിരോധിനിയോടണ്ണത്തിഡേം.

Meaning of words in Malayalam:

വിഷമതയാർന്നു അന്തു : ഇതിൽ അന്തു എന്ന അഭിവൃ വളരെ വിഷമതയോടുകൂടിയതാണ്. (Here, the 'other' aspect of knowledge is very difficult/ problematic.)

അവണ്യവിവേക ശക്തിയെന്നു : അവണ്യമായ അഭിവിന്ദ വിവേചിച്ചിയായാനുള്ള ശക്തി കൂടാതെ (without the unfragmented discriminative power of knowledge)

വെന്നുകൊൾവാൻ : അതിനെ ജയിക്കുവാൻ (to conquer it)

വിഷമം : പ്രയാസമാണ്. (it is difficult).

വിഷമയെവന്ന് : അങ്ങനെയുള്ള ഈ വിഷമയായ അന്തുയെ ജയിച്ച് (by conquering this difficult 'other')

അതിനാൽ : അതുവഴി (thereby)

വിവേകമാകും : വിവേകമാകുന്ന (which is wisdom)

വിഷയവിരോധിനിയോട് : വിഷയങ്ങളോടു താത്പര്യമില്ലായ്ക്കുന്ന വിനയാകുന്ന സ്വഭാവത്തോട് (വെരാഗ്യത്തോട്) (towards that nature which is averse to sense objects/worldliness, i.e., dispassion)

അണ്ണത്തിഡേം : സ്വയം അടുത്തുകൊള്ളണ്ടതാണ്. (one should draw near/attain access).

"To subdue even somewhat the obduracy of the 'other' is hard indeed without wisdom's limitless power; By such do gain mastery over it and unto Her who is Wisdom The anti-sensuous One, close access attain."

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* meticulously guides the seeker towards self-realisation, systematically building upon foundational principles. Having introduced the critical axiological framework of 'same' and 'other' as fundamental divisions of the 'powers of wisdom,' Guru, in the verse under analysis, addresses the practical and profound challenge of dealing with the 'other' aspect of consciousness. This verse posits that the 'other' - representing the divisive, sensuous, and outwardly-directed aspects of knowledge - is the root of human adversity and must be subdued through the 'limitless power of wisdom' to attain 'close access' to the 'anti-sensuous One.' The following exposition will critically analyze Guru's methodology in addressing this axiological field of interest, drawing on the provided verse and its comprehensive explanations, and integrating further insights.

The Verse and its Central Axiological Challenge

The verse under consideration highlights the inherent difficulty in overcoming the 'other' aspect of consciousness, which represents divergence and engagement with the sensuous world. It asserts that such mastery is impossible without the 'limitless power of wisdom.' The ultimate goal is to 'gain mastery over it' and thereby attain 'close access' to 'Her who is Wisdom, The anti-sensuous One,' signifying a deep, unitive experience of ultimate reality.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a detailed and nuanced interpretation of Guru's address to the 'other' aspect of consciousness,

emphasizing the interplay of various forces and the ultimate path to transcendence.

1. The Reciprocity and Conflict of Consciousness's Modes:

The explanation immediately establishes that the functioning of consciousness depends on 'reciprocities, ambivalent polarities and peculiar modes.' It underscores the 'subtle organic relationship' and 'law of inverse proportion' between the 'same' (vertical) and the 'other' (horizontal) aspects of wisdom. When horizontal (sensuous) tendencies are accentuated, vertical (pure, non-sensuous) ones suffer, and vice-versa. This highlights a fundamental axiological tension: the more one is drawn to the external, differentiated world ('other'), the less one is attuned to the inner, unifying truth ('same').

The 'same' is explicitly defined as 'pure and unrelated to sense-objects,' unaffected by 'attractions and repulsions.' Conversely, the 'other' is 'the sensuous side of life,' which 'tends to be strengthened at the expense of the former.' This establishes a clear value judgment: the 'other' is the obstacle, and the 'same' is the path to liberation.

2. The Root of Adversity: Reliance on 'Anya' (The Divisive Other):

The second explanation clarifies that the 'root cause of these adversities lies within ourselves,' specifically in 'Our persistent reliance on 'Anya' -the divisive aspect of knowledge.' It directly links suffering (Vi-sama, literally 'devoid of Sama' or 'contrary to Sama') to this reliance on the 'other'. Consequently, the 'singular path to eradicating suffering... is to overcome the problematic 'Anya', rather than attempting to subdue others.'

This overcoming, Guru states, requires 'unfragmented discriminative wisdom (akha??a viveka s-akti).' This refers back to

verse 35, where a state of 'effulgence akin to the simultaneous rising of ten thousand suns' (non-dual experience) is described, leaving no place for adversity. The explanation posits that akha??a viveka sakti conquers 'Anya', leading to a mindset 'averse to sense objects (vi?aya virodhini).' While seemingly sequential, these occurrences are 'in essence, simultaneous' or unfold as a 'single event' experientially. This 'disinterest in transient sense pleasures' is not mere detachment (vairagya) but a deeper reorientation of attention from manifold experiences back to 'unified Knowledge.'

3. Conquering Craving and Utilizing 'Visama':

The explanation strongly links the overcoming of 'Anya' to conquering 'craving (t???)', which is identified as 'the root of all our adversities.' Once craving is 'completely overcome, the truth will dawn that there is nothing else in the world left to conquer.' This highlights a practical, psychological, and ethical dimension to Guru's axiology: freedom from suffering and mastery over the 'other' are achieved through the internal discipline of overcoming desire.

Critical Analysis of Guru's Methodology in Verse 37

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in addressing the 'other' aspect of consciousness is both profoundly realistic and pragmatically transformative. It highlights the dynamic interplay within consciousness and provides a clear path for liberation from suffering.

1. Acknowledging the 'Obduracy of the Other':

Guru's methodology is grounded in a realistic appraisal of the human condition. He explicitly acknowledges the 'obduracy of the 'other', recognizing that the pull of sensuous experiences and outward-directed consciousness is strong and deeply ingrained.

This avoids any naive idealism, presenting the spiritual path not as an effortless ascent but as a challenging struggle requiring 'wisdom's limitless power.' By framing it as something 'hard indeed to subdue,' Guru validates the seeker's experience of difficulty, providing a clear objective for their efforts. This realism lends credibility to his teachings and prepares the aspirant for the arduous nature of inner work.

2. Axiological Clarity and Inverse Proportion:

Guru establishes a clear axiological hierarchy by positing an 'inverse proportion' between the 'same' (vertical, pure) and the 'other' (horizontal, sensuous). This is a crucial methodological tool for self-assessment. It means that any increase in identification with the 'other' (e.g., through craving, outward pursuits) automatically diminishes access to the 'same'. Conversely, cultivating the 'same' naturally weakens the grip of the 'other'. This provides a dynamic model of spiritual progress, where progress in one domain directly impacts the other. It is a quantitative and qualitative assessment, allowing the seeker to understand the energetic trade-offs in their conscious engagement. The warning against 'half-hearted efforts' directly stems from this understanding of proportionality - a partial reduction of the 'other' is insufficient to gain absolute status for the 'same'.

3. Redefining the Root of Adversity: Internalizing Blame and Seeking Inner Solutions:

A powerful aspect of Guru's methodology is the radical internalization of the cause of adversity. He directly refutes the common human tendency to 'attribute blame to external factors' and instead asserts that 'the root cause of these adversities lies within ourselves,' specifically in 'Our persistent reliance on 'Anya'. This shifts the focus from external control to internal mastery. By identifying

'Anya' as the source of Vi-sama (suffering/adversity), Guru empowers the individual to take responsibility for their inner state. The logical consequence is that overcoming suffering requires an internal solution: conquering 'Anya' through akha??a viveka vakti (unfragmented discriminative wisdom), rather than attempting to change the external world or others. This is a profound ethical and psychological imperative.

Guru offers a comprehensive and ethically grounded path to self-realisation. His methodology is not about escaping the world but about achieving conscious mastery over the forces within one's own consciousness, transforming the very source of suffering into a means of attaining profound, anti-sensuous wisdom and unitive access to the Self. This section of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* stands as a testament to Guru's genius in distilling complex metaphysical truths into a practical and profoundly transformative path to unitive understanding.

Verse 38: Defining 'Sama' and 'Anya' and the Path to Unitive Poise

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* continues its profound exploration of the Self and non-Self, carefully building a comprehensive framework for understanding consciousness. In Unit 2, as we examine verses 38 and 39, Guru refines his axiological definitions of 'same' (Sama) and 'other' (Anya). He moves beyond simply identifying these categories to precisely defining their functional roles and introducing a more detailed, four-fold classification of the 'powers of wisdom.' This unit will critically analyze Guru's systematic approach to mapping the intricate architecture of consciousness, emphasizing how these refined distinctions are crucial for the seeker's journey toward a unitive vision.

പലവിധമായിയുന്നത്യായോയ്
വിലസുവതാം സമയം മേലിലോതും
നിലയയറിഞ്ഞു നിവർത്തു സാമ്യമേലും
കലയിലാഡിഞ്ഞു കലർന്നിരുന്നിട്ടും.

Meaning of words in Malayalam:

പലവിധമായ് അരിയുന്നത് : ഉള്ളതിനെ പലതായി അരിയുന്നത് (That which perceives existence as manifold)

അന്യ് : അന്യ് എന്ന അറിവാണ്. (is the knowledge called 'Anya' or the 'Other')

ഒന്നായ് വിലസുവതാം : ഉള്ളത് ഒന്നാണ് എന്നു തെളിവായി അരിയുന്നത് (That which clearly perceives existence as one)

സമ : സമ എന്ന അറിവാണ്. (is the knowledge called 'Sama' or the 'Same')

എന്നു : എന്നു മനസ്സിലാക്കിയിട്ട് (Having thus understood)

മേലിൽ ഓതും : ഇനി പറയാൻ പോകുന്ന (that which will be spoken of hereafter)

നിലയെ അറിഞ്ഞ് : അറിവിന്റെ നിലകളെക്കൂടി മനസ്സിലാക്കിക്കൊണ്ട് (by understanding the states/levels of knowledge as well)

നിവർത്തു : സ്വന്നം നിലയെ നേരേ നിവർത്തി നിരുത്തി (straightening one's own stance/position, maintaining an upright posture)

സാമ്യമേലും കലയിൽ : അന്യയും സമയും സാമ്യമായിത്തീക്കുന്ന സുക്ഷ്മാന്വന്തത് (in that subtle state where 'Anya' and 'Sama' become harmonious/identical)

അലിത്ത് : സയം അലിത്തുചേർന്ന് (melting and merging oneself)

കലർന്നിരുന്നിടേണോ : അതിൽനിന്ന് അദ്ദേംല്ല താൻ എന്ന അവസ്ഥയിൽ കലർന്നിരിക്കേണ്ടതാണ്. (one should remain, experiencing oneself as non-different from that state of harmonious blending).

"What appraises manifold variety, the 'other' that is; And the 'same' is what unitively shines; Thus understanding the state aforesaid, into that state That yields sameness, melt and mix and erect sit."

This verse provides concise definitions for the two fundamental categories of Knowledge: 'other (Anya)' is that which perceives and appraises 'manifold variety,' representing the divisive aspect of knowledge. 'Same (Sama)' is that which 'unitively shines,' representing the unifying aspect. The verse then offers a practical instruction: having understood these states, one should consciously 'melt and mix' into the state of 'sameness' and 'erect sit,' indicating a yogic posture and a state of inner poise.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a multi-dimensional understanding of Guru's axiological definitions and their practical implications for spiritual practice.

1. Defining 'Same' and 'Other' through Epistemological Function:

The first explanation underscores Guru's 'very precise definitions' of 'same' and 'other' as fundamental aspects of self-consciousness. The 'other' is inherently linked to 'multiplicity or plurality,' drawing a parallel with the Upanishadic dictum: 'he who sees multiplicity or plurality 'wends his way from death to death'.' This immediately establishes a negative axiological value to exclusive focus on plurality - it leads to suffering and the perpetuation of cycles of existence.

The distinction is then refined: 'Multiple interests in the relativistic world of plurality spell troubles, and unitive interest in life in the absolutist sense spells peace.' This clarifies the axiological consequences of each orientation. The movement in self-consciousness revealing underlying unity is 'vertical,' while that revealing multiplicity is 'horizontal.' These axes are to be known by their 'fruit,' by what they 'lead to,' rather than any intrinsic, static characteristic, emphasizing their functional, teleological nature in contemplative life.

2. The Practical Application: Melting into 'Sameness' and Yogic Posture:

The latter half of the verse, interpreted as 'precious practical indications pertaining to the actual 'practice' of yoga,' focuses on the active orientation towards unity. 'All that a man actually does in the form of action is the orientation of the spirit or the inner tendencies towards the unitive instead of the world of pluralistic rival values.' This implies that every action, every choice, holds axiological significance, directing consciousness either towards conflict or peace.

The instruction 'sitting erect' is interpreted as the essence of yogic practice, signifying 'restful but alert contemplation, implying harmony, balance or peace.' 'Sameness' here means 'equality besides that of unity,' linked to the Gita's concept of atmaupamyena (by analogy with one's inner being), enabling one to 'see the equality of everything with oneself.' This unitive vision, a 'verticalized view,' leads to peace, while the 'horizontalized version of reality leads to conflicts.'

3. 'Anya' as Manifold Perceptions and 'Sama' as Unified Experience:

The second explanation offers more precise definitions: 'Anya' is the mode of knowledge that perceives the 'undeniable plurality' of the world-its 'innumerable elements, each diverse in form, size, color, nature, and utility.' This is elaborated using the concept of *Triputo* (knower, known, and knowledge) and Guru's own *Advaita Deepika*, where the universe is an 'infinite number of names, an infinite number of mental impressions... and an infinite number of objects.' 'Anya' is thus the aspect of knowledge that apprehends this pluralistic nature of cosmic experience.

Conversely, 'Sama' is the mode of knowledge where individual phenomena are perceived as 'diverse facets of a single, unified experience or Knowledge,' all arising 'within the same consciousness.' This allows for 'the perception of unity amidst apparent diversity.' The ultimate refinement of 'Sama' occurs 'when the distinction between 'I, the knower' and 'this is my knowledge' is also transcended,' leaving a 'singular Knowledge that cannot be attributed to anyone,' which is the 'nature of the Self (*atma-svaropam*).'

4. 'Kala' (Art/Skill) and the Courage for Neutrality:

The harmonisation of 'Anya' and 'Sama' knowledge is identified as a 'subtle yet crucial aspect of spiritual practice,' termed 'Kala' (art or skill) by Guru. The objective is to discover and experience a 'profound dissolution, a complete absorption into' this state of balance. The discussion on 'Anya' and 'Sama' in these verses serves as aids to guide towards this ultimate objective.

Crucially, 'a certain courage is required to maintain a balanced, neutral stance, characteristic of a yogi, without leaning excessively towards either 'Anya' or 'Sama'. The term *nivarnnu* (standing upright or

unbending) encapsulates this 'firm sense of purpose and the fortitude to adhere to it,' also evoking the image of an upright meditation posture. This underlines that the axiological shift requires not just intellectual understanding but sustained inner resolve.

Critical Analysis of Guru's Methodology in Verse 38

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in delineating the axiological field of interest, particularly through the definitions of 'Sama' and 'Anya', is remarkably clear, functionally oriented, and profoundly practical, directly linking metaphysical understanding to personal well-being.

1. Function-Driven Axiological Definitions:

Guru's definitions of 'Sama' and 'Anya' are not merely conceptual but are deeply function-driven. 'Anya' is defined by its appraisal of multiplicity, while 'Sama' is defined by its unitive shining. This focus on function rather than static essence is crucial. It means that these are not fixed ontological categories but dynamic modes of consciousness that can be cultivated or de-emphasized based on their axiological outcome. The distinction being based on 'the end they serve in the contemplative life of man' - leading to conflict or peace, suffering or happiness - places human flourishing at the core of his axiological framework. This ensures that philosophical truth is not divorced from lived experience and its ultimate purpose is human liberation.

