CHAPTER-V

TEMPLE ENTRY POLITICS

The tangible success of the Temple entry Bill was an offshoot of Rajaji’s advocacy for the vice regal sanction which was further supported by Devadas Gandhi. This was amidst the points and counterpoints pertaining to the issue. Laterly Rajaji was responsible for driving the last trail on the Temple Entry Bill, thus making the issue dead into a coffin.

Temple entry by the depressed classes of Tamil Nadu was due to the efforts of many social reformers and social minded political leaders. The struggle for national liberation under Gandhi strengthened itself in the Civil Disobedience Movement. While he was hectic in mobilising popular support towards this end, leaders led by B.R. Ambedkar sought social safeguards in the form of reservation of seats in the central and provincial legislatures based on proportional representation to the Depressed Classes. As an outcome of All India socio-political developments, and in responding to the need of the time, the Justice Party backed P. Subbarayan Ministry initiated the 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 visualised to monopolise the credit for all the social reforms for the Party and himself. Encouraged by some of the Congress leaders, C.S. Ranga Iyer
and M.C. Rajah introduced measures in the central and provincial legislatures against untouchability and civic barriers. Till the formation of the Congress Ministry under provincial autonomy, 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 the Madras Presidency in July 1937, he initiated administrative measures besides introducing bills through legislature.

**Poona Pact and Its Impact**

Although the issue of temple entry figures in the nationalist agenda in 1920’s, it was not until the Poona Pact that the Congress showed active interest in it.\(^1\) By 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 in the central and provincial legislatures of India.\(^2\) As an immediate impact of the Poona Pact, the caste-Hindus at a public meeting in Bombay on 25\(^{th}\) September 1932 passed a significant resolution in favour of the depressed classes.\(^3\) 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

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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”.

As a commitment to his stand on untouchables, M.K. Gandhi also issued a public statement on 25th 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 be resided 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”. To give a fillip to the appeal of M.K. Gandhi, Rajaji along with Rajendra Prasad proclaimed the birth anniversary of M.K. Gandhi as the ‘anti-untouchability week’. It was observed throughout India from 27th September. Leaders and reformers attended a number of meetings and thereby public awareness was created for the

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abolition of untouchability. On 30th 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 Amritlal 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 early as possible. 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. Venkatramama Iyer 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 Devasthanam Committee meeting was convened on 7th October 1932, it also resolved to recommend the early introduction of legislative measures to remove disabilities.

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8 *Sutanitra Sanghu*, 30th September and 7th October 1932.
9 *I.A.R.*, Vol. II, 1932, p.257. The Tamil Nadu branch of Anti-untouchability League was established on 28th 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, *Sutanitra Sanghu*, 23rd November 1932.
10 Viyogi Hari (tr.), *Thakkar Bapa*, New Delhi, 1977, p.59.
Temple Entry Resolution of Subbarayan

Realising the need of a legislative measure for temple entry and persuaded by Rajaji, P.Subbarayan, the Premier of the Madras Presidency introduced in the Madras Legislative Council the Temple Entry Resolution on 1st November 1932, as a prelude to a possible future bill. It marked the beginning of an agitational politics in Tamil Nadu for the abolition of untouchability. This resolution included three notable provisions. Firstly, it urged the Government to recognise the strong and growing public feeling in the Hindu community to remove the disabilities of common worship at temples. Secondly, it sought the opening of temples to the depressed classes taking advantage of the Poona Pact. Thirdly, 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 P.Subbarayan pointed out that in the event of Council accepting it, he would make suitable legislations. In the course of discussion, members were divided

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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. \(^{16}\) C.Natesa Mudaliar and C.R.Parthasarathy Iyengar catalogued the benefits of the resolution that it would advance them. V.P.Narayan Nambiar briefed that it would remove the greatest curse on the Hindu religion and the most tragic blot on the Hindu society. Muslim members like Yakub Hasan too expressed views in favour to pass the resolution successfully. In advocating the resolution, K.Alamelumangathayar 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 ‘\textit{sati}’ by legislation and other movements led by 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.\(^{17}\) 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.\(^{18}\)

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 V.P. Narayan Nambiar 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. When C.S. Ranga Iyer gave notice for the Abolition of Untouchability Bill in the Central Legislature on 28th November 1932. Meanwhile, M.C. Rajah, a member of Central Legislature with an aim to remove social disabilities presented the Untouchability Abolition Bill in December 1932. Among the provincial bills, the bill of P. Subbarayan was considered most noteworthy than the bill of V.P. Narayan Nambiar on the temple entry issue. It dealt with the segregation of the depressed classes from temple worship as a social

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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.24 Further they came to know that many of the trustees of the temples were whole-heartedly welcoming the temple entry reform, but at the same time they were afraid of allowing the depressed classes into the temples because they were restricted to do so by Section 40, of the Madras Hindu Religious Endowment Acts II of 1927.25 Therefore, to avoid any imposition and compulsion on the trustees, the bill stipulated certain norms for the temple entry.26

P. 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 an argument failed to get support from the upper caste Non-Brahmin politicians. The Non-Brahmin legislators opposed the temple entry rights of the depressed classes and instead placed more emphasis on their educational and economic advancement27

The majority of the Non-Brahmin politicians displayed a conservative attitude on the issue of temple entry. But the depressed class leaders were somewhat guarded in their opinion. R. Srinivasan felt that the bill moved by P. Subbarayan was modest in terms of aims and objectives. R. Srinivasan, who differed from Ambedkar’s views on temple entry, felt that a legislation on such lines would lead to the spiritual uplift of the depressed classes. However, R. 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 these classes. He argued that temple entry issue was fast losing its importance as a substantial section of the Adi Dravidas had been drawn towards the atheist and anti-caste Self-Respect Movement.

