CHAPTER – IV

NARAYANA GURU’S CONCEPT OF ETHICS

Philosophy being the quest for the ultimate meaning of life, value sense and value judgments can never be considered outside its purview. In the Vedantic perspective and in the philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru as well, more than an applied aspect of philosophy, it is in ethics that the ananda content of atma finds self-expression in actual human life (S.Omana 28). Ethics has its origin in one’s self where the non-self is articulated with it.

The Guru’s philosophy is of a global and synthetic order where mere rationalism sinks into the background, bringing intuition and dialectical reasoning to the fore. Values in life are rather being treated as something strictly falling outside its scope. The analytic and synthetic tendencies are more equally blended and refer to an overall scheme of the absolute or a normative value reference to guide all speculations. A spiritually sound sense of values and way of life are held implicit within its scope with all value considerations regulating man’s relations with God as well as his relations with his fellow men.

The Guru here puts his finger not on the conduct as such but on the fundamental principles on which human relations and conduct are based. According to the Sanskrit tradition and the Guru too, jnana (wisdom) and karma (action) especially above all when dualistically conceived, had to be kept apart, while there is open a unitive way in which, without duplicating each
other, they can have fundamental aspects that mutually pre-suppose each other (Nataraja Guru The Philosophy of a Guru 120).

The perennial sources of human goodness, relations of conduct are one thing, while changing standards of good behaviour subject to historical fluctuations are another.

It is human action that is evaluated as moral or immoral. Actions that conform to the rules of right conduct are considered moral and immoral if otherwise. In otherwords, the ethical principles applied in life form morality. That all actions (karmas) are prakriti’s, not of any individual, which is made clear in the verse 43 of Atmopadesa Satakam and this has been dealt with in the previous chapter.

Prakriti’s actions, as such, are neither good nor bad; they are just karmas. It is only according to human evaluation, based on human interests, personal as well as collective, that actions are counted good or bad. He who lives fully identified with prakriti’s finds what he happens to do in life as prakriti’s karmas, and thus moral. Only he who thinks of himself as the doer of karmas worries about their goodness or badness. Therefore, we can say that a jnanin’s actions are amoral, and in that sense, good in an absolutist way. An ajnanin’s actions, on the other hand, could be good or bad, moral or immoral both having certain social conventions, all relativistic, for their basis (Swami Muni Narayana Prasad The Philosophy of Narayana Guru 88-89).
For leading a morally perfect life, a *jnanin* needs no help of ethical codes; it happens so with him as a natural course. An *ajnanin*, on the other hand, finds himself incapable of doing so. So the best he can do is to follow the guidelines given by the enlightened.

Sree Narayana Guru tried to make explicit true moral concepts which are implicit in the outlook of ordinary people irrespective of caste, class or creed, in everyday life. According to him, the moral law is universal and necessary. It must apply without exception not only to all men but also to all rational beings. Each person should act so that he can will that the maxim of his action becomes a universal law. What is right or wrong for everyone is indeed for all rational beings in all places and at all times.

The ethical theory of Kant is one of the oldest presentations of the formalist approach. He impressed upon the man the fact that order and consistency may be found within. Moral distinctions are not matters of mere expediency, nor expressions of personal inclinations, nor are they due to the blind pressure of social customs. Moral distinctions are real and intelligence is central. The sense of obligation is central in our moral consciousness, and there is an obligation to live according to some norm (Kant 69).

According to Kant, men have come to realize more fully that there must be a good motive of intrinsic value is essential to conduct, which we wholeheartedly approve, and that human personality is our end-in-itself. No act is good without qualifications unless it originates from a good motive or a good-
will. According to Kant: “Act so as to use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always as an end, never as merely a means” (Kant 72). Rational beings or persons are end in themselves and cannot rightly be used simply as means.

The Guru exhorted us to act as to treat humanity in thine own person or in that of any other in every case as an end, withal, never as means only. The idea of humanity as an end in itself is really a revolutionary idea. Never use another as a mere means.

In *Atmopadesa Satakam* verses 21 to 25 contain a very clear exposition of the core of the Guru’s ethical stance. The moral dictum that says one should do unto others as one should do unto oneself, is derived from the same dialectically absolutist ethics that the Guru adopts as seen in these verses. When loving one’s neighbour as oneself one avoids the duality between egoistic interests by cancelling out dialectical counterparts.

*A certain kind is dear, that is dear to me; what is one’s own desire*

*And what is to another, so variously thus puzzlement prevails*

*Round each object of desire; what to oneself is dear*

*That verily know to be another’s desire also.*

(Narayana Guru A.S Verse 21)

This verse enunciates the basis for all ethics of right or morally correct conduct. Kant’s categorical imperative corresponds to the same moral or ethical
principle innately present in man. In the *Bhagavad Gita* we have the notion of the sameness (*samya*) (*Bhagavad Gita* VI 32).

The axiomatic conclusion of the verse merely draws attention to the philosophical verity that there is no fundamental difference between the desires, appetites or aspirations of one man and another. All persons need food, sleep, waking activities or companionship involving many individual items of interests whether it is man, woman or child, or civilized or primitive and all human needs have the basic uniformity of character. Although, considered in detail, tastes might differ and the basic satisfaction depends on items that are alike. Looked at in this way, the basic axiom of good conduct reduces itself to one law; namely, one is right when one’s own taste accords with what is truly human, or conversely, to choose what one should rightfully prefer in life; one should be guided by what would be conducive to the happiness of humanity in general (Nataraja Guru *One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction* 108).

The conduct adopted for one’s self happiness must at once secure another’s happiness. Torturing one’s self for the happiness of others violates the self, and hence is against the spirit of this truth. Here Mahatma Gandhi was wrong. He tortured himself and sacrificed his own happiness to secure the happiness of a closed group, not even of humanity as a whole. The Bhagavad Gita discredits torturing the body in the name of austerity as demonic (*asura*).

