

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA AT ERNAKULAM

PRESENT

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V

&

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE K. V. JAYAKUMAR

Tuesday, the 27th day of January 2026 / 7th Magha, 1947SSCR 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
***ADDL.R14 TO R16 IMPLEADED**
14. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
SUCHITWA MISSION, LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT (LSGD),
PUBLIC OFFICE BUILDING, 3RD FLOOR, REVENUE COMPLEX, LMS,
VELLAYAMBALAM ROAD, UNIVERSITY OF KERALA SENATE HOUSE CAMPUS,
PALAYAM, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM – 695033.
15. KERALA STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD,
DISTRICT OFFICE, PATHANAMTHITTA, REPRESENTED BY THE
ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEER, OPPOSITE GENERAL HOSPITAL,
K.K.NAIR ROAD, PATHANAMTHITTA DISTRICT.

16. RANNI PERUNAD GRAMA PANCHAYAT,

REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY, PATHANAMTHITTA DISTRICT,

PIN - 689711.

*ARE SUO MOTU IMPLEDED AS ADDITIONAL RESPONDENTS 14 TO 16 VIDE
ORDER DATED 27/01/2026 IN SSCR.NO.43/2025

BY SRI.S.RAJMOHAN, SENIOR GOVERNMENT PLEADER

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

BY STANDING COUNSEL FOR TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD

BY SRI. T. NAVEEN, SC, KERALA STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD

BY SMT.SAYUJYA RADHAKRISHNAN, AMICUS CURIAE FOR

SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER

BY SMT.CHITHRA CHANDRASEKHARAN,SC,RANNI PERUNAD GRAMA PANCHAYAT

BY GOVERNMENT PLEADER FOR SUCHITWA MISSION

THIS SABARIMALA SPECIAL COMMISSIONER REPORT HAVING COME UP FOR
ORDERS AGAIN ON 27/01/2026, UPON PERUSING THE REPORT AND THIS COURT'S
ORDERS DATED 28/11/2025, 01/12/2025 & 07/01/2026, THE COURT ON THE SAME
DAY PASSED THE FOLLOWING:

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

SSCR No. 43 of 2025

Dated this the 27th day of January, 2026

ORDER

Raja Vijayaraghavan V, J.

This matter was posted as 'to be spoken to' based on the submissions made by the amicus curiae appearing for the Special Commissioner pointing out the non-removal of the clothes dumped by pilgrims into the Pamba river.

2. Having considered the submissions advanced, we are of the view that the SSCR is to be restored on file in the interest of justice.

3. SSCR No. 43 of 2025 was originally initiated on the basis of the report submitted by the Sabarimala Special Commissioner highlighting the alarming situation relating to the accumulation and non-removal of clothes collected from the riverbanks of the holy River Pamba.

4. By order dated 28.11.2025, this Court, after a detailed perusal of the records and materials placed on file, had observed that the holy River Pamba is not

merely a natural water body, but the sacred pathway leading to the abode of Lord Ayyappa. The spiritual ethos of Sabarimala pilgrimage rests on the foundational principle that a devotee must approach the Lord with both inner purity of mind and outer purity of conduct. When lakhs of pilgrims discard their clothes and other waste into the river, the sanctity and spiritual ambience of this sacred site are gravely compromised. The River Pamba, which symbolises cleansing and spiritual purification, cannot itself be reduced to a dumping ground for waste. Such acts of pollution directly contradict the very values of purity, self-restraint, and reverence that form the core of Ayyappa worship.

5. This Court had further observed that ensuring cleanliness of the river and its surroundings is not merely an administrative or logistical exercise, but a sacred obligation intertwined with the performance of dharma. Protecting the purity of the river is, in effect, an act of worship in itself. It is in a way the manifestation of collective reverence to the deity and respect for the ecological balance of the region. Accordingly, this Court had issued categorical directions to the Travancore Devaswom Board and the concerned authorities to undertake immediate remedial measures and to actively propagate the message that maintaining the cleanliness of River Pamba is an essential part of the pilgrimage experience and a spiritual offering to Lord Ayyappa.

