Viewing the Sabarimala issue through a Yogic Lens – Part 2



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One would wonder that when so much is being said and talked about in the Sabarimala case, what more could a sangha discuss? The news, opinions etc., give facts, legalities or opinions but do they question some of the basic notions of how we are talking about equality, discrimination, rituals from an inferior lens? The conversation brought out some of those important aspects, in a previous post, and continues below.

D: I see in this rights based litigation an echo of the idea of the "white man's burden". This was the justification used by the colonizer when he/she went about exploiting non-European people and lands. The litigants seem to be holding the moral agenda for an elitist, non-religious idea of India without understanding the Hindu lens through which to see these traditions. Impinging on other people's traditions and cultures is very un-Indian

C: Trolling and shaming people who do not agree with your view is also un-Indian.

D: Exactly the way the colonizer was shaming you for being an Indian.

B: I am reminded of a newspaper article that mentions India as a rape capital of the world, which is ridiculous because there is enough statistics to prove that other countries including USA have similar or higher cases. Rapes are happening because there is a clash between the way one is brought up and the exposure to world that is emerging right now.

D: The shaming of the entire community who believes in the Sabarimala journey is being done which is very dangerous. I also feel these voices are being raised because there is an entire generation of people who have lost the connection to temples and communities.

A: True, because these petitioners are all outsiders and not an insider who feels responsible for taking forward this tradition and its spiritual energy.

E: It is impossible to argue from a legal logical sense because there is no energy meter that can measure these experiences.

B: Can I say that if a person whether a man or woman does not follow the 40-day *vratham*, they cannot go? Why bring in the fact that women cannot go?

A: I want to have a dialogue with women who want to go to Sabarimala and understand why they want to go and then the rituals come into the picture. This is the framework with which we should approach this issue.

D: I want to bring in the meaning of *laukika* and *vaidika* principle. *Vaidika* means certain fundamental principles like in a marriage, the *pradakshiNa* of *agni* which has a certain spiritual significance unlike a *laukika* one which has a cultural significance, like a mangal sutra. The Arya samaj has done some great work in sticking to the *vaidika* principles of rituals like marriages and the rest which is *laukika* is free to be used or not and can undergo continuous change over a period.

A: The changes would have come by way of consensus building and there is nothing cast in stone.

C: Yes, we cannot turn blind to the dogmatic social impositions that have also been forced upon us due to politics and power.

B: I am also thinking about the whole #MeToo movement, that somewhere women have lost the ability to break free from this whole idea of inequality and see things in a deeper way. There are several things that need to change so we may be projecting this anger or frustration on the wrong object.

D: We are treating equality as A=B, i.e. if you have a job, I also need to have a job, if you can visit this temple so can I.

A: Interestingly the constitution talks about equity which is not A=B or not everything a man does a woman should do.

C: We do not understand what it means to be a woman, the *strI dharma*?

A: A man and woman celebrate spirituality in different ways. Navaratri is led by women whether it is keeping the Golu or chanting. Can we try and look at these things as a matter of equity and balance?

B: Then what is equity?

A: Equity is about dignity and respect for who the person is in every respect. Inequality would be there, like for example one is mathematically gifted, or artistic etc., which are the capabilities. These will always be different, and will be valued differently by society. Equity is something more profound because you are respecting the person in a much deeper sense.

E: In the Sabarimala case, I do not see a violation of equity because the whole family is involved right from the decision making, supporting during the *vratham* and then finally receiving the *prasAdam*.

B: I do wish all the men whether fathers, brothers or husbands really embark on such journeys to discover their boundaries. In fact, even women should do that!

D: Unfortunately, this process is not understood by the people sitting in court. There are no real dialogues in a court, only debates which are more antagonistic or I win-you lose kind of thing. The Indian way of solving an issue is not about losing but about finding a solution so that no one loses. Can we find a solution that will enliven and enhance equity?

C: What is an example of a spiritual practice that is followed by men and women differently?

A: There are certain *Asana* that men only do because of difference in the body structure, during pregnancy a woman’s body is different so she does a certain *Asana* and even certain

chanting. Sounds also have different impacts on men and women depending on their life stage and health.

