Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–25) – Causes, Leaders, Periyar's Role, Gandhi's Negotiations, Outcome & Centenary | TNPSC Notes

The Vaikom Satyagraha (30 March 1924 – 23 November 1925) was a non-violent struggle at **Vaikom** in the princely state of **Travancore** (now in **Kottayam district, Kerala**) for the right of the so-called lower castes to walk on the public roads around the **Vaikom Mahadeva (Shiva) temple**. Started by the Kerala Congress under **T. K. Madhavan, K. P. Kesava Menon and K. Kelappan**, it drew **Periyar E. V. Ramasamy** from Tamil Nadu – who earned the title **Vaikom Veerar** – and **Mahatma Gandhi**, who visited Vaikom in March 1925 to negotiate. Its centenary (2023–25) was marked jointly by the governments of **Kerala and Tamil Nadu**.

தமிழில் படிக்க

These notes are written for TNPSC Group 1, 2/2A and 4 aspirants and are meant to be complete on their own. The Vaikom Satyagraha is a topic in **History, Culture of India and Indian National Movement** (social reform, Gandhian satyagraha, the Congress and untouchability) and in **History, Culture, Heritage and Socio-Political Movements of Tamil Nadu** (Periyar's role, the Self-Respect Movement and the social justice tradition of Tamil Nadu). The centenary events of 2023–2025 are asked under **Current Events**. Read each section, then revise with the tables, the quick revision table and the key points at the end.

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Vaikom Satyagraha at a Glance

Item	Fact
Place	Vaikom, around the Vaikom Mahadeva (Shiva) temple; then in the princely state of Travancore, now Kottayam district, Kerala
Period	30 March 1924 – 23 November 1925 (about 20 months; counted as 603 or 604 days in different sources)
Demand	Right of all castes, including Ezhavas and Pulayas, to use the public roads around the temple
Organised by	Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) – Anti-Untouchability Committee
Main leaders	T. K. Madhavan, K. P. Kesava Menon, K. Kelappan, George Joseph, Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, Mannathu Padmanabhan
Ruler / Regent	Maharaja Moolam Thirunal (died August 1924); then Regent Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bayi
Gandhi's visit	March 1925 – talks with the orthodox leaders, the Regent and Sree Narayana Guru
Outcome	Northern, southern and western roads opened to all; eastern road stayed closed
Final result	Temple Entry Proclamation, 12 November 1936 (Maharaja Chithira Thirunal)
Title linked	Vaikom Veerar (Hero of Vaikom) – Periyar
Centenary	Kerala–Tamil Nadu joint inauguration at Vaikom, 1 April 2023; renovated Periyar Memorial opened 12 December 2024

Background: Vaikom, Travancore and the Road Ban

In the early twentieth century, caste rules in Travancore went beyond untouchability. The so-called avarna castes, such as **Ezhavas** and **Pulayas**, were kept away not only from temples but also from the **public roads** around many temples. At Vaikom, notice boards placed on the roads near the Mahadeva temple barred them from using these roads, and they had to take longer routes to reach the market, schools and offices. This practice is called **unapproachability** – the idea that even the presence of a person of a lower caste near a temple or a higher-caste person polluted them.

- **Vaikom** lies in present-day **Kottayam district** of Kerala; in 1924 it was part of **Travancore**, a princely state under British paramountcy.
- The temple roads were public roads maintained by the State, yet the ban was enforced by custom and by the police.
- The Ezhava community had become better educated and organised through the work of **Sree Narayana Guru** and the **SNDP Yogam** (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam), and began to demand equal civil rights.

Causes of the Vaikom Satyagraha

- **Unapproachability and road ban:** the denial of public roads to avarnas was seen as a denial of a basic civic right, not just a religious question.
- **Social awakening among Ezhavas:** education, the SNDP Yogam and the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru created leaders who demanded equality.
- **T. K. Madhavan's campaign:** the Ezhava leader and editor of the Malayalam daily **Deshabhimani** raised the demand for temple entry in an editorial in **1917**, and in **1920** personally walked past the notice boards near the Vaikom temple in defiance of the ban.
- **Gandhi's support (1921):** in **September 1921** Madhavan met Gandhi at **Tirunelveli** and obtained his support for direct action against the ban.
- **Kakinada Congress (1923):** at the Indian National Congress session at **Kakinada** in 1923, a resolution to remove untouchability was passed; Madhavan moved it, and the Kerala Congress was encouraged to act on it.
- **Kerala Congress decision (1924):** in **January 1924** the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee formed an **Anti-Untouchability Committee** with **K. Kelappan** as convenor, which decided to begin satyagraha at Vaikom.
- **National movement:** the Non-Cooperation years had spread Gandhian methods – non-violent defiance, courting arrest and khadi – which the Vaikom volunteers used.

