

BEFORE THE MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT

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RESERVED ON : 02.09.2026

PRONOUNCED ON : 28.09.2026

CORAM :

THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE C.V. KARTHIKEYAN

and

THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE R.SAKTHIVEL

W.P.(MD)Nos.23965 of 2019, 24336 of 2022 & 23363 of 2026

and

W.M.P.(MD)No.20583 of 2019

CNR:{HCMD011072732019}



Case QR

WP(MD) No. 23965 of 2019:-

K.Kaliyamoorthy

..Petitioner(s)

Vs

1.Union of India,
rep by its Secretary to Government,
Ministry of Culture, New Delhi.

2.The Director General,
Archaeological Survey of India,
New Delhi.

3.The Superintending Archaeologist,
Archaeological Survey of India,
Chennai Circle, Fort St.George,
Chennai-9.

4.The Commissioner,



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Hindu Religious and Charitable
Endowment Department,
Gandhi Adigal Salai,
Royapettah High Road,
Nungambakkam, Chennai.

5.The Thanjavur Palace Devasthanam,
represented by its Hereditary Trustee,
West Main Street, Thanjavur District.

6.The Thanjavur Palace Devasthanam,
rep by its Assistant Commissioner/Executive Officer,
West Main Street,
Thanjavur District.

..Respondent(s)

WP(MD) No. 24336 of 2022

Alagarsamy Pandian

..Petitioner(s)

Vs

1.State of Tamil Nadu,
Represented by the Principal Secretary,
Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department,
State of Tamil Nadu, Fort St. George, Chennai.

2.State of Tamil Nadu,
Represented by the Principal Secretary, Tourism,
Culture and Religious Endowment Department,
State of Tamil Nadu, Fort St. George, Chennai.

3.State of Tamil Nadu,
represented by the Principal Secretary,
Home, Prohibition and Excise Department,
State of Tamil Nadu, Fort St. George, Chennai 9.

4.The Superintending Archaeologist,
Archaeological Survey of India,
1st Floor, Fort St. George, Chennai 5.

5.The Assistant Superintending Archaeologist
Archaeological Survey of India,
Trichy Circle, Main Guard Gate,



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6. The District Collector,
Office of the District Collector,
Thanjavur.

7. The Commissioner,
Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department,
Chennai 34.

8. The Manager,
Thanjavur Aranmanai Devasthanam,
1221, Melaveli Veethi, Thanjavur.

9. The Additional Director General of Police,
Office of the Additional Director General of Police,
Idol Wing CID, Guindy, Chennai.

10. The Superintendent of Police
Office of the Superintendent of Police,
Thanjavur District.

11. The Conservation Assistant
Archaeological Survey of India,
Thanjavur Sub-Circle, Big Temple Complex,
Thanjavur.

...Respondent(s)

W.P.(MD) No. 23363 of 2024:-

K.Chinraj

Vs

...Petitioner(s)

1. The State of Tamil Nadu,
Represented through its Chief Secretary,
Secretariat, St. George Fort,
Chennai - 600 009.

2. The Secretary,
Department of Tamil Development and Information,
Secretariat, St. George Fort,
Chennai - 600 009.



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3. The Principal Secretary / Commissioner,
The Hindu Religious and Charitable
Endowments Department,
No.119, Uthamar Gandhi Road,
Chennai - 600 034.

4. The Commissioner,
Archaeological Survey of India,
Tamil Valarchi Valagam,
Tamil Salai, Egmore,
Chennai - 600 008.

5. The Commissioner
Archaeological Survey of India,
Thanjavur Sub Circle,
Arulmigu Thanjai Peruvudaiyar Temple
Complex, Thanjavur Town,
Thanjavur - 613 001.

6. The Joint Commissioner
Hindu Religious Charitable Endowments Department,
Office of the Joint Commissioner,
SM Salai, Thanjavur - 613 001.

7. The District Collector,
Office of the District Collector,
AVP Azhagammal Nagar,
Thanjavur - 613 001.

8. The Assistant Commissioner / Seyal Aluvalar,
Arulmigu Thanjai Peruvudaiyar Temple,
Thanjavur Town,
Thanjavur - 613 001.

...Respondent(s)

PRAYER in W.P.(MD)No.23965 of 2019:- Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, praying this Court to issue a Writ of Mandamus to quash the order passed by the 3rd respondent bearing No.



