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Saving Kerala



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It is not the religious validity of a court order, but the very mettle of society that is being put to test in Kerala now

Kerala is at a crossroads. For the first time, the very essence of this progressive State, applauded as a model for the rest of India, is being put to test. Kerala did not achieve its enviable position of being a progressive, liberal and modern society without struggle or sacrifice. It was as recent as December 1892 when Swami Vivekananda was shocked by inhuman caste-based customs there.

The journey from that low point of social and spiritual degradation to being the most progressive society in India has been achieved with the help of radical reformers – Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayyappan, V.T. Bhattathiripad, Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, and a host of visionary leaders in the freedom movement – who fought the evils of caste oppression and the various forms of discrimination that women in Kerala faced.

It is not the religious validity of a Supreme Court order, but the very mettle of society that is being put to test in Kerala now. To anyone observing developments around the Sabarimala face-off, it is obvious that the issue has been politically hijacked, even as the façade of religious fervour is maintained. It was to be expected that the RSS-BJP phalanx, which has been waiting for the kill for long, would sense in this the most opportune moment. By the candid admission of the State BJP President, the party is treating the Sabarimala issue as a political goldmine. A massive drama of deception is being thrust upon Keralites.

The RSS has also been inflicting a covert atrocity on Dalits and Adivasis in respect of their religions. The Adivasis aren't Hindus. They never were. They have their own religious forms of worship. Over the years, the RSS has worked in a calculated fashion to blot out their distinct religious heritage and identities. It is ironic that the very same RSS is now spearheading the movement to "save Sabarimala", wilfully overlooking the fact that Sabarimala belonged to the Adivasis, who have been driven out of its precincts.

The RSS-BJP agenda is not to save Sabarimala. It is to use Sabarimala. Lord Ayyappa, who was a forest deity worshipped by Mala Arayans, is valued only as a potent entry point into the hearts of Keralites. If Lord Ayyappa is sensitive to the pollution of menstruating women, he should be even more allergic to the hypocrisy of men.

Annexing the politics of Kerala is crucial for the RSS-BJP combine for the 2019 general election. The BJP may fare poorly in many north Indian States. The loss there can be compensated only if the politics of south Indian States is annexed. The desperation underlying this strategy is an indirect tribute to the good sense of Keralites. The RSS and the BJP know that Keralites cannot be hoodwinked politically. Religion, perhaps, is their point of vulnerability.

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