Section : III

EPILOGUE
Chapter : 12

RELEVANCE OF THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI NARAYANA GURU IN MODERN WORLD

Man by nature is selfish and by cultivation he is a social being. Human life and society always go together, as they are inseparable. Human person cannot live in isolation as it is impossible to him/her. Solitary life is unbearable to him as he is biologically and psychologically equipped to live in groups or in a society. Society has become an essential condition for human life to arise and develop one’s own personality holistically. Society is more than our environment. They are necessary and complementary to each other and not contradictory. As soon as we are born, the world gets to work on us and transforms us from merely biological into social units. Every human being at every stage of
history is born into society and from his earliest years moulded by that society. There is no difference between the life of the individual and that of the society what so ever. If the life of an individual is fully developed, automatically it leads to the development of society as well. Society is a necessary institution for man. Thus society came into existence for the sake of good life.

The life of individual is complex due to varying interest. It is important to note that the term 'society' can be synonymously used with 'nation'. Each nation is a society, which comes into existence out of plurality of people having a sense of belongingness with social interaction, consciousness and of natural character. The nature of man varies slightly from nation to nation and from country to country, shaped by prevailing social conditions, ideologies and conventions. The varying ideologies of a society are opposed to each other from
which social conflict emerges. Social conflict is an expression of different social tension and social struggle over values, ideologies, status, power and resources in which the aims of the social conflict is to neutralise the opponents or rivals.

Man being a rational animal should think rationally about the establishment of peace and harmony in the human society in order to lead a happy and contended life. The society has to be reconstructed in the way to gear it to face the new challenges thrown by the changing times as expressed by Sri Narayana Guru.

The present day human society is divided in the name of caste, creed, class, religion, language, nation etc., which has led the human society towards its war and destruction. A cold blooded war is always going on and on, here and there, a valconic war is arousing in the human society. If it continues, further, no wonder
mankind may perish soon. We have to bring harmony and peace on this earth by practicing the principles laid on by Sri Narayana Guru. Guru has done a marvalous job for reconstructing human society on the basis of following principles:

a. A casteless and classless equal society.

b. Non-discrimination between men and women.

c. Equal distribution of wealth among the members of the society

d. Equal sharing of political power by all people of the society.

e. A common universal spiritual practice.

**a. A casteless and classless equal society:**

The caste system, is most overwhelming factor in Indian life, which has divided the Indian society into a
multitude of almost hermetically sealed group hierarchically graded which is based on birth. It has threatened social harmony and political peace. During 19th century Sri Narayana Guru proclaimed that, man's worth should not be judged by his birth, but by his thoughts and deeds or his character. The spirit within the body knows neither the difference of male or female nor that of master and servant. Infact, he denounces the caste system itself and therefore envisaged the concept of one caste, one religion and one God in the entire universe. It is because the entire universe is created by God who is present everywhere. If God has himself enters and pervades whole of existence, Where is Brahmin and Paraiah (untouchables)? Where is varna system? All these differentiations are but the creation of fools says Narayana Guru. Hence he has advocated one caste, one religion and one God. This means the fundamental unity
of blood of the human species, the uniformity of the truths of all the religions and common goal of all human beings. Sri Narayana Guru says: "there is no difference between one man to another man and woman at all. All differences are created by lunatics and fanatics."\(^1\)

The high born is never born with his caste mark, nor the low born with his trade mark, the broom. The low born might have undertaken service as a means of existence in life's struggle. In fact Guru has strictly advised his fellow beings to change their traditional profession, hence toddy tappers took up the business and the like. Sri Narayana Guru says: "Let there be diversity of profession, nationality and language among men, but, the Dharma that is inherent in the heart of all men is "Humanism" and that is the caste of man."\(^2\)

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Sri Narayana Guru who held that caste and class system are responsible for stagnation of our development was of the opinion that without the destruction of caste and class democracy and equality could not function properly in India. It gives to the Indian character certain extra-ordinary virtues. In times of prosperity and strength, such a character strives for an odd kind of justice and at all times, it strives for stability and maintenance of identity. Caste prevails, because it is the only reliable insurance of the individuals against calamity or routine ill beings. Sri Narayana Guru says: "If a fence is raised up your path don’t turn back jump it, Don’t stop with walking through the road, enter the temple, enter every temple, everyday, everybody...... and sit along with others, let the government be informed of what you intend to do."
The social attack on caste should consist in mass interdining particularly in the villages at one end and inter-caste marriages at the other. At this, the heart of the traditionalists of today may shake. Nevertheless, people of the present modern world, are in the position to appreciate such bold ventures. But the society of that day could not stand it. Until the caste system is totally destroyed, the reconstruction of the Indian society, according to Sri Narayana Guru should be based on the principle of equal opportunity for the groups whom caste has more or less disabled than on the principle of equal opportunity. The principle of equal opportunity according to ability shall not finish the existing inequalities but only further widen it. Under equal opportunity only the 'genius or the exceptionally able would win in the battle". The path laid down by Sri Narayana Guru and his contemporaries, in respect of the
removal of Untouchability and abolition of caste system etc. is a guiding light today.

