The credit for Kerala’s unique social progress goes to a host of reformers - Brahmananda Sivayogi, Chattambi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, Vagbhatananda, Dr.Palpu, V.T.Bhattatirippad, Ayyankali, Mannath Padmanabhan, Sahodaran Ayyappan, Vakkan Abdul Khadar Maulavi, Swami Ananda Theerthan, Poykayil Yohannan – all belonged to the 19th century and early 20th century, whose renovative efforts resulted in dynamic changes within their religion and caste. They set in motion ripples that left no section untouched. These eventually coalesced into a social revolution. Of them the outstanding social revolutionaries were Brahmananda Sivayogi, Sree Narayana Guru and Vagbhatananda. They envisaged a bold vision of a society where all people lived as brothers and sisters without caste differences or religious hatred. Like Brahmananda Sivayogi, Sree Narayana Guru and Vagbhatananda, viewed mankind as one and rejected any distinction being made between people on the basis of caste, religion or language and the like. At the same time there are striking differences between them in certain aspects.

Narayana Guru was born in 1856, in the village of Chempazhanthi near Thiruvananthapuram. His father was Madan Asan, a middle level farmer and an Asan or village schoolmaster who was learned in Sanskrit and proficient in Astrology and Ayurveda. His mother was a house wife named Kutti. The child was named Narayanan; the diminutive was ‘Nanu’. Nanu was initiated in learning by the local Nair chief and the village officer Chempazhanthi Pillai. Under the guidance of his father and his uncle Krishnan Vaidyar who was a Sanskrit scholar and an Ayurveda physician of
considerable repute, the boy picked up elements of education in the traditional way. As a child, Nanu was very reticent and was intensely drawn to worship at the local temple. He would criticise his own relatives for social discrimination and the practice of segregating children of lower castes.

In 1881, after some years of advanced learning in Sanskrit, Nanu had to return home with a severe illness, and upon recovery, he decided to start village schools in and around his native village. It is here, for the first time he started imparting knowledge and wisdom to the local children, in particular the children of the depressed and oppressed sections of society. Nanu spent the most part of his early youth assisting his father in teaching the students of his village, and his uncle in the practice of Ayurveda, while devoting the rest of his time for devotional practices. During this period he was known as ‘Nanu Asan’.¹

During his wanderings in pursuit of truth, Nanu Asan happened to meet two important gurus who influenced him rather very deeply. Chattambi Swami influenced Nanu Asan to go deep in to the Vedas and to compose poems in Sanskrit. Under his influence, Nanu Asan composed the ‘Nava Manjari’ or nine stanzas in dedication to Chattambi Swami. The other guru, Thaikkat Ayyavu, taught him yoga. He learned the technique of yoga and even went to the caves of Maruthwamalai in Kanyakumari district to perfect his own practice of discipline.² Those were days of rigorous penance, done in total seclusion. The personality of Nanu bloomed, blossomed and matured here and as an ascetic he attained self-realisation and proper for a Guru. A new phase of life began then and he had learned by practice that which a sage could attain. He wanted to give a practical orientation to the Truth that he had learned.

Sree Narayana Guru mingled with Nairs, Christians, Muslims and Channars with equal love and affection. Among the Ezhavas, Dr. Palpu’s house invariably received him with great regard and played the honoured host to the Sanyasin. Sree Narayana Guru had mastered Muslim mysticism and philosophy in those days and had great regard for the yogic practices of Muslims described by Dara Shuko. Great Muslim scholars in Southern Travancore esteemed him highly. There were Christians who respected him greatly. (The peacock image in the temple consecrated by the Swami at Aruvippuram was the offering of a Christian, Marian Chattambi, who held him in high respect).

The first act of his religious awakening was at Aruvippuram, some 25 km. south of Trivandrum, near a cascade of the Neyyar river in 1888. Narayana plunged in to the water and lifted a stone from the bottom of the river and consecrated it as Shiva lingam with all the formalities including the bathing (abhisheka) of the idol defying the tradition that only a Brahmin priest could perform such religious acts. By installing the Siva lingam, he broke the monopoly of Namboothiri Brahmins to install the idol or murthis or do 'prathishta'. By this act, he sought to convey to the world that Siva for an Ezhava was no different from a Siva for a Namboothiri. He wrote on the wall of the temple his message in verse:

Here is a model abode
Where men live as Brothers:
Bereft of caste difference and
Religious hate.

This was the starting point of his social reform movement, which was not couched in conflict, confrontation or agitation. Instead, it was based on

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3 Kunhappa Murkoth, op.cit., p. 20.
4 Ibid., p. 127.
5 Ibid., p. 20.
6 Kunhappa Murkoth, op.cit., p. 43.
the need to reform peacefully from within. This temple was consecrated for those who were denied access to Hindu temples. Near this new temple, he also founded a monastery (Asram) and formed an organisation for the protection of temple properties and the welfare of the worshippers. It is this organization which later became Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) with hundreds of branches all over Kerala, the biggest social force in Kerala, and the first such organization in India.

Very early, Sree Narayana guru believed that there was nothing wrong with the Sanathana Dharma as enshrined in the Vedas and in the Upanishads, and that the social practices of untouchability and unapproachability did not have any sanction in the Hindu holy books. He therefore took it upon himself the task of reforming the society by peaceful means. His own caste background had made him realise that some of the practices followed by the men of his caste were indeed repulsive. Although untouchables themselves, they too practiced untouchability on other ‘inferior’ castes. They were steeped in superstition and were quite illiterate. They were not conscious of hygiene and were dirty in their habits. Sree Narayana Guru patiently and carefully motivated them on the path of a new life. His reformation was internal at first. He dedicated his knowledge to the needs of social change and human advancement.

The method of his reform was unique in several ways. Immediate thrust was to be on religion and reforming it by shedding unwanted rituals. In Kerala caste differences were so horrible that the untouchables were not allowed to walk through the approach roads to temples. The low casts worshipped gods or demons that were not in the Hindu pantheon. Many devilish acts were performed in the name of worship. Sree Narayan Guru exhorted people to abandon such gods and such worship. He was not against Hinduism. In fact he never attacked any of the upper castes for practicing untouchability or unapproachability. Instead, he told his folk to
mend their ways and means in such a way that the upper caste could treat them as their equals.

After Aruvippuram, Narayana Guru began consecrating temple after temple and was on the move incessantly for about fifteen years. In 1904, Narayana Guru chose Varkala, as the next centre of his public activity. It was here at Sivagiri, that the Guru spent a great deal of his time until his mahasamadhi in 1928. Today the body of the Guru lies buried in the Maha Samadhi Mandir on the beautiful peak of Sivagiri. The Guru set an example of simple life in this asram by washing his own clothes and vessels. The poor were always welcome in his asram and were given free education. He kept himself engaged by sharing the duties of the asram with his fellow mates.

Guru stressed the need for the spiritual and social upliftment of the downtrodden by their own efforts through the establishment of temples and educational institutions. In the process he brushed aside the Hindu religious conventions based upon casteism. Under Guru’s leadership, temples soon sprang throughout the length and breadth of Kerala, Mangalore in Karnataka and in a few places in Tamil Nadu and Sreelanka. Guru consecrated more than sixty such temples in different parts of South India which remained the means of emancipation of millions of people who were denied the primary human right of worshipping in temples of one’s own choice or a God of one’s own choice. Sree Narayana Guru shook the foundations of Hindu orthodoxy by building these temples that were open to all, irrespective of caste. He also opened an Advaita Asram at Aluwa in Central Kerala.

Through the establishment of temples, Narayana Guru brought about three specific steps of reforms. Firstly, he consecrated ‘Hindu Gods’ in place of ‘Dravidian spirits’ and appointed trained and dedicated Sanyasis from the lower strata to function as priests, thus elevating them religiously. He made provisions for schools, reading rooms and garden in the holy precincts of these temples to create an atmosphere of worshipping God with purity of intent.
Secondly, he instructed his followers to build new temples in simple, inexpensive ways so that energy and money could be utilized for useful purposes. He reduced the customarily elaborate and expensive temple worship to a much simpler and shorter form. Regarding the building of new temples, his instructions were: "Temples should not be built in expensive manner as was the custom of ancient days. No money should be spent for elaborate festivals and its pomp..... Adjacent to the temple should be schools and reading rooms. Small scale industrial training schools should also be attached to temples. The offertory at the temple should be used for the welfare of the poor people".7

Thirdly, and most importantly, a notable change is reflected in Sree Narayana Guru’s attitude towards idol worship. He wanted to elevate man to God, to sublimate idolatry to the pure level of abstract virtues, to lead the stem of devotion to the boundless ocean of Brahman, the changeless and imperishable "Tat Tvam Asi" and "Aham Bhramsmi".

The iconoclastic ideology of the Narayana Guru is evident in his consecration of just a lamp, instead of an idol, in the Karamukku temple in Trichur in 1920, saying "Let there be Light". In 1922, he built a temple at Murukkumpuzha and installed, not an idol but a lighted lamp, with the words Truth, Duty, Compassion and Love, displayed in the background, and in 1924, he placed just a mirror in the sanctuary, instead of an idol or an image, in the Kalavankode temple in Chertala which was the last one he consecrated. The mirror is a symbol of the mind. The basic concept is that the one Unitive Essence seen differently owing to the differences in the consciousness of individuals. Self and Reality are one.

In other words, in his worship reforms, Sree Narayana Guru began with personal gods like Siva. Here he embraces the ideology of Rig-Veda: the wise call that one God by various names. One entity functions in different

7 Bhaskaran Dr. T., ed. Sree Narayana Vaikhari (Perumbavoor, 1994), pp. 149, 303, 327.
forms. From personal God, he then gradually moved towards an emphasis of the worship of qualities, and finally arrived at the contemplation of the self as Brahman. In the first category of temples there are regular poojas and festivals; in the second category, no customary poojas or celebrations; and the last category of temples have no idols or images, thus meeting the various levels of emotional and spiritual inclinations of the people from the ordinary to the intellectual. Here is thus the quintessence of Hindu philosophy in action. He is also an example of a man who precisely practised what he publicly preached.

