HIGH COURT FOR THE STATE OF TELANGANA AT HYDERABAD

MONDAY, THE FIFTEENTH DAY OF APRIL
TWO THOUSAND AND TWENTY FOUR

:PRESENT:

THE HONOURABLE SRI JUSTICE N.V.SHRAVAN KUMAR

WRIT PETITION NOs: 6335, 37898 AND 13168 OF 2022

WRIT PETITION NO.6335 OF 2022

Between:

Kancherla Venkata Ramana, S/o. Late Sri Kancherla Mallikharjuna Rao
...Petitioner

AND

1. The State of Telangana, Rep., by its Secretary, Endowments Department, Secretariat, Hyderabad.
2. The Commissioner of Endowments, Office at Abids, Hyderabad, Telangana.
3. The District Collector, Bhadradri Kothagudem District, at Kothagudem.
4. Sri Seetha Ramachandraswamy Vaari Devasthanam, Rep. by its Executive, Officer at Bhadrachalam, Bhadradri Kothagudem District.

...Respondents

Petition under Article 226 of the Constitution of India praying that in the circumstances stated in the affidavit filed therewith, the High Court may be pleased to issue Writ, order or direction preferably Writ of Mandamus, declaring the action of the Respondents in distorting the History and Age-Old traditions of the Sri Seetha Ramachandraswamy Vaari Devasthanam, Bhadrachalam by improperly addressing the Lord of the Bhadrachalam Temple as Ramanarayana and thereby reciting the inappropriate Pravara (Invocation of the illustrious Ancestors) and Gothram (Clan/Original Ancestor) of the Principal Deities of the Bhadrachalam Temple during the performance of the Annual Celestial Wedding (Kalyanam) of Lord Sri Rama and Sita on Sri Rama Navami, which forms essential religious practice, as illegal, arbitrary and violative of Articles 14, 21, 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India and opposed to the intentions of the Founder of the Temple, Sri Bhakta Ramadas and consequently direct the Respondents to preserve the sanctity of the Original names of the Principal Deities of the Bhadrachalam Temple and further direct the Respondent No.4 to recite the historically correct Pravara and Gothramas stated in para 12(a) of the affidavit, of Lord Rama and Goddess Sita in their Human Incarnation during the Kalyanam.

IA NO: 1 OF 2022

Petition under Section 151 CPC praying that in the circumstances stated in the affidavit filed in support of the writ petition, the High Court may be pleased to direct the Respondent No.4 to recite the historically correct Pravara (Invocation of the illustrious Ancestors) and Gothram (Clan/Original Ancestor) as stated in para 12(a) of the affidavit, of Lord Rama and Goddess Sita in their Human Incarnation in the ensuing Annual Celestial Wedding (Kalyanam Mahotsav), pending disposal of WP.No.6335 of 2022, on the file of the High Court.

The petition coming on for hearing, upon perusing the Petition and the affidavit filed in support thereof and the order of High Court dated 08.04.2024 & 10.04.2024 made herein and upon hearing the arguments of Mr. A. RAGHURAM Advocate for the Petitioner, GP FOR ENDOWMENTS for the Respondent No.1, SRI. JAGAN MOHAN REDDY Advocate for the Respondent Nos.2 and 4 and GP FOR REVENUE for the Respondent No.3;

WRIT PETITION NO: 37898 OF 2022

Between:

G.T.V. Manindhar, S/o. G.H.L.Prasad,

...Petitioner

AND

1. The State of Telangana, Rep, by its Secretary, Endowments Department, Secretariat, Hyderabad.
2. The Commissioner of Endowments, Office at Tilak Road, Abids, Hyderabad.
3. The District Collector, Bhadradri Kothagudem District.
4. Sree Seetha Ramachandra Swamy Vari Devasthanam, Bhadrachalam, Bhadradri-Kothaduem District, Telangana, rep. by its Executive Officer.
5. The Chief Priest, Sree Seetha Ramachandra Swamy Vari Devasthanam, Bhadrachalam, Bhadradri-Kothaduem District, Telangana.

