

VAIKOM SATYAGRAHA

DAWN OF A NEW ERA



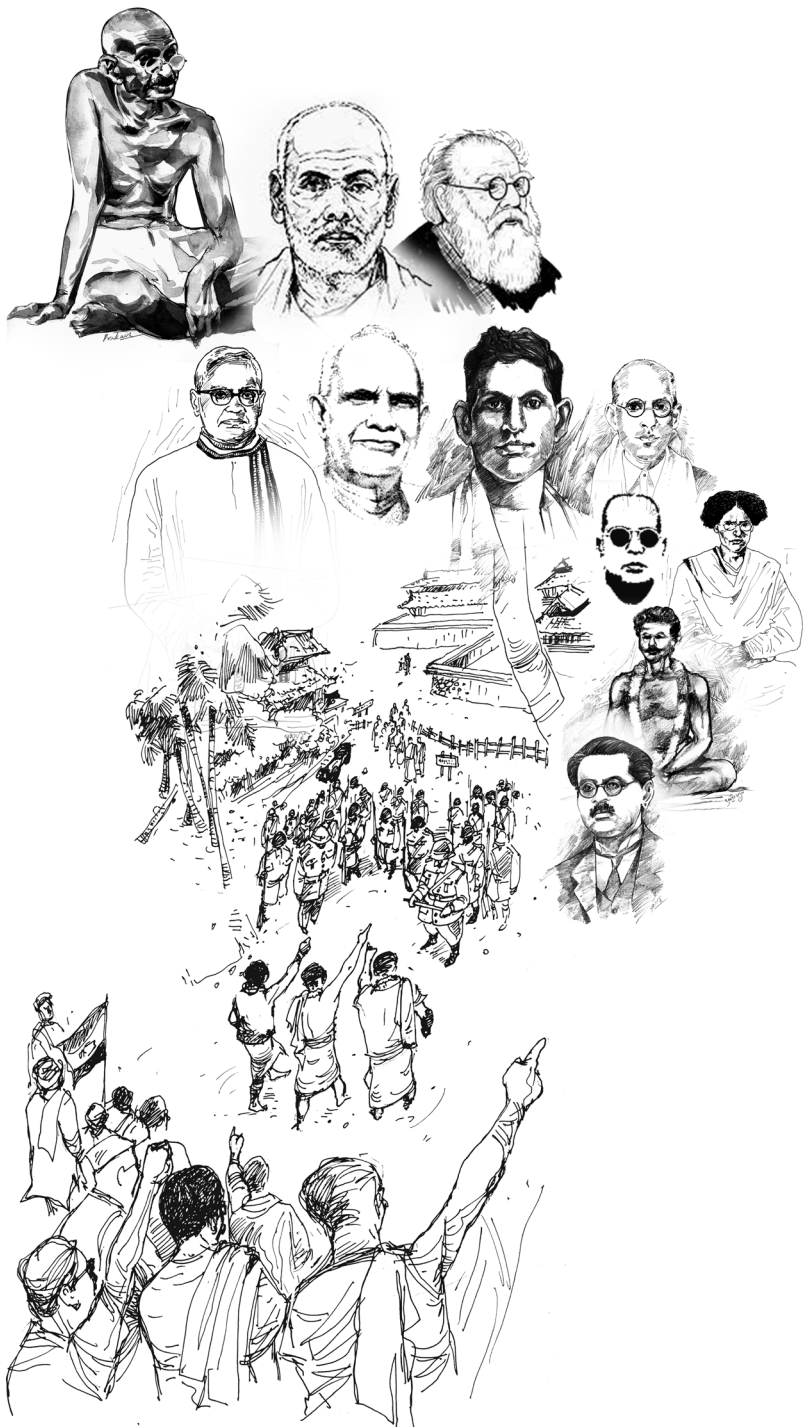
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The Vaikom Satyagraha stands as a luminous beacon, casting its profound influence across future generations. This monumental struggle not only heralded a new era of social awakening but also ignited the fervour for justice and equality in the hearts of countless individuals. The echoes of its impact resonate through time, inspiring progressive movements and emboldening the pursuit of human rights.

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Information & Public Relations Department
Government of Kerala



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**Information & Public Relations Department
Government of Kerala**

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COVER DESIGN & LAYOUT

Deepak Mouthatil

2023 March

PRINTING

Orange Printers Pvt.Ltd,
Thiruvananthapuram

Copies 200

For Free Circulation

Content & Research

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MESSAGE



I am glad to note that the Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala, is bringing out a booklet to commemorate the centenary of the Vaikom Satyagraha.

Kerala is a land in which several struggles were conducted as part of the renaissance movement. Vaikom Satyagraha stands apart among them, as in the Satyagraha, what we find is the confluence of both our renaissance movement and our national movement. They came together to ensure that all sections of the society could access public roads. In that sense, Vaikom Satyagraha was a beacon that showed us the way forward into a democracy with equality and unity as its hallmarks.

