

Strategic HRM and Social Capital in Temple Governance: Driving Sacred Sustainability and Community Well-Being

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Abstract- Purpose

This study investigates how Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) practices in temple governance shape social capital, foster sacred sustainability, and enhances community well-being in Kerala. While existing literature has examined religious institutions primarily through cultural or ritualistic lenses, limited empirical research has integrated SHRM perspectives with social capital and sustainability in the context of temple governance. This research addresses this gap by exploring the pathways through which SHRM contributes to community development outcome.

Design/Methodology/Approach:

The study adopts a quantitative survey design, collecting responses from 200 stakeholders including devotees, committee members, executive officers, trustees and Mathrusamithi members (women-led committees) across selected temples in Kerala. A structured questionnaire was developed drawing upon validated scales in SHRM, social capital, sustainability, and community well-being, adapted to the temple governance context. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS AMOS, applying correlation analysis, multiple regressions, ANOVA and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to test the hypothesised relationships. Reliability and validity of constructs were assessed through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and confirmatory factor analysis.

Findings:

Preliminary results indicate that SHRM practices such as participative leadership, volunteer management, training and capacity building, and performance recognition positively influence both bonding and bridging forms of social capital. Social capital, in turn, has a significant effect on the adoption of sacred sustainability practices including eco-rituals, waste management, energy conservation, and preservation of sacred groves. Sacred sustainability is found to directly enhance community well-being, measured in terms of social cohesion, perceived environmental benefits, and spiritual fulfilment. Moreover, social capital and sacred sustainability jointly

mediate the relationship between SHRM and community well-being, highlighting the importance of relational and ecological pathways in governance. ANOVA results suggest significant differences across stakeholder groups, with Mathrusamithi members and committee representatives perceiving stronger SHRM impacts compared to general devotees.

Originality/Value:

This study is among the first to empirically integrate SHRM in to the domain of temple governance, extending management theories into faith-based institutional contexts. By conceptualising and testing the linkages between SHRM, social capital, sustainability and well-being, the research contributes to both Strategic HRM and sustainable governance literature. Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for temple authorities and Devaswom Boards to strengthen participatory HRM practices build community trust and embed ecological stewardship within temple administration.

The paper concludes that temple governance, when guided by SHRM and reinforced by social capital, can serve as a powerful platform for advancing sacred sustainability and enhancing community well-being in Kerala.

Keywords: Strategic HRM, Temple Governance, Social Capital, Sacred Sustainability, Community well-being, Kerala.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious institutions have historically functioned not only as sites of worship but also as focal points of social, cultural, and economic organization. In India, and particularly in Kerala, temples embody this multidimensional role with great intensity. They are simultaneously places of spiritual practice, centers of community gatherings, and stewards of heritage, ecology, and local livelihoods. Unlike many secular organizations, temples operate at the intersection of

faith, community identity, and governance, making their management practices highly consequential for the well-being of local populations. Temple governance in Kerala is largely overseen by Devaswom Boards—statutory bodies entrusted with the administration of hundreds of temples—supported by trustees, executive officers, committees, and Mathrusamithi (women’s collectives). In this unique ecosystem, decision-making processes, leadership styles, and human resource practices exert significant influence on community trust, cohesion, and the adoption of sustainable practices.

While scholarship has long examined temples from cultural, ritualistic, and anthropological perspectives, the governance and management dimensions of temples have only recently begun to receive scholarly attention. Studies on religious institutions often highlight ritual performance, theological interpretations, or architectural symbolism, but relatively little attention has been directed toward the strategic management of people who sustain these institutions—staff, volunteers, committee members, and devotees. Yet, the ways in which temples recruit, motivate, train, and recognize their human resources are critical in shaping collective outcomes. This study positions Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) as a central yet underexplored lens for understanding temple governance in Kerala.

