

Female Devotees' Perceptions of Temple Management and Festival Organization: Insights from ISKCON for Religious Institutions

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Abstract—This study explores female devotees' perceptions of temple management and festival organization at ISKCON NVCC, Pune, with the broader aim of generating actionable insights for religious institutions. While existing literature emphasizes theological, cultural, and spiritual aspects of temple traditions, relatively limited attention has been given to management practices, infrastructural facilities, and the gendered experience of devotees. Drawing on primary data from 100 female respondents across diverse age groups, the study evaluates multiple service dimensions, including cleanliness, hospitality, spiritual ambience, security, prasadam distribution, communication, and festival organization. Quantitative findings highlight strong satisfaction with core spiritual activities such as daily rituals, kirtans, and Bhagavad Gita classes, while qualitative reflections emphasize the importance of safety, comfort, and inclusivity in shaping women's devotional engagement. Festival management, particularly decoration, spiritual ambience, and security, were highly appreciated, though areas such as parking, crowd control, and visitor amenities emerged as critical challenges. The study concludes by offering practical recommendations for religious organizations: strengthening parking and transport systems, enhancing safety and hygiene infrastructure, improving communication through digital tools, adopting structured queue systems, and investing in volunteer training with gender sensitivity. These findings affirm that blending spiritual depth with efficient management significantly enhances female devotees' satisfaction and can serve as a model for temples and spiritual centers globally.

Index Terms—Crowd management, Devotee perceptions, Female devotees, Festival organization, Gender-sensitive infrastructure, ISKCON, Religious institutions, Spiritual experience, Temple management, Volunteer hospitality

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious institutions in India have historically functioned not only as centers of worship but also as hubs of community life, cultural preservation, and social organization. With the growing number of devotees, festivals, and large-scale spiritual gatherings, the efficient management of temples has become an area of increasing importance. In recent years, the expectations of devotees have expanded beyond ritual performance to include cleanliness, safety, accessibility, hospitality, and the overall quality of the spiritual environment. This has placed temple management at the intersection of tradition and modern organizational practices.

Among contemporary religious movements, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has established itself as a global spiritual organization recognized for its structured administration, disciplined volunteer engagement, and ability to integrate devotional ethos with modern management practices. Its temples, particularly in urban centers like Pune, draw diverse groups of visitors who seek both spiritual nourishment and a welcoming environment.

While studies on temple management and pilgrim satisfaction exist, most remain gender-neutral, often overlooking the distinct experiences and expectations of female devotees. Women constitute a significant proportion of temple visitors and play vital roles in sustaining spiritual communities, yet their perspectives are underrepresented in academic research. Understanding their experiences provides not only insights into service quality but also guidance

for shaping inclusive, safe, and spiritually enriching environments.

This study, therefore, examines the perceptions of female devotees at ISKCON NVCC, Pune, with special attention to temple services and festival organization. By focusing on this dimension, the research aims to bridge a gap in literature and generate actionable insights that can guide other religious organizations in enhancing management practices and enriching the spiritual experiences of women devotees.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature provides a foundation for understanding temple management, spiritual engagement, and devotee satisfaction in modern religious organizations like ISKCON. While spiritual movements have long been studied for their theological and cultural impact, limited research focuses on their management systems, volunteer coordination, and event organization. This section highlights key studies relevant to the current research.

- a. Temple and Religious Institution Management: [1] Sethi presents a foundational exploration of how Indian spiritual traditions inform organizational leadership and management values. His work emphasizes the relevance of integrating dharmic principles into modern administrative systems, particularly within religious contexts. [2] Chatterjee offers a focused study on ISKCON's global organizational structure, detailing how its spiritual ethos is reflected in administrative uniformity, volunteer discipline, and event coordination. His analysis affirms that ISKCON's model stands out for its centralization and global consistency. [3] Chopra explores leadership roles within Indian religious institutions, noting that charismatic and hierarchical leadership often drive effectiveness in spiritual governance. This perspective is particularly useful in understanding the role of temple authorities in ISKCON settings. [4] Raj provide a comparative analysis of religious site management across countries, with emphasis on festival coordination, visitor flow, and sacred space maintenance. Their findings resonate with ISKCON's structured approach and offer a global benchmark for evaluating temple efficiency. [5]

Bharadwaj explores India's sacred geography and its implications for temple planning and resource allocation. His insights contribute to understanding how ISKCON's temple layout and operations reflect both tradition and functionality.

