



Vaikom Satyagraha

For Prelims: Leaders of Vaikom satyagraha, factors leading to satyagraha.

For Mains: Significance, role of women in Vaikom satyagraha.

Why in News?

As the year **2024 marks the centenary of the Vaikom Satyagraha**, Chief Minister of Kerala and Tamil Nadu jointly inaugurated the centenary celebrations.

What is Vaikom Satyagraha?

▪ Background:

- The princely state of Travancore had a **feudal, militaristic, and ruthless system** of custom-ridden government, some of the most rigid, refined and ruthless social norms and customs were seen in Travancore.
 - Lower castes like the **Ezhavas and Pulayas** were considered polluting and various rules were in place to distance them from upper castes.
 - These included a prohibition, not just on temple entry, but even on walking on the roads surrounding temples.

▪ Contribution of Leaders:

- In 1923, Madhavan presented the issue as a resolution at the Kakinada meet of All India Congress Committee. Subsequently, it was taken up by the Congress Untouchability Committee formed by the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee in January 1924.
- Madhavan, K.P. Kesava Menon who was the then secretary of Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee and Congress leader and educationist **K. Kelappan (also known as Kerala Gandhi)** are considered **the pioneers of the Vaikom Satyagraha movement**.

▪ Factors Leading to Satyagraha:

- **Christian missionaries**, supported by the East India Company, had expanded their reach and many **lower castes converted to Christianity** to escape the clutches of an oppressive system that continued to bind them.
- **Maharaja Ayilyam Thirunal**, took many **progressive reforms**.
 - Most important of these was the **introduction of a modern education** system with free primary education for all - **even lower castes**.
- Forces of capitalism and these reforms created new social hierarchies - which were not always congruent with traditional ones.

▪ Beginning of Satyagraha:

- **On March 30, 1924**, the **Satyagrahis walked** in procession towards the forbidden public roads. They were **stopped** 50 yards away from the place where a board cautioning the oppressed communities against walking on the roads (surrounding the **Vaikom Mahadeva temple**), was placed.
- Dressed in khadi and wearing khadi caps, **Govinda Panikkar (Nair)**, **Bahuleyan (Ezhava)** and **Kunjappu (Pulaya)**, defied the prohibitory orders.
- The **police stopped them**. In protest, the three men sat on the road and were arrested.

- Then on, every day, three volunteers from three different communities were sent to walk on the prohibited roads.

- Within a week, the **leaders of the movement were all arrested.**

- **Role of Women:**

- Periyar's wife **Nagammai** and sister **Kannammal**, played an unprecedented role in the fight.

- **Arrival of Gandhi:**

- **Gandhi** arrived at Vaikom in **March 1925**, held a series of discussions with leaders of various caste groups and met Maharani Regent at her Varkala camp.
 - The Vaikom Satyagraha was **officially withdrawn on November 30, 1925** after consultations between Gandhi and W.H. Pitt (police commissioner of Travancore).
 - A compromise was reached following the release of all prisoners and grant of access to roads.

- **Temple Entry Proclamation:**

- **In 1936**, the historic **Temple Entry Proclamation** was **signed** by the Maharaja of Travancore which removed the age-old ban on the entry of temples.

- **Significance:**

- Amidst rising nationalist sentiment and agitations across the country, it foregrounded social reform.
 - For the first time, **it brought Gandhian methods of nonviolent protest to Travancore.**
 - The movement continued for over 600 days, non-stop, through social pressure, police crackdowns and even natural disaster in 1924, is admirable.
 - The Vaikom satyagraha saw previously unseen unity across caste lines.

Conclusion

Till 1917, the Indian National Congress refused to take up social reform. But with the rise of Gandhi and increased activism within lower caste communities and untouchables, social reform soon found itself front and Centre of Congress's and Gandhi's politics.

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