



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

History

REMEMBERING VAIKOM SATHYAGRAHA IN THE LIGHT OF VAIKKATHASHTAMI

KEY WORDS: Sathyagrahis, Vadakkumkoor, Thekkumkoor, Untouchability, Caste Discrimination, Avarnas, Savarnas

Kavitha V S

Former Student, Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta.

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at analyzing the Vaikom Sathyagraha and Vaikathashtami. It explores the impact of Vaikathashtami on the Sathyagraha and the Sathyagraha on the Ashtami. This article is completely a return back to the past to identify the struggles and difficulties faced by the Sathyagrahis. The study focuses mainly on the procedures of Vaikathashtami and its importance in paving a new way to the Vaikom Sathyagraha.

Vaikom is situated on the northwest side of Kottayam district in the state of Kerala, India. It shares its western borders with Vembanad Lake. Formerly Vaikom was believed to be a part of a kingdom called Venmalanadu. Later, Venmalanadu was divided into Vadakkumkoor and Thekkumkoor, Vaikom became part of Vadakkumkoor dynasty. In 1742, the Maharaja of Travancore, Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma added Vadakkumkoor to his kingdom, thus Vadakkumkoor became a part of Travancore. Vaikom Sathyagraha was a social protest in Travancore against untouchability and caste discrimination in Hindu society. The agitation was centered on the Sri Mahadeva Temple at Vaikom in which Mahatma Gandhi and Periyar Ramasami Iyer participated. Vaikom Mahadeva Temple is a major pilgrim center in Kerala, also known as Dakshina Kaasi. Vaikom Temple is famous for the Vaikkathashtami, one of its main festivals, which is celebrated in November-December. Today people all over the world participating Vaikkathashtami regardless of caste or religion. The Vaikom Sathyagraha has played an important role in bringing about this situation.

Vaikom Sathyagraha proclaimed in Travancore was against the untouchability and the caste discrimination in the Hindu society of Kerala. On March, a Sathyagraha agitation was started on Vaikom Temple road to allow Avarna Hindus to enter. The first Sathyagraha in India against the practice of untouchability. At the Kakinada Congress Conference in 1923, T. K Madhavan's petition on the plight of untouchability in Kerala was passed by the Congress Committees on the issue of untouchability. Accordingly, a K.P.C.C meeting held at Ernakulam on January 24, 1924 and the execution was planned. The Untouchability Committee was formed in February.

Avarnas did not even have access to the roads near the Vaikom temple. A meeting was held under the leadership of Kumaranashan demanding that Avarnas be allowed freedom of movement through the temple streets. T.K Madhavan took initiative to organize a strike. Congress supported. A sathyagraha was started under the leadership of T.K Madhavan, K. Kelappan, K.P Keshavamenon, M.K Pilla, Kurur Neelakandan Namboothiripad, Mannathu Padmanabhan, Kannanthodathu Velayudha Menon, T.R Krishnaswami Iyer and George Joseph. The strike was to go to the temple every day by three members from the so called upper and lower castes, crossing the board with the slogan 'Avarnas have no access'. The first day's sathyagrahis were a man from the Pulaya caste, named Kunjappi, a young Ezhava man named Bahuleyan and a Nair revolutionary named Govinda Panicker who used Sree Narayana Guru's Vellore Math in Vaikom as a Sathyagraha Ashram. They were arrested and sentenced six months in prison. Sathyagraha and arrest to place on March 31.

On April 1, on the advice of Gandhiji, the Sathyagraha was suspended. Reconciliation dialogue with upper caste Hindus, but it did not work. On April 7, the Sathyagraha movement resumed T.K Madhavan and K.P Kesavamenon were arrested

for violating the law along with a Pulaya youth. He was sentenced to six months in prison. Within a few days, all the leaders were arrested and imprisoned. E.V Ramaswami Naiker from Tamil Nadu arrived in Vaikom with a group of volunteers. He participated in the Sathyagraha and was arrested. Akalis from Punjab came and opened a free restaurant at Sathyagraha Ashram. The Sathyagraha movement continued with arrests and torture. In September, Sree Narayana Guru visited the Sathyagraha Ashram. November 1, A Savarna Jatha led by Mannathu Padmanabhan, S. Padmanabha Menon and S.K Narayanapillai marched from Vaikom to Thiruvananthapuram demanding entry to the Avarners on Temple Road. In February 1924, Gandhiji wrote in his publication, Young India, that the Vaikom Sathyagrahis were fighting for something less important than swaraj "This is just one of the many struggles that must be waged against the veiled religion of religion and the blindness of the guise of scholarship". On March 10, 1924, Gandhiji reached Vaikom and took part in the Sathyagraha movement.

On November 23 1924, the Travancore Government decided to open all streets except the eastern side of the Vaikom temple to all castes, ending the successful Vaikom Sathyagraha which lasted for 20 months. In 1928, a proclamation was made to open all the temple streets in Travancore to the public. The Vaikom Sathyagraha was one of the Kerala's most important organized agitations for the eradication of untouchability. The Vaikom Sathyagraha was a testing ground for the Gandhian Principles of Sathyagraha. It was tested and proved as the most effective means for the first time. The Vaikom Sathyagraha was not movement for political freedom, it was an agitation to purify the Hindu society of its blemishes.

