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**Administration of Religious Institutions with the Role of Social Sciences in Promoting Equity and Sustainability**

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Abstract:

Religious institutions have a lot of power in communities around the world, and they can be formidable forces for change. Nonetheless, their administrative practices often do not align with contemporary principles of equity and sustainability. This research analyzes the role of social sciences in promoting justice and sustainability within religious institutions, emphasizing on Nigeria (Christian churches), South Korea (Protestant mega-churches), and India (Sanatani Hindu temples). This study examines the transition of religious groups from rigid hierarchies to more democratic platforms advocating for social justice, utilizing a mixed-methodology informed by diverse multidisciplinary research from sociology, anthropology, and development studies. This article analyzes the impact of traditional and modern institutions on social mobility, gender equality, education, and economic involvement in India, highlighting the role of significant social institutions in social development. This study examines the transition of religious groups from rigid hierarchies to more democratic platforms advocating for social justice, utilizing a mixed-methodology informed by diverse multidisciplinary research from sociology, anthropology, and development studies. These religious institutions can effectively align with the objectives of sustainability and equity by implementing social scientific frameworks, including participatory governance, transparency initiatives, and gender-sensitive policies. This article provides evidence of religious organizations that have successfully utilized social science concepts to foster positive change through comparative analysis and case studies. It identifies significant roadblocks to sustainable and equitable behaviours and proposes strategies to overcome them. The document calls for personalized reforms, interfaith engagement, and other activities to improve the ability of religious institutions to use their moral authority and protect the values of social justice. This study says that religious institutions should use social science-backed rules and policies to achieve social equality and sustainability. Religious groups teach, do community service, and work with both government and non-governmental organizations to promote a sense of shared responsibility for the environment and sustainable development. This article asserts that the governance of religious organizations can be markedly enhanced through the application of social science methodologies that promote equity, inclusivity, and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Administration, Education, Equity, Religious Autonomy, Religious Institution, Sustainability.

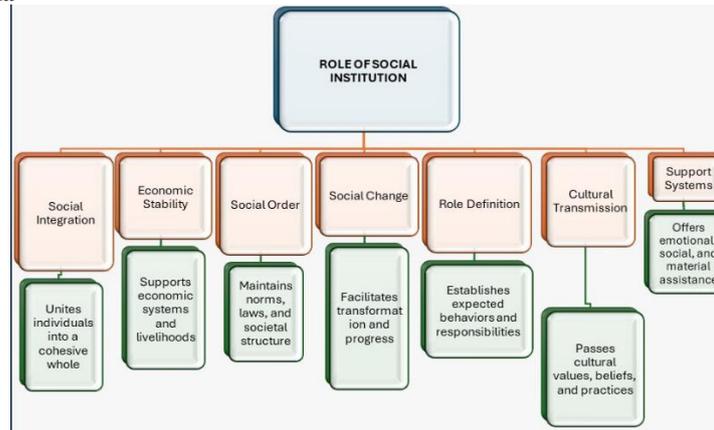
## 1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of "Religious Institution" is articulated in Section 2(f) of the Religious Institutions Act, 1988, referring to any entity dedicated to the advancement of a specific religion or belief system. This refers to all community religious worship facilities, regardless of their unique categorization. It includes various places of worship, including temples, churches, mosques, mutts, synagogues, and viharas.

'Social development represents the mechanisms by which a society improves the welfare of its populace through progress in social, political, and economic spheres. In India, a country marked by its rich cultural diversity and historical legacies, social institutions serve dual roles, acting both as facilitators and barriers to social advancement. This study analyzes the influence of five essential social institutions—family, education, religion, economy, and government—on the trajectory of social development in India. Social institutions play a crucial role in shaping human development and capabilities. Their impact on personal preferences, actions, and decisions raises questions about the idea of absolute autonomy in the decision-making process'. (Stewart et al., 2018; Stewart, 2013). "These institutions, encompassing norms and organizations, significantly contribute to the enhancement of social relational capabilities essential for human development" (Stewart et al. 2018). "The development process alters social institutions in unforeseen ways that challenge technocratic methodologies" (Woolcock, 2017). Social cohesion and effective institutions are essential for human development and capabilities (Stewart et al., 2018; Stewart, 2013). "Gender-related social institutions significantly influence development outcomes. Factors that restrict women's autonomy and bargaining power are associated with reduced female education, increased fertility rates, and elevated child mortality rates" (Branisa et al., 2009). "Recognizing the significance of social institutions, alternative Emerging development approaches are informed by insights from diverse social sciences" (Woolcock, 2017).

