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SC Allows Women Entry into Sabarimala Temple

In a 4:1 judgment, 5-membered constitution bench of Supreme Court, in ***Indian Young Lawyers Association vs. the State of Kerala***, has allowed women of all ages to worship in Sabarimala Temple.

- In its judgment, SC stated that '**devotion cannot be subjected to gender discrimination**'.
- Chief Justice Dipak Misra, Justice RF Nariman, Justice AM Khanwilkar and Justice DY Chandrachud constituted the majority, while the lone woman judge on the Bench, Justice Indu Malhotra dissented.
- The petitions had challenged the Constitutional validity of **Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965**, which **restricts the entry of women into the Sabarimala Temple** as being *ultra-vires* **Section 3 of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act, 1965** which states that places of public worship are to be open to all sections and classes of Hindus.

Sabarimala Temple Issue

- Located in the forests of the Western Ghats in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district, the hill shrine is dedicated to Lord Ayyappa and is managed by the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB).
- The Sabarimala temple prohibits women aged between 10 and 50 years from entering the shrine.
- It is said that its deity, Lord Ayyappa, is a "**Naisthik Brahmachari**" and that allowing young women to enter the temple would affect the idol's "celibacy" and "austerity".
- The Travancore Devaswom Board has said that the prohibition on women of menstruating age from entering the temple is a part of '**essential religious practice**' of Lord Ayappa devotees.

- The petitioners have argued that the ban enforced on menstruating women from entering the Sabarimala shrine does not constitute a core foundation of the religion.
- Preventing women's entry to the temple with an irrational and obsolete notion of "purity" offends the equality clauses in the Constitution.
- It takes away the woman's right against discrimination guaranteed under Article 15(1) of the Constitution.
- It also curtails the religious freedom assured by Article 25(1).
- In 1991, Kerala High Court upheld the prohibition on young women entry in Sabarimala Shrine. The High Court had pointed out that the 'Naisthik Brahmachari' nature of the deity was "a vital reason for imposing this restriction on young women".

SC judgment

- **Majority Judgement**
 - SC has ruled that Rule 3(b) is *ultra-vires* the Constitution, Section 3 of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act, 1965 as well as Section 4 of the 1965 Act which says that the regulations/rules made under this act shall not discriminate, in any manner whatsoever, against any Hindu on the ground that he/she belongs to a particular section or class.
 - Supreme Court condemned the prohibition as "**hegemonic patriarchy**" (hegemonic patriarchy means that patriarchy has become such an over-arching idea that discrimination based on it appears to be common sense to such an extent that not only men, even women become the supporter and perpetrator of the very notion which discriminates them).
 - It said that exclusion on grounds of biological and physiological features like menstruation was unconstitutional. It amounted to discrimination based on a biological factor exclusive to gender. It was violative of the right to equality and dignity of women.
 - SC said that prohibition founded on the notion that menstruating women are "**polluted and impure**" is a form of **untouchability** and the notions of purity and pollution stigmatized women.
 - SC also held that Ayyappa devotees do not form a separate denomination just because of their devotion to Lord Ayyappa, but it is only a part of Hindu worship.
 - SC overturned the 1951 judgment of Bombay High Court in the ***State of Bombay versus Narasu Appa Mali*** which held that the personal law is not 'law' or 'law in force' under Article 13 and held that immunising customs takes away the primacy of the constitution.
 - No customs or usages can claim supremacy over the Constitution and its vision of ensuring the sanctity of dignity, liberty, and equality and customs and personal law have a significant impact on the civil status of individuals.

- **Dissent Opinion**

- Justice Indu Malhotra dissented from the majority opinion and held that notions of rationality cannot be invoked in matters of religion by courts.
- She held the determination of what constituted an essential practice in a religion should not be decided by judges on the basis of their personal viewpoints. Essentiality of a religious practice or custom had to be decided within the religion and it is a matter of personal faith.
- Justice Malhotra observed that the freedom to practice their beliefs was enshrined in Article 25 of the Constitution. Harmonisation of fundamental rights with religion included providing freedom for diverse sects to practice their customs and beliefs.

AIIB Approves \$455-million Loan for Andhra Pradesh

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has approved a \$455-million loan to improve road transport connectivity by providing all-weather rural roads in 13 districts of the state of Andhra Pradesh.

- This will not only improve transport links to facilitate the delivery of agricultural and farm goods to markets but is also expected to result in better health and education outcomes.
- School attendance rates, especially among girls, are expected to improve.
- This will take AIIB's total commitment to India to over \$1.76 billion spread across seven infrastructure projects and a \$200 million equity investment commitment to India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIIF).

