CHAPTER V

UNIVERSAL RELIGION

The Guru, one of the greatest of the modern saints exemplifies in his own life, the deal of the unity of all life, the oneness of mankind. Universality of outlook constitutes the striking feature of the great life and thought of the Guru. His *modus vivendi* explains powerfully the applicability of the principles of Vedānta to daily life. The Guru's dictum of one in kind, One in Religion and One in God for man is a dynamic pointer to One world religion or universalism. This can be attained if we equip ourselves with an outlook and understanding that is at once unitive and unifying. According to the Guru, man is of one family because of the unitive and all embracing nature of the self as expressed in Ātmāpadeśa Śatakam. Verse - 11.

The repeated I, I contemplated from within
Is not many but remains one dwergent egorty
Being multiple with the totality of such
The self-substance too continuing assumes.¹

Guru's message of One caste, One religion, One God is of urgent importance in India whose democratic system is based on secularism.

This message helps to purify the hearts and minds of Indian humanity and lifts them beyond racial, religious, linguistic and parochial wrangles.

5.1 ONE CASTE, ONE RELIGION, ONE GOD FOR MAN (ORU JÄTI, ORU MATAM, ORU DAIYAM MANUSHYANU)

One of the most important messages of the Guru, 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for man Implies Advaita philosophy in concrete, factual identifiable terms. This great and benignant message of the Guru is the second verse of his famous work. Jāti Nirnaya (A Critique of caste) which contains five verses of which first is in Sanskrit and the remaining four in Malayalam. It says so.

“One of kind, One of faith,
and one in God is man,
of one womb, of one form
Difference here is none”

In this message there is practical Vedānta, a message of harmony and unitive understanding with universal connotation and contemporary relevance. He declared that the men of the whole world belong to the same species. Being different manifestations of the Unitive Brahman, the self and the external world are one and the same. This is one caste and one God. By one religion he declared that the

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2 ibid., p. 273
essence of all religions is the same. All have the same goal but the only
difference is in the means to attain the goal.

John Spiers, One of Guru's great disciples, paraphrases it "as
there being only one External Reality, dedicated service to that is the
true religion: and since all men are capable of that service, and since all
people, all life and all things move and have their existence by that One,
all separateness and division into race, caste colour and creed are
nothing but illusion foisted on the minds of men by ignorance and
forgetfulness of this sole Universal Reality.\(^3\)

5.1.1 One Caste (Oru Jāti)

The Indian constitution envisages a secular casteless and
classless society. The fundamental ideas inspiring these documents
were given to the people by Sree Narayana Guru a century ago. The
Guru accepted the non-duality of the individual self and the divine Self of
Advaita Philosophy of Sri Sankara. This notion naturally led to the
assertion of the non-duality of individual selves. Therefore he opposed
caste system.

The caste system and its direct off shoot untouchability were
degenerated form of traditional chāturvanyā which was based on the
division of people according to their family occupation. Chāturvanyā
was contrary to the very spirit of Advaita. The Guru's famous message

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'One Caste, One religion, One God for men' was an outcome of his interpretation of Sankara's Advaita. The message has great relevance for us today when the traditional family occupations have broken down. People belonging to different social groups have been taking up occupations that are alien to their classes. The Guru's teachings enable us to fight against caste system and untouchability which still persist in our country.

The theory of One caste based on Non-dual knowledge is the basic principle of the theory of One Religion of the Guru. So one caste shall be accepted as the basis of human religion and the present caste system shall be abolished in every sphere of life. Based on the famous saying 'Every one is born as Sudra but he becomes Brahmin by his action' (Janmana Ja yate Sudrah, Karmana Ja yate dvijah), caste is an anomaly in religions. Nataraja Guru says that Sankara treated the subject of caste as part of the Vyāvahārika (the world of relative, every day life), a necessary and given aspect of social obligation taken for granted as something natural. For various historical reasons the critical revaluations of the subject of caste in the light of the full implications of contemplative, non-dual self knowledge was avoided in India. In our own times, as we know, this neglect has led to extreme forms of social inequality and discrimination, known today as caste, exclusive and
segregatory, leading to the extremism of untouchability. It is Brahmin versus pariah dialectics.4

