

**Khirod Kumar Roul & Others.....Petitioner**

**Vs.**

**State of Orissa & Others.....Opp. Parties**

02. 21.10.2020

In view of extraordinary situation arose out of COVID-19 lockdown, the matter is taken up through video conferencing.

By way of this Writ Petition, the petitioners have sought for a direction to the State of Odisha and its instrumentalities to take steps in extending financial assistance to the Sevayats of Maa Sarala Thakurani, At-Jhankada, Po-Kanakpur, in the district of Jagatsinghpur, Odisha because of striving due to COVID-19 pandemic and or to allow public darshan of the Deity “Maa Sarala Thakurani” with due restrictions of social distancing.

The grievance of the petitioners is that the petitioners are the Sevaks belong to different category and the Sevaks/Sevayats are being entrusted with the Seva Puja of the deity MaaSaralaThakurani. The Sevaks of Maa Sarala Thakurani temple have completely devoted their life to the service of the deity “Maa Sarala Thakurani” and they are maintaining their livelihood out of the offerings made to them as personal gifts, donations by the devotees or public while having visit and darshan to the istadevi i.e. “Maa Sarala Thakurani” besides their offering and donations to the Temple Trust Fund.

Learned counsel for the petitioners submitted that the State Government have issued an advisory on religious

institutions regarding restrictions for access of general public to religious place due to COVID-19 pandemic and the same restrictions are being extended from time to time and still in force till date. The darshan of the deity is completely seized thereby making no alternate arrangement for the livelihood and sustenance of the petitioners and other similarly situated sevaks of the Maa Sarala Thakurani Temple. It is further submitted that the sevayats manage their families from the donations given by devotees but as the temple is closed, they have a tough time to maintain their livelihood. The opposite parties have completely failed to provide any financial assistances to the Sevaks towards performing daily seva puja of the deity. The petitioners have putforth their repeated grievance by filing representations to the respondents vide Annexures-2 & 3, but the same are pending consideration till date. As no action/decision has been taken on the said representations of the petitioners, they have filed this Writ Petition.

Considering the facts and submissions of the learned counsel for the parties, this Court is of the opinion that since the respondents have provided financial assistance to the Sevayats of different religious institution by considering their representations, this Court disposes of the Writ Petition with a direction to the petitioners to make a representation to the Opp. Party No.4-Commissioner of Endowments, Odisha within a period of two weeks from today and if such a representation is filed, the opposite party no.4 shall consider and dispose of the said representation of

the petitioners and other similarly situated Sevaks of the Mass Sarala Thakurani Temple, in accordance with law, after affording opportunities of hearing to the parties concerned and provide financial assistance, if possible, at the earliest. However, the above exercise shall be completed by the opposite party no.4 within a period of four weeks from the date of receipt of copy of this order.

As Lock-down period is continuing for COVID-19, learned counsel for the parties may utilize the soft copy of this order available in the High Court's website or print out thereof at par with certified copies in the manner prescribed, vide Court's Notice No.4587 dated 25.03.2020.

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**S. Panda, J.**

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**S. K. Panigrahi, J.**