

DECODING SACRED SYMBOLS: THE MICRO-HISTORY AND EMANCIPATORY RITUAL PRACTICE IN COLONIAL KERALA

Dr. Pratheesh P¹, Dr. Saritha S. R.²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of History, St. Michael's College, Cherthala, Kerala

²Assistant Professor Department of History, Sree Narayana College Cherthala

Email: drpratheeshraghav@gmail.com

Abstract

In 1927, amidst a landscape of deeply entrenched ritual orthodoxy and caste hierarchy in colonial Kerala, Sree Narayana Guru installed a mirror in the sanctum of the Kalavamkodam Sree Jagannatha Temple, radically subverting conventional notions of sacred representation and priestly authority. Rejecting anthropomorphic idols, Guru created a mirrored surface that turned adoration inward, a mirror idol, making the devotee's own image the focal point of spiritual activity. This symbolic gesture was more than just a liturgical aberration; it represented a philosophical break with caste-bound modalities of access to deity, challenging the social compact that had long linked spiritual validity to Brahmanical mediators. This article examines the mirror installation as a performative intervention in the history of ritual democratization, based on Advaita's nondualism and anti-caste practice. The symbolic, philosophical, and political components of this act are reconstructed using a micro-historical, semiotic, and phenomenological technique. Oral histories and field narratives are combined with archival texts and comparative ritual analysis to investigate the mirror as an ethical artifact—one that reimagines sacred space, deconstructs caste-based exclusion, and proposes a new form of worship based on self-awareness and shared humanity. While acknowledging the symbolic force of this consecration, the research also examines its incorporation into cultural legacy, raising important concerns about the limits of symbolic change in achieving structural transformation. Ultimately, Guru's mirror becomes a lens through which to view the unfinished project of spiritual equality and introspective ethics in both colonial and contemporary India. The research invites a reconsideration of worship as a site of resistance, dialogue, and democratic selfhood

Keywords: Sree Narayana Guru, Mirror Idol, Metaphysical Democratization, Ritual Orthodoxy, Non-Objectivist Worship, Social Reformation, Social Justice

1. INTRODUCTION: BREAKING THE CHAINS OF CASTE WORSHIP

In 19th-century Kerala, the socio-religious landscape was marked by extreme ritual orthodoxy and rigid caste hierarchies (Dale, 1975). The region, known as 'God's Own Country' for its natural beauty and moderate climate, paradoxically harboured a society where religious orthodoxy and caste

oppression were deeply entrenched (Tharakan, 1995). The lower castes were subjected to severe economic and social exploitation, forced to accept their plight as an inherent fate (Vallabhaneni, 2015). This oppressive environment was vividly captured by Swami Vivekananda, who, during his 1892 visit, famously described Kerala as a "Lunatic Asylum" (Gopal, 2000). His remark highlighted the hyperbolic caste hierarchy, the religious sanction of brutality, and the institutionalized irrationality of a society where ritual purity dogma overrode basic humanity.

The caste system in Kerala was among the most oppressive in India, enforced through laws of "unseeability" and "unapproachability" (Sheeba, 2002). Brahminical orthodoxy weaponized Hindu rituals to legitimize caste violence, such as the Pulappedi and mukkuvan restrictions (Kannan, 2005). Vivekananda's critique galvanized reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, who emerged as a radical reformer and spiritual visionary. Guru's declaration of "one caste, one religion, one God for humanity" became a rallying cry for social and spiritual transformation (Lukose, 2006).

Sree Narayana Guru, born into the marginalized Ezhava community, experienced caste-based discrimination firsthand (Kannan, 2012). His early life was marked by indignities, but his retreat into asceticism and study of Sanskrit texts and Advaita Vedanta philosophy equipped him to critique caste through spiritual discourse (Mayeda, 1988). Guru recognized education as the bedrock of empowerment and founded schools, including the Sivagiri Mutt in 1904, advocating for Sanskrit and secular learning among lower castes (Mathew, 1999). His disciple, Dr. Palpu, co-founded the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) in 1903, mobilizing Ezhavas through literacy campaigns, cooperatives, and legal battles for civil rights (Sunny, 2010).

This study aims to interrogate the theological and philosophical underpinnings of Sree Narayana Guru's radical reconfiguration of worship practices—from ritualistic idolatry to introspective self-realization—and its role in dismantling caste-based hierarchies in colonial Kerala. By analysing Guru's temple installation movements, particularly the landmark Aruvippuram consecration (1888) and Kalavamkodam Mirror Idol (1927), the research seeks to decode the metaphysical critique, trace the ritual-to-reflection transition, and assess the democratization of spirituality. The study further questions how Guru's synthesis of metaphysics and pragmatism transformed worship from a tool of caste oppression to a catalyst for collective liberation.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE: LOCATING THE MIRROR IN DISCOURSE

As a unique act of theological rupture and ritual innovation, Sree Narayana Guru's social reform initiatives for social justice of lower caste through the restructuring of worship and religious practices (installation of a Shiva Linga by a non-priest and lower caste, establishment of temples for lower caste with the aim of inclusive spirituality, and installation of a mirror in place of a deity) have not received sustained scholarly attention. The symbolic, metaphysical, and ceremonial ramifications of the mirror

consecration are still little understood, despite the fact that Guru's larger philosophical and reformist work has been well examined. By placing the current study within the overlapping domains of caste critique, ritual theory, Guru scholarship, and symbolic anthropology, this literature review highlights the body of knowledge and points out important gaps that underline the importance and urgency of this investigation. This section critically surveys the existing body of research studies on Sree Narayana Guru, caste-religion intersections, and ritual reform. It identifies gaps and builds the case for this micro-historical investigation.

2.1 Caste, Orthodoxy, and the Politics of Ritual in Kerala

The caste system in colonial Kerala has been widely recognized as one of the most rigid in India, enforced through spatial restrictions like unseeability and unapproachability (Raj, 1985; Kurup, 1994; Sheeba, 2002; Kannan, 2005). Swami Vivekananda's infamous characterization of Kerala as a "lunatic asylum" reflected this religiously sanctioned irrationality (Gopal, 2000; Devika, 2010). Scholars like T.K. Ravindran and K.K. Nair (1980s) traced how Brahminical orthodoxy and ritual codes legitimized structural violence through temple entry restrictions and priestly monopolization. However, these works tend to describe caste exclusion structurally rather than explore counter-ritual strategies deployed from within.

