Chapter - VI
CHAPTER-VI

TEMPLE ENTRY CAMPAIGN

The struggle in the socio-cultural sphere led to the demand for equal rights, status and access in religious matters as well. The practice of *varnashrama dharma* under the Hindu agama rules, gives exclusive privileges to the Brahmins to be the priests of the agamic temples that are rich and considered to be holier than the ordinary temples. The Sudras had no right to enter in the *sanctum sanctorum* and the position of the Depressed Classes was the worst and they could not even enter into the temples; they had to be contended with the worship of the gopura, standing outside the temple complex. In some places they could not use the streets around the temples. The struggle for the basic rights and human dignity took the form of temple entry.¹

The struggle for political freedom under Gandhi culminated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. While he was hectic in mobilizing popular support towards this end, the leaders like by B.R. Ambedkar sought social safeguards in the form of reservation of seats in the central and provincial legislatures based on proportional representation. The third session of the Madras Provincial Depressed Classes conference was held on 12 March 1930, at Tirupapuliyur in Cuddalur in the presence of a large gathering. R.Srinivasan moved the resolution relating to temple entry: “This conference resolves that with regard to entry into Hindu temples, the Depressed Classes should not attempt any forcible entry but try to assert their rights where they are entitled to them and to agitate continuously for them”.

V.I.Muniswami pillai next moved: “This Conference most emphatically condemns the action of the INC in declaring independence and starting civil disobedience and call upon all the peace-loving citizens to stand by

the Government in resisting this revolutionary movement. As an outcome of all-India socio-political developments, and in corresponding to the need of the time, the Madras Provincial Depressed Classes Conference was held in 1930. Justice Party backed P. Subbarayan Ministry initiated temple entry resolution in 1932. This was aimed at fulfilling his conviction in the self-respect ideology and his close association with non-Brahmin leaders. On the other side, the Congress under Gandhi visualized to monopolise the credit for all the social reforms for the Party and himself. Encouraged on the support of some of the Congress leaders, C.S. Ranga Iyer and M.C. Rajah introduced legislative measures in the central and provincial legislatures against untouchability and civic barriers. Till the formation of the Congress Ministry under provincial autonomy in 1937, the legislative forums worked as the agency to focus varied aspects of social disabilities. As a result, innumerable bills were moved against social restrictions and untouchability particularly in the Madras legislature. When Rajaji assumed the Premiership of Madras Presidency in July 1937, he initiated administrative measures at social ends besides introducing bills through legislature.

Temple Entry - A Move Against Untouchability

In 1932 political compulsions regarding communal electorate made Congress intensify the temple entry and anti-untouchability campaign, and through that numerous bills and acts came into being the central and provincial legislatures of India. As an immediate impact of the Poona Pact, the caste-Hindus at a public meeting in Bombay on 25 September 1932 passed a significant resolution in favour of the Depressed Classes. It declared: “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 roads and other public institutions. It was 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.

In order to elevate the social status of the Depressed Classes, M.K. Gandhi also issued a public statement on 25 September 1932 from Yerwada prison: “It has been a matter of increasing joy day by day to find great ancient temples being opened to the so-called untouchables and thus becoming purified speaking as a Hindu, striving to find and to live up to the very essence of it, I say without the slightest hesitation that God will reside in the idol of the temples only if they are thrown open unreservedly to the out-castes. Today with human outcaste, God himself is an outcaste. As a response to Gandhi’s appeal, Rajaji along with Rajendra Prasad proclaimed the birth anniversary of M.K. Gandhi as the ‘anti-untouchability week’. It was observed throughout India from 27 September 1932. Leaders and reformers attended a number of meetings and thereby public awareness was created for the abolition of untouchability. On 30 September 1932 at a large meeting in Bombay, the Congressmen formed the All-India Anti-Untouchability League with branches in different provincial centres with G.D. Birla as President and A.V. Thakkar as General Secretary. The headquarters of the League was located in Delhi. The main objects of the League were abolition of untouchability and the attainment of temple entry through peaceful persuasion as


8. Ibid., Vol. VI, 1938, p.1175.


10. The Tamil Nadu branch of Anti-untouchability League was established on 28 November 1932 in Tiruchirapalli, the centre of orthodox people with T.S.S. Rajan, G. Ramachandran and M. Bhakthavatchalam as it’s President, Secretary and Vice-President respectively, Sudanditra Sanghu, 23 November 1932; L.A.R., Vol. II, 1932, p.257.
early as possible. As within three days more than 150 temples were thrown open to
the untouchables in different parts of India. As a mark of response to M.K.
Gandhi's appeal the sanatanist leaders like T.C. Srinivasa Iyengar, K.R.
Venkatrama Iyengar and others circulated a public statement expressing the need to
throw open the Indian temples to the untouchables for national unity and Hindu
solidarity. When the Madurai Dewasthanam Committee meeting was convened on
7 October 1932, it also resolved to recommend the early introduction of legislative
measures to remove disabilities.

Temple Entry Resolution of Subbarayan

Realising the need of a legislative measure for temple entry and on
the persuasion of Rajaji, P. Subbarayan, the Premier of Madras Presidency
introduced in the Madras Legislative Council the Temple Entry Resolution on 1
November 1932, as a prelude to a possible future bill. It marked the beginning of
an agitation politics in Tamil Nadu for the abolition of untouchability. This
resolution included three notable provisions. The first provision urged the
Government to recognise the strong and growing public feeling in the Hindu
community to remove the disabilities of common worship at temples. The second
provision sought the opening of temples to the Depressed Classes taking advantage
of the Poona Pact. And the third provision it demanded the Government to bring a
legislation to open the temples to the Depressed Classes with regulations not
affecting the prevailing order and cleanliness in temples as well as the performance
of ceremonies according to the traditional convention of temples.

On his introduction of the resolution, Premier Subbarayan in his
introductory speech pointed out that in the event of Council accepting it, he would

11. Viyogi Hari (tr.), Thakkar Bapa, New Delhi, 1977, p.59
15. Government of Madras, G.O. No. 114,Public (General) Department, 31 March 1933 ;
make suitable legislations. In the course of discussion, members were divided in expressing their views. In supporting the resolution, T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar stated that entry into temples to the Depressed Classes placed them on equal footing with others. Even A.P. Patro, a Justice Party leader acknowledged that the Depressed Classes were certainly entitled in every way to enter the temples as they were born to enjoy so many other rights and privileges. C. Natesa Mudaliar and C.R. Parthasarathy Iyengar catalogued the benefits of the resolution that it would advance them. V.P. Narayan Namibiar briefed that it would remove the greatest curse on Hindu religion and the most tragic blot on Hindu society. Muslim members like Yakub Hasan too expressed views in favour to pass the resolution successfully. In advocating the resolution, K. Alamelumangathayaar Amma reproduced the past scene of social reform movement in India from the days of Rajaram Mohan Roy who made a crusade to end the practice of ‘sati’ through legislation and other movements of Pandit Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar and Harbilas Sarda. Therefore, in the case of temple entry also she mentioned about the urgent need for a proper legislation. R. Srinivasan considered the resolution as a very modest one since it did require the restoration of ancient temple that belonged to the Depressed Classes, but it claimed only an entrance into these temples. After the views ventilated by members, M. Krishnan Nair, the Law Member sought to ascertain the views of the members through poll, in which fifty-six voted in favour of it and nineteen members remained neutral. Accordingly, the resolution was accepted by the majority without dissent voice.

Temple Entry Bill of Subbarayan

Subsequently, P. Subbarayan drafted a bill to remove the disabilities faced by the Depressed Classes on temple entry issue. With Narayan Namibiar he


handed over two separate bills to the Madras Government in 1932. As the bills were considered a central subject viz; 'civil law', under section 80-A (3) of the Government of India Act of 1919, the Government of Madras submitted these bills for the previous sanction of the Viceroy.\textsuperscript{21} For a while, C.S. Ranga Iyer gave notice for his introduction of the Abolition of Untouchability Bill in the Central Legislature on 28 November 1932.\textsuperscript{22} Meanwhile, M.C. Rajah a member of Central Legislature with an aim to remove social disabilities presented the Untouchability Abolition Bill in December 1932.\textsuperscript{23} Among the provincial bills, the bill of P. Subbarayan was considered most noteworthy than the bill of Narayan Nambiar on the temple entry issue. It dealt with the segregation of the Depressed Classes from temple worship as a social disability and subjected to universal condemnation. The bill narrated about the move of the leaders of the Depressed Classes and the social reformers among the caste-Hindus to initiate a struggle and to start an agitation.\textsuperscript{24} Many of the trustees of the temples were whole-heartedly welcomed the temple entry reform. They were afraid of allowing the Depressed Classes into the temples because they were restricted to do as per the Section 40 of the Madras Hindu Religious Endowment Acts II of 1927.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore, to avoid any imposition and compulsion on the trustees, the bill stipulated certain norms for the temple entry.\textsuperscript{26}

Subbarayan, during the debate on the bill in the legislature, blamed the caste-Hindus for their apathy towards the Depressed Classes. He argued that the indifference of the upper castes had forced these Classes to dissociate themselves from the nationalist movement. Such arguments failed to get support from the upper caste non-Brahmin politicians. The non-Brahmin legislators opposed the temple entry rights of the


\textsuperscript{22} Harijan, Vol. II, 6 July 1934, p.167.

