

E-UN-36

HARIJANS' ENTRY
INTO
SRI MINAKSHI TEMPLE
AT
MADURA



MR. K. R. VENKATARAMA AYYAR'S
STATEMENTS

Extract from "The Madras Mail"

Sunday August 6,

AND

Thursday August 11, 1939.



DE NOBILI PRESS,
MADURA.

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Mr. VENKATARAMA AYYAR'S STATEMENT

Mr. K. R. Venkatarama Ayyar of Madura has issued the following statement:—

I arrived in Madura from Kodaikanal on July 4. I left on the morning of July 11 for Pudukottah on professional business and returned to Madura that evening.

The entry of the excluded persons into the great temple at Madura became known to me only about noon on July 8. My family priest came panting for breath and said that panchamas had been admitted into the Sri Minakshi Sundareswarar temple and had even entered the arthamantapams. I ascertained that the whole town was taken by surprise.

There was no previous intimation to anybody in the town. It was a secret arrangement between Mr. R. S. Nayudu, the Executive Officer of the Devasthanam, and Mr. A. Vythianatha Ayyar. That was what everybody began to say, after it became known that Harijans had entered. I wanted to proceed with care and make sure of the facts. About 3-30 p.m., on July 9, I saw Mr. R. S. Nayudu in his house and he and I alone were together for about thirty minutes. Mr. Nayudu's statement to me should not, at present, I think, be disclosed in terms.

Bhattars' Request

I was able to devote attention to this matter only from about 9-30 o'clock that night as I was engaged in another function in the Sethupathi High School premises till then. About 9-30 P.M. the mirasi Bhattars of the temple came to me on their way from Rao Saheb N. Natesa Ayyar's house to their homes. This was the first time that Bhattars or any of them saw me. I did not send for them. They told me that they unanimously demanded samprokshanam and suspension of further Harijan entry as conditions for their performing duties in the temple.

They added that the Executive Officer threatened some of them with dismissal and notified to them that he would break open the doors of the *sanctum sanctorum* and get pooja performed without any samprokshanam.

By the time I got to know this much, it was past 10 P.M. I at once rang up Mr. J. R. Bett, I.C.S., Collector and District Magistrate, Madura, apprehensive of any untoward incident overnight and put him in possession of what the Bhattars told me.

The next morning I sent an important letter with enclosures to the Premier acquainting him with the truth and stating that the Press report was grossly misleading. Later Mr. S. Satyamurthi sent me a telegram requesting me to persuade Mr. Natesa Ayyar to stay his hands, pending his letter. Mr. Natesa Ayyar agreed accordingly. His plaint and complaint were ready but were not presented.

In reply to Mr. Satyamurthi, I sent the following reply (a copy of the message was also sent to the Premier.):

“Natesa Ayyar delays proceedings. You interview Premier. Pooja by outsiders after breaking temple doors and suspending mirasi Bhattars deplorable. Newspaper reports utterly misleading. Crisis precipitated by overzeal, bravado, callous disregard of orthodox susceptibilities and Bhattars' protests and requests. Hope instructions will issue Executive Officer staying further aggravation and substituting conciliation. My letter to Premier posted before your telegram. Venkatarama Ayyar.”

Talk with Minister

On July 11, I returned from Pudukottah when I found a letter on my table from the Hon. Mr. S. Ramanathan, wishing me to meet him at Mr. Vythianatha Ayyar's house that evening. That was the first information to me that the Minister had arrived. I at once met the Minister and had a conversation with him, lasting about an hour. He told me that the Premier had sent him expressly with instructions to find out the exact situation at Madura and the entire truth about the Harijan temple-entry and the way in which it had been effected and whether the concerned worshippers and others had consented to it or not. In particular he said that the Premier had asked him to get from me my advice as to how to proceed next.

I told him definitely, after putting him in possession of all the facts, that it was quite clear that the entry

of excluded persons was surreptitious, and a fraud upon the worshippers. On July 12, by arrangement, the Minister came over to my house and Mr. Vythianatha Ayyar soon followed him and stayed with me till about noon.

The arrangement when we parted on July 11 was that all the Bhattars should be assembled in my house for the Minister to see and speak to them *in my presence* and hear their version and demands personally.