4/8/TJ/2019/M/1999 dated 03.09.2019 by calling for the records from the 3rd respondent and quash the same consequentially, to direct the respondents to pass suitable order for replacement of the mutilated Ashta Dig Balakas in the respective shrines built by King Raja Raja Chola with a new one and also to install new idols in the remaining vacant Ashta Dig Balaka shrines within the time fixed by this Court.

PRAYER in WP(MD) No. 24336 of 2022: Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, praying this Court to issue a Writ of Mandamus, to direct the respondents

a. To recover the Lord Indiran Idol which is believed to be missing, that was present in the Lord Indiran Temple which was located in the Thanjai Peruvudaiyar Temple.

b. To Open the Lord Indiran Temple which was located in the Thanjai Peruvudaiyaar Temple for the worship of common public.

c. To appoint the Oadhuvaargal for the said Lord Indiran Temple which is located in the Thanjai Peruvudaiyaar Temple and to conduct the rituals and poojas in the regular manner as being done to all other deities in the temple and to conduct Indira Vizha as mentioned in the Sangam Literature in accordance with the law within the time stipulated by this Court.

Prayer in WP(MD) No. 23363 of 2024: Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, praying this Court to issue a Writ of Mandamus, to direct the respondents to unlock the Indra Sub Shrine that has been securely locked since more than 40 years and conducting Pooja and worship at everyday



and maintenance in the lower level of the right side of west face in the east entrance of Thanjai Peruvudaiyar Temple had been built in the period of 1010 CE by Raja Raja Chola - I by considering the petitioner's representation dated 28.08.2024 within the time stipulated by Court.

WP(MD) No. 23965 of 2019:-

For Petitioner(s) : Mr.B.Muruganandam
For Respondents : Mr.M.Karthigeyavenkidachalapathy (RR1, 2, & 4)
Senior Central Government Standing Counsel
Mr.K.K.Udayakumar (R3 & R5)
Government Advocate
Mr.V.Chandrasekar (R6 & R7)
Standing Counsel

WP(MD) No. 24336 of 2022:-

For Petitioner(s) : Ms.R.Alagumani
For Respondents : Mr.K.K.Udayakumar (RR1 to 7 to 11)
Government Advocate
Mr.I.Murugesan (R9 & R10)
Counsel for State (Crl.side)

WP(MD) No. 23363 of 2024:-

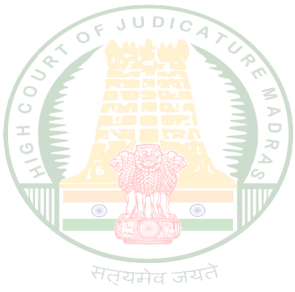
For Petitioner(s) : Mr.K.Chinraj (Party in person)

For Respondents : Mr.K.K.Udayakumar (R1 to R7)
Government Advocate
Mr.V.Chandrasekar (R8)
Standing Counsel

COMMON ORDER

(Order of the Court was made by **C.V. KARTHIKEYAN, J.**)

Since the issues raised in the three writ petitions are similar, a Common Order is passed.

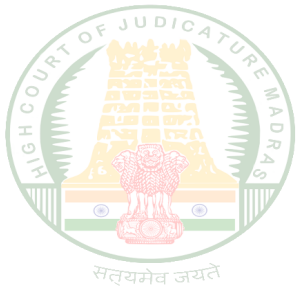


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2.W.P.(MD)No.23965 of 2019 had been filed as a Public Interest Litigation in the nature of certiorarified mandamus seeking interference with an order of the fourth respondent, Superintending Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India at Chennai dated 03.09.2019 in letter No.4/8/TJ/2019/M/1999 and seeking a direction against the respondents to replace the mutilated/install the missing Ashta Dikpalakas in their respective shrines in the Sri Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur also widely known as the Thanjavur Big Temple or Thanjai Peruvudaiyar Kovil.

3. Dikpalakas (or Dikpalas) are the guardian deities who rule and protect the specific eight cardinal and intermediate directions. As a group of eight, they are called Ashta Dikpalakas and when the Zenith (above) and Nadir (below) are included, they are called Dasa Dikpalakas or the guardians of the ten directions.

4. In the said writ petition, W.M.P.(MD)No.20583 of 2019 had been filed seeking a direction against the respondent to permit fixation of a new bell in the Temple after removing the old damaged bell under the supervision of the Archaeological Survey of India.