The Guru states that castes such as Brahmin and Pariah have no reality. Caste distinctions have no basis in actuality. “Racial distinctions do not amount to distinctions in the species in any strict terms. Like languages and customs these may give an appearance of variety to the species, but they are only superficial factors of no importance intrinsically to biology”5 The Guru defined caste as one in kind. Both the Brahmin and Pariah are essentially one in human content. Whatever asymmetry there may be in the appearance of one or the other is fictitious and quite irrelevant to spirituality. 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. The caste distinctions have no basis in Advaita Philosophy. The duality that is apparent between the interests of two individuals can be viewed univocally as referring to the self-same central or neutral Self conceived in the context of the Absolute. In Atmopadeśa Šatakam the Guru says that ‘Ātman is one only without a second. So the whole humanity is one in kind.’

5 ibid., p. 277
The distinction between caste and out-caste is artificial and unspiritual. The Bhagavadgītā explains the fourfold order based on guṇa (aptitude) and Karma (function) and not jāti (kind-birth).

"The fourfold order was created by Me according to the division of quality and works. Though I am its creator, know Me to be incapable of action or change." A class determined by temperament and vocation is not a caste determined by birth and heredity. The varṇa or the order to which we belong is independent of sex, birth or breeding. So the interpretation of some scholars in favour of caste system is due to the misunderstanding of the word 'varṇa' as caste in India. The vedās are not in favour of any discrimination of caste system which has prevailed in India. Mahābhārata explains: The whole world was originally of one class but later it became divided in to four divisions on account of the specific duties.

"Ekavarṇam Idam purṇam viswam asid yudhistira
Karmakriya viśeṣena cāturvyam pratiṣṭhitam".

In the Mahābhārata Yudhistirā says that it is difficult to find out the caste of persons on account of the mixture of caste. Men beget offspring in all sorts of women. So conduct is the only determining feature of caste according to sages.

7 ibid., p. 161
8 ibid., p. 161
"There is nothing absolute about the caste system which has changed its character in the process of history. Functional groupings will never be out of date and as for marriages they will happen among those who belong to more or less the same stage of cultural development. The present morbid condition of India broken into castes and subcastes is opposed to the unity taught by the Gītā, which stands for an organic as against an atomistic conception of society."\(^9\)

Buddha was the only great Indian philosopher who would not recognise caste. Like Buddha, the Guru boldly proclaimed the theory of one caste and dedicated his life to the well-being of humanity. On the basis of Advaitic vision, the Guru proclaims the theory of One caste, One religion, One God for man in his short poems Jāti Nirṇayam and Jāti Lakṣaṇa. Through Jāti Nirṇayam the Guru explains that 'humanity comes under a distinct species. Being so, its oneness and relatedness are beyond doubt'.\(^10\) It rejects the idea of casteism.

'Man's humanity marks out the human kind

Even as bovinity proclaims a cow

Brahminhood and such are not thus wise;

None do see this truth alas!

One in kind, One in faith and one in God is man;

Of one womb, of one form; difference here is none.'\(^11\)

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\(^9\) ibid., p. 161


One caste for man means as bovinity proclaims cowness, humanness marks out the human kind. Thus being human all men belong to the same caste according to the Guru. The Guru also says that the human species is one because within the same species only offspring truly breed.

"Within a species, is not, that offspring truly breed? The community of man thus viewed to a single caste belongs"12

Since there is no difference between man and man, both Brahmin and Pariah are essentially one in human species. The Guru exhorted that the great men are respected by their dedicated services and not by their birth. Birth was not a hindrance in the way of Parasara or Vyasa in their unique reputation as great sages and teachers.

"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"13

"The Guru's aim here is to reveal to all that these saintly characters, Parasara and Vyasa, who were recognized everywhere as ancestors of holy cherished memory and worshipped as such by all castes in every home in the Hindu world, 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 stock at all; hence here is the ultimate contradiction to be faced, of the Brahmin not only accepting and

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12 ibid., p. 273.
13 ibid., p. 273.
adopting the Pariah Guru but putting him on the topmost pedestal as a sage of supreme value from the Vedic point of view. In the contradictory absurdity thus proved, all caste prejudices based on heredity, dynasty and blind tradition must be dispelled, and the social atmosphere of the present ultimately and finally cleared of this major caste-impediment"14

The few verses of this short poem – Jāti Nirṇayam – convey even to the ordinary man the essence of his views on universal religion. With the aid of this short poem, the Guru establishes the undoubted fact of human solidarity of one kind genetically, of one fundamental faith religiously and of one supreme value considered under the many synonyms of God. He adds that the present cast system shall be abolished in every sphere of life.

