Guruvayur Satyagraha is a significant milestone in the social chronology of Kerala. The famous Sree Krishna temple of Guruvayur which lay outside Travancore, in the Malabar District of the erstwhile Madras province, where history re-wrote itself, provides an interesting insight into anti-untouchability movement in the state.\(^1\)

The authority of the temple administration- the Zamorin of Calicut- deliberately tried to deprive entry to a good majority of believers in tune with Kelappan’s proclamation that the demon of untouchability driven off the public streets had taken shelter in the sanctum of the temple.\(^2\) With confidence and unity from victory of Vaikam Satyagraha, leaders and activists derived strength to face the demon of untouchability.\(^3\)

The upliftment of the depressed sections of the Hindu community was always high on the agenda of the Indian National Congress in Malabar. The Congress meeting held at Vadakara on 3 and 4 May 1931 was a turning point. This Congress session passed two important resolutions. First, on the need for the establishment of *All India Charkha Sangham* in Kerala and a committee was constituted with C.H. Govindan Nambiar as secretary and
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Shyamji Sundardas, M. Karthyayaniamma, K. T. Kunjiraman Nambiar, and K. Kelappan as members. The second resolution was on the need to eradicate the evil of untouchability. The second resolution moved by Kelappan, received grand applause. Kelappan as well as other leaders felt that untouchability could be wiped out only if the depressed classes were permitted to enter the public temples.4

Following this, at the meeting of the Congress on 21 May 1931, a committee was constituted which included T.R. Krishnaswamy Aiyar, Kuroor Neelakantan Nambudirippad, P. Achutan and K. Kelappan, to submit a report enquiring where the Temple Entry campaign should start from. The committee, decided to organize Temple Entry campaign in Cochin and Malabar and work on it in association with the Travancore Committee for Temple Entry, the Nair Service Society and the S.N.D.P. yogam.

The Congress Working Committee was held in July 1931, at Bombay. K.P.C.C President K. Kelappan participated and submitted a representation to Gandhi and Congress Working Committee on 9 July 1931 highlighting the Temple Entry movement in Malabar.5 This was hailed by several local newspapers like Mitavadi, Sahodaran etc.
After Kelappan’s return from Bombay, the K.P.C.C. was convened on 2 August 1931 and passed a resolution sponsored by U. Gopala Menon, on the issue of Temple Entry. During his presidential address, Kelappan said:

“The launching of Satyagraha movement in Travancore and Cochin will be viewed as an agitation against the Government itself. But in this matter we have to fight with the conservatives, who were the real culprits. This has to be asserted. For this we have to launch the Temple Entry movement at Guruvayur in the British Malabar. Gandhi also has this opinion.”

“When their honour is at stake, when their rights are being taken away, when their livelihood is threatened, they have the right and it becomes their duty to offer Satyagraha........ they can do ............ if they have the will and the courage to suffer for the common good”

Gandhi wrote.

In pursuance of the Vadakara resolution on Temple Entry, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee decided in August 1931 to launch a Satyagraha in front of the famous Sree Krishna Temple, Guruvayur starting from 1 November 1931, if the prohibition continue to exist.

The Guruvayur temple owned by the Zamorin of Calicut was the
sacred shrine of the devotees of Kerala. But the people of lower castes were not permitted to worship there. They could walk only up to a distance of three-fourth kilometers away from the temple. Unlike Vaikam, here, the caste associations like N.S.S., S.N.D.P. yogam, Pulayar Mahasabha etc. were passive and lacked zeal to create an ambience for the community upliftment.\(^9\)

Subsequently a Satyagraha committee constituted under the chairmanship of Mannathu Padmanabhan decided to organize a Satyagraha volunteer band to gather favourable response for Temple Entry, not just in Malabar but across entire Kerala.\(^10\)

Mannathu Padmanabhan, the leader of the Nair community was already committed to the cause of Temple Entry. As the elected member of the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly he demanded the admission of all Hindus to temples. This uncompromising stand taken by Mannathu Padmanabhan on the Temple Entry issue changed the political scenario of Kerala. He took up the cause of the Temple Entry for all Hindus because of his deep rooted belief that it was an essential measure for social justice.

Practising what he preached, the Devi temple at Perunna, his family deity, was thrown open to all Hindus some twenty years before the Temple Entry Proclamation. Being a consistent and persistent advocate of Temple Entry,
his chairmanship was widely welcomed. Moreover, at all meetings held under the auspicious of the Nair Service Society, revolutionary resolutions were passed for Temple Entry to all Hindus and forwarded to the authontes. In addition, the Nair conferences across the state demanded rights to perform temple rites for all.

In Kerala an impressive groups of enthusiastic youths were formed to propagate the ideas of Temple Entry Satyagraha. Among the campaigners besides the names of K. Kelappan and Mannathu Padmanabhan, A.K. Gopalan, Moyyarathu Sankaran, K.P. Kayyalakkal, K. Raman Menon, K. Madhava Menon, V.T. Bhattathirippad, T. Subramanian Thirumumbu, C. Kuttan Nair, C. Devakiamma and M. Karthyayaniamma also find special mention.

The Temple Entry campaign was vigorously started in Ponnani taluk where the Guruvayur temple is situated. The propagandists like K. Kelappan, A.K. Gopalan, and Moyyarathu Sankaran toured the interior parts of the taluk and addressed several public meetings. This campaign blew tempestuously into the remotest areas of rural Kerala.

