

# NARAYANA GURU AND *VEDĀNTASŪTRAS*.

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**Abstract:** *The article analyses the Darśanas of Sree Narayana Guru in light of his work Vedāntasūtras. The analysis of the primary text on the basis of Guru's other works drives research to the core of Guru's Darśana. The article states how Guru used and reshaped the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta in his own terms. The thesis presents Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy of Advaita as a universal philosophy; one without religious and caste discriminations, and one that is based on spiritual brotherhood as well as humanitarian values such kindness and affection.*

**Keywords:** *Sree Narayana Guru, Vedāntasūtras, Indian Philosophy, Darśana*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Narayana Guru is a conspicuous figure of the last century in the social and philosophical milieu who gave the Advaita tradition a new vista and vision. He has written more than sixty works which replenished the philosophical tradition of Kerala. Atmopadesasatakam, Darsanamala, Advaitadipika are some of the most noted works among them. These texts have become the subject of many critical studies throughout the last century. One of the salient features that distinguish Narayana guru from other contemporary Advaita philosophers is that he had comprehended the Advaita philosophy in the form of Sutras in the work called Vedanta Sutras. This work made him to be counted as one among the ancient philosophers like Badarayana, Jaimini, Kapila, Kanada, etc. This small work which contains twenty four sutras had not been known to the world until C E 1978. This text had been discovered from the notebook of one of his disciples named Govindanasan. This text is said to be the one which is composed for the sake of teaching his disciples, including Govindanasan, the Vedanta philosophy in a lucid manner. This text is indispensable for a scholar who ever try to look into the philosophy of Narayanaguru. This text had not been subjected to proper academic studies as most of his other works had been done by the scholars.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Today the literature on Narayana Guru is an important sphere of study in Malayalam literature. Sixty four works attributed to the authorship of Narayana Guru are available and interpretations by many academic and Vedanta scholars are also available. Scholars and interpreters forwarded their salutations in this field of discourse, like *Sri Narayana Guruvinte Sampoorana Krithikal- Vyakhyanam* by Dr. T. Bhaskaran, 1985, *Sri Narayana Gurudeva Krithikal Sampoorana Vyakhyanam* by Prof. G Balakrishnan Nair, Kerala Bhasha Institute, 2003, *Sri Narayana Gurudeva Krithikal- 'Guruprasadam' Vyakhyanam* by Prof. M.H. Sasthrikal, Sivagiri Madam Publication, 2007. Nadaraja Guru, the disciple of Narayana Guru, has published translation and interpretation all his works in English. Nadaraja Guru's student Nithya Chaithanya yathi and his follower Muni Naarayana Prasad also gave significant interpretation to Guru's works.

Today more than fifty biographies of Narayana Guru are available beginning from Guru's beloved disciple Kumaranasan and then Moorkothu Kumaran, Prof. M K Sanu and many others also published the biography of Narayana Guru. Many creative works about the life and ideologies of Guru are also available such as the two *Mahakavyas- Sri Narayana Vijayam* (Sanskrit) by Prof. K Balarama Pannikkar and *Gurudeva Charitham* by Kayamkulam P N Murali.

So many *Ghandakavyas* are also available such as *Ampalappattu* by Moorkothu Kumaran, *Gurudeva Karnamritham* by Kilimanoor N Kesavan, *Gurupadham* by Prof. Kilimanoor Ramakanthan, *Snehadeepam* by Kedakulam Karunakaran, *Sri Narayana Gureswami Charitham* by Sheevellikara M C Kunjiraman Vaidhyar, *Gurudakshina* by Muttathukonam Vaidhyar P K Raghava Pannikkar, *Sri Narayana Guru Bhagavatham* by Prof. M radhakrishnan, *Sri Narayana Gurudeva Bhagavadam* by Puthanvellikkara Sukumaran and N K Nadarajan, *Sri Narayana Gurudeva Bhagavadam* by Sudhanantha Swamikal, *Sri Narayana Charitham* by Kadinamkulam Krishnan Vaidyar, *Sri Narayana Charitham* by Kappil Kesavan, *Sri Narayana Charitham* by Mezhuveli Kesavan, *Sri Narayana Vijyam* by Sachidanantha Swamikal, *Akshaya Meghajyothis* by V Chellappan V adhyar and *Sri Narayana Guru Ithihasam* by Raman Thollor.

