CHAPTER FOUR

THE VAIKAM SATYAGRAHA

Vaikam, an unheard-of place except within Travancore suddenly shot into national attention as flaming seat for Satyagraha.\(^1\) Vaikam Satyagraha assumed significance in that it rose above the caste divisions and conflicts inherent to the Hindu social order and stood for social justice and equality of the majority who were incidentally outcastes.\(^2\) The anti-untouchability campaign at Vaikam provides an interesting study because of its ‘calm spirit’.\(^3\)

Vaikam Satyagraha was not a sudden upsurge of 1924. It was, like most other movements, the peak expression of resentment that simmered silently over centuries. Resentment against inhuman exploitation, inequality and humiliation handed out by the privileged uppercastes.\(^4\) The form of untouchability practiced in Kerala, particularly in Travancore, was core to the Vaikam Satyagraha.

Signboards marked *theendal-palakas* prohibiting road usage to untouchables, dotted roads to temples. These humiliating messages served as warnings.\(^5\)

Kochukunju Channar, an Ezhava from Karthikappally tried hard for
these *theendal-palaka* removals in Sree Moolam Popular Assembly in 1905, but of no avail.⁶ Later, in the Assembly, Kumaran Asan, referred to the roads in Vaikam, Thirunakkara, Suchindram and a few other places, demanding their removal.

In 1919, T.K. Madhavan, General Secretary of S.N.D.P *yogam* and member of the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly moved this subject in the House. Travancore Government’s response was evident in Dewan M. Krishnan Nair’s reply which said ‘since this relates to religion, the Government cannot well interfere.’⁸ However, T.K. Madhavan persisted with the issue again in the 1921 Assembly. But Dewan Raghaviah muffled the move and declared that this subject shall not be brought up in the Popular Assembly.⁹

The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as a powerful political leader sent strong signals on the abolishment of untouchability. He asserted that untouchability could not assume a second priority in the National programme because without its removal, *swaraj* was meaningless.¹⁰

Gandhi was faced with social discrimination for the first time in South Africa. There he revolted against the discriminatory attitude of the South African Government against Indians, where, the migrant minorities
were treated as ‘lesser’ to the local population. These unfortunates lived bereft of basic rights. As a young man Gandhi witnessed how tormenting their lives were. They were degraded to emotional and economic wrecks. The situation resembled the untouchability scenario back home.

He wrote in *Young India:*

“Many educated and thinking members of the depressed classes have expressed to me the fear that the establishment of *swarajya,* before the conservative forces favouring the maintenance of the existing order are so thoroughly shattered as to never revive again in their present strength, will simply perpetuate the slavery to which they have been condemned for centuries past. They would very much like to join the movement for *swarajya* and do their best to promote its success, but they feel convinced that the one preliminary condition is that the forces which are opposed to the abolishment of untouchability and other disabilities from which they suffer, should be destroyed once for all.”

This uncompromising stand of Mahatma Gandhi attracted a disgusted T.K Madhavan. He decided to meet Gandhi at Thirunelveli to resolve the age-old taboo prevailing at home. He understood that a solution lay in turning to peaceful methods. Since ‘change of heart’ of the *savarnas* was a daunting task, he realized that a towering leadership was the need of the
hour. Only such a figure could bring all the parallel movements together for united strength. Hence, the meeting was of crucial importance and sowed the seeds of Vaikam Satyagraha in the fertile grounds of social uprising.\textsuperscript{13}

T. K. Madhavan’s meeting with Mahatma Gandhi at Thirunelveli on September 24, 1921 was a turning point in the history of Kerala, opening a new chapter in the social reforms. Gandhi addressed the people of Kerala through T.K. Madhavan, which emphasized his stand against untouchability and expressed foil support to T.K Madhavan’s mission.\textsuperscript{14} The Kerala populace was overwhelmed by Gandhi’s magnetic pull. As a continuation of his message from Thirunelveli, Gandhi wrote:

“Kerala is responsible for developing the worst forms of the sin of untouchability and there is a corresponding duty, therefore, on Kerala leaders of the so called higher communities, to lead the rest of the country in the removal of the sin.”\textsuperscript{15}

Gandhi’s writings and messages took effect. Forty six Hindu members of the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly signed a memorial in 1922 and submitted it to the Government urging Governmental action to facilitate \textit{Devaswoms} for the common good of all Hindus and advancement of Hinduism. The memorial further sought sanction for all classes of Hindus to worship at temples either managed or aided by the Government. This
indeed was Gandhian charisma.  

Following the Assembly resolution, the caste associations of the savarnas in Kerala viz, The Hindu Maha Sabha, The Nair Service Society, The Yogaskhema Sabha and The Kshatriya Mahasabha etc. conducted intensive propaganda across the state to awaken savarnas to changed times and accept equality as the new-age reality.

Vaikam Satyagraha commenced at the thirty eighth session of the Indian National Congress held at Kokanada in December 1923, which passed a resolution in favour of T. K. Madhavan’s initiatives. K. Kelappan Nair, T.K. Madhavan, V. Sankaran Nambudirippad and K. Velayudha Menon were specially empowered to tackle the situation in Kerala on an urgent basis. The Kokanada Congress resolution cheered thousands and was received on a grand scale.

Soon after the Kokanada Congress session, an enthusiastic meeting of K.P.C.C was held at Emakulam on 24 January 1924. It formed an “anti-untouchability committee” with K. Kelappan Nair as convener. T. K. Madhavan, Kurur Nilakantan Nambudirippad, T.R. Krishna Swamy Aiyyar and K. Velayudha Menon as members. Another committee was formed to undertake propaganda function for creating a favourable climate in the state.
K. Kelappan Nair was the convener and K.P. Kesava Menon, A.K. Pillai, Kurur Nilakantan Nambudirippad and Hassan Koya, were the members of this wing.\textsuperscript{19}

The anti-untouchability committee held a meeting on 16 February 1924 in the swarajasrama at Kollam. They chalked out a hectic programme to popularize the anti-untouchability sentiment and to activate the freedom movement and Temple Entry for the lower castes. The agenda included convening of Sunday prayer meetings, organizing all-Hindu processions irrespective of castes and submitting a memorial to the Maharaja of Travancore and Cochin towards theendal abolishment. These programmes and resolutions reflected the essence of the Kokanada Congress.

