

Religious Freedom and Gender Equality in Modern India with Reference To Śabarimala Temple Case

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ABSTRACT

One of the most intense religious disagreements in India is the discussion about the worship of the deity Ayyappa at the Śabarimala temple in Kerala. This article sheds light on the very controversial debate that has been going on for quite some time. In this region, there is a strongly entrenched tradition to prevent women who are fertile from entering the temple. People are believed to be fertile when they are between the ages of ten and fifty. This is due to the fact that this specific temple believes that Ayyappa is a brahmachari, which literally translates to "eternal virgin." Nevertheless, within the same Ayyappa cult in Kerala and some other regions of South India, there exist differences in the representations, interpretations, and rituals of this god. These versions enable women of any age to attend the temples. According to a decision handed down by the Supreme Court of India in September 2018, the prohibition on fertile women discriminated against women. The state of Kerala has been experiencing waves of demonstrations since October 2018, during which supporters and opponents of gender restrictions have battled, sometimes leading to violent altercations. Taking into consideration the Ayyappa cult and the ongoing issues with religious legislation in India, this article investigates the circumstances behind the occurrence of these events.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the highly contentious debate over the worship of the God Ayyappa at the Śabarimala temple in Kerala, one of the most heated religious disputes in India. Here, it is a deeply ingrained custom to keep fertile women out of the temple. Being between the ages of ten and fifty is considered fertile. There are variations in this deity's representations, interpretations, and practices, allowing women of any age to visit the shrines. In September 2018, the Indian Supreme Court ruled that the ban on fertile women was discriminatory. Since October 2018, Kerala has seen waves of protests where proponents and opponents of gender restrictions have clashed, occasionally leading to violent altercations. This essay looks at how these things happened in the context of the Ayyappa cult and current problems with religious regulation in India.

This paper discusses the mythological, historical, and anthropological background of the 2018 events surrounding the attempt to alter the custom of prohibiting women who are childbearing from entering the Ayyappa temple in Shabarimala. My sources include multiple ethnographic studies on the Ayyappa cult, interviews with experts on Kerala religion and culture, data from pilgrim interviews, and a variety of print and online media, particularly a large number from September to December 2018.¹

A basic feature of daily life in India is the conflict between public associations and state institutions—political, caste, and professional at all levels—over sacred cults.²

On December 6, 1992, a group of Hindu fanatics destroyed the Babur Mosque in Ayodhya, resulting in approximately 2,000 deaths. When state policy conflicted with legal requirements and court rulings, the public reacted angrily. There was intense debate over the issue's historical and religious-mythological context. The demolished mosque's site is currently

¹ Wilson, Liz. "Gendered Social Roles and Female Labor Migration: Repercussions for the Ayyappa Pilgrimage of South India." *Immigrant Women's Voices and Integrating Feminism into Migration Theory*. IGI Global, 2021. 81-96.

² Viswambaran, Visakh. "Intersectional pedagogy for gender transformation among graduate students in India: A case study from Kerala." *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 4.1 (2021): 100170.

heavily guarded by the army and police, leaving visitors few opportunities.³ Archaeological excavations are being done here, though they are not currently underway, mainly for legal reasons—to establish the existence of an old Hindu temple nearby, thereby validating the plan to build the temple of Rama. The Supreme Court of India, meanwhile, determined that this conflict was primarily based on the struggle for land ownership and inheritance rights.⁴

Modern India's court cases often revolve around the traditional institutions of Indian society. Litigation plays an important role in rethinking and changing a number of customary norms. Local and regional authorities must carry out their decisions, yet they frequently encounter opposition. In South Indian states, buffalo races are common. Violence against animals was the most important reason for this prohibition. At the same time, the appeal to the secular court and the police is a clear sign of our time.⁵

Sexual, gender, and family issues have also been in the spotlight in India for some time now. Firstly, we are discussing violence against women, sexual crimes, and various forms of coercion within families and castes. The courts have been actively discussing these topics for a long time. At the local level, some changes are taking place, for example, in the area of dress codes.⁶

It is noteworthy that a special act guides the Supreme Court of India when making decisions on religious issues.⁷ Permitting Public Interest Litigation (PIL), which is based on the principle of "essentiality": separating the "essential" features of a religious tradition from the "non-essential" ones, for example, in the case of *Stanislaus v. Madhya Pradesh* in 1977, the Court held that religious conversion is an insignificant part of the practice and propaganda of Christianity. In the case of *Acharya Jagadishwaranand Avadhuta Against the Calcutta Police Department*, 1983, the court decided that the skull and dagger dance was an insignificant part of Hinduism. The Supreme Court of India guided its decision in the "Ayyappa case," the subject of this article, on September 28, 2018.⁸

The "Ayyappa case" refers to a number of cases involving the repeal of the ban on women visiting several Hindu shrines and other shrines. For instance, a court decision preserved women's access to the renowned tomb of the Muslim Sufi saint Haji Ali in Mumbai, despite the discussion of such a ban. The Shani Shingnapur temple in the village of Shingnapur (Sonai) in Maharashtra also prohibited women from entering. However, based on the court decision of March 30, 2016, they can now enter there as well. The feminist organization Bhumata Ranragani Brigade, which brought together dozens of women activists, including Trupti Desai, played a leading role in this.⁹

Civil society activists initiated the "Ayyappa case" to abolish the custom of excluding women of childbearing age from the temple on Shabarimala Hill, in the southern part of Kerala, in the Patanamtitta district of the Periyar Tiger Reserve. Even the catastrophic flooding that occurred in Kerala in August–September 2018 took a back seat after the Supreme Court of India ruled in the Shabarimala case on September 28. The events sharply outlined the key issues of delineating and substantiating the boundaries of "private and public," "secular and religious," "pure and impure," and "local and national."¹⁰

The court tried to conduct the case in such a way as to avoid direct discussion of the cult practices themselves. The Court had another main task: to reconcile Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India. In addition to "the exercise of public order, morality, public health, and the fundamental rights of citizens," these two articles guarantee freedom of religion, practice, and propagation of religion, but there is also a contradiction. The fact is that Article 25 deals with individual rights, while Article 26 deals with collective and group rights. Article 25 (2b) states that the state shall ensure every Hindu believer his or her right of access to all Hindu temples. Article 26 affirms that the state shall give religious organizations the right to regulate all religious matters as they see fit and to administer their religious property. Thus, the inclusive approach—the proclamation of the unity of "Hindus"—often comes up against an exclusive principle: the actual autonomy of different cults and trends.¹¹

³ Mehta, Pangri. "Religious freedom and gender equality in India." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 25.3 (2016): 283-289.