Bhattar's Statement

The Bhattars accordingly assembled and in answer to the Minister said that they never consented to the entry of Harijans, none of them knew that Harijans were going to enter the temple on the morning of July 8, that Ponnuswamy Bhattar who had no duty that day was got at to function at the Minakshi shrine for the Harijan party on misrepresentations and as soon as the party came out of that shrine, he refused to go with them to the Sundareswara shrine. They unanimously said that there was no Bhattar present in the temple on July 8, between 8-55 A.M. and 9-35 A.M. which, according to Mr. A. Vythianatha Ayyar, was the exact period when he and his companions were in the temple.

About 8-50 A.M. a retired Headmaster, Mr. D. Rama Ayyar, noticed Mr. R. S. Nayudu near the temple gate as if in expectation of some distinguished visitors. He questioned him and Mr. Nayudu told him that he was there as usual and there was nothing particular that

day and nobody was expected. Mr. D. Rama Ayyar reported this to the *Mail* in a letter dated July 11, 1939.

Before July 8, Mr. Vythianatha Ayyar took some Harijans to the great Sri Subramaniaswami temple at Tiruparankunram somewhat openly, but even at the threshold adjoining the public road he was stopped and warned and he went away. Hence the change of modus from 'open into surreptitious.' So far as the Madura Temple was concerned Mrs. Rameswari Nehru arrived from Courtallam on July 7. She was staying with Mr. Vythianatha Ayyar. She was apparently left behind so that it might not be known that there was going to be Harijan temple entry. She left later on for the Coimbatore Harijan Conference. Her not accompanying the party on July 8 was significant. Mr. Vythianatha Ayyar and his companions, bare-bodied, wearing vibhuthi dipped their feet in the Potramarai tank, went to the Vinayaka and the Subramanya shrines, and then to Sri Minakshi Sannadhi and then to the Swami Sannadhi doing the entire walking within the premises and completing all the worship in 40 minutes, which could not have allowed them to stay at the Minakshi or the Sundareswaraswami Sannadhi for more than a fraction of a minute in each place.

The Hon. Mr. Ramanathan has assured me that he had told the Premier on July 14 in Madras what he saw and heard at Madura. Dewan Bahadur C. Krishnan Nayar repeatedly put him the question on July 12: "Is it true that a huge congregation of worshippers were

present in the temple enthusiastically consenting to the Harijan Entry? ”

The Minister's answer was that no information was sent by Mr. Vythianatha Ayyar, beforehand to the worshipping public and that there was no need for labouring the obvious. At that large assembly in my house, many others were present who stated what they knew. The Minister went for a drive with me as he had a strenuous day and on our return the Minister saw Rao Bahadur P. C. Muthu Chettiar who was till the previous day (from May 1937), a member and President of the Advisory Committee of this Devasthanam, appointed by the Hindu Religious Endowments Board. He had resigned just then. He was not informed nor any of his colleagues of the Advisory Committee and their consent was not sought or obtained. It is a monstrous lie that Madura was looking on with cheerfulness in a consenting mood.

Mr. Natesa Ayyar, immediately after the news spread all over the town, issued printed leaflets asking all worshippers not to go to the temple until after the performance of samprokshana. This accounts for the subsequent unimpeded entry into the temple of excluded persons. It is an undeniable fact that women of the worshipping class, the daily temple-going Brahmin and the large number of non-Brahmin temple-goers abstain from going to the temple from July 8.

On July 14, the Hon. Mr. Ramanathan returned to Madras and the first reaction to his disclosures to the Premier was the joint statement by Dr. B. Pattabhi

Sitharamayya and Mr. Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar requesting that action should not follow elsewhere on the model of Madura. That I think is a right step, but other counsels superseded it, and on July 16 the Tanjore Brahadeswaraswami temple was opened for Harijans under Congress guidance.

It transpired that reference to 90 other temples was not correct. Subsequently other temples were opened in other places. On July 9, Mrs. Rameswari Nehru exhorted all Tamil Nad to follow the example of Madura which was said to have opened temple doors to the Harijans without compulsion.

I have forgotten to state in the proper place that the Bhattars on July 12 told the Minister in my presence that the four sthaniks among them were sent for by the Executive Officer on July 6. They attended at his office. Other Bhattars knew nothing of it. The Executive Officer then told them that they should co-operate with him and permit Harijans to enter the temple and offer worship from within and that this was not his command to them, that the command was the Premier's. I leave matters there for the present.

