

Differences can be resolved through debate: Arya Samaj scholar Agnivesh

By Prachee Kulkarni, Pune Mirror | Sep 10, 2018, 02.30 AM IST



INTERVIEW : SWAMI AGNIVESH, ARYA SAMAJ SCHOLAR AND SOCIAL ACTIVIST

Points to clash of views with RSS version of Hinduism; claims religion based on humanity

Speaking at a conference against religious terrorism and intolerance, organised by Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS), activist Swami Agnivesh said doubt, debate and dissent are the three important aspects of democracy and free society. The Arya Samaj scholar also said that alarm bells have started ringing to indicate attacks on these pillars.

Members of Bramhan Mahasangh opposed the visit by Agnivesh and had given him an ultimatum. But the eight to ten Mahasangh members who had gathered at the venue could not do anything due to heavy police presence.

Agnivesh also spoke to Mirror after the programme. Here are excerpts from the interview.

You are facing protests and opposition at every place that you are visiting. How do you look at these attacks?

It is not wrong to protest, oppose, but the way it is done matters. There should not be use of force and muscle power. Those who do not have courage to debate are the ones who attack. I appeal that they stop being cowards else they might end up with the same fate. Hiding and attacking is against humanity. Come and talk. If you cannot talk directly, then put forth your points through media, I will answer that but attacking is not the way. People are saying dialogue is the only way and war is not an option. When the attack on Bhandarkar Institute happened, Atal Bihari Vajpayee had said that ideas should be opposed through ideas. But opposition is turning violent now. This will boomerang.

Who are these people?

They themselves are revealing their identities. They are not even able to hide it.

But these people allege that you are constantly talking against Hinduism and this won't be tolerated.

I am opposing the narrow minded ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). They call themselves Hindutvawadi. But they are trying to end the true nature of Hinduism. During the celebration of the 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Chicago address this year, Mohan Bhagwat is trying to preach the same age-old ideas on Hinduism. The entire world is moving in one direction and the RSS is going the opposite way. I challenge Mohan Bhagwat to an open debate over our ideas on Hinduism. Let us see what comes out of it. We have a very open-minded culture based on humanity and we should proudly be spreading it all over the world.

■ You always request the protesters to come forward for a dialogue. But that is what they do not seem to be ready for.

I feel bad for them for choosing to get violent. This is not approved by the constitution of our country. None of the attackers in the repeated mob lynching incidents are getting punished. I was attacked for the first time on July 17 and again on August 17 when I went to pay tribute to Atal Bihari Vajpayee. But there has not been a single arrest though all names and videos are available. This is state-patronised violence. We should hold Mr Modi accountable because he is keeping quiet and endorsing all of these incidents.”

■ You also spoke about the arrests of Elgaar Parishad members in Pune for allegedly being Maoists. How do you look at these arrests and why are you opposing it?

This is an attack on freedom of speech, democracy and decency. The police are addressing the press over this and justifying their stance openly. At present the Supreme Court seems to be the only ray of hope. On the other hand we also saw protests by members of right wing organisations against the recent arrests in the murder cases of Gauri Lankesh and Narendra Dabholkar. This is a sign of danger. They should talk through democratic means and not choose the path of violence.

■ How are you going to address this?

I am going to continue to travel and speak at every possible place. I am going to visit Varanasi soon where I will be launching the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam campaign, which means world is one family, to oppose these attacks.