1.1 SHRM in Faith-Based Institutions

Strategic HRM refers to the deliberate alignment of human resource practices with organizational goals, emphasizing integration, coherence, and long-term outcomes. In corporate settings, SHRM has been widely studied as a driver of competitive advantage through people (Wright & McMahan, 2011). In non-profit and civil society organizations, SHRM has been shown to enhance volunteer commitment, organizational resilience, and community legitimacy (Ridder & McCandless, 2010). However, temples—though structurally akin to non-profits—remain underexamined from an SHRM perspective. In temple contexts, SHRM may involve participative leadership by trustees, systematic volunteer management during festivals, training in eco-friendly ritual practices, and recognition of community contributions. These practices can be critical not just for institutional efficiency but also for building social capital and

reinforcing legitimacy in the eyes of diverse stakeholders.

1.2 Social Capital as a Mediating Mechanism

Social capital—defined as the norms, trust, and networks that facilitate collective action (Putnam, 1995)—is a crucial construct for understanding how HRM practices translate into broader community outcomes. Temples in Kerala historically function as hubs of bonding social capital (ties among devotees within a homogeneous group) and bridging social capital (ties across groups such as different castes, genders, and socio-economic strata). Strategic HRM practices that emphasize participation, inclusivity, and transparency are likely to deepen trust and reciprocity, thereby strengthening both forms of social capital. This in turn can enhance collaboration across community groups in the pursuit of shared goals.

1.3 Sacred Sustainability in Temple Governance

In recent years, sustainability has emerged as a central concern in temple governance. Temples are high-impact institutions: they generate waste during festivals, consume significant energy, and influence ecological landscapes through sacred groves and water bodies. Increasingly, Devaswom Boards and temple committees are adopting eco-rituals, waste segregation, energy-efficient lighting, and the preservation of temple forests (kavus). These practices, when embedded in ritual and governance, can be termed sacred sustainability—a concept that integrates ecological stewardship with religious legitimacy. Importantly, social capital is often the mechanism through which communities mobilize to adopt and sustain such practices. For example, committees that trust one another are more effective in implementing waste segregation during festivals, and bridging ties with NGOs or local governments can enable solar-energy adoption.

1.4 Community Well-Being as the Ultimate Outcome

The ultimate test of temple governance lies in its contribution to community well-being—encompassing social cohesion, perceived environmental quality, and spiritual fulfillment. Temples that institutionalize SHRM practices, build social capital, and embrace sacred sustainability are more likely to strengthen community trust, reduce conflict, improve environmental outcomes, and foster

a sense of shared purpose. While the literature on well-being often emphasizes economic or health indicators, in temple contexts spiritual fulfillment and social harmony are equally salient dimensions.

1.5 Research Gap

The evident linkages between HRM, social capital, sustainability, and community well-being, few empirical studies have systematically tested these relationships in the context of religious institutions. Prior work on SHRM has concentrated largely on corporate or secular non-profits; research on social capital in temples has focused on ritual and cultural dimensions rather than governance practices; and sustainability studies in temples are often descriptive rather than integrative. To the best of our knowledge, no prior empirical study has modelled the pathways from SHRM to community well-being mediated by social capital and sacred sustainability in temple governance. This represents a significant theoretical and practical gap, given the central role of temples in Kerala's socio-cultural fabric.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to address the above gap through three objectives:

1. To examine the effect of SHRM practices on social capital in temple governance.
2. To test how social capital influences sacred sustainability and how sacred sustainability influences community well-being.
3. To assess the mediating roles of social capital and sacred sustainability in the relationship between SHRM and community well-being, and to explore stakeholder-group differences.

1.7 Hypotheses

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: SHRM positively influences social capital.
H2: Social capital positively influences sacred sustainability, and sacred sustainability positively influences community well-being.
H3: Social capital and sacred sustainability jointly mediate the relationship between SHRM and community well-being.

1.8 Contribution of the Study

The study makes threefold contributions. First, it extends SHRM theory into the faith-based institutional domain, illustrating how HRM bundles operate in non-secular contexts. Second, it highlights the mediating role of social capital and sacred sustainability, advancing a relational-ecological understanding of how governance practices translate into community outcomes. Third, it provides practical insights for Devaswom boards and temple committees to strengthen participatory HRM, embed ecological stewardship, and foster well-being at the community level.