- b. Devotee Perception and Experience: [6] Patel investigates devotee satisfaction at the Sai Baba temple in Shirdi, analyzing elements such as spiritual ambience, cleanliness, hospitality, and crowd control. The study offers valuable comparative insights for evaluating ISKCON's temple environment. [7] Singh study pilgrim satisfaction at Varanasi temples and emphasize the importance of emotional-spiritual fulfillment alongside logistical convenience, supporting a holistic view of devotee perception. [8] Tiwari examine spiritual consumer behavior at popular religious destinations in India. They highlight the growing expectations of devotees regarding cleanliness, hospitality, and emotional fulfillment — all of which align with ISKCON's core service dimensions. [9] Kumar investigates pilgrims' perceptions at the Kumbh Mela, identifying spiritual ambience and crowd control as key drivers of satisfaction. These dimensions are central to this study's evaluation of ISKCON devotees' experiences.
- c. Event and Festival Management in Temples: [10] Hanna delve into the complexities of organizing large-scale religious festivals, highlighting the managerial challenges of handling crowds, volunteer coordination, and logistics. Their work underlines the importance of pre-planning, contingency systems, and structured leadership—core features also seen in ISKCON's festival management. [11] Natarajan focuses on traditional temple festivals in Tamil Nadu, drawing attention to how cultural symbolism and rituals are preserved through well-managed community participation. [12] Das presents a case study on Puri's Rath Yatra, highlighting pre-event planning, real-time coordination, and post-event crowd exit systems. The structured logistics he describes are comparable to ISKCON's festival protocols. [13] Sharma focuses on Maha Shivratri organization in North India, detailing how rituals, roles, and responsibilities are streamlined through community coordination — an approach mirrored in ISKCON's festival execution.

- d. Volunteer Engagement and Organizational Discipline: [14] Krishna study volunteer management practices at ISKCON Mumbai. They report that volunteer satisfaction, discipline, and retention are strongly influenced by spiritual training and a clear allocation of duties. [15] Iyer examines how devotion-led service among temple volunteers leads to intrinsic motivation, improving both efficiency and commitment.
- e. Technology and Modernization in Religious Institutions: [16] Dubey analyze how Indian temples, including ISKCON branches, have integrated digital platforms such as mobile apps, live-streams, and social media for outreach and engagement, especially during the pandemic. [17] Rathore argues that digital interventions in temple management are not just logistical improvements but also reshape the devotee experience, expanding access to spiritual services. [18] Ghosh analyzes how temples in India are adopting smart technologies for darshan booking, e-donations, and online satsangs. His observations are significant in contextualizing ISKCON's use of digital tools for outreach and engagement. [19] Narayan focuses on virtual spirituality during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing how temples maintained devotional connection through livestreaming and digital kirtans — methods ISKCON embraced actively.
- b. Primary Data Collection: Primary data was collected from 100 female devotees who are regular visitors at the ISKCON NVCC Temple in Pune during the period from 20th June to 10th July 2025. The sample ensured diverse representation across age groups within the female devotee community. Data was gathered using a structured Google Form, made accessible through QR codes displayed at strategic temple locations and also administered by trained student researchers using tablets. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items assessing cleanliness, hospitality, spiritual ambience, crowd management, and communication, along with ranking questions and a few open-ended prompts to capture personal suggestions and experiences. Prior to the full launch, the form was pilot-tested with 10 respondents to refine question clarity and format. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, with digital consent obtained at the beginning of the form to ensure ethical compliance.
- c. Data Analysis: The responses collected were analyzed through both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the quantitative analysis, data from Likert-scale and ranking questions was processed using percentage distribution to identify common perceptions and satisfaction levels related to temple management and festival organization. In the qualitative analysis, open-ended responses were thematically coded to highlight recurring patterns and ideas related to spiritual experience, volunteer management, communication practices, and areas for improvement. These themes were then integrated with the quantitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the female devotees' perspectives and to offer practical insights that could be adapted by other religious organizations seeking to improve their temple management systems.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- a. Research Objectives: The primary research objectives of this research study were:
 - i. To understand female devotees' perceptions of the overall management at ISKCON temples.
 - ii. To assess the efficiency and satisfaction related to the organization of festivals and daily spiritual and other activities from the perspective of female devotees.
 - iii. To identify areas for improvement or innovation based on the experiences shared by female devotees.
 - iv. To provide actionable insights that can guide other religious organizations in effectively managing their temples and spiritual centers, especially in enhancing the experience of female devotees.