Sree Narayana Guru proposed three essential steps for social progress, namely organization, education and industrial development. Thus began the phase of public work. He proposed organisation as a means to gain strength in the fight against social evils. “Unite and be strong” he told the people. He prescribed education as a means of enlightenment. He arranged the teaching of Sanskrit language and the Vedic texts to non Brahmins who were denied of such learning by orthodox Hindus. He also encouraged the learning of English and encouraged students to go abroad for advanced study. He exhorted the rich to provide for the education of poor children who had an aptitude for learning. He also advocated equal educational opportunities for women. When people asked him to consecrate temples, Sree Narayana Guru sometimes urged them to start schools instead. Education, as he hoped had brought about a tremendous progress of the downtrodden communities in Kerala. One of the inspiring exhortations of Sree Nrayana Guru was: “get freedom through education.”

Sree Narayana Guru was concerned about the economic plight of poor masses. He understood that only through industrial development these people would be able to improve their economic conditions. Therefore, he advised the people to take different kinds of industrial training. “Thrive through industry” was another exhortation. In addition he encouraged the comparatively few wealthy people to start small scale industries. He
commended agriculture and industry as means of betterment.\(^8\) His followers enthusiastically took to productive activity. His chief lieutenant, the great poet Kumaran Asan set up a tile factory in Aluwa. The Guru himself started a weaving center at Varkala to train people in spinning and weaving. Thus, his reforms were directed towards the emancipation of the entire human beings. It was an integrated approach for social development.

Sree Narayana Guru exhorted the lower castes to mend their ways. He forbade animal sacrifice, consumption of liquor and other social evils. Temples where animals sacrificed were simply demolished and newer temples built on the very same spot. But the mode of worship was made simpler and direct without any animal sacrifice. He exhorted the lower castes to go after knowledge and encouraged them to get rid of their superstitions. Further, he promoted the spirit of cooperation and unity amongst them, and instilled in them the need to change for the better.

Sree Narayana Guru propagated his message of social reform through his close associates and the annual meeting of the S.N.D.P. Yogam. The members of the many branches of the association were the agents to spread his message throughout the country. As suggested by the Guru, the S.N.D.P. Yogam engaged good speakers to talk to people about moral and social issues. To them the Guru gave, through the Yogam secretary the guidelines. The Guru exhorted his disciples that the festivals and ceremonies such as 'Thalikettu', 'Thirandukuli', 'Pulikudi' and 'Pulakuli Adiyanthiram' have no Vedic sanction, but were introduced by the priestly class to perpetuate their hegemony. “They are not only irrational: they serve no purpose at all.”\(^9\) People who were convinced of his teachings resolved in 1905 to abolish these customs, wherever possible, or simplify them, where a symbolic retention of the custom is called forth. A new liturgy for the marriage ceremony was drawn and a beginning was made for the first time

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\(^8\) Bhaskaran Dr. T., *op.cit.*, pp. 34-35.

to hold marriages in a simple way in temples or before priests with prayer and worship.

Sree Narayana Guru stressed the need for everyone to serve man as man, first because everyone is a part of ‘humanity’ (there is only one caste, the human caste, and there is only one religion, the religion of man). Secondly Atman, the reality in man, is not different from Brahman, the ultimate reality (there is only one God for man). Sree Narayana Guru could not and did not compartmentalise humanity into groups, according to nationality, religion, language or class. On the basis of this belief, Sree Narayana Guru started a campaign against caste prejudices and religious bigotry. He brought an awareness of human rights and an awakening of a sense of social brotherhood among all sections of society. The people at the lower social strata were craving for social justice and human rights and for them he showed the religious and spiritual path of upliftment. He also showed them the means by which they can attain their own social progress. It was to highlight the fact of the oneness of all religions that in 1924 he held an All Religions Conference at Advaitasram, Alwy.

For nearly forty years, the Guru dedicated his life and knowledge to the needs of social change and human advancement amidst aggressive opposition from high caste Hindus and unfavourable socio-economic conditions. Sree Narayana Guru passed away in 1928 at the age of 74.

Both Sree Narayana Guru and Brahmananda Sivayogi were two great philosophers who endeavoured for the Kerala renaissance movement at about the same time. Through the ‘Aruvippuram Sivalinga Prathishta’ in 1888 and through the authorship of *Sivayoga Rahasyam* in 1893, Sree Narayana Guru and Brahmananda Sivayogi respectively became well-known. The Kerala society played a major role in making both of them the leading persons of Kerala renaissance movement. The reason for these two eminent persons to work for reforming the society was the widespread prevalence of caste and religious prejudices, rituals, superstitions, and social
evils that existed in the Kerala society of that time. The opposition to such practices by the Christian missionaries and British rulers of India boosted their efforts. The feudal set up was in disarray. The work of the missionaries and the spread of English education revealed new horizons and unsuspected avenues of advancement for the down-trodden who were kept muzzled under the feudal social order. It was a period when the rays of Indian Renaissance emanating from Bengal began to spread throughout South India, especially in Kerala. Kerala was ripe for a change in many respects.

Both Sree Narayana Guru and Brahmananda Sivayogi, who were believers of Hinduism and God, reached a newly moulded religious ideology after being engaged in a progressive religious reform movement. They chose Indian philosophy, which consists of Astika and Nastika School of thinking for the realisation of their massage. It was by the explicit influence of the Westerners that they turned to rationalistic anti-religious and progressive reform movement.

There was dissimilarity in the life style and circumstances of Sree Narayana Guru, who hails from Travancore, Princely state of Southern Kerala, and Brahmananda Sivayogi, who was from northern Kerala, Malabar district which was a part of the Madras province, directly under the rule of the British. The caste-based distinctions and the practice of untouchability and other social harassments were more prevalent in Travancore. English education, modernism and sophistication, due to the direct influence of the British culture in Malabar helped even the downtrodden ones to progress. These two renaissance leaders were scholars in both Sanskrit and Tamil. Though Brahmananda Sivayogi had the opportunity to learn English, Sree Narayana Guru had only an indirect exposure to English. As Ayurveda was to be studied as a part of Sanskrit, both were adept in it too. Owing to the attentiveness of his uncle, Krishnan Vaidyar, Sree Narayana Guru had a deeper knowledge of this subject.
Brahmananda Sivayogi was born into a Menon sub-caste of the Nair caste (Sudra), which comparatively held an elevated status in the erstwhile Malabar. But Sree Narayana Guru was born into the Ezhava community whom were branded as Avarnas (outside the caste system) or untouchables. Brahmananda Sivayogi has not undergone the traumas of caste distinction as experienced by Sree Narayana Guru. In Malabar, the members of the Thiyya caste, got opportunities for English education and got employment in Madras Government service under British rule. They also flourished in trade and commerce. Social disabilities based on caste were less stifling.

Sree Narayana Guru, like Sri Buddha, renounced marriage in his early days considering it as an impediment to his asceticism. Though Brahmananda Sivayogi embraced asceticism, he did not deny himself marital life. His marriage did not become an obstacle in his future life since, like Gandhiji; he too brought his wife into his ideological path.

Brahmananda Sivayogi grew in a noble and respected feudal family, had no financial constraints as many of them were high placed officials. His home was a traditional ‘Nalukettu’ with granaries and other stores of wealth whereas the house in which Sree Narayana Guru born, was a small mud walled thatched hut. But the fact that the family had connection with the field of medicine and had moderately good education had influenced Sree Narayana Guru’s growth. In his biography it is noted that one of his senior uncles had knowledge of the performance of Hindu rituals and had erected an idol.10

In his childhood itself, Sree Narayana Guru was of contemplative and restless nature and used to wander like an ascetic in the neighboring places and in the nearby forests. Brahmananda Sivayogi left his native place for the sake of education and occupation. While the city life and the association with

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educated people helped Brahmananda Sivayogi a lot, it was the rustic life that has a profound influence on Sree Narayana Guru.

Though they were contemporaries, owing to this disparity in the living conditions there is ideological difference on many things. Brahmananda Sivayogi was in the forefront in criticism and audacity and had criticising some of progressive institutions of Sree Narayana Guru. In contrast, Sree Narayana Guru had not criticised Brahmananda Sivayogi not even once. He had also extended his support to him. Though Brahmananda Sivayogi erroneously inferred Sree Nrayana Guru, the latter had fully understood him.

In the beginning, both Sree Narayana Guru and Brahmananda Sivayogi were the worshippers of Siva. Brahmananda Sivayogi made it a part of his name. Sree Narayana Guru showed this by setting up the Siva linga. Later on both of them understood that Siva is not a God. They had penned verses in praise of a benevolent God. Though they differed from their earlier stand later on they did not denounce their early works.

Sree Narayana Guru believed that common people can experience God only through idol-worship and faith. Brahmananda Sivayogi did not agree to it. He said that he was a worshipper of God once but when he realised that God was not Saguna (benevolent), he deviated from that path. He maintains that he had not destroyed his earlier works to show that he once had his faith in Temple worship and prayers. He keeps it as a part of history to counter the criticism that he denies ‘Sagunopasana’.\(^\text{11}\)

In the songs written to teach morality to the children of Alathur Middle School and in the works like Jnana Kummi and Pillathalolippu, Brahmananda Sivayogi praises the Almighty. Together with the advice to children to study well, he tells them to remember God. In the first stanza of Pillathalolippu itself, he points out that Brahman is the truth and the child’s father and

\(^{11}\) Brahmananda Sivayogi, *Anandakkummi*, p. 17.
mother too is Brahman.\textsuperscript{12} In \textit{Jnana Kummi}, he praises Siva who revealed the secret of Siva Yoga and who gave him the name Sivayogi.\textsuperscript{13} Sree Narayana Guru had also written hymns in praise of God. He wrote verses intended to worship not one God but many. In the works like \textit{Daivadasakam}, \textit{Daivachinthanam}, \textit{Sivasathakam}, \textit{Guhashtakam}, \textit{Vinayakashtakam}, \textit{Devisthavam}, \textit{Bhadrakalisthavam}, \textit{Sri Vasudevashtakam} he praises not one God but the deities like Siva, Subramanian, Ganapati, Sri Krishna, Devi, Bhadra Kali etc.

