

Centenary of Vaikom Satyagraha

March 22, 2023

In news– The State-level inauguration of the Vaikom Satyagraha centenary celebrations will be jointly done by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his Tamil Nadu counterpart M.K. Stalin at Vaikom on April 1.

Brief history of Vaikom Satyagraha-

- Vaikom Satyagraha, from **30 March 1924 to 23 November 1925**, was a nonviolent agitation for access to the **prohibited public environs of the Vaikom Temple** in the Kingdom of Travancore.
- The Kingdom of Travancore was known for its rigid and oppressive caste system and hence Swami Vivekananda called Travancore a “lunatic asylum”.
- **The campaign, led by Congress leaders T. K. Madhavan, K. Kelappan and K. P. Kesava Menon**, was noted for the active support and participation offered by different communities and a variety of activists.
- Most of the great temples in the princely state of Travancore had for years forbidden lower castes (untouchables) not just from entering, but also from walking on the surrounding roads.
- **The agitation was conceived by the Ezhava Congress leader and a follower of Sri Narayana Guru, T. K. Madhavan.**
- **It demanded the right of the Ezhavas and ‘untouchables’ to use roads around the Vaikom Temple.**
- **Mahatma Gandhi himself visited Vaikom in March, 1925.** Travancore government eventually constructed new roads near the temple for the use of lower castes.
- The roads, however, kept the lower castes adequately

away from the near environs of the Vaikom Temple and the temple remained closed to the lower castes.

- After the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi, the agitation was given up and a compromise reached with Regent Sethu Lakshmi Bayi who released all those arrested and opened the north, south and west public roads leading to Vaikom Mahadeva Temple to all castes.
- She refused to open the eastern road. The compromise was criticized by E. V. Ramasamy "Periyar" and some others.
- Only in 1936, after the Temple Entry Proclamation, was access to the eastern road and entry into the temple allowed to the lower castes.
- **Vaikom Satyagraha markedly brought the method of nonviolent public protest to Kerala.**

Background-

- T. K. Madhavan, an Ezhava leader, first advanced the question of temple entry of lower castes in an editorial in Deshabhimani newspaper in December, 1917.
- Temple entry of lower castes was discussed and resolutions were introduced at meetings of S N D P Yogam and the Travancore Assembly between 1917 and 1920.
- In 1919, an assembly of nearly 5,000 Ezhavas demanded the right to entry into all Hindu temples managed by the Government of Travancore.
- In November, 1920, T. K. Madhavan, walked beyond the regulatory notice boards on a road near the Vaikom Temple. He later publicly announced his defiance to the district magistrate. Madhavan's later temple-entry meetings in Travancore instigated counter-agitations from caste Hindus.
- T. K. Madhavan met with "Mahatma" Gandhi at Tirunelveli in September 1921 to inform him of the predicament of Ezhavas in Kerala.
- Gandhi, though initially oblivious to the position of the community in state, offered his support for the

movement (“you must enter temples and court imprisonment if law interferes”).

- At the 1923 Indian National Congress session at Kakinada, a resolution was passed which committed the party to work for ‘the eradication of untouchability’. This resolution was introduced by T. K. Madhavan. The resolution also stated that ‘temple entry was the birthright of all Hindus’.
- In January 1924, Congress leader K. Kelappan convened an ‘Anti-untouchability Committee’ within the K P C C. Kelappan later toured southern Kerala with a contingent of Congress leaders from Malabar District.
- Madhavan also succeeded in getting the finances, the Congress support and pan-India attention for the satyagraha. The S N D P Yogam also conveyed its approval of the agitation.

The Sree Vaikom Mahadeva Temple-

- It is a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva in Vaikom, Kerala, India.
- The temple, along with the Ettumanoor Shiva Temple and the Kaduthuruthy Shiva Temple is considered a powerful place of Shiva.
- The belief is that if a devotee worships all the three temples before the *Ucha puja*, all his/her wishes are fulfilled. It is one of the oldest temples in Kerala and is famous for its Vaikom Ashtami festival.
- The temple is one of the few temples which is held in reverence by both Shaivas, the adherents of Shiva and Vaishnavas, the adherents of Vishnu.
- In Vaikom, Shiva is fondly called as *Vaikkathappan*, the lord of Vaikom.
- The lingam here is believed to be from the *Treta Yuga*, the third age of Hinduism and is considered one of the oldest temples in Kerala where puja has not been broken since its inception.

- The temple is one of the major Shiva temples in Kerala held in reverence along with the temples in Ettumanoor, Kaduthuruthy, Vazhappally, Chengannur, Ernakulam, Vadakkunathan and Thirunakkara.