*Those who torture all the organs of the body*

*And (harassing) Me (the Absolute) seated in the body;*

*Know to them to be of demonic resolves.* (*Bhagavad-Gita* XVII 6)
The discovery of the full worth of one’s life is accomplished by returning to the one beingness to which everything and everyone alike belongs. In this rediscovery, one learns to appreciate that his happiness is implied in the happiness of all and the happiness of others are as much of his concern as his own happiness.

The enlightened man’s moral teachings meant for the unenlightened will always have underlying them their enlightenment- the enlightenment that one atma alone appears as everything - as the guiding torch, though mostly left unsaid. Such teachings have implicit in them the fact that the effort made by everyone aims at revealing the ānanda content of ātma, or oneself, the one thing dearest to all. The realization that it is one ātma, oneself, that unfolds itself as every being, every human being, gives human life a new directive in respect of man’s conduct, that what ensures happiness to oneself should ensure the happiness of others as well. The Guru therefore says:

*The other man’s interest that is even mine: what to oneself*

*Is beneficial is so for the other man also: such is the course of*

*Discrete conduct; all acts aiming at each man’s self-happiness*

*Must spell at once the happiness of the other fellow-man.*

(Narayana Guru A. S Verse 22)

Any action that helps ensure one’s own happiness at the expense of the suffering of another, for sure, goes against the oneness of Reality, oneness of
By leading such an inconsiderate life what one does literally is making a hell of one’s own life.

In this verse the Guru only wishes to underline the law of human relations and conduct which is here enunciated in keeping with the correct dialectical approach. For example, when a man wishes that his own caste, tribe, sex or nation must win over another, he is committing one of the fundamental errors or signs against the interest of humanity thought of as a unit in the absolutist context. The rival claims possible for relativist unilateral interests are many when the same situation is viewed dialectically and unitively, without duality or contradiction between the component units, whether of family or nation, peace and happiness become naturally spelt out (Nataraja Guru The Philosophy of a Guru 127).

Desires can come into conflict when treated unilaterally and horizontally, but are resolved into the harmony of unity when both the counterparts of a relational situation are brought together through correct Self-knowledge.

The identification of one’s own best interest with that of one’s neighbour, who in principle represents one’s own dialectical counterpart among human beings which one comes into daily relationship, is the secret and the time honoured way of peace on earth and good-will to all mankind. This is the philosophical basis of human ethics as directly derived from wisdom through
Self-realization. The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man contain the same ethical law.

The equation of the Self and the non-Self, which is the essence of dialectical wisdom, implicit in the ethics presented in this verse and in the previous verse, has its philosophical echo in the Bhagavad Gita, chapter VI, verses 5 and 6.

*By the Self the Self must be upheld; the Self should not be let down; the self indeed is (its own) dear relative; the self indeed is the enemy of the Self.*

*This Self is dear to one (possessed) of Self, by whom even the Self by the self has been won, for one not (possessed) of Self, the self would be in conflict with the very Self, as if an enemy.*

Two sets of selves are here juxtaposed unitively without conflict and also put together horizontally with conflict entering into their relations. The ambivalent aspects of the same self can be conceived unitively or dualistically, the former resolving conflict and the later accentuating it (Nataraja Guru One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction 10).

All acts aiming at each man’s self-happiness, must spell at once the happiness of the other fellowman. These words have an apodictic finality of form and enunciate correctly and succinctly the whole foundation of the ethics
on which the Guru’s idea of human relations is based. The law of all morality is stated here in unequivocal terms. This law is conceived strictly according to the science of the absolute whose method is dialectical and not merely rational. It should be noticed here that the ends and means of morality and the subjective and the objective aspects of it are brought together in a way which is in keeping with the science of the Absolute. The personal and moral factors or elements involved have to be submitted to a dialectically valid operation to yield correct results. Such a scientifically thought out absolutist attitude can be seen to cover many features that schools of ethics from Machiavellianism to Nichomacheanism, in themselves all partial speculations in ethics, have left out of the purview. The Kantian ‘imperative’ as well as the Bergsonian ‘creative’ brands are all covered here by the Guru’s dialectical absolutist approach (Nataraja Guru *The Philosophy of a Guru* 128).

Nichomachean ethics is the result of recognizing the specific forms of value, whereby life is expressed through matter, through its potent possibilities or entelechia, in the context of Aristotelian ethics. The golden mean is goodness. Platonic ethics would stress the ability to appreciate the truth, the good and the beautiful, at the level of ideas rather than things. Epicurean and Stoic ethics fall apart by their stress or absence of austerity as a virtue. *Vedism* in the Indian context has a hedonist and relativist ethics while Buddhism and *Vedanta*, err, if at all on the side of the opposite tendency of severe austerity. The *Bhagavad Gita* strikes the balance between these opposite trends and a subtle axiological interplay of dialectics may be seen to regulate the aesthetics
and the ethics to save it from killing all joy in life where a balanced outlook is
substituted and regulated by a neutral attitude, and dictated by the wisdom of
the Absolute understood in a unified perspective integrating into unity
epistemological, methodological and axiological considerations (S. Omana 32).

It is often thought that religion and ethics depend on the person
concerned and is, therefore, relative to the individual. This is not the way to
look at truth. It has to be from both its aspects of Self and non-Self. Correctly
speaking, morality, though personal, cannot afford to connive at an error in the
furthermost corner of the world. Each man is his brother’s keeper. One man
unjustly treated anywhere in the world calls for retribution from the whole of
humanity with one voice. It is in this sense that slavery is immoral and a mere
mechanical equality is not desirable either. The dialectics of the one and the
many involved here has to be kept in mind if the full implication of the law
enunciated is to be understood in the spirit it is intended by the author (Nataraja
Guru One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction 112).

