

**CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: AN INQUIRY INTO HOW FAR
FOLLOWERS OF SREE NARAYANA GURU UPHOLD HIS
TEACHINGS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

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DECLARATION

I, **ANJALI D S**, hereby declare that the dissertation titled “**CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: AN INQUIRY INTO HOW FAR FOLLOWERS OF SREE NARAYANA GURU UPHOLD HIS TEACHINGS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**” is based on the original work carried out by me and submitted to Loyola College of Social Sciences(autonomous), Sreekkaryam, Trivandrum, during the year 2024-2026 towards partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Sociology Degree Examination. It has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship, or other similar title of recognition before.

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: AN INQUIRY INTO HOW FAR FOLLOWERS OF SREE NARAYANA GURU UPHOLD HIS TEACHINGS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY** is a record of genuine work done by **ANJALI D S** fourth semester Master of Sociology student of this college under my supervision and guidance and that it is hereby approved for submission.

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ABSTRACT

Sree Narayana Guru was one of the most influential social reformers and spiritual leaders in Kerala, whose teachings on equality, education, self-respect, and human unity played a significant role in challenging caste-based discrimination and promoting social transformation. The study examines the extent to which the followers of Sree Narayana Guru uphold his teachings in contemporary society. The study sought to explore the level of awareness among followers regarding Guru's teachings, the efforts undertaken to sustain and promote his vision, the ways in which his principles are reflected in daily life practices, and the perceived relevance of his philosophy in the present social context. The findings reveal that awareness of Guru's teachings remains relatively high among the respondents, although differences exist across generations. Education emerged as the most enduring legacy of Guru's vision, while values such as equality, religious tolerance, and respect for humanity continue to shape the daily lives of many followers. The study also found ongoing efforts by institutions and followers to disseminate Guru's teachings through educational, spiritual, and community-based initiatives. However, challenges such as the persistence of caste consciousness, tensions between Guru's universal philosophy and community-based interpretations, and declining engagement among younger generations continue to hinder the complete realization of his ideals. The study concludes that Sree Narayana Guru's teachings remain highly relevant in contemporary society and continue to offer valuable guidance for promoting social justice, human dignity, and inclusive social development.

Keywords: Sree Narayana Guru, Followers, Contemporary Society, Awareness, Equality, Education, Teachings and Practice

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CHAPTER:1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

India, as a civilization, has long been marked by deep and often paradoxical social realities. On the one hand, its philosophical traditions have consistently emphasized ideas such as universal brotherhood, spiritual unity, and the inherent worth of every human being. On the other hand, these ideals have coexisted with the historical persistence of the caste system, one of the most rigid and exclusionary forms of social stratification. Emerging from the varna framework and evolving into a complex network of castes and sub-castes, this system did not merely structure society but also legitimized inequality. Practices such as untouchability, denial of education, spatial segregation, and social exclusion became normalized, particularly affecting those placed at the lower end of the hierarchy (T. Shyamaraja, 2026).

It was within such a socio-historical context that Sree Narayana Guru emerged as a transformative figure. Born on August 20, 1856, in Chempazhanthy near Thiruvananthapuram, into an Ezhava family, Guru grew up in a society where caste restrictions were not only strict but deeply internalized. Kerala at the time was known for its extreme forms of caste-based discrimination, where even proximity and visibility could be construed as sources of pollution. Despite these constraints, Guru's early life was shaped by a strong intellectual and spiritual foundation, largely influenced by his father, Madan Asan, who was well-versed in Sanskrit and traditional knowledge systems (T. Shyamaraja, 2026).

Guru's intellectual journey included the study of Sanskrit, Ayurveda, and Vedanta, after which he briefly engaged in teaching before choosing the path of renunciation. However, his withdrawal from conventional social life did not translate into disengagement from society. Instead, it marked the beginning of a profound engagement with the structural inequalities of his time. By the late nineteenth century, he had already begun to attract followers, not only for his spiritual insight but also for his commitment to social transformation. His consecration of a Shiva idol at Aravipuram in 1888 was a landmark event, as it directly challenged the Brahminical monopoly over temple rituals and symbolized the assertion of dignity and rights by marginalized communities (Abraham, 2023). This act was not isolated but part of a broader vision that combined spiritual reform with social change. A major institutional expression of his vision was the establishment of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in 1903. Originating from the Aravipuram movement, the SNDP Yogam became a key platform for mobilizing marginalized communities and advocating for social justice. Leaders such as

Kumaran Asan and Dr. Padmanabhan Palpu played significant roles in strengthening the organization. The activities of the SNDP extended across multiple domains, including promoting access to education, encouraging economic self-reliance, challenging caste-based religious restrictions, and seeking political representation for the Ezhava community (O.K Praveen, 2018; Paul, 2025).

Education occupied a central place in Narayana Guru's vision of social transformation. He believed that education was the most effective means to uplift marginalized communities and integrate them into the social mainstream. Through the establishment of schools and institutions in places such as Sivagiri and Aluva, he emphasized a holistic model of education that combined moral, spiritual, and intellectual development. His support for movements like the Vaikom Satyagraha further demonstrated his commitment to challenging caste-based exclusion in public spaces (S. Sumadevi, 2013) Guru consistently emphasized education as a means of empowerment, leading to the establishment of institutions at Sivagiri and Aluva (T. Shyamaraja, 2026). His support for movements such as the Vaikom Satyagraha further demonstrates his active involvement in struggles against caste-based exclusion.

Beyond regional reform, Guru articulated a universal vision of human unity, most clearly expressed in his famous dictum: "One Caste, One Religion, One God for humankind." This was not merely a spiritual ideal but a powerful critique of social divisions and religious orthodoxy. His organization of the "All Religion Conference" in 1923 at Alwaye Advaita Ashram reflects this inclusive outlook, positioning him as a thinker whose concerns transcended caste and community boundaries(ML, 2017).

In this regard, Guru can be placed alongside other prominent social reformers such as B. R. Ambedkar, Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, and Jyotiba Phule, all of whom challenged entrenched systems of inequality in different ways. However, what distinguishes Narayana Guru is the manner in which he integrated philosophical thought, institutional development, and practical reform into a cohesive framework of social change. His interventions were not limited to critique but extended to creating alternative spaces and practices that embodied equality and dignity. Guru's teachings are rooted in compassion, oneness, and spiritual equality, providing an enduring framework to counter the persistence of social hierarchies and discrimination. Scholars note that while Guru's humanistic vision was against religious boundaries and promoted universal prosperity (Ashrof, 2025) today's environment of inequality and division makes his philosophy all the more relevant.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The teachings of Sree Narayana Guru have played a very important role in shaping ideas of social equality, education, and spiritual reform, especially among marginalized communities in Kerala. His contributions helped oppressed sections of society to question and challenge existing social barriers in areas such as temple entry, access to education, and social dignity. Through his efforts, Guru promoted values of equality, self-respect, and social justice, which contributed to wider processes of social change (Chandrabose. R, 2021) . Even today, Guru is widely respected and followed, but it is important to examine whether his core teachings are actually being practiced in everyday life.

One of the most important teachings of Guru is his emphasis on education as a means of empowerment. His message, “Become enlightened through education, strengthened through organisation and prosperous through hard work,” clearly shows that he believed education is the key to freedom and social progress. For Guru, education was not just about gaining knowledge, but about developing awareness, critical thinking, and the ability to overcome social and economic inequalities. He also stressed the importance of unity and collective effort, along with hard work, in achieving a better life (S Smitha & Anil AR, 2021). However, in today’s context, it is necessary to understand whether his followers are truly giving importance to education and collective progress in the way Guru intended.

Another major teaching of Guru is his famous message, “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Mankind.” This idea was a strong rejection of caste discrimination and religious divisions that existed in society. Guru believed that all human beings are equal and that differences based on caste and religion are man-made and should not divide people. Through this message, he tried to create a sense of unity and common identity among people (Paul, 2025). Even though this message is widely known and accepted in theory, caste and social inequalities still exist in different forms today. This creates a need to examine whether his followers are actually practicing this idea of equality in their daily lives.

A third important teaching of Guru relates to his views on spirituality and worship. Guru believed in a universal spiritual existence, but he never claimed himself to be a god and clearly discouraged people from worshipping him as a deity. Instead, he promoted a form of spirituality based on self-realization, moral values, and inner development rather than rituals and blind beliefs (Sreekumar, 2024). This understanding has also been supported in recent times, such as the observation by the Kerala High Court that Guru was not an avatar of God and should not

be treated as a deity (*The Times of India*, 2016). However, in present-day practices, there are instances where Guru is worshipped in ways that may go against his original teachings. This raises important questions about how his ideas are being followed. Even though Guru continues to be highly respected, social realities such as caste distinctions, inequality, and ritualistic practices still exist in society. This creates a gap between his teachings and actual practices. There is limited understanding about how far his followers are truly following his principles in their daily lives, especially in relation to education, equality, and spirituality.

Therefore, this study focuses on understanding how far the followers of Sree Narayana Guru are upholding these three important teachings in today's context. The study is conducted among followers in Thiruvananthapuram, particularly in Varkala and Chempazhanthu. It aims to examine their practices, attitudes, and experiences to understand whether Guru's teachings are being followed in their true spirit or not in contemporary society.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it examines how the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru are being understood and practiced by his followers in today's society. Guru's message of equality, education, and spiritual freedom played a major role in challenging caste discrimination and promoting human dignity in Kerala's history (Abraham, 2023; Renjith, 2024). Although numerous studies have examined Guru's life, philosophy, and reform activities, relatively few have explored how his teachings are understood and practiced by his followers in contemporary society. Therefore, this study is significant for several reasons.

Firstly, the study contributes to the existing body of sociological knowledge on Sree Narayana Guru by shifting the focus from his historical contributions to the contemporary experiences and perspectives of his followers. By examining how different categories of followers including monks, SNDP members, and ordinary followers, interpret and practice Guru's teachings, the study provides a deeper understanding of the continuing influence of his ideas in present-day society.

Secondly, the study helps to assess the extent to which Guru's vision has been translated into everyday social practices. It explores whether principles such as social equality, education, humanism, and religious harmony continue to shape the attitudes and behaviours of his followers. In doing so, the research offers valuable insights into the relationship between social reform movements and contemporary social realities.

Thirdly, the study highlights the challenges involved in preserving and transmitting Guru's teachings to future generations. The findings regarding youth participation, changing social values, organizational practices, and differing interpretations of Guru's philosophy can help organizations, educational institutions, and community leaders develop more effective strategies for promoting Guru's ideals in contemporary society.

Fourthly, the study is socially significant because it examines the continuing relevance of Guru's teachings in addressing present-day issues such as caste discrimination, social inequality, religious intolerance, and the erosion of human values. By documenting the views of followers regarding these issues, the study demonstrates how Guru's philosophy continues to offer meaningful guidance for creating a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

Finally, the study contributes to the preservation of the intellectual and social legacy of Sree Narayana Guru. By recording the experiences, opinions, and interpretations of his followers, it creates a valuable qualitative account of how Guru's teachings are remembered, understood, and practiced in the contemporary context. The findings may also serve as a reference for future researchers interested in social reform movements, religious and spiritual traditions, caste relations, and social change in Kerala.

The findings of the study may be useful for policymakers, educators, and social leaders who are interested in promoting social justice and harmony. In addition, this research will fill a gap in existing studies, contributing to a better understanding of how reformist ideas are still being followed or are facing challenges today.

CHAPTER:2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The present chapter reviews significant scholarly works, books, journal articles, dissertations, and other relevant sources related to the life, philosophy, and teachings of Sree Narayana Guru, as well as studies on social reform, religious movements, caste, social change, and the contemporary relevance of his ideals. The literature reviewed in this chapter provides the conceptual and empirical foundation for the present study and helps identify the research gap that the current investigation seeks to address. It also offers valuable insights for framing the research objectives, research questions, and analytical perspective adopted in this dissertation.

2.1.1. Reformist vision of Sree Narayana guru

Studies on Kerala's social reform movements point out the important role of Sree Narayana Guru in breaking caste barriers and promoting equality. Renjith (2024) explains that Guru had two main aims: "to spread the idea that God is accessible to everyone and to fight against social injustice." Through his efforts, many marginalized communities were encouraged to seek education, improve their living conditions, and demand dignity in society. Abraham (2023) looks at this reform from another angle by discussing the idea of "Sanskritization." Instead of simply copying upper-caste customs, Guru and the SNDP Yogam used temple rituals and priesthood as ways to claim rights that were earlier denied to lower castes. This was not imitation but a way of resisting inequality and showing that religious freedom belongs to all. Both these studies show that Guru's vision was about inclusion, equality, and the upliftment of marginalized groups.

2.1.2. Guru against ritualistic monopoly and caste discrimination

One of the strongest aspects of Sree Narayana Guru's reformist vision was his stand against ritualistic monopoly and caste-based exclusion. Kerala in the nineteenth century was deeply stratified, with strict restrictions on temple entry, priesthood, and religious practices. Renjith (2024) explains that Guru's interventions challenged this order by promoting the idea that spiritual practice was open to all, regardless of caste. Abraham (2023) points out that it was not just an imitation of upper-caste practices but a direct challenge to Brahmin authority, showing that worship was the right of all people. Chandrabose. R (2021) also notes that Guru's writings celebrated this moment as a symbol of liberation, marking Aruvippuram Siva Linga installation and making the lower-caste people as priests as a turning point in Kerala's reform history.

2.1.3. Sree Narayana guru's one world vision

Sree Narayana Guru's concept of the "one world vision" is centred on the idea of universal human unity and equality. His well-known message, "*one caste, one religion, one God for humankind*," reflects a rejection of socially constructed divisions such as caste, religion, and other forms of inequality (Thadathil George, 2019). This vision emerged in a context where society was deeply marked by discrimination and lack of social justice. The vision is not limited to a philosophical idea but is closely connected to social transformation. By promoting education, ethical living, and social reform, Sree Narayana Guru sought to redefine the foundations of society in a more inclusive and humane way. His teachings emphasise that the true value of religion lies in its ability to improve human character and contribute to the well-being of individuals and society (Thadathil George, 2019). Another significant aspect of this vision is the emphasis on the common goal of humanity. All human beings, regardless of their differences, strive for happiness and freedom, which indicates an underlying unity among them (Cybil, 2024). This idea highlights a universal human consciousness that goes beyond boundaries of identity and belief. Thus, the one world vision of Sree Narayana Guru presents a framework for harmony by encouraging equality, compassion, and mutual understanding. It offers a perspective that remains relevant in addressing contemporary social divisions and promoting a more unified society.

2.1.4. Education over ritual

In his later years, Sree Narayana Guru shifted his focus from temple-based reform to the promotion of education as the key to social transformation. Although his earlier temple reforms challenged caste restrictions in religious spaces, Guru realized that ritual inclusion alone could not eradicate deep-rooted social inequalities (Fakhre Alam, 2023; P Pratheesh & S R Saritha, 2025). He emphasized *Arivu* (knowledge) as a more powerful tool than ritual because education develops self-respect, critical awareness, and social empowerment. Guru therefore encouraged communities to establish schools rather than temples, symbolically relocating the sacred from idol worship to intellectual awakening. In his view, education represented the highest form of spirituality because it enabled individuals to recognize human equality and dignity. By democratizing knowledge, Guru challenged the epistemic foundations of caste hierarchy and opened pathways for marginalized communities to achieve social mobility and self-realization (Sreekumar, 2024).

2.1.5. Sanskritisation as the reclaiming of denied cultural rights

Abraham (2023) interprets Sanskritisation in the context of the Guru movement not simply as imitation of upper-caste practices but as the reclaiming of cultural and religious rights that had historically been denied to marginalized communities. The article argues that communities such as the Ezhavas used religious symbols, temple practices, and ritual forms as strategies to challenge caste exclusion (Zachariah, 2016). In this sense, Sanskritisation becomes a political and cultural assertion, rather than mere cultural imitation. This perspective adds a new understanding of how social mobility was pursued through symbolic and religious transformation.

