

**ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT OF TEMPLES AND MUTTS: AN  
ILLUSTRATIVE PRESENTATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

A temple or a mutt (also spelt as “Muth”, ‘Math’, ‘Matha’ etc.) is far more than a mere place of community worship. As a matter of fact, Indian temples and mutts are the most prominent public institutions whose sphere of influence covers not only religious philosophy but also economic and social way of life and activities of people of the region. The difference between a mutt and a temple is purely formal in character and in fact, the two are similar in their nature of functioning. Different varieties of work are involved in the day-to-day administration and management of a temple or mutt as an institution. In order to ensure efficiency, it becomes necessary to have adequate supervision of and control on employees engaged on different tasks in different departments. The temples and mutts in Udupi region in Karnataka State (India) work as institutions with social concern. They are the centers of Vedic and Secular learning apart from being the institutions for the relief of the poor. They encourage education, art and culture. They serve as the agents of social redistribution of wealth.

**KEYWORDS:** Indian Temples and Mutts, Prominent Public Institutions, Day-to-Day Administration and Management, Agents of Social Redistribution of Wealth

**INTRODUCTION**

A temple or a mutt as a religious institution is far more than a mere place of community worship in India. It could be conceived as a centre of all cultural and social activities of the people. It is noticed that the word “Mutt” is also spelt as “Muth”, “Math”, “Matha”, etc. However, in view of the Sanskrit pronunciation for the word, the spelling “Mutt” is preferred in this article. The real influence of such an institution extends beyond the purely religious and spiritual life of the people and makes the Indian temples and mutts the most prominent public institutions. They have been very powerful institutions whose sphere of influence covers not only religious philosophy but also economic and social way of life and activities of the people of the region.

The daily rituals in the temples provide employment to a large number of people. The personnel required for the temples include the priests, learned men, teachers, cooks, musicians, drummers, pipers, clerks, accountants and the functionaries of various kinds. A temple is a place for the people to get relief from their stresses in life. The daily activities in the temple guard them against the present shocks and stresses and those that are likely to arise in future.

The festivities in the temples provide an occasion of great social rejoicing and people of the region participate in the general merriments. Merchants naturally get an opportunity to sell the goods brought by them from distant places.

A temple, as an institution, requires a variety of goods and services for its day-to-day activities and also for the special festive occasions. In fact a temple is one of the biggest consumers in its locality. Apart from food articles, it requires other materials like cloth, jewels, gold, silver, vessels, metal lamps, bells, flowers, sandal, oil for the lamps, crackers and the like. The temple thus contributes to local trade and industry.

Schools for Vedic studies and also for other branches of learning are patronized by the temples. Intellectual debates and discourses are held very often in temple premises among scholars and thereby even the common people are enlightened. Institutions of formal and even professional education are established and managed by some of the temples. They are, thus, centers of Vedic studies and also of modern learning.

Temples often provide a venue for public entertainment. Keerthanas, competitions of different varieties, dramas, music and dance recitals are arranged in the temples on all festive occasions. The rich as well as the poor, irrespective of their caste and creed, get the benefit of these programmes of entertainment.

Temples take many measures to provide relief to the poor. The food offered to the deity in the temples is usually distributed as prasadam to the people without any class distinction. Some temples provide free food every day to the pilgrims and the poor and deserving local persons and students.

Temples, thus, play a remarkably leading role in the socio-economic life of the people of a region. "Temples help man to deepen himself. They help him to channalise his emotional energy into devotion, bringing him in tune with the higher spiritual faculties. But devotion should be harmoniously blended with knowledge. Otherwise man becomes a fanatic, a curse to himself and society. That is why temples of India functioned not only as centers of devotion, but also as channels promoting various branches of knowledge such as traditional

sciences, literature, philosophy, logic, medicine and even the art of self-defence. Temples point out to man an integral approach to knowledge in his all-round development-physical, intellectual and spiritual.”<sup>1</sup>

**The main parts of the temple are the following:**

1. Sanctum Sanctorum (Garbhagraha) where the image of God is placed.
2. The cover (Vimana) over the Sanctum.
3. Mantapa in front of the Sanctum.
4. Walls around the Sanctum.
5. The main gateway (gopura) of the temple.

