

Introduction:

For this project, we will be analysing the discourse around the Sabarimala issue. The temple, dedicated to Lord Ayyappa attracts tourists from various parts of the country and the world. The Kerala High Court restricted entry of women above the age of 10 and below the age of 50 in the year 1991, as they were of the menstruating age. This ban on women's entry has been practised for centuries, but, on September 28, 2018, the Supreme Court lifted the ban.

With CPI(M) siding with the temple's ideology of not allowing women and BJP siding with allowing women, the discussion is expected to go around the topic of women empowerment and freedom, but did the discussions around the topic go that way? Or was there any communal/personal agendas attached in the discussion? This is being tried to answer in the following subtopics:-

Election:

From the outside, it seems that the issue had a negative impact on BJP led alliance, NDA because the alliance won 0 seats in 2021 than in 2016 where it won at least 1 seat. But the Konni constituency in Pathanamthitta district which was present at the heart of the protest had a different story to put forward.

The vote share of NDA in Konni increased by 11.65% in 2016 to 21.6% in 2021, the district even had by-elections in 2018 in which NDA had 28.65% of the vote share where earlier it used to have a meagre 4.6% in 2011.

It can be argued that there could have been different reasons apart from the Sabarimala issue that was associated with an increase in vote share. A reason that was noticed in other states is that the popularity of BJP rose because of a more prominent and effective central rule throughout the year. However, we must remember that BJP had its peak influence in the 2014-17 period - after which it started to lose in many state elections like Maharashtra, Telangana and Odisha - and thus, it can be argued that the Sabarimala issue had a big role to play in these elections.

Not only this, but the BJP even won the pandalam municipality election results, an astounding victory because the municipal town was the epicentre for the Sabarimala issue and pandalam royalty is responsible for governing over the issues in the Sabarimala temple. In 2015 BJP won only 7/33 in the district and this precedence showed the immensity of the victory. Similarly, it won in Palakkad and retained the key cities of the state. This shows the level of impact Sabarimala's issue had on the election.

Similarly in the Kazhakuttam in Thiruvananthapuram district, there was a great war setup against the sitting candidate Kadakampally as he expressed his disappointment over the verdict of the Supreme court and BJP took the opportunity to attack the candidate over it and was able to increase vote share from 25% in 2015 to 30% in 2021, still, CPI(M) was able to retain the seat and won by a smaller margin, a trend followed in many of the Kerala legislatures.

There are a lot of criminal cases associated with the BJP candidates like in Konni the number of cases against the candidate is 248 whereas in Kazhakkootam the number is 48. Also, most of these cases are riot cases or related to "woman decency" like "Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty(354)". This concludes that a lot of political tactics were tried by both the parties and the issue might have become more communal and fierce in nature, which originally began as a silent protest for the rights of the woman. The winning candidates also have one of the highest assets and liabilities in the constituency showcasing money was also detrimental in the elections, which showcases the power-hungry nature and thus painting the discussion around Sabarimala in a negative manner.

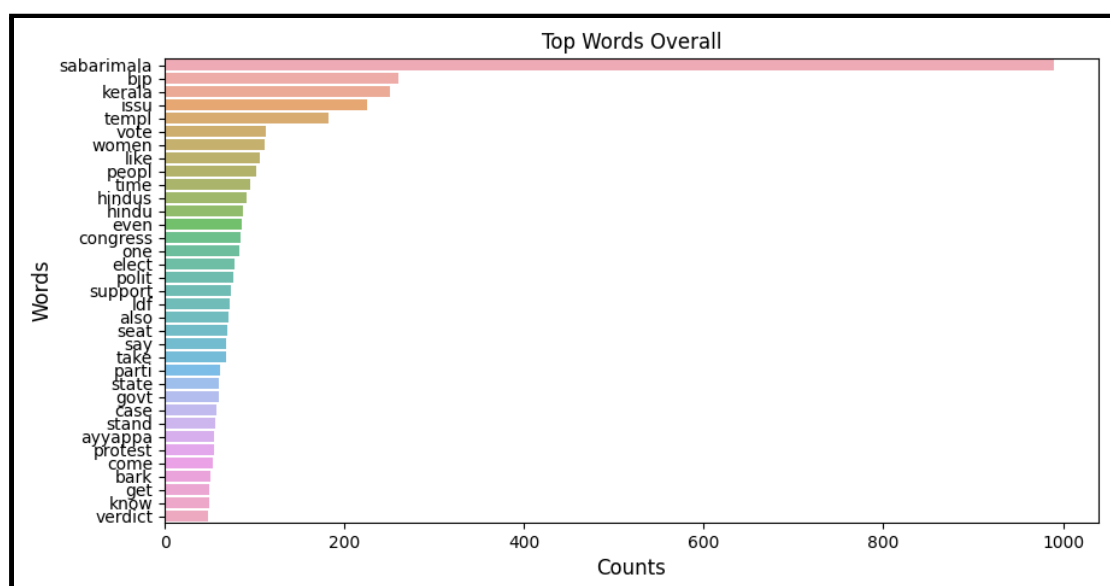
These results show that there was an extensive political and electoral campaign that was birthed out of this situation although superficially this seems like an issue about gender inequality, the political parties used this to further their own agenda. We see that it is common that the ideals of the political party are not reflected in the stance that the candidates took in the politicisation of the issue, rather personal agendas and opinions were propagated. This can be seen in the example of Kadakampally Surendran who regretted the Supreme Court's decision of allowing women into the temple. This is in contrast to the precedence set by CPI(M) since the independence