\textsuperscript{23} Venkatraman S.R., \textit{op.cit.}, p.12.


\textsuperscript{25} Harijan, Vol.II, 30 March, 1934, p.54.

\textsuperscript{26} Venkatraman, S.R., \textit{op.cit.}, Appendix- III, pp.iv-ix.
Depressed Classes and instead placed more emphasis on their educational and economic advancement.\textsuperscript{27}

The majority of the non-Brahmin politicians displayed a conservative attitude on the issue of temple entry. The Depressed Class leaders were somewhat guarded in their opinion. R. Srinivasan felt that the bill of by P. Subbarayan was modest in terms of aims and objectives.\textsuperscript{28} Srinivasan, who differed from Ambedkar’s views on temple entry, felt that legislation on such lines would lead to the spiritual uplift of the Depressed Classes.\textsuperscript{29} However, Srinivasan’s views on temple entry did not find support from the radical Depressed Class leaders. N. Sivaraj pointed out that temple entry could not solve the problems being faced by Depressed Classes. He argued that temple entry issue was fast losing its importance as a substantial section of the Depressed Classes had been drawn towards the atheist and anti-caste Self-Respect Movement.\textsuperscript{30}

The enlightened caste-Hindus pleaded for the temple entry right of the Depressed Classes in the Madras Legislative Council. The reformist Hindu politicians were of the opinion that there was no historical basis behind the social ostracism of the Depressed Classes.\textsuperscript{31} C.R. Parthasarathi Ayyangar, who had participated in the debate on the bill, stated that there was no Hindu shastra which sanctioned the practice of social segregation. He observed: “By allowing the Depressed Class people to enter the temples, we are not going to achieve the millennium and make the Adi Dravida, a man of culture or the highly cultured man in this country. Certainly not. But you don’t exploit them; you don’t treat with

\textsuperscript{27} MLCP, LXII, p.227.

\textsuperscript{28} Srinivasan pointed out that despite all attempts to resolve a long-standing religious demand of the ‘Depressed Classes’, the bill hardly made any attempt to restore the temples, which in the distant past had been managed by the Depressed Classes. (Ibid., p.245.)

\textsuperscript{29} Srinivasan and several other Depressed Class leaders criticized the view of some upper caste Hindu politicians that temple entry would hardly be of much benefit for the Adi Dravidas of Madras Presidency. (Ibid, p.245.)

\textsuperscript{30} Sivaraj pointed out that as long as the Hindus continued to worship God through an intermediary, the question of temple entry would not resolve the religious grievances of the non-Brahmins. (Ibid., p.246.)

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., pp.237-238.
contempt those persons who are weaker than yourselves in culture, in status, in
ability and skills.”

The non-Brahmin leaders remained divided in their opinion on the
issue of temple entry legislation. Sir A.P. Patro, an eminent non-Brahmin leader,
felt that the social discrimination faced by the Depressed Classes could only be
removed by undertaking programmes aimed at their economic betterment. However, a sizable section of the non-Brahmin legislators voted with the other
members, including Brahmins, in support of the bill. The Provincial Government,
fearing a nationwide repercussion, avoided taking a hasty stand on the issue.

In a telegram to the Viceroy, Gandhi pleaded with the Government to
adopt a realistic stand towards the bills dealing with the removal of the social
disabilities of the Depressed Classes in the Madras Presidency. Gandhi requested
the Viceroy to give immediate assent to the introduction of the Removal of the
He wholeheartedly supported the bill since it tried to live up to the promises made in
the Poona Pact. On the other hand, the conservative Hindus tried to mobilize
strong public opinion against the proposed legislation. The All India Varnashrama
Swarajya Sangha, in its meeting in Guruvayur, in 1993 declared that the issue of
temple entry could only be decided on the basis of Hindu religious scriptures and
usages. The Sangha in its resolution sent to the Government alleged that only a

32. Ibid., p.238

33. Ibid., pp.230 and 238

34. Ibid., pp,250-51.

35. Removal of Depressed Classes Religious Disabilities Bill was proposed by Narayanan Nambiar, a member of the Madras Legislative Council, towards the end of 1932. In early 1933, the bill was placed before the Legislative Council for consideration. Gandhi favoured the introduction of the bill along with the earlier one moved by P. Subbarayan, since both of them intended to fulfill a long-standing grievance of the untouchables. (CWMG, Vol LII, Ahmedabad, 1972, p.309.)
handful of self-seeking politicians had been trying to force the issue of temple entry through issuing threats of fast and referendum.\textsuperscript{36}

On 3 January 1933, the Madras branch of the Sangha sent a memorandum to the Viceroy against the proposed temple entry legislation. It stated that temple entry legislation constituted a violation of freedom of religious faith and neutrality that had been guaranteed in the Royal Proclamation of 1858. It also declared that a "mixed legislature," comprising non-Hindu members and alien government representatives, was not competent enough to deal with a deeply religious issue such as temple entry. The Sangha also criticized Gandhi for unnecessarily raising the issue, especially when the Depressed Classes were more interested in socio-economic uplift.\textsuperscript{37}

Despite the growing sanatanist opposition, the Tamilnadu Congress showed no signs of retreating from its demand of temple entry of the Depressed Classes. The influential Congress leaders, apprehending political implications of the sanatanist onslaught, favoured the integration of the anti-untouchability and temple entry campaigns within the Congress' general political agenda. However, Gandhi's conflicting opinions on temple entry sometimes placed them in a dilemma. While Gandhi supported the integration of the temple entry campaign within a broader movement aimed at the purification of Hinduism, he remained totally reticent about the participation of the Depressed Classes.\textsuperscript{38} Dilip Menon has pointed out that Gandhi believed that the Depressed Classes needed to perform the

\textsuperscript{36} Home Political, Department File No. 50/IV/1933, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi,1933.

\textsuperscript{37} The Madras Mail, 3 January 1933; Pradhan, A.C., The Emergence of the Depressed Classes Bhubaneswar, 1986, p.230.

\textsuperscript{38} Bayly has pointed out that Gandhi looked above all to the Hindu temples as the domain in which the attack had to be launched against the evil aspects of castes and untouchability. But Gandhi felt that the use of force, resulting from the involvement of the lower caste participants, could lead to an atmosphere of violence. In fact, Gandhi felt that issues like temple entry needed to be integrated with the anti-untouchability campaigns to ensure respectability to the socially ostracised communities. (Susan Bayly, Caste, Society and Politics in India : From the Eighteenth century to the Modern Age, New Delhi, 2000, p.247.)
role of admiring audiences vis-à-vis the entire show of self-sacrifice that was being enacted before them by upper castes.  

In the meantime, Tamil Congressmen displayed an interest in entering into negotiations with the Government. C. Rajagopalachari sent a telegram to C.F. Andrews, a well wisher of Indrans, requesting him to make a representation before the India Office for facilitating the Viceroy's sanction to the temple entry bills that had been introduced before the Madras Legislative Council. The active involvement of eminent political personalities like Rajaji and Devadas Gandhi largely accounted for the Congress' successes. The non-Brahmin members of the Congress in the Legislative Council also expressed the opinion that the Government needed to appoint a committee of savarna Hindus to ascertain the Hindu public opinion on temple entry.

Meanwhile, Gandhi as a national leader wanted to expedite both central and provincial measures for the abolition of untouchability and to create awareness to form a peaceful society. For this purpose, he sought the Government for facilities inside Yerwada prison to undertake works for the Depressed Classes. The Government suspected the move and conditioned him on 3 November 1932 that if he discontinued the Civil Disobedience Movement, he would be given all facilities for the works of Depressed classes as desired. The Government stand gave dissatisfaction to Gandhi and he started his welfare activities of the Depressed Classes in a possible manner by issuing a series of nine statements in

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39 Gandhi believed that the Guruvayur Satyagraha would be a test case and the reformist Hindus needed to exercise caution in their demand for entry of all castes into all temples. He was hesitant in adopting a radical approach on the issue since it was felt that such policies could alienate the conservative Hindus and place obstacles before the path of temple entry. (Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar 1900-1948*, New Delhi, 1994, p.115; CWMG., Vol.II, p.428.)