At ‘Kandothu’ near Payyannur an attempt was made to convene a meeting to organize a procession of the Harijans where the local majority
was *Thiyyas* (Ezhavas). The Ezhavas opposed to the presence of Harijans on the roads to their temples. Ignoring the protest, women, children and Harijans, under the leadership of A.K. Gopalan and V.S. Keraleeyan led a procession along the road. The infuriated Ezhava lords attacked the procession. A.K. Gopalan and Keraleeyan were beaten to unconsciousness. However, the event only attracted more public attention and sympathy to the cause. The educated middle class of the Hindu community who dominated the caste organizations, gave prominence to the movements for social justice and came to the forefront of the agitation for Temple Entry.\(^{15}\)

A.K. Gopalan wrote;

> “The journey and propaganda upto Guruvayur created a stir there. The sight of grandmothers and grandfathers of the upper castes waiting to receive us with lit lamps offering food and shelter sparked our enthusiasm. This procession was a thunder bolt to orthodoxy.”  

\(^{16}\)

As usual, unfortunately a minority stood against this wave. While the campaign created much enthusiasm, a meeting of the orthodox Hindus convened by Punnathur Valiya Thampuran, was held at the portals of Guruvayur on 20 September 1931. Many speakers warned against the dangers of permitting the Temple Entry to the untouchables. But Kelappan
who was allowed to speak, vehemently refuted the conservative views and earned public favour for Temple Entry.\(^{17}\)

The Guruvayur Satyagraha campaign had won popularity through the media by then. Sardar Vallabhai Patel had sent a message felicitating Kelappan for his courageous crusade. Kasturba Gandhi sent another message for the women folk of Kerala asking them to join hands with the men in the Satyagraha as bold equals. Both these messages had an overwhelming effect on the satyagrahis. It infused added determination.

The Satyagraha volunteer’s march from Payyannur under the leadership of Subramanian Thirumumbu reached Guruvayur on 31 October. That evening a mass assembled at the eastern gate of the temple. There, Kelappan made a passionate speech in which he appealed earnestly to the conscience of the orthodoxy. He then declared the commencement of Satyagraha from next morning.

On 1 November 1931, the Satyagraha volunteers from all parts of Kerala, marched in a procession barely three furlongs away from the Satyagraha camp. A large gathering from all over Kerala assembled at Guruvayur. The faces of the satyagrahis bore no hatred or revenge to anyone. With hymns on lips and love on their gentle faces, they marched to
melt the minds of the adamant orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{18}

The temple authorities worked strategies to prevent the satyagrahis from approaching the temple. They fenced the premises with iron rails posting formidable guards beside a strong contingent of police force under the District Superintend of Police, and the Divisional Magistrate.

The thorny fences, put up by the temple authorities all around, with strong guards posted to protect them, were symbolic of the deliberate barriers meant to separate man from man and his God. The orthodoxy was all set to fight a futile battle.\textsuperscript{19}

As per the decision of the Satyagraha committee, two satyagrahis, a Nambudiri and a Pulaya, moved forward to perform Satyagraha. The temple authorities and the orthodoxy blocked their free passage. Likewise, the satyagrahis posted two volunteers each in the southern and western gates of the temple and they were also blocked by the temple authorities. The satyagrahis, posted at each gate stood at the post continuously for three hours, chanting slokas and reciting hymns. The atmosphere overflowed with love, ahimsa and self-suffering.\textsuperscript{20}

The Guruvayur Satyagraha that aimed at the cause of Temple Entry for the unprivileged gathered immense support from the media. \textit{Kesari},
Mathrubumi and Malayala Manorama published detailed reports on the Satyagraha. The Mathrubumi went a step further to wonder and asked in an article ‘Will the Doors Open? - Vaathil Thurakkumo?21

As per the decision taken in the meeting of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee held at Calicut on 18 October, 1 November was declared as ‘All-Kerala Temple Entry Day’. Prayers, processions and public meetings were organized all over Kerala. This captured the nationwide attention and appeals requesting Zamorin to concede poured in from all quarters. Such appeals failed to make effect, however.22

The meetings organized during the evenings at Guruvayur brought a favourable effect on some temple officials. The speech made by Mannathu Padmanabhan changed the hearts of some temple servants especially Nair youths. Some of them left the unscrupulous duty and joined the Satyagraha instead. But the temple authorities who were with the conservatives were hard on satyagrahis.

It can be seen that in order to provoke the satyagrahis who stood firm on the ideals like love, endurance and self-sacrifice, the temple guards stood close to them menacingly. ‘The men appointed to stop the satyagrahis come to work having drunk soberly. One of their deeds was to puff out smokes on
to the faces of the satyagrahis’. But the calm of the satyagrahis gathered support increasingly. Those who remained witness to such sights were provoked. Ordinary folks expressed their solidarity by visiting the Satyagraha camps with fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile, the orthodoxy, who had been opposing the Temple Entry of Harijans, assembled under the leadership of Paliyath Kunjunniyachan and convened meetings against this Satyagraha.24

In the Satyagraha camp, the programmes went on smooth schedules as planned by the Satyagraha committee. The Satyagraha volunteers remained in the Satyagraha ashram, singing devotional songs and chanting bhajans peacefully. The use of charka, Gita recitation etc. attracted the mass. The satyagrahis convinced others that they were opposing only obnoxious practices and not faith. All this slowly brought forth a ‘change of heart’ on the savarnas.3

On the seventh day of the Guruvayur Satyagraha T. Subramanian Tirumumbu, the captain of the Temple Entry campaign was arrested for publishing a poem in Yuvabharatom, a periodical published by T.R. Krishna Swami Aiyar from Palaghat. As a response, all members of the Satyagraha committee assembled at Guruvayur and discussed the need to extend the Satyagraha to other temples under the Zamorin, if the authorities suppress
the Guruvayur Satyagraha for long.\textsuperscript{26}

