

Nation Building and Social Harmony The Legacy of Sree Narayana Guru

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The Legacy of Sree Narayana Guru
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K. Jayaprasad
Editor



**Mahatma Ayyankali Centre for Kerala Studies,
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Social and Political Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru

Udayakumar Manoharan

It would not be improper to state that the pursuit of philosophy attempts, in a rather *secular* fashion, to grapple with the world. Philosophical discourses are, therefore, essentially attempts to make sense of the pressing problems that humanity is facing at all given points in time. On the contrary, theology engages in reasoning about God. References to worldly affairs in theological discourses are, therefore, essentially of anecdotal significance, because they are merely demonstrable examples for ascertaining the existence of *the Being* that is believed to have created the universe. Philosophical exercises are made mainly in four different ways. Real life events are sometimes explained in terms of a metaphysical substrate, and at another time, it delves into the source, validity and tenability of human knowledge or the pursuit of philosophy explores the ethical or perhaps it seems to address the questions concerning aesthetic encounters. These two enterprises namely theology and philosophy are essentially Western in origin. But, in the history of human consciousness, there is yet a third category that belongs to the Eastern part of the world, which is called *darshan*. A possible equivalent of it is 'vision'. *Darshan* is neither philosophy nor theology; it is rather a descriptive account of the invisible dimensions of the visible effects of reality. The philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru in fact belongs to this Eastern tradition of *darshan*, which is not easily amena-

ble to be translated into the parlance of Western philosophy; because it does not mean speculative reasoning about the nature of existence; rather it implies that one comes to notice and realise something which is *already* there that hitherto remained as a submerged facet of reality. This attempt to demonstrate the deeper dimensions of reality is carried out not as a logical exercise, but by enhancing one's capability and perception through yogic practises and meditation. Nevertheless, for want of other terms, Narayana Guru's writing is here designated as philosophy for the purpose of this paper.

Framework and Approach

A particular approach has been adapted to studying the contributions of Narayana Guru. That is by making a conceptual distinction between the 'figurative' and the 'discursive'. The 'figurative' implies the whole sequence of historical interventions, as it actually happened in the history of Kerala, by Narayana Guru and their eventual significance. By the 'discursive' it is meant that the whole body of writings that he produced and the discourses that incited to. Since the attempt here essentially focuses on the *philosophical* aspects of his social interventions, the emphasis is on his writings only! How, then, can one possibly derive the social and political philosophy out of such a complex body of work by Narayana Guru? This exactly is the central question concerning his political philosophy. Such an attempt has to necessarily understand and elucidate Narayana Guru's conception of the 'Self' as it appears in *Atmopadesha Shatakam*¹ (*One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction*). This work is rather a meditative procedure for growing into the complete realisation of the true nature of oneself. Looking at through the prism of social sciences, the work implicitly offers an understanding of the basic constituent of the 'human social world': that is the 'individual human being'. Of all the hundred verses, two important ones in this respect are looked at for the purpose of this paper. Apart from that, one important verse from *Daivdashakam* (*Ten Verses on God*)² is also