Travancore Devaswom Board

Why in news?

The Travancore Devaswom Board and temple thantri's Thazhamon family were referred often in the Sabarimala temple controversy.

What are the temple boards in Kerala?

- Kerala has five Devaswom Boards, autonomous bodies under the state government, which manage the temples in the state and their assets, and ensure their smooth operation.
- Three out of five boards are Travancore, Cochin and Malabar Devaswom Boards.
- They manage around 3,000 temples among them.
- The other two are two temples, the Sree Koodalmanikyam Temple in Thrissur, and the Sri Guruvayur Temple, which have their own Devaswom Boards.
- All temples owned by the Travancore royal family passed under state control following the creation of the United States of Travancore and Cochin on 1949.
- The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB), a separate, autonomous body to run the temples in the erstwhile princely state of Travancore was set up.
- With the formation of Kerala state in 1957, the TDB came under the state government.

What are their functions?

- Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB), the erstwhile royal family of Pandalam, and temple thantri's Thazhamon family have stakes in the administration, traditions and rituals at the Sabarimala temple.

1. Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB)

- The Board has a president and two members, who are nominated by the government.
- The TDB runs 1,249 temples, including Sabarimala.
- Sabarimala contibuted Rs 342 crore to the TDB in the last fiscal, Rs 73 crore of which was ploughed back into the shrine.

- The TDB appoints priests, assistants and other staff in its temples; it made history last year by appointing Dalit priests.
- It also runs a few educational institutions.

2. (Erstwhile) Pandalam royal family

- The myth of Ayyappa, the deity of Sabarimala, has its origins in the royal family of Pandalam.
- The Royal family emerged from a branch of the Pandyas of Madurai who settled at Pandalam in southern Kerala.
- In the 18th century, the shrine passed under the control of the Travancore kingdom.
- However, the Pandalam family continued to enjoy rights over rituals and traditions at the temple.
- Even now the royal family has custody over the ornaments worn by Lord Ayyappa.
- During the festival season every year, these ornaments are taken in a procession to Sabarimala from the Pandalam palace.
- After the festival ends, the chief priest closes the shrine and hands over the key to a member of the royal family, who then instructs him to safeguard the shrine until the next pilgrimage season.
- The Devaswom department under the Travancore State honoured the Pandalam family's rights over the temple.
- The family claims the TDB has only administrative rights over the temple.

3. Thazhamon family

- Members of the Brahmin Thazhamon family, based in Chengannur in Alappuzha district, have traditionally been the thantri (supreme priest) of the temple.
- Legend has it that the sage Parasurama gave the Shiva temples of Kerala to the Thazhamon to run.
- Shaiva practices were followed at Sabarimala, even though Ayyappa is believed to have brought Vaishnavas and Shaivas together.
- The post of thantri passes from generation to generation in the Thazhamon family.
- While the thantri is the supreme priest, the mel shanti is the chief priest who supervises the daily puja.
- The chief priest is appointed by the TDB every year.

Source: The Indian Express



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