2. The Uncompromising Link between Truth and Happiness:

A central methodological premise for Guru is the uncompromising link between philosophical truth and practical happiness. He dismisses pragmatic arguments for the 'reality' of plurality if they do not lead to peace, asserting that 'Philosophy should not merely satisfy the intellectually or

academically valid aspiration... but must bring him nearer to happiness, which is his goal in life.' This axiological stance elevates the pursuit of peace and happiness to a criterion for evaluating philosophical positions. It means that a philosophy, however intellectually sound, is incomplete if it does not address the fundamental human desire for lasting well-being. This teleological orientation ensures that his spiritual teachings are directly relevant to the human condition.

3. Prescriptive and Action-Oriented Guidance:

Beyond mere definitions, Guru provides direct, prescriptive guidance for spiritual practice. The phrase 'melt and mix and erect sit' is a clear instruction for how to shift one's consciousness from 'Anya' to 'Sama'. 'Melting and mixing' implies a dissolution of individual boundaries and a merging with the unitive. 'Erect sitting' (nivarnnu) is not just a physical posture but a symbol of inner stability, alert

awareness, and resolute intention - the 'courage... to maintain a balanced, neutral stance.' This blend of mental transformation and physical discipline showcases a holistic methodological approach, recognizing the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit in the quest for Self-realisation. This emphasis on *sadhana* is a hallmark of his practical philosophy.

Verse 39: The Second Division: Specific Attributes of 'Sama' and 'Anya'

അരുളിയ ശക്തികളെത്തുടർന്നു രണ്ടാം
പിരിവിവയിൽ സമതൻവിശ്വേഷമേകം;
വിരതി വരാ വിഷമാവിശ്വേഷമൊന്നി-
ത്തരമിവ രണ്ടു തരത്തിലായിട്ടുണ്ട്.

"Following up further the said powers - a second division: One of these is an attribute of the 'same', while the other Qualifies the never-to-detachment-attaining harshness Of the 'other': thus making two kinds of these again."

Meaning of words in Malayalam:

- അരുളിയ : ഇവിടെ പറയുന്ന (That which has been spoken of here)
- ശക്തികളും : രണ്ടു ശക്തികളും (the two powers)
- തുടർന്ന് : തുടർന്ന് (further on)
- രണ്ടാം പിരിവ് : അവയുടെ ഉൾപ്പെടെയും രണ്ടുണ്ട് (their subdivisions are also two)
- ഇവയിൽ : ഈ ഉൾപ്പെടെയുള്ളിൽ (Among these subdivisions)
- എക്കം : ഒന്ന് (one)
- സമ തൻ വിശേഷം : സമയുടെ വിശേഷമാണ്. (is an attribute/particular of 'Sama')
- ഒന്ന് : മറ്റാണ് (the other)
- വിരതിവരം : അവസാനമില്ലാത്ത (never-ending/never-detaching)
- വിഷമാവിശ്വേഷം : വിഷമയുടെ (അന്യയുടെ) വിശേഷമാണ് (is a specific attribute/particular of 'Vi?ama' (the 'Other'))
- ഇത്തരം : ഇങ്ങനെ (Thus)
- രണ്ടു തരത്തിലായിട്ടുണ്ട് : രണ്ടു തരത്തിലാണ് ഈ (these (subdivisions) become of two kinds)

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* systematically refines its axiological framework for understanding consciousness. Having established the fundamental categories of 'same' and 'other' and their implications for human happiness and suffering, Guru, in this subsequent verse, introduces a further level of differentiation. He posits that these two primary divisions each contain a secondary, specific attribute, leading to a four-fold classification of the 'powers of wisdom.' The following exposition will critically analyze Guru's methodology in introducing these refined axiological divisions, drawing on the provided verse and its comprehensive explanations, and integrating further philosophical insights.

The Verse and its Further Subdivision

This verse indicates a deeper analysis of the previously established 'same' and 'other' categories. It states that each of these primary divisions contains a 'second division.' Specifically, one of these new divisions is an 'attribute of the 'same'', while the other 'qualifies the never-to-detachment-attaining harshness of the 'other.' This results in a total of four distinct categories within the overall structure of consciousness.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a meticulous unpacking of Guru's refined axiological framework, emphasizing its structural precision and its role in understanding the dynamism of consciousness.

1. Towards a Four-Fold Categorization of Consciousness:

The first explanation clarifies that this verse 'undertakes a more detailed analysis of the two primary tendencies in consciousness.' It explicitly states that 'Sameness' (peace-giving equality) and 'strangeness' or 'otherness' (conflict-inducing) are now

'further specifically characterized.' The core insight is that 'Natural attachment to specific attributes or actual things will be operative in consciousness in respect of values that are horizontal in import.' This means that the tendencies associated with the 'other' are not monolithic; they operate at a more granular level of specific attachments.

The explanation further clarifies the structural implication: 'The two primary divisions have thus each a second division, so that we have to distinguish four in all.' These four limbs are identified as 'two of them generic in status and two others specific.' While the precise integration of these four into 'global Self-consciousness' is deferred to the next verse, this verse's purpose is to provide a 'static view of psychophysical truths,' laying bare the 'structure and the frame of reference within whose four walls consciousness... lives, moves and has its being.' This prepares the ground for a 'more complete psychophysical dynamics' in subsequent verses.

2. The Universal and Particular within 'Sama' and 'Anya':

The second explanation provides the specific philosophical lens through which these 'second divisions' are to be understood: the categories of universal (sāmanya) and particular (viśeṣa). It asserts that the fundamental division of Knowledge into 'Anya' and 'Sama' is itself 'a system inherent within Knowledge, manifesting as the categories of universal and particular.'

This is illustrated through everyday examples: 'tree' as a universal encompasses particulars like 'mango,' 'jackfruit,' 'coconut.' If 'mango' is the universal, 'native mango' or 'parrot-beak mango' are its particulars. These correspond to 'genus' and 'species' in English. The experience of differentiation, which defines 'Anya', is underpinned by the 'conjoined presence of two aspects

of Knowledge: universal knowledge and particular knowledge.'

Applying this to the primary categories, the explanation states: 'There is an aspect within the universal 'Sama' that grants it a unique characteristic, representing its particular. Likewise, the universal 'Anya' also possesses its own specific particular.' This means that 'Sama' is not just a singular unifying principle, but has its specific manifestations or attributes. Similarly, 'Anya' is not just general multiplicity, but manifests through specific, concrete, and often obstinate attachments and differentiations. This deeper insight into the structure of 'Anya' helps explain its 'never-to-detachment-attaining harshness,' as mentioned in the verse.

Analysis of Guru's Methodology in Verse 39

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in this verse demonstrates a commitment to rigorous analysis and systematic categorization, revealing the intricate architecture of consciounsess and its axiological implications.

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical methodology is characterized by several key aspects that ensure precision, practical utility, and a comprehensive understanding of consciounsess.

Firstly, Guru employs Precision through Hierarchical Categorization. He moves from broad distinctions like 'Sama' (same) and 'Anya' (other) to more specific attributes, creating a layered map of consciounsess. This hierarchical approach provides philosophical clarity, preventing simplistic interpretations and offering a nuanced understanding of how consciounsess operates and how different 'powers of wisdom' manifest. It is akin to a scientific method, where initial observations are refined through detailed analysis.

Secondly, the Axiological Implications

of 'Specific Attributes' of the 'Other' are profound. By pinpointing an attribute that qualifies the "never-to-detachment-attaining harshness of the 'other', Guru highlights the tenacious nature of attachment to worldly values. This identifies precise targets for spiritual work, moving the discussion from abstract categories to the tangible manifestations of ego and desire that impede liberation, thus underscoring the practical utility of his system.

Thirdly, Guru's method involves Unveiling the Structure of Consciounsess (Static View). This crucial step provides a foundational 'static view' of psychophysical truths, laying bare consciounsess's underlying architecture. Understanding this anatomy is a prerequisite for grasping 'psychophysical dynamics' - how consciounsess actively functions and can be transformed. This foundational map provides cognitive tools for aspirants to recognize and locate their own experiences within a comprehensive framework.

Fourthly, Guru demonstrates Philosophical Rigor through Universal and Particular distinctions. Applying these established Indian philosophical concepts to 'Sama' and 'Anya' deepens the understanding of how 'Anya' differentiates phenomena. More importantly, it shows that even the unifying 'Sama' possesses particular attributes, preventing it from becoming a vague concept and suggesting that unitive vision is rich with specific insights, not bland homogeneity.

Fifthly, Guru consistently Bridges Abstract Thought and Experiential Reality. While his analysis is intellectual, it emphasizes that these 'intellectualized versions of reality' must 'translate into dynamic terms and relate organically with one's own inner experience.' The initial 'static view' is thus a prerequisite for 'complete psychophysical dynamism,' making his practical Advaita Vedanta a journey from conceptual mastery to experiential realization.

Finally, Guru justifies The Necessity of Abstraction in Understanding the Core. He defends abstraction, comparing it to mathematics, asserting that simplifying complex psychic phenomena into 'main categories, pictured in a simple manner as in a map,' is a valid and necessary approach for coherent comprehension. This methodology balances intricate analysis with accessible conceptual tools, making subtle domains like consciousness understandable.

Guru demonstrates a methodological precision that is both analytically rigorous and pragmatically oriented towards the aspirant's journey. This verse sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how these four aspects of consciousness interact dynamically, ultimately guiding the seeker towards a complete and unitive understanding of the Self, free from the entanglements of the 'other'.

Verse 40: The Dynamic Interplay and Spin-Emergence

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* consistently guides the seeker through the intricate landscape of consciousness. Building on the foundational

classifications of 'same' (Sama) and 'other' (Anya) and their subdivisions, Guru now shifts from a static understanding to a dynamic analysis of their interplay. In verses 40 and 41, he clarifies the ceaseless psycho-physical dynamics of these powers of wisdom, showing how they constantly project their specific attributes onto their generic counterparts. This process, termed 'spin-emergence' (bhrama-kala), is presented as the fundamental mechanism by which all predication - all our thoughts, perceptions, and assertions about reality - come into being. We will critically analyze Guru's profound method, examining his theory of reality construction within consciousness and the axiological implications of mastering this dynamic interplay for unitive realization.

സമയിലുമനൃത്യിലും സദാപി വനി-
അമരുവതുണ്ടത്തിന് വിശ്വേഷശക്തി
അമിതയതാകിലുമാകെ രണ്ടിവറ്റിന്-
ദ്രേകലയാലവിലം പ്രമേയമാകും.

"On to the 'same' as on to the 'other' there constantly alight Their respective specific powers; though not proportionate By spin-emergence as between these two in all, All predication whatsoever come to be."

Meaning of words in Malayalam:

സമയിലും അനൃത്യിലും : സമ, അനൃ എന്നീ അവിവുകളിൽ (In the knowledge of Sama and Anya)

സദാപി : എല്ലാം (always/constantly)

അത്തിന് വിശ്വേഷശക്തി : അതാതിന്റെ വിശ്വേഷശക്തി (its respective specific power)

വനിഞ്ഞ അമരുവതുണ്ട് : ചേർന്നു നില്ക്കുന്നു. (comes and firmly establishes itself/ alights)

അമിതയതാകിലും : ഇവ അളന്നു തിട്ടപ്പെടുത്താൻ സാധിക്കാത്ത തരത്തിലുള്ളതാണെങ്കിലും (Even though these are immeasurable/incapable of being quantified)

ആകെ രണ്ടിവറ്റിന് : ആകെയുള്ള ഈ രണ്ടു പിരിവുകളുടെ (of these two overall divisions)

ഭ്രേക്കലയാൽ : ചുറ്റിത്തിരിയലിന്റെ ചെറിയെരംശം മുഖ്യമിരമാണ് (through a minute fraction of their spin/ revolution/ illusion-power)

അവിലും : സകലതും (all/everything)

പ്രമേയമാക്കും : അറിവിനു വിഷയമായിത്തീരുന്നത് (becomes an object of knowledge/ predication).

This verse describes a continuous and dynamic process: specific powers constantly project onto or manifest from both the 'same' and the 'other' aspects of consciousness. It highlights that this dynamism, though not always proportionate in its 'spin-emergence' (bhrama-kala), is the fundamental mechanism through which 'all predication whatsoever come to be.' This implies that all our perceptions, thoughts, and assertions about reality are a result of this ceaseless interplay.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a multi-faceted interpretation of Guru's dynamic model of consciousness, emphasizing its axiological implications and the path to integrated understanding.

1. The Psycho-Physical Dynamics of Consciousness:

The first explanation immediately calls for 'intuitive imagination' to visualize the 'subtle psycho-physical dynamics implied here.' It clarifies that the two axes of 'same' and 'other', with their four modalities (generic and specific for each), are in constant operation. 'The accentuation of one set of tendencies over the other takes place as man gets interested in one kind or category of subject or another.' This highlights the volitional and attentional aspect of consciousness, where our interests determine which tendencies dominate.

The commentary reiterates the 'subtle or organic reciprocity' between these tendencies,

like 'two branches of the same tree could grow, one at the expense of the other.' This interdependence and independence, with 'positive or negative poles which could be accentuated at the expense of its rival set,' define a 'phenomenological circulation of thought or feeling that goes on always and constitutes the content of self-consciousness.' Examples like the alternation between action and pure thought, or existential and essential aspects, illustrate this dynamism. A 'complete cosmology and psychology have to be fitted into the scheme in which the dynamism functions in actual experience.'

2. The Immeasurable Nature of 'Sama' and 'Anya' and 'Bhrama-Kala':

The second explanation reinforces the idea that both 'Sama' (unifying) and 'Anya' (differentiating) are fundamental, mirroring the 'universal principle of genus and species.' It reiterates that 'particular knowledge is inherently contained within universal knowledge,' a principle that applies to the powers of 'Sama' and 'Anya'. Concrete examples like 'This is a pot' (particular knowledge) subsumed within 'this' (universal knowledge) illustrate how specific instances of 'Anya' are contained within its universal aspect, and similarly for 'Sama' (e.g., 'knowledge' as a particular within the universal 'this').

A key insight is that both 'Sama' and 'Anya' are Amita (immeasurable) in their expanse. 'Knowledge' itself, when considered universally, is 'immeasurable,' and likewise, the 'Anya' aspect, leading to 'distinct

perception,' is 'limitless, as there is no end to such individual enumerations.'

The central point of this explanation revolves around the 'immeasurable powers, 'Sama' and 'Anya', perpetually revolve within Knowledge, the ultimate reality.' This constant, dynamic interplay itself is also 'immeasurable.' Our experience of the universe is described as only a 'minute fraction of this vast revolution.' All that is knowable (prameya) falls within this minute fraction. This underscores the boundless scope of Knowledge and its powers.

Finally, the explanation addresses the Advaitin perspective on bhrama-kala. The 'object's inherent existence' and the 'experience concerning the object' are not distinct realities from the 'bhrama-kala of consciousness.' Instead, they are all 'diverse appearances (pratīkṣas) of the same singular truth, which is the *ātman*.' The ultimate awakening is the profound realization: 'That is I.'

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in Verse 40 offers a deeply insightful transition from static classification to a dynamic model of consciousness, revealing the ceaseless interplay of its powers and their axiological implications.

Dynamic Axiology and Interplay of Tendencies: Guru moves beyond defining 'Same' and 'Other' to illustrate their dynamic, reciprocal relationship. The "constantly alight[ing] their respective specific powers" highlights a continuous process of manifestation and absorption, a fluid dance of forces. The "law of inverse proportion" expands into a "phenomenological circulation," where accentuating one set of tendencies (e.g., sensuous pleasures) diminishes others (wisdom). This dynamic axiological framework shows how our choices influence consciousness's content and quality,

emphasizing "totality of experience" and "harmony" as the goal for spiritual progress.

Predication as a Result of Dynamic Spin-Emergence: The profound insight that "All predications whatsoever come to be" through this "spin-emergence" (bhrama-kala) is a key methodological contribution. Guru theorizes how reality is constituted in consciousness: every thought and judgment arises from the ceaseless projection and interaction of 'Same' and 'Other' tendencies. This firmly places reality construction within an active conscious process, challenging static or materialist views. The suggestive link to quantum mechanics highlights the inherent dynamism Guru perceives at existence's fundamental level.

