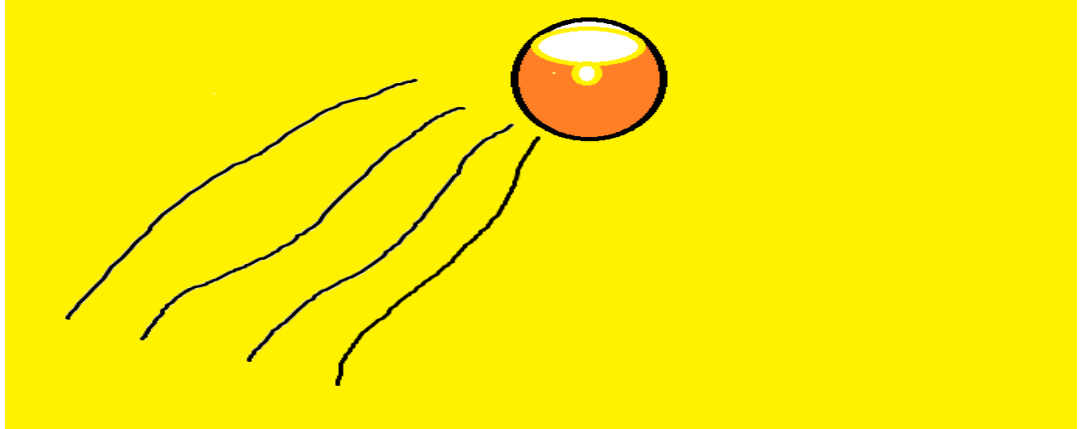




ISSN 2348-1781

Santhigiri Synthesis: Research Paper Series No.3

Knowledge for the People



**The Religious Thoughts of Narayana Guru
Tradition Modernity Dualism**

P Chandramohan

**Santhigiri Social Research Institute
Santhigiri Research Foundation
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala 695584
2014**

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Santhigiri Synthesis: Research Paper Series

Publisher: Santhigiri Social Research Institute, Thiruvananthapuram

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Citation for this paper:

Chandramohan P. 2014. "The Religious Thoughts of Narayana Guru: Tradition Modernity Dualism ". *Santhigiri Synthesis: Research Paper Series No.3*. Thiruvananthapuram: Santhigiri Social Research Institute.

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In this paper, I intend to discuss in detail the religious ideas of Narayana Guru in the context of modernity and tradition. It may be stated at the outset that I am not alluding to tradition and modern as binary opposites nor do I seek to counterpose them as referents with watertight boundaries. However, these concepts have been conceived as binary opposites in all contemporary societies. Given this understanding, it has become customary to classify any practice in terms of this opposition between tradition and modernity. For example, traditional knowledge and modern knowledge; traditional dress and modern dress; traditional education and modern education; traditional customs and modern practices; traditional culinary practices and modern food habits; the static tradition and dynamic modernity; a list that would seem endless. But it may be possible to bypass this opposition between modernity and tradition. For instance, one could portray Guru as traditional in the sense that he followed *Advaita Vedanta* but, on the other hand, it is also possible to say that he was modern for he believed in equality and negated all caste distinctions. Therefore, what is required is to examine the intertwined strands of his ideas. In this context it is necessary to see the Guru as a synthesizer of the desirable aspects of modernity and tradition.

Most of the academic writings on the socio-religious history of Kerala have generally viewed the emergence of modern ideas and the development of a critical attitude towards religious superstition and social obscurantism as a consequence of the introduction of English education¹ and institutions² and the activities of Christian missionaries³. While emphasizing the role of missionaries and western knowledge and ideas, the writers, have however, overlooked the potentialities of socio-religious ideas that were rooted in what is called as 'the Indian intellectual tradition'. Had these changes been due to the impact of Western thought and ideas, instead of modernization, our society would have undergone a process of westernization.⁴ The intellectual's quest to re-shape or reformulate the society and community did not fructify mainly because of their ambivalent, often contradictory, attitude towards

tradition and modernity. If tradition served as a powerful weapon in the efforts to realize modernity, modernity did not involve a complete rejection of the past. There is a belief that the western influence automatically leads to 'progressive' social and political consciousness and the traditional influence invariably develops 'conservative' attitudes. One of the arguments that gained predominance has been that Narayana Guru was the product of Indian intellectual tradition mainly based on the *Advaita* philosophy of Sankara,⁵ and that the sources of the evolution of his intellectual thought were derived from traditional knowledge. Nevertheless, rationalism and religious universalism, the two important intellectual and ideological strands of the nineteenth century, were the binding principles of Narayana Guru's socio-religious reform activities. This may perhaps help us to question the general belief that the western influence automatically leads to 'progressive' social and political consciousness and that the traditional influence invariably promotes 'conservative' attitudes. Here the attempt is to place as well as portray Guru's ideas as a combined outcome of both tradition and modernity as western education had already been mediated through the former.

A lot has been written on Narayana Guru,⁶ not strictly with the aid of an academic approach, but mainly journalistic, and often devoid of a critical historical perspective. Some of these writings have been undertaken with the aim of appropriating the legacy of Narayana Guru for legitimizing one or other sectarian interests⁷. To some extent, the fairly extensive literature on Narayana Guru owes its existence to the efforts of Malayalees to orient themselves towards their contemporary social, cultural and religious needs in order to legitimize themselves with the help of the 'past', that is, what happened in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of their society.

