
**REDEFINING WAQF GOVERNANCE: A SOCIO-LEGAL
EXAMINATION OF THE WAQF (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2025 -
BALANCING RELIGIOUS RIGHTS, STATE
ACCOUNTABILITY, AND BENEFICIARY EMPOWERMENT**

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ABSTRACT

The research paper provides an important socio-legal analysis of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 - a pioneering legislation that seeks to update the rules relating to the administration of Waqf institutions in India. Waqf is a unique concept of an Islamic endowment that has played a very important part in the fields of philanthropy, religion, and education through the ages. It has been governed not according to laws but on the principles of faith. The 2025 amendment has sought to correct the age-old anomalies of misadministration, non-accountability, and lack of transparency. This Act has given the states powers to oversee the administration of the Waqf institutions and also made it obligatory to provide financial disclosure. In this paper, through the analysis of provisions of the Act, the question is explored of whether these amendments have achieved the right balance between the autonomy of the Waqf trusts and state interference to avoid any misappropriation. Through the case laws, precedents, and illustrations, the implications of the amendments for the beneficiaries of Waqf institutions are examined.

1. Introduction

The institution of Waqf, which is dedicated property under Islamic law with religious, charitable, and pious objectives permanently, has immense historical and socio-religious importance in India. In view of its philanthropic and socio-welfare principles, Waqf has traditionally been an important means for socio-economic security, especially for disadvantaged segments of the society. Whether it is the construction of mosques, madrasas, and graveyards or the running of educational and health institutions, waqf properties have traditionally played an important role in ensuring the continuation of religious life and social justice. These endowments have over centuries developed into a large asset base, with India being one of those countries that have the largest holdings of waqf properties in the world. However, despite their significance, the institutions of waqf have faced problems like mismanagement, corruption, encroachments, and lack of regulation since long past.

With regard to these persistent issues, the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 comes across as a highly important piece of legislation designed to bring about reforms in the management and functioning of Waqf institutions in India. By providing for strict accountability and greater powers of the Waqf Board, among other measures, the amendment aims at bringing about a number of necessary changes within this system. In particular, some of these changes relate to the process of registration and documentation of Waqf properties, the introduction of mandatory audit for better financial management, and the establishment of a mechanism for dealing with disputes. Apart from that, this Act endeavors to solve such problems as encroachment of Waqf land and its misuse in some other way.

At the same time, the advent of greater state involvement in the administration of waqfs brings about significant issues from both the constitutional perspective and socio-legal standpoints as far as the issue of maintaining the balance between the autonomy of religion and state control is concerned. Since waqf is essentially an element of religious practice and community identity, it has to enjoy some autonomy in its administration. Otherwise, it may be undermined by state interference, which would lead to conflict between the religious freedom of a person and state responsibility.

Thus, it becomes crucial to critically evaluate how the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 manages to deal with this challenging triad and whether this legislation is able to establish a proper balance between autonomy of the religious institutions, the power of regulation possessed by

the state and rights and interests of the beneficiaries. In addition to that, the paper aims at analyzing to what extent the mentioned act changes the situation of beneficiaries, who suffer from social and economic disadvantages and rely on support provided by the Waqf institutions.

From the point of view of its structure, the paper is divided into several main parts. First of all, the evolution of Waqf institutions and their governance framework in India with particular attention paid to the difficulties connected with the regulation of this issue in the country. After that, there will be analysed the content of the mentioned act. Then the socio-legal analysis of the act will be performed. There will be considered the implications that this piece of legislation brings to the issues of religious autonomy, regulatory control and beneficiaries' rights. The judicial and institutional responses to the act will be also discussed.

2. The Historical and Legal Evolution of Waqf in India

The practice of Waqf has a historical significance in India, which has developed over time as a means of religious charity and welfare. Waqf is a practice that has originated from the principles of Islamic law wherein it denotes the dedication of movable or immovable property for uses of a pious, religious, or charitable nature according to Muslim law. The property dedicated as a Waqf is irrevocable, inalienable, and vests in God. In the case of India, the concept of Waqf has come into existence in the medieval era of India, especially during the rule of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal era when rulers, noblemen, and affluent people endowed property and resources in order to use them for religious or public welfare purposes.

Conventionally, the management of Waqf had been decentralized and undertaken by the mutawallis. The mutawallis had been entrusted with the duty of administering the Waqf property in accordance with the intent of the founder. This system of administration had depended largely upon personal integrity and social control rather than any legal process. While this provided great flexibility and independence to the institution, at the same time, it rendered the institution susceptible to mismanagement over time. The lack of well-defined governance systems had led to a great degree of inconsistency in the process of management which had varied from region to region and from institution to institution.

