



**UPSC
GURUS**

**MAJOR SUPREME
COURT JUDGEMENTS**

INDIAN YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION V. STATE OF KERALA (2018)

Constitutional Interpretation & Basic Structure

PRELIMS SNAPSHOT

- ♦ 1. Prelims Snapshot (Fact Box)
- 📅 Year: 2018
- ⚖️ Case: Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala (Sabarimala Case)
- 👥 Bench Strength: 5 Judges (Constitution Bench)
- 📖 Key Articles Involved: Article 14, Article 15, Article 25, Article 26
- 🧠 Doctrine Evolved: Essential Religious Practices Doctrine reviewed; Religious customs cannot subvert gender equality
- 💬 Famous Line: "Patriarchy in religion cannot be permitted to trump over constitutional morality."

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

The case challenged the centuries-old practice at the Sabarimala temple in Kerala, which barred women aged 10 to 50 years from entering the temple, citing the celibate nature of the deity, Lord Ayyappa.



The Indian Young Lawyers Association filed a petition arguing that this practice was discriminatory and violated women's Fundamental Rights.

The temple authorities defended the ban under the Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Doctrine and Article 26(b), claiming denominational autonomy.

CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RAISED

- Does excluding women from temple entry violate Articles 14 and 15 (equality and non-discrimination)?
- Can religious customs override Fundamental Rights under Article 25 (freedom of religion)?
- Are such customs essential religious practices, protected under Article 26?

VERDICT & RATIO DECIDENDI

In a 4:1 majority, the Court struck down the ban and ruled that:

- The exclusion of women is discriminatory and unconstitutional, violating Articles 14, 15, and 25



- The practice does not constitute an essential religious practice and therefore is not protected under Article 26
- Constitutional morality must guide all institutions, including religious ones
- Justice D.Y. Chandrachud noted: "To treat women as the lesser child of the Constitution is to blink at the Constitution itself."

Justice Indu Malhotra dissented, arguing that the court should not interfere in matters of deep religious belief unless they are unconstitutional on their face.

DOCTRINE / PRINCIPLE EVOLVED

- Essential Religious Practices Doctrine is not immune to Fundamental Rights scrutiny
- Gender equality, dignity, and access to public religious spaces are constitutionally guaranteed
- Constitutional morality must prevail over social or religious morality



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IMPACT & LEGACY

- Opened the doors of Sabarimala to women of all ages, although the implementation faced resistance
- Sparked broader national debates on the balance between religious freedom and gender justice
- Set a precedent for cases like Haji Ali Dargah and Triple Talaq
- Referred to a larger bench in 2019 (9-judge bench) to reconsider the scope of ERP doctrine and rights under Articles 25–26
- Deepened the conversation around intersectionality in constitutional rights



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RELEVANCE FOR UPSC

- GS Paper 2:
 - Fundamental Rights vs. religious practices
 - Constitutional morality and gender equality
 - ERP Doctrine and role of judiciary
- GS Paper 4 (Ethics):
 - Ethical pluralism, reform vs. tradition, justice vs. belief
- Essay Paper:
 - Apt for themes on Faith vs. Equality, Morality in Public Spaces, Constitutional Reforms
- UPSC Interview:
- Highly relevant for debates on religion, women's rights, secularism, and judicial reform

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