In verse 23 the Guru points out how static self-centered striving,
egocentrically carried on, finishes up in vain frustrations, eliminating in the
process both general good and the good for oneself. In this verse the Guru
clearly enunciates the basis of ethical conduct on a dialectical formula as
between oneself and one’s own counterpart in the world of human relations.
Many of the ordinary theories of unilaterally conceived ethics are here bypassed
by the Guru in favour of an approach more in keeping with non-duality which is
the basis of the whole philosophy of Self-knowledge.
For the sake of fellow-man, unceasing, day and night

Unstintingly strives the kindly man;

The niggard lying prone, what frustration’s toil undertakes,

That is for his own sake alone.

(Narayana Guru A.S Verse 23)

This verse teaches the same principle as the dictum “love thy neighbour as thyself,” only the dialectical bipolarity is more explicit and the unworkability of one-sided interest in the self more categorically denounced.

Our life flows between the banks of compassion and selfishness. Nature pushes us towards the bank of selfishness when our personal identity is threatened. Our spiritual belongingness attracts us to the opposite bank of compassion when others exposed to danger require our services.

A person with a strong and healthy spiritual identity places his own self as one among others and thus acts out of compassion even when his own self preservation is at stake. Compassion is the most dominant note of a cluster of values such as love, rejoicement, peace, justice, freedom and fraternity. The realization of all these values is experienced at different degrees of happiness.

When compassion dawns in the firmament of our life as our guiding star we become easily acceptable to others and we also detect in every one something good to love and accept. Encouraged by the showing of love and happiness we may even become strong enough to commit ourselves with unlimited liability. The world will always find a good friend in a kindly person...
who is not daunted by reproaches and reprovals. Such a pleasant person brings out his or her goodness spontaneously. The sun shines and does not radiate darkness because it is its nature to shine so only good comes to the world from the compassionate sage as he engages in action without feeling that he is doing anything (Nitya Chaitanya Yati Neither This Nor That But Aum 48).

The principle viewed from the ethical standpoint in verse 23 is restated in terms of Self-knowledge in the next verse 24.

*What here we view as this man or that*

*Reflection reveals to be the Self’s prime form;*

*That conduct adopted for one’s self-happiness*

*Another’s happiness must also secure at once.*

(Narayana Guru A.S Verse 24)

In this verse the social and ethical standpoint is restated in terms of Self-knowledge. The duality that is apparent between the interests of two individuals can be viewed unitively as referring to the Self-same central or neutral Self conceived in the context of the Absolute (Nataraja Guru One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction 114).

The nature of the Self is a transparency of its awareness and the freedom from the aches and pains of ignorance. To a person who has realized this truth, the suffering of another person is a blemish in universal consciousness. He recognizes his unlimited liability to cleanse the world consciousness of its smudges of impurity. This commitment to perpetuate universal goodness makes
compassion the central motivating force in his life (Nitya Chaitanya Yati
*Neither This Nor That But Aum* 50).

The good, the truth and the beautiful are lasting values in the context of Absolutism. Hence killing and eating mercilessly of animals, says the Guru, is to be untenable on the basis of a very direct reasoning belonging to an imperative order. By hurting another one hurts one’s Self in a dialectical context, though this aspect may not be so evidently clear in a mechanistic context. This variety is brought out in so many words in verse 25 of the *Atmopadesa Satakam*.

> What spells benefit to one, while to another distress brings,

> Such conduct is one that violates the Self; beware!

> That spark of pain intense to another given

> Into inferno’s ocean it falls, there to burn its flames.

(Narayana Guru *A.S Verse 25*)

Ethics is not to be conceived as depending on the conduct of a good man taken by himself; it is to be understood as a double-edged situation cutting both ways. It has to be conceived not as a lame or one-sided affair but as a process in which donor and beneficiary belong to a unitive and universal context. Violation of the unitive Self-hood on the one side is equated here with its dialectical counterpart of a general fire of inferno for which the spark of pain given to a single individual could be the partial stimulus to create a wholesale reaction (Nataraja Guru *One Hundred Verses of Self Instruction* 115).
When the dualistic attitude has once been abolished, and generosity spreads evenly like sunlight without distinction, on all human beings, even on the publican and the sinner, that kind of generosity belongs to the context of the Absolutist way of life and is one that, in the context of Self-realization, is very important to keep in mind.

The implications of the same subtle reciprocity of the Self and the non-Self are here unitively developed from the negative side. Like the quality of mercy, kindness has to be conceived as a double blessing and its absence as a double disaster. The non-dual way is the only escape when conflicting interests develop in a given situation due to unilateral action.

**THE FIVE ETHICAL CODES**

‘Satyam’ (truth), ‘ahimsa’ (non-violence), ‘asteyam’ (non-stealing), ‘avyabhicharam’ (chastity) and ‘madyavarjanam’ (avoidance of alcoholic liquor) are the five dharmas or attributes of righteousness.

In the words of the Guru

*Ahimsa-satyam-asteyasthadhaiva- avyabhicharithaa*

*Madyasya varjanam chaivam panchadharma-ssamaasathah.*

(Narayana Guru Sree Narayana Smrithi 8)
Satyam

*Satyam* is implicit in *sat*, means that which exists. So Truth or *Satyam* is that which is existing. It is the eternal *Brahman*. Be truthful in word and deed. Never be dishonest.

In the words of Narayana Guru

*Sathi saadhu bhaveth-sathyam sathaym – brahma-sanaathanam*

*Sathye thishtathi-lokoyam-vadeth-sathym na cha anrutham.*

(Narayana Guru Sree Narayana Smrithi 50)

Of all that is good venerable and truthfulness happens to be the best. The source of this universe is eternal truth. This world itself is based on that truth. Therefore, always tell the truth; never tell a lie or untruth.

One, who lives in truthfulness, strictly observing truth always, will become equal to a *yogi*. Whatever he says in this world will have undisputed positive results.