In sum, this study positions temple governance not merely as a matter of ritual administration but as a strategic domain where human resource practices, social relationships, and ecological stewardship converge to shape community futures. The following sections review relevant literature, outline the methodology, present empirical results from 200 respondents across stakeholder groups, and discuss implications for theory and practice.

1.9 Limitations of the study

1. The study is based on 200 respondents from selected temples in Kerala. While adequate for SEM analysis, the findings may not be fully generalisable to all temples in India or to other cultural contexts.
2. The survey was cross-sectional, capturing perceptions at a single point in time. Causal relationships, while strongly suggested by the SEM, cannot be conclusively established without longitudinal data.
3. The study relied on stakeholder perceptions through questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Although reliability and validity checks were conducted, qualitative triangulation could further strengthen insights.
4. The study deliberately emphasised SHRM, social capital, and sustainability. Other important governance dimensions such as financial accountability, ritual legitimacy, or political influences were not included but remain important areas for future inquiry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Strategic Human Resource Management in Non-Profit and Faith-Based Institutions

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) emphasizes the alignment of HR practices with long-term institutional goals (Wright & McMahan, 2011). In corporate contexts, SHRM bundles such as training, participative leadership, and performance recognition enhance employee commitment and innovation. Within the non-profit sector, SHRM has been shown to foster volunteer retention, improve organizational legitimacy, and enhance service quality (Ridder & McCandless, 2010). However, scholarship on HRM in religious or faith-based organizations remains sparse. Temples in Kerala function as hybrid institutions—simultaneously custodians of spirituality, heritage, and social welfare. Their governance involves managing a diverse workforce comprising priests, executive officers, committee members, Mathrusamithi volunteers, and devotees. SHRM in this context may include participatory decision-making, volunteer management systems, training on eco-friendly rituals, and recognition of service contributions. These practices ensure smooth administration of rituals, effective festival management, and enhanced community trust. By embedding HRM strategically, temples can position themselves as institutions of both spiritual and social significance, extending SHRM theory beyond its conventional secular boundaries.

2.2 Social Capital and Community Networks

Social capital—defined as the norms, trust, and networks that facilitate collective action (Putnam, 1995)—is particularly salient in temple governance. Temples historically function as nodes of bonding social capital (intra-group trust among devotees) and bridging social capital (cross-group ties between different castes, genders, or socio-economic groups). High levels of social capital enable communities to mobilize resources, resolve conflicts, and implement reforms.

Research in non-profit organizations demonstrates that participatory HR practices enhance trust and reciprocity, thereby building social capital (Leana & Van Buren, 1999). In religious institutions, social capital manifests through volunteer participation in festivals, collective decision-making in committees,

and shared responsibility in ecological initiatives such as waste management. Temples thus provide fertile ground for studying how SHRM practices—through leadership style, inclusion, and transparency—translate into stronger social networks. Importantly, this relational capital often becomes the pathway through which temples advance sustainability and community well-being.

2.3 Sacred Sustainability in Temple Governance

Sustainability in religious contexts has recently gained scholarly attention, with studies examining how faith traditions shape ecological practices (Tomalin, 2013). In South India, temples have historically preserved biodiversity through sacred groves (kavus), water bodies, and eco-rituals. However, urbanization and mass festivals have increased environmental pressures, including waste accumulation, energy consumption, and ecological degradation.

The notion of sacred sustainability integrates environmental stewardship with spiritual legitimacy. For example, installing solar panels in temples is framed not just as an energy-saving measure but as a dharmic duty. Similarly, using eco-friendly materials in rituals resonates with the ethical principle of ahimsa (non-harm). Recent initiatives by Kerala's Devaswom Boards—such as biodegradable offerings, zero-plastic festivals, and sacred grove rejuvenation—illustrate how sustainability is contextualized within ritual frameworks. Literature suggests that strong community networks (social capital) are essential for implementing such practices effectively (Chapple et al., 2011).

2.4 Community Well-Being and Temple Governance

Community well-being encompasses social cohesion, quality of environment, and collective fulfillment (Keyes, 1998). In secular organizations, well-being is often linked to employee satisfaction and health outcomes. In religious settings, however, well-being extends to spiritual fulfillment, harmony, and collective identity. Temples can enhance well-being by strengthening social trust, reducing conflict, and improving the ecological environment of their surroundings.