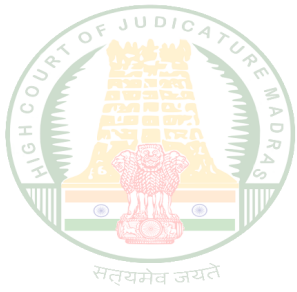


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5. W.P.(MD)No.24336 of 2022 and W.P.(MD)No.2363 of 2024 have both also been filed as Public Interest Litigations in the nature of a mandamus seeking a direction against the respondents to open the Lord Indira shrine in Thanjai Peruvudaiyar Temple and install the missing deity of Lord Indira in the said Temple.

6. The Thanjai Peruvudaiyar Temple also known as Sri Brihadeeswarar Temple, was built by King Raja Raja Cholan I more than 1000 years back. Separate and distinct shrines with vimanas were built for the eight Dikpalakas to guard the eight directions. The guardian deities had also been consecrated and installed. However, over the passage of time, the deities went either missing or were damaged. The temple is a live temple with daily poojas being conducted. There are throngs of devotees who seek blessing of the Gods and Goddesses. It can never be disputed that it would not bode well to have shrines without deities or with broken deities.

7. The petitioners claim that they are the devotees of the temple and, frustrated by efforts not taken to either replace the broken deities or to install the missing deities, they had approached this Court by filing these three Public Interest Litigations.

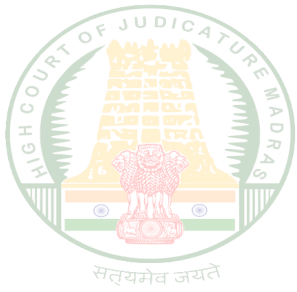


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8. The Superintending Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India by letter dated 03.09.2019 had refused the request of the petitioner in W.P. (MD)No.23965 of 2019 to remove the damaged deities and to install new deities in the eight shrines. He contended that such replacement is not permissible under the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 and the Rules, 1959.

9. Challenging that refusal letter, W.P.(MD)No.23965 of 2019 had been filed in the nature of Certiorarified Mandamus while in the other two writ petitions, mandamus is sought for the same relief.

10. Thanjai Peruvudaiyar Temple, also known as Sri Brihadeeswarar Temple had been built by King Raja Raja Cholan -I with the construction starting in 1003 CE and finishing in 1010 CE. The main tower (vimanam) is 216 feet (66 meters) high. It is one of the tallest temple towers of this kind. The capstone (Kumbam) in the top doom is carved from a single stone weighing 80 tonnes. Cement or joining glue was not used in the construction. The granite stones were stacked and locked back. The inside Bull (Nandi) had been carved from one single stone.



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11. The Nandhi is 13 feet high and 16 feet wide. The temple is one of the largest in India and is a living testimony to the greatness of Dravidian architecture of the Chola period. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva represented as a huge Lingam. It is considered as one of the third '*Great Living Chola Temples*', along with the Chola-era Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple and Airavatesvara Temple. The temple is also listed as part of the UNESCO world heritage site. Fortified walls with extensive rock art works surround the temple.

12. There are numerous inscriptions and frescoes, which provide information about the tale of the temple and the fortunes of the city. It was originally called as Raja Rajeswaram, after King Raja Raja Cholan- I. It is located on the South Bank of Cauvery river in Thanjavur. It is also called as Dakshina Meru (Meru of the South). The Mount Meru is a sacred, five-peaked mountain believed within Hindu, Jain and Buddhist cosmologies and revered as the centre of all physical, metaphysical and spiritual Universe. The inscriptions, frescoes and sculptures in the temple, though predominantly relate to Shaivism, are also related to Vaishnavism and Sakthism. The temple has a massive prakara (corridor). There is a sanctum for Lord Nataraja, the Lord of dance. The temple has shrines for Nandhi, Parvathi, Murugan, Ganapathy, Sababathi,

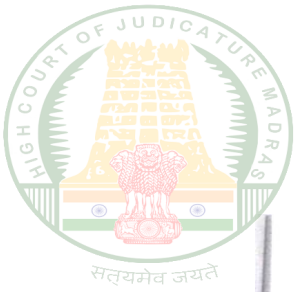


Dhakshinamoorthy, Chandeswara, Varahi, Thiagaraya, Thiruvaroora, Sri

Karuvoorar and others. It is one of the most visited tourist attractions in the State of Tamil Nadu. The inscriptions in the Temple calls the temple deity Periya Udaya Nayanar. The temple is now called Peruvudayar Kovil.