The propaganda committee visited all prominent places in Travancore spreading the new message. It was during one such march that K. Kelappan Nair, convener of the propaganda committee discarded his caste title ‘Nair’, in a gesture of caste-resentment. It spoke volumes.

On 29 February the anti-untouchability committee reached Vaikam and held a public meeting there. It was a huge gathering and it was decided to organize a march in protest against untouchability the following day.

Vaikam as a venue for anti-untouchability mission was not by
chance. It was one of the worst places where untouchability and unapproachability were practiced in its horrid form. The Vaikam temple of Lord Siva was out of bounds for the Ezhavas, Pulayas and other non-caste-Hindus with prohibitive signboards *theendal-palaka* displayed all over. Curiously, non-Hindus were spared of this ban. The anti-untouchability procession at Vaikam was however, postponed to 30 March by the anti-untouchability committee, to facilitate greater preparedness.

In the light of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee’s decision of *avarna* procession on 30 March 1924, at Vaikam, K.P. Kesava Menon, sent a letter to Gandhi, seeking his blessings and permission to commence Satyagraha. In reply, Gandhi emphasized on absolute non-violence all through the event.

The K.P.C.C. announcement raised many an eyebrow among the conservatives. They mustered collective might to face the challenges posed by Congress volunteers. They filed a petition which claimed that the roads to the temple were exclusively for temple purposes and further that the pathways were never permissible to any classes outside their own. If non-caste people treaded these roads it amounted to a serious breach of the prohibition and could end regional peace. So it was in the best interests that Vaikam temple stayed protected from any possible pollution.
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In the wake of savarna petition, the Kottayam District Magistrate, M.V. Subramanya Aiyyer issued a prohibitory order under section 127 of the criminal procedure code of Travancore. A copy was served to K. P Kesava Menon, K. Velayudha Menon, A.K Pillai and T.K Madhavan. In spite of the prohibitory order, the Congress workers continued their violation, of course in absolute conformity with non-violence. Subsequently, two deputations, one favouring the Satyagraha and another in opposition proceeded to Thiruvananthapuram praying for the intervention by the Maharaja. But the Maharaja chose to maintain status quo and instructed the District Magistrate and police officers to take necessary measures to prevent untoward incidents.

As the 30 of March 1924 approached, Congress volunteers from distant parts of Kerala marched towards Vaikam. The newspapers in Kerala gave wide publicity and sensational coverage to the event. Malayala Manorama wrote:

“The movement now started seems to be humble in its origin but it will become a mass movement within a short span of time. We request the authorities to initiate favourable action in this regard.”

The dawn of 30 March 1924 held fresh enthusiasm to the satyagrahis at Vaikam, There before the assembled crowd, Kesava Menon read the
message sent by Gandhi. Infused with new strength, they marched in two rows towards the prohibited area and briskly under the leadership of K.P Kesava Menon, T.K Madhavan, K. Kelappan, A.K. Pillai, Krishna swamy Aiyyar and K. Velayudha Menon. Gandhian idealism and nationalist sentiment ran harder in their veins. And yet, the calm and solemn appearance of the volunteers shone with a light that added to the brightness of this morning hour.

At first, a batch of three men, - Kunjappy a Pulaya, Bahuleyan an Ezhava and Govinda Panikkar a Nair, entered the prohibited area where theendal-palakas hung. They were arrested promptly and taken into police custody. They served a six-month sentence for declining to seek sureties.

On 31, the second day of the Satyagraha, another batch of three, a Nair and two Ezhavas followed suit and were arrested similarly. They too were sentenced to six month’s imprisonment on similar lines.

Meanwhile, two Aiyar brothers, Sivarama Aiyar and Vancheswara Aiyar, representing Vaikam orthodoxy met Gandhi at Juhu and tried to convince him that the disputed Vaikam roads were actually private. Gandhi realised that the satyagrahis there had failed to win savarna’s hearts. Change of opponent’s heart without any coercion was fundamental to
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Satyagraha. So Gandhi in his letter asked satyagrahis to temporarily stop the demonstration.

K.P. Kesava Menon apprised Gandhi on the prevalent facts and after a brief pause of six days, on 7 April, the Satyagraha proceeded with renewed vigour, on peaceful lines invariably. Still anonymous letters from savarnas continued to threaten the lives and limbs of the satyagrahis. Hired goons of the orthodoxy intimidated them of dire consequences. But unfazed, the satyagrahis stood their ground.

Satyagraha leaders tried hard to win the hearts of savarna leaders at Vaikam including their leader, Indanthurthy Nambiadiri. It was futile. Enraged with the ongoings the orthodoxy flexed their influence on the District Magistrate who ordered a raid on the Satyagraha ashram. Letters and literatures were seized. The Magistrate summoned the leaders viz., T.K. Madhavan, K.P. Kesava Menon, K. Kelappan, and A.K. Pillai to Kottayam, 23 miles away from Vaikam on 7 April to answer the charges of breach levelled against them. K.P. Kesava Menon and T.K. Madhavan courted arrest and were sentenced to six month’s simple imprisonment. They were taken to the Thiruvananthapuram central jail the same day. The arrest created widespread unrest that fuelled the satyagrahis with added determination. Mathrubumi, the National daily expressed concern thus:

O'
“The news that a civilized Government sentenced its subjects to six month’s imprisonment for using a road belonging to that Government, cannot fail to cause amazement to the world. We doubt whether the Travancore Government has fully realized what a rash act they are committing. But what is involved in this is not merely that a subject has been punished for using a Government road. A patriotic Hindu can but feel ashamed at the sight of a Hindu Government trying forcibly to keep away Hindus from near a Hindu temple.”

Until, 10 April 1924, the Satyagraha proceeded uneventful. Then police commissioner Pitt decided to refrain from arresting the satyagrahis. The restricted area was barricaded and guarded by the police.