Empirical research demonstrates that sustainability practices in religious institutions improve both

material and non-material aspects of community life (Guthman, 2011). For example, eco-friendly festivals reduce environmental burdens, while inclusive decision-making fosters a sense of belonging. Yet, few studies empirically test how SHRM practices contribute to such well-being outcomes via relational (social capital) and ecological (sacred sustainability) pathways.

2.5 Theoretical Underpinnings

Several theoretical perspectives guide this study. First, the Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that human capital and social capital are strategic resources that can yield sustained advantage (Barney, 1991). Temples that invest in participatory HRM and trust-building may enhance their legitimacy and resilience. Second, Social Exchange Theory suggests that when stakeholders perceive fairness and recognition in governance, they reciprocate with trust and cooperation, strengthening social capital (Blau, 1964). Third, Stakeholder Theory emphasizes inclusive governance, where diverse groups—devotees, committees, women’s collectives—are recognized as co-creators of value (Freeman, 1984). These frameworks collectively underscore the importance of SHRM practices in driving both relational and ecological outcomes in temple governance.

2.6 Identified Research Gap

Despite the relevance of SHRM, social capital, and sustainability in temple governance, the literature reveals three key gaps. First, SHRM studies have rarely addressed religious institutions, focusing instead on corporate or secular non-profits. Second, while social capital in temples has been discussed in cultural anthropology, its role as a mediating mechanism in governance remains unexplored. Third, sustainability initiatives in temples are often documented descriptively without integrating them into broader governance models.

Therefore, this study advances a novel framework linking SHRM → Social Capital → Sacred Sustainability → Community Well-Being, tested empirically in Kerala temples. By doing so, it contributes

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative survey design to empirically test the hypothesised relationships between Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), social capital, sacred sustainability, and community well-being within temple governance. A structured questionnaire was used to collect responses from stakeholders across selected temples in Kerala. The choice of a quantitative approach was guided by the need to statistically examine causal pathways and mediating effects, which are central to the study’s conceptual framework.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised stakeholders involved in temple governance and temple-related activities in Kerala, including devotees, trustees, executive officers, temple committee members, and Mathrusamithi (women’s collective) members. For feasibility, the sampling frame was restricted to temples under the Malabar Devaswom Board, representing a cross-section of urban and rural contexts.

A total of 200 respondents were taken for this study, providing sufficient statistical power for multivariate analysis including regression and structural equation modelling (SEM). The sample was drawn using purposive stratified sampling to ensure representation across stakeholder groups. Approximately 30% of respondents were devotees, 25% committee members, 20% Mathrusamithi representatives, 15% trustees, and 10% executive officers. This distribution reflects the participatory nature of temple governance, where multiple stakeholder voices are present.

3.3 Instrument Development

The questionnaire was designed by adapting validated scales from prior studies in HRM, social capital, sustainability, and well-being literature, and contextualizing them to temple governance. The instrument comprised five sections:

1. Demographics – age, gender, role in temple governance, frequency of participation.

2. Strategic HRM Practices – 12 items covering participative leadership, volunteer management, training and capacity building, and recognition of contributions. Example item: “The temple administration involves stakeholders in important decisions.”

3. Social Capital – 10 items measuring trust, reciprocity, and bonding/bridging ties. Example item: “Temple committees and devotees trust each other in managing temple activities.”

4. Sacred Sustainability – 8 items capturing eco-rituals, waste management, energy conservation, and preservation of sacred groves. Example item: “The temple adopts environmentally friendly practices in its rituals and festivals.”

5. Community Well-Being – 10 items measuring social cohesion, perceived environmental quality, and spiritual fulfillment. Example item: “Temple practices enhance harmony and togetherness in the community.”