13. There were additions and renovations and repairs over the 1000 years of existence of the temple. Subsequent rulers including Nayakas and Marathas of Tanjavur renovated the temple and sponsored additional shrines. It is also classified as Perunkoil (also called Madakkoil), a big temple built on a higher platform of natural or man-made mounds. The temple complex is rectangle covering 240.79 meters from east to west and 121.92 meters from north to south. Some of the shrines were added during the Pandiya, Nayaka, Vijayanagara and Maratha eras.

14. The details above have been freely gathered from different sources and more, particularly from an authentic source, a book on iconography written by Sri T.A. Gopinatha Rao on and being commissioned by the Maharaja of Travancore and published in the year 1914. The first page of Volume One, Part-I of the book is scanned and presented below:



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ELEMENTS OF HINDU ICONOGRAPHY

VOLUME ONE
PART I

T.A. GOPINATHA RAO



MOTILAL BANARSIDASS
PUBLISHING HOUSE • DELHI

Email: mlbd@mlbd.in • Website: www.mlbd.in

   @mlbdofficial

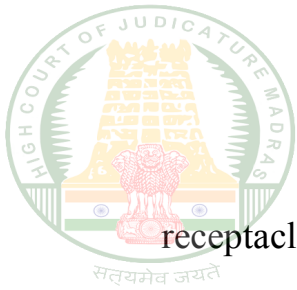
15. The temple and premises comes under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) under the Ministry of Culture of the Government of India. The temple walls have numerous inscriptions in Tamil and Grantha scripts. Many of



these begin with the invocation to the King and most of them discuss the gifts given to the temple or to the temple personnel or even to the residents of the city.

16. There are sixty four inscriptions of Raja Raja Chola -I, twenty nine inscriptions of Rajendra Chola I, one each of Vikrama Chola, Kulothunga-I and Rajamahendra (Rajendra II), three of a probable Pandyan king and two of Nayaka rulers namely, Achyutappa Nayaka and Mallapa Nayaka. These inscriptions have been deciphered and translated by Rai Bahadur V.Venkayya, who was the Government Epigraphist for India and printed and published in a book by the Superintendent, Government Press in Calcutta, Bombay, London and Leipzig in the year 1913. The front page of the book is scanned and produced below:

17. It had been recorded in the said book that in the second gopura, left entrance, the inscriptions record the gift of 8 gilt copper pots, all intended to be used as pinnacles. A ninth pot had also been presented. There was also one



receptacle for sacred ashes. The pinnacles were for the shrines of the regents of the eight quarters. The regents are eight in number, Indra, Agni, Yama, Nirriti, Varuna, Vayu, Soma and Isana. These inscriptions establish that shrines had been built for the eight Dikpalakas. The eight regents are the guardians of the eight directions. They are as follows:

- East : Indiran (Lord of heaven and weather)*
- South East : Agni (God of Fire)*
- South : Yaman (God of Justice)*
- South West : Nirriti (God of death, sorrow and decay)*
- West : Varunan (God of seas, ocean and rain)*
- North West : Vayu (God of winds and air)*
- North : Kuberan (God of fortune)*
- North East : Esanar (God of birth, death, resurrection and time)*

18.As a matter of fact, there are actually 10 Dikpalakas called Dasa Dikpalakas. The directions mentioned above are extended to include the vertical axis, Zenith (upward), which signifies Lord Brahma, Creator of the Universe and Nadir (downward), which signifies Lord Vishnu, the Preserver. The Digpalakas are also known as Lokapalakas.



19. The main Gopuram of the Temple is scanned and presented below:

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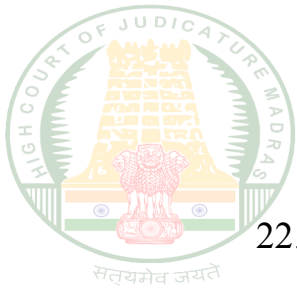
20. A careful observation of the same would show that on the top of the Gopuram, there is a central axis sharply pointing upwards and set a huge Kumbham. As stated earlier, the Kumbham had been carved from a single stone weighing 80 tonnes. This temple is unique not only because there are shrines



for 8 Dikpalakas, but more significantly right at the top of the main vimana,

which rises to a height of 216 feet, there is a dedication to the ninth direction, the Zenith, Lord Brahma, the Creator and then, there is also a dedication to the tenth direction, the Nadir, Lord Vishnu, the Preserver, signifying the gravitational pull and held in the Vimana of the abode of Lord Shiva, the Destroyer. Thus, there is a confluence, an unification of the Holy Trinity, Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. This significance is rarely noticed and less rarely spoken.

