

CHAPTER -IV

POPULARISATION OF TAMPLE WORSHIP

Travancore, having Hinduism as the basic religion, was one of the most caste-ridden part of India. From time immemorial the temples of Travancore and their precincts were treated as **sanketam** grounds not open to non-caste Hindus. The temples being the nerve centres of Travancore made their impact on the life of every Hindu here in one way or the other. There was hardly a **kara** or village without an important temple. In number and sanctity, they enjoyed a value and importance of their own. Some of the Travancore temples had merited mention even in the ancient **puranas**. There were many temples whose consecration had been directly attributed to maharishis or saintly personages of such high eminence in the Hindu hierarchy, as Parasurama, Khara and Vilvamangalthu Swamiar¹. The village life, infact centred round the temple and Hindu public were closely associated with it in various

¹ *The Temple Entry Proclamation Memorial Souvenir*, 1936, p.2.

ways². But in the course of the evolutionary process, it brought about with it some of the evil practices like casteism, untouchability and pollution. Since 1916, the non-caste Hindus of Travancore agitated for temple entry and equality of worship. It changed the basic structure of the society and placed it on the path towards modernisation. The movement aimed at equal distribution of social privilege among all sections of the population and it paved the way for the popularisation of temple worship in Travancore.

The temples in Travancore were by and large founded and richly endowed by the **savarnas**. The trustees or **uralars** who managed the temple affairs were caste-Hindus among whom the namputiris stood first and they were the ecclesiastical heads of temples. They exercised spiritual authority in their respective **sanketams**³. They were the learned practitioners and strict followers of the **agamic** doctrines, which guided the temple worship. In the disguise for the observance of **agamic** principle, they started the practice of social evils like **teendal**, **totil**

² Report of the High Level Committee for Temple affairs, p.11.

³ Report of the High Level Committee on Temple affairs, op.cit., p.14.

(unapprochability and untouchability), **asudhi** (pollution) etc. in the precincts of the temples as well as their place of residence. As the temples were closely associated with the institution of caste system⁴, they were constructed and consecrated by savarnas in accordance with the directions contained in the **agamas**. The widely accepted **agamic** work in Travancore was the **tantrasamuchayam** written by Narayanan nambutiri⁵. This **nibandha** (rule or doctrine) elevates the position of the brahmins to the highest pedestal in the socio-religious hierarchy. The **nimittas** or causes of **asudhi** (defilement) formed the genesis of such social evils like untouchability, unapproachability and pollution. It was considered that **asudhi** occurs when **avarnas** enter the temple. Several purifactory ceremonies have been prescribed in the **tantras** for removing **asudhi**. Many castes were regarded as polluting by proximity. They were not allowed to approach within certain distances of Hindu temples⁶. Numerically the non-caste Hindus formed the largest class⁷. According to the 1931 census of

⁴ B.Sobhanan, *Temple Entry Movement and the Sivakasi Riots*, 1985,p.1.

⁵ *Report of the, Temple Entry Enquiry Committee*, pp.14-15.

⁶ J.H.Hutton, *Caste in India*, p.179.

⁷ T.K.Velu Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol.I, pp.434-35.

Travancore, there were thirty such **avarna** classes⁸. The total population of the **avarnas** in comparison to that of caste-Hindu brahmins and nairs and syrian christians and muslims during the year 1931 is shown in the following table. It shows that the avarnas comprised nearly half of the total population of the state in 1931⁹.

⁸ The Thiry avrna classes were:

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. Adi Dravidar | 11. Kaniyan | 21. Panickar |
| 2. Alavan | 12. Kavathy | 22. Paravan |
| 3. Arayan | 13. Kuravan | 23. Parayan |
| 4. Bharatar | 14. Marakkan | 24. Pulayan |
| 5. Chakkiruvar | 15. Maravan | 25. Pulluvan |
| 6. Chakkiliyan | 16. Mukkran | 26. Tantan |
| 7. Cavalkkaran | 17. Nadar | 27. Tanta-Pulayan |
| 8. Ezhavan | 18. Nulayan | 28. Valan |
| 9. Ezhavathy | 19. Palan | 29. Velan |
| 10. Kakkalan | 20. Panan | 30. Vetan |

