

Indian women make a 620 kilometre wall of protest

They were asserting their right to enter the Sabarimala temple in Kerala - and have given hope for women's rights

Before you read the complete article, look at this vocabulary and find it in the text:

to uphold: to maintain

pilgrimage: a journey to a place of particular interest

to shove: to push (someone or something) roughly

mob: a large crowd of people who can cause trouble or violence

to make it in: to get into a place (with an element of difficulty)

to vow: to solemnly promise to do a specified thing

to grant entry: to allow someone to go into a place

to hold equal weight: to be of equal importance

to rekindle: to reignite or revive

pledge: a solemn promise

On 1st January, in one of the biggest movements for women's rights in India, 5 million women lined up across the length of the southern state of Kerala to "**uphold** Renaissance values". What they were demanding was an end to violent demonstrations against women trying to enter Kerala's Sabarimala temple, a popular Hindu **pilgrimage** site.

Since 1991, the temple has accepted only men and older women, in their millions every year, to preserve the mythological celibacy of the ruling deity, Ayyappa. Between 17th November and 24th December, more than a dozen women of menstrual age, including reporters, tried to enter the temple but were stopped, **shoved** and stoned by **mobs** of male devotees. None of the women could **make it in**, despite police protection and prohibitory orders. Both sides are far from giving in. Protests have since continued, though most women who were sent back by the **mobs** have **vowed** to return.

The wider debate Sabarimala has thrown up is between the logic in **granting** women **entry** to one of India's most popular temples at a time when they have the same rights as men in most arenas, and the dangers of a court imposing a social reform for which the intended society is far from prepared.

That neither of India's two biggest parties can openly support the women's constitutional right to enter a temple confirms the country's complicated realities.

If the legend of Ayyappa's celibacy is sacred to his devotees, and therefore worthy of exemption from state intervention, then similar appeals from believers of other faiths should **hold equal weight** - for instance some sections of India's Muslim society have appealed against the Indian government's continuing strike-down of "triple talaq", which allows Muslim men to instantly divorce their wives.

But the sight of the 385 mile (620km) "women's wall" - one of the largest ever congregations of women in the world - has **rekindled** hopes for a genuine movement.

Standing shoulder-to-shoulder along the highways was a wide range of women - young and old, rural and urban, farmers and doctors, activists and actors - taking the **pledge** to fight for gender equality. Early the next morning, two women - Bindu Hariharan (42) and Kanaka Durga (44) - went to Sabarimala. They had visited the temple on 24th December, but were prevented from entering by rioting protesters. They had said they would get in - and sure enough, on this occasion, they got in.

Adapted from www.theguardian.com by ECP coach Darren Kurien

Let's chat about that!

Write your opinions in an email and send them to your ECP coach!

- Do you believe that equality can really exist? Why / (not)?
- Can you tell us about a time when you saw two people being treated differently because of prejudice. How did it make you feel?
- What is worse: sexism, racism or any other form of -ism? Why?
- What other news issues are going to be important this year?
- And what personal issues are going to be important for you this year?



The shrine, dedicated to Lord Ayyappa, is visited by over 50 million devotees every year



Basque women were not allowed into the region's traditionally men-only 'cooking clubs' until relatively recently

Social Events In English

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Next chat: Sat 12th January

11:00 to 12:30 - Panadería Bertiz, C/Francia



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Time: 11:00 to 12:30

Place: Panadería Bertiz, C/Francia

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New year, new resolutions

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Time: 19:30 to 21:30

Place: ECP Hub (C/San Ignacio de Loyola 15)

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657 73 13 54

Vocabulary for religion

to pray

a prayer

to confess

a confession

to sin

a sinner

faith

pilgrimage

a pilgrim

synagogue

church

temple

soul

mosque

a Sikh

Sikhism

Christianity

a Jew

Judaism

Islam

a Muslim

Hinduism

a Buddhist

a Christian

a Hindu

Buddhism

Orthodox

Protestant

Catholic

seva

reincarnation

Prophet

Guru

sacred

holy