

CHAPTER – II

**Joti Rao Phooley,
Sree Narayana Guru**



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JOTI RAO PHOOLEY (1827-1890) and Sree NARAYANAGURU (1856 - 1928)

In the reformation activities two eminent persons who did considerably great work in the field of social reform in the south were – Joti Rao phooley in Maharastra and Narayana Guru in Kerla. Both of them brought great changes in their areas and they were in a way the harbingers of a new transformed societies.

Joti Rao Phooley:-

Joti Rao was born in the 1827. as the younger son of Govinda Rao who was a flower vendor in Poona. His origins are thus humble and all through his life he struggled hard for the amelioration of the depressed classes and for the welfare of women.

Jotirao was the first Indian to start a school for the untouchables and a girls school in Maharastra.¹ He wanted to remove the ignorance and superstition of the Shudras, Atishudras and Indian women and to break the shackles of their slavery. So he heroically threw open the gates of knowledge to the lower classes and to Indian women. It was his aim to reconstruct the social order on the basis of social equality, justice and reason.

Jotiro naturally had to face opposition and also indifference at the hands of the Maharastrian writers and authors of his day who were mainly Brahmins. The prejudices of this adversaries who came from the Brahmin caste were so intense and the boycott of his name by them so complete that even those who carried on his battle for social justice, for educational opportunities and for removal of ignorance and superstition. Could not come forward to work on a biography of jotirao.

¹ He started the first school for girls in the year 1848 August



Jotirao's attack on Brahminism was unmistakable. The Hinduism of his day had decayed and deteriorated into Brahminism which, according to him, bred social inequality and resulted into privileges and power for and defecation of the Brahmins as a class. He realized that the seeds of their power, supremacy and privileges lay in their scriptures and puranas; and these works and the caste system were created to exploit the lower classes.

It is not Jotirao alone who said that Brahmanical scriptures were written to exploit the lower classes. A few years after Jotirao's death, Swami Vivekanand, giving his verdict on them, expressed the same view. The Swami said that whenever the Brahmins wrote anything they would deny all rights to others and he added that Vyasa tried to put meanings upon the Vedas to cheat the poor Shudras.²

So Jotirao attacked the Brahmanical scriptures and puranas, revolted against priestcraft and the caste system and set on foot a social movement for the liberation of the Shudras, Atishudras (Untouchables) and women. He was above caste. He agitated for the welfare of the Indian peasants and labour and it should be noted that the Indian peasants and labour Movement is an offshoot of his social movement. His sympathies were broader and were not confined to the labour classes. He started girls schools for the benefit of all classes, championed the cause of widow remarriage, conducted an orphanage and praised the work of those Brahmins who stood for social justice and reason.

2. The complete works of Swami Vivekananda Mayavati Memorial Edition, Vol IV (1948), P.305.



In short, Jotirao stood for the dignity of man, religious toleration and human rights. He regarded all Indians as equal and free and declared that one law should be applicable to man and woman.

Fuss should not be made about Jotirao's attack on the Congress of his day. The earlier leaders of the Indian National Congress openly said that they wished to make British rule permanent in India. On the contrary, Jotirao, who had opposed the Poona Municipality spending money on the decoration of the city and on the address to be given to a British Governor-General on the occasion of his visit, believed that British rule would some day end. He had nothing to do with the Congress leaders of his day who did not care to associate themselves with the peasants, labour and Untouchables. A patriot of humanity, he was not prepared to regard those leaders as patriots who did not respect human dignity and the human rights of their countrymen. So high was the level of his patriotism.

Jotirao's life is thus an inspiration to those who really aim at achieving emotional integration and at giving a human, social and economic content to the Swaraj of India.

Noble Socrates was given poison and driven to death by hatred. Yet he lost no peace of mind. Look into his works. Those who live with reason and truth for the welfare of the world make posterity and themselves happy. Vedantists should not tolerate discriminations and prejudice. A rationalist will not take to religious practices and mutterings of *mantras*. That dedication is fruitless. A rationalist will not tonsure poor widows and will not worship stones and metals and trees.



Jotirao is a better poet than prose writer. His poems have a good flow. His prose is a wild fruit. It is not sweet but has medicinal properties. The prose is rough, at times suffers from grammatical errors and is occasionally obscene. Jotirao's poems reveal his wisdom and humanism.