VAIKKATHASHTAMI

Vaikom Mahadeva Temple is one of the 108 Shiva temples built by Parasurama. The main deity of the Vaikom temple is Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is also known here as Vaikkathappan and he appears three forms in a day – morning he is Dakshinamurthy, noon he is Kirathamurthy and in the evening he is Sambasivan along with the Goddess Parvathi. Huge Siva Linga worshiped here, which is five feet in height and is believed to be from the 'Tretha yuga'. The Vaikom Temple is famous for the Vaikkathashtami is celebrated on the day of Krishnapaksham in the Malayalam month of Vrischikam. The main festival is Krishnapaksha Ashtami. It is believed that on this day, lord Shiva, in the form of Lord Parameswara along with Goddess Parvathi appeared in front of Vyakhrapadha Maharshi and bestowed blessings.

Vaikathashtami is a festival that lasts for 13 days. Ashtami is celebrated on the twelfth day of the festival. The festival gets its name from the fact that it concludes on Ashtami day. The festival starts with Thrikkodiyettu (Holy Flag Hoisting ceremony). Sreebali and Vilakku will be held in the following days. From the second day of the festival, the arrival of the Poothalam varavu of Nair, Ezhava, Viswakarma, Pattarya,

Veerasaiva, Pulaya, Ullada, Paravar, Tamil Viswabrahmana, Vilakkithala Nair and Dheevera communities is a spectacular sight. Hrishabha Vahanam is the procession of the seventh day of Ashtami festival. It is believed that on that day the Lord Vaikkathappa visits his devotees on the back of his holy vehicle, Nandi. One of the major highlights during the festival is the Ashtami Vilakku or lamps. Panchavadhyam, Gajapooja, Aanayoottu etc. will be held as a part of this festival.

Ashtami Darshanam

The famous Ashtami Darshanam starts at 4.30 a.m. on the same day. Lord Shiva, along with his wife, blessed Vyakhrapadha Maharshi, who was performing penance at the base of the banyan tree on the east side of the Temple. Ashtami Darshanam is performed during that holy moment. No good deeds are done on Ashtami. But on the day of Ashtami, those who perform Ashtami darshanam are relieved of sufferings and sorrows. Visiting Ashtami is considered as a virtue of a human being.

Vaikkathappan is also known as the 'Giver of Food' (Annadhana prabhu). Prathal Sadhya is the major offering in the Vaikom Mahadeva Temple. There are no offerings to the lord on the day of Ashtami. The father fast for the victory of his son Subrahmanyam, the main deity of Udanayanapuram temple. But Vaikkathappan has a condition that none of his devotees do not be hungry on that day. A grand feast, Annadhanam was held in Vaikom on that day. This is known as Prathal sadhya. In the Aana panthal (elephant shed) in the eastern side of the temple, Lord Shiva waits for the arrival of his son. The main ceremony of Ashtami Vilakku is the arrival of Udayanapurathappan. On that day, a festive procession will be held from Udayanapuram temple to Vaikom Mahadeva Temple. Udayanapurathappan arrives atop a caparisoned elephant in complete fanfare accompanied with traditional music, temple arts and dance. After defeating Surapadman, Udayanapurathappan, who arrives victorious, will be reaches the temple at around 1:00 AM. Vaikkathappan then welcomes his son with Pradakshina.

Koodipooja

Koodipooja in Vaikom temple is a ritual that not heard of any other temple. The spirit of another temple is not usually entered into the main shrine of any temple. Udayanapurathappan and Koottummel Bhagavathy enter the premises on the day through the north gopuram. Moothedathukavu Bhagavathy and Kizhakkumkavu Bhagavathy enter the temple through the south gopuram. All of the deities assemble in the elephant shed in the east side of the Vaikom Mahadeva temple. This annual meeting of six deities of the nearby temples is known as Koodipooja. It is believed that attending and praying at koodipooja will bring all good fortune.

Koodipiriyal

Then father (Vaikkathappan) and son (Muruga-udayanapurathappan) bids farewell. This ritual is known as Koodipiriyal and is very heart breaking. Playing Dhukhakhandara ragam in a single rhythm will bring tears to the eyes of devotees and elephants. This is an emotional event.

Aarattu

After the ritual koodipiriyal, Vaikkathappan returns to the Sreekovil. The ritual immersion of the principal deity (Aarattu) is performed on the next day at Udanayanapuram Subrahmanya temple and the annual Vaikkathashtami festival comes to an end.

CONCLUSION

The Vaikom Sathyagraha was an important movement that led to the temple entry. Another achievement of Vaikom Sathyagraha is certainly communal harmony. Progressive minded Savarnas and Avarnas came together with Christians and Muslims. It is to be remembered that many upper class

Hindus played the role of active leaders till the end of the Sathyagraha, and this has demonstrated the basic unity of the people. The Vaikom Sathyagraha played an important role in the celebration of Vaikkathashtami even more beautifully than ever before. Without any distinction of Savarna or Avarna, devotees from all categories actively participated in the Ashtami festival with their presence and cooperation.

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