In the poem Jāti Lakṣaṇa the Guru explains that the group (inam) or the caste of animals can be determined on the basis of the common or essential characteristics possessed by the members of a particular group. Sri Buddha was also of this opinion. Here the guru defines casteism scientifically and gives the common characteristics (Sāmānyā Lakṣaṇa) on the basis of which caste can be determined.

a. The animals which unite with each other and give birth to their off springs, belong to the same group. Which do not do so belong to other groups.

b. The members of a particular group possess similar physical posture, sound, body temperature and smell as the common characteristic.

c. The group of animals can be determined on the basis of their sāmānya lakṣaṇa, possessed by the members of that particular group. Eg. 'humanness' is the sāmānya lakṣaṇa of human beings.

d. We can enquire the name, native place and occupation of a person. But we need not ask about his caste because his Jāti lakṣaṇa, 'humanness' is the same for all human beings and it can be perceived directly.

e. We need not lie about our caste. All belong to the same caste, humanity. So there is no need of questioning about other's caste and there is no such distinction as lower and upper caste.

Thus the Guru exhorts that every group (inam) has its own sāmānya lakṣaṇa and the group or caste in which the animal belongs depends on their common or essential attributes. The groups can be divided only into two – the males and females. No other divisions exist. The Guru also adds that the group or inam is nothing but the vivartha of Arivu. He concludes the poem by making use of the vedāntic simile of ocean and waves. Group is the waves that arise from the ocean of Arivu. The waves are nothing but the ocean itself. So the inam or group
is the *Arivu* or knowledge. The knowledge is essentially the nature of self. So there is no difference between one's self and the other's.

According to the Guru caste restricts man's freedom and destroys his intelligence. Caste makes it impossible to take up professions according to aptitude. Avocations become an obligation of birth in a community even if the person has not the ability or aptitude for them. So progress becomes impossible due to caste system.

Now-a-days instead of this caste system there emerged a new moral arena of life called community or *Samudāyam*. Hence Nair community and Ezhava community have been synonymous to Nair caste and Ezhava caste. The S.N.D.P. Yogam was established based on the principle of the Guru that without an organisation no community can achieve prosperity and strength. He stated that the Ezhava community does not indicate a caste or religion and people can be admitted into this organization irrespective of cast and religion. The concept of humanism or human equality put forth by the Guru differs from that of Mahatma Gandhi who wished to implement a modern network of the village republics to combat caste oppression. Thus the Guru was bringing Vedānta down from the intellectual heights to the laymen. As a 'jñānin of action' he sensed the social evils of his day and contributed to the elevation of the oppressed classes in Kerala. To quote Nehru "he worked for a classless and casteless society". He said that Sree Narayana Guru lived here and from here radiated his message
– the message of no caste, no division and he wanted to build up a casteless and classless society. That message is still very much needed in these days. In order to get a casteless, classless society what are we to do? Many things have to be done. But the general approach which I presume is Sree Narayana Guru's approach through the mind and heart and not of a compulsion and coercion. Where there is not this turning of the heart and mind, all other changes are likely to be superficial.15

"Ask not speak not, Think not of caste". This is the final warning the Guru has given to those who accept the message of human brotherhood; and this contains the simple answer to the caste system. The Guru says that caste exists in the ignorance and superstitions of the people and nothing more is required get out of that self made snare than to ignore it. One cannot come out of the spell unless the above simple rules are observed. The saint who taught with such broad – mindness has been recognised by all the castes as their Guru and his birthday and Samadhi day have been made public holidays by the Government in Kerala.

The Guru also states that man is not made for caste, for the world or any such things; all these are for men. The S.N.D.P. Yogam is a body of people without any sort of caste leaning and to whom religion was not a creed but a matter of personal faith. His disciples should be

15 Souvenir to commemorate the 112th birthday of Sree Narayana Guru – A Sree Narayana Guru Mission Publication 31st August. 1966, p. 28
absolutely no thought of caste. He has openly proclaimed that only those who have given up caste mentality should be admitted into the order of disciples.

