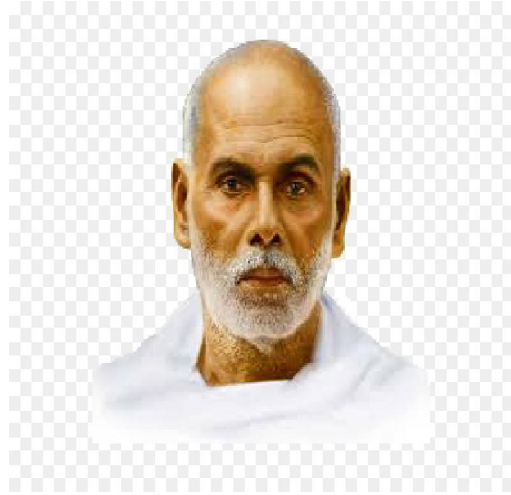




Sree Narayana Guru was born in 1856 C.E. in the village of Chempazhanthi in Thiruvananthapuram. He is considered among the greatest social reformers and philosophers of Kerala and India. He led a reform movement in Kerala by rejecting the caste system and promoting new values of spiritual freedom, social equality and upliftment of the downtrodden.



Sree Narayana Guru was born under the star 'Chathayam' in the month of 'Chingam' in 1856 AD (1032 of the Malayalam calendar) in the village of Chempazhanthi in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala as the son of Madan Asan, a farmer, and Kutti Amma. Yet Gurudev reportedly told some of his followers that he was actually born in 1030. When his 60th birth anniversary was being celebrated 1916 he laughingly said "my 60th birthday (sashtabhdhapoorty) was quite a while ago.

His parents, ? Madan Asan? and ?Kutty Amma? endearingly called him ?Nanu?. At the age of five, he began his education in the neighboring school in the old ?Gurukula? model.'Madan Asan' was also a teacher ("Asan") who was learned in Sanskrit and proficient in Astrology and Ayurveda.

When Narayana Guru was 5 years old, he was enrolled in a school which ran under the traditional Gurukula model. He was intensely drawn to worship at the local temples and composed several hymns. He had already begun expressed strong aversion toward the caste discrimination that existed in society and often criticised his own relatives for showing such tendencies.

At the age of 21 he came under the tutelage of the great Raman Pillai Asan, a renowned Sanskrit scholar of the Puthuppally Varanappally family in Central Travancore. He was taught Sanskrit, poetry, drama, literary criticism, and logical rhetoric. He also extensively studied the Vedas and the Upanishads. On his return in 1881, his father was on his death bed. His mother had already died when he was 15. He ran a village school for children and came to be known as "Nanu Asan".

Despite his marriage to a Kaliasamma, NanuAsan changed his role as a teacher to that of a Parivrajaka (a spiritual wanderer). It was during this time period that he met Kunjan Pillai, who later came to be



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Despite his marriage to a Kalliamma, NanuAsan changed his role as a teacher to that of a Parivrajaka (a spiritual wanderer). It was during this time period that he met Kunjan Pillai, who later came to be known as Chattampi Swamikal. Recognising Nanu Asan's immense passion for yoga and his philosophical genius Chattampi Swamikal introduced him to Thycattu Ayyaavu, a 'Hatha yogi'. Under him Nanu Asan mastered Hatha Yoga (a branch of Yoga, introduced by Yogi Swatmaramaas, that unites pairs of opposites referring to the positive (sun) and negative (moon) currents in the system). These teachings had a lasting impact on the life and philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru.

From here he moved to the wilderness of Maruthwamala where he established a hermitage and lived a secluded life immersed in meditative thought and yoga. This would last for eight long years. After an unpretentious life of over thirty years, this is when Narayana Guru is believed to have attained a state of Enlightenment.

A spiritual trip took him to Aruvippuram, a forest area known for its natural beauty. He settled there for a while and soon started attracting people for spiritual as well as physical rejuvenation. The Guru felt the necessity of constructing a temple there for the regular worship of Lord Shiva. A small canopy of coconut and mango leaves was raised over an altar on a rock jutting out in the water at a beautiful spot near the river. The Guru himself later installed a Shiva linga (idol) in the temple. When asked about his right to install an idol he replied that the idol he had installed was not that of a Brahmin Shiva.

In 1904 he decided to settle down in a place to continue his spiritual practices. He chose Sivagiri at Varkala, twenty miles north of Thiruvananthapuram. He started a Sanskrit school in Varkala and poor boys and orphans were given free education regardless of their caste. Temples were built at different places - Thrissur, Kannur, Anchuthengu, Tellicherry, Calicut, and Mangalore. It was in the year 1912 that he built the Sharada Devi Temple at Sivagiri.

In 1913, he founded the Advaita Ashram at Aluva. This was an important event in his spiritual quest. This Ashram was dedicated to a great principle - Om Sahodaryam Sarvatra (all men are equal in the eyes of God).

In 1928 the Guru's health conditions declined drastically and he remained bedridden for some months. The Guru's birthday was celebrated in many places in that year. On 20 September, 1928 the Guru finally left Earth, but his legacy and beliefs are still alive with us to this very day.



This is the place where Sree Narayana Guru's tomb is located and place where guru was enlightened and got the salvation. The Samadhi (the final resting place) of the Guru here attracts thousands of devotees every year during the Sivagiri Pilgrimage days 30th December to 1st January.

The Sivagiri Mutt, built in 1904, is situated at the top of the Sivagiri hill near Varkala. Even decades after the guru breathed his last here in 1928; Gurudevan's samadhi continues to be thronged by thousands of devotees, donned in yellow attire, from different parts of Kerala and outside.

The Sivagiri Mutt is also the headquarters of the Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham, an organization of his disciples and saints, established by GURU.

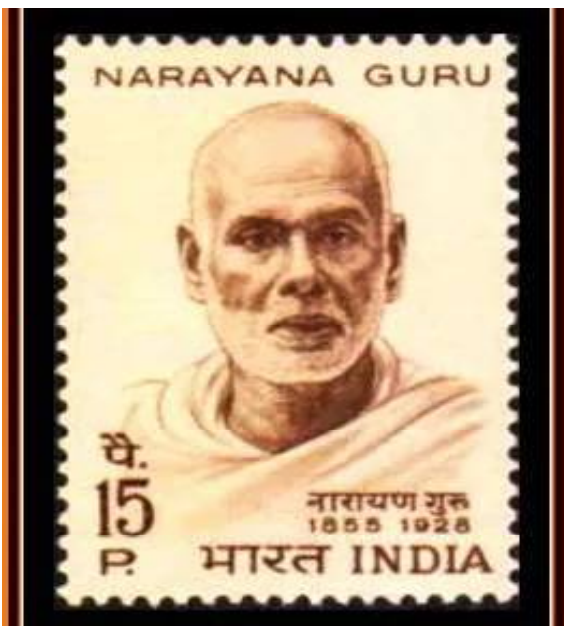
This place, in due course, developed into the site of the Sarada Temple, and guru established an architecture was simple and different. For the first time in India, a temple with windows and ventilation was devised. The opening of this temple was uniquely marked by the inspirational ceremony of guest of hymns in praise of the mother Sarada. The Guru himself wrote 'Janani-navaratna Manjari' ?? nine Gems in praise of the mother.?



## Along with Mahatma Gandhi

In 1925 Guru supported the famous Vaikom Satyagraha movement, which demanded entry for lower caste people in the Shiva temple at Vaikom and all temples in Kerala. Mahatma Gandhi visited Kerala during this time to support the Vaikom Satyagraha and met the Guru at Sivagiri Ashram and the two sages had interesting discussions on the issues of caste and untouchability. Gandhiji expressed that it was a great privilege in his life to have the darshan of an esteemed sage like Sree Narayana Guru.

### THE FIRST MALAYALI TO APPEAR IN THE INDIAN POSTAL STAMP



## One caste on religion

was a real Karma Yogi and his whole life was dedicated for the betterment of the suppressed. He was an innate poet and a great scholar in Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit. He was an author of many beautiful and inspirational works in these languages. His words and deeds ignited sparks of revolution that led to a remarkable cultural renaissance in the profligate society of Kerala.





### With Tagore

The great Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore met Guru in 1922. About his warm meeting with Guru, Tagore later said: “I have been touring different parts of the world. But I have never come across one who is spiritually greater than Sree Narayana Guru”

### **Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru**

It is not a matter of great wonder that Sree Narayana Guru became one of the greatest proponents and re-evaluators of Advaita Vedanta, the principle of non-duality put forward by Adi Shankara, for both hail from the same pristine land of Kerala. Only a span of a thousand years separates both.

Sree Narayana Guru further extended this non dualistic principle into practical modes of self-realisation through spiritual education, compassion, and peaceful coexistence of humanity. He was also an egalitarian who advocated social equality and universal brotherhood. The Guru worked hard as a social educationist and condemned discrimination in the name of caste, creed and religion. Education was one of his primary concerns by which, he believed, that one could uplift his/her quality of life.

His philosophies are best reflected in his poetic ventures that mingles aesthetically the principles of ethics, logics and metaphysics. His famous words one caste, one religion and one god for man worked as a fresh waft in the socio-cultural realm of the then Kerala.

In his renowned work Atmopadesa Satakam, which consists of one hundred verses of



self-instruction, the Guru proposes his philosophy of egalitarianism. Written in Malayalam around 1897 this fertile poetic expression undoubtedly emanates from a spirit that has attained an experienced state of primordial knowledge and quintessence of the Universe. It reflects the Guru's ability to view the human race, from a dignified and elevated perspective, in unqualified equality and without any racial, religious, caste or any other discrimination. The Guru's philosophy emphasised the consistency between true existence of the "common reality" on Earth and one Divine behind the creation and sustenance of the Universe, dismissing any concepts of illusory worlds.