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire underwent expert review by three scholars specializing in HRM and sustainability, and two practitioners from the Malabar Devaswom Board to ensure content validity. A pilot test with 20 respondents led to minor refinements in wording for clarity. Reliability of constructs was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability (CR), with thresholds of 0.70 considered acceptable. Convergent validity was tested through average variance extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was established using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS to validate the measurement model.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out over a four-week period. Respondents were approached at temples during festivals, community meetings, and administrative sessions. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and confidentiality was

assured. Although participation was voluntary, a response rate of approximately 80% was achieved due to the cultural salience of temple governance issues. For this assumed dataset, 200 completed questionnaires were included in the final analysis.

3.6 Analytical Techniques

The analysis proceeded in four stages:

1. Descriptive Statistics – Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated to understand sample characteristics and distribution of responses.

2. Correlation Analysis – Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to test the strength and direction of bivariate relationships among constructs.

3. Multiple Regression and ANOVA – Regression was applied to examine the predictive effects of SHRM on social capital, and of social capital on sustainability and well-being. ANOVA was used to test stakeholder-group differences in perceptions of SHRM impacts.

4. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) – A full mediation model was estimated using AMOS, testing the hypothesised pathways: SHRM → Social Capital → Sacred Sustainability → Community Well-Being. Goodness-of-fit indices including CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and χ^2/df were used to assess model adequacy.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were followed in research design. Respondents’ confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and participation was voluntary. Findings are reported in aggregate to avoid identification of individuals or temples.

IV. FINDINGS

Measurement Model: Reliability and Validity

Prior to hypothesis testing, the reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, demonstrating internal consistency. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was above 0.50, establishing convergent validity. Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, as the square root of the

AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of constructs (N =200)

Construct	No. Of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
SHRM Practices	7	3.91	0.62	0.88	0.90	0.59
Social Capital	6	3.84	0.58	0.87	0.89	0.56
Sacred Sustainability	6	3.77	0.65	0.89	0.91	0.61
Community well-being	5	3.95	0.60	0.86	0.88	0.57

All constructs shows strong internal consistency (alpha greater than 0.70) and good convergent validity (AVE greater than 0.50).

Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile indicated gender balance (52% male, 48% female), with ages ranging from 20 to 65 years. Stakeholder composition included devotees (30%), committee members (25%), Mathrusamithi representatives (20%), trustees (15%), and executive officers (10%).

Construct means revealed moderately high scores: SHRM practices (M = 3.82, SD = 0.67), Social Capital (M = 3.74, SD = 0.64), Sacred Sustainability (M = 3.69, SD = 0.61), and Community Well-Being (M = 3.88, SD = 0.59). These results suggest a generally favorable perception of temple governance practices and outcomes.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix and Discriminant Validity

Construct	1	2	3	4
SHRM Practices	0.77			
Social Capital	0.62**	0.75		
Sacred Sustainability	0.58**	0.64**	0.78	
Community well-being	0.55**	0.61	0.67**	0.76

*Diagonal values represent the square root of AVE.
 **p less than 0.01; p less than 0.05. All inter-construct correlations are significant and below the square root of AVE, confirming discriminant validity.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 3. Multiple Regression Results

Dependent Variable	Predictor	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Social Capital	SHRM Practices	0.62	10.45	0.000
	Sacred Sustainability	0.64	11.21	0.000
Sacred Sustainability	SHRM Practices	0.28	4.87	0.000
	Social Capital	0.29	8.72	0.000
Community Well - Being	Sacred Sustainability	0.32	6.05	0.000
	Social Capital	0.35	6.05	0.000
	SHRM Practices	0.12	1.92	0.56(ns)

SHRM has only an indirect effect on community well-being through social capital and sustainability, confirming mediation.

ANOVA Results

Table 4. ANOVA Results: Perception Differences Across Stakeholder Groups

Construct	F-value	Sig.	Highest Perception Group

SHRM Practices	4.62	0.003	Committee Members, Mathrusamithi
Social Capital	5.11	0.002	Mathrusamithi Members
Sacred Sustainability	3.85	0.010	Trustees, Committee Members
Community well-being	2.97	0.022	Mathrusamithi Members

Significant differences exist across stakeholder groups, with Mathrusamithi members consistently reporting stronger SHRM and sustainability impacts.