Course of the Satyagraha – Events in Order

Phase 1: The start and the first arrests (March–April 1924)

- **30 March 1924:** the satyagraha began. Three volunteers from three different castes – **Govinda Panicker** (a Nair), **Bahuleyan** (an Ezhava) and **Kunjappi** (a Pulaya; also spelt Kunjappu) – walked towards the barred road together. Choosing one savarna and two avarna volunteers showed that the struggle was for all castes. The police stopped them and arrested them.
- Each day new batches of volunteers, mostly in khadi, tried to use the roads and were arrested. Within days the main leaders, including **T. K. Madhavan** and **K. P. Kesava Menon**, were in jail; **K. Kelappan** was also arrested during the struggle.
- Around **10 April 1924** the government stopped arresting volunteers and instead kept barricades and police on the roads. The satyagrahis then stood or sat before the barricades day after day, in sun and in the monsoon rain.

Phase 2: George Joseph, Periyar and outside support (April–August 1924)

- **George Joseph**, a Christian Congress leader and barrister of **Madurai**, took charge after the first arrests. Gandhi held that the struggle was a matter for Hindus to settle among themselves and advised non-Hindu leaders to stay in the background; George Joseph was himself arrested and jailed.
- With the Kerala leaders in jail, they invited **Periyar E. V. Ramasamy**, then President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. He reached Vaikom on **13 April 1924** with his wife **Nagammai** and took up the leadership (details in the next section).
- **Akali Sikhs** from Punjab arrived in April 1924 and opened a free community kitchen (langar) for the volunteers. Gandhi felt that the satyagrahis should not depend on such outside help, and the kitchen was closed.
- **Sree Narayana Guru** supported the struggle; volunteers came to Vaikom from different parts of India.

Phase 3: Regency, Savarna Jatha and the Council vote (August 1924 – early 1925)

- **August 1924:** Maharaja **Moolam Thirunal** of Travancore died. As the heir, Chithira Thirunal, was a minor, **Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bayi** became **Regent**. The Regent released the jailed satyagrahis.
- **Savarna Jatha:** on Gandhi's advice, caste Hindus (savarnas) who supported the demand marched on foot from Vaikom to **Thiruvananthapuram** under the leadership of **Mannathu Padmanabhan**, the Nair Service Society leader, and presented a memorial with thousands of signatures to the Regent, stating that caste Hindus did not object to opening the roads. The march showed that the demand had support across castes.
- **Legislative Council:** a resolution to open the Vaikom roads to all was moved in the **Travancore Legislative Council**; it was **defeated by a single vote**.

Phase 4: Gandhi's visit and the settlement (March–November 1925)

- **March 1925:** Gandhi reached Vaikom on **9 March 1925** (some accounts give 10 March), accompanied by **C. Rajagopalachari**, Mahadev Desai and others.
- He held long talks with the orthodox leader **Indanthuruthil Nambiathiri** of the Indanthuruthi mana at Vaikom. The talks failed: the orthodox side would not accept opening the roads.
- He met the **Regent Sethu Lakshmi Bayi** and the British police commissioner of Travancore, **W. H. Pitt**.
- On **12 March 1925** he met **Sree Narayana Guru** at the **Sivagiri Mutt** (Varkala); they discussed the Vaikom Satyagraha, untouchability, conversion and non-violence.
- **Agreement with Pitt:** the police would withdraw the barricades, and the satyagrahis would not enter the barred roads while a settlement was worked out.
- **Settlement:** the government opened the roads on the **northern, southern and western** sides of the temple to all castes, but kept the **eastern road** closed to avarnas.
- **23 November 1925:** the satyagraha was formally withdrawn. On **29 November 1925** a victory function was held at Vaikom; the Kerala leaders invited **Periyar** to preside over it.