...Respondents

Petition under Article 226 of the Constitution of India praying that in the circumstances stated in the affidavit filed therewith, the High Court may be pleased to issue a writ or order or orders more particularly one in the nature of writ of Mandamus declaring the action of the respondents more particularly 4th and 5th respondents in middling in the spiritual and ritual issues pertaining to conduct of pooja to Lord Sree Seeta Ramachandra Swamy temple of Bhadrachalam by grossly violating and deviating from the established norms and practices, as illegal, arbitrary and violative of Articles 14,19 and 25 to 29 of The Constitution of India and consequentially direct the respondents to follow the established rituals and norms of pooja vidhana more particularly naming the Lord as Ramachandra Swamy in all poojas and not as Ramanarayana.

IA NO: 1 OF 2022

Petition under Section 151 of CPC praying that in the circumstances stated in the affidavit filed in support of the Writ Petition, the High Court may be pleased to direct the Respondents to constitute a committee of experts consisting of Acharyas of various Hindu sampradaya/tradition, vedic scholars and other stake-holders to examine the issue complained of and submit a report within prescribed period and consequentially restore the age old traditions of worship, pending disposal of Writ Petition No.37898 of 2022, on the file of the High Court.

The petition coming on for hearing, upon perusing the Petition and the affidavit filed in support thereof and the order of High Court dated 10.04.2024 made herein and upon hearing the arguments of Sri. SRIKANTH HARIHARAN, Advocate for the Petitioner, GP FOR ENDOWMENTS, for the Respondent Nos.1 and 2, GP FOR REVENUE, for the Respondent No.3, Sri. K. Jagan Mohan Reddy (SC for ENDOWMENTS), for the Respondent Nos.4 and 5;

WRIT PETITION NO: 13168 OF 2022

Between:

Jamalapurapu Srinivas Rao, S/o. J. Rameswara Rao,

...Petitioner

AND

1. The State of Telangana, Rep., by its Secretary, Endowments Department Secretariat, Hyderabad.
2. The Commissioner of Endowments, Office at Abids, Hyderabad, Telangana.
3. The District Collector, Bhadradri Kothagudem District, at Kothagudem.
4. Sri Seetha Ramachandraswamy Vaari Devasthanam, Rep. by its Executive Officer at Bhadrachalam, Bhadradri Kothagudem District.

...Respondents

Petition under Article 226 of the Constitution of India praying that in the circumstances stated in the affidavit filed therewith, the High Court may be pleased to issue Writ, order or direction preferably Writ of Mandamus, declaring the action of the Respondents in distorting the History by reciting the inappropriate Pravara (Invocation of the illustrious Ancestors) and Gothram (Clan/Original Ancestor) of Lord Sri Rama and Goddess Sita during the performance of their Annual Celestial Wedding (Kalyanam) on Sri Rama Navami, as arbitrary and violative of Articles 14, 21 and 25 of the Constitution of India and consequently direct the Respondent No.4 to recite the Historically correct Pravara and Gothram of Lord Rama and Goddess Sita in their Human Incarnation during the Kalyanam Rituals.

IA NO: 1 OF 2022

Petition under Section 151 of CPC praying that in the circumstances stated in the affidavit filed in support of the Writ Petition, the High Court may be pleased to direct The Respondents not to distort History while reciting the Pravara (Invocation of the Illustrious Ancestors) and Gothram (Clan/Originar Ancestor) of Lord Sri Rama and Goddess Sita during the ensuing Sri Rama Navami Kalyanam at the

Respondent No.4, pending disposal of Writ Petition No.13168 of 2022, on the file of the High Court.