6. When the matter was listed on 01.12.2025, this Court closely monitored the steps taken pursuant to the above directions. Thereafter, on

07.01.2026, based on the submissions made by the learned Amicus Curiae for the Special Commissioner, this Court recorded that the directions issued had been complied with and that there was no further dumping of clothes or waste into the holy River Pamba.

7. On the said assurance, the proceedings were closed, trusting that the concerned authorities would continue to discharge their responsibilities with diligence and sensitivity.

8. However, it has now been brought to the notice of this Court that the contractor who was entrusted with the duty of removing the accumulated clothes has failed to carry out the work. Certain photographs have been placed before this Court by the learned Amicus Curiae appearing for the Special Commissioner. The same depict a deplorable and disturbing state of affairs. Large heaps of discarded clothes and other waste materials are seen floating and stagnating in the holy river, emanating foul stench, contaminating the water, endangering aquatic life, and posing serious public health hazards. Such conduct reflects gross negligence, administrative apathy, and a complete disregard for the sanctity of the river as well as for the binding directions issued by this Court.

9. This Court cannot remain a silent spectator to the continuing degradation of the holy River Pamba, particularly after the pilgrimage season has concluded, when remedial and restorative measures ought to be undertaken with

greater efficiency and urgency. We are of the considered view that it is the duty of the Travancore Devaswom Board to ensure that the river is properly cared for during the inter-seasonal period, so that it is allowed to recuperate and regenerate before the onset of the next pilgrimage season, instead of being permitted to further degenerate due to neglect and inaction. The failure on the part of the Devaswom Board and the concerned local authorities to carry out restoration works and maintain sustained cleanliness not only undermines the ecological integrity of the region, but also erodes public confidence in institutional accountability. Immediate, coordinated, and time-bound intervention is therefore imperative.

10. In the above circumstances, this Court is of the view that wider institutional participation is necessary to ensure effective enforcement and long-term environmental protection. Accordingly, this Court suo motu implead the following authorities as additional respondents:

- i) Executive Director, Suchitwa Mission, Local Self Government Department (LSGD), Public Office Building, 3rd Floor, Revenue Complex, LMS, Vellayambalam Road, University of Kerala Senate House Campus, Palayam, Thiruvananthapuram – 695033.
- ii) Kerala State Pollution Control Board, District Office, Pathanamthitta, represented by the Environmental Engineer, opposite General Hospital, K.K. Nair Road, Pathanamthitta District.

iii) Ranni Perunad Grama Panchayat, Represented By its Secretary, Pathanamthitta District, Pin - 689711.

11. The learned Government Pleader shall take notice on behalf of Suchitwa Mission, Sri. T. Naveen takes notice on behalf of the Kerala State Pollution Control Board and Smt. Chithra Chandrasekharan, learned standing counsel, takes notice for the Ranni Perunad Grama Panchayat.

12. A joint inspection shall be conducted by a team of officers from the Kerala State Pollution Control Board, Suchitwa Mission, and the Health Officer of Ranni Perunad Grama Panchayat, in coordination with the officers of the Travancore Devaswom Board. The said team shall forthwith inspect the affected stretches of the River Pamba, assess the extent of pollution and accumulation of waste, and recommend appropriate measures to ensure that all discarded clothes and other waste materials are removed within the shortest possible time and that the holy river is maintained in a clean and ecologically sustainable condition.

13. The respondents shall also suggest effective measures for the continued protection, restoration, and maintenance of the river. It shall be the responsibility of the Travancore Devaswom Board to ensure that the dumped clothes are removed by the contractor concerned or through any other lawful and appropriate means, without any further delay. The entire exercise shall be carried out in an environmentally sustainable manner, strictly adhering to scientific methods

and statutory waste management protocols.

14. Separate statements shall be filed by the concerned officers of Suchitwa Mission, the Kerala State Pollution Control Board, the local authority, and the Travancore Devaswom Board detailing the actions taken, the present status of compliance, and the measures proposed for long-term prevention and sustained river conservation.

H/o.

Sd/-

**RAJA VIJAYARAGHAVAN V,
JUDGE**



Sd/-

**K. V. JAYAKUMAR,
JUDGE**

msp