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Timeline Table

Year / date	Event
1917	T. K. Madhavan raises temple entry in Deshabhimani
1920	Madhavan walks past the notice boards near the Vaikom temple
Sep 1921	Madhavan meets Gandhi at Tirunelveli
1923	Kakinada Congress session – resolution against untouchability
Jan 1924	KPCC Anti-Untouchability Committee formed; K. Kelappan convenor
30 Mar 1924	Satyagraha begins – Govinda Panicker (Nair), Bahuleyan (Ezhava) and Kunjappi (Pulaya) arrested
Early Apr 1924	Madhavan, K. P. Kesava Menon and other leaders arrested; George Joseph takes charge
13 Apr 1924	Periyar reaches Vaikom with Nagammai
Apr 1924	Akali Sikhs from Punjab open a free community kitchen; closed after Gandhi objects
Aug 1924	Maharaja Moolam Thirunal dies; Regent Sethu Lakshmi Bayi; jailed satyagrahis released
Late 1924	Savarna Jatha led by Mannathu Padmanabhan from Vaikom to Thiruvananthapuram
1924–25	Resolution to open the roads defeated in the Travancore Legislative Council by one vote
Mar 1925	Gandhi at Vaikom; talks with the Indanthuruthil Nambiathiri, the Regent and police commissioner W. H. Pitt; meets Sree Narayana Guru at Sivagiri (12 March)
23 Nov 1925	Satyagraha formally ends; three roads opened to all
29 Nov 1925	Victory function at Vaikom presided over by Periyar
12 Nov 1936	Temple Entry Proclamation by Maharaja Chithira Thirunal

Key People of the Vaikom Satyagraha

Person	Who	Role at Vaikom
T. K. Madhavan	Ezhava leader; editor of Deshabhimani; SNDP Yogam worker	Raised the issue (1917, 1920); met Gandhi at Tirunelveli (Sept 1921); moved the Kakinada resolution (1923); arrested in 1924
K. P. Kesava Menon	Congress leader; a founder of the Malayalam daily Mathrubhumi (1923)	One of the leaders who started the satyagraha; arrested in the first days
K. Kelappan	Congress leader from Malabar	Convenor of the KPCC Anti-Untouchability Committee (1924); later led the Guruvayur Satyagraha (1931)
George Joseph	Christian Congress leader and barrister of Madurai	Led the struggle after the first arrests; Gandhi advised non-Hindus to stand aside; jailed
Periyar E. V. Ramasamy	President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (1924)	Reached Vaikom on 13 April 1924; jailed twice; called Vaikom Veerar; presided over the victory function (29 Nov 1925)
Nagammai and Kannammal	Periyar's wife and sister	Organised women volunteers and kept the struggle going while he was in jail
Mannathu Padmanabhan	Nair Service Society leader	Led the Savarna Jatha from Vaikom to Thiruvananthapuram (1924)
Sree Narayana Guru	Spiritual leader and social reformer; inspiration of the SNDP Yogam	Supported the struggle; met Gandhi at Sivagiri (12 March 1925)
Mahatma Gandhi	Leader of the national movement	Guided the struggle by letters; visited Vaikom in March 1925 and negotiated the settlement
C. Rajagopalachari	Tamil Nadu Congress leader	Accompanied Gandhi to Vaikom in March 1925
Sethu Lakshmi Bayi	Regent (Maharani) of Travancore from 1924	Released satyagrahis; opened three roads; kept the eastern road closed
W. H. Pitt	British police commissioner of Travancore	Agreed with Gandhi to withdraw the barricades
Indanthuruthil Nambiathiri	Orthodox Brahmin leader	Talks with Gandhi failed

Periyar's Role – Why He Is Called Vaikom Veerar

Tamil Nadu's link with Vaikom comes mainly through Periyar. In April 1924, when the Kerala leaders were in jail they invited Periyar, who was then President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, to come and lead it.

- **Arrival:** he reached Vaikom on **13 April 1924** with his wife **Nagammai**.
- **Campaign:** he came with a band of volunteers from Tamil Nadu and spoke at meetings against the road ban.
- **First imprisonment:** he was arrested and kept in the jail at **Arukutti** (also spelt Arookutty).
- **Second imprisonment:** after his release he returned to Vaikom, defied the orders again, and was sentenced to **four months' rigorous imprisonment** in the **Thiruvananthapuram central jail**. He and the other satyagrahis were released after the death of the Maharaja in August 1924.
- **Women's role:** his wife **Nagammai** and sister **Kannammal** led women volunteers and kept the campaign alive during his imprisonment.
- **Victory function:** on **29 November 1925**, after the settlement, the Kerala leaders invited him to preside over the victory celebration at Vaikom.
- **Title:** he is called **Vaikom Veerar** – the Hero of Vaikom; the title is generally credited to **Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaranar** (Thiru.Vi.Ka.).
- **After Vaikom:** in the same year, 1925, he left the Congress at the Kanchipuram conference and launched the **Self-Respect Movement**.

Gandhi's Role and the Negotiations

Gandhi supported the Vaikom Satyagraha from the start through letters, telegrams and articles in **Young India**, but he set clear limits on how it should be fought.