2.1.6. Spirituality as a tool for social transformation

One of the important themes emerging from the studies is the role of spirituality in promoting social change among marginalized communities. The writings of Sree Narayana Guru show that spiritual ideas were not limited to religious practice but were closely connected to social reform and community upliftment. The literature explains that Guru's teachings emphasized equality, human dignity, and unity, which helped marginalized groups question caste hierarchy and develop self-respect (Chalam, 2024; Thadathil George, 2019). The formation of organizations such as the SNDP Yogam also reflected how spiritual ideas were translated into collective social action and institutional development (Jeffrey, 2011). At the same time, cultural and religious practices were used by oppressed communities as a way of reclaiming spaces and rights that were previously denied to them, which can be understood as a form of social assertion (Abraham, 2023). The study on the Sree Narayana Gurukulam further shows how spiritual institutions became spaces where philosophical ideas and social reform worked together to bring about wider social transformation. Thus, spirituality in the Guru movement functioned as a powerful means of social awareness and change.

2.1.7. Institutionalisation of Sree Naraya guru's teachings

Patnaik K Arun (2024) examine how Sree Narayana Guru's reformist philosophy has been institutionalized through the SNDP Yogam, arguing that his ideals of equality, universal brotherhood, and social justice continue to shape the collective identity of his followers, although these principles have been reinterpreted within changing social and religious contexts. Similarly, O.K Praveen (2018) highlights that the SNDP Yogam played a crucial role in translating Guru's teachings into practical social reforms by promoting education, women's empowerment, economic upliftment, temple entry, political representation, and the eradication

of caste discrimination. The organization also established educational and spiritual institutions to preserve and disseminate Guru's ideals. Together, these studies provide a valuable foundation for assessing whether contemporary followers continue to uphold Guru's original vision in their beliefs, practices, and everyday social life (O.K Praveen, 2018; Patnaik K Arun, 2024)

2.2. RESEARCH GAP

A considerable body of literature exists on the life, philosophy, social reform activities, and contributions of Sree Narayana Guru to the transformation of Kerala society. Previous studies have extensively examined Guru's role in challenging caste discrimination, promoting education, advocating social equality, and contributing to the upliftment of marginalized communities, particularly the Ezhava community. Researchers have also analysed Guru's philosophical writings, spiritual teachings, and the historical significance of reform movements associated with organizations such as SNDP Yogam and Sivagiri.

However, much of the existing literature remains historical, philosophical, or organizational in nature. While these studies provide valuable insights into Guru's ideals and contributions, relatively little attention has been given to understanding how his teachings are interpreted, practiced, and sustained by his contemporary followers in their everyday lives. There is a noticeable lack of qualitative studies that explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and practices of individuals who identify themselves as followers of Sree Narayana Guru. Furthermore, existing research often focuses on Guru himself, his reform movement, or the institutional achievements associated with his legacy, rather than examining the extent to which his principles are reflected in the attitudes, values, and daily practices of present-day followers. Limited scholarly attention has also been paid to the challenges involved in transmitting Guru's teachings across generations, the varying interpretations of his philosophy among different categories of followers, and the perceived gap between Guru's original vision and contemporary organizational practices. Another important gap lies in the absence of studies that comparatively examine different groups associated with Guru's legacy. As a result, there remains insufficient understanding of how awareness, interpretation, and implementation of Guru's teachings differ across these groups.

The present study seeks to address these gaps by adopting a qualitative case study approach to explore the extent to which followers of Sree Narayana Guru uphold his teachings in contemporary society. By examining the perspectives of monks, SNDP members, and ordinary followers, the study aims to generate a deeper understanding of the continuing relevance of

Guru's teachings, the efforts undertaken to sustain his vision, the challenges faced in practicing his ideals, and the ways in which his principles are reflected in contemporary social life.

2.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.3.1 General Research Question

To what extent are the followers of Sree Narayana Guru upholding his teachings in contemporary society?

2.3.2 Specific Research Questions

- 1) How do followers of Sree Narayana Guru perceive and understand his teachings?
- 2) How do followers of Sree Narayana Guru promote his vision in contemporary society?
- 3) How are his principles reflected in their daily life practices?
- 4) How do followers interpret the relevance of Sree Narayana Guru's teachings in contemporary society?

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted for the study. It describes the research approach and design, study area, sampling procedure, participants, sources and methods of data collection, and techniques of data analysis employed to address the research objectives and questions. The chapter also explains the ethical considerations followed during the research process to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

3.1.1 Title of The Study

Continuity and Change: An Inquiry into How Far Followers of Sree Narayana Guru Uphold His Teachings in contemporary society.

3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

The current research aims at studying the relevance of Sree Narayana Guru's ideology in contemporary society. This is qualitative in nature and hence, a qualitative approach has been adopted to study the stated objectives. The study employs a case study research design. A total of ten case studies were conducted among three categories of followers: monks/ spiritual leaders, SNDP members (including office bearers and regular members), and ordinary followers of Sree Narayana Guru. The participants consisted of five men and five women belonging to different age groups and social backgrounds. To ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to all respondents.

3.3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY AREA

Chempazhanthy and Varkala were purposively selected as the study areas due to their close association with the life and legacy of Sree Narayana Guru. Chempazhanthy, the birthplace of Sree Narayana Guru, holds immense historical and cultural significance as the place where his early life and ideals originated. Varkala was selected because it is home to the Sivagiri Mutt, one of the most important spiritual and institutional centers established in connection with Guru's vision. Sivagiri continues to promote Guru's teachings through various spiritual, educational, and social initiatives. The selection of these two locations enabled the researcher to study followers who are closely connected to Guru's vision and to examine the contemporary relevance and practice of his teachings in areas of significant historical and institutional importance.

3.4. SAMPLING

Purposive sampling used to select participants who are followers or actively engaged with the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru. The selection was based on their knowledge of and engagement with Guru's philosophy to obtain in-depth perspectives related to the research questions. A sample of around 10 participants were selected to ensure representation from both community leaders and ordinary followers.

3.4.1. Inclusion Criteria

The study included adult respondents who identified themselves as followers of Sree Narayana Guru and were willing to participate in the research. Participants were selected from three categories: monks and spiritual leaders associated with institutions influenced by Guru's teachings, SNDP members including office bearers and regular members, and ordinary followers from the Ezhava community. All respondents were residents of the selected study areas of Chempazhanthi and Varkala and possessed sufficient awareness of Sree Narayana Guru and his teachings to contribute meaningfully to the study.

3.4.2 Exclusion Criteria

The study excluded individuals who did not identify themselves as followers of Sree Narayana Guru, those below 18 years of age, and persons who were unwilling to participate or provide informed consent. Individuals with limited awareness or knowledge of Sree Narayana Guru's teachings, as well as those residing outside the selected study areas, were also excluded from the study.

3.5. SOURCE OF DATA

Primary data: Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted with ten respondents, including monks and spiritual leaders, SNDP members (office bearers and regular members), and ordinary followers from the Ezhava community.

Secondary data: Secondary data were gathered from books, research articles, newspaper reports, and other publications related to the study area.

3.6. TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION

An interview guide was used as the primary tool for data collection along with field notes. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to gather detailed information regarding the respondents' awareness, perceptions, experiences, and practices related to the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru.

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through in-depth interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The interview responses were carefully reviewed, coded, and organized into relevant themes and sub-themes. The themes were generated based on the research questions and recurring patterns identified from the participants' narratives.

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was limited to followers associated with Chempazhanthi Sivagiri Madam, restricting the generalizability of the findings.
- The qualitative case study design involved a small purposively selected sample.
- Availability of respondents was limited due to personal and professional commitments.
- Considerable effort was required to redirect respondents from narrating the life and philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru to discussing the actual implementation of his teachings in contemporary society.
- The study primarily relied on participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and self-reported accounts. As a result, the findings reflect subjective interpretations that could not always be independently verified.
- Time constraints limited prolonged engagement and the number of interviews conducted.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the case studies of ten followers of Sree Narayana Guru selected from different backgrounds and levels of involvement with Guru's teachings and institutions. For confidentiality and ethical considerations, "pseudonyms" have been used wherever necessary. The respondents include monks and spiritual practitioners associated with Guru's institutions, members of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, and ordinary followers of Sree Narayana Guru. Among the participants, five are men and five are women belonging to different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. The experiences and perspectives of the respondents are presented in both narrative and verbatim forms.

4.2. NARRATION OF CASES

4.2.1. Kiran

Kiran is a 68-year-old Hindu man from Kerala who, after returning from Saudi Arabia, embraced a spiritual life and is currently residing at Sivagiri Mutt, Varkala, as a Swami. He belongs to the Ezhava community, a prominent Hindu community in Kerala that has historically been classified among the Other Backward Classes. Through his life at Sivagiri and his close association with the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru, Kiran has adopted a deeply spiritual outlook and actively reflects upon the Guru's philosophy in his daily life.

Kiran reports that, influenced by the Guru, he has come to believe that eating meat or any non-vegetarian food is sinful. He explains that the Guru preached against harming living beings or consuming them as food. This aligns with the common Hindu principle of non-violence (ahimsa) toward animals. Kiran emphasizes the Guru's injunction that all life should be respected, suggesting that abstaining from meat prevents generating bad karma through violence. In his view, "Karmabala" literally the "power of karma", means that every action has consequences. Thus, killing animals for food would generate negative karmic consequences that affect one's future. Similarly, he believes in "Punarjanma" rebirth or reincarnation, where one's current life circumstances are shaped by past deeds. In summary, Kiran holds that meat-eating harms living beings, which accrues bad karmic effects called "Karmabala" and influences future rebirths called "Punarjanma". During the interview, Kiran mentioned the terms "Sookshmam" and "Sthoolam." These are Sanskrit-based concepts referring to

the subtle and gross aspects of human existence. The “sthoola shareera” (gross body) is simply the physical body – the mortal, material body that we see and touch. The “Sukshma Shareera” (subtle body) comprises the mind, senses, life-energy, and vital forces that animate the physical body. (In many Indian philosophical systems, one’s being is said to consist of a physical body and a subtle body (made of mind and prana). Kiran uses these terms to emphasize “deeper spiritual dimensions” – implying that a person is not just the visible body but has an inner “subtle” self. He seems to suggest that the Guru taught his disciples to recognize this inner self (often equated with the soul or (atman) beyond the outer form.

When asked about the Guru’s teachings on caste discrimination and social change, Kiran underlined the critical role of education. He stated that “education is the foundation of social transformation”. This mirrors historical efforts in Kerala: Sree Narayana Guru and others emphasized educating marginalized castes to uplift them. In fact, when Mahatma Gandhi visited Guru’s Sivagiri Ashram in Varkala, Guru told him that education and economic empowerment were keys to improving lower-caste communities. (Sree Narayana Guru famously had the motto “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man”, advocating unity beyond caste lines. He established schools and temples open to all castes, promoting education and equality.) Kiran also observed a paradox: *“high education does not guarantee morality”*. He pointed out that even well-educated people can commit sinful or harmful acts. As an example, he cited international conflicts (such as tensions between Iran and the United States) to illustrate that modern, educated nations still engage in violence. (Added context: Scholars note that formal education alone does not ensure ethical behavior, character and values are equally important. In many spiritual traditions, one’s inner transformation (self-knowledge) is considered paramount to truly ethical action.) Kiran’s view reflects a belief that moral transformation depends not just on schooling but on inner realization.

A central point in Kiran’s account is the distinction between two kinds of knowledge. He uses the terms Bhoutika Jnanam for worldly or material knowledge (like academic degrees, professional qualifications, science and technology) and Atma Jnanam for spiritual self-knowledge (the understanding of one’s own soul or true nature). He explained that many people accumulate Bhoutika Jnanam, they become graduates, postgraduates, or even doctors, yet they may still perform unethical actions (greed, violence, exploitation, etc.). In contrast, a person who attains “Atma Jnanam”, according to Kiran, understands the true purpose of human existence. Such a person has clarity about life’s meaning and would use even worldly knowledge wisely to benefit society. (Added context: In the Guru-veneration tradition,

attaining “Atma Jnanam” is often seen as the ultimate goal. As one spiritual teacher put it, “It is the realization of the unity that underlies the diversity which constitutes Atma-jnanam”. In other words, perceiving oneself as part of a universal whole, beyond labels of caste, religion, or nation, is true self-knowledge.) Kiran believes that only someone with “Atma Jnanam” has the insight to transform society, because they act from a place of inner wisdom rather than ego or greed. Kiran warned that outward appearances can be deceptive. He noted that merely wearing holy attire (a swami’s robe or even the simple white khadi of Mahatma Gandhi) does not guarantee that a person is truly pure, wise, or spiritually advanced. To Kiran, the Guru (“Guru Devan”) represents genuine spiritual greatness, and appearances alone can be “a mask.” In other words, someone may look saintly but still lack the inner qualities that the Guru embodies. (Many spiritual traditions caution that external rituals or clothing are superficial if not backed by inner change. The important thing is to discern the qualities of honesty, compassion, and wisdom, not just dress or titles.). Through-out the interview, a recurring theme was that “*to understand society, one must first understand oneself*”. Kiran emphasized that rather than focusing on others’ faults, individuals should engage in self-reflection and inner growth. This aligns with the Guru’s broader philosophy. For example, Upanishadic wisdom (echoed by many modern gurus) teaches that social harmony comes from recognizing one’s own divine nature. (As one spiritual discourse explains, knowing the unity behind all diversity is the essence of *Atma-jnanam*, and only then can one treat others with true respect. In practice, this means that personal spiritual awareness is a prerequisite for meaningful social reform.). Kiran also observed how devotees interact with the “Mandiram”. He noted that many people come primarily with personal requests, they pray for health, wealth, jobs, or other material benefits. If their wishes are granted, they feel that their faith has been vindicated and continue to visit regularly. If not, they often cease coming. This pattern of devotion is common in many religious traditions: people make vows or prayers in hopes of a miraculous answer.

4.2.2. Aruna

Aruna (name changed), a 48-year-old woman, is an ordinary follower of Sree Narayana Guru. She belongs to the Hindu religion and the Ezhava caste. She is a resident of Pongamodu, Thiruvananthapuram. As a devotee of Sree Narayana Guru, she actively engages with the Guru’s teachings and values in her daily life.

She often visits the Chempazhanthi Sree Narayana Gurukulam, the birthplace of Sree Narayana Guru, as well as Sivagiri Mutt, Varkala, which serves as an important spiritual and social reform center associated with the Guru. She was influenced by her grandparents, who

were followers of Guru Devan. They kept a beautiful photograph of him in their house and regularly chanted the hymn “*Guru Brahma, Gurur Vishnu, Gurur Devo Maheshwara,*” which is traditionally dedicated to teachers.

In today’s context, she particularly values Guru’s teaching, “*Mathamethayalum manushyan nannayal mathi*” (Whatever the religion, what matters is that a person should be good). She explained that she does not differentiate people on the basis of religion and has friends from various religious communities. For her, religion does not matter in personal relationships.

According to her, education plays a crucial role in uplifting people’s lives. However, she also pointed out that, “*education alone is not enough, as even educated individuals may engage in fraudulent or unethical activities. A person needs both education and the right mindset to treat others with humanity. Without humanity, education becomes meaningless, and such individuals may even fail to support their own loved ones.*” She mentioned that institutions associated with Sree Narayana Guru, especially those under Sivagiri and Chempazhanthi Guru Madam, run schools and colleges. In these institutions, students from the Ezhava community are often given preference, while the selection of teachers is based purely on qualifications. She also stated that traditionally marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, receive assistance from these educational institutions.

She strongly felt that Guru’s vision of equality is not fully practiced by present-day followers. According to her, even major members of the SNDP do not always follow Guru’s ideals of equality and simplicity. She gave the example of a prominent follower from her locality who organized a grand and luxurious wedding for his daughter, which contradicted Guru’s ideals. The marriage was neither inter-caste nor inter-religious.

Although she is not against inter-caste marriage, she remains concerned about societal perceptions and the comments people may make. She also stated that if such a situation arose in her own family, she would not support religious conversion or forceful conversion. At the same time, she observed that today’s younger generation is generally more accepting of inter-caste marriages and is often able to convince their families as well. She explained that the increasing preference for simple marriages today cannot be attributed solely to Guru’s teachings. Rising marriage expenses are also a major factor. While some young people consciously follow Guru’s ideals of simplicity, many others still aspire to luxurious weddings.

Referring to Guru's slogan, "*One caste, one religion, one God for mankind*," she interpreted it as a message emphasizing humanity. However, she felt that many followers today treat Guru himself as a divine figure. Some even consider him a "man-god." She also pointed out that many SNDP followers believe Guru belongs mainly to the Ezhava community, which sometimes creates the impression among other communities that Guru is only for Ezhavas.