41 FNR for the First Half of January 1933 (Confidential).

42 Ibid.

terms of matters related to temple entry, Hinduism, Depressed Classes and removal of untouchability.\textsuperscript{44}

Thus the need for the temple entry bills like that of P. Subbarayan was highly felt by both the national leaders and social reformers and expected legislation of those bills. Yet, the Government shelved these bills aside for a long time, apprehensive of opposition from the orthodox Hindus. However, high pressure came out from Indian leaders like Rajaji, P.N. Sapru and M.R. Jayakar who emphasised the early need for temple entry.\textsuperscript{45} M.K. Gandhi, at last threatened to commence a great and fierce war of \textit{atma sakthi} (spiritual power) since 2 January 1933, in the absence of Viceroy’s sanction for the introduction of P. Subbarayan’s bill.\textsuperscript{46} Gandhi also proposed to consider the postponement of his fast if a social change was realised through a law in the near future.\textsuperscript{47} However, the Governor-General observed that he could not do anything as there was no public opinion. On the other hand, he promised to speed up the matter.\textsuperscript{48} Yet, realising the Government’s difficulty, he gave some more time.\textsuperscript{49}

However, the delay of Viceroy to accord sanction to the bill of Subbarayan provoked the press of Tamil Nadu to air their views against the Viceroy. The press generally hoped that the bill of P. Subbarayan would be a boon. The newspapers published from Madras like India and \textit{Tennindia} highly protested against the inactivity of the Viceroy.\textsuperscript{50} The Gandhi and \textit{Anandha Bodhini} appealed that the Government without any delay it should come to do its duty because the public opinion was already created on the signing of Poona Pact

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., Vol. II, 1932, pp.261-274.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Times of India}, 24 February 1933, Harijan, 25 February and 4 March 1933.


\textsuperscript{47} \textit{The Times of India}, 11 November 1933.

\textsuperscript{48} Trilok Nath, \textit{op.cit.}, p.176.


\textsuperscript{50} \textit{India}, 23 December 1932, \textit{Tennindia}, 27 December 1932, M.N.N.R., p.43.
and there was a large attendance in Bombay conference. The *Andhra Patrika* urged the Government of India as well as the Madras Government to respect those popular feelings favouring Subbarayan’s bill.

However, the British officials in India expressed strong reservations against the proposed temple entry legislations. The Home Secretary to the Government of India feared that the Viceroy’s sanctions to the bills could disrupt the relations between the Government and the conservative Hindus. But he did agree that the Government’s silence on the matter could subject it to severe criticism. He stated that the bills introduced before the Madras Legislative Council could not be given sanction since they related to a legal aspect covered by the Central Subject of Civil Law. The Government of India was also in no mood to grant sanction to the bill brought before the Madras Legislative Council.

The lukewarm response on the part of the Depressed Classes in Madras Presidency vis-à-vis Congress’ Harijan campaign greatly influenced the Government’s

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53 The Home Secretary felt that the Viceroy’s sanctions to the bills might alienate the conservative supporters of the British Raj and strengthen the hold of the Congress over the India masses. (Home (Political) Department, File No. 50/1/1933, National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi.)

54 C.S. Ranga Iyer’s bill pleaded for the abolition on untouchability throughout India. The Home Member as well as the Home Secretary felt that anti-untouchability bills brought before the Central Legislative Assembly could hardly achieve their desired objectives because of the lengthy debates that would take place in the Assembly. Moreover, it was also felt that the circulation of the bills in the province would not lead to any solution because of the differences of opinion. (Ibid.)

thinking on the matter. The Secretary of State advised the Government of India to keep a close vigil on the bills that had been granted sanction for introduction in the Central Legislative Assembly.\textsuperscript{56} The Government of India was also advised to see that the bills generated full scale discussion both within the legislature as well as in the public bodies and local government institutions.\textsuperscript{57} In January 1933, the Viceroy announced that sanction could not be granted to the bills, pending before the Madras Legislative Council since they affected religious beliefs of the Hindus in general. The Viceroy's decision to withhold sanctions to the introduction of the temple entry bills in the Madras Legislative Council gave rise to discontent within the Tamil Nadu Congress.

As public pressure mounted on, Lord Willington decided to give his verdict to the bill of Subbarayan. For this purpose, he approached his own colleagues and experts and sought the views of local government.\textsuperscript{58} As there was a divided Hindu opinion on the bill, Lord Willingdon, on his decision on 23 January 1933\textsuperscript{59} refused permission to Subbarayan and Narayan Nambiar to introduce their bills as the problem was of an all-Indian character and so it could not be approached merely on a provincial basis.\textsuperscript{60} However, on the same day, the Viceroy gave his sanction to the introduction of the 'Untouchability Abolition Bill' of M.C. Rajah and 'Temple Entry Disabilities Bill' of C.S. Ranga Iyer in the Central Assembly.\textsuperscript{61} He also stated that the two bills should be

\textsuperscript{56} The two bills that had been placed before the Central Legislative Assembly were the Untouchability Abolition Bill of Rao Bahadur M.C. Rajah and the Hindu Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bill of C.S. Ranga Iyer. (\textit{Ibid.}, p.16.)

\textsuperscript{57} Home (Political) Department, File No. 50/1/1933. NAI. New Delhi.

\textsuperscript{58} Ayula Gopala Jeevaratnam, \textit{op.cit.}, p.211.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{The Hindu}, 23 January 1933; \textit{Tamil Nadu}, 23 January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, pp.11 and 103.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{L.A.R.}, Vol.1, 1933, p.5; Dhanajay Kheer, \textit{op.cit.}, p.232.

circulated for public opinion. On the basis of the public opinion, the Government was to decide the legislation and its implementation according to the needs of circumstances.

The Viceroy’s refusal of Subbarayan’s bill came in for severe criticism by the press. The *Podujana Ooliyan* observed that it was a mistake on the part of the Viceroy to have exercised, as he liked. His formal preliminary sanction was necessary for the introduction of a provincial bill. The *Samadarsini* questioned the validity of the Viceroy’s objection to the introduction of Subbarayan’s bill in the provincial legislature. *The Hindu* observed that the Viceroy’s refusal to give sanction to Subbarayan’s bill could not be justified either on the technical grounds or on the ground that it involved an all-Indian nature.

The *Swarajya* observed that the Viceroy’s blank refusal to Subbarayan’s bill was a tragic error of judgement, because the bill was deliberately drafted to meet the particular requirements of the Madras Province and was in fact a little more than an amending bill of Madras Hindu Religious Endowments (H.R.E.) Act of 1927. As an extreme form of attack, *Sudantira Sanghu* published a cartoon, which represented the Viceroy as a mother who was rocking the cradle, in which her children known as conservatives were lying and to lull the children, the mother singing thus ‘Subbarayan’s bill bogey, run away. *Gandhi*, publishing another cartoon highlighted the double role of the Viceroy, while the *Andhra Patrika* and *Stri-Dharma* questioned the technicalities and legality behind the Viceroy’s power.

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There were some papers which welcomed the refusal of Subbarayan’s bill. The *Tamil Nadu*, *Arya Dharmam*, *Rahbar-I-Deccan*, *the Nowjawan*, *the New Times* and *Madras Mail* justified the Viceroy’s decision and denounced the whole temple entry campaign as a political stunt. On the whole, it was obvious that the moderate public opinion accepted the Viceroy’s decision as a fair compromise not by blocking the way to social reform but by preventing a hasty and ill-considered legislation before public opinion had enough time to express itself. On the other hand, the decision of Viceroy came as a shock to the advocates of the temple-entry. Gandhi commented on the decision as unintentional challenge to Hinduism and to social reformers. Yet, he viewed that the decision would not affect the temple entry process which had already progressed from Guruvayur in the extreme South to Haridwar in the North. C.S. Ranga Iyer condemned the Viceroy’s decision as the worst form of bureaucratic intrigue and bureaucratic injustice. After the refusal to the provincial bills, the same nature of bills came to be introduced in the Central Legislature.

### Central Legislative Bills

After the refusal to the Provincial bills, the same nature of bills came to be introduced in the central legislature. At first M.C. Rajah brought an amendment bill on 24 March 1933 to amend section 144 of the Criminal Procedure

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71. F.N.R., 20 January and 20 February 1933.


75. C.S. Ranga Iyer’s speech on the Untouchability Abolition Bill, 1 February 1934, (Government of Madras, G.O. No. 2121, L.G.D., 24 July 1934, p.35.)

Code of 1898 which was used mostly against the untouchables. However, he could not move the bill in the Assembly since there were two pending bills of M.C. Rajah and C.S. Ranga Iyer on the same subject Concerning the Untouchability Abolition Bill of M.C. Rajah, it was aimed to removing the disabilities arising from any existing enactment, regulation or order and any custom or usage and interpretation of law.

M.C. Rajah sponsored the bill on 24 March 1933 in the Central Legislative Assembly. Immediately the bill encountered strong opposition. Brojendra Mitter, the Law Member opposed the bill more severely than even the orthodox member. He characterised the bill as vague and indefinite. Hence, the Government of Madras circulated the bill for the selected officers, associations and orthodox Hindus and for formality to some others.

Then the meetings the Government allowed C.S. Ranga Iyer to introduce “Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bill” (Reproduction of P. Subbarayan’s Madras Temple Entry Bill) on 24 March 1933. When the bill was introduced, it was opposed by an orthodox member Vasudeva Raja of Kollengode because it involved the religious matters of the Indians and this bill was against the spirit and letters of the proclamation of Queen Victorica. However, R.K.

