



TEMPLE ENTRY MOVEMENT IN ODISHA OF HARIJAN DURING

COLONIAL PERIOD

Dr. Sandhyarani Kanhar

Lecturer in History, A.M.C.S. College Tikabali, India

Abstract:

The temple entry of Harijans was an important part of Harijan Movement. The temple entry Movement was intended to give rights to Harijans to enter and worship in the same manner as upper caste Hindus. The movement was a campaign against Untouchability. The movement was launched with the purpose of self-mobilisation and self-respect among the Untouchables. The movement shows a path as a collective agitation of untouchables against the exploitation both in the form of class, caste and creed, culture and social disparity in the society.

The Depressed classes include the people within Hindu society who belong to those castes which Hindu religion considers to be polluting by virtue of hereditary Occupation. They refer to those castes which belong to the lowest rung of the Hindu caste hierarchy and whose touch or proximity was considered polluting by the caste Hindus.¹ They were denied and deprived of various basic human rights. Socially, they remained segregated from the caste Hindu. Throughout period under review they remained subject to certain common social disabilities and degradation.

Mahatma Gandhi fought against casteism, religious hatred, superstitions, social oppression and economic exploitation. His fight for national liberation was a part of the struggle of suffering against oppression. In Indian society Gandhi initiated through his constructive programme touched all aspects of human society. One such aspect of his programme was removal of untouchability. Gandhi's perception of untouchability was the most painful and difficult social problem, with which history has ever cursed the civilized people.² A humble attempt has been made in this paper to highlight the importance and impact of Temple Entry Movement in Orissa.

Key Word: Harijan, Temple enter, Sanatanist, Gandhi, Dalit Leaders

Introduction

The problem of the untouchables came into the limelight because of a number of factors the British policy of sectional representation and there to treat the untouchables as a separate section for the purpose of representation, incorporation of the removal of the untouchability as an important item in the congress programme and sure but trade growth of political consciousness among the educated elements of the Untouchables.³

The movement will help to develop an idea how this movement heralded a new era of social emancipation in orthodox society. The purpose of the Movement was not only to entry of untouchables to the temples, but to enlarge it so that there should not be any distinction between one class and other class of Hindus.

Methodology

The study adopts a historical and analytical methodology to examine the Temple Entry Movement of Harijan on Odisha. Primary sources include contemporary newspaper, reports, writings related to Mahatma Gandhi and Harijan leaders. Secondary sources such as books, journals, and previous historical studies are also consulted. The collected information is critically examined to understand the causes, nature, activities, opposition, and impact of the movement. Special attention is given to the Jagannath Temple at Puri and other important centers in Odisha. The study follows a chronological and descriptive approach.

Religious Disabilities of The Harijan

Though the untouchables professed Hinduism and worshipped Hindu deities, denied access to the Hindu temple. The Untouchables do not have any right to enter a temple or offer worship at other than the regular hour, or to personally



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perform services normally reserved to specially functionaries.⁴ Moreover, they were excluded from entering the temples but were permitted *darshan* of the holly image through an aperture from an outside passage. The Brahmins of superior caste did not officiate in their ceremonies, in some cases their ceremonies were performed by their own caste men and in other by lower Brahmins. This religious disability was the root cause of the other social disabilities of Untouchables. Denial of admission to the temples had considerable social implication, because the temple was not merely a religious institution but also 'in many ways a social one'.⁵

Gandhi started an All India Anti-Untouchability League in September 1932 and the weekly Harijan in January 1933.⁶ An All India Harijan Sevak Sangha was formed with G.D. Birla as its president and A.V. Takkar as secretary. A branch of Harijan Sevak Sangha was organized at Cuttack under the Chairmanship of Balunkeswar Acharya, a reputed *Kaviraja* of Cuttack.⁷ The main objectives of this organization were to promote the social economic and educational well-being of the Harijans.

