CHAPTER II

TEMPLE ENTRY PROCLAMATION, 1936

In Travancore the society was divided into Upper Class and Lower Class. The special privileges enjoyed by the high castes created many problems leading to social disharmony and communal conflicts. The temples were considered as sanketam grounds and reserved exclusively to the high caste Hindus.  

Further the low caste Hindus were not permitted to enter the temples. Lack of physical cleanliness and poverty disqualified the low castes to enter the prohibited area near the temples. The low caste Hindus were not permitted to use freely the public roads and the roads leading to temple premises. These ills of the society were opposed by the people and consequently the proclamation of 1936 was promulgated in their favour.

2.1. The Problems of the Depressed

The high caste Hindus, who preserved the Sastric rules and age-old customs in their pristine purity, were in control of the administration of the temples. They were opposed to any innovation in the existing order that

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2 The Regulations and Proclamations of Travancore, 1112 M.E., p. 4.
pressed hard upon the self-respect and honour of the inferior castes. They
denied to the lower castes even the right to walk along the roads around the
temples.\footnote{Samuel, V.T., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 23.}

In 1928, there were complaints of ill-treatment of low caste people by
the caste Hindus during festivals. Hence the government of Travancore
instituted an enquiry and the committee submitted its report to the
government on 2\textsuperscript{nd} September 1918. They were of the view that on
occasions of temple processions along the roads, the low caste people should
be permitted to remain on the verandah of private houses and shops situated
within the limits of private lands on either side of the road. But the
committee recommended that the low castes should not be “allowed to
remain on the road-side margins and also within a distance of fifty yards on
the road proper both on the front and rear of the deity when the procession
passes.”\footnote{Karunakara Menon, P.K., \textit{History of Freedom Movement in Kerala}, Vol. II, Trivandrum,
1966, pp. 290-291.} Such an arrangement was not expected to cause serious
inconveniences to the public using the road as the procession would take
only three or four minutes to cover a distance of one hundred yards.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 291.}
The Ezhavas or the ‘excluded caste’ were not allowed to enter even the outer-closures of the Hindu temples. They and other lower castes were denied admission to the temple precincts and also the passage on roads in the immediate vicinity of the temples. They had to worship and make their offerings from distance ranging from fifty to hundred yards from the outer walls of the temple. Almost all Savarna temples had trees of flag stones to indicate the limit up to which the members of the Avarna castes were permitted to enter. The Svarna worshippers would place their cash offerings to the deity at the allotted place and withdraw themselves to allow the priests to take the cash offerings and then wait for the ‘prasadams’ at the prescribed distance. Even the Christians were not permitted to walk through the roads near the temples. To rub salt in the wound Dewan Krishna Rao issued an edict in 1857.

2.2. The Edict of Krishna Rao

Krishna Rao, the Dewan of Uthram Thirunal Marthandavarma issued an Edict in February 1857. It reads as follows: “Though an Ellower (Ezhavar) becomes a Christian he must not cease to be an Ellower – therefore you must not allow Cherian and other converts to the Christian religion to pass through the public high way by the temple but must compel

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them to go round through the fields."\(^8\) The edict further prohibited the non-caste Hindus and the Christian converts from using temple roads. On the public roads near temples, sign boards were put up by the government prohibiting lower castes from entering the roads. The matter was brought to the notice of the Christian missionaries. The missionaries brought the disabilities and consequent sufferings of the people to the notice of the Madras government. But nothing substantial happened.\(^9\) Kumaran Asan raised the issue in the 12\(^{th}\) session of the Assembly to draw the attention of the government to this evil and referred to roads in Vaikkam, Tirunakkara, Suchindram and a few other places and demanded the removal of the prohibition boards placed near some of these temples.\(^10\) A stone pillar measuring 3 feet height was erected to prevent the people from entering into the temples.\(^11\) The denial of the right to walk along roads in the vicinity of temples became the subject of specific petition in the Assembly.

There was no uniform rules regarding the entry of low castes to the roads and temples. At Suchindram, for example, the Ezhavas could not go upto the outer wall during the festivals, though they could do so at other times. During certain festival occasions the whole village was closed against

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\(^9\) The Memorials of the Missionaries to Sir. C.E. Trevelyan, 18\(^{th}\) July 1954.

\(^10\) Proceedings of the Srimulam Popular Assembly, Trivancore 11\(^{th}\) to 15\(^{th}\) Sessions, 1916, p. 120.

the entry of the avarnas. Even scavengers were excluded during festivals and sanitation was not attended to. The illogical and inhuman restrictions imposed on the lower castes had far reaching consequences. In several places, petitions and protests were followed by satyagrhas and riots.

2.3. The Vaikam Satyagraha

The Vaikam Satyagraha was a movement to get entry into the temple at Vaikam in Central Travancore. At Vaikam access to temple had two roads, one for the high caste Hindus and the other for the Ezhavas, Pulayas and the low caste Hindus. They could group to a particular point. Beyond that entry into the temple was restricted by a notice board. However, there was no restriction to Christians and Muslims. Hence the affected parties started a movement in front of the temple to get the approach road to the Vaikam temple thrown open to the Avarnas or untouchables. Under the able leadership of T.K. Madhavan, it assumed formidable proportions. In 1929, T.K. Madhavan moved this subject in the Assembly. But Dewan Raghavaiah disallowed the motion on religious grounds. The government silenced the Ezhava leaders by not allowing a discussion of the matter in the Assembly. It held that a religious issue was an improper subject for discussion on the floor. In 1921, T.K. Madhavan again raised the issue of

