

SC Ruling on Puri Jagannath Temple

Why in news?

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The Supreme Court recently gave directions on the administration of the Puri Jagannath Temple.

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What is the case about?

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- A petition was filed on harassment and exploitation faced by visitors in the temple.

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- This was said to be due to the commercialisation of rituals.

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- Concerns were also raised on issues of hygiene, encroachments and management of the temple.

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What are the court's directions?

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- The SC gave some specific directions to the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA).

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- SJTA is to ensure that no direct collection of the offerings is made by any Sevaks.

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- All the offerings should be through either hundi or deposited and accounted for and properly utilized.

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- They should not be individual pockets by the Sevaks/attendants.

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- As, these would be given their due remuneration as per rules.

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- To ensure this, the SJTA has to review the arrangement of CCTV cameras and install more.
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- An independent panel must view the footage at suitable intervals and submit a report to the District Judge.
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- The court has directed the Puri District Judge to file a report on exploitative practices.
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What are the concerns?

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- The Servitors of the Temple are largely dependent on the temple for their livelihood.
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- Given this, the SC's directive may force them into penury/poverty.
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- The order does not distinguish between dakshina and daan.
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- The former is a fee paid voluntarily by devotees to servitors for performing their desired rituals.
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- On the other hand, daan is the donation to the temple.
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- Many devotees are under the impression that the SC has banned dakshina.
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What is SJTA's stance?

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- There is said to be coercive collection of large amounts in the form of dakshina.
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- The Shri Jagannath Temple Act, 1954, provides for the welfare of servitors.
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- Under this, the Shri Jagannath Temple Foundation Fund receives all donations exceeding Rs 500.
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- The collections are invested in long-term fixed deposits in banks and the interest returns to the Fund.
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- A portion of it is used to run a sebayat (servitors') hospital, give scholarships to their children, and for old age and widow pensions.
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- Given this support system, servitors should not expect any part of the temple's offerings.
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Source: Indian Express

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Quick Fact

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Puri Jagannath Temple

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- The Shree Jagannath Temple is located in Puri, Odisha.
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- It is an important Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Jagannath, a form of lord Vishnu.
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- It is well known for its annual Ratha Jatra, or chariot festival.
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- The temple is one of the four great 'Char Dham' pilgrimage sites.
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- Char Dhams are the pilgrimage sites found at India's four cardinal points.
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- The other three are Badrinath (Uttarakhand), Dwarka (Gujarat), and Rameswaram (Tamil Nadu).
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