A GLANCE OF SUCHINDAM TEMPLE ENTRY PROCLAMATION OF 1936

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Introduction

Suchindram is one of the most popular place in kanyakumari district. It’s have many historical importance. Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple is one of the important Temple in ancient Travancore. During the time of 19th and 20th century the low caste people were treated inhumanity by the upper caste people in Travancore. There are so many social evils and customs were practiced in Travancore society. One is prohibition of Temple entry. The low caste people should not permitted to enter in the suchindram Temple. So there are various agitations against to the government by the low caste people organizations. Finally the government was announced the proclamation in 1936. This proclamation gives us the temple entry right to the low caste people. The main aim of the article is brings out the proclamation of 1936.

The Problems of the Depressed People

The high caste Hindus, who preserved the Sastric rules and age-old customs in their pristine purity, were in control of the administration of the Temples. They were opposed to any innovation in the existing order that pressed hard upon the self-respect and honour of the inferior castes. They denied to the lower castes even the right to walk along the roads around the Temples.² Hence the government of Travancore instituted an enquiry and the committee submitted its report to the government on 2nd September 1918. But the committee recommended that the low castes should not be “allowed to remain on the road-side margins and also within a distance of fifty yards on the road proper both on the front and rear of the deity when the procession passes.” Such an arrangement was not expected to cause serious inconveniences to the public using the road as the procession would take only three or four minutes to cover a distance of one hundred yards.³ The Ezhavas or the ‘excluded caste’ were not allowed to enter even the outer-closures of the Hindu Temples.³

They and other lower castes were denied admission to the temple precincts and also the passage on roads in the immediate vicinity of the Temples. The Svarna worshippers would place their cash offerings to the deity at the allotted place and withdraw themselves to allow the priests to take the cash offerings and then wait for the ‘prasadams’ at the prescribed distance. Even the Christians were not permitted to walk through the roads near the temples. To rub salt in the wound Dewan Krishna Rao issued an edict in 1857.

The Edict of Krishna Rao

Krishna Rao, the Dewan of Uthram Thirunal Marthandavarna issued an Edict in February 1857. It reads as follows: “Though an Elover” becomes a Christian he must not cease to be an Elover therefore you must not allow Christian and other converts to the Christian religion to pass through the public high way by the temple but must compel them to go round through the fields.”⁴ The edict further prohibited the non caste Hindus and the Christian converts from using Temple roads. On the public roads near Temples, sign boards were put up by the government prohibiting lower castes from entering the roads. The matter was brought to the notice of the Christian missionaries. The missionaries brought the disabilities and consequent sufferings of the people to the notice of the Madras government. But nothing substantial happened.⁵

Kumaran Asan raised the issue in the 12th session of the Assembly to draw the attention of the government to this evil and referred to roads in Vaikkam, Tirunakkara, Suchindram and a few other places and demanded the removal of the prohibition boards placed near some of these Temples.⁶ A stone pillar measuring 3 feet height was erected to prevent the people from entering into the Temples.⁷ The denial of the right to walk along roads in the vicinity of Temples became the subject of specific petition in the Assembly. There was no uniform rules regarding the entry of low castes to the roads and temples at Suchindram, for example, the Ezhavas could not go upto the outer wall during the festivals, though they could do so at other times.

Incidents at South Travancore

At Cheramadam an officer of the Salvation Army was going on horseback, with pariah followers on 27th August 1892. The Vellalas assaulted him.⁸ Vadiveeswaram, a part of Nagercoil, was wholly inhabited by Brahmans, who never allowed the depressed classes to enter into their streets. A riot broke out in the year 1872 as a Brahmin widow married a Christian.⁹ From that time low castes and the Christians were strictly prohibited from entering the Brahmin and other caste Hindu streets.¹⁰ Two Zenana workers were assaulted and killed. Their umbrellas were wrested from their hands and broken before their eyes. Their clothes were torn and mud was thrown at their faces. Few able-bodied men threatened to push them down into tanks or shoot them. Kurichi, a small village situated very near to Suchindram is a thickly populated village of Nanchilnad Vellalas. They were highly jealous of the activities of the Salvationists in and around Suchindram. Therefore the Salvationists were not permitted to walk along the Vellala streets with chapels, umbrellas and turbans. If anybody violated this rule, he was severely punished.