21. The temple is unique. There are shrines for the 8 Dikpalakas. There is the axis pointing to the ninth direction, upwards, signifying Lord Brahma, the Creator. There is the tenth direction, the gravitational force in the force of the Kumbam, holding fort and maintaining balance, signifying Lord Vishnu the Preserver and also the Lingam of Lord Shiva, the Destroyer of ego, clearing away illusion to allow for new growth. They are guarded by the eight Dikpalakas, who themselves and whose shrines are in a very, very sorry state. The guardians have been destroyed, or rather the trust they reposed on mankind has been betrayed, leaving the Holy Trinity, the Trimurthis to fend for themselves.



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22.The reports submitted to the Court taken during the inspection conducted by the Joint Commissioner, HR & CE Department, Assistant Superintending Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India, Trichy and the Hereditary Trustee, Thanjavur Palace Devasthanam, Thanjavur reveal the present status of eight Dikpalakas as follows:

East : Indiran (Lord of heaven and weather) (missing)

South East : Agni (God of Fire) (damaged)

South : Yaman (God of Justice) (missing)

*South West : Nirriti (God of death, sorrow and decay)
(missing)*

*West : Varunan (God of seas, ocean and rain)
(damaged)*

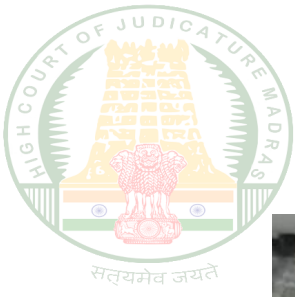
North West : Vayu (God of winds and air) (damaged)

North : Kuberan (God of fortune) (missing)

*North East : Esanar (God of birth, death, resurrection and
time) (damaged)*

23.The scanned images of the photographs of the eight shrines submitted to the Court taken during such inspection are presented below:

Indiran



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Agni



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Yaman





Nirriti

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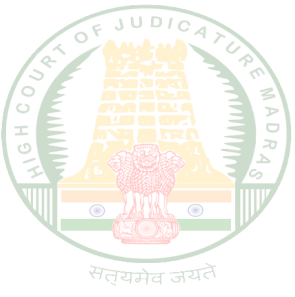




Varunan

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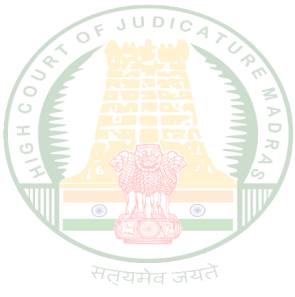




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Vayu





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Kubera

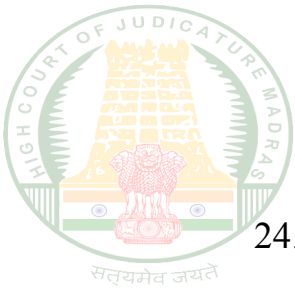




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Esanar





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24.The report had been presented by the joint team consequent to the

order by us on 15.07.2026, when we have directed as follows:

“The Joint Commissioner, HR & CE Department, Thanjavur, the Assistant Superintending Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India, Trichy Circle and also Mr.Babaji Raja Bhonsle, Hereditary Trustee of the Temple as on date, may make a joint visit with intention to cooperate with each other, with intention that they are acting for the devotees, who visit the Temple, over the disputed place where, it was stated that 8 Idols were situated and locate the places, take photographs of the same and file a report before this Court.”

25.It had been initially contended on behalf of the respondents that since the temple is controlled by the Archaeological Survey of India, there can never be either replacement of damaged idols or installation of the missing idols. It must be stated, with due appreciation to the joint team who visited the temple as devotees, the representations subsequently made in the Court was to ensure that no structural damages are caused during replacement or installation of the Deities.

26.It must also be kept in mind that by an agreement dated 28.02.1946 between Rajah Sri Rajaram Rajah Saheb, Hereditary Trustee of the Tanjore Palace Devasthanam and the Governor General in Council acting through the Collector of Tanjore, it had been covenanted that the monument namely, Sri



Brihasevaraswami temple shall be protected and preserved as an ancient

monument as envisaged under Section 3 of the Ancient Monument Preservation

Act, 1904 by notification of the Government of Madras No.161 dated

05.09.1922, and published at page 950 of Part I of the Fort St.George Gazette

dated 12.09.1922. By the said agreement, it had been provided as follows:

(i) That the said monument shall be maintained in repair by the Governor General through the Archaeological Department of the Central Government PROVIDED ALWAYS that the said Department shall determine what repairs, if any, shall from time to time, be carried out.

