

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

Wednesday, the 10th day of September 2025 / 19th Bhadra, 1947
SSCR NO. 23 OF 2025

**IN THE MATTER OF TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD - SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER
REPORT - SM.NO.23/2025 - REPORT REGARDING DETACHING OF GOLD COVERING OF
'DWARAPALAKA IDOLS' ON EITHER SIDE OF SREEKOVIL WITHOUT INTIMATING COURT - SUO
MOTU PROCEEDINGS INITIATED - REG.**

PETITIONER:

SUO MOTU

RESPONDENTS:

1. **STATE OF KERALA**
REPRESENTED BY THE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT,
REVENUE (DEVASWOM) DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695001
2. **TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD**
REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, NANTHANCOD, KAWDIAR POST,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 003
3. **THE DEVASWOM COMMISSIONER**
TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD, DEVASWOM BUILDINGS, NANTHANCOD,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695003
4. **EXECUTIVE OFFICER**
SABARIMALA, SABARIMALA P.O., PATHANAMTHITTA - 689 662
5. **CHIEF VIGILANCE & SECURITY OFFICER (SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE)**
TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM HEAD QUARTERS, NANTHANCOD, KAWDIAR POST,
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - 695 003

***ADDL.R6 IMPEADED**

6. THE THIRUVABHARANAM COMMISSIONER,
THIRUVABHARANAM OFFICE, ARANMULA, PATHANAMTHITTA, PIN- 689 533
*IS SUO MOTU IMPEADED AS ADDITIONAL 6TH RESPONDENT VIDE ORDER
DATED 10/09/2025 IN SSCR.NO.23/2025

BY SRI.S.RAJMOHAN, SENIOR GOVERNMENT PLEADER

BY STANDING COUNSEL FOR TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD

BY SMT.SAYUJYA RADHAKRISHNAN, AMICUS CURIAE FOR SABARIMALA SPECIAL
COMMISSIONER

THIS SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER REPORT HAVING COME UP FOR
ADMISSION ON 10.09.2025, UPON PERUSING THE REPORT, THE COURT ON THE SAME
DAY PASSED THE FOLLOWING:



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

SSCR No. 23 of 2025

Dated this the 10th day of September, 2025

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V, J.

This report filed by the Special Commissioner concerns the removal of the gold-plated copper coverings of the "Dwarapalaka Idols" located on either side of the Sreekovil without prior intimation to the Special Commissioner.

2. We find that in almost similar circumstances, this Court, by order dated 30.06.2023 in S.S.C.R. No. 13 of 2023, had occasion to consider issues relating to the repair of the Mudramala, Japamala, and Yogadandu adorning the idol of Lord Ayyappa of Sabarimala Sree Dharma Sastha Temple, undertaken without furnishing any information to the Special Commissioner. This Court had strongly deprecated such action on the part of the respondents and categorically held that the procedure adopted by the Board in effecting those repairs, after removing the ornaments from the Sreekovil without intimating the Special Commissioner, Sabarimala, was highly inappropriate. While disposing of the said matter, this Court had issued specific directions to the Devaswom Commissioner and the Thiruvabharanam Commissioner to ensure that henceforth, all such activities in the Sreekovil of Sabarimala Sree Dharma Sastha Temple shall be

undertaken only with prior intimation, well in advance, to the Special Commissioner, so as to enable him to file a report before this Court, if necessary, and to seek appropriate orders.

3. In the present report, the Special Commissioner has stated that no intimation whatsoever was given to him prior to the removal of the gold plating from the "Dwarapalaka Idols" on either side of the Sreekovil, purportedly for purposes of maintenance. It is further reported that the removed parts were transported to Chennai for such maintenance, whereas ordinarily, repair of gold ornaments is carried out at the temple premises itself.

4. The learned Standing Counsel for the Devaswom Board, however, contended that what was removed are in fact gold-plated copper coverings over the "Dwarapalaka Idols". He submitted that as early as 16.06.2023, the Executive Officer was intimated by the Thanthri regarding the necessity of carrying out repairs. According to him, the procedure adopted was in strict compliance with the prescribed safeguards; the coverings were detached after preparation of a mahazar and then sent to Chennai for repair. It was further submitted that one Mr. Unnikrishnan Potti, who had earlier sponsored the gold plating at "Smart Creations" had undertaken to sponsor the present repairs as well, and accordingly, the items were dispatched to "Smart Creations" in Ambattur Industrial Estate, Chennai. The learned Standing Counsel further contended that the Special Commissioner was informed by phone on the morning of 08.09.2023 and that a

written communication was also issued on the same day.

5. Having considered the submissions advanced on behalf of the Devaswom Board and in the light of the earlier order, we are of the considered view that the action of the Board in detaching the gold-plated copper coverings over the idols without prior intimation to the Special Commissioner and without seeking appropriate orders from this Court cannot be countenanced. The letter first issued by the Thanthri requesting for carrying out repairs of the door was in the year 2023. This Court, as early as 20.06.2023, had deprecated similar conduct and had observed that such actions were highly inappropriate. The Devaswom Commissioner, the Executive Officer, and the Thiruvabharanam Commissioner were arrayed as respondents 4 to 6 in the said proceedings and were fully aware of the binding directions issued by this Court. If that be the case, we fail to understand the reason why they have proceeded to despatch the plates to Chennai without prior permission.

6. We have perused the documents placed on record by the learned Standing Counsel appearing for the Travancore Devaswom Board. It is evident, therefore, that the gold plating of the items in question was carried out by the said concern in the year 2019, with a warranty period of forty years, as reflected in the records. If that be so, we fail to comprehend the rationale behind despatching the plates once again to the very same concern in the year 2025, after the mere lapse of six years. We also take note of the fact that, as a matter of established practice,

plating works are ordinarily undertaken under strict supervision within the Sannidhanam premises itself. Moreover, the seats of the Dwarapalakas, as well as the door panels and lintel of the Sreekovil, are themselves to be plated. These fixtures, by their very nature, cannot be transported to Chennai. If that be the case, there was no justification in detaching the panels alone and sending them outside. The same could have been very well done at the site itself. We are, therefore, of the firm view that the removal of the gold platings without prior written intimation, followed by their immediate transportation to Chennai, amounts to an unwarranted and irregular exercise. The requirement of prior intimation in writing to the Devaswom Commissioner is not a mere procedural formality; it is a vital safeguard intended to ensure proper checks and balances so that temple property remains adequately protected and is not subjected to waste, misuse, or loss.

7. The Thiruvabharanam Commissioner, Thiruvabharanam Office, Aranimula, Pathanamthitta, PIN- 689 533 is suo motu impleaded as additional respondent No. 6 in this report.

8. The Devaswom Commissioner, the Executive Officer, and the Thiruvabharanam Commissioner, the respondents herein, shall show cause why action shall not be taken against them for wilful violation of the earlier binding directions.

9. We are not impressed by the submission of the learned Standing Counsel that the transportation of the idols was in strict accordance with law and

subject to all safeguards. Since the repair work has been undertaken without proper intimation either to the Special Commissioner or to this Court, we deem it necessary to direct the respondents to forthwith stop the repair work being carried out at "Smart Creations" on the sponsorship of Mr. Unnikrishnan Potti. The items transported to Chennai shall forthwith be re-transported back to the Sannidhanam.

Further, the respondents are directed to produce before this Court, on 12.09.2025, the entire file and records relating to the repairs of the gold-plated copper coverings over the "Dwarapalaka Idols", so that appropriate orders can be issued.



Sd/-

**RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE**

Sd/-

**K.V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE**

APM