Holistic Integration of Ethics, Aesthetics, and Wisdom: Guru's methodology explicitly integrates wisdom with ethics and aesthetics. The principle of "harmony and the golden mean" applies to spiritual progress, morality, and art. This holistic axiological framework demonstrates that spiritual advancement is intricately woven into a broader conception of a well-lived life. Cultivating wisdom "side-by-side with love of beauty or of virtue" suggests that a truly wise person embodies these qualities integrally, preventing "asymmetrical development" and offering a rich vision of human perfection.

Verse 41: The Nucleus of Perception: 'This is a Pot'

ഇതു കൃതമെന്തിലാദ്യമാമിതെന്നു-
ഇതു വിഷമാ കൃതമോ വിശേഷമാകും;
മതി മുതലായ മഹോദജാലമുണ്ടാ-
വതിനിതുതാൻ കരുവെന്നു കണ്ണിടേണു.

'In 'this is a pot' the initial 'this' is the harsh While 'pot' is what makes its specific attribute; For the mind with its myriad magic of Great Indra to come to be, Understand, this to be the nucleus.'

Meaning of words in Malayalam:

'ഇത് കുടം' എന്തിൽ : 'ഇതു കുടമാകുന്നു' എന്ന അരിവിൽ കാര്യത്തിൽ (In the context of the knowledge 'This is a pot')

ആദ്യമാം : അതിൽ ആദ്യം വരുന്ന (that which comes first in it)

'ഇത്' എന്നുള്ളത് : 'ഇത്' എന്ന അരിവ് (the knowledge 'This')

വിഷമാ : വിഷമയായ അന്യയാണ്. (is the 'Anya' which is 'Vishama' or 'harsh')

'കുട'മോ : കുടം എന്ന അരിവാകട (And the knowledge 'pot')

വിശേഷമാകും : അതിൽ ഉൾപ്പെടെയായ വിശേഷമാണ് (is its subdivision, the specific attribute/particular)

മതി മുതലായ : സ്വഭാവി തുടങ്ങിയുള്ള (Mind and such others)

മഹാരൂപജാലം : അതുതപ്രതിഭാസങ്ങൾ (miraculous phenomena/grand illusion)

ഉണ്ടാവതിന് : പ്രതീതമാകുന്നതിന് (for manifesting/appearing)

'ഇത്' താൻ : ഇവിടെ പറഞ്ഞ 'ഇത്' എന്ന അന്യയായ അരിവാണ് (the 'Anya' knowledge called 'Ths', mentioned here)

കരുവെന്നു : കാരണമായിരിക്കുന്നത് എന്ന (is the cause/nucleus)

കണ്ണിടേണോ : കണ്ണുകൊള്ളുണ്ടാണോ (one should understand/see).

This verse dissects a simple declarative statement to reveal the underlying mechanisms of perception. The 'initial 'this'' is identified as the 'harsh' (referring to the 'other' or Vi?ama from previous verses), representing the universal, undifferentiated aspect of perception. "Pot" is what makes its specific attribute,' representing the particular, differentiated aspect. Guru declares that this combination of universal 'this' and specific 'pot' is the 'nucleus' for the mind's ability to create the 'myriad magic of Great Indra' (Mahendraj?la) - the illusion of a manifold, external world.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a multi-layered interpretation, grounding Guru's analysis in Indian philosophical traditions while also hinting at its relevance to modern

thought.

1. Semantic Analysis and the Structure of Thought:

The first explanation situates Guru's analysis within the lineage of 'ancient thinkers of the time of the Mimamsakas' and the 'methodology and epistemology of the Advaita Vedanta.' It notes the surprising proximity of modern semantics and logical syntax to this ancient approach, despite its current imperfections. Guru's method involves a 'semantic, or rather syntactic, analysis of a simple atomic proposition' ('This is a pot') to reveal the 'inner structure of one of the two primary movements or categories of the thinking process implicit in language.'

The 'harsh' element, 'this,' is explicitly linked to the 'other' of the previous verse. This 'this' is 'virtual and generic,' applicable

to 'any object,' representing the broader, undifferentiated aspect of perception. 'Pot,' conversely, is the 'actual and specific aspect' of that thought. This transition from generic 'this' to specific 'pot' is identified as a 'pure psycho-physical, neutral, atomic event,' representing the 'subtle-to-gross horizontal movement.' The 'harshness' of the 'other' is further attributed to actuality's 'space-time finiteness and its specificity of character,' which limits freedom.

The 'myriad magic of Great Indra' (Mahendrajala) is elucidated as 'the world of pluralistic and disjunct rival values related to sense-realities of the actual, or its virtual aspect,' understood 'objectively' with their ramified derivatives. This is equated with the 'phenomenal' in Kantian terminology, representing the natural habitat of 'practical immanent reason.'

2. 'Anya' as Universal (Samanya) and Particular (Viœ?a) in Manifestation:

The second explanation reiterates that 'Anya' (or 'Viœama') apprehends multiplicity. It applies the universal (samanya) and particular (viœ?a) distinction directly to the 'This is a pot' example. 'This' is 'universal knowledge (samanya jñana),' while 'pot' is 'particular knowledge (viœ?a jñana).' The underlying 'knowledge of 'This' remains common to all' such predication ('This is a pot,' 'This is a cloth,' 'This is a pen'), and within this common 'This,' all particulars are subsumed. This means the 'universal form of 'Anya' itself is the underlying cause for our ability to perceive everything distinctly.'

The explanation expands this to our perception of ourselves, seen as a composite of body, mind, intellect, etc., each 'distinctly recognized by its specific characteristics.' Our inner instruments (anta?kara?as) and sense organs (indriyas), themselves products of our self-perception as manifold, then perceive the external world as similarly 'manifold.'

This holistic view defines mahendrajala (grand illusion) as the single Self appearing as multiple, thereby causing the world to appear similarly diverse.

The 'miraculous power, 'Anya' or 'Viœama', is responsible for creating this experience of 'limitless multiplicity' from both the perspective of the perceiver (e.g., 'this is mind, this is intellect') and the perceived (e.g., 'this is a pot, this is a cloth'), all through its universal aspect, 'This.' The verse concludes by stating that it is this 'This' - the universal aspect of 'Anya' - that 'we must conquer,' acknowledging its challenge and promising a meditative path in the next verse.

Critical Analysis of Guru's Methodology in Verse 41

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in this verse is characterized by its microcosmic analysis of macrocosmic reality, demonstrating how the fundamental axiological challenge of duality arises from the very structure of our perception and language.

1. Semantic Deconstruction as a Path to Axiological Insight:

Guru's choice of semantic (or syntactic) deconstruction of a simple proposition ('This is a pot') is a powerful methodological tool. By breaking down a seemingly innocuous statement, he reveals the deep-seated mechanisms of perception and how duality is fundamentally woven into our cognitive and linguistic structures. This is not merely a linguistic exercise but a philosophical move to expose the source of the 'other' within consciousness itself.

By showing how the generic 'this' (universal) combines with the specific 'pot' (particular) to form a complete thought, Guru illustrates the 'nucleus' of all predication, thereby revealing the foundational process by which the mind constructs a manifold

world. This is a profound insight into the mechanics of our 'mahendrajøla' or grand illusion.

2. The Axiological Dimension of 'Harshness':

The identification of 'this' - the universal, generic aspect - as 'harsh' is a key axiological statement. It links the undifferentiated substratum of objective perception directly to the obdurate nature of the 'other' (Anya). The 'harshness' stems from the way this generic 'this,' when particularized into finite, space-time bound objects, imposes limitations and restricts freedom. This is Guru's critical assessment of objective reality: while it is the basis of our everyday experience, its very structure (generic 'this' particularizing into specific 'pot') is inherently limiting and the source of suffering (as it pertains to the 'other' that causes Vi?ama. This implies that true freedom lies beyond this dualistic, predicative mode of consciousness.

3. The Mind as Creator of 'Myriad Magic':

Guru's description of the mind as generating the 'myriad magic of Great Indra' (Mahendrajøla) is a vivid metaphorical explanation of its projective and illusory power. This is not a passive reception of an external world but an active construction of a pluralistic, phenomenal reality. The term 'magic' carries a strong axiological connotation, suggesting illusion and enchantment, rather than ultimate truth. This highlights Guru's Advaitic stance: the world of 'pluralistic and disjunct rival values' is a creation of the mind, a realm of appearance (phenomenal, in Kantian terms) rather than the Absolute. This implies that the path to liberation involves understanding and ultimately transcending this 'magic.'

4. Universal and Particular as the Engine of Differentiation:

The explicit application of the universal

(sømønya) and particular (viøe?a) distinction to 'Anya' is a crucial methodological tool. It provides a formal philosophical explanation for how differentiation occurs. Every act of distinguishing one object from another, or one quality from another, relies on the mind's ability to apply a universal category ('this,' 'tree') and then specify it with a particular ('pot,' 'mango'). This mechanism is presented as the very engine of multiplicity, both in self-perception (identifying with various parts of oneself) and in world-perception. By breaking down the mechanism of differentiation, Guru provides the seeker with the intellectual means to deconstruct their own perceived reality and identify the source of duality.

5. Axiological Imperative: Conquering the 'This':

The verse culminates in an urgent axiological imperative (അക്ഷരശാസ്ത്രപരമായ അനിവാര്യത): 'It is this 'This' that we must conquer.' This 'This' is not just a linguistic element; it represents the universal aspect of 'Anya', the fundamental substrate of all objective and differentiated perception. Conquering 'this' means transcending the very mode of consciousness that creates multiplicity and limitation. This is a direct, practical call to action based on his meticulous philosophical analysis. It reveals that the axiological field is not merely for theoretical understanding but for active transformation of one's consciousness. The challenge is clear, and the promise of a meditative path reinforces the practical orientation of his teaching.

6. Microcosm to Macrocosm:

Guru's methodology here is to examine a microcosm (a simple sentence) to reveal macrocosmic truths about consciousness and reality. By dissecting 'This is a pot,' he lays bare the universal principles (സാർവ്വതീകരണങ്ങൾ) governing all thought, perception (അനുഭവം), and the construction of the

phenomenal world. This demonstrates a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of language, cognition (അരിവ്), and ultimate reality, offering a powerful tool for understanding the axiological landscape (അക്ഷരംശസ്ത്രപരമായ കാഴ്ചപ്ലാൻ) of human experience.

Guru systematically unveils the 'nucleus' from which all predication (പ്രതിപാദനം) and the complex world of differentiated experience arise. His methodology is not just intellectually rigorous but provides a direct, actionable insight into the core challenge of the spiritual path (ആത്മിയ പാത): to understand and ultimately transcend the very mechanism that creates the illusion of a separate and limiting 'other'.

Verse 42: The Essence of Unitive Knowledge and the Path to Sadgati

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* systematically leads the seeker from the complexities of manifold perception to the fundamental simplicity of unitive consciousness. Following his detailed

analysis of the 'other' (Anyā) as the source of duality through the 'This is a pot' proposition (Verse 41), Guru, in the subsequent verse (42), directs his attention to the 'same' (Sama) by breaking down the proposition 'This is knowledge.' This analysis reveals the core of unitive awareness, positioning it as the path to dissolve the mind and attain the 'good path' (sadgati) of Self-realisation. The following discussion will critically analyze Guru's method in exploring this crucial axiological field, using the provided verse and its comprehensive explanations, and integrating further philosophical insights.

ഇദമരിവെന്തിലാദ്യമാമിതെന്തു-

ഇതു സമ, തൻരെ വിശ്വേഷമാണു ബോധം;
മതി മുതലായവയെക്കു മാറി മേൽ സങ്ക-
ഗതി വരുവാനിതിനെം്പണ്ഡജിച്ചിഡണം.

"In 'this is knowledge' the initial 'this' is 'same' While its attribute is cognitive consciousness. For the mind and all else to vanish And the good path to gain, this should one contemplate."

Meaning of words in Malayalam:

'ഇദം അരിവ്' എന്നതിൽ : 'ഇത് അരിവാണ്' എന്ന അരിവിൽ (In the knowledge 'This is knowledge')

ആദ്യമാം : ആദ്യമുള്ള (That which comes first)

'ഇത്' (ഇദം) : 'ഇതു' എന്നുള്ളതാണ് (is 'This')

സമ : സമയായ അരിവ്. (is the knowledge called 'Sama' or 'Same')

തന്റെ വിശ്വേഷമാണ് : അതിന്റെ ഉൾപ്പെടെയായ വിശ്വേഷമാണ് (is its specific subdivision/attribute)

ബോധം : 'അരിവ്' എന്നുള്ളത്. (is 'knowledge' or 'cognitive consciousness')

മതി മുതലായവയെക്കു : ബുദ്ധി, ഇന്ദ്രിയങ്ങൾ തുടങ്ങിയവയുടെയും അവയുടെ വ്യത്തികളുടെയും ഒക്കെ തലം (The level of intellect, senses, and their functions etc.)

മാറി : കടന്നുപോയി (having transcended/gone beyond)

മേൽ : അതിന്പുറമുള്ള (beyond that)

സർഗ്ഗതി വരുവാൻ : സർഗ്ഗതി പ്രാഹിക്കുവാൻ (to attain the good path/ultimate state)

'ഈ'നെ : ഇവിടെ പറഞ്ഞ 'ഈ' എന്ന സമയിലെ സാമാന്യത്വം (this 'This', the universal aspect within 'Sama' mentioned here)

ജീവിത്വം : തപോപൂർവ്വകം ധ്യാനിക്കേണ്ടതാണ്. (one should contemplate / meditate with ascetic devotion).

This verse dissects the proposition 'This is knowledge' to reveal the underlying nature of Sama (the 'same'). The 'initial this' is identified as Sama, representing the universal, unifying aspect of knowledge. Its 'attribute' is cognitive consciousness.' The ultimate purpose of contemplating this is for 'the mind and all else to vanish' and to 'gain the good path' (sadgati), which signifies the attainment of ultimate reality or Self-realisation.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a meticulous unpacking of Guru's analysis of Sama, highlighting its qualitative nature, its distinction from Anya, and its ultimate role in transcendental experience.

1. Scrutinizing Pure Reason and Qualitative Reality:

The first explanation situates this verse as a scrutiny of the 'other' universal atomic or elementary proposition in terms of pure reason or knowledge.' Unlike the quantitative movement of the 'other' (Anya), this aspect is described as 'the qualitative (സൂഖ്യപരമായ) rather than the quantitative aspect of reality.'

The specific attribute of pure reason is identified as 'cognitive consciousness (bodha).' The Advaita Vedanta (അദ്വാനരോഗ്യം) epistemology is invoked to distinguish strictly between 'Self and non-Self sides, the conceptual and the perceptual aspects of the event called awareness within consciousness.' While Jnana applies to the subjective/conceptual and Jneya (ജ്ഞാനിക്കേണ്ടതാണ്) to the objective/non-Self, consciousness

(ജ്ഞാനം) here is seen as an 'activity,' distinguishing 'positive act of cognition' from 'mere passive awareness.' However, these dualistic distinctions ultimately 'get absorbed into the unitive status of the Absolute,' serving merely methodological and epistemological purposes.

The ultimate standpoint is where 'knowledge (ജ്ഞാനം)' becomes finalized beyond terms of becoming into terms of pure being,' where 'there is neither plus nor minus... but only the pure unitary or unitive light of the Absolute that is fully itself.' This 'ultimate standpoint is the goal of the aspirant for Self-knowledge (ജ്ഞാനാത്മാഭാവം),' and the verse merely 'indicates' the path.

2. 'Sama' as Singular, Unifying Knowledge:

The second explanation reinforces that Sama perceives 'everything as unified' and is 'singular.' Guru's choice of a single example ('This is knowledge') serves to illustrate this singularity and profound insight. It breaks down an experience of perception: the existence of the perceived object, the 'I' as perceiver, and the act of perceiving - all are 'diverse manifestations of the same underlying Knowledge (ജ്ഞാനം).' Thus, each can be seen as 'This is knowledge,' demonstrating their non-distinctness from Knowledge itself. The 'potential for experiences is infinite, and all these infinite experiences can be perceived as 'This is knowledge', which is the power of Sama - 'that which shines forth as one.'