⁴ Sullivan, Donna J. "Gender Equality and Religious Freedom: Toward a Framework for Conflict Resolution." *NYUJ Int'l L. & Pol.* 24 (1991): 795.

⁵ Stuart, Alison. "Freedom of religion and gender equality: inclusive or exclusive?" *Human Rights Law Review* 10.3 (2010): 429-459.

⁶ Gaffney Jr, Edward McGlynn. "Curious Chiasma: Rising and Falling Protection of Religious Freedom and Gender Equality." *U. Pa. J. Const. L.* 4 (2001): 394.

⁷ Mustafa, Faizan, and Jagteshwar Singh Sohi. "Freedom of religion in India: Current issues and supreme court acting as clergy." *BYU L. Rev.* (2017): 915.

⁸ Ghosh, Soumalya. "Supreme Court on Women's Right to Religious Freedom in India: From Shirur Mutt to Sabarimala." *Indian JL & Just.* 10 (2019): 162.

⁹ Parthasarathy, Suhrith. "An Equal Right to Freedom of Religion: A Reading of the Supreme Court's Judgment in Sabarimala." *U. Oxford Hum. Rts. Hub J.* (2020): 123.

¹⁰ Jawed, Maria, and Dhanaji Mukundrao Jadhav. "Evolving a New Religious Freedom Jurisprudence: A Step Towards Ensuring Equality for Women." *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 10.2 (2021): 327-341.

¹¹ Uma, Saumya. "At the crossroads of freedom of religion and women's equality rights: Some reflections from South Asia." *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 9.1-2 (2016): 67-80.

The case under consideration demonstrates the contradiction between two principles established in Indian law: on the one hand, the protection of an individual's right to worship any god, regardless of their sex or caste, and on the other hand, the guarantee to religious communities to profess and practice their beliefs and cults as they wish.¹²

There is another important feature of sacred cults and practices in India. In parallel with, and partly intersecting with, secular law, there is another world in which the Hindu gods act as "legal persons": they own property, issue decrees, govern on their behalf, make decisions, and administer justice. However, in numerous instances, believers perceive the gods as akin to a "physical person"—as living entities with their own biographies, lifestyles, customs and habits, weaknesses, daily routines, and dispositions. Thus, the gods have distinct personalities, even if they don't always act accordingly.¹³

2. SHABARIMALA THE COURSE OF EVENTS:

The three main characteristics of the Ayyappa cult on Shabarimala Hill are as follows: First, it is inclusive of different castes and religions; the temple is open not only to Hindus but also to Muslims, Christians, and people of all faiths. Secondly, the cult of Shabarimala is exclusive, restricting the admission of women of childbearing age to this temple, formally defined as the age range of ten to fifty years. The cult requires the adept to undergo a special preparation before visiting the shrine, observing the gates for 41 days, and to take a set of vows that include. People associate men who have assumed this status with God Himself and compare them to Him. They wrap their small luggage—clothes and food, as well as offerings to the temple and, above all, a coconut filled with ghee—in a bundle, irumudi, which they wear on their heads. Its adepts, along with the cultivated spirit of male fraternity, are also present. The sacred space of Shabarimala and the cult of Ayyappa is phala-shruti; that is, it is believed that it brings miraculous gifts, first of all, healing from diseases (including immortality, which extends to the entire family of the pilgrim) and deliverance from sins, for Hindus, up to the possibility of gaining religious liberation from the wheel of rebirth, that is, moksha.¹⁴

The temple on the hill of Shabarimala and the cult of Ayyappa as a whole are believed to have existed since the ninth or tenth century AD (although there are other opinions), but they became known only in the last half century. Today, it is one of the most visited temples in India, especially between December and February, when hundreds of thousands of pilgrim's flocks here. Up to 50 million people visit the temple each year.¹⁵

The scandal erupted in 2018. Five women lawyers, members of the Young Lawyers Association of India, filed a complaint with the Supreme Court of India in 2006. This case, known as the Indian Young Lawyers Association vs. State of Kerala, reported that the temple administration had violated the rights of women believers by preventing them from visiting the shrine. 28 September 2018 The Supreme Court of India, by four votes to one, decided to satisfy this claim. The majority of judges discovered discrimination against the rights of women believers, guided by the concepts of "dignity, equality, and gender justice." The custom of excluding women from the temple was considered discriminatory.¹⁶

The Supreme Court of India has ruled that preventing women of childbearing age from attending the Shabarimala temple is a clear violation of the rights of Hindu women to practice their religion under the already mentioned Article 25 of the Constitution, as well as under Article 14 (Equality of Citizens) and Section 3 of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship Law, which requires that places of public worship be open to all Hindus, regardless of their customs and practices.¹⁷

The Ayyappa cult generally views the god's "virginity" as insignificant. Justice R.F. Nariman pointed out that the temple's ban on women's attendance goes against several articles and the spirit of the Indian Constitution, which strives to combat discrimination, particularly against. The defense of customs should not rely on the notion of "cleanliness," as the concept of "untouchability" encompasses both cleanliness and pollution. Judge Chandrachud stated that women's right to religious service should not be restricted by religion.¹⁸

Indu Malhotra, the sole female judge, asserted that the court shouldn't intervene in religious matters unless individuals from a specific sect or movement commit crimes. She believed that in matters of religion, an appeal to rationality does not apply, and believers themselves, without the state's participation, should decide what is essential for a given community. Indu Malhotra questioned the Supreme Court's decision, in particular the "virginity" of the god Ayyappa for the cult as a whole, and pointed to the enormous diversity of local Hindu practices, one of which is the cult of Ayyappa in Shabarimala. In her view, it would be better not to exercise legal force in this area. Nevertheless, a majority vote adopted

¹² Jawed, Maria, and Dhanaji Mukundrao Jadhav. "Evolving a New Religious Freedom Jurisprudence: A Step Towards Ensuring Equality for Women." *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 10.2 (2021): 327-341.