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia and beyond.
- Officially launched in January 2016, the AIIB is headquartered in Beijing, China.
- It is a multi-lateral development bank initiated by China and supported by a wide range of countries and regions, which provides financing for infrastructure improvement.
- The international infrastructure bank owns about USD 100 billion of subscribed capital, including approx USD 20 billion in paid-in capital.
- India is the second largest shareholder with 7.5 percent followed by Russia with 5.93 percent and Germany with 4.5 percent.
- India is also the largest recipient of loans from the bank so far.

National Investment and Infrastructure Fund

- National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) is a fund created by the Government of India for enhancing infrastructure financing in the country. Its creation was announced in the Union Budget 2015-16.
- It is registered with SEBI as Category II Alternative Investment Fund (AIF). Category II funds are allowed to invest anywhere in any combination, but cannot take debts, except for day-to-day operation purposes. These include private equity funds and debt funds.
 - In India, alternative investment funds (AIFs) are defined by Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) as any privately pooled investment fund, (whether from Indian or foreign sources), which are otherwise not coming under the jurisdiction of any regulatory agency in India.
 - The Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) have been categorized into three classes by the SEBI, viz. Category I, Category II, and Category III.
- The objective of NIIF would be to maximize economic impact mainly through infrastructure development in commercially viable projects, both greenfield, and brownfield, including stalled projects. It could also consider other nationally important projects, for example, in manufacturing, if commercially viable.

SATAT Initiative

Government is planning to launch SATAT initiative to promote Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG) as an alternative, green transport fuel.

- Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) is an effort that would benefit both vehicle-users as well as farmers and entrepreneurs. Compressed Bio-Gas plants are proposed to be set up mainly through independent entrepreneurs.
- The programme will be funded under Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) component of Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G) to benefit households in identified villages through Gram Panchayats.
- The initiative will help in efficient municipal solid waste management and in tackling the problem of polluted urban air due to farm stubble-burning and carbon emissions.
- Use of CBG will also help bring down dependency on crude oil imports and in enhancing farmers' income, rural employment and entrepreneurship.
- Bio-gas is produced naturally through a process of anaerobic decomposition from waste /bio-mass sources like agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste, sewage treatment plant waste, etc.
- After purification, it is compressed and called CBG, which has pure methane content of over 95%.
- CBG is exactly similar to the commercially available natural gas in its composition and energy potential. It can be used as an alternative, renewable automotive fuel.

- Given the abundance of biomass in the country, Compressed Bio-Gas has the potential to replace CNG in automotive, industrial and commercial uses in the coming years.
 - Compressed Bio-Gas networks can be integrated with city gas distribution (CGD) networks to boost supplies to domestic and retail users.
 - The National Policy on Biofuels 2018 also emphasises active promotion of advanced bio-fuels, including CBG.
 - Earlier, the Government of India had launched the GOBAR-DHAN (Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources) scheme to convert cattle dung and solid waste in farms to CBG and compost.
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Important Facts for Prelims (29th September 2018)

KHARTALS- Sound of the Desert

- Khartal is a traditional percussion instrument, it is an important part of Rajasthani music.
- This instrument is played by the Manganiyars and the Langa communities in Jaisalmer and Barmer.
- The instrument derives its name from the Hindi words 'kara' means hand and 'tala' means rhythm — rhythm of the hand. It is used during religious and social celebrations.
- Khartal comes under the category of idiophones of the self-sounding variety, where the properties of vibrator and resonator are combined by the instrument.
- It is traditionally made from sheesham wood or teak since this produces the required nadam or sound. Since the instrument looks like animal bone, it is also called rhythm bone.
- Khartals can also be made of metal. The instrument is usually plain but sometimes designs are drawn on it.
- This instrument is held on the hand and played. Sometimes the performer (usually played by men) play pairs of khartals with both the hands. The flat surfaces are struck together by alternately closing and opening the fingers.
- Khartals can be played both as a solo instrument or part of an ensemble. A common feature of performances in Rajasthan is the rhythmic exchange between khartal and dholak artistes.

Bhubaneswar's Tribal Museum Reflecting Tribal Culture and Art

- The Tribal Museum, as it is known in Bhubaneswar, is a quick capsule of tribal culture and art and represent Odisha's cultural identity.