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Shanmuga Chetty, a non-Brahmin leader and President of the Assembly welcomed this bill for legislation. Therefore, it was a struggle between Gandhi and his sympathizers on the one side and caste-Hindus on the other side. Finally, Sir Henry Haig, the Government spokesman asserted in the assembly that this bill was impracticable and inequitable and it would likely lead to serious disorder. It should be introduced only through persuasion of the orthodox people and public opinion must be sought.

As the report of the public opinion was not received in time, M.C. Rajah who introduced the Abolition of Untouchability Bill, withdrew it on 23 August 1934. The Hindu Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bill of C.S. Ranga Iyer received report of public opinion from various provinces. C.S. Ranga Iyer wanted to introduce the bill in the Central Assembly. But his attempt was also not successful because the assembly was dissolved and fresh election was ordered. During the election time, the introduction of this bill was unimportant and Congress leaders failed to support it. If they supported they could not get the votes of orthodox people. So they quoted the views of B.R. Ambedkar for temple entry. This change of Congress attitude was very clear when G.K. Devadhar, the President of Maharashtra (H.S.S) indicated the relaxation in the stand of the Congress on temple entry to Depressed people. When they approached Rajaji to know the stand of Congress in the coming election, he viewed that Congress would not approach the people for claiming votes for the support of the temple entry bill and Congress would not involve in any measures which would impair its interest in election. It obviously showed that the Congress took double stand in C.S. Ranga

87. Ibid., pp. 155-156.
Iyer's bill. This stand of Congress irritated C.S. Ranga Iyer to steer a bitter attack on the Congress and its frontline leaders. He was against the view of Rajaji and the Congress leaders were also not bold enough to face the public with well defined political issues and principles during the election time^93.

C.S. Ranga Iyer said: "By his statement Rajaji had driven the last nail on the coffin of the temple entry bill, while the same Rajaji and other Congressmen earlier went to Delhi session from door to door begging for the support of the Assembly members". He further remarked that either the Congressmen were cowards or they had no conviction in the bill. He added: "In the name of non-violence and religion, Congressmen had sidetracked the vital temple entry issue. They were slaves and they should remember that the Hindu religion was not a 'humbug' like Congress politics and God was greater than M.K. Gandhi and these religious questions were bigger than Congress planks". C.S. Ranga Iyer concluded that when the community is ablaze and when the opposition is uncompromising, there was no use of forcing a piece of legislation like this bill through the house even if there was a chance for it.^94 Thereupon on the united opposition shown by the Government, the sanatanists and the Congressmen to the bill, C.S. Ranga Iyer withdrew it on 23 August 1934 and he appealed to the sanatanist leaders to build separate temples near their own house.^95

E.V.R wrote a scathing editorial condemning Congress and blaming Gandhi and Rajaji for 'Consigning Ranga Iyer's bill to the abyss and burying it there. He pointed out that the money collected by H.S.S. had gone to fill the Congress party coffers. The editorial further remarked that for all its declared concern for Depressed Classes, the Congress in Madras had actually fielded a Brahmin candidate against V.I. Munisamy Pillay, a Depressed class leader, who contested the election to the central legislature as an independent candidate and defeated him. A fair recompense, indeed, concluded the editorial, to these who had saved Gandhi's life during his 'epic' fast. Another Kudi Arasu editorial noted that,


in spite of having ostensibly withdrawn from Congress, Gandhi thought it first to instruct Congressmen to withdraw support for Ranga Iyer’s Bill. Kudi Arasu carried Ambedkar’s condemnation of Gandhi and expressed its own support for the opinions expressed by the latter.  

Madras Provincial Legislative Bills

After the Central Legislative Assembly elections held under the Indian Council Act of 1935, Congress leaders were in jubilant mood. They wanted to throw open temples to the Depressed people as in the case of Tranvancore. Drafting the Madras Hindu Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bill with the assistance of Rajaji in January 1937, M.C. Rajah sought the help of the former to introduce it in the Madras Legislature. To fulfill the demand of M.C. Rajah, Rajaji insisted on the Madras Government for the careful consideration and introduction of M.C. Rajah’s bill in the Legislature on 18 March 1937. As a step further in this direction, Rajaji made a statement at the meeting of Thanjavur circle temple committee, on 5 May 1937 that he could not rest at peace for a minute longer without securing temple entry for the Depressed people and invited M.C. Rajah to introduce a bill in the Madras Legislature. On 19 October 1937 M.C. Rajah and Rajaji expressed his intention to Rajaji introduce a bill in the Assembly. On the favourable reply from Rajaji, M.C. Rajah introduced his bill on 30 March 1938. It provided for the practical expression of the people’s desire when they wished to allow the Depressed people to join them in worship in their temples. It did not seek to throw open the doors of temples to the Depressed people at once, whether caste-Hindus liked it or not. There was not a piece of compulsion in it. The provisions of the bill stood for creating machinery for the education and ascertainment of public opinion and for giving practical expression to it. If the majority of caste-Hindu worshippers decided to open any of their temples in their


98 Kalaimagal, (Tamil Monthly), December 1945, p. 572; Dalit Voice, (Fortnightly), Bangalore, 1 August 1989, p.3.
area to the Depressed people, the bill enabled them to do so even-though a small minority objected to it and vice versa. To the surprise of all, Rajaji who gave his consent to introduce the bill, opposed the bill of M.C. Rajah. He stated that the Malabar region was closely connected with language, custom, religious institutions and people of Tranvacore State. Therefore, he pointed out that it would be wiser to proceed from Travancore to Malabar along lines of least resistance and it had the unique advantages of being the most enlightened part of the Madras State. Therefore, he appealed M.C. Rajah to drop his bill as the government itself was of the opinion shortly to introduce a measure for temple entry in Malabar at first. The same measure was to be extended later on to the other parts of Madras State. He also observed that at a simultaneous period all the temples in the State could not be opened when the public was immersed in ignorance and superstitions.

There was a great support to Rajaji’s idea in the Assembly from the members. To support Rajaji’s method of approach, V.I. Muniswami Pillai, a minister appealed M.C. Rajah to agree to the views of Rajaji. He also pacified M.C. Rajah, expressing that after the introduction of a Malabar bill, the Government would sincerely bring a new bill covering mostly all the provisions of the bill of M.C. Rajah. Even Kumararaja Muthiah Chettiar, a leader of Justice Party also appealed to M.C. Rajah to agree with Rajaji’s method. T. Prakasam, another Congress member too requested M.C. Rajah to withdraw the bill as 250 members of the Legislature insisted for it. The enraged M.C. Rajah retorted that if he accepted the request of 250 representatives of the Assembly he could not answer the 250 million Depressed people. Further he vehemently abused Rajaji for his change of mind in a week and blamed for cheating him and the people. He also emphasized his stand that he was unwilling to withdraw his bill. Finally M.C. Rajah remarked that he was deceived in a bid to allow the Depressed people into the temples through legal means and referred the motion to the select committee.


100. Viduthalai, 19 August 1938, p.1.


for opinion. His bill was supported only by twenty-four members and 130 members opposed and eight members were neutral. Thus the motion was not passed.  

Thereupon, R. Venkatsubbu Reddiar, a Madras legislator felt that the denial of temple entry to the untouchables would affect the purity, strength and solidarity of the Hindus. Therefore, to protect the interest of Hinduism and Hindu social polity, he drafted the ‘Madras Hindu Temple Entry Bill’ on 21 August 1937 and sought to allow the Depressed Class people of Hindu religion to enter into the temples like the other caste-Hindus. It agreed that accession was to be followed on the condition prescribed in the matter of dress, personal cleanliness and conduct. It sought to nullify all the customs, usages, restrictions, etc., to such entry of the Depressed Classes. It also provided to collect a fine not exceeding Rs.100/- from those who were convicted by the magistrate as obstructors. However, when the bill came for scrutiny, the Madras Government felt it as a far-reaching one. But the sanatanist members did not like to introduce the bill. When the bill was thus salved in the secretariat, R. Venkatasubba Reddiar, seeing the ultra vire nature of the bill, withdrew it on 31 August 1931. The H.S.S, which was fighting for the cause of temple entry to the Depressed Classes protested against the Madras Government and it demanded a special legislation for Malabar.

Malabar Temple Entry Bill

At this juncture, Rajaji ministry introduced the ‘Malabar Temple Entry Bill’ in the Legislative Assembly on 1 December 1938. Accordingly, it enabled the trustees of the temples in Malabar to throw open them to the Depressed people if the opinion of the majority of the worshippers was found to be in favour of such a step. It also mentioned that the requisition signed by not less than fifty voters for opening the temple should be forwarded to the Madras Government for action. There was also another provision in the bill that if the trustees of the

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104 Government of Madras, G.O. No. 155, Legal Department, September 1937.