Regarding idol worship, she said Guru installed Shiva Lingas in temples such as Aruvippuram Shiva Temple not merely to promote idol worship, but to help individuals attain spiritual well-being. According to her, the idol symbolizes the inner power within oneself and serves as a medium for self-connection rather than an object of blind worship. She personally admires Guru as a teacher and spiritual master rather than as a god. Although Guru's photograph is displayed in her home, it is kept alongside images of figures like Gautama Buddha. She observed that the younger generation is generally less active in respecting or following Guru's teachings. She recalled hearing someone at Guru Deva Madam say that "Guru Devan gave me prosperity and well-being," reflecting the belief in his divine power. Similarly, she felt that practices such as Guru Pooja conducted in institutions like Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham Trust are not entirely in tune with Guru's teachings, since he himself did not encourage being worshipped as a god.

According to her, only a few people who truly understand Guru's teachings genuinely practice them. Merely claiming to be a follower does not necessarily mean living according to his ideals. She acknowledged that Guru's teachings have influenced her daily life. For example, Guru emphasized cleanliness beginning from the kitchen, and she consciously follows this principle. She also encourages her daughters to value education and read Guru's books, which were preserved in her home by her father. Additionally, no one in her household consumes alcohol. She further stated that she never asks about a person's caste while interacting or forming relationships with them. She also mentioned that one of her family members conducted a simple marriage following Guru's ideals, inviting only around ten people. This type of marriage is referred to as a "Guru Arul-based marriage."

Finally, she explained that the gap between Guru's teachings and contemporary practice exists because many people today prefer luxurious lifestyles over simple living. She believed that most followers are either unaware of Guru's teachings or do not take them seriously. Materialism, according to her, also contributes to caste-based inequalities, especially when economically weaker communities face prejudice. She added that people often support

endogamy because they are uncertain about the caste or religion identity of children born through inter-caste or inter-religious marriages, especially since institutions such as schools and colleges still require caste certificates. To better promote Guru's teachings, she suggested organizing proper sessions and lectures through the SNDP that are open to everyone irrespective of caste. She emphasized that such programs should be free and accessible so that those genuinely interested in understanding Guru's teachings can benefit from them.

4.1.3. Anandh

Anandh (name changed) is a 23-year-old Hindu male belonging to the Ezhava community and hails from Perumbavoor, Kerala. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Sanskrit and is currently pursuing Vaidhikam (Vedic studies), commonly known as Shanthi Padanam, at Sivagiri Mutt, Varkala.

His family, especially his parents, are members of the SNDP, and he first learned about Guru and his teachings through his family. He is trying and has dedicated his life to learning about Guru, attaining his vision, and propagating it to others for their well-being.

He thinks that the most important teaching of Guru is Guru's Ashtalakshyas, which are the eight important aims that Guru instructed the Sivagiri Mutt to follow in 1926. These include education, business, science and technology, organization, agriculture, cleanliness, etc. He stressed that Guru had foreseen the importance of science and technology. During the COVID period, people completely depended on science and technology, and cleanliness also became important for protecting ourselves. He particularly emphasized Guru's teachings on education and organization.

Regarding the teaching "Become enlightened through education," he explained that institutions working on the basis of Guru's teachings have established schools and colleges across different places in Kerala, such as SN Colleges and Central Schools. These institutions also provide financial aid to students who are economically backward, irrespective of their caste.

There are many people from different castes and religions studying in these schools and colleges. Likewise, people from all religions visit the Sivagiri Mutt. However, with regard to Shanthi Padanam, most students belong to the Ezhava community, and currently only two students at the Sivagiri Mutt are learning Shanthi Padanam. He referred to both SNDP (1903) and Sree Narayana Guru Dharma Sangham (1928). Regarding caste, he stated that mankind itself is the one and only religion in the world. He quoted Guru's shloka, "*Jathibhedam*

Mathadwesham Ethumillathe Sarvarum Swadharathwena Vazhunnu Mathrikasthanamithu,” to explain Guru’s vision of humanity. He was not sure whether people today are living in accordance with this quote, but he believes that this teaching remains highly relevant in contemporary society. He also referred to a positive example during the 2018 Kerala floods, when people helped each other without considering religion, caste, or any other background.

According to him, inter-caste marriages and interreligious marriages are acceptable. He said that people should not fear society when making such decisions in their lives. Being a good human being is enough, and people should show kindness to others.

The younger generation is hesitant to follow Guru’s teachings, as many are engaged mainly with smartphones today. Only a few students willingly come forward to learn about Gurudev. The Sivagiri Mutt is making efforts to address this by organizing a summer camp. Through newspaper announcements, around 100 students below the age of 17 are selected to stay at the Sivagiri Mutt for one week. During the camp, they are trained to lead a simple life, become good and ideal students, and uphold Guru's teachings. Both boys and girls attend this camp annually.

Some people misinterpret the message of “One caste, one religion, one God for mankind.” He pointed out that “*Guru never referred to any particular caste, and his literary works focused on viewing everyone as equal.*”

Regarding Guru’s spirituality, he mentioned that Guru suggested certain pooja-related practices, but they were not mandatory. Above all, Guru emphasized attaining knowledge. People sometimes view Guru as a god or god-like figure because visitors to the Sivagiri Mutt often share their worries and hardships with Guru, believing that he will show them a way to overcome their struggles. He referred to the hymn “Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu...” in this context.

The way he follows Guru began with hearing about him, then reading Guru’s books, and eventually delivering prabhashanams (speeches) on such topics. Later, he and his family began visiting the Sivagiri Mutt, travelling from Perumbavoor to Varkala. During the COVID-19 pandemic period (after 2020), he came to Narayana Gurukulam at Varkala (nearly 1 km from Sivagiri), where he met Muni Narayana Prasad Swami. He spent some time with him, and the Swami inspired him to learn more about Guru. From that experience, he felt an inner calling to study all of Guru's literary works. He also views his Sanskrit degree from Kalady University as part of that inner calling that led him to this path. He referred to Sree Narayana Guru only

as “Bhagavan” or “Guru” and stated that he should not be addressed by any other terms, as doing so would be disrespectful to Gurudev.

Regarding celebrations, he said that people today mostly follow a luxurious style of marriage. However, there are still people who organize marriages according to Guru Arul Prakaram, where only about 15 people participate. He also noted that during the COVID period, many people knowingly or unknowingly followed such minimal forms of marriage.

Regarding temple rituals, he explained that temples where Guru installed idols follow only the ritual practices suggested by Sree Narayana Guru and do not go beyond them. The priests are from different castes and not necessarily from the so-called upper castes. Anyone who has learned Vaidika Vidyabhyasam can perform poojas there. He further stated that even the rest of his life is guided by Guru’s blessings.

He said that he could not speak much about the top leaders or famous personalities within the SNDP because he felt hesitant to do so. He also stated that people are disobeying Guru’s teachings regarding the avoidance of alcohol and drugs, as many young people today are becoming addicted to drugs.

His suggestion to future generations is that they should willingly come forward and accept Guru’s teachings. He referred to IAS officer Shika Surendran from Perumbavoor as an example of someone who upheld Guru’s teachings and achieved great success in life. He mentioned that she became the Collector of Thrissur in 2016. According to him, sincerely following Guru’s teachings can lead to success in life. He also stated that the Guru Dharma Pracharana Yuvajana Sabha is helping the younger generation follow and thrive according to Guru's teachings.

4.1.4. Swami Devanarayana

Swami Devanarayana (name changed) is a 60-year-old Swami (Acharya) at Sivagiri Mutt. He was born in Pathanamthitta and has been residing at Sivagiri, Varkala, for the past 42 years. He was Christian by birth.

Swami Devanarayana has been visiting Varkala Sivagiri since the age of 13. After completing his Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, he experienced what he describes as an “*inner calling*”. During this period, he immersed himself in spiritual literature, particularly the works of Swami Vivekananda, including “Sahithya Saraswasam”, along with other philosophical and spiritual texts. These readings drew his attention towards the path of a Guru or Acharya. Swami

Vivekananda's writings, especially those emphasising the unity of the Atman and the universality of religion, have historically served as a guiding light for many seekers in the Advaita and neo-Vedantic traditions.

Coming from a Christian background, Swami Devanaryana pursued formal theological training for priesthood for seven years. This period of structured religious study within the Christian tradition deepened his understanding of devotion, scripture, and inner calling and rather than creating a barrier, it ultimately guided him towards the path of “*Atmajnana*” or Self-Knowledge.

According to Swami Devanaryana, the most important teaching of Sree Narayana Guru is “*Atmavidya*”; the Knowledge of the Self. “*Atmavidya*” speaks of the divinity that already resides within every human being. Because this divine essence is inherent and universal, it naturally leads to a spirit of inclusiveness. In terms of caste, one who has attained “*Atmavidya*” sees all human beings as equal, since the same divine soul pervades all. This knowledge, he explains, cannot be adequately expressed in words. It is “*Acharyashastropadeshaganitajnanam*” meaning it is a knowledge that descends through the living tradition of Guru-Acharya lineage, facilitated by the Acharya and the Shastra; comprising scriptures such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. Swami Devanaryana studied under “Swami Punyananda Saraswathi” and sought the guidance of Acharyas at Sivagiri Mutt, where he engaged deeply with the study of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.

Swami Devanaryana elaborated on Sree Narayana Guru’s celebrated teaching: “Become enlightened through education, strengthened through organisation, and prosperous through hard work.” He interprets this as encompassing two fundamental dimensions of knowledge:

1. *Atmavidya* - Knowledge attained through inner discovery, self-inquiry, and spiritual realisation.
2. *Bhouthikajnana* - Knowledge acquired from the external world, such as formal degrees, academic qualifications, and technical skills.

He asserts that “*Atmavidya*” is the primary source of true enlightenment. However, academic and intellectual education remains indispensable for individual and societal development. Crucially, formal education must be complemented by moral values and a connection to something higher, what he calls a “celestial” dimension. He notes that regardless of whether a person identifies as an atheist or a believer, every individual ultimately holds within their heart

an innate inclination towards a higher reality. This divine presence is already within them, even if they are yet to recognise it. This vision aligns with the broader Advaita Vedanta perspective, which holds that every individual is, at their core, divine and that the purpose of education is not merely to impart information, but to help individuals realise their inherent divinity.

Sivagiri Mutt and its affiliated institutions under the Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham Trust actively run hospitals, schools, and colleges. Swami Devanaryana emphasises that these institutions are not primarily established for profit but as services to humanity, serving people irrespective of their caste, religion, or any other identity. For those wishing to contribute to this mission, the Sivagiri Donation Portal facilitates contributions towards “Grahanadha” (ceremonial offerings) and “Annadhanam” (food charity), enabling devotees to participate in the Mutt's philanthropic activities.

Sree Narayana Guru's famous declaration, “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man” is, according to Swami Devanaryana, a statement about the *Soul*, not about any particular caste, religious group, or deity. The Guru was speaking of the eternal truth, the singular reality of the “Atma”, which transcends all human-made distinctions. The Mutt propagates the authentic meaning of the Guru's teachings through “Vaidika Sampradayam” (the Vedic tradition) across India. Students who come to Sivagiri to learn “Vaidika Vidya” do so out of their own interest and may engage in roles as either “Acharyas” (teachers) or “Vaidikas” (those who conduct and perform rituals and poojas).

Swami Devanaryana affirmed that Sree Narayana Guru himself supported inter-caste marriage, and as a follower of the Guru, he sees no issue with such unions. He spoken of two significant social reform practices:

1. “Panthibhojanam” - A reform movement in Kerala where people sat together in the same row (panthi) and ate food together, irrespective of caste, as a direct challenge to untouchability and caste hierarchy.
2. “Misrabhojanam” - The practice of people from different castes and religions sharing a meal together, symbolising social equality and brotherhood.

That has been still practiced in Sivagiri Madum. Swami Devanaryana observed that in contemporary Kerala, many political leaders are publicly breaking caste barriers. He affirmed that the essence of a person is what matters, not their caste or birth identity.

Swami Devanaryana explained that Sree Narayana Guru's spirituality is vast and multifaceted, so vast, in fact, that even his contemporary followers acknowledge that they have yet to fully grasp its depth. He discussed the Guru's concept of “Maya” (illusion or delusion) and asserted that the only unchanging, eternal reality is the “Atma”; the Soul.

Though Guru's primary teaching is rooted in Advaitic spirituality, he himself practised idol worship, composed hymns dedicated to Hindu gods and the Sun, and held several goddesses in reverence. He installed a “Sivalingam” at Aruvippuram, not as an imposition, but in response to the wishes of the people around him who desired such worship.

On the question of religious freedom, Swami Devanaryana reflected the Guru's inclusive vision: individuals are free to worship in a temple, visit a church, or offer prayers in a mosque. The divine is not confined to any single form or tradition. “Karma Yoga” (selfless action) and “Upasana” (devotional practice) are regarded as stepping stones that cultivate moral values and ultimately lead the seeker towards the supreme truth.

Swami Devanaryana articulated several key philosophical concepts in the context of Sree Narayana Guru's teaching:

Brahmasthayam: The state in which the individual recognises that the one supreme power within us “Brahman” is the only ultimate truth.

Jagathmidhya: The world as understood through the senses is an illusion (Maya); only Brahman or the Atma is real.

Ekadevivam: The understanding that the individual self and the divine are ultimately one, expressed in the phrase “*Njan vere, daivam vere*” (I am separate, God is separate), which, when properly understood, dissolves into a state of “Advaita” (non-duality), often passing through “Dwaita” (duality) as an intermediate stage.

He clarified that “*this is not a matter of mere believe, it is a matter of understanding*”. He affirmed his faith in the power within himself (the Atman), rather than in an externally imposed deity.

Swami Devanaryana conveyed that caste-based thinking can only be truly uprooted when an individual undertakes genuine spiritual inquiry and moves towards “Atmajnana” (Self-Knowledge). He observed that all great Gurus and Rishis have, through the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and similar texts, been pointing to this same truth, the divine reality within

every human being. To transmit this knowledge across generations, institutions and systematic frameworks of learning are necessary. His own path of following Sree Narayana Guru involves continually deepening his study of the Guru's life and works, examining them from multiple perspectives, and internalising the understanding that the divine and the self are ultimately inseparable.

4.1.5. Vimala

Vimala (name changed) is a 71-year-old Hindu woman belonging to the Ezhava community. She is a widow and currently lives alone at Kaikkara, near Varkala. She has been associated with the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru for many years and has actively participated in activities related to the propagation of Guru's philosophy through organizations such as the SNDP and Sree Narayana Dharma Yogam. Her lifelong engagement with Guru's teachings has shaped her spiritual outlook, social values, and daily practices.

According to Vimala, a person cannot live without both spirituality and material life; both are necessary in today's world. She stated that the Sivagiri pilgrimage ideals and the objectives promoted by the SNDP encompass almost every aspect of life, including education, health, cleanliness, faith in God, and organization. She explained that one of the major difficulties she has faced in propagating Guru's teachings and engaging in social service activities is organizing people. According to her, it is difficult to carry out such activities alone, and throughout her years of involvement with the SNDP, she has faced many challenges in mobilizing members and volunteers.

From childhood onwards, she was taught to listen to and respect her elders and teachers. She explained that she always tried to learn new things and never hesitated to listen to the advice of her teachers before making decisions in life.

Vimala regularly reads *Daiva Dasakam*, the well-known prayer composed by Sree Narayana Guru. She recalled that when she was young, her mother used to send her to the Narayana Gurukulam at Varkala, where she had the opportunity to listen to Nataraja Guru, one of the prominent disciples of Sree Narayana Guru and the founder of Narayana Gurukulam. According to her, Nataraja Guru taught her spirituality and introduced her to the deeper aspects of Guru's teachings.

Reflecting on those experiences, she stated:

“I attended many lectures about Guru. Listening to them became an important part of my life, just like my hands and legs. By repeatedly participating in such activities, I became a part of the path of Sree Narayana Guru Dharma Yogam. Whether people believe me or not, Nataraja Guru had a divine aura within him that influenced us to follow this path.”

She also remembered that the students at Narayana Gurukulam included both boys and girls and people from different castes, although followers from other religions were relatively few. Vimala spoke about Guru's Ashtalakshyams (Eight Objectives), which form the foundation of the Sivagiri Pilgrimage movement. According to her, these objectives address various aspects of social, educational, and economic development and remain highly relevant even today. She mentioned that she regularly reads monthly magazines and publications related to Sivagiri and keeps herself updated about its activities. She stated that she continues to learn about Guru and his teachings and believes that every year scholars and Swamijis provide new interpretations and perspectives on Guru's philosophy.