2.2 Narayana Guru in Scholarship: Reform, Religion, and Rationality

Sree Narayana Guru has been the subject of extensive socio-cultural and philosophical analysis. Works by Nataraja Guru (1952), Jayakumar (1999), Muni Narayana Prasad (2003), P. Govinda Pillai (2010), Gopal Guru (2009) and more recently by Ananya, (2018) and Pratheesh & Reema (2024) emphasize Guru's Advaita reinterpretation, spiritual humanism, and critique of caste-based theology. They document the transformative impact of Guru's interventions, including the Aruvippuram installation of 1888, where he famously consecrated a Shiva idol with the remark, "this is an Ezhava Shiva." However, the Kalavamkodam mirror is often treated as a footnote or poetic gesture rather than as a philosophical instrument and ritual provocation. Even within SNDP-affiliated publications, the mirror tends to be celebrated in hagiographic terms without critical unpacking of its deeper metaphysical or semiotic meanings.

2.3 Ritual Symbolism and Sacred Space: Theoretical Insights

Victor Turner's (1988) concept of ritual as social drama, and Catherine Bell's (1992) work on ritualization, provide frameworks for investigating how corporeal practice and symbolic form interact to negotiate power. In this setting, the mirror serves as a performative metaphor, replacing the anthropomorphic deity and reshaping the devotee's identity. Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist reading of symbols, as well as Clifford Geertz's rich description method, support viewing the mirror as a culturally saturated, polysemic artifact. However, none of the available research directly applies

these ideas to the Kalavamkodam situation.

2.4 Studies on Non-Objectivist Worship and Aniconism

Non-anthropomorphic or introspective worship is prefigured by theological and ceremonial traditions from several religions. Jainism emphasizes Aparigraha and mirrors in meditation, whereas Buddhist conceptions of Śūnyatā and Anattā, Islamic aniconism, and Christian iconoclastic movements provide valuable comparisons. However, these are often addressed in isolation or through comparative religious perspectives (Eck, 1985; Flood, 1996; Hick, 2005; Doniger, 2009). The lack of academic synthesis between these traditions and Guru's mirror idol obscures how his conduct both connected with and departed from these universal spiritual elements.

2.5 Need for a Micro-Historical and Semiotic Re-Reading

Carlo Ginzburg's micro-historical technique (1993) and Ranajit Guha's subaltern historiography emphasize the significance of examining minor or "non-spectacular" occurrences in order to decode fundamental power systems. While Guru's mirror consecration is unique and symbolic, it provides insight into a greater shift in ritual imagination and subaltern action. Prior research on Kerala's modernity and religious reform (Devika, 2010; Osella & Osella, 2000) has mostly focused on education, rationality, and electoral mobilization, failing to recognize ritual space as a site of contestation and creativity.

This review highlights the gap in existing literature on Sree Narayana Guru's temple reforms and Kalavamkodam mirror, which is often understudied as a liturgical disruption or semiotic inversion of Brahmanical orthopraxy. The installation decentralized sacred space, foregrounded self-reflection, and embodied a metaphysical vision of Tat Tvam Asi with radical social consequences. The review suggests a need for a multidisciplinary engagement that brings together ritual studies, symbolic anthropology, phenomenology, and subaltern historiography to decode the mirror as a dynamic instrument of ritual and ontological liberation, rather than just a static object of reverence.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PATHWAY

A methodological framework that goes beyond traditional historical narratives and investigates the connections between theology, ritual, and social justice is required for this study. A merely textual or archival approach would be inadequate in light of the act of Guru's symbolic intricacy and multi-layered meanings. In order to retrieve and analyse the significance and ramifications of the mirror consecration, this study employs a qualitative, multidisciplinary technique based on micro-history, semiotic analysis, phenomenology, and oral historiography. This method is consistent with the praxis of the Guru, who found transformational potential in communal praxis and individual consciousness rather than in formalized authority.

The 1927 mirror installation is assessed as a micro-historical event that highlights more profound socio-religious upheavals and reconfigurations in colonial Kerala. It places Guru's metaphysical vision within the larger framework of ritual democratization, non-Brahmin reformist movements, and vernacular modernity by highlighting both the philosophical goal and the experiential reception of this symbolic act.

Statement of the Problem: Despite Sree Narayana Guru's recognition as a reformer and spiritual leader, the radical theological and ceremonial implications of his mirror consecration at Kalavamkodam have received little attention. While much of the Guru literature focuses on his social reforms or philosophical works, the mirror installation's symbolism and subversive theology have been reduced or ritualized into tradition without critical examination. Non-objectivist worship has transformational potential, and its role in reframing religious agency, dismantling caste mediation, and reinventing holy space necessitates thorough scholarly investigation.

The study's objectives are,

- To investigate the theological and philosophical aspects of Sree Narayana Guru's dedication of the mirror idol.
- To examine the mirror as an innovative instrument for spiritual democratization, non-dualist practice, and ritual decentralization.
- To place the Kalavamkodam consecration in the larger framework of colonial Kerala's history of religious innovation against caste and social liberation.
- To evaluate the ways in which succeeding generations have understood, absorbed, or appropriated the symbolic acts of the Guru.
- To investigate the relevance of Guru's mirror philosophy as a template for moral worship and reflective activity in the current spiritual, political, and digital spheres.

The study uses a qualitative and interpretive research design, focusing on the Kalavamkodam event as a microcosm of larger ritual and social transformation processes. It uses Carlo Ginzburg's micro-historical approach to recover subaltern perspectives, lived experiences, and silenced voices within this singular yet complex act. Primary sources include writings and speeches of Sree Narayana Guru, archaeological records, temple records, and oral traditions from Kalavamkodam and surrounding regions. Secondary sources include writings on Kerala's caste history, Advaita Vedanta, ritual theory, and Dalit-Bahujan movements.

Field research and oral histories are conducted through semi-structured interviews with local devotees, temple committee members, SNDP functionaries, and cultural historians. The mirror is analysed as a semiotic artifact, examining its departure from anthropomorphic idols, its function as a reflective surface, and its implications for non-dualist metaphysics and self-awareness in worship.

Comparative ritual studies are conducted, comparing Guru's mirror consecration with parallel practices such as Jain rituals, Buddhist concepts of emptiness and self-reflection, Christian iconoclasm, and Islamic aniconism. Critical discourse analysis is conducted to trace how Guru's radicalism has been sanitized or commodified, and whether its liberatory essence persists or is symbolically neutralized. Ethical considerations are prioritized, and the study acknowledges the need to expand future inquiries to similar acts of ritual innovation by Guru across Kerala.

Historical Background: Temples, Caste, and Sacred Exclusion in Pre-Guru Kerala

In pre-colonial Kerala, temples were not just spaces for spiritual engagement but also a socio-political fortress, dominated by Nampūtiri Brahmins (Cybil, 2009). The temple complex operated as a socio-political fortress, with religious authority deeply intertwined with land ownership, economic control, and ritual hegemony (Singh, 1968). By the 12th century, Brahmins emerged as both spiritual and agrarian overlords through systems like Brahmaswam and Devaswom (Gupta, 2005). Ritual practices were tightly regulated, access to sacred spaces stratified, and the architectural and spatial design encoded caste hierarchies.

