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Time to rescue God from priestdoms: Both Sabarimala ban and Kerala sexual blackmail cases exemplify the rot that has set in

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Swami Agnivesh in [TOI Edit Page](#) | [Edit Page, India](#) | [TOI](#)

Swami Agnivesh and Valson Thampu

It is strikingly symbolic that two cases pertaining to two religions from the state of Kerala are currently under the scanner. The first relates to women within an age group being banned from the sanctum sanctorum of Sabarimala temple. In the second, priests have been booked for blackmailing a woman, abusing her confessions. Differences of religion apart, the victims in both instances are women. And that is a serious issue; for what imperils women endangers humanity itself.

It is our considered opinion that the real issue is being overlooked in both instances. Courts are equipped to deal only with legal aspects, but religion is more than law. This should not be misinterpreted to mean that faith is above facts. It is not. Only blind faith is. And blind faith is a curse on humanity.

The two cases point to symptoms of religious disarray. Currently, only random symptoms are being addressed. Our eyes are shut firmly against the disease. Given the religiosity that thrives today, it is inevitable that it proves virulently hostile to our humanity.



Religion results from the human longing for love. Eyebrows may be raised at this statement; but that could well be because we misunderstand love. Love is not the net in which others can be trapped for one's comfort or convenience. It is, on the other hand, the only force we know that delivers us from ourselves, which is our supreme need. Love, if it is indeed love, involves self-transcendence.

The spiritual paradox is: he who lives for himself loses himself; but he who lives for God (read, 'for one's fellow human beings') finds himself. All religions have lost this spiritual light. When love is cast out, religion becomes a mechanical thing.

The lure of the mechanical model of religion is that man can install himself at the centre of it. The sphere of religion is, therefore, one in which man plays God. But this is a perverse thing. Its inherent dishonesty can be masked only with pretensions and hypocrisy. Two such pretensions are at the heart of the issues that the courts are currently considering.

These pretensions can be listed simply. By what spiritual provision does a priest have the authority to forgive the sins of others? Second, by what logic can men assume that the biological state of one half of the human race 'pollutes' and imperils the divine?

The core spiritual truth, relevant to the first issue, is that all sins are committed primarily against God. Secondly, all human beings are sinful. So, the pretension of sinful men to be sin-forgiving agents of God is puerile. Equally ridiculous is the notion that man can decide unilaterally what will pollute and jeopardise the health of deities, as in the Sabarimala case. If the temple argument in this instance is valid, God stands condemned for creating something that can pollute and destroy him. He committed the further mistake of making priests and poojaris wiser than himself.

The fact of the matter is that there is something seriously wrong with our religiosity. It doesn't matter which religion. Religious differences are canards crafted by the priestly class to hypnotise credulous people labelled as 'believers'. What is lacking in religiosity of this kind is a sense of mystery, from which alone stems the human willingness to look beyond the mercenary and the mechanical.

Religion must be valued for the quality of humanity it nurtures. Spiritually robust religiosity will produce men and women who inspire others and enrich the human species, wrestling with themselves and with the forces of darkness in the world. Passion for truth and justice is their hallmark. They refuse to be confined to narrow, subhuman interests and advocacies, knowing them to be incompatible with the spiritual intuition of the primeval oneness of our species, as in vasudhaiva kutumbakom or the Kingdom of God.

It is demeaning for women to beg to be accommodated in a priest-controlled, man-centred, religious establishment. Christian women, likewise, must exercise their right to un-mediated access to God. God has nothing to do with these man-manufactured canards meant to swell the supermarkets of religion. To wish to be accommodated somewhere on its margins is an insult to oneself.

DISCLAIMER : Views expressed above are the author's own.

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Swami Agnivesh is a social activist.

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NOTASEL

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