Poems are also written about Guru and his teachings such as *Guru Pournami* (Anthology of poems) by S. Remesan Nair and *Guru Narayaneeyam* (Anthology of poems edited Dr. Shornur Karthikeyan, Kerala Sahitya

Academy). *Guru Narayaneeyam* comprises of 243 poems each written by various poets like Kumaran Asan, Vallathol, Sahodharan Ayappan, P Kunjiraman Nair, vaillopilly, G Sankara Kurup, Akitham, ONV Kurup, Attoor Ravi Varma, K G Sankara Pillai, Sachidananthan, Kuripuzha Srikumar etc. The life and teachings of Guru comes in all genres of literature in Malayalam.

### 3. MATERIALS:

One of the important previous studies which worth citation is the one which is done by Swami Muni Narayana Prasad with an elaborate commentary, published by D. K. Printworld, New Delhi in 1997. In the next year a translation in Malayalam also appeared to this work. The eminent scholar Dr. T. Bhaskaran, even though included this text in his interpretive study of the works of Narayanaguru, never made any detailed analysis or study of the text. Prof G Balakrishnan in his thorough study on the works of Narayanguru has included this text as the sixth one in the second volume and Prof. M. H. Sastrikal has included it as the twenty second in his study but both of them do not exceed more than twenty pages. Moreover the above cited works had been subjected to the studies for the degree of Master of Philosophy.

### 4. DISCUSSION:

This text holds a prominent position as the one in which the Vedanta philosophy is again comprehended after a long period of at least two thousand years. It is obvious that the text had been composed in period where we find the Sutras of Badarayana has not become obsolete. It can be presumed that Narayanaguru might have had some dissensions to the traditional interpretation of the Badarayana Sutras which consists of Apasudradhikarana. Hence a historical approach is also significant in the study of this work. It can also be assumed that Narayanaguru might have tried to condense his philosophy that he tried to manifest through the miscellaneous other works on Advaita Vedanta and a study on this way is also tenable in this context.

After Sankara Advaita philosophers indulged in minute polemic discussions and theoretical stances which paved way to different schools and this tendency had made the tradition abstruse to the scholars. The work of Narayanaguru proclaims emancipation from this long cherished tradition and the scope of the study can also be directed in this way.

- The Study analyses the philosophical and social facets of this work with a proper study of its historical background.
- The study traces the glimpses of his thoughts in Vedanta Sutras which are disseminated in the other works of Narayanaguru.
- This study recognizes the method in which Narayanagu comprises the thoughts of his predecessors and an analysis is also made to discover whether he made any exclusions or inclusions in this work.

### 5. METHODOLOGY:

An ideology used in many ways in a previous period in history might be used differently in a later historic period even when the ideology remains the same in every period, its application and result would differ. The term 'reconstruction' refers to the intellectual activity of reconstructing an action of previous periods to impact antonymous effect in a later stage. The Advaita Vedanta which proposes unity between God, Universe and Individual's soul was also the philosophy which showcased caste differences among human beings. This ideology which was used to install the caste system was later utilized by Guru to destroy the caste system and to prove that there are no castes, Brahmins or others. The historical process of spiritual destruction of inverse values induced through spirituality has always been on roll in the world. Both history and philosophy have to be simultaneously analyzed to study this, whereas the study of any one element, either historical or philosophical, will not bear full fruit. The thesis has incorporated the methodology of history, criticism and comparison in analyzing *Vedāntasūtras* and its interpretations. The methodology of language and linguistics has also been used in the syntactic division of Sutras.