Narayana Guru belonged to a family of cultural and intellectual tradition and a community of some standing, notwithstanding his low position in the caste hierarchy. In short,

he inherited considerable cultural and social capital which made him an 'exception' within the general social hierarchy. Perhaps, this could have qualified him to transcend the binary mentioned above. As a result of this intellectual inheritance and cultural background Narayana Guru possessed a mind which combined brilliance and incisiveness in a finely balanced proportion. Almost all the biographers of the Guru have narrated in detail that Nanu as a boy used to reveal his innate nature very often by reacting to affairs related to religious rituals and caste sensibilities in his own naughty way⁸. Evidently, even at that young age, when education and conscious thinking had little influence on his actions, the two significant aspects of the future Guru's mental makeup which could be discerned even in his childhood were *rationalism* and *humanism*⁹ or humor and scepticism about the present.

There are no sources to enlighten us on whether he was associated with any teacher other than Raman Pillai or educational institutions and their curricula that may have shaped his education. The paucity of information about the formative influences on Nanu makes it difficult for us to understand his evolution as a spiritual-intellectual with a vision for the future socio-religious transformation of society.

In 1884, after the death of his father, he left home in search of Truth¹⁰. During 1884-1888, he travelled extensively in South India¹¹ when he came in contact with Chattampi Swamikal and Taikkattu Aiyavavu, who influenced his intellectual contours¹². It was possibly from Chattampi Swamikal that he acquired a critical attitude towards the scriptures as well as his notions that the Vedas were the sole preserve of the Brahmins. It was possibly also from him that he learned that non-Brahmins too had the right to consecrate idols in temples¹³. From Thaikkattu Aiyavavu¹⁴, he practiced yoga which helped him to 'open the inner eye'¹⁵. It is strongly believed that the Guru's famous dictum "*Oru Jathi, Oru Matham, Oru Daivam Manushyanu*" (one caste, one religion and one God for mankind) was borrowed from

Thaikkattu Aiyavuvu who had propagated, much earlier, in Tamil, *Oru Jathi than Manushyanu*, *Oru Matham than Manushyan*, *Oru Daivam than Manushyanu*¹⁶.

During this period he had developed deep in Sanskrit and Tamil lore and had acquired himself with various provincial cultures and also familiarized with Buddhism and Jainism¹⁷. From where or from whom he acquired this still remains an enigma. Thus, the long existing historical knowledge considerably influenced the intellectual make up of Narayana Guru¹⁸.

Narayana Guru's socio-religious experiences during this journey also contributed, to some extent, to his intellectual transformation. It was during this period that he became especially sensitive to the social problems, particularly to those of the low castes. Unique both in appearance and demeanor when compared to conventional *Sanyasi* or a *Sadhu*, he mixed with people of all veins without being touchy about whether one belonged to this or that caste or social status¹⁹. He lived in the midst of the poor and saw for himself their grinding poverty and superstition which added to their misery and brought about their ruin²⁰. He witnessed the oppression and injustice to which they were subjected to. This close contact with the weaker sections of the society provided him with a clear understanding of their socio-religious and economic conditions and a conception of the remedial measures. By his sheer character, personal magnetism and homely wisdom he stormed the hearts of thousands and earned the respect of even those who could not agree with his ideas and activities.

The widespread missionary activities in Travancore at a time he was socially active²¹ and his tour to Malabar, a predominantly Muslim area²² might have familiarized him with the dictums of Christianity and Islam. His ideas for the social and economic uplift of the lower castes might or might not have been derived from Christianity, nevertheless he was inspired by the activities of Christian missionaries²³. It is possible that missionary activities and the subsequent changes in society helped Narayana Guru to introspect about the strengths and

weaknesses of traditional culture and its institutions, but it would be far-fetched to assume that the missionaries were mainly responsible for his socio-cultural ideas. It would be more appropriate to propose that the socio-cultural ideas of Narayana Guru were occasioned by the missionary presence but not created by missionaries. There seems to be no casual link between the two; in other words it is worthless to casually connect them because they had their own independent existence and functions in Travancore irrespective of their coexistence during the same historical time.

The social practices and religious beliefs prevalent in the late nineteenth century Kerala society were perceived as 'religious superstition' and 'social obscurantism'²⁴. The popular notion was that Hindu religion was a compound of magic, animism and superstition²⁵. Polytheism and idolatry made religion into ceremonious rituals. The commonsensical view was that the Brahmins established their monopoly of scriptural knowledge and interpretation of rituals. As the backward communities were not generally allowed to participate in the institutionalized pattern of worship followed by the *Savarnas*, the religious beliefs and practices of *Avarnas* followed the so called 'abominable' practices: the worship of totems, guardian deities and demons of destruction replete with detestable rites and abhorrent practices²⁶. The worship of the snake, very popular among the Malayalees, was such an instance and skin diseases, leprosy and sterility, for example, were believed to be caused by the wrath of serpents²⁷. The practice of *Mantravada* or spells, offerings of fermented drinks and the sacrifice of cocks and goats, singing obscene songs about female genitals, copulation and masturbation and devil dancing were part of the rituals for the worship of spirits²⁸. The religious beliefs and practices were thus a mixture of magic, sorcery, witchcraft, divination and several other forms of popular religion; the forms differed slightly between the *avarnas* and *savarnas*. But then, the content remained the same; they being common to both of the groupings. The rites and practices observed at the time of birth, death, puberty, pregnancy,

began to be treated as absolutely absurd and irrational²⁹. It is often said that such practices had led to the 'decadence' of the society; it is at such sites that we find tradition becoming antithetical to modernity.

