When they said women can’t go to the Sabarimala Temple, they said so because back in the day in southern India most people climbed these hills during the night. And, this was tiger land. Today of course the poor tigers need protection, but at one time, they were king of the jungle. A carnivorous animal can sniff out a woman much more easily than they can a man. So, they said women can’t go to hill temples because they invite danger.

Similarly, they said a woman shouldn’t enter a temple during her menstrual cycle because those were the days set aside for her to rest. Life was very physical – a woman had to cook, look after the family, take care of the cattle. So during this time they said she need not participate in anything, including religious duties.

They created a separate room for her, gave her a scripture to read, no one was allowed to visit her, not even her husband. The idea was that she gets the rest she needs.

Times are different now. Those who ‘ban’ women from temples today usually are of the opinion that natural cycles of the body are ‘impure’. But there is nothing pure or impure about biology; it just is. Your very existence is a result of this. You are not in existence by yourself as ‘man’ or ‘woman’. I am not taking sides. I am speaking for the human species as a whole. We are one species, why are we dividing everything on the basis of gender?

Today, women can climb any mountain they want to, why should a temple be any different? But should they? Consider this: If a woman has such devotion for Ayyappa that she cannot live without seeing him, then by all means she should go to the temple. But if this is all about proving a political point, then this isn’t the right way of going about it. If this is about feminism, and if feminism is about equality, that equality should be of opportunity, not sameness.

I am a woman, so anything ‘woman’ I will support or I am a man, so anything ‘man’ I will support – this is a silly way to exist. It essentially means you are too identified with your gender, it means identifying with certain parts of the body, isn’t it? Identifying yourself with reproductive organs is a very poor way to live. If you must identify with some body part, at least choose the brain.

If you are really interested in the well-being of women, there are serious issues that need focus – girl children’s nourishment, education, sanitary needs for a dignified life, and above all, economic empowerment and freedom to choose the life she wishes to live. Unfortunately, we find that there is more activism than activity. All this activism is making life so crude. To make it worse, we have given a lot of people the hope that if you disrupt something, then you will become a leader. Agitation is the technology of how to stop something. Administration is the technology of how to get something going. If agitators become administrators, it is a disaster.

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