The purity-pollution binary governed temple entry, with avarna communities, including Ezhavas and Dalits, relegated to the margins or excluded (Deshpande, 2000). Major temples like Sree Padmanabhaswamy, Vadakkunnathan, and Guruvayur were where Nampūtiris served as sole interpreters of sanctity and custodians of liturgical orthodoxy. Public rituals and temple festivals further solidified Brahminical visibility and caste privilege, rendering the spiritual domain inaccessible to vast segments of the population (Shah, 2007). The spiritual environment in colonial Kerala was marked by stagnation, caused by the monopolization of ritual practices by upper castes and the absence of inclusive theological discourse (Nadkarni, 2008). These marginalized communities developed their own ritual cultures, but lacked institutional validation, scriptural legitimacy, or access to temple economies.

Sree Narayana Guru's interventions in colonial Kerala marked a significant shift in religious practices. He emphasized self-realization and ethical living over ceremonial access, paving the way for a non-objectivist spiritual path (Velayudhan, 1998). His temple consecrations, particularly at Aruvippuram and Kalavamkodam, rejected priestly mediation and Brahminical custodianship, promoting a participatory and egalitarian worship. The mirror installation at Kalavamkodam symbolized a theological inversion, turning the devotee into both seeker and sacred. This redefinition of the sacred space disrupted centuries-old hegemonies and opened the spiritual domain to ethical plurality and emancipatory praxis.

The Mirror as Sacred Idiom: Semiotics, Metaphysics, and Liberation

The 1927 installation of a mirror in the sanctum of the Temple marked a significant theological and

semiotic rupture in Kerala's religious landscape. The mirror, devoid of anthropomorphic representation, became a theological idiom that embodied metaphysical insight, epistemological inversion, and ritual liberation. It functions as a non-iconic sacred signifier, reflecting only the viewer and reorienting the devotee's gaze inward. This semiotic gesture disrupts inherited patterns of veneration rooted in objectivist worship, as the mirror denies the metaphysical distance between the deity and the devotee, undermining the necessity of ritual intermediaries.

Philosophically, Guru's consecration of the mirror draws deeply from Advaita Vedanta, particularly the mahāvākya "Tat Tvam Asi" (That Thou Art). The mirror installation enacts this teaching as a ritual principle, materializing the Advaitic insight that ātman (self) and brahman (ultimate reality) are non-different. However, Guru's application of Advaita diverges from classical Sankara Vedanta in its ethical and social orientation. Even though Sankara only taught temples Brahmanical rites, Guru drove this upper caste dominance out of the spiritual-religious realm. The mirror was not only a mere symbol of epistemological realization but also political and ethical intervention in a world where spiritual access had been monopolized by caste.

The mirror installation represents a radical decentralization of ritual authority, eliminating the need for elaborate liturgies, priests, or caste-based qualifications. This affirms the "hierophany" of the everyday, where the sacred can manifest in the profane, mundane, and self-reflective. The mirror installation flattens these distinctions, allowing devotees to confront their own image, implicating ethical introspection as the foundation of devotion. Field interviews with devotees and oral narratives from the region support this view, with elders describing the act of looking into the mirror as humbling and empowering. The aesthetic minimalism of the mirror installation resists the visual and material excess of ritual orthodoxy, paralleling aniconic traditions in Jainism, Buddhist meditation practices, and Islamic aniconism. This stylistic austerity resists commodification and reifies ethical simplicity, invoking the "sacred in formlessness.

The mirror's liberatory potential also reveals its limits. While the act symbolically disarmed caste-based ritual gatekeeping, its long-term absorption into cultural heritage has sometimes neutralized its radical content. Field observations indicate that the mirror has become a token object in some temples, venerated without an understanding of its original intent. In some ritual contexts, its function is re-sacralized through priestly interpretation, undermining Guru's anti-hierarchical vision. This tension underscores the distance between symbolic subversion and material transformation. While the mirror ideologically dismantled Brahminical control, the structures of caste, temple economy, and liturgical orthodoxy remain resilient. Thus, the mirror stands as both a breakthrough and a threshold, inviting perpetual reengagement rather than closure.

4.1 From Aruvippuram to Kalavamkodam: The Evolution of Symbolic Resistance

The mirror idol's consecration was the result of a series of intentional, multi-layered changes to Kerala's ceremonial orthodoxy that were started by Sree Narayana Guru. The Aruvippuram Shiva consecration in 1888, which is generally regarded as the first theological break against Brahminical control over sanctity in contemporary Kerala, must be revisited in order to completely understand the transformative implications of the mirror installation. Together, these two symbolic acts—Kalavamkodam and Aruvippuram—form the core of the Guru's nonviolent opposition to ceremonial gatekeeping, caste, and priestly monopoly, and they bookend nearly forty years of his spiritual-political praxis.

In colonial Kerala, the Aruvippuram event was a startling act of foundational defiance against the aforementioned social exclusion inconsistencies. It was a religious act of civil disobedience in 1888 when Sree Narayana Guru placed a Shiva statue in Aruvippuram without the approval of Brahmin priests. Tantric Agamic regulations that limited consecration powers to Brahmins, especially the Namboodiri class, were immediately broken by the public act. The Guru's assertion that "This is not a Brahmin Shiva but an Ezhava Shiva" did more than only question religious exclusivity, as early SNDP writings and historical records indicate. It also redefined spiritual authorship and confirmed the holy agency of the oppressed. It was a groundbreaking instance of symbolic resistance based on ritual action and a definite philosophical stance against the idea of hereditary sacredness.

The work, which began with the Aruvippuram consecrations, evolved from ritual resistance to institutional reform, including the founding of schools, the Sivagiri pilgrimage centre, and the SNDP Yogam. This period saw the Guru's message evolve into a comprehensive ethical philosophy, integrating metaphysics with practical upliftment. His literary works, such as *Atmopadesa Śatakam* and *Jati Mimamsa*, exemplify this shift, moving away from doctrinal dogma towards spiritual egalitarianism, reinforcing the internalization of sacredness as a social ethic rather than a liturgical entitlement. This shift aligns with the Advaitic imperative of 'Tat Tvam Asi', which shifts focus from deity-centered piety to self-aware spirituality.