Under the leadership of T.V. Chattukutty Nair, Krishnan Pachan and Narayanan, the Satyagraha continued unabated. And as per Pitt’s instructions the police were to only watch around. Chattukutty Nair fasted under the blazing sun refusing even water. Requests to give-up were shoved off. At last an exhausted Chattukutty Nair fell unconscious and was shifted to a nearby hospital. Chattukutty Nair’s sacrificial Satyagraha made waves among the citizens across the country.

Gandhi carefully watched the new scenario, asked the satyagrahis to stop fasting. Since fasting in Satyagraha has well-defined limits, he said
“you cannot fast against a tyrant, for it will be a species of violence done to him”. According to Gandhi fasting can only be resorted to against a lover, not to extort rights but to reform him.

“In my opinion, in the Vaikam movement, opponents of the reform are the tyrants” Gandhi observed.

The Satyagraha took a new turn. Instead of sending three volunteers to the western gate, on 12 April they sent three of the six to the west and the other three southwards. It was decided that if no satyagrahi arrests were made within 18 April or road usage by non-caste allowed, the committee would commence Satyagraha at the northern and eastern gates too. On the 13 of the same month, Kurur Nilakantan Nambudirippad and Chittedathu Sanku Pillai reached Vaikam to provide added leadership to the Satyagraha. Chittedathu Sankupillai was seriously wounded in a goonda attack.

E.V. Ramaswami Naicker from Tamil Nadu reached Vaikam. He was a social reformer and held in high esteem in the Travancore circles. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, the charismatic leader of non-Brahmins was also known as the father of the rationalist movement in India. He minced no words to point out to the huge gathering that the caste-Hindu oppression was primarily responsible for mass conversion to Christianity and Islam.
EVR announced his decision to stay on with the Satyagraha to the end. \(^{33}\)

EVR said:

"The command from the neighbouring sister province of Kerala is irresistible. A grave situation has arisen. Repression is rampant. The satyagrahis and the leaders including Sriman Joseph are trying to remove untouchability, the corner stone of our Mahatma’s programme-have been made the victims of it. These considerations far out-weigh in my mind and I have started. Perhaps I may also be arrested; but it is nothing. I appeal to all sympathizers, be they leaders, propagandists, volunteers or persons of whatever creed, to flock to Kerala. Those that cannot do so, can at least give their financial aid. Many volunteers in Tamil Nadu have often said and also written to me that they were only looking forward to a Satyagraha and still many others, that they would suffer in the cause of the removal of untouchability.... fail not to avail of it. Hasten up every one of you and join the noble cause." \(^{34}\)

Naicker took part in the Satyagraha in defiance of the prohibitory orders on 14 April when he addressed the congregation there. And he had to undergo six month’s imprisonment for this. Naicker’s speeches worked
wonders in and around Vaikam and gave a fillip to the movement.  

Parallel to these, the Satyagraha leaders organized awareness programmes across the state and requested the Travancore Government to extend the use of roads and highways to all classes of people, irrespective of caste or creed.  

These resolutions and meetings clearly expressed the sincere solicitude of the liberal-minded caste-Hindus for their fellow non-caste Hindu brethren. Apparently, they were moved by Gandhian ideals and practices and support for the Satyagraha at Vaikam came from even remote comers of Travancore. This whole-hearted savarna support to the Vaikam Satyagraha exactly reflected in the editorial of Malayala Manorama:  

“As Nairs and other high-caste-Hindus are evincing sympathy for the movement, it can be supposed that there is only the opposition of Government against it. It is not proper that the Travancore Government should be bent upon perpetuating the evil of untouchability in this twentieth century. There is no reasonable connection between religion and unapproachability. Though in the past injustice has been done to the depressed classes, there is no need to perpetuate it now."  

K.P. Kesava Menon and T.K. Madhavan were arrested and George
Joseph assumed the captaincy as the secretary of the Satyagraha committee. Sahodaran Ayyappan was arrested. George Joseph was arrested along with two other satyagrahis, Sebastain and K.G. Nair and sentenced for six month’s imprisonment.38

Gandhi found the Vaikam Satyagraha as a Hindu effort to purify the Hindu orthodoxy. He wrote to George Joseph:

“As to Vaikam, I think that you shall let the Hindus do the work. It is they who have to purify themselves. You can help by your sympathy and by your pen, but not by organizing the movement and certainly not by offering Satyagraha. If you refer to the Congress resolution of Nagapur, it calls upon the Hindu members to remove the curse of untouchability.”39

Gandhi repeated his stance that untouchability was the sin of the Hindus and they must suffer for it and purify themselves and pay the debt they owed their suppressed brothers and sisters. Again he wrote:

“The silent loving suffering of one single pure Hindu as such will be enough to melt the heart of millions of Hindus; but the sufferings of thousands of non-Hindus in behalf of the untouchables will leave the Hindus unmoved. Their blind eyes will not be opened by outside interference, however well intentioned and generous it may be; for it will not bring home to them the sense of guilt. On the contrary, they
would probably hug the sin all the more for such interference. All
reforms to be sincere and lasting must come from within.”

The satyagrahis true to their pledge, sat under the scorching
April sun all day and spent nights too without drinking a drop of water. The
flower garlands they wore dried crisp in the blazing sun. Still an undaunted
hope remained.

George Joseph was arrested but the Satyagraha continued under the
leadership of Krishnan Nambudirippad. On 13 April, Kurur Neelakandan
Nambudirippad and Chittedathu Sanku Pillai participated in the Satyagraha.
M. Emperumal Naidu and Ayyamuthu Goundan boosted the will of
Travancore people through their inflamed speeches.

The orthodoxy now turned violent. Chittedathu Sanku Pillai was
brutally assaulted by orthodoxy-hired goondas. But as a true satyagrahi,
Chittedathu Sanku Pillai suffered the torment with calm and the other
satyagrahis too stayed so. He attained martyrdom in December 1924 at the
age of 38.

On 17 April, the veteran Congress leader and lawyer, S. Sreenivasa
Aiyangar reached Vaikam for a first-hand appraisal. The study was to
furnish the Government of Madras a factual picture of the situation.