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temple entry in the Assembly. Dewan Raghavaiah again disallowed the
motion on the ground that it was a religious subject.\textsuperscript{14} This prohibition of
self expression in the Assembly added fuel to the fire of Ezhava urge to
reach the goal of social emancipation. The actual starting point of the
Vaikam Satyagraha was the Kakinada Congress of 1923. The Congress
session at Kakinada passed a resolution for taking effective steps in this
regard.\textsuperscript{15} On 30 March 1924, a Satyagraha campaign as started in front of
the temple at Vaikam in Central Travancore.\textsuperscript{16} Very soon the Vaikam
satyagraha assumed all India importance. The Kerala Hindu Sabha, the
Kshatriya Maha Sabha and the Indian National Congress. extended their
support to the movement. Volunteers from different places took part in the
satyagraha. A band of volunteers of Madurai led by E.V. Ramaswamy
Naicker reached Vaikam, but were arrested.\textsuperscript{17} Advised by Gandhi, the
Satyagrahis decided to meet the Maharani Regent Sethu Lakshmi Bai in
person and to submit a memorial. Two jathas, one led by Mannathu
Padmanabha Pillai from Vaikam and another led by M.E. Naidu from
Suchindram in South Travancore reached Trivandrum on 12\textsuperscript{th} and 7\textsuperscript{th}
November 1924 respectively. The deputation of the volunteers under the

\textsuperscript{14} Proceedings of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, Vol. V, 1921, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{15} P.K.K. Menon, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 11.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Hindu}, 31 March 1924, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{17} Mahadeva Desai, \textit{The Epic of Travancore}, Ahamadabad, 1937, p. 11.
leadership of Changanassery K. Parameswaran Pillai waited upon the Regent and presented a memorial containing the redressal of their grievances.\textsuperscript{18} But the Maharani replied, “it is not possible to give a satisfactory remedy to this important matter immediately”. Next the deputation met Dewan Bagadhur Raghavaiah and he replied, “I will examine the situation carefully”.\textsuperscript{19} Now this appeared unsatisfactory and the satyagrahis continued the picketing. On 10\textsuperscript{th} March 1925, Gandhi visited Vaikam and as a result of an agreement reached between the government and Gandhi, all roads, except those on the eastern side of the temple, were opened to the Avarnas with effect from 7\textsuperscript{th} April 1925.\textsuperscript{20} Now they continued the satyagraha on the road on the eastern side, but was withdrawn, on the advice of Gandhi on 23\textsuperscript{rd} November 1925.\textsuperscript{21} The Vaikam satyagraha, which assumed all India significance greatly contributed to the social awakening in the state.\textsuperscript{22} The course of events in Vaikam led to the outbreak of similar agitations at Guruvayur, Ambalapuzha and Suchindram.\textsuperscript{23}

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\textsuperscript{18} Menon, P.K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{The Hindu}, 20 January 1925, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{20} Daniel, D., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{21} Ravindran, T.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{22} Daniel, D., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{23} Eapen, K.V., \textit{A Study of Kerala History}, Kottayam, 1971, p. 221.
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2.4. Guruvayur Satyagraha

A similar agitation occurred at Guruvayur in 1932. The depressed classes like the Nayadis, Pulayas, Cherumas, and Kanikkars were not allowed to enter into Guruvayur road and temple.\(^{24}\) Leaders like K. Kelappan constantly sought to make the people to realise that the denial of elementary rights of citizenship to them amounted to great social injustice. There were frequent reports of outrageous assaults on the depressed classes by the members of the higher castes. The temple authorities put up thorny fences around the temple to prevent the depressed classes from entering the premises of the temple. It is on record that Mr. Krishna Pillai was mercilessly beaten by the temple authorities for having rung the bell at the mukhamandapam in front of the sanctum sanctorum.\(^{25}\) Thus, the Guruvayur Satyagraha started. It took a new turn on 13\(^{\text{th}}\) September 1932 when Mahatma Gandhi announced his fast unto death over the announcement of the government for the grant of separate electorate to the Harijans.\(^{26}\) People from all walks of life vigorously participated and the movement spread throughout Kerala and later on the government took decision in 1936, to allow all people irrespective of caste and creed to enter into the temple.

\(^{24}\) Karunakara Menon, P.K., *op.cit.*, p. 266.
2.5. Incidents at South Travancore

At Cheramadam an officer of the Salvation Army was going on horseback, with pariah followers on 27th August 1892. The Vellalas assaulted him.27 Vadiveeswaram, a part of Nagercoil, was wholly inhabited by Brahmins, who never allowed the depressed classes to enter into their streets. A riot broke out in the year 1872 as a Brahmin widow married a Christian.28 From that time low castes and the Christians were strictly prohibited from entering the Brahmin and other caste Hindu streets.29 Two Zenana workers were assaulted and killed. Their umbrellas were wrested from their hands and broken before their eyes. Their clothes were torn and mud was thrown at their faces. Few able-bodied men threatened to push them down into tanks or shoot them.30

Kurichi, a small village situated very near to Suchindram is a thickly populated village of Nanchilnad Vellalas. They were highly jealous of the activities of the Salvationists in and around Suchindram. Therefore the Salvationists were not permitted to walk along the Vellala streets with chapels, umbrellas and turbans. If anybody violated this rule, he was

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severely punished.\textsuperscript{31} When Colonel Jesuretnam rode on horseback along this street, the villagers chased the horse from pillar to post and cut off its tail. They also threw a lot of stones at the Colonel till blood oozed out from his fore-head.\textsuperscript{32} The rioters chased him. Two of the rioters namely Chodalaimadan and Mallanthamby inflicted a severe blow with a stick. However the Colonel took shelter in a nearby school. Later a case was filed against the Andy Essaki, Chodalaimadan and Mallanthamby and they were sentenced to pay a fine of Rs.50/- along with one month rigorous imprisonment.\textsuperscript{33}