The most distressing factor, however, was caste. The practice of untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability affronted human dignity. Government offices, schools and courts were not open to low castes. They were prohibited from entering public roads, temples, palaces, etc.³⁰ Thus the rules and regulations relating to caste hampered social mobility, fostered social division and sapped individual initiative.

The Guru understood the inter-dependences and inter-connections between religious and social life and also between religious beliefs and social stigmas-the implications of the prevalent form of worship on social institutions. Thus, Narayana Guru was quite aware of the material, psychological and spiritual problems that affected the deprived sections of Kerala society. The influence of this social experience in the transformation of Nanu from a school teacher to Narayana Guru the reformer is entrenched in the non-duality between tradition and modernity.

Religious Reforms and Narayana Guru

The reformers of Kerala can be distinguished into two broad categories; the first group believed that social behavior can be affected through rearticulating the existent religious idioms. The second group of reformers organized themselves under non-religious leadership and gained their ends through constitutional means and secular organizations³¹. However, as elsewhere in India, the reformers who belonged to the first category were more successful in Kerala, than the second. This perhaps may be owing to the fact that religion was the dominant ideology of the time and it was not possible to undertake any social action without a referential

relation with it³². Though the English-educated people were respected by the masses, they were not accepted as their cultural ideal. This was mainly because of their alienation both from the existent culture and their partial affinity with the emergent cultures.³³

Having realized the interconnection between religious beliefs and social practices, Narayana Guru started his activities by making reform resonant with religious idioms in order to legitimize the need to reform oneself and others. The Keralites met their religion at every turn- at birth, puberty, marriage, death, etc. As social life was strongly influenced by religious tenets, Narayana Guru realized that religious idioms were a necessary prerequisite for social reform. This is exemplified in the famous consecration of Shiva and the proclamation that he had consecrated “Ezhava Shiva”. In such instances, along with several others, we discern that Narayana Guru sought to replace the existing abominable religious beliefs and practices with a different form of worship. The establishment of temples and consecration of idols by the Guru was an expression of this alternative path. In contradiction to the attitude of the nineteenth century Indian intellectuals³⁴, except Sree Rama Krishna Paramhansa, Narayana Guru conceded that idolatry and rituals and the practices of traditional religion³⁵ was necessary for people in the earlier stages of their religious understanding, before they could grasp the abstract truth embodied in spiritual philosophy. That is why, although he himself did not believe in idolatry³⁶, he sanctioned it as the nucleus around which an alternative form of worship could evolve³⁷. The first step was the consecration of an idol of Shiva at Aruvippuram in 1888.

The words he inscribed on the temple wall eloquently declare his vision of universal brotherhood and oneness of man: ‘In this model place all inhabitants irrespective of caste and religion can dwell freely as brothers’³⁸. Narayana Guru wished for this temple to symbolize the brotherhood of man and equality of all before God. One of the most striking features of the religious thoughts of his reformation was a universal outlook based on the unity of Godhead.

By this consecration Narayana Guru unleashed an attack on the sacred order of *Varnadharmā*. The consecration of Shiva thus symbolized a struggle between the *status quo* and change. It was on the basis of religious universalism that the Guru formulated in his 1914 doctrine, "One caste one religion and one God for mankind".³⁹ This underlines the fact that he was moving towards a universal religion based on the best tradition of Hindu theism. He indirectly declared that all believers in one God were his brethren and also advocated wide toleration in the tract on different modes of worship. To him the claim of superiority of one religion over the other stemmed from ignorance. He drew parallel with the story of the seven blind men who felt the parts of an elephant and each gave his own version as he distinguished.⁴⁰ The Guru advised his followers, "Whatever be one's religion it is enough that man become good,... Whatever a man does for his own pleasure shall be for the benefit of others."⁴¹ The Guru's general interest in comparative religion led to the holding of a *Sarva Mata Sammelanam* (All Religions Conference) on 3-4 May 1924. He declared his objective in organizing the conference saying: "To know and to make known, not to argue and win".⁴² When the principles of different religions were discussed on a common platform, the underlying unity was easier to grasp. The principal motives of this conference were: to search for universal truth in religion, to create interest in comparative religion, to bring home to people the essential unity of all religions, and finally to create an atmosphere for developing the idea of religious universalism. Soon after the conference, he decided to start a "School of all Religions" which he called "Mata Mahapathashala" at Sivagiri in order to teach the essentials of all religions.⁴³ In this sense, he was not against religiosity, but against differential treatment (often hierarchical) of people in terms of religion/caste one adhered to.

