

Temple Donation Management, How India's Biggest Temples Safeguard Donations

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Temple Donation Management Latest News

- Recent allegations of theft of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya have brought public attention to how India's major shrines handle the vast offerings they receive.
- Temples like Tirupati, Jagannath, Vaishno Devi, Siddhivinayak, and Kashi Vishwanath collect hundreds of crores in cash each year, besides tonnes of gold, silver, and jewellery.

The Common Chain From Hundi to Bank

- Across India's biggest temples, the broad donation journey is remarkably similar. Offerings placed in hundis (donation boxes) are:
 - Removed by authorised personnel
 - Shifted to counting centres
 - Segregated into cash, coins, and valuables

- Counted and recorded
- Deposited into designated bank accounts
- The entire process runs under CCTV surveillance.
- The crucial insight: temples do not differ in the journey of the donation, but in the **institutions governing it** — who supervises each stage, who appoints the handlers, and what legal and administrative safeguards ensure accountability.

How the Major Temples Do It

• Ayodhya (Ram Temple)

- **A trust-led system.** Around 35 hundis are opened by trust officials and an SBI representative, and taken to a counting hall in the Pilgrim Facilitation Centre.
- Staff outsourced by SBI and trust employees count cash and jewellery under a retired banker's supervision, with overall responsibility resting on a trust member.
- Verified collections go into the **trust's SBI account.**

• Tirupati

- Scale backed by institutional depth.
- Its famed **Parakamani** system involves permanent TTD finance staff, nationalised bank representatives, and vetted volunteers (mostly serving/retired government and bank employees), all under an extensive CCTV network monitored by the temple's **vigilance wing.**
- Personnel wear pocketless clothes, are frisked entering and leaving, cash moves in armoured transport, and access is segregated across roles.

• Jagannath (Puri)

- **Procedure written into law.** The emphasis is on codified procedure.
- Hundis are opened under the Temple Administrator or a gazetted officer, with a Managing Committee member as **independent witness.**
- Each hundi is sealed before and after opening, entries go into **statutory forms**, and CCTV monitors handling. It has also expanded digital donation channels.

• Vaishno Devi

- **A corporate-style model.** Donation boxes are opened by committees of accounts officers, area managers, and security personnel rather than individual trustees.
- Finance, security, and operations run through **specialised departments** under the Shrine Board, with dedicated transport (including helicopters) for the mountainous terrain.

• Siddhivinayak (Mumbai)

- **Oversight at the counting table.** The main hundi is opened every Thursday in the presence of an executive officer, a trustee, a bank representative, and an auditor under CCTV — ensuring multiple independent stakeholders witness every stage.

• Kashi Vishwanath

- **Government inside the process.** The **district administration** is part of the chain.
- The 56 donation boxes are opened under a Sub-Divisional Magistrate, counting happens before bank officials and a retired gazetted officer, deposit receipts create an audit trail, and jewellery is valued by government-approved appraisers.

Where the Ram Temple Stands Apart

- This is the analytical heart of the piece. The key difference lies in the governing framework.

Statute vs. trust deed

- Most older major temples are run under dedicated state legislation:
 - Tirupati (TTD) – AP Charitable and Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments Act
 - Jagannath – Shri Jagannath Temple Act
 - Vaishno Devi – J&K Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act
 - Siddhivinayak – Maharashtra trust law
 - Kashi Vishwanath – UP Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act
- These laws create governing bodies, define administrators' powers, prescribe financial procedures, and provide for government oversight and statutory audits.
- The Ram Temple is different: the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra functions through a trust deed, not a dedicated statute.
- Day-to-day management, appointments, and finances rest entirely with the trust.

Composition of management

- In older temples, key financial processes involve executive officers, statutory administrators, government nominees, magistrates, and auditors whose duties are defined by law.
- At the Ram Temple, several key office-bearers involved in donation management have long associations with the RSS or its affiliates, and responsibility is concentrated within the trust structure rather than distributed across a broader statutory framework.

A flagged internal weakness

- This distinction matters because a private internal audit (November 2020), commissioned by the trust itself, described the management structure as “highly unprofessional”.
- It found no systematic financial reporting, and recommended standard operating procedures, a clear hierarchy, stronger maker-checker controls, formal HR processes, jewellery inventory registers, and tighter accounting/IT oversight.

No mandatory public audit

- Unlike many temple boards, the Ram Temple trust is not subject to mandatory financial audits by the state or central government.
- Questions about public audit and oversight have reached the courts, and the trust has not publicly disclosed whether the 2020 audit's recommendations were fully implemented.

Conclusion

- Despite all the procedures, no major temple has escaped controversy. The key lesson: institutional safeguards are rarely built overnight.
- Many systems that now appear routine — layered oversight, codified procedures, independent verification, statutory accountability — were strengthened only after earlier controversies exposed weaknesses.
- Whether the current investigation pushes Ayodhya towards the same kind of institutional reform that older temples adopted after their own crises may prove its most lasting consequence.

Source: IE

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