of India. Traditionally known for its liberal actions towards gender equality and women empowerment, we see that candidates are focussed more towards being in power than supporting the political party's ideology.

The electoral results demonstrate a positive picture in front of us, but the question of discourse and discussions around the elections is still there. The main reason behind it was women empowerment, but did the electoral campaigns focus on it or was the main issue diluted in the process to please the voters to a more communal aspect, this will be seen in the following Twitter and newspaper analysis.

Tweets:

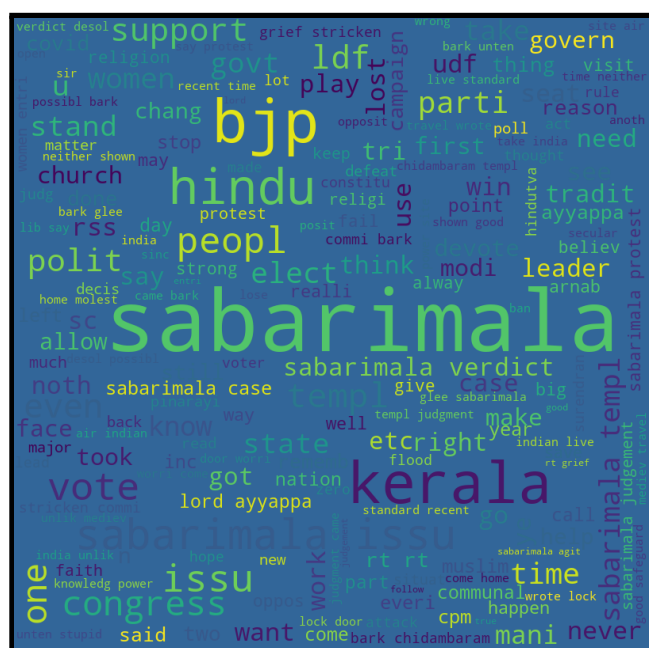
In the tweets analysis, we will first do a brief analysis of word frequency, and then, using real tweet data, determine the context in which the words seem to be used and if our assumptions based only on frequency analysis were correct. We anticipate this event to be a gender issue with a dash of political conflict thrown in, as the whole situation centres around prohibiting females of a certain age range from entering.



We immediately notice the word women in the frequency analysis and wordcloud, confirming that this incident did revolve around women; however, we expected its frequency to be much higher and the use of words relating to menstruation to be even more prevalent, but they were in extremely low frequency (~10 in 1000 tweets),

which is strange given that this entire case is predicated on the fact that women in their menstruating years are prohibited to enter the temple. What's more astonishing is that the majority of terms with a high frequency are political in nature, referring to either the state or a political party. And terms referring to women and women's entrance are very rare. This may indicate that individuals have shifted their focus away from the original problem and toward the positions of political parties and courts, as shown by the use of political terms such as LDF, BJP, Congress, and parties. "Modi" has also surfaced, which leads us to believe that the BJP may have had a significant role in this whole issue. And, as shown by tweets, Modi is often used to speak about the BJP as a whole, without necessarily citing or discussing his own choices. However, the frequency analysis does not reveal whose party is on either side of the interior contents of the tweets. However, the frequent use of the term "Hindu" reinforces the idea that this argument is also centred on Hindu law.