Need for proper recognition and regulation of the Waqf properties started emerging during the colonial era. One of the early legislations that came out during this era was the Mussalman Wakf Validating Act, 1913 which validated the Waqf alal aulad and thus confirmed the validity

of dedicating property for charitable and family purposes. It was followed by the Mussalman Wakf Act, 1923 which included the provisions relating to registration and supervision of the Waqf property.

Post-independence, there have been more comprehensive efforts on the part of the Indian state towards regulating Waqf institutions. One of the landmark statutes was the Waqf Act of 1954, which was important as it provided for State Waqf Boards to oversee the management and administration of Waqf properties. Such an act envisaged creating a system of governance through maintaining records of all transactions related to income and expenditure and preventing any kind of mismanagement. However, despite its progressive outlook, this act faced many problems, ranging from inefficient bureaucracy to lack of proper enforcement.

It is in light of these limitations that legislature passed the Waqf Act of 1995, which superseded the previous law and contained elaborate provisions concerning administration of Waqf properties. This statute increased the authority of State Waqf Boards, provided for Waqf Tribunals for resolving disputes and focused on record keeping and proper supervision. The statute also dealt with the problem of encroachment of Waqf lands and unauthorized occupation. Later amending acts in the year 2013 further improved these provisions by increasing penalties for encroachment, improved survey procedures and accountability of mutawallis.

In spite of all of the above-mentioned progress, there have still been quite a few difficulties faced by Waqf governance in India. The first of them can be characterized as an inefficient control and supervision over Waqf properties, resulting in mismanagement thereof. Many instances of such kind have been recorded when the properties have been either underused or illegally occupied, which, of course, has led to huge financial losses.

The second issue is connected with financial opaqueness, that is, the difficulty of tracking income and expenditure due to insufficient accounting and non-systematic audit processes. It usually leads to fraud and other illegal activities carried out by those who occupy the leading posts within the Waqfs.

In addition to that, one more issue is the inefficiency of the administrative mechanisms employed for Waqf management. In particular, the procedure of dispute resolution was not quite efficient, and the Waqf Tribunals set up to make the special adjudication were also not

very convenient in terms of accessibility. And all this was complicated by the socio-economic vulnerability of beneficiaries themselves.

Apart from these structural challenges, the governance of Waqf properties has also been impacted by political influence and bureaucratic hurdles, which have often compromised the autonomy and efficacy of the Waqf Boards. The lack of a well-defined and consistently enforced regulatory regime has created a marked variance in the quality of governance across various states.

Considering the historical and legal context discussed above, one can easily deduce that although the Waqf institution has been an important part of the socio-religious dynamics in India, its governance has always posed several problems. In essence, the development of Waqf law has always involved the effort of reconciling the traditional practices with the modern-day regulatory requirements. Nonetheless, the presence of challenges like mismanagement, lack of accountability, and poor enforcement of rules indicates the necessity for further reforms -which will eventually pave the way for the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.

2.1 Key Provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025

The Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 can be viewed as an important milestone in the legislation concerning Waqf institutions in India. In order to make certain changes in the existing laws and introduce necessary improvements in the operation of Waqf institutions in India, this amendment Act provides for a number of reform initiatives directed at making Waqf institutions more transparent and accountable and improving their governance and administration. The 2025 Amendment Act can be seen as a logical continuation of the Waqf Act of 1995 that had some gaps in terms of regulation of Waqf institutions. One of the main aspects addressed in the 2025 Amendment Act is the problem of inadequate supervision of Waqf institutions by state authorities. It should be pointed out that there were serious problems with the utilization of Waqf properties due to the lack of adequate state supervision and control over these institutions. As a result, the 2025 Amendment Act intends to increase the supervisory powers of State Waqf Boards.

Yet another key feature of the amendment is the incorporation of mandatory financial and operational disclosures, which will help in addressing the long-running problem of lack of transparency in Waqf administration. According to the Act, it is the responsibility of the

mutawallis or the administrators to keep proper accounts and provide financial statements to the appropriate authorities. Periodic auditing and proper documentation of the Waqf properties is also required in order to build an improved system of accounting records. This amendment has been put in place in order to make sure that the revenues from the endowment property are used according to their designated purpose.