This was followed by Kakkad riot, a small Harijan village situated at a distance of a mile northeast of Suchindram. Christians and low castes were not permitted to go near the temples. At Mylaudy Nadar Christians were dwelling. Their houses were on one side, and on the opposite side there were some houses of the Vellalas. Both the Nadars and the Vellalas walked along this street and also they drove their carts through it and used it for various other purposes. But the Vellalas did not allow the Nadars to go in procession through this street.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Porsatham} (Tamil), January 1983, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{32} English Records, Trivandrum, Cover File No. 1627 of 1892, Letter dated 13 January 1893.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{34} Proceedings of Travancore Legislative Council, Vol. VI, 1924, p. 585.
There was another incident when the Sudras of Vanur, a village not far from Panjalingapuram, insulted and threatened to assault the girls of the Mission School for having passed by a particular way.\textsuperscript{35} Thus the temples and their roads leading to them were not open to all the Hindus irrespective of caste till half a century ago. The so-called avarnas – or backward classes were prevented from entering the temples. They could offer worship only from allotted places of prescribed distances. The prohibition of entry into the roads and temples was certainly a positive denial of justice. Strange it was that a large portion of the community who contributed their quota to the state revenue with which the roads were constructed, were debarred from entering the roads. The denial of equal rights to the lower castes and the high-handed actions of the men of the high castes led to riots and restlessness in different parts of the state of Travancore during the latter half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and the early decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. At Suchindram the reactions against the different forms of social injustice manifested themselves in the Suchindram satyagraha.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Letter from the Resident to Acting Chief Secretary, Government of Madras, dated 9 March, 1870.

2.6. The Suchindram Satyagraha

The social disabilities from which the depressed classes like the Ezhavas, Nadars, Pulayas and Parayas suffered for centuries assumed large proportions and the leaders including Dr. M.E. naidu, Gandhi, Raman Pillai and others constantly sought to make the people realise that the denial of elementary rights of citizenship to them amounted to a great social injustice. The frequent reports of outrageous assaults on the depressed classes by the members of the higher castes at places like Mylaudi, Panjalingapuram, Cheramadam and especially at Suchindram attracted the attention of political leaders and social reformers.

It was certainly a negation of civil liberty to prevent the depressed classes from walking along the roads and streets used by the caste Hindus.\(^{37}\) The social reformers keenly felt that the total exclusion of the depressed classes from the temple and streets was a black mark on Hinduism and hence they demanded its speedy removal.\(^{38}\) They also focussed the attention of the people to the fact that denial of elementary rights of citizenship was a great social injustice. They made a propaganda that temple entry was only the means to remove untouchability.\(^{39}\)


In 1916, Kumaran Asan brought this evil to the notice of the government and referred to roads at Suchindram and demanded the removal of the ‘tindal palakas’ placed near this temple. He said, “There were certain public roads and streets in which they [the low castes] were not admitted. Certain places were inaccessible to them on account of proximity to temples. But there was no uniform principle adopted in those cases. The Ezhavas could not go up to the outer wall of the Suchindram temple during the utsavam period, though they could do so at other times. During certain festive occasions the whole village was closed against the low caste people in Nanjilnad. The prohibition would seem all the more serious when it was known that even scavengers were excluded and that sanitation was not attended to during those periods”.

The social restrictions imposed upon the lower classes created widespread discontent in Travancore. Several social organizations demanded abolition of social disabilities and inequalities. For quite a long time the inhabitants of South Travancore were praying in various ways for opening the streets of Suchindram to all sections of people irrespective of caste or creed. But the government ignored their applications. When the people realized that their representation and appeals would not move the

40 Proceedings of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, 1916, p. 120.
41 Ibid.
government and a few caste Hindus, they began to assert their birth-right by offering satyagraha.

One of the popular satyagrahas was perhaps the twenty month long satyagraha carried on at Vaikkam in 1924 to secure for all lower caste Hindus the right to use approach roads to the Siva temple at Vaikkam. As a result, Satyagraha agitation was started in many other places to gain the right of temple entry. Sporadic agitation was started at Kottayam under the leadership of T.K. Madhavan and others for achieving entry into Tiruvarappu temple lanes. Under the leadership of A.K. Gopalan, there sprang up another agitation at Guruvayur.

One of the significant features of the Vaikkam Satyagraha was the march of people from the North Travancore and the South Travancore to Trivandrum in order to press the government to keep the streets and temples open to all. The Savarna Hindu ‘jatha’ from Vaikkam to Trivandrum was led by Mannath Padmanabha Pillai. Another ‘jatha’ of about eighty caste Hindus including Brahmins, Vellalas and Nairs marched from Kottar to Trivandrum under the inspiring leadership of Dr. M.E. Naidu. The other

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44 District Superintendent of police to Pitt, Commissioner of Police, Kottayam, dated 12 October 1927, File No. 846, English Records, Cellar, Trivandrum.
prominent members who participated in the ‘jatha’ were M. Sivathanu Pillai, Therayakalputhoor, Manakavalaperumal Pillai, Gandhi Raman and Muthukaruppa Pillai.\(^47\) Both the leaders of the ‘jathas’ met at Trivandrum. They submitted a petition to the Regent Sethu Lakshmi Bai on 12\(^{th}\) November 1924 and the Maharani announced later that the approach roads adjacent to the Vaikkam temple would be opened to all Hindus, irrespective of caste.\(^48\)