The Historical Padayatra of Gandhiji in Orissa in order to promote the Harijan cause and to remove all social disabilities of Harijans, Gandhiji covered 12,500 miles in his All-India tour between November 1933 and August 1934. He began his historical Padayatra from Puri on 9th may 1934 to create awareness among the people for the abolition of Untouchability.⁸

Harijans Temple Entry at Different Places

There are number of meetings discussed for allowing of Harijans to enter Hindu temples. Gandhi led the programme with his followers in two courses of action for implement. Firstly, they should try to educate the public opinion for securing to the Harijans perfect freedom to enter temple of public places. Secondly, they should erect model schools, temples, dig wells, "specially designate for the convenience of untouchables but open to others subjects, always a priority for Harija."⁹

Special importance was attached to the entry of untouchables into the Jagannath temple mainly for two reasons. Firstly, Jagannath temple was the premier temple of Orissa and one of the most important shines Hinduism of the whole country opening of its door for the untouchables was expected to give a tremendous boost to the temple entry movement in Orissa as well as the test of the country. Secondly, in view of the egalitarian tradition of the temple with regard to the sharing of the *Kaibalya* or *Mahaprasad*, it was also expected that this temple would give a lead in the matter of temple entry.¹⁰

Gandhi presidential address to the third session of Orissa Provincial Conference held on 29 and 30 March 1929, Gopabandhu Chaudhury, the leading congress leaders observe "it is highly deplorable to note that untouchability is prevailing among the people of Orissa, though in Jagannath temple all castes high and low could take the Mahaprasad together"¹¹

The movement for the Harijans entry into the temples started in Orissa with Gandhi's fast in September, 1932.¹² Gandhi was still continuing his fast, a deputation consisting of important persons from Khurda and Cuttack met Ramachandradeb, the Raja of Puri request him to declare the temple open for the untouchables. But the Raja expressed his inability to do so.¹³

A meeting was held in the Cuttack town hall on 18th December, 1932 under auspices of the Harijan Sevak Sangha which was attended by Gapabandhu Chaudhury, Satyanarayan Sengupta, Radhanath Rath, Rajkrushan Baose and Atal Bhari Acharya to allow the untouchables into the temple of the city.¹⁴ *Utkala Sanatan Dharma Sabha*, whose secretary, Pancha Jyotirbit Kavyatirtha Saraswati Parikshit Das Sharma oppose that 'the removal of Untouchable and entry of untouchables into the temples, would destroy the Sanatan religion'.¹⁵

On 8th January, 1933 at Puri, the Sanatan Dharma Rakshini Sabha was planning to hold a meeting oppose the temple entry movement. At the same time, the congress Leader, Pandit Nilakantha Dash, tried to raise the voice for the public to support of untouchables entry into Jagarnnath temple.¹⁶



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On 14th May 1933, the working committee of the provincial Harijan Sevak Sangha met at Puri and held a meeting with Pandit Nilakantha Das as the President and Lokanath Mishra as the Secretary to continue the movement at Puri.¹⁷ The Harijan worker requested the *All-India Harijan Sevak Sangha* to judge the temple entry at Puri as an All-India Issue. A local leader suggests that the doors of the temple Jagannath were open for all castes in the past and therefore they should be opened now for untouchables. Jivaram Kalyanji worked among the intelligentsia and the priestly class for creating an atmosphere in favour of abolition of untouchable and temple entry.¹⁸

Pandit Nilakantha Dash and Lokanath Mishra tried to convince the priests of the Jagannath temple the issue of temple entry. The priests sought to reform the Mukti Mandap Sabha so as to give a favourable decision in favour of untouchable's entry into the temple.¹⁹