Apart from improving the level of supervision and transparency, the amendments also introduce changes in the appointment and the powers of the Waqf Boards. Given the need for professionalism in management of such institutions, there have been improvements in terms of the ways in which members of the board are selected and an attempt to include individuals who have professional knowledge in areas of law, finance and administration. In doing so, the amendment seeks to empower the Waqf Boards to deal with property and financial issues better. It is further noted that the amendment gives the boards greater powers to exercise supervision over the Waqfs, take any necessary measures for dealing with any form of maladministration and to remove or change the mutawallis when they fail to perform the duties entrusted to them. It is expected that these powers will be used in such a way that the property will be managed in accordance with the law and in keeping with the wishes of the founders.

Equally important are the mechanisms introduced by the amendment for beneficiary protection and dispute resolution. The Act places greater emphasis on safeguarding the interests of beneficiaries, who are often the most affected by inefficiencies and corruption in Waqf administration. It provides clearer avenues for lodging complaints and addressing grievances related to mismanagement, encroachment, or denial of benefits. Furthermore, the amendment seeks to strengthen the functioning of Waqf Tribunals by improving their capacity to handle disputes in a more efficient and specialized manner. This is particularly significant given the historical delays and procedural challenges associated with dispute resolution in Waqf matters. By enhancing access to justice and ensuring that disputes are resolved in a timely manner, the Act aims to make the legal framework more responsive to the needs of beneficiaries, especially those from economically weaker sections.

In essence, the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 represents a comprehensive effort to reform the governance of Waqf institutions by introducing stronger regulatory oversight, enforcing financial transparency, improving institutional capacity, and prioritizing beneficiary protection. While these provisions reflect a progressive approach toward accountability and

efficiency, their ultimate success will depend on effective implementation and the ability to maintain a careful balance between regulatory control and the preservation of the religious and charitable character of Waqf.

3. Socio-Legal Implications: Balancing Autonomy and State Control

In relation to the above context, it must be noted that the passage of the Waqf (Amendment) Act of 2025 involves important socio-legal issues because it tries to balance the delicate relationship between the autonomy of religious trusts and governmental regulation. As can be seen from the definition of the term "Waqf," the very essence of it is related to the religious character of this institution since it comes from the charitable principles of Islam. Accordingly, the issue of religious trusts' autonomy is far from being an administrative problem as it is closely connected with the concept of the constitutional right of freedom of religion. Maintaining the religious character of the Waqf includes taking care of the intentions of the waqif and the principles associated with the Waqf in general. Otherwise, the problem may arise of the excessive involvement of the state that will turn the religious institution into a statutory one.

On the other hand, the demand for state accountability cannot be ignored. The historical case of governance of Waqfs in India proves that lack of control always meant mismanagement, corruption and massive encroachment on Waqfs, resulting in loss of faith from the part of people in the system. The amendment of 2025 proves that recognition of this fact, which is evident from the inclusion of control mechanisms into the process of management of Waqfs. This measure is legitimate because the role of state here is the protection against possible misuse of power on the part of custodians and assurance that Waqfs will be used only for the charitable purposes.

The other important aspect of the reform is its likely potential of empowering the beneficiaries of Waqf properties who generally belong to economically and socially disadvantaged segments. Traditionally, the beneficiaries of Waqf properties have been passive beneficiaries who lack the knowledge of their rights and involvement in the governance process. The focus on transparency, accountability, and grievance redressal systems through the amendment can change this trend. Through better channels of complaints and the management of the financial resources, the reforms can facilitate the empowerment of beneficiaries to raise their voices against any injustices. In such a way, the amendment will lead to an inclusive and participatory

model of Waqf governance where the interests of beneficiaries should not be compromised due to any kind of administrative inefficiencies.

However, the relationship between religious autonomy and state regulation brings about various challenges and possible disputes. In particular, there is a problem of overreach, which suggests exercising the authority by the regulator in the manner that undermines the freedom of Waqfs. The issue is connected with the question how far state regulatory authorities can influence on religious issues, such as religious rituals and the interpretation of the founder's intentions. Moreover, there is a danger of increasing bureaucracy, which may lead to inefficiency and even to political influence on the process of administration of the property owned by Waqfs. These challenges emphasize the necessity of the balanced regulation taking into account religious specifics and following principles of fairness and proportionality.

In general, the socio-legal significance of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 can be considered through the prism of its efforts to maintain the necessary balance between three aspects - autonomy, accountability, and empowerment.

3.1 Judicial and Institutional Responses

Indeed, the evolution of Waqf governance in India has largely been characterized by an active involvement of the judiciary in the interpretation of laws governing Waqfs and the protection of beneficiary rights. The judiciary has consistently upheld the unique nature of Waqfs as both charitable and religious institutions while at the same time highlighting the need for good administration and accountability. Through various judgments and rulings, the judiciary has endeavored to clear ambiguities in the laws governing Waqfs, settle disputes relating to ownership and management of Waqf properties as well as ensuring that Waqf properties are used in accordance with the intended purpose.