At the time of its conception, Narayana Guru's philosophy was in many respects ahead of its time and focused on a futuristic world order that could be shaped from his philosophical connotations that are underlain with transcendental aesthetics and logic embodied in knowledge and pure reason. Most of the serious scholars of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy have been from generations beyond his lifetime; and this list keeps growing.

## **Works of Sree Narayana Guru**

**Guru's works reflect his philosophies and outlook on life.** Following is a list of his works written in Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil.

### **In Malayalam**

Advaitha Deepika  
 Anukamba Dasakam  
 Arivu  
 Athma Vilasam  
 Atmopadesa Satakam  
 Bhadrakalyashtakam  
 Chijanda Chinthakam  
 Daiva Chinthanam - 1 & 2  
 Daiva Dasakam  
 Jathi Lakshanam  
 Jathi Nirnayam  
 Jeevakarunya Panchakam  
 Shiva Shathakam  
 Swanubavageethi

### **In Sanskrit**

Asramam  
 Bhadrakaliashtakam  
 Brahmavidya Panchakam  
 Charama Slokangal  
 Chidambarashtakam  
 Darsana Mala  
 Dharmam  
 Genani Navamanjari  
 Guhashtakam  
 Homa Manthram  
 Municharya Panchakam



Nirvruthi Panchakam  
 Slokathrayi  
 Sree Vasudeva Ashtakam  
 Vedantha Suthram  
 Vinayaka Ashtakam

### **In Tamil**

Thevarappathinkangal

### **Translations**

Isavasyo Upanishad  
 Ozhivil Odukkam  
 Thirukural

## **SUMMERY**

Sree Narayana Guru was born at Chempazhanthi in Thiruvananthapuram district on 20th August 1856 (Chathayam in the month of Chingam).

§ His father was Madan Asan and mother was Kutty Amma.

§ His was named Narayanan and was dotingly called Nanu.

§ At the age of five, Nanu joined a nearby school for formal education. He continued his education at home with his father and uncle in Tamil, Sanskrit, and other traditional subjects. His father was a teacher(Asan), was proficient in Sanskrit, Astrology and Ayurveda. His uncle Krishnana Vaidyan was a reputed Ayurvedic physician. He was taught the basics of the Tamil and Sanskrit languages and traditional subjects such as Siddharupam, Balaprobhodhanam and Amarakosam.

§ He had his higher studies at Varanapally by Kummampalli Raman pillai Asan.

§ He showed strong affinity for poetics and reasoning, composing hymns and singing them in praise of God.

§ His mother passed away when he was 15. Nanu spent the most part of his early youth assisting his father in tutoring, and his uncle in the practice of Ayurveda, while devoting the rest of his time for devotional practices at the temples nearby.

§ After his studies he also began teaching in a near-by school. From that time the people respectfully called him “Nanu Asan”.

§ His friendship with Chattambi Swamikal started in 1884. Chattambi Swamikal introduced him to Thycaud Ayyaswami, a distinguished yoga guru of Trivandrum. From him Nanoo learned ‘yogasanas’, practices like Nauli, Dhoudi, and Khadam and Khechari mudra.

§ Later he went to Maruthwamala in search of ultimate truth and spent 8 years of solitary life. Here, Narayana guru is believed to have attained a state of Enlightenment.

§ In 1888, he installed an idol of Shiva at Aruvippuram on the banks of Neyyar river.



§ As only Brahmins had ever installed an idol, that event was dubbed as ‘Aruvippuram revolution’. When Brahmins challenged his right to consecrate, he replied in his famous quote “I installed my siva; not a Brahmin siva”.

§ At Aruvippuram these words were inscribed on a plaque “Without differences of caste, Nor enmities of creed, Here it is, the model of an abode, where all live like brothers at heart”.

§ In 1891 Kumaranasan (then Kumaru) met § Sree Narayana Guru was appointed as the first president of SNDP Yogam founded in 1903 with the initiative of Dr.Palpu.

§ A new phase began in the Guru’s life in 1904. He decided to give up his wandering life and settle down at Sivagiri, about 32 kms north of Thiruvananthapuram. The name ‘Sivagiri’ was given by Guru.

§ In 1905 he organised the first agricultural and industrial exhibition in India, at Kollam

§ He established many temples at different parts of the Kerala. He did the prathishta of the goddess Sree Sarada at Sivagiri on April 1912.

§ In 1914 he established Adwaithasramam at Aluva (Ernakulam district).

§ In 1916 he met Ramana Maharshi at Thiruvannamala, Tamil nadu.

§ Guru made his first visit to Sri Lanka in 1918. It is the only foreign country visited by him.

§ Rabindranath Tagore visited Sree Narayana Guru at Sivagiri in 1922.

§ Tagore recorded after his visit to Sivagiri, ‘I have been touring different parts of the world. During these travels, I have had the good fortune to come into contact with several saints and maharshis. But I have frankly to admit that I have never come across one who is spiritually greater than Swami Sree Narayana Guru of Kerala — nay, a person who is on par with him in spiritual attainments. I am sure I shall never forget that radiant face, illumined by the self effulgent light of divine glory and those yogic eyes fixing their gaze on a remote point on a far-away horizon.’

§ Guru provided leadership to the ‘Sarva Matha Sammelanam’ held at Aluva in 1924.

§ The theme of the conference was “Not for argument but to know and inform others”. He visited the Satyagrahis at Vaikkom in 1924.

§ When Gandhiji visited Kerala in connection with Vaikom Satyagraha in 1925, he also visited Guru.

§ Mahathma Gandhi wrote in the guest book at Sivagiri, “I consider it the greatest good fortune of my life to have visited the beautiful Travancore state and met the most venerable saint, Sree Narayana Guru Swami trippadangal”.





- § Guru's second visit to Sri Lanka was in 1926.
- § Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham was registered in 1928. Guru attained samadhi on 20th September 1928 (5th of Kanni month of Kollam Era).
- § He is regarded as the father of the renaissance of Kerala.
- § He belonged to Ezhava community and it was an era in which Ezhavas were facing much social injustices in the caste-ridden society of Kerala.
- § He was the first Keralite to be appeared on an Indian stamp and also the first Keralite to be inscribed on a coin of RBI.
- § He is only Keralite whose birth day and death anniversary are declared holiday by the Government of Kerala.
- § He was the only person who was exempted from court appearances in civil cases by Government of Travancore.
- § The slogan popularized by Sree Narayana Guru—"One caste, one religion and one God for mankind".
- § He also exhorted "Liquor is poison, make it not, sell it not, drink it not".
- § "Organize and strengthen Educate and Enlighten" was also the advice of Guru.
- § He taught "Whatever may be the religion of a man, it is enough if he becomes virtuous", "Ask not, Say not, think not caste", "Act that one performs for one's sake should also benefit other".
- § The novel 'Guru' by K.Surendran depicts the life of Sree Narayana Guru.
- § The film 'Yugapurushan' directed by R.Sukumaran based on the life of Guru.
- § Sivalinga Swamikal was the first Sanyasa disciple of Guru.
- § Anandatheertha Swamikal was his last Sanyasa disciple.
- § The first work of Sree Narayana Guru is Gajendramoksham Vanchipattu. His other famous works are Atmopadeshasatakam, Darshanamala, Daiva Dasakam, Nirvritipachakam, Janani Navaratna Manjari etc.
- § Sivagiri pilgrimage, now known as Sivagiri Theerthadanam, was conceived by Vallabhasserri Govindan Vaidyar and T K Kittan Writer. It was duly approved by Gurudevan on January, 1928.

## **The great search**

One of the later vedantic compositions of Narayana Guru is known as Advaita Deepika. The metaphoric ideogram of 'the flame of non-dual knowledge' implies the knower's identity with the knowledge that is illuminated. The same message was exemplified in the Guru's own life when he began his more serious search. He took upon himself the role of a teacher. In this role he was a seeker, a seer, and also an illuminator. His 'one-teacher school' was not to teach the 'three R's', but to bring into people's lives the insight of the spiritual masters of the past such as Vyasa, Valmiki, Sankara, and Tiruvalluvar. The lonely flight of a seeker is not only not appreciated by the world, but in most cases he is neither recognized as a seeker nor does the world seem to know that there is anything to seek at all. The only business of life is to wake up and sleep, to eat and mate and carry on the ten thousand and one transactions of life. So it is no wonder that the relatives of Narayana Guru thought that the best that they could do for him was to arrange for a marriage.

