

SC Verdict on Padmanabhaswamy Temple

July 15, 2020

The verdict was pronounced on the dispute over **management of Thiruvananthapuram's historic Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple**, which is considered one of the richest temples in the country.

Dispute Over Padmanabhaswamy Temple

The central legal question was whether Marthanda Varma, the younger brother of Balarama Varma, the last Ruler of Travancore, could **claim to be the "Ruler of Travancore" after the death of the ruler in 1991**. The court examined this claim **within the limited meaning of that term according to the Travancore-Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act, 1950** to claim ownership, control and management of the ancient Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

In 1971, privy purses to the former royals were abolished through a constitutional amendment stripping their entitlements and privileges. The move was upheld in court in 1993 and the last ruler of Travancore who died during the pendency of this case continued to manage the affairs of the temple till then. In 1991, when the last ruler's brother took over the temple management, it created a furore among devotees who moved the courts leading to a long-drawn legal battle. The government joined in; supporting the claims of the petitioner that Marthanda Varma had no legal right to claim the control or management of the temple.

SC Judgement

Reversing the 2011 Kerala High Court decision, the Supreme Court Monday **upheld the right of the Travancore royal family to manage the property of deity at Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple**. The court said that, as per customary law, the **shebait**

rights (right to manage the financial affairs of the deity) survive with the members of the family even after the death of the last ruler. The ruling ends the legal battle the temple and members of the royal family have fought with the government for decades.

The sprawling temple, an **architectural splendour in granite**, was rebuilt in its present form in the 18th century by the Travancore Royal House which had ruled southern Kerala and some adjoining parts of Tamil Nadu before integration of the princely state with the Indian Union in 1947.