105 Kudi Arasu, 21 August 1938, pp. 5-6.
temples wanted to throw any temple to the Depressed people without reference to voters, they could do so.\textsuperscript{106}

When the bill was introduced in the Assembly, T.T. Krishnamachari, an orthodox member opposed it on the ground that provincial legislature could not legislate this bill as it was related to religious institutions. But the speaker of the Assembly rejected his plea as it was not a federal subject and affirmed that it was within the power of the provincial legislature. N. Natesh Iyer, another critic opposed the bill of Rajaji. He observed that there were two motives behind the bill. Firstly, the bill was introduced in Malabar district with the intention to stir the people of Cochin against its ruler who denied temple entry. Secondly, the author of the bill planned to keep his ministry for its life period from the wrath of sanatanists, by not introducing any temple entry legislation in Tamil Nadu. Therefore, it was very obvious reason that Rajaji was planning to shift the responsibility for temple entry legislation on to a new government.\textsuperscript{107} Thereupon, the bill was left to scrutiny for select committee on 2 December 1938. After careful modifications, the committee submitted it to the Government on 5 December 1938. Finally the bill again came for discussion in the Legislative Assembly on 8 December 1938 and passed without any material change in the Assembly.

As a next step Rajaji introduced the bill in the Legislative Council, on 13 December 1938, where two members of the opposition, R. Narayana Swami Naidu and Maniayya Hegee raised some clarifications and stated that it would lead to conflict with customs and usages, and agamas and sastras. However, the bill was passed into law as “Malabar Temple Entry Act” on 13 December 1938. Finally, this Act received the assent of the Governor on 18 January 1939 and was promulgated on 7 February 1939. Though the act was passed, it could not be implemented in Malabar because the temples were managed by private trustees.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{106} Rengaraju, G., \textit{Temple Entry Politics in Colonial Tamil Nadu}, Chennai, 2006, p.90

\textsuperscript{107} Raghupalchari, C., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{108} Kudi Arasu, 25 August 1938, p.6; Selvamuthu Kumaresami, L., Rajaji and Temple Entry Politics, 1937-1939', p.197.
It clearly showed that unless permissive legislations were followed up by regular and systematic propaganda in favour of them, they could not yield good results. Nevertheless, the Malabar Temple Entry Legislation had its echo in Tamil Nadu. In this connection, the Tamil Nadu Provincial Political Conference held at Rajapalayam on 31 December 1938 passed a resolution which appealed to all temple trustees and managements in Tamil Nadu not to wait for similar legislations. They should open voluntarily, generously and gracefully all temples to the Depressed people as early as possible.

The passing of the legislative bills was a continuous process. Both the Central and State governments have analysed the subject of temple entry question, and passed the bills into law amidst strong resistance of the orthodox people. In this connection, Madras Province was the pioneer in passing the temple entry bills. Really, Rajaji studied and analysed the situation in Madras Province and at first implemented temple entry in Malabar region which was the part of the Madras Province, and witnessing successful temple entry there he wished to implement temple entry in other parts especially in Tamil Nadu.

**Temple-Entry in Madurai**

In the third decade of the twentieth century, Gandhi appealed to the people to give up the practice of untouchability and leaders like Kelappan of Malabar, E.V.R. and Subbarayan gave the clarion call to allow the Depressed people into the temples. Temple entry by untouchables was on the social agenda of national movement, especially during the 1930s. Deliberations were held on several occasions within the INC to discuss the issue. Polls were conducted to elicit the public opinion. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, polls were conducted at Kanchipuram, Srirangam, Kumbakkonam and Madurai, all of which were well-known centres of Brahminical orthodoxy. In all these four places, the people were in favour of the temple entry proposal. In Madurai, 5732 caste-Hindus voted in the poll. Out of them, 4746 supported the temple entry. Further, in 1933, the

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election to the Trustee's Committee of the Meenakshi temple fought on the issue of temple entry. Brahminical orthodoxy, which was opposed to temple entry, set up its own candidates. However, out of the seven elected members of the Committee, six were from the group favouring temple entry. This Committee later passed a resolution in favour of temple entry.

Between May and July 1939, the Tamil Nadu Congress carried out a temple entry campaign. A Temple Entry Conference was held in Madurai on 13 June 1939 at the Victoria Edward Hall to mark its beginning. It was presided over by Mrs. Romeswari Nehru, Vice-President of All India HSS. The speeches of the leaders like Rajaji, T.S.S Rajan, A. Vidyanantha Iyer and N.M.R. Subbaraman were fully concerned about the public of the necessity of temple entry to the Depressed Classes. When it was resolved in the conference to request the Government of Madras to bring legislation for temple entry, Rajaji, the Premier said "Don't worry about temple-entry legislation, but prepare the way and arrange for the opening of temples for the Depressed Classes. If the law is resorted to for the purpose of preventing you achieving your goal, I will give you legislation within eight days." Rajaji also stated that in all national activities Madurai used to play a leading role and expressed his hope that Madurai would do so in the temple entry movement too.

Public meetings were organised to publicise the issue and mobilise support. Even a signature campaign was also conducted. A group of fifty-four Depressed Class members under the leadership of Vaidyanatha Iyer and other leaders of the HSS, toured the parts of Tranvancore and visited various temples in the region, which had by then been thrown open to Depressed Classes by the Tranvancore Temple Entry Proclamation. Around this time, the Congress dominated Municipal Council of Madurai passed a resolution in support of temple

111. Ibid.


114. The Mail, Madras, 16 June 1939.

entry. A. Vaidyanatha Aiyer and other Congressmen, in collaboration with R.S. Naidu, the Executive Officer of the Meenakshi temple, started making elaborate plans for the temple entry event in Madurai. A group of about fifty Congressmen underwent training in the methods of Satyagraha.\footnote{116}

A Vaidyanatha Iyer of Madurai had close association with Premier Rajaji who offered him all his moral support to the proposed temple entry reform in Madurai. Moreover, Madurai had a number of earnest Congressmen - N.M.R. Subbaraman, P.K. Ramachari and a host of others who, under the inspiration of national leaders, came forward to offer their help and co-operation to achieve the goal of temple-entry in Madurai. In order to mobilise public support to this reform the workers of H.S.S. made their laudable efforts. Arguments in favour of temple-entry were speeded in the form of notices everyday. Wall posters adorned every car with the following matter: “Depressed Classes are Hindus and please give them temple-entry” .\footnote{117} Public meetings became very common and not a day passed without there being atleast two or three meetings in each and every corner of Madurai town.\footnote{118} A. Vaidyanatha Iyer spoke in many meetings and forced the urgency of the reform on the attention of every individual in the town of Madurai.\footnote{119} N. Halasyam, M.L.A. of Tiruchi addressed many gatherings in Madurai. Theagaraja Sivam, L. Krishna Bharathi, Krishna Kunthu, P.K. Ramachari, Mangala Pattabhi Ramayya and many others also delivered stirring speeches about temple-entry. All the meetings in Madurai were largely attended by the people and in the course of a fortnight the public opinion was thoroughly mobilised in support of temple entry. The workers of HSS even carried on house to house propaganda and met the leading people of all communities.\footnote{120} They also approached the Executive Officer, archakas, sthanikas and other servants of the


\footnote{117} \textit{Harijan}, Vol. VIII, 16 September 1939, p.275; \textit{The Hindu}, 6 July 1939.

\footnote{118} \textit{The Mail}, 29 June 1939; \textit{The Hindu}, 4 and 5 July 1939.

\footnote{119} \textit{The Indian Review}, Vol.4, Madurai, December 1939, p.774.

\footnote{120} \textit{Annual Report of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1938-1939}, p.29.
temple and explained to them of the need for temple entry.\textsuperscript{121} Pasumpon V. Muthuramalinga Thevar who was at Madurai instructed the recalcitrant Hindus not to impede the temple-entry reform.\textsuperscript{122}

The wonderful event of temple-entry by the Depressed Classes in Madurai at last took place on 8 July 1939. On this day at 8.45 a.m. a batch of Depressed Classes numbering five and one Nadar made their first entry into the famous shrine of Sri Meenakshi in the company of A. Vaidyanatha Iyer, the president of the Tamil Nadu H.S.S and L.N. Gopalasamy.\textsuperscript{123} The names of the five Depressed Classes were Kakkan, member, Madurai District Board, Swami Muruganandam, Alampatti, Madurai district, Muthu, Harijan Sevalaya worker, Madurai, V. S. Chinniah, Mathichiym, Madurai, V.R. Poovalingam, Virattipattu, Madurai taluk and S. S. Shanmuga Nadar, Municipal Councillor, Virudhunagar.\textsuperscript{124} R.S. Naidu, the Executive Officer, A. Chidambra Mudaliar of the Meenakshi Devasthanam Committee, the Superintendent, the Peishkar and the other servants of the temple were present at the entrance of the temple and they also received the temple entry party. Nobody present in the temple raised any objection or protests when A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and his party entered the temple and worshipped at the shrines in the temple.\textsuperscript{125} Huge crowds of people witnessed this historical event and news of this event spread at once like wildfire.\textsuperscript{126} “The hearts of millions of Hindus must have throbbed with joy on reading the news of the peaceful realisation of temple entry of Depressed Classes in the great Meenakshi temple at Madurai.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{124} \textit{The Hindu} and \textit{The Mail}, 8 July 1939.