Even after the lapse of a century, Vaikom Satyagraha continues to inspire us to take up people's issues that are relevant to our current times. Amidst the orchestrated efforts that are being made to thwart our unity by sowing the poisonous seeds of communal disharmony and societal discord, let the centenary celebrations of the Vaikom Satyagraha reinvigorate us to resist such dubious designs.

My best wishes to the centenary celebrations and the booklet that is being brought out to mark the occasion.

Pinarayi Vijayan
Chief Minister

MESSAGE



I am delighted to know that the Information & Public Relations Department is bringing out a handbook in honour of the centennial celebrations of the Vaikom Satyagraha. This historic event played a pivotal role in Kerala's progress as a politically & culturally conscious state, and it is a matter of immense pride for us to commemorate it. The handbook will serve as a comprehensive guide to understand the significance of this movement, and I hope it will be widely read and appreciated by all.

Saji Cherian

Minister for Cultural Affairs

FOREWORD



The Information & Public Relations department of Kerala is bringing out a handbook on the Vaikom Satyagraha to commemorate the centennial celebrations of the event. The Satyagraha was a significant movement that challenged the discriminatory caste system in Kerala and paved the way for a more egalitarian society. The handbook is a tribute to the Satyagrahis and an effort to preserve the memory of their struggle for social justice and equality.

The handbook provides a short account of the Vaikom Satyagraha and its impact on Kerala's society, culture, and politics. The Satyagraha was a nonviolent movement that relied on the principles of truth, love, and nonviolence, and the handbook highlights the role played by Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders in inspiring the Satyagrahis.

The book is a tribute to the Satyagrahis and their legacy, recognising the contributions made by these brave men and women towards building a better society.

It is also a way to ensure that the legacy of the Satyagraha lives on and is a valuable educational resource that can be used by schools, colleges, and universities to promote awareness of Kerala's history and its contributions to the larger national and global context.

Finally, the book celebrates Kerala's tradition of social activism and is an inspiration to all those who believe in the power of collective action and social change.

T. V. Subhash IAS

Director,
Information & Public Relations Department

PREFACE

To liberate themselves from societal malpractices faced by the underprivileged communities in Travancore and the and alleviate the economic hardships suffered by the lease tenants of Malabar, numerous protests transpired from the 19th century's inception. "Freedom from forced labour, the right to wear upper garments" (Liberation from compulsory labour and the right to don upper clothes) served as the slogan for the Channar Revolt in southern Travancore. Lasting over a century, the revolt ultimately concluded victoriously, dismantling the forced labour system, legally abolishing slave traditions and the slave trade, and granting all women, irrespective of caste, the right to wear upper garments.

However, the lease tenants' issues in Malabar remained unaddressed. The farmers' agitation sought to end landlordism and secure land ownership rights, culminating in the 1921 Malabar Rebellion. The British administration and the landlord class brutally suppressed the uprising, and even at the time of India's independence, the farmers' problems in Malabar persisted unresolved.

In the early 20th century, two mass movements in Kerala gained nationwide attention. The first, the Malabar Rebellion, was jointly led by the anti-British Khilafat Movement and the Indian National Congress, fighting for self-rule. The rebellion, although in Kerala, gained national renown due to its focus on farmers' issues and Mahatma Gandhi's involvement. The second movement, Vaikom Satyagraha, was organised under Congress's leadership, entirely under Gandhi's control. Yet, there was a

fundamental difference between the Malabar Rebellion and the Vaikom Satyagraha. While the former sought economic objectives, the latter focussed on the elimination of untouchability and freedom of movement in public spaces

Another notable difference was the Vaikom Satyagraha's leadership by educated middle-class intelligentsia. Despite involving thousands of uneducated and illiterate individuals, leadership remained with the middle class. As a movement against the caste-based social system, intellectuals played a leading role in awakening society. The Vaikom Satyagraha's uniqueness lay not in economic objectives but in emphasizing civil rights protection, showcasing a mature political consciousness.

BACKDROP

Over centuries, India's caste-based societal system formed, dividing people into two primary categories: the privileged upper castes or "Savarnas" and the underprivileged "Avarnas." The Savarnas, possessing wealth and power, controlled most resources, while Avarnas were denied access. During this period, the most valuable asset, agricultural land, was divided among the ruling elite, priests, and landowners (under the names Deva Swam, Brahma Swam, and Pandaravaka/Cherikkal). Consequently, Brahmins, custodians of Deva Swam and Brahma Swam lands, controlled two-thirds of total wealth, empowering them within society. Additionally, Brahmins established themselves as intellectual leaders by embracing Chaturvarnya system's philosophical foundations in Northern India and incorporating principles from sacred texts and scriptures. As a result, the caste system and the distinction between Savarnas and Avarnas emerged from Brahmin dominance in both economic and intellectual spheres.

The caste system and its divisions were created by Brahmins who gained economic and intellectual superiority. The social reform movements and the values of the renaissance that emerged in Kerala were endeavours to liberate Kerala's society from the intangible yet unyielding constraints of caste traditions.

