

Ni Satyam Jnānam Ānandam

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Abstract

Narayana Guru was a rishi of this new age in which science and freedom of man have become of great importance to mankind. His basic stand was that of a non-dualist visionary. He identifies the Ultimate Reality with God. God, *Brahman*, *Ātman*, *arivu (cit)* were interchangeable terms to him. God alone exists. All that appear as forming the world are simply manifestations of the one God. The ultimate goal of a seeker or supplicant can attain is finding oneself one with God. The Guru installed deities – either of Siva, Devi, Ganapaty or Subramanya – in many temples. Every deity, in his perception, is a visual means that helps the supplicant attain non-dual experience. Bhakti or devotion is considered to be the best of all tools for God-realization.

Keywords: *God, devotion, God – realization, happiness.*

1. Introduction

Narayana Guru (1856-1928) was a wisdom teacher of India whose life followed the ancient and immemorial programme of oriental saints and prophets. He was part of the traditional hierarchy of Vyasa, Śuka, Yajnavalkya and the other great Gurus of the Upanishadic tradition. He gave a new dimension to Upanishadic wisdom fully in line with the Age of Science in which he lived. According to the Guru there is only one Ultimate Reality. In his *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* verse 94 Guru ponders on that Ultimate Reality thus:

Boundless, indeterminate and beyond the grasp of mind and words.

How could the course of right reason move within its domain?¹

The Ultimate Being is known as Sat-Cit-Ānanda in Upanishads.

Sat transcends the distinction between individual beings (*jivas*), the universal reality (*jagad*) and God (*Īsvara*). Pondering on this non-dual Being, the Guru says in his *Daiva Cintanam* part II:

Jiveśvara-jagad-bheda-rahita advaita tejase²

(Salutations) to the non-dual effulgence that is beyond the distinction of individual souls, God and the world.

Cit attains its absolute dimension in the intuitive vision experience of the knower, the known and the knowledge being absorbed into their intuitive oneness. Naraya Guru says: Knowledge, the object of knowledge and the person's knowledge together make one primeval effulgence.

The *ānanda* experience ranges from the ordinary sense pleasures to the non-dual bliss at the highest where the enjoyer and the enjoyed become interchangeable. Realizing the upper limit of one's own self-content gives the experience of immortality-the one birthless and deathless Reality.

Thus the ultimate goal one can attain is realizing oneself as sat-cit-ānanda or saccidananda.

Narayana Guru confirms this vision in his Ātmopadeśa Śatakam verse 100.

Neither that, nor this, nor the meaning of existence am I,

But existence, consciousness, joy immortal; thus attaining clarity emboldened,

Discarding attachment to being and non-being one should gently gently merge in SAT-AUM.³

In this essay, an earnest attempt is made to give a clear exposition of the integral vision and the philosophy of God of Narayana Guru, and shows how it takes the spiritual aspirant to the goal of God-realization.

2. Guru's Concept of God

The Guru does not postulate God as a separate entity. Guru identifies the Ultimate Reality with God; as Mahatma Gandhi identifies Truth with God or

² Narayana Guru, *Complete works of Narayana Guru*, 6 Edn, Narayana Gurukula, 231, (2012).

³ Nitya Chaitanya Yati, *Guru, Neither This Nor That But AUM*, 1 Edn, Vikas Publishing House, 221, (1982).

¹ Narayana Guru, *Complete works of Narayana Guru*, 6 Edn, Narayana Gurukula, 156, (2012).

Spinoza identifies Substance with God or Leibniz identifies Monad of monads with God. The Guru defines God as *satyam-jñanam-ānandam* (truth-knowledge and happiness) equivalent to the Upanishadic dictum *sat-cit-ānanda* in his Universal prayer *Daiva Daśakam*.¹ In one of his Tamil hymns to Siva, called *Tevāram*, he says:

In the plenitude of Existence all that is unreal having become no obstruction, notion of the primeval cause gone, the necessity of a mould in which the world is cast gone, the notion of effect gone, all conceptualization of the Real gone, the non-dual meaning-content of *tat* (That) and *tvan* (you) that throws away all the sufferings, all the evils and also death-that transcendental Form is my God.²

To the Guru Brahman, Ātman, arivu (cit), God, are synonymous. This one Ultimate Reality is conceived of differently by different religions. The prophetic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, on the other hand, think of that Reality as Jehovah, God the Heavenly Father or Allah. Without his knowledge, outside his reign, nothing happens anywhere in the world, either in the personal life of humans or in the total flow of nature. Humanity's being free on the one hand and dependent on nature the other, was also decreed by God. Therefore, to live in compliance with the commandments of God is the best way open for humans to be happy in life. Such commandments reach humans through the messengers of God, known as prophets. Obeying these commandments enables one to live a free life while being part of the flow of nature.

Religions like Buddhism and Jainism do not believe in the existence of a God. Such religions do admit *dharma* as fundamental factor, that unifies the life of each individual with that of the total.