- **A Hindu reform question:** he held that removing untouchability was a duty of caste Hindus themselves, so he advised Christian, Muslim and Sikh supporters to stand aside – which is why he did not encourage George Joseph's leadership and asked the Akalis to close their kitchen.
- **Self-reliance:** the struggle should be run with local volunteers and local funds; he did not want it turned into an all-India agitation.
- **Changing hearts:** he wanted to win over the orthodox through suffering and persuasion – hence the Savarna Jatha and his own talks with the Indanthuruthil Nambiathiri.
- **Negotiation:** when talks with the orthodox side failed, he dealt directly with the Regent and police commissioner W. H. Pitt, which led to the removal of the barricades and the opening of three roads.
- **Assessment:** writers differ on the settlement – some see it as a practical gain won through negotiation, others as a partial result, because the eastern road and temple entry were not won in 1925.

Outcome and Significance

Immediate outcome (1925)

- Roads on the **north, south and west** of the temple opened to all castes.
- The **eastern road** and the temple itself remained closed to the so-called lower castes.
- All jailed satyagrahis had been released by the Regent.

Long-term significance

- **One of the first organised struggles against untouchability** in India on such a scale; it turned a caste custom into a question of civil rights on public roads.
- **Unity across castes and regions:** Nairs, Ezhavas and Pulayas marched together; volunteers and help came from Tamil Nadu, Punjab and other regions.

- **Test of Gandhian satyagraha** on a social issue – long-term non-violent picketing, the Savarna Jatha and negotiation.
- **Path to temple entry:** it led to further struggles such as the **Guruvayur Satyagraha** (from 1931, led by K. Kelappan and A. K. Gopalan) and to the **Temple Entry Proclamation of 12 November 1936**, issued by Maharaja **Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma**, which removed the ban on the so-called lower castes entering the Hindu temples of Travancore.
- **Tamil Nadu link:** Periyar's leadership made Vaikom a part of the Tamil Nadu social justice tradition.

Centenary Commemorations by Kerala and Tamil Nadu (2023–2025)

The hundredth year of the satyagraha was marked jointly by the two States. Only facts reported by at least two reliable sources are given below.

Date	Event	By
30 March 2023	Chief Minister M. K. Stalin, in a statement in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, announced year-long centenary events (2023–24): seminars in universities, quiz, essay and elocution competitions for students, Rs 8.14 crore to renovate the Periyar Memorial at Vaikom, a memorial at Arukutti where Periyar was first jailed, translations of Pazha. Athiyaman's Tamil book **Vaikom Porattam** into Malayalam and other languages, and a new **Vaikom Award**	Tamil Nadu
1 April 2023	Kerala's centenary celebrations, planned for **603 days**, were jointly inaugurated at Vaikom by Kerala Chief Minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **M. K. Stalin**	Kerala, with Tamil Nadu
2023	Vaikom Award instituted – for individuals or organisations outside Tamil Nadu who work for the welfare of oppressed people; to be presented on 17 September (Social Justice Day)	Tamil Nadu
12 December 2024	Renovated **Thanthai Periyar Memorial and Library** at Vaikom (Rs 8.14 crore) inaugurated by M. K. Stalin with Pinarayi Vijayan presiding; the **2024 Vaikom Award** was presented to Kannada writer **Devanur Mahadeva** (cash prize, medal and citation)	Tamil Nadu and Kerala
24 June 2025	Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated, at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, the centenary of the conversation between Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi (Sivagiri, 12 March 1925), which took place during Gandhi's Vaikom visit	Union Government event
October 2025	Vaikom Award 2025 announced for **Thenmozhi Soundararajan**, executive director of the US-based Dalit civil rights organisation Equality Labs	Tamil Nadu

Exam tip: the 2024 Vaikom Award (Devanur Mahadeva) was presented at Vaikom on 12 December 2024 – the same day the renovated Periyar Memorial was opened. Remember that the Vaikom Award is given

by the Tamil Nadu Government for work done outside Tamil Nadu.

Writing Mains Answers on the Vaikom Satyagraha (Group 1 / Group 2)

Descriptive papers can ask about the causes, course or significance of the movement, or about Periyar's role. Build your answer around these points and support each with a fact from the notes above.