Social institutions bring stability and structure to society, emphasizing their relevance. The formulation of standards and guidelines that govern behavior and alleviate disorder and discord is crucial for sustaining social fabric. Social institutions, including family and education, are fundamental in the transmission of cultural ethos, generational beliefs, and customs. Family, religious, and community organizations provide essential emotional and social support to individuals facing challenges. Economic institutions supervise the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, playing a crucial role in fostering overall stable economy and growth. They enhance social cohesion by bringing individuals together and cultivating a sense of belonging and community. Institutions function as catalysts for social transformation by responding to new concepts and challenges, thus promoting societal advancement and evolution. They play a crucial role in delineating roles and social norms, directing individuals towards acceptable conduct within diverse social contexts.

**Role of Social Institutions in India**



**Fig 1: Different Roles of Social Institutions**

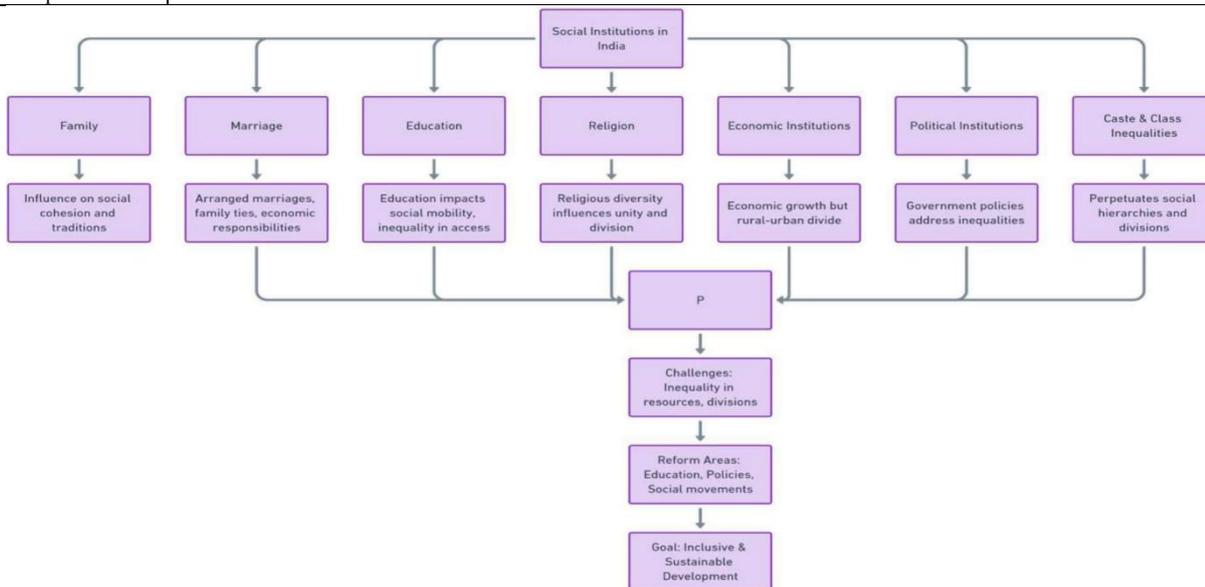
The social development of India is shaped by a multitude of social institutions, such as family, education, religion, economy, and political governance. The transition from joint to nuclear family structures has afforded women increased autonomy in their educational and career pursuits; however, enduring traditional values such as caste and religious affiliations persist in shaping social mobility and matrimonial choices. The accessibility of education has expanded; however, prevailing social inequalities have been exacerbated by its uneven distribution across urban and rural regions, as well as disparities related to caste and gender. The pursuit of quality education remains a significant challenge for marginalized communities, constraining their opportunities for upward mobility and reinforcing cycles of poverty.

The interplay of political and economic institutions significantly influences India's social development, particularly through improvements in urban infrastructure and efforts aimed at poverty alleviation. The persistence of economic inequality is notable, particularly as a result of the informal labor market's prevalence and the disparate benefits conferred by liberalization policies. Political interventions such as MGNREGA and affirmative action have sought to tackle rural poverty and caste-based disparities; however, their effectiveness is significantly undermined by issues of corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The impact of religion on social hierarchies persists, sustaining divisions and inequality, which underscores the need for continuous reforms aimed at fostering a more inclusive and equitable trajectory for social development in India.