Jotirao wrote a book called *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustaka* which was posthumously published. *It is book on religion.*

In the preface dated April 1, 1889, to the book, which Jotirao has written for the benefit of all, he says that the Almighty has created numerous solar systems with stars and planets and various creatures. He has written this book to teach how men and women should follow the right path and live peacefully for the glory of God and the happiness of humanity, keeping in mind the Almighty, and enjoying the fruit of the holy and veracious kingdom of God.

Although Jotirao revolted against the Brahminical scriptures, he stuck to the main theme in Hindu philosophy that insists on the kingdom of God and not on the establishment of an earthly empire.

Almost all leaders of the *Satya-Shodhak Samaj* have on several occasions accepted the fact that jotirao had abandoned Hindu superstitions and customs, rigid and irrational rites, rituals, dogmas and ceremonies, and simplified the other forms of Hindu ritual.

Joti rao worked and lived for the people. He taught people to think over religious rites and their origins, and he interpreted to them their correctness or falsehood as the case might be. He refuted idolatry and upheld belief in one God. He believed that people should not be exploited in matters of religion and in the practical world.



In the *Sarvajanik Satya-Dharma Pustaka* Jotirao further observe: "All religious works are written by men and they do not contain truth from beginning to end. Changes were made by certain obstinate men in these books to suit certain occasions and the requirements of the times. So religions have not become equally helpful to all; and they give rise to divisions and cults full of hatred and envy.

God created all things. He is kind and desires that all should enjoy human rights. If the earth we inhabit is created by God why should the peoples of different countries, be torn asunderwhen there are so many rivers in different countries how can a particular river in a particular country become the most sacred? That most sacred river does not hesitate to carry with its water the droppings of dogs: All men possess the same kind of features and intellect. Nobody is sacred by birth. Everybody has his virtues and vices as a human being.

Joti rao says offering food to God, is not the proper way of honouring him. Those men of the society who serve the people and by chance become helpless in old age, should be supported, and the orphans and crippled children should be maintained. The man whose conduct does not show discrimination, and who loves and serves all irrespective of caste or creed, be he a Brahmin, or a Red Indian or Mahar, he should be entertained at dinner.³

There is no such thing as heaven. It is no part of the universe. Woman is superior to man. One can repay the gratitude of all persons except the mother. She is the beauty of the home; she is the kind eye that guards all.

3. Mahatma Joti rao pooley (Father of the Indian social revolution) Dhananjay Kheer. P.253, Bombay. Popular Prakashan 1964.



Woman is by nature weak. Man is greedy and bold. So he bent her to his will and kept her under his domination very selfishly by preventing her from acquiring worldly knowledge. Polygamy is cruel. Man is the source of greed, hatred and sin.

There should not be discrimination between laws for men and women. One law should be applicable to both. A man is allowed to marry three women, but a woman marrying three persons is not tolerated. So a man must not be allowed to marry more than one woman if his wife is alive. Greedy men have adopted these selfish laws. There should not be one law for the Brahmins and another for the Shudras. British rule has introduced laws before which every man, Brahmin or non-Brahmin, is equal.

Those who believe that man and woman are born free and they have all rights to enjoyment are followers of truth. Those who do not worship stars and stones but the God of the Universe are followers of truth. Those who, instead of dedicating things to God with the false notion of propitiating him, do not prevent human beings from enjoying things created in the world and who allow others to sing the glory of God, are followers of Truth. Those who do not hurt causelessly any creature in the world are followers of Truth. Those who do not individually or unitedly make aggression on others are followers of truth. God has given us freedom and religion. Those who do not deprive others of their rights or put others to a loss are followers of Truth. Those who regard excepting their wives, all other men and women as their brothers and sisters, are followers of truth. Every man or woman has a God-given right to freedom of expression in writing, speaking and publishing; he or she should not do it in such a way as to deprive others of their rights. Then alone they are followers of truth. Those who do not condemn others for their political views or religious beliefs and do not harass them are followers of truth.



Those who protect the rights of all men and women to property and freedom, and protect them from harassment are followers of truth. Those who do not take wine and opium or those who do not help such drunkards are followers of Truth. Those who do not kill beings except bugs, lice, scorpions, serpents, jackals, lions and tigers, and do not help greedy persons and murderers or suicides are followers of truth.