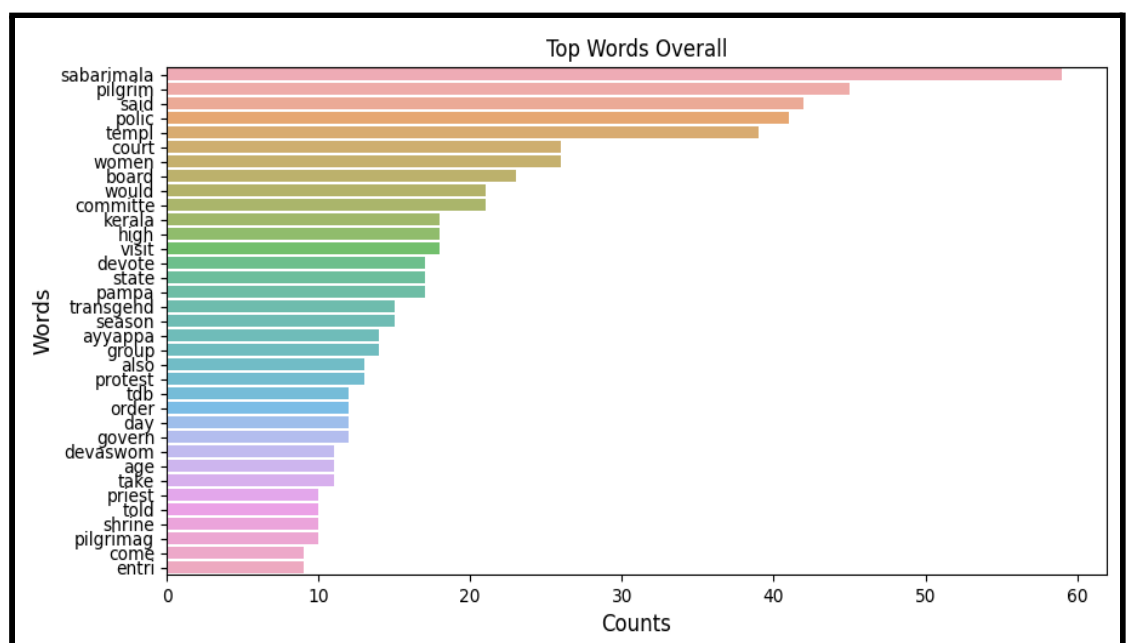
We can see from a small sample of tweets that a section of the population is opposed to the BJP exploiting this issue to get votes, with one comment stating that just using the term "Ayappan" would not help you win seats. And they were accused of trying to foment communal strife in Kerala. Now, upon further examination, we find that the whole event is simply referred to as the Sabarimala case, which may encapsulate the words that we were expecting but failed to find. Because this research was conducted on the past 1000 tweets, the true nature of the Sabarimala problem is no longer being discussed openly. We notice that a significant percentage of these tweets discuss the BJP's ongoing efforts to foment unrest in the state. All of this supports the frequency analysis, which indicates that this has evolved into a political issue rather than a gender problem. Nobody is discussing gender equality, either. The term "equality" appeared just five



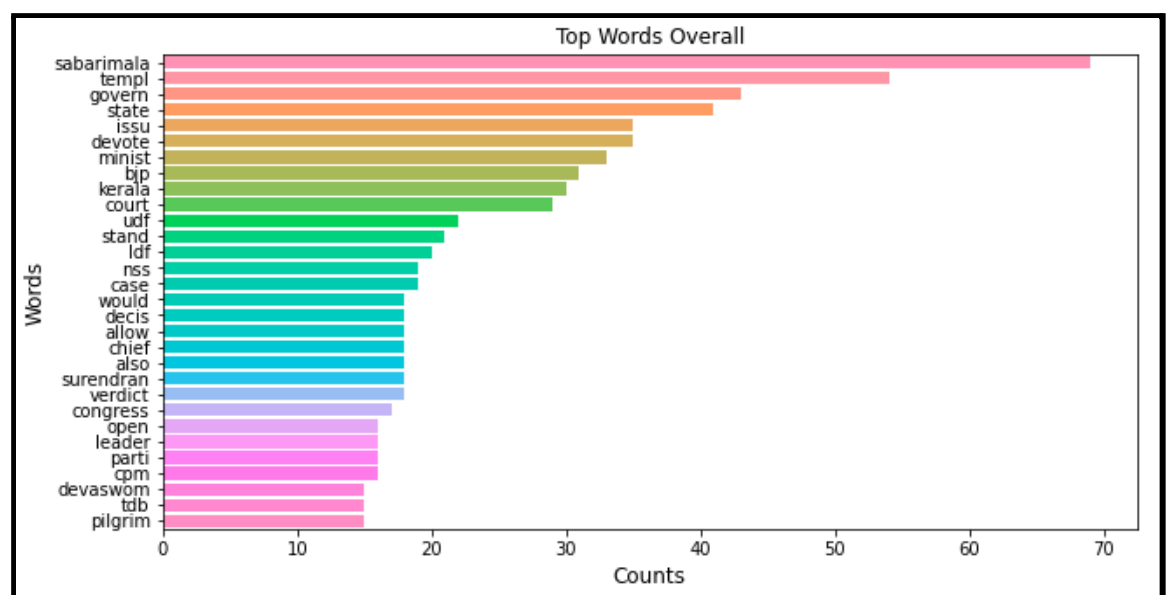
times in 1,000 tweets. This leads us to wonder how many of these comparable issues lose their initial purpose and morph into a communal conflict. All of the above-mentioned parties seem to have lost sight of the real problem and are instead focusing on winning seats for themselves. Not only the BJP, but every party is attempting to sow divisiveness, a frowned-upon textbook strategy for capturing a certain vote bank. However, it seems to be functioning as well. As stated before, the majority of tweets are about this. Now, the majority of tweets are critical of the BJP and refer to some other party as the winner. Now, whether this is detrimental to the BJP or not is debatable. However, this seems to be working for all other parties, who have taken sides as well, although at a less severe level.