IV. FINDINGS, INSIGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS: DATA-DRIVEN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The present study is based on responses collected from 100 female devotees at the ISKCON NVCC Temple, Pune. A diverse age distribution was observed among the respondents, with the majority (52%) belonging to

the 18–30 age group, followed by 31–45 (39%), 46–60 (7%), and those above 60 years (2%). This gender-specific and age-diverse dataset provided valuable insights into female devotees' experiences, satisfaction levels, and expectations regarding temple management and festival organization. The findings presented below integrate both quantitative trends and qualitative reflections to highlight key patterns in perception and engagement.

A. Findings and Insights:

- a. Satisfaction Ratings Across Temple Service Dimensions: To gain insights into the satisfaction levels of female devotees regarding various

aspects of temple functioning, feedback was collected on 14 key areas at ISKCON NVCC Temple, Pune. These areas spanned spiritual, operational, and infrastructural dimensions—including daily rituals, cleanliness, prasadam distribution, communication, security, and parking facilities. Each service area was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "Very Poor" and 5 indicated "Excellent." The responses, summarized in Table 1, highlight both the strengths and areas for improvement in temple management, offering a valuable perspective for enhancing the overall devotee experience.

Table 1: Devotee Satisfaction Across Temple Services ($n = 100$)

Temple Service Aspect	Very Poor (1)	Poor (2)	Average (3)	Good (4)	Excellent (5)	Grand Total
Cleanliness & hygiene	2	0	15	26	57	100
Hospitality of volunteers/staff	2	2	15	29	52	100
Spiritual ambience	2	0	11	11	76	100
Prasadam quality & distribution	0	0	20	13	67	100
Daily rituals (arati, kirtan, etc.)	2	0	11	9	78	100
Crowd movement & directions	0	0	15	39	46	100
Book stall & gift shop	0	0	13	22	65	100
Food Services (Govinda's restaurant & Snacks)	0	4	22	30	44	100
Live Telecast Services (Darshan, Kirtan, etc.)	2	0	11	17	70	100
Communication & Updates (in-person + digital)	2	0	13	35	50	100
Visitor Amenities (seating, water, washroom etc.)	0	0	19	33	48	100
Security arrangements	2	0	15	26	57	100
Parking arrangements	4	9	22	28	37	100
Overall temple management	2	0	13	33	52	100

Table 1 presents the responses to the question: *"How satisfied are you with the following aspects of ISKCON NVCC temple?"*. Key findings indicate that ISKCON NVCC Temple performs exceptionally well in areas central to the spiritual experience of devotees. The highest-rated dimension was daily rituals (arati, kirtan, etc.), with 78% of respondents rating it as excellent, closely followed by spiritual ambience at 76%, and live telecast services at 70%, reflecting a strong appreciation for both in-person and virtual devotional offerings. Prasadam quality & distribution also stood out, with 67% rating it as excellent, while the bookstall

and gift shop (65%) and cleanliness and hygiene (57%) further contributed to positive impressions of the temple environment. The hospitality of volunteers (52%) and overall temple management (52%) were also highly rated, indicating that both people-based service and administrative efficiency are well maintained. Meanwhile, security arrangements (57%) and communication & updates (50%) show reliable performance in ensuring order and information flow, though with room for enhancement. **Key insights** drawn from the data reveal that while spiritual and ritual aspects are clearly the temple's core strengths,

