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## MADRAS LEGISLATURE: TEMPLE ENTRY AND PRESS ACTIVITIES

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The struggle for political freedom under Mahatma Gandhi culminated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. While he was hectic in mobilising popular support towards this end, leaders led by B.R. Ambedkar sought measures for social justice. By 1932 political compulsions regarding communal electorate made Congress intensify the temple entry and anti-untouchability campaign and through that numerous bills and Acts came into being in the central and provincial legislatures of India.<sup>1</sup> As an immediate impact of the Poona Pact, the caste-Hindus at a public meeting in Bombay on 25th September 1932 passed a significant resolution in favour of the temple entry of depressed classes.<sup>2</sup> As an outcome of all-India socio-political developments, and in responding to the need of the time, Justice Party backed P. Subbarayan Ministry initiated temple entry resolution in 1932. 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 previous sanction of the Viceroy.<sup>3</sup> 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* highly protested against the inactivity of the Viceroy.<sup>4</sup> The *Gandhi* and *Anandha Bodhini* appealed that the Government without any delay should come to do its duty because the public opinion was already created on the signing of Poona Pact and there was a large attendance in Bombay conference.<sup>5</sup> The *Andhra Patrika* urged the Government of India as well as the Madras Government to respect those popular feelings favouring P. Subbarayan's Bill.<sup>6</sup> However, the British officials in India expressed strong reservations against the proposed temple entry legislations. The Home Secretary to the Government of India feared that the Viceroy's

sanctions to the Bills could disrupt the relations between the Government and the conservative Hindus.<sup>7</sup>

As public pressure mounted on, Lord Willington decided to give his verdict to the Bill of P. Subbarayan. For this purpose, he approached his own colleagues and experts and sought the views of local government.<sup>8</sup> As there was a divided Hindu opinion on the Bill, Lord Willington, on his decision on 23 January 1933<sup>9</sup> refused permission to P. Subbarayan and Narayan Nambiar to introduce their Bills as the problem was of an all-Indian character and so it could not be approached merely on a provincial basis.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> He also stated that the two bills should be circulated for public opinion.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of the public opinion, the Government was to decide the legislation and its implementation according to the needs of circumstances.<sup>13</sup> The Viceroy's refusal of P. Subbarayan's Bill came in for severe criticism by the press. The *Podujana Oolijan* observed that it was a mistake on the part of the Viceroy to have exercised, as he liked. His formal preliminary sanction was necessary for the introduction of a provincial Bill.<sup>14</sup> The *Samadarsini* questioned the validity of the Viceroy's objection to the introduction of P. Subbarayan's Bill in the provincial legislature.<sup>15</sup> *The Hindu* observed that the Viceroy's refusal to give sanction to P. Subbarayan's Bill could not be justified either on the technical grounds or on the ground that it involved an all-Indian nature.<sup>16</sup> The *Swarajya* observed that the Viceroy's blank refusal to P. Subbarayan's Bill was a tragic error of judgment, because the Bill was deliberately drafted to meet the particular requirements of the Madras Province and was in fact a little more than an amending bill of Madras Hindu Religious Endowment Act of 1927.<sup>17</sup> 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 knows as conservatives were lying and to lull the children,