TEMPLE-ENTRY AND INTERFERENCE WITH LAW

Mr. K. R. Venkatarama Ayyar
on Madura Incidents

CONGRESS ATTITUDE CRITICISED

Madras, Aug. 10.

MR. K. R. VENKATARAMA AYYAR has issued the following statement :

In my statement published in *The Mail* of August 6 I referred to the events as they progressed down to July 14. The Hon. Mr. S. Ramanathan made it quite clear during his stay at Madura that his instructions were to report to the Premier after taking me in hand and utilising me as already stated and that it was for the Premier to act on his report. In view of the joint statement of Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar, I thought that appeasement of Madura, which was in the throes of intense agony, was on its way and, even at slow pace, might arrive at Madura in time to arrest the increase of acerbity by the proceedings in the Sub-Court and the District Court of Madura on July 17. What arrived at Madura on July 17 was the model Congress apparatus of appeasement, which was made to cross the amphitheatre of the Madura Subordinate Judge's Court soon after the learned

Judge started hearing the Injunction Petition, in which, as all could easily see, a mandatory injunction directing *Samprokshana* and a prohibitory injunction preventing further entry of excluded classes, would easily have been ordered in five minutes if the existing law had been allowed its operation. Just then a telegraph peon brought a telegram addressed by the Hon. the Minister for Public Information to the Respondent Sri A. Vaidyanatha Ayyar. The latter duly opened the telegram in court and read it out and passed it to the learned Judge. It announced the promulgation of the ordinance in Madras. The amnesty was a carefully calculated, pre-arranged affair, and the course of justice in open court—the single salutary safeguard and sheet-anchor of British Raj in this country—was theatrically thwarted.

Terrorism is all pervasive ; it intimidates and overpowers all but culprits. What an apt apparatus of appeasement this ordinance which arrived in time and was delivered by the hand of the party on trial to the presiding judge ! History will not fail to chronicle this cold-blooded travesty of justice and barefaced substitution of executive lawlessness for the time-honoured reign of law.

Conversation with Premier

After this I immediately threw off my Congress shackles, inclusive of the membership of the Madura District Board. On the night of the 17th I had a long telephone conversation with the Premier, in the course of which he accorded permission to me to publish my

communications to him inclusive of the letter I sent him thereafter that night. His letter of reply which by arrangement reached me on July 19 was marked 'Personal'. I am however free to say that he then "*quite understood and appreciated my agitation of mind*" and that on his side he acted *statedly in accordance with the light that was vouchsafed to him*. He told me over the telephone that he sent no replies to my letter and telegram as '*my friends*' filed suits and prosecutions in court and that it was a different matter whether they were in touch with me and had my approval. He particularly asked me to mention this as his explanation when I published our correspondence and talks.

The Hon. Mr. Ramanathan must have told the Premier that I had severely discountenanced the idea of the matter being taken to a criminal court and had no hand in the making of the civil case and petition and had nothing to do with them. It is enough to say that in my fruitless telephone conversation the Bill and the Ordinance and the way chosen by the Premier for wrecking the constitution were the themes on which I was most indignant. I happened to argue the question of "*Ultra Vires*" in the appeal in the District Court as Rao Saheb N. Natesier was unwell and unable to attend Court. I now feel that if I had not been a Congress man on July 8, 9 and 10 and till the promulgation of the Ordinance, and if my press statement which was sent to the Premier, instead of to the Press on July 10 had been published in the Press or permitted earlier by the Premier to be published, the course of events so far as

the campaign of misleading the public by stage-managed declarations and misleading other temples to follow the lead of Madura is concerned, might have been different. Political affiliation operating as a bond, not of mutual helpfulness for sound co-operative political action, but as a destroyer of all freedom of expression of all views but one, is a danger, the full magnitude of which it was left to the present Premier of Madras to demonstrate to me by his deliberate tactics in dealing with me and my correspondence. My personal experiences in Madras since Aug. 3 are a further irony which I cannot easily forget. I hope I shall be free to continue my campaign against misrule and madness and to make my representations to the illustrious statesmen at the helm of affairs.

