

Brahmananda Sivayogi: A Vanguard of Social Reform in Hindu Society

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Abstract: *Brahmananda Sivayogi's life and work exemplify the transformative power of individual courage and intellectual inquiry in challenging entrenched social norms and superstitions. His legacy serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for truth, justice, and human dignity in a world plagued by ignorance and prejudice. As we reflect on Sivayogi's contributions, we are inspired to continue his legacy of questioning, learning, and striving for a more enlightened and equitable society.*

Keywords: Brahmananda Sivayogi, social reformer, intellectual inquiry, truth and justice, human dignity

1. Introduction

Brahmananda Sivayogi, also known as Govindankutty, the son of Ravunyarath Kunjkrishna Menon and Karattu Naniyamma, was born on August 26, 1852, in Kollenkode, Kerala. He grew up in an environment that nurtured his curiosity and intellect, leading him to challenge prevalent social norms and superstitions.

His education, which included Sanskrit and later English in Ernakulam, exposed him to diverse perspectives and rational thinking. Influenced by friends from various backgrounds, Sivayogi began questioning societal practices like the caste system, untouchability, and animal cruelty. Caste system was very rigid in Kerala.¹ The position of untouchables was very low in society.² Seeing a low caste itself was a cause of impurity.³ The daily wages of low caste people were given to them in a far-off place to protect purity of landlords.⁴ Low castes couldn't walk through roads near temples. Kerala had such inhuman divisions in society in those days.⁵

He became a prolific writer, penning sixteen books in Malayalam and Sanskrit, which criticized societal ills and advocated for women's education and social reform. His works, including "Sivayogarahasya" and "Ananda Sutra," aimed at uplifting women's status and challenging caste prejudices.

Objectives

- 1) To explore the life and teachings of Brahmananda Sivayogi
- 2) To analyze his role in the Kerala Renaissance
- 3) To evaluate his impact on Kerala society
- 4) To examine the relevance of Shivayogi's teachings in contemporary Kerala

Hypothesis

- 1) Brahmananda Shivayogi's teachings and initiatives played a pivotal role in shaping the Kerala Renaissance, leading to significant social, cultural, and educational reforms in the region.
- 2) Shivayogi's emphasis on education and social reform helped to empower marginalized communities, particularly women and lower-caste individuals, in Kerala

- 3) Shivayogi's leadership and vision helped to foster a sense of community and social cohesion in Kerala, which in turn facilitated the region's transition from a traditional to a modern society.

2. Methodology

This essay employs a qualitative research design, focusing on a historical analysis of Brahmananda Shivayogi's life, teachings, and legacy.

3. Literature Review

- Heimsath, Charles H., The Functions of Hindu Social Reformers with Special Reference To Kerala, Indian Economic and Social History Review
- Samuel Mateer, Native Life in Travancore
- Robin Jeffrey, Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908
- C.J.Fuller, The Nairs Today
- Ward and Connor, Memoir of the Survey of Travancore and Cochin States

Brahmananda Sivayogi: A Trailblazer in Challenging Social Norms

Sivayogi delved into philosophy and comparative religion, seeking universal truths. Through religious discourses and writings, he spread his message of peace, unity, and human prosperity. He founded Anandamatha, promoting non-violence, mental strength, freedom of thought, and secularism, while rejecting orthodox beliefs like rebirth, idol worship, and fasting.

He vehemently opposed Brahminical orthodoxy and advocated for social reforms such as widow remarriage, ending the Marumakkathayam system of inheritance, and advocating for prohibition and female education.

Brahmananda Sivayogi established both the Anandamatha and the Ananda Mahasabha, organizations dedicated to combating social injustices. His activism was fuelled by a prolific writing career, producing sixteen books in Malayalam and Sanskrit. These writings served as powerful tools to critique societal wrongs and advocate for progressive change.

Sivayogi's literary works focused on condemning detrimental practices in society while advocating for uplifting women through education. He fearlessly challenged the caste system and other social evils, aiming to pave the way for a more equitable and just society.

Important works of Sivayogi	Year
Sivayogarahasya	1899
Strividyaposhini	1903
Mokshapradipa	1905
Ananda Sutra	1910
Anandasopana	1913
Rajayogaparasya	1914
Anandavimana	1916
Vigraharadhanakhandana	1916
Anandakummi	1920
Anandamataparasya	1923
Anandaganam	1923
Anandadarsa	1927

Brahmananda Sivayogi immersed himself in the study of logic and philosophy, meticulously comparing religious texts from various traditions in search of universal truths. His extensive reading and deep contemplation empowered him to challenge the societal norms that were detrimental to humanity.

Armed with this knowledge, Sivayogi embarked on a mission to spread enlightenment through religious discourses, seminars, letters, and books. His aim was to awaken people to the inherent dignity of all human beings and to inspire them to question and transcend the divisive tendencies of society.

During the feudal era in Kerala, education was strictly denied to women, regardless of their caste or background. Brahmananda Sivayogi boldly advocated for women's education during this time, recognizing its essential role in societal progress.

Sivayogi likened illiterate women to mere cattle, emphasizing the detrimental impact of their lack of education on both themselves and their families. He argued that men could never find fulfillment in life if their wives remained uneducated. According to Sivayogi, educated women possessed the ability to easily impart crucial knowledge to their children, essential for their proper upbringing. He believed that an illiterate woman's inability to understand the correct approach to child-rearing rendered her ineffective as a mother.

Brahmananda who had learned the Vedas and the Upanishads and spent his time in contemplation formed a new philosophy or religion called Anandarsha in 1892. Through the Anandamatha he propagated peace, unity and prosperity for human brotherhood. The fundamental principles of Anandamatha are non-violence, mental power, freedom opinion and secularism. Anandamatha doesn't fasten men in the bondages such as rebirth, heaven, hell, idol worship, fasting etc.

Sivayogi says that the meaning of Brahmins as one born of the Brahma, is used in a general sense, and if this view is accepted, all men are to be called Brahmins. He also rejected all religious orthodox ideas such as soul, god, heaven, and

worship. The Caste Hindu orthodox ideas such as sin, prayer, and idolatry were condemned by him.

Sivayogi championed the cause of social reform among the Hindus by advocating change in the Marumakkathayam system of inheritance, widow remarriage, prohibition of liquor, female education etc.

The personality and teachings of Brahmanada Sivayogi exercised a profound influence on the social life Kerala.

4. Conclusion

Brahmananda Sivayogi, an eminent figure in the annals of Indian history, emerged as a beacon of social reform among Hindus during a time marked by tradition-bound customs and entrenched societal norms. Born in Kerala during the late 19th century, Sivayogi embarked on a transformative journey, dedicating his life to challenging prevailing orthodoxies and advocating for progressive change within Hindu communities. His steadfast commitment to social justice, coupled with his visionary insights, positioned him as a trailblazer in the realm of social reform. This essay endeavors to delve into the remarkable life and enduring legacy of Brahmananda Sivayogi, highlighting his pivotal role in reshaping the cultural and social fabric of Hindu society.

References

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