In 1865, the Travancore government permitted individuals from all caste and religious divisions to utilise public roads. Nonetheless, the caste-based police rejected this decision,

believing it contradicted their faith and traditions. The government imposed penalties on violators of its order by revising it in 1884. Traditionalists contested the decision in the High Court, leading a judge to amend the government's order by segregating public roads into royal and village roads. Royal roads remained restricted for lower castes, while the village road could be used by them, as stipulated in the government's order. Those who violate this order could be punished. Despite the High Court ruling, traditionalists were unwilling to accept even this compromise.

The public road from Venganur to Balaramapuram market was designated a village road, but the upper caste community resisted this decision. Consequently, in 1893, Ayyankali led a bullock cart procession as a protest. Displaying determination and defiance, he challenged the traditionalists, who were incapable of silencing his opposition to their customs. Ayyankali's bullock cart journey through the village road was not considered



a legal violation, preventing authorities from punishing him. His struggle for the right to freedom of movement marked the inception of a battle for civil liberties, which gained momentum and became increasingly apparent three decades later, demonstrating its escalating strength at Vaikom.

In the vicinity of the Vaikom temple, roads were decalredas village roads, rendering them accessible for public travel. Although the temple was government-owned, upper caste authorities, led by the Nambudiri Brahmin residing in the Indam Thuruthy Mana, prohibited untouchables from passing through the temple's surrounding pathways. They also displayed discriminatroy boards (theendal Palaka) stating, "People of lower castes are not allowed beyond this point."

The Vaikom Satyagraha aimed to oppose upper caste practices defying government orders and to challenge the government to abolish caste-based restrictions, with Vaikom serving as the movement's epicenter.

Numerous petitions and protests calling for the recognition of citizens' rights were met with government inaction. Consequently, protesters intensified their demands in the legislative assembly. Thirvananthapuram, home to India's first legislative assembly dating back to 1888, originally saw the assembly as a limited forum for airing public grievances, and only government officials were appointed as members. However, mounting pressure from the upper castes and landlords compelled the government to expand the assembly to include elected public representatives. In 1904, the assembly was rechristened Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, and membership increased. Voting rights were restricted to land taxpayers, effectively disenfranchising a substantial portion of the population from voting and assembly membership.

Intellectuals protested this discrimination, leading to the nomination and appointment of numerous lower-caste assembly members. N.Kumaran Asan, C.V. Kunjiraman, T.K. Madhavan, Ayyankali, Kavarikkulam Kandan Kumaran, and T.T. Kesavan Shastri were among those who joined the assembly. The civil

rights struggle persisted within the assembly, advocating for a more inclusive and representative society.

Fighting against the enduring discrimination faced by the backward castes, they demanded equal freedom of movement, temple entry, and other basic rights within the assembly. Nevertheless, authorities repeatedly denied these requests on various grounds. T.K. Madhavan asserted in the assembly that the freedom to worship is a fundamental right. C.V. Kunjiraman wrote in a newspaper editorial that if existing temples denied entry, the government should create new temples for the backward castes. The government responded that discussing such matters in the legislative assembly could harm the state's delicate religious balance, making such debates inappropriate. The government's evasive answer to the question raised by Kumaranasan in the assembly on July 27, 1920, reveals their reluctance to tackle the issue directly.

FROM LOYALTY TO THE CROWN TO POLITICAL AWARENESS

What unified the assembly members, journalists, and intellectuals was their shared loyalty to the king. Signs of a transition from subservience to progressive politics began to emerge among the intellectuals in Travancore, initially manifesting through journalism. K. Ramakrishna Pillai, editor of *Swadeshabhimani*, was among the first to experience the repercussions of expressing political consciousness. Soon, newspapers like *Kerala Kaumudi*, *Deshabhimani*, *Arayan*, and *Kerala Chandrika* led the charge in shaping public opinion against the prevailing orthodoxy. This realisation that mere academic exercises within the assembly would not yield benefits prompted the middle class to shift towards more overt political activism.

The Indian National Congress (*Bharata Mahajana Sabha*) had yet to initiate work in Kerala. However, a district committee was operational in Malabar, which was a part of the Madras

province, and was led by K.P. Kesava Menon, Mancheri Ramayan, K. Madhavan Nair, C. Krishnan, and others. In contrast, there was no similar activity in Travancore. In April 1920, a political meeting was held at Kollam Peerangi Maidan to provide a political explanation, resulting in the establishment of Travancore Rashtriya Mahasabha, organized by Dr. Velukutty Arayan, C.P. Karunakara Menon, and others. The first resolution passed was to form a political organisation, and the second was to establish responsible governance in the state. This referred to the system where elected people's representatives participate in the administration. The 'Rashtriya Mahasabha' was undoubtedly the precursor to the Travancore State Congress, which was formed eighteen years later. The second conference was held in Thiruvananthapuram the following year, and Pattam Thanupillai, Changanassery Parameswaran Pillai, C. Keshavan, and others participated, eventually becoming leaders of the State Congress.