She described one of her social service activities:

“Whenever there is a funeral in my locality, I inform my co-workers because we are supposed to go there, share the family's sorrow for a while, and chant hymns for the peace of the departed soul. However, some people do not want us to do this.”

She advised that everyone should remain humble like Sree Narayana Guru and communicate with others with compassion and simplicity. According to her, people should never approach others with greed or ego.

Speaking about Guru, she remarked:

“I believe that Sree Narayana Guru came into this world in a human form, but he was much more than an ordinary human being.”

As a mark of respect and devotion, she and other members of Sree Narayana Dharma Yogam participate in Thiruvathira performances during the Sivagiri pilgrimage celebrations. She also noted that Guru's followers in Sri Lanka conduct similar programmes and continue to propagate his teachings for the welfare of society. She again emphasized that one of the major obstacles in spreading Guru's teachings is the difficulty of organizing people and motivating them to participate in social and spiritual activities. According to her, many young people are reluctant to learn about spirituality or attend lectures related to Sree Narayana Guru. Even when she invites them to such programmes, they often show little interest.

She expressed her disappointment by stating:

“Nobody is ready to join me in doing the service activities taught by Guru. Sometimes I feel that my locality is a cursed place because people are not willing to accept new knowledge.”

She also stated that many dedicated spiritual leaders and Gurus are currently working in Sri Lanka to propagate Guru’s teachings and guide those who sincerely follow Sree Narayana Guru.

Regarding educational activities, she explained that the SNDP has been supporting students for many years through scholarships and financial assistance. Students are required to apply for these benefits, and eligible candidates are selected from the applications received. According to her, anyone can apply regardless of caste.

While discussing funeral practices, she explained that, according to the customs she follows, family members of the deceased are expected to avoid celebrations, laughter, and entertainment for a few days after the death because the soul is believed to remain around its familiar surroundings for some time after leaving the body.

When discussing Guru's famous message, “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Mankind,” she observed that Guru did not encourage practices such as excessive fireworks during religious festivals, although such practices continue in many temples and churches.

She openly admitted:

“Those who claim to be Guru's followers are not always following his teachings properly. Even I may be following only about fifty percent of what Guru taught.”

Vimala strongly supports inter-caste and inter-community marriages. She explained her view by saying:

“If I have a wound and you have a wound, both of us bleed red blood. There is no difference between us other than being human beings.”

Regarding rituals and ceremonies, she noted that many young people are now adopting simple and minimal forms of marriage, which she believes are closer to Guru’s ideals. She further stated that temples should function as centres of learning and knowledge. According to her, temples established by Sree Narayana Guru follow the principles laid down by him, and people from any caste who have received the necessary training can perform priestly duties. However, she felt that some people still remain attached to caste-based thinking.

She also stated:

“Guru supported worship for those who preferred it because such practices may give people peace of mind and inner comfort.”

Vimala explained that she follows Guru’s teachings through her behaviour, speech, and food habits. Although she occasionally consumes non-vegetarian food, she does so only very rarely. She also recites *Atmopadesa Sathakam* before going to sleep because it gives her peace of mind, calmness, and good sleep. Finally, she emphasized that if future generations are to understand Guru’s teachings and values, they must be actively introduced to them. According to her, one should not simply wait for an inner calling. Parents, teachers, and facilitators have an important role in guiding children towards Guru’s teachings. She believes that such guidance would help children develop respect for elders, teachers, and moral values from an early age.

4.1.6. Jagadeesh

Jagadeesh (name changed) is a 74 year, old man originally from Vakkam and currently residing at Ulloor, Pongumoodu, Thiruvananthapuram. He comes from an academic background in Sociology and worked as an anaesthesia technician in Dubai for several years. His association with Sree Narayana Guru began during his childhood. His father, who worked in Singapore and Gujarat, was an artist, and their home contained pictures of Sree Narayana Guru, Kumaran Asan, and other prominent personalities. Growing up in such an environment helped him become familiar with Guru’s teachings from an early age. His connection with Guru’s philosophy deepened further when he studied at SN College from 1968 to 1973. During his years in Dubai, he became actively involved in SNDP activities, serving as Joint Secretary and later as a counsellor for nearly ten years. At present, he serves as the District Secretary of the Guru Dharma Pracharana Sabha in Thiruvananthapuram.

According to Jagadeesh, *“if people truly understand and follow Guru’s teachings and philosophy, many of the social conflicts seen today can be reduced”*. He believes that Guru’s message, “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity,” remains highly relevant in contemporary society. He stated that the primary aim of the Guru Dharma Pracharana Sabha is to promote a casteless and classless society.

He explained that Guru emphasized Pancha Dharma, Pancha Shuddhi, and Ashta Lakshyanganal. According to him, Ahimsa (non-violence) is the foremost principle within Pancha Dharma. Abstinence from alcohol, Astheyam (non-stealing), and moral conduct are also important values. These teachings encourage people to lead ethical and peaceful lives. Jagadeesh stated

that the *Ashtalakshyangal* include education, sustenance, organization, profession, agriculture, technological education, faith, and other aspects of holistic development. During the annual Sivagiri pilgrimage, these objectives are discussed through lectures and awareness programmes. Experts, doctors, and scholars are invited to speak on themes such as education, health, and social development. He explained that Pancha Shuddhi includes purity in speech, home, body, and other aspects of life. *Vak Shuddhi* (purity of speech) teaches that one should not lie, insult others, or speak ill of people. Instead, individuals should appreciate good deeds and learn to forgive mistakes.

According to Jagadeesh, Guru's message, "Gain enlightenment through education and strength through organization," remains highly relevant even today. However, he feels that the younger generation has not fully understood Guru's teachings in their true spirit. He expressed concern about social media addiction, excessive dependence on mobile phones, and the declining level of communication within families. He contrasted this with earlier times, when joint family systems allowed greater interaction, learning, and sharing of experiences. He believes that education alone is not sufficient and that life experience is equally important. Parents, he argued, should invest in education and character formation rather than merely accumulating wealth for their children. He emphasized that children should learn the realities of life through experience so that they can face challenges with resilience and emotional strength.

Through the Guru Dharma Pracharana Sabha, he participates in activities such as *Ravi Vara Patasalas* (Sunday classes), lectures, monthly meetings, and study sessions on Guru's teachings. Children are introduced to Guru's writings and messages, while regular prayer, chanting, and reading of Guru's works are also encouraged.

Jagadeesh explained that the organization is open to people from all castes and religions. Anyone can join and participate in its activities. He noted that the Sabha functions according to Guru's principles of equality and universal brotherhood and includes members from different religious backgrounds.

Regarding Guru's message of "One Caste, One Religion, One God," he felt that only about 40-50 percent of society truly understands and practices it. He also referred to Guru's message at Aruvippuram: "This is a model place where people live as brothers without caste differences and religious hatred," which he considers equally significant. According to his understanding, humanity is more important than caste or religion. Therefore, he believes that inter-caste and

inter-religious marriages are fully acceptable within Guru's philosophy. He remarked that, *"fundamentally, there are only two categories in the world are, men and women."*

When discussing Guru's concept of God, Jagadeesh stated that God represents knowledge and enlightenment. Ignorance is darkness, whereas knowledge is light. In his view, spirituality involves moving from ignorance to knowledge. He added that Guru's philosophical depth is immense and that a complete understanding of it requires serious study and reflection. He explained that Guru opposed extravagance in all forms of life. Guru advocated simple living, simple pilgrimages, and simple marriages. He discouraged unnecessary expenditure and luxurious celebrations and opposed practices that caused suffering to living beings.

According to Jagadeesh, Guru's teaching of compassion extends to all forms of life. One should not intentionally harm even an ant. Guru opposed animal sacrifice and other cruel customs, and his vision was based on universal love and non-violence.

Regarding idol worship, he stated that *"people do not worship the idol itself but rather the divine presence represented through it. And when devotees pray with closed eyes, their focus is on God rather than the physical image before them."*

In his personal life, Jagadeesh tries to follow Guru's teachings as sincerely as possible, although he acknowledges that fully living according to them is difficult. Every night, he spends time in prayer and recites Guru Stotram, Guru Dhyanam, Daiva Dasakam, and other devotional verses. He believes that these practices help him maintain peace of mind and inner balance.

He described a true Sannyasi as a person who has renounced all worldly attachments. In his understanding, Sree Narayana Guru himself embodied this ideal. Guru's fearlessness, compassion, and spiritual realization placed him at an extraordinary level.

Jagadeesh believes that there remains a significant gap between Guru's ideals and present-day society. According to him, if people genuinely practiced Guru's teachings, there would be far less conflict, hatred, and violence. He feels that Guru's vision of universal brotherhood and a united humanity have not yet been fully realized.

When asked about the younger generation, he emphasized the importance of Guru's teachings on non-violence, morality, self-discipline, education, and spirituality. He believes that these values can guide individuals toward a better and more meaningful life. One of the major challenges he identified in propagating Guru's message is the limited participation of young people. He observed that most active members are above fifty years of age. According to him,

spiritual values and faith should be cultivated from childhood through family practices such as prayer, reading, and moral education.

Jagadeesh also highlighted Guru's role in challenging social evils and discriminatory practices such as untouchability, Smartha Vicharam, child marriage, Marumakkathayam-related injustices, Pulappedi, Mannappedi, and other oppressive customs. He noted that Guru consistently worked towards social reform, equality, and human dignity. He acknowledged that caste consciousness continues to exist in society. In his opinion, education and awareness are the most effective ways to overcome it. He stressed that children should be introduced to Guru's values from an early age and that families have a crucial role in this process. He further stated that children should receive not only formal education but also practical life experiences. They should understand hardship, hunger, financial limitations, and social realities, as such experiences help build character, maturity, and resilience.

In conclusion, Jagadeesh strongly believes that Guru's teachings remain highly relevant in contemporary society. According to him, if humanity follows Guru's principles of equality, education, morality, compassion, and spirituality, many of the problems faced by society today can be overcome.

4.1.7. Dr. Priya

Dr. Priya (name changed) is a 67-year-old married Hindu woman residing at Thonnakkal, Thiruvananthapuram. She is a Homeopathic doctor by profession and has been associated with the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru for several decades. Her first introduction to Guru's philosophy came through her father, who was himself a follower of Sree Narayana Guru. Over the years, she developed a deep interest in studying Guru's life, writings, and philosophy. She has been actively associated with Narayana Gurukulam and has participated in conventions, lectures, and discussions related to Guru's teachings. Her understanding of Sree Narayana Guru is largely shaped by the study of his original works and the teachings of spiritual leaders in the Narayana Gurukulam tradition.

Dr. Priya stated that she is definitely a follower of Sree Narayana Guru. According to her, her father was her first guru and the person who introduced her to Guru's teachings. After her father's death nearly thirty years ago, she became more deeply interested in studying Guru's philosophy and writings. She explained that most of her understanding of Guru comes directly from his literary works rather than from secondary interpretations.

She has been associated with Narayana Gurukulam and learned through the tradition of Nataraja Guru, Nitya Chaitanya Yati, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, Guru Narayana Prasad, and, at present, Swami Tejaswaran. She regularly attended conventions where discussions and lectures on Guru's teachings were conducted.

She emphasized that her lectures on Guru's philosophy were based on her own study and understanding rather than merely repeating the interpretations of others.

According to her, annual conventions were usually organized in December and sometimes in other locations such as Thalassery. Participants were provided with a list of topics related to Guru's philosophy and were allowed to choose subjects according to their interests. Each participant would present their ideas, followed by discussions and interactions. She recalled that her involvement began after meeting Guru Narayana Prasad and expressing her desire to participate in the programmes. She noted that he never asked about her educational qualifications or background but simply encouraged her to select a topic and share her thoughts. This experience motivated her to continue studying and presenting Guru's teachings. Although she has not attended such conventions for nearly ten years due to personal circumstances, she continues to remain engaged with Guru's philosophy.

At present, she uses social media platforms, Facebook, and online discussion groups to share and promote Guru's teachings, thereby contributing to the continued dissemination of his ideas in contemporary society.

She also stated that she is currently working on a book that explores the question of who Sree Narayana Guru truly was. According to her, Guru is often described as a social reformer, spiritual master, philosopher, or Advaitin, but she believes that his true significance has not yet been fully understood.

She further explained that she has been studying the tantric dimensions of Guru's Kali temple traditions and hopes to publish her findings either as a book or through digital platforms so that they may reach a wider audience.

When asked about the contemporary relevance of Guru's teachings, she referred to his famous message:

"One caste, one religion, one God for humanity."

According to her interpretation, Guru meant that there is only one caste, the human caste and one religion the religion of humanity. She explained that the divine is not separate from human beings but exists as consciousness within every individual.

She believes that this message remains highly relevant in contemporary society because it promotes equality, human dignity, and a sense of universal brotherhood beyond caste and religious divisions.

In her view, Guru should be understood as the “Modern Vyasa.” She explained that just as Vyasa is associated with transmitting spiritual wisdom, Sree Narayana Guru played a similar role in modern times. Although many people remember him primarily as a social reformer, she believes that his significance extends far beyond social reform.

According to her, Guru was fundamentally an Advaitin whose teachings were rooted in the philosophy of non-duality.

She referred to works such as *Jati Nirnayam* and *Atmopadesa Sathakam* as essential texts for understanding Guru’s ideas on caste and human equality. She argued that many contemporary interpretations focus mainly on the social aspects of Guru’s work while neglecting the deeper spiritual dimensions. She also discussed her study of *Darshanamala*. Although the text is written in Sanskrit and she does not possess advanced formal training in the language, she explained that she devoted considerable time to understanding it through reflection and meditation.

She stated that whenever she encountered difficulty in understanding a verse, she would meditate upon it deeply and reflect on its meaning. Through this process, she felt that Guru himself guided her understanding.

This experience strengthened her belief that sincere dedication and commitment are essential for understanding Guru's teachings. Dr. Priya also spoke about her personal association with Guru Narayana Prasad Swami. She has travelled with him to various parts of India, including the Himalayas, and regards him as a sincere representative of the Advaitic tradition. She believes that many misunderstandings surrounding him emerged due to external influences and inaccurate representations. According to her, the most important step for anyone seeking to understand Sree Narayana Guru is to study Guru's original writings.

She repeatedly emphasized that direct engagement with Guru’s texts is necessary because many people claim to represent Guru's teachings without fully understanding his original message.

She also stated that Guru should not be viewed in competition with other spiritual teachers. Respecting Sree Narayana Guru does not require rejecting or disrespecting other spiritual traditions.

While discussing social reform, she observed that reform should not be understood merely as the correction of social evils. Rather, she believes that reform involves restoring higher truths and values that have been forgotten over time. In this sense, she considers figures such as Adi Shankaracharya, Sree Narayana Guru, and Lord Krishna to be reformers. According to her understanding, Guru's opposition to caste discrimination was not limited to social criticism. Instead, he emphasized personal transformation as the foundation of social change.

She believes that the roots of inequality lie within human attitudes and limitations and that genuine social transformation occurs only when individuals cultivate wisdom, purity, and higher understanding.

She further noted that Guru's temple consecrations demonstrated that spiritual realization is not restricted to any particular caste. Anyone who sincerely surrenders to the Divine and pursues spiritual growth can attain higher realization.

Finally, she stated that Guru did not gain influence through political leadership or organized mass mobilisation. Rather, people were naturally drawn to him because of his wisdom, spiritual insight, and depth of realization.

According to her, Guru's enduring relevance lies in his ability to guide individuals toward self-transformation, universal humanism, spiritual awareness, and equality, values that continue to hold significance in contemporary society.

4.1.8. Meera

Meera (name changed) is a 64-year-old married Hindu woman residing in Varkala, Thiruvananthapuram district. She is a retired High School Malayalam teacher and currently lives with her family. She has two children, both of whom are married. Throughout her professional career as an educator, she was actively engaged in teaching and mentoring students, which enabled her to develop a close understanding of social and cultural values within the community.

The respondent explains that many of the concepts and practices associated with Sree Narayana Guru are connected to the spiritual path shown by the Guru. According to the respondent, the divine element present in the institutions and temples established by the Guru is not always

clearly understood by people. The Guru used many remarkable methods and examples to explain his ideas and social vision to ordinary people.