A mammoth meeting of protest was held at Madura on July 27 under the chairmanship of Mr. L. K. Tulasiram, a leading advocate of Madura and the accredited leader of the Sourashtra community. Another meeting was held on July 29, which was presided over by Mr. M. S. Aiyaswami Pillai. A resolution was passed at that meeting, condemning the action of the Executive Officer Mr. R. S. Nayudu in closing the temple doors from 4 A.M. till after 6 A.M. on the morning of July 29, and preventing the entry into the temple of thousands of worshippers as well as about seven Mirasi Bhattars from entering the temple to exercise their lawful rights and (so far as the Bhattars were concerned) discharging their bounden duty of performing Samprokshana. It became clear after these two meetings and the demonstration of opposition to the ways and means

adopted for securing Harijan entry made from 4 A.M. to 8 A.M. on July 29 by several thousands of worshippers that it was no longer possible to maintain that the worshipping classes were consenting parties to what had taken place on July 8 and the subsequent unimpeded entry of excluded classes. All this had to be countered.

Black Flag Demonstration

The Premier and the Hon. Mr. Ramanathan arrived at Madura on the morning of July 30. They were the guests of Sri A. Vythianatha Ayyar. I knew of their arrival only about 10 a.m. and I was due that day at Pudukottah on professional business. The idea struck me and others that the oppositionists, i.e., the Sanatana Sangists and critics who, like me, are opposed to the methods and measures adopted for securing the entry of excluded classes into temples might assemble in large numbers and present black flags to the Prime Minister and his colleague that day in order to satisfy the distinguished visitors that the worshippers as a body were opposed to the temple-entry as it was effected and that the Prime Minister was entirely in error in being '*mad with joy*'. I accordingly delivered to the Premier about 11 a.m. on July 30 the following open letter.

“*Madura, July 30, 1939.*”

From K. R. Venkatarama Ayyar.

DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

The aggrieved worshipping public of Madura whose hearts are lacerated and bleeding profusely

from out of the wounds inflicted by your lieutenants and local friends who have perhaps in their zeal and frenzy overdone their part and misapplied your instructions and failed to fulfil the conditions, if any, laid down or which might or must have been laid down by you and your responsible colleagues when you were here on June 13 last, do not wish to miss the opportunity of facing you publicly in the open to-day to demonstrate and lay bare for your inspection and treatment the wounds inflicted on them, as well as their opposition to your way of proceeding in this big matter, by a *presentation of black flags in solemn silence to you and the Hon. Mr. S. Ramanathan*. I just now understand that both of you have arrived by the Trivandrum Express. *Kindly fix a time and place. At about 7-15 p.m. will you kindly appear at the Mayya Mantapam and sit on a platform or dais to face the assembled black flaggers who will greet you silently with dignity, decency and calm composure and after a quarter of an hour of silent demonstration enable you to fulfil your further engagements here? We will hold our meeting at Mayya Mantapam after you leave us. Will you kindly permit and facilitate this? Be* pleased to give me your reply at once as I am booked for arguing a case in the Pudukottah Chief Court to-day.

I beg to be excused for all this trouble that I am giving you, but I feel that if you were in my position, you would act as I crave leave to do. *This is not a confidential, but an open letter.*

Believe me, Dear Prime Minister,

Yours——.

K. R. VENKATARAMA AYYAR ”.

The Prime Minister endorsed on it "I shall gladly do this. C. R. 30-7-39".

Visit to the Temple

I straight away went to Pudukottah and returned at about 6 p.m. and went first to the temple to find out for myself how things were inside the temple, as an odious report of indecent assault on a woman on the one side and exaggerated reports of the number of the rightfully entitled worshippers who entered the temple on the other side were raging. I then went to the black flag demonstration place. Though it was a special compact between me and the Premier that none but the Premier and the Hon. Mr. Ramanathan should come to our place of demonstration and that none of the Premier's party men or the pro-temple-entry volunteers should attend the black flag demonstration and *the Premier had in front of him more than seven hours to control his forces and put them in the way, a large pilot-force of armed Congress and Harijan temple-entry volunteers and mill labourers and trained urchins marched straight from the People's Park meeting, which was addressed by the Premier, to our demonstration spot on the river sands and attacked the peacefully assembled demonstrators and caused considerable bloodshed.*

Wounded Demonstrators

It is evident—the Premier had hardly concealed it—that the black flag demonstration was regarded as an unpardonable effrontery on our part and that it was resolved by those who wanted to teach a lesson to

us that the *figurative flow of blood* referred to in my letter should be made an *actual flow of blood from wounds to be inflicted by them by organized pelting of boulders and stones and by blows with sticks and big bamboos.* The Premier and his colleague came and saw all this.