The Guru declared that all humanity belong to the same species. This knowledge he acquired was because of the Ātma-Jñāna attained through the study of Advaita Darsana. The declaration made by the Guru in the last Millenium is now proved to be true scientifically by two famous scientists - Francis Collin (Director H.G. Project) J. Craig Venter (Director Celeia Genomics) based on their study on Gene mapping. And on 26th June 2000 the then American President Bill Clinton announced the world that all human beings in the world belong to one and the same human species.¹⁶

Legislative enactments may penalise the observance of the absurd distinctions and caste leanings; and we may hope that the forces which the Guru set in motion will in due time accomplish the downfall of that accursed system.

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¹⁶ Mathrubhumi Daily, 21.9. 2000, Kozhikode. P.4
5.1.2 One Religion

The religious transformation taken place in Kerala was mostly due to the principles and practices established by the Guru. Many lakhs of people have been benefitted by this divine man’s efforts. Even the first act of his public work-consecration of temple at Aruvippuram – shook the foundation of the fortress of orthodoxy, and this event was steadily becoming a revolutionary force heralding a new cultural renaissance. The epoch making Temple Entry Proclamation of his Highness Sri Bala Rama Varma, Maharaja of Travancore was an expression of the changing outlook and marks the dawn of a new age of freedom and reconstruction.¹⁷

One of the chief contributions of the Guru is his message of One caste, One religion and One God. He taught a better a way of life based on Advaitic theory of religion to all humanity including spiritualists and materialists as well. The Guru declared the theory of One Religion based on One ultimate reality. The Guru thus turned out to be a source of inspiration to all those who worked for the religious, cultural and material advancement of society. People belonging to all communities – Nairs, Ezhavas, Christians sought blessings from the Guru and he mingled with the people with equal love and affection. To him the whole world was one family (*Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam*) and he accepted and honoured all religions including Christianity and Islam.

In the course of his long quest for truth, he gathered much knowledge about world religions. Islam was very dear to him because of its emphasis on equality and brotherhood. Sufi Mysticism appealed to his devotional and poetic turn of mind. There were occasions when he gave his own interpretations of the verses in the Quran. They were acceptable to the Muslim divines too. Many were the Muslims of the south Travancore who considered him as their Guru. He revered Jesus Christ as the Apostle of love and peace. All these contacts and the experience so gained made him fully convinced of the universality of love and of the unitiveness of all religious doctrines.\(^{18}\) The knowledge he gathered provided a practical orientation to his Darsana or vision of reality.

Through his message of One religion the Guru has emphasized the basic unity of all religions based on Advaita Vedānta and he never denied the usefulness of any particular religion. Religion is the realization of the ultimate truth. The Guru stated that "the aim of all religions is one. Once the different rivers run in to the sea all of them merge into it; the difference disappear. The aim of religion is to lift the thought of man towards the highest point. After this goal is achieved, each individual will find his way to it on his own. For the man who has experienced the ultimate truth, the aid or religion is no longer needed. He becomes the source of religious faith for other men. The Buddha did

not attain the ultimate in enlightenment by studying Buddhism. He realized and then he preached what he had realized. And the sum total of those teachings became Buddhism. This is true of other religions also.\textsuperscript{19} The Guru exhorted that the religious wars and communal strives will have no end because no community can be annihilated. If religious strife is to end every one should be taught the other man’s religion and he should learn it with an open mind and recognize the other religions. That will pave the way to the realization of the same fundamentals of different religions, which is meant by the expression “One Religion for Man”.

The Guru lucidly explains that “Today Hinduism means the entire conglomeration of an immense variety of beliefs belonging to an entire scale of values which spans a considerable hiatus (gap) that exists in the matter of customs, manners, rites and philosophy among different groups and believers. Veda, Mimamsa. Dvaita, Advaita, Visishtadvaita, Saiva, Sakteya, Vaishnava all these are forms of the Hinduism. If this entire gamut of beliefs can be called one religion viz Hinduism, then all religions Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism etc can be collectively known as “One Religion”\textsuperscript{20}

He also stated that “If the religion preached by its founder and subsequently elaborated into different branches by his followers, can be

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\textsuperscript{20} ibid., p. 42.
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called one religion and given the name of the founder, the spiritual
tenets preached by the different Achāryas can also, by an extension of
this principle be termed as one religion. People should see the
phenomenon of unity in diversity as it exists between different
religions."21

As the foreigners styled the people of Hindustan as Hindus and
many distinctly different religions are called by the common generic
name of Hinduism, it is not illogical to designate all the religions of the
world by the appellation "One Religion" with a single unambiguous
essence and goal. According to the Guru, the essence and the goal of
all religions is the same. The gist of the Guru's message is that the texts
of religions should be studied without any discrimination. The religion of
the Guru tolerates all form of worship as alternative approaches to
Reality. It shows tolerance and universal outlook, and provides for the
fellowship of faiths and inter-religious unity. He practiced and taught the
Advaita way of life, i.e., "One Religion."