Vedānta that admits *Brahman* or *Atman* as the Ultimate Reality, asks individuals to realize their identity with Brahman, as an ornament finds its identity with gold. The total nature no doubt, is already in full identity with Brahman results in the vanishing of the problem of bringing together the individual's will and the will of nature. This realization of oneness ensures everlasting peace in life as well as immortality, for the ultimate Reality is immortal.

Guru's vision being all comprehensive and unitive no one could see an outlander in him, and more those of different perceptions had the feeling that the Guru was with them. Even atheists were there among his close followers. God alone exists; all that appear as

forming the world are simply various manifestations of the one God. God alone is what you see always; you simply mistake it as the world. God and the world are inseparably one.

3. Prayer

Prayer is a religious observance and it is found in one way or other in all religions. It prevails even in religions that do not admit the existence of God or souls. Even atheists and nihilists seem to have some sort of prayer-like observances. In short, prayer is a psychological phenomenon that manifests in all humans, the religious as well as non-religious. It is the incessant effort made by the people to keep their will always attuned to the will of God.³ An Advaitin being a non-dualist in reality, needs no prayers, for in his perception, there is no duality between the supplicant and perfection of wisdom. Still, he does a prayer. Such a prayer should be a means to attain the highest of non-dualistic perception. The universal prayer, *Daiva Deśakam* of Narayana Guru is such a prayer. This prayer, as is the case of his numerous hymns, is in the form of a supplication made by the ignorant for the attainment of the wisdom of non-duality. The prayer then is that of a Vedantic seeker for his final merger in the ocean of splendor of God, and for experiencing the eternal happiness of the being eternally one with God.

In another hymn on *Śiva*, *Sadasiva Darśanam*, Guru says;

O God, please keep in mind that I do not have any desire other than attaining straightaway the state in which you and I become one.⁴

4. Temples

Temples are considered as mediums through which devotees approach the godhead, which cannot be otherwise comprehended or grasped directly. When we worship at a temple, we temporarily step out of the limitations of worldly life and try to have glimpses of transcendental reality. The deity, which is the object of devotion and worship, guides the devotees in their pious life. Thus temples bring devotees close to the divine. Narayana Guru installed various deities Ganapathy, Siva, Vishnu, Subramanya, Devi are such deities. His praising many gods does not mean that he admits of more than one God. The Guru sees many gods as representing the one *Brahman* or *arivu*. Every deity

³ Omana, S, *Vedānta - The Science of Consciousness* Sree Narayana Guru's Vision, 1 Edn, D.K. Print World, 96, (2022).

⁴ Muni Narayana Prasad, Guru, *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru*, 3 Edn, D.K. Print World, 83, (2017).

¹ Nitya Chaitanya Yati, Guru, *Daiva Dasakam*, 1 Edn, Narayana Gurukula, 57, (1981).

² Narayana Guru, *Tevāra Patikam*, Narayana Gurukula, 78, (2012).

in his perception is a visual means that helps the supplicant attain the non-dual experience, provided, of course, the supplicant is a seeker as well. Eighty-five temples were founded by the Guru. The first one was the Śiva temple at Aruvippuram near Neyyattinkara town in Thiruvananthapuram. The installation of this temple was an epoch-making event, for it was the first time that a person outside the orthodox priestly caste dared to officiate the installation of a deity. That temple was open to all irrespective of caste, religion, race or any other consideration. It was the norm in those days in Kerala, that Brahmana priests alone had the authority to install idols in temples. But Narayana Guru a non-Brahmana showed that he could perform the job on the strength of his spiritual wisdom. And those who belonged to the lower stratum in the caste system were not permitted to enter and offer worship in the existing orthodox temples. That was how Narayana Guru established the first ideal society of mankind (manava samudayam) at Aruvippuram in the history of the world. In ancient Greece Plato, the well-known philosopher described an ideal state in his Republic, but he could not succeed in establishing an Ideal state there.¹

After installing Siva, Subramanya and other deities Guru made a departure from tradition by installing in Murukkumpuzha Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, the inscription of certain words pertaining to higher values – *satyam*, *dharmam*, *daya* and *santi*. In Kalavamkodu Temple the Guru installed a mirror with the inscription on it *AUM*. In Karamukku Temple installed a lamp.

Temples in the perception of the Guru are not merely place of worship. They also serve as the local point for the cultural advancement of the localities concerned. All these reflect Guru's concern for leading people towards the light of wisdom with temple worship simply as a means.

5. Rites

In every human civilization in the world, we can observe some symbolic actions that prevail. Such actions of symbolic significance are called rites. Narayana Guru was a jñānin. Yet, he was not totally against rituals. The *Bhagavad Gita* recommends the integration of *Karma* and *jñāna* to attain the goal. Narayana Guru has the same attitude towards rituals. The Guru revisualized fire sacrifice, for which he composed a new mantra entitled *Homa Mantra*.