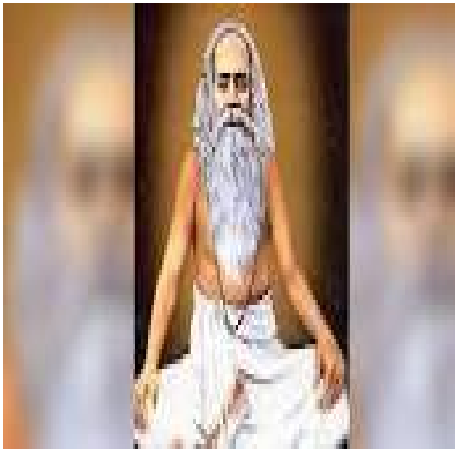


The conflict that ensued and the way in which Narayana Guru circumvented the arrangement can be an excellent study of the attitude of Indian people to spirituality when sex-life and interpersonal relations are to be interpreted, especially in the Victorian era. Although in actual practice there was a great eroding of sexual restrictions, the professed adherence of the Indian people to the old world norms were far removed from the medieval one. There are different versions of Narayana Guru's marriage. All narrators agree that he did not present himself at the wedding ceremony. It was conducted in proxy by his sister"8 All agree that he probably had no physical relation with the woman whom his relatives brought to his home and looked upon as his wife. Also there is general agreement that he did not show any displeasure to this person who had the misfortune of being treated as a wife though not having a meaningful identity. The strange relation of the Yogi to his wife is presented in *The Word of the Guru* by Nataraja Guru without any exaggeration or spiritual embellishment. Once he called another neighbor and asked him to take his wife to a festival in a nearby Bhagavati or Kali temple to which she dearly wished to go. With the Guru's better ways, it was too crowded and noisy for him, but the villagers praised its importance very highly. On another occasion the Guru cured his wife who had fainted for some reason, and he took some familiar green herb and squeezed the juice into her nostrils. The irritation set aright the circulation in her head and brought her back to normality. These are all scanty remarks that the present writer is able to make regarding the marital life of the Guru. His wife continued to live in her parents' house in accordance with the matriarchal customs prevailing then in that locality. With the ever-widening path of Guruhood that our hero began to tread as more and more years went by, the question of his married life and the family relations receded more and more into the background. It was thus naturally and normally transcended. She died, and no children of the marriage are known to have seen the light of day. Subjects such a celibacy, Immaculate Conception, or virginity, etc., were points, which were never raised in connection with either of them. The relation was as neutral and mysterious as the Zero that we have spoken of According to the biographer Mr. Moorkoth Kumaran, the Guru said more or less in the following manner before breaking away completely from his parental home: "We are all born in this world to serve some purpose. I have my work to do and you have yours. Let me go my way; you go your own way." This has resemblance to what Ramaria Maharshi, an uncompromising advaitin of this century once said, about himself. There is also the famous existential prayer: "I do my thing, and you do your thing. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations. And you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you and I am I, and if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful. If not, it can't be helped. There comes a time in the life of every seeker that he cannot any longer carry on the transactions of the relativistic pattern of home life without becoming hypocritical. In such a state, the true person in the seeker undergoes a great stress. The crisis of such a person is described differently in different books. The Mumukshu Prakarana of Yoga Vasishtha, the breaking away of Prince Siddhartha from the palace of Kapilavastu, the hidden life of Jesus Christ terminated by forty days of fast and mental torture, the restless days of Prophet Mohammed in the caves of Mecca before the visitation of Gabriel, and the graphic, descriptions of the restlessness of the seeker in the Vivekachudamani of Sankara, give sufficient descriptions of the spiritual seekers' common plight. Narayana Guru's predicament was not different. He left his home and wandered aimlessly in whichever direction he felt like going. Most of his wanderings were either on the coastlines of Kerala or in the interior villages of the present Tamilnadu. In Tamilnadu most cities and villages are built around a temple of Shiva, Subrahmanya, Devi, Vishnu or Vinayaka. Every temple has its own legend and the stories of the saints who were devoted to these temples.



As a result there are many pockets of traditional psychology, magic, mysticism and alchemy in a number of places, and Narayana Guru had the great advantage of relating himself to those people who kept these traditions alive. As he had a very high sense of personal discipline, which included a superior personal hygiene, he must have been very selective in choosing his spiritual practices. He had a very high critical acumen and did not accept anything at its face value without experiencing and experimenting with instructions in his own life to prove their verity to himself. Sometimes it amounted to the torturing of his body or of his mind. His love for truth was always uncompromising and he never liked to load his mind with half-baked theories or unverified information.

## Finding a soul mate



After wandering for some time he came to live with an old comrade of his called Perunelli Krishnan Vaidyar. This gentle man was a very erudite scholar in Sanskrit. Apart from being a poet of great merit, he was a pioneer in the theatrical art of Kerala and spent most of his time in presenting his own plays on the stage. He attracted a large crowd of literary enthusiasts and art critics around him. Among them there was a great genius that had an insight into the secrets of art and sciences. He was an expert in the rhythmic art of drumming. In addition to this he was conversant with all the rules implied in the rhetorics of the Vedas. He could easily sketch people in their varied moods. He amused himself by giving demonstrations of all the possible variations in drumming. This unusual

man is known by different names, but his original name was Ayyappan. Officially he was Shanmughadasan. Afterwards he was known as Kunjan Pillai. He was entrusted with the duty of a monitor by his master and so was called Chattampi. As this gentleman wandered like a recluse and lived a life of

piety, he became popularly known as Chattampi Swami.

In many respects Nanu and Chattampi Swami were very different. Nanu Asan was a man of restraint. He spoke only scantily. He was both gentle and dignified when he himself related to others. Being supersensitive to the suffering of his fellow men Nanu Asan was seen most of the time somewhat in a sad mood like that of Jesus Christ. This is not to suggest that he did not know the uncontaminated bliss of the real self. Chattampi Swami was outgoing and was even provocative in his humor and argumentation. His critical acumen was very sharp and he did not allow pretenders to escape his scathing criticism.' If Nanu Asan abhorred erotics and the erotic company' of women, Chattampi Swami approached erotics with the 'masterly mind of a poetic genius and he made little difference of man and women in sharing his erudition and the wisdom born of his keen observation.

In spite of these differences Nanu Asan and Chattampi Swami loved and respected each other as fellow-seekers.

In those days the frontiers of spiritual search were not very clearly defined. Astrology, medicine, alchemy and Yoga were considered as subjects of allied interest. Most Vedantins were also yogins. Nanu Asan and Chattampi Swami also wanted to become proficient in Yoga. Chattampi Swami who then was an adept in Yoga gave his friend certain instructions on Yoga and Tantra.



Seeing Nanu Asan's interest in Yoga, Chattampi Swami took him to his Yoga teacher who was in the service of the British Resident in Trivandrum. This Yogi was known as Thycattu Ayyavu his exact name is not known. The fact that he is remembered today both as a Brahmin as a Pariah shows that he might have lived a life that was beyond the frontiers of caste prejudices. The relation of Chattampi Swami and Narayana Guru with Thycattu Ayyavu is known to posterity only from the accounts of their devotees. It seems both of them loved and respected their teacher very much. Some people believed that Chattampi Swami initiated Nanu Asan into an esoteric mantra. On that account they insist that Chattampi Swami should be recognized as the spiritual preceptor of Narayana Guru. Narayana Guru did not consider himself to be a disciple of any particular person. He once said that his Guru was God and Man. When the controversy on Narayana Guru's relationship with Chattampi Swami became heated up his own disciple Tampi (afterwards Nataraja Guru) asked him of the rumored Guruhood of Chattampi Swami. He said' he had no objection to any one thinking of Chattampi Swami as his Guru. Chattampi Swami always looked upon Nanu Asan as an equal and made no claim for himself as his Guru. Unfortunately devotees of both masters made an ugly issue of this. Nanu Asan always referred to Chattampi Swami intimately as 'Chattampi' and described him to others as a "veritable Vyasa of our time." The Guru even qualified Chattampi Swami as a sat guru.

Even though Nanu Asan became proficient in Yogic discipline his thirst for illumination was not quenched by what he derived from his experience of Hatha yoga.

### **The final plunge**

Narayana Guru was only concerned with two things in his life; one was the in-dwelling Absolute that shines within all; and the other was the woes of life to which man is exposed everywhere. It was not his intention to make a hero of himself in the minds of others. He, therefore, did not bother to tell anyone what difficulties he overcame to achieve the fulfillment of his search. Nataraja Guru in his well known book *The Word of the Guru* gives a beautiful description of Narayana Guru's search.

Leaving his home behind him, for years he had wandered from one man to another, from one center to another, before he came to settle down, for the time being at least, at this spot. During this period of restless travelling he had sometimes walked three to four hundred miles with no better provision than that of a mere mendicant. Sometimes he had to swim across rivers or stretches of backwater on the coastline, but these barriers could not hinder the spirit of search that had awakened in him. Unknown to the millions, who only later began to adore him, he passed from one village to another, sleeping at night on a cloth spread on the stone slabs of some wayside rest house, with his stick as his only companion beside him. Other vesper hours found him perchance in a wayside verandah or some forsaken temple-yard where, with the leaves rustling in a gentle evening breeze and sometimes with the moon shining, he spent his night, famished perhaps, fatigued and forlorn, but at least apparently in slumber: in reality inwardly awake with the 'light of the silent tabernacle' of the mind.

It is generally believed that the Guru did the last phase of his penance in a cave in Marutvamalai, which is not far from Kanyakumari. How long he remained in this cave and how he managed to sustain himself physically are all, at best, only guesses today. It is presumed that he had his awakening during his solitary penance in the cave of Marutvamalai. His reference of mystical experiences given in the *Atmopadesa Satakam* must have direct bearing on what he had experienced in Marutvamalai. We quote here two verses from the *Atmopadesa Satakam* translated by Nataraja Guru, which allude to such an experience.





If an arid desert most expansive should become overflowed  
 By river water all at once, such would be the rising symphony  
 Falling into the ears, to open then the eye, do therefore  
 Daily become the best of sages, endowed with self-control  
 Like the dawn all together of ten thousand solar orbs  
 Wisdom's function comes: such verily is that which  
 Tears asunder this wisdom-hiding, transient Maya-darkness here  
 And as the primal Sun prevails.