Just as Anya had its universal and particular, Sama also has its particular. The 'This' in

'This is knowledge' represents the universal Sama, while 'knowledge' (or 'consciounsess' - வேங்கோ) defines its particular, specifying the 'nature of the experience of knowing everything as one.'

The crucial point is that if 'this' (in 'This is knowledge') is taken in isolation, it is 'formless, yet it is knowledge.' It is within this 'formless consciounsess that conceptualization occurs.' The inner instruments (anta?kara?as) and sense organs (indriyas), discussed previously, are necessary for defining experience. However, the 'This' in 'This is knowledge' refers to the 'formless essence of consciounsess that remains when the operations of the intellect, senses, and other faculties are set aside.'

This 'formless essence of consciounsess' is identified as 'not separate from our Self-essence (øtma-sattø).' These terms are contextual names for the 'same fundamental reality.' Therefore, this 'formless (unconditioned) essence of consciounsess... is our ultimate reality, the supreme goal of Self-realisation (sadgati).' To attain this sadgati, one must 'endeavor to reduce all experiences to 'This is knowledge', and then proceed further into the 'This' itself, 'meditating on the understanding that this formless essence of consciounsess is 'T.' This is presented as a 'meditative experience requiring the transcendence (அதிகமிக்கல்) of the intellect and its auxiliary functions.' The ultimate purpose of contemplating these verses (36-42) is to illuminate this path to sadgati.

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in Verse 42 rigorously focuses on the essence of consciounsess (bodham), distinguishing it from its manifestations and positioning it as the ultimate axiological goal of Self-realization (øtmasøk?øtkøra?).

Axiological Primacy of Qualitative Experience: Guru establishes the clear

axiological primacy of qualitative (gu?aparama?) experience over quantitative measurements. While 'Anya' (other) operates in quantitative distinctions, 'Sama' (same) is associated with the "qualitative rather than the quantitative aspect of reality." This indicates that Self-realization involves shifting focus from the measurable world to the immeasurable, unitive quality of pure consciounsess (bodham). The "negative nothingness" as the "ground of all absolutist realities of every grade of value" suggests that the highest value lies in an unconditioned, formless essence, attained by negating phenomenal attributes, providing a clear value system.

Deconstruction of 'Knowledge Itself' as the Path: Guru's profound methodological choice to deconstruct the proposition "This is knowledge" (arivu) unveils the mechanism of unity. It demonstrates that even the concept of knowledge, when purified, points back to an unconditioned essence. The 'this' in "This is knowledge" is the universal Sama, the formless consciounsess (bodham) that remains when conceptualizations and functions of the anta?kara?as and indriyas are set aside. This is a critical step in Advaitic neti-neti methodology, where negating conditioned aspects leads to the unconditioned Self. The axiological aim is to reduce all experiences to "This is knowledge" and then melt into the 'This' itself, recognizing it as 'T', highlighting the essential identity between formless consciounsess (bodham) and the Self.

'Bodha' (Cognitive Consciounsess) as the Specific Attribute: Identifying bodha (bodham, cognitive consciounsess) as the "specific attribute" of pure reason (constituting 'Sama') is significant. It implies that while the ultimate 'this' of Sama is formless, its characteristic manifestation in awareness is the act of knowing, or pure cognition (arivu). This crucial distinction means Sama is not

inert; it is inherently luminous and self-aware, aligning with Advaitic philosophy (advaita-darśana?) where Brahman/Atman (brahma?/atma?) is Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). The 'Chit' aspect, pure consciousness (bodham), is the key attribute for unification, informing the seeker that unity is achieved through an awakened, aware state.

Teleological Goal: Vanishing of Mind and Gaining Sadgati: The verse's explicit teleological statement, "For the mind and all else to vanish / And the good path (sadgati) to gain, this should one contemplate," provides a clear axiological goal. The "vanishing of mind" refers to the cessation of dualistic thought processes, a transcendence (atikramikkal) of the conditioned mind, allowing the unconditioned Self to shine

forth. "Gaining the good path (sadgati)" is the supreme value, representing Self-realization (ātmasaṅkṣepa). This positions the contemplation of Sama as the direct means to achieve the highest human aspiration, emphasizing this specific practice's transformative power.

Guru meticulously lays bare the 'nucleus' of unitive consciousness (మొంచు). His methodology empowers the seeker not just to understand the distinction between 'Same' and 'Other' intellectually, but to systematically reduce all experiences to their unitive ground and ultimately realize the identity of the formless 'this' with their own Self-essence (అతమసత్త). This verse serves as a crucial bridge from analytical understanding to the direct, liberating experience of the Absolute.

Recap

- ◆ The world is a manifestation of Brahman.
- ◆ Brahman does not actually change to become the world.
- ◆ *Vivartavāda* explains the world as an apparent transformation.
- ◆ *Māyā* is the power behind this apparent manifestation.
- ◆ The world is not ultimately real.
- ◆ Its reality is empirical (*vyāvahārika*).
- ◆ Brahman's reality is ultimate (*pāramārthika*).
- ◆ The world is non-different from Brahman.
- ◆ The appearance of multiplicity is due to *māyā*.
- ◆ Knowledge removes the illusion of separation.
- ◆ The world is an apparent projection.

- ◆ Guru teaches Self-realisation as the highest goal.
- ◆ Ignorance (avidyā) hides the Self.
- ◆ The question “Who are you?” points to the true “I”.
- ◆ Self (Ātman) is one; ego is many and transient.
- ◆ Ego blocks the knowledge of the Self.
- ◆ Body and mind are impure; the Self alone is pure.
- ◆ Worldly happiness is temporary.
- ◆ Realisation of the Self brings freedom.
- ◆ Spiritual pride is also ego.
- ◆ Prayer helps remove ego.
- ◆ Guru uses analogies like fire and sparks.
- ◆ Darkness is used as an example of ignorance.
- ◆ Knowledge of truth is non-dual (advaita).
- ◆ Liberation comes through Self-knowledge.

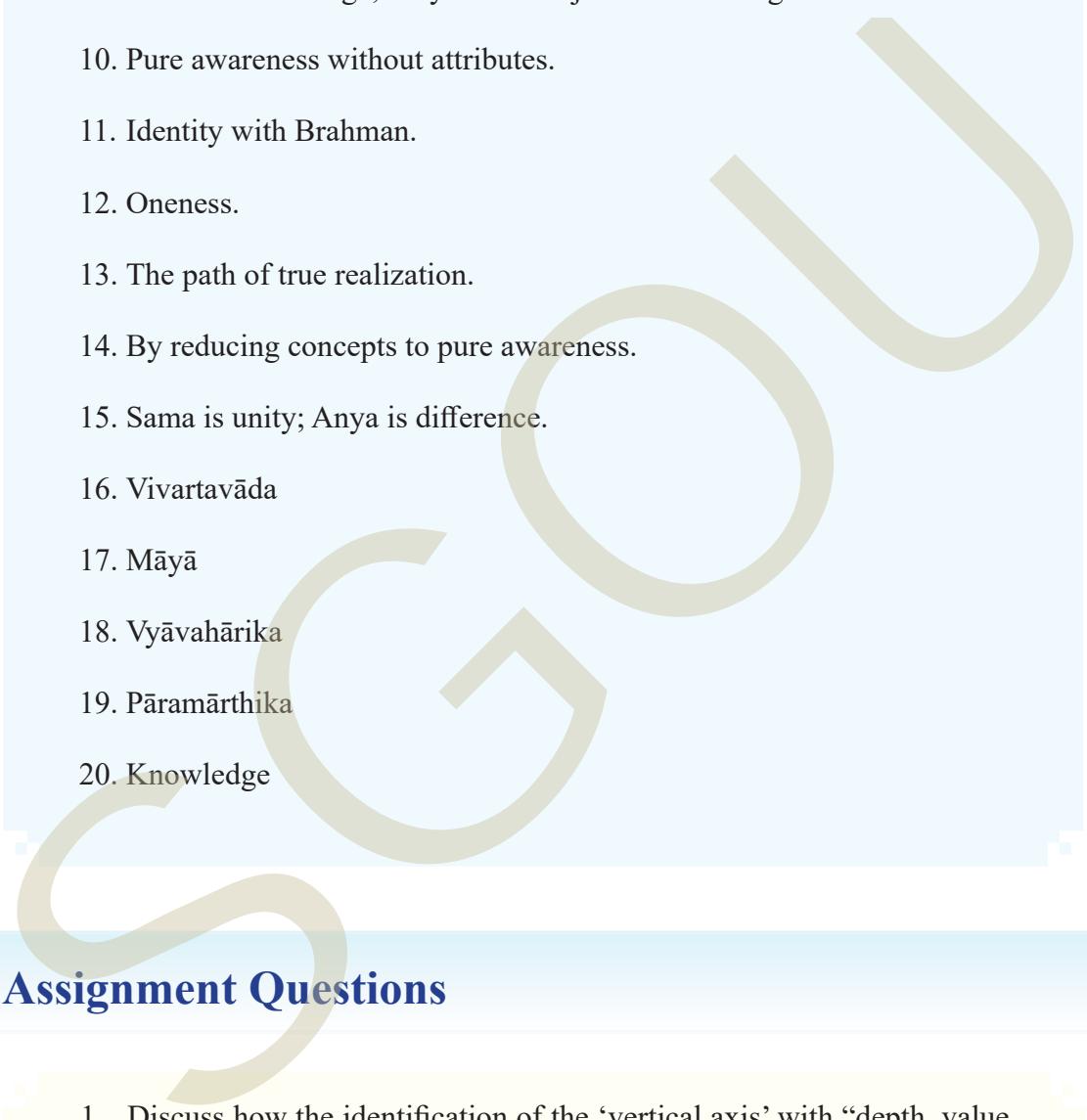
Objective Questions

1. What does axiology mean in philosophy?
2. When we say something is ‘good’ or ‘right’, which field of philosophy are we engaging with?
3. In verses 36–37, which two categories of consciousness does Sree Narayana Guru introduce?
4. What is meant by ‘Sama’ and ‘Anya’ in Guru’s taxonomy of consciousness?
5. What ultimate goal is suggested in merging into the form of ‘other-sameness’ (Anya-Samya)?

6. What does Guru describe as the substratum of all manifestations such as doubt, memory, imagination, and emotions?
7. According to Guru, what is identified as the root cause of human adversity?
8. What is the ultimate reality?
9. In Advaita Vedanta, what is the distinction between Jnana and Jneya?
10. What is meant by the “formless essence of consciousness”?
11. What is the ultimate realization when the seeker melts into the “This” of consciousness?
12. What is identified as the specific attribute of Sama?
13. What does the “good path” (sadgati) signify?
14. How does Guru’s methodology move from intellectual analysis to direct experience?
15. How does Guru distinguish Sama from Anya in terms of experiential quality?
16. What theory explains the world’s appearance from Brahman?
17. What power causes the apparent world?
18. What is the world’s empirical reality called?
19. What is the ultimate reality called?
20. What dissolves the illusion of separation?

Answers

1. The philosophical study of values
2. Ethics
3. ‘Sama’ (same) and ‘Anya’ (other)
4. ‘Sama’ means sameness or unity, while ‘Anya’ means otherness or difference.



5. The ultimate goal is liberation (mokṣa)
6. The substratum is consciousness itself
7. An outlook centered on ‘otherness’ (Vi-sama).
8. Brahman
9. Jnana is knowledge; Jneya is the object of knowledge
10. Pure awareness without attributes.
11. Identity with Brahman.
12. Oneness.
13. The path of true realization.
14. By reducing concepts to pure awareness.
15. Sama is unity; Anya is difference.
16. Vivartavāda
17. Māyā
18. Vyāvahārika
19. Pāramārthika
20. Knowledge

Assignment Questions

1. Discuss how the identification of the ‘vertical axis’ with “depth, value, and contemplative unity” explicitly defines an axiological hierarchy within Guru’s framework.
2. Analyze the “conflict between the ‘individual selves’ and the ‘unity of the Absolute Self’” as a central axiological problem that Guru’s philosophy seeks to resolve.

3. How do the concepts of *kshetra* and *kshetrajna* from the Bhagavad Gita reinforce the axiological distinction between the manifest world and the underlying consciousness in Guru's thought?
4. Examine how the emphasis on the 'qualitative aspect' for *Sama* and 'quantitative divergence' for *Anya* reveals an underlying axiological judgment in Guru's classification of knowledge.
5. Discuss the axiological implications of identifying 'bodha' (cognitive consciousness) as the "key attribute of this unitive principle."
6. How does the "teleological goal of the 'vanishing of mind' and attaining the 'good path' (*sadgati*)" reflect the supreme value posited within this axiological framework?
7. Analyze the statement that "the ultimate realisation is a meditative experience that transcends intellect," linking it to the experiential nature of axiological understanding in Advaita.
8. In what way does Guru's methodology, by systematically reducing experiences to their unitive ground, serve to re-evaluate and re-prioritise human values?
9. Reflect on how Guru's discerning guidance (e.g., in verse 12 if applicable from other units, or generally in his approach) tempers the quest for the Self with humility, contributing to an ethical dimension of axiological realisation.
10. Explain the Advaitic perspective that the world is a manifestation of Brahman, rather than a separate creation.
11. How does *māyā* account for the apparent diversity and multiplicity of the world from the unitary Brahman?
12. Discuss the implications of perceiving the world as Brahman's manifestation for one's spiritual understanding and practice.
13. How does Sree Narayana Guru's teachings align with or further clarify the Advaitic view of the world as a manifestation?
14. What is meant by the statement that Brahman does not undergo any real change to become the world?



UNIT

Dualities Merged into the Neutrality of the Absolute Consciousness

Verses – 73 and 89 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain how Sree Narayana Guru's interpretation, particularly in verses 73 and 89, achieves an Advaitic synthesis by merging dualities into absolute consciousness
- ◆ analyse the 'fire-and-sparks' analogy and the concept of 'being of non-being' (*asadasti*) to understand the world's paradoxical nature and relative reality
- ◆ articulate 'global awareness' as the supreme axiological goal, recognising Knowledge (*Ātman*) as the sole, all-inclusive reality
- ◆ discuss the significance of direct experience (*anubhūti*) as the ultimate validation for comprehending the non-dual truth and transcending phenomenal distinctions

Prerequisites

In Sree Narayana Guru's seminal work, *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* (One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction), the profound journey towards understanding the ultimate reality is meticulously unfolded. This unit explains a core aspect of Guru's Advaitic vision: the dissolution of all perceived dualities into the seamless neutrality of absolute consciousness. Through a systematic deconstruction of our everyday experiences and perceptions, Guru guides the seeker beyond the apparent distinctions of subject and object, knower and known, individual and universal. He reveals that the innumerable forms and names that constitute our world are ultimately expressions arising from a singular, undifferentiated ground, inviting us to transcend the fragmented view of reality and embrace an all-encompassing oneness.

The “neutrality of the absolute consciousness” in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* signifies a state of pure awareness that transcends all pairs of opposites – good and bad, pleasure and pain, existence and non-existence. This is not an empty void, but the unconditioned, ultimate reality (Brahman) that is the substratum of all existence, yet remains untouched by its manifestations. Guru’s verses illuminate how, through deep introspection and the dismantling of ego-centric perceptions, the individual consciousness can merge with this absolute, non-dual awareness. This realization marks the cessation of all mental modifications and the dissolution of the illusion of separation, leading to true liberation and an abiding experience of peace and unity.

Keywords

Duality, Neutrality, Consciousness, Maya, Asadasti, Global Awareness, Anubhuti, Knowledge

Discussion

This unit explains Sree Narayana Guru's Advaitic synthesis, as articulated in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* verses 73 and 89. It explores how Guru meticulously dissolves apparent dualities, leading to the realisation of the absolute neutrality of consciousness. Through powerful analogies like fire and sparks, and concepts such as the world's paradoxical nature as 'being of non-being', the Knowledge is presented as the singular, all-encompassing reality. We will examine how this vision culminates in 'global awareness' as the supreme axiological goal, validated not by intellect alone, but by direct, transformative experience.