The petition coming on for hearing, upon perusing the Petition and the affidavit filed in support thereof and the order of High Court dated 10.04.2024 made herein and upon hearing the arguments of Sri. KOWTURU PAVAN KUMAR, Advocate for the Petitioner, GP FOR ENDOWMENTS, for the Respondent Nos.1 & 2, GP FOR REVENUE, for the Respondent No.3, Sri. K. Jagan Mohan Reddy (SC for Endowments), for the Respondent No.4, the Court made the following.

ORDER:

Writ Petition No.37898 of 2022 is filed to declare the action of respondent Nos.4 and 5 in meddling in the spiritual and ritual issues pertaining to conduct of pooja to Lord Sree Seeta Ramachandra Swamy Temple of Bhadrachalam by grossly violating and deviating from the established norms and practices, as illegal and arbitrary and consequently direct respondents to follow the established rituals and norms of pooja vidhana more particularly naming the Lord as Ramachandra Swamy in all poojas and not as Ramanarayana.

Writ Petition Nos.6335 of 2022 and 13168 of 2022 were filed to declare the action of respondents in distorting the History and Age-Old traditions of Sri Seetha Ramachandraswamy Vaari Devasthanam, Bhadrachalam by improperly addressing the Lord of the Bhadrachalam Temple as Ramanarayana and thereby reciting the inappropriate Pravara (invocation of the illustrious ancestors) and Gothram (Clan/original ancestor) of the principal deities of the Bhadrachalam Temple during the performance of the Annual Celestial Wedding (Kalyanam) of Lord Sri Rama and Sita on Sri Rama Navami, which forms essential religious practice, as illegal and arbitrary and consequently direct respondents to preserve the sanctity of the original names of the principal deities of the Bhadrachalam Temple and further direct respondent No.4 to recite the historically correct Pravara and Gothram as stated in para 12(a) of the affidavit of Lord Rama and Goddess Sita in their human incarnation during the Kalyanam.

Mr.D.V.Sitarama Murthy, learned senior counsel appearing for the petitioner in W.P.No.37898 of 2022 would submit that in all these writ petitions, the common issue involved is that petitioners are aggrieved by the action of respondents in violating the constitutional rights more particularly deviating from the age-old practices which are essential religious practices, while performing the celestial wedding (Kalyanotsavam) of Lord Rama and Goddess Seetha at Sri Seetha Ramachandraswamy Vaari Devasthanam, Bhadrachalam, Khammam, Telangana State (referred as 'Bhadrachalam Temple' hereinafter) especially in regard to recitation of Gothram (Clan/original ancestors) and Pravara (Invocation of the illustrious ancestors) of Sri Ramachandraswamy and Seetha Devi.

The petitioners in these writ petitions are the devotees of Sri Ramachandraswamy and are practicing Hindu culture. Petitioner in W.P.No.6335 of 2022 submits that he is the lineal descendant of Kancharla Gopanna known as Bhakta Ramadasu and that he is also participating in celestial wedding of Sri Seetha Ramachandra Swamy performed at Temple. It is submitted that the Kalyanotswavam is being performed for centuries now and successive State Government after 1956 and prior thereto Nizam of Hyderabad had also recognized the event of Kalyanotsavam and also used to send gifts for the event of Kalyanotsavam.

Learned senior counsel would submit that the significance of Gothram and Pravara lies in establishing the very identity and descent of families of the bride and the bridegroom and their invocation in Kalyanam rituals constitute an essential religious practice. He would further submit that the petitioners and the folklore are pained by the distortion of history and deviation from the essential part of the rituals being undertaken especially during the Kalyanotsavam i.e., the Priests therein are now reciting/chanting the name of Lord Rama as "Rama Narayana" instead of "Ramchandra Swamy" during the Sankalpam. It is further submitted that the traditional practice of reciting

"Ramachandra Swamine Varaya" has now been replaced with "Ramanarayana Swamine Varaya" and in contrast the Priests are reciting the ancestral lineage of Lord Rama as Parabrahma Sharma, Vyuhanarayana Sharma, Vibhava Vasudeva Sharma belonging to Achyuth Gotra which actually pertains to the Supreme Lord Narayana. Similarly the lineage of Seetha Devi is being recited as Viswambhara Sharma, Ratnakara Sharma, Ksheerarnava Sharma belonging to Soubhagya Gotra which actually pertains to Goddess Mahalakshmi. It is submitted that the Pravara and Gotra of Lord Rama and Sita Devi in their human form are being changed to that of their original divine incarnations which is not in tune with the purport of Rama Avatar.

