

# **CONCLUSION**

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The temples of Tamil Nadu, true to the local saying “No temple no Village,” acted in the Tamil society as a center of spiritual as well as secular activities of the general public living around them. The temple, it is no exaggeration to say, was indeed a symbol of a rudimentary experiment in the creation of a welfare state. It touched every facet of local life, political, social, economic and religious. It provided proper social environment and offered ample scope for self-improvement. Unfortunately, the temple became a center of discriminative practices in the past. The Brahmins (the priestly class) commanded high esteem in the temple ritual practices and formed the upper echelon of the society. In the middle strata of the society were bureaucrats, merchants, peasant-proprietors and artisans. The farm labourers and slaves were treated as untouchables and placed in the lower rungs of social ladder. They were prohibited to enter into the holy areas of temples for a long time and it delayed the emerging social trends.

This study, “Struggle for Temple Entry in Tamil Nadu,” highlights the related factors which led to prohibiting and banning the entry of the outcastes, called **avarnas**, who constituted nearly one fifth of the total population of Hindu society. They were declared untouchable on the grounds that they cause human pollution and this would affect the idols or deities of the temples and the worshippers. It also deals with the remedial measures initiated by the revolutionary and rationalistic movement to nullify the false beliefs of orthodox and fanatic Hindus and achieve the temple entry to the untouchables, as a matter of civil rights enjoyed by others in the Hindu fold.

At the outset, the study depicts the wrong notions and imaginary beliefs by which the orthodox Hindus developed the peculiar concepts of

untouchability, pollution, defilement or human stain, or slur emanating from their mere touching, approaching and sight of them. The study also has narrated as to how a section of non-Hindus were excluded from the Hindu society as untouchables, unseeables and unapproachables for centuries.

The study has also revealed the neutral stand taken by the British government in the matter of temple entry. Further it also explains how the Poona Pact concluded between B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of untouchables and the Gandhi had been a turning point in the lives of the untouchables to secure civil and political and rights.

The study brought to light the stand taken by M.K. Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar, the mouth pieces of untouchables, that non-entry of outcastes is the very negation of the fundamental truth of all religions, all principles of humanity and the dictates of reason. The study provides a descriptive analysis tracing the dangerous and critical situation that prevailed in Travancore State, which prompted Dewan C.P. Ramasami Iyer to declare open the Hindu temples to the untouchables.

The participation of satyagrahas and leaders like E.V. Ramasami and his family, Kelappan and others in the temple entry agitation and Gandhi's interferences to give up the satyagrahas at crucial hours, and the inconsistent stand taken by Gandhi in staging satyagraha have been traced out elaborately. A detailed analysis of the Hindu Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bills introduced by P. Subbarayan as minister of the Justice Party in 1932, and other related Bills of C. Ranga Iyer and M.C. Rajah, as Central Legislative Members has been presented in the study.

B.R. Ambedkar had engineered the temple entry movement at Kalaram temple in Nasik in 1930, but he did it as a matter of civil rights

to the untouchables, not as a life-securing process. Later he abandoned the attempt and preferred the strategy of conversion to other religions.

The genuine efforts taken by Rajaji as a premier of Madras Province in 1939, and his initiative in moving the temple entry bills in the Madras Legislature and his constructive support for the approval of Subbarayan's Bill in both houses of Madras Legislature have been analytically discussed in this study.

The role played by the prominent depressed class leader A.S. Sahajanandam, the founder of Nandanar Educational Institutions and Nandanar Mutt, and M.C. Rajah and J.Shiva Shunmugam Pillai in extending their support to the temple entry and participation in attending the opening of Hindu temples, along with the member of Harijan Seva Sangh of Tamil Nadu has also been elaborated in the study.

In history nothing happens suddenly, for behind every struggle there is a long period of gestation and preparation. The ancient Tamil society was free from many of the evils like glaring inequality and steep gradation. But the situation that was considered as ideal began to change as a result of the migration and invasion of the Aryans, the Muslims, the Marathas and the Telugus. The people of the land, who were mostly Adi-Dravidas and Dravidas, were reduced to servitude. They were not only deprived of their land but also were relegated to the background in the social hierarchy.

The traditional Tamil Society, based upon the caste and religious considerations, was compartmentalized. It led to the birth of many caste-oriented customs and practices. The social stratification divided the people into advantaged and disadvantaged sections of the society. Attainment of social equality was considered as the stepping stone for the gaining of civic and political rights. For a long period, social equality

was not materialized in Tamil society because of lack of literacy, economic self-sufficiency and lack of political wisdom. The temple entry agitations and riots paved the way to the larger movement for social transformation.

