
Vol V, Issue I

ISSN: 2582-1490

May 2022

**ASSOCIATION OF THIRD WORLD STUDIES
SOUTH ASIA CHAPTER
(ATWS - SAC)**

Registered at Bengaluru District with
S.No.152/94-95 Bengaluru - 560005, India
www.atwssac.org

Journal

Launched on the occasion of the
Silver Jubilee Celebrations and International Seminar
held of ATWS - SAC at University of Kerala
Kariavattom, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India.

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**ASSOCIATION OF THIRD WORLD STUDIES
SOUTH ASIA CHAPTER**

'Mandakini', 7/Kailas Gardens, Sreekariyam P.O.,
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India, Pin : 695017

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Foreign : \$11.986 (including postal charges)

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Association of Third World Studies (Journal)

**South Asia Chapter, 'Mandakini, 7/Kailas Gardens, Sreekariyam P.O.
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**ASSOCIATION OF THIRD WORLD STUDIES,
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Association of Third World Studies, South Asia Chapter (ATWS-SAC) was founded on June 10, 1994 by Prof. (Dr.) Isiah Azariah. The South Asia Chapter of the International Association of Third World Studies, Georgia, USA, ATWS-SAC is a multi-disciplinary association working independently and involved in genuine research and publication of problems related to the Developing Countries of South Asia. The Association has been organising workshops, annual conferences and national and international seminars with major goals like social harmony, environmental protection, sustainable development and uplift of the marginalised where Governmental attention is urgently solicited.

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1. Provide ongoing forums to discuss and analyse Third world problems and developments from different perspectives or view points and thus improve understanding of the underlying forces shaping the destiny of the Third World and impacting global developments.
2. Promote professional development through the encouragement of research, publication and teaching in the area of Third World Studies.
3. Facilitate professional and social communication by sponsoring activities that will bring together persons interested in Third World Studies.
4. Promote the enhancement of the quality of life of Third World people through formal association with private and public institutions involved in the development of the Developing Countries.

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**GANDHI AND TEMPLE ENTRY MOVEMENT
PARTICULAR REFERENCE WITH
THIRUVATTAR ADHIKESAVA TEMPLE**

SUJI R

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Thiruvattar a beautiful village in Kalkulam Taluk in Kanyakumari District under the control of Travancore rulers upto 1949. Travancore was the symbol of inequality and the social evils like untouchability, slavery and temple entry restriction were common. These social inequalities prevailed especially in Thiruvattar. The roads of the Adhikesava temple premises were not open to the non- hindus particularly unprivileged communities. The privileged class lived very luxuriously they followed certain customs and traditions in the temple. Thus the temple was under the control of privileged classes like *karyakars* or the *yogakkars* of the temple administration. This inequality was opposed by Mahatma Gandhi and to create awareness among the people, he visited Kanyakumari District four times. The fourth visit was historical important, he visited Thiruvattar in January 14, 1937. His visit meant for allowing low caste people for worship in Thiruvattar Adhikesava Temple.

Caste Restrictions

On those days the high class people only dominated the low caste in and around Thiruvattar. During the Venadu period, there were five Madams attached to Adhikesava temple and they were Marthanda Madam, Munikal Madam, Ramanna Madam, Panchanda Madam and Kanchi Madam. They were entrusted with the task of supplying articles to this temple. The head of each madam was a Brahmin and for the proper functioning of these, there were *Pillamars*. Members of *yogam* in Adhikesava temple and helpers of five Madams of Nair family were called Pillamars of Madam. The elder one of every Nair family of five *Madams* in Thiruvattar was eligible to this position and it was given by the *Marumakkalthayam* system¹.

The life and property of the tenants were at the mercy of *Pillamars* and Nairs of *Madams* especially after the thirteen century A.D. Marthanda *Madam* attached to Thiruvattar Adhikesava Temple was incharge of Nanjilnadu region and in 1657, the clash tookplace between this *Madam* and presents of Nanjilnadu. In the same year Marthanda *Madam Potti* broke the tom tom of the *Vellala* community people of Nanjilnadu. Tom tom was an instrument and which was the mark of respect to the Nanjilnadu peasants by the ruler of Venadu. Hence, the affected people retaliated and set fire to Marthanda Madam. The *Pottis* and *Pillamars* belonging to Adhikesava temple and Padmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum persecuted the peasants. Another clash took place between Marthanda *Madam Pottis* and tenants of Nanjilnadu in 1703. The Mudaliar records are the first hand evidence to the ill-treatment of Marthanda *Madam* in Thiruvattar². From Venadu rule Brahmins and Nairs were ruling power in Thiruvattar. They were in majority in Thiruvattar other low caste people were live in less quantity.

So, in Thiruvattar Adhikesava temple the Nairs played a vital position. Their position is equal to *Nambuthiris* and all administration came under the control of Nairs. The important evil in the society was casteism and the Brahmins held the highest place in society. As owners of all land in the country, they depended upon the Nairs for the proper management of their lands. The Nairs grew into warrior class protecting the interests of the Brahmins and in course of time, they also joined with the Brahmins to form the upper class.