ശ്രോകം 73

ഒരു പൊരുളിക്കലനേകമുണ്ട്,നേകം
പൊരുളിലോരർത്ഥമും,മെന്ന ബുദ്ധിയാലെ
അറിവിലാണുമന്ത്രമോ, യിതെല്ലോ-
വരുമറിവീലതിഗോപനീയമാകും.

Of one thing there could be many, as in many objects

One single meaning reside; by such knowing we can know

Consciousness as inclusive of all, differencelessly;

This secret ultimate is not given to all to know.

ഒരു പൊരുളിൽ = ഒരേ സത്യത്തിൽ

അനേകം ഉണ്ട് = അനേകം ഭാവരൂപങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കുന്നു.

അനേകം പൊരുളിൽ = അനേകം ഭാവരൂപങ്ങളിൽ

രംതമവും = ഒരോറു സത്യവും നിറഞ്ഞിരിക്കുന്നു.

എന്ന ബുദ്ധിയാലെ = ഇത്തരത്തിലുള്ള അറിവുണ്ടായാൽ

അന്വേദമായി = ദേഖാവങ്ങളെല്ലാം ഇല്ലാതായി

അരിവിൽ അടങ്കും = എല്ലാം അരിവിൽ അടങ്കിപ്പോകും.

ഇത് = ഇന്ന ധഹന്യം

എല്ലാവരും അരിവീല = എല്ലാവരും അരിയുന്നില്ല.

അതിഗോപനീയമാകും = അതു വളരെ മരണ്ടിരിക്കുന്ന സ്വഭാവമുള്ളതാണ്.

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* systematically guides the seeker towards the pinnacle of Advaitic understanding: the merging of all dualities into the absolute neutrality of consciousness. Having deconstructed the 'same' (Sama) and 'other' (Anya) as both static categories and dynamic processes, Guru, in this verse (verse 41), directly addresses the ancient and perplexing philosophical problem of the 'one and the many'. He asserts that consciousness, in its ultimate nature, is 'inclusive of all, differencelessly,' thereby resolving this fundamental duality and revealing a profound 'secret ultimate' that transcends ordinary perception. The following exposition academic learning material will critically analyse Guru's methodology in exploring this core axiological field, drawing on the provided verse and its comprehensive explanations, and integrating further philosophical insights.

The Verse and its Unitive Assertion

The verse under consideration reads:

'Of one thing there could be many, as in many objects / One single meaning reside; by such knowing we can know / Consciousness as inclusive of all, differencelessly; / This secret ultimate is not given to all to know.'

This verse tackles the problem of the one and the many head-on. It posits that a single entity can manifest as many, and conversely, a single meaning can reside within many objects. Through this understanding, Guru

asserts that one can apprehend 'Consciousness as inclusive of all, differencelessly,' a state where distinctions dissolve. He concludes by stating that this 'secret ultimate' is not universally accessible, implying its profound, esoteric nature.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a rich philosophical context for Guru's resolution of the one and the many, connecting it to both Western and Indian traditions, and highlighting its experiential depth.

1. The Dialectics of One and Many and their Numinous Resolution:

The explanation grounds this dialectic in Indian wisdom traditions, citing the Rig Veda and the Bhagavad Gita's reference to ekatva (oneness) and prithaktva (separate plurality) as pertaining to the 'same central truth of the Absolute.'

The core insight is that 'The idea of unity depends on the notion of multiplicity, which is its inevitable dialectical counterpart.' The ultimate resolution, however, transcends both: 'When the one and the many cancel out there is the numinous value called the Absolute.'

The culmination is the generalisation that 'consciousness' is 'inclusive of all differencelessly', where one and the many merge in the unity of the Absolute.' This requires 'Contemplative insight to penetrate into this secret of secrets,' underscoring its

inaccessibility to ordinary intellect.

This principle is directly applied to Knowledge (Ariuvu) and the universe: 'Those whose interest lies in the universe perceive multiplicity within unity, considering the many as ultimately real.' Conversely, 'those whose interest lies in Truth perceive the singular essence pervading all phenomena, considering the one as ultimately real.' This highlights an axiological choice: where one directs one's interest determines the perceived reality.

The explanation then explicitly states: 'the capacity to perceive the one as many and the many as one is an inherent prowess of Knowledge.' It is the 'same fundamental Knowledge that manifests as both the experience of unity and the experience of multiplicity.' Therefore, 'the one and the many are non-different within Knowledge.' This 'constitutes the illusory power (Maya vaibhava) of Knowledge, or the Self (Atman).' However, this intrinsic nature of Knowledge 'often goes unnoticed by most, remaining profoundly veiled.'

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in this verse presents a masterful synthesis, moving beyond the mere analysis of dualities to their transcendence and absorption into the absolute neutrality of consciousness.

Resolution of the One and the Many through Consciousness: Guru directly addresses the ancient philosophical conundrum of the one and the many, proposing a resolution rooted in the nature of consciousness itself. His examples illustrate the bidirectional flow: the single (archetypal tree, gold) manifests as many (individual trees, ornaments), and the many are expressions of a single essence. The key methodological step is asserting that "Consciousness is inclusive of all, differencelessly." This statement represents Guru's ultimate axiological truth. True

reality is neither fragmented multiplicity nor a bare, featureless unity, but an absolute consciousness where all distinctions-all dualities of 'same' and 'other'-merge into a state of neutrality. This neutrality signifies a profound peace where the inherent tension of duality is resolved.

Axiological Choice: Interest Determines

Reality: A powerful methodological insight is the concept that one's 'interest' (rucu) determines perceived reality. The analogy of the jewellery buyer versus the gold proprietor brilliantly illustrates this axiological choice. If one's interest lies in the ephemeral, manifest world, one perceives multiplicity and is caught in its conflicts. If one's interest is in the underlying Truth (the gold itself, or Atman), one perceives unity and finds peace. This shifts the axiological field from an objective truth to a subjective orientation, implying that suffering arises from where we place our interest or value. The path to the Absolute is thus an intentional redirection of interest towards the unitive.

Maya as the Power of Undifferentiated

Inclusivity: Guru's methodology interprets Maya not as mere illusion, but as the "illusory power (Maya vaibhava) of Knowledge, or the Self (Atman)," which enables the simultaneous perception of unity and multiplicity. The capacity to perceive the one as many and the many as one is an "inherent prowess of Knowledge." This sophisticated understanding views Maya not as an external obscuring force, but as an intrinsic power of the Absolute itself to manifest diversity without losing its unity. This axiological understanding means the world of multiplicity is not to be rejected as utterly false, but understood as a manifestation of the Self's own power, which can be seen differencelessly with the right perspective. The neutrality of absolute consciousness embraces both poles of duality without favouring either.



The Numinous Value of the Absolute:

The concept of "the numinous value called the Absolute" emerging when the one and the many "cancel out" suggests that ultimate reality transcends conceptualisation and duality. It is not just a logical synthesis but an experiential state of transcendence, evoking awe and reverence. This reinforces the "secret ultimate" nature of this knowledge. By linking it to Plato's Parmenides and the paradox of 'being and not being,' Guru aligns his Advaitic resolution with a universal philosophical quest for the ineffable ground of existence. The neutrality of absolute consciousness is precisely this state where all categories collapse, revealing a reality beyond dualistic thought.

Esoteric Nature and Contemplative Insight:

The repeated emphasis that "This secret ultimate is not given to all to know" and requires "Contemplative insight to penetrate into this secret of secrets" highlights the esoteric and experiential nature of this knowledge. It is not accessible through ordinary intellect or sensory perception. This methodological stance differentiates Atmopadesa-satakam from purely academic philosophy; it is a text for spiritual aspirants engaged in deep contemplation (sadhana). The "veiled" nature of this intrinsic truth necessitates sustained inner work, affirming that the ultimate axiological insight is a matter of direct realization, not mere intellectual assent.

Transition from Dialectic to Experiential Fusion: Guru's methodology moves from dialectical analysis to a call for experiential fusion. While he uses logical and analogical reasoning to explain the one and the many, the ultimate instruction is to apprehend "Consciousness as inclusive of all, differencelessly." This is not a mental deduction but a shift in the mode of being. The very structure of the verse, moving from 'knowing we can know' to the assertion of

'Consciousness as inclusive of all,' indicates this transition from intellectual understanding to unitive realization.

The Ultimate Neutrality and Inclusivity

Sree Narayana Guru's analysis of the axiological field of interest in this verse represents the culmination of his exploration of dualities, providing a resolution in the absolute neutrality of consciousness. By:

- ◆ Directly resolving the ancient problem of the one and the many through the assertion that 'Consciousness is inclusive of all, differencelessly.'
- ◆ Highlighting the axiological choice of 'interest' as the determinant of perceived reality (multiplicity or unity), thereby empowering the seeker to reorient their focus towards truth.
- ◆ Interpreting Maya as the inherent 'illusory power' of the Self to manifest both unity and multiplicity, revealing its non-differentiation within the Absolute.
- ◆ Pointing towards the 'numinous value' of the Absolute where all dualities cancel out, signifying a transcendent, ineffable reality.
- ◆ Emphasising the esoteric nature of this 'secret ultimate', requiring contemplative insight beyond ordinary intellectual grasp.
- ◆ Guiding the seeker from dialectical understanding to experiential fusion, where all distinctions merge into unitive awareness.

Guru offers a deeply liberating vision. He dismantles the inherent conflict of dualities by showing them to be non-different within

അരിവിലിരുന്ന് = സത്യമായിരിക്കുന്ന അരിവിൽനിന്ന്

അസത് അസ്തിയെന്ന് = സ്വയം ഉമയില്ലാത്തതും ഉള്ളതാണെന്ന തോന്തരുളവാക്കുന്തുമായ

അസംഖ്യം = എന്നെല്ലാത്ത

പൊരിയിളക്കി = തീപ്പാരികൾ ഇളക്കിമേന്നു

ഭൂവനം = പ്രപഞ്ചം

സ്ഥാരികയാലേ = ഉള്ളതായി പ്രതീതമായിക്കാണിരി കുകയാണ്. അതിനാൽ

അരിവിനെ വിട്ട് = അരിവല്ലാതെ

ഒരു വസ്തു അന്യമില്ലെന്ന് = മറ്റാരു സത്യം ഇല്ലെന്ന്

അരിയണം = അരിയണു

ഈ അരിവ് = ഇ അരിവ്

വൈകരുപ്പുമേകം = വൈക്കുരുപ്പും കൈവരുത്തും.

the boundless and neutral expanse of absolute consciousness. This verse is not merely a philosophical statement but an invitation to a direct, transformative experience of the Self, where the perceived 'other' and the inherent 'same' are reconciled into an all-inclusive, tranquil reality.

Verse 89

അരിവിലിരുന്നസദസ്തിയെന സംഖ്യം
പൊരിയിളക്കിബവനം സ്ഥാരികയാലേ
അരിവിനെ വിട്ടാരു വസ്തുവന്യമില്ലെന്നിയണമീയറിവെകരുപ്പുമേകും.

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.

Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa*



Śatakam culminates its analysis of consciousness by demonstrating the ultimate unity of all perceived dualities within the Absolute. Having defined and dynamically explored the 'same' (Sama) and 'other' (Anyā) and resolved the problem of the 'one and the many', Guru, in this concluding verse of the specific sequence (verse 42), addresses the very nature of the phenomenal world and its relationship to ultimate Knowledge. He asserts that the world, though appearing as 'non-being,' arises from Knowledge, and crucially, 'outside of knowledge not a thing exists.' This leads to 'global awareness,' where all dualities are absorbed into the neutrality of absolute consciousness. The following discussion will critically analyse Guru's methodology in articulating this unitive vision, drawing on the provided verse and its comprehensive explanations, and integrating further philosophical insights.

The Verse and its Affirmation of Knowledge's Totality

The verse under consideration reads:

'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.'

This verse employs the vivid analogy of sparks arising from fire to illustrate how the 'innumerable' world 'appears' out of Knowledge. It posits that the world is a manifestation of 'non-being' asserting its 'being,' a paradox reflecting its illusory yet perceivable nature. The core assertion is that 'outside of knowledge not a thing exists,' leading to the ultimate realisation of 'global awareness,' a state where all distinctions are resolved within the Absolute.

Philosophical Interpretations

The provided explanations offer a deep dive into Guru's synthesis of Advaitic principles, particularly his nuanced understanding of Maya and its relation to the Absolute, bridging historical philosophical divides.

1. Knowledge as Light and the Elusiveness of Maya:

The first explanation begins by highlighting philosophy's aim: 'a finalized, unitive and satisfactory answer to the questions and problems that seriously face man.' Truth must be 'one and has to be understood as a whole,' leading to 'wholesale knowledge' that brings freedom and power. Knowledge is compared to the Sun and its light, both 'consisting of the same stuff,' implying that inner subjective knowledge and outer objective manifestation are intrinsically unified.

The explanation then addresses the 'further subtlety' of Maya, previously examined as an 'elusive entity with a double epistemological reference,' being both sat (existent) and asat (not real), and characterised by 'indeterminism.' The central question is the relation between this 'double-sided concept of Maya and the unitive and globally understood Absolute.' This relationship, acknowledged

as 'most subtle,' has historically caused 'differences between Vedantists.'

Guru's choice of the 'sparks of fire' analogy is seen as a bridge between rival Advaitin schools, specifically between Sankara (stressing cause over effect) and Ramanuja (giving primacy to effect as much as material cause, with his anupapatti against Maya). The sparks (effects) arise from the central fire (cause). While 'having the same fire implied in them,' sparks also have 'inert coal too as their basis,' and their fire 'does not last.' This duality allows each spark to be seen as 'both real and unreal,' 'lasting and transient.'

2. The World as 'Asadasti' and Manifestation of Knowledge:

The second explanation reiterates the non-separation of 'the existence of the world and the existence of Knowledge.' It explicitly states how 'Knowledge itself manifests as the world.' The 'fire' analogy signifies Knowledge (Arivu), and the 'multitude of sparks' constitute the 'perceived world.' Thus, 'what appears as the world is, in essence, Knowledge itself.'

The world is described as Asadasti (non-existent-existent), meaning it 'does not possess independent existence (asat).' Its existence is 'contingent upon, and contained within, the existence (astitva) of Knowledge.' We experience both presence ('is') and absence ('is not'). Both are 'valid experiences' and 'modifications (bhava-rupa) occurring within Knowledge.' It is the 'same singular Knowledge that gives rise to both the experience of 'is not' (asat) and 'is' (asti).' The 'totality of these experiences constitutes the world.'

The ultimate truth is that 'there is no reality other than Knowledge (the Atman).' This must become 'direct experience (anubh-uti).' When this occurs, it becomes 'unequivocally clear that 'I' and 'the world' are not separate

from the single reality of Knowledge.' This 'unification is our ultimate goal,' leading to the dissolution of all doubts and questions.

Sree Narayana Guru's methodology in this verse offers a synthesis of Advaitic metaphysics and experiential realization, providing a conclusive statement on reality and the attainment of absolute consciousness.

Unitive Resolution of Cause and Effect (Bridging Vedantic Schools): Guru's brilliant fire-and-sparks analogy is a methodological masterpiece, offering a relatable image for the abstract Advaitic concept of Maya and its relation to Brahman. By showing that sparks (effects) are fundamentally fire (cause) yet possess transient aspects, he bridges the historical divide between Sankara's emphasis on cause and Ramanuja's on effect. He acknowledges both the ultimate reality of the source (Knowledge/Fire) and the relative, asadasti nature of the phenomenal world (sparks). This inclusive approach allows for a nuanced understanding where the world is not absolutely false but a contingent manifestation of the Absolute. This nuanced understanding is essential for the "neutrality of absolute consciousness"-it encompasses both source and manifestations without contradiction.

The Paradox of 'Being of Non-Being' (Sat-Asat Anirvacaniya): The phrase "Asserting the being of non-being to make the world appear" directly addresses the Advaitic concept of anirvacaniya (indescribability) of Maya. The world is neither truly existent (sat) nor absolutely non-existent (asat), possessing only a provisional, apparent existence. Guru's methodology articulates this paradox, compelling the seeker beyond conventional logic. The world appears because a fundamental "non-being" (lacking independent reality) asserts a form of being (perceivable and experiential). This explains the emergence of dualities through the apparent "being" of what is ultimately

"non-being" from the Absolute perspective. Consciousness's neutrality lies in its ability to contain this paradox without limitation.