**Mind Map to Visually Organize the Key Concepts Related to Social Institutions in India**

**Table 1: Mind Map to visualize Social Institutions and Factors Religion**

Social Institution	Key Points
Family	- Primary socialization agent - Cultural values & traditions - Joint vs Nuclear families - Gender roles & expectations - Support system - Influence on marriage, career, and social mobility
Marriage	- Arranged marriages based on caste, religion, and social standing - Family's role in economic responsibilities - Impact on individual independence - Changing dynamics with modernity
Education	-Key to social mobility and human capital - Disparities based on caste, gender, rural-urban divide - Public vs Private education - Government initiatives (RTE, Midday meal) - Challenges in educational equity and quality
Religion	- Shaping cultural identity and social cohesion - Hindu caste system & caste-based discrimination - Role in social movements (e.g., Dalit movement) - Religious diversity leading to both unity and conflict
Economic Institutions	- Impact of liberalization and economic growth - Urban-rural divide (dual economy) - Informal economy's dominance - Employment crisis and inequality
Political Institutions	- Role in promoting social equity (MGNREGA, PDS) - Panchayati Raj and rural governance - Challenges (corruption, policy implementation gaps)
Caste & Class Inequalities	- Impact on social mobility and development - Regional disparities in health and education - Affirmative action and social justice efforts



**Fig 2: Structural representation of Social Institutions**

The social development of India is influenced by various social institutions, including family, education, religion, economy, and political governance. The shift from joint family systems to nuclear family structures has provided women with greater independence in their educational and professional endeavours; nonetheless, longstanding traditional values, including caste and religious affiliations, continue to influence social mobility and marriage decisions. The expansion of educational accessibility is evident; nonetheless, existing social inequalities have intensified due to the uneven distribution of resources between urban and rural areas, alongside disparities associated with caste and gender. The quest for quality education poses a considerable challenge for marginalized communities, limiting their prospects for upward mobility and perpetuating cycles of poverty.

The interaction between political and economic institutions plays a crucial role in shaping India's social development, especially through advancements in urban infrastructure and initiatives focused on poverty reduction. The enduring nature of economic inequality is significant, especially due to the widespread existence of the informal labor market and the unequal advantages provided by liberalization policies. Political interventions like MGNREGA and affirmative action aim to address rural poverty and caste-based disparities; nonetheless, their efficacy is considerably compromised by the prevalence of corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The influence of religion on social hierarchies remains significant, perpetuating divisions and inequality. This highlights the necessity for ongoing reforms that promote a more inclusive and equitable path for social development in India.

Bayly (2001) traces the development of the caste system from the eighteenth century, illustrating how caste-based discrimination has persisted despite the modernization of India. Social mobility and exclusion continue to pose significant challenges for Dalits and other marginalized groups. Despite the efforts of modern legal systems to foster equality, caste identities persist in significantly influencing access to social status, employment, and education (Srinivas, 1957). The tension between established religious traditions and the principles of social justice is underscored by the persistence of caste discrimination.

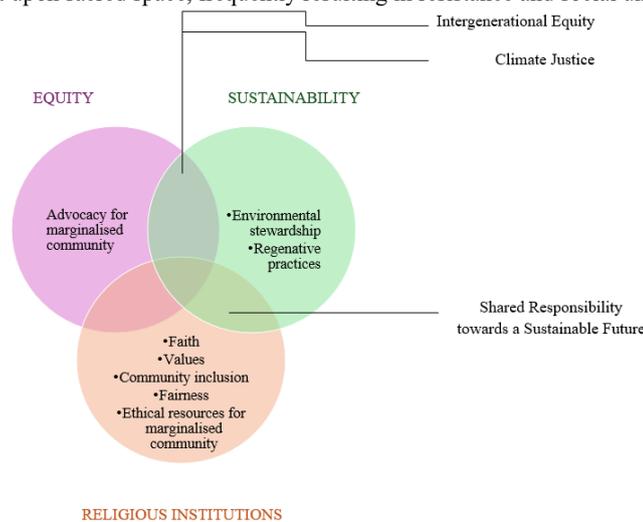
### 1.1 Overview of the importance of religious institutions in society and the relevance of equity and sustainability.

Religious organizations have traditionally played an important role in shaping the cultural, social, and moral elements of society throughout numerous civilizations. They often wield significant influence over their adherents and serve as crucial elements in the formation of ethical norms, spiritual direction, and communal principles. In numerous societies, these institutions play a crucial role in cultivating cultural identity and enhancing social cohesion. Religious institutions hold considerable spiritual and cultural importance for numerous believers. Governmental administration in these areas may be viewed as an infringement on sacred space, frequently resulting in resistance and social unrest.

In a secular state, the government is constitutionally required to uphold neutrality in religious matters, refraining from both favoritism and discrimination against any specific religious group. Numerous instances indicate that state authorities frequently engage in religious matters, as alignment with religious elements can bolster their legitimacy and public credibility. Research indicates that autonomous religious institutions are more inclined to contest the legitimacy of state authority (Casanova 1994; Künkler and Leininger 2009).