5.1.3 Philosophical implications of one religion

Ātmāpadeśa Śatakam verses 44 to 49 give the philosophical
implications of One religion. The Guru says that the ignorant people do
not recognize the truth that the essence of all religions is one and the
same. Their ideas may be compared to apparently conflicting view of

21 ibid., p. 42
the blind men who cognized the elephant in many forms, touching the
different parts of its body and interpreted the shape of the animal in
different manner depending upon the particular portion each one
touched.

"Not seeing that the various religions in the world
Are essentially the same, advancing various arguments
Like the blind men and the elephant, roam not like fools.
But stop wandering and calmly settle down"\(^{22}\)

The Guru then explains that the rules of one religion or faith may
not be valid for another religion. Different religions came to be
established under the influence of different external conditions, which
make them appear as different, but they are essentially one and the
same. So the arguments based upon illusion about the superiority of
one religion over the other, has no meaning at all. Here the Guru is
stressing the message "One Caste, One Religion and One God for
man".

"One faith in another's view is low, and the doctrine
Cardinal as taught in one, in another's measure, lacks;
Know, confusion in the world shall prevail so long
As the unitive secret herein remains unknown."\(^ {23}\)

The people who quarrel in the name of religions are ignorant of
the fact that ultimately there is only one faith and one religion. The


\(^{23}\) ibid., p. 589
people who make no discrimination between different forms of faith
know the secret. The Guru expressed this view in Ātmopadeśa
Satakam verse 47.

“All men do even plead for a single faith to prevail
Which no disputant owns to himself withal;
Those wise ones free from other-faith-dispute
Alone can know here wholly, the secret here implied.”24

All kinds of religious practices have the ultimate goal. The
difference between the religions is due to the difference in the method of
practical teaching. The philosophical implications of One Religion that is
explained by the Guru in the six verses of Ātmopadeśa Śatakam verses
44 to 49 can be summarized as

a) All religions have common aim and end i.e. – Happiness.

b) Ardent mutual adoptions is implicit in religious affiliation.

c) Rival religions argue for the same value.

d) Essence of all religions is the same.

All religions have the common aim of Happiness. “To the eye of a
person able to see the essential as distinct from the merely superficial
aspect of religions, there is a common basic substratum of which the
divergent expressions are only secondary and unimportant marginal
aspects. All religions in essence answer to one central human need for

24 ibid., p. 594
spiritual consolation. They all seek happiness and there is no religion in the world which aims at suffering rather than happiness."\(^{25}\)

"Every man at every time makes effort in every way. Aiming at his Self-Happiness; therefore in this world

Know faith as one; understanding thus,

Shunning evil, the inner Self into calmness merge."\(^{26}\)

"The one religion of mankind, to which the Guru referred in his well known motto of One race, One religion and One Ideal or God for all mankind, is to be visualized on the basis of the common end of Happiness that all religions, however varied and different superficially have as the central value implied in their teaching."\(^{27}\)

Ardent mutual adoption is implicit in religious affiliation. According to the Guru all men have self realization already implicit in their relational life. When a man accepts certain religion as pattern of behaviour there is a deep seated fusion of the self and non self factors which take place within him. When the relation is with the true Self in man, adoption does not result in conflict. But the ego participates, it tends often to far and exaggerate the disparity of religions. "The possibility of adopting a religion as one’s own is itself, as the Guru points out, only a recognition of the homogenous parity in the participation of the self and non self factors involved. By itself this possibility belongs to

\(^{25}\) ibid., p. 588

\(^{26}\) ibid., p. 599

\(^{27}\) ibid., p. 589
the pure Self and when understood in such a pure perspective, is fully dignified and conducive to Self realization."²⁸