Though the Vaikkam satyagraha ended with resounding victory, the ban on road entry remained intact in the other famous temples at Ambalapuzha Tiruvarappu and Suchindram.\(^49\) The Siva temple at Suchindram was surrounded by car streets and Sannadhi Street, which were inhabited by Brahmins and Vellalas. The car streets and Sannadhi Street were included in the Devaswom Sanketam. There, the men with pollution could not enter.\(^50\) From the very early days, the agamic prescriptions and time-honoured customs were strictly followed in this temple. There were many graded limits to enter the temple. The Vellalas, Nairs and Chettis were permitted to go into the Ardhamandapa and the Tiruchura Mandapa and not


\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) Report of Devaswom Group, Nagercoil, File No. 726, 1106 M.E.
into the Garbhagraha, the sanctum sanctorum.\textsuperscript{51} Beyond the Dhavajastamba, the Vairavis, Challas, Potters and Oil-mongers were not allowed.\textsuperscript{52} The avarnas like the Ezhavas, Nadars, Parayas, Pulayas and the Kuluuvana who wanted to worship in this temple had to stand at a distance of a furlong away from the outer wall limits.\textsuperscript{53} Bamboo screens were placed at the entrance of all the main streets, denoting the prohibition of entry to the forbidden classes. Also a Gramaveethi, from the eastern side of Suchindram village covering a distance of about a furlong and a half was not accessible to Parayas by a long standing custom.\textsuperscript{54} Earlier several attempts of the outcastes to cross the street ended in severe prosecution. In a bid to determine the right of temple entry, the radical Hindus rallied under the banner of Dr. M.E. Naidu.

Some enlightened Hindus from Nanchilnad who were interested in the proposed Suchindram Satyagraha met at Dr. M.E. Naidu’s residence at Kottar on Tuesday the 19\textsuperscript{th} January 1926 at 6 p.m. to concert measures for conducting satyagrahas at Suchindram for gaining admission to the members of depressed class into the streets of Suchindram.\textsuperscript{55} They elected M. Subramoniya Pillai of Therur as President and resolved to conduct

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\item \textsuperscript{51} Pillai, K.K., \textit{The Suchindram Temple}, Madras, 1953, p. 265.
\item \textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, 1934, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{54} English Records, File No. 726, 1115 M.E.
\item \textsuperscript{55} No. D. Dis. 1475 (Judicial), Letter dated 8.6.1101 M.E. (21.1.1926) from M.E. Naidu to the Dewan of Travancore.
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regular satyagraha at Suchindram.\textsuperscript{56} They also appointed a satyagraha committee. It was composed of Mr. Subramoniyam Pillai, M. Sivathanu Pillai, K. Perumal Panikkar, T.M. Chidambaramathan Pillai, N. Agasthialingom Pillai, P. Swaminath Pillai, P. Subramania Iyer, M. Sudalamuthu Pillai, M. Mathevan Pillai, Dr. M.E. Naidu, T. Muthukaruppa Pillai, P.C. Thanumalayaperumal Pillai and Gandhi Das C. Muthuswamy.\textsuperscript{57} The committee resolved that Messrs. M.E. Naidu, N. Perumal Panikkar, P.C. Thanumalaya Perumal and Gandhi Dhas C. Muthuswamy be the Secretary, Treasurer, Publicity Officer, Volunteer and Captain respectively.\textsuperscript{58} It was also resolved to make necessary arrangements and start satyagraha on Wednesday the 14\textsuperscript{th} of Thy 1101 M.E.\textsuperscript{59} The Executive Committee again met on 7.7.1101 M.E. and resolved to commence satyagraha at 8 a.m. on Wednesday 14\textsuperscript{th} Thy 1101 M.E.\textsuperscript{60} But on account of Car Festival at Boothapandy and Nagercoil, the satyagraha committee met on 13.6.1101 M.E. and resolved to commence satyagraha at 8 a.m. on Friday 16\textsuperscript{th} Thy instead of 14\textsuperscript{th} Thy.\textsuperscript{61} They selected many volunteers to participate in the satyagraha. They were Therkkumon Ganapathy Iyer, Jeevanandam, 

\textsuperscript{56} Letter from M.E. Naidu to the Dewan of Travancore, dated 8.6.1101 M.E. (21.1.1926), D.Dis. 1475, Judicial.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. to the Commissioner of Police, dated 18 June 1926.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Letter from M.E. Naidu to the Dewan of Travancore, Trivandrum, dated 13.6.1931.
Chinnathambi Samban, Karuthudaiyan and Annamalai. The volunteers got the support of the people of the surrounding locality through posters, distribution of pamphlets and leaflets and public meetings.

As already planned the satyagraha movement at Suchindram was started at 8 a.m. on 29th January 1926. Some satyagraha volunteers started from their Ashramam at Kottar early in the morning and proceeded to Suchindram singing Subramaniya Bharathi’s sons ‘Achamillai, Achamillai’ (without fear! without fear!) and posted five volunteers there under the care of Captain C. Muthuswami alias Gandhi Dhas. Out of these five volunteers two were Parayas, one Brahmin, one Ezhava and one Vellala. They were stopped by some youngsters of the place headed by one S.K. Velayudhan Pillai, a merchant of Suchindram. The satyagrahis were prevented from entering the streets surrounding the Suchindram temple. Hence the satyagraha volunteers squatted on the road where they were obstructed. The anti-satyagrahis also did so. They sat there face to face on the road leading to the Suchindram temple from the Nagercoil – Kanyakumari road between the local post office and the English school on the north eastern side of the Suchindram temple tank. At 12 noon another group of 5 satyagrahis were

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64 Ibid.
65 Letter from the Inspector of Police, to the Commissioner of Police dated 20.2.1926.
posted there relieving the first party. They remained there till 5 p.m. Dr. M.E. Naidu visited the spot and went away. C. Muthuswamy announced that next day’s satyagraha would be started through the Sannadhi street on the eastern road of Suchindram.