The enlightened caste-Hindus pleaded for the temple entry right of the depressed classes in the Madras Legislative Council. The reformist Hindu politicians opined that there was no historical basis behind the

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28 M.L.C.P., *Op. Cit.*, p.245. Srinivasan pointed out that despite all attempts to resolve a long-standing religious demand of the ‘untouchables’, the bill hardly made any attempt to restore the temples, which in the distant past had been managed by the depressed classes.

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. *M.L.C.P., Op. Cit.*, p.245

30 *Ibid.*, p.246. 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.
social ostracism of the depressed classes.\textsuperscript{31} C.R.Parthasarathi Iyyangar, who had participated in the debate on the bill stated that there was no Hindu \textit{shastra} which sanctioned the practice of social segregation. He observed:

\begin{quote}
“By allowing the depressed class people to enter the temples, we are not going to achieve the millennium and make the \textit{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 contempt those persons who are weaker than yourselves in culture, in status, in ability and skills.”\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

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.\textsuperscript{33} However, a sizeable section of the Non-brahmin legislators voted with the other members, including Brahmins, in support of the bill.\textsuperscript{34} The Provincial Government, fearing a nationwide repercussion, avoided taking a hasty stand on the issue.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.}, p.238.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, p.230.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, pp,250-51.
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 Depressed Classes Religious Disabilities Bill in the Madras Legislative Council. 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. All India Varnashrama Swarajya Sangha, in its meeting in Guruvayur, 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 handful of self-seeking politicians had been trying to force the issue of temple entry by issuing threats of fast and referendum.

On 3rd 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 by

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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. (C.W.M.G., Vol.LII, Ahmedabad, 1972, p.309.)

36 Home Political File No. 50/IV/1933, N.A.I., New Delhi.
the royal proclamation of 1858. It also declared that a “mixed legislature,” comprising Non-Hindu members and alien government representatives, was not competent 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.37

Despite the growing sanatanist opposition, the Tamil Nadu Congress showed no signs of retreating from its demand of temple entry by 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.38 Dilip Menon pointed out that Gandhi believed that the depressed classes needed to perform the role of admiring audiences vis-à-vis the entire show of self-sacrifice that was being enacted before them by upper castes.39

38 Susan Bayly, Caste, Society and Politics in India: From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age, New Delhi, 2000, p.247.
In the meantime, the Tamil Congressmen displayed an interest in entering into negotiations with the Government. Rajaji sent a telegram to C.F. Andrews requesting him to make a representation before the India Office for facilitating the Viceregal sanction to the temple entry bills that had been introduced before the Madras Legislative Council.\footnote{Pradhan, A.C. \textit{Op.Cit.}, p.230.} The active involvement of eminent political personalities like Rajaji and Devadas Gandhi largely accounted for the Congress successes.\footnote{F.R., for the First Half of January 1933.} 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.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

Meanwhile, M.K. 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 untouchables. The Government suspected the move and conditioned him on 3rd November 1932 that if he discontinued the Civil Disobedience Movement, he would be given all facilities for Harijan works as desired.\footnote{\textit{I.A.R.}, Vol. II, 1933, pp.352-353.} The Government’s stand gave dissatisfaction to M.K. Gandhi and he started his Harijan welfare activities in a possible manner by issuing a series of nine statements in terms of matters related to temple entry, Hinduism, depressed classes and removal of untouchability.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Vol.II, 1932, pp.261-274.}
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, apprehending 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.\(^{45}\) M.K.Gandhi, at last threatened to commence a great and fierce war of atma sakthi (spiritual power) since 2\(^{nd}\) January 1933, in the absence of Viceroy’s sanction for the introduction of P.Subbarayan bill.\(^{46}\) Gandhi also proposed to consider the postponement of his fast if a social change was realised through a law in the near future.\(^{47}\) 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.\(^{48}\) Yet, realising the Government’s difficulty, he gave some more time.\(^{49}\)

However, the delay of Viceroy to accord sanction to the bill of P.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 \textit{India} and

\(^{45}\) \textit{Times of India}, 24\(^{th}\) February 1933; \textit{Harijan}, 25\(^{th}\) February and 4\(^{th}\) March 1933.


\(^{47}\) \textit{The Times of India}, 11\(^{th}\) November 1933.


Tennindia highly protested against the inactivity of the Viceroy. The Gandhi and Ananda Bodhini appealed that the Government without any delay should come to do its duty because the public opinion was already created on the signing of Poona Pact and there was a large attendance in the Bombay conference. The Andhra Patrika urged the Government of India as well as the Madras Government to respect those popular feelings favouring P.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.

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50 India, 23rd December 1932; TennIndia, 27th December 1932, M.N.N.R., 1932, p.43.
51 Gandhi, 28th December 1932; Ananda Bodhini, 4th January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, p.43.
52 Andhra Patrika, 6th January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, p.43.
53 Home Political File No. 50/1/1933, NAI, New Delhi.
54 Ibid.
The lukewarm response on the part of the depressed classes in Madras Presidency vis-à-vis Congress’ Harijan campaign greatly influenced the Government’s 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. \(^{56}\) 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. \(^{57}\) 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 P.Subbarayan. For this purpose, he approached his own colleagues and experts and sought the views of the local government. \(^{58}\) As there was a divided Hindu opinion on the bill, Lord Willingdon, on his

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\(^{56}\) 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. (Ibid., p.16.)