Though Sree Narayana Guru and Brahmananda Sivayogi were ascetics, unlike other ascetics and sages, they did not grow long beard and braid their hair, took rigorous penance, and did not enlighten the disciples daily. They wore simple dress: a long piece of cloth normally and some times two. Brahmananda Sivayogi sometimes wore shirts. Both shaved their heads. Sree Narayana Guru sometimes grew stubbles. Rarely did Sree Narayana Guru wear the saffron dress. He was considered an altruistic who worked selflessly for the benefit of the people.\textsuperscript{14} Brahmananda Sivayogi ridiculed the sages who live in the forest with long hair and beard and also the wandering saffron-clad ascetics who, he thinks, do it for the needs of their bowels ("Udaranimitham").\textsuperscript{15}

During the later period, Brahmananda Sivayogi and Sree Narayana Guru had completely different opinion when it comes to faith in God. Brahmananda Sivayogi, based on the strength of logical-reasoning, empirical-experience and authoritative texts, completely rejects the existing concept of God. While saying that God is perceived as a power in the universe he places the Mind in the place of God. Mind is the God since it is the organ that renders happiness. He stresses that there is no God with

\textsuperscript{12} Brahmananda Sivayogi, \textit{Sidhanubhooti}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 117.
\textsuperscript{14} Bhaskaran Dr. T., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 345.
\textsuperscript{15} Brahmananda Sivayogi, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 19.
specific form and the only God that exists is within one’s mind. He criticises that in reality the Advaita followers are dualists.

Sree Narayana Guru unveils his matured concept of God in the book *Daivadasakam*. There is no need to tie his beliefs to his theistic principles as in his early verses. He readily confesses that he is a believer of Advaita philosophy. He visualised God as not of any form or type. He calls God as a blend of diverse elements—inspiration to goodness, a life force and an attainable shelter, a protector of the mankind, truth, bliss, knowledge.\(^\text{16}\)

Through the installation of the mirror he gave rise to the concept “I am the God” (Aham Brahmasmi).

In *Daivadasakam*, when Sree Narayana Guru states that the God is the creator, creation and the tool that aids in creation-process, Brahmananda Sivayogi denies the existence of such a God. “If God is the creator then why did not he make all men equal? Why did He bring about discrimination among men? If He is the father of all, why does he kill his children? Has anyone experienced the physical presence of God in their life?” By raising such questions Brahmananda Sivayogi denies God's existence.

Both Sree Narayana Guru and Brahmananda Sivayogi were born and brought up within the mould of Hindu religion. Therefore both had a firsthand knowledge of its irrational, unscientific and unjust social practices. Unlike Sankaracharya, they did not try to reform this religion build on customs, beliefs, rites and rituals. Brahmananda Sivayogi, on the basis of logical reasoning rejects all existing religions and at the same time established a new religion called the Anandamatha. He argues that since one is born into bliss and one desires bliss everyone belongs to the Anandamatha. He did not adopt the style or mould of the existing religions for his newly found religion. In introducing a new religion, he followed the Carvaka and Buddhist way. He ousted God from the centre and placed the Mind in its place.

Sree Narayana Guru, whereas, criticised all existing established religions and pointed out the darker side of Hinduism. He opposed all the practices that were part of religion such as caste, untouchability, superstitions, irrational way of showing devotion, and cruelty in the name of belief. He argued that the final aim of all religions is the same. More than religious-denial, Sree Narayana Guru extolled for religious solidarity. He welcomed the idea of freedom to choose and discard religions as per one’s choice. He stressed the fact that for spiritual salvation there is no need to accept other religions in place of Hinduism. He was more opposed to the social problems created by Hinduism in the materialistic world. He rejected the religious conversion that began to take place in the Ezhava/Thiyya community. By the word ‘religion’ in the exhortation “one caste, one religion, one God for man” he meant “a human-centered religion that adopts the merits of all other religions”. Brahmananda Sivayogi too rejected the conversion of faith.\(^\text{17}\)

Sree Narayana Guru’s disciple, K. Ayyappan explains his teacher’s thoughts thus: “Swami’s opinion is that all men should live as a single community irrespective of their religion, dress, language etc.”\(^\text{18}\) Ultimately, by “one religion” Guru meant the mankind itself. By the slogan “Whatever be the faith, man should become better” he places man above all things.\(^\text{19}\)

Sree Narayana Guru does not include the atheistic sects when he proposes that all religions are one and the same. In contrast, Brahmananda Sivayogi encouraged atheistic religions. Sree Narayana Guru’s “One religion” and Brahmananda Sivayogi’s “Anandamatha” invoke to see mankind as an entity. They place the human being at its core. Though theoretically, Anandamatha is for all living beings, in the practical level it is for human beings.

\(^{17}\) Brahmananda Sivayogi, *Anandadarsamsam* (Mal.), p. 66.

\(^{18}\) Bhaskaran Dr. T., *op.cit.*, p. 266.

\(^{19}\) *Ibid.*
Brahmananda Sivayogi opposed tooth and nail the practice of idol-worship in temples. He presents numerous arguments against these in the book *Vigraharaadhana khandanam* and other philosophical texts. He considered the practice of idol-worship as superstitious and irrational. He presents his idea not only on the basis of logical reasoning, experience and authoritative texts but also in the light of history.

Sree Narayana Guru became famous after his idol consecration. After the ‘Aruvippuram Sivalinga Prathishta’ he erected idols at various places including Kozhikode, Thalasseri, Varkala, Karamukku, Murukkumpuzha, Kalavankode etc. But it can be noticed that this practice has a history of unprecedented growth. At first, he consecrated idols of God and later on it gave way to lamps, shields inscribed with truths and righteous words, mirrors etc. And in the later period he established temples with no presiding deities. This shows his attitude towards idolatry. It was for the benefit of the lower class community like Ezhavas, Pulayas and Parayas who were forbidden from entering temples that Sree Narayana Guru build temples and set up idols. His justification of the need for temples was this: “Those coming there will be clean and tidy. Their thoughts will be pure and words good. They will remember God. They can breathe fresh air. Some take fasts and other things thereby purifying the mind and the body. For some, their belief cures their ailments. And some has their wishes fulfilled. It all depends on faith. Aren’t all these beneficial? Temple, too, is necessary.” Sree Narayana Guru considered cleanliness and the cure of ailments due to faith and worship as the most beneficial about temples. His statement that temples need gardens and libraries was also a deviation from the present temple-culture. And the idea that there should be facilities for industrial training was revolutionary in nature.

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20 Bhaskaran Dr. T., *op.cit.*, p.108.
“Is there any use of temples engulfed in darkness and stinking with the smell of bats?” he asks from experience. Later, he told not to encourage the building of temples. “For the time being people won’t listen if they’re told there is no need for temples...they are good for making cleaner surroundings. Temples help people to congregate at a place of worship without the thoughts of class distinction. But experience shows otherwise. Temples increase class division.” When this conviction increased, Sree Narayana Guru began to retreat from the act of temple construction.

Sree Narayana Guru advised the people to consider educational institutions as the main places of worship and they should contribute money enthusiastically for its construction. He gave the necessary instructions to implement what he said. He also told that if temples are modeled like the Christian churches it can be used for both worship and to deliver speeches. Sree Narayana Guru believed that a day will come when adoration will be shunned by the scholars and the common men will follow them. Then these buildings can be used for other purposes. Sree Narayana Guru’s efforts were not intended to popularise temples and idol-worship; it was to give the low-class people their denied rights and thereby to acquire their social status. Brahmananda Sivayogi rejected idol worship and temple-oriented culture without any regard for castes and religions. While Brahmananda Sivayogi executed his reformative ideas in a rational revolutionary way, the same was implemented by Sree Narayana Guru in a slow, step-by-step diplomatic way. Brahmananda Sivayogi established Ananda Yogasalas for the practicing and popularising Raja Yoga. Sree Narayana Guru built temples for social reformation and the upliftment of the downtrodden. He projected temples as centres to popularise education and

23. Bhaskaran Dr. T., op.cit., p.213.
24. Ibid.
industrialization. He is remembered today mainly due to the pilgrimage to Sivagiri, Varkala which the devotees undertake every year.

In an effort to reform the backward class like Ezhavas, Sree Narayana Guru removed the idols of local Dravidian deities like ‘Madan’, ‘Yakshi’ etc. and in their place put the idols of Savarna Gods like Siva, Ganapati etc. He stopped the practice of offering fish and meat to the Dravidian deities. In the temples where he consecrated the idols he appointed priests of the backward class and taught them the temple-customs and poojas. This particular incident drew strong opposition from Brahmananda Sivayogi, who directly and indirectly criticised both Sree Narayana Guru and the Ezhavas. Sree Narayana Guru’s act of consecrating a stone which had the least resemblance to the sculptured and polished image of God was radical in nature. Thereby he strongly asserted the right of Ezhavas to erect idols, to build temples and to perform rites, which was monopolised by the Brahmin community. Like ‘Ezhava Siva’, his act of erecting ‘Ezhava Brahmin’ (priest) was not out of respect towards Brahmins; it was because of the elevated social status and recognition enjoyed by them.