### 6. THESIS STRUCTURE:

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, titled *A Historical Background of Life and Social Reforms of Sree Narayana Guru* inquiries into the lifestyle and social set rooted in the caste system and slavery before the birth of Sree Narayana Guru and describes the social system in which the Ezhavas fared at the time in Kerala. It gives a fair description of lifetime of Guru and his activities as a social reformer such as the various temple / idol consecrations he made, the ideologies behind each consecration, Guru's vision of temple, his stand against the amoralities such as *keṭṭu kalyāṇam* (mock marriage ceremony), *tiraṅṭu kalyāṇam* (announcement and celebration of

puberty), consumption of alcohol, and how he stood support of mixed marriage and mixed feast. The philosophical base of reformations brought by Sree Narayana Guru, as well as his view on the caste cāturvarṇya system is discussed here. The first chapter ends with a thorough analysis of Guru's perception of caste, religion and the philosophical traditions which formulated the same.

The second chapter titled *Philosophical Evolution in the Texts of Sree Narayana Guru* analyses his poems to explain the transformations that took place in Guru's thoughts. The chapter adopts the method of individual analyses of his poems and the history of his life to look upon the transformation education and social relations make in a person who showed utmost devotion from childhood. Guru, who was born into a family of Devi devotees, was a devotee of Devi and was against sacrifices which included violence. During his period of education at the Varanappilly House, Guru is introduced to Puranas and literature in Malayalam and Sanskrit, the influence of which was evident in the poets of the time. His poems portray the chronology of his transformation from being a devotee of Lord Subrahmanyan during his days as a wanderer to the Tamil Saiva tradition and eventually halting at the fundamental philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. The second chapter ends with explaining the premise of the development of Sree Narayana Darsana and its relation to the philosophy of Advaita.

The third chapter, titled *The Vedanta Sutra of Sree Narayana Guru: A Critical Study based on its Interpretation* conducts an in-depth analysis of the interpretations of *Vedāntasūtras*, the text which provided Guru with the title of an aphorist or Sūtrakāra. Here, the similarities and differences in the interpretations of G. Balakrishnan Nair, M H Sastri, Muni Narayana Prasad and T Baskaran are unearthed and studied. The difference in the division of Sutras except in the interpretation of T Baskaran is meticulously analyzed to find that the four interpretations of *Vedāntasūtras* have three different Sutra forms in terms of syntactic and semantic structure which were also subjected to study. It was found out in this chapter that the interpretation of G Balakrishnan Nair and his Sutra division show more justice to the authorial intention than other three interpreters, and hence his interpretation was relied upon for further analysis.

The fourth chapter titled *A study of Guru's Vedāntasūtra in the Light of his other Works* attempts to interpret each of his Sutras in the light of his other works and their philosophical premises. *Vedāntasūtras*, which is an aphorism of Guru's own philosophies is analyzed with respect to the works Guru wrote on various time periods as well as Guru's thoughts. The peculiarities of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy of Advaita are explained through this approach. This approach also helps to eliminate the deviation in meaning which otherwise would happen had the Sutra in Sanskrit is independently analyzed without taking into consideration the philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru. This chapter concludes with the findings from texts that portray concepts similar to the ones stated in the Sutras.

The fifth chapter titled *Vedāntasūtra : The Vedanta of Renaissance* is arranged as the conclusion. It lists the research findings of previous chapters and also explains *Vedāntasūtras* as the gospel of self-curiosity on the basis of the interpretation in the fourth chapter. The conclusion repeatedly affirms that it is possible to explain Sree Narayana guru's philosophies on the basis of *Vedāntasūtras*. It also portrays the internal struggles within the Sree Narayana Darma Sangham, the internal and external challenges it faces and explains Guru's concept on one religion on the basis of the philosophy of Advaita. It makes a brief portrayal of the structure of *Vedāntasūtras* to state that the Sutras reconstruct the philosophy of Advaita to shape it into Vedanta of the renaissance. The chapter and thesis end by stating the relevance, limitation and scope for further studies on the area and subject.