Overtime, a change of temperament spread among the opponents. A meeting of about thirty Brahmins was conducted at Guruvayur. Ramaswamy Aiyar moved a resolution favouring the Satyagraha. Though Venkitachalam Aiyar supported, the move was discarded on the basis of majority opinion.\textsuperscript{27}

Among the satyagrahis, the children too demonstrated immense endurance. On 3 December, Unnikrishnan, a satyagrahi boy of twelve was beaten ruthlessly by the orthodoxy. Unnikrishnan maintained a faint smile throughout. This struck a sympathetic chord in all present there. Despite heavy rain that night, the satyagrahis continued the Satyagraha unaffected.\textsuperscript{28}

Gandhi wrote:

“To preserve intact the civil nature of this disobedience, the satyagrahi must be wholly unarmed, and inspite of insults, kicks or worst must meekly stand the ground, and be arrested without the slightest opposition.”\textsuperscript{29}

These teachings of Gandhi exactly reflected in the young satyagrahi - Unnikrishnan. As a true satyagrahi, he faced the kicks and blows with cheer and patience. Following this, students and children in large number visited
the Satyagraha *ashram* and participated in the *bhajans*.

The inhuman torture of Unnikrishnan, the Harijan lad who offered Satyagraha became a topic of discussion throughout Kerala. The boy’s smiling response to such torture even in the face of exhaustion touched hearts of one and all. This feeling was reflected in the editorial of *Mathrubhumi* which strongly criticized this incident.\(^{30}\)

However from this incident onwards, physical force came to be used continually against the satyagrahis. On 21 December, P. Krishna Pillai was mercilessly beaten by the temple servants for having rung the sacred bell in front of the temple *sanctum sanctorum*, a right exclusively reserved for the orthodoxy. P. Krishna Pillai a true satyagrahi, accepted the torture with a smiling face.\(^{31}\)

The most inhuman torture was met by A.K. Gopalan on 28 December. He was leading a procession of satyagrahis in front of the temple. While talking to the large gathering, he was surrounded by the reactionaries and beaten black and blue. Hundreds trampled him. He received blows at the navel, the left spine and the neck. A.K. Gopalan, with folded hands, prayed to his fellowmen, not to ill-treat him and chanted hymns loudly. He fell down unconscious.
A.K.G. described this incident in his autobiography:

“Someone carried me outside. The attack caused a lot of physical discomfort. I could not even swallow food. After this event I was under treatment for a long time.”

In spite of the physical exhaustion, A.K. Gopalan stood firm on the principles of non-violence, endurance and prayer. This was what Gandhi wrote in 1921:

“Victory is impossible until we are able to keep our temper under the greatest provocation. Calmness under fire is a soldier’s indispensable quality. A non-co-operator is nothing if he cannot remain calm and unperturbed under a fierce fire of provocation... The might of the tyrant recoils upon himself when it meets with no response, even as an arm violently waved in the air suffers dislocation.”

This horrific event stunned the masses and earned their support. The Mathrubhumi, reported:

“It is not for the first time that Sri. Gopalan is subjected to physical torture for the struggle against the insane and cruel practice of untouchability. What can be inferred from this extreme fury of the selfish aristocracy towards a man, is his commitment for the sake of the cause. In addition to the torture of a lower class boy, the trampling of Gopalan and showering blows on P. Krishna Pillai, how many
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more people subjected to what not, will pacify the hearts of the temple
authorities.”

Such gruesome happenings enraged the commoners whose sympathy
lay with the satyagrahis. They forcibly removed the barricades around the
temple and manhandled the temple authorities. The temple authorities there
upon suspended the poojas and closed the temple for a month. It was
reopened on 28 January 1932. Hereafter, there was nobody to prevent the
satyagrahis. They moved freely up to the Gopuram of the temple. The
authorities now realized that though the satyagrahis might be peaceful and
non-violent, the public would not withstand violence on them.

The Guruvayur Satyagraha won nationwide attention. News papers
outside Kerala also began reporting it. Leaders of the Congress like
Rajagopalachari and Nariman arrived at Guruvayur.

Great changes were coming in the political scenario of India. The
Civil-disobedience movement hitherto stopped was revived. Following this
the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee was declared illegal. Since the
Congress committee was dissolved, the Guruvayur Satyagraha committee
was also dissolved.

A new committee was constituted, to conduct the Satyagraha. On 6
January 1932, MannathiiPadmanabhan was elected President of the new
committee. A.K. Gopalan captain of the volunteers, N.P. Damodaran, publicity officer and Kunnikrishnan, secretary of the S.N.D.P. yogam were arrested at the Satyagraha camp on 8 January for having addressed a public meeting to protest against the arrest of Gandhi. They were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for six months. P.M. Kamalavati was elected as the volunteer leader in place of A.K. Gopalan.\textsuperscript{37}

In the mean while the Zamorin died. His successor was a retired Judge with a cosmopolitan outlook. Expectations of a solution round the corner deepened. On 3 December 1931, the new Zamorin sent a memorandum to Sir. George Frederick Staneley, the Lt. col. about the temple and the Satyagraha going on there. He however contended that as a hereditary trustee, it would be highly improper to throw open the Guruvayur temple to all Hindus defying the immemorial customs that transcended generations. He stated that, “according to the immemorial custom and usage observed in this temple as well as elsewhere in the other temples of Kerala the caste-Hindus alone (Brahmins and Nairs) are entitled to enter the temples for purpose of worship, while the non-caste-Hindus (the ‘theendal’ castes) are not entitled to do so”. He solicited the active support and help of the Government to put an end to the Temple Entry satyagraha.\textsuperscript{38}

On 27 January 1932, Kelappan sent a profound letter to the Zamorin...
and pleaded for the opening of the Guruvayur temple. The open letter went on like this:

“You do not have royal power. But now you have won the opportunity to rule supreme to the hearts of the people of Kerala. Do not spoil this golden chance to wipe the tears of the 75 lakh Keralites, to eradicate the filth in the Hindu religion and nourishing it thereby, which I humbly request you to undertake and bless the unprivileged therein,”39

This request never fell on the ears of the Zamorin. However, the satyagrahis went on with their routine programmes; bhajans, public meetings etc.