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

decision on 23\textsuperscript{rd} January 1933\textsuperscript{59} refused permission to P.Subbarayan and V.P.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 circulated for public opinion.\textsuperscript{62} On the basis of the public opinion, the Government was to decide on the legislation and its implementation according to the needs of circumstances.\textsuperscript{63}

The Viceroy’s refusal of P.Subbarayan’s bill came in for severe criticism by the press. The \textit{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.\textsuperscript{64} The Samadarsini questioned the validity of the Viceroy’s objection to the introduction of P. Subbarayan’s bill in the provincial legislature.\textsuperscript{65} The Hindu observed that the Viceroy’s refusal to give sanction to P.Subbarayan’s bill could not be justified either on technical grounds or on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{59} \textit{The Hindu}, 23\textsuperscript{rd} January 1933; \textit{Tamil Nadu}, 23\textsuperscript{rd} January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, pp.11 and 103.
\item \textsuperscript{61} \textit{C.W.M.G.}, Vol.LIII, January-March, 1933, pp.14-15.
\item \textsuperscript{63} \textit{Samadarsini}, 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, p.105.
\item \textsuperscript{64} \textit{Podu Jana Ooliyan}, 29\textsuperscript{th} January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, pp.104-105.
\item \textsuperscript{65} \textit{Samadharsini}, 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, p.105.
\end{itemize}
the ground that it involved an All Indian nature.\(^{66}\) The Swarajya observed
that the Viceroy’s blank refusal to P.Subbarayan’s bill was a tragic error of
judgment, 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 H.R.E., Act of 1927.\(^{67}\) As an extreme form of
attack, \textit{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.\(^{68}\) Gandhi, publishing
another cartoon highlighted the double role of the Viceroy. While the
\textit{Andhra Patrika} and Stri-Dharma questioned the technicalities and legality
behind the Viceroy’s power.\(^{69}\)

There were some papers which welcomed the refusal of
P.Subbarayan’s bill. The Tamil Nadu, Arya Dharmam, Rahbar-I-Deccan, the
Nowjawan, the New Times and Madras Mail justified the Viceroy’s
decision\(^{70}\) 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

\(^{66}\) \textit{The Hindu}, 23\textsuperscript{rd} January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, pp.11-12.
\(^{67}\) \textit{Swarajya}, 24\textsuperscript{th} January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, p.12.
\(^{68}\) \textit{Sudantira Sanghu}, 26\textsuperscript{th} January 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, p.104.
\(^{69}\) \textit{Gandhi}, 27\textsuperscript{th} January 1933; \textit{Andhra Patrika}, 23\textsuperscript{rd} January 1933,M.N.N.R., 1933, p.104.
\(^{70}\) \textit{Tamil Nadu}, 23\textsuperscript{rd} January 1933; \textit{Arya Dharma}, 26\textsuperscript{th} July 1933; \textit{Rahbar-I-Deccan}, 21\textsuperscript{st} February 1933; \textit{Nowjawn}, 26\textsuperscript{th} February 1933, M.N.N.R., 1933, pp.103-106 and 173.
way to social reform but by preventing a hasty and ill-considered legislation before public opinion had enough time to express itself.\textsuperscript{71} On the other hand, the decision of Viceroy came as a shock to the advocates of the temple-entry.\textsuperscript{72} M.K.Gandhi commented on the decision as an unintentional challenge to Hinduism and to social reformers.\textsuperscript{73} Yet, he viewed that in any way the decision would not affect the temple entry process which had already progressed from Guruvayur in the extreme South to Haridwar in the North.\textsuperscript{74} C.S.Ranga Iyer condemned the Viceroy’s decision as the worst form of bureaucratic intrigue and bureaucratic injustice.\textsuperscript{75} After the refusal to the provincial bills, the same nature of bills came to be introduced in the Central Legislature.\textsuperscript{76}

**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\textsuperscript{th} March 1933 to amend section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code of 1898 which was used mostly against the untouchables.\textsuperscript{77} However, he could not move the bill in the Assembly since there were two

\textsuperscript{71} F.R., 20\textsuperscript{th} January and 20\textsuperscript{th} February 1933.
\textsuperscript{72} Mahatma Gandhi, *Harijana Pani*, (Tamil), Madras, 1933, p.21.
\textsuperscript{75} C.S. Ranga Iyer’s speech on the Untouchability Abolition Bill, 1\textsuperscript{st} February 1934, G.O. No. 2121, L.G.D., 24\textsuperscript{th} July 1934, p.35.
\textsuperscript{77} *Ibid.*
pending bills\textsuperscript{78} of M.C.Rajah and C.S.Ranga Iyer on the same subject\textsuperscript{79} concerning the untouchability Abolition Bill of M.C.Rajah, it was aimed to remove the disabilities arising from any existing enactment, regulation or order and any custom or usage and interpretation of law.\textsuperscript{80}

M.C. Rajah sponsored the bill on 24\textsuperscript{th} March 1933 in the Central Legislative Assembly. Immediately the bill encountered a strong opposition.\textsuperscript{81} Brojendra Mitter, the Law Member opposed the bill more severely than even the orthodox members.\textsuperscript{82} He characterised the bill vague with indefiniteness.\textsuperscript{83} Hence, the Government of Madras circulated the bill for the selected officers, associations and orthodox Hindus and for formality to some others too.\textsuperscript{84}

Then the meetings the Government allowed C.S. Ranga Iyer to introduce \textit{“Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bill”} (Reproduction of P. Subbarayan’s Madras Temple Entry Bill) on 24\textsuperscript{th} March 1933. When the bill was introduced, it was opposed by an orthodox member Vasudea 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 Victoria\textsuperscript{85}.