The government's administration of religious institutions may be viewed as an overextension of authority, particularly if it seems to endorse particular religious practices or beliefs. Such actions threaten to undermine the secular structure of the nation and could compromise the state's credibility. In specific situations, government administration is essential, especially in instances of financial irregularities, corruption, or human rights violations, to ensure adherence to the legal framework and safeguard societal welfare. However, this authority has frequently been misapplied, leading to concerns regarding the infringement of religious autonomy. Religious freedom is a fundamental principle in democratic societies, enabling individuals and groups to practice their faith without undue interference. Currently, there is increasing apprehension that state administration of religious institutions may compromise their autonomy. State-imposed restrictions, including the control of minority clergy appointments, regulation of religious political movements, and imposition of criteria for religious office, have been associated with heightened religious radicalization and terrorism (Henne, P. S., 2018).

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**Fig 3: Inter-relationship between Religious Institution, Equity, Sustainability, and Social Sciences**

#### Religious Institutions

Religious institutions are organizations centered around shared beliefs, practices, and values related to the sacred or spiritual. They play multifaceted roles in society, including:

- Moral and Ethical Guidance: Religious institutions often provide moral frameworks and ethical codes that shape the behavior and values of their members and the broader community.
- Community Building: They create social bonds, foster a sense of belonging, and provide support networks for individuals and families.
- Social Services: Many religious organizations are involved in providing social services such as education, healthcare, poverty relief, and disaster assistance.

- **Advocacy and Social Justice:** Historically, religious institutions have been at the forefront of social justice movements, advocating for human rights, equality, and systemic change.

### **Equity**

Equity means fairness and justice in the distribution of resources, opportunities, and outcomes. It acknowledges that various individuals and groups may possess distinct needs and necessitate customized strategies to attain equitable results. Within the framework of religious institutions, equity signifies:

- **Inclusivity:** Ensuring that all members, regardless of their background, identity, or status, have equal access to participation and leadership opportunities.
- **Fair Resource Allocation:** Distributing resources and services in a way that addresses the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of the community.
- **Social Justice:** Advocating for policies and practices that promote social justice and challenge systemic inequalities.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability involves a comprehensive consideration of environmental, social, and economic factors. This concept pertains to addressing the requirements of the current generation while ensuring that future generations retain the capacity to fulfill their own needs. Concerning religious institutions:

- **Environmental Stewardship:** Many religious doctrines highlight the significance of nurturing the Earth and its resources. Practices aimed at sustainability encompass the reduction of carbon emissions, the conservation of energy and water resources, and the encouragement of responsible consumption habits.
- **Social Sustainability:** This encompasses the promotion of social cohesion, the safeguarding of human rights, and the guarantee of access to vital services such as education and healthcare for every individual within the community.
- **Economic Sustainability:** Religious institutions can contribute to economic sustainability by promoting fair labor practices, supporting local businesses, and investing in sustainable development initiatives.

### **Social Sciences**

The social sciences encompass various disciplines that examine human behavior, social structures, and the dynamics of society. Their offerings serve as essential resources for comprehending the intricate relationships among religious institutions, equity, and sustainability. Illustrations of pertinent social science fields encompass:

- **Sociology:** Helps to understand the social structures, norms, and power dynamics within religious institutions and how they impact equity and sustainability.
- **Political Science:** Examines the role of religious institutions in shaping public policy, advocating for social change, and promoting justice.
- **Economics:** Analyzes the economic activities of religious institutions, their impact on local economies, and their role in promoting sustainable development.
- **Environmental Studies:** Examines the environmental implications of religious practices and explores the capacity of religious institutions to advocate for sustainable development.

### **Interrelationships**

The interaction exists through the manner in which social sciences provide insight and direction to religious institutions as they strive for equity and sustainability.

- **Informing Practices:** Research in the social sciences can assist religious institutions in comprehending the underlying factors contributing to inequality and environmental degradation, thereby facilitating the formulation of more effective strategies to tackle these issues.
- **Encouraging Ethical Decision-Making:** The application of social science theories and frameworks offers valuable ethical guidance for religious leaders and administrators, assisting them in making decisions that align with principles of equity and sustainability.
- **Evaluating Influence:** Methodologies from the social sciences can be employed to evaluate the influence of religious institutions on social and environmental outcomes, offering critical insights for enhancing their practices.

Through the incorporation of social science viewpoints into their administrative strategies, religious institutions can improve their capacity to foster equity and sustainability, thus playing a role in the advancement of a more just and sustainable society. The effective and clear governance of religious institutions requires a strong structure for overseeing and recording financial assets, properties, and various resources, especially in a time marked by growing intricacy and examination.

#### **1.5 Research questions:**

- How can social sciences inform the administrative practices of religious institutions to promote equity and sustainability?
- What are the key barriers preventing religious institutions from adopting more equitable and sustainable practices?
- What specific administrative strategies can religious institutions implement to better align with equity and sustainability goals?