“The way to stand erect before the tyrant is not to hate him, not to strike him but to humble ourselves before God and cry out to him in the hour of our agony.”40

On 28 January, the Zamorin ordered the re-opening of the temple whereupon the volunteers renewed their Satyagraha. Poojas and other formalities were conducted as usual as per customs. Pressure mounting from all quarters, the Zamorin convened a meeting of the priestly class related to the Guruvayur temple administration at Thiruvanchira kovilakam. But it made no difference to their mood.
The public support for Guruvayur Satyagraha increased day by day. The thirteenth annual conference of the Nambudiri youth league held in December 1931 at Taliparamba passed a resolution favouring Temple Entry for all Hindus including Adi Dravidas. A similar resolution was passed by the Yogakshema sabha as well.\textsuperscript{41}

On 15 February, a public meeting was held in Gokhale Hall at Madras under the auspices of eight prominent associations including Mahila Bharata Sangam, Bharatha Seva Sangham, Anti-untouchability Committee, Keraieeya Vidyarthi Samajam, etc. and registered its support for the Guruvayur Satyagraha. This meeting was presided over by T.S. Ramaswami Aiyar, the then president of Madras Corporation.\textsuperscript{42}

One among the many attempts of the temple authorities to put off Satyagraha was a petition filed at the Palghat sub-division Magistrate court against the local people who favoured Satyagraha. The Magistrate had made an enquiry and in April the Palaghat sub-divisional Magistrate ruled that all the roads around the temple except the one around the north pond were public roads. This judgment enabled the volunteers to proceed up to the gate of the temple to offer Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{43} The Zamorin, not prepared to retreat, filed another appeal petition in the High court to restore former status.\textsuperscript{44} But the Satyagraha continued without any change till August.
The attitude of the Zamorin towards the verdict of the Palghat subdivisional Magistrate had raised public criticism. This reflected in the press too. *Mathrubhumi* the leading daily which offered a whole-hearted support to the Guruvayur Satyagraha criticised the authorities without mincing words. It criticized the intention of the authorities to ‘preserve untouchability locked up within the temple portals of Guruvayur.’

The *Yogakshemasabha*, convened a meeting of the members of the community on 24 April at Kozhikode and passed a resolution in favour of Temple Entry. The ‘change of heart’ of Nambudiries, including women participants of the meeting, in favour of the Satyagraha was an indicator of the wave in favour of Temple Entry which was visible in the *savarna* rank and file.

Parallel to these, some satyagrahis were entrusted with the duty of collecting funds for meeting the expenses of the Satyagraha. The Temple Entry movement got a fillip in April 1932 when P.S. Warrier, founder and proprietor of the *Arya Vaidya Sala*, Kottakkal, declared the Viswambharan temple, privately owned by him open to all Hindus, including the depressed classes.

The Satyagraha committee chalked out a detailed propaganda
programme after necessary deliberation. It was decided to conduct a tour in Malabar and Cochin. In the first phase, it was decided, the propaganda tour programme would start from Payyannur on 7 May and conclude on 25 at Ottappalam. C.I. Rugmini Amma, V. Raghavan, Kavil Rama Panikar, Vagbhatananda Guru, K. Kelappan, V.T. Bhattathirippad, C. Kuttan Nair, M.P. Govinda Menon, N. Krishna Aiyyar, and K.P. Kunjirama Poduval were entrusted with this programme. The tour team had to visit eighteen selected centres in Malabar.49

Amidst this, the High Court Judge Ramesham gave the verdict that, if required, members of any caste could visit Guruvayur temple premise. Commenting on this, the Mathrubhumi suggested that the temple authorities, giving up all egos, should permit Temple Entry to the depressed classmen who legally cannot be prevented from doing so by the Zamorin always.50

On the evening of 21 August, when the bhajan groups of the satyagrahis were moving from the eastern portals to the western, someone threw a heavy rock piece weighing approximately eight kilograms from inside the temple which hit on the head of S. Vasudevan, one of the Satyagraha volunteers. The injury was serious. At night after prayers, Kelappan, in his address to the volunteers reiterated the laws and
regulations which should be adopted in Satyagraha. He said: “Satyagraha cannot be offered if one possess fury or hatred even if one dies. We may be satisfied of having done something for the upliftment of the downtrodden and elevating their social status.” The speech reflected the essentials of Gandhian mode of action devoid of any complaint, anger or hate to others.

The Temple Entry Satyagraha took a new turn on 13 September 1932, when Gandhi announced his decision to fast unto death in the context of the decision of the Government to have separate electorates for the scheduled castes in India. Kelappan, considered it as the most appropriate moment to attract public attention to the Temple Entry movement in Kerala, On 18 September, 1932 he announced his resolve to fast unto death before the Guruvayur temple in case the untouchables would continue to be shut out.