The caste segregation, religious disability and economic disparity placed the majority of the Tamil people in a lower position in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. The awakening among these people was considered necessary to remedy to social disabilities associated with them. These disadvantaged people suffered from all kinds evils of imposed on them by customs and traditional beliefs. A group of minority people controlled the majority of the people through their domination in learning and land possessions. In the Tamil society, the conditions of the Nadars and the depressed people were very pathetic. They were denied civic rights including the right to temple entry. This disability was rooted in the concept of purity and distance observed by the caste-Hindus.

Eleven hypotheses were formulated (Chapter-IV) to test certain popularly held impressions related to Temple Entry Movement. The first hypothesis posits that Nadars were the first to indicate this movement. Among the depressed sections, the Nadars were economically strong because of their involvement in business activities. But the Nadars also were denied the right to temple entry. They were the first organized people in Tamil Nadu to initiate the fight for the cause of temple entry. In order to attain the right to temple entry, they agitated in the temples at Thanjavur, Madurai, Erode, Arupukkottai, Kamuthi, Kalugumalai, Srivilliputtur, Sivakasi, Tirunelveli and Tiruchendur. It led to communal riots between the Nadars and caste-Hindus. But the court verdicts were in favour of the caste-Hindus. Thus the first hypothesis is sustained by historical facts.

The social awakening and transition of the Tamil society was initiated by the British administrators. The rule of the British in India was a great advantage to the depressed people. Because of the British rule, there was the introduction of western education and judicial system based upon equality before law. Administrative measures for the eradication of disabilities were done systematically. The leniency of the British towards depressed people elevated the latter to a great extent. Besides, the Christian missionaries worked among the depressed people. Their books and speeches created lot of changes among the depressed people. The missionaries ran a number of schools and educational institutions. They treated the low caste people equal to the high caste people. The Christian societies had done not only religious service but also social and medical services. A number of underprivileged people embraced Christianity and obtained education. They kindled the feelings of their Hindu counterparts. A number of voluntary agencies also disseminated knowledge to the low caste people. The British passed a number of legal measures which abolished the evil practices of the Hindu society. The modern facilities developed consciousness among the majority of the people. The socio-religious reform movement at national and regional level contributed a lot to the creation of consciousness among the depressed people and it ultimately helped their emancipation. The important social reform leaders who took up the cause of eradication of untouchability were Rajaram Mohanroy, Keshab Chandrasen, Jotirao Phule, Dayananda Saraswathi, Vivekananda, Sri Narayana Guru, Muthukkutti Swamigal and Ramalinga Adigal. The rise of social reformers and spread of Western education ensured a period of social transformation. The reformers were all of the opinion that the Hindu *sastras* did not support untouchability. It was solely the fault of the later fanatic Hindus.

The awakening among the depressed people gradually emerged because of the various forces working at different levels. The advent of communal organisations integrated them. Such organisations were determined to fight for social equality and economic disparity. The depressed class leaders started newspapers and organised associations. The notable associations were Nadar Mahajana Sabha, Dravida Mahajana Sabha, Adidravida Mahajana Sabha and Paraya Mahajana Sabha. The rise of depressed class leaders like C. Iyothidoss, R. Srinivasan, M.C. Rajah gave a strong lead to their people. At all India level, B.R. Ambedkar was considered the messiah of the depressed people. Thus the administrative measures, combined with missionary activities, helped the creation of consciousness among the depressed section of the population. In addition to this, the Western educated Indians also promoted the consciousness of the avarnas to resist discrimination and support temple entry movement. Hence the second hypothesis is sustained.

The verdict of the Privy Council was significant because it arrested the activities of the Nadars who were the front-line fighters for temple entry of the depressed people. Hence the Nadars decided to build new massive temples in the brahminical style and waited for an awakening from the depressed people. When the Justice Party and Self Respect League advocated the temple entry, the Nadars joined in large numbers. Hence the third hypothesis is also sustained.