The Premier asked me on seeing my young son bleeding profusely and other boys and adults also bleeding, "Why did you bring your son?" forgetting that I was away in Pudukottah and arrived just in time to reach the place of demonstration, 10 minutes before the Premier himself came and witnessed the performance of his party-men.

When the injured boys and adults cried out, and the Hon. Mr. Ramanathan was stanching the blood flowing out of my son Ramakrishnan's wound on his eye-brow and forehead with his own hand-kerchief, the Premier cried, "Why are these boys crying? Are they going to die?" The Hon. Mr. Ramanathan quietly asked my infant son why he came there. The boy's answer was "Sir, I am a Scout. I came here to do Scout service. The real question is, Sir, not why we came here, but why your party-men came here and attacked us. Is it right, Sir, that after your solemn pact with my father your men should come and attack us?"

The Hon. Mr. Ramanathan told me all this and repeated this conversation between him and my son at the final interview between me and the Ministers on July 31. My letter dated July 31 calling off the ladies' meeting which the Premier had asked me to arrange for him has already been published in the papers.

That letter, when it was perused by the Premier, shook him completely. He turned to me and asked, "Need this letter be published?" I answered, "Most certainly. Have I not wound up the letter saying that I am straight away releasing it to the Press?" He then said, "You are unfair and uncharitable to me".

I asked him if there was a single word of untruth in my letter. He answered that every word in the letter was true, but that any person who read the letter would at once hold him (the Premier) to be a man of no character and that my uncharitableness arose out of the way in which I had pieced together all the truth about him.

I answered that there was hardly any time for me except barely to state the facts as they took place and that I was not at all convinced even after hearing the Premier fully that there was any unfairness or uncharitableness on my part. He then stiffened himself and declared, "You are a dangerous man". I instantaneously retorted. "Truth is the danger that you are unable to face".

At this point, as I was about to leave, I renewed my conversation with the Hon. Mr. Ramanathan about the telegrams which had passed about the middle of July between Rao Saheb N. Natesier and Mahatma Gandhi, which conversation had been suspended when the Premier joined us from his room.

Telegram to Mr. Gandhi

All that remained for the Hon. Mr. Ramanathan to tell me in that connection, was how he made bold to

contradict the matter in Mr. Natesier's telegram to Mr. Gandhi reading as follows :

10 a.m. July 14, '39.

Gandhiji, Abbottabad.

“Vaidyanathier suddenly stealthily led untouchables Madura temple. Trustees, minister conniving. People stunned, crying. Temple priests locked sanctorum suspending worship. Temple deserted. Trustee broke open doors. Truth Ahimsa overthrown. Hyder Tippu repeating. Criminal Civil cases filed—Further entries threatened. Complaints contemplated. Avoid agony. Suspend further action. Validating Indemnifying Bill introduced. Tyrannical legislative abuse recall. Dailies white-washing real situation.

NATESIER,

President,

All-India Varnashrama Sangh.”

When the copy of this telegram which was in my file then with me was perused by the Hon. Mr. Ramanathan and he was about to explain to me how he categorically denied it to the Mahatma, the Premier at once stopped his colleague and warned him that they might get into further difficulties if he spoke to me. I thereupon left them politely.

The Premier has expressed his grief and sense of shame for the wounds inflicted by his party men on the black flag demonstrators in a belated statement dated Aug. 2. So important and so laboured an expla-

nation which was not given to all the correspondents at Madura, who expressly asked the Premier for his reply to my letter of July 31, that evening at the Madura railway station has not so far been dealt with in the Press or in the Legislative debates.

I wonder how it did not occur to any member of the Legislative Houses to move an adjournment motion to consider the recent bloodshed at Madura, on July 30, inflicted on unarmed men, women and children by a ministerialist armed pilot party. I wonder whether if such a thing had happened in England, Parliament would have passed over it with such indifference. Sufficient reference was not made to it in the debates on the Bill.