⁹ Source : T.K.Velu Pillai, **op.cit.**, pp.434-435.

| Year | Caste and Religion | Total Number of People | Grand total | Percent age |
|------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1931 | Brahmins | 68072 | 936483 | 22.24 |
| | Nairs | 868411 | | |
| | Syrian Christians | 948514 | 1301788 | 29.32 |
| | Muslims | 353274 | | |
| | Other Non-Caste Hindus (Avarnas) | 2857702 | 2857702 | 48.44 |
| | Total | | 5095973 | 100 |

Yet mostly the brahmins who managed the affairs of the temples in Travancore till 1812 enjoyed absolute freedom to carry on the custom and practice of the temple ceremonies virtually lead to the social boycott of the **avarnas** in the pretext of making **asudhi**. It later gained the power of an unwritten law for not allowing **avarnas** to enter into the precincts of temples. In most cases these customary regulations and practies had no sanction in the **dharmasatras** but the ethics of the brahmins gave a superior

religious sanction for them, thereby making custom stronger than law. Besides denying temple entry, signboards were hoisted by government on public roads near temples not to enter the roads and pollute with their presence the sacraments of God. The main reason for the outbreak of temple entry movement was the velocity of suppression and oppression exercised by the caste-Hindus against the non-caste Hindus. The hardships suffered by the non-caste Hindus due to the curtailment of natural freedom, the denial of their human rights and privileges, the perpetuation of the injustice of socio-religious inequality by the caste Hindus and their governments continued without open protest till the first decade of the 20th century.

The socio-religious movements started by Sri Narayana Guru under the organisation called Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam was the most decisive force in Travancore which encouraged the **avarnas** for emancipation struggle against caste-Hindus¹⁰. The social reform work of Muthukutty Swamikal in South Travancore

¹⁰ T.K.Ravindran, *Vaikam Satyagraha and Gandhi*, 1975, p.4.

opened the eyes of the **avarnas**¹¹. The individuals demanding recognition of independent status formed an important step along the struggle for social status. The educated enthusiasts of Nanjilnad vellalas launched an agitation in the first quarter of the 20th century in order to hasten the transformation of family system from collectivism to individualism and from **marumakkathayam** to **Makkathyam**¹². The **marumakkathayam** system had been a mile stone round the neck of Nanjilnad vellala community¹³. The progressive **savarnas** also favoured a social change and they stood for the cause of **avarnas** in getting their social rights recognised and to remove the social evils of the society such as denial of temple entry to them. The liberal attitude of the **yogakshema sabha**, an organisation of young educated and progressive looking namputiri brahmins aiming at the eradication of the unjust religious practices of orthodox brahminism was yet another factor that boosted the morale of the agitators.

¹¹ P. Sarveswaran, '**Vaikunda Swamikal and social Reform Movement**', Journal of Kerala Studies, vol. VIII, 198, pp.1-11.

¹² K.K.Pillai, **History of India with special reference to Tamilnadu**, Madurai 1976, p.168.

¹³ Travancore Legislative Council Proceedings, speech of T.K. Velupillai, Vol.XIX, 1931, p.98.

One of the chronic disabilities of the depressed community was the denial of accessibility. They were ruthlessly kept out of public services, public roads, public wells and places of worship¹⁴. The most distressing and intolerable of the many disabilities was the prohibition of these classes from passing along some roads situated near temples and places¹⁵. At Vaikam there is a famous temple dedicated to Lord Siva. The road around the **prakara** (outer wall) of this temple was used for ceremonial processions and therefore access to **avarnas** had been restricted on this road. Signboards called **Tindal palakas** were hoisted on the southern, northern and western sides of the road forbidding the depressed classes from entering on the road and polluting it by their approach and touch. Yet other non-Hindus like Christians and Muslims were free to use it. Even domestic animals had entry, on the other hand **avarnas** were disallowed. It was to remove the signboards and to open the roads for the untouchables that the famous Vaikam satyagraha was launched on 30th March 1924. The satyagrahis

¹⁴ K.Rajayyan, *History of Tamilnadu* 1565-1982, madurai, 1982, p.280.