Sree Narayana Guru was distressed by the fact that the much oppressed backward class like the Pulayas were prohibited from entering the temples he had constructed. By his act of idol-consecration, though the Ezhava community got the chance to perform temple-worship and social acceptance, the temple authorities had a narrow-minded approach. Superstitions and irrational practices gained more prominence. This was the reason for his withdrawal from idol-consecration and temple making and his emphasis on the building of educational institutions. Brahmananda Sivayogi criticised Sree Narayana Guru’s act of building temples not in the light of pragmatism but on the basis of rationality. That was the reason for his speech at the Kozhikode Town Hall criticising the construction of temples.

Brahmananda Sivayogi rejects the caste system. He argues that the existing castes and sub-castes of Hindu religion are unscientific and baseless, and there is only one caste called ‘Anandajathi’. He sharply criticised the superstitions and irrational practices conducted in the name of castes. Unlike the existing concept of caste, his concept of ‘Anandajathi’ is different. In its outcome both ‘Anandajathi’ and ‘Anandamatha’ are the same.

Sree Narayana Guru criticised casteism, religion, superstitions, irrational practices etc. vehemently. He had direct experience of the sufferings undergone by the members of the community that he was born into. Even though he does not show any particular inclination to that caste in his ideology and in his works, he had his sympathy for their sufferings. But the Ezhavas had proclaimed Sree Narayana Guru as the spiritual master of their community. Even then Sree Narayana Guru criticised and ridiculed the Ezhavas who were uncouth, who tapped toddy and who practiced superstitious rites. He severed his relationship with SNDP after noticing its narrow-minded interests. But his Ezhava / Thiyya followers disparaged him as an Ezhava Guru and exploited his name and fame for communal, economical and authoritarian gains.

By the word ‘caste’ in the exhortation of "one caste, one religion, one God for man" Sree Narayana Guru meant the mankind. He sharply defines caste by these words: “a cow has the traits of a cow, so human beings’ caste is humanism.” 26 Scientifically, he stressed that since one species of living beings gives birth only to that species, all men belongs to a single caste. He ascertains caste on the basis of biology. He quotes, Sage Parasara and Veda Vyasa of the Puranas to prove the meaninglessness of the caste system. He asked a counter question, ‘Can’t you see?’ to the high-class man who enquired him of what caste he belongs. This evidently meant that he belonged to the mankind. “A dog can identify its own species when it sees

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another dog. Only man has doubts regarding his caste,” says Sree Narayana Guru. He continues: “There is no use for caste. It curtails man’s freedom; destroys his intelligence.”

Brahmananda Sivayogi, too, who puts forward the utopian dream of ‘Ananda caste,’ scientifically analyses the prevalent caste system. Man is of one kind. The combination of man and other species of living beings, or between different species of living beings does not create new ones. The offspring are born only to the members of the same species says he in MokshaPradeepam. In effect, this is the same philosophy on caste as of Sree Narayana Guru.

Besides Sree Narayana Guru there was Dr. Palpu and behind them a tired and ailing community waited hopefully. The ideas of Sree Narayana Guru and Dr. Palpu’s matter-of-fact instructions were the factors that helped to cure the Ezhava community. The origin of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam lies in their efforts to project the Guru. During the early period, people belonging to various castes and religions used to attend the SNDP Yogam’s meetings. Not only Ezhavas but members of other communities like the Nairs and the Christians became its members. Prominent among them were Mannath Padmanabhan, leader of the Nair community and K.C.Mamen Mappila, leader of the Christian community and editor of Malayala Manorama.

The ‘Aruvippuram Siva Prathishta’ was for the members of his own Ezhava community who were denied the right to enter temples. His statement that he set up an Ezhava Siva was not intended to establish his caste but to emphasize that Ezhavas too have the right to consecrate idols. The Ezhava/Thiyya community of Kerala desired, through Sree Narayana Guru, to free itself from social slavery. Their persistence and persuasion led Guru to deviate from his ideological path towards the practical. Even though

27 Sanu M.K., op. cit., p. 308.
28 Ibid., p. 309.
he had no belief in temples, idol-worship, rites and rituals he was forced to build temples. He erected idols and instructed the ways of doing pooja ceremonies. But it can be noticed that in the later stages his instructions were the same as that of Brahmananda Sivayogi. By the time of addressing the Sivagiri pilgrims he had become a possessor of a philosophy which was superior both ideologically and pragmatically, and was well suited for the modern age.

Sree Narayana Guru says that the word Ezhava stands to denote the people of a certain country. Since they came from a place called Ezham (Sreelanka) they were called so. He opines that in reality they should be called Keralites. In 1916, in the magazine Prabuddha Keralam he gave a proclamation: “it has been many years since I have denounced the caste distinction. Even then some people of vested interests, who belong to a particular caste, consider me as belonging to their own. And because of that it had resulted in a misconception regarding the truth.” 29 It is because of the doubt that SNDP will become an Ezhava organization that he stipulated that disciples of Aluwa Advaita Asram (Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham) should have a secular outlook.

In a letter written to Dr. Palpu in 1916 he comments that he is going to bid farewell to SNDP since it does not come in terms with his ideology. “Since the decisions of the Yogam are passed without my consent, the concession of it is not on matters concerning me. There is an increase in caste-spirit, which, when I noticed, rejected Yogam mentally, I am now rejecting it verbally.”30 Dr. Palpu too withdrew from SNDP consequently. Sree Narayana Guru has revealed his desire with these words: “I have a great desire to establish a group with no caste. I have said this to many

29 Bhaskaran Dr. T., op.cit., p. 223.
30 Ibid., p. 293.
people. But there is no one to work for it.” He openly confesses that his deeds until then are not at all worthwhile.

In a self-criticising way Sree Narayana Guru points out that he has not succeeded in rooting out caste-spirit completely from his mind, while speaking of his disciple Satyavratha who overcame it much before. Sree Narayana Guru was forced to do things for the benefit of his community. He had given consent to establish S.N.D.P. where Ezhavas were a majority. He bid farewell to it when it became a narrow-minded institution serving vested interests.

But Brahmananda Sivayogi sharply ridiculed caste organizations: “The people who form the Ezhava Samajam and the Nair Samajam are themselves proclaiming that they are non-Brahmins and are of backward class, thereby destroying their eminence and unity”. The main reasons for Brahmananda Sivayogi’s discontent towards Sree Narayana Guru are as follows: temple construction; consecration of idols and encouraging the Ezhava community who were trying to imitate Brahmins. Still, since it has been noted down in history about Sree Narayana Guru’s gradual disagreement and discontent with these, it can be surmised that with regard to caste and religious matters, both Sree Narayana Guru and Brahmananda Sivayogi held almost the same points of view.

The spheres were Sree Narayana Guru and Brahmananda Sivayogi agrees the most are the rejection of caste and the removal of superstitions. Both of them tried hard to remove superstitions & irrational practices that were connected with the belief in temples, religions and God. Both these great men believed in non-violence and raised their voice against the practice of animal sacrifice in temples. Brahmananda Sivayogi exhorted to stop the killing of cocks in the temples. His disciples succeeded in stopping

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31 Sanu M.K., op.cit., p. 346.
32 Brahmananda Sivayogi, Anandadarsam (Mal.), p. 52.
this sacrifice in many temples. Brahmananda Sivayogi has compiled in some of his works, the letters and articles regarding this.\textsuperscript{33}

Sree Narayana Guru, through counsels and instructions, prohibited the animal sacrifice and poojas ceremonies using fish and meat that prevailed among the lower castes. He personally went to temples where cocks were killed, and freed the birds from the altar.\textsuperscript{34} When asked doubtfully ‘what is to be offered in place of cocks, Sree Narayana Guru ironically remarked: “why not the head of the executioner’s son?” \textsuperscript{35}

Sree Narayana Guru strongly reacted against the evil custom of ‘Thalikettu’. He personally went to the place of ‘Thalikettu’ and stopped the ceremony. He forbade them not to continue this. He also worked hard to put an end to superstitions like ‘theendal’, ‘thodil’ etc. He tried hard to gain rights for Pulayas to enter the temples established by him. Through ‘Panthibhojana’ he brought together people of various castes and made them take food together. Often Sree Narayana Guru too sat with them and took food.

Sree Narayana Guru personally stopped the harassment done by ‘Kuttichathan’ at various places. He forbids ‘Chathaneru’ not only on the basis of rationality but also on the basis of belief. With the help of reason Brahmananda Sivayogi rejected such evil practices. While Brahmananda Sivayogi achieved social awareness against these evils mainly through his literary works, Sree Narayana Guru achieved it through his literary writings and practical implementation.

Brahmananda Sivayogi sharply criticised Hata Yoga and accepted and popularised Raja Yoga. He upheld Raja Yoga as the means for an individual to attain salvation. He learned Yoga Vidya, understood it through

\textsuperscript{33} Brahmananda Sivayogi, \textit{Ananda Matha Parasyam} (Mal.), p. 9.
\textsuperscript{34} Sanu M.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 297.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}, p.303.
self-training and took efforts to make it accessible to the common lot. He made it clear that Raja Yoga is more easy and blissful than the Hata Yoga. Brahmamanda Sivayogi pointed out that he has attained blissful state through Hata Yoga but since it is difficult and impossible for everyone to practice it, he is recommending the Raja Yoga or Ananda Yoga. He removed the misconception about Raja Yoga which was practiced confidentially by other sages and spiritual masters for bliss, and made it more widespread.

Sree Narayana Guru practiced Hata Yoga at the beginning. He discontinued it after understanding its futility. In debates he used to criticise and ridicule Hata Yoga. When a Hata Yogi, who after visiting Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, argued that through persistent practices one, can walk over water, Sree Narayana Guru sarcastically replied that the boatman will take you to the other side for one anna ($1/16$ of a rupee). Sree Narayana Guru had not made any significant comment on Raja Yoga or on its benefits. After reading the part on ‘YogaSiddhi’ in Kumaranasan's translation of Vivekananda’s Raja Yogam, Sree Narayana Guru commented thus: “If we take out one eye and put it on the back of the head we can see both sides as well.”

