Polity & Governance · GS - II

Examine the constitutional balance between religious autonomy, customary practices and state regulation in the administration of religious institutions in India.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
DAILY PRACTICE 26/11/2026	GS - II	Polity & Governance

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Articles 25 and 26, essential religious practices, denominational autonomy, secular administration, public order, judicial review, constitutional morality

Model Answer

Religious institutions in India often combine spiritual practices, customary traditions and substantial administrative responsibilities. Disputes over rituals and temple management raise questions about the boundary between religious autonomy and legitimate state regulation.

Constitutional Protection of Religious Autonomy

1. **Article 25:** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, health and other constitutional provisions.
2. **Article 26:** Protects religious denominations' rights to establish institutions and manage their religious affairs.
3. **Article 26(b):** Specifically safeguards autonomy in matters of religion, while remaining subject to constitutional limitations.

Limits and Scope of State Intervention

1. **Secular administration:** Under Article 25(2)(a), the State may regulate economic, financial, political and other secular activities associated with religious practice.
2. **Social reform:** Article 25(2)(b) permits legislation for social welfare and reform, including opening Hindu religious institutions to all classes and sections of Hindus.
3. **Judicial scrutiny:** Courts examine whether a disputed practice is genuinely religious, whether it is protected constitutionally and whether applicable restrictions are justified.
4. **Customary traditions:** Long-standing customs deserve consideration, but custom alone cannot override constitutional requirements.

Institutional Balance

Temple authorities and hereditary functionaries may perform traditional religious roles, whereas statutory bodies and governments may exercise legally assigned administrative responsibilities. Clear division of authority, consultation and transparent procedures can minimise disputes.

Conclusion

Constitutional governance requires neither unrestricted state control nor immunity of religious institutions from regulation. The objective should be to preserve legitimate religious autonomy while ensuring equality, accountability and constitutional compliance.

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