¹⁵ *Travancore Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol.VI, 1928, p.321.

fought a crusade against the oppressive social tyranny. Another disability experienced by the depressed class especially **tiyas(ezhavas)** was the refusal of appointment in the civil service and denying the elementary civic rights to them. This was strongly protested by the **ezhava** community. The reason alleged for this exclusion was that the **ezhavas** were confirmed inferiors and any attempt for their social upliftment would turn out to be futile effort¹⁶. The socio-religious protest spearheaded by the oppressed classes against the religious segregation and social discrimination had passed through a series of agitations before winning the goal.

Vaikam Satyagraha:

Inspired by the revolutionary philosophy of SriNarayana Guru through the S.N.D.P. yogam, T.K.Madhavan and other members of **ezhava** community started the sathyagraha movement at Vaikam in March 1924 to secure for all lower caste Hindus the right to use the approach roads to the Siva temple at Vaikam¹⁷. In the month of

¹⁶ E.R., File No.1899/M.884, Government Secretariat, 1924.

¹⁷ T.K.Ravindran, **op.cit.**, p.4.

December 1917, T.K.Madhavan, in an editorial in the **Desabhimani** daily newspaper forcibly raised the question of temple entry to the depressed classes. His message of temple entry gained momentum in due course and was taken to every nook and corner of the state. The movement took a definite shape in March 1924. The satyagrahis demanded the government to remove the signboards on the different sides of the temple roads and to throw open the roads around the Vaikam temple to all people without making any caste distinction. The signboards on other sides were placed exactly at a distance of sixty-four feet from the outer walls of the temple as per the recorded opinion of **tantri**¹⁸. In the meantime progressive **savarna** Hindus also joined hands with the enlightened members of **ezhava** community. The S.N.D.P. Yogam, Nair service society, the Kerala Hindu Sabha, the Yogakshema sabha, the Kshatriya sabha etc participated in the agitation¹⁹. In the meantime T.K.Madhavan met Gandhiji at Tirunelveli and sought his advice and assistance in the struggle against untouchability. Gandhiji advised Madhavan to

¹⁸ Government Secretariat E.R File No.605/1924, Vol.I, 1924.

¹⁹ D.Daniel, **Struggle for responsible government in Travancore**, 1935-1947, Madurai, p.24.

concentrate on civic rights before agitating outright for temple entry. The pradesh congress committee of Travancore in its meeting on 20 January 1924 formed an anti-untouchability committee and also participated in the agitation. Though the committee resolved to start the procession on 1st March 1924, it was postponed to 30th March 1924. The decision seemed wise since they got ample time for wider propaganda since the satyagraha campaign was started without proper preparation on the part of the congress committee²⁰.

On 30th March 1924, as scheduled the satyagraha began. Anti untouchable committee decided to send at a time three or four volunteers consisted by one **pulaya**, one **tiya** and one **nayar** marched to the prohibited road. They were arrested, taken before district magistrate, were later sentenced to six months imprisonment. A band of volunteers led by K.P.Kesava Menon walked to temple precincts, but was served with ban orders by the district magistrate. In defiance, batches of volunteers staged satyagraha and courted arrest. A band of volunteers of madurai led by E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker reached Vaikam, but were arrested.

²⁰ T.K.Ravidran, *op.cit.*,p.54.

The organisation of caste -Hindu **jatha** was one of the high lights of the movement. Mannathu Padmanabhan from Vaikam and M.E.

Naidu from Suchindrum in south Travancore led the **jatha**. They assembled at Trivandrum and presented a memorial to the Regent, Sethu Lekshmi Bai on 12th November 1924²¹. The Regent agreed to consider the matter favourably but this appeared unsatisfactory which led to the continuance of the struggle. On 10th March 1925, Gandhiji visited Vaikam and as result of an agreement between the government and Gandhiji, all roads except those on the eastern side were thrown open to **avarnas** with effect from 7th April 1925. However, the British authorities looked at it as a political upheaval rather than as a social and religious protest²².