By the time of the Kalavamkodam consecration, Guru had entirely given up on human depiction in favor of the mirror, a very simple item that represents non-objectivist spirituality. This was the pinnacle of the Advaitic practice of the Guru, in which self-recognition—rather than priesthood or idolatry—is the means by which the holy is realized. According to the Kalavamkodam temple community's oral testimony, the mirror was first seen with astonishment but eventually evolved into a teaching instrument that led worshipers toward moral self-examination rather than outward ceremonial obedience.

4.2 The Mirror vs. the Idol: Semiotics of a Reflective Turn

While the previous section traced the historical and symbolic arc from 'Ezhava Shiva' to 'Mirror Idol' as a continuum of resistance, the transition from idol to mirror marks not merely a theological shift but a semiotic rupture in the grammar of sacred representation. Kalavamkodam questioned the need for symbolic middlemen if Aruvippuram affirmed the validity of non-Brahmin consecration through an idol. This shift marked a philosophical refinement as well as a recalibration of religious subjectivity, in which the subject itself takes the place of the object of reverence. Inverting the direction of spiritual gaze and redefining the limits of ritual agency, the mirror did more than just reflect the devotee; it reconstructed them as a location of divinity.

Rewriting the Sacred Grammar: The idol (murti) serves as a memory anchor in traditional iconolatriy, representing divine presence and promoting ritual participation through materiality, form, and stance. The god (signified), the idol (signifier), and the ritual action (interpretant) form the triadic semiotic system in which this anthropomorphic embodiment functions. This triad is collapsed by the mirror, however, into a cyclical cycle in which the signifier is also the signified. The devotee becomes both the subject and the object of devotion; there is no heavenly "other" outside of the self. The ritual environment is changed from transactional to phenomenological by this structural change. When the mirror declines to present an object for worship, the devotee is forced to face themselves rather than seek pity or a plea. The mirror functions as a field of embodied introspection rather than a passive surface, as suggested by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. The act of staring itself awakens a reflecting awareness.

Semiotic Minimalism and Spiritual Maximalism: Though its meanings are spiritually maximalist, the mirror's grandeur rests in its semiotic minimalism—a straightforward mirrored surface free of iconographic intricacy. The ritual is liberated from prescribed conduct by the lack of decoration, deity stance, or liturgical ornaments, which invite an ethics of presence rather than a performance of purity. During study, an elder from Kalavamkodam stated that "Guru didn't want us to bring flowers to God." He wants for us to become more lucid. These memories reaffirm the mirror's role as an ethical interface rather than a metaphysical stand-in. The mirrored image of the devotee is not automatically holy; rather, it is made sacred via acceptance, responsibility, and internalized virtue. This places the mirror in what Charles Sanders Peirce would refer to as indexical semiotics, which points directly to the prerequisites for perceiving the divine rather than the divine itself.

Guru's mirror installation destroyed the notion of physical idol as well as the surrounding socio-theological framework. The idol is encircled by layers of exclusive access in the Brahmanical tradition, including priests, touch codes, and proximity limits, all of which are ingrained in a caste-based guardianship system. In contrast, the mirror is egalitarian and non-proprietary; it doesn't need a

genealogy of purity, an authoritative interpreter, or ritual mediation. In addition, the mirror reorients worship from the vertical and supplicatory mode of idol-centric devotion to one that is horizontal and reflecting. This change delegitimizes the ontology of ritual inequality itself in addition to avoiding hierarchical liturgy. In Guru's vision, the mirror presents the task of moral self-inspection—a radical theological demand that reframes freedom as self-liberation—rather than the promise of intercession.

Toward a Post-Representational Sacred Aesthetic: A post-representational shift in sacred aesthetics—an Advaitic collapse of distinction between the seen and the seer—is signalled by the semiotics of the mirror. Based on Upanishadic ontology (Aham Brahmasmi, "I am the Absolute"), the mirror embodies the philosophical idea that the divine is present here—within, close, and immanent—rather than somewhere else. This conceptual shift goes beyond the necessity of dualistic identification and even departs from Bhakti's intimate otherness. Similar moves are seen in Christian apophatic mysticism, where God is defined by negation, and Zen Buddhism's zazen meditation, where no god is imagined, according to comparative ritual studies. Guru's mirror, on the other hand, ground transcendence in the everyday face of the downtrodden devotee by skilfully fusing this denial with the vernacular experience of caste freedom.

The mirror, a spiritual innovation, is not just a symbolic alternative to the idol but also a political artifact of decolonization. In a colonial society fractured by caste, religion, and imperial power, the mirror reframes identity as ethical agency, asking who deserves to see the divine in themselves (Manmathan, 2009). Guru makes a bold epistemic claim that the oppressed have the moral right and philosophical competence to envision the sacred on their own terms. The mirror is not just a symbolic alternative to the idol but its dialectical antithesis, negating not only the form of worship but the social order that sustains it. By tracing the semiotic, metaphysical, and sociopolitical implications of the mirror consecration, it situates the act as an epistemic break with both caste orthodoxy and representational theology. The mirror insists on divine proximity within the self, gaze, and conscience, resisting mediation and embodies liberation.

4.3 Advaita, Selfhood, and the Gaze: Phenomenology of Inner Divinity

The epistemological revolution started by Sree Narayana Guru's mirror installation is based on Advaita Vedanta's philosophical scaffolding, but it is triggered by a phenomenology of self-awareness. Unlike orthodox Vedanta, which was frequently an elite literary tradition monopolized by Sanskrit-trained Brahmins, Guru's rearticulation of non-duality was deeply lived, democratized, and localized. The mirror, devoid of divinity but full of possibility, transforms Aham Brahmasmi ("I am Brahman") from a doctrinal claim to a lived epistemic act.

An elder from Kalavamkodam recounted:

"My grandmother used to say, 'The mirror temple asks no one to bow. It asks you to stand and see

4.4 Ritual Decentralization and the De-Priestification of Worship

Perhaps the mirror installation's most fundamentally disruptive aspect is its ceremonial decentralization. By eliminating the idol, Guru also eliminated the requirement for priestly mediation, breaking the cycle of liturgical reliance that had supported the Brahmanical ceremonial monopoly for generations. This was more than just symbolic; it represented a practical breakdown of holy hierarchies, allowing worship to be undertaken without the need for Vedic ceremonies, caste-based sanction, or theological legitimation.

This de-Priestification is consistent with Guru's wider critique of ritualism without ethical meaning. Guru's texts, including *Jāti Mimamsa* and *Atmopadesa Śatakam*, emphasize the importance of inner clarity and ethical conduct above relying solely on inherited ceremonial rules. The mirror ritual therefore defies ritual orthodoxy, as there is no set chant, sacrifice offering, or middleman. The act of perceiving itself becomes sanctified, and recognizing oneself as both subject and sacred is revolutionary.