\textsuperscript{79} G.O. No. 2121, L.G.D., 24\textsuperscript{th} July 1934, pp.124-125.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{I.A.R.}, Vol.II, 1933, p.106.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{C.L.A.D.}, Vol.III, 1933, p.2533.
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Mathrubhumi}, 4\textsuperscript{th} February 1934; \textit{India} 2\textsuperscript{nd} February, 1934, M.N.N.R., 1934, pp.109-110.
\textsuperscript{84} G.O. No.1106, L.G.D., 7\textsuperscript{th} April 1934; G.O. No.2121, 24\textsuperscript{th} July 1934, pp.68-144.
However, R.K. Shanmuga Chetty, a Non-Brahmin leader and President of the Assembly welcomed this bill for legislation. Therefore, it was a struggle between M.K. Gandhi and his sympathizers on 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 23rd August 1934. The Hindu Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bill of C.S. Ranga Iyer received a report about 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 the orthodox people. So they quoted the views of B.R. Ambedkar for temple entry. This

87 Ibid., pp. 155-156.
change of Congress attitude was very clear when G.K. Devadhar, the President of Maharastra H.S.S indicated the relaxation in the stand of the Congress on temple entry to Harijans. When they approached Rajaji to know the stand of the 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 the Congress would not involve in any measures which would impair its interest in election. It obviously showed that the Congress took a double stand in C.S.Ranga 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.

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 side tracked the vital temple entry issue. They were slaves and they should remember that the Hindu religion was not a ‘humbug’ like Congresses 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 was

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ablaze, when the opposition way uncompromising, there was no use of forcing a piece of legislation like his bill through the house even if there was a chance for it. Thereupon, on the united opposition shown by the Government, the sanatanists and the Congressmen to the bill, C.S. Ranga Iyer withdrew it on 23rd August 1934 and he appealed to the sanatanist leaders to build separate temples near their own house.

E.V.R., wrote a scathing editorial condemning the Congress. Blaming Gandhi and Rajaji for ‘consigning Ranga Iyers 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’s coffers. The editorial further remarked that for all its declared concern for untouchables, the Congress in Madras had actually fielded a Brahmin candidate against V.I. Munusamy Pillay, an untouchable 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, inspite of having ostensibly withdrawn from Congress, Gandhi thought it first to instruct Congressmen to withdraw support for C.S.Ranga Iyer’s Bill. Newspaper Kudi Arasu carried Ambedkar’s condemnation of Gandhi and expressed its own support for the opinions expressed by the latter.

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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 the Madras Government for the careful consideration and introduction of M.C. Rajah’s bill in the Legislature on 18th March 1937. As a step further in this direction, Rajaji made statement at the meeting of Tanjore circle Temple Committee, on 5th May 1937 that he could not rest at peace for a minute longer without securing temple entry for Harijans and invited M.C. Rajah to introduce a bill in the Madras Legislature. On 19th October 1937 M.C. Rajah and Rajaji expressed his intention to introduce the bill in the Assembly. On the favourable reply from Rajaji, M.C. Rajah introduced his bill on 30th March 1938. It provided for the practical expression of the people’s desire when they wished to allow Harijans to join them in worship in their temples. It did not seek to throw open the doors of temples to Harijans all 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

98 Kalaimagal, (Tamil Monthly), December 1945, p.572; Dalit Voice, (Fortnightly), Bangalore, 1st August 1989, p.3.
ascertainment of public opinion and for giving practical expression to it. If the majority of caste-Hindu worshipers decided to open any of their temples in their area to Harijans, 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 the language, custom, religious institutions and people of Travancore State. Therefore, he pointed out that it would be wiser to proceed from Travancore to Malabar along the lines of least resistance and it had the unique advantages of being the most enlightened part of the Madras State. Therefore, he appealed to 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 the same measure was to be extended later on to 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 Rajaji100. 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

100 Kudi Arasu, 21st August 1938, p.5.
leader of the Justice Party also appealed to M.C.Rajah to agree with Rajaji’s method\textsuperscript{101}. T. Prakasam, another Congress member too requested M.C. Rajah to withdraw the bill as 250 members of the Legislature insist for it. The enraged M.C.Rajah retorted that if he accepted the request of 250 representatives of the Assembly here he could not answer to 250 million people. Further he vehemently abused Rajaji for his change of mind in a week\textsuperscript{102} and blamed for cheating him and the people. He also emphasized his stand that he was unwilling to withdraw his bill\textsuperscript{103}. Finally M.C. Rajah remarked that he was deceived in a bid to allow the Harijans into the temples through legal means and referred the motion to the select committee 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.\textsuperscript{104}

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 ‘\textit{Madras Hindu Temple Entry Bill}’ on 21\textsuperscript{st} August 1937 and sought to allow the depressed class people of the Hindu religion to enter into the temples like that of the 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

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Viduthalai}, 19\textsuperscript{th} August 1938, p.1.
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Kudi Arasu}, 21\textsuperscript{st} August 1938, p.6.
\textsuperscript{103} Selvamuthu Kumarasami, L., \textit{Loc.Cit.}, p.196.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Viduthalai}, 19\textsuperscript{th} August 1938, p. 4.
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 obstructers. 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 showed in the secretariat, R. Venkatasubra Reddiar, seeing the ultra vire nature of the bill, withdrew it on 31st August 1931.105 The Harijan Sevak Sangh (H.S.S.), which was fighting for the cause of temple entry to the untouchables 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 1st December 1938. Accordingly, it enabled the trustees of temples in Malabar to throw open them to Harijans 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.106 There was also another provision in the bill that if the trustees of the temples wanted to throw any temple to Harijans without reference to voters, they could do so.107