The anti-satyagrahis lodged some allegations regarding the violence of the satyagrahis to Mahatma Gandhi. In response to that, Gandhi dispatched a letter to Dr. M.E. Naidu on 26th February 1926 demanding full details regarding the satyagraha movement at Suchindram. In reply to the above letter Dr. M.E. Naidu wrote to Gandhiji denying the allegations. This was intimated to one Arunachalam of Suchindram, who had reported the violence of the satyagrahis at Suchindram.

On 18th August, Mr. Sivathanu Pillai, the honourable elected member of the Thovalai Constituency, spoke on the satyagraha campaign at Suchindram in the Travancore Legislative Council. He brought to the notice of the government some cases of assault and blackmailing in connection with the Suchindram satyagraha. He further said that 13 persons joined together and assaulted some youngsters belonging to the depressed classes in the very

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66 Letter from T. Kumaran Thampi, Inspector of Police, Edalakudy, to the Commissioner of Police, Travancore, Trivandrum, dated 16.6.1101 M.R.
67 Letter from the Inspector of Police, Edalakudy, to the Commissioner of Police dated 30.1.1926.
69 Ibid.
presence of a head-constable and three other constables.\(^{70}\) Another member who supported M. Sivathanu Pillai was M. Subramoniya Pillai, member of the Agasteeswaram constituency. He said in the Assembly that the peaceful and non-violent satyagrahis were regularly and systematically assaulted by the rowdies of Suchindram.\(^{71}\)

As announced earlier the satyagraha work was begun at the eastern road in Sannadhi street at Suchindram next day, that was on 30\(^{\text{th}}\) January 1926 at 8 a.m.\(^{72}\) In the morning E.V. Ramaswami Naicker of Erode was present there.\(^{73}\) Dr. M.E. Naidu also visited Suchindram and went away. There were ten volunteers under Captain Muthuswamy. The satyagrahis were prevented by the anti-satyagrahis from going forward in the streets at Suchindram. In the afternoon they were removed and another party of volunteers was posted there. Further, two volunteers pushed forward to enter the street connecting Sannadhi street and the main road. Those two persons were also prevented by the anti-satyagrahis. The satyagraha came to a close at 5 p.m. and there was an open meeting of the satyagrahis on the bank of the river Palayar. M. Sivathanupillai, Dr. M.E. Naidu of Kottar, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker of Erode and Perumal Panicker of Kottar who participated in the

\(^{71}\) Ibid., p. 682.
\(^{72}\) Letter from the Inspector of Police, Edalakudy, to the Commissioner of Police, dated 30.1.1926.
\(^{73}\) Ibid.
meeting spoke on satyagraha movement for temple entry in Travancore. The meeting began at 6 p.m. and came to a close at 8 p.m. It was announced later in the meeting that the next day being Sunday, there would be no regular satyagraha, but a procession of the volunteers would be held.

The satyagraha won gradually the sympathy of some leading enlightened caste Hindus. The movement received momentum when Govindaraja, the brother of M.E. Naidu arrived at Suchindram on 11th February 1926 with a group of fifteen volunteers. The satyagraha volunteers S. Annamala Samban of Kakkad, Ganapathy Adavi of Kottar, Captain Muthuswami and Yesudiyan Samban of Kakkad were present from 6 a.m. to 12 noon on the northern road. Anti-satyagraha villagers, Chudalayandi Pillai, Mathevan Pillai, Andiappan and Velayudhan Pillai were sitting there in opposition. The brother of Dr. M.E. Naidu went with a flag and said to the anti-satyagrahis that they would enter into the streets in the afternoon. At the Sannadhi street the satyagraha volunteers Karuthudayan Samban of Kakkad, Chellappan Pillai of Eranial and Rengaya Panicken of

74 Letter from the Inspector of Police, Edalakudy, to the Commissioner of Police, dated 30.1.1926.
75 Ibid., dated 11 February 1926.
76 Ibid., dated 14 February 1926.
77 Ibid.
78 Letter from T. Kumaran Tampi, Inspector of Police, Edalakudi, to the Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, dated 11.2.1926.
Kottar were present. Anti-satyagrahis K. Arumugam Pillai, Desia Pillai, Ayyakutty, Mathevan Pillai and Kolappan Pillai of Suchindram were there in opposition. On receiving this information the anti-satyagrahis rang the bell at Perambalam Temple and gave information to the villagers regarding the intention of the satyagrahis.

As the agitation of the satyagrahis was intensified, the 12 Pidakaikars numbering nearly 10,000 assembled in the Sannadhi street under the leadership of Madhevan Pillai, K.S. Velayudhan Pillai and Mootha Pillai. They passed a resolution regarding the prevention of low castes from entering the streets of Suchindram. It is interesting to note that the meeting was attended by M. Sivathanu Pillai, the son of Madhevan Pillai and Gandhi Raman who were active participants in the satyagraha movement. When the resolution against the entry of low caste people in the roads and temples was read out, the anti-satyagrahis clapped their hands with great enthusiasm but the resolution was opposed by M. Sivathanu Pillai and Gandhi Raman.