The respondent states that many rituals, customs, and celebrations followed in temples and society are often not practiced in the way the Guru originally intended. *“The Guru advised people to avoid practices symbolized by “kariyum karimarunnum” (elephants and fireworks). Today, many accidents and tragedies occur because of elephants used in temple festivals and the use of fireworks”*. The respondent notes that despite deaths and injuries caused by these practices, society is often unwilling to abandon them. People continue to use elephants in temple processions and continue fireworks despite the dangers. According to the respondent, *“if the Guru’s teachings had been followed more sincerely, society in Kerala and India might have progressed differently.”*

The respondent mentions that Guru-established temples are found not only in Kerala but also in other states such as Karnataka. It is said that there are more than forty such temples in Karnataka. Many positive changes are taking place in these institutions, but the wider public is often unaware of them. The respondent feels that there is insufficient effort to publicize these developments.

The respondent acknowledges that organizations such as the Guru Dharma Pracharana Sabha and various monks are engaged in activities related to the Guru’s mission. However, the respondent feels that these efforts are not always effective in informing the public about important issues and developments connected with the Guru’s movement. Many people are interested in learning about the Guru, and opportunities exist for them to do so, but awareness remains limited. The respondent believes that monks and spiritual leaders should take greater responsibility for guiding people and helping them understand the Guru’s teachings.

The respondent states that it is not possible for an ordinary person to follow every instruction of the Guru exactly as it was spoken. Instead, people should move forward by understanding the deeper meaning behind the teachings. The Guru’s words should not always be interpreted only in their literal sense; rather, they should be understood at a higher moral and philosophical level. The respondent explains that the teachings of the Guru are a blessing for both the living and the dead. Although the respondent has read some of the Guru’s works and is familiar with texts such as “Daiva Dasakam”, there is still much more to learn. The Guru’s teachings should be read, studied, and understood continuously. As an example, the respondent refers to the Guru’s teaching that no living being should be harmed. This should not be interpreted only in

a strict literal sense. In modern life, it is impossible to avoid every situation in which some form of harm may occur knowingly or unknowingly. Therefore, the real message is that people should not intentionally harm or trouble others. A person should not knowingly cause suffering to any living being. Understanding this deeper meaning helps people become better human beings and allows them to follow the Guru's path in practical ways.

The respondent also refers to the Guru's advice against alcohol consumption and explains that such teachings should be understood and applied in a meaningful way rather than merely repeating the words. The important thing is to understand the positive purpose behind the teaching and live accordingly.

Regarding the spread of the Guru's teachings, the respondent says that several organizations and institutions already work for this purpose. Meetings, classes, gatherings, and programs are organized in ashrams and community centers where people are invited to learn about the Guru's philosophy. Weekly classes and discussion groups are conducted in many places. The respondent observes that such activities appear to be less common in areas like Varkala and Thiruvananthapuram compared to some other regions, where larger numbers of people gather to discuss and learn about the Guru's teachings. The respondent notes that monks, householders, and organizations involved in Guru Dharma Pracharana are working for propagation, but the overall impact remains limited. One major challenge identified by the respondent is the low participation of young people. Meetings and programs are attended mostly by people above fifty or sixty years of age, especially retired individuals. Younger people often lack the opportunity, time, or interest to participate.

The respondent compares this situation with other religious communities. In some religious traditions, children are regularly taken to places of worship by their parents and are brought up according to the teachings and discipline of that faith. As a result, values and practices are transmitted from one generation to the next. Children learn what is considered right and wrong through regular participation in religious life. According to the respondent, "*Hindu society lacks a similar level of organized discipline and continuity.*" People are free to attend temples whenever they wish and may also choose not to participate. The respondent feels that, "*many Hindu children do not grow up with a strong sense of connection to a spiritual guide, institution, or mentor whom they can approach with their problems, doubts, and concerns. As a result, many young people drift away from religious and spiritual learning.*"

The respondent believes that younger generations need guidance and a sense of belonging. Many people in earlier generations learned about spiritual values because they observed their parents and elders visiting temples and discussing religious teachings. Through repeated exposure, those values were naturally passed on. Today, however, this process has weakened significantly. The respondent states that only a small percentage of young people actively read and learn about these teachings on their own. Whatever knowledge they receive usually comes from their parents, but even that has become limited. Modern life is filled with practical concerns such as education, employment, and family responsibilities, which leave less time for spiritual instruction and community participation. The respondent suggests that if there were stronger expectations or regular systems encouraging participation in religious and spiritual activities, more young people might become involved. In the absence of such structures, interest continues to decline.

The respondent concludes by emphasizing that these observations are personal opinions based on experience and concern for the future of the Guru's teachings. The respondent expresses gratitude for the opportunity to discuss these matters and appreciates the interest shown in learning about Sree Narayana Guru and his philosophy. The respondent explains that when we remember and study the sufferings, oppression, and hardships experienced by our ancestors, we understand the significance of Sree Narayana Guru. Rather than merely speaking about social change, Guru inspired people through action and practical reform. According to the respondent, if Guru had not existed, it would be impossible to imagine where society would be today. The community was subjected to severe oppression, and there was no one to resist or challenge the system. People were only expected to endure suffering, and the capacity to react against injustice had been lost.

The respondent states that the progress achieved through Guru's efforts still exists today, but there is a danger that society is once again moving toward systems of oppression. This is happening because people have lost their ability to respond collectively to injustice. The loss of social awareness and reaction has weakened society. As an example, the respondent refers to the famous Shiva consecration at Aruvippuram in 1888. At that time, lower-caste communities were denied even basic human dignity. In such a social environment, Guru performed the consecration of a Shiva idol. The respondent emphasizes that Guru's courage must be understood in the context of that period. The act itself was revolutionary.

The respondent explains that when upper-caste leaders heard about the consecration, they came to question Guru with anger and hostility. They approached him intending to challenge and intimidate him. However, Guru remained calm. According to the respondent, all of Guru's actions reflected peace and composure. When questioned about his authority to consecrate a Shiva idol, Guru reportedly replied that he had consecrated "our Shiva." The respondent rejects the popular claim that Guru said, "I consecrated an Ezhava Shiva." According to the respondent, Guru would never have used such divisive language because he stood for equality and universal humanity. The respondent points to the famous inscription associated with Guru's ideals:

"This is a model place where all people live as brothers without distinctions of caste and without religious hatred."

The respondent explains that Guru's gentle and thoughtful response prevented conflict. The people who came with anger and social power eventually withdrew without attacking him. They were physically powerful, influential, and accustomed to asserting authority, yet they chose not to retaliate. The respondent interprets this as evidence of Guru's spiritual power and divine presence. According to the respondent, many people approached Guru with anger and prejudice, but they left transformed by his personality and wisdom. No one ultimately harmed him. This is viewed as an expression of Guru's divine nature. The respondent states that whether Guru should be called God is not the main issue. What matters is recognizing the extraordinary spiritual influence he exercised over people.

The respondent further explains that understanding Guru's teachings gradually guides a person toward a righteous path. One does not need to belong formally to any Guru Dharma organization to follow Guru's ideals. Many people around the world accept Guru's teachings and live according to his principles without being members of any institution.

Discussing Guru's teachings for contemporary society, the respondent says that Guru's message was meant not only for his own time but also for future generations. One important example is Guru's concept of pilgrimage. Most people think pilgrimage means bathing, wearing special clothes, visiting temples, offering prayers, and returning home with souvenirs. However, Guru gave pilgrimage a much broader meaning. According to the respondent, Guru viewed pilgrimage as a means of human development and social upliftment. He identified eight important goals associated with it. This included education, health, agriculture, devotion to God, industry, technology, and other areas essential for human progress. The respondent

particularly highlights Guru's reference to technology and information technology. Considering that Guru lived more than a century ago, the respondent believes this demonstrates his extraordinary foresight and vision. These ideas existed in Guru's mind long before modern technological developments occurred.

The respondent then discusses intercaste marriage. According to the respondent, *“intercaste marriage can be an effective means of reducing caste divisions if accompanied by meaningful social support. The respondent suggests that governments could provide greater encouragement and assistance to such families. Without broader social changes, however, caste identities continue to remain influential, and the full benefits of intercaste marriage may not be realized”*.

The respondent mentions that Sree Narayana Guru himself supported intercaste marriage and refers to historical examples associated with Guru's reform activities. The respondent also discusses reservation policies, noting that the issue is complex. While some people argue that reservations should be removed, the respondent believes careful examination is necessary. Reservations were introduced for important reasons, and removing them could create serious problems. At the same time, the respondent suggests that the present system may not always function exactly as intended and requires thoughtful evaluation.

Turning to Guru's concept of God and spirituality, the respondent refers to Daiva Dasakam. The opening prayer, “God, protect me without abandoning me,” is presented as an expression of Guru's understanding of God. According to the respondent, Guru believed that human beings require divine guidance and support throughout life. The respondent explains that even people who identify as atheists may eventually encounter situations that reveal human limitations. A person may believe that all success comes solely from personal ability and effort. However, unexpected events such as accidents, illness, or misfortune can occur despite one's talents and preparations. In such moments, people instinctively seek help and protection beyond themselves. To illustrate this point, the respondent describes a student who studies extremely hard and is fully prepared for an examination. Despite possessing knowledge and ability, unforeseen obstacles may prevent success. Therefore, human effort alone is not always sufficient. According to the respondent, divine grace plays an important role alongside personal effort. The respondent also refers to a traditional belief that even when a person prepares perfectly, success depends on factors beyond individual control. When people unexpectedly remember what they studied at the right moment or overcome a challenge successfully, they

often attribute it to divine assistance. This reflects Guru's understanding of God as a guiding and protecting presence.

The respondent further explains a metaphor found in Guru's teachings, comparing God to a navigator who guides a boat safely through difficult waters. Just as a navigator prevents a boat from sinking, God protects and guides human beings through life's uncertainties. According to the respondent, this protective and guiding presence forms the essence of Guru's concept of God and spirituality.

4.1.9. Meena

Meena (name changed) is a 54-year-old Hindu woman belonging to the Ezhava community. She is currently a homemaker and resides at Melvettoor, Thiruvananthapuram district. She is married and an active member of the SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam). Originally from Kayikkara, she later moved to Melvettoor with her husband, who is from Anjengo, after purchasing a house there approximately ten years ago.

Meena's association with Sree Narayana Guru began during her childhood. Her mother regularly took her to Sivagiri, which helped her develop an early connection with Guru and his teachings. Over the years, she deepened her understanding of Guru through reading his works, biographies, and writings produced by his disciples. As a devotee, SNDP member, and regular visitor to Sivagiri, she has developed a strong attachment to Guru's philosophy and continues to reflect on its relevance in contemporary society.

Meena stated that her association with Sree Narayana Guru began in childhood. Her mother used to take her and her siblings to Sivagiri regularly. Before appearing for her SSLC examination, she performed Guru Pooja and then attended the examination. According to her, Guru has always been a guiding presence in her life.

She explained that for her, Guru is God. While many people may consider Shiva or Krishna as their favourite deity, she stated that if someone asked her who her favourite deity was, she would answer that it is Sree Narayana Guru. Initially, she did not know much about Guru. However, she gradually developed a deeper understanding after reading Guru's works and biographies. She noted that many authors have written biographies of Guru and that numerous works have also been written by his disciples.

According to Meena, Guru authored both devotional and philosophical works. Among his devotional compositions are hymns dedicated to Shiva, Subrahmanya, and Devi. She identified *Atmopadesa Sathakam* and *Daiva Dasakam* as some of Guru's important works.

She observed that ordinary people generally know Guru through three well-known teachings: "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity," "Do not ask, tell, or think about caste," and "Liquor is poison; do not make it, give it, or consume it." However, she emphasized that those who study Guru deeply will discover that his teachings extend far beyond these familiar messages. According to her, Guru's teachings are endless and continue to offer new insights.

Meena stated that she visits Sivagiri regularly. She noted that the prayers conducted there are different from those performed in many other temples. During worship, the sanctum remains open, allowing everyone to witness the rituals.

She explained that the 108 names of Guru are chanted during worship. Guru Dhyanam begins with "Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu..." followed by the 108 Namavali, *Daiva Dasakam*, and *Samarpanam*, which concludes the prayer.

She stated that she follows only Guru's path. Although she has not visited Narayana Gurukulam, she expressed a desire to do so in the future. According to her understanding, the institution is open to everyone, and children study there. Referring to Guru's teaching of "One Caste," she explained that Guru meant the human race as a whole.

According to Meena, many people who claim to be followers of Guru do not fully practice his teachings. She observed that SNDP often presents Guru primarily as the leader of the Ezhava community, whereas Guru himself upheld the principle of "One Caste, One Religion, One God" for all humanity. She further remarked that in some educational assistance programmes, preference is often given to Ezhava students who obtain higher marks. In her opinion, this approach does not fully reflect Guru's principles because Guru regarded all people as equal.

She stated that, as far as she knows, *SNDP does not always provide benefits equally to everyone*. She referred to a case in which "*SNDP office bearers allegedly demanded a large amount of money for a B.Ed. admission, while the student later secured admission elsewhere by paying a lower amount*". According to Meena, SNDP does not always fully follow Guru's principles in practice. As a member of the organization, she believes that such realities become more visible from within.

She stated that she does not oppose inter-caste marriages and pointed out that Guru himself supported such marriages. She referred to an account stating that Guru conducted the marriage of a foreign woman named Margaret and an Indian man, believing that Eastern and Western people should unite.

According to her, Guru had no caste or religion. The only distinction he recognized was between those who possessed resources and those who did not. She explained that Guru's concern was always that underprivileged people should receive support and opportunities. Meena recalled a story in which someone asked Guru about his caste during a journey. According to the story, Guru replied, "If you cannot recognize it by seeing me, how can you know it if I tell you?" She interpreted this response as a reminder that the true caste is humanity.

She stated that people from other communities are also given membership in SNDP. She personally knows individuals from other communities who participate actively in its programmes and activities. According to Meena, "*Guru's first monastic disciple was Sivalingadas Swami, who belonged to the Nair community. She further stated that Guru's disciples included Christians and Brahmins*". She referred to a Christian disciple named Ernest and noted that one of the last individuals to receive monastic initiation from Guru belonged to the Brahmin community. She explained that even today, monks from different communities are associated with Guru's institutions, including some who come from Christian backgrounds.

Regarding youth participation, Meena observed that involvement appears to be relatively low in the Thiruvananthapuram region, whereas younger people seem to be more active in northern Kerala. She mentioned that she had participated in pilgrim walks in the past, although she does not attend them as frequently now.

According to her, several organizations make efforts to implement Guru's teaching, "Become enlightened through education." She stated that some unions conduct classes for children, while Sunday schools teach Guru's works and philosophy. However, she also observed that money continues to influence employment opportunities and admissions to educational institutions. In her opinion, such practices are contrary to Guru's teachings. Meena stated that Guru taught that temples should be accompanied by educational institutions. She also noted that Guru opposed the use of elephants and fireworks in temple celebrations. However, she pointed out that these teachings are not followed everywhere. She referred to temples such as Kabaliswara Temple as examples of institutions that follow Guru's ideals more closely, noting that fireworks are not conducted there. According to Meena, more people will come to understand Guru in the future.

She recalled hearing that Guru himself had said that Malayalis would gradually understand these ideas. She expressed her belief that the coming era will be Guru's era.

Discussing idol worship, she explained that ordinary people often need a visible form through which they can understand God. In reality, she believes that God exists within every human being. However, because many people find it difficult to realize this truth directly, idols and consecrations continue to play an important role. She added that Guru later emphasized that educational institutions were even more necessary for society. Meena referred to Guru's consecration of the Shiva Linga at Aruvippuram. According to her, Guru performed the consecration because lower-caste people were not permitted to enter temples at that time. Since they required a place for worship, Guru consecrated the Shiva Linga for them. She further explained that when some people questioned how an Ezhava could perform a consecration, Guru reportedly replied, "We consecrated our Shiva." While some interpreted this as meaning an "Ezhava Shiva," she stated that those who truly understand Guru believe he meant a Shiva for all human beings to worship.

In conclusion, Meena emphasized that Guru's message of "One Caste, One Religion, One God" was never intended solely for Ezhavas or Hindus. According to her, Guru's message was meant for all humanity and continues to remain relevant in contemporary society.

4.2.1. Vivek

Vivek (name changed) is a 28-year-old Hindu man belonging to the Ezhava community. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Technology (B.Tech.) and a Master's degree in Political Science. At present, he is preparing for government service examinations. Having grown up in a social environment influenced by the legacy of Sree Narayana Guru and the activities of organizations associated with Guru's movement, Vivek developed an interest in understanding Guru's philosophy, social vision, and its contemporary relevance. His academic background in both technical and social science disciplines has shaped his perspective on social reform, caste relations, education, and community development.