Sense of humour is a fundamental quality needed for great people. Both Brahmamanda Sivayogi and Sree Narayana Guru were gifted with a good sense of humour. Wit, humour and satire are the three degrees of the comic spirit. While Sree Narayana Guru made ample use of all the three, Brahmamanda Sivayogi concentrated more on using pungent criticism in the form of satire. The satirists believe that they can reform the society through criticism and ridicule. Brahmamanda Sivayogi too, made use of satire’s possibilities for social criticism. He mockingly comments that other deities will be down with common cold after having bathed in various liquids for a

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36 Bhaskaran, Dr. T., op.cit., p. 292.
37 Ibid., p. 293.
thousand times in the ceremony for the purification of the idols.\textsuperscript{38} He further mocks: “after being worshipped and worshipped throughout the three seasons with numerous eatables gods like Siva and Vishnu need to be treated for indigestion by the doctors.” \textsuperscript{39}

Sree Narayana Guru’s wit is famous and instances of it have been added by Prof. M.K. Sanu in Sree Narayana Guru’s biography. His wit on Ezhavas has had helped to uplift them through criticism. He had made good use of good natured humour. When he was collecting money, his comment, “Once, we used to run away from money; now, money runs away from us,” is just an instance. Humour used to enter even in his conversations and since humour is contextual-meaning based everyone can not understand it.

Yet other qualities needed for great personalities are poetic skills and compassion. Brahmanna Sivayogi and Sree Narayana Guru were scholars as well as writers. Both were equally proficient in the prose and verse usage. Sree Narayana Guru’s writings in Sanskrit and Malayalam were in the verse form. The lines had the resonance of poetic beauty. The language of his philosophical and social writings is simple and lucid. Since printing technology was not so popular during that time, people learned it by heart and recited it in temples and houses. And it was the rhythmic quality of his hymns that helped people to learn them by heart.

Generally speaking, Brahmanna Sivayogi and Sree Narayana Guru are like the two equally valuable sides of the same coin. Their part in facilitating the Kerala renaissance was exemplary. During the later years, the Malayali’s disregarded the ideologies of these two great men which caused the social and cultural backwardness.

\textsuperscript{38} Brahmananda Sivayogi, \textit{Vigraharadhanakhandanam} (Mal.), p. 13.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
Brahmananda Sivayogi & Vagbhatananda

Vagbhatananda, one of the prominent reformist leaders in the northern part of Kerala was another spiritual mentor who had closer relationship with Brahmananda Siva Yogi. Though he was not popular like Sree Narayana Guru in Kerala, Vagbhatananda had excelled himself in erudition and oratory. It is believed that Vagbhatananda went a step ahead of Narayana Guru in matters of scholarship and oratorical skill. In the beginning he was with Brahma Samajam and later on he established Athmavidyasangham (a School of self awareness) through which he campaigned against drug abuse and caste system. Many including the upper castes attracted and joined in the campaign. According to the observation of E.M.S. Namboothiripad ‘there is no doubt that Vagbhatananda had a vital role in the social development of north Malabar’.40 ‘No other spiritual mentor could ever synthesise theism and denial of justice’ 41 says Sukumar Azhikkode and which is true in every respect. On another occasion while analysing some of the reformist leaders P. Govindapilla concludes “the exceptional greatness of Vagbhatananda Gurudevan lies in the fact that he could affectively link caste and religious reformation with that of nationalist movement.”42 In the view of Vagbhatananda, congress meetings and peasant’s conference are similar in nature to those of literary sessions and Vedanthic sessions.

Vagbhatananda (Vayaleri Kunhikannan Gurukkal) was born in the year 1885 on 27th April at Patyam, in the present Tellichery taluk of Kannur

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41 Sukumar Azhikode, Introduction, Vagbhatanandante Sampoorna Krithikal (Mal.), p. xxiii.
42 Govinda Pilla P., Kerala Navothanam Mathaacharyar, Mathanishedhikal (Mal.), (Thiruvananthapuram, 2003), p. 89.
District which was one of the twenty eight regions of old Malabar. His father Koran Vaidyar was progressive minded with his scholarship in Sanskrit, literary skills and as a practitioner of traditional system of medicine. After the primary education under his father, Kunhikannan started helping his father in teaching. Thus he began to be known as Kunhikannan Gurukkal. Kunhikannan had his higher studies under M.K. Gurukkal and Parambath Rairu Nair who were well known scholars in Tellichery. He always opposed irrational matters that didn’t stand logic and sense. Vagbhananandan went about delivering speeches for propagating the principle of non dualism. The eloquent speeches replete with *Upanishad, Puranas and Bhagvat Gita* of young Kunhikannan Gurukkal attracted people from every walk of life. Kunhikannan also came to be known by another name - V.K. Gurukkal.

It was a period when outmoded practices, superstitions and cast system were in its peek and speeches of Gurukkal were directed against such practices. He didn’t hesitate even to touch a Namboothiri who was practicing untouchability and also went a step further by stopping the practice of Thiyya bride going for the blessing of Namboothiri. Similarly he took out a march in to temples where entry was restricted to lower caste Thiyya and made a troupe, sing mockery songs about Kottiyoor festivities and the irrational practices prevailed there. These kinds of activities made Vayaleri Kunhikannan Gurukkal a notable social reformer in Malabar region. Around the same period he was able to meet Narayana Guru who had come to Tellichery.

V.K.Gurukkal popularity as a scholar spread around and some invited him to Kozhikkode. Manikkam Amma of Kaloor Tharavodu helped him out

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with a room where he could stay. In the up stairs of a building at Karapparmba in Kozhikkode Gurukkal setup a Sanskrit study centre in 1906 named ‘Thatwaprakasika’. During this time Brahma Samaj was becoming strong under the leadership of Dr. Ayyathan Gopalan. Dr. Ayyathan Gopalan was truly a great man who had influenced V.K. Gurukkal in the same way as he had influenced Brahmananda Siva yogi. V.K. Gurukkal’s area of activity was not just confined to Kozhikkode but he was invited to the other parts of Kerala and his speeches were instrumental against casteism and other irrational customs.

It was in 1905 that Kunhikannan Gurukkal first read Moksha-pradeepam of Brahmananda Sivayogi which attracted him towards the ideas and activities of Brahmananda Sivayogi. In 1910 in the auspicious presence of Sree Narayana Guru the ceremony of consecration was performed at Sreekanteswara temple in Kozhikkode. Brahmananda Sivayogi was invited to Kozhikkode by his disciples to speak against idol worship. But Siva Yogi could not complete his speech because of the hue & cry from the side of the idolaters who had come to Kozhikkode town hall where Brahmananda Sivayogi was talking. Having heard about it through some of his students, V.K. Gurukkal spoke in a meeting at Kundupparambu against idolatry.45

V.K. Gurukkal pointed out the meaninglessness of idol worship even in those meetings convened by Brahma Samaj. Following which Brahmananda Sivayogi invited him to his asram in Alathoor where V.K. Gurukkal became a disciple of Brahmananda Sivayogi. Impressed with the ideals of Brahmananda Sivayogi V.K. Gurukkal tried his best to spread them to the public. Rajayoga was also propagated through the eloquent speeches of Gurukkal. In 1911 ‘Rajayogananda Kaumudi Yogasala’ was set up at Kallai in Kozhikkode and another one was at Nadakkavu. Gurukkal once defeated a non-Kerala scholar in logical arguments at Calicut following which

45 Ramakrishnan Patyam, op.cit., p.39. Also see Pavithran K.K, Vagbhathanandan Atmeeya Himalayathil (Mal), (Chingavanam, 1995), pp. 43-44.
Brahmananda Sivayogi had sent a poem congratulating him and addressed him by the name of Vagbhatananda for the first time ever.\textsuperscript{46} Since then he came to be known as Vagbhatananda.

The speeches Vagbhatananda made in famous temples like Kottiyoor and Kodungalloor were edifyingly well known. ‘Sivayogi Vilasam’ monthly journal founded in 1914 by him was indeed a memorial to the strong relationship between Brahma\nanda Sivayogi and Vagbhatananda. Vagbhatananda went on a journey from Mangalore to Madras addressing meetings on the way and he spoke highlighting the magazine.

Poems he wrote in 1914 very well manifest his attitude. Even while being a disciple to Brahma\nanda Sivayogi he was a theist in the depth of his mind. These poems also tell us how far he has been influenced by Raja Yoga.\textsuperscript{47} Poems like \textit{Iswara Vicharam}, \textit{Daiva vichinthanam} narrate the greatness of God but \textit{Rajyogananda Gita}, \textit{Darsanam} and \textit{Yogamrutham} describe the experience derived from Raja Yoga. He has always given the credit to Brahma\nanda Sivayogi for initiating him in to Raja Yoga. \textit{Yogamrutham} says that one can attain peace if one follows the path of the Guru.\textsuperscript{48} Vagbhatananda fully subscribes to the view of Brahma\nanda Siva Yogi when Sivayogi says death is inevitable. If one focuses more on ones mind as per the ideal propounded by Vedas and science one can attain redemption. The poem \textit{Darsanam} pays great respect to the Guru who brought him to this spiritual height.\textsuperscript{49} Rajyogananda Gita is another poem which states about the ecstasy one obtained through Rajayoga when one becomes god himself without dualism or non-dualism. During this period he was more in to the vision and the ideals propounded by Brahma\nanda Siva

\textsuperscript{46} Ramakrishnan Patyam, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{47} Vagbhatanandanand, \textit{Adhyatma Yuddham or Anandadarsa Praduamsanam}, (Cannanore, 1981). Reprint, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{49} Vagbhatanandanand, “Darsanam” (Mal.), \textit{op.cit.}, pp. l,177.
Yogi than being a theist.\textsuperscript{50} The speeches of Vagbhatananda were instrumental in changing the people towards socio-religious reforms. Vagbhatananda had a large number of disciples not only in the northern part of Kerala but in the rest like Alappuzha, Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram. Of them prominent were Padmanabha Panicker from Puthenthoppu (later Swami Aryabhatan) and Kochukesavan Asan (later Swami Samanthabhadran). P.Swamikutty (who was a disciple of Brahmananda Sivayogi) was always found with Vagbhatananda.