The battle for bourgeois equality in India is not being fought, as was the case in the west, between unequal individuals. It is being fought much rather between and by the vulnerable communities which were collectively unfree and found themselves in the realm of juristic freedom and competitive politics all of a sudden, around the time of independence. Two things were happening within these vulnerable communities. On the one hand, because of capitalist development, land reforms, education, employment, etc, and also among the dalit class and income differentiation have been taking place with their traditional leadership. Earlier, such castes organized as jatis were internally egalitarian because of same occupation and skill endowment in similar income levels. With the break down of the close
links between the ritual status and occupation and the movement of people of different occupations and acquisition of varied and dissimilar skills, jatis started becoming internally inegalitarian, the process though has a different tempo across the distinct caste leading to the formation of modern classes within the caste communities. Differentiation and dispersion of inherited bases of power, if we go by the global pattern of consequences of capitalist development, also sets in process the dissolution of the 'primordial' communities. Nothing of the sort has happened in India nor seems likely to be in the near future even with the rapid individuation of interests and persons. The process of extension of democracy in India has thus become a very untidy one and it does not seem to become anything better in the short term. The understanding of this requires disentangling of the deeper processes of
democratization in Indian society which are masked by the surface features of untidiness. It is this untidiness which has been a source of so much adverse comment and condemnation by the media and other professional commentators.

b. Non - discrimination between men and women

In the ancient period there was a double code of morality, one for men and another for women. The human behaviour is largely determined and directed by culture, the gender roles are products of the historic-cultural factors. This in turn have let to the origin of the unequal hierarchical and exploitative relationship between a man and a woman. Different standards are adopted to judge the individual and social conduct of man and woman. From centuries, male dominated mind has been thinking in terms of superiority of male. During the 19th century in Kerala women and Shudras
have no right of access to vedas or any other scripture. To such a level had the age reduced women in matters pertaining to religion and culture. Under such circumstances Sri Narayana Guru had boldly proclaimed, that there was no distinction between man and woman in any realm, and provided equal opportunities to women.

According to Guru, men and women differ only at the physiological level.

Narayana Guru was as modern as Lohia who said with regard to emancipation of woman as: "Of all injustices plaguing the earth, those arising out of the inequality between sexes are perhaps the bed rock. Most of the humanity suffers from one equality or another, but one half of it is weighted down further. Woman's participation in collective life is exceedingly limited".4
The women problem is undoubtedly difficult. She must indeed take part in the agitation against inequality, under-feeding and unemployment. Here, women cannot obtain economic justice, or even social justice, unless the male monopoly of resources and the means of production are broken and the entire people become their owners, controllers and masters. Even the giving and taking of dowry must be penalised, and a change in the marriage conception should also take place. Abortion should be permitted in an over-populated country, sterilization and facilities of sterilization or at least birth control should be made available to every man and woman.

There is a strong need today as to make those Indian women aware of their rights, who are lagging behind in the 21st century. Inequality between the sexes has become part of human nature which has to be
eradicated immediately. In countries like the Soviet Union and the United States the two do not have equal status and privileges. Woman's participation in collective life is exceedingly limited. Unequal employment practices are a very small expression of woman's inferior position, often insidiously concealed. Such understanding will teach us that men and women, all are human beings and equally having the freedom of enjoying all the rights and are free to choose their own mode of life. When a section of society is held down by debility, physical or cultural, the only way to bring it up to equality with others, but the system of providing equal opportunity to her will not solve the problem. If we so realize and desire, we can create a society where roles responsibilities, qualities and behaviour patterns are not determined and imposed by gender, caste, class or race, a society where everyone will have the right and
freedom to choose roles, to develop talents and to have a life of one's choice. Guru says "strength through organisation freedom through education Economic independence through industries". Then and then only, a universal justice towards, all fractions of humanity is done. Narayana Guru has advocated the above mode of life equal status to woman for the development of human societies.

c. Equal distribution of wealth among the members of the society.