Aiyangar met a number of leaders, especially, T.K. Madhavan and K.P.
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Kesava Menon in the prison, collected adequate evidences to the cause of the civil resisters and met the Maharaja. His public speech in Thiruvananthapuram and statement in *The Hindu*, provided a clear picture on the Satyagraha campaign at Vaikam to all Indians.

Aiyangar initiated a discussion with the *savarna* leaders like S. Krishna Aiyyar, Venketarama Aiyyar, Vazhuthangathu Thampuran and Indanthuruthy Nambiadiri. The leaders of the Nair community such as Mannathu Padmanabhan, Changanachery K. Parameswaran Pillai, and N. Ramakrishna Pillai also argued for the cause of the satyagrahis in the meeting. But all in vain.44

The writings of Gandhi and the articles published in the leading National dailies created favourable atmosphere for the Vaikam Satyagraha throughout India. As a result of these, a band of Akalis decided to help the Satyagraha at Vaikam by opening a toll-free kitchen for the satyagrahis. Gandhi expressed hope that the Sikh’s free kitchen would be withdrawn and the movement would be confined to Hindus only.

“The sacrifice of helpers from other parts of India will not convert the opponents and it is highly likely that the last state of the untouchables will be worse than the first. Let it be remembered that Satyagraha is a most powerful process of conversion. It is an appeal
to the heart. Such an appeal cannot be successfully made by people from other parts of India flocking to Vaikam."\(^{45}\)

Amidst police excesses and hired goonda terrorism, the satyagrahis remained cool, running the *charkas*, sat near the barricade, singing National and devotional songs. They strictly followed the Gandhian ideals in letter and spirit. This was lauded by the *Malayala Manorama* by comparing their sufferings with that of Jesus Christ in an article.\(^ {46}\)

The Akali delegation headed by Lala Lai Singh and Kripal Singh reached Vaikam and opened a toll free kitchen for the satyagrahis. The kitchen which worked for sometime, wound up. *An*

Referring to the outside help, Gandhi wrote in *Young India*:

> “But why may the Vaikam Satyagraha not receive monetary aid from outside, especially if it be from Hindus? So far as non-Hindu assistance is concerned, I am as clear about such pecuniary help as I am about such personal help. I may not build my Hindu temple with non-Hindu money. If I desire a place of worship I must pay for it. This removal of untouchability is much more than building a temple of brick and mortar. Hindus must bleed for it, must pay for it. They must be prepared to forsake wife, children and all for the sake of removing the curse. As for accepting assistance for Hindus from outside, such acceptance would betray unreadiness on the part of the
local Hindus for the reform. If the Satyagrahis have the sympathy of the local Hindus, they must get locally all the money they may need.... Satyagraha is a process of conversion.... Outside pecuniary help must interfere with the love process if I may so describe the method of Satyagraha.”

Mahatma Gandhi’s stand on avoiding ‘outside help’ worked in right spirit. The satyagrahis now tried for a self-reliant structure—a new method of fund collection—called *Pidiyari* (collection of a handful-of-rice-contribution from each family everyday to feed the satyagrahis).

This bonding act was a powerful blow to the aims of the orthodoxy. The modes of repression changed and they started to assault the volunteers. The goondas brutally kicked the Satyagraha leader Sivasailam and his followers on their stomachs. This was photographed by Charles. B. Hill, an American journalist who visited Vaikam the same day.

On 9 May at Vaikam, a joint meeting of the Nairs and Ezhavas, decided to send a deputation consisting of ten prominent persons to meet the Dewan. N. Kumaran, C.V. Kunjuraman, Mannathu Padmanabhan, Prakkulam Parameswaran Pillai, Changanachery K. Parameswaran Pillai, M.N. Nair, Govindan Channar, and Kurumban Daivathan were the members.
This powerful alliance between N.S.S. and S.N.D.P. yogam was an epoch-making development in the social history of modern Kerala. This Vaikam spirit, certainly was the direct outcome of the first impingement of Gandhian ideals upon the politics and society of Kerala. The deputation met the Diwan on 16 May 1924, and submitted the ‘Nair-Ezhava’ memorial. After reading the memorial, the Dewan replied that the facts and arguments presented through the memorial required examination.

At this moment at Vaikam, the women folk came to the forefront of the Satyagraha. Mrs. Ramaswami Naicker, Mrs. Govindan Channar, Mrs. T.K. Madhavan were some of the women leaders. Vaikam Satyagraha thus brought to the forefront the spirit of women who were otherwise restricted to the kitchens. It was the first time that women marched in such large numbers. A report of the second district conference of the Congress at Chengannur mentions that ‘There are high-born Nair ladies who have not disdained to serve Pulayas with meals and remove the leaves out of which they have eaten.’

Mrs. Nanikkutty Amma another women satyagrahi was entrusted to enroll women satyagrahis. On 5 June, six women satyagrahis under the leadership of Mrs. Ramaswamy Naickar, Mrs. Govindan Channar and Mrs.
Muthuswamy participated in the Satyagraha which attracted the attention of all across the state.  

Commenting on the Satyagraha movement at Vaikam, the *Navvulatota*, daily, from Masulipattanam observed:

“Indians do not allow some of their own countrymen to walk along the roads round the temple at Vaikam. They have thus been behaving more arbitrarily than the white men against whose conduct in refusing to grant us independence, we have been complaining for many years. When our own countrymen are behaving in this fashion why should we abuse white men? If unfortunately, we get *swaraj* at anytime, can there be any doubt that our own men will act arbitrarily as at Vaikam.”

On 20 June events took a turn, when, Pichu Aiyangar, the Assistant Superintendent of police ordered to stop singing and seized the charkas. The police assault on volunteers lasted for half an hour.

Criticizing the police violence at Vaikam the *Janavartamani* observed:

“As the higher authorities do not appear to have condemned the conduct of the police, there is room to suspect that they may have instigated the police to harass the satyagrahis. But the volunteers at Vaikam will be prepared even to sacrifice their lives and will not give
up the principle of non-violence as a result of the hasty acts of the police.”

Reacting sharply to this incident the Mathrubhumi, expressed ‘thanks to Pichu Aiyyangar for the public persecution of the satyagrahis, as such ill-thought brashness only hastens victory for the satyagrahis. It points out that such a policy is improper for any Government which claims to be civilized.

