

A STUDY ON VAIKOM AND GURUVAYUR SATYAGRAHA

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INTRODUCTION

In India concepts of caste system has its own group as untouchables and out caste and then used these to deny them ownership of land, entry into temples access to common resources such as water from the village lake or well. High caste, including the lower among them were not to have any physical contact with untouchables they could not aspect water food their lands. In the villages the untouchable castes performed all the menial jobs such as those of water carriers, hide of dead animal's leather works as well as the Jajomani system they received fixed share of the produce from the land owner final a payment for their services. From the middle and the late nineteenth century onwards about economic changes especially the commercialization of agriculture production and relations, emergence of contractual relations, new employment offers side the village in factories ,the army, all contributed to a split in the position of the untouchables social reforms such Jyoitbha Phule in Maharastra and Sree Narayana Guru in Kerala also began to questioning the caste system and caste from 19th, 20th century onwards. Gandhi integrated the issues of abolition of untouchability into the national movement and major campaigns and struggles, such as the Vaikom sathyagraha (1924-25) and Guruvayur Sathyagraha (1931-32) were organized.

The Nambudiris had varying rules regarding the degrees of ritual pollution while interacting with people of different caste. In return, most castes practiced the principles of untouchability in their relationship with the other regional castes untouchability in Kerala is not restricted to Hindus, and George Mathew says that, "Technically, the Christians were outside caste hierarchy, but in practices a system of inclusion and exclusion was developed.

The rules of untouchability were severe to being with and they were very strictly enforced by the time of the arrival of the Dutch East India company in the 17th century. Robin Jeffery, who is a professor specializing in the modern history and politics of India. Quotes the wife of a Christian missionary, who wrote in 1860 that a Nair can approach but not touch a Nambudiri Brahmin, a

Ezhava must remain thirty six paces off and a Pulayan slave must keep ninety six steps distant. A thiyyan must remain twelve steps away from a Nair, and a Pulayan sixty six steps off, and a Parayan some distance further still.

By the late 19th century the caste system of Kerala had evolved to be the most complex to be found anywhere in India and the exploitation of it had become considerable. Barendse explains this development it turned to gross unrequited exploitation only in the 19th century when the British colonial pacification removed the threat of the peasant harvests being ravaged by armies or robbers and their huts being burned to the ground.

The system was gradually reformed to some degree, with one of those reformers, Swami Vivekananda, having observed that it represented a “mad house” of castes the usual four tier Hindu caste system, involving the varnas of Brahmins (priest), Kshatriya (warrior), Vaisya (business person, involved in trading, entrepreneurship and finance) and Shudra (service person) did not exist. Kshatriyas were rare and the Vaisyas were not present at all. The roles left empty bit the absence of these two ritual ranks were taken to some extent by a few weirs and by Syrian Christians, respectively.

The process of amelioration of caste distinctions by various social reforms movements were overtaken by the events of 1947. No political parties, and no political leaders, no intellectuals support the idea that caste is part of a natural moral order based on hierarchy,..That caste is occupationally linked and hereditary, that each caste embodies its own code of conduct and that low-caste membership is the consequence of transgressions in one’s previous life). Myron Weiner has said that the ideological basis for caste.

The lower castes no longer accept their position in the social hierarchy and no longer assume that their lower economic status and the lack of respect for members of the higher caste are a “given” in their social existence. But the movement for change is not a struggle to end caste; it is to use caste as an instrument for social change caste is not disappearing, not is “casteism”-the political use of caste for what is emerging in India is a social and political system which institutionalizes and transforms but does not abolish caste.

Throughout post-independence India, including in Kerala, there exists a framework of reservation which is fluid in nature and attempts to recognize the social-economic disparities between various castes.

Depending both on local circumstances and on the changing modern socio-economic environment, castes are classified as forward classes, other backward classes, scheduled caste, and the scheduled tribes. These classifications determine what-if-any assistance a caste

community receives in any given area. Formal classification lists are compiled for the latter these groups; any community which is not listed in any of those categories is, by default a forward class.

