

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM
PRESENT
THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V
&
THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE K. V. JAYAKUMAR**

Friday, the 28th day of November 2025 / 7th Agrahayana, 1947

SSCR NO. 43 OF 2025

**IN THE MATTER OF TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD - SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER
REPORT - SM.NO.43/2025 - REPORT SUBMITTED BY THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER,
SABARIMALA REGARDING TIMELY REMOVAL OF COLLECTED CLOTHES FROM PAMBA RIVER BANKS
- SUO MOTU PROCEEDINGS INITIATED - REG:**

PETITIONER:

SUO MOTU

RESPONDENTS:

1. STATE OF KERALA

**REPRESENTED BY THE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT,
REVENUE (DEVASWOM) DEPARTMENT , THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, PIN - 695001**

2. CHIEF POLICE COORDINATOR

**(ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE) (POLICE HEAD QUARTERS)
SABARIMALA , PATHANAMTHITTA - 689713**

3. TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD

**REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, NANTHANCODE, KAWDIAR POST,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM-695003**

4. DEVASWOM COMMISSIONER

**TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, DEVASWOM BUILDINGS, NANTHANCODE,
KAWDIAR POST, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM-695003**

5. THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

SABARIMALA, SABARIMALA P.O., PATHANAMTHITTA - 689662

6. THE CHIEF VIGILANCE AND SECURITY OFFICER

**(SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE), TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM HEAD QUARTERS,
NANTHANCODE, KAWDIAR POST, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695003**

7. PRINCIPAL CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695014
8. DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
PERIYAR TIGER RESERVE, WEST DIVISION, PEERUMEDU, IDUKKI - 685531
9. ASSISTANT ENGINEER (ENVIRONMENTAL),
SABARIMALA DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD,
PATHANAMTHITTA - 689645
10. THE ENVIRONMENT ENGINEER
KERALA STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD, DISTRICT OFFICE,
PATHANAMTHITTA - 689645
11. THE ENVIRONMENT ENGINEER
KERALA STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD, PATTOM ,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695004
12. KERALA STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD
REPRESENTED BY ITS MEMBER SECRETARY, MIG AND HIG COLONY,
GANDHI NAGAR, ELAMKULAM, ERNAKULAM - 682020
13. THE STATION HOUSE OFFICER
PAMBA POLICE STATION, PAMBA - 689662

BY SRI.S.RAJMOHAN, SENIOR GOVERNMENT PLEADER

BY SRI.NAGARAJ NARAYANAN, SPECIAL GOVERNMENT PLEADER (FOREST)

BY STANDING COUNSEL FOR TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD

BY STANDING COUNSEL FOR KERALA STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD

BY SMT.SAYUJYA RADHAKRISHNAN, AMICUS CURIAE FOR

SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER

THIS SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER REPORT HAVING COME UP FOR
ADMISSION ON 28.11.2025, UPON PERUSING THE REPORT, THE COURT ON THE SAME
DAY PASSED THE FOLLOWING:

**RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V.,
&
K.V. JAYAKUMAR, JJ.**

SSCR No. 43 of 2025

Dated this the 28th day of November, 2025

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V. J.

The instant report has been submitted by the Sabarimala Special Commissioner regarding the timely removal of clothes collected from the riverbanks at Pampa.

2. The report states that the inspection conducted by the Special Commissioner has revealed that the banks of the river Pampa and the steps leading to the river are heavily littered with discarded clothes left behind by devotees. It is further recorded that although a Kuthaka has been granted to remove the accumulated clothes in a timely manner, the said work is not being carried out effectively, even at the very commencement of the Mandala–Makaravilakku Season 2025–26.

3. We have considered the submissions advanced.

4. From the commencement of the Pilgrim Season on 17.11.2025, on average, pilgrims, often exceeding 80,000 per day, reach Pampa and Sannidhanam. It appears that a widespread but wholly non-ritualistic practice has evolved wherein many of them discard their dhotis and other garments along the riverbank, on the steps leading to the holy river, and in some cases directly into the river. The photographs placed before us by the Special Commissioner depict large quantities of clothes dumped on the steps leading to

the holy river, as well as garments floating in the river itself. This conduct causes serious and cumulative ecological harm. Cotton garments absorb water and settle on the riverbed, interfering with the natural flow of the river, creating stagnant pockets, reducing dissolved oxygen levels, and placing considerable stress on aquatic life. Fish become trapped in these cloth bundles, and the slow decomposition of fibres increases the biochemical oxygen demand of the river. The dumped garments also obstruct natural drainage channels, encourage the spread of invasive vegetation, and contribute to water stagnation and bank erosion. Although the Devaswom Board has engaged contractors to remove the accumulated clothes, we are of the view that post-event removal is wholly inadequate to address the continuous and large-scale dumping which overwhelms any manual cleaning effort.