Things took a turn for worse. R.K. Krishna Pillai, Acting Commissioner of Police in the absence of Pitt, took charge. The policemen fisted and kicked satyagrahis recklessly. Reports of police squeezing the testicles and injuring genitals were widespread. Such ugly atrocities invited mass resentment and sharp criticism from the press.

Swarat wrote:

“The police have crushed the testicles of some volunteers’. This sentence appearing in the report will stun the heart of any man who has any respect for humanity. When we hear further that one of the volunteers so persecuted is on the verge of death, we can easily guess how satanic must have been the senseless persecution carried out by the police.... We regret to have to point out again to the Government that as the repression from the authorities increases, it will only increase the force and motive power of the Satyagraha struggle....
Can it be that Brahminism can become perfect only by drinking human blood?" 

Newspapers like the Samadarsi, the Veerakeralam and the Keralasanchari had articles condemning in strong terms the actions of the police towards the satyagrahis. The Deshabhimani, the Bharatakahalam, the Sreevazhumkode, the Nazarani Deepika and all other papers condemned the atrocities and found fault with the Government.

In another instance, Subramaniya Aiyyar, a volunteer inspector was wrestled down and his khadi clothing burnt. Another satyagrahi, Raman Elayathu while talking to the satyagrahis at the eastern gate was whisked away and they rubbed lime into his eyes. But the volunteers maintained their calm and prayed for their assailters too. 

In response to harassment reports on the satyagrahis and especially the lime-rubbing incident, Swadeshimitram criticized that such incidents are let to happen in presence of police! Further that, in similar incidents of future the police too should be held responsible.

Gandhi, who had complete information of the situation at Vaikam, wrote a strong-worded article in Young India on 3 July 1924.

"The Vaikam Satyagraha has entered upon probably the last stage.

The newspapers report - and the report is confirmed by private
advice - that the Travancore authorities have now practically abandoned the Satyagrahis to the tender mercies of goondas.... Are they conniving at this open violence against the innocent Satyagraha? Has such an advanced state like Travancore abdicated its elementary function of protection of life and property? ... They blind the eyes of volunteers by throwing lime into them... But the satyagrahis must not lose their heads. The khaddar dress of the volunteers is said to have been tom from them and burnt. This is all most provoking. They must remain cool under every provocation and courageous under the hottest fire. Loss even of a few hundred lives will not be too great a price to pay for the freedom of the “unapproachables”. Only the martyrs must die clean. The satyagrahis like Caesar’s wife must be above suspicion”.

Newspapers were loud to reflect public fury over cruelty to the satyagrahis. *Samadarsi* observed:

“Fortified by the firm conviction that the non-violent satyagrahis will not retaliate, they make these soldiers of the truth starve by stopping those who take food to them and prevent them from going to ease themselves. The police beat or otherwise maltreat the children of those who are in favour of Satyagraha when they go to school.”

Responding to the destruction of charkas which were treated by the satyagrahis as a divine instrument for expressing their faith in non-violence
and constructive work, *Malayala Manorama*, wrote:

“The authorities seem to be dreaming that, if the volunteers are violently belabored and their spinning wheel, which they revere as a divine instrument seized, they will become incensed and take to violent measures and that the movement will automatically stop. But their hope will only end in a dream.”

On parallel with Satyagraha strides, police authorities were empowered to defeat pro-Satyagraha movements. This was very clear when *Mathrubhumi* appealed to the people of Ottappalam in Malabar to protest against the action of a police officer Thampan in refusing the use of the public reading room for a meeting in support of the Vaikam Satyagraha.

An alarmed orthodoxy turned against the press. They accused the press for picturing the satyagrahis the lamb and the caste-Hindus a pack of wolves. An isolated orthodoxy, ran from pillar to post in search of a respected journal to accept their line of thinking. Defeated, they started their own publication, *Dharmaprasthanam*.

The official communiques sought to put all the blame on the satyagrahis, and justified the actions of the police and *savarna* orthodoxy. The *KeralaKaumudi* on 24 July, in a biting remark said that the people of Kerala will only smile for hiding the truth.
The Maharaja Sree Moolam Thiranal passed away on 7 August 1924. The Satyagraha was suspended for three days to mourn his death. Subsequently Sri Chithira Thiranal ascended the throne on 1 September 1924. As a gesture of goodwill at the enthronement ceremony all Vaikam satyagrahis including K.P. Kesava Menon and T.K. Madhavan were set free. In view of Sri Chithira Thiranal being a minor, the British Government appointed the senior Maharani Sethu Lekshmi Bhai as the regent.70

In an article, Gandhi congratulated the Maharani Regent as well as the satyagrahis for showing positive indications in the accession of power that would work for a good mutual rapport.

Gandhi wrote

“I tender my congratulations to the Maharani Regent of Travancore on her generosity in releasing all the Satyagrahi prisoners. I tender too my congratulations to the Satyagrahis on suspending Satyagraha for the time being. It paves the way for an understanding and enables the state authorities to review their attitude towards the Satyagrahis without embarrassment. Let me hope that H.H the Maharani Regent will recognize that untouchability is no credit to Hinduism, but that it is a serious blot upon it.71

The press also sounded optimistic over the changed scenario. The
Kerala Chandrika wrote:

“This act of setting the Satyagraha prisoners at liberty shows a praiseworthy state of mind. But so long as a section of Her highness the Maharani’s subjects are prohibited by the Government from walking over the Vaikam road, so long, the Government will not be at all civilized.”

Well-wishers of the satyagrahis expected some changes in the Governmental policy. This is what exactly reflected in the report of Mathrubhumi on 25 September 1924. The paper pointed out that ‘with the installation of the young Maharaja and the assumption of the administration by the Maharani Regent, an unprecedented opportunity has occurred for the Travancore Government to remove all disability with regard to free access to roads suffered by the theendal castes.’

Amidst all, the sufferings of the satyagrahis, who offered the Satyagraha, standing in neck deep water, with folded hands and prayer songs in their lips during the monsoon flood of August was heart breaking.

