

BILL OF P.SUBBARAYAN AND INTRODUCTION OF TEMPLE ENTRY RESOLUTION FOR UNTOUCHABILITY IN TAMILNADU

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At the end of the nineteenth century, there were about seventy-five thousand temples in the Madras Presidency. Most of them were small and poor, employing a solitary priest and possessing a few brass ornaments. A detailed analysis of the Hindu Temple Entry Disabilities Removal Bills introduced by P. Subbarayan as minister of the Justice Party in 1932, and other related Bills of C. Ranga Iyer and M.C. Rajah, as Central Legislative Members has been presented in the study.

Introduction of the Resolution

Realising the need for a legislative measure for temple entry and persuaded by Rajaji, P. Subbarayan, the Premier of Madras Presidency introduced in the Madras Legislative Council the Temple Entry Resolution on 1 November 1932, as a prelude to a possible future bill. It marked the beginning of an 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.¹

On his introduction of the resolution, Premier Subbarayan pointed out that in the event of the Legislative Council accepting it, he would make suitable legislations. In the course of discussion, members were divided in expressing their views. In supporting the resolution, T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar stated that entry into temples to the depressed classes placed them on equal footing with others.² Even A.P. Patro, a Justice Party leader, acknowledged that the depressed classes were certainly entitled in every way to enter the temples as they were born to enjoy so many other rights and privileges. C. Natesa Mudaliar and C.R. Parthasarathy Iyengar catalogued the benefits of the resolution. V.P. Narayan Nambiar briefed that it would remove the greatest curse on Hindu religion and the most tragic blot on Hindu society. Muslim members like Yakub Hasan too expressed views in favour of passing the resolution successfully.³ In advocating the resolution, K. Alamelumangathayaar Amma reproduced the past scene of social reform movement in India from the days of Rajaram Mohanroy who made a crusade to end the practice of 'sati'

by legislation and other movements led by Pandit Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar and Harbilas Sarda.⁴

The Untouchability Abolition Bill

Therefore, in the case of temple entry also she mentioned about the urgent need for a proper legislation. R. Srinivasan considered the resolution as a very modest one since it did require the restoration of ancient temple that belonged to the depressed classes, but it claimed only an entrance into these temples.⁵ After the views ventilated by members, M. Krishnan Nair, the Law Member, sought to ascertain the views of the members through voting, 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.⁶ Subsequently, P. Subbarayan drafted a bill to remove the disabilities faced by the depressed classes on temple entry issue. With 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 prior sanction of the Viceroy.⁷ At the same time, C.S. Ranga Iyer gave notice for his introduction of the Abolition of Untouchability Bill in the Central Legislature on 28 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 1932.⁸

Among the provincial bills, the bill of P. Subbarayan was considered more noteworthy than the bill of Narayan Nambiar on the temple entry issue. It dealt with the segregation of the depressed classes from temple worship as a social disability and subjected this social evil to universal condemnation. The bill narrated 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.⁹ Further they came to know that many of the trustees of the temples were wholeheartedly welcoming the temple entry reform, but at the same time they were afraid of allowing the depressed classes into the temples because they were directed to do so by Section 40 of the Madras Hindu Religious Endowment Act II of 1927. Therefore, to avoid any imposition on the trustees, the bill stipulated certain norms for the temple entry.¹⁰

Bill of P. Subbarayan

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 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 advancement.¹¹

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. 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.¹² However, Srinivasan's views on temple entry did not find support from the radical depressed class leaders. N. Sivaraj pointed out that temple entry could not solve the problems 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.¹³

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 social ostracism of the depressed classes. C.R. Parthasarathi Ayyangar, who had participated in the debate on the bill, stated that there was no Hindu shastra which sanctioned the practice of social segregation.¹⁴

The non-Brahmin leaders remained divided in their opinion on the issue of temple entry legislation. A.P. Patro, an eminent non-brahmin leader, felt that the social discrimination faced by the depressed classes could only be removed by undertaking programmes aimed at their economic betterment. However, a sizeable section of the non-Brahmin legislators voted with the other members, including Brahmins, in support of the bill. The Provincial Government, fearing a nationwide repercussion, avoided taking a hasty stand on the issue.¹⁵

In a telegram to the Viceroy, M.K. 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. The 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.¹⁶

On 3 January, 1933, the Madras branch of the Sangha sent a memorandum to the Viceroy against the proposed temple entry legislation. It stated that temple entry legislation constituted a violation of freedom of religious faith and neutrality that had been guaranteed by 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.¹⁷

Despite the growing **sanatanist** opposition, the Tamil Nadu Congress showed no signs of retreating from its demand for 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.¹⁸ 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. Dilip Menon has pointed out that Gandhi believed that the depressed classes needed to perform the role of admiring audiences vis-a-vis the entire show of self-sacrifice that was being enacted before them by upper castes.¹⁹

Sanction of Temple Entry Bills

In the meantime, Tamil Congressmen displayed an interest in entering into negotiations with the Government. C. 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. The active involvement of eminent political personalities like C. Rajaji and Devadas Gandhi largely accounted for the Congress' successes. The non-Brahmin members of the Congress in the Legislative Council also expressed the opinion that the Government needed to appoint a committee of **savarna** Hindus to ascertain the Hindu public opinion on temple entry.²⁰

