



100 Years of Vaikom Satyagraha

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Why in News?

Recently, India commemorated the **centenary of Vaikom satyagraha**, a pivotal movement in India's history that challenged **untouchability and caste oppression**.

What is Vaikom Satyagraha?

▪ Background:

- Vaikom Satyagraha, a **nonviolent agitation**, unfolded in **Vaikom** within the princely state of **Travancore, Kerala** precisely a century ago spanning from 30th March 1924 to 23rd November 1925.
 - This movement stood as a formidable protest against the entrenched practices of untouchability and caste discrimination that had long plagued Indian society.
 - The movement was triggered by the **prohibition of people from oppressed classes, especially Ezhavas**, from walking on the roads surrounding the Vaikom Mahadeva temple.
- Efforts were made to negotiate with authorities, including **Maharani Regent of Travancore, to open temple roads**.
- It was the **first among the temple entry movements in India**, setting the stage for similar movements across the country.
 - It emerged amidst the growing nationalist movement and aimed to foreground social reform alongside political aspirations.

▪ Key Figures:

- It was led by visionary leaders like **Ezhava leader T K Madhavan, K.P. Kesava Menon, and K. Kelappan**.
- **Erode Venkatappa Ramasamy**, revered as **Periyar or Thanthai Periyar**, played a crucial role, mobilising volunteers, delivering speeches, and enduring imprisonment, earning the title '**Vaikom Veerar**'.
- The movement gained more power when **Mahatma Gandhi** reached Vaikom in March 1925 and held discussions with leaders of various caste groups.

▪ Strategies and Initiatives:

- The satyagraha initially focused on opening the roads surrounding the Vaikom temple to people from all castes.
- Leaders of the movement strategically chose nonviolent methods, inspired by Gandhian principles of protest.

▪ Outcome:

- The Vaikom Satyagraha led to significant reforms, including the **opening of three out of four roads** surrounding the temple to people of all castes.

▪ Aftermath and Legacy:

- In November 1936, the Maharaja of Travancore signed the historic Temple Entry Proclamation, which **removed the age-old ban on the entry of marginalised castes** into the temples of Travancore.
- The Vaikom **Satyagraha led to a division in perspectives**, with few viewing it as a Hindu reformist movement, while another saw it as a fight against caste-based atrocities.

- Memorials, including the Vaikom Satyagraha Memorial Museum and Periyar's Memorial, were established to commemorate the movement's significance.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. Which one of the following is a very significant aspect of the Champaran Satyagraha?

- (a) Active all-India participation of lawyers, students and women in the National Movement
- (b) Active involvement of Dalit and Tribal communities of India in the National Movement
- (c) Joining of peasant unrest to India's National Movement
- (d) Drastic decrease in the cultivation of plantation crops and commercial crops

Ans: (c)

Q2. With reference to Rowlatt Satyagraha, which of the following statements is/are correct? (2015)

1. The Rowlatt Act was based on the recommendations of the 'Sedition Committee'.
2. In Rowlatt Satyagraha, Gandhiji tried to utilize the Home Rule League.
3. Demonstrations against the arrival of Simon Commission coincided with Rowlatt Satyagraha.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Mains:

Q. Since the decade of the 1920s, the national movement acquired various ideological strands and thereby expanded its social base. Discuss. (2020)