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105 G.O. No. 155, Legal Department, 7th September 1937.
106 *Kudi Arasu*, 21st August1938, pp. 5-6.
107 Text of Malabar Temple Entry Bill of C. Rajagopalachari, 1938.
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. Natesa 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 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 the very obvious reason that Rajaji was planning to shift the responsibility for temple entry legislation on to a new government.\textsuperscript{108} Thereupon, the bill was left to scrutiny for select committee on 2\textsuperscript{nd} December 1938. After careful modifications, the committee submitted it to the Government of 5\textsuperscript{th} December 1938. Finally the bill was again came for discussion in the Legislative Assembly on 8\textsuperscript{th} December 1938 and passed without any material change in the Assembly.

As a next step the Rajaji introduced the bill in the Legislative Council, on 13\textsuperscript{th} December 1938. Two members of the opposition, R.Narayana Swami Naidu and Maniayya Hedge 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 13th December 1938. Finally, this Act received the assent of the Governor on 18th January 1939 and promulgated on 7th February 1939. Though the act was passed, it could not be implemented in Malabar because the temples were managed by private trustees. 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 31st 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 Harijans as early as possible.

In 1938 the Madras Legislative Assembly passed the first Comprehensive Penal Act known as Removal of Civil Disabilities Act of 1938 or Madras Act No.XXI of 1938, to remove social disabilities making it an offence to discriminate Scheduled Castes not only in regard to publicly supported facilities, such as roads, wells and transportation but also in regard to any other secular institution, to which the general public were admitted including hotels, restaurants, shops, etc. The Act also barred judicial enforcement of any customary rights or disability based on membership in

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such a group. Violation was made a cognizable offence, with a small fine for the first offence and larger fines and up to six month’s imprisonment for subsequent offences. The enacted legislation, indeed raised the social status of depressed classes to some extent. Thereafter, V.Kurmayya, Minister of Harijan’s Affairs piloted the removal of Civil Disabilities Bill in the Madras Legislative Council on 10th February 1947. It aimed at rectifying certain shortcomings left in the Act of M.C.Rajah. This legislation which was known as the Madras Removal of Civil Disabilities (Amendment) Act, 1947 or the Madras Act XI of 1947 got the sanction of Governor-General on 1st June 1947 and was thereby promulgated. On the implementation of the Act, there was a phenomenal improvement in the social position of the Harijans on the whole.

The passing of the legislative bills was continuous process. Both Central and State governments analysed the subject of Civil disabilities and temple entry question and passed the bills into law amidst strong resistance raised by 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 the Madras Province and at first implemented the temple

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114 G.O. No. 2896, Development Department, 4th July 1947.
entry in the Malabar region which was a part of the Madras Province, and witnessed successful temple entry there and he wished to implement the temple entry in other parts especially in Tamil Nadu.

**Madurai Temple Entry Campaign**

The role of A. Vaidhyanatha Iyer in the Madurai temple entry event, on the inspiration given by Rajaji and Gandhi and the subsequent opposition raised by the *sanatanists* marked a new chapter in the social reforms of the Congress in Tamil Nadu. The whole preparation for the Madurai temple entry, the legislative measures, the court proceedings, the odds faced by Vaidhyanatha Iyer in the noble cause of the untouchables, the significance of Madurai temple entry event in the temple entry movement and the subsequent opening of all the major brahminical temples to the outcastes in Tamil Nadu was the outcome of the temple entry campaign of the Congress. on 8th July 1939 a bright, new chapter opened in the annals of Hinduism. A short bespectacled man, a typical, tuft and holy-ash Brahmin, A.Vaidhyanatha Iyer, led outcaste people into the hollowed precincts of the Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple. Thus, 8th July is the anniversary of this epoch-making event in the history of Tamil Nadu as well as the Nation. Custom has all along prohibited the entry of outcaste people into Hindu temples but on this historic day this was changed.
A.Vaidhyanatha Iyer was one of those great leaders who threw themselves into the various freedom movements initiated by Gandhi and was jailed several times. He took part in the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha in 1931 and suffered imprisonment. He founded the *All India Harijan Sevak Sangah* in Tamil Nadu in 1932 along with N.M.R.Subbaraman, T.S.S.Rajan, Ramachandran, L.Krishnasamy Bharathi, Sivaramakrishna Iyer, L.N.Gopalsamy and P.K. Ramachari as part of Gandhi’s Harijan movement. He did pioneering work for the removal of untouchability and Harijan uplift. He was the president of the Tamil Nadu *Harijan Sevak Sangh* from 1935 till his death. His burning zeal was for the constructive programmes of Gandhi-Khadi and village industries, prohibition, communal harmony and above all removal of untouchability. He dedicated his life particularly to the cause of Harijan welfare which was dear to the heart of Gandhi. He felt that entry of Harijans into temples would go a long way in helping them join the social main stream.