In 1934 Bamana Chandra Das and Nandakishore Das assisted by Harish Chandra Das of Neula, Bhagirathi Das of Anandpur, Gobardhan Puan and Artabandhu Mahanty of Aurangabad allowed the Harijans to enter the temples of their family deities.²⁰ The temple entry of Harijans created a special place at Bari. The Gopinath temple at Remuna near Balesore and the temple of Siva at Kujang in the Jagatsinghpur district were opened to worship God for Harijan.²¹ Under the supervision Acharya Harihara Das the temples were opened for Harijan at Rambha and Ganjam in February, 1935. The Raghunath temple of Gate Bazar at Berhampur was opened for Harijan. The Narayana Birabar Samanta opened the Pareswar temple at Paradip to the Harijan.²² A Harijan temple was constructed by Laxmi Narayan Mishra and Bodharam of Sambalpur for Harijans at Pandrupathar village in Jharsuguda.²³ There was a temple entry attempt by Harijans in Bikrampur and Nawrangpur in September, 1938.²⁴ On 15th May during the fast phase of his *Padayatra* of Gandhi perform the ceremony of opening the temple of Nikunja Vihari at Baliana to all including the Harijans who displayed considerable enthusiasm.²⁵ Kntakabi Laxmikanta Mohapatra of Talapada in Tihidi Block of Bhadrak opened the temple of his family deity, Gopinath Jew to the Harijans.²⁶ Kokila Devi promoted the Hindus to open the temple for Harijans in village Bhadrak.²⁷

Harekrushna Mahatab opened the temple of his family deity at Agarapara in Bhadrak district for the Harijans. Gopabandhu Choudhury inaugurated the temple entry function and Pandit Basudev Rath acted as the chief Priest. About four thousand people were gathering on the occasion. Mahatab's family temple was opened for Harijan and named as *Karma Mandir*.²⁸

The contemporary temple entry in Kendrapada is due to the rise of education, consciousness and mobilization among the Harijan, against the practice of untouchability by the upper castes and for their right to enter the Jagannath Temple.²⁹ A meeting was held at Jajpur under the auspices of the local anti-untouchability league, the Zamindar of the Calicut to declare the Guruvayayer temple open for the untouchables.³⁰

During the colonial era, the movement of the masses that carves for justice through many songs and poems were writing by the poet and authors which were sung in meetings and marches. In this record writings of Bira Kishore Das, Banchanidhi Mohanty was noteworthy. In order to popularized the temple entry, the contemporary Newspapers also took the Prominent role among the masses. Literary works, dramas, cultural organization and the other possible measures were created to create awareness among the masses' the organizations were started functioning for the movement.

Opposition by Sanatani's and the Conservative Society

The Sanatani's adopted all possible measures to persuade the people to boycott the meetings. Placards containing "GO BACK GANDHI" were also pasted on the walls and streets of the city. Throughout Gandhi's tour in Orissa he had to face opposition of the Sanatani's, but he seemed to have routed them completely by his arguments. They staged black flag demonstration on 9th May when he began his foot march from Puri to Vira-Harekrushnapur.³¹

At Baradeswar in the Bhadrak district, there was a stiff opposition to Gandhi's mission by the local Hindus who objected to the discussion of the workers to have the camp of Gandh in the temple. Swamin Lalnath led the black flag procession in 16th may. When Gandhi addressing the meeting on the sands of the river Kathjori. Gandhi decided that as long



as Sanatanis themselves did not allow the Harijans to entry the temples out of their own correspond there was no way to enter Harijan forcefully.³²

Conclusion

The temple entry movement was not fully succeeded in the conservative of Hindu society of Orissa. But to some extent the attempt was successful. The movement has some limitations. Firstly, Gandhi's movement against the temple entry for Harijans has arrived into Orissa very late. It came out clearly when Gandhi was not allowed into Puri Jagannath temple by the priests. The conservatives opposed it tooth and nail, the reforms were half-heated and the middle-class intellectuals of Orissa were apathetic to it. Lack of unity, leadership, ideology and strong organization are some of the causes for the late starting of the Temple Entry Movement in Orissa. But the movement was purely non-violent in nature and organised through Gandhian method.

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