several logistical and support areas require targeted improvement. Notably, parking arrangements emerged as the lowest-rated service, with only 37% marking it as excellent and a combined 13% rating it as poor or very poor, indicating a significant pain point for devotees. Food services (Govinda's restaurant & Snacks) received only 44% excellent ratings despite being a high-engagement area, suggesting unmet expectations related to quality, hygiene, or service speed. Visitor amenities like seating, water, and washrooms scored moderately (48% excellent), revealing a need for better infrastructure to support comfort, especially for women with families or elderly dependents. Although communication systems (50% excellent) and crowd movement (46%) were reasonably rated, the gap between "good" and "excellent" responses suggests an opportunity to

streamline temple navigation and make updates more real-time and user-friendly. Collectively, these insights highlight that while the temple excels in spiritual delivery, an upgrade in peripheral but essential services could significantly elevate the overall devotee experience.

b. Most Appealing Aspects of the Temple Experience: To better understand which features of temple life most strongly attract and engage female devotees, participants were asked to select their top three preferences from a predefined list of temple offerings and experiences. The responses reflect personal choices rooted in both spiritual engagement and service appreciation. All female devotees responded, and the aggregated counts of their selections are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Most Appealing Aspects of ISKCON NVCC Temple ($n = 100$)

Particular	Count
Daily Spiritual Activities (Arati, Kirtan, Bhagavad Gita class)	80
Festival Celebrations	65
Prasadam	59
Govinda's Restaurant & Snack Center	2
Book Stall and Gift Shop	2
Temple Architecture and Ambience	17
Spiritual Counselling/Interaction	33
Cleanliness, Hygiene, Drinking Water, Washroom Facilities etc.	15
Volunteer Behavior and Hospitality	4
Live Telecast & Digital Access (Darshan/Kirtans/Classes)	9
Social Media Outreach	7
Parking Facility	0
Security Arrangements	2

Table 2 presents the responses to the question: "*Which three aspects do you personally find most appealing at ISKCON NVCC?*" Key findings from the data show a clear alignment between devotees' spiritual expectations and their most valued experiences at ISKCON NVCC. The most appealing aspect, selected by 80% of respondents, was Daily Spiritual Activities such as arati, kirtan, and Bhagavad Gita classes. This was followed by Festival Celebrations (65%), highlighting the community's enthusiasm for collective worship and cultural expression. Prasadam emerged as the third most popular feature, with 59% citing it as a core attraction, reflecting the deep devotional value associated with sanctified food

offerings. Spiritual counselling or interaction also held notable appeal (33%), suggesting that personalized engagement with spiritual mentors and guides contributes meaningfully to the overall experience. Secondary preferences such as temple architecture and ambience (17%) and cleanliness and hygiene facilities (15%) demonstrate that while these aspects are appreciated, they do not define the core appeal for most devotees. Key insights reveal that ISKCON NVCC's greatest strength lies in its ability to offer a spiritually immersive experience rooted in daily practice and collective celebrations. The strong appeal of devotional routines and prasadam distribution confirms that consistent spiritual nourishment—both

intellectual and physical—is central to the temple’s attractiveness. The relatively lower appeal of digital engagement (9%), volunteer behavior (4%), and physical infrastructure like parking and security (each receiving 2 or fewer selections) suggests that these dimensions, while functionally important, do not serve as primary emotional or spiritual draws for devotees. Interestingly, features like social media outreach (7%) and live telecast access (9%) reflect moderate interest, signaling potential for growth if these platforms are better tailored to complement the in-person devotional experience. Overall, the findings affirm that ISKCON NVCC’s appeal is grounded in active, shared devotional practices that foster community, continuity, and spiritual depth.

c. Feedback on Festival Management Services at ISKCON NVCC: To understand female devotees’

satisfaction with ISKCON NVCC Pune’s festival management, feedback was gathered on ten key dimensions of festival organization. These included aspects such as planning, cleanliness, digital access, volunteer support, and security, covering major events like Janmashtami, Gaura Purnima, Radhashtami, and Rathayatra, among others. Each dimension was rated using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "Very Poor" and 5 represented "Excellent." The responses, summarized in Table 3, offer meaningful insights into the effectiveness of festival arrangements and highlight areas where improvements can enhance the overall devotional experience.