During Narayana Guru’s period economic status of the individuals was related to caste affiliations. Different occupations has high or low status. A person's occupation itself revealed his or her caste group. Caste affiliation was related to economic status of individuals. The higher class people looked down upon the people with occupations that involved physical labour or
service to others. Guru emphasized that every person had to make a living by honest work. This honest work laid emphasis on service, not on rewards. The teachings of Guru have great significance for a democratic society of the modern world. In a democratic society sovereignty lies with the public. In a democratic government the procedure followed is group discussion, group decision and group execution and hence he has started S.N.D.P. to propagate the social philosophy. In a democratic economy, every one must be an earning member of the society. In a planned economy beggary and unemployment are unthinkable in any form or sense. According to Narayana Guru, society should be dynamic and progressive but not static. Guru says: “wealth and all activities of man should be aimed at not only for promoting the interest of himself, the society
and the nation to which he belong, but also for the successive growth and wealth of entire mankind.6

In another place Guru says :those who idle away their time and do not earn their bread should be made to realise that they are committing a crime against society. Wherever possible, start factories and encourage people to learn about industries scientifically.7

If a society is to become a happy and self-sufficient unit ; all who formed its constituent parts must work hard and realize the importance of work. In Guru's eyes, living under the obligation of others as parasites was no living at all, hence he condemns begging. None has the privilege of living on somebody else's labour, as a parasite. Every one must live on his own labour. Here one is reminded of Mahatma Gandli's words, "Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day; and if everybody took enough for himself and nothing more,
there would be no pauperism in this world, there would be no man dying of starvation". Guru and Gandhiji have similar opinion on begging and self help.

During global era the Indian economy is open to foreign investments, competition has entered all sectors of industry. It is making the Indian economy more efficient in using resources. This process must accelerate with foreign investment which will upgrade the technology and capacity in these existing businesses. The free market oriented reforms ought to take this grave Indian reality into consideration. The reforms strategy thus should embody sustainable economic empowerment of the rural masses, investments to enhance their capability and effective measures for accelerating development of the disadvantaged sections of our society. The relative equality thus can be the bedrock of launching the socio-cultural offensive in the
form of mass education programmes. The policy of positive discrimination in favour of the disadvantaged sections of the Indian society will have to be reinforced much more vigorously in all the sectors of economy than ever before. According to Guru progress of the human being has to be all round: religious, social and economic. All are equally important and interlinked. All these aspects are to be taken care of simultaneously. However in his scheme of social change, he gave primary importance to education not only men but also woman must be educated and He believed that the community needed economic power, and it would come only through industry and commerce. This is the great responsibility vested in S.N.D.P. Kerala. Thus Narayana Guru has a foresight to herald economical equality and thereby social justice.
d. Equal sharing of political power by all people of the society.

Aristotle said long ago man by birth is a political animal. Politics is essentially an ancient and universal experience. In India, democracy had its halcyon days in the vedic times. For people had little scope to express their ideas since society was fettered by the Varnashrama-Dharma. Democracy is thus as old as humanity. The voice of the people may be less heard in absolute monarchy or least heard in the state. The state is essential for achieving social justice.

Whereas, Sri Narayana Guru was a role model in combining his spiritual and practical life. His greatness was in the emphasis he placed upon striking a balance between the two. He preached and practiced dignity and divinity of work, equality, freedom, fraternity and welfare of society. In this regard, Sri Narayana Guru
was a true statesman, not a politician. He did not care to have any high title or position. Guru's attitude towards life is critical and robust. He analyses the traditional lore and social structure and exposes their drawbacks, so that people may think of eradicating them and evolving new principles and doctrines. Guru recognized and respected the individuality of each and everyone. From the highest to the lowest all have equal access to political leadership. The Gurus movement later turned towards socialism and communism which was reflected in Kerala society.

Woman has an equal status with man so that sex differentiation in matters of religious and social was put a stop. Guru takes into account the initiative of the individual in deciding his vocation. Each individual is free to choose his vocation in life. That is his birth right. His concept of society is basically democratic. The
democratic approach is ingrained in his thought and action. In this connection A.K. Pavitran writes: "From its ivory tower..... Narayana Guru brought it down to the market place and gave it a down-to-earth freshness and flavour, thereby rendering an invaluable service to the downtrodden communities of our country who were subjected to degradation and demoralisation for many thousands of years".

As Guru emphasized that every individual should work on developing global family feelings. The positive feelings will proliferate from one neighbour to another neighbour, from one community to another community. In this way we will be making big changes starting with small steps. Ultimately; the change and work towards the welfare of the entire society and world at large. Guru preached and practiced truly humanistic thinking and universal family feelings.
In this way the 19th century socio-religious movement brought a new wave of thinking and practice that was hitherto unknown. Guru built an ideal society that was a dream of modern leaders, such as Mahatama Gandhi in India and Martin Luther in the United States. The social philosophy of Guru can be summed up in the words as "philosophical liberalism'. During freedom struggle philosophical liberalism could go well with a certain amount of program firmness as the action was in right direction and the political scene was not corrupted by lies and fraud. But after independence this "political conditions or firmness' was forced by untruthfulness of the national scene. As far as the relationship between philosophy and political conditions is concerned, "the world has indeed known a combination of philosophy and political conditions almost entirely sealed to each other'.