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{The Hindu}, 9 July 1939.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid, 8 July 1939; \textit{The Times of India}, 10 July 1939.

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Harijan}, Vol VII, 15 July 1939, p.203.
The temple-entry in the Meenakshi temple is a great landmark in the social reform movement in Tamil Nadu. It was a remarkable reform in the Hindu religion as it brought equality among the worshippers of God. A great change had come over the Tamil land without violence and bloodshed. The whole scheme was executed non-violently without any breach of peace. The temple-entry in Madurai, therefore, is called a ‘bloodless revolution.’ Leading the temple-entry, Madurai had made history in the annals of social reform. The servants of H.S.S. under Vaidyanatha Iyer’s inspiring leadership worked incessantly and indefatigably towards this consummation. R.S. Naidu, the Executive Officer and A. Chidambara Mudaliar of the Meenakshi Temple Devasthanam Committee also lent their support to this reform. Rajaji, the Premier, called the temple-entry in Madurai as a ‘beautiful and historic event’ and said “no action was taken in this regard anywhere else without the same amount of thought, preparation and consultation and the guidance of respected leaders as rendered in the Madurai event.”

About the historic temple-entry in Madurai, Romeswari Nehru observed thus: “Mahatma Gandhi, Rajagopalachari, T.S.S. Rajan, Vaidyanatha Iyer and others no doubt laboured hard but their labours would have been set at naught if they had not found favour with the people. The great change was accomplished by the people themselves as a result of propaganda and not by the exercise of any authority”. P.K. Pushparaj, Councillor, Corporation of Madras and Member of H.S.S., Madras remarked thus: “The throwing open of the holy precincts of the ancient and historic temple of Sri Meenakshi at Madurai to the long afflicted and oppressed people marks down a golden era in the history of Hindu India”. G. Ramachandran, Kerala Congress leader observed: “While Tranvancore has undoubtedly led in Depressed Class temple-entry, Madurai has gone further, in that the reformers did not have the support of or rely on the arm of any state authority. Depressed people entered the Madurai temple entirely on the strength of love and assurance of the conversion of hearts of the so-called savarnas (caste-Hindus).

128 FNR., 20 July 1939.


130 The Hindu, 12 July 1939.
so far as the reliance was thus entirely on love, 'the Madurai miracle is an advance on the Travancore miracle.' But it was the Travancore example which watered and manured the seed of temple-entry in Madurai'.

“The proclamation of opening the state temples of Travancore was no doubt a very big step. But it was the prerogative of the Maharaja. The Maharaja, the Maharani and the Diwan C.P. Ramaswami Iyer brought about transformation. But the opening of celebrated temple of Madurai is a greater-event. In that it is the popular will that has brought about the happy consummation. It reflects a decided conversion of the temple-goers of the Meenakshi temple. A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and his co-workers deserve all the praise for the ceaseless efforts they have put forth in educating public opinion”. Gandhi also sent a telegram to A. Vaidyanatha Iyer urging him not to take to heart what the sanatanists might say or do. In his reply to Gandhi's wire, A. Vaidyanatha Iyer thanked the former for his encouragement and support given to him towards the temple-entry reform in Madurai.

The Meenakshi temple in Madurai is the most famous one in South India and as Rajaji has put it “If the gates of Shri Padmanabha Shrine at Trinvandum and of a Sri Meenaskhi at Madurai have been thrown open the exclusion may be taken as automatically abolished”. A. Vaidyanatha Iyer chose “the right time and place to drive the dagger deep into the heart of untouchability”.

Sanatanists’ Dissent

In the beginning temple-entry event seemed to have passed off peacefully. On 9 July 1939 the Madras Mail's headlines read 'Pleasant surprise for Madurai: no opposition reported from caste-Hindus'. But on the same day the

131. The Mail, 15 July 1939.


133. Ibid., Vol VII, 23 September 1939, p.280.

134. Ibid., Vol VII, 15 July 1939, p.203.

135. The Mail, 10 July 1939.
trouble also began. Temple priests, enraged by this sudden happening, abused the entrants. However, the regular pujas were not discontinued and everything went according to schedule on that day and the next. At once N.Natesa Iyer appealed to the bhattars and sthanikas of the temple that in view of the of Depressed people's entry into the arthamandapam and their receipt of prasadams under the direction of R.S. Naidu, it became necessary to perform samprokshanam (purification) and suddhi according to the sastras and until this performance, abisheka and arathanas should be stopped to the Meenakshi Sundarreswarar and other deities. He also issued a plea to the orthodox people and temple archakar calling attention to the need for purification ceremony before worship was resumed. This appeal had some influence on the orthodox temple servants. There were reports about plans for a second entry on 10 July, this time on a much larger scale. Reacting to this, the sanatanists gathered in a house called Mangala Nivasam on Danappa Mudali Street. This group was led by K.R. Venkatarama Iyer and Natesa Iyer, well known lawyers in Madurai at that time. Natesa Iyer was the President of the All India Varnashrama Swarajya Sangah (AVISS), an organization that advocated Brahminical orthodoxy. It was decided at the meeting that the Meenakshi temple be closed from the night of 9 July, and daily worship be discontinued until a purificatory ritual was performed. Santhu Bhattar, a temple priest with hereditary rights to perform pujas and whose turn fell on 10 July, refused to accept the decision. In spite of his objection Muttusubbhar Bhattar and other priests, after finishing their day duties locked all the inner doors of the temple. In the evening, they refused to unlock them and continued the daily worship until a samproksana ritual, a purificatory aspersion was performed. The Executive Officer could not extract the keys from Muttusubbhar or his colleagues.

K.R. Venkatarama Iyer, a sanatanist from Madurai was irritated on the activities of R.S. Naidu and A. Vaidyanath Iyer, and sent a telegram to Gandhi thus: “Armed Madurai temple peons opposing orthodox worshippers. This is waging war during world war. Pray, issue immediate instructions to end such highhandedness. We have after all lived together.” For his part, N. Natesa Iyer also sent a telegram to the Governor of Madras praying for his involvement in the matter of entry of Depressed Classes into the Madurai Meenakshi temple. The other eminent sanatanists of Tamil Nadu who supported the cause of Madurai sanatanists
were Srinivasa Iyengar, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, T.R. Venkatrama Sastri, P.S. Sivasami Iyer and T.T. Krishnamachari. Through these obstructive tactics Vaidyanatha Iyer was segregated from the orthodox Hindus especially among the Brahmins. It was also made with the aim to divert him from his works related to the Harijan temple entry Depressed Classes. At last, the sanatanists excommunicated Vaidyanatha Iyer from their community in all possible ways. On the death of his father, no local Brahmin came forward to perform funeral ceremonies and priests from other places were called. They further raised anti-slogans against him surrounding his house and also burnt his pictures in public streets.

Early in the morning on 10 July 1939, R.S. Naidu, who had anticipated such a move, had the locks broken and reopened the temple with the assistance of Sandhu Bhattar and a magistrate, thus facilitating a second temple entry on a large scale. From 10 July onwards, most temple priests, except Santhu Bhattar, ceased performing the regular pujas. Other temple servants, however, continued to perform their duties. The Executive Officer suspended Muttusubbhar and two other priests from duty. Within a few weeks all the priests who had failed to perform their duties except one Sandhu Bhattar, was suspended and substitutes were brought in from other temples. Initially, a priest was brought from the neighbouring town of Aruppukottai, but he fell ill due to tuberculosis and was admitted to the Government hospital. He passed away in the hospital the following day. The sanatanists interpreted this as a sign of the fury of the goddess, and made propaganda that such a fate would befall those who dared to undermine the sanctity of the temple. Later, about twelve priests came from Tirunelveli to replace those suspended.¹³⁶

From the day of the temple-entry, the sanatanists got together regularly at Mangala Nivasam. A golden pot to which the presence of the Goddess was believed to have been transferred was kept there and worshipped. They announced that the goddess had left the temple, and was now present in this place. In a fairly short time, a plot of land was identified to build a ‘new’ temple for Meenaskhi. On completion of the construction, an idol was installed and regular

pujas began. This new place of worship was situated close to where Venkatarama Iyer lived. And the houses of the two women who wrote songs condemning the temple entry were located on the streets to the right and the left of his house.