Table 3: Satisfaction of Female Devotees with Festival Management at ISKCON NVCC ($n = 100$)

Festival Service Aspect	Very Poor (1)	Poor (2)	Average (3)	Good (4)	Excellent (5)	Grand Total
Festival planning & scheduling	2	0	7	27	64	100
Decorations and spiritual ambience	2	0	2	18	78	100
Crowd control and movement	2	0	13	34	51	100
Announcements and communication	2	0	2	38	58	100
Live Telecast & Digital Access (Darshan/Kirtans/etc.)	2	0	4	29	65	100
Quality and availability of prasadam	2	2	11	16	69	100
Volunteer support during events	2	0	9	25	64	100
Parking and traffic control	4	2	18	27	49	100
Cleanliness during and after festivals	2	2	4	25	67	100
Safety and security during events	2	0	5	22	71	100

Table 3 presents the responses to the question: “Rate the following aspects of ISKCON’s festival management.”. Key findings indicate that ISKCON NVCC Temple performs exceptionally well in areas central to the festival experience of female devotees. The highest-rated dimension was decorations and spiritual ambience, with 78% of respondents rating it as excellent, followed closely by safety and security during events at 71%, underscoring the temple’s commitment to creating a spiritually vibrant and secure environment for women and their families. Quality and availability of prasadam was another standout aspect, with 69% excellent ratings, highlighting the temple’s emphasis on devotional

hospitality. Cleanliness during and after festivals (67%) and live telecast & digital access (65%) also received strong approval, reflecting the effective use of technology and hygiene management to enhance the overall experience. Other positively rated areas included volunteer support during events and festival planning & scheduling, each with 64% excellent responses, indicating high levels of organizational and human resource efficiency. Key insights drawn from the data suggest that while ISKCON NVCC’s spiritual and devotional offerings are widely appreciated, certain logistical and operational services require focused attention. The most notable concern was parking and traffic control, with only 49% rating it

excellent and a combined 6% marking it poor or very poor - making it the lowest-rated service in the survey and a significant challenge for women managing transport during festivals. Crowd control and movement also showed a relatively lower satisfaction level, with only 51% rating it as excellent and the highest percentage (13%) choosing “average,” pointing to the need for improved navigational planning and space management. Though announcements and communication were rated excellent by 58% of respondents, the data indicates room for enhancement through more timely, multi-lingual, and women-sensitive information dissemination. Collectively, these insights suggest that while the temple’s core strengths lie in spiritual ambiance, security, hospitality, and digital accessibility, improvements in transport logistics, crowd navigation, and communication strategies could significantly elevate the festival experience for female devotees and their families.

B. Suggestions:

a. Temple and Festival Management: Strategic Suggestions from Female Devotee Perceptions at ISKCON NVCC:

- Strengthen Parking and Traffic Management Systems: Devotee feedback highlights the urgent need for improved parking infrastructure. Suggestions include designated parking zones, real-time space monitoring, and traffic volunteers during high-footfall events.
- Upgrade Basic Infrastructure and Hygiene Facilities: While spiritual offerings were highly appreciated, amenities such as washrooms, drinking water stations, and seating areas require regular upkeep and expansion to ensure comfort.
- Introduce Structured Queue and Prasadam Distribution Systems: Replacing manual or coupon-based systems with digital tokens or queue management displays can enhance fairness and reduce crowding during prasadam.
- Improve Festival Crowd Navigation and Zoning: Implement better space allocation, clear signage, and designated entry/exit points to ease crowd movement, particularly during large-scale celebrations like Janmashtami or Rathayatra.
- Enhance Multi-Channel Communication Systems: Develop an integrated communication plan that combines display boards, public announcements, mobile notifications, and social

media updates to keep visitors informed in real time.