The Hereditary Trustee shall be consulted in the matter of repairs.

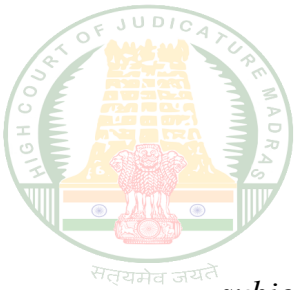
(2) That the Hereditary Trustee shall be the Custodian of the said monument and shall be responsible for keeping it clean and tidy.

(3) That the Hereditary Trustee shall not undertake any repairs to the said monument without the previous sanction in writing of the Superintendent of Archaeology for Southern Circle, Madras (hereinafter called the said Superintendent).

(4) That the Hereditary Trustee shall not destroy, remove, alter, deface or imperil the said monument.

(5) That the Hereditary trustee shall not build on or near the site of the said monument or cultivate the site or any part thereof without the previous permission in writing of the said superintendent.

But the said monument shall continue to be used as heretofore for religious worship and such observances shall not in any way be affected by this agreement. Subject to the provisions of this Agreement the Hereditary Trustee shall continue to enjoy the same honours and privileges as he now enjoys or is entitled to in respect of the temple.



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(6) *That the public shall have free access to the said monument subject to the following restrictions:-*

(a) that such persons shall be persons who according to the custom and usage pertaining to the temple are entitled under the law to have access thereto.

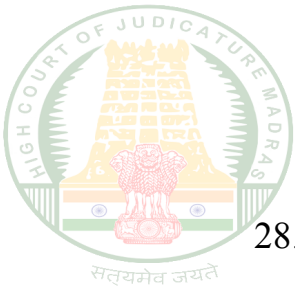
(b) that in feasts, festivals and other such functions usually celebrated in the temple and premises they may take part only to such extent as they have done or been permitted to do heretofore.

.....”

27. Act VII of 1904 subsequently ceased to have effect after the notification of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. Section 39 of the said Act is as follows:

“39. Repeals and savings.-(1) The Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Declaration of National Importance) Act, 1951 (71 of 1951), and section 126 of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956 (37 of 1956), are hereby repealed.

(2) The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 (7 of 1904), shall cease to have effect in relation to ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains declared by or under this Act to be of national importance, except as respects things done or omitted to be done before the commencement of this Act.”



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28. It is thus seen that the *things done* have been saved under the aforementioned provision. This would include the agreement referred *supra*. It was pointed out during the initial days of argument that these idols can never be either replaced or installed owing to Section 6 (2) (c) (iii) of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, which is as follows:

“6. Preservation of protected monument by agreement.-(1) The Collector, when so directed by the Central Government, shall propose to the owner of a protected monument to enter into an agreement with the Central Government within a specified period for the maintenance of the monument.

(2) An agreement under this section may provide for all or any of the following matters, namely:-

.....

(c) the restriction of the owner's right-

.....

(iii) to destroy, remove, alter or deface the monument, or

....”

29. However, the reliefs sought in the writ petition are not to destroy or remove or alter or deface the Idols. It is only to install the idols which are



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missing and to replace the idols which are broken. The broken idols can very well be again preserved by the Archaeological Society of India.

30.A broken or damaged idol (khandit moorti) should not be used for worship. This principle is established by tradition. It is held that a cracked or damaged idol has lost its consecratory holiness or steady spiritual focus. It disturbs the calm needed for prayer. The broken idol has to be respectfully immersed (visarjan) in clean river or pond or buried near a sacred tree, like peepal or banyan tree.

31.In the instant case, since the monument is preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India, they can retain possession of the broken idols. However, since the temple is a sacred living temple, broken idols can never and should never be permitted to remain in their shrines. The shrines can never be permitted to remain without a Deity. On both counts, very unfortunately, the sanctity of the Temple continues to suffer. This situation should no longer exist. It should be addressed and redressed with due reverence.