E: Can we prevent such issues from arising again and may be turn to a consensus forming way of decision making?

D: We can only look at our processes as a group. We cannot really influence the larger polity. During earlier times, courts were called upon to restore balance in society and create enlivenment, today they are all about rights. The Indic way would be to call for a discussion of responsibilities and mutual respect.

E: The reason I asked was that it seems impossible for me to have such a dialogue with a liberal or even a right winged friend of mine.

D: Me as an individual asking for my rights without looking at the contextual responsibilities or the community, is not a yogic dialogue. There is no one isolated self who will be impacted and so on, it is a community issue.

E: Hmm…so if the community is following a certain tradition which is not impacting anyone negatively, it is not doing something unconstitutional and the family is also happy, the question of individual rights does not arise.

B: In the triple talaq case, the muslim woman were the ones who were affected, and they went to court, so there also the group was negatively impacted.

A: Apply the same Indian framework to this also. The issue is being raised by the affected party; women. Can we come to a consensus or solution that would restore balance and growth in society? I am staying away from the legal and personal laws for now because we need to approach it in another manner.

I am only trying to look at it from this one frame rather than confuse it with other lenses we see in the media.

E: I also see the whole issue of decolonizing the mind being very important because if I continue to look at our processes and thinking from colonized framework, how can I ever transform? The critique and shaming will only deform and oppress me, without letting me grow as a true Hindu.

A: As compared to standing on the outside like a white man looking at the native pretending to be the ‘savior’.

C: I remember when we moved to Sholayur a few years back, we got an invitation from the village to participate in the temple festival which was their way of welcoming us. Temples are an amazing way to reconnect to our roots and accepting them.

E: I am not going to Sabarimala for the past ten years and I am asking myself why is it difficult to undertake this journey? Part of the reason is the whole loss of sanctity in the process whether it is the commercialization of the Guru swami who helps you do the pujas.

D: Looks like there is a loss of a sense of community?

E: Yes, the community did away with all differences including religious one rather than create some. Some of the songs played at night before the temple shuts down are sung by Yesudas, a Christian. I am not sure how rigourous the devotees are about the *vratam* and group prayer these days.

A: This is the beauty of Indianness, to accept all this in the larger scheme of things, and do one's bit to keep the flame pure.

D: I am very sure that even the Devaswaram board would not have many rights when it comes to making decisions on Sabarimala. The process would be a *prashNam*, where you ask for divine guidance to solve a problem.

E: I am also reminded that in every Kerala temple there are two purohits; one is the Shanti priest who are appointed on a rotational basis serving a temple for 5 years and then move to another one to expand their knowledge. The Tanthri is from the traditional family that is attached to the temple. The Tanthri brings in the history, rituals and age-old traditional practices associated with the temple and the Shanti priest brings in newer knowledge and practice seen in other temples he has served. This is how balance and equity are truly brought out.

C: As I listen to the many voices here and outside, there is some need for a change; may be the processes or the system itself needs an overhaul.

A: Even the courts don't seem to be growing or expanding their horizons because they continue looking at western liberal viewpoints of equality only. I wonder how we can bring back some of our earlier practices that create community responsibility and individual dedication.

B: I can be modern, liberal and contemporary yet be respectful to my community and roots. I am glad that I found a framework of how to look at this whole issue because I never

understood the energy and meaning behind these practices.

C: I am also sitting with a certain sadness wondering what is it that we can do and how does one have such a dialogue in the world? But at least it is a start in the sangha.

D: I am quite happy with this dialogue but what is disturbing me is how we continue to impose the colonized ideas on our processes rather than dialogue and find consensus. The imported frameworks with which we look at ourselves is very different from the Indian way. If we do not rediscover our true ways we would not transform as a nation in a healthy way.

A: It must start from within first, even Gandhi ji went about the process of decolonizing himself like he started dressing in a certain way. He went about studying the ground reality, and shared his inner most thoughts while he enquiring about himself. Change is always inside out.