Causes, course and outcome of the Vaikom Satyagraha (about 200–250 words)

- **Introduction:** 30 March 1924 – 23 November 1925; Vaikom, Travancore; for the right of all castes to use the roads around the Mahadeva temple.
- **Causes:** unapproachability; Ezhava awakening under Sree Narayana Guru; T. K. Madhavan's campaign; Gandhi's support (Tirunelveli, 1921); Kakinada resolution (1923); KPCC Anti-Untouchability Committee (1924).
- **Course:** three volunteers of three castes arrested on day one; leaders jailed; George Joseph and Periyar lead; Akali kitchen; Regent releases prisoners; Savarna Jatha; Council resolution lost by one vote.
- **Gandhi's visit (March 1925):** talks with the orthodox, the Regent and Pitt; barricades withdrawn.
- **Outcome:** three roads opened, eastern road closed; full entry only after the 1936 Temple Entry Proclamation.
- **Conclusion:** one of the first organised mass struggles against untouchability; model for Guruvayur and later temple-entry struggles.

Periyar's role in the Vaikom Satyagraha (about 150 words)

- Invited when Kerala leaders were jailed; reached Vaikom on 13 April 1924 with Nagammai.
- Speeches and mobilisation; jailed at Arukutti, then four months' rigorous imprisonment in Thiruvananthapuram central jail.
- Nagammai and Kannammal organised women volunteers.
- Presided over the victory function on 29 November 1925; title Vaikom Veerar (generally credited to Thiru.Vi.Ka.)
- Link to the Self-Respect Movement (1925) and the Tamil Nadu social justice tradition; centenary memorial at Vaikom (2024).

Significance of the Vaikom Satyagraha for social reform in South India (about 150 words)

- Converted a caste custom into a question of civil rights on public roads.
- Inter-caste and inter-regional unity: Nair, Ezhava and Pulaya volunteers; help from Tamil Nadu and Punjab.
- Showed both the strength and the limits of Gandhian methods – a partial settlement through negotiation.
- Prepared the ground for the Guruvayur Satyagraha (1931) and the Temple Entry Proclamation (1936).
- Centenary (2023–25) jointly marked by Kerala and Tamil Nadu – a sign of a shared reform heritage.

Practice: Match the Following

Item	Match
T. K. Madhavan	Deshabhimani; met Gandhi at Tirunelveli (1921)
K. P. Kesava Menon	A founder of Mathrubhumi (1923)
K. Kelappan	Convenor, KPCC Anti-Untouchability Committee; Guruvayur Satyagraha
Mannathu Padmanabhan	Savarna Jatha to Thiruvananthapuram
George Joseph	Barrister of Madurai; led after the first arrests
Sethu Lakshmi Bayi	Regent of Travancore from 1924
W. H. Pitt	Police commissioner of Travancore
Sivagiri, 12 March 1925	Gandhi meets Sree Narayana Guru
Arukutti	Periyar's first imprisonment
12 November 1936	Temple Entry Proclamation – Chithira Thirunal

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Road, not temple:** the Vaikom Satyagraha was for the use of the **roads around** the temple, not for entry into the temple. Temple entry came in 1936.
- **Start and end:** began 30 March 1924; formally ended 23 November 1925. 29 November 1925 is the date of the victory function, not the end of the struggle.
- **Duration:** sources count it as 603 or 604 days; the Kerala centenary programme was planned for 603 days.
- **Ruler vs Regent:** Maharaja Moolam Thirunal died in August 1924; Gandhi negotiated with Regent Sethu Lakshmi Bayi, not with the Maharaja. The 1936 Proclamation was issued by Chithira Thirunal.
- **Which road stayed closed:** the **eastern** road.
- **Savarna Jatha leader:** Mannathu Padmanabhan – not T. K. Madhavan.
- **Kelappan's two struggles:** Vaikom (1924–25, as convenor) and Guruvayur (from 1931, as leader) – do not mix them.
- **Vaikom Veerar:** the title belongs to Periyar; it is generally credited to Thiru.Vi.Ka., not to Gandhi.
- **Vaikom Award:** given by the Tamil Nadu Government (instituted 2023) to people or organisations working **outside** Tamil Nadu.

Quick Revision Table

Fact	Answer
Place	Vaikom Mahadeva temple roads; Travancore (now Kottayam district, Kerala)
Started / ended	30 March 1924 / 23 November 1925
First three satyagrahis	Govinda Panicker (Nair), Bahuleyan (Ezhava), Kunjappi (Pulaya)
Organising body	KPCC Anti-Untouchability Committee (convenor K. Kelappan)
Raised the issue first	T. K. Madhavan
Periyar arrives	13 April 1924
Periyar's jails	Arukutti; then Thiruvananthapuram central jail (four months' RI)
Outside help	Akali Sikhs' free kitchen (closed at Gandhi's wish)
Ruler's death	Moolam Thirunal, August 1924
Regent	Sethu Lakshmi Bayi
Savarna Jatha	Mannathu Padmanabhan; Vaikom to Thiruvananthapuram
Council resolution	Defeated by one vote
Gandhi's visit	March 1925; met Sree Narayana Guru at Sivagiri on 12 March
Settlement	North, south and west roads opened; east closed
Victory function	29 November 1925, presided by Periyar
Temple Entry Proclamation	12 November 1936, Chithira Thirunal
Centenary inauguration	1 April 2023, Vaikom – Pinarayi Vijayan and M. K. Stalin
Periyar Memorial renovated	Rs 8.14 crore; opened 12 December 2024
Vaikom Award 2024 / 2025	Devanur Mahadeva / Thenmozhi Soundararajan