An Indian temple is only a reflection of the physical form of man. According to Kathopanishad, “This body of ours is a temple of the Divine.” The parts of a temple are identical with the parts of human body. As per the illustration, the Vimana is the head, the Sanctum is the neck, the front Mantapa is the stomach, the walls around the Sanctum are the legs, the Gopura is the feet and the Lord in the Sanctum is the soul of the body.

According to clause 17 of Section 6 of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act (Madras XIX) 1951, ‘a temple’ means a place, by whatever designation known, used for public religious worship, and dedicated to, or for the benefit of or used as a right by the Hindu Community or any section thereof or as a place of public religious worship<sup>2</sup>.

According to clause 10 of Section 6 of the Act, ‘a math’ means a Hindu religious institution with properties attached thereto and presided over by a person whose duty is to engage himself in imparting religious instruction or rendering spiritual service to a body of disciples or who exercises or claims to exercise spiritual headship over such a body; and includes places of religious worship or instruction which are appurtenant to the institution.

According to clause 16 of Section 6 of the Act, specific endowment means any property or money endowed for the performance of specific service or charity in a math or temple, or for the performance of any other religious charity, but does not include an archaka, service-holder or other employees of religious institution.....

According to clause 15 of Section 6 of the Act ‘religious institution’ means a math, temple or specific endowment.

In a temple, ‘agama system’ of pooja ritual is followed, whereas in a mutt the ‘tantra system’ is followed.

The very vastu system for a mutt is different from that for a temple. In a mutt the idol of God is faced to the West, whereas in a temple, it is faced to the East.

In a mutt no 'Bali stones' (Bali Peethas) are found whereas they are found in a temple around the sanctum sanctorum (i.e., by the side of the outer walls of the sanctum sanctorum).

In the case of a mutt, the Government control and interference are at the minimum as compared to those in the case of a temple.

The Pontiff of a mutt, claiming spiritual headship, is the supreme authority holding legal ownership of all fixed assets (including the landed property) and the current assets of the institution. But in the case of a temple, normally the Trust (with some local leaders as Trustees) owns the supreme power of administration of the institution.

**The technical differences between a mutt and a temple<sup>3</sup> are the following:**

1. Usually the Sanyasins conduct worship in a mutt while a priest does so in a temple.
2. A dhvajastamba (flag post) and balipeethas exist in a temple but they are not found in a mutt.
3. The panchavadyas (musical instruments) used in a mutt are different from those used in a temple.
4. In a mutt pooja (worship) is conducted as per the tantrasara rites while in a temple it is conducted as per the ancient agamic procedures and rites.
5. A mutt has academic and ecclesiastical functions to perform besides spiritual ones. It also houses an apostolic seat with a resident reigning pontiff. A temple is merely a shrine of public worship which also periodically acts as a spiritual civic center. It is usually run by a set of hereditary priests.

However, the difference between a mutt and a temple are purely formal in character and as a matter of fact, the two are similar in their nature of functioning. Both a mutt and a temple are religious institutions meant for public religious worship and for the benefit of the public at large.

“Administration is the force which lays down the objects for which an organization and its management are to strive and the broad policies under which they are to operate. Management is a force which leads, guides and directs an organization in the accomplishment of a predetermined object. Organisation is the combination of the necessary human beings, materials, tools, equipment, working space and appurtenances brought together in a systematic and effective correlation to accomplish some desired object.”<sup>4</sup>

Administration is a determinative function. The main task of administration is to determine the specific goals of an institution and to frame the general policies essential to achieve the set goals.

Management is an executive function. The concern of management is the effective implementation of policies framed by the administration for the successful functioning of an institution.

“The managerial function, in carrying out the policies of administration expands as the lower levels of supervision are reached, while the administrative function decreases in importance.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus ‘administration’ is a top-level function which relates to formation of policies (i.e., ‘thinking’ function) while ‘management’ is a lower-level function which relates to the implementation of policies. (i.e., ‘doing’ function).

As a matter of fact one cannot draw a clear line of demarcation between the functions of thinking and doing. There are executives who perform both the functions of administration and management.

However, an executive of higher level in the hierarchy spends more time on administrative activities, than on managerial activities, and an executive of the lower level in the hierarchy spends less time on administrative activities and more time on managerial activities.

Different varieties of work are involved in the day-to-day administration and management of temple as an institution. This diversity in the nature of different activities of a temple makes it necessary to specify the areas within which the employees of the temple have to perform their duties. This indeed, naturally results in the departmentation of the work involved in a temple.