The great awakening bestowed upon the Guru an all-inclusive vision of unity. A man who is seeing the one Absolute that transcends the phenomenal may feel tempted to withdraw himself from the maddening crowd of humanity into the silence of a cloister. But Narayana Guru experienced the vision of unity in a very different manner. The immanent and all pervading Absolute in its purest aspect is the Blissful Awareness of Eternal Existence. But it very often occurs to us as an ill-fed child, a crying mother, and a downtrodden man of the street or a neglected member of an outcaste society. Paying homage to the Absolute, in such a case, is by relating to such people with tears in the eye and reverence in the heart. For this reason Narayana Guru decided to return to the world from which he had withdrawn to seek the mystery of life. It was not an easy task for him to get adjusted to the conflicting worlds of the numinous beauty inside and the phenomenal ugliness outside. It was not possible for Narayana Guru to return to the society all at once. He therefore chose to live in a thick jungle on the banks of the river Neyyar, a couple of miles away from the township of Neyyattinkara. Like a molten gold in a smith's furnace the Guru's inner psyche was in an ecstatic state of white heat. In his jungle abode he was slowly melting into shape to become a Guru. It was necessary for him to remain undisturbed in the solitude of the forest. The mystical turbulence he had undergone in those wonderful days can be seen reflected in the various hymns he sung in praise of Shiva, Subrahmanya and Devi. We are tempted to quote here some of the very beautiful passages from The Word of the Guru of Nataraja Guru, which throw light on Narayana Guru's mystical experience in those days.

This state of self-absorption increased soon after. Human company of any sort became unbearable to him. When a curious passer-by stood and watched him as he would a curious animal in the zoo (so he himself described it) he would sometimes spring to his feet in resentment and walk off to the neighboring hill-top on the summit of which, on a pile of stones for a seat, he would sit cross-legged, erect and silent, gazing at the vast panorama of hills that was visible from that point of vantage. He sank deeper and deeper into oblivion of the affairs of the world. The mind seemed to feed on itself and reap a strange happiness.

The emotional counterpart of this incessant search was so heavy as to make even a sturdy supporter grown under its trials. The torrential stream on the banks of which he sat was but an objective representation of the state of emotion in his heart. Nothing can describe adequately the trials he underwent. It would be vain to undertake the task.

It was as if he was drunk. The red fire of knowledge was beginning to glow within him. It was as if his feelings were beginning to melt. It was as if the ambrosial essence of his being was beginning to pervade his mental horizon. This emotion made him call upon as his only refuge--God, 'whose tender feet dripped with the honey of compassion.' God was to him the pearl of perfection, the dancing center of his life, the lotus that sprouted in the silence of his heart caught in the center of which, buried among the petals, like a bumble bee having its fill of honey, his soul in the form of a radiant child planting his foot in the center of a glowing radiance, had devoured within his being the light of the sun and the moon. It was as if this radiant form was dancing and swaying at the center of his being,



mounted on the back of a peacock with outspread feathers of green and gold. It was as if a lamp shed its steady light in the silent house of the mind .

It was an experience beyond words; and the volume and force with which images such as these surged up within his mind, richly breaking through barriers of rhyme and metre in some of his prayers written at this period, throw ample light on its nature.

This new experience was not in the nature of an event. It was an experience that changed for him the meaning and import of all events, so called. He waited no more for events that would bring him pleasure or pain. He inwardly smiled at the events that others round him attached so much importance to. The events that disturbed or frightened others round him, making them put on grave faces and speak to one another with hidden hatred seemed to him child's play. Death had lost its bitter meaning to him and the unknown had lost its mystery.

It was as if he had come into possession of a rich heritage. A veritable ball of radiance had come into his possession. Its light seemed to heave, with every breath reaching beyond the bounds of the three worlds. Sounds seemed to fill the sky. The eye was filled with beauty. Music and rhyme burst forth unpremeditated in his voice. Tears of compassion and pity stood ready, at the least little demand, to overflow into action. He became a changed man with a strange silence in his ways, both the subject and the object of utmost compassion.

Undivided and uncramped with trivial events, time to him became richer and richer in inner meaning, while the ponderable aspect of time became of less import. Past,present and future merged into a continuous whole and he forgot weeks and months as they glided freely by without affecting him. The joy of the state into which he had fallen was alluring him deeper and deeper into his own consciousness. Controlling with an iron will the domination of one set of emotions over another, upright as a bolt, established firmly in that kind of reasoning which concerned itself with the most immediate realities of a simplified world, he soon entered into a distinct phase in his life. The hunger of a simple villager who carne to visit him became a matter of greater concern to him than theological disputation or the establishment of a new religion. He began to live in a present which was the result of an endless and pure experience of the past and the most far-reaching expectation of the future. The result was that his duties became clear as daylight to him at every step. Philanthropy became a natural hobby to him. Philosophy gave his actions a detached motive, and poetry gave him the means of natural expression.His life and ambitions were simplified and the foundations of a career of benevolence and prosperity were laid in his personality.

At this time Narayana Guru must have been in his middle thirties. Most probably he might have been 36, When Narayana Guru was undergoing the emotional upheavals of his mystical frenzies a young sannyasin was wandering from Kanyakumari to the north of India. He was none other than Narendranatha Dutt who became famous afterwards as Swami Vivekananda. The rigid caste prejudices and cruel oppression to which the sun-burnt working majority were subjected made Swami Vivekananda write a wrathful letter to a devotee in Calcutta. In that letter he described the princely state of Travancore (now part of kerala) as a lunatic asylum of caste bigotry. When the Swami visited Mysore the Maharaja of Mysore received him with great love and he was introduced to all the important people working under him. Among them was Dr. Palpu from Travancore. Dr. Palpu was the head of the Public Health Department. He was also the durbar Physician. Even though he was the first in his community to go abroad and take a medical degree from England, he was not given a position in the service of the Travancore Government on the plea that such an appointment was against the caste tradition in India, He did not consider it as a personal insult. To him this insult was symbolic of the



injustice shown to the several millions of downtrodden people in India. He disclosed his grief to Swami Vivekananda. The prophetic vision of Swamiji could easily see what was going to happen in the southern regions. He advised the doctor to seek the blessings and guidance of a spiritual Guru hailing from Kerala itself. In the meanwhile something was happening also to the young yogi who was meditating in the jungles of Aruvipuram. A lad of sixteen saw a man sitting on the solitary bank of the river Neyyar. Something in that man had drawn him to the yogi. The yogi requested the lad not to publicize his presence there. However, the boy became a constant visitor to the yogi, and he even brought fruits and boiled tapioca to his Guru. This young man was destined to be the first disciple of Narayana Guru. He became later known as Sivalinga Swami. In spite of the promise of secrecy, news had leaked out to the public and soon there was a flow of people to the hermitage. The Conservator of Forests in that area was very unhappy that he had no children. As was usual they looked upon the newly found yogi as a benevolent siddha who would grant them the boons they wanted. The Conservator of Forests asked his people to clear the jungle and make a footpath to the hermitage of the yogi. As was normal the Guru blessed the man and his wife, and a daughter was born to them. She became afterwards a good legislator and a social worker. Her name was Narayani Amma. More and more devotees gathered for worship and it became necessary to have a temple for the visitors.

#### A stroke of revolution

From Rameswaram to Kailas there are thousands of temples dedicated to Shiva. In most of them the deity installed is sivalinga. But when Narayana Guru picked up a stone from the river Neyyar and installed it on a pedestal with a silent prayer, it made a land-mark in the social and spiritual history of India." This sivalinga is more 'talked about than the sivalinga of Rameswaram installed by Sri Rama himself. It is probable that the caste tradition was not so rigid in the days of Rama so that no Brahmin questioned the right of a Kshatriya to install a sivalinga. Narayana Guru's transgression of the convention which had persisted for over 3000 years was not at all acceptable to the caste-people of India. Not only was the Guru not a Brahmin, he was not even a, shudra. He came from a community which was totally outside the four-fold varnas of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. Like Sankara, he was also a dravilasisu In the words of Nataraja Guru the great event of the installation of the temple took place in this manner:

A group of women and children, more sun-burnt than the rest of the crowd, sat segregated from the others. They were poor peasants, who, after a day's hard work, had come in search of consolation to the festive scene. For ages these poor laborers and their ancestors had tilled the soil for the richer people who took advantage of their goodness. On the basis of their caste, these people had been condemned to age-long suffering, and were segregated and spurned. The Guru's watchful eyes lighted on the group He asked the orators to wait a moment. He asked the crowd if these people should be segregated. Why should they not come and feel equality with the others The Guru arranged that two of the boys from the crowd be brought on the platform, and seated them, after kind questions, One on either side of him. "They are God's children as much as the others", he murmured, and tears of compassion more eloquent than speeches carried home his silent message to, the crowd. Even they who would have growled at such a "departure from tradition, could not resist the winning power of the Guru's eyes. They crouched, innocent of the axe, which the Guru aimed at the dead root of tradition. Statesmanship or subtle diplomacy was employed. It was the simplest manifestation of humanity, welling up in the heart of the Guru that won the case forever. Thus the first victory of the Guru was won. The boys were later admitted, as members of the hermitage; and they and many such, remained near the Guru, wherever he went, until the day of his passing away. While others Spoke and became excited over the past or the future, striving for hours to direct the popular mind, the Guru sat silent,



and acted. His silence, when judged by its effect, marked the high-water mark of oratory. In winding up the proceedings of this memorable day, the Guru had merely a few simple words to say. These he put in the form of a motto, which one of those present proclaimed to the crowd. It read:

Devoid of dividing walls  
 Of caste or race  
 Or hatred of rival faith,  
 We all live here  
 In Brotherhood,  
 Such, know this place to be!  
 This Model Foundation!