When Colonel Jesuretnam rode on horseback along this street, the villagers chased the horse from pillar to post and cut off its tail. They also threw a lot of stones at the Colonel till blood oozed out from his fore-head.¹¹ Later a case was filed against the Andy Essaki, Chodalaimadan and Mallanthamby and they were sentenced to pay a fine of Rs. 50/- along with one month rigorous imprisonment.¹² This was followed by
Kakkad riot, a small Harijan village situated at a distance of a mile northeast of Suchindram. Christians and low castes were not permitted to go near the Temples. At Mylady Nadar Christians were dwelling. Their houses were on one side, and on the opposite side there were some houses of the Vellalas. Both the Nadars and the Vellalas walked along this street and also they drove their carts through it and used it for various other purposes. But the Vellalas did not allow the Nadars to go in procession through this street. There was another incident when the Sudras of Vanur, a village not far from Panjalingapuram, insulted and threatened to assault the girls of the Mission School for having passed by a particular way. At Suchindram the reactions against the different forms of social injustice manifested themselves in the Suchindram satyagraha.

The Temple Entry Enquiry Committee

The Suchindram satyagraha and the pressing demand for the right of Temple entry for the lower castes both from the right thinking men of the higher castes and the lower forced the government to conduct enquiry. The committee with Subramania Iyer, the retired Dewan of Travancore, as the President of the Committee was announced by the Government of Travancore on 8th November 1932. The total members of the committee were nine and it included two low caste people also. The committee submitted its report on 11th January 1934 and it stated that all the people irrespective of caste had the right to use public roads, wells, ponds and inns. But a Proclamation for Temple entry was not mentioned in this report, and so it was opposed by caste Hindus vehemently.

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

The Proclamation of 1936

As already pointed out the report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee impressed upon the government about the need for throwing open the Temples, roads, chatrams, wells and tanks to all, irrespective of caste. Moreover, the mounting pressure from the reformists led to the promulgation of the historic Temple Entry Proclamation. On 12th November 1936, at the instance of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan of Travancore, Maharaja Sri Chithira Thirunal issued the proclamation on 7th November 1912. The text of the proclamation is as follows:

"Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and all comprehending toleration, centuries, adapted itself to the Hindu subjects should by consolations and solace of the Hindu faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command, that subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping at the temples controlled by us and our Government". The proclamation laid down clear cut rules for the low caste for entry into the temples.

The rules provided for the observance and maintenance of the customs and usages relating to worship and ceremonies obtaining in temples. Taking meat into the Temple, smoking within the premises, carrying cloth umbrella and kerosene lamp and such practices would be disallowed. The Chief Devaswom officer was vested with powers to grant or withhold permission depending on customs and traditions. The authority shall prevail until set aside by higher authority. The Chief Officer had powers to pass orders for arrest against those who violated the rules. If any contravenes the rules or commits any offence which requires purificatory ceremonies, he shall be punished by a Magistrate. In matters regarding clarification or interpretation of any of those rules the decision of the Dewan shall be final. The rules prescribed in general terms, the dress of the worshippers and the objects which they were prohibited from crossing into the Temples.

The proclamation occupied a unique place in the socio-religious life of Travancore because of “the sublimity of its conception, the loftiness of its ideals and the magnitude of its effects”.

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conclusion

This article deals about the Temple entry proclamation of Suchindram Temple. In the beginning period of Temple entry movement, the high cast people enjoyed many privileges and created many problems among the low caste people. After the announcement of Temple entry proclamation, the low caste people got the right to enter into all Temples in Suchindram as well as the Travancore.

End notes

5. Ibid., p.101
6. Proceedings of the Srimulam Popular Assembly, Travancore, 11th to 15th Sessions, 1916, p. 120.
13. Letter from the Resident to Acting Chief Secretary, Government of Madras, dated 9th March, 1870.
19. Ibid., p.4.