“Departmentation is a part of the organisation process. In the context of management, departmentation means dividing and grouping of activities and employees of an enterprise into various departments. Departmentation implies the division of the total work into individual functions and sub-functions.”<sup>6</sup>

Departmentation, thus, implies dividing of operating functions and re-grouping them into different convenient divisions called departments.

“Departmentation may be on the basis of (1) Departmentation by functions, (2) Departmentation by territory (3) Departmentation by products and (4) Departmentation by customers.”<sup>7</sup>

In a temple Departmentation is normally on the basis of functions. Different functions in a temple are grouped into various departments on the basis of functions expected to be performed by the employees.

It is not possible for the official heads of the temples to attend to all the details of multifaceted activities carried out every day in the temples. The collection of income through seva receipts, sale of coconuts, sale of cassettes and photos, sale of prasada etc., meeting the expenditure on various items, maintaining accounts, looking after the religious activities and cultural programmes, arranging of the free meals to thousands of persons twice a day, taking care of cows, elephants etc., maintaining the choultries, safe keeping of the valuables, procuring and storing food grains and other items and the like are the varied functions normally performed in many temples and mutts every day. In order to ensure the efficient performance of all these functions, the full time paid employees are necessary. At the same time, in order to ensure efficiency in administration and management, it is necessary to have adequate supervision of and control on employees engaged on different tasks.

The official head of temple normally gets the managerial work done through the 'manager', who is normally called by the designation 'Divan' by the inner circle of the temple. The main task of the manager is to execute the decisions taken by the top-level management of the temple.

The Divan (i.e., the manager) has to look after the day to day affairs of the temple. He has to ensure that the regular accounts of all the receipts and disbursements are maintained and that all such transactions are adequately supported by source documents – in case of income, cash memos/receipts, and in the case of disbursements, the vouchers. All the officials and other employees of the temple will have to work under the immediate control and supervision of the Divan.

“Control implies authority – authority to detect deviations and authority to take necessary corrective actions. It would be impossible for a manager to exercise control in the absence of proper authority.”<sup>8</sup>

The next important post of office in a temple is of the 'Parupattagara', the chief superintendent of the religious affairs of the temple. He is the immediate executive boss of all the non-administrative religious staff like the pooja assistants, cooks etc. The administrative staffs come directly under the Divan. The Parupattagara is second in power and status to the Divan and takes care of mainly the religious wing of the temple activities, supervising the staff engaged in such activities.

When the temple concerned is comparatively big in its operation, there will be a Deputy Divan who will assist the Divan in discharging his multi-administrative duties. Apart from the Divan, Parupattagara and the Deputy Divan, there will normally be some supervisory officials in – charge of different activities of the temple, and ‘Paneetha’ is one of such supervisory officials.

The Paneetha is the official in-charge of stores section of the temple. A temple normally requires a variety of goods, apart from food grains, for its day to day activities and also for special festive occasions. Groceries of almost every kind, rice, lentils, vegetables etc are stored in the storerooms and warehouses of the temple. This area in the temple is known as ‘Ugrana’ (i.e., storehouse). The Paneetha is the supervisory official of the temple, who is in-charge of stores section of these items. In case of very big temples, however, the Paneetha will be in-charge of the stores section of food grains only, and the stores section of other items will be in-charge of a separate official called by the designation ‘Kottary’. In case of some temples, the Paneetha is not only the official in-charge of stores section but he also supervises the process of preparing and packing of the ‘Prasada’. Kottary is normally in-charge of the activities in connection with mass feeding arrangement in the temples.

The temples in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts of Karnataka State (India) are well known for their legendary mass feeding in the form of food prasadam. In some important temples thousands of people, comprising of pilgrims, students, widows/orphans etc., are given free food twice daily. The two daily meals are provided to all of them, absolutely free, irrespective of their caste and creed. In recent years, the scope of this traditional mass feeding in temples has widened qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

The temples and mutts in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi region in Karnataka state (India) have come out in a big way to help the people of different sections of the society in recent years. They work as the institutions with genuine social concern for the overall development of the region. In the socio-economic field, the temples and mutts are potential employers for a host of employees, big consumers of goods and services, centers of Vedic and Secular learning, apart from being the institutions for the relief of the poor. They encourage education, art and culture. They serve as the agents of social redistribution of wealth. The temples and mutts thus, play a very important role in socio economic life of the people of the region.

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