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e. A common universal spiritual practice.

Religion has great significance for human life. It gives meaning and purpose for human life. It is a binding force which can bring peace, love, fellow feeling in the world and can save human life from disaster. Religion can solve all the national, international and social problems. All religions are divinely inspired but are products of the human mind and taught by human beings. It is the task of religion to grow in man the consciousness that he is part and parcel of society. Religion clearly states that misunderstanding is the root cause of social disharmony. Religion also points out that social relation are fundamentally valuable.

Inspite of such a lofty ideals and vision of religion, now a days people are misinterpreting and practicing contradictorily to its real ideals and hence religion is not in the present juncture, an uplifting factor in the lives of
mankind and has not led to love and peace in the world. While all the propounders and leaders of religions have preached passionately in their times and in their own way the gospel of love, brotherhood and selfless service to humanity, by and large, has failed to live up to those ideals. No religion teach us to hate other religion. No religion allows violence. It is sustaining force of the universe.

India as a democratic and secular nation which always supports the communal and religious harmony. No religion says or preaches any immoral or illegal activities. No religion is superior or inferior to any other religion. Each has a goal to be achieved. Religion is a necessity in one's life to guide one to help the poor to reach self-sufficiency, to the illiterate to reach literacy, to the sick to become healthy. Religion must be our way of living and not merely used for preaching. Every
preacher must be a practitioner and then only people will have faith in religion.

Thus the universal religion guides people to raise above the ordinary evils of the world and enables to unify thoughts for the promotion of humankind. Religion works systematically for the betterment of whole human society. The traditional form of any religion is not the religion which humanity needs today. We need a religion to be consistent with the scientific facts by which human society can achieve peace, harmony, friendship and cooperation between men and men and nation and nation for all-round human progress. By understanding these values, we can re‐construct a human society in the global context where peace and harmony will prevail.

Narayana Guru has therefore built about 60 temples to provide equal opportunity to all sectors of
people to practice religion. He has bull-dozed the caste distinction and bull-dozed worship of thousands of Gods. hence he says: 'One caste, One religion and One God for entire mankind. He was prescribed certain code of conduct to one and all. Common spiritual practice is required to one and all to reach common goal. Guru, who has visualised, universal religion and universal value-education has prescribed universal principles to be followed by one and all to herald peace, tranquility and harmony on this earth. This factor is most needed in our present day society. Hence Guru’s ideas are most relevent to our modern society.

Spiritual Globalization means integration and unification of different groups belonging to different nations and isms on the basis of a philosophy of Vasudaiva Kutumbakam i.e. the family of Vasudeva or God. In other words God as the creator, sustainer etc. of
the universe is like a father of entire mankind and all of us are the children of that spiritual father and hence we belong to one family, the family of God.

Re-construction of new social order in the global context by peace and harmony is possible when conflicts and wars are eliminated in interpersonal relations and their place is taken by understanding and co-operation, goodwill and trusteeship between nation and states. The greatest contribution of India to the world in this global context lies in the exposition of ideas like the solidarity of humanity and the harmony of existence. The spiritual and philosophic vision has been experimented by Guru with the cultural and religious field and extended it to social and political contexts also.

Guru was such a practical philosopher that his all programmes were constructive and all inclusive, so as to build a new social order. He has developed his own
value system so as to avoid communal strife, caste conflicts and many maladies in the society such as corruption, malpractice, etc. This understanding of the underlying unity of mankind and new value system has been the driving force for the spiritual globalization. This spiritual and philosophic vision of Guru is most modern and relevant to our modern society so as to build a culture which would be universal in outlook and harmonious in existence.

History has been witness to the sad story of so-called 'holy-wars', of wars between the Cross and the Crescent, conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, between Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Jews and others. The intolerance, deep seated hatred and hostility between followers of different religions continue to prevail in many parts of the world even today. To put an end to turmoil, Narayana Guru's philosophy is the only way out, Hence Narayana Guru's philosophy which is based on spiritual realisation is relevant to our modern world.
Foot Notes:


2) Satchidananda Swamy: *Sri Narayana Gurudev, Jhani of Action* (Varkala:Bharathiya Vidyabhavan 1996) p.79

3) Sathyabai Sivadas: *Sri Narayana Guru, the Social Philosophy of Kerala,*