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 3 November, 1932 that if he discontinued the Civil Disobedience Movement, he would be given all facilities for Harijan works as desired. The Government stand gave dissatisfaction to M.K. Gandhi and he started his Harijan welfare activities under restricted circumstances by issuing a series of nine statements related to temple entry, Hinduism, depressed classes and removal of untouchability.²¹

Thus the need for temple entry bills like that of P. Subbarayan was keenly felt by both the national leaders and social reformers and they expected those bills to be enacted. But the Government shelved these bills for a long time, apprehending opposition from the orthodox Hindus. However, high pressure was exerted by Indian leaders like Rajaji, P.N. Sapru and M.R. Jayakar who emphasised the early need for temple entry.²² M.K. Gandhi, at last threatened to commence a great and fierce war of **athma sakthi** (spiritual power) since 2 January, 1933, in the absence of Viceroy's sanction for the introduction of P. Subbarayan's bill. Gandhi also proposed to consider the postponement of his fast if a social change was realised through a law in the near future. 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. Realising the Government's difficulty, M.K. Gandhi gave some more time.²³

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 *India* and *Tennindia* strongly protested against the inactivity of the Viceroy. The *Gandhi* and *Anandha Bodhini* appealed to the Government to do its duty without any delay because the public opinion was already created on the signing of Poona Pact and there was a large attendance in Bombay conference. The *Andhra Pairika* urged the Government of India as well as the Madras Government to respect those popular feelings favouring P. Subbarayan's bill.²⁴

However, the British officials in India expressed strong reservations about the proposed temple entry legislations. The Home Secretary to the Government of India feared that the Viceroy's sanction 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.²⁵

The lukewarm response on the part of the depressed classes in Madras Presidency vis-a-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. 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.²⁶ 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 sanction to the introduction of the temple entry bills in the Madras Legislative Council gave rise to discontent within the Tamil Nadu Congress.²⁷

As public pressure mounted, Lord Willington decided to give his approval to the bill of P. Subbarayan. For this purpose, he approached his own colleagues and experts and sought the views of local government. As there was a divided Hindu opinion on the bill, Lord Willingdon, refused permission to P. Subbarayan and Narayan Nambiar on 23 January, 1933, to introduce their bills because the problem was of an all-Indian character and so it could not be approached merely on a provincial basis.²⁸ 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. He also stated that the two bills should be circulated for public opinion. On the basis of the public opinion, the Government was to decide on the legislation and its implementation according to the logic of circumstances.²⁹

The Viceroy's refusal of P. Subbarayan's bill came in for severe criticism by the press. The *Podu Jana Ooliyan* observed that it was a mistake on the part of the Viceroy to have exercised his option, as he liked. His formal preliminary sanction was necessary for the introduction of a provincial bill. The *Samadharsini* questioned the validity of the Viceroy's objection to the introduction of P. Subbarayan's bill in the provincial legislature. *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 the grounds that it involved an issue of an all-India nature.³⁰ The *Swarajya* observed that the Viceroy's blank refusal to P. Subbarayan's bill was a tragic error of judgement because the bill was deliberately drafted to meet the particular requirements of the Madras Province and it was in fact a little more than an amending bill of Madras H.R.E. Act of 1927. As an extreme form of attack, *Sudantira Sanghu* published a cartoon, which represented the Viceroy as a mother who was rocking the cradle in which her children, dubbed as conservatives, were lying. To lull the children, the mother was singing thus, 'Subbarayan's bill bogey, run away.³¹ *Gandhi*, publishing another cartoon highlighted the double role of the Viceroy. The *Andhra Patrika* and *Siri-Dharma* questioned the technicalities and legality behind the Viceroy's power.

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* justified the Viceroy's decision and denounced the whole temple entry campaign as a political stunt. On the whole, it was obvious that the moderate public opinion accepted the Viceroy's decision as a fair compromise, which did not block the way to social reform but only prevented a hasty and ill-considered legislation before public opinion had enough time to express itself. On the other hand, the decision of Viceroy came as a shock to the advocates of the temple-entry.³² M.K. Gandhi criticised the decision as an unintentional challenge to Hinduism and to social reformers. However he viewed that the decision would not in any way affect the temple entry process which had already progressed from Guruvayur in the extreme South to Haridwar in the North. C.S. Ranga Iyer condemned the Viceroy's decision as the worst form of bureaucratic intrigue and bureaucratic injustice. After the refusal to the provincial bills, bills on the same lines came to be introduced in the Central Legislature.³³

The social awakening and transition of the Tamil society was initiated by the British administrators. The rule of the British in India was a great advantage to the depressed people. The leniency of the British towards depressed people elevated the latter to a great extent. The British passed a number of legal measures which abolished the evil practices of the Hindu society. Providing access to the untouchables into Hindu temples, the advocates in the ranks of caste-Hindus wiped out the age-old stains, slur and stigma of untouchability, which totally belittled, lowered and disgraced the image of Hinduism. It is a sorry state of affairs that the Hindu temples in rural India have still not given any access to the rural Dalits in India.

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