

Relooking at The Temple Entry Satyagraha of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Prof. Dr. Arun Vitthal Sonkamble, H.O.D., Dept. of History,
Ch. Shivaji Night College of Arts and Commerce, Solapur,
arunsonkamble6126@gmail.com

Introduction:

The establishment of British rule in India led to several changes. The Socio-Religious reform movement was one such change which has left a prominent impact on India's march towards modernity. A closer look at the movement in terms of leadership, participation, objective and issues they dealt with reveals its two types. The one was led by caste Hindus (Savarna's) and the other emerged from amongst the deprived class (Avarnas). The former was reformist in nature while the later fought for radical change within Indian society. If anything in India can be compared with the grand revolutions, such as French, American, Russian and Chinese. In terms of their objective, character their ideas and the centrality they accorded to their plebeian class. It will be very clearly said that it was the movement of the depressed classes in India. Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Ch. Shahu Maharat, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy, Shri Narayan Guru and most importantly Dr. B.R. Ambedkar were the hardcore proponents of depressed class movement for radical change.

Present study focuses upon the temple entry satyagraha's to understand the difference between the two socio-religious reform movements. The study also attempts to find parallels between present temple politics and past.

The Congress Satyagrahas :

The Vacom Satyagraha of Travancore principality was a pioneering one. T.K. Madhavan Ezhava (so called erstwhile untouchable carte in Kerala) was the first to raise the issue in an editorial in 'Deshabhimani'. He also introduced resolution in the assembly calling for temple entry.

T.K. Madhavan a former member of Shri. Narayan Guru's SNDP later on joined Gandhiji in past 1920's. The decade of 1920's began with Gandhiji's first all India movement, the non co-operation movement. The movement introduced constructive programme. The issue of untouchability was one of the issue under the constructive programme. Punjab witnessed rise of Akali's while Malabar Kerala witnessed the Moplah rebellion of 1921 and communal tensions associated with it. The Viacom Satyagraha provided an opportunity to mobilise people and revive the congress which had suffered severe setback with the Moplah rebellion. The 1923's Kakinada session of the congress provided on impetus to the Satyagraha.

T.K. Madhavan put forward his stand over the Satyagraha. He appealed to caste Hindus and stated that the core of the demand of Viacom was not temple entry but assertion of the rights of the avarnas to use the common public properties like roads. The Hindu wrote

about the Viacom Satyagraha as a truly glorious fight to establish the dignity of man and his right to free movement had begun.

While the savarna's approach towards the Satyagraha seemed to be different. It was seen as an opportunity to revive Congress. It was seen as an opportunity to halt the Ezhava's closeness towards Christianity. The exclusion of the newly emerging well to do class of the Ezhava's may lead to mass conversion. Gandhiji kept away the Christians from the Satyagraha.

The leadership of the Satyagraha was in the savarna hands. Congressmen like K. Kelappan, K.P. Kesav Memon, Mannath Padmanabha actively participated in the Satyagraha. The methods utilized in the Satyagraha were the Gandhian techniques of peaceful march, appealing to the conscience of the caste Hindus, fasting, reciting of patriot songs etc. Gandhiji toured Travancore, held talks with the rulers.

The Satyagraha also witnessed participation of non Congressmen like E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, Shri. Narayan Guru. Narayan Guru had little enthusiasm for Gandhian techniques. Interestingly even the Akali Jathas of Punjab participated. Narayan Guru suggested forceful entry but later changed his stand. His moto was 'One Caste, One Religion, One God'.

The Satyagraha failed to achieve its core objective. But it inspired the future assertive politics of the depressed class in South India.

Similar Satyagraha were concluded in different parts of the country over different periods. More or less their nature remained unchanged. Most were conducted under Gandhian leadership from Congress platform and particularly from Harijan Sevak Sangh's platform post 1932. Examples are the Malabar (Guruvayasu), The Puri (1932-34), The Swami Narayan Ahmedabad (1948) and the Pandharpur (1947) Satyagrahas. The Puri Satyagraha began with Gandhiji's fast followed by his padyatras in Orissa. Except the Pandharpur Satyagraha most of them failed due to opposition from Caste Hindus. The Pandharpur Satyagraha saw participation of caste Hindus from varied political backgrounds. Sane Guruji and Vinoba Bhave were staunch Gandhians, S.M. Joshi and Madhu Limye were leftist, Harijan Sevak Sangh's Kakasaheb Barve, Appasaheb Patwardhan. Though Gandhiji opposed fast, Sane Guruji's fast unto death (1947) led to opening of the temple. For the opening of Swaminarayan Temple in Gandhiji's home state it required a Supreme Courts verdict in 1966.