## 7. RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- *Vedāntasūtras* of Sree Narayana Guru summarizes the philosophies of Guru and therefore can be used to explain Guru's Darsanas.
- The number of Sūtras in its various interpretations seems to differ.
- The Śivāravindaṃ vyākhyāna by Balakrishnan Nair stands equivalent to the nature of original Sūtras compared to other interpretations.
- Guru rejected the notion that Brahmanic/Vedic education shall be inherited only by those who are Brahmins by birth, and clearly stated instead that anyone curious for knowledge has the right to learn.
- The notion Guru had adopted was that one should acquire knowledge for learning as well as teaching others, and not to argue and win. His literary works maintain this notion, as can be found in *Vedāntasūtra*. He did not employ criticism for its sake, rather explained the concept within a source of knowledge or concept in order to attain equality.
- The Sūtras mention the oneness between the world and the god, the life forms and the world, and the living souls and the cosmic soul.

- Guru does not propose a complete rejection of the world, rather proposes spiritual philosophy which agrees upon its practical substance.
- Guru in many places follows the Sankara philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, yet he rejects the same as well as many other places.
- The influence of the mystic Saiva tradition is evident in his various works including *Ātmopadeśasāka*. Therefore, the analysis of Sūtras on the basis of other works written by Guru would find in it sensational and ideological/theoretical elements.
- The ultimate statement of *Vedāntasūtras* is ‘ātmanyāt kin-cinnāsti’, where, Guru declares that the essence of the soul is in itself.
- *Vedāntasūtras* is a self-quest, which ends at the realisation that nothing is detached from the soul. Guru states that the soul is the universe and the God, and its essence is found within. Guru’s Darsana focus on subjectivity. *Vedāntasūtras* puts forth spiritual inquiries into one’s own self and realizes that everything is soul, while not being it any attempt for the realization of God. Guru is able to philosophically make possible the inquiry for perpetuity, without rejecting the practical substance of the universe.
- *Vedāntasūtras* is a gospel of one’s curiosity of self

## 8. CONCLUSION:

Analysis of the sūtras on the basis of other works and philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru proved to do more justice to Guru’s thoughts. This point of view focuses on the deviation in Vedanta which Guru had employed in his philosophy right from the question of ownership of knowledge. Guru had transformed the social chain of knowledge distribution through his involvement, where the savarna ‘owned’ knowledge was made socially achievable to the people of subjugated communities as well, which also led to the recreation of Vedanta from what it proposed and followed.

Another factor was Guru’s affinity towards the Saiva branch of philosophy in Vedanta, the effect of which may be found in the variation from purely theoretical to sensational in his philosophy. While discussing the spiritual soul, the statement like “dhvanimayamāyigaga- namjvalikkumannāl- aṇayumatīnkalaśeṣadr̥ṣyajālam” in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, as well as the concept of ‘rudratva’ brought into use in *Vedāntasūtra* shows the difference the Vedanta of Sree Narayana Guru has with the Vedanta of Sree Sankara. The shift from conceptual Vedanta to a sensual one was a historical reconstruction in the discipline of Vedanta.

Sree Narayana Guru defines Vedanta in the modern period where man is thought to be the centre of intellectual and practical existence. Even the concept of spirit is an individual. The terms person and spirit are used synonymously in the common tongue as well. *Brahmasūtra* discusses about ‘Brahman’. The shift from God to spirit in Guru’s *Vedāntasūtra* is not coincidental, rather the historical contexts where man has become its centre poses the social curiosity on the context of ‘spirit’. Modernity states that everyone is equal. In a scenario where everyone suddenly attained self-value different from the idea of Savarnas alone to be considered of any value, questions began to rise about personality in the minds of people. It was during the attempts to attribute self-respect to each man and woman to ask ‘who he or she is’ above ‘who God is’ that Narayana Guru redefined Vedanta in terms of spirit and vitality, thereby giving new meaning and goal to the Indian philosophical stream of self-inquiry. *Vedāntasūtra* concludes by affirming the importance of self in spirit. Another concept the text focuses on is of fraternity, where Guru had developed the notion into spirit-fraternity, spiritual oneness, and oneness of person and God. Even when the ‘person’ attains centrality, the Vedanta of Sree Narayana Guru proposes the renaissance politics of universality through the concept of fraternity, where no one is alien or strange to one another.

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