¹³ King, Ursula. "Hinduism and women: Uses and abuses of religious freedom." *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook*. Brill Nijhoff, 2004. 523-543.

¹⁴ Kaushal, Rachana. "Religious Freedom and Human Rights in India: Conflicts and Reconciliation." *Danubius* 32. Supplement (2014): 225-235.

¹⁵ Viswambaran, Visakh. "Intersectional pedagogy for gender transformation among graduate students in India: A case study from Kerala." *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 4.1 (2021): 100170.

¹⁶ Mittal, Akansha. "Law and Religion: Sabarimala Temple." *Supremo Amicus* 12 (2019): 16.

¹⁷ Paranjape, Sharayu Kelkar. "Religious Pluralism Analysed with Sabarimala Case." *Jus Corpus LJ* 3 (2022): 414.

¹⁸ Sullivan, Donna J. "Gender Equality and Religious Freedom: Toward a Framework for Conflict Resolution." *NYUJ Int'l L. & Pol.* 24 (1991): 795.

the court's decision to allow women of any age to attend the temple in Shabarimala. Waves of protest engulfed the state of Kerala the very next day, September 29, 2018. All political parties and related public organizations instantly intensified their activities. Events unfolded rapidly.¹⁹

The temple administration opposed the judgment and began to assert its right to determine visitation rules. The Parivar Sangh is an association of organizations that profess the principles of the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS) movement and the Bharata Janata Party (BJP), put forward the slogan of the need to preserve local characteristics and the rights of specific communities to practice worship in their own way, and spoke out against the unification of religious life in India. The Kerala women's group, in contrast to feminist organizations and activists' Right to Pray campaign, has united under the Readytowait slogan, indicating their willingness to wait until they are beyond childbearing age to attend the Ayyappa temple on Shabarimala. Thousands of Keralans, mostly women, have supported the ban and opposed the admission of women under fifty years of age to the shrine. As early as September 30, 2018, the owners of the Shabarimala temple, members of the princely family of Rama Varma from Pandalam, as well as the creators of Whatsapp groups across Kerala, called for a peaceful protest under the banner of the newly established Ayyappa dharma Samrakshana Samithi and under the slogan Save Sabarimala. The RSS and People for Dharma united tens of thousands of protesters on October 1, 2018. They marched, chanted, and blocked traffic.²⁰

Political parties began to actively exploit the situation around Shabarimala. It is noteworthy that initially, almost all political parties operating in Kerala—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), the Indian National Congress (INC), the BJP, and various organisations within the framework of the RSS—welcomed the demand for women of all ages to have access to the temple, promoting the slogan of equal rights for women in all temples in India. However, the situation changed in just a couple of days when protests broke out in Kerala. The parties quickly changed their minds. The BJP and the party's president in Kerala, lawyer Sridharan Pillai, expressed complete solidarity with the protesters and believers, explaining that this was necessary to strengthen "Hinduness" (Hinduta) as opposed to the Communists, who allegedly sought to "destroy Shabarimala." The INC party, along with the united Muslim groups in the state, also expressed opposition to the court decision. Shashi Tharoor, a prominent politician and writer who represents the INC party, emphasized the need for public consensus to legitimize the Constitution. When other Hindu organizations joined, the protest grew.²¹

The ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala, a bloc of two communist parties, continued to advocate for the admission of all women to Shabarimala. Pinarayi Vijayan, the Chief Minister of the state, backed the admission of women and complied with the court's decision. I intend to visit the church. In the run-up to the pilgrimage session, some 800 women registered to attend the temple. On October 18, 2018, the first day of the lunar month of Tulam, the shrine was opened, and more than ten women, including female journalists, tried to enter the temple. They faced denial of entry due to calls for violence during their protests. For example, Kollam Tulasi, a BJP candidate, stated that Ratishan, from the Communist Party, sued him for violating several legal articles, including inciting religious feelings and making sexually offensive statements against women. The actor apologized, stating that the deep devotion and enthusiasm of mothers in the demonstration of prayer had guided him, and his words "only reflect the pain of the devotees of Ayyappa."²²

Tradition dictates that on October 22, the god Ayyappa entered a sacred sleep known as the yoganidra, leading to the temple's closure for a month. On November 16, the temple reopened for the two-month mandalam season. November 17 was the first day of Vrishchika's month, marking the beginning of a 41-day fast and pilgrimage.²³

The nearest settlement received about 4500 police officers, while the church itself hosted about 1600 police officers. They also deployed special rapid-reaction forces there. The assumption was that the police should provide assistance to women when needed. On the night of January 1–2, 2019, two women, 44-year-old Bindu, a college teacher and Communist Party activist, and Kanaka Durga, accompanied by several police officers, began the ascent of Shabarimala. Early in the morning, at about 3:45 a.m., they reached the shrine of Ayyappa. They entered through the service entrance, visited the church, where there were very few visitors at that time, and soon left. The Chief Minister of Kerala, Pinarayi Vijayan, confirmed that the women had indeed visited the temple. He also said that the police must ensure the safety of all visitors to the shrine. Meanwhile, the State Minister, H.E. Jayarajan, described the temple's hour-and-a-half closure for purification as "disobedience to the court" and "outlawing untouchability." However, protests flared up again, with BJP representatives waving black flags and organizing a protest march in the state capital. Rahul Eishwar, a BJP activist, stated that women activists for gender equality were non-believers, their purpose was not to worship God, and their practice of "secular

¹⁹ Mehta, Pangri. "Religious freedom and gender equality in India." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 25.3 (2016): 283-289.

²⁰ Chakrabarti, Anindita. "Religious Freedom, Legal Activism, and Muslim Personal Law in Contemporary India: A Sociological Exploration of Secularism." *Religious Freedom: Social-Scientific Approaches*. Brill, 2021. 35-58.

²¹ Wilson, Liz. "Gendered Social Roles and Female Labor Migration: Repercussions for the Ayyappa Pilgrimage of South India." *Immigrant Women's Voices and Integrating Feminism into Migration Theory*. IGI Global, 2021. 81-96.

²² Bijukumar, V. "When religious faith mutilates gender equality: women entry in Sabarimala Temple in Kerala." *ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* 4.2 (2019): 238-244.