Kelappan’s declaration shocked the nation. Leaders like Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, and C. Rajagopalachari requested Kelappan not to undertake fast. But Kelappan stood firm. In a statement he said:

“Many such ancient temples at different places had opened their gates for the depressed. In spite of the attempt to lay open the gates of Guruvayur for the past ten months, that day still remains far away. If this doesn’t
happen now when Mahatmaji’s moral support is there, it would be difficult to materialize this in near future. When we think of the great injustice inflicted upon the lower classes including the Pulayas, no amount of sacrifice of lives will be more. It becomes imperative that this injustice be stopped when we consider that the oppressed and the oppressor are both human beings. I hereby enter fasting praying to all to forgive. He added that what I am doing is my duty and that I am fully aware that wasting this opportunity is not wise.”

The *Mathrubhumi*, analyzing the situation remarked:

“...Are the *savarnas* of Kerala so hard-hearted?” and expressed hope that the conservatives and the temple authorities of Kerala will utilize this opportunity for establishing justice.

Kelappan made a public speech where he said that he nursed no hatred towards temple authorities:

“Though I have always opposed their merciless deeds, I love them with all my heart. I have opposed them only for their good and the good of the underprivileged.”

Kelappan’s decision to fast astonished the people outside Kerala too. The Keralites of Bombay, responded in a telegram, remarked that it would
be great dishonour for Kerala to lead Kelappan to extreme fasting and that
the Keralites must undertake Satyagraha at the portals of the Zamorin’s
palace. Similar opinion was also made by the Keralites in Rangoon.56

In the morning, after prayer, Kelappan talked to the volunteers:

“Your responsibility is great, I may no longer be with you and no
longer will be able to talk and I shall pass in peace. Happy to know all
will be well with you in the cause. Everything depends on your
courage, endurance and enthusiasm. Bless me.”57

At 6.30 a.m. Kelappan started from the Satyagraha ashram,
accompanied by a bhajan party of thirty satyagrahis. People on both sides
shed tears,

Kelappan started his fast at the eastern gate of the Guruvayur temple
for victory or for death. In the evening there was a large public meeting in
which Mannathu Padmanabhan participated and an appeal was made to the
public to celebrate 25 September as Guruvayur Day by holding meetings all
over the Madras Presidency. On the same day, a huge procession, went
round the Guruvayur temple and a meeting was held in front of the eastern
gate.58

Kelappan’s fast created waves throughout India. The Satyagraha
volunteers led processions from different parts of Kerala to Guruvayur.
They decided to send a deputation to the Zamorin. But the Zamorin informed K. Madhavan Nair, the leader of the Satyagraha, that he would not budge till Kelappan stopped the fast.\(^59\)

On 22 September, 1932, a deputation of sixteen leading citizens of Calicut led by K.P. Raman Menon waited on the Zamorin at his palace. They requested him to convene a conference of all sections of Hindus for the discussion of the important issue of Temple Entry. The Zamorin replied that he did not consider it proper either to convene the suggested conference or participate in it; as it would be wrong on his part to attempt to bring about innovations opposed to the traditional customs. He further felt that a decision on his part without consulting the Maharajas of Travancore and Cochin is unfair.\(^60\)

Kelappan was rapidly deteriorating in health. Intense effort was made to put an end to Kelappan’s fasting. Kuroor Nambudiifgad left for North-India with this intention.\(^61\) Dewan T.R. Ramachandra Aiyar and K. Natarajan requested Kelappan to break his fast as attempts were made for arriving some amicable settlement regarding the Temple Entry. A. Rengaswami Aiyangar, Dr. Subramaniyan, T.R. Venkatarama Sastri and U.P. Narayanan Nambiar from Madras informed Kelappan on 28 September that in view of the proposed introduction of a Bill in the Madras Legislature.
penalising the non-admission of the low castes into temples, he should give up the fast. Kelappan responded: “Deeply thankful for your efforts for the cause. However, I feel the present fast necessary to effect the ‘change of heart’ which alone can work for social harmony.”

As a result of the mounting pressure on him, Zamorin himself sent a telegram to Kelappan requesting him to abstain from Satyagraha. In reply to this, Kelappan sent a message on 1 October, showing his willingness even to die. He said:

“... I can gladly sacrifice my life for a cause so dear to me. I shall renounce it therein.”

The orthodoxy did not stay silent. On 25 September 1932 a deputation of twenty five persons, waited on Zamorine to point out that under section forty of the Hindu Religious Endowment Act no trustee could do anything against the usage of the temples entrusted to him.

On the same day after a meeting at Calicut a procession marched to the Zamorin’s palace at Calicut. But the Zamorin permitted only A.K. Warrier and H. Manjunatha Rao to meet him. He informed them that he had no objection personally to open the temple and that he was doing his best to make others agree to the great reform.
Kelappan’s fast reached to the grass-root rungs of society. On 21 September, the trustees of Sree Ramaswamy temple at Tali in Calicut decided to allow the Harijans to enter their temple.63

Some people started individual Satyagraha for Temple Entry in their localities. On 25 September, Kudali Thazhathuveettil Kunjiraman Nambiar, a disciple of Gandhi started fasting in his own house requesting his uncle Kunjuraman Nambiar, to open the family temple to avarnas of their locality.66

The following resolution was unanimously passed in the Congress session held at Bombay on 25 September, 1932. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya chaired the meeting. The resolution was:

“This conference resolves that henceforth, amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth and that those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same right as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads and all other public institutions. This right shall have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest Acts of the swaraj Parliament, if it shall not have received such recognition before that time. It is further agreed that it shall be the duty of all Hindu leaders to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means, an early removal of all social disabilities now
imposed by custom upon the so-called untouchable classes, including
the bar in respect of admission to temples."67

On 26 September Pandit Malaviya sent a telegram to K. Kelappan
from Poona informing him that the Poona pact has indeed changed the
whole scenario and that the latter should put an end to his fast.