Axiological Primacy of Global Awareness:

The core axiological assertion is that "outside of knowledge not a thing exists" and that "Such knowledge global awareness shall yield." This establishes Knowledge (Atman) as the sole reality and ultimate value. All perceived dualities, including 'I' and 'the world', are ultimately non-separate from this singular Knowledge. "Global awareness" signifies a state of consciousness where all distinctions collapse into a seamless, all-inclusive unity. This is the culmination of the axiological journey, where the seeker transcends limited, dualistic perception to experience the Absolute in its totality. This unitive vision leaves "nothing else as residue," offering "satisfactory certitude" and resolving all fundamental questions of existence.

'Asadasti' and the Nature of Worldly Experience:

Guru's use of Asadasti (non-existent-existent) to describe the world is a precise methodological tool. It acknowledges our daily experience of both presence and absence as "valid experiences," but frames them as "modifications (bhavarupa) occurring within Knowledge." This means even the experience of absence is an aspect of Knowledge. This approach prevents nihilism while affirming the world's contingent nature. The "indigence of the sparks" (their relative, transient nature) explains why the phenomenal world "emerges into view." This subtle understanding is key to merging dualities: the apparent world, being a modification of Knowledge, is not fundamentally separate, thus integrating into a neutral, non-dual awareness.

Integration of Theory and Direct Experience (Anubh-uti):

The methodology constantly bridges abstract philosophical concepts with the imperative of direct



experience (anubh-uti). The goal is not merely intellectual comprehension but a lived realization that 'I' and 'the world' are not separate from the single reality of Knowledge. This emphasis makes the Atmopadesa-satakam a practical guide for spiritual transformation. The dissolution of doubts and questions is the practical outcome of this unitive experience, serving as empirical validation for the seeker.

The Metaphor of Incandescent Light: The idea that if "fire should burn more brightly, there may not be any sparks at all, as in incandescent light," is a powerful metaphorical methodological insight. It describes the state of pure, non-dual Absolute Truth. It suggests that the emergence of "sparks" (the phenomenal world) is due to a lesser luminosity of the source. When the Absolute shines in its full glory, worldly distinctions and dualities dissolve, not into nothingness, but into the effulgence of pure being. This offers a compelling image of the ultimate state where dualities are transcended in pure, undifferentiated awareness, leading to the absolute neutrality of consciousness.

Global Awareness as the Neutrality of the Absolute

Sree Narayana Guru's analysis of the axiological field of interest in this verse represents the ultimate Advaitic synthesis, where all dualities are absorbed into the absolute neutrality of consciousness. By:

- ♦ Employing the profound fire-and-sparks analogy to reconcile the cause-and-effect relationship, subtly bridging Vedantic interpretations of Maya.

- ♦ Articulating the paradoxical nature of the world as 'being of non-being' (asadasti), thereby clarifying its relative reality as a contingent manifestation of Knowledge.
- ♦ Establishing 'global awareness' (where 'outside of knowledge not a thing exists') as the supreme axiological goal, affirming Knowledge (Atman) as the sole, all-inclusive reality.
- ♦ Explaining how both 'is' and 'is not' are modifications within singular Knowledge, integrating all experiences into a non-dual framework.
- ♦ Insisting on direct experience (anubh-uti) as the ultimate validation and transformative pathway to this unitive vision.
- ♦ Using the metaphor of incandescent light to describe the state of full, non-dual Absolute Truth, where phenomenal distinctions dissolve.

Guru culminates his teaching by revealing that the neutrality of absolute consciousness is not a void, but an all-encompassing, luminous reality where all apparent dualities are ultimately seen as non-separate manifestations of the Self. This verse offers the seeker a comprehensive, satisfying, and liberating vision, ensuring that all questions dissolve in the light of unified, global awareness.

Recap

- ◆ Dualities merge into absolute consciousness.
- ◆ Verse 73 reveals unity in multiplicity.
- ◆ Verse 89 equates everything to Knowledge.
- ◆ The fire-sparks analogy reconciles cause and effect.
- ◆ The world's nature is paradoxical 'being of non-being'.
- ◆ Global awareness is the supreme axiological goal.
- ◆ Knowledge is the sole, all-inclusive reality.
- ◆ 'Is' and 'is not' are modifications within Knowledge.
- ◆ Direct experience (*anubhūti*) is the ultimate validation.
- ◆ Absolute Truth is like incandescent light.

Objective Questions

1. What is merged into absolute consciousness?
2. What is the world's paradoxical nature?
3. What analogy reconciles cause and effect?
4. What is the supreme axiological goal?
5. What is the sole all-inclusive reality?
6. What is direct experience called?
7. Is absolute consciousness a void?
8. What transcends phenomenal distinctions?
9. What does Verse 89 compare everything to?
10. What is the cause that the fire-spark analogy bridges?
11. What is Verse 73's ultimate secret?

Answers

1. Dualities
2. Asadasti
3. Fire-sparks
4. Global awareness
5. Knowledge
6. Anubhūti
7. No
8. Knowledge
9. Knowledge
10. Maya
11. Unity

Assignment Questions

1. Analyse the meaning and philosophical implications of Guru's statement in Verse 73 that "Of one thing there could be many, as in many objects / One single meaning reside."
2. Discuss how the 'fire-and-sparks' analogy (Verse 89) helps to reconcile the cause-and-effect relationship and understand the role of Maya.
3. Elaborate on the paradoxical concept of the world as 'being of non-being' (*asadasti*) and how it clarifies the world's relative reality.
4. Explain how Guru integrates the concepts of 'is' and 'is not' as mere modifications within singular Knowledge, contributing to a non-dual framework.
5. Discuss the significance of direct experience (*anubhūti*) as the ultimate

validation and transformative pathway to the unitive vision.

6. Analyse the metaphor of incandescent light in describing the state of full, non-dual Absolute Truth.
7. How does Guru ensure that the “neutrality of absolute consciousness is not a void, but an all-encompassing, luminous reality”?
8. Examine the axiological implications of establishing ‘global awareness’ as the supreme goal, particularly regarding the value placed on unified understanding.
9. How do verses 73 and 89 collectively contribute to understanding that all apparent dualities are ultimately seen as non-separate manifestations of the Self?





Atmas Self-manifestation as ‘The Known’

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain Sree Narayana Guru’s concept of Atma’s self-manifestation as ‘The Known’, highlighting the non-duality between the Self and the universe
- ◆ analyze the role of Turiya Bodham and the dissolution of Triputi in achieving pure, unified consciousness
- ◆ differentiate between *Vivarta* and *Sarjana* in the context of the world’s appearance and its relationship to Brahman
- ◆ discuss the significance of ‘Applied Vedanta’ and the ethical implications of experiential realization of universal oneness

Prerequisites

This unit, “Atman’s Self-Manifestation as ‘The Known’,” explains a crucial aspect of Guru’s Advaitic (non-dual) philosophy: how the singular, all-pervading Self, or Atman, manifests as the diverse world of objects and experiences that we perceive as ‘the known.’ It explores the intricate relationship between the unchanging, knowing consciousness (the Seer) and the ever-changing phenomenal world (the Seen), revealing that what appears as external and separate is, in essence, a projection or manifestation of the Atman itself.

Through a series of insightful verses, Guru guides us to recognize that the universe, with all its forms and names, is not distinct from the fundamental consciousness that perceives it. This unit will illuminate how the Atman, in its inherent nature, unfolds as the entire cosmos, making every ‘known’ object a subtle expression of the Self.

By understanding this truth – that the Seer and the Seen are ultimately non-dual – the seeker can transcend the illusion of separation and realize the inherent unity of all existence, moving towards a state of liberation and absolute knowledge.

Keywords

Non-dual realization, Turiya Bodham, Atma Bodham, Triputi, Vivarta, Maya-vada, Samvit Sagara, Sarjana, Janani Navaratna Manjari

Discussion

The Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru: Atma's Self-Manifestation as 'The Known'

Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical framework, as elaborated in his seminal works like Atmopadesasatakam and Darsanamala, offers a profound understanding of how the ultimate reality, Atman (അത്മാവ്), manifests as the seemingly diverse universe, which we perceive as 'The Known'. This unit deals with Guru's unique perspective on this self-manifestation, emphasizing the experiential nature of non-dual realization and the dissolution of perceived distinctions.

The Experiential Nature of Non-Dual Realisation

Sree Narayana Guru unequivocally asserts that true non-dual experience (advaitanubhuti) transcends mere intellectual comprehension or reliance on pramanas-proofs or authoritative texts. He cautions, "Without direct experience, the indivisible, solidified Consciousness cannot be known; it is an ocean of silent, solidified nectar." This critical caveat highlights that intellectual understanding, while foundational, is insufficient for genuine realization. The ultimate truth of Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) is not a

conceptual construct but a profound, direct, and non-discursive experience. It demands a transcendence of ordinary cognitive modes 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 toward understanding reality is ultimately an experiential one (അനുഭവപരമായത്), culminating in a silent, blissful awareness.

Guru's Atmopadesasatakam profoundly analyzes empirical experience, moving beyond conventional understanding. Verse 28 encapsulates this journey:

അമിമുടിയറ്റിതോടു മാലിയന്നം
സ്വഹൃദമറിയുന്നതു തുരുംബോധമാകും;
ജയമറിവീലതു പിന്ത ചെയ്തു ചൊല്ലി-
നിടയിലിരുന്നറിവല്ലരിഞ്ഞിടേം.

'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!'

This verse, along with its commentary,

അടിമുടിയർ = ആദിയും അന്തവും ഇല്ലാതെ
 അടിത്താട്ടു മഹലിയന്തം = കാൽ മുതൽ തല വരെ (പുർണ്ണമായി)
 സ്ഥാപനമരിയുന്നത് = ബോധത്തെ സാക്ഷാത്കരിച്ച് അറിയുന്നത്
 തുരുബോധമാകം = ജാഗ്രത് സ്വപ്നസൂഷ്മപ്ത്യനു വേണ്ടെങ്കിൽ കടന്നു നിൽക്കുന്ന നാലാമത്തെ സത്യാനുഭവമാണ്.
 ജയമരിവീലതു = ഈ അറിവ് ജയവുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടതല്ല
 ചിത്ത ചെയ്ത് = ചിത്തിച്ചോ സകല്പിച്ചോ
 ചൊല്ലുനിടയിലിരുന്നിവല്ല = ശബ്ദാച്ചാരനണ്ടേതാടുകൂടിയുള്ള അറിവല്ല
 അറിഞ്ഞിട്ടേണോ = ഈത് വ്യക്തമായി യരിക്കേണോ.

elucidates three distinct stages of reality, transitioning from the limitations of ordinary perception to the boundless expanse of Turiya Bodham (തുരുബോധം).

Stages of Empirical Experience

1. Fragmented, Dualistic Perception (Jagrat): The initial stage is characterized 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 (അജ്ഞാനം) 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, where consciousness is bound by

the psycho-physical apparatus and its inherent limitations.

2. Limited Awareness (Swapna & Sushupti - സ്വപ്നവും സൂഷ്മപ്തിയും): The second stage, though not explicitly detailed in the presented verse, encompasses the states of dreaming (Swapna) and deep sleep (Sushupti), 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 conceptualization, or expressed through words, is deemed "no knowledge at all" by Guru. It is confined by the very mechanisms of thought and speech ("Naiva vaca na manasa s-akyo vaptumuprayata?"), 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.

3. **Turiya Bodham (තුරියාභ්‍යම):** The ultimate stage is Turiya Bodham, or Turiya-consciousness, representing 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 (പരമாತ்மாவ්), 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. 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-realization, all manifestations of ignorance, including the individual soul concept and dualistic conceptualizations, 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.

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. The core structure of the Shatakam can be read as a progression, from perception of duality to the realization 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 വിഭൂതിയയുമോർത്താൽ
ജലനിധിതനില്യയർന്നിടും തരങ്ങാ-

വെളിയിലിരുന്നു = നിർവ്വികല്പപജ്ഞാന സ്വരൂപമായ പരബ്രഹ്മത്തിൽനിന്നും

വിവർത്തമിങ്ങുകാണും = അതിന് ചലനമോ മാറ്റമോ ഉണ്ടാക്കാതെ പൊതിക്കാണപ്പെടുന്ന വിവർത്തരുപങ്കളായ

വെളി മുതലായവ = ആകാശം തുടങ്ങിയ

விழுதியணுங் = விவியருபத்தில் காணப்படும் அறையுடையணுங் (அத்தோம், வாயு, அங்கி, ஜலம், டூமி)

ஈர்த்தால் = சிறிசூலோகியால்

ஜலநியதனிலுமிருந்துங் = ஸமூத்திரத்தில் பொன்னிகாணப்படும்

தங்காவலியத்துபோலை = திரமாலக்கலைபோலை

அவேமோய் வரேண் = காரணத்தில்தினுங் ஏரு வேவுமிலூத்தவயாணன் காணேஷ்தான்.

வலியத்துபோலையேமோய் வரேண். (Verse 3)

‘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.’

This is the classic method of Atma Vichara (அத்தோமிசாரம்), 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.

This verse directly follows earlier verses that establish the supreme consciousness as the ultimate reality. 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.

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 (vibhுti - விழுதி) arising from the supreme consciousness (Paramatma). This aligns with the Advaita Vedanta concept of Vivarta

(விவரத்தம்) (superimposition or apparent modification), where an effect appears different from its cause but does not have a separate substantial reality. Unlike parinama (பரிணாமம்) (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.

Guru employs the classic Vedantic analogy of the sea and its waves to illuminate this concept of non-difference (அவேமோ). 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.

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 (മായാവാദം) (doctrine of illusion) and ajatavada (അജാതവാദം) (doctrine of emergent appearance). This 'seeming to be' is attributed to nescience (അവിജ്ഞ) (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.

The process of Panchikarana (പഞ്ചികരണം), where elements interpenetrate to form individual entities, further highlights this idea of non-difference, even though the Guru's verse does not 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 (സംവിത് സാഗരം - 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.

Tripudi and Avastha Traya

Tripudi (ത്രിപുടി - Three folders), meaning 'what Tripudi' is made clear by Guru in verse 4 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*:

അരിവുമരിഞ്ഞിടുമർത്തമവും പുമാർത്ത-
നനിവുമൊരാദിമഹിസും മാത്രമാകും;
വിരളത വിട്ടു വിളങ്ങുമമഹത്താ-
മരിവിലമർന്നു മാത്രമായിട്ടേണോ.

അരിവും = പദാർത്ഥമജ്ഞാനം (സങ്കല്പവും)

അരിഞ്ഞിടുമർത്തമവും = അതിന്റെ ഫലമായി വെളിയിലുണ്ടെന്ന തോന്തുന പദാർത്ഥമവും

പുമാൻ തന്നിവും = താൻ, താൻ എന്ന സ്വയം അറിയുന്നവൻ

രാദിമഹിസുമാത്രമാകും = ആദ്യമേയുള്ള ഒരേയൊരു അവണ്ണബോധമാണ്

വിരളതവിട്ടു = ഇടതടവില്ലാതെ സർവ്വത

വിളങ്ങും = നിറഞ്ഞു പ്രകാശിക്കുന്നു

അമമഹത്താം = ആ വലിയ

അരിവിലമർന്നു = ബോധത്തിൽ ലായിച്ച്

അതുമാത്രമായിട്ടേണോ = അതുമാത്രമായി അവഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നു

"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 acosmic 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 realize that all three are indeed the same consciousness. The dissolution of this triad (Tripiti-vinas-a - ത്രിപൃഥിവിനാശം) is central to achieving non-dual experience.

The concept of Avastha Traya (അവസ്ഥാത്രയം), the three states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, and deep sleep), is intrinsically linked to Tripiti. As discussed, Guru explains how even in these states, the underlying reality is the same consciousness, though perceived differently due to the limitations of thought and inert matter. Realization involves moving beyond these limited states to the Turiya state, where the Tripiti dissolves.