After the Aruvippuram consecration, Narayana Guru installed images in sixty-four temples in different parts of Kerala. Three distinct phases can be discerned in the establishment of these new places of worship. During the first phase gods of the Brahmanical

pantheon were consecrated in place of “lower satanic gods of primitive religion”. He forbade the worship of evil spirits and keeping of images representing such beliefs in temples and houses of well-to-do Ezhavas.⁴⁴ Their place was taken by the newly consecrated temples. He also brought about changes in the method of worship; animal sacrifices and offerings of fermented drinks were replaced by flowers and fruits.⁴⁵

The second phase was marked by the establishment of simple and inexpensive temples. Though these temples had idols, *pujas* and celebrations were dispensed with. They were, in fact, conceived more as community places with gardens and libraries which provided a serene and educative atmosphere.⁴⁶

The third category of temples had no idols or images, like the temples at Karamukku in which he had, in 1920, installed a lamp in place of an idol and pronounced the benediction, “Let there be light”.⁴⁷ At Murukcupuzha, in 1921, he placed a granite slab with the inscription ‘Truth, Duty, Kindness and Peace,’⁴⁸ and at Kalavancode in 1927 he installed a mirror which symbolically represented the fact that god is present in the self⁴⁹ or rather “know yourselves”. According to Nataraja Guru, “A plain mirror and lamp was installed by him at one place, so that idolatry might come into line with Self knowledge, for at least one’s own image in a mirror told no distorted lie in any hysterical terms”.⁵⁰

These innovations in his consecration not only differentiate his concept of temples from that of the Brahmanical ones but also illustrate his precept that ideals are more important than idols. Narayana Guru was quite different in inspiration, character, and message to the traditional saints of pre-modern and also westernized reform movements. That was his uniqueness. But his active participation in the socio-religious movement in Kerala, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, endowed him with the halo combining a modern Indian reformer with that of a traditional Hindu Sanyasi.⁵¹

Our understanding of Narayana Guru will depend on our perception of the character of the socio-religious movements in the nineteenth century Travancore. A significant aspect of his religious reform was the freedom it afforded to an individual to be critical about one's own tradition and one's position within the unfolding of modern ideas and practices, without renouncing totally the former and selectively accepting the latter.

Irrespective of whether the consecrations were looked upon as sanskritization or protest, the fact that they sought to change the popular form and attitude of worship among the lower castes is undeniable. At the same time the system he created was not a replica of what the upper castes followed. It was an intervention intended to create a new mode, distinct from both the popular and the elitist. Unlike his successors in socio-religious reform, he was not demanding homogenization of identity among the lower and the upper castes through temple entry but was striving for the creation of a new religious ethos.

The objective of Narayana Guru's religious reform efforts does not seem to be to enable the low castes to have access to the Brahmanical gods, as has been argued by Genevieve Lemercinier⁵², but to create a system of worship of their own. That Narayana Guru initially consecrated the idol of Shiva, despite his disapproval of idolatry, was an indication of the influences of both the elite and the popular culture. At the same time he was eager to create a system distinct from both which explains the changes he made in consecration during the later stages as he was himself transforming or reformulating his own selfhood.

The consecration of temples by Narayana Guru cannot be viewed either as an attempt to revive the past or as a rebuttal of it. His consecration of temples not only signified a rational approach to customary practices but also represented an effort to embellish faith with rationality. If religion did not keep pace with the demands of the times, it would get fossilized and justifiably relegated. While consecrating idols in the temples Narayana Guru was least

concerned about religious sanctions or bothered his head over whether such practices existed in the past. When the upper castes questioned his possession of scriptural authority to make him suitable to undertake consecration, the Guru replied “My consecration is of an Ezhava Shiva and not of a Brahmin Shiva”.⁵³ Hearing this, the people, *Savarnas* and *Avarnas* alike, were torn between their retained sentiments and emerging commitment.⁵⁴ The important intellectual criterion which marked the consecrations was persuasive reason and convincing rhetoric. Not very many were able to match the uncompromising reasoning of Narayana Guru. On another occasion when the Guru was installing an idol in a temple in Trivandrum, a scholar very sarcastically expressed his doubt whether the time was auspicious for such sacred function. The Guru calmly replied, “A horoscope is cast after the birth of the child. The birth does not take place according to a pre-determined auspicious time. The consecration is over. Now you can do your calculation”.⁵⁵ His only concern at that time was the effect the consecration has on society. He was concerned about creating social mobility and promoting individual initiative rather than toeing the scriptures. Thus his consecrations broke the rules of customary practices which resulted in emotional and sentimental ruptures in society; but then, the times was such that reason prevailed over both of them.