Those teachers who do not show partiality in teaching their pupils on account of casteist prejudices or those who condemn men who do so, are followers of truth. Those who are impartial in dispensing justice are followers of truth.

Those who help the men suffering from dangerous disease, or orphans or crippled or respect them who do so are men of right conduct. The religious books which are prepared by great men for the use of the common man contain some truth. If in a family a woman on reading Buddhism follows Buddhism, her husband on reading the Bible follows Christianity and her daughter follows Islam if she has read the Koran, or if the son is a Satya-Shodhak Samajian, they should not hate each other's faith. They should consider themselves as belonging to God's family and as children of one God.

Astrology has nothing to do with the future of a man. The birth of daughter should be as pleasing to man as the birth of a son. The function of naming the male child should be performed on the 12th day and in case of a female child should be performed on the 13th day. A child should be given milk at the breast of the mother for the first six months if possible. The mother should teach the child gradually.

Marriage should be settled by a girl or a boy in consultation with their elders. The boy and the girl should give proper thought to the matter. They should take a vow just after the marriage. They should give gifts to poor men irrespective of caste or creed.



Those who have lived virtuously and unselfishly die a peaceful death. They have no terrors of anything. While on the death bed one should call his relatives and friends, advise them to follow the path of truth, and then bid them farewell:

Oh God! You gave me conscience and reason. I lived a truthful life in the world in obedience to your will receive my relatives and others also for their having lived a truthful life. Let your kingdom of truth prevail. Thus one should pray.

Thus filled with a heroic ethical purpose, Joti rao's ethico – religious personality stands on a high spiritual plane. By his emphasis on Truth, equality and Humanism, Mahatma Phoolley occupies a place in the pantheon of great thinkers and sages of India.



Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928):-

Another great social reformer of this period was Sri Narayanaguru of Kerala who has transformed the lives of many depressed classes in Kerala.

About Sri Narayana Guru, Rabindranath Tagore said “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 (great saints). 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 a par with him in spiritual attainments.

I am sure I shall never forget that radiant face, illuminated by self-efulgent light of divine glory and those yogic eyes fixing their gaze on a remote point on the distant horizon.”

That was the impression which Tagore gathered when he met the Guru in 1922.

Romain Rolland the famous French thinker sums up his observations by recording.

“The great Guru Sree Narayana’s teaching was permeated with the philosophy of Sanakara He was, one might say, Jnanin (one who has knowledge of self) in action, a grand religious intellectual, who had a living sense of the people and of social necessities. He has contributed greatly to the elevation of the oppressed classes (there were two million of them) in south India, and his work had been associated at certain times with that of Gandhi.”



Gandhi always referred to the Guru as his Holiness Sree Narayana Guru and accepted the Guru's points of view while intensifying Harijan uplift activities.

Today, Sree Narayana Guru's life, his message and his activities have urgent and specific relevance to India in particular and the world at large in general.

The Guru was an Adwaitin (believer in non-dualism) in the sense in which Sankara acharya was, but with a difference. In his sixteen years of preaching Adwalta (non-dualism) philosophy and establishing it as the sublime contribution of India to the world of metaphysical thought, the Acharya had created an elite who were to carry on his tradition. The Guru carries on the tradition, but in doing so extends it so as to become a Jnanin (follower of the path of knowledge of self) in action incarnated for the benefit of the suffering multitudes.

Within a period of less than half a century, he had transformed the depressed castes of Kerala from dust into men who could stand on their own legs as self-respecting human beings. Thanks to his activities, they could walk on the public roads with complete freedom. The roads around temples were thrown open to them in 1925 and the temple authorities were forbidden by law in 1936 to refuse entry to the untouchables into the temples, years before anything like it happened in other parts of India.

All roads lead to the same summit, so say the Adwaitins. The guru added a practical rider to it, saying that each man has to start the journey from the point at which he finds himself. The longest journey, says a Chinese proverb, starts with the first step. He began with that first step and lighted the way for his followers along the entire journey, by message, by reform of social customs, by provision of different types of

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houses of worship and. Above all, by metaphysical writing shorn of all irrelevant embellishments.⁴

Wherever there are down-trodden, underprivileged groups in the world, message of Sree Narayana Garu. “Educate that you may be free; organize that you may be strong; industrialise that your financial status may improve⁵ – “has relevance at all times.