VAIKOM SATHYAGRAHA

Vaikom Sathyagraha of the, 1924-25 was a historical movement in Travancore against untouchability in Hindu society. The movement was centered at the Shiva temple at Vaikom, near Kottayam. The Sathyagraha aimed at securing freedom of movement for all section of society through the public roads leading to the Sri Mahadevar Temple, Vaikom.

The Vaikom Sathyagraha was the first systematically organized agitation in Kerala against orthodoxy to secure the rights of the depressed classes, for the first time in history. The agitation brought forward the question of the civil rights of the low caste people into the forefront of Indian politics and social scenario.

The town is very famous for its Shiva temple, which in the early twentieth century was the citadel of orthodoxy and castes has was custom prevalent in those days, the untouchables known as avarnas¹ where not allowed to enter the temple but at Vaikom they were not permitted even to use the public road around the temple. Notice board where put up at different sports profitable the entry of Avarnas reminding them of their social inferiority. All the more unbearable to them where the fact that Christians or Muslims was freely allowed on these road. An Avarna had to walk through a circuitous route, two there miles longer to avoid the roads besides the temple.

The Ezhava first took up issue in 1905. The Ezhava representative in the Travancore legislature, raise the Question of the use of the public road around the temples by avarnas. The authorities remind adamant and refused to take up the matter event for discussion as it was considered a religious question in 1920-21. Kumaran Asan also raised the question and it was desired to shift the notice board a little, so that some parts of the roads would be accessible to the avarnas.

T.K. Madhavan the organizing secretary of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P) became a member of the Travancore legislature and felt that Asan and the others has accepted a humiliating compromise. T.K Madhavan wants to demand out righting temple entry but he was denied permission to even introduction to the resolution in the legislator.

The struggle continued like this up to 10 April, when the police adopted the new tactics of barricading the roads and thus tried to prevent the Satyagrahis from reaching the disputed roads.

The police also decided not to arrest the Satyagrahis, and they responded with fasting. But Gandhiji disapproved of fasting as it went against his theory of Satyagraha. The police who were watching the progress of the agitation were convinced that their policy of not arresting the Satyagrahis was not very effective. So they wanted to use strong-arm tactics to crush the agitation. The conservatives joined the police, and in due course, the conservatives took over and the police became silent witnesses to the atrocities committed on the volunteers by the conservatives. When the Satyagraha started the ruling Maharaja of Travancore was Sree Moolam Thirunal. He and his minister Divan Bahadur T. Raghavaiah were golden props of extreme orthodoxy. They wanted to keep old customs. Divan Raghavaiah made a speech in the Travancore legislature strongly defending the Savarnas and denouncing the Satyagraha.

Meanwhile hundreds of letters were sent to Gandhiji to suspend the agitation. Two advocate brothers from Kerala, Shivarama Iyer and Vancheeswara Iyer met Mahatma Gandhi and argued that the roads around Vaikom temple are private property and hence the Satyagraha was irrelevant.

All newspapers in India flashed headlines about the Satyagraha. Money flowed from different states to Vaikom. The Akalis of Punjab came to Vaikom to open a free kitchen for the Satyagrahis. Non-Hindus like barrister George Joseph, Bhajematharam Mathunni and Abdul Rahman (the Editor-in-Chief of The Young India) came forward to offer Satyagraha. But Gandhiji did not accept any of these. Gandhiji wrote in the Young India on April 24, 1924, and May 1, 1924 against accepting outside aid.

Involvement of Periyar

E.V. Ramasami who is affectionately called Periyar by the Tamilians, came with his wife Nagamma and a group of followers and offered Satyagraha on April 14. As the head of the Satyagraha. Periyar was imprisoned twice. Gandhi, who was also present on the Vaikom scene, was disturbed about the whole affair but seemingly unable to stop it. His concern grew when other religious groups became involved. Thus the Sikh community offered to meet expenses. Money was also said to have come in from Burma, Singapore, and Malaysia, from non-Brahmin immigrants, Muslims and Christians.