Temple entry by people belonging to the depressed class people formed an important phase in the movement for the removal of untouchability. For a long tradition, the temples played a vital role in the social life of Tamil people. It is generally viewed by the people that they should not dwell in a place bereft of any temple. But it is very sad to point out that a certain section of the Hindus, who were treated as untouchables, were denied the privilege of entering into the temples for worshiping gods and goddesses.
The members of the Nadar community spearheaded a movement for temple entry in Tamil Nadu in the nineteenth century. For a while, the Nadars were prevented from entering into the temples on the grounds that they indulged in the profession like toddy-tapping and it was considered one of the *Panchama Pathagas* (five sins). The temples in Tamil Nadu were constructed to the Brahminical deities and were opened only to the caste-Hindus. The intellectual attainments and economic well-being never helped the Non-Caste-Hindus to enter the prohibited areas near the temple.\(^\text{116}\)

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, Periyar E.V.Ramasamy and Subbarayan gave a clarion call to allow the depressed people into the temples.\(^\text{117}\) Temple entry by untouchables was on the social agenda of national movement, especially during the 1930’s. Deliberations were held on several occasions within the Indian National Congress to discuss the issue.\(^\text{118}\) 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.\(^\text{119}\)

Further, in 1933, the election to the Trustee’s Committee of the Meenakshi temple was 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 at the Victoria Edward Hall Madurai on June 13th, 1939 to mark its beginning. It was presided over by Romeswari Nehru, Vice-President of *All India Harijan Savak Sangh*. The speeches of the leaders like C.Rajaji, T.S.S Rajan, A.Vaidyanantha Iyer and N.M.R. Subbaraman was fully concerned with the public necessity of temple entry to the untouchables. 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 untouchables. If the law is resorted to for the purpose of preventing you from 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 also.

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120 Ibid.
123 *The Mail*, 16th June 1939.
Public meetings were organised to publicise the issue and mobilise support. Even a signature campaign was also conducted. A group of fifty four untouchables under the leadership of A.Vaidyanatha Iyer and other leaders of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, toured the parts of Travancore and visited various temples in the region, which had by then been thrown open to untouchables by the Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation. Around this time, the Congress dominated Municipal Council of Madurai passed a resolution in support to temple entry. A.Vaidyanatha Iyer 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 (passive protest).  

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 Harijan Sevak Sangh made their laudable efforts. Arguments in favour of temple-entry were broadcasted in the form of notices everyday. Wall posters adorned

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every car with the following matter: “Harijans are Hindus and please give
them temple-entry.” Public meetings became very common and not a day
passed without there being at least two or three in each and every corner of
the Madurai town. 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. 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 Harijan Sevak Sangh even carried on house to house propaganda
and met the leading people of all communities. They also approached the
Executive Officer, archakas, sthanikas and other servants of the temple and
explained to them the need for temple entry. Pasumpon V.Muthuramalinga Thevar who was at Madurai instructed the recalcitrant
Hindus not to impede the temple-entry reform.

126 Harijan, Vol. VIII, 16th September 1939, p.275; The Hindu, 6th July 1939.
127 The Mail, 29th June 1939; The Hindu, 4th and 5th July 1939.
130 Ibid.
Temple-Entry in Madurai

The wonderful event of temple-entry by the untouchables in Madurai took place at last on July 8th, 1939. On this day at 8.45 a.m. a batch of untouchables, numbering five and one Nadar, made their first entry into the famous shrine of Sri Meenakshi in the company of A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and L.N. Gopalasamy. The names of the five untouchables were Kakkan, member, Madurai District Board, Swami Muruganandam, Alampatti, Madurai district, Muthu, Harijan Sevalaya worker, Madurai, V.S.Chinniah, Mathichiyam, Madurai, V.R.Poovalingam, Virattipattu, Madurai Taluk and S.S.Shanmuga Nadar, Municipal Commissioner, Virudhunagar. R.S.Naidu, the Executive Officer, A.Chidambara Mudaliar, a member of the Meenakshi Devasthanam Committee, the Superintendent, Peishkar and 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. Huge crowds of people witnessed this wonderful event and news of this event spread at once like wildfire. “The hearts of millions of Hindus must have throbbed with joy on reading the news of the peaceful realisation of temple entry of the untouchables in the great Meenakshi temple at Madurai”.

133 The Hindu and The Mail, 8th July 1939.
134 The Hindu, 9th July 1939.
135 Ibid., 8th July 1939; The Times of India, 10th July 1939.
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 came over the Tamil land without violence and bloodshed. The whole scheme was executed non-violently without any breach of peace.\textsuperscript{137} The temple-entry in Madurai, therefore, is called a ‘bloodless revolution’. By leading the temple-entry, Madurai had made history in the annals of social change. The servants of \textit{Harijan Sevak Sangh} under A. 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 in the same amount of thought, preparation and consultation and the guidance of respected leaders as rendered in the Madurai event.”\textsuperscript{138}

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

\textsuperscript{137} F.R., 20\textsuperscript{th} July 1939.
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Harijan}, Vol. VII, 15\textsuperscript{th} July 1939, p.203.
propaganda and not by the exercise of any authority”. P.K.Pushparaj, Councillor, Corporation of Madras and Member of Harijan Sevak Sangh, Madras remarked “The throwing open of the holy precincts of the ancient and historic temple of Sri Meenakshi at Madurai to the long afflicted and oppressed untouchables marks down “a golden era in the history of Hindu India.” 139 G.Ramachandran, Kerala Congress leader observed: “While Tranvancore has undoubtedly led in Harijan 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. Harijans entered the Madurai temple entirely on the strength of love and assurance of the conversion of hearts of the so-called savarnas (caste-Hindus). In so far as the reliance was thus entirely on love, the Madurai miracle is an advance on the Tranvancore miracle. But it was the Travancore example which watered and manured the seed of temple-entry in Madurai.” 140

“The proclamation 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.Ramasamy Iyer brought about transformation. But the opening of the celebrated temple of Madurai was a greater event in that way is the popular will that had 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

139 *The Hindu*, 12th July 1939.
140 *The Mail*, 15th July 1939.
praise for the ceaseless efforts they have put forth in educating public opinion.”