Sree Narayana Guru, visited Vaikam during the third week of September 1924 and blessed the satyagrahis. Deshabhimani published an interview in which Swami disclosed that he was collecting subscriptions in his Sivagiri ashram for the cause of Satyagraha. This was really inspiring
The benedictine blessings of Sree Narayana Guru, rendered inestimable support to the satyagrahis.\textsuperscript{75}

During his visit to the Satyagraha ashram at Vaikam, a meeting presided over by Sree Narayana Guru was organized. Swami Satyavrathan, T.K. Krishnaswami Aiyyer and Saraswathy Swami delivered speeches. Swami Satyavrathan requested all Ezhavas present in the meeting to adopt Pidiyari and Kettuthengu for helping the Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{76} As a token of his support, Sree Narayana Guru made a donation of Rs.1000/- to the Satyagraha fund and promised to offer Satyagraha himself, if necessary. As a mark of respect, the khaddar shawl woven in the Satyagraha ashram was presented to the Guru and he accepted it with great pleasure.\textsuperscript{77} On the advice of Sree Narayana Guru, Govindan Channar gave up his title Channar and accepted the title Das which means ‘servant’ to suit him better in his present avocation, the Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{78}

The orthodoxy in an article written in their mouthpiece Dharmapra\textit{thananam} alleged that “the Satyagraha movement would not have continued so long had the Government proclaimed at the very outset that the Vaikam roads are part of the temple precincts and not public roads”. They argued that “it is the duty of the Government to eradicate this perpetual nuisance called Satyagraha”. The \textit{Dharmapra\textit{thananam}}
recommended that the Government should initiate stronger action than the present ‘soft’ approach.\textsuperscript{79}

Satyagraha is a process of conversion. To rouse the conscience of the orthodoxy and to create more public opinion in favour of the Vaikam Satyagraha, the satyagrahis as Gandhi advised decided to organize a \textit{savarna jatha} from Vaikam to Thiruvananthapuram and to submit a memorial to the regent Maharani seeking the grant of freedom of movement. They also decided to launch another march from Suchindram to Thiruvananthapuram under the leadership of M. Emperumal Naidu.

Subsequently, it was decided by the anti-untouchability committee to entrust Mannathu Padmanabhan, who had already established his role in the crusade for the abolition of untouchability. Mannathu Padmanabhan, the General Secretary of the Nair Service Society, was nominated as the commander-in-chief of the proposed \textit{savarna jatha} from Vaikam. The Nair Service Society, possessed progressive views and opposed evils such as untouchability right from its inception on 31 October, 1914. They accepted this nomination in a jubilant mood.\textsuperscript{80}

The mission of Nair Service Society was spelt aloud in the lines of an oath taken by the \textit{Nair Samudaya Bhritya Jana Sangham} at the time of
formation. It said “I will not engage in activities which are against other communities”. Doing justice to this oath, the Nair Service Society tried its level best for the upliftment of the other castes. Mannathu Padmanabhan as secretary of the Nair Service Society participated in the meetings of the untouchables in several places and asked them to rise to the level of securing fundamental civil rights by acquiring education.\footnote{81} Regarding the untouchability Mannathu Padmanabhan observed that, ‘the foolishness of non-Brahmins is more dominant in this than the wisdom of the Brahmins.’

Removal of untouchability and caste rigidity and the establishment of social equality were the prime objectives of the Nair Service Society under the leadership of Mannathu Padmanabhan. The Mannar Nair conference, held in 1916 passed a resolution and decided that Nairs should not observe unapproachability. Moreover, the Nair conference held at Ambalappuzha in 1922 unanimously resolved that every Hindu without distinction of caste should have a right not only to enter and worship in temples but also to perform pujas.

In the same year another meeting of the Nairs held at Vaikam passed a resolution recognizing the right of all non-caste-Hindus to use the road around the Vaikam temple and roads similarly situated else where in the state. To cap it all, Mannathu Padmanabhan himself stood as an epitome for
social equality even by sharing food with Azhakan Pulayan in his mother’s kitchen and to clean his waste plates by his orthodox mother herself. The nomination of Mannathu Padmanabhan as the captain of savarna jatha, received much enthusiasm among the people across the society.

After proper discussions and detailed planning, on 1 November 1924 under the leadership of Mannathu Padmanabhan and with directions from T.K. Madhavan and K.P. Kesava Menon, the march began. K. Kelappan, Edavarat Padmanabha Menon, A.K. Pillai, C.V. Kunjuraman, Prakkulam Parameswam Pillai and C. Kesavan were the other leaders of the savarna jatha.

Mannathu Padmanabhan wrote:

“The jatha left Vaikam on 1 November 1924 after offering prayers at the Mahadeva temple for the realization of its purpose. A board, on which it was written that ‘freedom of movement was the birth right of all citizens’ and a flag of the Indian National Congress, were carried in front of the procession. The sight of these people marching forward, singing songs specially composed for the occasion, touched the hearts of all those who saw them. The crowds which stood on the road sides watching the jatha pass demonstrated their sympathy and support by garlanding its members
and conveying their best wishes.”

The savarnas greeted the jatha with nirapara (vessel-like measuring unit of paddy over flowing with the grain), nilavilakku (burning brass oil lamp) and vay kurava (women producing a peculiar sound reserved for auspicious occasions) proved the support of the savarnas for the cause of the jatha. The Government viewed the savarna jatha leniently; so far as the procession in itself goes it does not seem to be objectionable or likely to lead to any disturbance of the peace.86

The savarna jatha was carried out peacefully without any obstruction not only because of the personal qualities of its participants, but also due to the strong support received from the savarnas.

The savarna jatha received rousing receptions at Chengannur, Mavelikara, Kollam, Mayyanadu and Sivagiri. Of the receptions, at Sivagiri, the abode of Sree Narayana Guru, was the most inspiring. The Guru blessed the members of the jatha and told them that there was no other mechanism to record the opinion of the savarnas than the jatha, which had veritably brought about a radical transformation of Kerala society. 86

The savarna jatha reached its destination at Puthen Kacheri Maidan in Thiruvananthapuram on 11 November 1924 covering a distance of 200
kilometers where it was merged with the *jatha* led by M. Emperumal Naidu. The entire Thiruvananthapuram city and its surroundings were submerged in a human sea, like of which Kerala had not witnessed earlier or later.⁸⁹

Thereafter, a public meeting was held chaired by V. Achutha Menon and passed a resolution moved by P.K. Govinda Pillai, editor *Subhashini* urging the Government to open the Vaikam roads to all Hindus.

