

would give up office; I would not withdraw this policy." This was CR in his true stature. The prohibition law was introduced in the Presidency in this context.

The next important measure CR enacted was the Agriculturists' Debt Relief Act. This Act extinguished debts incurred by the agriculturists wherever amounts paid by way of interest and repayment of capital amounted to twice the sum borrowed. Opposition parties stated that this had a leftist tinge. CR explained that his measure was based on the principle of *dumdapat* adumbrated in the Laws of Manu -- the ancient law giver. Incidentally it showed how fair-minded a law-giver Manu was in this matter. Those adversely affected by the proposal raised a hue and cry. CR, however, had his way.

Next was the legislation regarding entry of the so-called untouchables into the Hindu temples. Here he indulged in a frontal attack on orthodoxy and customs which had become out-of-date.

Temple Entry

One day when I returned home (48 Bazlullah Road as it then was) I found my father engaged in enthusiastic conversation with a couple of friends. I could see an air of excitement. I asked my father what the excitement was about. CR tossed a copy of *The Hindu* before me and asked me to find out the cause. There was a news item stating that A. Vaidyanatha Iyer of Madurai accompanied by a batch of "Harijans" entered the great Meenakshi Temple of Madurai and that they were allowed by the trustees to offer worship to the deity. I asked father and others whether this piece of news item was the cause for their excitement. CR said that I was right. Then he handed over the copy of *The Mail* and asked me jubilantly to read the same item of the news splashed in big headlines. After some time the visitors left us. CR's mood of elation soon changed to one of seriousness and anxiety. I could see what this was due to. Though the entry and worship of Harijans at the temple was an exhilarating incident, the fact remained, that under the then existing law, the batch that entered the temple under Vaidyanatha Iyer's leadership was liable for prosecution for committing sacrilege of a place of worship. This was what was worrying CR at the moment. Knowing his own mind and trend of thought I helpfully suggested that there was no way out

to create all round goodwill.

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Nation-Building

Though catapulted into the high office of Prime Ministership of the sprawling Presidency, all of a sudden, it did not take long for CR to launch administrative, social and economic programmes of action. The Congress had on its agenda a set of nation-building programmes. Till its partymen accepted political offices, it carried on propaganda in favour of these items non-officially. CR now resolved to use his newly acquired opportunity to implement these very programmes through legislative and administrative machinery. The masses admired his action and supported him. But in the sad world, however, unanimity is not always obtainable. Some friction arose. By all available means CR tried to carry public opinion with him. In the legislature, measures, though drastic, were carried on through the process of Select Committee where the opposition, small though it was, had its say.

CR decided to introduce total prohibition starting from a district to begin with. His colleagues in the cabinet honoured him by asking him to introduce prohibition from his home district of Salem first. Dixon was appointed Collector of the district with a special responsibility for the enforcement of the newly introduced prohibition law. The law allowed for special "permits" for those who needed drink on medical grounds. Permission to Christian churches to use wine for sacramental purposes was also granted. Dixon and other officers through their sincerity and loyalty made the prohibition experiment in the district a great success. The Collector's periodical reports to the government reflected how beneficial the prohibition was to society. CR utilised the services of non-officials to back up the law. In the place of the defunct liquor shops tea shops were opened as an alternative. CR went on an extensive tour of the area. He received a royal welcome. In due course the experiment was extended to other districts. The introduction of prohibition was gradual. Enforcement was efficient. In the course of a debate in the Legislative Assembly on the Prohibition Bill, CR was accused of carrying out this programme under the compulsion of central leaders. CR silenced this objection by saying: "If the all-India leaders of the Congress sent me down an order today, 'Withdraw your Prohibition Programme,' I

that an indemnifying ordinance had been issued. This was an unexpected blow to the so-called Sanatanists.

This story has been related by me in some detail because of the historic nature of the happening. It also gives a glimpse of how CR's mind worked.

The Ordinance was followed by further legislation which is now a matter of history.

The Congress Party's temple-entry legislation under Rajaji's leadership was part of the programme to utilise governmental power under office-acceptance in nation-building activities.

Introduction of Hindi in Schools

Hindi or *Hindustani* was considered by Congressmen as the national language of India. It was considered beneath the dignity of Indians to depend on a foreign language, which in our case was English for inter-provincial contact and communication. The need for a common Indian language was felt. Hindustani or Urdu was evolved during Mughal rule. This was functioning as the *lingua franca* of India. Propaganda for Hindi was one of the items of the nation-building activities of the Congress. There was an organisation called the Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha functioning in Madras. Gandhiji, Rajaji and Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya were the principal office-bearers of the body.

CR felt at that time that Southerners should learn Hindi to play their part in the mainstream of Indian life. He introduced teaching of Hindi in select schools. Though the attendance in the classes was compulsory knowledge of Hindi on the part of the students was not needed for promotion. This was the true position. Those elements which were smarting under electoral defeats used the occasion to start an agitation. They indulged in picketing of some of the schools concerned and at our own residence shouting slogans. They were even obstructing passage. At one stage CR had to go to the Secretariat, leaving the house by the backdoor. He ordered the arrest of picketers, using the very provisions of law which were once used against Congressmen during their freedom campaigns. CR found himself in the snare of critics. There were heated debates in the Assembly. Even Gandhiji wanted CR to soft pedal the situation. The leader of the Self-Respect Movement, E.V. Ramasamy Naicker,

but an immediate ordinance "indemnifying" these worshippers against punitive action. I added: "Why not ask your government's legal advisors to draft an ordinance?" CR felt that they would not rise to the occasion so quickly. Then I said: "You have to do it yourself as you are wont to do." CR said: "I can do it if I can have a copy of an English enactment on indemnity." I placed before him an Act of the type required taking it from a rack of reference books. His first reaction was: "This is an Indian Act. It cannot be foolproof." I persisted: "These Indian Acts are all modelled on English Acts. So you can rely on them." CR accepted the suggestion. Reclining on the swing he told me, "All right, I will give you a dictation. Take it down." Since I had learnt shorthand and typewriting I was able to do it. By midnight CR's draft was ready. The Law Minister Dr. P. Subbaroyan was also alerted. His concurrence was obtained. After some finishing touches next morning by the Secretary of the Legal Department of the Secretariat it was sent to the Governor, Lord Erskine, who was camping at Ootacamund. Meanwhile the Sanatanists of Madurai were roused. They launched legal proceedings against Vaidyanatha Iyer and the batch that went with him. Kakkan, a Harijan, who in later years became a minister of the state, was also included in the batch. The Governor referred the draft ordinance to the Viceroy for his previous sanction as the measure touched the law of trusteeship, a Central Subject. For more than a week nothing happened. Meanwhile a storm was brewing in Madurai. The orthodoxy was up in arms. CR sent a letter to the Governor saying that the Congress Party and its ministry in Madras were committed to the temple-entry reform. He also contacted the Governor through telephone.

It was the general policy of the British administration not to interfere with established customs. This had been their attitude since the Revolt of 1857. Though it instigated the minorities against the caste Hindu majority, they preferred to remain neutral, whenever legal intervention was required. Because of the stand taken by the Madras Government, the Viceroy could no longer remain neutral. They had to support the movement for social reform to clear themselves from opprobrium. So CR got telephonic word from the Governor residing in Ooty that the Viceroy had given his sanction. Immediately the ordinance was issued indemnifying Vaidyanatha Iyer and others from legal action. The Madras Minister for Information, S. Ramanathan, was sent to Madurai to tell the Court there