Such, then, was the manner and such the character he gave to his work. It soon overflowed the limits of the province and spread its seeds far and wide.

The local enthusiasts formed a committee to manage the temple and there was an arrangement for the gathering of devotees on all nights of the new moon and full moon. When Dr. Palpu visited his parental home in Trivandrum, he came to know of a young yogi called Nanu Guru who was attracting thousands of people to his hermitage. On hearing this he remembered the prediction of Swami Vivekananda that the redemption of the toiling millions of Kerala will come only through a Guru. So he went at once to Sree Narayana Guru. When they saw each other it was like the Ganges coming to the ocean. Dr. Palpu dedicated himself entirely to the cause of the Guru without any reservation. The Guru took up the challenge of redeeming India of the scourge of casteism and untouchability. This led to the formation of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (S. N. D. P.) Yogam.

Publically accepted as a Guru

From 1884 to 1904 Narayana Guru's headquarters was mostly at Aruvipuram. The S. N. D. P. Yogam, founded with the blessings of the Guru, became a powerful mouthpiece of all the socially and economically oppressed people of Travancore. The call for justice and equality made by the Yogam also began to be echoed in other parts of Kerala and Madras State (now Tamilnadu).

Narayana Guru was a parivrajaka and he never stayed in one place for more than a fortnight. Even in those days when there were no roads, he walked on foot to almost every village in Kerala and the then Madras State. This enabled thousands of people to relate to him personally. His ideals and mode of life influenced them. From all the accounts, he roamed about in South India, healing people of their physical and mental maladies and inspiring everyone to live a clean life of love and co-operation. Since those days these accounts have become legendary and therefore it is hard to separate fact from fiction. However, his life had a close resemblance to that of Jesus Christ who wandered in Judea, Jordan, Galilee and Syria healing people and giving sermons. In 1901 the State Census Manual of Travancore recorded Sree Narayana as a Guru and an erudite Sanskrit Scholar. A sharp drop in the statistics of the commission of crime was also alluded to as a result of the correcting and moralizing influence of Narayana Guru on the society.

Affinity with the Tamil culture

Narayana Guru knew Tamil even in his boyhood days. Before going to Marutvimalai and even after settling down in Aruvipuram, he was in close contact with several Tamil scholars and the well known ashrams and adheenams in Tamilnadu. In the ashrams of the Saivites in Karaikudy, Madurai, Kumbhakonam and Tiruchendur the Guru was always received with great honor. The Sannyasins of the Kovilur mutt in Karaikudy even now remember him as a Guru of their spiritual hierarchy.





Narayana Guru was very thorough with , Sivapuranam and all the works of Pattanathu Pillayar, Manicka Vachakar, Appar, Sundaramurti, and Tirujnana Sambantar. He even translated part of Tiruvalluvar's TiruKural, Ramalinga Swamikal, who became very famous in Tamilnadu as an advocate of integral vision (samarasam) and social equality ('samerase suddha sammirga nilai), was like an elder brother to Narayana Guru. Taimanavar's hymns such as Sukhavari must have influenced Narayana Guru's composition of hymns and psams. The Guru was, however, critical of Taimanavar's sentimentalism. Narayana Guru was not in the habit of writing compositions in his own hand. He always sung them for his devotees and only very few of such compositions were recorded by people. Among these are three Tamil works, which have been recovered from the fast disappearing records of those days. One Such work entitled Tevaram has been recently published by Dr. T. Bhaskaran of the Malayalam Department of the Kerala University. To understand · the Malayalam compositions of Narayana Guru, one should have a fairly good familiarity with the myths and legends popularly sung in Tamilnadu and also should know some of the basic terms used by the followers of Saiva Siddhanta and Sivadvaita.

The sanskrit background of the Guru

We have already mentioned that the Guru had a very systematic and very good training in Sanskrit grammar, rhetoric, poetry and Vedanta philosophy. His understanding of other Darsanas was also precise and profound, Unlike the traditional uncritical acceptance by students of the commentaries and notes given by previous Acharyas like Sankara, he was critical. Even though, by and far, he was an Advaitin and a good defender of Sankara, he was very sympathetic in giving his attention to the arguments of Ramanuja and Madhva directed against Sankara. We will have occasion to discuss this in a later chapter where we have to compare Narayana Guru's stand with Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva. The Guru mostly relied on his own experiences, which were in perfect resonance with the original teachings of the Upanishads. Outside the Prasthanatraya the only other books he had accepted were Yoga.Vasistha Ramayana of Valmiki and the Yogasutras of Patanjali. He had, however, his own reservation in accepting all that is given in these works, as the last word on yoga

The Guru at Aruvipuram

Nobody knows when exactly Narayana Guru left his hermitage in the Marutvamalai and came to a forest on the banks of the river Neyyar at Aruvipuram. In those days it was a thick forest full of wild animals and nobody dared to go there. It is possible that he spent a considerable time in a cave on the river bank until he was located by a young lad who was combing the forest in search of his cow that was missing. Although the boy promised the Guru not to tell anyone of his presence there, the news leaked out that a saint was living in the forest, Curiosity was aroused, and soon he became a center of attraction.

Guru and the S.N.D.P. Yogam

The fate of Narayana Guru did not seem to be very fortunate at this time. The historical events of his time to which he gave his sanction and benign blessings are today looked upon as his own historical acts. As a result of such an interpretation the passions and prejudices of his followers have come to cast their shadows on the historical personality of Narayana Guru.

The S.N.D.P. Yogam was founded and registered by a group of enthusiasts headed by Dr. Palpu and Kumaran Asan' According to the biography of Narayana Guru written by Moorkoth Kumaran, the founding of the Yogam was in M. E. 1078 Dhanu 23. Its first General Secretary, Kumaran Asan, read out the constitution and byelaws of the S. N. D. P. Yogam to the Guru. The Guru objected to the definition of the word 'community' (sarnudayarn) that was given in the constitution. It was limited to



those communities known as Ezhava, Thiya, Billava and Nadar. He wanted it to be changed into the community of the human family His follower's thought it was not pragmatically feasible to have such a global basis for their organization. When he saw that they were not prepared to have such a wide vision, after cautioning them of how it would adversely affect their purpose he agreed to give his blessings, probably with the hope that some day they would realize the narrowness of their tribalistic affinity.

The Yogam engaged itself in the laudable efforts of eradicating untouchability and voicing the fundamental human rights of the working class. These efforts actually paved the way for many of Guru's followers to accept later the Marxist interpretation of socialism as their most acceptable ideal. Under the aegis of Dr. Palpu, Kumaran Asan, T. K. Madhavan, C.V. Kunjuraman, Moolur Padmanabha Panickar and others, several drastic changes were brought about in the social structure and texture of the Kerala community The role that Narayana Guru played was only of a catalyst and not as a fighter in the front lines. To others he set an example by his own personal life. His high dignity and sense of oneness with mankind did not allow him to give vent to anger or protestation against any particular person or community. He believed that there was only one caste for man and that was humanity. In this attitude he was uncompromising.

When a place became filled with activities and the concerted action of several people, the Guru always left such a place to the people concerned and went out to look for new avenues and pastures.

Shifting his headquarters to Varkala

In the year 1907 Narayana Guru left Aruvipuram and came to live on a hillock which was not far from the temple of Janardana. Eighteen years after the founding of the S.N.D.P. Yogam in Aruvipuram, Narayana Guru consecrated a temple at Sivagiri and dedicated it to Sarada, the goddess of wisdom Within this period the Guru traveled extensively and founded a number of temples such as in Anjengo and Perungottukara (1904), Trichur (1910), Cannanore (1907), Tellichery (1908), Calicut and Mangalore (1910).

The new headquarters and Sarada Temple founded in 1912 implied in it a secret gesture of the Guru that he wanted a more open place and a fertile field for the incubation of global ideals that are worthy of human wisdom and dignity. He personally administered the center and initiated several spiritual aspirants into the sacred order of sanyasa. A cross section of the Kerala community could be seen among his sanyasin disciples. His first sanyasin-disciple was Sivalinga Swami. He was a Nair. His other well known disciples were Swami Sathyavrata (Nair), Bodhananda (Ezhava), Sree Narayana Chaitanya (Nair), Swami Amritananda (Namboodiri), Swami Govindananda (Ezhava), Swami Dhalma Tearthe (Nair), Swami Ananda Teertha (Shenoy), Swami Sankarananda (Ezhava), Swami Guru Prasad (Thiya), Swami Vidyananda (Ezhava) and Swami Atmananda (Ganeke).

Sanyasins are never considered to belong to any caste or tribe. We have deliberately mentioned here their caste background only to show that the Guru was very eager to have a spiritual fraternity that could transcend the frontiers of caste. The Guru even gave sanyasa to an Englishman by name Earnest Kirk . The Guru advised Kirk to continue in his western mode of clothing and to retain his own Christian name. In the ashram the Guru took young boys from among the so called 'untouchables' particularly from the Pariah and Pulaya communities, and made them chant the Upanishads, offer worship in the temple and cook and serve food to the residents and visitors to the Sivagiri Mutt .