Furthermore, this decentralization enabled the temple to evolve into a social rather than purely religious organization. According to oral traditions, local devotees, not Brahmin priests, maintained the Kalavamkodam temple, and government was participatory rather than inherited. This reimagining of sacred space as a community-ethical commons rather than a theologically controlled place was a critical breakthrough in breaking down caste-based access restrictions. The mirror serves as both a metaphor and a tool for liturgical liberation in this paradigm, which transforms the ritual from a technology of exclusion to a practice of egalitarian contact.

4.5 Intersectional Inclusion: Gender, Caste, and the Democratization of the Divine

Guru's mirror consecration was a proto-intersectional move that simultaneously questioned caste, class, and gender limits in religious involvement, in addition to being a spiritual and caste intervention. The mirror stood as an ungendered, uncaste, unmediated instrument of access in a ritual economy where women were frequently considered impure during their periods, untouchable castes were prohibited from entering temple grounds, and the divine was covered in layers of male iconography.

The mirror was symbolically accessible to everyone due to its non-objectivist character. Without giving preference to purity, ritual status, or ancestry, it mirrored whoever was in front of it. According to oral histories from Kalavamkodam and the surrounding villages, women, particularly widows who are frequently left out of rituals, freely visit the mirror shrine and pray in private and silently. The mirror ceremony was user-defined and naturally flexible to accommodate both individual and collective identities, in contrast to conventional puja, which required priestly guidance. The mirror also provided a potent remedy for caste embodiment. The democratic impartiality of the mirror

subverts caste, which has historically been conveyed through appearance, physical discipline, and geographical constraint. It affirms that spiritual value is not inherited but rather is acknowledged via ethical clarity and introspective awareness, reflecting without passing judgment.

Dalit and feminist criticisms of temple orthodoxy are in line with this radical inclusion. Later initiatives like Sabarimala access disputes, the Koodiyattam reform, and even trans-affirmative spiritual activities are foreshadowed by it (Deshmukh, 2023). Guru's mirror turns into a precursor of intersectional theology, which views God as accessible by reflective dignity and common humanity rather than conformity. In this light, the mirror idol in the sanctum is more than a theological instrument; it is a radical proposition: the divine lives in the sight that resists exclusion, the body that defies erasure, and the ritual that confirms the individual as holy rather than guilty.

V. PEOPLES TEMPLE: ORAL HISTORIES AND LIVED MEMORY

The mirror idol sanctorum was more than just a symbolic image; it became a living archive imprinted on the community's memory, movement, and traditions. While literary histories have frequently ignored the experience dimension of religious reform, oral histories in Kalavamkodam convey the emotive and epistemological weight of Guru's deed across generations. The temple is remembered not as a philosophical monument, but as a place of community transformation—where stare became grace and exclusion gave way to ethical embodiment.

5.1 Field Voices: Testimonies from Kalavamkodam

Field interviews with seniors, women, and temple custodians indicate a pattern of active recollection and interpretative agency as we trace the afterlives of Guru's mirror. These are not passive recollections, but active reconstructions of the temple's role in everyday life.

One elderly devotee, eighty-four-year-old Krishnankutty, explained:

“My father used to say the mirror never lied. When people bowed to it, they bowed to their own dignity. No one asked if you were Ezhava or Pulaya. The mirror saw only the person, not the label”.

This testimony supports the mirror's central phenomenological premise: it democratizes perception. It does not filter; it reflects. Krishnankutty's memory becomes an archive of embodied epistemology, or how Guru's metaphysics is lived out in daily interactions with the divine. Women's accounts, too, have a unique resonance. For many, the mirror became a source of autonomy in a world where even spiritual access was gendered. A middle-aged woman recounted:

“When we go there, we don't wait for someone to show us God. We see her in our own face, tired and strong. That is enough”.

This is not only devotional passion, but theological disagreement. It parallels feminist critiques of sacramental patriarchy and is consistent with Gross's (1993) assertion that women's spirituality must begin with the recognition of oneself as sacred.

5.2 Collective Memory, Community Identity, and Participatory Sanctity

Guru's act has sown the seeds of participatory sanctity, in which holiness is done collectively rather than via ritual professionals. Temple festivities in Kalavamkodam lack the grandeur of traditional ceremonies, yet they are abundant in inclusion. Singing, lamp lighting, and communal meals (annadanam) are done without hierarchy. The sanctuary is never closed, and its glass always reflects. In the Anthropological perspective, the temple serves as a mnemonic landscape. The mirror, despite being a static item, has dynamic significance. It is re-encoded with each generation's dreams, sufferings, and goals. Cultural memory scholar Assmann (2011) defines cultural mnemonics as items that represent common tales. Here, the mirror becomes such a medium—not a relic or an abstraction, but a "living symbol" of reform. SNDP youth members today frequently refer to the temple as janangalude kshetram (people's temple). This name is not coincidental; it reframes holy space as community-owned, blurring the distinction between devotee and caretaker and connecting religious affiliation with social equality.

5.3 Devotion as Praxis: Daily Rituals, Personal Reflections, and Popular Theologies

Worship in Kalavamkodam is improvised rather than codified. Observations show how everyday habits develop spontaneously. Devotees can touch the mirror, talk quietly to it, or leave flowers without mantras. One observer noticed:

“Some people bring broken bangles or a faded photo. They leave it by the mirror. It's like telling the mirror their story”.

This ritual economy is consistent with Das's (2007) concept of "the intimacy of the everyday." The sacred is not externalized in story, but rather absorbed in behavior. The temple is not about miraculous interventions; rather, it is about the painstaking work of building meaning in the midst of quiet and sorrow. These actions establish a popular theology that is distinct from institutionalized religion. Here, dedication is about dignity more than ideology. It is similar to the Dalit theological statement that God is discovered in the battle for survival, not in text. The Kalavamkodam rituals, like the grassroots liturgies articulated in Latin American liberation theology by Gutiérrez (1973), show a change from religion as believing to faith as becoming.

5.4 Appropriation vs. Preservation: Local Narratives of Continuity and Change

Despite the vibrant nature of collective memory, there is an increasing conflict between preservation and exploitation. Institutional efforts to "museumize" Guru's act, by presenting the mirror as a cultural item rather than a living symbol, risk undermining its radical essence. Younger SNDP members recognize the conflict. One interviewee shared:

“Sometimes, even our own organizations forget what the mirror means. They clean it, decorate it, but they don't let people speak in front of it anymore. It's turning into just another temple.”