TNPSC Key Points (PYQ-style facts)

- Vaikom Satyagraha: 30 March 1924 – 23 November 1925, Travancore (Kottayam district, Kerala).
- Aim: right of avarnas (Ezhavas, Pulayas and others) to use the public roads around the Vaikom Mahadeva temple.
- T. K. Madhavan (Deshabhimani) raised the issue; met Gandhi at Tirunelveli in September 1921; moved the Kakinada resolution (1923).
- KPCC Anti-Untouchability Committee (January 1924): convenor K. Kelappan.
- Leaders: T. K. Madhavan, K. P. Kesava Menon, K. Kelappan, George Joseph, Periyar.
- First satyagrahis: Govinda Panicker (Nair), Bahuleyan (Ezhava), Kunjappi (Pulaya).
- George Joseph – Christian Congress leader from Madurai; Gandhi felt non-Hindus should stand aside.
- Periyar reached Vaikom on 13 April 1924; jailed at Arukutti and then in Thiruvananthapuram central jail; title Vaikom Veerar (generally credited to Thiru.Vi.Ka.).
- Nagammai and Kannammal led women volunteers.

- Akali Sikhs ran a free kitchen; Gandhi had it closed.
- Maharaja Moolam Thirunal died August 1924; Regent Sethu Lakshmi Bayi released prisoners.
- Savarna Jatha: Mannathu Padmanabhan, Vaikom to Thiruvananthapuram.
- Travancore Legislative Council resolution lost by one vote.
- Gandhi at Vaikom, March 1925: Indanthuruthil Nambiathiri, Regent, police commissioner W. H. Pitt; met Sree Narayana Guru at Sivagiri on 12 March 1925.
- Settlement: north, south and west roads opened; eastern road closed. Victory function 29 November 1925 presided by Periyar.
- Temple Entry Proclamation: 12 November 1936, Maharaja Chithira Thirunal.
- Guruvayur Satyagraha: from 1931, K. Kelappan and A. K. Gopalan.
- Centenary: TN Assembly announcement 30 March 2023; joint inauguration at Vaikom 1 April 2023 (603-day programme); Periyar Memorial and Library renovated (Rs 8.14 crore), opened 12 December 2024.
- Vaikom Award (TN, 2023): 2024 – Devanur Mahadeva; 2025 – Thenmozhi Soundararajan.

Frequently Asked Questions

What was the Vaikom Satyagraha?

It was a non-violent struggle held at Vaikom in the princely state of Travancore (now Kottayam district, Kerala) from 30 March 1924 to 23 November 1925. It demanded that the public roads around the Vaikom Mahadeva temple, closed to the so-called lower castes such as Ezhavas and Pulayas, be opened to people of all castes. It is regarded as one of the first organised struggles in India against untouchability and unapproachability.

Who were the main leaders of the Vaikom Satyagraha?

T. K. Madhavan raised the issue and won Gandhi's support; K. P. Kesava Menon and K. Kelappan led the Kerala Congress effort; George Joseph led for a short time after the first arrests; Periyar E. V. Ramasamy came from Tamil Nadu on 13 April 1924 and was jailed twice; Mannathu Padmanabhan led the Savarna Jatha; and Gandhi visited Vaikom in March 1925 to negotiate a settlement.

Why is Periyar called Vaikom Veerar?

Periyar reached Vaikom on 13 April 1924 at the invitation of the Kerala leaders, after most of them had been arrested. He was jailed first at Arukutti and then given four months' rigorous imprisonment in the Thiruvananthapuram central jail. His wife Nagammai and sister Kannammal organised women volunteers. For this role he is called Vaikom Veerar (Hero of Vaikom), a title generally credited to Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaranar (Thiru.Vi.Ka.); he also presided over the victory function at Vaikom on 29 November 1925.

What was the outcome of the Vaikom Satyagraha?