All these programmes have however, to be based on deep religious faith that the supreme ONE alone exists and all that we see are only its variegated manifestations. Every man’s face is different from that of every other man and yet no one ever doubts that we are all human beings and therefore sons of the same Father in heaven.

The adwaita Philosophy of the Guru will prevent mutual cooperation and professions of oneness from deteriorating into a carnal philosophy of human pragmatism.

The message of ‘One caste, one religion, one God for man should not have a commercial mentality behind it, if the United Nations Organisation and other world bodies are to succeed in their mission. Sree Narayana Guru’s message has a universal significance and relevance for all times.

4 Sree Narayana guru , Murkot Kunhappa, published by National book trust, New Delhi printed at kay kay printers, kamala Nagar Delhi, Year, 1982.p.vii

5. Ibid



Birth and Childhood:-

Sree Narayana garu was born in A.D. 1856 in Chembazanthi a quiet little town, about 12 kilometers north of Trivandrum, the capital of the then Indian native state of Travancore. Trivandrum is today the capital of Kerala, one of the most fascinating States of India, nestling in the south west corner, with the western Ghats in the east and the Arabian Sea on the west forming its main borders.

There are two communities in Kerala known generally as Nairs and Ezhavas, who form the largest castes in that states. Nairs were Sudras belonging to the hierarchy of the Varna (Caste) system and so were counted among the cluster of the higher castes known as Savarnas (those having caste). The Ezhavas were an unapproachable caste belonging to the group of castes outside the Varna system and were, therefore, avarnas (outcasts, those not in the caste purview). Sree Narayana Guru was born an Ezhava.

Contact with Ezhavas at a distance of 12 feet was supposed to pollute the Savarnas this pollution distance increasing as one went up the scale of castes until at last the Ezhava polluted the Brahmin at a distance of 32 feet. At the same time, there used to be a number of castes below the Ezhava, one below the other, who polluted each other in various ways at varying distances. The maltreatment which these Avarnas had to suffer was so horrible and meaningless that Swami Vivekananda characterized Kerala as the 'lunatic asylum of India'.

Untouchable, may even unapproachable and down – trodden, as the Ezhavas happened to be, there were even in those dark days a fair sprinkling of vaidyas or physicians among them practicing the Ayurvedic system, whose texts were in classical Sanskrit. Naturally, therefore, there were Sanskrit scholars of high caliber among them.



In fact, the entire landscape of Kerala is peppered with Ezhava Vaidyas (physicians) and Sanskrit scholars so much so too, survived among the masses in Kerala due to the Ezhava Vaidyas. Of course, the Namboodiri Brahmins were the repositories of Sanskrit and sastras like Ayurveda. But they were inaccessible to the ordinary run of men and their number was small.

Sree Narayana Guru provided guidelines on religion to the people at large-people who had to live an active rather than a contemplative life. He wanted them to understand that religion was not a mere formula or a set of rites and ceremonies, but a way of life. It permeated all life and was devoid of differences between the sacred and the profane.

Adwaita philosophy becomes pointless unless it teaches men to treat their followmen as equals. In Kerala, the greatest impediment to such conduct was the abominable caste system. Naturally, therefore, the Guru's message of universal love was expressed in the idiom of the people of Kerala, when he said: *One caste for man*.

The Ezhavas who numbered several lakhs were divided into Thiyyas, Chovans, Thandans, etc., who did not intermarry Swami's advent very soon moulded them into one community throughout entire Kerala. The temples, institutes, hostels, etc., of the Ezhavas were thrown open to all castes. As one humorist put it: "Even Brahmins were now permitted temple entry."

When several branches of the Ezhavas who had so far lived more or less in closed circles were wrought into one big community, thereby becoming the largest caste, the Nairs and others too combined together and formed bigger groups or societies for their own betterment. Further, the repercussions of Sree Narayana Guru's activities resulted in



all castes of Kerala opening their eyes and taking vigorous action to reform their own customs and rites. By this time, i.e. the early decades of the twentieth century, the reform movement and activities of the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission and the Servants of India society had spread their influence in Kerala society, thereby accelerating and informing the social movements here with modernizing tendencies.