Nagamma with Mrs. Joseph, Mrs. T K. Madhavan and Mrs. Govindan Channar, among others formed a Women's committee to persuade the women of the villages and get them ready to participate in the Satyagraha. They went around villages explaining to the women, the meaning and purpose of this Satyagraha and collecting from them, handfuls of rice and small changes to maintain the volunteers' needs. The women started to offer Satyagraha on May 20, 1924.

Nagamma was arrested along with Mrs. T.K. Madhavan and later released. Nagamma's leadership induced courage and solidarity in the women.

The role of Sree Narayana Guru in Vaikom Satyagraha

Sree Narayana Guru, who had never shown any interest in the activities of the Indian National Congress, involved himself with the Vaikom Satyagraha and extended much co-operation. The reason is quiet evident. The Vaikom Satyagraha was not an agitation for political freedom, it was a movement to purify the Hindu society of its blemishes, and this was what Guru also attempted through his actions and messages.

But somehow, a small misunderstanding arose between Mahatma Gandhi and Sree Narayana Guru, regarding the modus operandi of the Satyagraha. One of Guru's dialogues with the General Secretary of the SNDP was misinterpreted in such a way that it led to believe that the ideals of Gandhiji and Guru clashed. There was a stage when someone suggested to Gandhiji to withdraw the support for the Satyagraha because the spiritual leader of the ezhava was urging his followers to use violence, which is against the principles of Satyagraha.

The Guru had thorough discussions with his favorite disciple T. K. Madhavan. About the Vaikom Movement, even before T. K. Madhavan met Gandhiji about the issue. The Guru had another discussion with K. M. Kesavan, the then General Secretary of the SNDP when the Satyagraha was launched.

Guru offered his Vellore Mutt near Vaikom for the use of the Satyagrahis and Head Office was set up there. He made a personal contribution of Rs.1000.00 to the struggle fund, and set up a special collection box at Sivagiri. Two of his favorite disciples, Swami Sathyavathan and Kottukoikal Velayudhan were deputed to work for the Satyagraha.

When the Satyagraha was at its peak, on September 27, 1924, the Guru visited the venue. He reached Vaikom by boat. Thousands were waiting at the jetty to receive him. He was welcomed with a multicolored garland of khadi yarn. He was also presented with the second khadi towel woven at the Satyagraha Ashram, the first one was sent to Mahatma Gandhi. The Guru jokingly offered to wear khadi garland and volunteer Satyagraha.

The Savarna Processeion by Mannathu Padmanabhan

In the meanwhile Mahatma Gandhi felt that the support of the Savarnas was essential for the success of the Vaikom Movement. So he suggested to the leaders at vaikom, that a procession consisting of only Savarnas should march to Trivandrum, the capital, to register their solidarity

with the Avarnas and lend their full support to the cause. The Savarna procession of about five hundred men set out from Vaikom on November 1, 1924 under the leadership of Mannathu Padmanabhan, the unquestioned leader of the Nair Service Society. There was spontaneous welcome to the procession at every place they passed. On their way, the procession swelled as people joined. They halted at Sivagiri. Paid homage to Sree Naravana Guru, and received his blessings. When the procession reached Trivandrum on November 12, 1924, with the jubilation of a conquering army, it had gathered nearly 5000 men. A similar procession of about a thousand men from Suchindram under the leadership of Perumal Naidu also reached Trivandrum on the same day. A mammoth public meeting was held.

Final actions

On November 13, 1924, a delegation headed by Changanassery Parameswaran Pillai waited on the Regent Maharani Sethu lakshmi Bhai and submitted a memorandum signed by more than 25,000 Savarnas.