Gandhiji also sent a long wire to A.Vaidyanatha Iyer urging him not to take to heart what the sanatanists might say or do. In his reply to Gandhiji’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 Trinvandrum 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.”

At first, the temple-entry event seemed to have passed off peacefully. On 9th July 1939 the Madras Mail’s headlines read ‘Pleasant surprise for Madurai: no opposition reported from caste-Hindus’. But on the same day the 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 Harijans entry into the arthamandapam and their

144 The Mail, 10th July 1939.
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 *arthanas* should be stopped to the Meenakshi Sundarreswarar and other deities. He also issued a plea to orthodox people and temple *archakas* 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 10th 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 Sangam*, an organization that advocated Brahminical orthodoxy. It was decided at the meeting that the Meenakshi Temple be closed from the night of 9th July 1939, 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 10th July 1939, refused to accept the decision. In spite of his objection Muttusubbhar Bhattar and other priests, after finishing theirs day’s 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 Bhattar or his colleagues.
Irritated by these activities of R.S.Naidu and A.Vaidyanatha Iyer, K.R.Venkatarama Iyer, a sanatanist from Madurai sent a telegram to Gandhi thus: “Armed Madurai temple peons opposing orthodox worshippers. This is waging war during world war. Pray issue immediate instructions on such highhandedness. We after all live 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 Harijans 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 A.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. At last, the sanatanists ex-communicated A.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 slogans against him surrounding his house and also burnt his pictures in public streets.

Early in the morning of 10th 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 July 10th onwards, most of the temple priests, except Santhu Bhattar, ceased performing the regular pujas. Other temple servants, however, continued to perform their duties. The Executive Officer suspended from duty Muttusubbhar Bhattar and two other priests. Within a few weeks all the priests who had failed to perform their duties except one Santhu Bhattar, had been suspended and substitutes were brought in from other temples. Initially, a priest was brought from the neighbouring town of Arupukkottai, 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 fate would befall those who dared to undermine the sanctity of the temple. Later, about twelve priests came from Tirunelveli to replace those suspended.145

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 Meenakshi. On completion of the construction, an idol was installed and regular pujas began. This new place of worship was situated close to where Venkatarama Iiyer 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. The two song books written by Brahmin women expressed their anguish over five Harijans and a Shanar breaking the caste norms and entering the Madurai Meenakshi Temple. Bhagirathi Ammal’s *Alaya Etirppu Kummi Pattu Pustakam* (1939) and S.Dharmambal’s *Alaya Pravesa Kantana Pattu Pustakam* (1940) represented resistance to the Madurai temple event. Bhagirathi Ammal’s book talks about the temple entry as an anomaly, a deviation from Hindu dharma as norm. She vehemently condemns the Ordinance issued by the Government, and subsequent the Act passed by the Legislature. She also accused the Congress and the ministers of treachery and rebuked them for belying the expectation that the Congress and its ministry would not interfere in matters relating religion. She charged the Premier with bribing members of the Legislature in enacting the legislation. She cited the examples of Ravana, Duryodhana, Hiranya and Bhadmasura and warned the Premier against the fate that those embodiments of evil suffered. Subsequently, she 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 Untouchables, and to restore the ancient Hindu *dharma*. She urged the Premier to resign from his position as he had caused great damage to this *dharma*, and had proved to be an inefficient ruler. She depicted the untouchables, who entered the temple as
thieves and their act as portending an end to \textit{varnashrama dharma} and ushering in of \textit{adharma}. Dharmambal’s book is more programmatic and lacks Bhagirathi Ammal’s shrillness and immediacy. The text depicts an elaborate search for goddess Meenakshi, who makes her exit from the temple upon the entry of Untouchables, in a rather long march through the streets of Madurai and the premises of the temple. The text eventually located her in Mangala Nivasam, and invited the \textit{sanatanists} to congregate there and become members of the \textit{All India Varnashrama Swarajya Sangam} also known as \textit{Sanatana Sangam} to fight for the restoration of \textit{dharma}. The work explicitly mentions the names of R.S.Naidu and Vaidhyanatha Iyer while referring to the Madurai temple entry event. Dharmambal also refers to the \textit{sanatanists} decision to build a new temple. In following such a decision a new temple for Meenakshi was built.\footnote{Paramasivan,T., \textit{Loc.Cit.}, pp.269-273.} The priests who had quit the polluted temple performed the rituals there. Both their songs clearly indicate that caste could belong to women too and they too could emasculate lower caste men.\footnote{Anandhi, S., ‘Caste and Gender in Colonial South India,’ in \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, Vol.XL, No.15, Bombay, 9\textsuperscript{th} April 2005, pp.1521-1522.} Thus the works of the two women expressed the orthodox sentiments and also highlighted the prevailing tense 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 Harijan temple entry, who were members or supporters of the All India Varnashrama Swarjya Sangh. The Sangh’s President, N. Natesa Iyer, a Madurai lawyer, personally denounced Naidu and announced that the Meenakshi temple had been defiled and that the deities had left it; they would not return until the temple had been purified. On 13th 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 17th July 1939, however, the Madras Government, in line with a threat made by Rajagopalachari, issued an Indemnity Ordinance to block any legal action against those involved in admitting Harijans into the temple. The ordinance promulgated by the Government to address the urgency of the situation was a face-saving measure taken by Rajaji, the then Premier of the Madras Presidency. The promulgation of the Ordinance indemnified the Executive Officers and other servants of the temples in the Madurai, Tanjore 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.Vaidhyanatha Iyer was brought before the Court for illegally taking the Harijans into the temple. For a while, the Court scene was historic; it was a
fully crowded Court 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 the 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 criticisms of the sanatanists against the promulgation of the 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 All India Harijan Sevak Sangh.
Early in the morning of 29\textsuperscript{th} July 1939 the \textit{sanatanists}, led by Natesa Iyer and accompanied by several priests, demonstrated in front of the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{148}