The Nambudiris of Kerala, who were counted as the most orthodox of Brahmins, now became one of the foremost of radical communities in India. Their revolutionary activities on the fields of widow remarriage, etc. Were most amazing. The Nairs formed a society on the lines of the Servants of Indian Society and effected. Most significant changes in social life. The Pulayas stood up as men conscious of their rights. Happily, however, there was no violent animosity in Kerala in those days towards such activities by different castes.

The seed for it all was sown by Sree Narayana Guru who had thus in his own unobtrusive way upturned the virgin soil of orthodoxy and brought forth a goodly harvest of welcome changes with in a short span of 50 years. Kerala is unique in that the untouchable castes here have progressed much more and much faster than in the other states of India.

This great progress was achieved without shedding a single drop of blood. Although the earlier struggles by the lower castes against oppression had produced violent fights with the vested interest, the movement for self-dependent in their rise in the social field under the leadership of Sree Narayana Guru was obstructed, if at all, in a more in those days where the higher castes came out to help and lead the movement of the untouchables for their rights.⁶

⁶ Ibid p 50



Their Achievements:-

The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam or S.N.D.P., as it is popularly known, was a society founded in 1903 under the aegis of the Guru for the dissemination of the ideals of Sree Narayana Dharma among the masses and for the uplift of the down-trodden castes of Kerala. Anyone from any caste could be a member of the Society. Quite naturally the reins of the society came into the hands of the Ezhavas, who happened to be in an overwhelming majority among its members. The Swami's ideal which was one of universalism was not affected by this circumscription of the society's leadership because everyone of them working under the Guru was heart and soul for the uplift of all depressed castes.

This uniformity of the S.N.D.P.'s membership facilitated the smooth management of the Society. The Ezhavas were numerically the largest caste, a factor which lent strength to their movements. They had a pivotal position, being at the top of the hierarchy of the untouchables and just below the Nairs. What they achieved inspired all castes below them to emulate their move for betterment, and induced the higher caste to examine and improve the customs and ways of their respective castes. The Ezhava tradition of Vaidyas (physicians) and Sanskrit scholars, landlords and richmen on top among them equipped them for quick progress up the social ladder. Their leader was a great saint and so the whole movement was imbued with a spiritual aura. Moreover, they had already made some trial movements earlier towards bettering their position in life, and achieved some success although those attempts involved some sporadic violence. They, therefore, welcomed this opportunity of struggling with greater dignity and aplomb.



The S.N.D.P. now had its vast annual gatherings. They were graced in its earlier days by the presence of the Guru who gave them guidance and determined the tenor of the deliberations. People assembled in hundreds and later in thousands, some special meetings having more than half – a – lakh of people who listened in pin-drop silence to speeches made without the aid of loud-speakers. Those meetings would very often be addressed by the higher castes and also by officialdom, including the Dewans of Travancore and Cochin.

The disabilities of the depressed castes dropped one by one like leaves in autumn until at last they could walk along public roads without fear of polluting anyone, use roads around temples, get admitted to schools, colleges and hostels, secure jobs in government service and even have certain percentages of jobs reserved for different groups of castes – and then finally came the entry into temples in 1936. Travancore was the first state in India to grant that privilege to all castes. What a miraculous achievement for the guru who passed away or attained his Samadhi as the saying goes in 1928! To think that all this was gained by the untouchables as a whole within a space of thirty years and without creating any bad blood is indeed wonderful.

Vaikom Satyagraha:

T.K. Madhavan who was the third secretary worked like a Trojan, increasing the membership of the Yogam from 4,000 to 50,000 in four months. He organized the whole movement into a well-oiled machine that spurred to action every man, woman and child, In the Vaikom Satyagraha movement which he initiated for achieving the freedom of the roads round the upper – caste temple at Vaikom, he brought mahatma Gandhi to the South to bless his endeavours and guide the volunteers. Here was someone putting into



practice what Mahatmaji had been dreaming all along. The Guru, whom Gandhiji met, commanded the greatest respect from him. Always he referred to the Swami as His Holiness Sree Narayana Guru. His influence persuaded the Mahatma to redouble his efforts for Harijan uplift.