This resolution of the *savarnas* exactly reflected the Gandhian ideals which paved the way for the organization of the *savarna jatha*. The triumph of the *savarna jatha* reached the distant regions of India too! This is evident from the receipt of a telegram to Mannathu Padmanabhan from a Hindu association from Sind congratulating him on the achievement of the goal of *savarna jatha*⁹⁰

The mission to create favourable opinion among the *savarnas* in favour of the anti-untouchability movement proved successful. Gandhi’s intention to purify the hearts of the Travancore orthodoxy was successfully fulfilled.

A deputation consisting of twelve representatives of the *savarna jatha* waited on 12 November, 1924 at 8 a.m. at Satelmond Palace. Changanacherry K. Parameswaran Pillai along with Mannathu...
Padmanabhan, M. Emperamal Naidu, V.V. Narayanan Nambudiri, Samudayathil Kesava Kurup, Prakkulam Parameswam Pillai, Kalloor Narayana Pillai, Sivathanu Pillai, Ramakrishnan Pillai, M.L.C., S. Krishna Warrier, A.K. Pillai and Padmanabha Pillai submitted a memorial, signed by more than 25,000 caste-Hindus. The memorial opened a new chapter in the annals of Kerala history.

After a careful hearing, the Maharani Regent replied that it was difficult to give an instant reply since, “a resolution has come up for discussion in the Legislative Council and will be taken up in the next meeting of the Council. When final orders are passed the representation contained in the memorial will receive due consideration,” she assured.

The memorial demonstrated a deep solicitude of the caste-Hindus for the well being of their suffering lower caste brethren, the like of which had never occurred in the history of Kerala. The memorial breathed the noble spirit of communal harmony and a genuine liberal concern for a just and orderly life in the society.

On request from Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave visited the Satyagraha ashram at Vaikam. During his speech, Vinobhaji appreciated the patience of the satyagrahis. He observed that since these customs were age-old, it
Meanwhile, Gandhi wrote a letter to A.K. Govinda Das appreciating the patient sufferings of the satyagrahis and expressed his anxiety to reach Vaikam.

In December 1924, the 39th session of the Congress was held at Balgaum under the presidency of Mahatma Gandhi. T.K. Madhavan along with Kurur Nambudirippad participated in it. They had given an authentic account of the Satyagraha to Gandhi. Highly pleased with the discipline of the volunteers and their adherence to truth and absolute abjuration of violence, Gandhi had agreed to visit Vaikam at the earliest opportunity. The Congress congratulated the satyagrahis on their non-violence, patience, courage and endurance. Further the Congress expressed its hope that the Government will recognize the justice of Satyagraha. Gandhi sanctioned Rs.1000/- for meeting the expenses of Vaikam Satyagraha.

In the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly, in February 1925, during the fourth day of the session a Bill demanding freedom of movement was introduced by the Ezhava member of the Legislative Council, N. Kumaran. After long serious discussions on the floor of the Assembly for two days,
the resolution was put to vote. Unfortunately, the resolution was defeated.

22 members (including 15 officials and 7 non-officials) cast their ballots against 21 members, (including 19 elected and 2 nominated).

When the resolution came for discussion, P. Parameswaran otherwise known as ‘manager Parameswaran’, an Ezhava member and brother of Dr. P. Palpu, formerly the General Secretary of S.N.D.P. yogam and the most ardent disciple of Sree Narayana Guru, opposed the Bill. He opposed Vaikam Satyagraha in the Assembly. Even though an Ezhava by birth, he asked the mover of the resolution, N. Kumaran another Ezhava member to withdraw the Bill.0 0

He had even dared to give a clean certificate to the ancient regime under the Maharajas of Travancore.

While these dramatic turns developed in the Assembly, a large number of people were eagerly waiting outside the council hall. When the resolution lost support by P. Parameswaran’s opposition vote, the people grew agitated. They sloganed against P. Parameswaran and shouted abuses. C. Kesavan in his autobiography Jeevithasamaram wrote:

“‘We all Ezhava students were assembled in the Town Hall. I ran after that serpent who left the hall after venomously biting the community through voting. That man was flying on a horse-carriage. I chased
him. I kept on shouting vile words at him for almost one furlong. I never hesitated to even become a murderer.”

It is notable that while an avarna member voted against their common interest, all savarna members of the Assembly stood unitedly by and voted in favour of the resolution. The mover of the Bill, N. Kumaran acknowledged the strong stand of the savarna members who stood in favour of the Bill.

The outcome of the Assembly pained the satyagrahis. But they remained calm and optimistic. Gandhi through an inspiring letter kept the momentum of the Satyagraha intact. He wrote:

"The Vaikam satyagrahis are fighting a battle of no less consequence than that of swaraj. They are fighting against an age-long wrong and prejudice."

On personal grounds, K.P. Kesava Menon, resigned from office of the secretary and K. Kelappan took charge. On 28 February 1925, Kuroor Nilakantan Nambudirippad was sentenced to undergo two month’s imprisonment by the Kottayam District Magistrate for defying the externment order passed on him.

Gandhi accompanied by Mahadeva Desai and his son Ramadas Gandhi, C. Rajagopalachari and others reached Vaikam on 10 March at
5.30 p.m. by a chartered motor boat from Kochi. More than seven thousand people assembled there to receive Gandhi. The Satyagraha camp sprang to celebration and to the satyagrahis, Gandhi’s presence was a divine bliss. The satyagrahis expressed hope that their demands will meet success soon. As expected, the event threw orthodoxy into further stress and gloom.¹⁰⁴

When the public meeting started, Gandhi received a registered letter delivered by a postman. This letter of protest from the orthodoxy opposed his attitude in favour of social justice. The orthodoxy of Vaikam, under the leadership of Indanthuruthy Devan Neelakantan Nambiadiri had been adamant. To dispel misapprehensions of the orthodox sections and to bring about a change in their hearts towards the satyagrahis, Gandhi decided to talk with them.