Sree Narayana Guru's teachings on Atma's self-manifestation as 'The Known' are not merely theoretical expositions but a call to experiential realization. He systematically dismantles the illusion of duality by demonstrating how the diverse phenomenal world is but a manifestation of the singular, pure consciousness. Through concepts like Turiya Bodham, the dissolution of Tripiti, and the understanding of Vivarta and Sarjana, Guru guides the seeker towards the profound truth that the self and the non-self are ultimately one. His unique blend of spiritual insight and social activism, exemplified by 'Applied Vedanta', ensures that this inner realization leads to outward transformation, fostering a society rooted in the recognition of universal oneness.

By emphasizing direct experience over mere intellectual understanding, Guru presents self-inquiry that culminates in the blissful awareness of our true nature, the Atman, which is eternally manifesting as 'The Known' universe.

Recap

- ◆ Atma self-manifests as 'The Known' universe.
- ◆ The universe is ultimately a manifestation of Consciousness.
- ◆ Knowledge of an 'other' is an illusion.
- ◆ True knowledge is the Self knowing itself.
- ◆ Duality of knower-known is transcended.
- ◆ Turiya Bodham is the fourth state of consciousness.
- ◆ Tripiti (knower, known, knowing) dissolves in unity.
- ◆ The world is an apparent transformation (*Vivarta*).
- ◆ Guru uses light/darkness symbolism for awareness.
- ◆ 'Applied Vedanta' links inner realization to social transformation.

Objective Questions

1. What does Atma manifest as?
2. What is the fundamental nature of the universe?
3. What illusion does Guru dismantle?
4. What state is beyond waking, dream, sleep?
5. What triad dissolves in pure consciousness?
6. What kind of transformation is the world?
7. Is the world a real creation (*sarjana*)?
8. What symbolizes awareness of Self?
9. What symbolizes spiritual unawareness?
10. What is the true nature of Atman?
11. What leads to outward transformation?
12. What is Guru's unique blend called?

Answers

1. The Known
2. Consciousness
3. Duality
4. Turiya Bodham
5. Triputi
6. Apparent (*Vivarta*)

7. No
8. Light
9. Darkness
10. Blissful awareness
11. Inner realization
12. Applied Vedanta

Assignment Questions

1. Explain Sree Narayana Guru's central argument that Atma's self-manifestation as 'The Known' implies the non-duality of the Self and the universe.
2. Discuss how the concept of *Turiya Bodham* serves to transcend the ordinary states of consciousness and reveal the Atma's true nature.
3. Analyse the process of the 'dissolution of Triputi' and its significance in achieving pure, unified consciousness according to Guru.
4. Differentiate between *Vivarta* (apparent transformation) and *Sarjana* (real creation), explaining why the world is seen as *Vivarta* in Advaita Vedanta.
5. How does Sree Narayana Guru's use of light and darkness symbolism aid in making abstract philosophical concepts of awareness and unawareness accessible?
6. Discuss the meaning and implications of 'Applied Vedanta' as a synthesis of spiritual insight and social activism.
7. Why does Guru emphasize *experiential realization* (*anubhavaparamaya sākṣātkāram*) over mere intellectual understanding for Atma's self-manifestation?
8. Explain how the systematic dismantling of the illusion of duality leads to the profound truth that the self and the non-self are ultimately one.

9. How does the unit suggest that a journey of self-inquiry culminates in the blissful awareness of one's true nature as Atman?
10. Analyse the statement: “the individual ‘I’ is not annihilated but understood as a continuous expression of the One Self-substance” in the context of self-manifestation.





The Science of Sciences

UNIT

Learning Outcomes

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

- ◆ explain how Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical understanding of Consciousness (*arivu*) establishes Vedanta as the foundational "Science of all sciences."
- ◆ differentiate between externally-oriented and internally-oriented methods of knowledge, appreciating why the latter is central to Vedantic self-realisation.
- ◆ familiarise the concepts of *sama* and *anya* knowledge as classified by Sree Narayana Guru, understanding their significance in the journey towards ultimate reality.
- ◆ describe the practical spiritual discipline (*sādhanā*) prescribed by Sree Narayana Guru for achieving non-dual oneness, connecting it to the 'This' (Atman/Brahman) as the final goal.

Prerequisites

To effectively engage with the axiological insights presented in this unit, a solid grounding in certain philosophical concepts is highly beneficial. A fundamental prerequisite is familiarity with the Advaita Vedanta concept of Brahman as the ultimate, non-dual reality, which is posited as the supreme value or ultimate truth to be realised. Equally essential is understanding Atman as the individual Self's intrinsic identity with this Brahman, thereby highlighting the value of self-realisation and liberation. Furthermore, an understanding of how Maya operates to create the illusion of multiplicity is crucial, as discerning reality from illusion is a key step in apprehending true value. It would also be helpful to recall earlier lessons on Guru's dialectical methodology and his emphasis on introspection as a valuable means to uncover deeper truths and inherent values. A basic grasp of the distinction between the

empirical ego and the transcendent Self, as discussed in previous verses, will provide vital context for appreciating the hierarchies of value implied in these philosophical distinctions. Ultimately, an open mind, willing to embrace philosophical paradoxes and engage in contemplative thought, is crucial for appreciating Guru's subtle yet precise approach to understanding existence and its ultimate significance.

Keywords

Epistemology, Consciousness, Arivu, Atman, Brahman, Sama, Anya, Sādhanā

Discussion

The Science of Sciences: An Epistemological Perspective

The epistemological perspective on Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy is drawn and condensed from Swami Muni Narayana Prasad's insightful interpretations in his work, 'The Philosophy of Narayana Guru'. Epistemology, as a philosophical discipline, investigates the origin, structure, method, and validity of knowledge. Within Vedanta, however, epistemology is not a separate category but is inherently woven into its very body. The process we call 'knowing' is understood as a fundamental mode of one Consciousness, or *arivu*, also referred to as Atman or Brahman. This *arivu* is the singular Substance from which everything derives its form; hence, Vedanta itself is fundamentally an epistemology – a comprehensive study of Consciousness.

The Origin and Nature of Knowledge

Every instance of knowing arises from this singular *cit* or *arivu*. Knowledge emerges from the interaction of two sides: the subject (*jñātā*) and the object (*jñeyā*). Essentially, both subject and object are manifestations of the same *cit*, appearing in subtle (*sūkṣma-bhāna*)

and gross (*sthūla-bhāna*) forms, respectively. Driven by an inherent *karma*-urge, the subject and object are impelled to connect. This contact serves to transcend their apparent differences, culminating in the realisation of their essential oneness in *cit*. This specific knowledge (*viśeṣa-jñāna*) is, in truth, an event where the non-dual Atman or *arivu* reveals itself. As Sree Narayana Guru states in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*:

"Ātmā, confined in body, in its essential being, thinks of objects (of interest) as 'This is mine', or 'That is mine' and find identity with them, forgetting its embodiedness. Proper pondering on this makes anyone attain the final experiential non-dual oneness." (Verse 48)

Just as rubbing two pieces of wood produces fire that consumes the wood itself, the convergence of subject and object reveals the singular *arivu*, which then subsumes both.

Methods of Knowledge

The methods of gaining knowledge can be broadly classified as externally-oriented or internally-oriented. While the former involves a subject seeking reality in external

objects, the latter, characteristic of Vedanta, focuses on the enquirer investigating one's own true nature. External knowledge is always conditional and relative, thus unable to reveal ultimate reality. The internally-oriented method, being unconditional, leads to the Real. For this reason, it is the primary method upon which Vedanta relies.

The Validity and Structure of Knowledge

Indian philosophical traditions recognise various valid means of knowledge, or *pramāṇas*, such as perception, inference, and verbal testimony. However, the validity of these *pramāṇas* is limited to externally-oriented knowledge. They cannot facilitate the self-knowledge that Vedanta ultimately seeks, as the Self is not an object perceivable by senses or inferable from them. Verbal testimony from a realised authority can offer indirect guidance, but true enlightenment requires profound, meditative contemplation. Sree Narayana Guru unequivocally asserts:

“How can any *pramana* work with this unthinkable, ineffable enlightenment!”
(*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, Verse 94)

This highlights that the ultimate realisation of the inseparable oneness of Atman and the world transcends conventional logical frameworks.

The structure of knowledge, much like the world itself, unfolds from Consciousness. Sree Narayana Guru elucidates this in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, stating:

“Infinite is the way in which the knowing function becomes unfolded from the one consciousness; yet its entire range could well be classified into two: *sama* and *anya*.”
(Verse 36)

Verse 38 further clarifies:

“The knowing function in which one perceives many realities is called *anya*,

literally ‘the other’; the knowing function in which Reality is perceived as one is called *sama* (the same).” (Verse 38)

External, worldly knowledge generally falls into the *anya* category, while the internally-oriented knowledge, where knowledge knows itself, is of the *sama* kind. While the *anya* is manifold, the *sama* is singular. Subjugating the *anya* is a prerequisite for attaining *sama*, demanding an intuitive insight into the infinite amidst the transient.

However, the seeker should not simply abandon *anya*. Instead, one must realise that the one *arivu* manifests as both kinds of knowledge, or reductively see them converging in a neutral *arivu*. This *arivu* is the essence of the seeker and, indeed, the essence of everything.

A Path to Realisation (*Sādhanā*)

Sree Narayana Guru prescribes a specific spiritual discipline (*sādhanā*) to attain this ultimate goal:

1. Direct the mind inwards to discern the substance from which the seeking mind itself emerged.
2. Train the mind to perceive all specific knowledge as simply ‘knowledge’, treating each instance as “This is but just knowledge.” Then, shift attention from the specific part (‘is knowledge’) to the fundamental ‘This’. This ‘This’ is the essence that assumes specificity. Through meditative search, one becomes absorbed in this ‘This’, until ‘This’ alone remains.

This ‘This’ is the Atman; it is the *arivu*; it is Brahman. “You are That! I am That!” This *sādhanā* is the practical path to realising

the ultimate reality that is the ‘Science of Sciences’.

The Science of Sciences: Understanding Ultimate Knowledge

This epistemological perspective on Sree Narayana Guru’s philosophy is drawn and condensed from Swami Muni Narayana Prasad’s insightful interpretations in his work, ‘The Philosophy of Narayana Guru’.

The ancient Mundaka Upanishad makes a profound claim, referring to what it teaches as *sarva-vidyā-pratistha* – “the one firm foundation of all sciences.” This bold assertion raises a fundamental question: how can Vedanta, a philosophical and spiritual tradition, legitimately claim to be the bedrock upon which all other fields of knowledge rest? The answer lies in its unique understanding of Consciousness as the ultimate reality.

Vedanta as the Foundation of All Knowledge

Vedanta is essentially the science of Brahman, the science of Atman, or more broadly, the science of Consciousness (*arivu*). Swami Muni Narayana Prasad explains that this singular, all-pervasive Consciousness possesses an infinite capacity to unfold itself and find expression. Consequently, all forms of human endeavour – including the diverse arts, the empirical sciences, and various academic disciplines – are fundamentally nothing more than manifold manifestations of this one Consciousness. This implies a crucial insight: a singular, foundational Consciousness underlies every branch of study, which for convenience, we categorise as ‘sciences’. If such a science exists that concerns itself with this all-underlying Consciousness, then that science inherently becomes the ultimate foundation for all other sciences. This is precisely what Vedanta, particularly as articulated through the profound vision of Sree Narayana Guru,

embodies: it is, therefore, the Science of all sciences.

The Bhagavad Gita offers a powerful metaphor to illustrate Consciousness’s growth and branching out into all sciences (symbolically represented by the verses of the Vedas). It is compared to a vast, inverted banyan tree. Its roots extend upwards into the unknown, symbolising the transcendent, originating source. Its branches reach downwards, forming the ever-expanding world of human disciplines and knowledge. Some roots, representing specific areas of study, grow downwards to become the objects of inquiry in the manifest world. Conversely, other branches or ‘roots’ bend upwards in their growth, seeking to reconnect with and understand the ultimate, unknown root, symbolising the quest for foundational knowledge.

The Origin and Nature of Knowledge

Every instance of knowing originates from this singular *cit* or *arivu*, the unmanifested Consciousness. Knowledge emerges from the dynamic interaction between two fundamental aspects: the subject (*jñātā*), which is *cit* manifested in a subtle form (*sūkṣma-bhāna*), and the object (*jñeyā*), which is the same *cit* manifesting in a gross form (*sthūla-bhāna*). Even subjective states of *cit* can, at times, become objects of knowledge. Thus, subject and object are not fundamentally distinct entities but merely two different forms through which the one *cit* shines forth.

“Atmā, confined in body, in its essential being, thinks of objects (of interest) as ‘This is mine’, or ‘That is mine’ and find identity with them, forgetting its embodiedness. Proper pondering on this makes anyone attain the final experiential non-dual oneness.” (Verse 48)

This transformative event is comparable



to the act of rubbing two pieces of hard wood together to produce fire for a fire-sacrifice. The friction results in the emanation of fire, which then consumes the very two pieces of wood. Similarly, the coming together of subject and object in the act of knowing causes the one *arivu* to shine forth, simultaneously dissolving both the subject and the object into itself.

Methods of Knowledge

The methods of gaining knowledge can be broadly classified as either externally-oriented or internally-oriented. The former involves an enquirer, the subject, seeking what is real in an object that exists externally. This method, while useful for understanding the manifest world, yields knowledge that is always conditional, fragmented, and therefore relative to the observer's senses and conceptual frameworks. Consequently, it cannot lead to the attainment of ultimate reality.

In contrast, the internally-oriented method, which is central to Vedanta, involves the enquirer looking within oneself to discover one's true nature. This method offers unconditional and absolute knowledge, directly leading to the Real. For this profound reason, it is the primary method upon which Vedanta consistently relies, a principle clarified even in the very first verse of Guru's *Atmopadeśa Śatakam*.

The Validity and Structure of Knowledge

Different schools of Indian thought recognise various valid means of knowledge, or *pramāṇas*, such as perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), and verbal testimony (*śabda*). However, the validity of these *pramāṇas* is inherently limited to externally-oriented knowledge. They are incapable of facilitating the self-knowledge that Vedanta ultimately seeks. For instance, the Self cannot be grasped through perception because it is

not an object of any sense organ. Similarly, inference relies on prior sensory experience, rendering it ineffective for comprehending the Self, which transcends such experience.

While verbal testimony, in the form of instructions from a realised authority, can offer indirect guidance, it does not immediately lead to enlightenment. The seeker must ponder meditatively on these words, allowing their deeper meanings to unfold through personal introspection. This limitation leads Sree Narayana Guru to a categorical assertion in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*:

“How can any pramana work with this unthinkable, ineffable enlightenment!”
(Verse 94)

This highlights that the ultimate realisation of the inseparable oneness of Atman and the transient world, though logically an impossibility, is a direct, intimate experience that transcends conventional logical frameworks. Just as an ornament, a transient form of indestructible gold, would intrinsically feel the presence of the eternal gold within itself, the enlightened being intimately perceives the one Atman as the fundamental Substance permeating their own transient existence.

The structure of knowledge, much like the world itself, unfolds from Consciousness in a coherent and perfect pattern. Sree Narayana Guru elucidates this in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, stating:

“Infinite is the way in which the knowing function becomes unfolded from the one consciousness; yet its entire range could well be classified into two: sama and anya.”
(Verse 36)

Verse 38 further clarifies this crucial distinction:

“The knowing function in which one perceives many realities is called anya,

literally ‘the other’; the knowing function in which Reality is perceived as one is called *sama* (the same).” (Verse 38)

Apparently, all worldly, externally-oriented objective knowledge falls into the *anya* category, characterised by the perception of multiplicity. In contrast, the internally-oriented knowledge, where Consciousness comes to know itself, is of the *sama* kind, characterised by the perception of unitary Reality. While countless examples exist for *anya* knowledge, only one ultimate knowledge exemplifies the *sama* kind. Subjugating and overcoming the *anya* mode of knowledge, though challenging, is a prerequisite for reaching the *sama*. This requires an intuitively penetrative eye capable of perceiving the infinite and eternal, even amidst the transient appearance of multiplicity.

