

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

Thursday, the 27th day of November 2025 / 6th Agrahayana, 1947

DBP NO. 67 OF 2025

**IN THE MATTER OF COCHIN DEVASWOM BOARD - REPORT NO.57/2025 IN PETITION NO.16/2025 - SEEKING APPROVAL FOR THE ESTIMATE FOR THE REPAIR OF MAIN BLOCK (H BLOCK) OF SREE KERALA VARMA COLLEGE , THRISSUR - SUO MOTU PROCEEDINGS INITIATED
- REG:**

PETITIONER:

**THE COCHIN DEVASWOM BOARD,
REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, ROUND NORTH, THRISSUR-680001**

RESPONDENT:

**THE SENIOR DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
KERALA STATE AUDIT DEPARTMENT, COCHIN DEVASWOM BOARD AUDIT,
THRISSUR**



**BY SRI.S.RAJMOHAN, SENIOR GOVERNMENT PLEADER
BY STANDING COUNSEL FOR COCHIN DEVASWOM BOARD
BY SRI.P.RAMACHANDRAN, AMICUS CURIAE FOR OMBUDSMAN**

**THE DEVASWOM BOARD PETITION HAVING COME UP FOR ORDERS AGAIN ON
27/11/2025, UPON PERUSING THE PETITION AND THIS COURT'S ORDER DATED
21/11/2025, THE COURT ON THE SAME DAY PASSED THE FOLLOWING.**

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

DBP No. 67 OF 2025

Dated this the 27th day of November, 2025

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V., J.

This Devaswom Board Petition is filed on the basis of the report submitted by the Ombudsman, wherein approval was sought for the estimate pertaining to the repair of the Main Block (H Block) of Sree Kerala Varma College, Thrissur, Kerala.

2. It appears that the Ombudsman, after perusing the application filed by the Cochin Devaswom Board (CDB), granted permission to carry out the repairs, subject to certain conditions.

3. When the matter came up for consideration on 21.11.2025, this Court noted that the proposed repair work concerns Classroom Nos. 113, 114, 116A, 116B and 116C of Sree Kerala Varma College. The photographs placed before this Court revealed that the roof, rafters and tiles of all these classrooms were in an acutely dilapidated condition. The report of the Principal of the College discloses that not less than 500 students pursue their studies in these classrooms. Since the method adopted by the

Engineers of the Maramath Wing did not inspire confidence, we directed the Executive Engineer to appear before us on 26.11.2025 and place before this Court detailed sketches, documents revealing the existing condition of the structure, and the specific reasons for opting for a truss-based construction for these blocks.

4. The Executive Engineer as well as the Assistant Executive Engineer appeared before this Court on 26.11.2025 and produced the files of the Engineering Wing of the Cochin Devaswom Board relating to the proposed repair of the Main Block.

5. We have perused the proceedings in the file, the report of the Principal-in-Charge, the abstract and detailed estimates prepared by the Maramath Wing, and the photographs.

6. At the outset, we must record our deep concern and dismay at the present condition of the buildings of Sree Kerala Varma College. From the official web page of the College, we note that a group of public-spirited citizens had approached the then Maharaja of Cochin, Sri Kerala Varma XV (Aikya Keralam Thampuran), seeking support to establish an institution of higher learning in Thrissur. His Highness responded with extraordinary

generosity. He granted the free use of the Merry Lodge Palace and its extensive grounds, sanctioned a free grant of One lakh rupees from Devaswom Funds, a loan of Rupees Four lakhs for capital expenditure (later converted into a free grant), and 250 candies of timber for construction. In recognition of this remarkable patronage, the institution was named Sree Kerala Varma College. The Maharaja himself inaugurated the College on 11 August 1947.

7. We find that the central landmark of the campus is the Merry Lodge Palace, originally the palace and summer retreat of the Maharaja of Cochin, a structure of high architectural merit and significant heritage value.

8. However, the photographs placed before us of the Main Block, Physical Education Block, Merry Lodge Palace, Hostel Block and Botany Block reveal a shocking state of neglect, deterioration and structural degeneration. What is even more astonishing is that the College website continues to display images of these buildings in their original glory, bearing no resemblance to their present, dilapidated condition.

9. The state of the Main Block, in particular, is pitiable, if not alarming. We are unable to comprehend how the Cochin Devaswom Board, which is entrusted with the administration and upkeep of this historic institution of higher learning, has permitted matters to deteriorate to such an extent. The Board appears to have exhibited a disturbing indifference both to the structural integrity of the buildings and to the preservation of their heritage character. The Merry Lodge Palace, the Hostel Block, the Botany Section, and several other structures do not appear to have received even the most basic maintenance, including a fresh coat of paint, in the recent past. The neglect is evident on the face of the record and stands wholly at odds with the legacy and historical importance of the institution.

