INTRODUCTION

The study “Social and Religious Transformation of Kerala with Special Reference to Brahmananda Sivayogi” is an attempt to analyse the role of Brahmananda Sivayogi in the socio-religious transformation of Kerala. The term ‘transformation’ is used in this study to indicate a comprehensive history of the related ideas and institutions and their change.

Currently in Kerala, intellectual studies have increasingly become important with great involvement of magnetic leaders of the renaissance movement in different aspects of social life. Though various scholars and authors have done systematic and critical study highlighting the various aspects and issues of Kerala society, the role of Brahmananda Sivayogi in modernising Kerala is neglected or forgotten. As a result no serious study has appeared so far regarding the spiritual and religious aspect of renaissance movement undertaken by Brahmananda Sivayogi or any analytical study in connection with the transformation in Kerala. This work therefore tries to bring Brahmananda Sivayogi from ‘invisibility’ to ‘visibility’ and seeks to argue that Sivayogi’s rational ideals and its role in transforming Kerala society are worthy.

The present study is an exploration into this much neglected area of research. The social degeneration was an inherent phenomenon that continued along with its social systems for a long period without any external or internal compulsions for change. The nineteenth century society of Kerala was quite ignorant about modern concepts of equality before law and God. The main concern of the study is the methods that Brahmananda Sivayogi used in order to penetrate in to the core of the social structure of Kerala especially northern Kerala. The researcher had selected this problem because of its uniqueness as well as non-representational nature.

Traditional religion in this particular phase was not helpful to solve social anomalies or guarantee social justice to a large section of the society
who was destined to be outcastes or Avarnas. Thus here religious as well as social issues travelled through parallel ways. The study delves into the issues of casteism and related irrational practices. The study has been focused on the specific contribution of Sivayogi and its chain of reactions on the socio religious life of Keralites. This movement not only provided the catalyst to a new cultural awakening among the Keralites but also brought a new sense of cultural pride to the rise of nationalism in Kerala.

**Aims and objectives:**

The concern of the study has been to understand the social transformation of Kerala from the middle of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century with special reference to the ideology of Brahmananda Sivayogi whose life and mission is interwoven with the history of Kerala. The ‘Siddhasram’ founded by him is the first rational institution which took up the challenging mission of liberation focusing on the society’s religious beliefs and practices from superstition and backwardness there by achieving integrated development of the human person in the context of society. In an age of religious fundamentalism, political hatred and selfish aggrandisement, the scope of such a topic is highly relevant. It attempts to rise above these barriers and intends to transcend to the entire humanity irrespective of caste, creed and religion. No attempt has been made so far to analyse the role played by Brahmananda Sivayogi at its true historical perspective.

His ideals and mission was a revolutionary break in the socio-cultural set up of Kerala at that time. But Sivayogi is still ‘unknown’ for many. Only a few, especially those who are in northern Kerala have known and heard about his virtuous life. The central purpose of the study is to see how Sivayogi can be placed in the historical context of Kerala as well as to analyse his ideology, which culminated in the service of humanity and led to modernisation of Kerala. This work also analyse rational similarities of eminent intellectuals of South India and contemporary social reformers of
Kerala and their services towards social transformation which led to modernisation of India. The study is relevant and important in the present Indian context when the renaissance values are undermined by communal force, religious fanatic groups and even by political parties with a strong communal or religious base. An attempt is made in the following pages to evaluate Brahmananda Sivayogi’s role in the modernisation of Kerala in the background of the forces that influenced his ideology and activities.

**Methodology**

The work was done in the framework of social transformation and its methodology is primarily descriptive and interpretative. The data has been collected by both formal and non-formal techniques of interviews, observations and recall while examining the life, vision and mission of Brahmananda Sivayogi. The study is largely based on original data. The primary sources comprise of the writings of Brahmananda Sivayogi and other social reformers, unpublished Asram records, newspaper reports, letters, memoirs etc. It is further supplemented by most of the available secondary works viz. published books, journals, newspapers and souvenirs. Besides these, the primary and secondary data are corroborated by a series of personal interviews and discussions with eminent scholars. A historical deductive method is resorted to arrive at conclusions based on the nature of sources consulted.

**Design of the study**

This study is conceived in six chapters. The first chapter makes an in depth scrutiny of the socio-religious and economic condition of Kerala during the nineteenth century to present an over all view of the Kerala society during the time of Brahmananda Sivayogi. It also tries to analyse the colonial discourses and practices, as they were instrumental in transforming Kerala society. Here it is necessary to highlight the background for the emergence of intellectual movement of the latter nineteenth century in Kerala.
The second chapter discusses the biography of Brahmananda Sivayogi in detail and the foundation of Ananda Matha by Brahmananda Sivayogi. The chapter concerns the development of a protest ideology in Brahmananda Sivayogi against the oppressive forces in the society. The researcher believes that rational humanism, advocated Sivayogi, is an adequate philosophy of life for all human beings.

The third Chapter depicts the multifaceted activities of the intellectuals of south India–Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh- and their rational ideologies which contributed much to the transformation of their own society. The rationale behind selecting Phule, Periyar and Gora is due to certain similarities and differences that existed among them. The main reason behind most of the socio-religious movements in South India was the tension between Brahmans and non-Brahmans. All the thinkers discussed in this chapter have, broadly speaking, supported logical and scientific thinking like Brahmananda Sivayogi. “Rationalism” is linked to “reason” and rationalists emphasize reason in one way or another, either in the sphere of knowledge or in the sphere of ethics. Therefore, in away, all of them are rationalists. The rationalist philosophy of life is based on reason. There are striking ideological resemblances among these rational philosophers and Brahmananda Sivayogi. The researcher emphasises this to highlight the fact that the concerned period was a period of resurgence in South India. The chapter concludes with the analysis of the development of rational ideology and its role in transforming and modernising Indian society.

The fourth Chapter is the core chapter that analyses in detail the philosophical and socio-religious speculations of Brahmananda Sivayogi. It makes a close study of the ideas expressed by Brahmananda Sivayogi in the context of various social evils in the contemporary Kerala society.

The fifth chapter is an attempt to study and compare the ideology of Brahmananda Sivayogi and the contemporary intellectuals and philosophers of Kerala. This necessitates an analysis of their position in social
transformation. It is essential to realise the ideology of Brahmanda Sivayogi in this context.

The concluding chapter constitutes critical analysis of the socio-religious transformation of the society due to the influence of the reform movement of Brahmananda Sivayogi during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. This chapter tries to evaluate Brahmananda Sivayogi’s role in the history of Kerala and how far his rational philosophy is useful in the present Kerala.