By the end of July 1939, many temples in Tamil Nadu had been opened to Harijans, some with trouble and some without, but no incidents on the scale of those in \textit{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 \textit{sanatanists}. Rajaji, initiating a discussion on the bill, stated that temple entry reform was long overdue and the Government could not maintain 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 Harijans into temples. It was also stated that the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{149} 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 opined 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.\(^{150}\)

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 Harijans and that the reform needed to be undertaken without any further delay. V.S.Srinivasa Sastri 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 opined that it was out of sheer political compulsions that the Congress was hurriedly pushing through the temple entry legislation. Opposing these ideas, the Congress 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.\(^{151}\)


The Justice Party legislators criticized the Congress ministry for neglecting the interests of the Harijans. 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 had 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. 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 Harijans. 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.

On 5th 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 Harijan entry into the Meenakshi temple, received the assent of the British Viceroy in early September. Natesa

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Iyer’s appeals to the Viceroy and the Governor of Madras were ignored. His efforts to persuade the Maharajas of Cochin and Mysore, and the Raja of Sivagangai, to suspend their endowments in the temple also seem to have been unsuccessful. The Raja of Sivagangai was reported to be not against temple entry. After October, 1939 active protests died down.

Legal action was started too. Natesa 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. 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 in 1944 was finally over.

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156 Madras Mail, 25th September and 6th November 1939.
157 Ibid., 20th September 1939.
Under the *Temple-Entry Authorization and Indemnity Act* in 1939, all temples in the Madras Province had to be thrown open for the untouchables. On 9th July 1939 the *Soundararaja Perumal Temple* at Valayapatti in Melur taluk, intimately associated with *Saivite Meenakshiamman Temple* at Madurai, was thrown open. On 16th July 1939, the great *Brihadeswar Temple* at Tanjore was opened after consultation, with its trustee.\(^{159}\) Rajaram, the Rajah and the hereditary trustee of Tanjore Palace Devasthanam had also thrown open ninety temples under his control for the untouchables.\(^{160}\) On 26th July 1939 the temple of *Tirukurtalanathaswami* near Courtallam Falls in the Tirunelveli district was opened.\(^{161}\) On 27th July 1939, *Kasi Viswanatha Temple* at Tenkasi was kept open for the untouchables.\(^{162}\) Thereafter, *Kudulalagar Temple* at Madurai and *Sri Kalamega Perumal Temple* at Tirumohur in Madurai District were also kept open.\(^{163}\) 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.\(^{164}\)

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161 *Harijan*, 12th August 1939.


The outbreak of the Second World War on 3rd September 1939 and the clarion call for Quit India diverted the attention of the Congress leaders from the temple entry activities. Even then, a few more temples were thrown open here and there. On September 1945, on his birth day, the Maharajah of Ettaiyapuram opened his two family temples of Lord Siva and Vishnu to the untouchables. Following this, the Theagarajaswami Temple at Tiruvarur and Nelliappar Temple at Tirunelveli were kept open for the untouchables. There, on January 11th, 1947, Jegajeevanram, the Labour Minister of Interim Central Government entered along with untouchables and worshipped the deities. In fact, it gave great enthusiasm among the social reformers who advocated the temple entry. On 3rd February 1946 in realization of his earlier promise, Gandhi entered the Meenakshi temple with untouchable leaders like V.I.Muniswami Pillai.

One scholar C.J.Fuller, has stated: “The Higher Courts 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 temples is highly unreasonable, inhuman and unjust and the temple entry reform was the result of advanced and well reasoned public opinion. The reform

166 Nandabalan, Kovilai Thiravunkal, (Tamil), Tiruchi, 1946, p.41.
168 Ibid., pp.992-996.
removed a great wrong of centuries from the Hindu society only after many years of patient and earnest work done by the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh. 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 Act of the Government of Madras only succeeded the reform and recognized the latter’s will. The Higher Courts in India held that the Temple 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.\footnote{G.O. 53, Legal Department, 13th May 1947.}

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.

The temple built by the \textit{sanatanists} for the temporary purpose seems to have been in existence until 1945. Subsequently regular \textit{pujjas} were discontinued, the temple closed, and eventually demolished. The gates of the Meenakshi Temple were never again closed for the Untouchables.\footnote{Selvamuthu Kumarasami, L., ‘Vaidhyanatha Iyer and the Proceedings of Madurai Temple Entry Event, 1939-1945’, in Naditha Krishna, (pub.) \textit{Journal of Indian History and Culture}, Chennai, September 2007, pp154-155.}

To conclude, because of the obstructive tactics of the \textit{sanatanists}, Vaidhyanatha Iyer had to spend time and energy to ensure the smooth functioning of the temple in the aftermath of the entry by Harijans. Some
even went to the extent of hauling up Vaidhyanatha Iyer before the court for taking Harijans into the temple illegally. Rajaji the Premier moved promptly in the matter. In retrospect, if Rajaji had not forced the legislation at that time, the entry of Harijans into temples would not have been possible for many years. It will be remembered that in October 1939, the Rajaji’s Ministry resigned in the wake of the Second World War and popular Government assumed power only in 1946.