Newspapers:

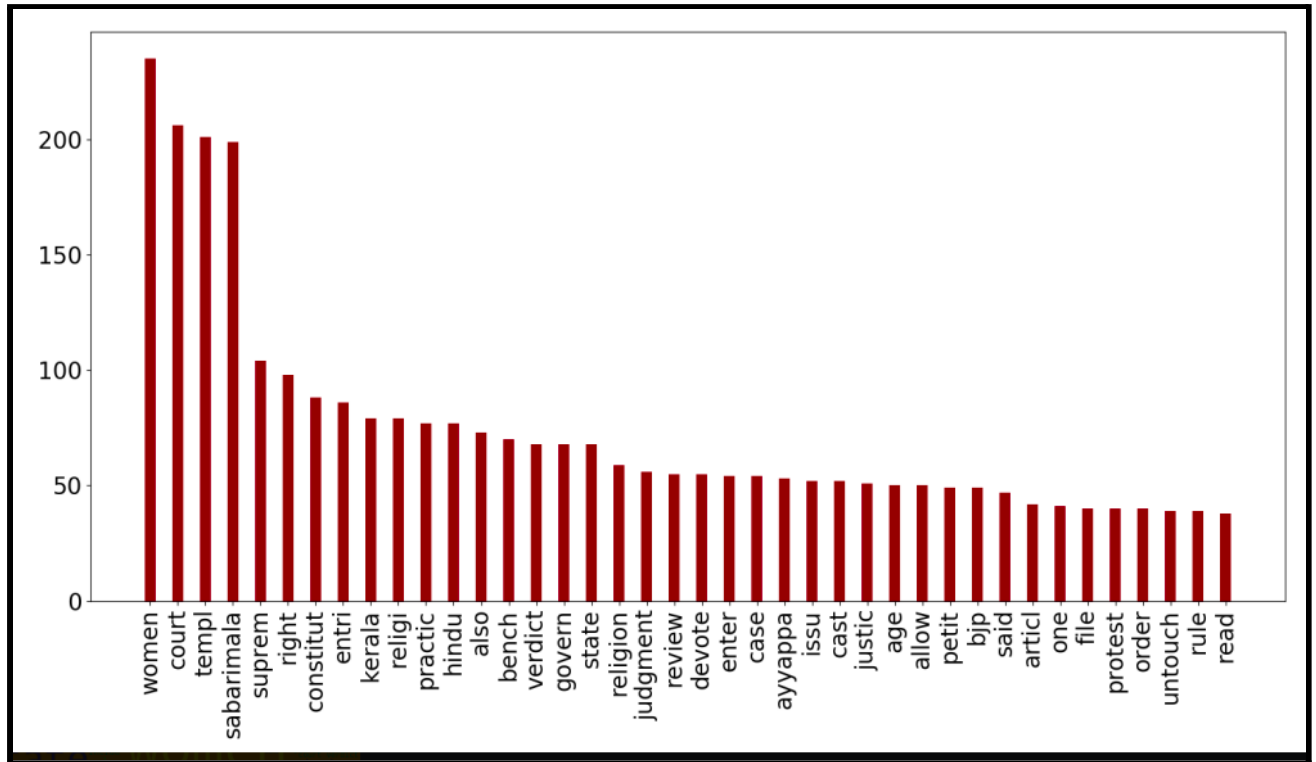
The Hindu



Times of
India



The Wire



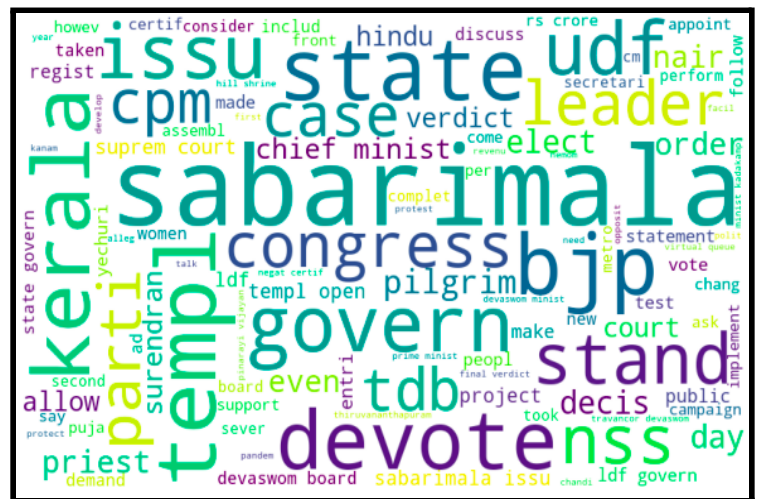
Note: The following analysis is a compilation of observations made by referring to 20 articles each from 'The Times of India', 'The Wire' and 'The Hindu'.

Women between 10 and 50 years were banned from entering the Sabarimala ashram due to religious customs that stated women of reproductive age should not enter the temple to respect the celibate nature of Ayappa. The frequent use of 'women' supports that the issue revolves around women. The Devaswom boards control the rules and regulations in Hindu temples. The Travancore devaswom board is responsible for the regulation of the



Sabarimala temple. The frequent use of ‘devaswom’ and ‘travancore’ suggests the mention of the same in the articles. In 1991, the Kerala high court’s verdict banned the entry of women between 10 and 50 years into the Sabarimala ashram, in accordance with the decision of the Devaswom board. It claimed that such a restriction didn’t violate any of the articles of the Constitution. Later, in 2018, the Supreme Court’s verdict on the Sabarimala issue allowed the entry of women of all age groups into the temple. It stated that such a restriction violated article 25 of the constitution. So we see a contrast in judgement by the Kerala high court and the Supreme court. The frequent mention of ‘high court’, ‘supreme court’ reflects the mention of the same in the articles.

Following the verdict of the Supreme Court, there were a lot of protests by Ayappa devotees who were angry at the decision. The protests were so violent that schools and some other public institutions were closed and police were enforced to control the angry mob. Many protesters were arrested. The frequent use of ‘protest’, ‘police’ suggests the mention of the same in the



