

## **My daughter's been denied admission: Kerala teacher who tried to enter Sabarimala temple**

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A 43-year-old school teacher and Dalit activist, who made an unsuccessful bid to offer prayers at the hill shrine in October last year, has alleged that her daughter has been denied admission at a private school under pressure from right-wing outfits.

### **Bindu Thankam Kalyani backs the entry of women of all ages at the hill shrine. (Express Photo)**

**Kochi:** A 43-year-old school teacher and Dalit activist, who made an unsuccessful bid to climb the hill at Sabarimala in Kerala and offer prayers at the temple in October last year, has alleged that her 11-year-old daughter has been denied admission at a private school under pressure from right-wing outfits.

Bindu Thankam Kalyani, who teaches English at the Government Higher Secondary School in Agali in Palakkad district, who vociferously backs the entry of women of all ages at the hill shrine, has had to endure stiff protests from RSS-backed right-wing outfits ever since she made a failed bid to enter the temple at Sabarimala. The outfits are opposed to her stand on the raging issue of women's entry into the Ayyappa Temple at Sabarimala.

"I had spoken to the principal and teachers at the Vidya Vanam school in Anaikatti a few days ago and they were in favour of my daughter's admission there. However, when I went there with my daughter yesterday, there were about 60 people outside the school gate. Initially, I didn't know why they were there. I didn't expect any protests in Anaikatti (which falls on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border). Later, I realised they had assembled in protest against me and my daughter's admission," Kalyani told the Indian Express over phone from Agali.

"I feel that the school authorities are in favour of granting admission to my daughter. But they are afraid that the protests could affect studies of other children at the school too. There are about 300 kids studying there. They must be fearing that if my daughter studies there, there could be an attack on the school. The principal said we could talk about admission once the protests around Sabarimala subside," she said.

"How can they (right-wing groups) protest at schools where little children are studying?" Kalyani asked.

In fact, the decision to shift her daughter from the government school in Agali, where she taught, to the private school in Anaikatti 18 kilometres away stemmed from the mental torture her daughter had to undergo from the teachers and her classmates, the Dalit rights activist said.

"Earlier she (her daughter) loved the government school in Agali and had great friends there. But after the Sabarimala row, the atmosphere at the school changed adversely. The classteacher and other parents would tell her classmates to not talk to her or walk with her. Even children would come to her asking her not to turn out to be like me. But she was a very bold kid and would take little notice. But gradually it got to a point, where she got mentally exhausted. She told me she didn't want to go to the school again," sighed Kalyani.

Kalyani alleged that the behaviour of the teachers towards her daughter became unprofessional and extremely personal after her Sabarimala journey.

Kalyani, who used to teach in a school in Kozhikode district before being routinely transferred to Agali as part of government procedure last year, had to face the wrath of extreme Hindu outfits who conducted prayer marches to the school opposing her teaching job. In Kozhikode, days after her return from Sabarimala, senior state BJP leaders like

Sobha Surendran had protested outside the school calling her a "Maoist" for attempting to enter Sabarimala. She was forced to vacate her rented accommodation after the agitation grew louder.

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