“This dweller within the body from its existential body view
In respect of all things treats ‘That’ or ‘This’ as ‘mine’
Transcending physical limitations; when we consider this
We should concede that any man immediate realisation has”²⁹

Atmāpadeśa Śatakam Verse 46 underlines the fact that persecution only makes unilateral faith firmer. The martyrs to any deep belief prove the irony of the situation in the history of any religion, and this is contrary to What might be expected by me mechanistic reasoning. The apocalyptic touch of the last line of verse 46 give a prophetic touch of the Guru’s philosophy of religion.³⁰

To vanquish (a religion) by fighting is not possible, no religion Can be abolished by mutual attack;
The opponent of another faith
Not remembering this and presisting in his fight,
His own doom shall be in vain fight for, beware!³¹

The religious reformers are trying to unite all humanity under one faith. A fanatic might want all others to come under his religion. Rival antagonism could be minimised if the religious zealots realise the fact that they are pleading for the same value. Atmāpadeśa Śatakam verse 47 brings this fact to light.

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The difference between religions is due to the difference in their method of practical teaching. All kinds of practice have the ultimate goal—the unfolding of divinity. The essence or the basic subject matter of all religious faiths or patterns of behaviour is the same. It is the direct global insight into the nature of the Absolute or total truth. So Narayana Guru explains the need for taking a global view of religious system. He also stresses the need to see the underlying unity of all religions.

The Guru’s last message to the people strengthens the view that ultimately there is only one faith and one religion. Just about a year and a half before he passed away, he gave his last message to the people gathered in the annual meeting of the S.N.D.P. Yogam near Alleppy. It ran thus.

“I am very much pleased to understand that you are having serious discussions about social organisation and religious reform. But the object of organisation should not be to bring together people of a particular caste and create a community. Our organisation should be such as will unite all mankind. Religion should allow full liberty of faith and be acceptable to cultured minds. It should be such as will lead men to a great ideal. The central principle contained in ‘One caste, One religion, One God’ can form the basis of such religion. It appears to me that the best method of organisation will be to unite all those who believe in this eternal truth. To those who think that without a change of religion the inequalities and injustices will not end, to such, accepting this as
their faith will be religious conversion and a proclamation of independence." This principle must be followed by all the religious reformers of India.

5.1.4 One God

The Guru Proclaimed that the essence and the goal of all religions is the same. The main contribution of the Guru is the concept of One God on the practical side for the establishment of the concept of the non-dual Brahman in Advaita. The theory of One Religion aims at One God, i.e. Brahman. Those who believe in God can agree with Sree Narayana Guru that there is only One God. If we can understand the spirit of Advaitic theory of religion, we can do better services for the well being of humanity. The Guru upheld the oneness of the Absolute in all his philosophical poems. The Self and this external world which sustains us are one and the same. They are different manifestations of the One Absolute – The Unitive Brahman. That is the One God. All the religions in this world aim at this One Absolute. The Guru explains the One God as the creator, Creation and the innumerable creatures including 'I'. So this world the cause of the world, the knower of the world are all One and same, i.e. The One God. Guru explains this view in his work Janani Navaratna Manjari – Verse 6.

You become the deer, and the fish too,

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The snake, and the heavenly bird alike
The firm earth, and the river also, woman as well as man.
Even the word on high and inferno within your name-form couple.
Assuming varied natures cognizes here,
As the 'I' that too is even You!
O, One of word content alone, all is comedy indeed!³³

In Darśanamāla the Guru expounded that the Lord from whom
the universe became manifested is Brahman. He is Vishṇu, He is Śiva,
He is the Supreme Self (Paramātma) and He is everything indeed.³⁴
By this Brahma, the creator (in the vedic context) of the Indra, Varuṇa and
others (Vedic gods) as well as Vishṇu Who is the Lord of Vaishṇavas,
and Śiva who is the Lord of Śaivities and the Supreme self of the
Vedāntins, are all treated as one and the same. He is the Ultimate.³⁵
It is also indicated that the world originates from the same Lord having the
three-fold character, and that it originates in Him, endures in Him, and
dissolves in to Him once again.³⁶

The One God, the Brahman is the instrumental and material
causes - nimitta kāraṇa and upādāna kāraṇa - of the world.