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79 Letter from T. Kumaran Tampi, Inspector of Police, Edalakudi, to the Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, dated 11.2.1926.
80 Ibid.
81 Lajapathi, M., Kumarimavatta Swatantra Poratta Thyagi Siva Muthu Karuppa Pillai (Tamil), p. 40. (Nanjilnad was divided into 12 regions known as ‘Pidakais’ and the high-caste people of the pidakais were called ‘pidakaikars’. The twelve pidagais were Melpidagai, Naduppidagai, Anantapuram pidagai, Alakiyapandiapuram pidagai, Thovalai pidagai, Thalakudi pidagai, Kottar pidagai, Agasteeswaram pidagai, Parakkai pidagai, Suchindran pidagai, Padapatty pidagai and Terpidagai.)
82 Moni, P.S., op.cit., p. 18.
The important pidakaikars who participated in the meeting were Thanumalayaperumal Pillai of Suchindram, Thanu Thambiya Pillai of Parakkai, Madhavan Pillai of Cheramadom, Sivathanu Pillai of Boothapandy, Kumarrswamy Pillai of Kadukkarai and Paradesiya Pillai of Eraviputhur.\footnote{Moni, P.S., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 18.}

By 12 noon, another batch of satyagrahis namely Roopachandra Lala of Kottar, Arumuga Perumal Panickar of Kottar and Govindaraju Naidu came to the Sannadhi street and relieved the first batch; while villagers Arumugom Pillai, Desia Pillai, Ayyakutty, Kolappa Pillai and Mathevan Pillai were there still opposing the satyagrahis and on the northern road satyagrahis Chinnathampi Samban and Karavan Samban of Kakkad, Raman Pillai of Eraviputhur and Ganapathy of Kottar and Captain Muthuswamy relieved the first batch while the anti-satyagrahis Chadayappa Pillai, Mathevan Pillai, Andiappan, Subbayya Pillai and Velayudhan Pillai were in opposition.\footnote{Letter from T. Kumaran Tampi, Inspector of Police, to the Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 11 February 1926.} Captain Muthuswamy and Chinnathampi Samban of Kakkad pushed through their way against the anti-satyagrahis. In the tussle that followed their clothes were torn.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} Captain Muthuswamy and Chinnathampi Samban removed their Khathar coats and caps and were ready to fight.

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83 Moni, P.S., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 18.
84 Letter from T. Kumaran Tampi, Inspector of Police, to the Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 11 February 1926.
85 \textit{Ibid.}
However, further clashes were averted by the intervention of the police. These developments created a stir in the village.

The news of the clashes between the satyagrahis and the anti-satyagrahis at Suchindram spread like wild fire in the surrounding villages and more than 200 villagers from Kakkad, Kakumputhoor, Kurichi, Parakkai, Marungoor, Thamarakulam, Osaravilai, Eraviputhur and Therur assembled at Suchindram. They stood behind the anti-satyagrahis at both the points where the latter were sitting on the road. They were on their alert to prevent the satyagrahis from forcibly entering into the streets. As the police was warning the people against any possible breach of peace, Gandhi Dhas Muthuswami and S.V. Chinnathampi Samban stood up, ran to and fro and pushed forward against the anti-satyagrahis at 5 p.m. on the northern road. Anti-satyagrahis tried to prevent them. But Muthuswami attempted to go forward along with Chinnathampi Samban by breaching the bamboos fixed across the street and proceed to go beyond the prohibition board, and enter the open ground on both the sides of the road. There also they were prevented by the villagers. Again Muthuswami went towards the Chellam Pillai of Suchindram who was an anti-satyagrahi and hit him on the belly.

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86 English Records, Trivandrum, Confidential Section File No. 662, Satyagraha at Suchindram, Letter from R. Vishnu Pillai, Devaswom Commissioner to the Dewan of Travancore, M.E. Watts, Nagercoil Camp, 12 February, 1926.

87 Ibid.
with his head. This caused some disturbance but it was stopped by the local police. In spite of the presence of the police, the villagers namely Chellam Pillai and parakkai P. Arumugom Pillai and others pushed Muthuswami and Chinnathampi Samban away and beat them on their back. At 6 p.m. both the parties quit the place.

The Suchindram satyagraha suffered a setback owing to police raids in the homes of the satyagrahis as well as the opposition of the high castes. Still there were sporadic outbreaks of clashes and counter clashes between the satyagrahis and those who opposed them. The untouchables were severely threatened with destruction for their support to the satyagrahis. Their children were severely assaulted on their way back from the mission school at Nagercoil. This was purposely done at the instigation of one Kadukkarai Kumaraswamy Pillai and Suchindram Thanumalayaperumal Pillai. G. Devasahayam, a native of Kakkad complained about this matter to the Police. Infuriated at this, Thanumalayaperumal threatened to destroy the village of Kakkad. The government took action prohibiting M.E. Naidu from making public speeches. Hence the satyagrahis appealed to Gandhiji

88 English Records, Trivandrum, Confidential Section File No. 662, Satyagraha at Suchindram, Letter from R. Vishnu Pillai, Devaswom Commissioner to the Dewan of Travancore, M.E. Watts, Nagercoil Camp, 12 February, 1926.
90 No. D. Dis. 1475 (Judicial) Telegram dated 13.2.1926 from G. Devasahayam to the Dewan of Travancore.
who visited Nagercoil on 8th October 1927, met the Commissioner of Police and discussed the satyagraha movement of Suchindram and explained to him that the demand of the satyagrahis was very legitimate.\textsuperscript{92} Gandhiji asked the satyagrahis to desist from the satyagraha movement for the time being at Suchindram. He then met the Regent Her Highness Sethu Lakshmi Bai at Trivandrum and discussed the question of Temple entry.\textsuperscript{93}

At this juncture the Nair Service Society and Harijan Seva Sangh recommended to the government the granting of temple entry right to the non-caste Hindus. Mahatma Gandhi also carried an ‘anxious negotiations’ with the government authorities in Travancore regarding the matter.\textsuperscript{94} Now Gandhiji advised the satyagrahis to carry on non-violent agitation by squatting on the streets until they were allowed by the anti-satyagrahis to enter the streets. Accordingly a party of 24 volunteers went to Suchindram on 27th February 1929 and started the Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{95}