²³ Mehta, Pangri. "Religious freedom and gender equality in India." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 25.3 (2016): 283-289.

disregard" was detrimental to the temple. Press reports later revealed that Kanaka Durga faced severe ostracism and expulsion from her family.²⁴

Even in cities as remote from Shabarimala as Kasargod and others, traffic was blocked. Both sides of the conflict appeal to the court. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine a court decision that would satisfy all parties involved in this problem.²⁵

3. AYYAPPA THE HISTORY OF MYTH AND THE CULT'S SPECIFICS

The cult of the god Ayyappa combines several myths and legends, and although this mixture sometimes and partly seems artificial, like a collage, it has its own logic.

There are at least two distinct layers to the cult's formation history. The first is Ayyappa, a local hero, God, deified person, hunter, and or warrior. The second is Ayyappa as a brahminical deity, a son, according to various sources, born accidentally or purposefully from the two main Hindu gods, Shiva and Vishnu, in the form of the sorceress Mohini; here his main task was to defeat the demon in the form of the buffalo Mahishi, or Mahishasuri.²⁶

In Sri Lanka, Ayyappa is depicted riding a white elephant. Craftsmen from Chengannur crafted the two-and-a-half-foot high idol of Ayyappa in the temple of Shabarimala from an alloy of five metals (panchaloha), depicting the god in the yogic pose of utakatasana. His right palm depicts the gesture of chinamudra (two of its meanings are "time" and "unity of the soul and the supreme Brahman"), and his left palm is drawn aside in the posture of a dolahasta. On his forehead is a sacred sign, tilak, of the Vishnuite type, and on his neck is a bell.²⁷

Due to the article's limited space, we cannot expound on the complex myth of Ayyappa in detail. Only those motifs directly related to our plot will we revisit.²⁸

None of the major Puranas, mythological narratives about the gods and their cults, or other epic texts of Hinduism contain the story of Ayyappa. The main sources of his biography are oral myths and legends known from folk songs in Kerala's Malayalam and Kannada languages in the Kodagu (Kurg) district of Karnataka. Between the Brahminical cults of Kerala and the Ayyappa cult, a certain distance is palpable. Sri Bhutanathopakhyanam, a nineteenth-century composition, is the only Sanskrit text to tell the story of Ayyappa as a brahminical deity. The text states that Ayyappa's birth resulted from the union of the gods Shiva and Vishnu in the form of the seductress Mohini, his adoption by the king of Pandalam, his feat of killing the demon Mahisha, his driving of a pack of tigers from the forest (his stepmother asked him to bring tiger's milk for healing), and his departure from home, accompanied by the men's fraternity. At the end of his earthly life, he dissolved into the sacred idol of Shashta on top of Mount Shabarimala.²⁹

Both mythology and the Ayyappa cult are multifaceted. Radhika Sekar, a Canadian Tamil researcher, identifies a link between this god and the Yakshas, which she believes is evident in some of his temples shaped like platforms around. Obviously, the theme of the hunter god, who dominates in myths, is essential here. In some ways, Ayyappa is similar to another deity of the Dravidian South of India, namely Ayanar. Ayyappa has two wives, Purna and Pushkala, and a son, Satyaka, in a temple near Shabarimala, Achankovil Sri Dharmashashta. The god Shartava, a hunter-warrior, accompanies Ayyappa in the Kodagu area with sobaks. Researchers have drawn comparisons between Ayyappa and Buddha, citing similarities such as their names Shasta (Shashta, synonymous with Shastra, meaning "teacher", "scholar"), their roles as defenders of justice, law, and dharma, their dedication to asceticism and yogic practices, and their use of sharanas for protection, which also serves as a means of transcending the earthly ego. However, Ayyappa is first and foremost a warrior god and a hunter, in stark contrast to the Buddha, whose very incarnation was benevolent to all living beings, especially animals. According to legend, Ayyappa is the brother of the holy apostle John.³⁰

Two other revered sacred characters closely associated with Ayyappa are noteworthy: Wawar, a Muslim, originally a bandit or pirate, an adversary but later a friend and companion of Ayyappa, and Malikappurattamma (literally, "mother who lives beyond the manor"), a bride, a prospective consort, or a bride in a state of expectation. A mosque that also resembles the tomb of a saint, dargah, located in the temple complex on Shabarimala, is functionally and structurally similar to the shrines of the Hindu A temple dedicated to the "eternal bride," her pida pratishtha ("sacred place of sitting"), and a

²⁴ Sullivan, Donna J. "Gender Equality and Religious Freedom: Toward a Framework for Conflict Resolution." *NYUJ Int'l L. & Pol.* 24 (1991): 795.

²⁵ Raday, Frances. "Culture, religion, and gender." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 1.4 (2003): 663-715.

²⁶ Jenkins, Laura Dudley. "Diversity and the constitution in India: what is religious freedom." *Drake L. Rev.* 57 (2008): 913.

²⁷ Kaushal, Rachana. "Religious Freedom and Human Rights in India: Conflicts and Reconciliation." *Danubius. Supplement* (2014): 225-235.

²⁸ Mustafa, Faizan, and Jagtेशwar Singh Sohi. "Freedom of religion in India: Current issues and supreme court acting as clergy." *BYU L. Rev.* (2017): 915.

²⁹ Mittal, Akansha. "Law and Religion: Sabarimala Temple." *Supremo Amicus* 12 (2019): 16.

³⁰ Jawed, Maria, and Dhanaji Mukundrao Jadhav. "Evolving a New Religious Freedom Jurisprudence: A Step Towards Ensuring Equality for Women." *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 10.2 (2021): 327-341.

gold-plated idol (erected after a fire in 1952) are located near the main temple of Ayyappa on Shabarimala, to the left of the sannidhanam.³¹

The cult of Ayyappa, both in terms of myth and ritual, is not monolithic; it absorbed a number of local mythological stories, images, and practices, including Shaivite and Vishnuite, and possibly shared some common features with early Buddhism. It combines Brahmanical characteristics with many aspects that oppose the Brahminical world: in a number of temples, Ayyappa offers alcohol and non-vegetarian food as offerings. People from all castes, including Muslims and Christians, visit Ayyappa's temples and participate in the initiation rites of adepts, known as gurusvas. Moreover, people revere Ayyappa's dvarapalas, Karuppaswami and Kaduttaswami, who serve as his protectors. Kaduttaswami, a member of the relatively low Yezhawa caste, engages in agriculture and some crafts, and temples are erected in his honor as the guardian of the main shrine. On the one hand, Ayyappa is revered as a local hero, an inhabitant of the hills and jungles, a hunter surrounded by animals, a protector against bandits and robbers (especially for merchants), and as an outstanding warrior who preserves justice and has the power to crush those who have authority but do not respect the norms of morality. On the other hand, Ayyappa is a common Hindu god who unites various branches of Hinduism, Vaishnavism, and Shaivism. Both have a story of miraculous birth, having been born from two main cult male gods and created by the efforts of many gods; both have fought demons in the form of buffaloes; and finally, let's not overlook the fact that the vahans, or mounts, of both turn out to be tigers.³²