In “Daiva Daśakam” Narayana Guru explains the concept of God
in its universal numinous context as the One Absolute factor. Daiva
Daśakam is an universal prayer in Malayalam, an open prayer for

³⁴ Nataraja Guru, The Integrated Science of the Absolute. (Varkala: East
West University of Brahmavidya, 1967) p. 184
³⁵ ibid., p. 184
³⁶ ibid., p. 184
freeing all humanity from suffering and ignorance. This work is deep in philosophical intent. It ends with the appeal that all may be merged in Universal Bliss – Brahman the One God of all religions. In this poem we find that ‘The Guru equates the depth aspect of the ocean with the Absolute, God or Reality. The surface aspect of the ocean is meant to be analogous to the collective and overt aspect of the consciousness of humanity conceived as a unit.37

5.II ALL RELIGIONS CONFERENCE AT ALWAYE.

Sree Narayana Guru held an All Religions Conference on Sivarathri day in 1924 at Advaitasram, Alwaye. It was to highlight the fact of the oneness of all religions. This was the first conference of religions held in India. In that conference Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Parsi thinkers and leaders gave discourses on various religions. The object of the big conference was, in his own words “To know and to make known not to argue and to vanquish” The motto was written large on the gate, in various parts of the assembly and on the dias too, serving as a backdrop to the speakers and as a background to their sermons. Justice T. Sadasiva Iyer of Madras High Court chaired the gathering. Scholars representing different religions and other secular views took part. Manjeri Ramakrishna Iyer and Mitavadi C. Krishnan spoke in defence of rationalism. Rshi Ram an Aryasamajist,

Sivaprasad of the Brahma Samaj and a Buddhist Bikshu from Srilanka were among those present. Mohammed Maulavi and K.K.Kuruvila spoke about Islam and Christianity respectively. The deliberations took place in the august presence of the Guru. The welcome speech of Swamy Sathiavrathan explained the main theme of unity among religions detailing how outward differences not withstanding an inner unity prevailed.

Sathyavrathan said that the Guru was born as a Hindu and lived as one. Yet he has striven to understand the basic tenets of other religions also. All religions aim ultimately at moulding the good individual. Realizing this, he formulate his message of 'One caste, One religion and One God for man'. Just like different systems of medicines there are different philosophical approaches and consequently many religions. All help alike. Myths and tales associated with these religions have much in common. No religion is free from blemishes. Like the capitalists who exploit the producers of wealth, in all religions there has emerged the system of priesthood. It is the priests who have turned religion into rites and rituals. Religion has been commercialized. Sree Narayana Guru sponsors courses of study which will impart knowledge on all religions and their philosophies. He intends starting an institution for such studies.

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39 ibid., p. 97
The message of the Guru was read out by Swami Sathyavrathan at the end of the two day conference. That follows as such “As the speeches in this conclave of religions have shown that the ultimate goal of all religions is the same, and that there is no need for conflict among those who take different paths, we have decided to provide facilities to study the message of all religions at the proposed Academy at Sivagiri.40 Thus in India the dialogues among different religions were set in motion for the first time and ever since 1924 Navarathri day, the holding of a “Conference of all religions” has become an annual feature at Alwaye. Every function in honour of Sree Narayana Guru has a conference of religions and also the leaders give discourses on various religions. “Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians assembled at the Hindu temple festivals; came together in union by their respect for Sree Narayana Guru. It is the most inspiring, soul stirring sight for any man to see. Believers and atheists can be seen seated side by side on the dias when the Guru is being honoured.41

The need for the recognition of the unity in essentials of all the major faiths of the world, is greatest now in India. Religious strifes are interminable because the fight is over matters of which the warriors are not sure, and decisive victories are not possible. The verses of the Guru’s “Matamimamsa” has got the popularity in Kerala. It can be easily grasped and practiced by all: and help us to bring unity amongst us.

40 ibid., pp. 97,98
Thus we can see that, different from Sankara, the Guru brought Advaita philosophy out of the closets of sages and scholars into the open common grounds.

### 5.III PROSELYTISM

Customs, faiths and modes of worship differ from religion to religion, from sect to sect. These differences condemn humanity to several separate compartments denying opportunities for closer understanding. Customs drive people farther and farther away from each other. But beneath these superficial differences there is a universal stratum of noble humanity. According to the Guru knowledge or education should create opportunities to awaken this innate humanity.

