

Advaita Vedanta a tool for the Renaissance of Kerala; An appraisal of the philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru.

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Abstract:

This study explores the role of Advaita Vedanta, as interpreted and propagated by the eminent philosopher Sree Narayana Guru, in contributing to the cultural and intellectual renaissance of Kerala. The paper provides an in-depth analysis of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical teachings, emphasising their relevance to social and spiritual transformation. The examination of Advaita Vedanta as a guiding principle for societal upliftment and enlightenment in the context of Kerala's Renaissance is a central theme. The study seeks to shed light on how Sree Narayana Guru's synthesis of Advaita Vedanta influenced and shaped the socio-cultural fabric of Kerala during a crucial period of intellectual awakening.

Introduction

Advaita Vedanta is one of the oldest schools of Indian Philosophy immensely strengthened and propagated by the teachings of Sri Sankaracharya in the last part of the eighth and first quarter of the ninth century. The theory of non-duality has a surpassing character with a strong basis in Vedas and other valuable texts like Upanisads. In the nineteenth century, it emerged as a tool to uplift society which was tied with superstitious beliefs, rigid customs, and practices. Different Social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Agamananda, Chattampiswamikal, etc. used this theory of oneness for this purpose. There are many scholars on this subject, but this paper concentrates only on Sree Narayana Guru and his contributions to the field of Renaissance of Kerala by using the principles of Advaita Vedanta.

Advaita Vedanta – The Philosophy of Oneness

Advaita Vedanta has a strong foundation of the idea of oneness. Depending on the Upanishads and correlating oneness and multiplicity, Goudapada established, and Sri Sankara propagated the Advaitic concept of Brahman, the omnipresent, omnipotent

omniscient ultimate reality.^[1] Here there is no separate entity for the universe.^[2] It has the nature of a snake in a rope, which is superimposed by Maya^[3] or Avidya. It is only relatively real ie; unreal. The individual souls are nothing but Brahman only, which is the undercurrent of all beings.

Concept of Atman and Isvara in Advaita Vedanta

The concept of an unconditional ultimate reality, which transcends all limited and conditional everyday existence, is seen in all absolutistic philosophies. In Advaita Vedanta, the ultimate reality depends upon knowledge.^[4] Different Upanishads describe that before the origin of the universe, this Brahman was there.^[5] This eternal Brahman only is in front and is in behind; on the right and on the left, below and above. This world is the highest Brahman only.^[6] Brahman is considered as omnipresent. It is everywhere in ether, air and in every sentient body. It is bodiless, soreless, sineless, pure and untainted by sin.^[7] It is un-uttered by speech, unthinkable with the mind, invisible with plane eyes, non-smellable and non-hearable. In short, it is beyond all sensory objects.^[8] In the midst of worldly experiences, one cannot distinguish the unnamable, formless, and indescribable character of Brahman. It might be known only through firm intuition or soul experience.

When this Brahman has attached with qualities it is called Saguna Brahman or God. It is described as the consciousness covered with the totality of ignorance (Samastyajnanopahitachaitanya).^[9] He is conceived as the source of creation, existence, and dissolution of all diversities. Being the omniscient indwelling controller, he is considered as the protector of the world.^[10] In Brhadaranyakopanisadbhasya God is illustrated as the bridge to overcome Maya forever and to attain the supreme reality.^[11] Dr.S Radhakrishnan has evaluated the opinion of Sankara regarding God. He remarked that the reality of God in Sankara's philosophy is neither a self-evident axiom, nor a logical truth, but an empirical postulate which is practically useful.^[12]

Concept of Jiva and Universe in Advaita Vedanta

In Advaita individual self (Jiva, Jivatman) is a limited form of the Supreme self. Because of the Upadhis or obstructions Brahman appears as Jiva. According to Sankara really there is one Pratyagatma (Individual self) and it is nothing but the Paramatma. The limiting adjunct is Maya or Avidya. The diversity of the individual selves is due to the adjuncts like

body^[13], name, form, longings, and actions.^[14] In the universe, every sentient being or individual self has its own body and internal as well as external organs for acting in the stage of world drama. Here the individual self becomes one with the attributes of internal organs like kartrtva, bhoktrtva, pramatrtva, etc. This is not natural. On the contrary, it is temporary and unreal.

The individual self experiences different states and the ultimate reality has the Turiya state, ie; the transcendental state. Viswa, Taijasa, Prajna, and Turiya experience awakening state, dreaming state, state of deep sleep, and transcendental state.