The study of Ayyappa's cult must consider space and Kerala's social characteristics. The brutal caste system that developed here, which Swami Vivekananda called "crazy" and actively criticized, implied a firm separation of castes and subcastes. A number of castes were considered not just "untouchable" but even "invisible"; one look at their representatives could "defile" those who stood higher in the social hierarchy. Kerala is considered the "land of the gods." Brahmin families acquired land here, leading to the construction of significant and expansive temple complexes dedicated to the Hindu gods, particularly Vishnu (Padmanabhaswamy) and Krishna (Guruwayur). According to the Puranic myth, the god Vishnu himself gave Kerala to the brahmanas; his avatar, Parasurama, created it by conquering it from the ocean.³³

The local gods, as well as the Buddha cult, are believed to have merged with Brahminical traditions and ideas, but it seems that a way back to the "de-Brahmanization" of the cults is also possible. For example, in the 1980s and early 1990s, the interpretation of Ayyappa as an exclusively regional god of Dravidian origin and identity emerged and intensified. However, to this day, the priests of the temple are the Nambudiri Brahmins, who have a special status in the local caste hierarchy, and their origin is considered to be fundamentally different from that of other castes. There is even a version that the very popularization of this cult in the 1950s was a special joint project of representatives of the castes of Nambudiri and Nayars in order to redirect money flows and pilgrimage activity, reducing the growing cult of Murugan, according to the myth, brother of Ayyappa. Openness to people of other faiths also played a role in the popularization of Ayyappa; Muslims and Christians' active participation expanded the ranks of adepts.³⁴

4. THE PILGRIMAGE TO SHABARIMALA HIGHLIGHTS THE MEN'S CODE AND THE WOMEN'S QUESTION

The most important way to worship Ayyappa is to observe a 41-day fast, accompanied by the taking of a number of vows and following certain precepts, when people, or adepts, become like gods. They leave their usual activities for a while, dress in black clothes, unite in pilgrimage groups, and make a yatra, which culminates in a visit to the temple on Mount Shabarimala.³⁵

In remembrance of Ayyappa's forest travels, which he made with loyal warriors in an atmosphere of male brotherhood, people celebrate the days of fasting and pilgrimage. Therefore, the adepts of God lead an ascetic lifestyle and strive for maximum simplicity in everything; they wear monochrome.³⁶

They dress almost always in black (sometimes a different color, like saffron, but always monochromatic), eat simple food, refrain from cutting or shaving, avoid engaging in worldly affairs, and observe strict celibacy. The formula of refuge of the sharanagata, which they constantly repeat during these days, "Swami Sharanam Ayyappa," means renouncing one's own ego and submitting one's personality to God.³⁷

³¹ Manhas, Anupam. "Religious Freedom in Indian Society: Challenges and Solutions." *Indian J. Integrated Rsch. L.* 3 (2023): 1.

³² Klíngorová, Kamila, and Tomáš Havlíček. "Religion and gender inequality: The status of women in the societies of world religions." *Moravian Geographical Reports* 23.2 (2015): 2-11.

³³ Bijukumar, V. "When religious faith mutilates gender equality: women entry in Sabarimala Temple in Kerala." *ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* 4.2 (2019): 238-244.

³⁴ Wilson, Liz. "Gendered Social Roles and Female Labor Migration: Repercussions for the Ayyappa Pilgrimage of South India." *Immigrant Women's Voices and Integrating Feminism into Migration Theory*. IGI Global, 2021. 81-96.

³⁵ Jenkins, Laura Dudley. "Diversity and the constitution in India: what is religious freedom." *Drake L. Rev.* 57 (2008): 913.

³⁶ Ghosh, Soumalya. "Supreme Court on Women's Right to Religious Freedom in India: From Shirur Mutt to Sabarimala." *Indian JL & Just.* 10 (2019): 162.

³⁷ Chakrabarti, Anindita. "Religious Freedom, Legal Activism, and Muslim Personal Law in Contemporary India: A Sociological Exploration of Secularism." *Religious Freedom: Social-Scientific Approaches*. Brill, 2021. 35-58.

Perhaps the roots of this tradition can be traced back to archaic male initiation. The Ayyappa of the mythological narrative teaches by each of his actions the ideas of male brotherhood, united by a single spirit, goals beyond the comfort of worldly life, the ideas of justice, masculinity, and fidelity, and how to oppose the desires of women. Malayali, who live outside India and lead a very different way of life, in particular the office staff of the Gulf countries and especially Dubai, also play the role of a kind of return to their native culture, social therapy, and a radical, albeit temporary, change in lifestyle.³⁸ All this is tied to the calendar: vows are taken and consecrated on the first day of the month of Karttik (mid-November), temple visits take place during mandalu-ji in the month of Markagi (41), from about November 15 to December 26, and during the most sacred period of the year, during the celebration of makaravilakku or Makara sankranti (January 14–15); On this day, Shabarimal experiences two miracles: in the evening, a light begins to shine in the north-western direction, which all adepts consider to be the incarnation of Ayyappa himself, and in the afternoon, two people bring a casket containing the god's golden jewellery, kept in the house of the Pandalam royal family.³⁹

A large bird, the manifestation of Garuda, is believed to accompany the adepts carrying the casket. Otherwise, the Ayyappa Temple is only open to the public on the first five days of each Malayali month and on Mahavishva Sankranti, the calendar New Year, on April 14.⁴⁰

The pilgrimage begins with maladharam—the laying of a cheek of rudraksha seeds on the neck of the adept by his teacher, gurusvas. Perform this on the first day of Karttik month (mid-November). The pilgrim then performs irumudi kettal, which involves tying a special piece of luggage on his head. After a short rite of initiation, pilgrims make three turns around their axis and leave the house, sometimes backwards. They have passed into another space of being. From that moment on, people began to call them.⁴¹

"Ayyappanas," or "swamis," are like God. Some of the features of initiation are similar to funeral customs; in fact, there used to be a real danger of dying during a jungle journey. Before going to the temple on Shabarimal, adepts visit a number of other temples on their way.