10. Coming back to the petition, we find that it is based on a letter issued by the Principal on 07.12.2024, that the Board was informed that the Main Block and the PG Block were in a dangerous condition and that the buildings were leaking. The Principal also reported that although repairs had been carried out earlier, the structural defects persisted. He further reported termite infestation affecting the rafters and reapers, which were falling onto the students. The plastering was also giving way, and the

bathrooms were in an unsanitary condition. The Principal had also reported that the safety of the students and the staff were at peril if urgent repairs were not carried out. The Principal requested urgent intervention by the Board to ensure the safety of the students and staff.

11. Subsequently, on 24.06.2025, in continuation of the earlier communication, the Principal issued another letter to the CDB stating that the total area of the building requiring repairs was approximately 17,500sq.ft. He suggested that the rafters and reapers, which had sustained damage, be replaced with GI sections of dimension 1.5 x 0.75 inches and that the Mangalore Pattern (MP) tiles be replaced with 0.5 mm GI sheets. He estimated the total cost of the work at ₹19.8 lakhs. The Principal also stated that the PTA did not have sufficient funds to carry out the repair work, and suggested that ₹10,00,000/- be allotted urgently and the balance amount disbursed to the PTA as and when the work progressed.

12. We have examined the Abstract Estimate prepared using the 'Price' Software by the Maramath Engineers for the H Block of Sree Kerala Varma College and the so-called detailed estimate. We find that both

the abstract and the detailed estimate are identical and that neither contains any specification whatsoever regarding the grade of steel, the nature of construction materials including paint, the labour components, or any other technical detail.

13. We are given to understand that the Main Block of Sree Kerala Varma College was constructed in the year 1912. In view of the heritage nature and immense historical significance of the building, any repair work must necessarily conform to heritage conservation principles, structural sensitivity and public accountability.

14. The present approach of the Board as well as the Maramath Engineers is confined to preparing a vague abstract estimate devoid of technical specifications, bill of quantities, detailed structural assessment or architectural conservation inputs. We have no doubt that the "Price Estimate" prepared is wholly inadequate, technically unsafe, and entirely inappropriate for a heritage college building of this age and importance.

15. We are further of the view that entrusting the execution of such a sensitive and technically demanding project to a non-technical body such as the PTA, based merely on a lump-sum estimate, would expose the

structure to irreversible damage. We wonder how the Board has decided to grant such permission without even assessing the quality of materials to be used and the competency of the contractor. The use of materials such as GI tubes interspersed with wooden rafters is likely to cause structural failure due to material incompatibility. Preparation of an abstract estimate without any details would inevitably lead to inflated costs, substitution of inferior materials and pilferage. The lack of accountability is evident on the face of the record, and we find a gross violation of established engineering and public-works protocols.

16. In a structure of this nature, any restoration must adopt minimal intervention, ensure material compatibility, preserve the authenticity of the building, and be grounded in proper documentation and transparency. In the present case, there has been no structural condition assessment to determine the extent of damage, no architectural documentation, and the estimates prepared are grossly vague. The material proposals are inappropriate, and the absence of a Bill of Quantities is wholly unacceptable. The proposed execution method is equally improper.

17. In these circumstances, we direct the Cochin Devaswom Board to engage a qualified Architect, or to utilise the expertise of the Maramath Wing, to prepare a preliminary structural and architectural condition assessment forthwith. A comprehensive structural audit shall be conducted by a qualified Structural Engineer, mapping the grade of deterioration, the condition of the roof and rafters, the load-bearing capacity of the walls, and termite-induced damage. The Engineer shall also prepare proper architectural documentation, including a roof plan with a tile-condition assessment. Material specifications for timber, roofing materials, purlins and bracings, painting systems, and all other components shall be clearly set out, along with a detailed conservation plan. A detailed estimate and Bill of Quantities shall thereafter be prepared covering timber rafters, tiles, tile-laying techniques, fasteners, scaffolding, labour, dismantling and disposal charges, contingencies, and conservation charges. As far as possible, the structural authenticity and heritage character of the building shall be maintained. Only after the above exercise is completed may the work be tendered to a competent contractor skilled in the restoration of old and heritage structures. If the condition assessment and Bill of Quantities are properly prepared, the Maramath Wing can themselves

oversee the execution and take the work to its logical completion.

18. We strongly deprecate the practice of preparing vague and unscientific abstract estimates, and we expect the Maramath Wing to be far more diligent, meticulous, and professionally responsible in all future undertakings. The Maramath Wing shall bear in mind that a serious responsibility is cast upon them to act with professional competence and to carry out the work entrusted to them with industry, care, and unwavering accountability.

19. We direct the Maramath Wing to carry out the exercise as directed above and place a comprehensive report before this Court within four weeks from today, without fail.

Post on 07.01.2026.

Sd/-

**RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE**

Sd/-

**K.V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE**

PS/27/11/25