5. The holy river Pampa is not merely a river but the sacred pathway to the abode of Lord Ayyappa. The scriptures and the tradition surrounding Sabarimala teach that a devotee must approach the Lord with inner and outer purity. When thousands of pilgrims dump their clothes into the river, the sanctity of this holy site is disturbed. The river, which symbolises purification, cannot itself be made impure by heaps of discarded garments floating on its surface and gathering on its steps. Polluting the Holy river contradicts the very principle of purity and restraint that forms the core of Ayyappa worship. Ensuring cleanliness is not a mere administrative duty but a continuation of dharma, honouring the Lord by keeping His surroundings pure. The Board should take efforts to spread the message that the duty to keep the Pampa clean is a form of worship and an offering of reverence to the deity, who is worshipped as the one who protects good, restrains evil, and upholds righteous conduct.

6. As an initial step in our endeavour to stop the dumping of clothes in the banks of the Holy river and the steps leading to Pampa, the following measures shall be taken by the Board. On instructions, the learned Standing Counsel appearing for the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) submitted that the Kuthaka holder has employed 80 personnel to collect the clothes, out of which 30 persons can be employed to carry out the plan, which we detail as under:

Directives:

a) A significant part of the solution lies in influencing the behaviour of pilgrims even before they reach the riverbank. Pilgrims tend to follow what they perceive others doing; therefore, clear and consistent instructions must be communicated well in advance of their arrival at Pampa. Steps shall be taken to ensure that announcements are made from buses, KSRTC stands, and queue complexes, informing pilgrims that dumping clothes into the Pampa is environmentally harmful and expressly prohibited. Visual boards displaying simple messages such as “Dumping cloth pollutes the Pampa — Prohibited under law” in all vernacular languages shall be placed at every entry point, if not already installed. These measures are essential to create early awareness and behavioural conditioning.

b) For effective waste disposal, heavy-duty, waterproof garment-disposal bins shall be placed at intervals of every 50 metres, with clear colour-coded signage indicating that the bins are meant exclusively for cloth disposal. Supervisors shall ensure that no dumping occurs on the steps leading to the river or in the surrounding areas.

c) The 30 employees engaged under the kuthaka arrangement, along with as many additional employees as the Devaswom Board can reasonably spare,

and volunteers concerned with environmental protection, shall be deployed in three continuous shifts to ensure uninterrupted presence on the ground. The Chief Police Coordinator shall also provide the services of a sufficient number of police personnel for guidance, positive nudging, and direct interdiction whenever necessary. Their presence is crucial to maintain discipline and prevent violations.

d) Ten mobile hand-held speakers shall be placed across the entire stretch, continuously broadcasting messages every one to two minutes, including “Dumping dhoti in Pampa harms the holy river” in all vernacular languages. Speakers and mics can also be handed over to volunteers who can scout the area and deter the pilgrims from dumping clothes. These periodic public announcements will reinforce the behavioural directives issued to the pilgrims.

e) CCTV cameras shall be installed every 50 metres to vigilantly monitor attempts to dump clothes into the river. The presence of such surveillance will have a strong deterrent effect and will also facilitate effective monitoring of the staff deployed in the area.

f) When a pilgrim is seen carrying a cloth towards the water, volunteers shall intervene politely and guide the devotee to the designated disposal facility, offering a bin or collection bag. This substitution method is proven to be effective in large crowds, reduces confrontation, and ensures compliance with environmental norms.

g) The control and monitoring system shall operate in three shifts—4:00 AM to 12:00 PM, 12:00 PM to 8:00 PM, and 8:00 PM to 4:00 AM—ensuring round-the-clock vigilance.

h) A rapid-response team consisting of ten members shall patrol the entire stretch, promptly removing any clothes that may be dumped inadvertently and preventing the formation of large accumulations.

7. We have no doubt that if this plan is faithfully implemented for one full pilgrimage season, the results will be substantial. The quantity of cloth dumped directly into the river is expected to decrease by 60–70%. Flow velocity in previously clogged sections will be restored, levels of Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) and turbidity will decline, fish mortality will reduce, riverbanks will remain clean and accessible, and the burden of post-event cleaning will be significantly reduced. In consequence, the divine Pampa river, which holds immense spiritual significance for millions of devotees, will experience a marked rejuvenation, allowing it to regain its natural purity and flow consistent with its sacred character.

8. All measures directed herein shall be implemented forthwith by the Devaswom Board, and a compliance report shall be placed before us within ten days.

Post on 12.12.2025.

Sd/-

**RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE**

Sd/-

**K.V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE**

APM