Entry of Women in Masjids

Why in news?

Recently, Delhi's Jama Masjid, one of India's biggest mosques, has prohibited the entry of solitary or group of girls into the mosque without the presence of a male companion.

What is the issue about?

- The authorities reasoned that the ban is to stop some women who fail to respect the sanctity of the place of worship by making videos there.
- The management clarified that the ban excluded those women coming for worship, or those accompanied by their husband or families.
- Following a meeting with the Lieutenant-Governor, the mosque authorities withdrew the ban.
- In 2019, the Jama Masjid administration had banned shooting videos with music inside the mosque.
- Incidentally, the Jama Masjid is otherwise one of the few mosques to allow women worshippers to offer regular prayers.

What is the Islamic law on women's entry?

- Most Islamic scholars agree that a prayer can be offered at home but can only be established in a group.
- Most of them also agree that women have been exempted, not prohibited from going to the mosque, keeping in mind their child-rearing and other domestic responsibilities.
- The Quran at **no place prohibits** women from going to mosques for prayers.
- Wherever the Quran talks of establishing prayer, it talks in gender neutral terms.
- Before the five daily prayers, a prayer call or **azaan** is pronounced, inviting both men and women for prayers.
- For **Hajj and Umrah (lesser pilgrimage)**, Mecca and Medina have separate halls earmarked for men and women to pray.

What about the practice across the continent?

- **West Asia** - There is no ban on women coming to the masjid for prayers.
- **U.S. and Canada** - Women access mosques for prayers, and even gather there for special Taraweeh prayers in Ramzan.
- **India** - Only a handful of mosques maintained or owned by Jamaat-e-Islami and the Ahl-e-Hadith sect have provisions for women worshippers.
- Most mosques while not expressly forbidding women's entry in masjids, have no provision or a separate prayer zone for women.
- Under the circumstances, they are reduced to a 'men only' zone.

Have there been similar bans before?

- In 2011, a grill was put up on the premises of the **Haji Ali Dargah**, **Mumbai**, prohibiting the entry of women inside the sanctum sanctorum.
- With the requests to enter being denied by the dargah management, a campaign, **'Haji Ali for All'**, was started.
- The women approached the Bombay High Court which ruled in their favour in 2016.

A Dargah is a Sufi Islamic shrine built over the grave of a revered religious figure, often a Sufi saint or dervish.

What is the legal issue?

- According to the Constitution, there is complete equality between men and women.
- In the ***Haji Ali Dargah case***, the High Court quoted **Articles 15, 16 and 25 of the Constitution** to grant women the desired access to the dargah.
- There are petitions filed before the Supreme Court wherein access has been sought for women in all mosques across the country.
- The apex court has clubbed them with the Sabarimala case.

Article	Provision
Article 15	Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth
Article 16	Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment
Article 25	Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion

Related links - SC Verdict on Women's Entry into Sabarimala Temple

References

1. The Hindu | On the entry of women in masjids
2. The Indian Express | Restriction on the entry of women into masjids

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