To Narayana Guru it was immaterial whether his consecrations had the sanction of religious institutions, as his reform activities were a struggle against cultures that ought to be relegated.⁵⁶ They posed a challenge not only to the Brahmin hegemony, but also to the senseless customs that had survived through ages as though by divine ordinance. A sense of freshness was generated through the Guru’s efforts, casting a seminal ray of light on the life of the untouchables and those unapproachable of Kerala who were, for centuries, wallowing in darkness and slavery. Temples were, to Narayana Guru, a means to an end. Once the end was achieved he did not bother about the proliferation of temples. In 1917 the Guru advised his followers, “Do not encourage construction of temples any longer; if at all any temple is to be

constructed it should be a small one. The educational institutions should be the chief temples.⁵⁷ In the religious sphere his reforms sought to remove priestly monopoly of religious knowledge and also to simplify religious rituals on the basis of ideals of humanism, economic rationalism and perhaps nationalism as well. The social implication of his consecrations was to liberate individuals from conformity born out of fear and from an uncritical submission to the exploitation by the priests. The religious activities of Narayana Guru were an explicit expression of his opposition to all distinctions based on caste and Varna. According to him there was no fundamental difference between a Brahmin and a Pariah; both belonged to a single human caste.⁵⁸ In “Jati-Mimamsa” he emphasized this oneness: terms like Brahmin and Pariah are churned out ideas and superimposed on the reality of the humans which is essentially and fundamentally the same.⁵⁹

The greatness of Narayana Guru was that he practiced what he preached. In other words, he lived the life he wanted others to live. He started his crusade against *Varnadharma* by liberating himself from its bondage, not by demanding rights of others but by freeing himself of all dependence on caste practices and stipulations.⁶⁰ He was the practicing model of “how to take care of oneself” in the changing times. The uplift of the communities, who were lower in social status to the Ezhavas, was considered by the Guru as a part of his life’s mission. He admitted people from all castes to temples consecrated by him. He maintained personal relations with those who belonged to the castes lower than his in the hierarchy. In order to uplift the conditions of the Cherumas and the Pulayas, he not only admitted them as students but also employed them as cooks, ignoring all caste taboos.⁶¹ The Guru felt that it was paradoxical that while the Ezhavas were fighting against pollution practiced by the upper castes, they were themselves treating the Pulayas and Parayas as untouchables.⁶² Narayana Guru reminded the Ezhavas that unless they changed their attitude towards the communities considered as inferior to them in caste hierarchy, they have no right to clamor for justice.⁶³

With this reform in view he encouraged inter-caste marriages and inter-dining.⁶⁴ This goes on to show that 'going beyond' was an integral part of his reform lexicon. Narayana Guru's outlook on India was quite different from the upper caste elite thinkers of the Indian renaissance. As Hindu culture and the caste system rested upon Brahmanism, Narayana Guru geared his moves in opposition to cultural and ideological hegemony of *Savarnas*.

Consecrations of idols in temples by Narayana Guru were a move against the cultural hegemony of Brahmins and represented the first expression of social reform. To Gail Omvedt, 'caste struggle' like 'class struggle' could become revolutionary only when it poses as an alternative, a more advanced social system rather than being simply a negative protest or a competitive struggle for more economic or social-cultural rights within the framework of exploitation".⁶⁵ Narayana Guru's reform activities represented the fulfilment of the renaissance's desire for social transformation along revolutionary lines. In other words, Narayana Guru formulated a theo-ideology of reason in order to tilt social relations in such a way so that there are no 'up' and 'down' within the texture of sociality. His consecrations of idols, inscriptions and mirrors were re-formulating practices that have no precedents but gained prevalence as far as future freedom and self-fulfilment are concerned. Perhaps, that is why he was unique and has become an icon in all imaginable fields of social actions; as someone who could live a life without referential relations to both tradition and modernity. And live a life of his own as an exemplar being in this world for the future to come.

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5. Nataraja Guru, *The Word of the Guru: An Outline of the Life and Teachings of the Guru Narayana*, PAICO Publishing House, Ernakulam, Cochin, 1968 especially Chapter XX “More Intimate Jotting” pp.241-266; M.K. Sanoo writes, “Advaita was Swami’s declared character of faith. The influence of Raman Pillai should have been a deciding factor in Swami’s progress to Advaita Philosophy” *Narayana Guru Swami*, Vivekodayam, Printing and Publishing Company, Irinjalakuda, 1976, p. 53. P. Chandramohan, “Popular Culture and Socio-Religious Reform: Narayana Guru and the Ezhavas of Travancore” in *Studies in History*, 3,1, ns (1987), Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp. 57-74
6. Sree Narayana literature can be divided into two broad categories as the works of and on Narayana Guru. The second one can again be divided into various categories such as Biographies, Memoirs and Reminiscences, Studies, Essays, Exposition/Commentary, Poetry/Songs, Anthology and Souvenirs. All these parts together there are about 250 Works on Narayana of which are 54 biographies, 45 exposition and Interpretations, 40 poetries/songs, 80 essays/studies, 15 Collected Works and more than 20 souvenirs. Besides hundreds of articles published in Newspapers, Weeklies and Magazines. For a detailed accounts of Sree Narayana Literature See Champadan Vijayan “Sree Narayana Sahithyam Malayalathil in *Mathrubhumi Varanthapphippu*, 16 September, 1990 p.III.
7. There are some attempts by certain sections to appropriate for themselves his legacy – to paint him as a champion of revived Hinduism (P. Parameswaran, *Sree Narayana Guruswamikal Navothanathinte Pravachakan*, Jayabharath Publications, Calicut, 1971, Second edition 1979), to describe him as a crusader of the dalit for their movement for “social justice, P.K. Gopalakrishnan, “Sree Narayana Guru – Torch Bearer of Enlightenment for Revolutionary Changes” in a Seminar on *History of Political Development in Kerala*, 11 and 12 December 1985, Sponsored by Indian Council of Historical Research and University of Kerala), M.S.A Rao, *Social Movements and Social Transformations*, Macmillan, Delhi, pp.37-