The operations of the Travancore State Congress rapidly evolved into the Indian National Congress. In April 1921, political activists from the Malabar District Congress Committee, Travancore, and Kochi converged at Ottapalam to establish the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC). Subsequently, the KPCC played a crucial role in forming the Vaikom Satyagraha Success Committee, propelling the iconic movement forward.

During the same period that Mahatma Gandhi guided the Indian National Congress towards a leadership role; intellectuals from Travancore were already engaged in the party's political activities. In December 1920, the Congress embraced nonviolent civil disobedience as a means to advance the Indian independence movement. This approach to peaceful protest and independence appealed to the people of Travancore, who held interests in freedom and self-rule.

Heeding the counsel of fellow activists, T.K. Madhavan decided to meet Gandhi in Thirunelveli in September 1921. There, they engaged in an extensive dialogue on topics such as temple entry and civil liberties. Gandhi maintained that temple

entry and civil liberties were fundamental human rights that ought to be granted to all Hindus. These discussions, coupled with Gandhi's leadership in the Congress, significantly influenced the Travancore Congress Committee's activities. Gandhiji did not object to incorporating this into the Congress's agenda.

T.K. Madhavan took the initiative to address this issue at the AICC meeting, having obtained permission from Gandhiji. In addition to him, K.P. Kesava Menon and K.M. Panicker were registered as conference delegates. At the All India Conference in Kakinada on December 23, 1923, T.K. Madhavan delivered a speech. The motion passed without any opposition. The discussions during the conference revealed that situations similar to that in Kerala existed in many South Indian states. Representatives highlighted that, particularly in Tamil Nadu, members of the Nadar community were denied entry to Hindu temples. Nonetheless, the Kakinada resolution generated more enthusiasm in Kerala than in other states.

THE CONGRESS AND VAIKOM SATYAGRAHA

The representatives who returned from the Kakinada conference convened a meeting of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC). They developed and announced action plans necessary to move forward with the abolition of untouchability movement as a powerful protest. As the first step, a meeting held on January 20, 1924, formed a committee for the eradication of untouchability movement. The committee included K. Kelappan as the convener, T.K. Madhavan, Kuroor Neelakantan Nambudiripad, T.R. Krishnaswami Ayyar, and K. Velayudham Menon.

Another committee was formed for the necessary promotion to make the protest successful, comprising A.K. Pillai, Hassan Koya Poomala, Kuroor, T.K. Madhavan, and K.P. Kesava Menon.

It was decided that the resolution would be presented to the Maharajas of Travancore and Kochi. Additionally, it was

resolved to observe elimination of untouchability day, coinciding with the Vishu festival, as the beginning of the new year, throughout Kerala. To raise public awareness and foster civic consciousness, it was agreed that people would organize processions and demonstrations on all public streets. The formal inauguration was planned for March 1, 1924, with a procession through the Vaikom temple premises, in which people from all castes and creeds were encouraged to participate. Moreover, a public meeting was agreed upon for February 29 to clarify these matters.

According to a press release issued by the Satyagraha Ashram, around 3000 individuals, including lawyers, students, and traders, were in attendance. Kesava Menon spoke for approximately an hour about the history of the Congress, its responsibility to the people, the current state of Indians, and the necessity of freedom of movement. Other speakers, such as A.K. Pillai, K. Velayudha Menon, and T.K. Madhavan, also addressed the audience. Everyone departed with enthusiasm for the upcoming Satyagraha Samara, set to commence the following morning.

That evening, the district magistrate, police inspector, and Tahsildar paid a visit to the camping site of the leaders and requested that the satyagraha be terminated. The officials expressed concerns that there may be a possibility of conflict between those who oppose the satyagraha and those who participate in it. The leaders assured the officials that the satyagraha was carrying out in peaceful cooperation and would not cause any provocation. Despite the arguments, the authorities asked if the satyagraha could be postponed temporarily, and the leaders agreed to extend the program until March 30th.

Although the satyagraha was peaceful and non-violent, there was tension and a desire for change in the air throughout Travancore district. Hundreds of people from all castes and religions were gathering for the satyagraha. In addition to Congress, various community organizations, such as SNDP, NSS, Kshatriya Kshema Sabha, Nampoothiri Yogakshema

Sabha, Araya Mahajan Sabha, and Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham, also came out in support of the satyagraha and their leaders arrived to participate.

However, on March 26, government officials who were opposed to the satyagraha issued an order banning it under Section 127 of the Criminal Procedure Code at the request of the Kottayam District Magistrate. Key leaders, including K.P. Kesava Menon, K. Velayudha Menon, A.K. Pillai, and T.K. Madhavan, were subsequently detained for their involvement in inciting the movement.