#### **1.6 Research Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative, comparative case study methodology to analyze the role of religious institutions in promoting equity and sustainability via their administrative practices and community involvement, drawing on perspectives from the social sciences. This research examines the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) in Nigeria, Presbyterian churches in South Korea, and specific Indian institutions, including ISKCON, Sikh Gurdwaras, and South Indian temple trusts. Data is gathered through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and document analysis. This research utilizes theoretical frameworks including Liberation Theology, Social Capital Theory, and Participatory Development to conduct a thematic and comparative analysis of the influence of religious values and structures on promoting inclusive development.

## **2. ADMINISTRATIVE MODEL OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA AND SOUTH KOREA: - CASE STUDIES AND EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS**

### **2.1 COCIN in Nigeria,**

Plateau State, Nigeria, is acknowledged for its rich biological resources, which sustain the livelihoods of a considerable segment of the population. In recent years, the state has faced significant environmental issues, including deforestation, erosion, pollution, and the impacts of climate change. The challenges have led to adverse effects on the health and livelihoods of the state's populace. It is crucial to analyze the impact of religious organizations, such as the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), on promoting environmental sustainability in Plateau State. The Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) represents a significant Christian denomination in Plateau State, Nigeria, distinguished by its considerable influence and presence in the area. The COCIN church has persistently engaged in community development and social welfare by participating in education, healthcare, and advocating for social justice throughout the years. There has been a growing recognition of the

imperative for environmental sustainability and conservation in Plateau State, driven by the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation in the region.

Prior research has explored the possible impact of religious organizations, such as the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), on advancing environmental sustainability and conservation efforts in Nigeria. Research by Oshagbemi and Ojewuyi (2020) demonstrates that religious institutions have the ability to mobilize communities and increase awareness of environmental concerns, utilizing their extensive networks and influence. Adebayo and Oluwakemi (2020) underscore the significant role that religious organizations play in promoting environmental sustainability. Their considerable audience allows them to leverage their influence to promote awareness and champion sustainable practices effectively.

The Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) stands as a significant religious entity in Plateau State, possessing the capacity to effect meaningful advancements in environmental sustainability throughout the area. Nonetheless, the existing body of research is insufficient in delineating the precise roles and contributions of the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) towards the advancement of environmental sustainability in Plateau State. This research seeks to fill the current void by conducting an in-depth analysis of the actions and programs implemented by the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) regarding environmental sustainability within the region. This research examines the role of the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) in promoting environmental conservation, advocacy efforts, and community engagement. The aim is to provide substantive analysis regarding the role of religious institutions in effectively addressing environmental challenges in Nigeria.

## **2.2 Presbyterian churches in South Korea**

The impact of missionaries on economic growth has been thoroughly analyzed, with research highlighting their positive contributions to education (Nunn 2014), the spread of information (Bai and Kung 2015; Ma 2021), and the promotion of democratization (Woodberry and Shah 2004). Protestant missions have been recognized for fostering human capital accumulation and diminishing gender gaps (Becker and Woessmann 2008, 2011). In former Western colonies, isolating the impact of missionaries from overarching colonial factors is challenging (Jedwab et al. 2022). Korea represents a distinctive instance, having been seized by Japan in 1910 and not classified as a Western colony. This facilitated a more distinct differentiation between missionary and colonial influences. Western missionaries in Korea functioned independently of their home governments and frequently encountered limitations imposed by Japanese authorities (Park 2003). The origins of Protestantism in Korea date to 1883, when Shangryun Seo, a ginseng merchant, embraced Christianity following assistance from missionaries in China. He established the Sorae Church and commenced the translation of the Bible into Korean despite a governmental prohibition (Oak 2016; Park 2023).

The entrance of missionaries such as Horace Allen and Horace Underwood in 1884 signified the commencement of organized missionary activities in Korea. They identified an established Protestant community and concentrated their efforts in the North, where autonomous churches had previously developed. This atmosphere facilitated the implementation of the Nevius Plan, a strategic initiative conceived by John L. Nevius that prioritized self-governance, financial autonomy, and indigenous leadership. Missionaries such as Underwood and William Baird, the founder of Soongsil University, advocated for this paradigm by advancing literacy, rural leadership, and the incorporation of the Korean language in school (Christian Culture Institute of Korea 2013). Consequently, Presbyterian churches thrived in northern Korea, with places such as Pyongyang earning the designation "Jerusalem of East Asia."

The influence of these missions was substantial. Research indicates that Protestant initiatives resulted in increased literacy rates by the late 1930s (Becker and Won 2021; Izumi et al. 2022). Presbyterians surpassed Methodists in human capital development, primarily because to the Nevius Plan. The 1909 Comity Agreement clearly delineated Korea into mission zones for each denomination, facilitating straightforward comparative research. Presbyterians, driven by the pursuit of self-sufficiency, actively participated in educational outreach to enlarge their congregations. The legacy of these endeavors endures: Presbyterian churches are democratically constructed, whereas Methodist congregations are hierarchically organized. Korea exemplifies how missionary techniques, particularly those advocating for autonomy and education, can independently influence long-term developmental outcomes.