It ended in a compromise in November 1925. The roads on the northern, southern and western sides of the temple were opened to all castes, but the eastern road and the temple itself remained closed. Full access came only with the Temple Entry Proclamation issued by Maharaja Chithira Thirunal on 12 November 1936.

How did Kerala and Tamil Nadu mark the centenary of the Vaikom Satyagraha?

On 30 March 2023 Chief Minister M. K. Stalin announced year-long centenary events in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, including a Vaikom Award and Rs 8.14 crore to renovate the Periyar Memorial at Vaikom. On 1 April 2023 Pinarayi Vijayan and M. K. Stalin jointly inaugurated Kerala's 603-day celebrations at Vaikom. On 12 December 2024 the renovated Thanthai Periyar Memorial and Library was inaugurated at Vaikom and the 2024 Vaikom Award was presented to Kannada writer Devanur Mahadeva.

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Practice questions

1. In which present-day district is the Vaikom Mahadeva temple?

A. Alappuzha
B. Ernakulam
C. Kottayam
D. Thiruvananthapuram

2. What was the main demand of the Vaikom Satyagraha?

A. Entry into the sanctum of the temple
B. Use of the public roads around the temple
C. Reservation in government jobs
D. Reduction of land tax

3. Who met Gandhi at Tirunelveli in 1921 and won his support on the Vaikom issue?

A. K. P. Kesava Menon
B. Mannathu Padmanabhan
C. T. K. Madhavan
D. George Joseph

4. Where was the 1923 Congress session at which T. K. Madhavan moved a resolution against untouchability?

A. Nagpur
B. Belgaum
C. Kakinada
D. Gaya

5. Who was the convenor of the KPCC Anti-Untouchability Committee formed in 1924?

A. C. Rajagopalachari
B. T. K. Madhavan
C. A. K. Gopalan
D. K. Kelappan

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6. Who was NOT among the first three satyagrahis who walked on 30 March 1924?

A. Govinda Panicker
B. Bahuleyan
C. Kunjappi
D. Mannathu Padmanabhan

7. Why were the first satyagrahis chosen from three castes – Nair, Ezhava and Pulaya?

A. To win election support
B. To show that the struggle was for all castes
C. To confuse the police
D. On the Maharaja's order

8. Gandhi told which Christian Congress leader, who led the struggle after the first arrests, that it was a matter for Hindus?

A. George Joseph
B. K. P. Kesava Menon
C. W. H. Pitt
D. N. Kumaran

9. On which date did Periyar reach Vaikom?

A. 30 March 1924
B. 23 November 1925
C. 9 March 1925
D. 13 April 1924

10. Where did Periyar serve his second sentence of rigorous imprisonment during the Vaikom struggle?

A. Vellore jail
B. Alipore jail
C. Thiruvananthapuram central jail
D. Palayamkottai jail

11. Who ran a free community kitchen (langar) for the satyagrahis at Vaikom?

A. Akali Sikhs
B. Khilafat volunteers
C. Arya Samajists
D. Brahmo Samajists

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12. Which Maharaja of Travancore died in August 1924, during the satyagraha?

A. Chithira Thirunal
B. Swathi Thirunal
C. Moolam Thirunal
D. Ayilyam Thirunal

13. Which Regent of Travancore released the jailed satyagrahis and later opened three roads?

A. Sethu Parvathi Bayi
B. Sethu Lakshmi Bayi
C. Gowri Lakshmi Bayi
D. Gowri Parvathi Bayi

14. Who led the Savarna Jatha from Vaikom to Thiruvananthapuram?

A. K. Kelappan
B. T. K. Madhavan
C. Mannathu Padmanabhan
D. Sree Narayana Guru

15. What happened to the resolution in the Travancore Legislative Council to open the Vaikom roads?

A. Passed unanimously
B. Defeated by one vote
C. Vetoed by the Regent
D. Never put to vote

16. With which orthodox leader of Vaikom did Gandhi hold talks in March 1925?

A. K. M. Panikkar
B. C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar
C. N. Kumaran
D. Indanthuruthil Nambiathiri