Due to concerns that peaceful protests may lead to violations, the directive given by Gandhi to the protesters and supporters was to maintain complete nonviolence. He advised leaders through a letter and through his messages of non-cooperation that their aim was to change the hearts and minds of those in power through satyagraha, rather than gaining concessions through a show of strength. This message was reiterated by K. P. Kesava Menon, the president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, who provided clear instructions on how to conduct a satyagraha campaign. Ensuring law and order in a location where a large number of strangers gathered was a difficult task. People from Nagercoil in the south and Malabar in the north came to participate. It was emphasized that those who came from far-off places should only join the Satyagraha movement with a certificate from a reputable person in their area. The SNDP meeting office served as the organizing committee's office for the Satyagraha struggle, with Sree Narayana Guru's permission.

On March 30, 1924 (1099 Pisces 17) the Satyagraha movement began as scheduled. Three individuals were the first to participate in the movement. K.P. Kesava Menon documented the events, stating that the participants at the Satyagraha camp prepared to leave for the temple road after bathing. The three initial participants were Kunjappi, a Pulaya, Bahuleyan, an Ezhava, and Govinda Panikar, a Nair. At 7 o'clock, they departed from the camp, walking in pairs. It took approximately an hour to reach the temple road, where they encountered a

large crowd of onlookers and policemen. A sign posted on the road, about a hundred yards from the temple, read, "untouchable castes should not enter beyond this point." The participants stopped when they reached 50 yards from the sign, and only those three who were ready for the Satyagraha movement stepped forward.

Following the instructions of ASP Kichu Iyengar, Aroor Police Inspector Sharma and Vaikom Police Inspector Warriar arrested, produced in court, convicted, and sent them to jail. Leaders of the Congress and other community organizations were on their way to Vaikom. Among those who arrived were T.K. Madhavan, Trivikraman Thambi, Dr. V.V. Velukutty Arayan, K.P. Kayayakal, Madhavan Vakeel, Mathunni, A.K . Pillai, George Joseph, and many others. The authorities had made preparations to bring charges against prominent figures. Dr. V.V. Velukutty Arayan, who was simultaneously a Congressman, Araya Samudaya leader, newspaper editor, and evangelist, withdrew from Vaikom and addressed public meetings in the coastal areas of Arur, Alappuzha, Purakkad, Thottapalli, Muhamma, Panavalli, Karthikapalli, and Karunagappalli, creating a favorable atmosphere for satyagraha. The rulers were incensed by this and issued a ban against Arayan. District Magistrate Krishna Pillai issued an order prohibiting his speech in Kollam district

The Satyagraha soon gained national attention, with leaders and non-leaders of the Congress sending telegrams and letters in support of the movement, many of which were addressed to the Maharaja. In addition to Mahatma Gandhi, individuals such as S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Swami Shraddhananda, C. Rajagopalachari, C.R. Das, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, and C.F. Andrews visited Vaikom at various times to express their solidarity with the Satyagraha. The All India Congress Committee also decided to contribute Rs. 1000 per month to the Satyagraha fund.

The message of Satyagraha was spread in a non-religious manner, and sympathizers from other states visited to show their support. The most significant of these was a delegation of

twelve from Punjab, led by Akali Dal leaders Lala Lal Singh and Kripasingh. They established a "Lankar" free food hall for the satyagrahis.

Similarly, important support for the satyagraha came from leaders of the Islamic community. Janab K.E. Abdul Rahman Kutty, the Managing Editor of 'Kerala Chandrika', also visited Vaikom with other activists. Khilafat movement workers and members of various Muslim organizations from different parts of the region provided support and shared their experiences with the satyagrahis. Janab M.K. Abdu Rahim functioned as the leader of the volunteers. The Madras Presidency Khilafat Volunteer Captain Abdul Hamid Khan, Mahid Khan Sahib from Kallada, Sait Hussain Sahib from Salem, H.B. Mohammed Rauthar from Pathanapuram, and many other Muslim leaders visited Vaikom, provided financial assistance, and offered their support.

Prior to the onset of Satyagraha, Gandhiji had actively expressed his interest in the eradication of untouchability movement. He played a key role in organizing and implementing Satyagraha, as well as in analysing the daily programs. He repeatedly emphasized that Satyagraha must be non-violent and tolerant. He strongly criticized the upper caste leadership, but he was also adamant that the strike should not spiral out of control. In fact, he had even proposed delaying the start of the Satyagraha. Gandhi's interventions played a significant role in quelling the flames of the fire of the movement.

Gandhiji expressed his criticism towards the Akalis for initiating the Bhojanshala, stating that the movement was not about food. However, he did not support the idea of a hunger strike either. He believed that the elimination of untouchability and the right to free movement were internal matters of the Hindu community, and that religious believers should not meddle in it. According to him, such interference would only lead to division within Hindu society and disrupt the existing harmony

This resulted in a decline in the momentum of the

movement. The Akalis, Muslims, and Christians were compelled to withdraw their support from the satyagraha. The government seized this opportunity to shift its stance. It was decided that arrests, punishments, and imprisonment would be avoided as these actions only served to increase public participation. Therefore, the government began to handle the satyagrahis peacefully. The location of the theendalpalaka was cordoned off and access was restricted. Those who attempted to breach the fence were either ignored or repelled without violence. The satyagrahis and the authorities faced each other without causing harm. Consequently, with each passing day, the movement grew weaker and weaker.

