

SC to hear review petitions to 2018 Sabarimala judgement in April: A timeline of the case

The state government is weighing its prospects in the apex court, even as it maintains its position as established in its 2017 affidavit permitting entry to women of all ages

Written by: [Shaju Philip](#) 4 min read Thiruvananthapuram Feb 18, 2026 07:08 PM IST



A view of the entrance to the temple's sanctum sanctorum (Sabarimala Sree Dharma Sastha Temple)

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The Supreme Court on Monday (February 16) said a nine-judge Constitution Bench will start hearing the review petitions on April 7 regarding its 2018 verdict allowing

young women entry to the Sabarimala Dharma Sastha Temple. A three-judge bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi said the CJI will notify the composition of the bench separately through an administrative order.

The implementation of the 2018 verdict during the temple's 41-day pilgrimage season that year drew severe public backlash and cost the ruling CPI(M) dearly in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. The state government is weighing its prospects in the apex court, even as it maintains its position as established in its 2017 affidavit permitting entry to women of all ages.

With the review hearings scheduled with the assembly elections, here is how the issue has evolved over the years.

The initial challenge in the Kerala High Court

While the temple has enforced a ban on female pilgrims aged 10 to 50 years, the first legal challenge was mounted in 1990 by S Mahendran of Kottayam in the Kerala High Court. He claimed that young women in the objectionable age group were trekking to the temple and offering prayers there.

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In 1991, the HC ruled that the age restrictions on women's entry are in accordance with tradition and do not violate fundamental rights. It also directed the Travancore

Devaswom Board, which oversees the temple's administration, to bar entry to women of menstruating age.

How the Supreme Court weighed in

In 2006, the Indian Young Lawyers Association petitioned the Supreme Court under Article 32 of the Constitution, challenging the entry ban directed by the state government, the Devaswom Board, and the Sabarimala Chief Tantri (head priest). The petitioner sought to declare Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965 as unconstitutional, in violation of Articles 14, 15, 25 and 51A(e) of the Constitution of India.

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On September 28, 2018, a five-judge bench of the court, by a 4:1 majority, removed the age restrictions on women's entry to the hill shrine in Kerala. It struck down as unconstitutional Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship Rules, 1965, which allowed the exclusion of women on the grounds of custom.

This verdict was heavily criticised, with several organisations and stakeholders affiliated with the temple filing review petitions.

Ahead of the temple's annual pilgrimage season in 2019, the court said that its 2018 verdict may impinge on the affairs of other religions, and referred the matter to a larger bench of at least seven judges. However, it did not stay its 2018 verdict in the matter.

In 2020, a nine-judge bench headed by then Chief Justice of India S A Bobde held the petitions seeking a review of this verdict as maintainable, and presented seven questions for the Constitution Bench to review.

Kerala government stance reflective of its ruling party

Depending on the party at the helm, the state has taken contrasting positions on the

subject.

The Left Democratic Front government under then Chief Minister V S Achuthanandan took a progressive stance on the subject. In its affidavit before the Supreme Court in November 2007, it supported the public interest litigation filed by the Young Lawyers Association. The state asked the apex court to constitute a commission comprising eminent scholars to review the question.

The succeeding United Democratic Front government, led by the Congress Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, took a U-turn. In February 2016, the state told the Supreme Court that its assertions in the 2007 affidavit wrongly sought to support the petition. The state asserted that the practice of restricting entry to women aged 10 to 50 years is an essential and integral part of the customs and usages of the Temple, which is protected under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution.

The LDF returned to power later that year, and thus reverted to its 2007 position, advocating for the entry of women of all ages to the temple.

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