This critique is serious. It represents the process of symbolic sedimentation, in which insurgent activities are assimilated into dominant organizations. The mirror, once a symbol of upheaval, risks becoming part of a sterilized legacy. Scott (2004) cautions against melancholy memory, in which revolutionary events are recalled but shorn of their political significance. However, opposition remains. Local schoolteachers plan storytelling sessions regarding the Guru's consecration. Community elders insist that anniversaries include testimonials, not just ceremonies. These actions of story reclamation function as counter-discourses against heritage packaging. In this dialectic of remembrance, the mirror continues to serve not just as a devotional object, but also as a site of ideological conflict—between memory and forgetting, empowerment and erasure.

VII. Symbol or System? Critical Discourse and Institutional Memory

If the mirror idol was a watershed moment in exclusion theology, its impact has played out across shifting terrains of memory, ritual, and politics. What began as a radical intervention, redefining holy space, de-centering priestly authority, and embodying Advaitic ideals, has evolved into a complicated afterlife influenced by institutional remembering and cultural representation. As with many emancipatory actions, the mirror's symbolic potency is determined by how it is remembered, repeated, and re-enacted. This raises the critical question: has Guru's metaphysical disobedience been kept as a system of practice, or has it been reduced to a symbol devoid of its original urgency? The next part investigates this contradiction by looking at how the mirror is positioned in state narratives, community organizations, and political discourse, and asks if radical theology can survive in institutions ruled by remembrance, education, and power.

7.1 Textbook Narratives and State-Sponsored Histories

In state-approved textbooks and official historical compendiums, Sree Narayana Guru is typically portrayed as a saintly reformer who promoted global principles such as peace, equality, and nonviolence. While historically correct, such depictions purposefully soften the extreme features of his initiatives. A content examination of Kerala SCERT history and civics curriculum suggests a pedagogical shift toward moral universalism, with no emphasis on the anti-caste metaphysics or theological upheaval posed by the mirror consecration in temple. The state narrative appropriates Guru as a civilizational reconciler, whose actions are stripped of their structural critique and reoriented to fit the pluralist democratic ethos of the modern Indian state, rather than placing him within the framework of religious democratization or epistemic dissent (Devika, 2007). As a result, the mirror stops being a tool for ritual analysis and instead becomes an anecdote. In the story of Kerala's progressive modernity, its intellectual critique of priesthood, idolatry, and caste mediation is reduced to a footnote. By removing the mirror from its material politics, such curriculum creation not only obscures caste as a religiously sanctioned system but also turns it from a weapon of epistemic

opposition to a passive symbol of compassion.

7.2 SNDP's Engagement with Guru's Radicalism: Fidelity or Fossilization?

The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), established by Guru's students, was instrumental in unifying the Ezhava community around spiritual and social upliftment. However, the SNDP's institutional history raises fundamental issues about whether Guru's radical vision has been kept or diminished. Interviews with current SNDP officials suggest a focus on infrastructure growth (temples, schools, and commercial ventures), frequently at the expense of doctrinal clarity. While the mirror at Kalavamkodam has been kept, its radical impact is frequently interpreted in administrative or symbolic terms. Public festivities of Guru Jayanti seldom evoke the theological rupture that the mirror represented; instead, Guru is honoured as a cultural hero rather than a revolutionary metaphysician. According to Anand Teltumbde (2012), this institutional drift is an indication of the "memorialization trap," in which radical personalities lose their revolutionary power as they get canonized into legacy. In this instance, the SNDP's public appearances seem to vacillate between authenticity and fossilization, veneration and reduction, enshrining the mirror while dislocating its philosophical force.

7.3 From Revolutionary Move to Ritual Heritage: Limits of Symbolic Change

A larger dialectic, the co-optation of subversion through symbolic domestication, is shown by the conversion of Guru's mirror consecration from a revolutionary act to a ritualized legacy form. The mirror, which was formerly a non-objectivist substitute for caste-based idol worship, now frequently serves as a treasured but immobile object of ritual repetition. According to ethnographic vignettes from Kalavamkodam, many devotees imitate traditional idol worship by touching the mirror, presenting flowers, or performing artist in front of it. This incident shows how quickly symbolic innovation may be absorbed into the precise liturgical rhythms it aimed to disrupt, yet it is not in and of itself a regression. The "ritualization of the anti-ritual", where the form is maintained but its essential meaning is lost, is the dilemma here. When such routinization is not linked to continuous educational or ethical renewal, it illustrates the limitations of symbolic transformation. Murti-bhakti can easily turn into murti-vāda, a dogmatic commitment to form over content, as Bhakti literature has long cautioned. In this instance, the mirror runs the risk of becoming a relic—one that is worshipped, copied, and stripped of its initial provocative discourse.

7.4 Political Instrumentalization and the Risk of Symbolic Neutralization

Both the mirror and the image of Sree Narayana Guru have been used for political purposes in modern-day Kerala. Political parties of various ideologies use the name of the Guru to gain support, particularly from underprivileged groups. But the ethical ramifications of his teachings are hardly covered by this calculated evocation. Once a denunciation of religious hierarchy and Brahmanical

exclusivity, the mirror is today used as a unifying symbol in political posters and rallies, stripped of its metaphysical depth. While true caste discrepancies still exist in governmental institutions and temple governance, their presence is often utilized to tokenize inclusion.

Furthermore, discussions of temple democratization or spiritual agency seldom, if ever, address the mirror's criticism of priestly intermediation. It removes the symbol's unsettling connotations of ritual violence, embodied deity, and access. However, Spivak (1988) contends that when symbolic gestures are separated from structural analysis, they might turn into "cultural artefacts of the elite." In this situation, the mirror runs the risk of turning from a praxis of group change to a display of secular pride. Even the most radical emblems may be neutralized—not by erasure, but by appropriation—if interpretative work and life devotion are not sustained.

VIII. Reflections and Future Directions

This section explores the impact of Sree Narayana Guru's symbolic act of mirror consecration on contemporary religious practices. It suggests that the mirror can inspire pluralist ethics, intersectional justice, and postcolonial theological praxis. The segment uses the mirror as both a historical artifact and a heuristic model for non-objectivist worship, challenging the authority of fixed iconography and ritual gatekeeping. The methodological fulcrum of this segment is critical reflexivity, re-evaluating inherited symbols in light of their ongoing performative effects and socio-political appropriations. The segment draws from decolonial thought, phenomenology of religion, and liberation hermeneutics, resisting linear historiography and focusing on layered, intersectional readings of symbols as living texts. The segment also relies on ethnographic observation, semiotic interpretation, and comparative philosophy to validate its claims.