Guruvayur Satyagraha:

The **avarnas** organised similar agitations in other places of Travancore, Cochin and Kozhicode. In Kottayam it was organised under leadership of T.K.Madhavan and Kuttan Nair for the entry into Tiruvarppu temple lanes. Among such agitation, the Gruvayur

²¹ D. Denial, **op.cit.**, p.24.

²² E.R., G.O. No. 151, Political Department, Ordinary Series, dated 21 April 1924.

satyagraha gained more importance. A **jatha** under the captaincy of A.K.Gopalan to enter the famous Guruvayur temple was another remarkable event in the struggle for social status. On 3rd August 1931, the provincial congress committee resolved to commence satyagraha before the Guruvayur temple and K.Kelappan took a leading part. He started the agitation on 31st October 1931. The continuous Satyagraha was organised and every day the satyagrahis comprising of **avarnas** rounded the four gates of the temple in procession. They rang the bell at Guruvayur temple, which as a custom was rung only by brahmins. They challenged the nambutiris stating that non-caste Hindus also had the same privileges as the brahmins had²³. He also instructed the satyagrahis to break the custom and to ring the bell as a token of their protest against this evil practice. In response to this the temple authorities appointed a watchman to guard the temple bell and thereby the attempt made by the people to ring the bell every day was failed. But it was a surprising development that on the

²³ A.K.Gopalan, *In the cause of the people*, (An Autobiographical Reminiscences), 1976, p.43.

next day P.Krishna Pillai rang the bell and he was beaten up severely²⁴. Subsequently 168 **savarnas** submitted a memorial to the governor of Madras to take steps against the satyagrahis. Yet the governor held the view that the courts were the proper forum to decide the matter. So the temple management filed a petition in the sub-divisional magistrate court in Malabar forbidding the low castes from using the roads but the court decided the case in favour of the right of the **avarnas**. Consequently, the temple was closed for a few days. Having encouraged on the court's decision, a group of agitators moved around the temple and took bath in the temple tank. The temple management lodged a complaint before the district magistrate and due to the intervention of the magistrate, the temple was re-opened on 28th January 1932. However, the attitude of the caste - Hindus and temple administrators including the Zamorin was not changed and this led to another stage of agitation for a permanent solution to the problem of temple entry in the state. At this stage K.Kelappan decided to go on fast until the opening of the temple to the non-

²⁴ T.V.Krishanan, *Life of Sakhavu Krishna Pillai* (Mal), New Delhi, 19171, pp.20-21.

caste Hindus ²⁵. On 20th September 1932, he started his fast unto death and this induced not only **avarnas** but also **avarnas** to organise procession in support of satyagraha and save the life of Kelappan. The news reached throughout India and 25th September was observed as 'Guruvayur day' with processions and public meetings. Finally at the request of Zamorin, Gandhiji sent a telegram to Kelappan advising him to suspend the fast. Though the satyagraha was stopped abruptly without materialising the demand fully, it sowed the seed for another satyagraha movement at Suchindrum which carried on the message of total temple entry to the non-caste Hindus of the state.

Suchindrum Satyagraha:

In continuation to Vaikam satyagraha and Guruvayur satyagraha and popular movements for temples entry in other parts of the state, the satyagrahis of South Travancore started their struggle to enter the temple and temple street at Suchindrum²⁶. The Siva temple at Suchindrum surrounded by car streets and

²⁵ A.K.Gopalan, **op.cit.**, p.44.