## **2.3 ISKCON, Sikh Gurdwara, and South Indian temple trusts,**

Religious institutions in India significantly contribute to promoting equity and sustainability, frequently engaging communities that government programs do not reach. ISKCON's \*Food for Life\* initiative has provided more than 7 billion free vegetarian meals worldwide, establishing it as the largest food relief organization globally. The focus on inclusivity is evident in initiatives such as the midday meal scheme in India, which serves over 1.2 million children each day. ISKCON's Govardhan Eco Village, recognized by the United Nations in 2017, exemplifies sustainable living through practices such as organic farming, solar energy utilization, and wastewater recycling, illustrating the capacity of spiritual organizations to embody ecological responsibility.

Sikh gurdwaras are acknowledged worldwide for their commitment to equity, exemplified by 'langar', the community kitchen that serves over 100,000 individuals daily at the Golden Temple alone. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Sikh organizations globally intensified their initiatives, providing meals, oxygen, and shelter without regard to caste or religion. Since 2011, the environmental initiative 'EcoSikh' has established over 700 sacred forests in India and various other countries, contributing to biodiversity and climate action efforts. Gurdwaras in locations such as Delhi have implemented solar panels and adopted waste-reduction strategies to ensure that community service aligns with environmental sustainability.

Large South Indian temple trusts, such as the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), exemplify the integration of religious tradition and public welfare initiatives. TTD offers more than 100,000 complimentary meals each day and operates various hospitals and educational institutions. The organization excels in green initiatives, with a large solar kitchen producing 1,200 kg of steam daily for cooking, alongside the implementation of water recycling and organic waste management systems. Temples in Tamil Nadu and Kerala are actively restoring temple tanks and water bodies to address groundwater depletion, positioning religious spaces as contributors to environmental sustainability and social equity.

## **3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT**

In India, religious institutions fulfill both spiritual and social-cultural functions. Their administration can substantially affect equity and sustainability results. This questionnaire method having 120 responses out of a 150 sample size seeks to collect insights from key stakeholders like priests, pastors, imams, temple administrators, mutt mahants, and governmental agencies to examine how social science principles can enhance inclusivity and sustainability within these institutions.

**Question 1:** "How do you perceive the current administrative practices of your religious institution in terms of transparency and inclusivity?"

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Very Transparent and Inclusive</b> – Clear rules, diverse leadership, accountability	18	15%
2. <b>Moderately Transparent but Not Fully Inclusive</b> – Processes are visible, but leadership remains exclusive	30	25%
3. <b>Not Very Transparent, Nor Inclusive</b> – Closed decision-making, favoritism reported	42	35%
4. <b>No Idea / Never Involved in Administration</b> – Followers unaware of inner workings	24	20%
5. <b>Refused to Answer / Incomplete Response</b>	6	5%

**Question 2:** "To what extent are marginalized groups (e.g., women, lower castes/classes, ethnic minorities) included in the decision-making processes of your institution?"

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Actively Included</b> – Representation of women, Dalits, minorities is present and visible	16	13.3%
2. <b>Symbolic Inclusion Only</b> – Token presence, but no real authority	34	28.3%
3. <b>Rarely Included</b> – Marginalized groups are largely absent from leadership	46	38.3%
4. <b>Completely Excluded</b> – Explicit exclusion based on caste/gender	18	15%
5. <b>Unaware / No Comment</b> – Don't know or didn't respond	6	5%

**Question 3:** "In your view, how can insights from social sciences (such as sociology, anthropology, or economics) improve the governance of religious institutions?"

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Can Greatly Improve Governance</b> – Social sciences help make systems more inclusive and rational	38	31.7%
2. <b>Can Somewhat Help</b> – Useful, but needs adaptation to religious contexts	29	24.2%
3. <b>Skeptical or Unsure</b> – Not sure how social sciences relate to religion	26	21.7%
4. <b>Opposed</b> – Believe religious institutions should not be influenced by secular disciplines	20	16.7%
5. <b>No Opinion / Don't Know</b>	7	5.8%

**Question 4:** "What strategies does your institution employ to ensure equitable distribution of resources (e.g., donations, land, services) among followers and the wider community?"