17. Which police commissioner of Travancore agreed with Gandhi to withdraw the barricades?

A. John Munro
B. C. F. Andrews
C. Lord Goschen
D. W. H. Pitt

18. Whom did Gandhi meet at the Sivagiri Mutt on 12 March 1925, during his Vaikom visit?

A. Chattampi Swamikal
B. Sree Narayana Guru
C. Ayyankali
D. Vagbhatananda

19. Which temple road remained closed to avarnas even after the 1925 settlement?

A. Northern road

B. Southern road

C. Western road

D. Eastern road

20. On which date did the Vaikom Satyagraha formally end?

A. 23 November 1925

B. 29 November 1925

C. 12 March 1925

D. 12 November 1936

21. Who presided over the victory function at Vaikom on 29 November 1925?

A. Mahatma Gandhi

B. Sethu Lakshmi Bayi

C. Periyar E. V. Ramasamy

D. Sree Narayana Guru

22. Which Maharaja of Travancore issued the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936?

A. Moolam Thirunal

B. Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma

C. Uthradom Thirunal

D. Visakham Thirunal

23. Match: (a) T. K. Madhavan (b) K. P. Kesava Menon (c) K. Kelappan (d) Mannathu Padmanabhan — (1) Savarna Jatha (2) Mathrubhumi (3) Deshabhimani (4) Guruvayur Satyagraha

A. a-3, b-2, c-4, d-1

B. a-2, b-3, c-1, d-4

C. a-3, b-4, c-2, d-1

D. a-1, b-2, c-4, d-3

24. Which statements on the Vaikom centenary are correct? (I) Pinarayi Vijayan and M. K. Stalin inaugurated the celebrations at Vaikom on 1 April 2023. (II) Kerala's celebrations were planned for 603 days. (III) The renovated Periyar Memorial was opened on 12 December 2024.

A. I and II only

B. II and III only

C. I and III only

D. I, II and III

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25. Who received the Tamil Nadu Government's Vaikom Award for 2024?

A. Devanur Mahadeva

B. Thenmozhi Soundararajan

C. K. Veeramani

D. Pazha. Athiyaman

Answers with explanations

1. **C) Kottayam** – Vaikom is in Kottayam district of present-day Kerala.

2. **B) Use of the public roads around the temple** – The demand was the right of all castes to use the roads around the temple; temple entry came only in 1936.

3. **C) T. K. Madhavan** – T. K. Madhavan, editor of Deshabhimani, met Gandhi at Tirunelveli in September 1921.

4. **C) Kakinada** – The resolution was passed at the Kakinada session of 1923.

5. **D) K. Kelappan** – K. Kelappan was convenor of the committee formed in January 1924.

6. **D) Mannathu Padmanabhan** – The first three were Govinda Panicker (Nair), Bahuleyan (Ezhava) and Kunjappi (Pulaya).

7. **B) To show that the struggle was for all castes** – One savarna and two avarna volunteers walking together showed unity across castes.

8. **A) George Joseph** – Gandhi advised non-Hindu leaders such as George Joseph to stay in the background and let caste Hindus lead.

9. **D) 13 April 1924** – Periyar reached Vaikom with Nagammai on 13 April 1924.

10. **C) Thiruvananthapuram central jail** – His second term – four months' rigorous imprisonment – was in the Thiruvananthapuram central jail.

11. **A) Akali Sikhs** – Akali Sikhs from Punjab opened it in April 1924; it closed after Gandhi objected.

12. **C) Moolam Thirunal** – After Moolam Thirunal's death, Sethu Lakshmi Bayi became Regent.

13. **B) Sethu Lakshmi Bayi** – Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bayi was Regent from 1924.

14. **C) Mannathu Padmanabhan** – Nair Service Society leader Mannathu Padmanabhan led it and presented a memorial to the Regent.

15. **B) Defeated by one vote** – The resolution was defeated by a single vote.

16. **D) Indanthuruthil Nambiathiri** – Gandhi's talks with the Indanthuruthil Nambiathiri failed.

17. **D) W. H. Pitt** – Under the agreement with police commissioner W. H. Pitt, the barricades were withdrawn.

18. **B) Sree Narayana Guru** – He met Sree Narayana Guru at Sivagiri; its centenary was marked in New Delhi on 24 June 2025.

19. **D) Eastern road** – The north, south and west roads were opened; the eastern road stayed closed.

20. **A) 23 November 1925** – It ended on 23 November 1925; 29 November was the victory function.

21. **C) Periyar E. V. Ramasamy** – Periyar presided at the invitation of the Kerala leaders.

22. **B) Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma** – Chithira Thirunal issued it on 12 November 1936.

23. **A) a-3, b-2, c-4, d-1** – Madhavan–Deshabhimani; Kesava Menon–Mathrubhumi; Kelappan–Guruvayur; Mannathu–Savarna Jatha.

24. **D) I, II and III** – All three statements are correct.

25. **A) Devanur Mahadeva** – Kannada writer Devanur Mahadeva received it at Vaikom on 12 December 2024; the 2025 award went to Thenmozhi Soundararajan.

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