²⁶ T.K.Ravindran, **op.cit.**, p.97.

sannadhi teru (temple street) were inhabited by brahmins and vellalas. Car streets and **sannathi teru** (temple street) were included in the devaswom **sanketham** and as such the polluted men were denied entry in these areas. The vellalas, nairs and chettis were permitted to go into the **arthamandapa** and **Thirucurtamandapa** and not to the **garbhagraha** (sanctum sanctorium) which was opened only for brahmins²⁷. Bamboo screens were put up at the entrance of all the main streets, denoting the prohibition of entry to the forbidden classes. Some enlightened Hindus held a special meeting to organise a satyagraha at Kottar on 19th January 1926. A working committee consisting of leaders with Subramanya Pillai as president and M.E. Naidu, H.Perumal Panickar, P.C.Thanumalaya Perumal and Gawridas as secretaries, treasurer and captain respectively was constituted²⁸. They recruited young volunteers and trained the satyagrahis for executing the mission. The satyagrahis stirred up the public

²⁷ K.K.Pillai, **The Suchindrum Temple**, Madras, 1953, p.295.

²⁸ E.R.Letter (Judicial) No.D.Dis 1475, dated 21 January 1926.

aspiration with huge posters, distribution of pamphlets and conducting public meetings. In the mean time the government banned M.E.Naidu, the leader of satyagrahis, from making public speeches participating in public meetings and entering specific areas²⁹. The agitators fixed finally 29th January as the appointed day and they started the procession singing songs and holding flags and placards from their **asramam** at Kottar. The captain and five volunteers determined to enter the prohibited **sanketam** limits³⁰. The government without the least vestige of shame arrested the leaders on the same day itself and sentenced them to rigorous imprisonment for a year. The arrest and punishment were questioned in the high court which not only acquitted the accused but also ordered to make accessible, the streets around the Suchindrum temple to all, irrespective of caste or creed as matter of civic right³¹. But the court order was not implemented then and there. The satyagrahis did not rest, they proceeded with their course of agitation realising the aspirations of the people. They

²⁹ Travancore Legislative Council Proceedings. Vol.IX, p.681

³⁰ Five volunteers: two pulayars, one ezhava, one vellala, one brahmin.

³¹ P.Ramachandran, **M.V. Naidu and Suchindrum Satyagraha**, *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol.III, 2 June 1976,

were prohibited from holding public meetings in and around Suchindrum. But ignoring the police barricades, the satyagrahis advanced towards the temple. The police dispersed them with force³². The movement received momentum when Gandhiraja, the brother of M.E.Naidu arrived at Suchindrum on 11th February 1926 with a band of 15 volunteers. The procession challenged the caste-Hindus and forced to enter the car street. This resulted in a clash between the satyagrahis and antisatyagrahis and many of the untouchables were severely assaulted at many places. The depressed community of Kakkad was threatened with destruction for their co-operation with satyagrahis and their children were brutally attacked on their way back from the mission school at Nagercoil³³. On 13th May 1930, the satyagrahis resumed the satyagraha movement under the leadership of Gandhi Raman Pillai of Eraviputhoor and he was arrested along with six others. Even

³² **S.M.P.A.**, vol.XX., pp.739-740.

³³ **Travancore Legislative Proceedings**, vol.IX, p.681.

though a section of caste-Hindus were antagonistic towards the movement, the satyagrahis managed to continue the struggle and a situation arose when the government could not ignore the sentiments of the **avarnas**.

As a result the government issued a press communique on 8th November 1932 announcing their decision to appoint a committee to enquire into and report on the question of temple entry³⁴. A committee consisting of eight members with V.S.Subramaniya Iyer, a retired **dewan** of Travancore as the president was announced by the government³⁵. The committee was to report whether in the temples of the state, the caste - Hindus enjoyed an exclusive right to worship and whether in any particular caste-Hindu temple there was any local practice limiting the entry of non-caste Hindus. The government also wanted to know the opinion of all Hindus regarding the creation of social and religious equality by allowing temple entry³⁶. The first meeting of the committee was held on 7th December 1932 and all the members

³⁴ R.Dis. No.648/Devaswom, dated 25 November 1932.

³⁵ **T.A.R.**, 1932-33, p.244.