- 38) to another he was a messiah of Ezhava liberation in Kerala (see the First Annual Report of the Secretary of the SNDP Yogam in *Vivekodayam* 13 May 1904, pp.15-19, see also the letter of P. Parameswaran to the Dewan of Travancore on the 18th January 1903, Travancore Government *English Records*, Cover No.8338, Kerala Secretariat Cellar, now it is in Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram See also Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religion*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay 1965, p.270-271 and according to Swami Dharma Theertha, Narayana Guru was the representative of "Hindu Nationalism" (Swami Dharma Theertha, *The Menace of Hindu Imperialism*, Har Bhagwan, Lahore, 1946, pp.264-276.
8. N. Kumaran Asan's *Brahmasri Sri Narayana Guruvinte Jeevacharithra Samgraham*, the first biography of Narayana Guru serialized in *Vivekodayam* in 1915. The first chapter published in *Vivekodayam*, April-May 1915, Vol.XII No.I pp.416-18. In 1979 these *Vivekodayam* articles were compiled, edited and published in a booklet form by Kumaran Asan Memorial Committee, Thonakkal and its second edition came out in 1984. See 1984 edition, p.88; see also M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit*; P. Parameswaran, *op.cit*; K. Damodaran, *Shri Narayana Guru Swami Tripadangalude Jeevacharithram*, Quilon, 1929, Kotookoikal Velayudhan, *op.cit*; Vijayalayam Jayakumar, *Sree Narayana Guru : A Critical Study*, New Delhi, 1999, p.44.
 9. M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit*, p.37.
 10. M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit*, 179 P. Parameswaran *op.cit* pp.36-37.
 11. Nataraja Guru *op.cit*, 256-261 M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit* pp.77-94 Kotookoikal Velayudhan, *op.cit*, pp.49-67 Parameswaran *op.cit* pp.30-52.
 12. P.K. Balakrishnan, *Narayana Guru (An Anthology)* Kottayam, 1969, p.204; See also Nataraja Guru *op.cit*, pp.258-60 M.K. Sanoo *op.cit*, 89-90.
 13. *Shri Chattampi Swami Shatabda Smaraka Grantham*, Quilon, 1953, pp. 14, 98-99 and 206-211.
 14. Thaikkattu Aiyavu was a devotee of Lord Subramanian and well known for his knowledge of Vedanta, Tamil spiritual tradition and mysteries of yoga. See M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit* p.90; see also V.T. Samuel, *One Caste, One Religion and One God: A study of Sree Narayana Guru*. New Delhi, 1977, p.46
 15. P. Parameswaran, *op.cit*, pp.41-42; see also M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit*, p.90.
 16. A.C. Raja, *Sivarajayogi Thycaud Ayyaswami Thuruvadikal*-(1960); See also Wikipedia
 17. V.T. Samuel, *op.cit*, pp.110-15.
 18. Nataraja Guru, *op.cit*, pp.254-61
 19. Nataraja Guru Writes," Clean shaven, with no ornamental things about him, the Guru Narayana avoided even any stripes or colors in his clothing. He dressed in two seamless pieces of white cloth (in later years tinged orange at the request of his ochre-robed disciples of the Sanyasin tradition). He would sip clean pure water as if drinking a rich beverage, and extol simple foods like fruits or roots. Often he preferred to sleep on a cloth spread on stone for a couch under the clear starlight, with his own arms alone for a pillow; and likewise he preferred bathing in rivers and walking on foot; and he would eat any kind of food from the devoted hands that offered it in village homes as he moved among the people." in *op.cit*, p.248