The failure of the government to implement the Vaikkam Settlement of 1926 by which the government had agreed to throw open the roads at Suchindram also led to the intensification of the Suchindram satyagraha in

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 100.
\textsuperscript{95} Mahadev Desai, The Epic of Travancore, p. 22.
1930. On 13th May 1930 satyagraha was resumed under the captainship of Gandhi Raman Pillai. A.C. Sundaram Pillai was elected Secretary of the temple-entry committee. He collected funds for the satyagraha movement from prominent persons like Ramakrishna Nadar and Subramoniya Nadar at Rajakkamangalam.\textsuperscript{96} Gandhi Raman Pillai was advised by Tamburan, the Superintendent of Police, not to resume satyagraha but he turned a deaf year.\textsuperscript{97} Hence the police raided his house and seized several hand-bills, and posters and banners, connected with Suchindram satyagraha.\textsuperscript{98} As the satyagraha movement gathered momentum, Gandhi Raman Pillai was arrested on 29.9.1105 M.E. at Thuckalay.

On May 1930 some satyagrahis distributed printed handbills to the public with an object of organizing meetings of both caste and non-caste Hindus to protest against the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi.\textsuperscript{99} One of the meetings was to be held in the eastern ear street at Suchindram and it was stated that on such an occasion the caste Hindus would welcome the members of the other castes. As advertised in the hand-bill, some caste Hindus led by Eraviputhoor Ganesan, Siathanu of Marungoor and Kutty Vellar accompanied by a Sambavar, named Kakkadu Vallikkunnu and few

\textsuperscript{96} Patel, A.C. Sundaram Pillai, 80th Birthday Celebration Souvenir, 1988, p. 5. (Interview with A.C. Sundaram Pillai, dated 6.5.1989).

\textsuperscript{97} Moni, P.S., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 30.

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Ibid}.

others proceeded to the Sannadhi Street at Suchindram at 3.30 p.m. on 30th Medam 1105 M.E. (1930), but they were stopped at the entry limit and arrested by the police under section 134, of the Criminal Procedure Code. A case was registered against (S.C. No. 48 of 1105) six persons including Gandhi Raman Pillai. They were brought to the padmanabhapuram Additional District Magistrate Court and they were convicted. The order was later on set aside by the High Court of Travancore. 100

Though some of the satyagrahis were arrested and fined by the government they never stopped their satyagraha movement. It is on record that one Manickam Vaithiyar and certain other Sambavars of Suchindram informed the government regarding their wish to enter into the temple through the Car streets of Suchindram, in view of the fact that the accused in the Suchindram satyagraha case had been acquitted by the High Court of Travancore. 101 By another letter, Manickam Vaithiyar, Barnabas, Gandhi Raman and V. Nilakantan informed the government that they were going to use the temple tank and enter the temple on 19.3.1106 M.E. 102 On 8.1.1930, a batch of Pariahs passed through the eastern Car street and the road to the

100 Chief Secretary’s File No. 726, Judgment in Suchindram Satyagraha cases and the situation thereafter at Suchindram.

101 English Records, Trivandrum, Confidential Section, File No. 726, Copy of the Judgement in Suchindram Satyagraha cases, Trivandrum, 5 November 1930, p. 5.

east of the temple tank at about 4.30 p.m. At 9 a.m. another batch of four men (Pariahs) passed through the southern and eastern Car Streets and then through the road to the east of the temple tank. Another batch of five Pariahs took the same route by 9.15 a.m. Though the Pariahs and their leaders violated rules of the temple with impunity, the temple was well guarded and the pujas were going on regularly.

On 19.11.1930, a batch of 30 high caste men and 4 batches of Pariah boys passed through the western Car street. But the caste Hindus of the street prevented them and hence the Pariah boys went back. After some time, a rowdy, along with four others matched through the same street holding a knife in one hand and a big stick in the other. But they were hooted down by some of the savarna residents of the street.

On receipt of information about the above incidence Mr. Achuthan Pillai, Assistant Superintendent of Police and the Police Inspectors of Nagercoil and Edalakudi rushed to the spot. They were then informed of what had taken place and of the likelihood of the Pariahs coming in a body at night to wreak vengeance on the savarna villagers Mr. Achuthan Pillai and others proceeded immediately to the Paracheri where a hundred of the

103 Report from Dikshitar, Devaswom Commissioner, dated 8.11.1930 to L.A. Bishop, Commissioner of Police.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., dated 10.11.1930.
villagers had assembled there to assault them. Mr. Achuthan Pillai then explained the matter to the villagers that the recent judgement of the High Court of Travancore, did ensure their right to enter the roads and temples and assured that the government would be very sympathetic in the matter of temple entry and final solution could be arrived after the pending cases were settled. The Pariahs were advised by him to have patience and not to create any trouble and they agreed. In spite of the assurance given by the Pariahs, the Police Inspector of Edalakudy and some Policemen were posted for night duty in Suchindram. Prohibitory orders were issued by the Additional District Magistrate and by the government to prevent the use of the Sanketam road by the avarnas.

Encouraged by the Judgement of the High Court, one Manickam and certain other Sambavars informed the government that they had decided to go in procession through the Car streets of Suchindram and to the temple. The Ezhava of Kottar also informed the government that they had decided to pass through the Car streets in motor cars and buses. However, their attempts were thwarted by the intervention of Pitchu Iyengar, the Commissioner of Police. Still the satyagrahis continued to use the Car street

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106 Report from Dikshitar, Devaswom Commissioner, dated 8.11.1930 to L.A. Bishop, Commissioner of Police, dated 10.11.1930.