³⁶ **The Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee**, 1934,p.2.

were present for the meeting. A questionnaire was drawn up and copies of it were sent to 5774 leading persons including trustees of temples and representatives of associations. The questionnaire was also published in the gazette in three languages English, Malayalam, and Tamil and answers were invited from all interested persons. Including eight ladies 3122 persons sent their answers to the questionnaire³⁷. The temple entry enquiry committee submitted its report on 11th January 1934³⁸. The report of the committee was published on 24th April 1934. The report was in favour of temple entry to all classes of Hindus. The referendum conducted among the caste-Hindus showed that the majority was in favour granting temple entry to **avarnas**. The report of the temple entry enquiry committee thus states: "From the preponderance of the oral evidence and the information as to the general feeling in the country which we have been able to gather from that evidence, it is clear that there is a strong feeling among **savarna** in favour of temple entry being allowed". The government conceded, a section of

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.3.

³⁸ P.Ramachandran, *op.cit.*, p.15.

caste Hindus relented , the long standing demand of the non-caste Hindus were accepted and the government announced the historic temple entry proclamation, which came into effect on 12th November 1936³⁹. The auspicious occasion of twenty fifth birthday of His Highness the Maharaja, falling on the 12th day of November 1936 was chosen and that memorable day, the people of Travancore and all India heard the proclamation which has made a definite land mark in the history of our country⁴⁰. The reform had been effected under the advice of the **dewan** Sir.C.P.Ramaswamy Iyyer, who has himself a Hindu with deep knowledge of spiritual as well as secular affairs⁴¹.

The temple entry proclamation⁴² was viewed from several angles not only as a Hindu act, not only as an Indian act, but as an act of liberation and sublimation of humanity. T.K.Velu Pillai characterised the proclamation as 'the spiritual magnacarta of

³⁹ **Travancore Government Gazette**, dated 24 November 1936, p.335.

⁴⁰ **The temple Entry Proclamation Memorial Souvenir**, p.4.

⁴¹ T.K.Velu Pillai, **op.cit.**, p.518.

⁴² Vide in the Appendix.II, p.7.

Travancore'⁴³. With this epoch making manifestation, the temple worship became popularised among all sections of Hindu society in Travancore. As per the rules framed under Travancore - Cochin Temple Entry Act, simply a minor restriction was imposed that in case of any doubt regarding the genuinity of a person with regard to his religion, he must only give a declaration that he is a follower of Hindu faith⁴⁴. Since popularisation of temple worship came into existence, the income in the temples of Travancore also increased. The **kanikka**, **nadavaravu** etc in the temples increased in accordance with the increase in the number of people visited the temples everyday. Many temples which were at the verge of financial crisis improved in economy, thereby the daily **pujas** and other ceremonies held properly. The proclamation created a healthy and vigorous spiritual life and helped for the advancement of various castes and classes among the Hindu community⁴⁵. The **Kammalas** of south Travancore who had accepted the position of a polluting caste and had no entry in temples came to be treated as

⁴³ T.K.Velu Pillai, **op.cit.**, Vol. IV, p.25.

⁴⁴ Vide in the Appendix.III, p.10.

⁴⁵ A.Sreedhara Menon, **Kerala District Gazetteers**, p.274.

equals with so called high castes⁴⁶. The proclamation radiated a fusion on sub-castes, which in turn fostered inter-marriage and inter-dining among different castes⁴⁷. After the proclamation the brahmin boys used to sit very close to the so called low-caste children in many of the schools and colleges. Thus it was the birth of a new era, an era of equality and freedom in the state. The dawn of the new era demanded more regulations in the administration of temples in Travancore. The government thought of bringing the administration of temples under legislation, in order to make temple administration effective and accountable to people. The transition of the state from monarchy to democracy also warranted the enactment of laws for the better governance of the temples in the state. This paved the way for enactment of Hindu Religious Institutions. Act (Act XI of 1950) for further regulation and control of temples in Travancore.

⁴⁶ L.A. Krishna Iyyar, **Social History of Kerala**, vol.I, Madras, 1970, p.6.

⁴⁷ A.Sreedhara Menon, **Social and cultural History of Kerala**, NewDelhi, 1979,p.74.