The orthodox leader, Nambiadiri, also the temple trustee, refused to meet Gandhi at the Satyagraha ashram where Gandhi stayed. He stated that he would be met with only at his own place. On 10 March 1925, Gandhi visited Nambiadiri’s residence. Nambiadiri, afraid of pollution, offered Gandhi a seat in the specially constructed portico, adjacent to his house. Nambiadiri, spoke from his seat inside his residence. Gandhi proved the basic contradictions in the orthodox’s stand and disproved the validity of their arguments. He argued that when man practices wrong notion for
centuries, the wrong does not transform into right simply by merit of time.\textsuperscript{105}

At the fag end of the conversation with Nambiadiri, Gandhi offered three alternatives as a solution.

(1) To conduct a referendum among the \textit{savarnas} within Vaikam taluk or over the whole state on this issue.

(2) To conduct arbitration, i.e. the representatives of both parties should settle the dispute, with the help of a pundit and the Dewan as the umpires.

(3) To conduct an examination by recognized pundits of the authenticity and meaning of the scriptural authority for maintaining unapproachability.

All the three proposals were rejected by the orthodoxy.

Soon after the meeting, Gandhi spoke at a public meeting at Perinchilambu field. The inspiring speech was reported by \textit{Malayala Manorama} as follows:

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“The evil of untouchability exists in the society for centuries. The eradication of this evil is not easy. Unmeasurable patience is needed for this. God help only those who wait with patience. I am sure that
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the public opinion of Vaikam favours the satyagrahis. Moreover, the public opinion which I received from outside Vaikam is also favouring this movement. From the other parts of India support grows day by day. If the satyagrahis will work properly, if they possess enough patience, no doubt ultimately victory goes to them.”

After a brief two-day visit, Gandhi left Vaikam for Thiruvananthapuram. On the way, Gandhi spoke at different places and reached Varkala on 12 March, 1925. Gandhi met the Regent Maharani who appraised Gandhi that she was personally sympathetic to the cause of the depressed class.

Mahatma Gandhi was deeply impressed by the simplicity of Her Highness. Gandhi later wrote, “She granted me a patient and courteous hearing. She was anxious for the opening of the roads at Vaikam and appreciated the proposals made by me.” Gandhi blamed the blind orthodoxy of Travancore who prevented Her Highness from the historic declaration of free movement. He requested the people to bring down the opposition of the blind orthodoxy.

At 4.00 p.m Gandhi visited Sree Narayana Guru. Guru agreed with the means adopted for the freedom of movement at Vaikam. Gandhi wrote: “I waited also upon His Holiness Sree Narayana Swami Guru. He entirely
approved of the Satyagraha movement and said that violence would never succeed and that non-violence was the only method.”109

Referring to the conversion as a remedy to untouchability, Gum said that the Hindu religion was more than sufficient for spiritual salvation, and for spiritual salvation, conversion was not necessary. In a public meeting, Guru advised that every one should wear Ichadi. Gandhi returned to Vaikam on 15 March.110

The orthodoxy at Vaikam arranged a second meeting with Gandhi on 17 March. Since Gandhi during his previous discussion asked for scriptural evidences for untouchability, the orthodoxy produced a copy of the Sankara Smriti and quoted four verses from Keralacharam, supporting the present custom of untouchability. Gandhi after careful observation nullified their contention saying that the text only referred to unapproachability in connection with residential houses and not public roads or temples.111

On 17 morning, Gandhi attended a prayer meeting of the satyagrahis and spoke to them. In the afternoon at 2.00 pm, he attended a large meeting of the Pulaya community. Before his departure to Alwaye he expressed his satisfaction on the Satyagraha movement at Vaikam and expressed his
confidence that the Satyagraha will be successful in not too distant a future.\textsuperscript{112}

Meanwhile, Gandhi held brief discussions with the Commissioner of Police, Pitt. On 18 March Gandhi wrote a letter from Alwaye to Pitt referring to their conversations regarding the feasibility of removing barricades and pickets and assured that the satyagrahis will not trespass to the prohibited area. In his reply Pitt informed Gandhi that orders for removal of barricades on four temple roads at Vaikam have been given. Subsequently the terms were accepted by both the parties and the order was implemented with effect from 7 April 1925.

The Satyagraha continued unabated and peacefully. A change slowly came over the adamant orthodoxy too. They abstained from torturing the satyagrahis. The emerging era prevented them indulging in such inhuman practices. The prohibitory orders were withdrawn on 4 April 1925, three days earlier than the date agreed by Pitt. Three months went by peacefully. On June 18, K. Kelappan sent a letter observing that the satyagrahis were not fully satisfied with the agreement, as the roads were laid open only partially.\textsuperscript{113}

On July 11, Gandhi wrote a stronger letter to Pitt. He sounded the
feasibility of a direct action for obtaining the legitimate rights of the satyagrahis. Again, on 28 instant, Mahatma Gandhi issued a warning to Pitt that he would seek the help of Rajagopalachari, Tamil Nadu state Congress president.

The strong attitude of Gandhi worked well. The Government at last declared the roads open on all three sides of the temple. Thus the Satyagraha was called off on 23 November 1925. K. Kelappan made a public statement wherein he stated:

“We are satisfied that the purpose for which Satyagraha was started has been achieved and we therefore under advice from our revered leader withdrew Satyagraha from Vaikam roads.”\textsuperscript{114}

Thus, after 20 months of relentless fight, the Satyagraha committee, reached its goal.

The anti-untouchability committee held on 29 November 1925, evaluated the situation and passed a resolution:

“In view of the fact that the Government have thrown open all roads in Vaikam to all citizens irrespective of caste or creed and that they follow no invidious distinction in their use, the object of Satyagraha having been achieved, this meeting approves of the decision of
the untouchability committee under instructions from Mahatmaji to
dissolve the Satyagraha *ashramom* and demobilize the volunteers
there of.”"^{115}
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