**Song Books of Sanatanists**

The two song books written by two Brahmin women expressed their anguish over five Depressed Class members and a shanar breaking the caste norms while entering the Madurai Meenakshi temple. Bhagirathi Ammal’s Aalaya Etiyppu Kummi Pattu Pustakam (1939) and S. Dharmambal’s Aalaya Pravesa Kantana Pattu Pustakam (1940) represented resistance to the Madurai temple event. Bhagirathi Ammal’s book viewed about the temple entry as an unethical practice and contrary to the existing customs.¹³⁷

Subsequently, Bhagirathi Ammal urged the women to resolve themselves to work for the cause of their svadharma: to reclaim the Goddess, ‘the daughter of the Pandiyas,’ whom they have lost to the Depressed Classes, and to restore the ancient Hindu dharma. She urged the Premier to resign form his position as he had caused great damage to this dharma, and has proved to be an inefficient ruler. She, however, reiterated her allegiance to the British Crown and prayed for its victory in the war effort.

Dharmambal’s Kantana Pattu, published in the following year, was more programmatic and lacked Bhagirathi Ammal’s shrillness and immediacy. Coupled with this was the text’s use of a more drawn-up musical metre and an idiom repleted with Sanskrit words and phrases. The text depicts an elaborate search for goddess Meenakshi, who made her exit from the temple upon the entry of Depressed Class members, in a rather long march through the streets of Madurai and the premises of the temple. The text eventually located her at Mangala Nivasam, and invited the sanatanists to congregate there and become members of the A.I.V.S.S. to fight for the restoration of dharma.

Dharmambal’s work explicitly mentioned the names of R.S. Naidu and Vaidyanatha Aiyar while referring to the event of 8 July. An ascetic who had

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come to Madurai from North India at that time, probably the head of a mutt, was also referred to. She appealed to him to suggest ways and means to deal with the situation. Dharmambal also referred to the sanatanists’ decision to build a new temple.

Following the resolution that a new temple for Meenakshi was built, and the goddess was worshiped there by the sanatanists. The priests who had quit the ‘polluted’ temple performed the rituals there. Both of their song books thus clearly indicate that caste could belong to women too and they too could emasculate lower caste men. Thus the works of the two women expressed the orthodox sentiments and also highlighted the prevailing dense and hostile situation in which the temple entry event took place under the courageous leadership of Vaidhyanatha Iyer.

The priests who quit the temple were given the strong support of the ‘sanatanists’ - orthodox Hindus, vehemently opposed to Depressed Class temple entry, who were members of supporters of A.I.V.S.S. The Sangha's President, N. Natesa Iyer, a Madurai lawyer, personally denounced Naidu and announced that the Meenakshi temple had been defiled and that the deities left it; they would not return until the temple had been purified. On 13 July 1939, Natesa Iyer arranged for a suit to be filed by two priests and various other persons connected with the temple in the Madurai Subordinate Judges Court, praying for an injunction to compel the Executive Officer to allow and pay for a purification ritual. On 17 July 1939, however, the Madras Government, in line with a threat made by Rajaji issued an Indemnity Ordinance to block any legal action against those involved in admitting the Depressed people into the temple. The Ordinance promulgated by the Government to address the urgency of the situation was face-saving measure taken by Rajaji, the then Premier of Madras Presidency. The promulgation of the Ordinance indemnified the Executive Officers and other servants of the temples in

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the Madurai, Thanjavur and Tirunelveli districts from all liability in respect of all acts associated with temple entry. Rajaji was anxious to save Vaidhyanatha Iyer, his ardent supporter within the Congress. Being an urgent move of the Government, the ordinance was signed by the Governor of Madras at Ootacamund, where the latter was having his vacation. Before this Ordinance came into vogue, A. Vaidhyantha Iyer was brought before the Court for illegally taking the Depressed class people into the temple. For a while, the Court scene was historic; it was a fully crowded room, tense with excitement. As soon as the Judge took his seat, the District Collector arrived at the Court and gave the government counsel a copy of the Ordinance which the Madras Government had just then promulgated. The case was therefore dramatically dismissed. Consequently, Natesa Iyer's suit was dismissed, as was his appeal to the Madurai District Court.

The promulgation of the Ordinance by the Madras Government was severely criticized by several sections of the sanatanist legislators who condemned it as 'unjustifiable and unconstitutional.' However, Rajaji justified his action as right by remarking that 'no reform in the world was achieved except by some persons who acted as law-breakers. Therefore, he pleaded that no one should find fault with reformers who by their actions made reparation for a long-standing wrong; no one should pick holes in a matter of this kind; and nobody should find fault with the Government for extending its support and protection to them.' In this way, Rajaji stifled the criticism of the sanatanists against the promulgation of Ordinance with the solid background of his party members. Indeed, he did the promise once he had given to Vaidhyanatha Iyer in the Madurai conference and fulfilled the great task placed before him by Romeswari Nehru, the Vice-President of the A.I.H.S.S.

Early in the morning of 29 July 1939 the sanatanists, under Natesa Iyer and accompanied by several priests, demonstrated in front of the Meenakshi temple, demanding to be allowed in so that the priests could purify the temple. The doors were locked against them. Two days later, some priests again tried to enter the temple and R.S. Naidu stopped them.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Fuller, C.J., op.cit., pp.116-118.
By the end of July 1939, many temples in Tamil Nadu had been opened to the Depressed class people, some with trouble and some without, but no incidents on the scale of those in Meenakshi temple seem to have occurred. The Government also decided to convene a special session of the legislature to get an indemnity bill passed to protect the temple officials against whom legal proceedings had been initiated by the sanatanists. Rajaji, initiating a discussion on the bill, stated that temple entry reform was long overdue and the Government could not maintain a silence over the matter. He argued that the bill was circulated to enable the trustees of the temple to act in accordance with public opinion on the issue of entry of the Depressed people into temples. It was also stated that the Malabar Temple Entry Act had not been abandoned and that it would certainly come into play where trustees were unwilling to act in accordance with the general public sentiment. The bill, despite many amendments, was moved by the members of the legislature, and was passed without much change. The critics of the bill favoured the introduction of the principle of referendum for ascertaining public opinion that had been followed in the case of the Malabar Temple Entry Act. Rajaji was of the view that it was not necessary to implement the same method for different legislations. He also certified that there was no political motive behind the bill and that it had been conceived from a purely religious point of view.

Subsequently, the bill, which had been passed in the Legislative Assembly, came up for discussion before the Madras Legislative Council. In defence of the bill, Rajagopalachari stated that he favoured temple entry of the Depressed class people and that the reform need to be undertaken without any further delay. V.S. Srinivasa Shastri argued that the Congress had adopted a highly irregular and improper method to bring about social reform. At the same time, conservatives like T.S. Srinivasa Ayyangar criticized the Congress for interfering with the customs and traditions of the Hindus. The conservatives felt that it was out of sheer political compulsions that the Congress was hurriedly pushing through the temple entry legislation. Opposing these ideas, the Congress

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leaders asserted that by introducing such legislation the Congress was trying to live up to the expectations of the people who had voted for it in the elections.\(^{144}\)

The Justice Party legislators criticized the Congress ministry for neglecting the interests of the Depressed class people. They argued that rather than emphasizing the temple entry issue, it would have been better had the Congress fought for the socio-economic uplift of these Classes. The Justice Party leaders also felt that to gain political mileage the Congress deliberately introduced such legislations. The Congress refuted the allegations made by the Justice Party and openly declared that the temple entry legislation was not being used as a smoke screen to cover up the failures of its ministry.\(^{145}\) Rajaji made it clear to his non-Brahmin critics in the Justice Party that his ministry would continue to support programmes for the uplift of the Depressed class people. He also reminded them that there would be no infringement of Civil law if temple entry legislations were introduced by the Government. The bill, despite the opposition of the sanatanists, was passed in the Legislative Council.\(^{146}\)

On 5 August 1939, the Temple Entry Authorization and Indemnity Act (22 of 1939) was passed by the Madras Legislative Assembly (the lower chamber) and the Legislative Council (the upper chamber) followed a suit a few days later. The Act, which specially stated that no one was to be prosecuted in connection with the entry of the Depressed class people into the Meenakshi temple, received the assent of the British Viceroy in early September.\(^{147}\) Natesa Iyer's appeals to the Viceroy and the Governor of Madras were ignored.\(^{148}\) His efforts to persuade the Maharajas of Cochin and Mysore, and the Raja of Sivagangai, to suspend their endowments in the temple was also unsuccessful. The Raja of


\(^{145}\) Ibid., pp.33-35.


\(^{147}\) Fuller, C.J., \textit{op.cit.}, pp.117-119.

\(^{148}\) \textit{Madras Mail}, 20 September and 6 November 1939.
After October 1939 active protests seem to have died down.

Legal action was started too. Natesan Iyer’s case, dismissed by the District Court in 1939, was reopened in 1940 but dismissed again in 1942. An appeal failed in the Madras High Court in 1944, as did a further appeal in the Indian Federal Court in 1946. Both higher courts decided that the Indemnity Act was validly enacted and that the Executive Officer should not be ordered to allow a purification ritual.