Since the police did not arrest them, the satyagrahis decided to leave the food for the rest of the day. However, Gandhi did not permit this. He contended that hunger strikes were irrelevant in the presence of those who do not uphold righteousness and justice. As a result, the number of people participating in the Satyagraha dwindled. The KPCC did not have a strong presence in Travancore and encountered challenges related to organization and funding. Furthermore, there was no provocation from the government. Consequently, the struggle entered a phase of decline.

Massive floods occurred in Kerala during June and July, causing a lot of trouble. Despite this, the satyagrahis continued their protest every day, even standing neck-deep in rainwater. They believed that starting a hunger strike could help increase public participation. Consequently, a delegation was sent to Bombay to meet with Gandhiji and seek his permission to begin a fast. Kuroor Neelakandan Namboothiripad and K. Madhava Menon went to Bombay on this mission, but they were unsuccessful in changing Gandhiji's stance. However, they returned with some alternative suggestions. The crux of Gandhiji's advice was to conduct propaganda campaigns to transform the minds of the ruling and upper-class elites. Gandhiji proposed that efforts should be made to convince everyone that the state's philosophy should be based on humanism, and not on obsolete smritis and dharmashastras that were followed by the upper classes and prescribed advice.

The struggle was aimed at persuading the government that those adhering to outdated traditions were a minority, and that the majority of the Hindu community, consisting of both upper castes and avarnas, was opposed to superstition and the denial of civil rights. Later, a protest, Savarna Jatha, was organized based on these principles.

Gandhiji visited Kerala in the month of March 1925 after the successful completion of the Savarna Jatha. He visited Aluva, Varkala Sivagiri and Thiruvananthapuram and held talks with civic dignitaries, royal family members and the saintly venerable Sree Narayana Guru. Three of these dialogues are worth noting and all three are related to the elimination of untouchability.

The first of these events was a meeting with upper caste leaders at Indam Thurutti Mana in Vaikom. On March 10, 1925, the gathering at the mana included Mahatma Gandhi, his secretary Mahadev Desai, his son Ramdas Gandhi, C Rajagopalachari, and T.R. Krishnaswamy Iyer. Upper caste attendees included Indam Thurutthi Devan Nilakanthan Nampyathiri, Thekumkur Raja, Vadakumkur Raja, Vazhuthanakattu Raja, M.K. Ramanpillai, P.C. Krishnapillai, Venkatarama Iyer, Ganapathy Iyer, Kochumadam Govindapillai, Diwan Peshkar M.V. Subramanyan Iyer, Devaswom Commissioner P. Vishwanatha Iyer, and Tahsildar Subramanya Iyer.

The upper class relied on Hindu Dharma Shastra, Shankarasmriti, traditions, and conventional beliefs to assert their stance. They claimed that according to Hindu belief, reincarnation exists, and those who committed sinful deeds in their past lives are reborn into a lower caste, which cannot be altered by humans as it is God's will. When Gandhi inquired whether God would punish those who defied His will, they responded that God's will is enacted through humans. Nampyathiri stated that the temple and its surroundings belonged to the upper caste members, who had traditionally experienced it, and no one could violate it. A few days later, Mahakavi Vallathol visited Gandhi, and they discussed

Shankarasmriti. Vallathol informed Gandhi that there had been additions made to this work by a Brahmin, and that Shankara had not mentioned anything about the untouchability system. Vallathol also revealed that some parts of the original text, written on palm leaves, had been destroyed, and these sections were rewritten and added to serve Brahmin interests.

The second meeting took place with the Regent Maharani at Varkala Palace on March 12, 1925. In addition to the two of them, Koyi Thampuran was also present. An extensive conversation ensued between the participants. The Maharani informed Gandhi that, personally, she disagreed with untouchability and believed that all paths should be accessible to everyone. However, as a ruler, she was obliged to adhere to established rules, customs, and hierarchies, which could not be violated. In essence, it was evident that the government would not adopt a supportive stance on the matter.

The third meeting occurred that evening at Varkala Ashram with Sree Narayana Guru. Both yogis shared the same view regarding untouchability and agreed that religious conversion was not a solution to the issue. Gandhi commended Sree Narayana Guru's efforts towards social reform, and in turn, the Guru acknowledged and appreciated Gandhi's work for the upliftment of people.

The correspondence on this matter persisted even after Gandhi left Kerala. In a telegram sent to the Police Commissioner, Gandhi proposed certain terms for a compromise. These terms were deliberated at both the government and Satyagraha leadership levels, leading to a provisional agreement. The government's action was to rescind the prohibition order that had been issued prior to the start of the Satyagraha. Conversely, the Satyagrahis consented not to proceed beyond the designated boundary marker.