In an interesting turn, Krishnabhat a Brahmin youth of 27, proceeded
to Zamorin’s palace and applied for an interview. Zamorin declined his
demand. Thereupon, Krishnabhat declared his intention to begin fast at the
gate of Zamorin’s palace at Meenchantha in Calicut, till the Guruvayur
temple was thrown open to the depressed classes. He sat under a banyan
tree situated in the eastern gate of the palace and was determined to fast
unto death.68

All-Kerala savarna conference was held at Guruvayur on 29
September under the presidentship of Mattannur Madhusoodanan Tangal
and decided to fast within the Guruvayur temple. More than ten thousand
people participated in the savarna conference. This conference passed the
following resolutions

i. Untouchability is despicable. It should be prevented by law.

ii. Temples are public places and should be accessible to all.

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iii. Kelappan’s strong faith is awesome and we must pray for a happy ending.

iv. A deputation group shall visit the Zamorin to intimate the demands of the conference.

v. The masses should remain non-violent.

vi. A committee has been appointed to win freedom of worship at Guruvayur.

All these resolutions were unanimously passed except for the one seeking end to Kelappan’s Satyagraha. The move was dismissed acknowledging that Satyagraha indeed was the right course of action. A committee of action for Temple Entry was formed with V.T. Bhattathirippad and K.A. Damodara Menon as secretaries. Thus on 1 October 1932 a batch of twenty four savarna volunteers started their fast within the temple and soon their numbers rose to fifty.

The Zamorin now requested Gandhi to advise Kelappan to postpone his fast for a few months. He contended that the admission of the low castes into the temple would wound the sentiments of the orthodox Hindus which is violent in a sense. Gandhi enquired Kelappan whether he had given sufficient notice to the Zamorin before undertaking the fast. Kelappan
asserted that the question of giving notice did not arise, for in any society and at any time, a few reactionaries might always be found to oppose any proposed social reform.

Gandhi sent a telegram to the Zamorin, stated that Satyagraha is not intended to compel people but only to rouse their conscience and he added that it would not be fair to compel Kelappan to give up. Gandhi reminded that it was for the Zamorin to take all steps for saving his life. According to Gandhi, Kelappan had committed two errors. In the first instance, he ought to have previously consulted Gandhi, as an expert director in matters like fast, but he failed to do so; secondly, he should have given the Zamorin reasonable notice of his intention to go on fast. Gandhi felt coercion in Kelappan’s fast.71

On 30 September, Gandhi suggested that Kelappan should suspend the fast immediately and instructed that Kelappan must give notice to the temple authorities that after three months he would be free to resume it, subjected to Gandhi’s consent, in case the temple should continue to be inaccessible to the low castes. Gandhi assured his share and responsibility in the Temple Entry Satyagraha at Guruvayur.72

Following Gandhi’s words, Kelappan put an end to his fast on
2 October. Since Kelappan could not speak, his statements were read out in which it was said that he had stopped the fast only for three months, during which all temples including Guruvayur should open the portals to the downtrodden.

Soon after his fast, Kelappan sent a telegraphic message to Gandhi,

“I am enslaved to the endearing order of the commander. I have ended the fast to day at eight o’ clock. I hereby send my humble felicitation to Bapuji on his birthday”.

Gandhi in reply to Kelappan, expressed his joy over ending Kelappan’s fast,

“I feel very happy. Your act is right. Take special care of your health in the primary stages of ending the fast.”

Kelappan was removed to the Satyagraha ashram. The Temple Entry Satyagraha was suspended. Simultaneously, the fasting of Krishnabhat, in front of the Zamorin’s palace also withdrawn.

Gandhi Jayanti was celebrated throughout Kerala on 2 October. As part of this everyone, from Brahmin to unseeable Nayadi, entered the Subramaniyan temple at Palghat for prayers. Simultaneously Mayyazhi Puthen temple in north Kerala, Pokkattu Bhagavati temple Mavelikara in the south Kerala, also opened for the untouchables. Moreover, meetings
were organised and resolutions were passed all over Kerala in this
direction.\textsuperscript{74}

After Kelappan’s fast and the suspension of the Temple Entry
Satyagraha, it was decided to carry on a vigorous anti-untouchability
campaign all over Kerala. It was proposed to launch the campaign from
Guruvayur and to travel on foot from one side to the other end of Kerala to
do the necessary propaganda in favour of Temple Entry. In Travancore, the
N.S.S. and the S.N.D.P. \textit{yogam} made arrangements for the \textit{jatha}. For co-
ordinating this programme many local committees were formed and
meetings were held in several parts of Kerala.\textsuperscript{75}

Responding to the news that Pandit Madanamohan Malaviya would
arrive at Guruvayur to have talks about the Temple Entry movement with
the Zamorin, the Zamorin took a negative stand. Moreover, putting an end
to all hopes of Temple Entry within three months, the Zamorin made it clear
that he had neither promised so, nor has he even thought about it.\textsuperscript{76}

Rabindranath Tagore wrote a letter to the Zamorin requesting him to
open the gates of the Guruvayur temple to the Harijans. Mahatma Gandhi
also sent a telegram to the Zamorin asking him to provide Temple Entry
before 2 January 1933. He hinted that he would directly intervene in this
Towards the end of November 1932, Gandhi had decided that the Temple Entry question at Guruvayur should be settled by a referendum.