The experience of individuals is evidence for the unreality of the universe, being a diversified entity with different names, forms, etc.^[15] Each person has a different experience and it does not last for a long period. The object, which is non-existent in the beginning and the end is definitely so in the present (in the middle). So the object is said as unreal, though it seems as real.^[16] This unstable character of nature and natural products is also supporting the unreality of the universe.

Sree Narayana Guru – a brief introduction

Sree Narayana Guru was a philosopher, thinker, poet, and social activist of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. He developed his ideology based on Advaita Vedantic ideas and through his writings, he taught the common man.

Life and works of Guru

Sree Narayana Guru was born in 1856 (1032 Chingamasam, Chatayam nakshatra) at Chempazhanthi. Kuttiamma of Vayalvarath veedu, Madanasan were his parents. He had a personality that could not adapt to the social conditions of his childhood, a sense of rationality, restraint, a reasonable conclusion, an interest in solitude, and a scholarly personality. According to Dr.T Bhaskaran for an easy study, the works of Sree Narayana Guru can be divided into five categories. They are Stotra, Anusasana, Darsana, Vivarthana(Translation), and Gadya. From the works, 32 are Stotras of different deities like Vishnu, Siva, Subrahmanya, and Devi. Advaitadeepika, Atmopadesasatakam, Daivadasakam, etc. are philosophical (10) works, Jeevakarunyapancakam, Jatinirnayam,

Jatilakshnam, Anukampadasakam, etc. are Anusasana (10) works, Gadyaprarthana, Cijjadacintanam, Daivacintanam Atmavilasam are Gadya (5) works, and Thirukkural, Isavasyopanisad are translation (2) works. Despite these differences, it is possible to see the nature of one over the other in some works. The rarity was evident in the way that he connected the knowledge he gained from the scriptures and life with his thinking and shared it with others. So it was acceptable for the common man, who is the listener of his speakings.

Concept of Atman and Isvara according to Guru

Advaita Vedanta has inspired the philosopher Sree Narayana Guru and the philosophical works are the result of the same. Darsanamala, the famous work contains ten darsanas, in which adhyaropa^[17] and apavada^[18] are the basic principles of Advaita Vedanta. These two concepts become two darsanas in Darsanamala. Mayavi, Chitrakara, Yogi, etc. are used as examples to describe the concept.^[19] In Apavadadarsana the concept is very clear and after the recognition of reality everlasting reality lightens.^[20] Asatyadarsana also proved the non-dual reality of Atman.^[21] The Nirvanadarsana explicitly defined the Advaita thought.^[22]

The famous teaching of Sree Narayana Guru is one caste, one religion and one God is for mankind. The ten Malayalam slokas of Daivadasakam defined the concept of God which has the same entity as Atman.^[23]

Concept of Jiva and Universe according to Guru

According to Guru, there is no difference between a man and another man and a man to a woman at all.^[24] Even though the colour, name, height, etc. may be different, the pure consciousness is the same and common alike with a tree which has branches leaves, flowers, fruits, etc but the sap flowing through the tree makes it united and one. The universe is nothing but knowledge, the multiple objects which we see are not eternal.^[25]

Influence of Advaita Vedanta in the works of Guru

Sree Narayana Guru accepts the authority of Advaita Vedanta to establish the non-dual omniscient reality. He declared the theory of one caste, one religion, and one God for the prosperity of the whole world on the vision of Advaita Vedanta. The concept of Isvara ie;

Saguna Brahman has many forms like Siva Vishnu Subrahmanya, etc. for the sake of devotees who are in the realm of Advaita.

The vision of Sree Narayana Guru about the temple was unique. It should have a library, and the amount of offerings get from the devotees should be used for the benefit of poor people. Money shouldn't be spent on festivals and celebrations. The Arthanareesvarastava clarifies the revolutionist, humanistic perspective of Guru.^[26] These types of works influenced many writers and scholars in the twentieth century like Vayalar Ramavarma.^[27]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of Advaita Vedanta as a transformative tool for the Renaissance of Kerala through the lens of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy reveals a profound interplay between spirituality, societal evolution, and cultural resurgence. Sree Narayana Guru's adept application of Advaita Vedanta principles provided a philosophical foundation for breaking down societal barriers, fostering inclusivity, and nurturing a spirit of enlightenment. His teachings not only served as a beacon of wisdom during Kerala's Renaissance but also continued to inspire contemporary discussions on the integration of spiritual values with societal progress. The enduring legacy of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophical insights underscores the timeless relevance of Advaita Vedanta as a dynamic force for positive change in the cultural and intellectual landscape of Kerala.