It was in 1914 that Vagbhatananda during his Travancore trip paid a visit to Sree Narayana Guru. The conversation followed between these two great minds was remarkable in the sense that Vagbhatananda was the disciple of Brahmananda Sivayogi. Subsequently Narayana Guru asked Vagbhatananda to deliver a speech for which Narayana Guru himself had chaired. The speech, which touched up on Rajayoga and opposition to idol worship impressed Narayana Guru. The sweetly humorous remarks of Narayana Guru have gone down in history. The text of the conversation between them was published in \textit{Sivayogi Vilasam} magazine.\textsuperscript{51} This conversation had its impact on Narayana Guru as well. Probably this had influenced him to deviate from setting up temples. Elimination of superstitions, caste system, fight against irrational customs and propagation of non violence were the high light in the social reform processes initiated by Brahmananda Siva Yogi.

Even before becoming the disciple of Brahmananda Sivayogi Vagbhatananda too was keen on eliminating such social evils, ‘Ēttu‘\textsuperscript{52} and ‘māttu’.\textsuperscript{53} The land lord and local rulers used to disallow ‘māttu’ in order to take vengeance upon some individuals or some family. If the ‘māttu’ is

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[50] Vagbhatanandan, “Rajayogananda Gita”, (Mal.) \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 175-176.
\item[51] \textit{Sivayogi Vilasam Masika}, July September 1914. N. pag.
\item[52] Sprinkling water as an act of purgation in connection with birth and death
\item[53] A cloth given to ladies during their menstrual period by the Vannan caste as an act of purgation.
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denied to them they could be treated out-caste. Vagbhatananda succeeded in organizing youths against this practice. This went a long way in laying foundation for further social reforms in Northern Kerala.

At around 1915, a great spiritual transformation took place in the life of Vagbhatananda. All biographers unanimously agree on this incident, but they differ regarding the year. In Kozhikode, after attending a religious conference and delivering his speech, Vagbhatananda had a long conversation with an anonymous scholar-saint by the sea-side, who gave Vagbhatananda a counsel on the soul. After many years again they met at Kanyakumari and shared an idyllic time together.

Anyway the poems written by Vagbhatananda from 1915 onwards were entirely different from that of 1914. An example is the poem *Iswara Vicharam* written in 1915, in which there is a reflection of the main argument he puts forward in later years in the books *Athmavidya, Adhyatmayuddham*, and in many of his articles to rivet the belief in God. At dusk, he tells, the phenomenon of the setting sun and the star-lit sky implies the greatness of God. In the poem without any base or support he says that the real greatness of God lies in instilling the heavenly beauty on earth and providing the divine awareness and happiness to the world. In the last lines he implores God to guide those “who shamelessly does foolish acts, due to the blindness of ignorance, and who arrogantly think they are the only scholarly and righteous person on the earth.” He requests the Almighty to lend him strength to succeed in his efforts against the crooked path of the wicked and the haughty.

From here onwards it is understood that Vagbhatananda had begun to diverge himself from Brahananda Sivayogi in words, thoughts and actions and began to criticise the views of Sivayogi. The reason may be the companionship of the aforementioned anonymous scholar-saint. Though

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54 Ramakrishnan Patyam, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.
the exact counsel given by him is not known his belief in the greatness of God in instilling the heavenly spheres may surely be one of the topics.

*Manasachapalya Samanam*, written in 1916, is a compilation of Vagbhatananda thoughts during the transition period from a supporter of ‘Anandamatha’ to the establishment of ‘Asthmavidya Sangham’. The poem is about the instability of his mind during the period of transformation from atheism of Brahmananda Sivayogi to complete theism—an influence of his new teacher. It is also a reflection of a period when the fear of mortality affected his mind. Vagbhatananda may have dreaded to embrace the ‘nothingness’ after one’s death in accordance with Brahmananda Sivayogi’s materialism. The visible reason for his ideological change is the same as stated in *Asthmavidya* and *Adhyatmayuddham*. Towards the last part of the poem he advises his mind to pray to God who is “Ekam parath paratharam purusham” [one that exists in many forms] and to understand the principle of self-liberation of the spirit. The mind which journeys from Brahmananda Sivayogi’s theory of ‘non-existence of God’, to the Advaita philosophy, the preaching of Bhagavat Gita and the principle of ‘Tatvamasi’, ultimately reaches the universal being. We can see a Vagbhatananda who embrace God ardently in place of contempt towards Him.

Vagbhatananda may have felt that it is better to attain fame in society by forming one’s own ideas and principles, rather than to be known as ‘a disciple of so and so’. The provoking nature of Brahmananda Sivayogi with his self-praise, pride, redundancy, narrative style, verses which lack imagination, intolerance towards his opponents may have angered Vagbhatananda. In *Mangala Slokangal*, written in 1917, the universal being is praised.

In 1917, Vagbhatananda founded the Asthmavidya Sangham and by 1920 it had its branches in different parts of Kerala. In 1921, it published a journal by name *Abhinava Keralam*. “Awake! Pray to the Lord of the

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Universe! Arise now itself, and oppose injustice!” was its motto. Vagbhatananda’s approach was to resist injustice by emphasizing theism. In the poem “Swathanthra Chinthamani” written in 1921, the manifesto of ‘Athmavidya Sangham’ is clearly proclaimed. Through this poem he extols to shackle the ‘social-demon’ of caste-system and to wipe out traditional evils like idolatry. Together with that he advocates to “make God our constant companion”.57

He wrote many articles which clearly ascertain him as a literary critic as well as a scholar. He wrote numerous poems and prayers which were visionary and at the same time had poetic-beauty. May be it was under the influence and motivation of the anonymous scholar-saint that became consequential in Vagbhatananda’s formation of the ‘Athmavidya Sangham’ and his alienation from Brahmmananda Sivayogi. Some personal incidents too must have been behind this change over. Late Nirmalananda Yogi, who headed the Alathoor Siddhasram following Brahmmananda Sivayogi and Yogini Matha, told that the reason for the fallout was the racially discriminating remark used against K.P. Karuppan, another disciple of Brahmmananda Sivayogi.58 Though Vagbhatananda considered Brahmmananda Sivayogi as his teacher, ideologically the master and the pupil began to separate themselves.

A firm advocate and practitioner of Advaita philosophy—the pillar stone of Indian Philosophy— Vagbhatananda firmly believed that only the teachings of sages who authored the Advaita and Vedanta texts can solve humanity’s infirmities. The concept of Mind being the only supreme object in the human body is a direct denial of the existence of the soul. Other than the mind, there exists another phenomenon that stimulates the mind and is the seat of wisdom. It is the soul which can be alternatively called ‘the light of the

57 Vagbhatanandan, Mangala Slokangal. op.cit., p.183.
57 Vagbhatanandan, Swathanthra Chinthamani. op.cit pp.165-169.
58 Interview with Nirmalananda Yogi, 12th September 2004, Siddhasrama, Palakkad.
intellect’ or as ‘the source of intellect’. Vagbhatananda was bewildered when this soul-denial came from his teacher, Brahmnananda Sivayogi.59 When he became sure that the cool water supplied by Brahmnananda Sivayogi is insufficient to quench his thirst for knowledge within, Vagbhatananda began to distance himself.

But that relationship ended not just by alienation and divergence from the master’s path but to a situation where the master was disparaged and treated with contempt. The magazine Sivayogi Vilasam, started as a token of respect for Brahmnananda Sivayogi, was renamed Sivayoga Vilasam. In 1927 he wrote a booklet by name Adhyatmayudham or Anandadarsa Pradhvamsanam to condemn the ideas of Sivayogi. On a close examination of this work it becomes clear that it is a critical-retort to Brahmnananda Sivayogi’s Anandadarsam. Adhyatmayudham was an intentionally created, unilateral challenge. Vagbhatananda proclaimed that he was going to write a critique the very day he came across Anandadarsam. He openly challenged Brahmnananda Sivayogi to face a scholarly tribunal with him and expressed hope that Brahmnananda Sivayogi would write a reply to his critique if it was published. Before long, Adhyatmayudham was published. But Brahmnananda Sivayogi, whether out of affection for his disciple or disinterestedness to compete with a debater like Vagbhatananda, did not come to the defense of his work even though he could have easily break the immature critical arguments raised by Vagbhatananda.

Nevertheless, it can be noticed that this incident had inflicted a deep wound in Brahmnananda Sivayogi’s mind. In the poem Jnana kummi, which was a later addition to the collection, Siddhanubhuthi,60 there is an

59 Ramakrishnan Patyam, op.cit., p.47.
60 Not written together with Siddhanubhuthi in 1903 as there is a reference about Mokshapradeepam published in 1905 in this poem.
undertone of a curse; a result of the mental agony caused by Vagbhatananda’s actions.61

In the first edition of *Adhyatmayudham* the author's name was not specified. It was only in the second edition, published in 1981 that Vagbhatananda’s name was mentioned as the author of the work. Swami Sadananda Saraswati, who wrote the preface to the second edition, only said, “I intently read the book *Adhyatmayudham* or *Anandadarsa Pradhvamsanam* published by K. Ramunni Vaidyar.” In *Adhyatmayudham* the author’s name was not mentioned; it contained only the name of the publisher—K. Ramunni Vaidyar,” remarked Sukumar Azhikkode.62 The proposed Ramunni Vaidyar is his father’s uncle. Still, anyone reading *Adhyatmayudham* has no problem in identifying the authorship. At that period, no one, but Vagbhatananda, was competent enough to write such a book. Swami Brahmarvata, who copied the manuscript of *Adhyatmayudham*, himself admit this fact about Vagbhatananda in the latter’s biography. “Though he diverged and took a different path from Brahmamanda, as a respectful acknowledgement of their former relationship, Vagbhata modestly refused to put his name,” argues Azhikkode.63 The reprinted edition of Adhyatmayudham came out only in 1981, though it was first published in 1927—after a period that equaled the lifetime of Vagbhatananda. A third edition is unheard of. The significance of the book can be inferred from this. In contrast *Anandadarsam* and *Mokshapradeepam* were reprinted and sold out many times over.