“A satyagrahi, must first mobilize public opinion against the evil which he is out to eradicate by means of a wide and intensive agitation. When public opinion is sufficiently roused against a social abuse even the tallest will not dare to practice or openly to lend support to it. An awakened and intelligent public opinion is the most potent weapon of a satyagrahi” Gandhi wrote.

On 25 November C. Rajagopalachari reached Calicut, and the next day, he spoke to the masses on the relevance of anti-untouchability campaign. Karnad Sadasiva Rao also reached Calicut. Under the leadership of Sadasiva Rao, Rajagopalachari, Kelappan, Gopala Menon and Madhavan Nair travelled through the Ponnani taluk and delivered speeches in favour of the referendum. On 26 November Rajagopalachari met the Zamorin but the latter declined to debate on the Temple Entry issue. Urmila Devi, sister of Deshabandhu Chithranjandas also came down to Malabar as per the instruction of Gandhi. K. Madhavan Nair was made the director of the referendum in Ponnani taluk.

On 1 December Kasturba Gandhi reached Calicut. She was accorded a warm reception in the evening. A large gathering including women
assembled for the meeting. Kasturba asked the women to come forward to work towards eradication of untouchability. Her arrival inspired the volunteers.\textsuperscript{82}

For the smooth conduct of the propaganda, Ponnani taluk was subdivided. Kasturba Gandhi, Urmila devi, Mannathu Padmanabhan, Madhavan Nair, and Gopala Menon participated in different meetings. The work was organized with village as the unit where all adults in the savarna community were requested to cast their vote for or against Guruvayur Satyagraha. Government watched the developments closely. A Government communique reported:

‘The protagonists of Temple Entry at Guruvayur expend their energies mainly in talk and argument, but the situation requires watching. They are busying themselves with preparations for the conduct of a referendum on the question in Ponnani Taluk. The Zamorin not unnaturally refuses to commit himself to abide by its result, as a referendum conducted mainly by the advocates of Temple Entry cannot be expected to give a result, which will not be open to challenge on the ground of bias.

The referendum was started on 3 December 1932. In the Ponnani taluk, there were three lakh twenty four thousand and five hundred Hindus
and the number of Hindus entitled to Temple Entry was sixty-five thousand.
The volunteers visited 8,141 houses of savarnas (out of 8,416) in the taluk.
27,465 persons, including women were approached. 7,302 persons refused
to vote and 20,163 persons recorded their opinion. Of them, 15,568 persons
were in favour of Temple Entry (77%) 2579 persons were against it (13%).
A few remained neutral (10%). Nearly 8000 women voted in favour of
Temple Entry. The Government viewed this referendum seriously and
reported that nothing ostensibly unfair has been noticed.84

The orthodoxy grew alert and was upset by the referendum. Their
leaders from all over India hurried to Kerala and asked Zamorin to stand his
ground with steadfastness. They held a conference at Guruvayur on 29
December, and appreciated the Zamorin for his firm stand against Temple
Entry. They conferred the title Dharma Veera Mahaveera on him. It was
noteworthy that almost all the pundits of Kerala kept themselves away from
the conference.85 The report of the referendum was submitted to Gandhi by
C. Rajagopalachari, K. Kelappan and K. Madhavan Nair.

The tide of progressive public opinion was too strong and the result
of the referendum helped to dispel the wrong impression that the caste-
Hindus in Malabar were opposed to Temple Entry.86
On 1 November 1932, P. Subharayan moved a resolution in the Madras Legislative Council recommending that the Government bring up a legislation to set at rest the doubts and disabilities which trustees of Hindu temples feel in regard to throwing open temples to the untouchables. When the resolution was put to vote, the resolution was carried by a majority. In the same year two more Bills were came to the council. In November 1932, Narayanan Nambiar brought forward a Bill called ‘The Removal of Depressed Classes Religious Disabilities Bill’ and in December of the same year Subbarayan introduced another Bill called ‘Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Act’. In January 1933, the Legislative Council passed resolutions requesting the local Government to recommend to the Governor General to give his assent to the Bill.

The 8 January 1933 was celebrated throughout as ‘Guruvayur Day’ in support of Subbarayan’s Bill on Temple Entry. This celebration was an eye-opener to the conservatives. The Temple Entry cause thus headed a long way strongly.

As per the decision made earlier the, anti-untouchability committee launched the propaganda procession and was received warmly not only in Malabar but also in Cochin and Travancore. A huge row of savarnas came forward to receive it and they strained every nerve to make it a success. The
banners and placards held by the Satyagraha procession led by A.K. Gopalan proclaimed:

‘Don’t query caste, speak not or even think about it. Temple Entry is the birth right of all Hindus.’

Even as the procession was moving, some lords intimated their willingness to open the temple gates to the lower class. The procession through Travancore was splendid. Nairs, Nambudiris and Ezhavas were eager to receive the marching stream. Thirty thousand men including students participated in its reception at Thiruvananthapuram. Subsequently, the *jatha* moved to Malabar and was dispersed at Kanjangadu. The *jatha* members impressed upon the masses how untouchability was only muck that had seeped into the minds of human society.