Narayana Guru and temples



Narayana Guru founded a number of temples in Kerala and a few on the West Coast of Karnataka. Some scholars of his time who were influenced by the Brahma Samaj of Swami Dayananda Saraswati even suspected that the Guru was in favor of idolatry. Some others thought of Narayana Guru as Hindu revivalist wanting to protect the masses from being converted into Christians and Muslims. In fact all these are mistaken notions. He was always willing to give his guidance and blessings when people wanted to walk in the right direction. In those days the temples governed by orthodox theocrats were inaccessible to most of the working class people. Even though the temples were barred to the so-called 'low-caste' people, their offerings in money and kind were always accepted. Such shameless exploitation of the poor by their caste-superiors was to be met with in a telling manner. The answer lay in the founding of 'counter temples' which were open to all.

When people rallied round to make new temples, the chief passion that moved them was their thirst for liberty from the chains of social oppression and the enslavement of caste traditions. Narayana Guru was very particular that the new temples he founded were all to be on spots of great scenic beauty. The temple itself should be a work of art. From the first experiment of founding a Shiva temple at Aruvipuram he came to know how temples could become instrumental in changing the life style of people. The regular temple-goers became more and more clean in their habits. The citadels of caste-superiority and domination were in and around the temples of orthodoxy. The secret of the sacredness of temples and the mystery of divinity, screened away from the eyes of all except the privileged classes, were now thrown open to the public by the temples of Narayana Guru. Through a series of installations of differently conceived deities, the Guru also wanted to educate the masses. After installing deities like Shiva and Devi, the Guru made a departure from the tradition by installing in one temple the inscription of certain words pertaining to higher values such as: Satyam, Dharmam, Daya and Santi. Even in Sivagiri Mutt the Guru did not allow such kind of offerings and rituals that would make the premises unclean and unhygienic. At the place called Kalavamkodam near Shertallai instead of installing any deity, the Guru installed a mirror with the inscription on it 'tat tvam asi, (that thou art).

In certain places when people requested the Guru to make a temple for them, he advised them to have a school instead of a temple. Once in Trichur the editor of a progressive journal asked the Guru of his attitude towards temples. The Guru said that a clean temple situated in a hygienic place with good water and fresh air would inspire people to come and spend their time in prayer and meditation. An open place dedicated to God is free of parochial feelings. It can be a good stepping stone for a more serious search into the higher values of life. The editor asked him if it was good to propitiate stone images in reply the Guru said: "When a man goes to a temple, he is only thinking of God and not of stone images. They are confused only if people like you ask them to look for stone images. Nobody worships stone. Pointing to the newly built temple at Trichur, the Guru continued. "Make good gardens around temples, and plant trees around. in every temple there should be a good library and arrangements for teaching the fundamentals of living a virtuous life. A well-conceived temple will be of great help to the public. The Guru knew in his mind that 'the Sivalinga he installed was only a stone. In the tenth Verse of the 'Asatya Darsana' of Darsana Mala the Guru writes:

One (alone) is real, not a second.

What is unreal indeed seems as being real.

The Sivalinga is stone itself

Not a second made by the mason

The Siva in the sivalinga is projected on it by the devotee. The image serves the purpose of the language of iconography.



### Advaita ashram

When Sivagiri became a well-established center, the Guru once again changed his residence. He went further north to Alwaye and founded an ashram' not far from Kalady, the birthplace of Sankara, who was venerated for his non-dual wisdom. As homage to the hallowed memory of Sankara and to proclaim his own stand, the new ashram was founded in 1913. Nataraja Guru in his *The Word of the Guru* gives a very picturesque description of the Advaita-Ashram as it was in the time of Narayana Guru. We quote that section in full length:

The traveler who was animated by a desire to see this leader of one of the modern religious movements in India, would most probably have had to alight, as the present writer once did, at the small railway station called Alwaye, two stations to the north of the terminus of the Cochin State Railway. Alwaye is a small municipal town belonging then to the State Of Travancore. It is associated with the name of the great Indian philosopher, Sankaracharya, who is said to have taken sanyasa, the vow of renunciation in search of wisdom, while bathing in the broad river of crystal water winding its way through the town. If the traveler had directed his footsteps along one of the roads leading to the river-side, he would have come across a stile leading into a compound, which he must cross, keeping his way along the narrow avenue till he reached the bright river-side beyond the trees. He would have found, on turning to the right, a neat little white building strewn round with pure river sand the silence of the place broken only by birds or by the voice of occasional bathers in the river. On one side he would see below him the river boiling over with a thousand whirlpools on its broad breast, the banks overgrown with luxuriant vegetation. If the Guru was in the Ashram (hermitage) he could invariably be found on a little raised seat overlooking the river. As he turned to look at the visitor, the latter would, if he had a keen eye, discover from the expressions of his face that the Guru had just been disturbed from some all-absorbing subject while he sat gazing at the river scene. There could be discovered a peculiar composure in his features revealing a peaceful otherworldly contemplation. He would ask the newcomer who he was, in the most gentle of voices, and treat him, probably, to a meal of fruits and milk. After that, if he conversed, the topic in all probability turned on how human nature must improve; how there is no necessity for man to quarrel with man, as he does at present, on supposed religious, national, or racial distinctions; how, while a cow or a dog may be considered to belong to a different "caste" it is absurd to think that one man differs from another except in trivial things like dress or language; and how it is immaterial, in everyday life, what school of philosophy or what creed a man professed so long as he does not transgress the bounds of common human goodness. Before the newcomer retired from the abode of the Guru leaving him to gaze on the river scene in absorbing meditation, let him walk round the humble hermitage, and he would not have failed to observe the neat little kitchen where a Brahmachari (dedicated student) prepared light food for the Guru, or noted how sparing the Guru's diet was. In the grounds of the hermitage he would have found trees, each one of them receiving its share of the Guru's care. Before leaving the precincts had the visitor cast his glance on the inscription in golden letters on one of the walls of the Ashram, he would have read as follows: 'One in Kind, one in faith, one in God is man, Of one same womb, one same form, difference none there is at all.'

### Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi

It is an irony of history that the man who dedicated his entire life for the cause of abolition of caste is today pinned down to the name of a particular caste group of Kerala as their benefactor; while Mahatma Gandhi, who ardently believed in the four varnas and the merit of occupational distribution implied in the caste system, is now venerated as the foremost champion against casteism and untouchability.





Some followers of Narayana Guru, headed by T. K. Madhavan wanted to include in the policy and program of the Indian National Congress, the abolition of taboos and the shown to people nick-named as 'the untouchables. Mahatma Gandhi was not convinced of Narayana Guru's doctrine of "One Caste, One Religion, and One God." However, Mahatma Gandhi found it was of great political advantage to include the program of abolishing untouchability in the general schedule of the Indian National Congress. Mahatma Gandhi called himself a Vaishnavite and he wanted to see India as a people of Vishnu (Vaishnava Janata). In spite of his love for all and his universal outlook, he hated Hindus embracing Christianity or Islam.

After the inclusion of the abolition of untouchability in the national program of the Congress, T. K. Madhavan and others did not want to wait for the fate of the program to come on its own. They decided to get involved in direct action. Mahatma Gandhi gave his approval too. The venue of the action was Vaikam, and it became famous as the Vaikam Satyagraha. Narayana Guru placed his land at the disposal of the Satyagrahis to make their camp. Other leaders of Kerala who took an active part in the Satyagraha were Manhath Padmanabhan and Changanasseri Parameswaran Pillai.

Even though Narayana Guru gave his full consent and blessings to this agitation, he had his own views of Satyagraha. Afterwards, when Mahatma Gandhi met Narayana Guru at Varkala, the sage of Sabarmati and the Guru of Varkala had an interesting discussion which was of great significance in helping us to know the outlooks of these two great men. When Mahatma Gandhi arrived in Cochin, some Hindu enthusiasts wanted Gandhi to impress upon Narayana Guru the need to stop low caste Hindus from getting converted to Christianity. Mahatma Gandhi presented the subject in a tactful manner to Narayana Guru. He said:

The caste-Hindus and the low caste-Hindus are both the sons of Hinduism. The caste-Hindu is the elder brother who shoulders responsibility, and he therefore exercises certain privileges. The low caste-Hindu is his younger brother who is to be cared for. If the elder brother turns out to be somewhat rough and aggressive that should not make the younger brother a runaway from his mother Hinduism.

Narayana Guru could not agree with the logic of Mahatma Gandhi's suggestion. The Guru said: If a Hindu has no belief in his religion and has belief in another religion, it is good that he embraces the religion in which he believes. Such a conversion will help Hinduism in getting rid of a non-believer, and the religion to which the man gets converted will have the benefit of adding one more believer to it. Moreover the man will be benefited with love and sympathy which he will get from his fellow-believers.

There is nothing wrong in such conversions.

On hearing this Mahatma Gandhi approached the subject from another angle. He said: 'The convert is embracing Christianity not for the spiritual worth of that religion but for the social and economic benefits he gets from that religion.

Narayana Guru agreed to that and he wanted Mahatma Gandhi to understand it as a socio-economic problem, which could be met only by taking adequate measures that, could { give social and economic justice to the aggrieved members of the society. This point went home to Mahatma Gandhi and it was even responsible for making a big change in Gandhi's attitude .towards the entire problem of caste-conflict in India. It was significant that Mahatma Gandhi afterwards changed the name of his paper Navajovan to Harijan and even called himself a Harijan.