32.The Act casts a responsibility on the District Collector with the duty to protect a place of worship from misuse, pollution or desecration. Section 16



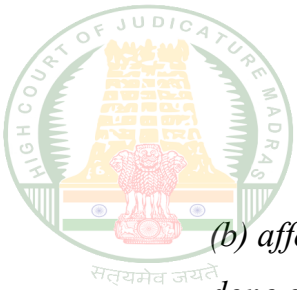
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of the Act very clearly states that when the Central Government has acquired a protected monument, such monument should be preserved and protected by the District Collector. Under Section 16 (2) (b) of the Act, the Collector must preserve the monument by taking such other action as he may think necessary in this behalf.

33. We had suo motu impleaded the District Collector, Thanjavur as a third respondent in the writ petition. We had called upon the District Collector, in the light of the said provision, to file a report. The District Collector stated that the agreement referred *supra* ceased to be in existence. That statement is not correct, since Section 39 of the Act extracted above saves ***things already done***, and this savings clause protects the agreement entered into on 28.02.1946.

34. We may also refer to Section 6 of the General Clauses Act, which is as follows:

“6. Where this Act, or any [Central Act] or Regulation made after the commencement of this Act, repeals any enactment hitherto made or hereafter to be made, then, unless a different intention appears, the repeal shall not-
(a) revive anything not in force or existing at the time at which the repeal takes effect; or



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(b) affect the previous operation of any enactment so repealed or anything duly done or suffered thereunder; or

(c) affect any right, privilege, obligation or liability acquired, accrued or incurred under any enactment so repealed; or

(d) affect any penalty, forfeiture or punishment incurred in respect of any offence committed against any enactment so repealed; or

(e) affect any investigation, legal proceeding or remedy in respect of any such right, privilege, obligation, liability, penalty, forfeiture or punishment as aforesaid;

and any such investigation, legal proceeding or remedy may be instituted, continued or enforced, and any such penalty, forfeiture or punishment may be imposed as if the repealing Act or Regulation had not been passed.”

Thus again under Clause (c) above, any act done in this case, the greatest dated 28.02.1946 and the rights which accrued under the agreement are saved and continue to be in force.

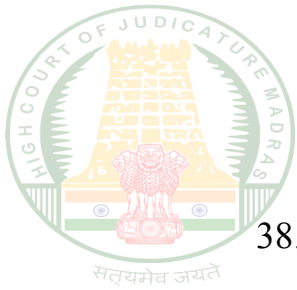
35.The Temple has celebrated 1000 years of existence. Kumbabishekams have been performed. But we have to state that emptiness prevails in the eight corners of the temple. The Gods, who guard the directions have been left astray, neglected, forgotten, damaged, ignored and missing. This does not bode well for the temple. A vacuum, an emptiness remains. That fact having been identified should be rectified and addressed. The presiding Deities of the eight



directions should be installed in their rightful and lawful places. This would enable the devotees to offer their poojas and pray to the Gods who guard the eight directions. They are significant Deities. The devotees can worship the God of rain, the God of fire, the God of justice and death, the God of sorrow, the God of water, the God of wind, the God of wealth and power and also Lord Shiva in his benevolent form presiding over birth, death, resurrection. The shrines and their presiding Deities must be restored to their Pristine glory.

36.King Raja Raja Cholan - I would have been shedding tears till this date that the temple, which he so fondly built, unfortunately, had not been preserved with the respects it deserves owing to the damage caused to the idols or owing to the missing of the idols in the eight corners. The corners are as important as the main deity in the centre.

37.We are of the firm view that the deities should be installed /replaced with due reverence in accordance with the agama principles and in consultation with experts and Sthapathis. The glory of the temple would resonate only then and never till then.



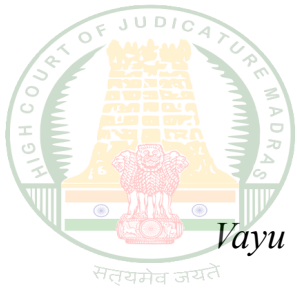
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38.We therefore, hold and direct that it is imperative that the eight guardians are permitted to guard the eight directions and the devotees are given the benefit to pray to them for wealth, for support, for justice, for birth, for rain, for wind and for peace of mind.

39.We are informed that the bell, which is the subject matter of W.M.P. (MD)No.28583 had actually been replaced. If that be the case, we find no reason why the eight idols should also not be installed/replaced. W.M.P. (MD)No.20583 of 2019 stands closed.

