

The overwhelming power and influence of religious institutions

[Religion](#)



Religion has played a major role in shaping peoples social and spiritual life. Communities around the world put aside their differences to share a common faith and pass down these beliefs to the generations. However, the influence these religious institutions hold over people's lives is growing rapidly in more ways than one. Critics say that religious systems today has so much control over their followers lives that they've practically quashed their free will.

Are religious institutions suppressing the views of the common people?

Religion defines the moral sense of the people, thus also defining laws and societal norms. As, a result these religious institutions often suppress the views of people to extort ransom and swindle them out of their fortune.

People are blinded by the unconventionalities and superstitions of these influential institutions. Several parts of the world, namingly, Saudi Arabia, India and Thailand use religion as a lucrative source of income through pilgrimages and other religion associated tourisms.

What is giving these religious institutions this dominance to subdue the views of the people? The research question will attempt to determine the ways in which religious institutions exhibit their power and influence to change the views of the people.

The key issues this research question will explore are

- At what level should one tolerate these beliefs?
- To what level do these beliefs agree with scientific explanations?
- Are religions changing the outlook of the world?

Global perspectives:

Religion should remain what it truly is — a voluntary belief, not science and not law. One of the main issues in the world today is the fact that to some people, religion is science and the law. This belief has, and still is, causing fatal problems throughout the world. It has altered the way of people's lives in a somewhat negative manner. It benefits from the fear and guilt of people to strengthen its power. For example, the Islamic religion states that a Muslim is obligated to donate 2.5% of his wealth to charity due to the Zakat law. This has been described as more of a money making scheme as the rich as well as poor are plundered of their wealth.

Meanwhile in Saudi Arabia, Religion governs how individuals behave and operate in nearly all contexts. About 93% of the people are Muslims and the constitution is comprised by the law of the Quran. For example, Anyone proselytizing faiths other than Islam could be arrested and also imprisoned with a possible death sentence on the table. Almost anything not stated in the Koran, does not agree with the Sharia law. The Sharia law is the constitution of the country and has many unjust restrictions over its nationals, as well as tourists. and a much larger depreciation over the years due to these restrictions. Moreover, until the recent legalization in 2017, women were not allowed to drive and were faced with unjust laws enforced upon them Nevertheless, Women are still required to limit the amount of time spent with men to whom they are not related. The majority of public buildings, including offices, banks and universities, have separate entrances for the different sexes.

These laws are often criticized for their inequalities against Woman rights and have heard uproar and been pressurized by large organizations such as the UN and by the women of Saudi Arabia for facing the unjust and unequal laws. It must be mentioned that tourism has been brutally affected in Saudi Arabia as the prominent, holy cities of Mecca and Medina prohibit non-Muslim tourists. This displays their conservative approach towards their country, enforced due to their religion. Statistics display a decline in tourists by 11% between 2016 and 2017.

Even now in the modern times, Saudi Arabia is ruled by its Sharia laws. These laws have subdued the rights of people and their freedom of speech. The imposition of death penalties and harsh punishments have been used to create fear and guilt in the people's minds. As a result, it has led to the promotion and dominance of the Islamic institution, displaying its power and influence on the people of Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, one of humanities largest tragedies is the holocaust that took place mainly due to religious conflict. Between the years of 1939 and 1945, the Nazis who were Christians claimed the lives of over 5 million Jews. This was mainly due to the religious conflict between Christianity and Judaism that existed for years, creating the atmosphere of antisemitism in Europe. The conflict rose to such a point that any Jew would be forced to convert or they would be killed. These Jews were often tortured and religion was being used as an easy way to manipulate people into committing crimes and seeking vengeance. The Jewish were held in concentration camps where Catholic Nazis brutally tortured them and made them do hard labor. Had

their religious relations been better, this human tragedy could have been avoided.

For thousands of years now, religious institutions have masqueraded as medicine. People reach out to these institutions to seek out their problems all year around. In the last few decades, religion has become more of a business, extorting money, rather than having positive effects on society.

National/Local perspectives

When it comes to India, the diverse culture and tradition is majorly influenced by religion. Religion has its roots deeply embedded into India since the onset of time. However, religious institutions have been known to have ill effects on Indian society. India has struggled to be united as one nation due to this diversity of different religions. Moreover, a major drawback in India's development is the influence of religious superstitions. They have impacted the lives of people in ways more than one. Each religion has an arrangement of convictions which might be superstitious frequently. Such thoughts obstruct the advancement of society and the advancement of people. For example, the most ubiquitous practice amongst most Indians is the 'nazar utaarna', which is essentially a religious ritual to prevent negative vibes from entering one's body or abode. It is often practiced before the inauguration of a new office premise or a new home. And then Indians also tend to ostensibly ward off any evil 'nazar' from their cherubic new-borns and infants, by applying thick dark eyeliner known as 'kajal', on their eyelids, or a black 'tikka' on their foreheads, or on their necks or behind the ears of the children. It is hence, believed that the God would then protect

them from these spirits. This may sound ridiculous, but the sad truth is that it has an assuaging effect on many traditionalists, and sadly on educated ones too!

Hinduism has dominated other religions in all parts of the country. According to the 2017 census, India consists of 74 % Hindus and 14 % Muslims.

However, a growing concern is the rapid growth rate of Muslims in the country. Muslims are growing at a staggering 24% compared to the 18% growth rate of Hindus. This alarming growth rate predicts India to become a Muslim country by 2050. Statistics show that in the last 30 years the number of Muslims has been growing rapidly more than Hindus. This has led to uproar by Hindu politicians and Hindus within the country. This is where religious institutes play their negative role. There have been constant feuds and riots regarding these matters, often going out of hand. Individuals having a place with various religions feel that their religion is predominant. They even attempt to force their religious practices on others which would prompt clash circumstances. In India, collective clash has turned into a typical component. For example, On 6 December 1992, members of the Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal destroyed the 430-year-old Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. It was claimed by the Hindus that the mosque was built over the birthplace of the ancient deity Rama. The resulting religious riots caused at least 1200 deaths. Since then the Government of India has blocked off or heavily increased security at these disputed sites while encouraging attempts to resolve these disputes through court cases and negotiations.

In the past, India has witnessed conflicts between other religious communities as well. This instability is primarily due to the involvement of religious leaders who promote their religion in ways more than one. The best example includes, the rebellion of the Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale, who demanded the separation of a portion of Punjab to be declared a separate state, known as Khalistan. This united all the Sikhs in the country and violence broke out. This also caused the assassination of the prime minister, Indira Gnadhi at that time being. As a result, more than 3000 Sikhs died over the course of three days.

The present scenario in India regarding religion is not satisfactory as, so much chaos is being created on the basis of religion which is in turn affecting us only, so there is a need of stopping this bedlam due to religion, as religion is related to God and if we believe in god then we will have to do the needful.

Personal Reflection

In my view, Beside its sporadic monstrous political indications, religion likewise has other marginally more unpretentious negative impacts on individuals around the world. Religious custom is frequently used to legitimize shameless activities in everyday life. Rather than its objective of creating peace and unity within society, religion has been masked.