It is further submitted that the Hindus together constitute religious denomination and are entitled to the constitutional guarantees under Article 26 of Constitution of India and that the protection under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution is not limited to matters of doctrine or belief and they also extend to acts done in pursuance of religion and therefore contain a guarantee for rituals and observances, ceremonies and modes of worship which are integral parts of religion. He would further submit that for the last hundreds of years the Kalyanam was being performed at Bhadrachalam Temple by referring to the Gothram and Pravara of Lord Rama in Human form and as such thepresent usage of Gothram and Pravara of the God form "Narayana" is opposed to the Temple's traditions and history. Questioning the same, the present writ petitions are filed.

Mr.L.Ravichander, learned senior counsel appearing on behalf of proposed respondent No.6 in W.P.No.37898 of 2022 would submit that the procedure for conducting rituals is in the exclusive domain of the Devasthanam and cannot be a matter of adjudication by any Court unless it affects secular or civil rights of others and those issues have to be looked into by the Pandits or the scholars in accordance with the Temple customs or the established practice and procedure. He would further submit that since there are disputed questions of fact, the

petitioners ought to have approached the Civil Court or competent authority to prove their claims with evidence and it is for the respondent Devasthanam to defend the same in accordance with law.

Learned senior counsel would refer to the judgment of The Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of *Srivari Daadaa v. Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams* in Special Leave to Appeal (C) Nos.6554 of 2021 dated 16.11.2021 and the Hon'ble Supreme Court has disposed of the said appeal with the following directions:

"It appears that the above-mentioned reliefs sought by the petitioner-in-person are in the nature of interfering with the day- to-day rituals in respect of the temple, which cannot be gone into by the Court. Whether any ritual or sewa is being performed in a prescribed way or whether there is any deviation from established practice would raise disputed questions of fact which cannot be decided in a writ petition. The procedure of conducting rituals is in the exclusive domain of the Devasthanam and cannot be a matter of adjudication by any court unless it affects secular or civil rights of others. These issues have to be looked into by the pandits or the scholars or the advisors in accordance with the temple customs or the established practice and procedure. These are not the issues for which the Court possesses expertise. So, if the Sevas, Utsavams and Darshanams in the temple are not being done according to the set principles, the petitioner will be at liberty to approach the civil court or the competent authority and prove his claims with evidence, and it is for the respondent - Devasthanam to defend the same in accordance with law."

Mr.V.Hari Haran, learned senior counsel appearing for the petitioners in W.P.No.6335 of 2022 has drawn attention of this Court to the letter of the Joint Commissioner and Executive Officer addressed to Principal Secretary, Endowments Department, Hyderabad on 09.06.2014 wherein a report was filed stating that some devotees requested to stop the propaganda that Sri Ramachandra Swami, who appeared in Bhadragiri, is considered as Rama Narayana and not to hurt the sentiments of the devotees.

While narrating various facts on this issue, it has been informed that there is a dispute which calls for consideration of the points

stated in the letter dated 09.06.2014. It is also submitted that the way the Kalaynotsavam has been performed while referring to the Gothram and Pravara which is affecting the sentiments of the devotees and requested that a committee of experts may be constituted to investigate and decide as to whether Lord who appeared in the Bhadrachalam is Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy or Ram Narayana and examine and resolve the matter.

Mr.V.Hari Haran, learned senior counsel submits that till date no committee has been constituted though the letter was addressed in the year 2014 and that since every year Kalyanotsvam is performed in Bhadrachalam and there is lot of unrest in the devotees and that the Principal Secretary may be directed to constitute a committee immediately which comprises of Vedic Scholars, Acharyas and Experts who are very well versed with the spiritual and ritual issues pertaining to performing the celestial wedding "Kalyanotsavam" at Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy Temple, Bhadrachalam.