Vivek demonstrated a strong awareness of the historical and social contributions of Sree Narayana Guru, particularly regarding the upliftment of marginalized communities through education, organization, and social reform. During the interaction, he reflected on the continuing relevance of Guru's teachings in contemporary society and discussed the extent to which these ideals are being practiced by present-day followers and organizations associated with Guru's movement. According to Vivek, the first and most important teaching of Sree

Narayana Guru is “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity.” He described it as Guru’s greatest teaching. He stated that Kerala society was historically divided by numerous caste identities. In his view, there are often no significant physical or genetic differences between communities such as Nairs and Ezhavas, yet caste functioned as a major factor that separated people. He contrasted this with visible differences that may exist between people from different continents, arguing that caste was the primary basis of division within Kerala society. He explained that caste, religion, and God were three major factors through which people distinguished themselves from one another. According to him, Guru’s message sought to unite these divisions. If caste, religion, and God are understood as one, there is ultimately no difference between people. Vivek further noted that Sree Narayana Guru installed major Hindu deities in temples based on the idea that all human beings are equal before the same God. He believed that if the freedoms enjoyed by upper castes were equally available to lower castes, social equality could be achieved.

Vivek stated that the phrase “Become enlightened through education” was not merely a slogan. In his understanding, *“Guru made this statement during a period when people had become increasingly focused on temple-building and temple consecrations. After conducting numerous temple consecrations,”* Guru was being invited to consecrate temples in many different places. According to Vivek, *“Guru realized that people were becoming overly concerned with temple construction and religious activities.”*

To redirect society’s focus, Guru emphasized education, organization, and economic development. Vivek explained that Guru wanted people to become stronger through collective organization and self-improvement. He believed that disadvantaged communities required economic advancement in addition to social equality. In his interpretation, Guru’s initial objective was to establish social equality through temple consecrations, but once this objective was partially achieved, he shifted his emphasis toward economic empowerment and education.

When discussing the impact of this teaching, Vivek pointed to the economic transformation that occurred among historically marginalized communities. He observed that people engaged in occupations such as toddy tapping and other low-status forms of labour gradually recognized the importance of education for improving their lives. According to him, this was the primary purpose of Guru’s message on education.

He further stated that Guru’s shift from spiritual discourses and temple consecrations toward education and economic development reflected a broader understanding of social progress. In

his opinion, Guru realized that communities needed practical opportunities for advancement rather than relying solely on spirituality. Vivek believed that this vision encouraged many individuals to enter trade, business, and professional occupations. As a result, many talented individuals from the community have achieved success in educational, social, and economic fields.

As far as Vivek knew, SNDP had supported students in various ways over the years. Examination fees for certain courses were sometimes paid through the organization. *“Educational institutions such as engineering colleges and SN Colleges were established, and scholarship programmes were also available, although, personally I had never received any scholarship or financial aid”*. He recalled that students who performed well in examinations were often rewarded. During Guru Jayanti celebrations, branches frequently gave prizes to students with the highest marks. Some branches also recognized achievements in arts and sports, thereby encouraging children’s talents.

There were also coaching programmes and educational support systems. According to Vivek, *“educational institutions themselves constitute one of the most important contributions associated with Guru’s movement.”*

Regarding support for marginalized communities beyond the Ezhava community, Vivek stated that he was not personally aware of specific programmes. He acknowledged that such initiatives might exist but explained that he lacked sufficient information about them. Since Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have dedicated government welfare departments and programmes, he was uncertain about the extent to which a community organization would assume similar responsibilities. As for caste differences in contemporary society, Vivek believed that they still exist both directly and indirectly. However, he emphasized that significant changes had occurred because of the efforts of Sree Narayana Guru and other social reformers. Visible caste segregation has greatly reduced. Unlike certain regions where different castes continue to live in separate localities, Kerala generally does not exhibit such rigid segregation.

According to him, people belonging to different castes and religions now live together in the same communities. He felt that the influence of Guru and other reformers played a major role in creating this social environment. At present, caste becomes most visible during marriage. Although endogamy still exists, considerable social change has taken place. Vivek believed that Guru’s teachings significantly contributed to these transformations. Earlier, practices such

as untouchability and distance pollution were widespread, and strict inequalities existed. Guru's interventions helped weaken these inequalities and challenged the belief that particular occupations should be permanently associated with specific castes.

He expressed support for both inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. According to him, *"if one genuinely follows the principle of "One Caste, One Religion, One God," then all people should be considered equal. Caste should never function as a basis for separating human beings. At the same time, practical difficulties can arise because family members may not always share the same outlook."* Discrimination, insults, or social exclusion may sometimes be directed towards individuals entering such marriages and their families. Although he would oppose such behaviour, he recognized that the emotional impact on those affected cannot always be undone.

When discussing whether Guru's message is misunderstood today, Vivek argued that many people, especially certain leaders of community organizations, do not fully follow the spirit of "One Caste, One Religion, One God." He felt that some leaders continue to promote community interests and divisions. Genuine followers may understand Guru's message, but he did not believe that all leaders fully embody the values and principles Guru advocated. According to Vivek, many people appear to be more interested in organizational strength and community advancement than in the broader universal meaning of Guru's teachings.

Regarding the younger generation, he observed that many young people are not particularly aware of social reformers or the historical realities of the caste system. In one sense, he considered this positive because they live in a more egalitarian society and do not constantly perceive themselves through caste identities. Most young people, according to him, focus on technology, careers, and practical knowledge rather than historical issues. Youth participation in organizations such as SNDP is relatively low compared to previous generations. Programmes that once attracted children and young people are less visible today. Nevertheless, Vivek did not believe that Guru's influence would disappear completely. In his view, there will always be individuals who value and follow these teachings. He further remarked that younger generations generally care less about caste. As economic differences decline, caste becomes less significant. Many young people are more supportive of inter-caste marriages and are less concerned with caste identities than previous generations.

Regarding Guru's ideas on God and spirituality, Vivek admitted that he did not possess a complete answer. However, from his understanding, Guru was influenced by Advaita

philosophy, which teaches that the individual soul and ultimate reality are fundamentally one. Concepts such as “Tat Tvam Asi” (“You Are That”) were important in this tradition.

He noted that Guru initially focused on temple consecrations but later adopted a different approach. In some places, Guru consecrated mirrors rather than idols. According to Vivek, the message behind this act was that the divine being sought externally already exists within oneself. He viewed this as a movement toward self-realization and inner spirituality. Vivek regarded Guru as a deeply spiritual figure, although he was uncertain whether Guru could be described as religious in the conventional sense. In his view, Guru’s emphasis gradually shifted from external forms of worship toward self-understanding and inner realization.

When asked whether contemporary followers pursue the spiritual path envisioned by Guru, Vivek expressed doubt. He believed that many people have become attached to rituals and external forms of worship, while Guru’s deeper spiritual vision is often neglected. Regarding the worship of Guru as a divine figure, Vivek noted that Indian culture has a long tradition of revering enlightened teachers. Guru worship exists in many forms and is widely accepted as part of the cultural tradition. However, he personally does not support idol worship of Sree Narayana Guru. Instead, he prefers to respect Guru as a spiritual teacher and follow his teachings. According to him, practicing Guru’s teachings is the highest form of respect that can be offered. Reflecting on current rituals, celebrations, and forms of idolization associated with Guru, Vivek felt that many of these practices are not entirely aligned with Guru’s original teachings. He referred to the process of Sanskritization, through which communities imitate the rituals and customs associated with higher castes. Over time, various customs and ceremonies have been adopted that may not fully reflect Guru’s original intentions.

He clarified that he was not necessarily judging these customs as good or bad. However, he felt that some of them create distinctions and divisions that are inconsistent with Guru’s vision. In his opinion, many present-day practices do not completely represent Guru’s original philosophy. For Vivek, the best way to respect Sree Narayana Guru is not through idol worship or ritualistic devotion but through understanding, practicing, and applying his teachings in everyday life. Speaking about his experiences with the local SNDP branch, Vivek expressed certain criticisms. He stated that representatives sometimes visit households primarily to collect monthly contributions, Guru Jayanti donations, or other funds. According to him, these collections are often presented as necessary for organizational activities and programmes. He questioned whether sufficient community service accompanies these fundraising efforts. Vivek

recalled that members of the local SNDP branch had approached his household for charitable contributions. However, he felt that he had not witnessed significant service activities in his locality prior to these requests. Consequently, he was reluctant to participate in such initiatives. He argued that genuine charity should begin within one's own locality and should involve meaningful service rather than merely organizing speeches or collecting funds. He further noted that local SNDP branches maintain records of households, membership details, and administrative divisions within specific areas. According to him, each panchayat is divided into branches, and each branch has designated office-bearers responsible for organizational activities and fund collection. He acknowledged that this assessment was based solely on his personal experience with the nearby SNDP branch and that the functioning of other branches may differ.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, the researcher presents and analyses the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of ten followers of Sree Narayana Guru belonging to different categories, including monks and spiritual practitioners, members and office bearers of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, and ordinary followers from the Ezhava community. The analysis is based on the narratives generated through the case studies and focuses on understanding the extent to which Guru's teachings are being upheld in contemporary society. Rather than analyzing each case separately, the data have been organized into themes that emerged from the respondents' experiences and viewpoints. The themes have been developed in accordance with the objectives and research questions of the study. Particular attention is given to the respondents' awareness and understanding of Guru's teachings, the efforts undertaken to sustain and propagate his vision, the reflection of his principles in everyday life, and the contemporary relevance of his philosophy.

4.2.1. Perception and Understanding of Guru's Teaching among the followers

This theme examines followers' awareness, understanding, and interpretation of Sree Narayana Guru's teachings. It explores the primary sources through which respondents became familiar with Guru's philosophy and highlights generational differences in the depth of understanding, reflecting how his teachings continue to be perceived and transmitted in contemporary society.

i. Sources of Awareness and Transmission of Guru's Teachings:

The narratives reveal that awareness of Sree Narayana Guru's teachings is transmitted through multiple channels, including family traditions, spiritual institutions, community organizations,

and personal study. For many respondents, family served as the first point of contact with Guru's philosophy. Parents and elders played a significant role in introducing Guru's teachings during childhood, thereby ensuring the intergenerational transmission of his ideals. Over time, this initial exposure was often strengthened through visits to Sivagiri, participation in Guru-related activities, reading Guru's writings, and engaging with institutions dedicated to preserving his legacy.

Meena recalled that her association with Guru began during childhood through her mother's influence, stating:

"My association with Sree Narayana Guru began in childhood. My mother used to take us to Sivagiri."

Similarly, Dr. Priya emphasized the role of her father in shaping her understanding of Guru:

"My father was my first guru. After his passing, around thirty years ago, I became more interested in studying Sree Narayana Guru in depth. Most of my understanding of Guru comes through his writings and works."

These responses highlight the importance of family as a primary agent in transmitting Guru's teachings and values. However, the narratives also suggest that awareness does not remain confined to family influence alone. Several respondents described how their understanding deepened through personal engagement with Guru's literature, philosophy, and institutions.

A significant example is provided by Dr. Priya, who explained how her association with Narayana Gurukulam contributed to her intellectual and spiritual understanding of Guru:

"I have been associated with Narayana Gurukulam. I learned through the tradition of Nataraja Guru, Nitya Chaitanya Yati, Guru Narayana Prasad, and at present Swami Tejaswaran is the guru there. I used to attend conventions and present lectures on Guru's teachings."

This statement demonstrates that Guru's teachings continue to be transmitted through organized philosophical and spiritual traditions established by his disciples and successors. Unlike respondents whose awareness emerged primarily through family practices, Dr. Priya's experience reflects a more structured and scholarly engagement with Guru's philosophy. Her participation in conventions and public lectures further illustrates how followers actively contribute to the dissemination of Guru's ideas within contemporary society.

This indicate that awareness of Guru's teachings is sustained through both informal and formal mechanisms. While family socialization introduces individuals to Guru's values, institutions such as Sivagiri, Narayana Gurukulam, and SNDP provide spaces for deeper engagement with his teachings. In addition, personal reading, spiritual reflection, and participation in community activities enable followers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Guru's philosophy.

ii. Contemporary Awareness and Generational Differences

The data suggest that although awareness of Sree Narayana Guru remains widespread among followers, the depth and nature of that awareness vary across generations. Older respondents generally displayed a deeper understanding of Guru's life, philosophy, and social vision, often acquired through direct engagement with his writings and participation in Guru-centered institutions. In contrast, younger generations were perceived as having a more limited familiarity with Guru's teachings.

Vivek observed:

"Many young people are familiar with Guru's name but possess only limited knowledge of his philosophy and literary works."

He further noted that the declining awareness among youth may partly be attributed to changing social realities:

"In one sense, that is a good thing because they live in a more egalitarian society and do not constantly think of themselves as inferior because of caste."

Several respondents also pointed to a decline in youth participation in community organizations and Guru-related programmes. Meena remarked:

"To my knowledge, youth participation is relatively low in the Thiruvananthapuram region, while young people are more active in northern Kerala."

Despite these concerns, respondents did not view the situation entirely negatively. Many believed that the reduced emphasis on caste identities among younger generations itself reflects the success of Guru's reform efforts. Young people today are more likely to focus on education, employment, and personal development than on caste-based identities. However, respondents expressed concern that while Guru's name remains widely known, his deeper philosophical teachings are often overlooked.

The analysis therefore suggests that awareness of Sree Narayana Guru continues across generations, but the mode of engagement has changed. Older followers tend to engage with Guru through spiritual practice, philosophical study, and organizational participation, whereas younger generations often encounter Guru through cultural memory, public celebrations, and symbolic representations. This highlights the need for continued efforts to communicate Guru's teachings in ways that remain meaningful and accessible to contemporary youth.

4.2.2. Efforts to Promote and Sustain Guru's Vision in Contemporary Society

This theme explores the various initiatives undertaken by followers and organizations to preserve and promote Sree Narayana Guru's vision in contemporary society. It examines educational, spiritual, social, and community-based efforts while also assessing perceived gaps between Guru's ideals and their implementation within present-day organizational practices.

i. Educational and Institutional Efforts to Promote Guru's Ideals

The narratives indicate that education continues to be regarded as one of the most important means of sustaining and promoting Sree Narayana Guru's vision. Several respondents emphasized that Guru's message of educational advancement played a significant role in the upliftment of marginalized communities and continues to influence social progress today. Followers associated with organizations such as SNDP, Sivagiri, and Narayana Gurukulam highlighted the role of educational institutions, scholarships, awareness programmes, and student support initiatives in carrying forward Guru's ideals.

Vivek pointed out the importance of educational institutions established under organizations inspired by Guru's teachings:

"As far as I know, SNDP used to support students. Examination fees for some courses were paid through the organization. There are educational institutions such as engineering colleges and SN Colleges. There are also scholarships, though I never personally received one."

He further added:

"There were also coaching programs and educational support systems. Educational institutions themselves are an important contribution."

These observations suggest that educational initiatives remain one of the most visible ways through which Guru's vision of social advancement is being implemented. The emphasis on

education reflects Guru's belief that social equality and economic progress could be achieved through knowledge and learning rather than through dependence on traditional hierarchies.

Similarly, Meena highlighted the continuing efforts to transmit Guru's teachings through educational activities:

"Organizations do attempt to implement Guru's principle of 'Become enlightened through education.' Some unions conduct classes for children. Sunday schools teach Guru's works and ideas."

This demonstrates that educational efforts are not limited to formal institutions alone but also include community-based programmes aimed at familiarizing younger generations with Guru's teachings and philosophy.

The findings indicate that education continues to occupy a central place in the efforts to preserve Guru's legacy. Through schools, colleges, coaching programmes, scholarships, and awareness classes, followers seek to sustain Guru's vision of social empowerment and self-improvement. However, respondents also noted that the effectiveness and reach of such initiatives vary across organizations and regions.

ii. Dissemination of Guru's Teachings Through Spiritual, Social, and Community Activities

Apart from educational initiatives, respondents identified various spiritual, social, and community-based activities as important means of promoting Guru's teachings in contemporary society. These include conventions, lectures, pilgrimages, prayer gatherings, community meetings, and the use of digital platforms to spread awareness about Guru's philosophy.

Dr. Priya described her active involvement in promoting Guru's teachings through public engagement:

"I used to attend conventions and present lectures on Guru's teachings."

