

W.P.(MD) No.15422 of 2026

BEFORE THE MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT

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DATED : 25.06.2026

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THE HON'BLE MR.JUSTICE D.BHARATHA CHAKRAVARTHY

W.P.(MD)No.15422 of 2026

and

W.M.P.(MD)No.11560 of 2026

Laura Frances Iyengar

... Petitioner

Vs.

1.TN HR and CE Department,
No.119, Uthamar Gandhi Salai,
Thousand Lights, Nungambakkam West,
Chennai-34.

2.The Assistant Commissioner,
HR and CE Department,
Pattukottai Taluk,
Thanjavur District.

3.Sri Arulmighu Abishta Varatharajaperumal Temple,
Represented by its Managing Trustee,
Karappankadu, Madukkur,
Pattukottai Taluk, Thanjavur District.

... Respondents

Prayer : Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, for issuance of a Writ of Certiorified Mandamus, calling for the records in NA.KA.EN/2741/2021/A5 dated 10.08.2024 on the file of the second respondent herein and quash the same illegal, incompetent and wholly



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without jurisdiction and further direct the 1st and 2nd respondents herein to permit the Petitioner to enter the premises of the Sri Arulmighu Abishta Varatharajaperumal Temple, Karappankadu, Pattukotai Taluk, Thanjavur District, without any hindrance and also to ensure that the petitioner is not prevented from participating in the religious festivals of the Temple.

For Petitioner : Mr.Sunny Sheen Akkara

For R1 and R2 : Mr.P.Rajagopalan
Standing Counsel

ORDER

This Writ Petition has been filed challenging the impugned order dated 10.08.2024 passed by the second respondent and consequently, seeking a direction to the respondents 1 and 2 to permit the petitioner to enter the premises of Sri Arulmighu Abishta Varatharajaperumal Temple, Karappankadu, Madukkur, Pattukottai Taluk, Thanjavur District.

2. The case of the petitioner is that she is an American citizen. Having been attracted to Hinduism, she embraced and has been professing the Hindu faith for several years. She has undertaken pilgrimages to various Hindu temples across the Indian subcontinent. Even in her official records, including her visa applications, she has consistently described herself as a Hindu, much prior to her marriage. Subsequently, she married



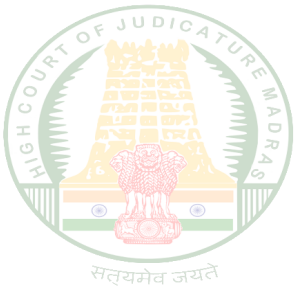
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one Varadha Balaji Venkadakrishnan, a Hindu, and the marriage itself was solemnized in the premises of the very same temple on 17.09.2023.

The petitioner continued to profess Hinduism and has actively participated in various Vaishnavite religious rituals and practices. It is further stated that her husband's grandfather had served as the Trustee of the temple.

3. While so, when the petitioner recently visited the temple, certain local persons objected to her entry under the mistaken impression that she did not belong to the Hindu faith. Consequently, when the petitioner's husband addressed a communication to the respondent authorities seeking permission for the petitioner to freely enter the temple and worship like any other Hindu devotee, the impugned order came to be passed.

4. The impugned order proceeds on the footing that the petitioner is an American Christian woman who attempted to enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temple and that, without violating any Agamic practice, she was permitted to remain within the outer precincts of the temple so as not to hurt the sentiments of other devotees. Aggrieved by the said characterization and consequential restriction, the present writ petition has been filed.

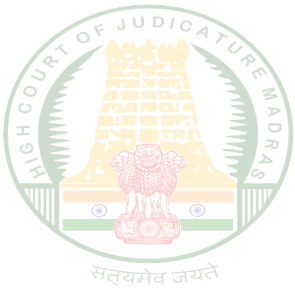


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5. The learned counsel for the petitioner would contend that the very description of the petitioner as an "American Christian woman" is factually incorrect and wholly unsupported by any material. According to the learned counsel, the petitioner professes Hinduism and has been following the faith for several years. Therefore, she cannot be arbitrarily characterized as a Christian merely on account of her nationality.