Though the memorandum was submitted with much optimism, reaction was not that favorable. The Maharani expressed that the issue had to be decided in the legislature. The resolution was moved in the legislature on February 7, 1925, by the then SNDP Secretary N. Kumaran . The text of the resolution was all roads around the temple at Vaikom, and similar roads all over the state of Travancore must be open for traveling for people of all castes and creeds. The resolution was defeated by twenty two votes against twenty one. It is understood that Dr. Palpu's brother who was expecting favors from the Government voted against the resolution. He was a close associate of the Narayana Guru at Aruvippuram, but he turned Judas. He was haunted by the community and he fled from places to place to save his life. He became a social outcaste and met with an ignoble death.

The defeat of the resolution severely affected the morale of the Satyagrahis and boosted the high-handedness of the Orthodox Hindus. While Gandhiji tried to lift the sinking morale through exhortations to remain patient and peaceful, Indanthuruthi Namboothiri, the leader of orthodoxy, arranged for hirelings to beat up the Satyagrahis . They were thrown into neck deep waters. Lime mixed with other strong irritants was poured into their eyes. The police stood silently watching as they were secretly instructed not to interfere. Gandhiji wrote in Young India. -The Travancore authorities may, however. Be respectfully told that the Congress cannot watch barbarity with indifference. The letting loose of the goondas on the devoted heads of the Satyagrahis, is bound to gather the Satyagrahis, the full weight of all-India public opinion.

As a protest against atrocities, statewide agitation began. Big Savarna temples were boycotted, bringing down their revenue. The Savarna Mahajana Sabha organized meetings at their

strongholds, against the Sathyagraha. Tension was mounting, and it was time that something was to be done. There were even reactions among the volunteers that the slow passive method of Sathyagraha was ineffective in the face of violence and goondaism.

GURUVAYUR SATHAYGRAHA

If the Vaikom sathyagraha in 1924 brought national attention to discriminative practices against the delits and the untouchable in entering temple the Guruvayur sathyagraha that began seven years later stirred the nations conscience to act decisively against such practices. The protest took the form of a peaceful sathyagraha organized by the Kerala congress-committee under the leadership of K. Kelappan popularley known as Kerala Gandhi. A month before this sathyagraha started efforts to mobilize people and founds had began procession from Thiruvananthapuram and the centers in the Malabar region reached Guruvayur along the way public meeting were held to explain the need to remove untouchability and the importance of temple entry. The sathyagraha continued for about ten months but neither the Zammorine of Calicut, who was one of the trustees of the temple nor the savarnas or upper caste changed their mind. The struggle attained momentum and entered a decisive towards the end of August 1932, when Kelappan was opened to dalits. However Gandhiji in prisoned at the time in Poona was not happy with the India of the fast and sent a telegram Kelappan requesting him to give up the plan. Gandhiji cited to reason.

One Kelappan had not got Gandhiji permission to go on fast gandhi also mentioned that the Zamorine had requested that the fast postponed on A.K Gopalan, the leader of communist Party on December 26. The opponents of the sathyagraha movement did not mind the passions of the people and they attempted to force entry in to the temple by removing the barricades the temple was closed and all pujas and offerings suspended for about a month. The sathyagraha had run its course for 10 months when K. Kelappan entered on an indefinite fast on October 2, 1932, on Gandhiji's advice. A limited referendum was held thereafter under the auspices of the congress among the hindus of Ponnanni taluk in order to acutance the views of the people on the issue of the temple entry. Thus though the Guruvayur sathayagraha failed to achieve its immediate objective, it had helped to create a climate in favour of the eradications of untouchability many temple Kerala as in other part of India were out of bounds for the lower.

Castes even roads around the temple were not open to them a large number of Dalits and upper caste. hindus assembled in Guruvayur to demanded that avarna (low caste) Hindu be allowed inside the temple. The protest took the form of a peacefull sathyagraha organized by the Kerala congress committee under the leadership of K. Kelappan popularly known as 'kerala gandhi'. A month before this sathyagraha started, effects to mobilize people and funds had began,

propaganda process from Thiruvananthapuram and centers in the Malabar region reached Guruvayur. Along the way public meeting were held to explain the need to remove untouchability and the importance of the temple entry.

