

NCERT Notes: Vaikom Satyagraha [Modern Indian History Notes For UPSC]

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Vaikom Satyagraha was a movement in Travancore (modern-day Kerala) for temple entry of the depressed classes. It took place near the Shiva Temple at Vaikom, Kottayam district, Kerala during 1924-25. Vaikom was at that time a part of the princely state of Travancore.

Background

- According to the prevalent caste system in Kerala and the rest of India, low-caste Hindus were not allowed to enter into the temples.
- In Kerala, they were not allowed even to walk on the roads that led to the temples also. (Kerala state was formed in 1956; earlier it was broadly divided into Malabar (North Kerala), Cochin and Travancore kingdoms).
- In the Kakinada meet of the Congress Party in 1923, T K Madhavan presented a report citing the discrimination that the depressed castes' people were facing in Kerala. It was after this session that movements against untouchability need to be promoted. In Kerala, a committee was formed comprising people of different castes to fight untouchability.
- The committee chaired by K Kelappan, comprised of T K Madhavan, Velayudha Menon, K Neelakantan Namboothiri and T R Krishnaswami Iyer.
- In February 1924, they decided to launch a 'Keralaparyatanam' in order to get temple entry and also the right to use public roads for every Hindu irrespective of caste or creed.

The movement

- The movement began on 30th March 1924.
- At the Vaikom Mahadeva Temple, there was a board which denied the entry of lower caste people (avarnas).
- The Satyagrahis made batches of three and entered the temple. They were resisted and arrested by the police.
- Gandhiji, Chattampi Swamikal and Sree Narayana Guru supported the movement.
- The movement gained prominence in the entire India and support came from far and wide.
- The Akalis of Punjab supported by setting up kitchens to provide food to the Satyagrahis.
- Even Christian and Muslim leaders were in support of the movement. This was shunned by Gandhiji because he wanted the movement to be an intra-Hindu affair.
- On Gandhiji's advice, the movement was taken back temporarily in April 1924.
- After discussions with Hindu caste people failed, the leaders again started the movement. Leaders T K Madhavan and K P Kesava Menon were arrested.

- E V Ramaswami Naicker (Periyar) came from Tamil Nadu to support the movement and then he was arrested.
- On 1st October 1924, a group of savarnas (forward castes) marched in a procession and submitted a petition to the Regent Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai of Travancore with approximately 25000 signatures for allowing entry to the temple for everyone.
- Gandhiji also met with the Regent Maharani. This procession of savarnas was led by Mannath Padmanabhan Nair. Beginning with about 500 people at Vaikom, the number increased to approximately 5000 when the procession reached Thiruvananthapuram in the month of November 1924.

Effects & Significance

- On 23rd November 1925, all the gates of the temple were opened to Hindus except the eastern gate. In 1928, backward castes got the right to walk on public roads leading to all temples in Travancore.
- This was the first time that an organized movement was being conducted on such a massive scale for the basic rights of the untouchables and other backward castes in Kerala.