A Path to Realisation (*Sādhanā*)

Sree Narayana Guru prescribes a specific spiritual discipline, or *sādhanā*, to attain this ultimate goal of realising the ‘Science of Sciences’. This methodical way of directing one’s mind in search of the Real involves two key steps:

1. **Inward Reflection:** The seeking mind must turn inwards and

discern for itself what fundamental Substance has assumed the form of the very mind that seeks. This is a profound act of self-inquiry.

2. **Transcendence of Specificity:**

One must train the mind to perceive all forms of specific knowledge (e.g., ‘knowing a pot’, ‘knowing a tree’) as simply ‘knowledge’. Each specific instance should be treated as “This is but just knowledge.” The meditative attention then shifts from the specific part (“is knowledge”) to the fundamental “This” that underlies it. This “This” is the essence from which all specificities emanate. As one’s meditative search deepens, one ultimately becomes absorbed in this “This,” until “This” alone remains, transcending all particular forms of knowing.

This ultimate ‘This’ is the Atman; it is the *arivu*; it is Brahman. It leads to the profound realisation: “You are That! I am That!” This *sādhanā* is the practical pathway to experiencing the ultimate Reality that is truly ‘The Science of Sciences’.

Recap

- ◆ Epistemology is the study of knowledge, inherent in Vedanta.
- ◆ Consciousness (*arivu*) is the single foundation of all sciences.
- ◆ Knowledge arises from the interaction of subject and object as manifestations of *cit*.
- ◆ Realising the oneness of subject and object reveals non-dual Atman.
- ◆ Internal inquiry is Vedanta’s primary method for ultimate reality.

- ◆ Traditional *pramāṇas* are limited for self-knowledge.
- ◆ Guru classifies knowing functions into *sama* and *anya*.
- ◆ *Anya* perceives multiplicity, while *sama* perceives unity.
- ◆ Overcoming *anya* is crucial for attaining *sama*.
- ◆ The one *arivu* manifests as both *sama* and *anya*.
- ◆ *Sādhanā* directs the mind inwards to the foundational ‘This’.
- ◆ Logic and mysticism mutually support understanding the Real.

Objective Questions

1. What is the philosophical study of knowledge?
2. What is the one substance everything originates from?
3. What is the subject in subtle form?
4. What is the object in gross form?
5. Which method of knowledge is characteristic of Vedanta?
6. How many types of knowledge are there in Guru’s classification?
7. Which type of knowledge perceives Reality as one?
8. Which type of knowledge perceives many realities?
9. What is the spiritual discipline for realisation?

Answers

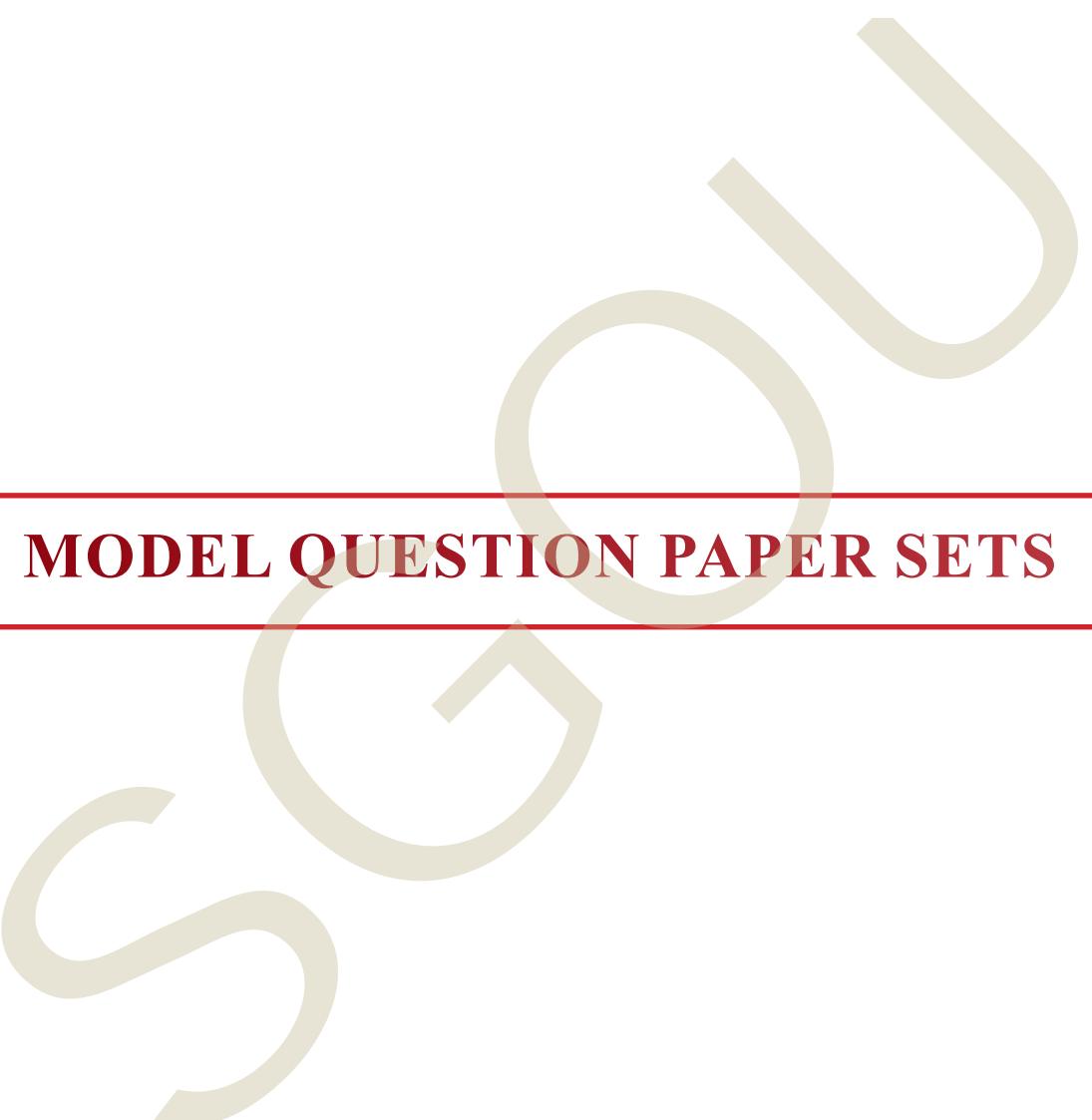
1. Epistemology
2. Consciousness
3. Cit
4. Cit
5. Internally-oriented
6. Two
7. Sama
8. Anya
9. Sādhanā

Assignment Questions

1. Explain how the concept of *arivu* (Consciousness) makes Vedanta ‘The Science of all sciences’.
2. Discuss why external methods of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) are deemed insufficient for attaining self-knowledge in Vedantic philosophy.
3. Analyse the significance of the “subject-object” interaction in the process of gaining specific knowledge, according to Sree Narayana Guru.
4. Compare and contrast *sama* and *anya* knowledge, providing examples of each and explaining their relationship to the ultimate goal.
5. How does Sree Narayana Guru’s interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita’s banyan tree metaphor reinforce the idea of Consciousness as the foundation of all disciplines?
6. What does Sree Narayana Guru mean when he states, “How can any pramana work with this unthinkable, ineffable enlightenment!”?

7. Describe the core aim of the *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline) prescribed by Sree Narayana Guru.
8. In what ways does Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy integrate seemingly contradictory schools of thought or scientific disciplines?
9. Discuss the role of introspection in Sree Narayana Guru's methodology for uncovering truth.
10. How does Sree Narayana Guru reconcile logic and mysticism in his approach to understanding Reality?





MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS





QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

**FIFTH SEMESTER – BA PHILOSOPHY WITH SPECIALIZATION
IN SREENARAYANAGURU STUDIES
DISCIPLINE ELECTIVE COURSE – B21PH05DC
PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU – SET I
(CBCS - UG)**
2023–24 Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION-A

Objective Type Questions. Answer any ten, each question carries one mark (10×1=10)

1. Which school of Vedānta forms the background of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy?
2. According to Vedānta, what is the true self of every individual called?
3. What does Nataraja Guru mean by "Unitive Understanding" in interpreting Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy?
4. What does epistemology deal with in philosophy?
5. Which yoga system did Guru learn from Aiyya Guru?
6. Which verse of Ātmopadēśa Śatakam discusses the Maya Tree?
7. Which verse of Ātmopadēśa Śatakam compares enlightenment to "ten thousand suns"?
8. What causes the illusion of separateness in knowledge?
9. Write the name of one mystical poem composed by Guru.
10. What is the highest means of knowledge according to Advaita Vedānta?
11. What does the term ananda-svarupa mean?
12. According to Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, what is the relationship between Ātman and Brahman?
13. Which aspect of human conduct, according to Guru, often disturbs reasoning?
14. What is the relation between self and non-self in spiritual progress?
15. Which is considered the final goal in Guru's spiritual philosophy?

SECTION B

Very short Questions (not more than five sentences). Answer any ten, each question carries two marks (10×2=20)

16. What is the difference between Māyā and Avidyā in Vedānta philosophy?
17. Describe qualified non-dualism of Rāmānuja?
18. How is the Ānandamaya kośa different from ordinary happiness?

19. How does Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy reconcile Jñāna and Bhakti?
20. What is the significance of ānanda in Guru's spiritual vision?
21. What was the significance of the Aruvippuram consecration in 1888?
22. How does Sree Narayana Guru describe the process of "cutting the Maya Tree"?
23. What is the importance of Guru's emphasis on direct experience?
24. How does Sree Narayana Guru relate epistemology and metaphysics?
25. What does Guru mean by the term Arivu in his philosophy?
26. What is the meaning of intuition in Guru's epistemology?
27. State briefly Guru's idea of equality of religions.
28. How does Guru distinguish between the empirical and the real self?
29. Why is reasoning important in Guru's philosophy?
30. What limitation of the senses does Guru highlight in Ātmopadeśa Śatakam (verse 10)?

SECTION- C

Short Questions (not more than page). Answer any five, each question carries four marks
 $(5 \times 4 = 20)$

31. Explain the background of Advaita Vedānta in Guru's philosophy.
32. Differentiate between conditioned knowledge (sopādhika jñāna) and unconditioned knowledge (nirupādhika jñāna) as explained by Sree Narayana Guru.
33. What are the mystical elements found in Guru's works?
34. How does Guru explain the role of knowledge (jñāna) in liberation?
35. Explain the role of ānanda in Guru's philosophy.
36. How does Guru define valid knowledge?
37. Discuss the importance of direct experience in Guru's mysticism.
38. What is the role of reasoning in Guru's epistemology?
39. How does Sree Narayana Guru reinterpret Śaṅkara's Advaita to make it socially and ethically relevant?
40. How does Sree Narayana Guru describe the movement from ignorance (ajnana) to wisdom in Ātmopadeśa Śatakam?

SECTION-D

Essay Questions (not more than four pages). Answer any two, each question carries ten marks
 $(2 \times 10 = 20)$

41. Examine Vedānta as the background of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy.
42. Analyse Sree Narayana Guru's understanding of Ananda as the nature of Brahman. How does he connect the realization of Ananda with ethical living, everyday life, and poetic vision?
43. Evaluate Guru's theory of knowledge and its significance in his philosophy.
44. Discuss the concepts of self and non-self in Guru's idea of spiritual progress.



QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

**FIFTH SEMESTER – BA PHILOSOPHY WITH SPECIALIZATION
IN SREENARAYANAGURU STUDIES
DISCIPLINE ELECTIVE COURSE – B21PH05DC
PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU – SET II
(CBCS - UG)**
2023–24 Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION-A

Objective Type Questions. Answer any ten, each question carries one mark $(10 \times 1 = 10)$

1. What does the word ‘Vedānta’ literally mean?
2. Name any one text that form the Prasthāna-traya.
3. Which Vedānta school is founded by Śaṅkara?
4. Which Vedantic concept explains the universe as a superimposition on Brahman, like mistaking a rope for a snake?
5. According to Guru, what is the significance of the repeated utterance of ‘I, I’ in verse 11?
6. Which verse of Atmopadeśa Śatakam suggests the tree structure of reality?
7. Name one method of knowledge accepted in Guru’s philosophy.
8. Name one pramāṇa accepted by Guru.
9. Who wrote Janani Navaratna Manjari?
10. Name any two of the nine classical aesthetic sentiments (Nava Rasas) conveyed in Kaali Naatakam?
11. What is meant by the concept of paradox in Guru’s philosophy?
12. Mention one element of Ānanda in Guru’s thought.
13. What is the supreme axiological goal described in Sree Narayana Guru’s Advaitic synthesis?
14. In Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, what threefold division of knowledge dissolves in true realization?
15. What are the two categories into which Sree Narayana Guru classifies the range of knowledge in Ātmopadeśa Śatakam?

SECTION B

Very short Questions (not more than five sentences). Answer any ten, each question carries two marks $(10 \times 2 = 20)$

16. Distinguish between Saguṇa Brahman and Nirguṇa Brahman.
17. What are the Prasthāna-traya in Vedānta?
18. State one major influence of Vedānta on Guru’s philosophy.

19. How does Vedānta describe the ultimate reality using the expression Sat-Cit-Ānanda?
20. How does Guru describe the role of wonder (vismaya) in philosophical inquiry?
21. What happens to tripuṭi in states of higher consciousness like meditation or samādhi?
22. Define the term pramāṇa.
23. What is meant by valid knowledge (pramāṇa)?
24. State the significance of ānanda in Guru's philosophy.
25. What does Guru mean by wonder (vismaya)?
26. Define the concept of Self in Guru's philosophy.
27. What is meant by non-Self in spiritual progress?
28. Mention one way Guru revalued Śaṅkara's Advaita.
29. State the importance of direct experience in Guru's epistemology.
30. According to Vedānta, why are conventional pramāṇas (like perception and inference) insufficient for attaining self-knowledge?

SECTION- C

Short Questions (not more than page). Answer any five, each question carries four marks
(5X4=20)

31. Explain the significance of Mahāvākyas in Vedānta.
32. What are the four qualifications (Sādhana Catuṣṭaya) required for studying Vedānta?
33. Discuss Nataraja Guru's interpretation of Sree Narayana Guru's Advaita as "Unitive Understanding."
34. Analyse Guru's philosophy based on his personal experiences.
35. Discuss the concept of origin of knowledge in Guru's epistemology.
36. Explain the method of knowledge (pramāṇas) accepted by Guru.
37. How does Guru revalue Śaṅkara's Advaita?
38. Explain the role of paradox and mystery in Guru's philosophy.
39. Write a short note on mystical elements in Kali Natakam.
40. Explain how Sree Narayana Guru distinguishes between sama and anya forms of knowledge.

SECTION-D

Essay Questions (not more than four pages). Answer any two, each question carries ten marks
(2×10=20)

41. Critically evaluate the Vedāntic background of Guru's philosophy.
42. Examine the significance of the tree-structure in Atmopadeśa Śatakam.
43. Discuss the scientific status of Śaṅkara's Advaita and Guru's revalued Advaita.
44. Explain the merging of dualities into the neutrality of Absolute Consciousness with reference to verses 73 and 89 of Atmopadeśa Śatakam.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യയാൽ സ്വത്രന്തരാകണം
വിശ്വപ്പരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കേണ

കൂരിരുടിൽ നിന്നു തെങ്ങങ്ങളെ
സുര്യവീമിയിൽ തെളിക്കുണ്ടം
സ്വനേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവെജയയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമെക്കുണ്ടം
ജാതിദേശമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജൂലിക്കുണ്ടം

കുരീപ്പും 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

**DON'T LET IT
BE TOO LATE**

**SAY
NO
TO
DRUGS**

**LOVE YOURSELF
AND ALWAYS BE
HEALTHY**



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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

PHILOSOPHY OF SREENARAYANAGURU

COURSE CODE: B21PH05DC



Sreenarayanaguru Open University

Kollam, Kerala Pin- 691601, email: info@sgou.ac.in, www.sgou.ac.in Ph: +91 474 2966841



ISBN 978-81-988933-4-5



9 788198 893345