The outcome was highly disheartening for the Satyagrahis, but since the settlement was a consequence of Gandhi's intervention, they had no choice but to accept it. This resolution brought relief to the upper castes, who considered the

maintenance of their established positions as a safeguard for the preservation of Sanatana Dharma.

SAVARNA JADHA (THE UPPER CASTE MARCH)

A decision was made to arrange an upper caste march with the aim of persuading both upper caste leaders and the government that the majority of upper caste members supported the eradication of untouchability, and that maintaining upper caste dominance was an outdated concept. However, there was another facet to the situation. As a massive campaign advocating for the elimination of untouchability was underway, a parallel effort persisted in preserving untouchability. Meetings were held in various parts of Kottayam district, where resolutions were passed in support of the Maharaja's stance on upholding Sanatana Dharma and the existing hierarchical structure.



While it was natural for Avarna castes and untouchables to demand an end to untouchability, it was crucial to demonstrate that the majority of the upper caste population stood in favor of abolishing untouchability and protecting the rights of the majority. The Savarna Jatha was organized to foster this conviction.

The Savarna Jadha departed from Vaikom on November 1, 1924, with all necessary preparations made in advance. The procession was led by prominent figures such as Mannath Padmanabhan, K.P. Kesava Menon, A.K. Pillai, and S. Padmanabha Menon. The march included 120 participants and over a thousand accompanying supporters. A flag bearing the inscription "Savarna Jadha Travancore" was carried at the forefront. The second line on the flag read, "Sahodara Avakasa Samrakshana Swadharma Paripalanam" Upon arriving in the western quarter with great devotion, the Jadha members offered their prayers wholeheartedly.

The Savarna Jadha, which began in Vaikom, concluded at Shankhumukham on November 11, attracting massive crowds at around 200 centers. Many officials who sympathized with the march also participated. The procession commenced from Vaikom, and another march started from Etalakudi near Suchindra in the south, led by Dr. M. E. Naidu and M. Sivathanupilla. The processions were warmly welcomed across caste and religious lines. When the march reached Thakkala, Muslim leaders offered food and drink to the participants, invited them inside the mosque, and honoured them. After circling the mosque, the procession continued to Kuzhithurai. The two processions eventually met at Shankhumukham.

With prior permission, the delegation met the Regent Maharani at Poojapura Palace on November 12 at 8 am. A substantial petition containing more than twenty thousand signatures was submitted, along with a printed resolution. Later, petitioners received the same response given to Gandhiji. The Savarna Jatha sparked a significant movement in society, creating an opportunity to expand the struggle from Vaikom

and its surroundings to the entire state. The Savarna Jadhya played a crucial role in breaking the stalemate caused by Gandhiji's intervention when Akalis, Muslims, and Christians withdrew from Satyagraha sites, and the government refrained from arresting and punishing the protesters.

THE ENTRY OF E.V. RAMASWAMI NAICKER (PERIYAR)

E.V. Ramaswami, a champion of the non-brahminical and Swayam Marayda movements in Tamil Nadu, arrived in Vaikom on April 12th, 1924, accompanied by 17 volunteers, including



Maduradas Dwarkadas and Narayana Swamy. His presence generated immense enthusiasm within the protest camp. On April 13th, Ramaswami delivered a passionate and powerful speech, criticizing the British rulers, the aristocracy they defended, the caste customs, and the religious conversions occurring under their governance. Subsequently, he was arrested for his provocative remarks and received a one-month prison sentence.

The government prohibited Ayya Muthugounder, who had accompanied Ramaswami, from delivering speech in Travancore. Despite the ban, Gounder spoke at Sarkara in Chirainkeezhu, leading to his arrest and a one-month sentence of rigorous imprisonment

The arrest and conviction of Ramaswamy Naicker and his associates ignited massive protests throughout Tamil Nadu. His visit to Travancore, along with the subsequent ban and punishment, led to widespread demonstrations in the region. The Tamil Nadu government responded by passing a resolution in the assembly that guaranteed freedom of movement for all, declaring its intention to enforce it.

Ramaswamy Naicker earned the nickname Periyar and also became known as 'VaikomVeera' (Valiant of Vaikom). Additionally, he returned to Travancore with his wife Nagammal, sister-in-law Kanakammal, and stepmother to participate in campaign events, which helped to mobilize women in support of the struggle. Prior to this, women primarily engaged in educational and social service activities. However, they soon began participating in public work as well.

Another factor that influenced this change was the stand posed by the upper caste supporting untouchability. They claimed they would reconsider their stance on untouchability if the anti-untouchability movement leaders could persuade upper-caste women to support their cause. This encouraged the leaders to actively involve women in their struggle.

Torture, legal cases, and punishment were common experiences for those involved in the satyagraha. Participants

and supporters were often brutally attacked by the police and hired thugs, not only in Vaikom but also throughout Kottayam district. Following Gandhi's advice, the protesters endured the violence, as the Congress leadership had strictly instructed them to avoid engaging in any provocative actions. Consequently, a Congress worker named Chittedath Shanku Pillai lost his life, becoming a martyr.