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Clear and Equitable Distribution Policies</b> – Resources shared transparently based on need	22	18.3%
2. <b>Partial Equity</b> – Some fairness efforts, but biased toward certain groups or castes	31	25.8%
3. <b>Unequal or Biased Distribution</b> – Resources controlled by dominant groups or individuals	41	34.2%
4. <b>No Formal Strategy</b> – Distribution is ad hoc or based on personal discretion	20	16.7%
5. <b>Unaware / Don't Know</b>	6	5%

**Question 5:** "How does your institution balance traditional religious values with the need for social justice and sustainability in today's context?"

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Actively Balancing Both</b> – Institution integrates tradition with social/environmental responsibility	26	21.7%
2. <b>Attempts to Balance, with Challenges</b> – Tries, but faces resistance from orthodox segments	35	29.2%
3. <b>More Focus on Tradition, Less on Justice/Sustainability</b> – Prioritizes rituals, status quo	37	30.8%
4. <b>No Effort Toward Balance</b> – Social justice or sustainability not seen as institutional responsibility	16	13.3%
5. <b>Unaware / No Clear View</b>	6	5%

**Question 6:** "Do you believe social sciences can help identify and reduce biases or hierarchies within religious systems? If yes, how?"

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Yes – Strongly Agree</b> – Social sciences can expose and challenge caste, gender, and class biases	44	36.7%
2. <b>Yes – With Conditions</b> – Helpful if done respectfully and with cultural sensitivity	28	23.3%
3. <b>Uncertain or Neutral</b> – Unsure how social sciences relate to religious reform	24	20%
4. <b>No – Religion Should Remain Independent</b> – Belief that religious systems should not be analyzed this way	18	15%
5. <b>No Opinion / Don't Know</b>	6	5%

**Question 7:** "What role do religious institutions play in addressing contemporary social issues like poverty, gender inequality, and environmental degradation?"

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Play an Active and Positive Role</b> – Actively involved in social welfare and advocacy	32	26.7%
2. <b>Involved in Select Issues Only</b> – Engage in charity or environmental work, but avoid gender/equality	29	24.2%
3. <b>Minimal or Symbolic Role</b> – Perform occasional charity, but no long-term engagement	35	29.2%
4. <b>Avoid Social Issues</b> – Focus solely on religious rituals and tradition	18	15%
5. <b>Unaware / No Comment</b>	6	5%

**Question 8:** "How inclusive is your religious institution in terms of participation and leadership opportunities for women, youth, and minority groups?"

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Highly Inclusive</b> – Equal opportunities for women, youth, and minorities in leadership and participation	20	16.7%
2. <b>Moderately Inclusive</b> – Some representation, but limited power or visibility	34	28.3%
3. <b>Minimally Inclusive</b> – Token involvement without decision-making power	38	31.7%
4. <b>Exclusive</b> – Dominated by specific castes, genders, or age groups	22	18.3%
5. <b>Unaware / Prefer Not to Say</b>	6	5%

**Question 9:** "What challenges or resistance has your religious institution faced while trying to implement reforms related to equity, inclusion, or sustainability?"

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Resistance from Traditionalists/Elders</b> – Strong opposition from those upholding old hierarchies	36	30%
2. <b>Lack of Awareness or Education Among Members</b> – Many don't understand why reforms are needed	28	23.3%
3. <b>Internal Power Struggles and Politics</b> – Elites blocking reforms to retain control	22	18.3%
4. <b>Fear of Losing Followers or Donations</b> – Concerns reforms may upset conservative base	20	16.7%
5. <b>No Significant Resistance Faced</b> – Reform has been smooth or well accepted	8	6.7%
6. <b>Unaware / No Comment</b>	6	5%

**Question 10:** "What specific changes would you like to see in the administration of religious institutions to make them more equitable and socially responsible?"

Suggested Change	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. <b>Inclusive Leadership (Women, Dalits, Youth, Minorities)</b>	34	28.3%
2. <b>Transparent Use of Resources (Donations, Land, Trust Funds)</b>	26	21.7%
3. <b>Community Welfare Programs (Health, Education, Environment)</b>	22	18.3%
4. <b>Accountability and Legal Regulation of Religious Management Committees</b>	20	16.7%
5. <b>More Integration of Social Science Research and Ethical Training for Priests/Trustees</b>	12	10%
6. <b>No Opinion / Don't Know</b>	6	5%

#### 4. DISCUSSION – STRATEGIES FOR BALANCING STATE OVERSIGHT AND RELIGIOUS AUTONOMY

The governance of religious institutions in India necessitates a careful equilibrium between state oversight and the maintenance of religious autonomy. Articles 25 and 26 of the Indian Constitution ensure religious freedom, allowing for regulation in the interests of public order, morality, and health. Judicial oversight, especially through the evolving interpretation of "essential religious practices," is crucial for maintaining balance by protecting fundamental religious functions while permitting state intervention when necessary. Reforming outdated religious endowment laws, including the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HRCE) Acts and the Wakf Act, is essential for improving transparency and accountability in financial and property issues while avoiding excessive state intervention.