*Yassathyaparavaan nithyam sathye ypgeeva varthathe*

*Sa yad vaktheeha thath sarvamatharkitha phalaavahamibid.*

(Narayana Guru Sree Narayana Smrithi 51)

**Astheyam (non-stealing)**

The word ‘*astheyam*’ means not coveting another one’s wealth, nor even thinking about it. It means that not to steal what belongs to others. Stealing
leads to ruin and non-stealing to prosperity. The one paves the way for infamy and the other to high reputation. Hence non-stealing is the ideal way of life. The three modes of action (trikarana) that is thought, word and deed, exemplifying truth is the path adopted by great men. The people have absolute respect for them. He who steals has a heart polluted by poison. He is treated as a mad dog and driven away from society. According to the Guru,

\[
\text{churaa- visha-samaakraanthi-maleemasa naraadhamam-}
\]

\[
\text{Nir-bharthysya-noonam asyanthi dooelarkam-iva-anaghaah.}
\]

(Narayana Guru Sree Narayana Smrithi 53)

One who is infested and defiled with the poison of larceny is branded as the most despicable and the meanest. Decent and honest people treat him as if he is a mad dog and certainly keep him away.

**Avyabhicharam**

\[
\text{Vyabhichara (adultery) is sinful. According to the Guru}
\]

\[
\text{Veekshanam para naareenaam kaama sankalpa poorvakam}
\]

\[
\text{Thath-sallaapascha-thadyogo vyabhichaara-ithi-smruthah.}
\]

(Narayana Guru Sree Narayana Smrithi 53)

Looking with desire at a woman other than one’s own, attempting to flirt with her and even thinking of her with lust is *vyabhichara*. Indulgence in it may lead to loss of fame and status, wealth and knowledge and even life. The person who commits adultery, even daylight appears pitch dark. That person becomes
unable to enjoy the genuine pleasures of conjugal life, which is a gift of the nature.

\[ \text{Divaapyandham – thamah pumso vyabhicharam-upeyushah} \]
\[ \text{thasmaanniyathi-dattham yath sukham thaccha-vinashyathi.} \]

(Narayana Guru Sree Narayana Smrithi 54)

Hence the Guru says:
\[ \text{Sva-pathnee-para-samsargo-kasyaapeetha-na-rochathe} \]
\[ \text{Varjayed-vyabhicharam thad-iaamuthra shubhaagrahee.} \]

(Narayana Guru Sree Narayana Smrithi 55)

In this world, no one likes his wife being intimate with another man. Therefore those desiring happiness and peace either in the present life or in the life after death should abstain from this sinful act.

All the religions of the world are against adultery. In Islam, it says in Surah Isra that “no one should come close to adultery, for it is a shameful deed, it is an evil, opening other roads to evil” (Quran Chapter-17 Verse 32).

**Avoidance of alcoholic liquor**

One who takes liquor digs his own grave. The Guru says:
\[ \text{Budheer-vaikalya-janakam madyam-ithy-uchyathe budhaihi} \]
\[ \text{Madyasevaam na kurveetha madyam vishasamam viduuhu.} \]

(Narayana Guru Sree Narayana Smrithi 56)
Liquor harms the brain incurably. So its use adversely affects the user, the society and the generations to come. That is why the Guru has said: “Liquor is poison. Do not make it, take it or give it” (Moorkoth Kumaran 170). The glorious Quran says “Abstain from having intoxicants, alcohol and drugs because intoxicants are one root cause for various evils in society and it prevents the universal brotherhood from prevailing”.

Of these five codes ahimsa is regarded as the greatest dharma. Ahimsa means non-infliction of injury to beings through thought, word or deed. All the other dharmas exist in ahimsa as mental attributes. Whereas in himsa (violence), orginates adharma (non-virtuosity). To those devoted to dharma as an austere observance, even wild animals do not pose danger.

Non-violence is the highest form of righteousness. Great souls like Buddha attained enlightenment and liberation by practicing ahimsa in its true sense, that is, without harming any living being through word, deed or thoughts.

**KINDNESS AND AHIMSA**

Kindness to life and the noble habit of non-hurting (ahimsa) are yet other traits that spontaneously find place with those of the non-dual vision of Reality. In Narayana Guru’s teachings, we find many examples showing how ethical actions arise directly out of the contemplative way of life. In works such as ‘A Critique of Caste (Jati Mimamsa), Scriptures of Mercy (Anukampa Dasakam), and Kindness to Life (Jiva Karunya Panchakam) he responds to
ethical issues pragmatically without swerving from his own position as a contemplative philosopher.

**A Critique of Caste (Jati Mimamsa)**

This short composition has been selected as an instance where the Guru was essentially a contemplative mystical philosopher dedicated to wisdom, treats critically a subject which at first sight seems to belong merely to the social world, to the domain of obligation or necessity.

After the Buddhist period the strictly neutral position of wisdom relative to social matters was violated and the necessary aspects of social obligations were stressed by way of a reaction against the heterodoxy implied in Buddhism. In this short poem the Guru brings in the characteristics of Reality hitherto uncritically treated, within the full scrutiny of contemplative criticism.

Sankara treated the subject of caste as part of the *vyavaharika* (the world of relative, everyday life), a necessary and given aspect of social obligation taken for granted, as something natural. In India because of various historical reasons the critical evaluation of the subject of caste in the light of the full implications of contemplative and non-dual Self-knowledge was avoided. This neglect has led to extreme forms of social inequality and discrimination, leading to the extremism of untouchability.

In the Guru’s word contemplation and commonsense come together without distinction and distortion. Under one discipline existence and Reality
meet. Everything is brought under the scrutiny of reason in these verses, but at
the same time, pure reason never degenerates into any kind of injunction or
mandate. Here, essentially the plea is that man should realize his true humanity
and unitive solidarity and realize also that terms like Brahmin and Pariah are
ideas superimposed on the Reality that is human nature which is essentially one
and fundamentally of one single sameness.