*AUM agne tava yat tejas tad brāhmanam
Atas tvam pratyakṣam brahmāsi
Tvadiyā indriyāṇi mano-buddhir iti sapta-jihvāḥ*

¹ Omana, S, *The Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru*, Narayana Gurukula, 38, (2018)

*Tvayi viṣayā iti samidho juhomi
Aham ity ājyam juhomi
Tvam naḥ prasīda prasīda
śreyaśbca preyaśca prayaccha svāha.*

O fire, this brightness of yours pertains to *Brahman*. For this reason, I consider you as *Brahman* become perceptible. Your seven tongues (*sapta-jihvāḥ*) are the five sense-organs, mind and intellect. Unto you I offer all the corresponding objects as oblation. Then I offer myself in the form of clarified butter. Be pleased with us, be pleased with us! And please grant us the favour of attaining the highest goal of life as well as having worldly gains. *Svāhā!*

This *mantra* that sounds like a Vedic one, shows how an ordinary fire sacrifice could be made sublime as a demonstrative lesson of higher wisdom. The burning fire, effulgence in essence, stands for *Brahman*. Into it are offered as oblation all that is objectively perceptible, i.e., the entire world, and finally the sacrificer or the subject as well. What remains then is *Brahman* alone. All the pleasures and pains of life are then felt simply as the sacred remnants (*prasād*) of the fire-sacrifice. This enlightenment bestows on us the highest happiness of wisdom along with all the worldly needs provided for.

In this work, the Guru shows, how Karma could be made use of as a means for imparting wisdom, by the harmony of Karma and Jñāna, a means that will be called *Jñāna-kārma-samanvaya*. In fact, his life itself was a demonstration of *Jñāna-kārma-samanvaya*.²

6. Bhakti or Devotion

Bhakti or devotion is considered to be the best of all tools for God-realization. *Bhakti* is defined as parama prema in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, one of the best Indian treatises on *bhakti*. In Sankara's *Vivekacūdamani*, he says that all the instruments for realization, nothing is more efficient than *bhakti*. In Narayana Guru's *Darśana Malā*, also *bhakti* is given a high place. *Bhakti* is defined as *ātmanusandhāna* (constant contemplative adoration of *ātma*). And this *ātma* is nothing but *Brahma* in essence. *Bhakti*, then could also be defined as *Brahmanusandhāna* (constant contemplative adoration on *Brahman*). *Ātma* or *Brahma* is sought by a seeker aiming at happiness (*ānanda*). Therefore, *bhakti* could be defined also as meditation on *ānanda*. A real *bhakta* is one who is fully convinced of the oneness of *ātma*, *Brahman* and *ānanda*. He always remains filled with the feeling, 'I am *ātma*; I am *Brahman*, I am *ānanda*.' When seen as meditation on *ananda*, it does not exclude from its scope the adoration a

² Muni Narayana Prasad, Guru, *The Philosophy of Narayana Guru*, 3 Edn, D.K. Printworld, 123, (2010)

husband has for his wife and vice versa, one's love for God, for one's guru, father, mother, king and the like.

In short, whatever it is that we love, the basic message behind that feeling is our love for ourselves, the love for *atma*, a ceaseless urge in all being. This self-love, instead of turning towards something external, could directly turn towards *atma* itself, towards the most lovable content of our own being, towards paramatma, and that is considered the best kind of *bhakti* called para-bhakti.

7. God-realization

God-realization, which is conceived of in experiential terms, is portrayed by Guru in his *Janani Navaratna Manjari* verse 3.

The ever-appearing and ever-disappearing experiences emerge first, and then they sway back and forth assuming the forms both of mind and matter. And thus the Real becomes darkened (as apparent forms) in a thousand ways, and then all of them roll back to their restful abode, finally to merge in its own splendour. Even philosophically perceiving thus is not wisdom. One should, instead, become a bee that gently falls into the honey-filled core of the lotus (God) and with its gentle murmur be there for ever in the ecstasy of blissfulness!¹

8. Conclusion

Narayana Guru was an enlightened seer. He identifies *arivu* with God. *Arivu*, God, Brahman, Ātman are synonymous. The ultimate aim of a supplicant or seeker is God-realization. Knowing oneself is the best way for realizing God. The final assessment of Narayanan Guru's teaching can be attempted only by placing him in a futuristic situation. The charisma of a futuristic Guru lies in his power to affect in a growing dimension the attitude and value visions of people who are born and brought up outside the geographical perimeter of his historical influence. The increase in the number of Narayana Guru's adherents as time marches from generation to the next is a clear indication of the worthwhileness of his teaching. During his lifetime, he was not very well known outside South India. Now as years pass, he is increasingly recognized and several enthusiasts are studying his philosophy in all the continents of the world. Guru's works are translated into all the languages of the world. Several Universities introduced the Philosophy of Narayana

Guru in their Faculty of Philosophy and in Kerala there is the Sreenarayanaguru Open University at Kollam.

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