Sree Narayana Guru saw that by applying the essential principles of religious teaching to their daily lives, the people could come out of their poverty and social degradation; and attain a new outlook and better standard of living. He, therefore, initiated measures of religious and social reforms by building schools and educating people. He revived the forgotten essence of the religions by bringing out the similarity rather than differences. He restored into the mind of Indian people a sense of proportion and a consciousness of their own worth and significance in society. Thus a spirit of self confidence and self discipline were instilled in their minds.
The Guru again and again stressed the point that there is no
difference in the basic principles of all religions. The religions thus
revealed is the “One Religion”. About conversion the Guru was of the
opinion that the religion has an external and an internal aspect. The
external conversion is not religious conversion but social transformation.
Change of the internal aspects is taking place naturally with the increase
in understanding. If one realizes that he has lost faith in his religion then
he should give it up. According to the Guru to follow a religion in which
one has no faith is both cowardice and hypocracy. His conversion is
good for himself as well as for the religion in which he has lost faith.
Increase in the number of non-believers is not good for any religion. But
it is a fact that if one try to understand or study this basic principles of
the religion in which he has lost faith should not have any change in the
internal aspects of religions.

According to the Guru change of religion of man should be on the
basis of conviction and not for convenience. Each man should have the
freedom to follow the faith of his choice and it naturally followed that the
freedom enjoyed by Hindus to embrace Christianity, Islam and
Buddhism should be available to all non-Hindus for conversion to
Hinduism. The Guru believed that the conversions are due to the
sufferings of the downtrodden classes and the proselytism can be
stopped by the spiritual, social and economic uplift of the backward
community. Conversion to Hinduism was difficult in those days because
Hinduism was not a proselytizing religion. The reason for this was that the castes which constituted Hinduism were not prepared to accept converts. But the Guru made arrangements to reconvert the converts who wished to become Hindus. The Guru proclaimed that whatever be his faith a man should continuously strive to improve himself and men should maintain purity in thought, word and deed. Whatever be the creed man should be good.

If unity in diversity and vice versa are possible in respect of one particular religion, we can extent the same understanding in respect of the common world religion. As Gandhiji pointed that as the leaves of one and the same tree were different from each other, men were found to be different and as long as differences existed the religion of man had to be different.\(^4\) In other words we can say that each individual has a separate religion of his own. If Hinduism has twenty crores of individuals these twenty crores of religions are grouped under one religion Hinduism. There are some features common to all religion. But the study of all religions would reveal the fact that there is no difference in their basic principles. Religions are mutually complementary and one cannot exist without the other. No religion is nobler than the other. No religion can survive unless it has a hard core of certain internal truths, dharma. Owing to the factors of time and place, it becomes necessary to give priority to one or the other. Islam gives primacy to brotherhood

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for may be in Arabia, during Mohammed Nabi’s time, it was incumbent to give pride of place to brotherhood. Christianity gives primacy to love but brotherhood is rooted in love and love is built on brotherhood. Eternal values are of equal significance. During Guru’s time India need deliverance from the conflicts between caste and religions. So the Guru put forth a suggestion to all to study and understand all religions with open minds and equal attention and try to give each other the wisdoms so gained. Then we could realize that conflict was due not to religion but to pride, and the basic tenents of all religions are the same. Then the desire for proselytism would also disappear. It is said,

“Insipite of his criticism of the caste system which is Hinduism in practice today, the Guru was not in favour of conversion to other religions. Members of the lower castes were being proselytised by means of material inducements. He was against this. If conversion to a particular religion took place as a result of genuine preference for its philosophy and ideals, there was no harm in it. Even that was superfluous because according to him the essence of all religions is the same. Indeed there is only one religion”

As a religious philosopher the Guru accomplished a revolution in the three great institutions of the Hindus, the caste representing the social system, the temples representing the religious system and the Matt of sanyasins representing the philosophical system. He has shown

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43 ibid., p. 113
how and in what manner these three have to be reformed and brought into harmony with the changing conditions and ideals of our life. According to him caste existed because we attributed it to ourselves and others. He advised his followers ‘Ask not, Say not and Think not caste’. He says that the followers of any religion do not speak of caste and why should the Hindus alone be branded with caste.

The Guru has shown to us in a practical manner through his numerous temples, schools, mutts and other institutions, the possibility of realizing the ideal of One race, One religion and One God. He has given to the world a new interpretation of life – problems pointed the way to One world religion for universal peace and brotherhood.