20. *Ibid* p.258.
21. When Colonel Macaulay was the President of Travancore, Christian missionaries received considerable help from colonial government. As a result the London Missionary Society, The Church Missionary Society and Danish Mission started their evangelical activities in Travancore in the beginning of the 19th Century. By the last quarter of the 19th Century Salvation Army also started working in Travancore. T.K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.I Trivandrum, 1938, P.727.
22. For Muslim contact see Murkoth Kumaran, *op.cit*, pp.410-12.
23. Stephen Fuchi, *Rebellious Prophets*, p.271. See also Swami Dharma Theerthan, *The Prophet of Peace* Chempazhanthi, 1931, p.91. After organizing inter caste dining with the Pulayas on 27 May 1917, when Sahodharan Ayyappan sought the blessing of the Guru for his endeavour for inter caste marriages and inter dining for which he faced strong criticism and opposition, the advice of the Guru was, "Don't feel dejected by opposition. This would grow into a great movement. Just bear in mind to be as forgiving as Christ," Quoted in M. Prabha "Sahodharan Ayyappan" in M. Govindan (ed) *Poetry and Renaissance: Kumar Asan Birth Centenary Volume* Sameeksha Madras, 1974, p.230 and M.K. Sanoo *op.cit*. p.260
24. Durate Barbosa, *A Description of the Coast of Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the 16th Century*, tr. and ed. Henry E.J. Stanley, London, 1866, p.129; See also G.A. Ballard, Resident to the Chief Secretary to the Madras Government, 9 March 1870, National Archives of India, *Madras Residency Records, Madras Political Proceedings*, 13 April 1870, G.O. No.143.
25. Max Webber, *The Sociology of Religion*, London, 1971, p.25.
26. For their socio-religious practices see L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Caste* Madras 1909, Vol I, p.310, See also Samuel Mateer, *Land of Charity* 1871, p.194, Francis Day, *The Land of Perumals*, Madras 1863, p.320, Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of South India*, Vol II Madras, 1909, pp.406-409, Nagam Aiya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol II, p.55, M.S.A Rao, "Supernatural Possession in Kerala" in *Man*, Vol.66, No.I March 1986, p.4., *Census of Travancore*, 1876, p.162.
27. M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit*, 228.
28. *Ibid*, pp 229-30; see also *Vivekodayam* 15 July 1904, Vol.I, No.2. P. Chandramohan, *Social and Political Protest in Travancore*, pp 178-180.
29. *Vivekodayam*, 15 November 1905, Vol.I, No.4, pp.73-74, *Census of India*, 1901, Report.p.280; C. Kesavan, *Jeevithasamaram*, Kottayam, Vol.I, 1968, pp.126-28; P.K. Gopala Krishnan, "Ezhavas," in 'Kerala Charitram', Ernakulam, History Association Kerala, Vol.I, 1979, p.985.
30. See *Vivekodayam*, 16 September, 1907; *Proceedings of Sree Mulam Popular Assembly*, 1913, p 163, 1920, p 108 and 1921, p 11; *Mitavadi*, February 1917, Vol. 5, No. 2, p 4 and *Mitavadi*, November, 1918, Vol. 6, No. 11, p. 26; *File No. 66/1911, Judicial Dept.*, Travancore
31. Charles H. Heimsath, "The Function of Hindu Social Reformers- with Special Reference to Kerala" in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol.XV, No.I pp.21-22.
32. According to Charles H. Heimsath, the reason for the failure of other reform movements in Kerala was due to lack of religious premises, See *Ibid* p.27; See also P.K. Balakrishnan, *op.cit*, p.108 and M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit*, p.170 or 175 and K.N. Pannikar "Socio-Religions Reforms and

the National Awakening” in Bipan Chandra (etc) edited *India’s Struggle for Independence 1857-1947*, Viking, New Delhi 1988, pp.82-83..

33. P. Chandramohan, “Education And Social Consciousness in the making of Modern Kerala” in Dr. Suresh Jnaneshwaran (ed.) *Historiography: Structure and Practice, A Festschrift in honor of Dr. T.K. Ravindran*, Trivandrum, 2010, pp 176-187; See also *Idem, Social And Political Protest in Travancore” op.cit*, pp.90 and 112.
34. The 19th Century intellectuals like Ram Mohan Roy believed that polytheism and idolatry negated the development of individuality and supernaturalism and the authority of religious leaders imbibed the habit of conformity born out of fear (see Ram Mohan Roy. *Tuhfat-ul-Muhawaddin*, J.C. Ghose (ed), *The English Works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy*, 1906, pp.945-46.
35. For nineteenth century Indian attitude towards idolatry See K.N. Panikkar, *Presidential address*, Section III, Indian History Congress, Thirty Sixth Session, Aligarh, 1975, p.20.
36. One day a few people approached the Guru with a request that he may consecrate an idol in their newly built temple. Instead of installing an idol, the Guru proposed to hang a lamp at the Sanctum Sanctorum of the temple. They insisted the Guru for installing an idol and finally he accepted it, as he knew that the people would not be satisfied with less than an “Aradhana Moorthy”. For this conversation between the Guru and the devotee see P.K. Balakrishnan, *Narayana Guru*, p.154.
37. P. Chandramohan, “Popular Culture and Socio-Religious Reform.” in *op.cit*, p.62.
38. The actual translation of the words which Narayana Guru inscribed in Malayalam on the temple wall was:
 - i. “Without differences of caste
 - ii. Nor enmities of creed,
 - iii. All live like brothers at heart
 - iv. Here is this ideal place”
39. Swami Dharmatheerthan “The Prophet of Peace, Chempazhanti, p.33. See also Nataraja Guru, *op.cit*, p.24
40. Narayana Guru “Jathinirayam” stanza no.2 in *Sree Narayana Gurudeva Krithikal*, *op.cit*, p.154, M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit* pp.332-335.
41. See his poem “Athmopadesha Shathakam,” stanza no.44 in T. Bhaskaran (ed), *Sree Narayana Guruvinte Sampoorana Krithikal*, Mathrubhumi Press, Calicut, 1985, p.366.
42. *Idem* “Athmopadesha Shathakam” in *Ibid*, p.115. See also Pazhambally Achyuthan, *Sree Narayana Guru (Smaranakal)*, Sarada Book Depot, Thonnakkal, 1960, p.123.
43. M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit*, pp.385-386
44. Muni Narayana Prasad “*Narayana Guru’s Complete Works*” “ Introduction” NBT, New Delhi 2006 p.xviii
45. In 1915 the Guru removed twenty-one deities from Kottattu Arumukam Pillayar Koil and the temples in nearby streets; See *Vivekodayam*, January 1915, Vol.II, No.10, p.354. See Pazhampally Achyuthan, ‘Guruvinte Karmapadharthy’ *SNDP Yogam Platinum Jubilee Souvenir*, Quilon, 1978, p.57. See also P.K. Gopalakrishnan, ‘Samudhaya Pariskarna Prasthanangal’ in *Kerala Charitram*, Vol.I, p.1208. Apart from removing the evil spirits, Narayana Guru also