107 Letter from Devaswom Commissioner, 12.11.1039 to A. Venkatarama Aiyar, the Acting Dewan of Travancore.

108 Ibid.
and Sannadhi street of Suchindram without paying heed to the instructions of the police.

Since the police feared that the Pariahs would attack the caste Hindus in the night the District Superintendent of Police arranged for police patrol. Depressed classes were seriously assaulted at various villages like Erachakulam, Narikkulamcheri and Elangadai.\(^{109}\) This tense situation lasted for a number of days.

It must be noted that the Suchindram Satyagraha had a remarkable impact on the government of Travancore. Realising the magnitude of the problem at Suchindram and elsewhere the government turned its attention towards remedial measures. This led to the appointment of a temple entry enquiry committee in 1932.\(^{110}\)

### 2.7. The Temple Entry Enquiry Committee

The Suchindram satyagraha and the pressing demand for the right of Temple entry for the lower castes both from the right thinking men of the higher castes and the lower forced the government to conduct enquiry. The committee with Subramania Aiyer, the retired Dewan of Travancore, as the President of the Committee was announced by the Government of


Travancore on 8 November 1932. The total members of the committee were nine and it included two low caste people also. The committee submitted its report on 11th January 1934 and it stated that all the people irrespective of caste had the right to use public roads, wells, ponds and inns. But a Proclamation for Temple entry was not mentioned in this report, and so it was opposed by caste Hindus vehemently.

Since they had no right to enter temples, most of the Ezhavas and Nadars wanted to join Christianity. Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan of Travancore realized the critical situation of the Hindu religion and came forward to issue a Proclamation on this matter.

2.8. The Proclamation of 1936

As already pointed out the report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee impressed upon the government about the need for throwing open the temples, roads, chatrams, wells and tanks to all, irrespective of caste. Moreover, the mounting pressure from the reformists led to the promulgation of the historic Temple Entry Proclamation. On 12th November 1936, at the instance of C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan of Travancore, Maharaja Sri Chithira Thirunal issued the proclamation on his 25th birthday.

113 Gladstone, J.W., Protestant Christianity and People’s Movement in Kerala, Trivandrum, 1984, p. 358
The text of the proclamation is as follows: “Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and all comprehending toleration, centuries, adapted itself to the Hindu subjects should by consolations and solace of the Hindu faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command, that subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping at the temples controlled by us and our Government”.

The proclamation laid down clear cut rules for the low caste for entry into the temples.

The rules provided for the observance and maintenance of the customs and usages relating to worship and ceremonies obtaining in temples. They specified the classes of persons who should not enter the temples. Persons who were not Hindus, those who were under pollution due to birth or death in their families, drunken or insane persons, women at certain times, professional beggars, persons suffering from contagious diseases were not to enter the temple. Taking meat into the temple, smoking within the premises, carrying cloth umbrella and kerosene lamb and such practices would be

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115 The Regulations and Proclamations of Travancore, 1112 M.E., Vol. IX, p. 3.
The Chief Devaswom officer was vested with powers to grant or withhold permission depending on customs and traditions. The authority shall prevail until set aside by higher authority. The Chief Officer had powers to pass orders for arrest against those who violated the rules. If anyone contravenes the rules or commits any offence which requires purificatory ceremonies, he shall be punished by a Magistrate. In matters regarding clarification or interpretation of any of those rules the decision of the Dewan shall be final. The rules prescribed in general terms, the dress of the worshippers and the objects which they were prohibited from carrying into the temples.

The proclamation occupied a unique place in the socio-religious life of Travancore because of “the sublimity of its conception, the loftiness of its ideals and the magnitude of its effects”. It is rightly stated, “no act of reform of any ruler in India has so far stirred the hearts, roused the enthusiasm or evoked the gratitude of the people to the extent that this momentous proclamation has done”. Mahatma Gandhi said, “I verily believe that when all else Travancore is forgotten, that one act of the Maharaja, the proclamation, will be remembered by future generations with

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117 Ibid., p. 580.
118 The Temple Entry Proclamation Memorial Souvenir, 1942, p. 1.
119 Ibid.
gratitude. To him the proclamation was a miracle of modern times. He also congratulated the Travancore Durbar and its advisers for the magnanimous act on their part. According to C. Rajagopalachari, it was “easily the most non-violent and bloodless revolution in the history of man in recent years”. According to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Maharaja’s Proclamation was the greatest of the achievements of Gandhiji in regard to the eradication of untouchability. The Temple Entry Proclamation is to be viewed from several angles not only as a Hindu act, not only as an Indian act, but as an act of liberation and sublimation of humanity. T.K. Velu Pillai characterized the proclamation as the “Spiritual Magna Carta of Travancore”. The proclamation was “applauded as a charter of religious liberty, and as a document of first-rate importance in the annals not only of Travancore, but of Hinduism. It marked a milestone in the progress of the backward communities. All walks of life were thrown open to them as freely as the higher castes. In commemorating the Temple Entry Proclamation, a set of stamps numbering four with different nominations namely three

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120 Souvenir on the occasion of the Shastiabhdha Poorthy of Our Patron Sree Parmanabha Dasa Sri Chithira Thirunal Ramavarma, 4\textsuperscript{th} November 1972, Sri Thirunal Sangeetha Sabha, Trivandrum, p. nil.
121 The Temple Entry Proclamation Memorial Souvenir, 1942, p. 2.
122 Souvenir on the Occasion of the Shastiabhdha Poorthy of Our Patron Sree Parmanabha Dasa Sri Chithira Thirunal Ramavarma, 4\textsuperscript{th} November 1972, Sri Thirunal Sangeetha Sabha, Trivandrum, p. nil.
chukrams, one chuckram and eight cash, twelve cash and six cash was issued in 1937. Thus, the depressed class of Travancore obtained equal right and self respect. The people of Travancore will remember it for years to come.