Indemnity Bill

The Premier concedes that the Sanatanists may expect that, true to Congress principles, the Congress Government should call off the movement because of this bloodshed. But he left that it would not be just or proper so to call off the programme of Harijan entry. Only they had to be vigilant and cautious in carrying it through. Bloodshed or no bloodshed, the interests of the people demanded the immediate passing of the Temple-Entry Authorization and Indemnity Bill introduced in its final form on Aug. 3 passed by the Assembly on Aug. 4 and practically finished in the Upper House in one day, Aug. 7, though formally passed on the 8th. The Premier got his mandate for all this from that section of the people of Madura who attended his three meetings on July 30.

I understand that a large portion of his audiences at the People's Park meeting and the Tilak Square meeting would not raise hands for him though his invitation was repeated. Very respectable persons who attended the meetings say so. The Manalmedu meeting near Mr. N. M. R. Subbaraman's house was practically no meeting at all. It was a five minutes meeting as the appointment to receive the black flag salute had to be kept and the Ministers were due at the Vaikai river bed precisely at 7-15 p.m. That the Premier relies on the support of his three meetings of July 30 and disregards the deep significance of the huge black flag demonstration and the predetermined attack on it by his party shows how callous and unreasonable he has become.

He says that I and my friends overadvertised our pact. Even on Aug. 2 his obsession that I was in Madura after the pact for advertising it and to take my son to be wounded by his party men has not left him. I was in fact on my way to and from Pudukottah and arguing in the Pudukottah Chief Court during the interval he refers to. The Premier could have sent word to the leaders of the black flag demonstration that he had regretfully to drop his visit at 7-15 p. m. as his followers could not be persuaded to desist from their determination to attack the demonstrators. He could have sent an adequate police force to prevent his men playing the part they threatened to do. He did no such thing.

Nagpur Recalled

Let me recall what I did in open Congress at Nagpur at the 35th Session of the Indian National Congress where I was the solitary Madrasite to strike a discordant note. I then left the Indian National Congress as it was captured by Mr. Gandhi—the apostle of “Non-co-operation”. In spite of his frequent and manifold vacillations and self-contradictions, he has since established for himself such a position by continuous matchless sacrifice and service that I thought about five years ago it was time that I re-entered the cherished national institution from which I and others of my way seceded owing to the Gandhian invasion of 1920-21. The names of ‘Mahatma Gandhi’ and ‘C.R.’ have now come to be used as if they are enough, without more, to overpower ‘Truth’ and banish ‘Truth’ altogether.

I think I have said enough now to establish that it is no longer possible for the present Congress organization to claim that ‘Truth’ is safe in the keeping of even so high a Congress-leader as the Premier of Madras—the Premier who has been acclaimed as the Premier of ‘Congress Premiers’. I have also shown that ‘Non-violence’ is not the practice of this Premier’s party, but only his boast. Notwithstanding his guarded way of evading personal responsibility, I suggest he suffered bloodshed when it was his duty to prevent it and he could have easily prevented it if he had so willed. Plenty of convincing proof of oath was and was about to be offered in the Madura suit. That is

why the Judge's mouth was gagged by the 'Ordinance', just when Justice demanded that it should be open.

Seceded Again

On these grounds, I have seceded again from the Congress and I am calling upon all other Congress-men who agree with me also to secede, so that we may enrol ourselves as a truly non-violent organization irrevocably wedded to the bare truth. I say that Mahatma Gandhi's telegram to Rao Saheb Natesier that the allegations in the latter's telegram to the former dated July 14 were incredible indicates an unquestioning faith on the part of the Mahatma in his chelas and an overreadiness to discredit even so impeccable a purist as Rao Saheb Natesier.

Were not accustomed worshippers who used to go to the temple every day keeping out of the temple? The time has come for truth-speakers and truth-lovers to stand together and make clear the frontier between them and all others.

If Mahatma Gandhi is true to his proclaimed principles he is bound now to call off the temple entry programme and reassess men and measures, so that men of character would be on one side and the others at an unapproachable and untouchable distance. Else there is imminent risk of our temples becoming 'Brothels' in the choice expression of the Mahatma himself an expression which was at once condemned by the Grand Old Man now lying ill and weak at 'Arama' Salem.