In the first verse of Jati Mimamsa the Guru reviewed the solidarity and
equality of mankind both in its existential and subsistential personality aspects
in the proper scheme of a contemplative science.

_Brahmin-hood and such are not thus wise;
Man’s humanity marks out the human kind.
Even as bovinity proclaims a cow
None do see this truth, alas!

(Narayana Guru J.M Verse 1)

This opening line provides the key to the main approach and method of
dealing with the subject. Caste distinctions have no basis in actuality. Subjected
to the most drastic and scientific tests homo sapiens falls within the human
species. Racial distinctions do not amount to distinctions in the species in any
strict terms.

According to the Guru, there was actually no difference between man
and man. In his Critique of Caste (Jati Mimamsa) all that the Guru denies is that
castes such as Brahmin and Pariah have no reality. While historical,
sociological, economic, or even dialectical circumstances may have caused the complex configurations of caste, this does not mean that it has a raison d’être of its own (Nataraja Guru Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru 279).

The Bhagavad Gita says that contemplatively the notion of Brahminhood does not exist even theoretically, any more than does the distinctions between the elephant, cow, dog or one who eats dog flesh.

_Vidyavinayasampanne_

_Brahmane gavi hastini_

_Shuni chai’ va shapaka cha_

_Panditah samadarshinahi._

_(Bhagavad-Gita V 18)_

“In a Brahmin who is learned and mild, in a cow, in an elephant, even in a dog and in a dog-eater, the wise see the same”. Thus both existentially and subsistentially the distinctions of caste become meaningless.

The seconds and third verses read as:

_One of kind, one of faith, and one in God is man;_

_Of one womb, of one form; difference here in none_

_(Narayana Guru J.M Verse 2)_

_Within a species, it is not, that offspring truly breed?_

_The community of man thus viewed, to a single caste belong._

_(Narayana Guru J.M Verse 3)_
Faith means formulated religion which is essentially a value regulating human conduct and relations in society. Dharma or righteousness, social or personal obligations or duties are all the same everywhere when they are shorn of historical or incidental stresses given by each particular expression of religion and they can be equated to one or other of the various aspects of wisdom. Thus in the light of contemplative Self-knowledge or neutral world wisdom as understood in revalued dialectical terms, all variations become included under One Religion, common to humanity as realized in norms of universal, unitive and simple values which remain the same for all men, irrespective at time or clime (Nataraja Guru Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru 285).

In the next verse of the poem the Guru brings together the inevitable dialectical counterparts of the problem,

*Of the human species is even a Brahmin born, as is the Pariah too.*

*Where is difference then in caste as between man and man?*

(Naryana Guru J.M Verse 4)

Without the Brahmin the concept of Pariah as a concept would lose its meaning, and without the Pariah as a background factor Brahmin-hood, at least in the Indian context, would lose its import because in the dialectics of history the one rises up in response to the other. But both the Brahmin and the Pariah, in the pure light of reason or contemplation, although they may be historical
counterparts, are essentially one in human context. Both the Brahmin and the Pariah belong to one and the same essentially human context.

In the next verse the Guru is trying to reveal the oneness of humankind with the support of the reference to historical fact. The verse 5 read as

_In bygone days of a Pariah woman the great sage Parasara was born,_

_As even he of Vedic-aphorism fame of a virgin of the fisher folk._

(Naryana Guru J.M Verse 5)

Parasara was the father of Vyasa, who was also called the Vedavyasa, said to be the author of the great epic Mahabharata and of the Bhagavad-Gita, contained or inserted in it, which is one of the canonical texts of Vedanta, held in high authority. Vyasa was born of a fisher maiden.

The Guru’s aim here is to reveal to all that these saintly characters, Parasara and Vyasa, who are recognized everywhere as ancestors of the holy cherished past and worshipped as such by all castes in every home in the Hindu community, are themselves outstanding reminders that mere prejudice lingers round the notion of caste, since they come from the much abused and misunderstood Pariah line and not from the Brahmin-hood. Hence, here is the ultimate contradiction to be faced by the Brahmin not only accepting and adopting Pariah Guru but also putting him on the topmost pedestal as a sage of supreme value from the Vedic point of view (Nataraja Guru Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru 292).
The Guru, however, has no need for this ambiguity and indeed his clarity restates the whole position. He has in these five verses brought about distinct conclusions. Humanity is one and indivisible in kind (jāti). There is no room for any multiplicity at any level of human nature, socially, religiously or contemplatively. Neither the actuality, empirically examined, let alone contemplative verities, admits of a raison d’etre for caste nor does history lend the idea any valid support.

**Kindness to Life (Jiva Karunya Panchakam)**

In his work Kindness to Life, Narayana Guru shows how contemplation and matters which primarily concern the commandments of a religion can be brought together under one general principle of wisdom and rational living. This short composition of five verses shows that ethics arises directly out of the contemplative way of life. The ethics here is dictated by the inner voice of contemplative reasoning when a man wants to be fully human. The Guru here follows a line of contemplative reasoning which is full of true humanity and dignity.

The pious man of prayer seeks refuge in God while denying what might give a similar refuge to animals. The contradiction in such a unilateral attitude of prayer, with the subsequent conflict which it brings about, is forthrightly abolished here.
All are of one Self-fraternity.

Such being the dictum to avow,

In such a light how can we take life?

And devoid of least pity go on to eat!

(Naryana Guru J.P Verse 1)

When piety and kindness are hinged one on the other they together constitute an important article of faith, a law or axiom of contemplation. In the very first verse, the Guru relates it to the axiom of the Advaitic or non-dual Reality of the Self. The Self is universal and unitive and therefore cannot countenance conflict between life and life. This is the first corollary arising out of the pure contemplation of apriori truth. When it is accepted that killing is wrong the same holds good on a forteriori with the question of eating. Kindness emerges naturally as the argument of the second degree which partakes of the logic of the emotions to at least in an equal measure as it is itself based on pure reason. To the Advaita one is as valid as the other since the principle involved is the same (Nataraja Guru Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru 316).