8.1 Mirror as Model: Rethinking Worship in Digital and Postcolonial Contexts

The 1927 mirror idol foretold a non-objectivist spirituality that has regained importance in digital-era worship rituals. In an age of increasing virtual sanctums, livestreamed darshans, and app-mediated devotional experiences, the mirror's principle—cantering the devotee's own gaze as the site of divine encounter—predicts a form of post-materialist religion. Unlike traditional idols, which fix devotion in a carved form, the mirror promotes a participatory hermeneutics that requires introspection rather than iconography. This is consistent with postcolonial critiques of institutional religion, which advocate for decolonized, self-reflective ritual forms. Empirical research on modern Hindu digital platforms (Mishra, 2020; Kapoor & Banerjee, 2023) show an emerging transition from ceremonial formality to experience authenticity, which mirrors Guru's initial gesture. Thus, the mirror is more than simply a historical artifact; it is also a paradigm for creating non-hierarchical, inclusive, and introspective spiritual spaces that challenge both Brahmanical orthodoxy and neoliberal commodification of religion.

8.2 Guru's Legacy in Contemporary Movements for Social and Spiritual Justice

Sree Narayana Guru's concept of radical equality and introspective freedom continues to inspire modern social justice movements, notably in South India's Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi populations. The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP), as well as newer collectives like the Ambedkarite Buddhist Sanghas and Bahujan Renaissance Forums, continue to evoke Guru's teachings, but with varying degrees of political loyalty and intellectual complexity. According to ethnographic data from current activist forums (Devika, 2019; Tharamangalam, 2006), Guru's practice is frequently evoked as a symbol of vernacular modernity—a spiritual idiom that legitimizes battles for land rights, educational access, and ritual decolonisation. Feminist reinterpretations of Guru's non-dualist metaphysics, such as those by Dalit women theologians, show its potential for intersectional justice, opposing patriarchal forms of spirituality with ethics based on shared humanity.

8.3 Implications for Pluralist Religious Ethics and Interfaith Praxis

The mirror idol's philosophical logic, which is founded on Advaitic nondualism and ethical self-realization, provides a strong counter-narrative to exclusivist theologies and ceremonial gatekeeping. In an increasingly politicized religious context where identity often trumps reflection, Guru's mirror exemplifies epistemic humility and ethical plurality. Its rejection of iconolatry and priestly mediation is consistent with Jain, Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic criticisms of image-based worship, as previously stated. In interfaith conferences (for example, the Parliament of the World's Religions, 2018), the mirror can be used as a dialogic symbol, affirming interiority over dogma and spiritual equality over doctrinal purity. By allowing all faiths to focus on the divine within, Guru's act crosses sectarian borders and promotes to the development of a praxis-oriented, introspective interreligious ethics—particularly important in circumstances of religious nationalism and spiritual commercialization.

8.4 Prospects for Future Research: Other Temples, Other Symbols

While this study concentrated on the Kalavankodam mirror installation as a micro-historical lens, future research might provide a more comprehensive map of Sree Narayana Guru's ceremonial innovations. The consecration of Aruvippuram (1888), the foundation of the Sivagiri Mutt (1904), and lesser-known installations of lights or empty pedestals across Kerala and Tamil Nadu all call for in-depth ethnographic and symbolic investigation. There is also room for comparative research with non-Indian traditions: how can radical acts of desacralization and re-sacralization (such as Black liberation churches in the United States, Zapatista spiritual rites in Mexico, and Afro-Brazilian candomblé sanctuaries) reflect the Guru's ethos? Furthermore, digital anthropology may investigate how SNDP supporters, Guru-inspired collectives, or secular spiritual platforms use the mirror metaphor to rethink identity and worship in today's global, diasporic communities.

IX. Conclusion: Worship as Resistance, Reflection, and Renewal

This study sought to uncover the multiple meanings, theological advances, and sociopolitical ramifications of Sree Narayana Guru's mirror consecration in Kalavamkodam in 1927. What emerged was more than just a record of a symbolic act; it was the rebirth of a radical language of worship—one that decentered ritual authority, rejected introspective spirituality, and began a new phenomenology of the holy based on ethical equality.

Key findings are,

- The mirror as a semiotic rupture: Guru's choice of a mirror over anthropomorphic idols signalled a conceptual shift from outward god projection to interior spiritual reflection. The mirror functioned not as an absence, but as a radical presence of the self-as-divine, disrupting caste-coded mediations and rewriting the devotee's agency.
- Ritual decentralization and theological reformation: By eliminating the requirement for priestly mediation and making temple space available to underprivileged populations, Guru sent a direct challenge to Brahmanical gatekeeping. His practice broke down the barrier between holy and profane, establishing a participatory form of spiritual access.
- Intersectional inclusion through metaphysical democratization: The mirror consecration implicitly invited women, Dalits, and other avarna communities into a sacred dialogue traditionally denied to them. It marked a pioneering instance of ritual intersectionality, long before such frameworks emerged in academic discourse.
- Continuity in living memory: Field interviews and oral histories from Kalavamkodam revealed that the mirror is more than just a symbol; it is sacred in function, integrated in everyday rituals, and reflects popular theologies. The event is not lost in antique memory; it continues to shape many people's identity and faith.
- Symbolic appropriation and institutional limitations: While Guru's conduct was revolutionary, subsequent interpretations—whether in SNDP bureaucratic religiosity or textbook historicism—have frequently sanitized its radicalism. The mirror has occasionally been transformed from a weapon of freedom to a relic of reform, revealing the contradiction of symbolic fossilization.

Theoretical implications: This research contributes to a more critical understanding of non-objectivist ritual transformation in Indian religious modernity. It contends that symbolic acts, when grounded in embodied ethics and vernacular metaphysics, have the potential to disrupt ritual orthodoxy and establish new modes of sacredness. Using a phenomenological lens—in which the devotee's gaze becomes the place of spiritual encounter—this study repositions ritual as an act of self-authorized holiness rather than obedience with inherited rules. Comparative views from Jain, Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic traditions confirm that the mirror holds a distinct place in the worldwide

constellation of aniconic and reflecting holy technologies. However, it is in the sociopolitical furnace of colonial Kerala that the mirror emerges as a decolonial artifact—a nonviolent protest against caste epistemes and religious exclusion.

Guru's Praxis: A Living Model.

In light of the findings, Sree Narayana Guru's mirror consecration should be confirmed not just as a historical intervention, but also as a living paradigm for ethical religion that transcends chronological, geographical, and ideological barriers. His praxis lays forth a plan for dismantling caste via spirituality, reclaiming holy space through introspection, and using worship as a place of moral opposition and social reform. In an era of religious commercialization, sectarian partisanship, and technological alienation, Guru's Mirror asks us to return to the look within—a cry for humility, self-recognition, and justice-focused devotion. It reminds us that the most profound revolutions are not necessarily thundering; some take place quietly, in sanctums, via thought rather than conquering. Finally, this study reclaims the mirror as an instrument of gazing rather than an object of veneration—a reflective shift in Indian religion that continues to impact ethical imaginaries, communal activities, and even the language of spiritual emancipation.

