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Hindu Rituals and Restrictions: Arvind Marden

Rituals are reflection of religion through social practices. Rituals are a part of all religions and to perform ritual is a duty of its followers. Hence Rituals are combination of both performance and restriction of some actions. Hindu religion is based on 'varnashram' (caste system). In scriptures of Hinduism, there were clear mentioned of restrictions for 'Vaishya', 'Shudra' and 'Untouchables'. Women have also followed several restrictions in performing rituals. Traditionally, the rules of "varnashram" (caste system) were maintained by Religious institutes. We have seen many changes in traditions and rituals performances due to education and movement of social reformers. There were also implemented some new laws; and many ritual performances and practices were banned. Sati system, Child marriage, untouchably, devadasi system, sacrifice of animals, etc. were abolished by law. Yet, some socio-religious restrictions against women and untouchables were prevailed in India. Although after independence the people of India adopted new constitution and accepted scientific approach. The constitution has given fundamental rights to every citizen without discrimination of any caste, creed, color, sex, and race. But there is still prevailed some traditional ritual practices and experienced discrimination against women and untouchables. Recently, there were seen two incidents of these types of religious practices of restrictions. Hence they were coincidentally related with same nature. Now I would like to discuss these two incidents. One of them is related to Sanidev temple of Singalapur. First of all read the following paragraph carefully. "Women activists slammed the tradition of prohibiting entry to the fairer sex at a famous Shani shrine in Ahmednagar district and the 'purification rituals' which were performed by villagers after women recently entered there. On Saturday, the age-old practice of prohibiting women from offering prayers at the shrine located in Shani Shingalapur village was breached when a women climbed the security barricade to the 'chauthara' (platform) where the idol is installed and offered prayers, before disappearing in the crowd. The villagers had performed a 'dudh abhishek' (milk purification) of the idol and observed a 'bandh' in the morning to protest the incident." (DNA e-paper, 2015)

After knowing these we must be shocked and several questions would be raised. "Where we are living? Is that village is a part of democratic country like India?" It is not only a matter of prohibiting of women but also performed 'purification rituals' by the villagers. The second incident was also related with the restriction of women entry into the temple. And the incident was related with the famous temple of Sabarimala. It was a historical temple of Kerala state. The roots of this incident were also part of the purification of the idol and were laid down in year 2006. The Supreme Court has asked Devaswom that "Do you have a constitutional rights to prevent women's entry at Sabarimala? Now we look into the matter. "The petition contended that women, aged 10-50 touching the idol was considered an act of desecration. The bench was hearing a petition filed by the Indian Young Lawyers Association and five

women lawyers seeking a direction to allow entry of women into the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple without age restriction. Women in the age group 10-50 are not allowed entry. The apex court had issued notice in the case way back in 2006. The petition had contended that women, aged between 10-50, touching the idol was considering an act of desecration. An attempt was made to prosecute Kannada actor Jaimala on the plea of desecration following her disclosure that she entered the sanctum sanctorum and touched the idol in 1987. The priests conducted a special ritual to purify the idol.” (Hindu, T. 2016, January 12)

The first incident was occurred in Shingalapur village of Maharashtra. I remembered Phule couple (Mahatma Jyotiba and Savitribai) who scarified their whole life for social reforms. They dedicated their life, but the question is what we have to do? We must not forget that the rules of denying women’s entry into the temple were made in past. The religious faith is not interfered by the Government, but there is difference between religious faith and bigotry. But today we are living in democratic India. And every citizen has the right to equality and gives protection against the discrimination these types of ban were violation of the articles 14 (equality before law), 25 and 26 (freedom of religion) of the constitution. This is time to think about humanity and believe oneself as a citizen of India instead of the follower of the particular religion. Every human being is equal and can enjoy all rights. The tendency of the Government to the religious issue would be changed. Government has tried to abolish these types of prohibitions. In digital era to put the machine for checking of menstruation period for entry of temple is not a scientific development. I hope that Government and whole society choose the scientific attitude and progressive way for Human development.

Reference:

1 e-paper, D. (2015, November 30). DNA e-paper, ‘Maharashtra: Activists slam Shani temple tradition naming womens entry’. Mumbai, Maharashtra.

2 Hindu, T. (2016, January 12). Do you have a constitutional rights to prevent women’s entry at Sabarimala? Sc to Devaswom:" India.

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