Another case was filed in 1942 by most of the priests who had been dismissed. R.S. Naidu formally dismissed them from the service of the temple in November 1939 and the dismissal orders were confirmed by the Hindu Religious Endowment Board in May 1940. In August 1945, it was resolved that the priests should be reinstated; on condition that they started work without performing a purification ritual and that they obeyed the officer’s lawful orders. They returned in September 1945 and their long absence – six years and two months less the eight months in 1944 – was finally over.

According to the ‘Temple-Entry Authorization and Indemnity Act’ in 1939, all temples in the Madras Province had to be thrown open for the Depressed Classes. On 9 July 1939 the Soundaraja Perumal temple at Valayapatti in Melur taluk, intimately associated with Saivite Meenakshiamman temple at Madurai, was thrown open. On 16 July 1939, the great Brihadeswar temple at Thanjavur was opened after consultation, with its trustee. Rajaram, the Rajah and the hereditary trustee of Thanjavur Palace Devasthanam had also thrown open ninety temples under his control for the Depressed Classes. On 26 July 1939 the temple of Tirukurtalanathaswami

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149 Ibid., 20 September 1939.

150 Fuller, C.J., op.cit.,p.121.

151 Ibid., pp.117-119.


near Courtallam Falls in the Tirunelveli district was opened. On 27 July 1939, Kasi Viswanatha temple at Tenkasi was kept open for the untouchables. Thereafter, Kudulalagar temple at Madurai and Sri. Kalamega Perumal temples at Tirumohur in Madurai district were also kept open. Subsequently, the Murugan temple at Palani, and Sri Renganatha Swami temple at Srirangam and Andal temple at Srivilliputtur were also thrown open. All these temples were situated in the localities of very orthodox Hindus.

In this connection one western scholar C.J. Fuller, has stated: "The Higher Court in India have failed to uphold the authority of the orthodox texts, in so far as the temple entry cases were concerned." But it can be contended that the custom of excluding a certain section of Hindu people from entering the Hindu temple is highly unreasonable, inhuman and unjust and the temple entry reform was the result of advanced and well reasoned public opinion. The reform removed a great wrong of centuries from the Hindu's society only after many years of patient and earnest work done by the Tamil Nadu H.S.S. This Sangh's workers paved the way for the opening of the people's hearts before the physical opening of the temple doors to the excluded Classes. The Temple Entry Act of the Government of Madras only succeeded the reform; it only recognized the latter's will. The Higher Courts in India held that the Temple Entry Act was valid in so far as the Constitutional provisions were concerned. The temple entry was a much needed reform and the Act passed in 1939 was perfected by another Act passed by the Government of Madras subsequently. By leading the temple entry movement, Madurai made history in the campaign for the removal of untouchability in the country. In appreciation of the commendable role of the leaders of Madurai towards temple-entry Gandhiji visited the Meenakshi temple in 1946.

154. Harijan, 12 August 1939.


158. Ibid., pp.125-127.

159. Government of Madras, G.O. No. 53, Legal Department, 13 May 1947
The temple built by the sanatanists in Madurai for the temporary purpose seems to have been in existence until 1945. Subsequently, regular pujas were discontinued, the temple closed, and eventually demolished. The gates of the Meenakshi temple were never again closed for the Depressed Classes.

On account of the obstructive tactics of some people, Vaidhyanatha Iyer had to spend time and energy to ensure the smooth functioning of the temple in the aftermath of the entry by Depressed Classes. Some even went to the extent of hauling up Vaidhyanatha Iyer before the court for taking Depressed Class members into the temple illegally. Rajaji, the Premier moved swiftly in that matter. In retrospect, if Vaidyanatha Iyer had not forced the legislation at that time, entry of Harijans into temple would not have been possible for several years. It will be remembered that in October 1939, the Congress Governments resigned in protest against the British forcing India into Second World War and popular Government were restored only in 1946.

**Srirangam Temple Entry**

The agitation of sanatanists reached its highest point at Srirangam* in 1939. Even though the temples like Madurai were thrown open, those at Srirangam practiced a distinction among the temple goers. There, the Depressed Classes were stopped at the entrance of the Sri Ranganathaswamy temple, the most famous sacred shrine for Vaishnavites in Tamil Nadu. To propagate temple entry at Srirangam against the backdrop of the Madras Temple Entry Indemnity Act, T.S.S. Rajan, the Minister for Religious Endowments, in the Rajaji’s ministry proposed to attend a public meeting and to inspect the temple there. On 9 September 1939 T.S.S. Rajan was expected at Sri Ranganatha temple. The local Police Inspector deputed a police party for bandobust duty and for maintaining law and order.

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* Arankam, Tiruvannamalai or Srirangam is important for both the Saivas and Vaishnavas. However, when one mentions the name of Srirangam, it is the temple or Ranganatha, which comes to one’s mind. It is because of its temple of Ranganatha, which comes to one’s mind. It is because of its temple, cult and festivals, both regular and periodical Srirangam is a deep-rooted name in Vaishnava lore where great philosophers like Sri Ramanuja lived and composed their contribution to literature.

Eventhough T.S.S. arrived late evening the police party allowed him to visit the temple. However, a crowd of about 400 sanatanists abetted the women to carry on the obstruction with the shouting of abusive words against the visiting party. Likewise, the women sitting in rows, held each other like a thick wall, organised human barrier and involved themselves in shouting and abusing riotously, beating their chests and did not budge from the place. Their weeping and wailing made the minister and his party flebbergasted. At that time, the police tried to send away the witnessing crowd. For a while, stones were thrown from behind which hit some leaders who accompanied the minister. A near violent situation erupted and the women did not give up shrieking and shouting. The Inspector and his party in a hurry cleared the passage for the Minister and his convoy to enter the shrine. Yet, T.S.S. Rajan, who entered the temple, was unable to come back, for over 2000 strong crowd menacingly advanced to him. They stubbornly refused to allow the minister to come out of the temple. They demanded an undertaking from him not to enforce the Temple Entry Authorization and Indemnity Act as a condition precedent to make his exit. When the police tried to make a way out, the womenfolk threw chilly powder into their eyes. Hence panic situation prevailed. At this juncture, the Deputy Superintendent of Police and the Reserve Police Party also arrived. Finding no other alternative in this chaotic situation, the police ordered lathi charge to disperse the womenfolk. As a result, four women were severely injured, three fell unconscious and a number of others sustained minor injuries. On the police side, six constables were slightly injured while handling the situation. The police arrested some leading sanatanist leaders like Sundarrajah, Ananda Rao, Sadagopachari,

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Sesharaghavan, Kannusami Pillai and fifteen Vaishnavaite women who were alleged to have obstructed the minister. Subsequently, all of them were let out on bail.\textsuperscript{167}

After this incident the minister went to the Nachiyar Sannathi Street to attend the proposed public meeting held under the auspices of Tiruchirappalli District Harijan Sevak Sangh as a part of temple entry propaganda campaign. In his speech at a large gathering, the minister regretted that the sanatanists in order to prevent the promulgation of Temple Entry Act instigated the ignorant women as cowards and further questioned that the history of sanatanism must have been associated with this kind of mischief enacted that evening.

He was sure that if the Srirangam temple was thrown open, Vaishnavism could once more become glorious, and appealed to the sanatanists to see that reason prevailed. He also said that the incident at the temple in the evening taught him a lesson that the temple entry must be done under sufficient protection. Gandhi regretted the incident at Srirangam where women were instigated by the sanatanists to satisfy their selfish and unjustified ends.\textsuperscript{168} In later years, due to the inspiration given by E.V.R., the members of left wing Cultural Literary Society of Tamil Nadu entered into the sanctum sanctorum of Sri Ranganathaswamy temple at Srirangam.\textsuperscript{169} Thus Srirangam witnessed the second major temple entry programme and the first one was launched in 1939. This showed that temple in common for all people and no one should have right to prevent any Hindu in the name of caste.

As the Depressed Classes continuously demanded the temple entry right, the Congress Party in power in late 1930s passed many resolutions and introduced bills and the legislations in the Central and Provincial legislatures,

\textsuperscript{167} Madras Mail, 10 September 1939.


\textsuperscript{169} In 1970 E.V. Ramasamy, the founder of Dravida Kazhagam announced that he would start an agitation to enter into the sanctum sanctorum of the temple in Tamil Nadu as one of his attempts to challenge the caste system. (Srirangam Koil Karuvarai Noolaiyu Poratam Yen? Chennai, 1993, p.4.) Twenty-three years later, on May 24, 1993, thirty-one members of the Left-Wing Cultural Literary Society of Tamil Nadu, under the leadership of Muthu of Tiruchi entered into the sanctum sanctorum of the Srirangam temple.
favouring temple entry. The legal sanctions made the orthodox temples in Tamil Nadu open to the Depressed Classes after the Indian independence. In the Post-Colonial period, the denial of the temple entry to the Depressed Classes into the village temples of Caste-Hindus or the dominant caste people resulted in communal clashes and even the riots, which ended in death toll. It obviously shows that the implementation of the law in the temple related issues, especially in temple entry issue is unsuccessful. The panacea for the long-standing issue is the change of the heart of the dominant caste people.