The Guru in this poem marks out the field of rational contemplative norms of conduct in terms of the dignity of man. Man is the measure of all things as Self-realization in universal term is his goal, when intellectually conceived. After understanding critically the position in regard to this question of killing and eating, it is for each man to make up his mind where he will draw the line of demarcation between what is necessary according to him and what he
should avoid in the name of kindness. But the palate here should not be the preponderant consideration.

The kindness meant in this poem is that tender feeling of universal sympathy, which is based on an open and rational outlook. Here reason is affiliated to a humanitarian outlook. This attitude is the essence of religion.

In this first verse the doctrine of non-duality, as conceived in universal term is invoked to support the idea of kindness as an obligation to be rightfully recognized by man. Reason makes kindness binding. Otherwise ethics would depend upon necessity and would be left for its support on instinct or animal nature. Non-dual contemplation requires reason to be taken as a corrective to instances. Instincts must always be subjected to the sublimating purification of reason.

Self-fraternity is the same as universal brotherhood or equality in the eyes of God spoken by the religious people

In the second verse the Guru said,

*The non-killing vow is great indeed,*

*And greater still, not eating to observe,*

*And in all, should we not say, o men of righteousness,*

*Even to this amounts the essence of all religions?*

(Naryana Guru J.P Verse 2)
There is no religion which does not stress one form or other of universal brotherhood and which does not advocate kindness to all living things. The commandment ‘thou shall not kill’ which Christianity and Islam inherited from Hebraic and perhaps from Proto Hebraic sources confirms this view. Buddhism in principle is solidly based on non-hurting (ahimsa), and Jainism marks the high level of this principle.

The verse 3 read as:

If killing were applied to oneself,

Who, as a favour, would treat such a dire destiny?

As touching all in equality, O ye wise ones,

Should that not be our declaration for a regulated life?

(Naryana Guru J.P Verse 3)

The appeal in this verse is to those endowed with wisdom or education. Equality leads inevitably to the notion of equity. The argument here is against unilateral attitudes of equity. Reciprocated equity applied to both sides concerned without difference and based on uniformly general principle, becomes equality, which the wise are here asked to recognize so that they may lead humanity along such lines. In the next verse it is stated as:

No killer would there be if no other to eat there was-

Perforce, himself must eat!

In eating thus abides the cruder ill

In that it killing makes.

(Naryana Guru J.P Verse 4)
It is often held the argument that someone else has done the killing and therefore one can eat without any qualms of conscience. The hollowness of such an argument is exposed here with a certain touch of humour. The picture arises of a lone huntsman having brought down a deer and being faced with the problem of consuming it all himself. This readily brings home the absurd relation between the killer and the eater, and the argument is not without its humorous side.

The last verse appeals to human dignity and in its name puts in its final plea against killing.

*Not killing makes a human good -*

*Else an animal’s equal he becomes*

*No refuge has the taker of life,*

*Although to him all other goods accrue.*

(Naryana Guru J.P Verse 51)

In this verse there is an appeal to a higher value in man which is reasonable. Man becomes the equal of an animal by wanting to kill it for the pleasure of his palate or for the pleasure of hunting, which are motives of a very ordinary order, common to more uniformed levels of life.

There are values and values. Those in the form of good which we enjoy here are many and varied and may be had in a unilateral fashion even when one is undeserving. But the essential good as a value, such as grace or refuge or sanctuary in God comes from the unitive, presiding principles of good with
which a bilateral and unitary relationship is necessary. One cannot think of bribing God for a partial favour based on no principles. To be loved of God one has to love one’s fellow creatures, all in all.

**Scriptures of Mercy (Anukampa Dasakam)**

This poem is a sequence of ten verses around the central concept of kindliness, compassion, grace or mercy. The slightest inclination one way or the other of the meaning of this central concept gives various representations, some based on hypostatic and others on hierophantic principles. The substance of reality can be conceived ontologically as the immanent, the transcendent or the teleological. A central concept or factor of human value touching the life in a direct way is possible to constitute a good, virtuous or holy life.

The concept of mercy affords such a pivotal factor. Mercy is the ‘twice blest’ state of the personality irrespective of the donor or the receiver, the subject or the object. In fact, it is identical with blessedness which objectively would be grace and subjectively would be bounty, generosity or compassion. One acts compassionately and receives grace. Blessedness is a central and neutral state which neither refers to objective or subjective factors. The difference between a state of being in love and that of blessedness, when conceived in their widest and most universal connotations, is negligible. The negation of such love is the negation of life and thus of all wisdom.
Contemplation itself depends on the middle way implied in a loving and positive attitude. Exclusiveness, hatred, a unilateral position and stressing duality, all suggest the negation of life and love. Love and consideration for other living creatures is the basis of the good life and upheld as the central doctrine and commandment of all the world religions. In this poem spiritual expressions are correlated over a wide and varied range.

Such Mercy that even to an ant
Would brook not the least harm to befall,
O Mercy-Maker do vouchsafe with contemplation
Which from the pure Presence never strays.

(Narayana Guru A.D Verse 1)

The opening verse reciprocally links the one who prays and the object or prayer through the intermediary of the one and the same concept of mercy. The kindness shown to an ant is of the same measureless quality as the mercy expected from God in the form of grace. Both refer to one common central value belonging to the human personality. To love a brother is natural and instinctive, but to love a lowly creature like the ant demands an intelligent who thinks in universal terms.

When this universal idea of kindness applies to one and all, including the Self, without any asymmetry or difference, the essential attitude belonging to contemplation is attained. Such contemplation knows neither the distinction of the subject nor the object but equates all factors impartially according to the
fundamental laws of knowing, which means reducing one factor in accord with its natural and normal dialectical counterpart.