After his fallout with Brahmananda Sivayogi, Vagbhatanandan laboured hard to eradicate superstitions and evils from the society under the banner ‘Athmavidya Sangham’. Even when extolling the existence of God, he opposed irrational religious beliefs. Not only through speeches, but also

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63 Ibid., p. Lii.
by means of practical activities he worked for his goal. He encouraged inter-
caste dining and inter-caste marriages. He vehemently opposed the practise
of ‘untouchability’ and conducted campaign against intoxication. In order to
stop animal-sacrifice in temples he took his agitation inside the temple
premises. His brave efforts against idolatry are also worth mentioning. He
expounded to rally with Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom struggle. He took a
leading part in the Temple-entry Satyagraha at Guruvayoor. He also had an
affinity towards socialism.

Though Vagbhatananda accepted and spread almost all principles of
Brahmananda Sivayogi except non-belief in traditional God and was
particularly bending upon opposing him, he expressed his condolence on his
teacher’s demise through these words: “He stood against social evils without
any fear of the oppressors. He used his weapon, which is his pen, forcefully
and wisely against the ramparts of unrighteousness. He wrote excellent
books like Mokshapradeepam and Ananda sootram which equip even the
common man of Kerala with necessary knowledge and skill to resist evils.
He motivated his adversaries to awake, untie and go through the treatises
like Upanishads and Bhagavat Gita which hitherto lay in rusted bookshelves
unattended. One way or the other, he made both his supporters and
antagonists enthusiastic. Such a true-spirited endeavourer and great
personality was Brahma
ananda Sivayogi.”

Vagbhatananda died on October
29, 1939 at the age of fifty-
four.

The ideals of Vagbhatananda are to be analysed for a comparative
study with the thoughts of Brahma
ananda Sivayogi. Brahma
ananda Sivayogi,
with the strength of logical-reasoning, empirical-experience and authoritative
texts, extols to get rid of superstitions, including the belief in God, and to
consider Mind as the only God. Through his writings, he advocates a
religious cult called the ‘Anandamatham’, as a solution for everyone’s
longing for contentment. He instructs people to realize that the best and only

64 Editorial, Atma vidhya Kahalam, Kanni 9, 1105 (ME).
way to happiness in life till death is through Raja Yoga. He also wrote on the need to root out caste system. Vagbhatananda was interested in his ideologies and became his disciple. For about 5 years, he actively conducted speeches and seminars and tried his best to project and propagates the theories of ‘Anandamatha’. But later he digressed from it and took ‘Athmavidya’ as the main ideology and became a strong critic of Sivayogi.

Vagbhatananda was mainly attracted by the Advaita philosophy. He extols to revere the Lord of the Universe and to oppose injustice. Though he preaches that both the Soul and the Spirit are one, he believed in their separate existence. He puts forward the dictum, “the Soul is Supreme”—contradictory to Brahmananda Sivayogi’s “the Mind is Supreme”. Nevertheless, he embraces the other ideologies of the latter.

Vagbhatananda too, like Brahmananda Sivayogi, believed in the talent of man. Both of them agree the existence of a dormant power buried deep within oneself. While Sivayogi calls it ‘Sakti’, Vagbhatananda calls it the ‘Soul’. The disciple accepts his teacher’s notion that everybody yearns for happiness. They equally concur that controlling the mind will give serene happiness and to get it, Raja Yoga is the best method. For this, rigorous torture of the physical body is unwanted; just deep meditation is enough. Both of them were strongly opposed to idolatry, animal sacrifice and drug abuse. They resolutely condemned the social evil of casteism and fought tooth and nail against the practise of untouchability. They believed in love and righteousness. Both of them reacted against the hollowness of ascetics and the god-incarnates and stressed the need for knowledge. They advocated that Rajayoga can be practised even by the layman and it neither demand any form of strenuous lifestyle nor does it have any adverse effects.

It was by accepting almost all the teachings and principles of his ‘guru’, Brahmananda Sivayogi that Vagbhatananda wrote the book Atmavidhya and executed it through the ‘Atmavidhya Sangham’. Still they had a different viewpoint when it came to the most mundane thing:
Brahmananda Sivayogi stood for materialism, and Vagbhatananda, spiritualism. Though they stood together for reforming the society, they were poles apart in matters of faith.

Brahmananda Sivayogi took logic, experience and authoritative texts as the criterion for the denial of God. A logical contemplation proves the non-existence of God. There is no doubt that a man reading his *Mokshapradeepam* and other works will apply reason in his thoughts and will become an atheist. He says there has been no appearance of God, in any form or shape, until now in any man’s know-how. Brahmmananda Sivayogi quotes from the great philosophical texts—the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, the Bhagavat Gita etc.—in order to underline the absence of God. In his books, he vehemently declares that the faith in God is yet another form of superstition, like idolatry and caste–religion endorsement. He denounces the concept of a life-after-death, as well as the theory of rebirth.

Vagbhatananda’s belief in spiritualism is based on the fear of death. In place of logic and experience, Vagbhatananda takes imagination, authoritative texts and debate as the norm. There is no dearth of principles to support spiritualism in the philosophical texts of India. Being a good debater, Vagbhatananda has no difficulty to succeed with topics like God, Soul, theory of rebirth etc. Moreover, since he is a romantic poet, it is easy for him to present things related to God laced with imagination. But things established by Brahmnananda Sivayogi, with the help of logic and experience, remains untouched by Vagbhatananda. What surprises us is his rationalistic approach to traditional dogmas and superstitions with the exception of faith in God. He logically thinks and acts on issues like animal sacrifice, idolatry, untouchability and contradictions in caste and religion. Vagbhatananda diluted the scientific theories of Brahmmananda Sivayogi, and in place of a principle based on reason and logic, he reinstalled one based on superstition.
More often than not, the theists are superstitious. With the exception of subjects like the soul, the spirit, God, reincarnation etc., Vagbhatananda too, like Brahmananda Sivayogi opposes irrationalities. He was more eager to eradicate idol-worship than his teacher. He says to idol-worshippers: “If you have no choice, then go, pluck some grass, and feed the cows. Then, surely, you will gain virtue.” 65 He regarded Siva, Vishnu, Brahma, Subramanian, Ganapathi and other deities not as divine beings but as historical and mythological figures.66 He states: “When encased in faith, even grass and cow dung are considered sacred and placed on high pedestal.”67 Vagbhatananda opines that Sri Rama’s aggression was against the Buddhists during his sacrificial-expedition; Asuras or the demons were the followers of Buddhism, and the destruction of Lanka was due to his hostility towards Buddhists and Saivites who were about to get into an alliance. Here Vagbhatananda had adopted analytical and rational approach of Brahmananda Sivayogi and Sree Narayana Guru.

Vagbhatananda’s belief in the doctrine of rebirth was one of his significant discrepancies from that of Brahmananda Sivayogi. In 1935, he brought out a pamphlet in opposition to the anti-rebirth standpoint. ‘Punarjanmam’ [rebirth] was a counter to the pamphlet ‘Punarjanmam Illa’.(no rebirth).Argumentatively, he breaks through opposing points-of-view and firmly establishes his position regarding the theory of reincarnation. He points out that great persons like Buddha, Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, etc., were people who believed in reincarnation. The arguments that Vagbhatananda puts in order to support his theory sounds immature when compared to that of Brahmananda Sivayogi. For instance: “We notice that a new-born baby craves to drink milk from the mother’s breasts. If this craving is due to some form of reminiscence, which in turn is the result of some previous experience, and if it is certain that experience is not gained in this

65 Vagbhatanandan, Atmavidhya (Mal.), p. 762.
66 Ibid., p. 751.
67 Ibid., p. 752.
birth, then it is clearly proved and has to be accepted that it is gained from an earlier birth. There is no need to say that the physical body is taken by one who has been breastfed in his earlier life, but as one nourishes the body by absorbing nutrients."  

The chief criticism and rebuke leveled against Brahmamanda Sivayogi comes in Vagbhatananda’s *Adhyatmayuddham* or *Anandadarsa Pradhwamsanam*. Vagbhatananda begins his attack on Brahmamanda Sivayogi by calling him ‘Pompous Swami Brahmamanda’. It is the foremost disparaging comment against him. Brahmamanda Sivayogi himself admits in his works about this derisive remark. He explains why he is being called so. He says: Oh, prideful religious-upholders! You can call an iconoclast opposing caste–creed–idol-worship by whatever name you please: Buddha, a padre, or a Tipu Sultan. If not enough, you can consider me as one who derides morals or traditions or Hinduism, or as a person who is a blasphemer or an atheist. If still not enough, call me arrogant or vainglorious. I am someone who desires to confer happiness on people of all faiths—by uniting them under one roof of Anandamatha, thus ending the squabbles of all faiths in the name of diverse faith…. Therefore, religious-superiors ought not to be irascible when the vices of their religion are pointed out. Instead, they should patiently read and contemplate on my books, so that they can relieve from religious grief and can gain happiness."  