took initiative to clear the 'Sarpakavu' or snake park with the intention of removing the superstition in connection with snakes and also to avoid the expenses for Sarpathullal, which was a special ceremony for the propitiation of snakes. Generally this *thullal* lasted one week. See M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit.*, p.228 and P.K. Balakrishnan, *op.cit.*, p.155.

46. P. Chandramohan, *Social And Political Protest in Travancore*, *op.cit.*, pp.178-181.
47. The Sarada Temple at Varkala is the best example of this; see M.K. Sanoo *op.cit.*, p.121.
48. P. Parmeshwaran, *op.cit.* p.122; Kotookoikal Velayudhan, , *op.cit.* p.319; M.K.Sanoo *op.cit.* p.550
49. *Ibid.* p.550 Kotookoikal Velayudhan, , *op.cit.* pp.96 and 319
50. *Ibid.* p 97, P.Parnameswaran, *op.cit.* p.149 and M.K.Sanoo *op.cit.* p.550
51. Natraja Guru, *op.cit.*, p.258.
52. P. Chandramohan, *Social and Political Protest in Travancore*, p.172.
53. Genevieve Lemercinier, *Religion and Ideology in Kerala*, New Delhi, 1984, pp.248-52.
54. *Vivekodayam* April-May 1917, Vol. XIV nos 1-2 (medam Edavam 1092 ME) pp.57-5. See also Murkoth Kumaran, *op.cit.*, 2nd edn, Calicut 1971, p.131, P.Parnameswaran, *op.cit.*, 2nd edn, Calicut, 1979, p.50; M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit.*, p.123. Even the Ezhava leaders like Cherunelli Krishnan Vaidyar and many others seriously doubted whether the Guru had the authority of scriptural sanction for consecrating an idol in a temple see P. Parnameswaran, *op.cit.* pp.57-58.
55. P.K. Balakrishnan "Religion, Temple and God" in *Narayana Guru (An Anthological Compilation)* *op.cit.*, p.154; see also M.K. Sanoo, *op.cit.*, pp.532-33
56. K.N. Panikkar has explained in detail the two dimensions of cultural – ideological struggle in colonial India in his first Damodaran Memorial Lecture delivered at Trivandrum on "Rationalism, Humanism and Secularization". This was reproduced in *Social Scientist* under the title "Culture and Consciousness in Modern India: A Historical Perspective" Vol.18, No.4 April 1990. See also *idem* "Culture and Ideology: Contradictions in Intellectual Transformation of Colonial Society in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XXII, No.49 December 5, 1987.
57. For this message of 1917 see P.K. Balakrishnan, *Narayana Guru op.cit.*, p.76; see also P.K. Gopalakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitram*, Trivandrum 1974, pp.529-30.
58. The Guru writes, "Of the human species even a Brahmin born, as is the Pariah too. Where is difference there in caste as between man and man?" in "Jati Mimamsa" in *op.cit.*; see also Nataraja Guru, *op.cit.*, p.283 and 287.
59. See "Jati Mimamsa" in *op.cit.*
60. Swami Dharma Theerthan *op.cit.*, p.99.
61. Pazhampally Achuthan, *op.cit.*, p.11; P. Parnameswaran, *op.cit.* pp.107-108.
62. *Vivekodayam*, June-August 1906, p.5 and December-January, 1908-1909, Vol.5, No.9, p.5 *Kerala Kaumudi*, 14 June, 1923,p.4. See also P.K. Balakrishnan "Kerala Navothanathinu

Charithraparamaya Oru Mukavura” in *Yoganadham*, October 1977, Vol.3, No.7, p.32; See also *Idem* “Oru Madhyasthan” in *Narayana Guru op.cit*, pp.150-51.

63. He told them, “You must look upon the Pulayas and the like with love. The Ezhavas should behave towards their inferior in such a way that those who deem themselves superior to the Ezhavas should see and learn from it. This is a matter you should pay special attention to,” Quoted in P. Parameswaran, *op.cit*, p.108.
64. A.Ayappan, *Iravas and Cultural Change*, *Bulletin Madras Government Museum*, 1945, p.156; *Kerala Kaumudi*, 2nd June 1921, p.2. See also M.K. Sanoo, *Narayana Guruswami*, p.261.
65. Gail Omvedt, “Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.VI, No.37, September 11, 1971, pp.1969-1979.

Santhigiri Synthesis: Research Paper Series No.3

Knowledge for the People



Published by
Santhigiri Social Research Institute
Santhigiri Research Foundation
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala 695584
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ISSN 2348-1781