The Guru and Rabindranath Tagore

Nationalism is as much a blinding force as tribalism or parochialism. Many of the national leaders of India had saintly qualities and were deeply erudite in their scholarship. But their horizon of interest was confined to the tradition of India or at best to the problems of India. Rabindranath Tagore was an



exception to this. He loved India more as a state of mind than a geographical area of the globe. He kept both his heart and mind open to all traditions and exposed himself to the influence of all religions and races. He lived and thought and envisaged the future of man as a true citizen of the world. His language was more of a poet than of a logician. His mystical insight was deep and profound. In short, in his thoughts, sympathies and visions, he was very close to Narayana Guru, if not identical with the Guru at least in some respects.

When Tagore's Gitanjali was selected for the Nobel Prize, he became the greatest pride of India. Narayana Guru wanted to know more of Tagore. His own disciple, Thampi (afterwards Nataraja Guru), was an ardent admirer of Tagore, and so he brought all the available works of Tagore, and told the Guru the substance of what he read. Narayana Guru appreciated Tagore's visions even in Gitanjali, but he was not in favor of his own disciple imitating the style and diction of Gitanjali. The Guru knew that his century was meant to be an age of analysis and reason. So he advised his disciple Nataraja Guru to be clear and precise in his presentation and substantiate his statements with evidence. Except in the matter of presenting thoughts as riddles, in all respects Narayana Guru considered Tagore as a good model for Thampi.

When Tagore visited South India, he was officially invited to be a guest of honor in the Sivagiri Mutt. Nataraja Guru was specially deputed by Narayana Guru to attend on Tagore. The following is an eyewitness account of the visit given by Nataraja Guru and referred to in his book *The Word of the Guru*:

Once came the poet Rabindranath Tagore, on one of his Southern tours, to visit the Guru. In honor of the great poet of Bengal the people in the vicinity of the hermitage arranged a kingly reception. Elephants were requisitioned. He was to be brought in procession as far as the foot of the hill of the ashram. Musical accompaniments were arranged. The Guru stood in the verandah of his rest-house and himself ordered the best carpets that the hermitage possessed, to be brought out to adorn the foot of the seat of the honored guest. The people thronged with the guest, anxious to hear the conversation between the Guru and the seer of Santiniketan. Each of the crowd thought himself the chosen follower of the Guru, and, as space was limited, it took some time to establish silence for the conversation. The two veteran leaders greeted with joined palms, and sat down facing one another. The seer of Bengal broke the deep silence that marked their meeting, and complimented the Guru, on the 'great work' he was doing for the people. The Guru's reply was not delayed. 'Neither have we done anything in the past nor is it possible to do anything in the future. Powerlessness fills us with sorrow.' His words sounded an enigma to some. Others thought he was just joking. Still others examined the logic of the statement. A characteristic silence followed the remark. The crowd looked at one another for a meaning, but it was the Guru's face itself that gave the silent commentary to the words. Deep silence and earnestness sat on his features. Smiles of curiosity and the rival expectations of the people were drowned into the neutral depths of silence by the suggestion that was expressed on the features of the Guru. All was silent for a minute or two. The climax of the interview was reached in silence where all met in equality. Usual conversation followed and the poet and the crowd retired.

Narayana Guru's contribution to philosophy

The works of Narayana Guru can be classified mainly into four divisions:

1. Mystical or devotional
2. Metaphysical
3. Socio-ethical
4. Aesthetic.

Although all the hymns and praises are essentially devotional and permeated with mystical effusions,



some of them contain fundamentals of epistemology and hence can be included in his metaphysical works. Indian aesthetics has its heart in devotion. All works of Narayana Guru except, perhaps, Darsna Mala, Arivu, Jati-Mimamsa and Jati-Nirmaya have great aesthetic content. The Guru's deducement of ethical norms is based on his philosophical visions and metaphysical conclusions. As a result, when we study any of the aforesaid aspects, we have to look into all his works. As we intend to elaborate on this point in the next section we do not want to say anything about his major works at the moment. A general classification only is noted above.

#### The World religions conference

In 1893 the first Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago. This was attended to by Mazoomdar of the Brahma Samaj, Nagacker of Bombay, Gandhi representing the Jains, Chakravarti and Mrs. Annie Bessant representing Theosophy. At the last moment Swami Vivekananda was also included in the list of the delegates from India. The very first speech of Swami Vivekananda in the Parliament of Religions opened up the possibility of a meaningful dialogue between the East and the West, and his persuasive logic was effective to make cracks in the walls of exclusiveness which kept one religion separated from another.

Thirty years after this epoch-making gathering of the world community in Chicago, Narayana Guru organized an 'All Religions' Conference' in Alwaye. This was the first of its kind in India. The Guru's dream of the people of all the races and religions coming together to share the light of love and spiritual insight had thus become a reality. Though the conference did not catch world attention like the Parliament of Religions, it turned out to be a great seed of unity sown in the right soil at the right time.

#### The past and the present

India's spiritual and cultural roots are deeply buried in the Sanskrit lore of ancient India. The history of India has been fated such that her articulation to the outside world be in English. Narayana Guru wanted the Indian people to be nourished by their tradition and to be active in their relations with the wider world outside using the medium of English. As an expression of his ideal of India's future education, he founded a Sanskrit school in Alwaye and also an English school in Varkala. The Guru's ideal of education was not lopsided. The discipline of the mind and the enlightenment of the soul should not be used as an excuse to neglect the developments of one's creative skills. As a gesture of this ideal he also founded an industrial school as an annex to the Sivagiri Mutt In short an archetype of the India of tomorrow was presented to his followers before he entered into the last phase of his life.

#### Shree Narayana Dharma Sangham

Narayana Guru was not very happy with the way in which his disciples were conducting their life-mission. He would not accept anything less than a world community of the human family. He hated the very idea of caste and man's adherence to such a totally irrational social prejudice and psychic coloration. So he decided to trust the materialization of his teaching in the hands of his sannyasin disciples who had come from all classes and communities, which included even westerners. This newly organized institution of sannyasins was called Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham. The sangham was registered in Trichur in the year 1926. After the registration of the Dharma Sangham, the Guru instituted a will and testament by which all the ashrams and mutts and temples founded by him were transferred to the care, custody and administration of the Dharma Sangham. The Guru nominated Swami Bodhananda to be his successor and Nataraja Guru to be the adviser of the Dharma Sangham.

#### Narayana Guru's four fold influence

To understand Narayana Guru's contributions, both historical and perennial, we have to mention here



the names of at least four of his foremost followers. Each one of them was so very different from the other, and yet what the Guru made to manifest through them complemented each other to make a lasting contribution.

#### T. K. Madhavan

There is an old proverb, which says that no prophet is honored in his own country. Narayana Guru was an exception. He was loved and venerated by all those who knew him as a god walking on the earth. Many came forward to be his lieutenants. Concerted action can be done only through organized effort. Narayana Guru found in the person of T. K. Madhavan an untiring soldier and an intelligent organizer who knew all strategies and devices useful in the fight for his cause. It is easier to work from where one stands before spreading the word the world over. The Guru's followers lacked the insight of an all-embracing philosopher and a universal lover. As in the case of the Guru, they had native common sense and great courage to face all issues squarely on a combat basis. The slogan that was raised by T.K. Madhavan, of course in the name of the Guru, was 'Organize and be strong'. He was responsible for building up strong unions of fighting people in southern Kerala to liberate the socially and economically oppressed people from the age-old machinery of tyranny. Nobody will dispute the fact that T.K. Madhavan was the prime mover of the political conscience of Kerala to enter the arena of revolt and mass action. If today Kerala is in the forefront of politically awakened India, we can trace the history of it to T.K. Madhavan and his loyalty to his master from whom he drew his inspiration and guidance. A political action, however profound and significant, will lose its impetus and will be forgotten in the course of time. However, this aspect of the Guru's influence cannot be belittled.

#### K. Ayyappan

Ayyappan came to Narayana Guru as a teenager. The Guru was very much impressed with the clarity of his logic and the unflinching courage he showed in carrying out his convictions. The disciples of Socrates were not all alike, and therefore he had a different message to each one. This was true in the case of Narayana Guru too. Ayyappan was a pronounced atheist, and he believed only in the light of reason. The Guru found in him a good reformist and an educator to eradicate from the public mind caste prejudices and religious superstitions. The task entrusted to him was a Herculean one. Ayyappan had to face the direct wrath of the religious, social and political custodians of vested interests. Though he did not believe in God, he believed in the Guru more than anyone else. Even though he believed in the infallibility of reason, he was willing to place the Guru's reason always above his own. Ayyappan was responsible for turning many youngsters of his time from the path of easy acceptance and cowardice to one of valiant resistance and non-conformity. His work fully complemented the work of his comrade T. K. Madhavan. His watchword, 'educate and be free' had the blessings of Narayana Guru. The new soul of Kerala has in its cerebration the thought-waves of K.Ayyappan. A number of progressive thinkers like M.C. Joseph, Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai, V. T. Bhattathirippad and Kesava Dev were in the camp and the campaigns of Ayyappan.

#### Mahakavi Kumaran Asan

Coming into the more perennial contribution of the Guru, we should try to understand what he made to manifest through his disciple, Mahakavi Kumaran Asan who was to him a mind-born son. The charm of good poetry never dies. Some of the outstanding words of truth are sung as imperishable poetry such as we see in the Rig Veda, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana; the Psalms of the Bible and the Holy Quran. All the finest feelings of Narayana Guru and what he mooted as the aspiration of the people of all time was sympathetically echoed in language of exquisite beauty by Kumaran Asan through his poems. The Guru did not make him a puppet or an instrument of propagation. He had





blessed the poet to grow into his own full stature both as a poet and as a person. Kumaran Asan is undoubtedly respected today as the father of the renaissance in Malayalam literature. In all his poems, we can hear the unerring commentary of Narayana Guru's silent word. Kumaran Asan's Chandla Bhikshuki and Duravastha are poetic expositions of Narayana Guru's teachings of social justice.