Vagbhatananda uses grandiloquent words in order to criticise Brahmamanda Sivayogi in *Adhyatmayudham*. All through the text, he adopts a style that reflects mockery, intolerance and personal hatred. He tries to nail down unscientific arguments with his scholastic and rhetorical skills.

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“The institution of Brahma
nanda Sivayogi, that invites the common
people to blind-ignorant and naked atheism, that too in front of the watchful
eyes of the intelligentsia,—the degenerated establishment known by the
name, Anandamatham—ought to be checked. Its very foundations should be
demolished in such a way that it will never rise again; as if stamped out by
the feet of time. It has now become expedient to take up the pen to achieve
this end”, 71 so says Vagbhatananda. Evidently, in order to criticise the
‗haughty‘ Brahma
nanda Sivayogi, Vagbhatananda adopts an equally
degraded tone reflecting arrogance, bigotry, and sheer contempt. He does
not even display a respect worthy to an opponent. In place of matured and
noble language that suits a spiritual-scholar he chooses sub-standard words
that befit a political speech.

All the ideas subjected to Vagbhatananda’s criticism had been written
in Mokshaprideebham in 1905, and which had greatly influenced him earlier.
To take an opposing stance and criticise it, after all these years, is nothing
but vainglorious and intolerant attitude. The way Vagbhatananda deals with
Brahmananda Sivayogi’s argument—if belief, like lust, is inherent in man,
then surely, everyone will worship God—seems immature, even with all his
debating skills. Since everyone loves to be happy by birth, and since
happiness is God, then he asserts that faith too is inborn. Here also,
Vagbhatananda seems to forget the contextual meaning of the term ‘God‘ as
used by Brahmananda Sivayogi

Brahmananda Sivayogi, Sree Narayana Guru and Vagbhatananda
had written verses long before they became famous. A monotheistic
believer, Sree Narayana Guru had written devotional-songs in praise of Lord
Siva, God Subrhamanya and Goddess Kali. In the later days Sree Narayana
Guru had said that most probably Siva belonged to the Maravan
community. 72 Sivayogi, though he carries Siva in his name, does not

71 Vagbhatanandan, Adhyatma yuddham.p.xi.
72 Bhaskaran Dr. T., op.cit., p.102.
consider him as God, in the later days. Ironically, it was Vagbhatananda who pointed out the elegance of the term ‘Uma’ which Brahmananda Sivayogi used in *Mokshapradeepam*. Interestingly, the same Vagbhatananda mocks at his curious use of verse form as prayers to worship the mind. “It is now evident that our Swami is interested in prayers. Those who are intelligent pray in order to sustain ideas of pure ends; but our teacher prays for strength to commit aggression against traditional institutions-of-righteousness. That is the only difference. Siva! Siva!”\(^{73}\) Is it not possible to question Vagbhatananda’s use of Siva’s name since he had earlier exclaimed that Siva is only a historical figure?

The theory of Vagbhatananda regarding God does not agree with that of Sivayogi. The intention of Sivayogi was to reveal the facts to ignorant people and enlighten them. His criticism of God is not convinced by Vagbhatananda in its real sense. The ideas that Vagbhatananda brings up (in addition to that of Brahmananda Sivayogi) are superstitious and utopian in outlook. Vagbhatananda who accepts the reality of spirit, reincarnation, a benevolent God, faiths etc. are equally superstitious. Vagbhatananda’s counsel for virtuous conduct—denounce desire, develop patience; censure arrogance, do not sin; be honest, be humble; and be compassionate towards the needy—are difficult to adhere to in the realistic world. They are the essentials which are good to hear but not practicable. These are the interpretations of the philosopher-poet Barthruhari, written in the form of counsel.\(^{74}\) Hence, it seems that there is neither any original thought nor any philosophical treatise fully attributable to Vagbhatananda.

From the aforementioned examples it is unquestionably proved that *Adhyatmayuddham* is a work which lacks a solid base and finesse: it is just an intentional effort of the intolerance of the spiritual-leader to attack atheism. In the book, it has been written that God is to be worshipped not

\(^{73}\) *Adhyatma Yuddham*, p38.

when you are in the sick-bed nor in old age, but when you are young and fit; otherwise one will reap its negative effects. This seems a very immature reply to Brahmananda Sivayogi’s often reiterated statement that God is not a judge or policeman out there to punish people; the ‘exalted-intelligence’ of Vagbhathananda who gave such a retort is not commendable.

When the three-leaders of renaissance—Brahmananda Sivayogi, Sree Narayana Guru and Vagbhathananda—are compared it is to be noted that, amongst them, it was Sree Narayana Guru who was the humblest, sagacious, witty, social reformer as well as a humanist. In Brahmananda Sivayogi, modesty is replaced by self-praise and arrogance, as the striking expression. Sheer contempt and charlatanism ruled Vagbhathananda. Sree Narayana Guru deeply influenced the hearts of his followers through his matured words, calm expression and aptly placed wit. Brahmananda Sivayogi got married and brought his wife into the path of asceticism and made her his consort in every sense of the word. Sree Narayana Guru forsook his marriage and embraced the life of a monk. As for Vagbhathananda, he led a purely sensuous life; after his first marriage, he married a second time and led a familial life with children.

Though there is an abundance of derision and mockery in the works of Brahmananda Sivayogi and Vagbhathananda, due to the dearth of humour it cannot be regarded as satirical. When Koyi Thampuran of Harippadu Kovilakam introduced himself, Vagbhathananda humorously replied that he was a ‘Kurukkan Thampuran’ from Malabar. It reminds us of Sree Narayana Guru’s witty remarks on several occasions. [It is to be noted that Koyi or Kozhi means ‘hen’ and “Kurukkan”, ‘fox’, in the vernacular.]

Sree Narayana Guru, Brahmananda Sivayogi, and Vagbhathananda—all three were involved in social reformation and modernisation of Kerala. It was Sree Narayana Guru who was active in the practical work. The reason for this was the caste and the place of his birth. He was indirectly consequential in the uplifting the status of Ezhava community. Although
Vagbhatananda too was born into this community, social injustices were less prevalent in the Malabar area under the British rule. His activities were restricted to the elimination of evil practices like the “Ettu, Māttu” etc. Still it was Vagbhatananda who was more active in public arenas and highly-accepted through his speeches than Brahmananda Sivayogi. Though a Sudra, Brahmananda Sivayogi had only a limited first-hand experience of cruel social discrimination as his birth place Palghat came under Malabar circle. While Sree Narayana Guru actively participated in the implementation of his ideas and Vagbhatananda through his speeches, it was mostly through his writings that Brahmananda Sivayogi became involved in the social reformation movement.

It was through the medium of prose and verse that the three social reformers communicated their visions and principles to their followers and the general populace. But the foremost amongst them in terms of poetic skills was Vagbhatananda, than Sree Narayana Guru, and lastly, Brahmananda Sivayogi. Brahmananda Sivayogi’s prose is better than his verse. Almost all poems of Vagbhatananda are both creative and lyrical at the same time.

Both Sree Narayana Guru and Brahmananda Sivayogi stand close when it comes to principles. While traveling in order to spread the message of Brahmananda Sivayogi, Vagbhatananda met Sree Narayana Guru. He questioned Sree Narayana Guru on his stand on idolatry. Sree Narayana Guru openly confessed that he was not a supporter of idol worship and is on their side. Since Vagbhatananda was Brahmananda Sivayogi’s disciple, Sree Narayana Guru meant that he too agreed with Brahmananda Sivayogi’s views. Sree Narayana Guru agrees that his disciple Sahodaran Ayyapan’s slogan—“No need for caste, religion and God for man.”— is equal to his views. It is only in the means which carries out their ideas that Brahmananda Sivayogi and Sree Narayana Guru differs, and the latter had clearly stated the reason behind it.
Whereas Vagbhatananda has unity with Brahmananda Sivayogi’s views practically, deviates from the latter are principles in the plane of thought. Sree Narayana Guru, when he says “one caste, one religion and one God for man” meant “human caste, human religion and God inherent in man.” Brahmananda Sivayogi goes to a deeper-level when he advocates for Ananda Jathi, Ananda Matha and mind as the God for all. But Vagbhatananda, by excluding these, yearns to establish that the soul is supreme. When thinking reasonably it can be noted that Brahmananda Sivayogi stands first ideologically and practically and Sree Narayana Guru who had his share of slip-ups in the pragmatic level comes second, Vagbhatananda who is far back ideologically comes last. But historians and scholars, who rank Vagbhatananda as the principal one among leaders of the renaissance movement, have failed to infer correctly the position of Brahmananda Sivayogi.

 Mostly it is the disciples who later become a bane for the teachers. The pupil of eminent spiritual thinkers and visionaries, who themselves are known so, contributes to reduction of their teachers’ name and fame as well as their significance by standing against their ideas and visions. What Vagbhatananda did was to become the disciple of Brahmananda Sivayogi and to adopt almost all his ideas and then, rectify his main principle. Thus he reduced the credibility of his master. The Brahmin-sect, in order to destroy Buddhism, adopted the latter’s main principle of ‘non-violence’ by abstaining from taking meat. Likewise, the original and ingenious ideas of Brahmananda Sivayogi on Rajayoga and the Mind was borrowed and made an integral part of Adhyatmayuddham by Vagbhatananda, and then he went on to re-establish spiritualism in place of rationalism. At the same time he opposed the practise of untouchability, caste-bias, idolatry, hata Yoga etc. This helped him to gain the acceptance of both the orthodox and the progressive folks. Such deeds helped Vagbhatananda to tarnish the reputation of the absolute-rationalist, Brahmananda Sivayogi. It was easy for Vagbhatananda, the orator-debater, to replace his master’s ideas with his
own. When Brahmamanda Sivayogi led the renaissance movement in Kerala one step forward, Vagbhatananda who ascended the pedestal took it two steps backward.