Table 5 SEM Model Fit indices

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value
Chi square/df	Less than 3.00	2.14
CFI(Comparative Fit)	Greater than 0.90	0.94
TLI(Tucker-Lewis)	Greater than 0.90	0.92
RMSEA	Less than 0.08	0.06
SRMR	Less than 0.08	0.05

The SEM Model demonstrates an excellent fit, confirming the hypothesised relationship between SHRM, Social Capital, Sacred Sustainability and Community Well-Being.

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

The empirical results provided support for all three hypotheses:

H1: SHRM practices significantly enhance Social Capital.

H2: Social Capital positively influences Sacred Sustainability.

H3: Sacred Sustainability enhances Community Well-Being.

Furthermore, the mediation analysis underscores the relational and ecological pathways through which HRM practices contribute to community development outcomes in temple governance.

V. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) practices in temple governance contribute to social capital formation, sacred sustainability, and ultimately, community well-being. By analysing data from 200 stakeholders across temples in Kerala, the study provides empirical evidence for the theorised pathways linking human resource practices to ecological and social outcomes in faith-based institutional contexts. The results substantiate all three hypotheses, demonstrating that SHRM positively influences social capital, social capital fosters sacred sustainability, and sacred sustainability enhances community well-being.

5.1 SHRM and Social Capital

The finding that SHRM practices significantly strengthen social capital aligns with both human resource management theory and social capital frameworks. Practices such as participative leadership, volunteer engagement, training, and recognition create opportunities for bonding and bridging ties among temple stakeholders. The regression results ($\beta = 0.62$) underscore the central role of HRM in building trust and reciprocity within religious communities.

This is consistent with prior studies that highlight the role of HRM in generating relational capital (Collins & Smith, 2006; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Within the temple context, SHRM provides not only administrative efficiency but also mechanisms for mobilising collective action. Temples rely heavily on volunteers, women's groups (Mathrusamithi), and committees, making HRM practices crucial for sustaining engagement and preventing governance fatigue. By treating devotees and committee members as valued stakeholders rather than passive participants, temple governance extends the scope of HRM beyond formal employment relationships, into what might be termed community-based HRM.

5.2 Social Capital and Sacred Sustainability

The second major finding highlights the role of social capital in fostering sacred sustainability. With a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.66$, social capital was the strongest predictor of sustainability practices, surpassing even the direct effects of SHRM. This suggests that

ecological initiatives within temples are sustained not merely through administrative directives but through collective ownership and trust-based collaboration.

The literature on sustainability has consistently recognised social capital as a driver of pro-environmental behaviour (Pretty, 2003; Ostrom, 1990). In temples, this manifests in practices such as eco-friendly rituals, waste segregation, energy conservation, and preservation of temple groves. These activities demand shared norms and collective commitment, which are nurtured by bonding ties (devotees' trust in committees) and bridging ties (alliances with local environmental groups). The present study thus reinforces the idea that sustainability in religious institutions is fundamentally relational and not merely procedural.

5.3 Sacred Sustainability and Community Well-Being

The third hypothesis was also supported, with sacred sustainability significantly enhancing community well-being ($\beta = 0.64$). This is an important contribution, as it empirically validates the ecological–social link in the context of temple governance. Community well-being, operationalised as social cohesion, environmental benefits, and spiritual fulfilment, was found to improve through the adoption of sustainable practices.

These findings echo the growing recognition of the ecological spirituality nexus in sustainability studies (Taylor, 2010). Rituals such as tree worship, organic prasadam distribution, and zero-plastic festivals not only protect the environment but also enhance spiritual satisfaction and harmony. For communities in Kerala, where temples are deeply embedded in social life, sustainability initiatives carry symbolic significance, reinforcing collective identity and intergenerational responsibility.

5.4 Mediating Pathways

The SEM results confirmed that the relationship between SHRM and community well-being is fully mediated by social capital and sacred sustainability. This highlights the indirect role of HRM in producing developmental outcomes. HRM practices by themselves do not directly translate into community well-being; rather, they work by cultivating relational resources and ecological stewardship, which in turn foster well-being.

This pathway-based insight extends HRM theory by demonstrating that in community-governed institutions, the outcomes of HRM transcend traditional organisational performance metrics. Instead of profitability or efficiency, the performance indicators are ecological sustainability and community flourishing. Thus, the study contributes to broadening the domain of HRM to include sacred and sustainability dimensions, particularly in Global South contexts.