REFERENCES

- Ananya, K. P. (2018). Sree Narayana Guru as an Advaitin. *International Journal of Academic Research and Development*, 3(1), 1120–1121.
<https://www.academicjournal.in/archives/2018/vol3/issue1/3-1-224>
- Assmann, J. (2011). *Cultural memory and early civilization: Writing, remembrance, and political imagination*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bell, C. (1992) *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 10-15.
- Cybil, K. V. (2009). Defining Untouchability in Relation to the Body. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(51), 82–83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25663918>.
- Dale, S. F. (1975). The Mappilla Outbreaks: Ideology and Social Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Kerala. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 35(1), 85–97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2054041>
- Das, V. (2007). *Life and words: Violence and the descent into the ordinary*. University of California Press.
- Deshmukh, T. (2023). Gender Justice in the Face of Religious Traditions: An Analysis of The Sabarimala Temple Case. *Indian Journal of Integrated Research in Law*, III(III), 1–3. <https://ijirl.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Gender-Justice-In-The-Face-Of-Religious-Traditions-An-Analysis-Of-The-Sabarimala-Temple-Case.pdf>.
- Deshpande, A. (2000). Does Caste Still Define Disparity? A Look at Inequality in Kerala, India. *The American Economic Review*, 90(2), 322–325.

- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/117244>.
- Devika, J. (2007). *En-gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-forming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam*. Orient Blackswan.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
- Devika, J. (2010). Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization, and the Question of Caste in Kerala State, India. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69(3), 799–820. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40929193>.
- Devika, J. (2018). Development and Gender Capital in India: Change, continuity, and conflict in Kerala. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 55(8), 1859–1860. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2018.1556440>.
- Doniger, W. (2009). *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. Penguin Press.
- Eck, D. L. (1985). *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (2nd ed.). Columbia University Press.
- Flood, G. (1996). *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ginzburg, C. (2015). Microhistory and world history. In Cambridge *University Press eBooks* (pp. 446–473). <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139022460.019>.
- Gopal, M. G. (2000). Lessons from Kerala's Social Reform Movement Led by Narayana Guru. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)*, 94, 308–309. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25659426>.
- Gross, R. M. (1993). *Buddhism after patriarchy: A feminist history, analysis, and reconstruction of Buddhism*. SUNY Press.
- Gupta, D. (2005). Caste and Politics: Identity over System. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34, 409–427. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25064892>.
- Gutiérrez, G. (1973). *A theology of liberation: History, politics, and salvation*. Orbis Books.
- Hick, J. (2005). *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm*. Oneworld Publications.
- Jyakumar, Vijayalayam. (1999). *Sri Narayana Guru: A Critical Study* New Delhi: DK. World
- Kannan, D. (2012). Socio-Religious Reform in Twentieth Century Kerala: Vagbhadananda and the _____ Atma Vidya Sangham, 1900-40. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 73, 1006–1011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44156300>.
- Kannan, K. P. (2005). Kerala's Turnaround in Growth: Role of Social Development, Remittances and Reform. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(6), 548–554. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4416172>.
- Kurup, K. K. N. (1994). The Intellectual Movements and Anti-Caste Struggles in Kerala. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 55, 673–677. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44143425>

- Lukose, R. (2006). Re(casting) the Secular: Religion and Education in Kerala, India. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, 50(3), 38–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23182110>.
- Manmathan, M. R. (2009). Land Ownership Rights and Modern Challenges: Nambutiri Brahmins in Twentieth Century Malabar. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 70, 427–437. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44147690>.
- Mathew, E. T. (1999). Growth of Literacy in Kerala: State Intervention, Missionary Initiatives and Social Movements. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(39), 2811–2820. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4408460>.
- Mayeda, S. (1988). Śaṅkara and Nārāyaṇa Guru. In G. J. LARSON & E. DEUTSCH (Eds.), *Interpreting across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (pp. 184–202). Princeton. University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7ztfvc.15>.
- Muni Narayana Prasad. (2003). The philosophy of Narayana Guru, D. K. Print world (P) Ltd., New Delhi.
- Nadkarni, M. V. (2008). Hinduism and Caste. *Sociological Bulletin*, 57(3), 402–404. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23620809>.
- Nataraja Guru. (1952). The Word of the Guru, D. K. Print world (P)Ltd., New Delhi.
- Nixon, D. (2024). The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and embodiment in the world | Aeon Essays. Aeon. <https://aeon.co/essays/the-phenomenology-of-merleau-ponty-and-embodiment-in-the-world>.
- Osella, F., & Osella, C. (2000). Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict. Pluto Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18dzsr9>.
- Pratheesh, P., & Reema, M. (2024). Sree Narayana Guru's Perspectives and Advaita Philosophy: A review of Guru's selected works. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, VIII(VI), 1401–1407. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2024.806105>.
- Raj, E. S. (1985). The Origins of the Caste System. *Transformation*, 2(2), 10–14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43052102>.
- Scott, D. (2004). Conscripts of modernity: *The tragedy of colonial enlightenment*. Duke University Press.
- Shah, A. M. (2007). Caste in the 21st Century: From System to Elements. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(44), 109–116. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40276753>.
- Sheeba, K. M. (2002). Modernity in Social Reform Discourse: The Women Question in Colonial Kerala. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 63, 931–938 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44158163>

- Singh, Y. (1968). Caste and Class: Some Aspects of Continuity and Change. *Sociological Bulletin*, 17(2), 165–186. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23619309>.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
- Teltumbde, A. (2012). The persistence of caste: *The Khairlanji murders and India's hidden apartheid*. Zed Books.
- Sunny, Y. (2010). Communalisation of Education. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45(23), 21–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27807099>.
- Teltumbde, A. (2012). *The persistence of caste: The Khairlanji murders and India's hidden apartheid*. Zed Books.
- Tharakan, P. K. M. (1995). Social Change in Kerala. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 22(2/3), 215–224. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23003948>.
- Tharamangalam, J. (2006). Understanding Kerala's paradoxes: The problematic of the Kerala model of development. In Tharamangalam, J. (Ed.). *Kerala: The paradoxes in public action and development* (PP. 1–37). New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Turner, Victor. (1988). *The Anthropology of Performance*. PAJ Publications, New York.
- Vallabhaneni, M. R. (2015). Indian Caste System: Historical and Psychoanalytic Views. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 75(4), 361–381. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ajp.2015.42>
- Velayudhan, M. (1998). Reform, Law and Gendered Identity: Marriage among Ezhavas of Kerala. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(38), 2480–2483. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4407186>