She further explained the nature of these conventions:

"Every year there would be conventions, usually in December. Participants were given topics related to Guru's philosophy and could choose one according to their interest. Each speaker was given fifteen minutes to present the main points, and discussions would follow in the afternoon."

She also highlighted her association with Narayana Gurukulam and the intellectual tradition through which she studied Guru's philosophy:

"I have been associated with Narayana Gurukulam. I learned through the tradition of Nataraja Guru, Nitya Chaitanya Yati, Guru Narayana Prasad, and at present Swami Tejaswaran is the guru there. I used to attend conventions and present lectures on Guru's teachings."

Dr. Priya also highlighted the growing role of digital media:

"Even now, through social media, Facebook, and online groups, I continue to share Guru's teachings."

This suggests that followers are increasingly utilizing contemporary communication technologies to ensure that Guru's ideas remain accessible to wider audiences.

Similarly, Meena referred to her participation in pilgrim walks and regular visits to Sivagiri:

"I have participated in pilgrim walks in the past, though I do not attend them as frequently now."

Such activities function not only as religious observances but also as spaces where Guru's teachings are remembered, discussed, and transmitted to new generations.

The analysis indicates that followers employ both traditional and modern methods to sustain Guru's legacy. While conventions, pilgrimages, and prayer gatherings continue to serve as important channels of transmission, digital media has emerged as a significant platform for spreading awareness and engaging younger audiences.

iii. Perceived Gaps Between Guru's Vision and Organizational Practices

While respondents acknowledged various efforts to promote Guru's teachings, many also expressed concerns regarding the gap between Guru's ideals and their implementation within contemporary organizations. Several participants felt that some organizations emphasize community interests and organizational growth more than Guru's universal message of equality and human unity.

Meena observed:

"Today, many people who claim to be followers of Guru do not fully practice his teachings."

She further stated:

“Although SNDP often presents Guru as the leader of the Ezhava community, that was not Guru’s principle. Guru had only one principle: One Caste, One Religion, One God.”

Similarly, Vivek expressed reservations about the functioning of certain community organizations:

“Regarding whether Guru’s message is misunderstood today, I think many people, especially some leaders of community organizations, do not fully follow the spirit of ‘One Caste, One Religion, One God.’”

He further remarked:

“Many people seem more interested in organizational strength and community advancement than in the broader universal meaning of Guru’s message.”

These observations reveal a recurring concern among respondents regarding the selective interpretation of Guru’s teachings. While organizations continue to promote Guru’s legacy through various activities, some followers perceive a divergence between Guru’s universal humanistic philosophy and contemporary organizational priorities.

The findings suggest that followers generally appreciate the efforts undertaken to preserve Guru’s legacy but simultaneously recognize the need for greater alignment between organizational practices and Guru’s original vision of equality, humanism, and social transformation.

4.2.3 Reflection of Sree Narayana Guru’s Teachings in Everyday Life Practices

This theme explores how respondents incorporate Sree Narayana Guru’s teachings into their daily lives. While awareness of Guru’s philosophy was widespread among all participants, the extent and manner in which these teachings were practiced varied. The narratives reveal that Guru’s teachings are reflected through attitudes toward caste, social relations, marriage, spirituality, religious practices, and ethical conduct. At the same time, respondents acknowledged that there often exists a gap between professing Guru’s ideals and fully implementing them in everyday life.

i. Practising Equality and Rejecting Caste-Based Discrimination

One of the most significant ways in which respondents reflected Guru’s teachings in their daily lives was through their acceptance of social equality and rejection of caste-based discrimination. Almost all respondents identified *“One Caste, One Religion, One God for*

Humanity.” as Guru’s most important teaching and viewed it as a principle that should guide social relationships.

Vivek emphasized the centrality of this teaching:

“The first and most important teaching is ‘One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity’. That is the biggest teaching. The first unifying factor is caste, the second is religion, and the third is God. If all these dividing factors are made one, then there is no difference between people.”

His response indicates a strong understanding of Guru’s philosophy as an effort to eliminate social divisions and establish human unity. Rather than viewing caste as a natural social category, he interpreted it as a barrier that prevents equality and social harmony.

Similarly, Meena explained Guru's concept of caste in universal terms:

“When Guru spoke of ‘One Caste,’ he meant the human race.”

This perspective demonstrates how Guru’s teachings continue to influence followers’ understanding of identity and human relationships. The emphasis is placed not on community distinctions but on common humanity.

Respondents also connected this principle to their personal attitudes toward marriage and social interaction. Meena stated:

“I do not oppose inter-caste marriages. Guru himself supported such marriages.”

Likewise, Vivek expressed support for both inter-caste and inter-religious marriages:

“If I truly follow the principle of ‘One Caste, One Religion, One God,’ then everyone is equal to me. Caste is not a factor for separating people.”

These responses suggest that Guru's teachings continue to shape personal beliefs and social attitudes among many followers. Acceptance of inter-caste and inter-religious relationships reflects an attempt to apply Guru's ideals beyond theoretical discussions and into everyday life.

At the same time, respondents acknowledged that caste consciousness has not completely disappeared from society. Vivek observed:

“As for caste differences today, they still exist directly or indirectly. However, there has definitely been a major change because of Guru and other social reformers.”

This indicates that followers recognize both the achievements and limitations of social reform. While overt forms of discrimination have declined, subtle forms of caste identity and social exclusion continue to persist.

The narratives therefore suggest that Guru's teachings remain influential in shaping values of equality and social inclusion. However, respondents also recognize that the full realization of Guru's vision remains an ongoing process within contemporary society.

ii. Spirituality, Worship, and the Personal Meaning of Guru

The data reveal that respondents engage with Guru's teachings not only as a social philosophy but also as a spiritual path. For many participants, Guru occupies a deeply significant place in their personal religious lives. However, their understanding of Guru's spiritual role varied considerably, ranging from viewing him as a divine figure to regarding him primarily as a spiritual teacher and philosopher.

For Meena, Guru occupies a central place in her devotional life:

“For us, Guru is God. Many people may consider Shiva or Krishna as their favorite deity. If someone asks me who my favorite deity is, I would say Sree Narayana Guru.”

This response illustrates how Guru has become an object of devotion for many followers. His teachings are not merely remembered intellectually but are integrated into personal religious practice and identity.

She further described her regular participation in worship activities at Sivagiri:

“I visit Sivagiri regularly. The prayers there are different from those in other temples. The 108 names of Guru are chanted. Guru Dhyanam begins with ‘Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu...’ followed by the 108 Namavali, Daiva Dasakam, and Samarpanam.”

These practices demonstrate how Guru’s memory continues to be preserved through rituals, prayers, and devotional traditions.

In contrast, Vivek adopted a more philosophical understanding of Guru:

“I see Guru as deeply spiritual, though I am not sure how religious he was in the conventional sense. His emphasis seems to have moved from external worship toward understanding oneself.”

He further added:

“I personally do not support idol worship of Sri Narayana Guru. I prefer to respect him as a spiritual teacher and follow his teachings.”

This perspective reflects a more intellectual and philosophical interpretation of Guru’s spirituality. Rather than emphasizing ritual worship, Vivek stressed self-realization, ethical living, and the practical application of Guru’s teachings.

Dr. Priya similarly highlighted Guru’s spiritual philosophy through her association with the Narayana Gurukulam tradition:

“I have been associated with Narayana Gurukulam. I learned through the tradition of Nataraja Guru, Nitya Chaitanya Yati, Guru Narayana Prasad, and at present Swami Tejaswaran is the guru there.”

Her response reflects a deeper engagement with the philosophical and contemplative aspects of Guru's teachings, particularly through traditions influenced by Advaita philosophy.

These diverse interpretations indicate that Guru continues to occupy multiple roles within the lives of followers, as a spiritual guide, social reformer, philosopher, and divine figure. Although the forms of devotion differ, respondents consistently viewed Guru as an important source of moral and spiritual guidance.

iii. Contradictions Between Guru’s Ideals and Contemporary Practices

While respondents expressed strong admiration for Guru’s teachings, many also highlighted contradictions between Guru’s ideals and contemporary social practices. Several participants believed that people often identify themselves as followers of Guru without fully practicing the values he advocated.

Meena stated:

“Today, many people who claim to be followers of Guru do not fully practice his teachings.”

She further observed:

“Although SNDP often presents Guru as the leader of the Ezhava community, that was not Guru's principle. Guru had only one principle: One Caste, One Religion, One God.”

Her comments reveal concerns regarding the narrowing of Guru's universal philosophy into a community-based identity.

Vivek expressed similar concerns:

“Regarding whether Guru’s message is misunderstood today, I think many people, especially some leaders of community organizations, do not fully follow the spirit of ‘One Caste, One Religion, One God.’”

He further remarked:

“Many people seem more interested in organizational strength and community advancement than in the broader universal meaning of Guru’s message.”

These observations indicate that respondents perceive a gap between Guru's teachings and their implementation in contemporary organizational settings.

Vivek also criticized the growing emphasis on ritualism and idolization:

“As for whether people today follow the spiritual path Guru intended, I do not think they do. Many have become attached to forms of worship and rituals, while Guru’s deeper spiritual vision is often overlooked.”

Similarly, Meena pointed out that several of Guru’s teachings regarding simplicity and social reform are often ignored:

“Guru said that temples should be accompanied by educational institutions. He also opposed the use of elephants and fireworks in temple celebrations. However, these teachings are not followed everywhere.”

These responses suggest that followers remain critical of practices that they perceive as inconsistent with Guru’s original vision. While devotion to Guru remains strong, respondents frequently questioned whether contemporary institutions and followers have remained faithful to the broader social and spiritual principles that he advocated.

The narratives therefore reveal an important tension between reverence for Guru and dissatisfaction with the ways in which his teachings are sometimes interpreted and practiced. This tension itself reflects a continued engagement with Guru's philosophy and an ongoing effort among followers to evaluate contemporary practices against his original ideals.

4.2.4 Contemporary Relevance of Sree Narayana Guru’s Teachings in Modern Society

This theme explores respondents' perceptions regarding the continued relevance of Sree Narayana Guru’s teachings in contemporary society. Despite significant social changes since Guru’s time, participants consistently argued that his philosophy remains highly relevant in

addressing present-day challenges such as social inequality, caste consciousness, communal divisions, moral decline, and the growing emphasis on materialism. The respondents viewed Guru's teachings not merely as historical contributions but as enduring principles capable of guiding contemporary society toward greater equality, social harmony, and human development.

i. Guru's Teachings as a Framework for Social Equality and Human Unity

A dominant perception among respondents was that Guru's teachings continue to provide an important framework for promoting equality and social cohesion in contemporary society. Although overt forms of caste discrimination have declined, many participants believed that social divisions continue to exist in subtle and indirect forms. Consequently, Guru's message of human unity remains highly relevant.

Vivek emphasized the enduring significance of Guru's philosophy by stating:

"Guru's teachings continue to remain highly relevant in contemporary society, particularly in matters concerning social equality, education, and human dignity."

He further explained:

"Guru's vision extended beyond the upliftment of any single caste or community and aimed at creating a society based on equality, mutual respect, and human values."

This response suggests that respondents perceive Guru's teachings as transcending the historical circumstances in which they emerged. Rather than viewing Guru solely as a reformer of the Ezhava community, Vivek interpreted his philosophy as a universal message applicable to all sections of society.

Similarly, Meena highlighted the continuing importance of Guru's message of human unity:

"The message 'One Caste, One Religion, One God' was never intended only for Ezhavas or Hindus. It was meant for all humanity."

Her statement reflects an understanding that Guru's teachings remain relevant because they promote inclusiveness and challenge social divisions based on caste, religion, and community identity.

Several respondents noted that while legal equality has largely been achieved, attitudinal changes remain incomplete. As a result, Guru's teachings continue to serve as a moral

framework for combating discrimination and fostering mutual respect among different social groups.

The narratives therefore suggest that respondents view Guru's philosophy as an important resource for addressing contemporary forms of social exclusion and promoting a more inclusive society.

ii. Relevance of Educational and Economic Empowerment in Contemporary Society

Another major area in which respondents perceived Guru's teachings as relevant was education and socio-economic advancement. Participants repeatedly emphasized Guru's famous call for educational enlightenment and viewed it as equally important in the present context.

Vivek explained:

"People who were engaged in occupations like toddy tapping and other low-status jobs began to understand that education was important for improving their lives. That was the purpose of the statement."

He further stated:

"This statement helped many people enter trade and business. Today there are many talented individuals from the community in educational, social, and economic fields because of this influence."

These observations indicate that respondents associate Guru's emphasis on education with social mobility, economic development, and empowerment. They viewed education as one of the most effective means of overcoming social disadvantages and improving quality of life.

Meena also referred to the continuing importance of educational initiatives inspired by Guru: *"Organizations do attempt to implement Guru's principle of 'Become enlightened through education.' Some unions conduct classes for children. Sunday schools teach Guru's works and ideas."*

The emphasis on education reflects respondents' belief that Guru's vision remains relevant in a society where knowledge, skills, and educational attainment continue to play a central role in determining social and economic opportunities.

Participants also argued that Guru's emphasis on self-improvement, organization, and economic progress remains valuable in helping individuals adapt to contemporary challenges and changing social conditions.

iii. Relevance Amid Emerging Social and Cultural Challenges

Respondents also believed that Guru's teachings offer important guidance for addressing emerging social and cultural challenges in contemporary society. Issues such as religious polarization, identity politics, materialism, and declining ethical values were frequently mentioned as areas where Guru's philosophy remains relevant.

Vivek observed: *"Guru's teachings could contribute significantly to addressing contemporary issues such as social inequality, discrimination, and the erosion of ethical values."* This perspective suggests that respondents view Guru's teachings not merely as solutions to historical caste oppression but as broader ethical principles capable of addressing present-day social problems.

Dr. Priya similarly emphasized the transformative nature of Guru's philosophy:

"Guru believed that real social change begins with the transformation of human consciousness." Her observation highlights the continuing relevance of Guru's emphasis on self-transformation, ethical conduct, and spiritual growth in a rapidly changing society.

Several respondents also expressed concern about increasing social divisions and competitive individualism. In this context, they viewed Guru's philosophy as a reminder of the importance of compassion, social responsibility, and collective well-being. Meena expressed optimism regarding the future relevance of Guru's teachings:

"I believe that more people will come to understand Guru in the future. I believe the coming era will be Guru's era."

This statement reflects a belief that Guru's ideas possess a timeless quality and may become increasingly relevant as society confronts new social, cultural, and moral challenges.

The narratives therefore suggest that respondents perceive Guru's teachings as dynamic and adaptable, capable of providing guidance not only for historical social reform but also for contemporary issues affecting modern society.

CHAPTER 5: MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the major findings of the study, followed by suggestions and conclusion. The findings are derived from the thematic analysis of ten case studies conducted among followers of Sree Narayana Guru, including monks and spiritual leaders, members of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, and ordinary followers from the Ezhava community. The respondents consisted of both men and women belonging to different age groups and social backgrounds, enabling the researcher to capture diverse perspectives regarding the contemporary relevance and practice of Guru's teachings.

The findings are organized in accordance with the research questions of the study and are based on the major themes that emerged during the analysis of the respondents' narratives. The study explored the level of awareness among followers regarding Guru's teachings, the efforts undertaken to promote and sustain his vision, the extent to which his principles are reflected in everyday life, and the relevance of his teachings in contemporary society. The analysis revealed that Sree Narayana Guru continues to occupy an important place in the social, cultural, and spiritual lives of his followers. Respondents generally demonstrated a high level of respect and admiration for Guru and acknowledged his contribution to social reform, education, equality, and human dignity. At the same time, the findings indicate variations in the depth of awareness, interpretation, and practical application of Guru's teachings among different categories of followers.

5.2 FINDINGS

The findings describe both the achievements and challenges associated with preserving Guru's legacy in contemporary society. While educational institutions, spiritual centres, community organizations, conventions, and digital platforms continue to disseminate his teachings, respondents also pointed to certain gaps between Guru's original vision and its present-day implementation. These observations provide important insights into how Guru's philosophy is understood, practiced, and negotiated within changing social contexts.

5.2.1 Awareness of Sree Narayana Guru's Teachings

The study found that awareness regarding Sree Narayana Guru and his teachings remains relatively high among the respondents. Almost all participants were familiar with Guru's core message, "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity," and identified it as the

foundation of his philosophy. Many respondents also demonstrated awareness of Guru's emphasis on education, social equality, self-respect, organization, and economic progress.