- b. Actionable Insights for Religious Organizations: The study of female devotees’ perceptions at ISKCON NVCC, Pune highlights several strengths in spiritual delivery while also revealing important areas of improvement in logistics, communication, and infrastructure. These findings offer valuable guidance for other religious organizations seeking to enhance temple management and the overall experience of female devotees.

- Prioritize Spiritual Immersion with Consistency:
 - Daily spiritual activities such as arati, kirtan, and scriptural discourses are the most valued aspects of temple life.
 - Religious organizations should ensure that these practices are well-structured, punctual, and inclusive, as they form the emotional and devotional anchor for female devotees.
- Strengthen Safety and Security Measures:
 - Female devotees place high importance on a safe environment, especially during festivals.
 - Appoint trained female security personnel, install surveillance systems, and ensure well-lit pathways and parking zones to provide both real and perceived safety.
- Improve Infrastructure and Amenities with Gender Sensitivity:
 - Basic facilities like clean washrooms, drinking water stations, and comfortable seating areas are essential for women, particularly for those accompanied by children or elders.
 - Investing in gender-sensitive amenities (mother-child rooms, sanitary facilities) reflects care for women’s needs and increases satisfaction.
- Enhance Festival and Crowd Management:
 - Large gatherings often pose challenges in navigation and comfort.
 - Structured queue systems, clear signage, digital tokens for prasadam distribution, and designated entry/exit pathways can reduce stress and create a more devotional atmosphere.
- Focus on Parking and Transport Solutions:
 - Parking emerged as one of the weakest areas in the study.
 - Religious centers should collaborate with local authorities to develop satellite parking with

shuttle services, assign traffic volunteers, and adopt digital space-tracking systems.

- Adopt Multi-Channel, Inclusive Communication:
 - Timely, clear, and multilingual communication enhances participation and satisfaction.
 - Religious organizations should use integrated tools: digital display boards, mobile notifications, public announcements, and social media for real-time updates during festivals and daily services.
- Leverage Technology for Accessibility:
 - Live telecasts, mobile apps for darshan booking, and digital donation/queue systems provide convenience and inclusivity for women who may face mobility, family, or time constraints.
 - Technology also helps devotees maintain spiritual connection when unable to attend physically.
- Nurture Volunteer Hospitality and Sensitivity:
 - Female devotees value respectful, empathetic interactions with volunteers.
 - Regular training for volunteers in hospitality, gender sensitivity, and cultural inclusiveness can strengthen the sense of belonging.
- Enrich Festivals with Spiritual Depth and Comfort:
 - While decorations and ambience are appreciated, the festival experience is enriched when combined with cleanliness, sufficient amenities, and structured crowd flow.
 - This balance between devotion and comfort is especially important for women who often manage family participation.
- Institutionalize Feedback and Continuous Improvement:
 - Establish anonymous feedback systems (digital or in-person) to capture women's perspectives regularly.
 - Continuous evaluation helps in tailoring improvements to devotee needs and enhances organizational credibility.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present study highlights that female devotees perceive temple management not merely as an administrative function but as an essential component of their spiritual experience. ISKCON NVCC, Pune, has demonstrated strong performance in areas such as daily rituals, spiritual ambience, prasadam

distribution, and festival decorations, which were consistently rated highly by respondents. These strengths reaffirm the organization's ability to integrate devotional depth with structured management. At the same time, the study underscores critical areas requiring attention—most notably parking arrangements, crowd control, visitor amenities, and communication systems. These gaps reveal that while spiritual fulfillment remains central, logistical comfort and infrastructural support play an equally important role in shaping devotee satisfaction, particularly for women who often balance family responsibilities during temple visits. The findings carry broader implications for religious institutions across traditions. By prioritizing gender-sensitive infrastructure, ensuring safety and inclusivity, adopting digital tools for accessibility, and institutionalizing continuous feedback, temples can create environments that harmonize spiritual immersion with organizational efficiency. Such an approach not only enhances the experiences of female devotees but also strengthens community trust and long-term engagement. In essence, effective temple management must be viewed as a blend of tradition and modernity—where rituals preserve spiritual heritage, and well-planned systems ensure that every devotee, especially women, feels respected, secure, and spiritually uplifted.

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