



W.P(MD)No.14096 of 2026

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BEFORE THE MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT

DATED: 13.05.2026

CORAM:

**THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE G.K.ILANTHIRAIYAN
AND
THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE K.RAJASEKAR**

W.P(MD)No.14096 of 2026

and

W.M.P(MD)Nos.10507 & 10594 of 2026

Rama.Ravikumar

... Petitioner

Vs.

1.The State of Tamil Nadu,
Represented by its Principal Secretary,
Department of Tourism, Culture and Endowments,
Chennai - 9.

2.The Principal Secretary to Government,
Water Resources Development Department,
Secretariat,
Chennai.

3.The Principal Secretary to Government,
Forest Department,
Secretariat,
Chennai.



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4.The Principal Secretary to Government,
Department of Archaeology,
Tamil Valarchi Valaagam,
Tamil Salai,
Egmore,
Chennai - 600 008.

5.The District Collector,
Tenkasi.

6.The Superintendent of Police,
Tenkasi.

7.The Inspector of Police,
Kutralam Police Station,
Tenkasi.

8.The District Forest Officer,
Tenkasi.

9.The Superintending Engineer,
Water Resource Development Department,
Tamilraparani Basin Circle,
Tirunelveli.

10.The Executive Officer,
Courtrallam Town Panchayat,
Tenkasi District.

11.The Executive Officer,
Kutralanatha Swamy Temple,
Kutralam.

... Respondents



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PRAYER:- Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, to issue a Writ of Mandamus, directing the respondents to take appropriate legal action against all persons responsible for the damage, destruction and removal of ancient rock cut idols at Kuttralam Main Falls, to ensure protection and preservation of the said idols and heritage structures, and consequently direct restoration / reinstallation of the idols in their original place of consecration.

For Petitioner : Mr.RM.Arun Swaminathan

For Respondents : Mr.S.Vinodh
Government Advocate for R1

: Mr.D.Gandhi Raj
Special Government Pleader
for R2 to R5, R8 & R9

: Mr.T.Senthil Kumar
Additional Public Prosecutor
for R6 & R7

: Mr.S.Sundara Pandian
Standing Counsel for R10

: Mr.S.Manohar for R11



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ORDER

(Order of the Court was made by **G.K.ILANTHIRAIYAN, J.**)

This Writ Petition has been filed seeking a direction to the respondents to take appropriate legal action against the persons responsible for the damage, destruction and removal of ancient rock-cut idols at Courtallam Main Falls, to ensure protection and preservation of the said idols and heritage structures, and for the restoration / reinstallation of the idols in their original places of consecration.

2.The petitioner is a devotee and has a genuine interest in the protection of Hindu religious institutions, heritage and the environment. The Arulmigu Kutralanatha Swamy Temple is situated near the Courtallam slopes reserve forest under the control of the respondents. In and around the Main Falls, several ancient rock-cut sculptures and stone idols exist. Despite this, several rock-cut sculptures were allegedly damaged by workers engaged by the Water



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Resources Department. Several idols were broken and removed from their original places of consecration, carried out by unskilled labourers without any archaeological expertise or supervision, under the guise of renovation and development works. The destruction and removal of such idols not only offends religious sentiments but also constitutes punishable offences. Therefore, the petitioner submitted a representation to take appropriate action against those responsible for the damage, destruction and removal of ancient rock-cut idols at Courtallam Main Falls.

3.This Court, on 06.05.2026, at the time of admission, directed the parties to maintain status quo and thereafter, on 07.05.2026, extended the interim order of status quo until further orders.

4.Therefore, the tenth respondent filed a petition seeking to vacate the interim order of maintaining status quo on the ground that



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the Government of Tamil Nadu, in order to facilitate the safety and convenience of the general public and tourists visiting the Courtallam Main Falls, issued G.O.Ms.No.319, dated 23.12.2022. Pursuant to the administrative sanction, a work order was issued to remove the existing arch structure and widening the public stand area from 3.6 meters to 8 meters, solely in the public interest, for ensuring better crowd management and safety measures. On receipt of the order, the officials of the Department of Archaeology conducted an inspection on 06.05.2026 and submitted a report. The report revealed that there was no damage caused to the carvings engraved on the rock surfaces. While digging the surface land, unfortunately, one idol was damaged. There are about 65 rock-cut idols engraved in the main rock hills area and all such carvings remain intact. The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation also reported that the ongoing developmental works have not caused any disturbance, destruction or damage to the said rock-cut carvings.



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5.The fifth respondent submitted a status report along with photographs, stating that to widen the stand area used by the public for bathing at Courtallam Main Falls, the Government issued the work order. Accordingly, the 75 year old arch was removed and the stand area was widened from 3.6 meters to 8 meters. Further, the ancient idols and sculptures carved in the Main Falls were not destroyed during the work. As the monsoon season approaches, the work is being carried out safely and expeditiously under the supervision of the Engineer of the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation. According to the Archaeology Department, 65 rock-cut idols are engraved in the main rock hills, and no damage or destruction has occurred. Approximately 40% of the work has been completed, and the remaining work is in progress, with a proposed completion date of 20.05.2026.



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6.The respondents have a duty to protect the historical, cultural, and archaeological significance of the Courtallam region and must take necessary precautionary measures to preserve and protect the heritage structures. At the same time, the respondents intend to ensure public safety, proper crowd management, uninterrupted tourist access, and safeguarding the seasonal livelihood of local persons dependent on tourism. The developmental works are thus undertaken in the larger public interest, as well as to protect the economic interests of local communities and persons dependent on seasonal trade.

7.In view of the above, this Writ Petition is disposed of with the following directions:

(i) The remaining development work shall be carried out in the presence of officials from the Archaeology Department.



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(ii) The respondents 9 and 10 must ensure that the carvings engraved on the rock surfaces are safe and that development activities are carried out without causing damage to any sculptures, ancient idols, or rock-cut idols.

(iii) The fifth respondent is directed to conduct an enquiry regarding the damage caused to the rock-cut idols at Courtallam Main Falls.

(iv) All respondents must ensure the protection and preservation of all idols and heritage structures situated at Courtallam Main Falls, Courtallam.

(v) The tenth respondent must ensure proper maintenance and development of public facilities during the Courtallam season by completing the development works within the stipulated period, in the larger public interest, and to protect the economic interests of



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local communities and persons dependent on seasonal tourism.

No costs. Consequently, the connected Miscellaneous Petitions are closed.

[G.K.I.J.] & [K.R.S.J.]
13.05.2026

NCC : Yes/No
Index : Yes/No
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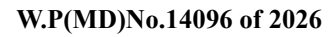
To

1.The Principal Secretary,
Department of Tourism, Culture and Endowments,
Chennai - 9.

2.The Principal Secretary to Government,
Water Resources Development Department,
Secretariat,
Chennai.

3.The Principal Secretary to Government,
Forest Department,
Secretariat,
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AND
K.RAJASEKAR, J.

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