Here the “pure Presence” is the Absolute conceived as a human value while contemplation is the intellectual or spiritual approach implied in appraising such a personalized value. The quality of mercy which “blesseth him that gives and him that takes”, is the common real living and actual factor which induces contemplation to yield a consciousness of the presence of the pure or the sacred in the sense of the Absolute. Neutral or global awareness as Self-realization amounts to the same thing. Philosophically conceived as ‘knowledge’, psychologically conceived as “Self”, cosmologically conceived as “the supreme divinity” or ethically and religiously conceived in the universal language of ‘brotherhood’ or “mercy” all these, representing, the existence, the truth and the value, meet in this central concept which the Guru has chosen as the normative principle or correlation for all the various forms of spiritual expression.

Grace yields blessedness; a heart Love-empty
Disaster spells of every kind.
Darkness as Love’s effacer and as suffering’s core,
Is seed to everything.

(Naryana Guru A.D Verse 2)

In this verse the inter-relation of factors is stated concisely, both the joy yielding positive and the suffering productive negative forces. Grace is first
equated to love on the positive side. Darkness and suffering are also to be understood as referring to the negative side of the personality.

Grace is only the positive side of one’s own love of life. We can place it in heaven or in the heart of each man. Sin and grace must be taken together and fitted into a common context of Self-knowledge so that all values have their place in the general scheme. When this is accomplished it would help to minimise the ideological conflicts.

**Grace, Love, Mercy – all the three**

**Stand for one same reality - Life’s Star**

“He who loves is he who really lives.” Do learn

**These syllables nine by heart in place**

**Of lettered charm.**

(Naryana Guru A.D Verse 3)

Here the positive factors are brought closer to one another to indicate that one dominant human value is intimately related to life itself. Doctrinal religion tends to reduce faith into dry liturgical formulae and creeds to be repeated mechanically for a promised salvation. It is not enough to understand love as a doctrine and say that one believes in it as an article of faith. This and other values have to enter into intimate union with the Self as part of a life that is lived. But even such a life, when theory and practice meet, involves an intuitive apprehension of Reality in the most intimate understanding of Self-realization.
The value which ought to dominate life is indicated as a star to guide the mariner on the sea of existence and then it is related backwards as it was to real living here and now. Thus, in both ways the unity of life and love is affirmed. The whole object here is to bring ethics, piety and knowledge unitively under one dominant conception of a human value in accord with the fundamental method and theory of the *Advaita Vedanta* which affirms ‘That Thou Art’ (Nataraja Guru *Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru* 361).


*Without the gift of Grace, a mere body

Of bone and skin and tissue foul is man

Like water lost in desert sand,

Like flower or fruit bereft of smell.*

(Naryana Guru *A.D Verse 4*)

The frustrated Self buried in its own desert sands does not emerge into positive levels of goodness either to humanity or to its own true nature. When grace has gone and love has weakened, the body loses its beauty. A flower through its fragrance confers some benefit, and fruit too has its positive smell-taste virtue. These are the opposites of the inert bodily aspects. Contemplation stabilizes, harmonises and equalizes these opposing factors producing the good life at all levels in different forms.
Those phases six that life do overtake(doubt as overtake or overtake)

Invade not wisdom’s pure domain

Likewise the Mercy quality, when human form has gone,

As good reputations form endures.

(Naryana Guru A.D Verse 5)

The perfume of a flower can leave its traces in its surroundings till breezes carry the scent across the fields. In a similar way when we come to human values which are subtler than the perfume of a flower, it is possible that the behaviour of a good man in a certain locality can create around him associations and memory factors. Sometimes this results from the contribution of many personalities who have lived a life of goodness. A highly spiritual man of the status of a harmonized contemplative or sage, his ineffable influence affects the surroundings almost permanently. The reputation of a Christ or of a Buddha belongs to this category. It does not depend on the passing away of the body.

The body is the phenomenal aspect of reality which suffers change. Metabolic changes and changes through the larger cycles of life and its extinction (such as the six phases usually mentioned in the terminology of Vedanta, viz., existence, birth, growth, transformation, decline and death), affect only one aspect of the personality. The subtler, purer or inner life tends to become independent of the states and the last lingering traces of duality vanish in Self-realization, which is the innermost awareness of all.
When human values enter into the conduct of a wise man, as it ought to be in a normal way at every stage of his spiritual progress from the real to the ideal, the highest aspects of the personality leave various traces on the environment. Actually, all this good influence remains as a favourable appreciation on the part of humanity, which is often grateful for the good implied in a certain way of life. This reputation is the life after death recognized here.

That Dispenser of Mercy could He not be that reality
Who 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?

(Narayana Guru A.D Verse 6)

The allusions here are to the three ways of appreciation of the central human value called kindliness in three different contexts. God himself is first referred to as the Dispenser of Mercy as He was Mercy-Maker in the first verse of the poem. Functionally, God is Mercy’s Author. Generosity, goodness and bounty are integral parts of his absolute nature in the usual sense of the positive, transcendental and immaterial principle. As representative of this principle, conceived as a human value, which makes human beings more humans, in the sense that they are distinguished from the less intelligent animals.

In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna represents as a guru or teacher of contemplative wisdom. He drives the chariot of Arjuna in the midst of the battle
field. Krishna was Arjuna’s friend and equal and at the same time an acharya or teacher. When the Bhagavad Gita refers to the word wisdom the guru or teacher quality gives Krishna another status. This is an objective aspect of the Reality but should be conceived in pure terms. Here such a Reality is the “Self” or “Substance”.