Heard Mr.D.V.Sitarama Murthy, learned senior counsel for petitioner in W.P.No.37898 of 2022; Mr.V.Hari Haran, learned senior counsel for the petitioners in W.P.No.6335 of 2022; Mr.L.Ravichander, learned senior counsel for proposed respondent No.6 in W.P.No.37898 of 2022 and learned standing counsel for Endowments Department.

It is pertinent to note that the subject Temple has been registered as Sri Sitarama Chandra Swamy vaari Devasthanam and all the receipts issued for the purpose of religious poojas and sevas are in the name of Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy vaari Devasthanam and the said fact is not disputed by learned standing counsel for the respondents.

A copy of the Register has also been placed before this Court to that extent, wherein the Temple has been registered in the name of Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy Temple and a certificate to that extent was

issued under Section 25 of Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, 1951 which was in force from 28.05.1951.

In view of all the above and also taking into consideration the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court (cited supra), the Principal Secretary, Endowments Department is directed to constitute a Committee comprising of five (5) experts who are very well versed with the spiritual customs, traditions and also the Sthalapuranam of Bhadrachalam Temple and the general concern of the folklore of Bhadrachalam Temple as to how the Kalyanotsavam has been performed all these years and also verify what was the Gothram and Pravara revered in the Kalyanotsavam before 2012 and after 2012 and clarify all the aspects which are raised in all these writ petitions and file a detailed report before the Principal Secretary, Endowments Department, who shall inturn examine the same and shall file a detailed affidavit before this Court for further adjudication.

It is made clear that the said constituted Committee shall give a detailed report to the Principal Secretary within a period of two months from the date of receipt of a copy of this order and the Principal Secretary shall examine the same and file a detailed affidavit before this Court within one month thereafter. It is also made clear that Principal Secretary shall also ascertain as to how the Gothram and Pravara of Sri Sitarama Chandra Swamy is revered in Sita Rama Chandra Swamy Temples in the entire State of Telangana at the time of Kalyanotsavam and the same shall also be referred in the report and affidavit.

It is also made clear that the committee shall consider all the issues raised in the letter of Joint Commissioner to Principal Secretary and the issues raised in these writ petitions also without being influenced by any sections of the society and shall file report in a sealed cover before the Principal Secretary.

It is left open to the Committee that if required, it may also take the inputs or assistance from all the stakeholders subject to their requirement.

Post the matter on 14.08.2024.

SD/- P.PADMANABHA REDDY
ASSISTANT REGISTRAR

//TRUE COPY//

SECTION OFFICER

To,

1. The Secretary, Endowments Department, State of Telangana, Secretariat, Hyderabad.
2. The Commissioner of Endowments, Office at Tilak Road, Abids, Hyderabad.
3. The District Collector, Bhadradri Kothagudem District.
4. Sree Seetha Ramachandra Swamy Vari Devasthanam, Bhadrachalam, Bhadradri-Kothaduem District, Telangana, rep. by its Executive Officer.
5. The Chief Priest, Sree Seetha Ramachandra Swamy Vari Devasthanam, Bhadrachalam, Bhadradri-Kothaduem District, Telangana
   (for 1 to 5 by RPAD)
6. One CC to MR. A. RAGHURAM, Advocate [OPUC].
7. Two CCs to GP FOR ENDOWMENTS, High Court for the State of Telangana at Hyderabad [OUT].
8. Two CCs to GP FOR REVENUE, High Court for the State of Telangana at Hyderabad [OUT].
9. One spare copy

HIGH COURT

NVSK,J

DATED: 15/04/2024

NOTE: LIST ON 14.08.2024

ORDER

WRIT PETITION NOs: 6335, 37898 AND 13168 OF 2022



DIRECTION