40.In view of the these reasons, we allow the writ petitions. Accordingly, the letter of the fourth respondent impugned in W.P.(MD)No. 23965 of 2019 dated 03.09.2018 is quashed. The following directions are issued:

(1)The District Collector, Thanjavur, the Joint Commissioner, HR & CE Department, Thanjavur, the Hereditary Trustee, Thanjavur Palace Devasthanam, the Assistant Superintending Archaeologist, Trichy Circle, Trichy together should act and take immediate steps to replace the damaged idols of Agni (South East Sannithi), Varunan (West Sannithi),



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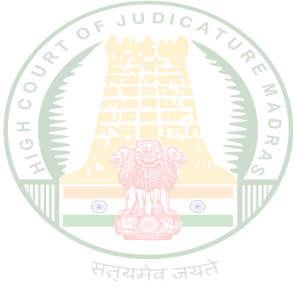
Vayu (North West Sannithi) and Esanar (North East Sannithi) and install the missing idols of Indiran (East Sannithi), Yaman (South Sannithi), Nirriti (South West Sannithi) and Kuberan (North Sannithi).

(2)We are fortified in issuing this direction, since as early as in the year 2008, the Sthapathi of the Temple had given his opinion that the damaged idols should be replaced and the missing idol should be installed.

(3)The officials aforementioned may even call for fresh opinion from experts, Pandits and Sthapathis regarding implementation of the direction issued.

(4)The preliminary work in compliance of the direction issued should be commenced within a period of three months from this date and the installation of the missing idols and replacement of the damaged idols should be done within a period of twelve months from this date.

39.Observing as above, the writ petitions are allowed. There shall be no order as to costs.



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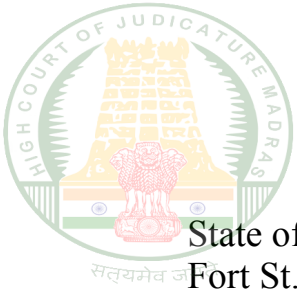
[C.V.K, J.] [R.S.V, J.]

28.09.2026

Index : Yes
Neutral Citation : Yes
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To

- 1.The Superintending Archaeologist,
Archaeological Survey of India,
Chennai Circle, Fort St.George,
Chennai-9.
- 2.The Commissioner,
Hindu Religious and Charitable
Endowment Department,
Gandhi Adigal Salai,
Royapettah High Road,
Nungambakkam, Chennai.
- 3.The Thanjavur Palace Devasthanam,
represented by its Hereditary Trustee,
West Main Street,
Thanjavur District.
- 4.The Thanjavur Palace Devasthanam,
rep by its Assistant Commissioner/Executive Officer,
West Main Street,
Thanjavur District.
- 5.The Principal Secretary,
Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department,
State of Tamil Nadu,
Fort St. George, Chennai.
- 6.The Principal Secretary, Tourism,
Culture and Religious Endowment Department,



State of Tamil Nadu,
Fort St. George, Chennai.

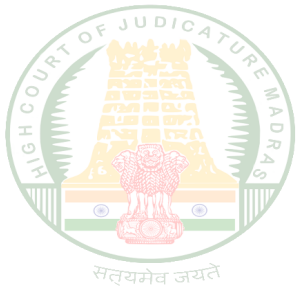
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7. The Principal Secretary,
Home, Prohibition and Excise Department,
State of Tamil Nadu,
Fort St. George, Chennai 9.
8. The Superintending Archaeologist,
Archaeological Survey of India,
1st Floor, Fort St. George,
Chennai 5.
9. The Assistant Superintending Archaeologist
Archaeological Survey of India,
Trichy Circle, Main Guard Gate,
Trichy.
10. The District Collector,
Office of the District Collector,
Thanjavur.
11. The Manager,
Thanjavur Aranmanai Devasthanam,
1221, Melaveli Veethi,
Thanjavur.
12. The Additional Director General of Police,
Office of the Additional Director General of Police,
Idol Wing CID, Guindy, Chennai.
13. The Superintendent of Police
Office of the Superintendent of Police,
Thanjavur District.
14. The Conservation Assistant
Archaeological Survey of India,
Thanjavur Sub-Circle, Big Temple Complex,
Thanjavur.



15. The Commissioner

Archaeological Survey of India,
Thanjavur Sub Circle,
Arulmigu Thanjai Peruvudaiyar Temple
Complex, Thanjavur Town,
Thanjavur - 613 001.



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**C.V. KARTHIKEYAN, J.
AND
R.SAKTHIVEL, J.**

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Judgment made in

W.P.(MD)Nos.23965 of 2019,
24336 of 2022 & 23363 of 2026

28.09.2026