The Swami's spirituality was so inspiring and T.K. Madhavan's electrifying enthusiasm so contagious that the broad – minded higher castes responded in a manner that is not easily equaled or surpassed in the history of social reform in India.

During the Vaikom Satyagraha, Madhavan was supported by broad-minded higher caste leader. The Brahmin, Nilakandhan namboodiripad, a fearless freedom fighter and a social reformer of the front rank worked hand in hand with him. K.P. Keshavan Menon, a Gandhian, and Mannath padmanabham were his other close associate and advisers among higher castes who went to jail along with Madhavan for this cause. It is intriguing to note that Mannath Padmanabhan was the founder of the Nair Service society which was working for the welfare of the Nair community. Here he was offering Satyagraha and going to jail for the rights of communities who were below the Nairs also.

Not satisfied with the struggle and the arrest that followed, Mannath Padmanabhan led two processions starting from the north and south, consisting of one thousand Savarnas (higher castes) each, walking a distance of more than one hundred miles to Trivandrum, the capital for the State, and presenting a memorial to the maharaja on behalf of the entire group of lower castes. The Maharaja was sympathetic, but allowed the question to be decided by the legislative Assembly. Within a year, roads round the temples were thrown open to all castes. The year was 1925.



C.Kesavan gave the Ezhavas their main baptism in politics, and conjoined its activities with the movement for representative government. This was a new line where the Ezhavas joined hands with the Christians and the Muslims and fought for freedom.

R.Sankar, another stalwart Secretary of the S.N.D.P., concentrated on educational expansion. Within a decade and a half, the Yogam had 13 colleges under it.

Their Social Reforms:-

The Comprehensive Scheme of activities which the Guru suggested to the down – trodden to take up for their advancement included social reform also. As far back as 1912, he summed up the various proposal which he had been suggesting at different times in response to the needs of each occasion.

Education appropriate to the times was, he said, the Sine quanon of all progress. Society did have enough promising boys who could grow up as assets to any community. Lack of money was the main obstacle that prevented them from rising to higher levels. Rich men should come forward to help these intelligent, studious, hard-working lads by granting them scholarships and other monetary aids.

Girls' education should be encouraged, and should never be neglected. Suppressed humanity should be made to stand up on its own legs. The masses should be provided with cottage industries and work-places in the cooperative sector. Instead of continuing as suppliers of raw materials to the affluent countries and purchasing finished products from them at high cost, they should produce manufactured goods in this country itself and thus help the poor. Let the money of the rich be utilized for these purposes also.



Universal education is indispensable. Adult literacy and establishment of libraries in every locality should be encouraged. While waiting for the unlettered to learn to read and write and progress slowly, leaders should provide them with short-cuts to cultural advancement. Learned men should inculcate modern ideas and culture in the illiterate through speeches, songs, dramas and similar means of development of culture.

The S.N.D.P had started a magazine called "*Vivekodayam*" which aimed at raising the cultural level of the ordinary man by a process of selective modernization. Kumaran Asan who edited the journal, was the greatest disciple of the Swami and one of the greatest thinkers and poets of modern Kerala.

Religious practices, social customs and rites often have, the Swami said, symbolic meanings which should not be overlooked. The magazine advocated a modern approach to inter-communal marriages and also in reforming and shortening the duration of various ceremonies as well as in economizing in their cost. The status of marriage rites was raised to that of sacrament, costly, meaningless customs, etc. were to be abolished.

The orthodox who did not quite appreciate these changes raised the canard that Asan was writing on his own, without Swami's consent or even knowledge. This suspicion was cleared by Swami at one or two public functions when he advocated the need to adopt these reforms by the community.

In those days the marriages of non-Brahmins were, as a rule, merely social functions, the Brahmin marriages alone being sacraments with prayers, *Mantras*, vows, *Poojas* and all the rest of it, taking up three or four day's time.



Swami converted the non-Brahmin marriages also into sacramental ceremonies with the performance of *Pooja*, the chanting of vedic verses, the exchange of vows, and with other concomitant observances—all of them hand-picked by the Guru out of the elaborate rituals of the orthodox Hindu marriage system. The Guru, who knew the modern man's mind through and through, limited the duration of the wedding ceremony to half an hour. And for those who were too busy even for that, he prescribed an abridged version that would last only ten minutes.