- It has hut replicas, textiles, rice grain sculptures, painters at work selling finished pieces, hunting and fishing implements, household objects like husking levers, musical instruments like the gagadyadengh, the two-stringed fiddle, and the changu, a single-membrane drum.
- With more than 5,000 objects and replicas on display, most of which are digitized, beautifully reflect tribal lifestyle, history, and art.
- It reveals what is common among its subjects: the Bondas, Saoras, Dongria Kondhs, Juangs, and Kutia Kondhs, among other tribes, by legends passed on through generations.
- It is a repository of information on tribals, for example, while navigating the museum one can learn about Bonda tribes of the Malkangiri district of southern Odisha that they live on shifting and wetland cultivations and are famous for making brooms and a drink from mahua flowers.
- Although Odisha is both a Hindu and Buddhist stronghold, tribal culture spills over into its cultural identity.
- Lord Jagannath (lovingly referred to as “kaliya”) in Odisha is considered to be the saviour and father of the state cutting across various castes and tribes. For eg: along with Hindus, Jagannath is also the God of Saoras (known for music and Saura tribal painting which is a style of wall mural paintings) and some other tribes.
- Further wooden deities of the Adivasis bear great iconographical similarity with Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra.
- The state still has some of the most untouched tribal sanctuaries in the country, and because of the state government’s efforts to preserve tribal traditions there is tribal art on street walls in downtown Bhubaneswar. For example, Saora paintings are in great demand through local art dealers.
- Slow, curated tours into tribal areas are beginning to attract international, anthropologically inclined travellers. The tribal museum is a good beginning to explore tribal Odisha.

Kumaoni Aipan- Red and White Glory

- Aipan is a traditional folk art specifically made by women of Uttarakhand.
- This art is done on the floor over brick red background with white paste made out of rice flour.
- Only two colours (red and white) are used to make religious motifs, repetitive geometric patterns and nature-inspired elements, which have a distinctive local flavour.
- The typical art is done on all special occasions and household ceremonies and rituals.
- It is believed that these motifs evoke divine power which brings good fortune and wards off evil.

Thanjavur: Repository of Indian Crafts

- Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu is famous for Brihadisvara temple, which together with two other 11th century Chola temples (the Brihadisvara Temple at Gangaikondacholisvaram and the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- It has four distinctive handicrafts that have won GI (geographical indication) tags:
 - Dancing Dolls
 - Thalaiyati Bommai are dancing dolls, painted in bright colours and intricate designs
 - During Dasara, the dolls are available everywhere from stores to makeshift stalls.
 - The papier mache (a composite material consisting of paper pieces or pulp) and clay dolls are set up in elaborate tiered displays that relate mythological stories during the 'Bomma Kolu' celebrations as part of Dasara.
 - Metal Art Plates
 - Maratha King Serofji Bhonsle was a patron of this art and many of Thanjavur's iconic crafts started during his reign and flourished.
 - The plates are made of silver, brass, copper and sometimes bronze.
 - They are embossed with figures of gods and goddesses surrounded by floral patterns.
 - Thanjavur Paintings
 - Thanjavur paintings renowned for their vivid colours, rich gold leaf work and glass bead inlay.
 - They reflect the influences of both the Maratha period in the 1700s, when they originated, and the Nayakas who ruled the region before the Marathas.
 - They are painted on wooden panels with religious theme representing Hindu gods and goddesses, and episodes from religious texts.
 - Saraswati Veena
 - It is one of the most important instruments for Carnatic music and revered for its resonant quality.
 - It is made from the wood of a mature jackfruit tree, taking an artisan two-three months of patient chipping away to complete it.
 - The bulb of the instrument is intricately carved with floral motifs or the image of Goddess Saraswati, and then polished for a gleaming finish.

Muziris Port

- Muziris is a port city in Kerala.
- It is among the oldest port in the world.

- Sangam literature describes Roman ships coming to Muziris for pepper.
- In 1341, after flooding in Periyar River basin on the Malabar Coast Muziris port was wiped off the world map.
- The remains of the port are being conserved and preserved through one of India's largest conservation projects - the Muziris Heritage Project.

Project highlights

- The largest heritage conservation project in India.
- The first Green Project of the Government of Kerala.
- Involvement of multiple Government Departments and convergence.
- More than 25 museums to appreciate the Muziris Heritage.
- A research and academic institution to support the project.
- Major improvements in infrastructure.
- Integration with local communities through native resource persons for data collection, survey etc.

Rail Heritage Digitisation Project

- Minister of Railways and Coal has launched “Rail Heritage Digitisation Project” of Indian Railways in collaboration with Google Arts & Culture.
 - It will showcase country’s Rail Heritage to National and International audience in an online story-telling platform.
 - The project is the largest cultural heritage digitization project in India.
 - Google described this project as an extension of their partnership with Indian Railways of providing public with Wi-Fi at 400 railway stations.
 - Indian Railways has four UNESCO accorded World Heritage Sites:
 - The Mountain Railways of India
 - Darjeeling Himalayan Railway located in the foothills of the Himalayas in West Bengal (Northeast India).
 - Nilgiri Mountain Railways located in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu (South India)
 - Kalka Shimla Railway located in the Himalayan foothills of Himachal Pradesh (Northwest India).
 - The Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (formerly known as Victoria Terminus Station), Mumbai.
 - In collaboration with Google Art & Culture, Indian Railways have already digitized National Rail Museum, Rewari Steam Centre, three World Heritage Railways, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus building and other prominent aspects of country’s rail heritage.
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