As the depressed people continuously demanded the right to temple entry in various sessions of the Congress party in the beginning of the twentieth century, they were compelled to pass many resolutions. In the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu, the agitation for temple entry was vigorous. In the Trivandrum Legislative Assembly, the temple entry issue was seriously debated. In the Kakinada Congress annual session, a resolution was passed against untouchability. Eradication of untouchability

was taken as part of the Constructive Programme of Congress. In 1924-1925, E.V. Ramasami and Kerala Congress leaders led the Vaikom Satyagraha. A number of different state leaders participated and demanded the roads of Vaikom temple be thrown open to the depressed people. Following the Vaikom Satyagraha, a similar one took place at Suchindram in 1926. M.E. Naidu played a key role in it. Gandhi came forward to give full support to the agitation. As a result, the Travancore government opened all the roads leading to the temples to the depressed people. In Bombay, M.R. Jayakar introduced the 'Hindu Untouchables Caste Disabilities Bill' in 1930. Gandhi welcomed the bill. In the same year, B.R. Ambedkar led a satyagraha at the Kalaram Temple in Nasik. Among the series of satyagrahas after Nasik, Guruvayur Satyagraha was successfully led by Kelappan Nair. Even though the Guruvayur temple entry turned out to be a sad episode, its impact in Tamil Nadu was significant. In support of Guruvayur temple entry, meetings were held at Nagapatnam, Chidambaram and Mannargudi in Tamil Nadu. Eventually, the Travancore Queen issued Temple Entry Proclamation in 1936. Gandhi acclaimed this proclamation as the 'Modern Miracle' and declared it as a brave, generous and gracious act. In a swift move, large number of temples (2000) were opened in Travancore. In order to temple entry, leaders of Tamil Nadu like A. Vaidyanatha Iyer, P.S. Krishnaswami Iyengar and N.M.R. Subbaraman and about fifty Harijans visited the Travancore State. Rajaji, R. Srinivasan and M.C. Rajah welcomed the temple entry of Harijans in Travancore. Thus the success of the temple entry campaigns in the neighbouring states encouraged the Tamils to start the same in Tamil Nadu also. Hence the fourth and seventh hypotheses also are sustained.

With the historic fast of M.K. Gandhi in September 1932, the history of struggle for temple entry entered into new era. The Yeravada Pact, also known as Poona Pact, was arrived at between caste-Hindus and

the depressed classes. Affirming his faith in the spirit of the pact, M.K. Gandhi organized All-India tours for Harijans, which softened the hearts of caste-Hindus in Tamil Nadu, especially the Maravas and Kallars in favour of temple entry by Harijans. The tour gave further impetus to temple entry campaign. During the tour, Gandhi addressed meetings at 161 places and covered a distance of 12650 miles. Thus the fifth hypothesis is affirmed.

For a while, both in the Central and Madras Legislatures, a number of bills were passed against untouchability, and in favour of temple entry. C.S. Ranga Iyer introduced the 'Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bill' in 1933. M.C. Rajah introduced the 'Abolition of Untouchability Bill' in 1934. But in the face of united opposition shown by the **sanatanists**, the Bills did not materialise into Acts. In the Madras Legislature, M.C. Rajah introduced the 'Madras Hindu Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bill' in 1937. Following it, Rajaji piloted 'Malabar Temple Entry Bill' in 1938. When the 'Malabar Temple Entry Bill' became an Act, it found its echo in Tamil Nadu. The leaders of Tamil Nadu began to insist on the cause of temple entry. At that time, Rajaji was the Premier of Madras Presidency and therefore he himself decided to conduct temple entry in Madurai. The Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh was very active in Madurai. R.S. Naidu, the Executive Officer of Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple and A. Vaidyanatha Iyer, a popular Congress party leader of Madurai, enjoyed good understanding and rapport with each other. Vaidyanatha Iyer, along with five Harijans and one Nadar, entered the Madurai temple amidst great opposition. The Madurai temple entry led by Vaidyanatha Iyer was the first successful event in the temple entry agitation in Tamil Nadu. Vaidyanatha Iyer by his yeoman service niched a remarkable place in the History of Tamil Nadu Harijan Temple Entry Movement. The **sanatanists** of Madurai vigorously resisted

Vaidyanatha Iyer. The **sanatanist** leaders like N. Natesa Iyer and K.R. Venkatarama Iyer stoutly opposed Madurai temple entry and even went to court to file a criminal complaint against Vaidyanatha Iyer and R.S. Naidu. To save them, Rajaji piloted 'Madras Temple Entry Indemnity Bill' in 1939. The Bill became Law. Thereupon, under the leadership of T.S.S. Rajan, a temple entry was orchestrated at Srirangam in 1939. More than 2000 **sanatanists** obstructed. T.S.S. Rajan was the then Minister of Hindu Religious Endowments. After the police lathi charge, the Minister entered the temple along with the Harijans. This establishes the validity of the sixth hypothesis.