Endnotes

^[1] ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः Brahmajnanavalimala 20.

^[2] पञ्चो यदि विप्रद्येत निवर्तेत न संशयः। मायामात्रमिदं द्वैतं अद्वैतं परमार्थतः॥ Mandukyakarika 1.17. In the Bhasya Sree Sankara also cleared this view. प्रपञ्चाख्यं मायामात्रं द्वैतं रज्जुवत् मायाविवच्चाद्वैतं परमार्थतः, तस्मान्न कश्चित्प्रपञ्चः प्रवृत्तो निवृत्तो वा अस्तीत्यभिप्रायः। Mandukyakarikabhasya 1.17.

^[3]The theory of illusion has a prima facie status in the philosophy of Advaita. The deluding and obscuring powers create the diversity of objects

^[4]प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म, सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म, विज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्म are the definitions of Brahma (Svarupalakshanas).

^[5]ब्रह्म वा इदमग्र एव आसीत् । Brhadaranyakopanisad 1.4.1.

^[6]ब्रह्मैवेदममृतं पुरस्तात् ब्रह्म पश्चात् ब्रह्म दक्षिणतश्चोत्तरेण । अधश्चोर्ध्वं च प्रसृतं ब्रह्मैवेदं विश्वमिदं वरिष्ठम् ॥ Mundakopanisad 2.2.11.

^[7] स यथोक्त आत्मा पर्यगात्परि समन्ताद्गाद्रतवानाकाशवद्व्यापीत्यर्थः। शुक्लं शुद्धं ज्योतिष्मदीप्तिमानित्यर्थः। अकायमशरीरो लिङ्गशरीरवर्जित इत्यर्थः। अन्नम अक्षतम्। अस्नाविरं स्नावाः शिराः यस्मिन् न विद्यन्त इत्यस्नाविरम्। अन्नमस्नाविरमित्याभ्यां स्थूलशरीरप्रतिषेधः। शुद्धं निर्मलमविद्यामलरहितमिति कारणशरीरप्रतिषेधः। अपापविद्धं धर्माधर्मादि पापवर्जितम्।।Isavasyopanisadsankarabhasya, 8.

^[8] यद्वाचानभ्युदितं येन वागभ्युद्यते । तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि।। Kenopanisad, 1.5-8.

^[9] Vedantasara, Khanda 7.

^[10] एष हि स्वरूपावस्थः सर्वेश्वरः साधिदैविकस्य भेदजातस्य सर्वस्येश्वरः ईशिता, नैतस्माज्जात्यन्तरभूतोऽन्येषामिव..... अयमेव हि सर्वस्य सर्वभेदावस्थो जातेत्येष सर्वज्ञः, एषोऽन्तर्यामी अन्तरनुप्रविश्य सर्वेषां भूतानां यमयिता नियन्ताप्येष एव । अत एव यथोक्तं सभेदं जगत्प्रसूयत इत्येष योनिः सर्वस्य यत एवं, प्रभवश्चाप्ययश्च प्रभवाप्ययौ हि भूतानामेष एव। Mandukya Karika Bhashya 6.

^[11] एषः भूतानां पालयिता रक्षिता। एष सेतुः। परमेश्वरेण सेतुवदभिधार्यमाणाः लोकाः सम्भिन्नमर्यादाः स्युः। अतो लोकानामसभेदाय सेतुभूतोऽयं परमेश्वरो, यः स्वयम्जोतिरात्मैव। Brhadaranyakopanisadbhasya 4.4.22.

^[12] Radhakrishnan S, Indian philosophy, Vol.II, p.545.

^[13] The gross body is the physical body, subtle body is made up of seventeen elements and causal body is the ignorance.