The 18 steps, which the "ayappanas" use to reach the srikovil in the temple's inner courtyard, are the temple complex's most important feature. Vishvakarman is believed to have built them. Vandalism plagued the temple during the 20th century, and it underwent multiple rebuilds, the most recent one following a severe fire in 1953.⁴²

Near the main temple, the sannidhanam, the "holy abode," are the temples of Ganesha and Murugan, the other sons of Shiva and the brothers of Ayyappa, and the goddess Mala, of obscure origin and character. The temples of Malikappurattamma, the Navagraha of the nine planets, and the shrines of the serpent-gods, the Nagas, Nagayaksha, and Nagaraji, particularly revered by the local tribal people, and the Palli of Vawara Swami (either a mosque or a dargah, both of which are not very accurate), are located to the northwest. Here, pilgrims bring camphor as offerings, along with ashes and pepper, the symbolism of which is not entirely clear. The Mauwi, the servants of this shrine, come from the Musaliar family, believed to be descendants of Vawar himself.⁴³

However, pilgrims spend some time in the temple complex; there are very simple places for the night with shared showers and toilets, as well as a slightly more comfortable guest house. Pilgrims perform a number of rituals; there may also be ecstatic dances near the temple of Malikappurattam. And then there is the descent from the mountain, which usually takes a little more than an hour. Returning home, the pilgrim breaks a coconut on the doorstep, takes off the garland, cuts and shaves, changes clothes, and distributes consecrated food to the household. Typically, several days of active communication follow this. Neighbors and acquaintances strive to visit the home of a person who has just completed a pilgrimage cycle; it is believed that the blessing flows from his body, which for many days carried the essence of God.⁴⁴ Thus, both the myth and the pilgrimage practice of the cult of Ayyappa testify to the central significance of the male code: this god or deified hero has a distinctly masculine identity with clear signs of male initiation. However, Ayyappa's story does not lack the feminine theme or sexuality, as evidenced by his opposition to his adoptive mother, his battle with the buffalo-faced demon Mahishi (from whose prostrate body emerges Lila, who in her earthly life was filled with erotic desire), his relationship with his fiancée "in a state of expectation" Malikappurattama, and his relationship with another

³⁸ Uma, Saumya. "At the crossroads of freedom of religion and women's equality rights: Some reflections from South Asia." *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 9.1-2 (2016): 67-80.

³⁹ Sullivan, Donna J. "Gender Equality and Religious Freedom: Toward a Framework for Conflict Resolution." *NYUJ Int'l L. & Pol.* 24 (1991): 795.

⁴⁰ Bijukumar, V. "When religious faith mutilates gender equality: women entry in Sabarimala Temple in Kerala." *ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* 4.2 (2019): 238-244.

⁴¹ Stuart, Alison. "Freedom of religion and gender equality: inclusive or exclusive?" *Human Rights Law Review* 10.3 (2010): 429-459.

⁴² Klingorová, Kamila, and Tomáš Havlíček. "Religion and gender inequality: The status of women in the societies of world religions." *Moravian Geographical Reports* 23.2 (2015): 2-11.

⁴³ Mustafa, Faizan, and Jagtshwar Singh Sohi. "Freedom of religion in India: Current issues and supreme court acting as clergy." *BYU L. Rev.* (2017): 915.

⁴⁴ Manhas, Anupam. "Religious Freedom in Indian Society: Challenges and Solutions." *Indian J. Integrated Rsch. L.* 3 (2023): 1.

female character, Malaya. Interestingly, the temple of Ayyappa Achankovil Sri Dharmashashta (about 30 km from Shabarimala) worships the god in a married state, with two wives, Purna and Pushkala, and a son.⁴⁵

For an analysis of the structure of myth, the contradictions and paradoxes of opposition, and the relationship between eroticism and asceticism, see Yakoy and women entering here, as well as in hundreds of other temples of Ayapa in South India and beyond. Moreover, one of the most important merits that the "ayyappans," the adepts of God, strive to receive is the acquisition of male power, expressed in the ability to procreate. Elizabeth Wilson also emphasizes this in her study: the institution of pilgrimage to Shabarimala continues to serve as a form of male initiation, assisting men in challenging themselves and overcoming obstacles, gaining life experience in austere conditions, and fortifying their masculine identity amidst social uncertainty, gender blurring, and other social boundaries.⁴⁶

Thus, the period of strict vow observance, of which abstinence is one of the most important, is by no means eternal, but rather temporary and clearly functional; all these efforts. Both forms of sexual manifestation extrovertist and introversion in shakti combine in the cult of Ayyappa. Ayyappa, as it turns out, combines erotic and ascetic features.⁴⁷

What happened to the women adepts of Ayyappa, and what is the history of their attendance and/or non-attendance at the temple on Sabarimala? It is known that throughout the temple's documented history, especially until the 1990s, women visited it, as did most other temples in Ayyappa. He recalled that during his rite of first feeding with solid food (in Malayalam: chorunu; Annaprashna), which took place in this temple in the 1940s, he was lying on the lap of his mother, who was undoubtedly of childbearing age. Mothers of babies always attended this ceremony, for which the temple administration issued receipts for payment. Radhika Sekar, a Canadian researcher of Tamil origin, describes in detail how she went on a pilgrimage to Shabarimala in 1986–1987. According to Radhika, the leader of the pilgrimage said, "Okay, I accept you into my group." Every year, God sends me trials. "You sent an ambassador this year to test my patience and devotion to him." The prohibitions prevented her from entering the temple through the platform of the eighteen steps, but allowed her to enter through the northern entrance. Her visit to the temple did not result in any complaints or conflicts, but she was unable to witness a number of rites.⁴⁸