Mahatma Gandhi held that the prospect for Temple Entry was bright in Travancore. Travancore was then ruled by an enlightened Sree Chithira Thiranal Maharajah. Under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, the Travancore administration constituted a committee under the presidentship of Y.S. Subramaniya Aiyar to study the matter and submit a report. Changanachery K. Parameswaran Pillai, Ullur. S. Parameswara Aiyar, T.K. Velupillai, Mahadeva Aiyar, M.P. Govindan and Punnassery Nambi Neelakanta Sarma were its members.
The committee toured the state and ascertained the views of the Hindus. Since, the conservatives had an upper hand in the committee, it submitted a baseless report. Separate reports were also sent by individual members. Changanachery K. Parameswaran Pillai and M.P. Govindan jointly reported that all Hindus should be permitted to receive the *darsan* of the deity standing in front of the *sanctum sanctorum*. On the other hand, Nambi Neelakanta Sarma reported that the *avarnas* should be kept out of the temple compound!

The disapponted Ezhavas and other backward class men, under the leadership of C.V. Kunjuraman, thought of converting to Christianity as the only panacea for this age-old problem. But Kumaran Asan, poet and Ezhava leader argued against religious conversion through an article “*Matha Parivartana Rasavadam*” (The Alchemy of Religious Conversion).

The sustained efforts initiated by the reformers created a wave of public opinion in favour of Temple Entry. On 10 January 1934 Gandhi came to Kerala and spoke in several public meetings, in which he painfully described Kerala as the ‘darkest spot of untouchability map in India’.

Gandhi reached Thiruvananthapuram on 21 January 1934. Recognizing the ‘time spirit’, on the eve of Gandhi’s entry in
Thiruvananthapuram, the Travancore Government through a *Communique* declared open public roads, tanks, wells and *Chatrams* to the Harijans. The Government *Communique* said:

“Government share the view that distance pollution of *theendal* must cease and are of opinion that no general public funds should be spent by Government in the maintenance of public tanks, public wells, *chatrams* etc., admission to which is denied to any person by reason of his belonging to a *theendal* caste”. The Government have resolved, therefore, that “all public roads public tanks, public wells, *chatrams*, etc, maintained by them out of their general public funds shall be thrown open to all classes of people, irrespective of the caste to which they belong. Measures to carry out these objects soon are being considered.”

Gandhi congratulated the Travancore Government on the steps they had taken but said that the reformers could draw satisfaction till the state withdrew recognition to untouchability in all forms.

In an interview given to the press at Thiruvananthapuram, Gandhi reiterated his stand by saying that there could be neither satisfaction nor rest until the state as such refused to recognise untouchability in any shape or form and expressed his hope that His Highness the Maharaja and his advisors would take up an impartial attitude.
*Harijan Sevak Sangh* initiated several welfare schemes all over Kerala, Night schools were opened, sanitation works, improving civic and social amenities, economic surveys, providing medical aids etc. were conducted.\(^95\)

The sustained efforts continued. ‘All India Harijan Day’ celebrations in Kerala was an unprecedented success. Public meetings, Harijan child welfare works, joint sports of Harijan and other Hindu children, joint *bhajans*, visits to Harijan houses were organized in accordance with the instructions of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* Kerala Provincial Committee. In all meetings, resolutions were passed unanimously thanking Gandhi, advocating Temple Entry and pledging the support of the Hindu community in Harijan uplift. All these programmes helped to focus attention to Temple Entry.\(^96\)

As a result of the constant mobilization of public opinion, the Travancore Maharaja issued ‘Temple Entry Proclamation’ on 12 November 1936.\(^97\)

Mannathu Padmanabhan observed: “The proclamation issued by Sree Chithira Thirunal Maharaja went beyond the expectations of all. The declaration offering absolute equality to all sections of the Hindus, and
permitting the Nambudiri and the Pulaya to worship the deity with equal freedom, taking their place before the Sreekovil, was indeed a divine blessing ensuring permanent protection to Hinduism. It destroyed at one stroke superstitious beliefs, evil customs like untouchability and unapproachability, all forms of slavery etc. and made all lovers of Hinduism, extremely happy. Though it came as a bombshell to the conservatives, when once the initial shock was over, they too felt proud of this royal decree. On that day on which the Brahmin, Harijans and others after a ceremonial bath, offered their prayers standing shoulder to shoulder with one another, in many of the important temples in Travancore, the entire sub-continent was cleansed of all social evils.”

Gandhi wrote:

“In the house of God in Travancore henceforth there will be no distinction between man and man. There will be no Harijan and no high caste, all will be Harijans-children of God.”

The proclamation as Gandhi believed was in response to the ‘time spirit’ by a prince imbued with the spirit of reform. Gandhi praised the Temple Entry Proclamation as a result of the “mass conversion of the caste-Hindus which no reformer or a missionary could have wrought.”
NOTES AND REFERENCES


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24. Ibid., 11 November 1931, p. 11.


27. Ibid., 18 November 1931, p.5.

28. Ibid., p.4.


35. Ibid., p.51.


38. File No. 813, dt. 6 February 1932, Under Secretary’s safe, Tamil Nadu State Achieves, Chennai.


41. *Mathrubhumi, op.cit.*, 29 February 1932, p.3.


44. *The Hindu*, 6 April 1932, p.3.


55. *Ibid.*, 26 September 1932, p.2.


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60. *The Hindu*, 23 September 1932, p.4.


69. File No. 813, Under Secretary’s Safe, Tamilnadu State Government Archives, *op.cit.*


83. Fortnightly report for the second half of November 1932 from Bracken to Hallett dt 3 December 1932 No. P.4-23 (Public General), Tamilnadu State Government Archives, *op.cit*.


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92. Kumaran Asan, N., (1109 M.E), ‘*Mataparivartana Rasavadam* ’

   Sarada Book Depot, Thiruvananthapuram, p.9.


97. Temple Entry Proclamation. See Appendix No.2.