^[14] अविद्याप्रत्युपस्थापितकार्यकरणोपाधिनिमित्तोऽयं शारीरान्तर्यामिनोर्भेदव्यपदेशो न पारमार्थिकः। एको हि प्रत्यगत्मा भवति, न द्वौ प्रत्यगात्मानौ सम्भवतः। एकस्यैव तु भेदव्यवहारः उपाधिकृतो यथा घटाकाशो महाकाशः इति। BSSB,12.20. अविद्याकामकर्मविशिष्टकार्यकरणोपाधिः आत्मा संसारी जीव उच्यते।तस्मात् उपाधिभेदेनैव एषां भेदो नान्यथा। BUSB 3.8.12., अक्षरस्यापि नामरूपकृतदेहोपाधिनिमित्तमेव जीवोत्पत्तिप्रलयनिमित्तत्वम्। MUSB 2.11.

^[15] Brahmasutrasankarabhasya gives a legible definition for universe in the bhasya of second sutra. इदं जगत् नामरूपाभ्यां व्याकृतं अनेककर्तृभोक्तृसंयुक्तं प्रतिनियतदेशकालनिमित्तक्रियाफलाश्रयं मनसाप्यचिन्त्यरचनारूपं च भवति।

^[16] आदावन्ते च यन्नास्ति वर्तमानेऽपि तत्तथा। वितथैः सदृशा सन्तोऽवितथा इव लक्षिताः।।

सप्रयोजनता तेषां स्वप्ने विप्रतिपद्यते। तस्मादाद्यन्तवत्त्वेन मिथ्यैव खलु ते स्मृताः ।।

आद्यन्तयोरभावात् वितथैरेव मृगतृष्णिकादिभिः सदृशत्वात् वितथा एव तथापि अवितथा इव लक्षिता मूढैः अनात्मविद्धिः । Mandukyakarika 2.6-7, and the bhasya portion.

^[17] Adhyaropa is a key concept of Advaita Vedanta and adhyaropapavadanyaya is used by a Teacher to instruct the disciple about the Advaitic principles. Sree Sankara lebibly described that it is the Anarthahetu or cause of the knowledge of Anatman.Adhyasa bhsya of Brahmasutra has given a very good description of it.

^[18] रज्जुविवर्तस्य सर्पस्य रज्जुमात्रत्ववत् वस्तुविवर्तस्य अवस्तुनः अज्ञानादेः प्रपञ्चस्य वस्तुमात्रत्वम्। सच्चिदानन्दानन्ताद्वैतं ब्रह्मैव वस्तु।

^[19] आसीदग्रेऽसदेवेदं भुवनं स्वप्नवत्पुनः। ससर्ज सर्वं सङ्कल्पमात्रेण परमेश्वरः।।१, असृजन्मायया स्वस्य मायावीवाखिलं जगत् । २,

मनोमात्रमिदं चित्रमिवाग्रे सर्वमीदृशं । प्रापयामास वैचित्र्यं भगवांश्चित्रकारवत् ॥ ५, व्यतनोदथ योगीव सिद्धिजालं जगत्पतिः॥

These are some sloka portions of Adhyaropadarsanam

^[20] चिदेव नान्यदाभाति चितः परमतो न हि । यच्च नाभाति तदसद्यदसत्तत्र भाति च ।

आनन्द एवास्ति भाति नान्यः कश्चिदतोऽखिलं । आनन्दघनमन्यन्न विनानन्देन विद्यते ॥

सर्वं हि सच्चिदानन्दं नेह नानास्ति किञ्चन । यः पश्यतीह नानेव मृत्योर्मृत्युं स गच्छति ॥ Apavadadarsana, 8-10.

^[21] एकं सत्यं न द्वितीयं ह्यसन्नं भाति सत्यवत् । शिलैव शिवलिङ्गं न द्वितीयं शिल्पिना कृतम् ॥ Asatyadarsanam, 10.

^[22] एकमेवाद्वितीयं ब्रह्मास्ति नान्यन्न संशयः । इति विद्वान् निवर्तते द्वैतान्नावर्तते पुनः ॥ Nirvanadarsanam, 10.

^[23] ദൈവദശകം 1,6, 7, 8

^[24] ജീവകാരുണ്യപഞ്ചകം 1.

^[25] ആത്മാപദേശശതകം 89.

^[26] അർദ്ധനാരീശ്വരസ്തവം. 5.

^[27] ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു നാളെയുടെ പ്രകാശഗോപുരം, നെടുങ്കുന്നം ഗോപാലകൃഷ്ണൻ, പേജ് 46. സ്നേഹിക്കയില്ല ഞാൻ നോവുമാക്കാവിനെ സ്നേഹിച്ചിടാതൊരു തത്ത്വശാസ്ത്രത്തെയും Famous words of Vayalar.

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