6. Per contra, the learned Standing Counsel appearing for the respondents 1 and 2 would submit that since the petitioner is admittedly an American citizen, she was presumed to be a Christian. It is further submitted that when the petitioner visited the temple, certain devotees present at the spot expressed apprehensions regarding her entry. However, she was not prevented from entering the temple altogether and was only advised to remain within the outer precincts. Thereafter, upon receipt of the e-mail sent by the petitioner's husband, the impugned communication came to be issued.

7. I have considered the rival submissions made on either side and perused the materials available on record.



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8. Hinduism is a faith that has historically been inclusive and accommodating. Unlike certain other religions, it does not prescribe any mandatory formal ceremony of conversion or issuance of any certificate as a condition precedent for acceptance into the faith. The issue is no longer *res integra* and stands settled by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in **Perumal Nadar (Dead) by LRs. v. Ponnuswami** [AIR 1971 SC 2352].

9. The Hon'ble Supreme Court has held that a person may become a Hindu either by birth or by conversion. A mere theoretical allegiance to the Hindu faith or a bare declaration of belief would not, by themselves, constitute conversion. However, a *bona fide* intention to embrace Hinduism, coupled with conduct unequivocally expressing such intention, may constitute sufficient evidence of conversion. The Supreme Court further held that no formal ceremony of purification or expiation is necessary to effectuate such conversion.

10. In the present case, the documentary materials placed before this Court, coupled with the averments contained in the affidavit, clearly demonstrate that the petitioner has consistently identified herself as a Hindu and has conducted herself in a manner that unequivocally

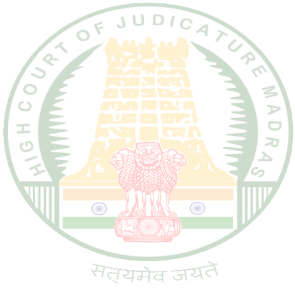


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establishes her acceptance and practice of the Hindu faith. Therefore, this Court is of the considered view that the finding recorded by the respondents describing the petitioner as an "American Christian woman" is factually erroneous and unsustainable.

11. Merely because the petitioner bears the name "Laura Frances" or holds American citizenship, she cannot be denied recognition as a Hindu when her conduct and belief unequivocally establish her adherence to Hinduism. Accordingly, the petitioner shall be treated as a Hindu devotee. Consequently, all rights and obligations applicable to a Hindu woman devotee in relation to temple worship shall equally apply to the petitioner. If Hindu women are permitted, in accordance with the customs, usages, Agamas and regulations governing a particular temple, to enter any specified area or perform any particular ritual, the petitioner shall also be entitled to the same. Equally, the petitioner shall not claim any special privilege or right not otherwise available to any other Hindu woman devotee.

12. In view of the above findings, this Writ Petition is allowed on the following terms:



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(i) The impugned order dated 10.08.2024 is declared illegal

to the extent it proceeds on the basis that the petitioner is an American Christian woman.

(ii) In view of the categorical finding of this Court that the petitioner professes and practices Hinduism, the respondent authorities and all officials functioning under the Department shall not deny to the petitioner any right available to a Hindu woman devotee in any temple, including Sri Arulmighu Abishta Varatharajaperumal Temple, subject to the customs, usages, Agamas and regulations governing such temple.

(iii) No costs. Consequently, the connected Miscellaneous Petition is closed.

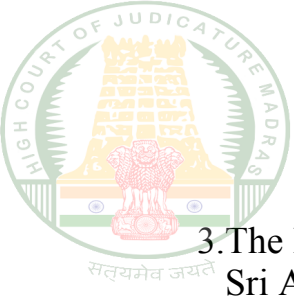
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To

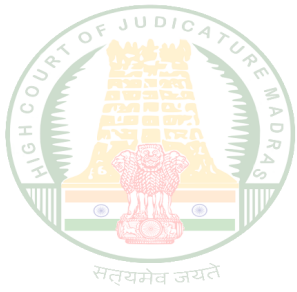
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D.BHARATHA CHAKRAVARTHY, J.

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