In addition to these, some individuals carried out heinous acts such as throwing lime into the eyes of volunteers. P. Krishna Pillai, the founder of the Communist Party in Kerala, witnessed one such incident as a teenager. In his autobiography "Sakhakkale Munnottu," he describes the heart-wrenching scene where Narayanan Ilayathu had lime thrown in his eyes, leaving them bloodshot.

In response to a question from a member of the Travancore Legislative Assembly, the government revealed that a total of 26 individuals, including Malayalis and non-Malayalis, had been punished in relation to the satyagraha. These punishments ranged from simple imprisonment to rigorous imprisonment.

UNTOUCHABILITY ISSUE IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The topic of freedom of movement had been raised twice in the Srimoolam Prajasabha. The first instance occurred on June 12, 1924, when questions were posed by Joseph Panjikanan, N Ramakrishna Pillai, John Nidhiri, K. Parameswaran Pilla, and P.K. Narayana Pilla. The Chief Secretary provided the answers.

Later, on February 5, 1925, N. Kumaran moved a motion, which read: "This Council recommends to the Government that all the roads in and around the Vaikom Temple and all other temples in Travancore should be opened for the movement of all the subjects of the Maharaja without distinction of caste or creed." The debate on this resolution took place on February 23,

24, and 25. After intense discussions, the resolution was put to a vote. With 21 members in favour and 22 against, including officers, the resolution was ultimately rejected.

THE SATYAGRAHA COMES TO AN END

In the end, despite the elite leadership's best efforts, the mounting public support for the strike compelled the government to reconsider its stance. They began to sense that the situation was spiralling out of their control. Consequently, by October 1925, the discriminatory boards near the roads along the west and south gates of the Vaikom temple were removed, granting freedom of movement to everyone regardless of caste or religion. However, the ban remained in place on the east side.

Soon after, the government decided to permit movement on the east road as well. The old roads to the west and south of the temple, as well as the western halves of the roads to the south and north, were opened. The authorities constructed a new gate approximately 50 feet away from the temple's eastern gate, with the land being added to the temple department. Now, there was only one road encircling the temple, which was accessible to people of all castes.

The Secretary of the Satyagraha Ashram issued a press release on November 23, 1925, announcing the suspension of the strike based on a positive assurance from the government. This brought the 603-day-long strike to a successful conclusion. The press release also clarified that while freedom of movement had been granted, untouchability still persisted. Therefore, the struggle to eliminate untouchability would continue.

LEGACY OF THE SATYAGRAHA

The prolonged Vaikom Satyagraha served as a harbinger for the future history of not only Kerala but also India as a whole. While the Satyagraha Committee acknowledged that

only freedom of movement had been achieved, and not the eradication of untouchability, it marked an important milestone. It is crucial to recognize that freedom of worship had not yet been secured. As a result, subsequent struggles in Kerala primarily focused on attaining the right to worship.

Seven years later, when the struggle for freedom of worship took place in Guruvayur, Vaikom Satyagraha veterans assumed leadership roles. Eleven years after, when the proclamation of temple entry was announced in Travancore, untouchability within the temple was also abolished. The Vaikom Satyagraha served as an inspiration for other movements in Kerala, such as the Paliyam Satyagraha, Thiruvappu struggle, Suchindram Satyagraha, and Kalpathi struggle.

The Vaikom Satyagraha was not aimed at securing political rights, but rather at attaining the humanistic renaissance value of civil rights. Seven years later, when a joint political committee was established in Travancore and the political struggle called the Nivarthana Agitation commenced, it became evident that the Vaikom Satyagraha had reached a more advanced stage. The truth is that the mental malady of untouchability was eradicated from positions of power. As a result of the Travancore Public Service Commission's establishment following the Nivarthana agitation in 1935, it was determined that untouchability would not exist in the legislature or government service. It is also a part of history that the Travancore State Congress, formed in 1938 by the leaders of the Vaikom Satyagraha, along with volunteers and those influenced by them, wrested democratic



Sending Chills Down the Spine of Obsolete Customs-
The Bullock Cart Protest of Ayyankali

Comments by Sree Narayana Guru
on Vaikom Satyagraha

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A nation of three and a half million people governs a country of thirty million individuals. The British possess artillery and aircraft, but they remain oblivious to their people's suffering. Among the thirty-two crore Indians, there are local kings and a thousand landlords – but their number

is minuscule. Countless individuals have nothing to conceal their nakedness, and millions struggle to support their children. Immoral individuals can travel the Vaikom Road, yet a devout lower caste person is prohibited from doing so.

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E.V.Ramaswami Naicker (Periyar)

Printed and Published by T.V. Subhash IAS,
Director, Information Public Relations Department
on behalf of Government of Kerala and
Printed at Orange Printers Pvt.Ltd., Thiruvananthapuram
Published from Information Public Relations Department,
Govt.of.Kerala, Government Secretariat,
Thiruvananthapuram-695001.
Editor: T.V. Subhash IAS