So, as previously stated, the main "problem" for a female pilgrim and visitor to the temple is her fertility, which is confirmed by the fact that she has menstruation. Fertility is associated with attractiveness and poses a "threat" to possible marriage and offspring. Menstruation has a serious "polluting" property that makes a woman temporarily "untouchable," even for the closest people in her family. Little girls under 9 years old, adults, and elderly women, formally after 50, can join pilgrimage groups. Furthermore, there are instances where younger women, such as those who have undergone uterine excision or experienced an early menopause, are eligible to join pilgrimage groups. The woman's conscience remains the sole decision-maker in these cases. We accepted Radhika Sekar based on the unique circumstances in her case to make a pilgrimage.⁴⁹

The ordination of female pilgrims follows the same process as that of boys and men. People refer to them as "amma," "mother," and perceive them not as the embodiment of Ayyappa, but rather as Malikkappurattamma, his "wife," who remains unfulfilled and in a state of "waiting." Ayyappa is somewhat similar to his "elder brother," Ganesha, who is also considered to be celibate and abstinent on the one hand, but on the other hand.⁵⁰

However, we must acknowledge that Shabarimala has consistently attracted a small number of female pilgrims. The temple's and cult's low popularity and the path's difficulty were the main reasons. In the autumn of 2018, the judges of the Supreme Court of India, having studied the documents, concluded: apparently, until the 1990s, there was only a slight restriction on the visit of women to this temple, but there was no complete ban, and there was no mass attendance of this temple by women either. This was not due to religious reasons or myths, but rather to physical distance and other "non-religious reasons."⁵¹

In 1955–1956, the Travankor Dewaswom Board, the body that oversees the temple's administration, issued two directives prohibiting women between the ages of 10 and 55 from attending the temple, arguing that the presence of women of childbearing age was contrary to "the fundamental principle underlying pratishtha"—the establishment of the customs and norms of a given church." Paragraph 3b of the Kerala Hindu Public Places of Worship Authorization of Entry Rules

⁴⁵ Jawed, Maria, and Dhanaji Mukundrao Jadhav. "Evolving a New Religious Freedom Jurisprudence: A Step Towards Ensuring Equality for Women." *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 10.2 (2021): 327-341.

⁴⁶ Viswambaran, Visakh. "Intersectional pedagogy for gender transformation among graduate students in India: A case study from Kerala." *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 4.1 (2021): 100170.

⁴⁷ Chakrabarti, Anindita. "Religious Freedom, Legal Activism, and Muslim Personal Law in Contemporary India: A Sociological Exploration of Secularism." *Religious Freedom: Social-Scientific Approaches*. Brill, 2021. 35-58.

⁴⁸ Ghosh, Soumalya. "Supreme Court on Women's Right to Religious Freedom in India: From Shirur Mutt to Sabarimala." *Indian JL & Just.* 10 (2019): 162.

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⁵⁰ Jenkins, Laura Dudley. "Diversity and the constitution in India: what is religious freedom." *Drake L. Rev.* 57 (2008): 913.

⁵¹ Kaushal, Rachana. "Religious Freedom and Human Rights in India: Conflicts and Reconciliation." *Danubius* 32. Supplement (2014): 225-235.

formally established the exclusion of women, either of childbearing age or only during menstruation, from the temple in 1965 and 1972.⁵²

In fact, it wasn't until the 1990s that the temple opened to women wishing to visit. In 1986, for example, the Tamil film "Believers Will Not Be Lost!" was filmed here, with Jayashree's sister dancing against the backdrop of the famous 18 steps. In some cases, women under the age of 50 visited the temple. However, in 1991, the High Court of India considered a case that provided some clarity to the vague nature of the prohibition. The plaintiff, one S. Mahendrana, complained about young women who offered their prayers at the Shabarimala temple and was particularly critical of the ceremony of the first rice feeding of the granddaughter of a former temple committee employee. The girl's grandmother responded that the temple only imposed restrictions on women's entry during the high pilgrimage season, but not at other times. The temple was always open to everyone on the first five days of each Malayali calendar month, during which the temple committee held the annaprashna, charging a fee and issuing receipts.⁵³

Justice K.B. Marar wrote in the Kerala High Court, on his own behalf and on behalf of Justice K. Paripuram, that according to witnesses and a tantric priest, there were bans on women of childbearing age from attending the temple. However, many recollections indicate that the prohibitions were specific to temple attendance and behavior, and the priests themselves did not prevent women from attending at odd hours during the non-pilgrimage season, such as during the main feasts. In 1991, however, the judges sided with the temple committee, the devaswoma, and made the situation worse by banning women of childbearing age from attending the temple at all.⁵⁴

Radhika Sekar provides two interpretations of this prohibition. First, there is the motive of concern for women and the safety of the entire pilgrimage group. Previously, it was a difficult journey—about 30 kilometers through a jungle filled with wild animals that could smell menstrual blood. Secondly, the cult belief holds that the adept absorbs the god Ayyappa into his body for 41 days, and when a woman begins to menstruate, her body simply cannot meet the real requirements.⁵⁵ So, we have a very ambiguous situation before us. Both the cult's peculiarities and the myth's multi-layered nature can support different points of view on the fairness and legitimacy of both women's admission and non-admission to the shrine.⁵⁶

5. INTERPRETATIONS OF THE AYYAPPA CASE: RELIGION, SOCIETY, AND LAW IN INDIA

Since October 2018, every newspaper or socio-political magazine in India has published a more or less extensive news item on the occasion of Shabarimala. The Internet is full of discussion platforms. To summarize the views expressed, there are two positions on which disputes arise.⁵⁷

The first argument is that the exclusion of women of childbearing age from the temple is a local tradition based on the cult's peculiarities and ideas about Ayyapa and his way of life. Respecting the rules adopted here is essential. Initially, his words even contained calls for violence, but then he softened his wording and began to appeal to the image of Mahatma Gandhi: "We will act the way of Gandhi, the way of non-violent resistance. If Trupti Desai intends to visit, hundreds of Ayyappa's devotees will lie down on the road leading to the temple." An Indian minister, Smriti Irani, also generally adheres to this position; in an interview with journalists, she advised women to admit their "impurity" during menstruation. Shashi Tharoor, a well-known politician and writer, expressed the view that we should test the acceptability of abstract norms of constitutional principles. The musician T.M. Krishna strongly criticized Shabarimala's admission of women of any age, arguing that it lacks the approval of society. Nirupama Menon Rao, the former Secretary of External Affairs of India, expressed a similar view, summarizing her message as "the court should not go where politicians are afraid to stick their heads."⁵⁸

According to the second position, the current temple administration and a number of political parties support the upper castes' arrogant practice of restricting women's access to Shabarimala under the guise of "tradition," which is similar to the previous ban on low-caste people entering many Hindu temples. It is necessary to fight against this ban, just as it was necessary to oppose the previous one. It is emphasized that the prohibition of women from coming to Shabarimala has

⁵² Uma, Saumya. "At the crossroads of freedom of religion and women's equality rights: Some reflections from South Asia." *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 9.1-2 (2016): 67-80.