After the Madurai and Srirangam Temple entry, many temples were thrown open in Tamil Nadu. All these temple were situated in the localities of the orthodox Hindus. The Maharajah of Ettayapuram opened two of his family temples in 1945. In 1947, Jagajeevanram, the Harijan Central Labour Minister entered, along with untouchables, into the temple of Tiruvarur. It gave great fillip to the advocates and promoters of temple entry. In order to rectify the loopholes in the Temple Entry Act of 1939, T.S.S. Rajan introduced the 'Temple Entry Authorization Bill' in 1947. On the day of the implementation of the Act on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1947, 148 temples were opened in Madras Presidency. The important places where temples were opened, were Srivilliputtur, Srirangam, Tiruvarur and Kanchipuram. In 1949, 'Madras Temple Entry Authorization (Amendment) Act', and in 1955 the 'Untouchability (Offences) Act', were passed against the practice of untouchability and it severely punished those who obstructed the temple entry of the Harijans.

In the struggle for temple entry, the role of the social minded caste-Hindu leaders is noteworthy. Leaders like M.K. Gandhi, C. Rajaji, A. Vaidyanatha Iyer. T.S.S. Rajan, E.V. Ramasami, T.M. Nair and M.E. Naidu played a key role in shaping the public opinion in favour of

the temple entry. Because of their leadership in public platforms and on the floor of the legislatures, the opposition of the **sanatanists** was strangled and it also ensured the smooth passage of the Temple Entry Acts of 1939, 1947 and 1949 which solved all the practical problems in allowing the Harijans into the temples. Till 1955, no one could be punished for the violation of Article 17 of the Indian Constitution because no punishment was specified. But the Untouchability Abolition (Offences) Act of 1955 punishes not only the practice of disabilities but also any indirect social support of untouchability. The Act marks the culmination of anti-disabilities legislations. As the Untouchability Abolition (Offences) Act of 1955 did not make the offences non-compoundable and cognizable, the Act was amended in the form of protection of Civil Rights Act of 1955 which came into force in Tamil Nadu in November 1976. Hence the eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh hypotheses also are sustained.

The agitation for temple entry slowly but steadily culminated in substantive victories in Tamil Nadu. It was mainly aimed at the abolition of untouchability. The temple entry was considered as the attainment of the highest social right of the depressed people. For this purpose, the Harijans Sevak Sangh, the Self-Respect League, the Congress and the Justice Party contributed a lot. The Congress Party was not consistent in its stand. Even Gandhi, who at one time supported the temple entry, at another time, was silent over the issue. In this connection, B.R. Ambedkar expressed his fear thus: "Temple Entry was Gandhi's final goal and that Gandhi wanted to preserve the caste system through this Harijan Temple Entry. He cited several examples regarding his plan. Gandhi at first opposed Ranga Iyer's Temple Entry Bill on 24, March 1933. But when the untouchables demanded political rights, he supported the Bill. When the Congress was threatened with defeat in the ensuing election, Gandhi gave up the fight for temple entry. Also when Kelappan went on

fast in order to persuade the Guruvayur temple authorities to open its door, he was persuaded by Gandhi to suspend the fast.” Ambedkar accused Gandhi of never undergoing fast for the sake of the untouchables. But due to the mass awakening, the Brahmin leaders like Rajaji and T.S.S. Rajan came forward to extend their support to the temple entry for the Harijans. The Travancore Proclamation accelerated the temple entry legislations in Madras Presidency. The legal sanctions compelled the temples in Tamil Nadu to throw open their doors to the depressed people after independence.

The Tamil society has progressed substantially towards social equality after the successful temple entry agitations. The recent temple entry agitations, issues and riots in the last three decades of the twentieth century at various places attest to the resurgent peoples’ movement in Tamil Nadu - a movement that witnessed the emergence of a new social order and the rising status of the depressed people in Tamil society. The obstruction to the Temple Entry Movement was rooted in the meaningless and false beliefs of the caste-Hindus. Thanks to the efforts taken by Rajaji and others, Tamil Nadu was saved from the age-old clutches of superstitious beliefs.

In India, the temple entry has been considered as a milestone in the progressive march of human civilization. Providing access to the untouchables into Hindu temples, the advocates in the ranks of caste-Hindus wiped out the age-old stains, slur and stigma of untouchability, which totally belittled, lowered and disgraced the image of Hinduism. It is a sorry state of affairs that the Hindu temples in rural India have still not given any access to the rural Dalits in India. Hindu religion could again assume its position as a source of the prosperity of Dalit Hindus if the Hindu temples in rural India are thrown open to their worship. If this move does not succeed, conversion would be the only alternative way for their survival.