The lower class was otherwise known as untouchables. They were forbidden to take water from the common pond or wells and not to use the roads, markets, temples of the high castes. Nairs must keep 16 feet from *Nambuthiri*, Ezhava

16 feet from a Nair and 32 feet from *Nambuthiri*, *Ezhava* 16 feet from a Nair and 64 feet from *Nambu thiri*. A Nadar should stand 36 feet away from a Brahmin whereas a *Pulaya* slave must stand 90 feet away³. The *Ezhavas*, *Nadars*, *Pulayas*, *Mukkuva* (fisher folk) were the low castes. When the Nair nobles came out in the public roads an attendant of their preceded them and shouting “*po, po*” which meant ‘go away’. In all aspects of life- public roads, temple roads and wells these caste restrictions were ruthlessly imposed upon economically and socially weaker sections⁴.

In schools, the students were not equally treated. The Schools in Thiruvattar inspected on July 2, 1910 the conditions of the schools were mentioned in the report. The state had only limited number of Schools for certain communities like the Nadars, Parayas and Fishermen. Even though, the low caste people given chance to acquire education, special attention was given to high class people in Thiruvattar. The classes were held in a small building (near the temple) only for the high caste Hindus.⁵ Special attention was given to the high class students in the schools. These conditions were familiar in Thiruvattar before the visit of Gandhi to this place.

Visit of Gandhi to Kanyakumari District

Gandhi also visited Nagercoil and Kanyakumari for the First Time On 14-3-1925. In his speech emphasized the importance of the freedom movement and asked the co-operation of the people to achieve the goal. In the year 1927 Gandhi made a visit again to Nagercoil. He was welcomed by the Municipal Committee and the student’s organization of Scott Christian College, Nagercoil. Gandhi addressed the people in the evening on 8-10-1927. In his speech he stressed the cause of the struggle, and advised the people to continue the fight in all lawful and legitimate lines. His visit creates a new spirit among the freedom fighters of Nagercoil.

Gandhi paid his third visit on Monday 22-2-1934 at 4.30 p.m. a public meeting was conducted under his headship through Travancore government seriously warned the people not to attend the meeting of Gandhi, the mass largely took part on the occasion and gave a warm welcome. He stayed at Kanyakumari and left the next day. The last visit of Gandhi was on 14-1-1937. He received by Dr. M. E. Naidu, president of Harijan Sevak Sangam and A. Sankarapillai, president, Nagercoil Municipality. A public meeting was held in that evening at SLB English School Mydon, Nagercoil. In his speech, he pointed out the

importance of Temple Entry, Proclamation issued by Sri Chitra Tirunal Maharajah and the equality of all men before God and Law. In the next day Gandhi went some villages like Thiruvattar. At 7.30 p.m on 15-1-1937 he left Nagercoil⁶.

Purpose of Gandhiji's Visit to Thiruvattar

- Gandhiji's attitude towards Hinduism and his patronization of Vaishnavism became one of the causes to visit Adhikesava Temple.
- To create awareness among the people about the Temple Entry Movement against untouchability and he was the supporter of Kadhhi Movement and freedom struggle
- He fought for the eradication of casteism and against untouchability all these mottos behind Gandhi to visit Thiruvattar especially Adhikesava Temple.

Sri Chitra Tirunal (1924- 1949), the Maharajah of Travancore issued the Temple Entry Proclamation on 12, November 1936⁷. On those days, in the Adhikesava temple, only Brahmins, Nairs and *Chettis* were allowed freely enter in the temple but, low caste people were not allowed to enter even in the temple complex⁸. This inequality was opposed by Mahatma Gandhi and to create awareness among the people, he visited south Travancore four times⁹. The fourth visit was historical important in the sense that he visited Thiruvattar on January 14, 1937¹¹. His visit meant for allowing the low caste people for worship in Thiruvattar Adhikesava Temple. Those who accompanied with Gandhi during his visit were allowed to enter the courtyard of the temple not inside *prahara*. Soon after entry in the temple courtyard beyond casteism they acclaimed about in their first entry in the temple. After his visit in Adhikesava Temple gradually people got awakening and tried to enter in the temple. In his speech, he pointed out the importance of Temple Entry Proclamation issued by Sri Chitra Tirunal Maharajah and the equality of all men before god and law. The uneducated people are being aware of Temple Entry Movement, step by step Thiruvattar Temple was also opened for all castes.

Impact of his Visit

The reign of Sri Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma constituted a period of constitutional administrative and social reforms. Many people participated in the freedom struggle movement especially picketing liquor shops, Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement in Kanyakumari district. The visit of Gandhi to Thiruvattar in 1937 had historical importance and it served as great source of inspiration among the people. He spread the principles of Civil Disobedience Movement, picketing, shops selling liquor, organising bonfires of foreign cloths, spinning clothes by using *Charkha* and fighting against untouchability.

One person called Gandhi Narayana of Thiruvattar was arrested for picketing shops selling liquor and imprisoned for one month in Trivandrum Central Jail. People from Thuckalay, Arumanai, Kulasekharam, Mathoor and Aruvikkara participated in the freedom struggle movement and showed their opposition¹². In memory of the visit of Gandhi, his image with one inscription and image of *Raattai* (the spinning *Charkha*) were installed on the eastern side of Adhikesava Temple where, he delivered his address to the people. On the same side a weaving shed was also started and functioned for many years.

Gandhiji's visit adds fuel to the spread of freedom Struggle in Thiruvattar. After his visit in Adhikesava Temple gradually people got awakening try to enter in the temple. Gandhiji's goal was achieved from the bottom of the society and gave enthusiasm and encouragement to the people. The Temple Entry movement and its awareness only spread at first by Gandhi in Thiruvattar. In these ways Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our Indian Nation visited places all over India in order to strengthen the freedom movement in every nook and corner of the country.

ENDNOTES

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