The findings revealed that awareness was acquired through multiple channels, including family socialization, religious institutions, Sivagiri, Narayana Gurukulam, SNDP activities, personal reading, and participation in conventions and spiritual gatherings. Respondents who were closely associated with spiritual institutions and Guru-related organizations possessed a deeper understanding of Guru's philosophical and literary contributions. However, ordinary followers were generally more familiar with Guru's popular teachings and social reform activities than with his philosophical writings. The study also found that younger generations possess comparatively less engagement with Guru's teachings. Although they recognize Guru as an important social reformer, their knowledge of his philosophy and social vision appears to be limited when compared to older generations.

5.2.2 Reflection of Guru's Principles in Daily Life

The study found that many respondents attempt to apply Guru's teachings in their everyday lives. Values such as equality, respect for all individuals, religious tolerance, non-discrimination, and the importance of education were frequently cited as principles that guide their personal conduct.

Several respondents expressed support for inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, considering them consistent with Guru's vision of social equality. Participants also emphasized the importance of treating individuals based on their character and humanity rather than their caste or religious background. Education emerged as one of the most visible areas where Guru's teachings continue to influence followers. Many respondents viewed education as a means of personal growth, social mobility, and community development, reflecting Guru's call to become enlightened through education.

However, the findings also reveal that certain social practices continue to reflect the persistence of caste consciousness. Respondents acknowledged that caste remains visible, particularly in marriage alliances and community relations. This suggests that while Guru's teachings have influenced attitudes and behaviours, their complete realization in society remains incomplete.

5.2.3 Relevance of Guru's Teachings in Contemporary Society

The findings strongly indicate that Sree Narayana Guru's teachings remain highly relevant in contemporary society. Respondents consistently emphasized that Guru's message continues to offer solutions to issues such as caste discrimination, social inequality, religious intolerance,

and social fragmentation. Participants viewed Guru's emphasis on education as particularly significant in the present context, where educational achievement remains closely linked to economic empowerment and social mobility. Guru's advocacy of equality and human dignity was also regarded as important in addressing contemporary forms of exclusion and discrimination. The study further found that respondents considered Guru's philosophy relevant beyond the Ezhava community. His teachings were viewed as universal principles capable of promoting harmony, social justice, and peaceful coexistence among people belonging to different castes, religions, and social groups. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Guru's teachings continue to function as a source of inspiration for social reform, ethical living, and human development in contemporary society.

5.2.4 Generational Changes in Engagement with Guru's Teachings

The study revealed notable differences between older and younger generations in their engagement with Guru's teachings. Older respondents generally possessed deeper familiarity with Guru's life, teachings, and social reform activities. Many had participated in organizational programmes, pilgrimages, conventions, and awareness activities associated with Guru's movement.

In contrast, younger respondents were often more focused on education, employment, and technological advancement. Although some of them respect Guru their engagement with his philosophy was comparatively limited. Several participants viewed this trend as, even though they have lack of knowledge about guru, the decline of caste consciousness among youth reflects the success of Guru's social reform efforts. Others expressed concern that younger generations may gradually lose connection with the philosophical foundations of Guru's teachings. This finding suggests that preserving Guru's legacy among younger generations remains an important challenge for contemporary institutions and followers.

5.2.5 Acceptance of Sree Narayana Guru's Philosophy Beyond Caste and Community Identities

The study found that Sree Narayana Guru's teachings are not confined to a particular caste or community. Some respondents observed that several monks, spiritual leaders, and devotees associated with Sivagiri Mutt and related institutions belong to diverse caste and religious backgrounds. According to them, individuals are accepted based on their commitment to Guru's teachings rather than their birth-based identity. This suggests that Guru's philosophy continues to attract followers beyond the Ezhava community and reflects the universal character of his message. The finding indicates that for many followers, adherence to Guru's ideals of equality,

spirituality, and human unity is considered more important than caste or community affiliation, thereby demonstrating the continuing relevance of his vision in contemporary society.

5.2.6 Persistence of Caste Despite Social Progress

Most participants agreed that overt forms of untouchability and caste discrimination have declined considerably compared to the past. People from different castes now interact more freely, share public spaces, and enjoy greater social equality.

However, respondents repeatedly identified marriage as an area where caste remains influential. Endogamous marriage practices continue to exist, and caste identity still influences family decisions in many cases. Several participants also pointed out that caste consciousness persists indirectly through community organizations and social networks. A few respondents further argued that caste continues to be reinforced through institutional and administrative practices. One participant observed that as long as government departments, educational institutions, and other public institutions continue to require caste certificates and categorize individuals on the basis of caste, it becomes difficult to completely eradicate caste consciousness from society. According to the respondent, meaningful social transformation requires not only changes in individual attitudes but also changes in the broader social and institutional systems that continue to recognize and reproduce caste identities.

The findings indicate that while Guru's teachings have contributed significantly to reducing caste inequalities, the complete eradication of caste-based attitudes and institutional forms of caste identification remains an unfinished process.

5.2.7 Tension Between Universal Humanism and Community Identity

A recurring finding of the study was the perceived tension between Guru's universal philosophy and contemporary community-based interpretations of his teachings. Many respondents emphasized that Guru's principle of "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity" was intended for all humanity rather than a particular caste or community. However, several participants felt that contemporary organizations and sections of society often present Guru primarily as the leader of a specific community.

Respondents expressed concern that excessive focus on community identity sometimes overshadows Guru's broader message of human unity and social equality. While organizations have played an important role in preserving Guru's legacy, some participants felt that there is a need to re-emphasize the universal dimensions of his philosophy.

This finding indicates the existence of differing interpretations regarding the purpose and direction of Guru's movement in contemporary society.

5.2.8 Diverse Perceptions of Sree Narayana Guru: Social Reformer, Spiritual Guide, and Divine Figure

One of the significant findings of the study is the variation in the ways respondents perceived Sree Narayana Guru. While all respondents expressed deep respect towards Guru, their understanding of his identity differed considerably. A section of the respondents viewed Guru primarily as a social reformer who fought against caste discrimination, promoted education, and worked for the upliftment of marginalized communities. For these respondents, Guru's greatest contribution lay in his efforts to establish social equality and human dignity.

Another group perceived Guru mainly as a spiritual guide and philosopher. These respondents emphasized Guru's Advaitic philosophy, teachings on self-realization, and his efforts to direct people towards inner spiritual development. Respondents associated with Narayana Gurukulam and spiritual institutions often highlighted Guru's philosophical teachings rather than his social reform activities alone.

At the same time, some respondents viewed Guru as a divine figure deserving worship and reverence. Guru's portraits, statues, temples, and ritual practices were seen by these followers as expressions of devotion and respect. However, a contrasting view also emerged among certain respondents who argued that Guru should be respected as a teacher rather than worshipped as a deity. They believed that following Guru's teachings was more important than ritualistic worship. These diverse perceptions demonstrate that Guru's legacy continues to operate simultaneously within social, spiritual, and religious spheres.

5.2.9 Ritual Commemoration and Divergent Views on Guru Worship

The study found differing opinions among respondents regarding the role of rituals and worship in preserving Sree Narayana Guru's legacy. While some participants viewed prayer meetings, Guru Jayanti celebrations, pilgrimages, statues, and temple-based observances as important expressions of devotion and respect towards Guru, others argued that Guru should primarily be remembered through the practice of his teachings rather than through ritual worship. These respondents emphasized that Guru's message of social reform, equality, and spiritual development was more important than ceremonial observances. The findings suggest that followers negotiate Guru's legacy through both devotional and philosophical approaches, reflecting the diverse ways in which his teachings are interpreted in contemporary society.

5.3.1 Education as the Most Enduring Legacy of Sree Narayana Guru

The study found that education was consistently identified as Guru's most successful and enduring contribution to social transformation. Across different categories of respondents, education was viewed as the primary instrument through which historically marginalized communities achieved social mobility, economic advancement, and greater self-confidence. Respondents frequently linked the present educational achievements of the Ezhava community with Guru's call to become enlightened through education. Many participants also believed that Guru's emphasis on education remains highly relevant in contemporary society, particularly in a rapidly changing world where knowledge and skills are essential for social and economic progress. The findings suggest that among all of Guru's contributions, education continues to be regarded as the most visible and successful realization of his vision.

5.3.2 Efforts to Promote and Sustain Guru's Vision

The findings indicate that various efforts are being undertaken by Guru's followers and organizations to preserve and disseminate his teachings. Educational institutions established under organizations inspired by Guru's ideals continue to play a major role in promoting social advancement. Scholarships, coaching programmes, educational support initiatives, awareness classes, Sunday schools, conventions, seminars, and lectures were identified as important means through which Guru's teachings are transmitted. The study further found that spiritual institutions such as Sivagiri and Narayana Gurukulam continue to function as centres for preserving and promoting Guru's philosophy. Pilgrimages, Guru Jayanti celebrations, prayer meetings, and spiritual discourses remain important platforms for spreading awareness among followers. Another significant finding was the increasing use of social media and digital platforms to disseminate Guru's teachings. Respondents noted that online discussions, lectures, and educational content have expanded the reach of Guru's message beyond traditional institutional settings. At the same time, many respondents expressed concerns regarding the gap between Guru's original vision and the functioning of certain contemporary organizations. While acknowledging the contributions made by organizations such as SNDP, some participants felt that organizational interests and community identity often receive greater attention than Guru's broader vision of human unity and social transformation.

5.4 SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are proposed:

- Greater efforts should be made to introduce younger generations to the life, philosophy, and social contributions of Sree Narayana Guru through educational programmes, workshops, and such kind of initiatives.
- Educational institutions associated with Guru's movement should strengthen activities that promote critical engagement with Guru's writings and philosophy rather than limiting awareness to slogans and commemorative events.
- Organizations such as SNDP, Sivagiri, and other Guru-inspired institutions should work towards ensuring greater alignment between their activities and Guru's universal vision of equality, humanism, and social justice.
- Digital platforms and social media should be more effectively utilized to disseminate authentic information regarding Guru's teachings and their relevance in contemporary society.
- Programmes encouraging inter-caste harmony, social inclusion, and communal coexistence should be strengthened in order to promote the practical application of Guru's ideals.
- More research should be encouraged on the contemporary relevance of Guru's philosophy, particularly among younger generations and diverse social groups.

5.5. CONCLUSION

The study examined the extent to which the followers of Sree Narayana Guru uphold his teachings in contemporary society through ten case studies conducted among monks and spiritual leaders, SNDP members, and ordinary. The findings reveal that Sree Narayana Guru continues to occupy a significant place in the social, cultural, and spiritual life of his followers. His teachings on equality, education, self-respect, human unity, and social reform remain widely recognized and respected across different categories of respondents.

The study found that awareness of Guru's teachings remains relatively high among followers, with family, religious institutions, Sivagiri, Narayana Gurukulam, and community organizations playing an important role in transmitting his ideas across generations. At the same time, the findings indicate that the depth of engagement varies among individuals, with older generations generally possessing a more comprehensive understanding of Guru's philosophy than younger generations.

The study further reveals that Guru's teachings continue to influence the daily lives of many followers through values such as equality, religious tolerance, respect for humanity, and the importance of education. Education emerged as the most enduring and visible realization of Guru's vision. Respondents consistently associated the educational and socio-economic advancement of historically marginalized communities with Guru's call to "become enlightened through education." This finding resonates with previous studies which argue that the social reform movement led by Sree Narayana Guru significantly contributed to the educational advancement, occupational mobility, and socio-economic transformation of the Ezhava community in Kerala (O.K Praveen, 2018; Patnaik K Arun, 2024).

The findings also demonstrate that Guru's philosophy continues to transcend caste and community boundaries. Respondents observed that individuals from diverse caste and religious backgrounds participate in institutions associated with Guru's movement, indicating the continuing relevance of his universal message of human unity (Thadathil George, 2019). At the same time, the study identified a tension between Guru's universal humanistic philosophy and certain contemporary community-based interpretations of his teachings. While organizations have played a crucial role in preserving Guru's legacy, some respondents expressed concern that community identity occasionally overshadows Guru's broader vision of social transformation and human equality. Another important finding is the diversity of perceptions regarding Guru's identity. While some respondents viewed him primarily as a social reformer,

others emphasized his role as a spiritual philosopher, and a few regarded him as a divine figure worthy of worship. These differing interpretations illustrate the multifaceted nature of Guru's legacy and the various ways in which his teachings continue to be understood and practiced. The study also highlights that despite significant progress in reducing caste-based discrimination, caste consciousness has not completely disappeared from society. Marriage practices, community affiliations, and social networks continue to reflect the persistence of caste identities. This suggests that although Guru's reform movement has achieved considerable success, the realization of a truly casteless society remains an ongoing challenge (Balakrishnan, 2021; P Pratheesh & S R Saritha, 2025).

Overall, the study concludes that Sree Narayana Guru's teachings remain highly relevant in contemporary society. His vision of social equality, education, spiritual development, and human unity continues to inspire followers and offers valuable guidance for addressing contemporary social issues (P Pratheesh & S R Saritha, 2025; Thadathil George, 2019). However, sustaining Guru's legacy requires renewed efforts to engage younger generations, strengthen awareness of his philosophical teachings, and reaffirm the universal values that formed the foundation of his life and work. The enduring relevance of Guru's message demonstrates that his vision extends beyond a particular community and continues to serve as a guiding force for building a more just, inclusive, and humane society.

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ANNEXURE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1) Personal Details

- Name of the respondent:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Place of residence:
- Religion:
- Community/Caste:
- Educational qualification:
- Occupation:
- Marital status:
- Membership in SNDP:
- Date of interview:

2) Understanding About Sree Narayana Guru

(Personal Understanding)

1. What does Sree Narayana Guru mean to you personally?

- personal inspiration
- influence in life
- role model

2. How did you first learn about his teachings?

- Family
- school or college
- SNDP or community organizations
- Books/media

3. Which teaching of Guru do you think is most important today? And why ?

- Equality
- Education
- Spirituality
- social reform
- caste issues

3) Education and Social Empowerment

(Education and Change)

4. What do you understand from Guru's teaching "Become enlightened through education"?
 - Importance of education
 - Awareness
 - Financial independence
 - Empowerment
5. Do you think education has improved the social and economic condition of communities over time?
 - employment opportunities
 - social status
 - awareness and confidence
6. What role have organizations like SNDP played in promoting education?
 - schools and colleges
 - scholarships
 - awareness programmes
7. Who do you think are the major beneficiaries of these educational activities?
 - Ezhava community
 - other marginalized communities
 - women
- 4) Equality and Social Change
(One Caste One Religion One God for Mankind)
8. What do you understand by Guru's message "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Mankind"?
 - equality among people
 - unity
 - humanity
9. Do you think this message is practiced in society today?
 - caste discrimination
 - social unity
 - religious harmony
10. Are caste differences still visible in everyday life?
 - Marriage
 - Ceremonies
 - social relationships
11. What are your views on inter caste marriages or inter religious marriage?

- Acceptance
- family response
- social change

12. Do you think younger generations understand and follow Guru's teachings?

- awareness among youth
- changing values
- influence of modern society

13. Do you think Guru's teachings are sometimes misunderstood or simplified today?

- political use
- ritual practices
- lack of awareness

5) Worship and Spirituality

14. According to you, what was Guru's idea about God and spirituality?

- simple spirituality
- morality
- humanity and peace

15. Do you think people today follow the spiritual path promoted by Guru?

- religious practices
- moral life
- social responsibility

16. How do you personally show respect towards Guru and his teachings?

- Prayer
- participation in programmes
- following values in daily life

17. Are present rituals and celebrations related to Guru in line with his teachings?

- temple practices
- celebrations
- simplicity or ritualism

6) Practice and Contemporary Relevance

(Practice in Everyday Life)

18. Do Guru's teachings influence your daily life?

- Personal behaviour
- Family values

- Social relationships

19. Can you identify situations where his teachings are ignored?

- Caste discrimination
- Social divisions
- Inequality

20. Do you think there is a gap between Guru's teachings and present social practices?

- Difference between belief and practice
- Social pressure
- Changing lifestyles

21. What are the major reasons for this gap?

- Lack of awareness
- Influence of caste and politics
- Modern lifestyle changes

7) Closing Questions

22. How do you think Guru's teachings have influenced society today?

- Positive changes
- Continuing challenges
- Relevance in modern society

23. What message of Guru do you think future generations should remember most?

- Equality
- Education
- Humanity
- unity

24. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding Guru's teachings and present society?

- personal experiences
- opinions
- suggestions for society