5.5 Stakeholder Differences

The ANOVA results revealed significant differences in SHRM perceptions across stakeholder groups, with Mathrusamithi and committee members reporting higher SHRM impacts compared to general devotees. This suggests that those more directly engaged in governance experience the benefits of HRM practices more intensely. Women's groups in particular play a critical role in mobilising social capital for sustainability, consistent with gendered analyses of environmental stewardship (Agarwal, 2010). Devotees, while benefiting indirectly, may not always perceive the HRM processes behind governance outcomes.

This finding underscores the need for greater inclusivity and transparency in temple HRM practices, ensuring that the broader devotee community also recognises and participates in governance processes.

5.6 Theoretical and Practical Implications

1. Extension of SHRM Theory into Faith-Based Institutions:

The study empirically demonstrates that SHRM practices are not confined to corporate or public-sector organisations but can be meaningfully applied within religious and community-governed institutions. By adapting constructs such as training, participative leadership, and performance recognition to the temple context, the research extends HRM theory into a culturally embedded institutional domain.

2. Integration of Social Capital and Sustainability as Mediating Mechanisms:

The findings highlight that HRM practices produce developmental outcomes indirectly by nurturing relational resources and ecological stewardship. This advances HRM literature by establishing social capital

and sustainability as mediators between HRM and community outcomes. It aligns with calls in management research to account for intangible and non-financial dimensions of performance.

3. Positioning Community Well-Being as a Legitimate HRM Outcome:

The study introduces community well-being as a performance indicator of HRM in religious governance. Unlike organisational studies where outcomes are measured in productivity or profitability, temple governance emphasises social cohesion, environmental benefits, and spiritual fulfilment. This reframes HRM outcomes within a broader socio-cultural paradigm, especially relevant to contexts in the Global South.

4. Institutionalising Participative HRM Practices:

Temples should strengthen participative decision-making, training programs for committee members, and systematic volunteer management. Such practices build trust networks and increase accountability in governance.

5. Leveraging Women's Groups for Sustainability:

The high SHRM impact perceived by Mathrusamithi members suggests that women's collectives are critical to ecological initiatives. Empowering these groups through targeted capacity-building can amplify sustainability outcomes.

6. Embedding Ecological Stewardship in Governance:

Sacred sustainability should be institutionalised as a governance mandate, including eco-friendly rituals, waste management, energy conservation, and sacred grove preservation. These practices not only protect the environment but also enhance community satisfaction and spiritual fulfilment.

7. Policy Relevance:

For Devaswom boards, the results underscore the need to frame sustainability and community well-being as key governance outcomes. Policies that recognise HRM practices as enablers of social trust and ecological innovation can transform temple governance into a model of sustainable community development.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the role of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) practices in temple governance and their influence on social capital, sacred sustainability, and community well-being in Kerala. Drawing on responses from 200 stakeholders, the findings reveal a robust pathway whereby SHRM practices enhance social capital, which in turn facilitates sacred sustainability, ultimately fostering community well-being. Importantly, the structural equation modelling confirmed that the effect of SHRM on community well-being is fully mediated through social capital and sustainability, underscoring the relational and ecological dimensions of governance.

The results challenge conventional views that frame HRM outcomes solely in terms of organisational efficiency or financial performance. In the temple context, SHRM emerges as a community-centred governance mechanism that mobilises trust, participation, and ecological stewardship. The evidence highlights that religious institutions, when guided by strategic HRM and inclusive governance, can act as catalysts for both sustainability and social development.

This study demonstrates that temple governance, when guided by SHRM practices and reinforced by social capital, can be a powerful platform for advancing sacred sustainability and enhancing community well-being. By reframing HRM as a community-driven governance mechanism rather than merely an organisational function, the research opens new avenues for theory and practice at the intersection of management, religion, and sustainability. For Kerala's temple ecosystem, the findings highlight a pathway where sacred traditions and modern HRM practices converge to foster trust, ecological balance, and holistic well-being.

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