

News

The Kerala High Court orders extensive changes to the Darshan crowd control mechanism at Guruvayoor Temple.



To lessen crowd density, the Court recommended dividing pilgrims into groups of 300–500 people and assigning time slots for darshan.

The Guruvayoor Devaswom Managing Committee was given detailed instructions by the Kerala High Court on Friday to modernize and simplify crowd control at the *Guruvayoor Sree Krishna Temple* .

Although the temple is open for extended hours, the actual darshan time is restricted to

10–11 hours each day due to ritual closures, according to a Division bench consisting of **Justices Raja Vijayaraghavan V and KV Jayakumar**.

In order to lower crowd density, it recommended grouping devotees into groups of 300–500 people and assigning time slots.

This came after the **Devaswom's** standing counsel stated that the temple can accommodate between 7,000 and 10,000 pilgrims.

"Physical reservations shouldn't go over the 7,000 daily cap. Reservations may be split between morning and evening sessions. In order to facilitate staggered darshan and lessen crowding within the temple grounds, the devotees may also be divided into groups (A, B, C, D, etc.), each with 300–500 members, according to the Court.

A system for the real-time digital display of darshan progress and queue movement must also be established by the Managing Committee. It was directed that the stress on devotees would be greatly reduced by a redesigned physical queue with real-time intelligence.

The Bench further stated that the temple should consider consulting with the Thantri to improve darshan hours.

These directives were issued after the Court noted that devotees have a right to a tranquil and respectable darshan free from needless suffering and emphasized that the **Guruvayoor Devaswom** Managing Committee has a legal and spiritual obligation to shield devotees from needless suffering.

Even ancient texts like the Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagavatam, according to the Bench, emphasize the obligation to treat devotees with kindness and consideration.

"These texts repeatedly emphasize that if people who worship the Lord had any hardship, trouble, or grief, the Lord would not be pleased. The Court said, "Both the Bhagavad Gita and the Srimad Bhagavatam essentially emphasize the sacred duty to protect the interests and welfare of pilgrims and devotees, ensuring that they are treated at all times with the highest degree of care, respect, and consideration."

The Court was reviewing petitions that were the result of concerns about the predicament of the elderly, women, children, and devotees with disabilities who must wait in long lines for

darshan at the **Guruvayoor** temple, especially on holiday days.

A few petitioners brought up the fact that devotees must wait eight to twelve hours for darshan during the busiest time of year. They also described the challenges encountered during the 2024 Ekadashi celebration and emphasized the inadequate facilities both within and outside the temple.

The unreasonable removal of the virtual wait system that the temple authorities had put in place during the COVID outbreak was also contested in the petitions.

There was a claim that the conventional line was no longer able to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims.

The Guruvayoor Devaswom rejected the reinstatement of online reservations, citing the impossibility of assigning exact darshan time slots due to Adi Shankaracharya's rigorous pooja vidhis.

According to the Committee, it was forced to stop virtual booking since the previous hybrid arrangement caused conflicts between online bookers and devotees who waited in the physical line.

It also argued that any system that committed to set times would find it challenging to handle a huge number of devotees due to the temple's restricted darshan hours, which were approximately 10 to 11 hours per day between ceremonial closures.

However, the Court noted that the temple administrators could not use ritual restrictions as an excuse to keep an antiquated system that burdened devotees.

It emphasized that contemporary technology might coexist peacefully with customs without going against tantric principles.

However, this Court believes that technology can be modified to support traditional tantric practices rather than undermine them. The Court said, "Given the challenges faced by devotees, it is imperative that a new, contemporary, scientifically designed system be introduced to ease their difficulties and ensure a dignified and spiritually fulfilling experience."

As a result, it issued a long list of instructions, beginning with a scientific assessment to

determine the temple's daily carrying capacity and grouping devotees into 300–500 person groups.

Additionally, it emphasized the lack of real-time queue movement data and said that a digital system, such as mobile applications with AI-based forecasts, could address this without interfering with temple rites.

The Court mandated that basic facilities like as drinking water, seats, shade, fans, rest areas, and designated waiting areas for elderly people, nursing mothers, children, and people with disabilities be made available as part of the infrastructure improvements.

In order to address the civic issues brought on by frequent pilgrimages, it also ordered the creation of a permanent multi-departmental committee made up of the Chairman/Member of the Devaswom Managing Committee, the District Collector of Thrissur, the Superintendent of Police, municipal officials, and health and environmental authorities, such as the Secretary of Guruvayoor Municipality, the District Coordinator of Suchitwa Mission, the Environmental Engineer, the Pollution Control Board, and the District Medical Officer.

According to the Court, an action plan needs to be turned in to the Court within two months.

The petitioner, PN Radhakrishnan, was represented by attorney Hrithwik D Namboothiri.

Sumesh CM, the petitioner, was represented by attorney K Mohanakannan.

Lekha Suresh, an advocate, made an appearance.

The Guruvayoor Devaswom managing committee was represented by Standing Counsel Vipin Das.