#### Followers

Today, Narayana Guru is understood, believed and followed different people in different ways. There is only little agreement between the representatives of the major groups and organizations that have taken upon themselves the responsibility of spreading the word of the Guru.

Close at home, Narayana Guru's name is rightly and wrongly associated with the S.N.D.P. Yogam. From the very name, it is easy to see that the founders of the organization derived their inspiration from Narayana Guru and wanted to foster his teachings as something similar to the dharma of the Buddha. In the course of three-fourths of a century, the Yogam has gone in a tangent that is now considered by many people as an unfortunate deviation to exclusive communalism, the very rancor that the Guru wanted to cure the people of. In the fifties, when the public lost all their faith in the leadership of the Yogam, its enthusiastic General Secretary Mr. R. Sankar, tried to infuse new blood into it by making the Yogam an advocate for literacy and service to the ailing masses. With this intention, he started the Sree Narayana Trust. The Trust was successful in founding a number of educational institutions like schools, arts and science colleges and institutes of technology. Now there are a number of leading colleges of the Kerala University, Cochin University and Calicut University which are ably managed by the S.N. Trust. Afterwards, Mr. Sankar was directly and indirectly responsible for founding hospitals with all modern equipments for surgery and nursing, in a number of places. But for these colleges and hospitals, many people who were socially and economically handicapped, would have had to live in misery, resigned to their fate.

Sivagiri was the headquarters of Narayana Guru and it is also in Sivagiri that his mortal coil rests. The sannyasin's order that was founded by the Guru himself manages the affairs of the Sarada Temple and the Brahmavidyalaya of the Sivagiri Mutt. The last hierarchical head, Mahadhipati, was Swami Sankarananda. During his lifetime, the Kerala High Court ordered that a trust be constituted to manage Sivagiri Mutt and all the ashrams and temples managed by the Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham. That trust has given away the office of the Madhadhipati. The sannyasins now elect one among them as a president for a term of five years.

For political purposes, India was divided into linguistic regions. The language barrier is a big handicap for the dissemination of culture. Only the followers of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Dayananda Saraswati succeeded in effectively breaking that barrier and bringing the ideas of their Gurus to all people all over India. The Sree Narayana Cultural Mission, a movement started recently under the leadership of Mr. K.K. .Viswanathanis trying to disseminate the teachings of the Guru on a national basis.

The only organization that works as an international movement is the Narayana Gurukula founded by Nataraja Guru, a direct disciple and spiritual successor of Narayana Guru. The Gurukula has expanded its function by founding the East-West University a unique educational movement, which is very much more a university of the people anywhere than one managed by a group of people somewhere. The present head of this Gurukula is Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati. The main Gurukula centers are in India, Singapore, Malaysia, Fiji, Australia, Europe and America.

Another powerful expression of Narayana Guru's call for one world came through the sacrifices of the world citizen, Garry Davis. The World Service Authority and the World Government for World Citizens, now having bases in Washington, London, Paris and Basel, are gaining momentum as a refuge for the stateless people of the world.



### Maha Samadhi

We think, it will be appropriate if we close this section on the Guru's biography with a touching account of the last days of the Guru given in The Word of the Guru.

As the image of Jesus carrying his cross has served as a symbol of his love and service to humanity; so also great masters make even their sickness and suffering serviceable to their fellow-beings. The life of the Guru was in every detail of it an example of the principle, which he enunciated as follows:

Act that one performs

For one's own sake,

Should also aim the good

Of other men.

In fact this maxim may be said to form the keystone of his whole life. By apparently trying to be selfish he on many an occasion impressed a useful principle or habit on the many who came in contact with him. He would insist that the barber who shaved him had the sharpest razor, and would see that the best methods were used in the art. He would complain of his chauffeur who did not gently put on his brakes when he came to an uneven part of the road. He would teach him to be proud of his car, and find fault with him if he had omitted to observe a new kind of car in which a visitor had come to see the Guru. He would say that he preferred a garland of gold to one of roses if, while on a tour, people greeted him with empty applause and theoretical loyalty and devotion. He would insist on good cooking more with a view to reforming the food habits than for his own sake. He would insist on small details in building, and order an alteration in spite of expense, in order to set a better example in architecture. He would like to hear music in order that he could patronize musicians. Himself an adept in the art of healing, he missed no opportunities, whenever he was ill, to call together a little group of medical men of different schools of medicine in order to discuss with them the various bearings of the case and make them discuss the details. In the system of medicine called the Ayurveda, which is the ancient Sanskrit system, there lay, buried and forgotten, gems of ancient experience which he found valuable to unearth and apply, suffering himself to be the subject of the experiment.

His last illness was rich in such opportunities. He would find some point in which one system failed and in which someone else knew better. Suffering and bedridden as he was, he would argue the minutest details with his doctors and those who attended on him. He went to Palghat and traveled about four hundred miles north-east to Madras, carried in stretchers and transported from place to place, from one doctor to another, from the care of one devotee, who loved to keep him under his care, to another.

Then he came back to Travancore from where a strong deputation had arrived to take him to Varkala. One of the stations on the way was Alwaye where on the platform were gathered all the students, young and old, of the Sanskrit school and the Ashram for which he had given long labors. The coming event was still unknown to them but a deep emotion at the illness of the Guru sat on the features of each one.

He arrived at Varkala. Others of a different school demonstrated some of the symptoms of the illness, which the experts of one school of medicine had declared incurable, to be curable. For some time the Guru seemed quite well. The radiant glow on his features had never disappeared. He still retained his good humor and although he was weak in body, he never yielded or compromised except where it was necessary. He guided the deliberations regarding his property and legal affairs with a perfect sense of justice and awareness of all shades of opinion. He regained a stage in which he took little walks on his own and, though highly emaciated, was still the same alert, radiant and kind Guru. It was in this condition that the present writer left him on his voyage to Europe.

A select group of friends, representatives of different nations and religions celebrated the 73rd birthday on September, 1928, in the beautiful city of Geneva. For the first time the Guru's message was proclaimed in the West. Strangers, united in worship, feasted together and discussed informally the significance of the ideals of universal appeal which the Guru's life had symbolized.



On the 20th September, 1928, about a week after this event, the Guru entered Maha-Samadhi or the Great Silence, peacefully and silently at Varkala. In one of his last writings he wrote:

That dispenser of mercy could  
 he not be that reality.  
 That proclaiming words of supreme  
 import the chariot drives.  
 Or compassion's ocean ever impatient  
 for all creation,  
 Or who in terms clear non-dual wisdom  
 expounds, the Guru.

#### Nataraja Guru

The youngest of his disciples in whom Narayana Guru showed much personal interest was Natarajan (afterwards Nataraja Guru), the second son of Dr. Palpu. When this son of Dr. Palpu was born, the Guru himself named him as Natarajan, and the Doctor promised the Guru to give his son for Guru's cause. Narayana Guru found in this boy even from the age of twelve, a disciple as dedicated and firm as was St. Peter to Jesus Christ. On hearing the news that Natarajan passed his Master's Degree in Zoology and also simultaneously got his Teacher's Degree, Narayana Guru welcomed him to join him as a member of the ashram in Sivagiri. For a short while he taught in the Advaita Ashrams in Alwaye as an English teacher. Thereafter, the Guru made him the headmaster of the Sivagiri school.

In 1923 with the blessing of Narayana Guru, he started the Narayana Gurukula Movement. In 1928 Narayana Guru sent his beloved disciple for a final finishing course at the Sorbonne, in Paris. The future Nataraja Guru received his Doctorate of Letters from the Sorbonne on presenting a thesis on "The Personal Factor in the Educative Process." Subsequently he joined the Fellowship School in Geneva and taught there as a physics teacher for five years,

While Nataraja Guru was in Geneva he wrote a series of articles in the Sufi Quarterly. This caught the attention of eminent western thinkers such as Romain Rolland, Sir Francis Young Husband and Sommersmet Maugham. Afterwards Nataraja Guru established fifteen Centers of the Narayana Gurukula in India and also centers in New Jersey (U.S.A.), Ghent (Belgium), Geneva (Switzerland), and Singapore in South East Asia.

In his well known book *The Word of The Guru* there is a short biography of Narayana Guru, throwing light on the Guru's teachings. Nataraja Guru also commented on Narayana Guru's *Atmoapadesa Satakam* (One Hundred Verses of Self. Instruction). Nataraja Guru's interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita* also throws light on Narayana Guru's attitude towards the *Gita*. *Daiva-Dasakam*, *Advaita-Dipika*, *Janan-Navaratna Manjarl*, *Jivakarunya Panchakam*, *Anukampa-Dasakam*, *Pinda-Nandi*, *Chijia.da-Chintanam*, *Kundalini- Pattu*, *Brahmavidya-Panchakarn*, *Municharya-Panchakam*, *Kali. Natakam*, *Jati-Mimamsa*, *Siva-Prasida Panchakam*, *Arivu*, *Nirvrti-Panchakam*, *Darsana-Msla*, *Agni Hotra*, *Anubhut Dasakam* and *Prapancha-Suddhi Dasakam* were all translated into English by Nataraja Guru. His magnum opus is an exhaustive commentary on the *Darsana Mala*. It is called *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*.