The sathyagraha continued for about ten months, but without much visible impact people the Zamorin of Calicut, who was one of the trustees of the temple among the savarnas or upper caste changed their mind. The end August 1932 when Kelappan however Gandhiji, imprisoned at the time in Poona, was not happen with the idea of the fast and sent a telegram to Kelappan requesting him to give up the plan. Gandhiji elited two reasons one Kelappan had not got Gandhijis permission to go on fast, two Kelappan had not reasonable notice of the intimations of the fast Gandhiji also mentioned that the Zamorin had requested that the fast postponed.

Out of more than 20000 opinions recorded, 77% voted for the temple entry 13%. Against it and 10% remained neutral. An interesting feature of the referendum was that more than 8000 women expressed their choice in favour temple entry. The result of the referendum was revealing in so far as it demonstrated was revealing in so far as it demonstrated that the campaign for the temple entry had the movement for eradication of untouchability in Kerala crowned its self with success on November 12, 1936 when the maharaja of Travancore Sri Chithira Thirunal Balaramavarma, issued his historic proclamation throwing open the temple in Travancore to all Hindus irrespective of caste. The leaders and leadership of sathyagraha and massive support of sanskrit scholars K.Kelappan, Mahatma Gandhi, communist party of India, such as P.Krishna Pillai, A.K.Gopalan, K.Madhavan, Sri Vaisravanth Raman Namboothiri, Sri Anjanam Madavadvan Namboothiri, Sri Ottur Unni Namboothiri, Sri Maliyur Sankaran Namboothiri, Swami Guruvaurappa Das, Venmana Namboothiri, Sri Vengeri Namboothiri, Sri Malavana Maheswaran Battathiri.

Role of Gandhiji

Kelappan in his reply said that the ten month protest itself was sufficient notice and that he took Gandhiji own fast at the reward a prison at that time for the causes of the under privileged, as consented Gandhiji's advice and Brock the fast at 8 a.m on October 2, 1932 after thirteenth days before that in a telegraphic reply K.Kelppan remained Gandhiji that from then on the whole burden of getting Kerala's temple opened for all would be on Gandhiji. He in turn assured Kelappan god helping I shall bear my share of the burden for another forever nothing much changed in Guruvayur or in the rest of the region that today constitutes the state of Kerala. It was only in 1936 that many temples in Kerala were opened for all to us. One of the most important struggles connected with the campaign for the eradication of untouchability was the Guruvayur sathyagraha (1931-32). Guruvayur sathyagraha was an important approach making event in the

history of the struggle against untouchability in Kerala the aim of the sathyagraha was to get the famous Sree krishna temple of the place thrown open to the avarnas for worship. The sathyagraha was started on November 1-1931 under the auspices of the Kerala provincial.

Congress in order to get the Guruvayur temple opened to all hindus. The sathyagraha lasted for about ten month. It captured all India attention by the fast of K. Kelappan, the leader Sarvodaya leader, and the assault on AK Gopalan was the caption of the volunteer corps. The leader of sathyagraha was K. Kelappan and the caption of the corps AK Gopalan. The sathyagraha attracted country wide attention and political workers from all over India converged on Guruvayur to extend help to the sathyagrahis. The Zamorin who was the trustee of the temple adopted an uncompromising attitude towards the demand for the temple entry T. Subrahmanian Tirumunbu, the caption of the temple entry campaign was arrested on November seven. P. Krishna Pillai was brutally assaulted by the temple officials for ringing the bell in front of the sreekovil, a privilege enjoyed by Brahmins only.

CONCLUSION

The Vaikom sathyagraha was the first systematically organized agitation in kerala against orthodoxy to secure the rights the depressed classes, for the first time in history. The agitation brought forward the question of civil rights of the low caste people in to the forefront of Indian politics. On November 13, 1924, a delegation headed by Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai waited on The Regent maharani S ethulakshmi Bhai and submitted a memorandum signed by more than 25,000 savarnas. We the under signed members of the deputation, loyally and respectfully beg leave to approach gracious high with the humble prayers that the roads around the Vaikom temple walls and all others roads similarly situated in other parts of the state many be thrown open to all.

