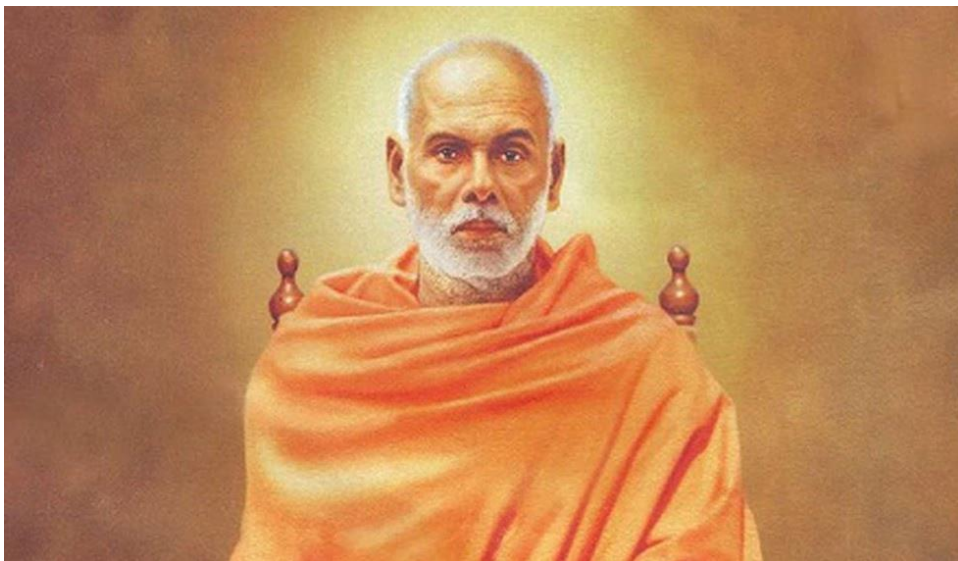




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Shri Narayan Guru

Shri Narayan Guru was truly a man of action and knowledge and a knower of religion. He was fully aware of the exploitation occurring to individuals and within the society. He made significant contributions for the upliftment of the backward class in South India, which was close to about twenty lakhs. Not only that, his social reform efforts were sometimes compared to the works of Gandhiji. Gandhiji always referred to Narayan Guru as the blessed soul Shri Narayan Guru. He adopted Guru's ideas in his work for the upliftment of the Harijans. In today's world, especially in the context of India, the life, message, and personality of Shri Narayan Guru hold special significance.



Shri Narayan Guru was born on 20th August 1856 in a small town called Chembazhanthi, which is 12 kilometers away from Thiruvananthapuram, the then capital of the Indian state of Travancore, in the Ezhava caste. At that time, it was believed that any person from an upper caste would become impure even if they came into contact with an Ezhava individual from a distance of 32 feet. Based on the caste hierarchy, this impurity distance would increase, and eventually, a Brahmin would become impure if he came within 32 feet of an Ezhava. Observing the ill-treatment towards these lower castes, Swami Vivekananda once referred to Kerala as the 'lunatic asylum' of India.

Shri Narayan Guru's uncles were prominent Sanskrit scholars and physicians. Among them, Krishna Wadiyar was also a teacher. As a social reformer, he made strenuous efforts for the upliftment of his caste, but he deliberately neglected the castes below Ezhava, keeping them in their place. Untouchability and ostracization aren't curses for any caste until these attributes are applied to those below them in hierarchy.

Shri Narayan Guru's education began at the age of five. His teacher was Chembazhanthi Moota Pillai, who was a renowned scholar, astrologer, a man of high ideals, and a respected upper caste individual in his region. In those days, a general knowledge of the Sanskrit language, sometimes written in the Brahmi script, was considered the primary objective of education. Narayan was very sharp in his studies. Whatever he was taught once, he would never forget.

Recognizing the discrimination faced by deprived communities, especially their exclusion from temples, Narayana Guru took upon himself the task of building temples for them. His famous motto was "One Caste, One Religion, One God for All." His efforts culminated in the establishment of several temples, the most notable being the Shiva temple at Aruvippuram in 1888. The consecration of this temple was a revolutionary event, as it challenged the traditional caste-based restrictions on temple access. It symbolized a new era where every individual, irrespective of caste or social status, had the right to worship. Narayana Guru's actions played a significant role in the social reform movement in Kerala and paved the way for greater inclusivity and social justice.

In 1903, under Guru's guidance, an assembly named "Shri Narayan Dharma Paripalana Yogam," popularly known as SNDP, was established. Its objective was to propagate Shri Narayan's ideas among the general public and uplift the backward classes in Kerala. Anyone from any caste could become a member. Since there was a significant number of people from the Ezhava caste in this assembly, its leadership naturally came into their hands. Swamiji's philosophy, which represented universality, was not limited to this community alone. The reason being, every individual working under his leadership was deeply committed to the upliftment of the backward classes. They were also naturally devoted followers of the Guru because Guru was born amongst them. This inspiration was sufficient.

For the upliftment of the backward classes, the comprehensive plans suggested by Narayan Guru included a scheme for social reform. Based on the needs of different situations, the ideas he proposed from time to time were codified in the form of sutras in 1912.

Dalits were considered unfit to walk on public roads, so they wouldn't pollute a person of a higher caste. This notion of unfitness started to fall away, one by one, like leaves in autumn. They could now move freely on public roads, use the roads leading to temples, gain entry into schools, colleges, and hostels, and secure jobs in government offices. Not only that, some specific castes even managed to get a certain percentage of jobs reserved for them. Finally, in 1936, they were granted entry into temples. Travancore was the first state in India to provide such an opportunity to all castes. It's

said that the Guru, who reportedly entered 'samadhi' in 1928, achieved this remarkable feat. Just the thought that the untouchables managed to achieve all this in a short span of thirty years without causing any resentment is astonishing in itself.

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Reference: Shri Narayan Guru- Writer- Murkhot Kunnhappa