

News

The Andhra Pradesh High Court directs the CID to look into the theft of offerings at the shrine of Tirumala.



*Devotees had presented the dollar bills as an offering to **Lord Venkateswara Swamy**.*

A Director General of Police (DGP)-ranking officer in the Crime Investigation Department (CID) has been asked by the Andhra Pradesh High Court to look into the theft of offerings at the Tirumala temple in 2023 [**M Sreenivasulu v The State of Andhra Pradesh and Others**].

In the October 27 order, **Justice Gannamaneni Ramakrishna** concluded that the

investigating officer and Tirumala Tirupati **Devasthanams** (TTD) authorities had reached a "complete compromise" in the case.

From the outset, this Court observed that the statutory provisions, statutory procedures, and a number of other administrative procedures have been fully approved in order to guarantee that the criminal proceeding is put on hold as quickly as possible for reasons that are known to all parties involved. This Court believes that a very serious investigation is necessary to determine whether the occurrences were caused by active collusion and foul play or by the authorities' egregious negligence and lack of application of their minds," it noted.

An official from the TTD filed a complaint in April 2023 about suspected foreign currency theft at the shrine.

A chargesheet was later filed by the police against CV Ravi Kumar, a supervisor at Parakamani, under Sections 379 (theft) and 381 (stealing by clerk or servant of property in possession of master) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Later on, nevertheless, the issue was brought up in front of a Lok Adalat. In September, the High Court stayed the Lok Adalat order and ordered the seizure of all case records in response to a request asking for an investigation into the "**Parakamani**" scam.

In light of its conclusions, the High Court requested in its most recent order that the CID investigate every facet of the case, including the complainant, the investigating officer, the TTD Board, and its officers.

On the basis of the investigation, the DGP has been requested to submit a report in a sealed cover along with recommendations for action.

Despite being a "**public servant**," the police had not used Section 409 of the IPC (**criminal breach of trust by public servant**) against Kumar, the court remarked. Additionally, it stated that the trial judge had not correctly used his judgment when he was taking cognizance of the case.

"The Investigating Officer must make sure that the accused is charged under Section 409 of the IPC at the very beginning of the investigation, and the Judicial Officer must make sure that the accused is charged at the stage of taking cognizance. In this respect, this Court believes without a doubt that both the Investigating Officer and the

Presiding Officer made a mistake. The lone judge stated, "This Court considers this omission to be a serious lapse."

According to its opinion, the allegations of lesser gravity were brought up possibly in order to make the settlement that was reached subsequently easier. The constitutionality of the Lok Adalat verdict has now been submitted by the Court to a Division Bench for proper examination.

The Court also concluded that the accused was not taken into custody and that the police had not even looked into his assets. Regarding the recording of the compromise following the receipt of stolen funds, the Court stated,

Section 409 of the IPC states that charges are not compoundable. The **"owner of the property"** is the qualified individual to compound or compromise, even with regard to the insufficient charges brought against the accused under Sections 379 and 381 of the IPC. For all intents and purposes, the de facto plaintiff cannot be considered the property's legal owner. It is true that the devotees presented the dollar bills to Lord Venkateswara Swamy as a gift. The property belongs to the Deity as soon as the devotees make contributions to him, and the T.T.D., acting on his behalf through its Management Board, must take this into consideration and approve a resolution. It is questionable, therefore, whether the T.T.D. Board of Management can even pass a resolution to compound or compromise an offense of this kind because the accused's offense is a **"public offence,"** and the T.T.D., a public institution, may have done so or not.

Acceptance of the accused's gift deeds

The accused and his family had offered the TTD properties valued at ₹14.5 crores, which the court also noted. It was discovered that after requesting an exemption from the TTD Board, authorities received the assets without publishing them in a report.

The Court also noted that there had been no police probe into the assets of Kumar and his family.

As a result, it mandated that the Anti Corruption Bureau's DGP officer look into the assets.

"The acquisition or possession of the assets will be examined from the perspective of Sri C.V. Ravi Kumar and his family's "known sources of income." Before the next listing date, the

report—which will also include the suggested course of action based on the investigation report—must be delivered to the court via the Registrar (Judicial), it said.

In addition, the Court ordered that a copy of the current order be included in the Annual Confidential Report of the II Additional Judicial Magistrate of First Class, Tirupati, Presiding Officer, who served during the pertinent time frame.

This Court believes that the learned II Additional Judicial Magistrate of First Class in Tirupati should be relieved of all Protocol responsibilities immediately in order to preserve administrative integrity and transparency. For successful compliance, the Registrar (Judicial) must present a copy of this order to the relevant Administrative Committee, the ruling stated.

The next hearing on the case is scheduled for December 2.

M Sreenivasulu, the petitioner, was represented by advocate Srinivasulu Kurru.

Lakshmi Narayana, the Special Public Prosecutor, attended the CID. C Srinivasa Baba, an advocate, attended TTD.

Other responders were represented by Senior Advocate C Nageswara Rao, Advocate Amarendra, and Advocate Uday Kumar Vampugadavala.