⁵³ Mehta, Pangri. "Religious freedom and gender equality in India." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 25.3 (2016): 283-289.

⁵⁴ Parthasarathy, Suhrith. "An Equal Right to Freedom of Religion: A Reading of the Supreme Court's Judgment in Sabarimala." *U. Oxford Hum. Rts. Hub J.* (2020): 123.

⁵⁵ Gaffney Jr, Edward McGlynn. "Curious Chiasma: Rising and Falling Protection of Religious Freedom and Gender Equality." *U. Pa. J. Const. L.* 4 (2001): 394.

⁵⁶ King, Ursula. "Hinduism and women: Uses and abuses of religious freedom." *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook*. Brill Nijhoff, 2004. 523-543.

⁵⁷ Jawed, Maria, and Dhanaji Mukundrao Jadhav. "Evolving a New Religious Freedom Jurisprudence: A Step Towards Ensuring Equality for Women." *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 10.2 (2021): 327-341.

⁵⁸ Stuart, Alison. "Freedom of religion and gender equality: inclusive or exclusive?" *Human Rights Law Review* 10.3 (2010): 429-459.

less of a religious reason than a social one and is rooted in Brahminical texts, in the "Laws of Manu," where a single category includes women's "impurity," untouchables, corpses, women in childbirth, etc.⁵⁹

The belief that Ayyappa's cult is fundamentally non-Brahmanic, that he is a local deity, that the Brahmins "expropriated" his cult, and that segregation and exclusivism are fundamentally alien to him is becoming increasingly prevalent. Lekshmi Rajiv's works vividly represent this. According to this point of view, the idea of God's "virginity" is also an invention of the Brahmins and does not correspond to Ayyappa's "real" temper. The well-known writer and thinker Sunil, who is a member of the Communist Party and a former member of the Rajya Sabha Parliament, along with Brinda Karat and the musician T.M. Krishna, all subscribe to this position, albeit with differing arguments and emphasis. They are very critical of the supporters of the prohibition, likening it to "casteism" and other forms of social segregation. T.M. Krishna expressed his belief that we should ignore Ayyappa's wishes if they unfairly restrict access to the temple for women aged 10 to 50 who seek his blessings. This is because bhakti, the central concept of Hinduism, is the highest form of love and devotion. Philosophically speaking, the September 28, 2018 decision was a kind of levelling and ordering of the cult, overcoming the existing unjust practice.⁶⁰

Since the Court's decision, there have been mutual accusations in the Indian public space between people who hold these two positions. Threats and even attacks have targeted prominent writers and public figures in Kerala for their support of the court's decision. However, the question still stands: which of the two positions qualifies as "anti-national"?⁶¹

In the Ayyappa case, journalist P.R. Ramesh points out the existence of a phenomenon known as "selective secularism." Indeed, the content of the very concept of "Hinduism" significantly contributes to the problem: it is fundamentally diverse and multistructured, yet the state inevitably strives to unify and standardize it. Then, both in judicial casuistry and in everyday practice, the question arises of the "rights of believers" that are common to all (in this case, Hindus). Modernists have consistently defended small traditions, such as in a series of alternative versions of the Ramayana, but Ramesh believes that in the case of Ayyappa, they are calling for the unification of all practices.⁶²

6. CONCLUSION

The conflict around the temple on Shabarimala has actualized several significant problems in religious life, jurisprudence, the economy of temple complexes, and relationships between "center," "region," and "place" in India. We re-formulated the concepts of "us" and "them," "appropriate" and "unacceptable," "public" and "private," "inclusivism" and "exclusion." It is noteworthy that "virginity," "fertility," and "menstruation" turn out to be by no means personal (private) works of God or man; these are special states with self-existent ontological qualities; they are actively discussed; their preservation, loss, or use is a public matter.⁶³

The dispute over Shabarimala again sharply raised the question of the autonomy of religious communities, temples, and cults at different levels of subordination and jurisdiction. Indeed, the Constitution of India stipulates that any Hindu temple should admit all Hindus, irrespective of caste or gender. However, the existence of very different religious and cultural practices remains a reality in modern India. Some temples allow entry even without shoes, while others are inaccessible. Different approaches resolve the question of allowing non-Hindus and people of low-caste origin into the temple. The category of privacy is particularly complex in India, both theoretically and practically. The boundaries of what is permissible and unacceptable in all senses are extremely shaky.⁶⁴

Perhaps the case of the cult of the god Ayyappa will strengthen the need to develop a new approach to constitutional rights in terms of their applicability to "Hinduism" as a whole. In the dispute over Shabarimala, all parties take irreconcilable positions, and the path to a possible consensus is not yet in sight. However, there is a sense that all parties involved in the conflict have benefited in the end; the symbolic "stakes" of the god Ayyappa, as well as the "defenders" and "opponents" of his "virginity," have obviously increased. The "battle" for Ayyappa between supporters of different positions continues and is likely to continue; the topics identified during the conflict are too serious and important. Similar to how God's virginity serves as a tool rather than an end in itself, I perceive Ayyappa as a convenient figure, akin to Archimedes' "lever" that can manipulate the entire universe.

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⁶¹ Sullivan, Donna J. "Gender Equality and Religious Freedom: Toward a Framework for Conflict Resolution." *NYUJ Int'l L. & Pol.* 24 (1991): 795.

⁶² Wilson, Liz. "Gendered Social Roles and Female Labor Migration: Repercussions for the Ayyappa Pilgrimage of South India." *Immigrant Women's Voices and Integrating Feminism into Migration Theory*. IGI Global, 2021. 81-96.

⁶³ Viswambaran, Visakh. "Intersectional pedagogy for gender transformation among graduate students in India: A case study from Kerala." *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 4.1 (2021): 100170.

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