Furthermore, advocating for internal reforms within religious institutions is essential. The formation of independent and autonomous committees tasked with financial and administrative oversight, which include religious leaders, legal experts, and financial professionals, has the potential to significantly bolster institutional integrity. Internal entities possess the ability to conduct audits and promote public transparency, thus reducing corruption while maintaining the institution's core spiritual roles. Instances of self-governance, exemplified by the practices of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad and the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, demonstrate the potential for meaningful internal reform. A crucial matter is the imperative to distinctly delineate between secular and religious functions. Legal frameworks must delineate ritual practices from institutional management to avoid confusion and mitigate power struggles. Engaging religious communities in the policy-making process holds significant importance. Establishing consultative frameworks that enable religious representatives to contribute to legislation affecting their institutions—such as educational policies, endowments, and charitable services—fosters inclusive and democratic governance. Limiting the impact of political forces within religious organizations is of paramount importance. It is imperative that political parties refrain from utilizing religious platforms for electoral gain, which calls for more stringent enforcement by bodies like the Election Commission to uphold the secular nature of the state. Initiatives designed to inform the public regarding the constitutional function of religion, the rights and obligations of religious entities, and the significance of secularism can reduce conflict and promote societal consensus on equitable regulation. The principle of minimalist state intervention asserts that governmental engagement ought to be confined to egregious cases of corruption, mismanagement, or breaches of law, thereby guaranteeing that such interventions are characterized by transparency, specificity, and temporal limitations.

The findings reveal a clear necessity for religious institutions that prioritize inclusivity, transparency, and social engagement. Inclusive leadership emerges as the most supported reform, garnering 28.3% approval. Respondents emphasize the critical need for equitable involvement of women, Dalits, youth, and minority communities within decision-making bodies. This indicates a profound conviction that current systems are defined by hierarchical structures and exclusivity.

The demand for financial transparency is positioned as the second most sought-after reform, with a notable 21.7% expressing concerns about the possible misappropriation or ambiguity surrounding the administration of temple funds and donations. Respondents emphasize the necessity of conducting regular audits, ensuring public disclosure of financial accounts, and reallocating funds to prioritize public welfare over lavish religious expenditures.

The third priority (18.3%) highlights the necessity for institutions to broaden their functions beyond mere rituals by establishing community welfare initiatives in areas such as education, health, and environmental stewardship, reflecting a growing expectation for religious spaces to engage in wider humanitarian responsibilities.

Additionally, 16.7% of participants express support for the implementation of legal oversight and accountability, highlighting the importance of democratic governance and the need for regulatory scrutiny of religious management entities, often controlled by elite or hereditary factions.

A segment of respondents, specifically ten percent, holds the view that equipping religious leaders with knowledge in social sciences and ethics may facilitate a modernization of institutional conduct, thereby aligning it with current values of equity and sustainability.

A mere 5% of respondents indicated a lack of opinion, suggesting that a significant majority recognizes the pressing need for reform in religious administration to ensure alignment with democratic, inclusive, and socially responsible principles.

This data underscores a notable shift in societal expectations, moving from a stance of passive acceptance of religious authority to one characterized by active civic participation, ethical governance, and a commitment to inclusive reform.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The Constitution of India, along with various federal and state laws, clearly permits government involvement in religious institutions. Nonetheless, Articles 25 and 26 serve as safeguards against the potential overreach of governmental authority, which could threaten the fundamental nature of religious practice. The government holds the authority to oversee the appointment of servants and priests for a temple; however, it does not have the power to prescribe the specific methods employed by the priest in conducting rituals and ceremonies. The involvement of the state in religious institutions presents a nuanced and intricate challenge. Although initiatives of this nature may enhance governance, transparency, and accountability, they simultaneously present challenges to the independence and credibility of religious institutions. Reaching a state of balance necessitates a thorough examination of the cultural, social, and political frameworks, along with a steadfast dedication to preserving the core tenets of religious freedom and self-governance. A robust governance framework should prioritize collaboration and communication between governmental bodies and religious organizations. This will enhance the understanding of interventions as fair, open, and considerate of religious traditions and values. As a result, it is permissible for the government to engage with religious institutions. The government must acknowledge the necessity of upholding the principles of secularism and the freedom of religion.

These initiatives collectively foster a framework for religious governance that is socially conscious, legally sound, and ethically balanced. The framework advances sustainable transformation through the integration of social science concepts, particularly those that highlight equity, public engagement, and the integrity of institutions, all while honoring spiritual individuality. This approach has the potential to serve as a model for democratic countries seeking to harmonize religious beliefs with governmental structures across various scenarios.

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