articles. The Kerala government supported the Supreme Court's verdict and Chief Minister Vijayan repeatedly stressed that his government would provide security to enforce it. Achuthan Nair Padmakumar was appointed the head of the Travancore Devaswom Board in 2017. He was closely associated with CM Vijayan. The frequent use of 'kerala government', 'chief minister', 'padmakumar' reflects the mention of the same in the articles. However, the ruling BJP party, which is predominantly Hindu-nationalist, condemned the verdict of the Supreme court, stating that it hurt Hindu values and customs. Hence, BJP might have contributed to the widespread protests against the Supreme Court's verdict. The frequent use of 'BJP' suggests the mention of the same in the articles. The frequent use of 'congress', 'cpm', 'udf', 'bjp' suggests that the original problem of barring women's entry has taken a political shape.

Although the Supreme Court's verdict allowed the entry of women of all age groups into the temple, women who tried to enter the temple were repeatedly blocked by angry mobs who protested against the verdict. However, in December 2018, four transgender women were allowed to pray at the temple. The frequent use of 'transgender' suggests the mention of the same in the articles.

In January 2019, two women activists (in the previously restricted age group) managed to enter the Sabarimala ashram amidst the tensions. The frequent use of 'women entry' suggests the mention of the same in the articles. Following this, the head priest closed the temple temporarily for purification, in order to perform some rituals (purification ceremony). The frequent use of 'priest', 'order', 'close' suggests the mention of the same in the articles.

Conclusion:

We have tried to analyse the discussion around the Sabarimala issue, in brief, helped by computational tools and analysing tweets, newspaper articles and election results.

Division of Work:

Devesh (2020115005): Analysis of Election Results and general discourse

Rahul (2020115006): Analysis of Tweets

Srijan (2020115001): Analysis of Election results and general discourse

Vithesh (2020115002): Analysis of Newspapers