It is interesting to note that after Swami's close followers among the Ezhavas had adopted this sacramental ceremony and conducted it in temples, non-Brahmins such as the Nairs, and others commenced transferring their marriage functions to the precincts of temples.

The Ezhavas and some of the higher castes used to conduct a mock-marriage prior to the regular marriage which took place only after a girl came of age. A small ornament called the *Tali* which was the symbol of the marital status was tied round the neck of the child by the person who conducted the ceremony. The real marriage ceremony, however, was performed after the girl had grown up the bridegroom being someone else altogether. The Guru declared that this *Tali Kettu* (tying of the *Tali*) function was meaningless and ordered its abolition. In some cases, he sent message to this effect direct to the parents of the children. In one or two instances, he walked into the midst of the crowd at the eleventh hour of the function and persuaded the father of the girl to stop the ceremony. The fathers agreed. It is noteworthy that in one instance it was the mother of the child who agreed to the stoppage of the function more readily than the father.



Another custom stopped by the Guru was the public feast and function conducted when a girl attained puberty.

These and other similar functions abolished by the Guru saved the families the thousands of rupees which were being lavishly squandered in carrying out social ceremonies that had become redundant in this age. By a sort of osmotic process the Nairs and other castes too stopped observing these functions after the Ezhava community had carried out the reforms at the instance of the Swami.

Space does not permit the narration of all the social changes brought about by the Guru. Among them, however, the amalgamation of small castes deserves special mention.

There were certain castes in Kerala who were numerically so small that those microscopic minorities suffered certain disabilities peculiar to themselves. They were unable to stand up against the atrocities committed on them. As they were scattered in different localities, they found it difficult even to get their children married to members of their own caste. The Swami made the Ezhavas gather them into their fold and thereby saved them from a social crisis. The year in which he did this was as early as 1906.

It was more or less in this connection that he asked almost in despair. "A casteless society has to be formed. Who will work for it"?

The thought led to the formation of the Sree Narayana Dharma Samaj, consisting of *Sanayasis* whom he had enrobed, a samaj that was drawn from different castes including Brahmins, Nairs, Ezhavas and others.



The institutions at Sivagiri. Always, etc, where caste distinctions had been wiped away from the very beginning are run by this Samaj of Sanyasis who were Brahmacharis (celebrates) with no worldly burdens of wife, children, family, etc., to restrict their service to the weal of mankind. They also run religious institutions, schools, charitable dispensaries, etc. Illuminating the minds of the lowest castes by the philosophy taught by the Swami is also part of their missions.

As early as 1921 he stated that “Alcohol is poison. It should not be produced, sold or consumed,” anticipating the promulgation of prohibition by several years.

Guru’s Teachings:-

The Guru shows us the Vedantic way of understanding. His great philosophical poem *Atmopadesa Sataka* repeatedly tells us that mere knowledge is not enough. Look within – go and find search – try and experience – see how it works – think – practice what you are told. These repeated exhortations of his are intended to make one realize again and again that the comprehender of Vedanta does not mean a man who graphs the verbal meaning of the lines, but one who has verified the truths in his own person.

As the mystics would have it a person has to become what the knows.

Sree Narayana Guru’s religion is a way of confronting life in all its aspects. All mankind has to be responsive to true spiritual realization by living a amity, good fellowship, and love, free from all antagonism of race, nationality, creed or caste. This has to be done in the name of the one supreme being who is santam (calm, tranquil), Sivam (auspicious), Adwaitam (one), that is the under standing which produces the same result as in the case of an excited visionary who relises cosmic truths. The two processes



are one Practise it and you will actually experience, even when you cannot understand it through reasoning, how spirituality penetrates all activity.

The greatest emphasis is therefore laid by the Guru on the formula that there are both a theory and a corresponding way of life that cannot be divided. The Guru expounds this philosophy in terms of one tradition and then in terms of another, repeating at every opportunity: Verify it in yourself, verify it.

The great Swami, who contributed so much for the reformation of the caste ridden and superstitions kerala, and for the uplift of the down trodden attained Samadhi on 20th September 1928. at the age of 72.

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