Gandhiji had to do something about it. He wrote to W.H Pitt, the then police commisionar of Trvancore to put an end to goondaism. Pitt beaig a European, was in a better position to intervene and bring an honorable settlement between Government and Gandhiji. Pitt agreed to influence the Government remove all barricades and withdraw the prohibitory orders. On condition that Gandhiji instructed the sathyagrahis not to cross the point where the prohibitory board was existed. However the police would Remains until all the terrors of the agreement were implemented. An agreement was reached through correspondence. Government agreed to withdraw the prohibitory orders passed in February 1924, and Gandhiji agreed to withdraw the sathyagraha. Government let the roads on three sides of the temple (North, South, and west) open for public but the eastern approach road, and the two roads leading to it from the north and south remained received to the savarnas only one view is that it was only a political success for non -

caste Hindus (Avarnas) as they gained access only to the roads on three side of the lake temple. The forth an important eastern road remained non accessible to them. It was nearly a blow to the Christians and Muslims as they lost their previously enjoyed freedom to have complete access on all the roads around the temple. New the eastern road was blocked to them. Because of the gates which remained closed the members of the Devaswam Board and the inmates of the temple who used the eastern road as thorough fore were denied the opportunity. Anyway it was a great opportunity for the Indian National congress party to grow in kerala. Before this agitation the congress in kerala was only a limited number upper caste and upper class people of malabar .The avarnas did not bother about the congress, as the congress leaders did not show any enthusiasm for the education of social inequalities. But when the party under took to lead the agitation at the Vaikom.At the exhortation of T.K. Madavan, they joined the congress. The congress swelled from being a class party to a mass party. Another achievement of Vaikam agitation is certainly communal harmomy, progressive minded savamas and avarnas come together with Christians, Muslims and even Sikhs it is to be remembered that many savarnar played the note of active leaders tilt the withdrawal of the sathyagraha, and this has demonstrated the basic unity of the people. Above all, The Vaikom sathyagraha was a testing ground for the Gandhian principle of sathyagraha. It was tested and proved as the most effective means for the first time.

One of the most important struggles with the campain for the eradication of untouchability that was the Guruvayur sathyagraha (1931-32). Guruvayur sathyagraha was an important approach making went in the history of the struggle against untouchability in kerala. The aim of the sathyagraha was to get the famous Sri Krishna - Temple of the place thrown to the Avarnas for workahip. The sathyagraha was started on November 1 - 1931 under the auspices of the kerala provincial congress in order to get the Guruvayur temple opened to all Hindus. The sathyagraha lasted for 10 months. It captured all India attention by the trust of K. Kelappan and assault on A K Gopalan was the caption of the volenter corps. The leader of sathyagraha was k kelappan and the of the corps. A K Gopalan the Zamorine was the trustee of the temple adopted and uncompromising attitude to wands the demand for the temple entry. Thus though the Guruvayur sathyagraha failed to advice it immediate objective, it had helped to create a climate in favour of the eradication of untouchability. Many temple Kerala has other part of India were out of bounds for the lower cast even roads around the temple were not open to them a large number of Dalits and upper caste Hindus assembled in Guruvayur to demanded that avarna Hindu be allowed inside the temple. The protest took the form of a peaceful sathyagraha organized by the Kerala congress committee under leadership of K. Kelappan popularly known as Kerala Gandhi .A month before this Sathyagraha started effects to mobilize people and founds had began propaganda process from Thiruvanathapuram and centers in Malabar region reached Guruvayur. The months movement for eradication of untouchability in Kerala around itself with success on November 12,1936 when the Maharajas of Travancore Sri Chithira Tirunal Balarama Varma

issued had historic proclamation throwing open the temple in travancore to all Hindus, irrespective of caste.

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