In the third line of the verse that is “compassion’s ocean, ever impatient for all creation,” has the reference to that type of wisdom which expresses itself realistically at the level of daily life. Buddha’s ethics had this character. The boundless human sympathy which welled up within Buddha over flowed and reached out to all life in the quest of a universal synthesis, taking in life as a while realistically and rationally. The universal elements present in Buddha’s sympathy gave it a mystical character which is described here as a restless ocean ever seeking to make good prevail in human affairs.

In human semblance here is He a divinity,

Or perhaps the law of right in sacred human form?

Is He the pure begotten Son of the Lord Most High?

Or kindly prophet Nebi, pearl and gem in one?

(Naryana Guru A.D Verse 7)

In the present verse the contemplative method of examination is carried out. In some cases it is easy to see the antinomian features. In certain other cases the pure and the practical coalesce more closely in the person of a prophet
or spiritual teacher, the two aspects adhere almost without distinction, like the
two sides of the same gold coin.

According to the Guru, the Nebi or the Prophet Mohommed has this last
described quality. He is called “kindly Prophet Nebi, pearl and gem in one.”
The pearl found in the ocean’s depth represents perfection. It symbolizes an
integrated normal value in human affairs. The gem is a similar beauty-value
with many facets. There is a certain pure severity combined with a lavish sense
of richness and kindness combined in the character and personality of
Mohammed the prophet.

*Is He that soul personified who with holy ashes once*

*Fever drove away many wonders worked?*

*Or yet that other of psychic power who wandering in agony,*

*Allayed His vented distress even with song?*

(Naryana Guru A.D Verse 8)

In this verse the reference is made to the early seventh century Tamil
saints. Appar, Sundarar, Manikkar and Tirugnasambandur were four of the
great names in this early era. The first two lines in this verse refer to Appar who
is said to have healed the Pallava king Mahendravarman I, of his chronic fever.
It was evidently faith healing to the credit of the Siva cult, by which Appar
became famous. The last two lines refer to Sundarar. The object here is to show
that bodily health depends on a balance of emotional and intellectual factors.
Else is he that sage of crowning fame who uttered once again

That holy script already known and writ in Hara’s name?

Or He devoted to the value of the Lord Supreme

Who here departed bodily ere life for him was stilled?

(Naryana Guru A.D Verse 9)

The author of the Kural, the monumental Tamil masterpiece dating from the beginning of the Christian era or earlier and based on the background of prehistoric Siva, who is also known as Hara, is referred to here.

The Guru revives here the classic the Kural and its author Thiruvalluvar. The author of the Kural is held in high esteem in the Tamil country and the Kural itself is very popular with its ethical and philosophical implications of deep significance. The perennial nature of the word wisdom as formulated in the systematically and critically constructed chapters of the Kural draws out the just homage from a Guru of a later age, who gives it an honoured place in these verses extolling representations of the word wisdom throughout the world.

The idea of the dialectical revaluation of the word wisdom is sagged in the line as once again. Wisdom lives on, ever and again revalued and restated by great sages and the person of such a sage capable of reevaluating word-wisdom critically and methodically and it attains a supreme status as the counterpart of such wisdom when objectively and correctly considered.

Dealing bounty here on earth and taking human form

Is He that Kama Dhenu Cow of all providing food?
Or perhaps that wonder tree of heaven supreme,

The Deva Taru which to each its gifts bestow?

(Naryana Guru A.D Verse 10)

After alluding to various forms in which the counterparts make the Absolute presence real to us in its various manifestations in different contexts, we came here to more matter of fact expressions of the emergent value of God in human affairs. The pragmatic good consists of distributing benefits in a concrete sense. The Kama Dhenu is the fabulous cow of plenty. It is a mythical symbol of certain values of general good or prosperity. It stands for the common weal as when social reformers speak of the greatest good of the greatest number in collective or individual terms. The man who wants to do good becomes elevated to a status of holiness by his very intention. He aims at an ideal, which, equated with himself, yields that numinous factor which is a supreme value (Nataraja Guru Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru 371).

The heavenly cow is like a generous man on earth. The heavenly cow’s aspects meet to reveal the same value though in apparently different forms. This central value is kindness or mercy. Good is always the centrally emergent factor and mercy is that same good stated in realistic language. A good man can be equated to a tree and vice versa. A cow of plenty can be equated to a generous man. Whatever the terms used in the understanding of value it has the same worth as a “Guiding star” in contemplative life.
In the envoi of the poem the Guru says thus:

High scriptures meaning, antique, rare
Or meaning as by Guru taught,
And what mildly a sage conveys,
And wisdom’s branches of every stage,
Together they all belong,
As one in essence, in substance same.

(Naryana Guru A.D Verse 11)

This concluding verse sums up the position in conformity with the convention as the first verse also did in a certain way, in explaining the general subject matter without entering into it too deeply.

The mystical doctrines contained in the body of the composition applied directly to a spiritual life without one special religious or academic colouration. In fact, it is above such distinctions and considerations. Vedanta, particularly Advaita Vedanta, is not substantive religion or scripture, but is a synthetic approach to all scriptures. The verse above should not be taken to be a new religion or any religion based on mercy as a creed or doctrine. Mercy is a transcending human values running through all expressions of spirituality, whether pre-vedic, post-vedic or non-vedic. The agamas are all the various later ramification and elaboration of the primary attitude of mercy implied in the highest scriptures.
In this verse the Guru wants to ensure that there is no mistake made in this matter. The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the later wisdom literature learned on them; whether they take the form of philosophy or asceticism, express the same human value which has been chosen as the central subject matter of this composition.

In concluding this dialectical counterpart we can see that the philosophy of Narayana Guru is a double-edged one. If theoretical speculation and transparency of vision together form one side of the coin that is his philosophy, the Self-contentment one experiences uninterrupted in life, absolutely perfect morality, compassion, non-violence (*ahimsa*) and such other personal traits that outwardly become visible in practical life, comprise the other side. In other words these are the dialectical counterparts of the non-dualistic vision of Narayana Guru.
REFERENCE