Analysing the causes of failure leads us to look at Gandhiji's views on the issue. Gandhiji denounced forceful entry, favoured appeal to the conscience of the caste Hindus. He was of the view that Harijan's must visit temples because their Hindutva will remain incomplete without temples. He emphasized that the Harijans should neither resort to law nor force but open their entry through Satyagraha. There is inconsistency in his stand. He further believed it is willing to accept the elevated aspirations of the new era that man must be treated as man, he must be given humanitarian rights and human dignity should be established for him it was a matter of rights and not of faith.

The congress kept itself away from the Satyagraha. Swami Anand, the Secretary of Anti Untouchability sub-committee of INC, refused to help the Satyagraha. The Congress stand was, weapon of mass satyagraha should be used only for the attainment of Indian Political Independence and not for promoting the cause of temple entry. Gandhiji didn't give his support rather he condemned the Satyagraha in strong terms.

The Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha was organised, financed by and for the depressed class. It was more radical and militant in nature. Starting in Feb. 1930 Babasaheb suspended the Satyagraha in 1935 without achieving the goal of temple entry. Temple entry was never the goal, the larger goal of energizing the depressed class, making them conscious of their rights and positions was achieved. It successfully expressed the caste Hindus futile and cosmetic social reformative approach.

At the Round Table Conference, London, Gandhiji claimed himself to be the sole leader of the depressed classes in India. He vehemently opposed Dr. Babasaheb's view that the depressed class is a minority separate from rest of caste Hindus, hence they deserve a separate electorate. Gandhiji claimed the so called untouchables as an integral part of the Hindu body hence doesn't require a separate electorate. He toured for Harijans temple entry and undertook fast for the cause. Same time he opposed their entry into legislative bodies as independent force by undertaking a fast unto death at Poona in 1932.

At Yeola 1935 while suspending the Kalaram Nashik Satyagraha Dr. Babasaheb made his historic proclamation that he was born a Hindu but will not die a Hindu. On 14th October, 1956 along with his followers he renounced Hindu religion and embraced Buddhism. This marks a beginning of revolution in modern India. Temple entry was a failure, Yeola and finally Nagpur was a grand success.

Temple in Contemporary Indian Politics :

After 75 years of Independence the depressed class is still struggling to have their own genuine leadership. If at all it developed all means were galvanized to exterminate it. Congress ruled for majority of the period hence was seen in the forefront in this task. Congress failed, even to develop depressed class leadership within its own organisation. It was a non Congress party which on its own strength provided Independent India's first Chief Minister from depressed class.

Today the Sangha parivar (RSS), the torch bearer of Hindu Nationalism, identifies temples as an essential part of the so called Hindu Nationalism. Chars and contradictions characterise present environment. A whole discourse has been created around Hinduism and temples. The UP elections were fought on the basis of 80-20 formula where 80 indicated all Hindus. Some time the political reservation of OBC's was taken away. The Sangha Parivar and its frontier organisation on one hand oppose reservation other hand provides it for a new class economically weaker section, this finds no mention the orphans in the constitution. New temple issues like the Gyanvapi are manufactured. The Bahujan youths are instigated with communal cries like 'Mandir Vahi Banayenge', 'Mathura Abhi Baki Hai'. The same

youths are unheard and denied of dignified and quality employment when they protest against the 'Agnipath' and 'Agniveer' Scheme.

The country witnessed opposition to Maharashtra governments move to democratise Pandharpur's temple administration by making it open to all irrespective of caste and ser. On the other had the Sangha Parivar to gain roots in the most literate State of India, Kerala is running a programme to teach temple rituals and customs to the youths. Dr. Babasaheb on supervision of Nashik Satyagraha directed to focus upon development and education. Today intellectuals are either killed or declared as Naxals, university campus's are vandalised, students beaten up and threatened. The 33% reservation for women in legislative bodies bill is pending for decades. On the other hand never demands of women's temple entry are emerging like Sabarimala and Shani Shingnapur.

Conclusion :

In India temple seems to be never a matter of faith but as a arena of politics. Faith acts as a strength in individual and collective life. If it is translated into blind faith and pollicised then it will prove harmful for the country's growth and development. Dr. Babasahab's thoughts on the issue are as relevant today and tomorrow as they were in the past.

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