One major trend in judicial decisions with regard to Waqfs in India is the use of a beneficiary-centric approach, especially when dealing with issues of mismanagement or misuse of Waqf properties. Over the years, courts have continuously highlighted the fact that Waqf properties are administered for the welfare of beneficiaries and should not be considered to be private property in the hands of mutawallis and administrators. This approach by the judiciary has been instrumental in promoting accountability in the administration of Waqfs.

Besides the judiciary, some of the institutional means that help to facilitate access to justice for the beneficiaries include the legal services authorities. These institutions provide legal aid and support for individuals who are incapable of asserting their rights as they do not have sufficient financial and social means. In case of Waqf disputes, these mechanisms are especially relevant, because the majority of beneficiaries are disadvantaged people and have no idea about legal procedures they can use to protect their rights. However, the efficiency of these mechanisms is largely dependent upon the level of awareness, outreach and efficiency of service provision.

Unfortunately, despite all measures that could ensure effective operation of the law, there are still a number of problems associated with its enforcement. It has been established that waqf boards and authorities face some difficulties such as insufficient resources, absence of professionals, inefficient working process, etc. It prevents them from efficient supervision, law enforcement and grievance resolution. Moreover, the issue of encroachment of waqfs' property has become rather topical; many legal disputes related to this issue are taking much time to be resolved.

The other important difficulty is associated with the coordination among the various institutional actors such as Waqf Boards, the state, and courts. The failure to have an organized and coordinated mechanism results in overlap of jurisdictions and enforcement. Sometimes, political influence and lack of administrative independence make the implementation even more difficult.

Generally speaking, although the judiciary and the institutional mechanisms have been crucial for the development and implementation of Waqf laws, their performance is hindered by various difficulties and constraints. Thus, the success of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 will rely not only on the content of this regulation but also on the ability of these institutions to implement it.

3.2 Case Studies: Beneficiary Impact and Real-World Outcomes

The effectiveness of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 may be determined in practical terms with respect to its effects on the beneficiaries and the results of the operation of the Act in reality. Indeed, in some cases, the changes introduced by the amendment to the Act have helped achieve greater efficiency in the governance of Waqfs and better use of the property owned by them. Thus, for instance, in those states where the provisions on the necessity of the disclosure

of information and auditing of activities have been strictly followed, there has been observed an increased revenue generated by Waqfs. As a consequence, more funds have become available for providing scholarships for education, medical assistance, etc. It is clear that in such cases beneficiaries were able to obtain more assistance in terms of resource availability; in other words, the amendment helped enhance accountability and improve management.

However, the effects of the reform have not always been wholly positive for all the regions, as there are particular cases when the introduction of this amendment proved insufficient or caused problems. First of all, the additional control has led to some bureaucratic problems with the distribution of benefits due to additional administrative procedures. At the same time, the increase in the regulatory authority of the government has sometimes caused conflicts between the Waqf administration and the state authorities because of some uncertainties of the sphere of intervention. Furthermore, it is argued that small Waqf organizations, which do not have an administrative capacity, find it difficult to observe the increased requirements of documentation. Thus, in some cases, it is the very need of compliance with the requirements that may impede proper management of the funds.

The viewpoints of the beneficiaries are essential when assessing the true effect of the amendment. Through testimonies and secondary sources, it is clear that although certain beneficiaries have benefited from better access to services and increased transparency in the management of the Waqf funds, others still find it difficult to enforce their rights. One major problem encountered by the beneficiaries is that of ignorance about how to utilize the mechanisms of grievance redressal and accountability. The interviews and observations in the field reveal that most people depend on intermediaries or local officials, making it difficult for them to realize any benefit from the amendments made. However, there are indications that beneficiaries become more willing to interact with the institutional mechanisms of redressal in areas where awareness programs have been implemented.

In summary, the case studies demonstrate an inconsistent yet progressive picture. Although the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 holds immense promise for enhancing governance and beneficiary outcomes, its effectiveness will depend on proper implementation, efficient administration, and greater awareness amongst various stakeholders. In this regard, the practical implications of the reform emphasize not only its promising nature but also the issues that need to be resolved for achieving its objectives.

4. Comparative Perspective

A comparative study on the administration of Waqf properties in various jurisdictions can be of much help in understanding the alternative forms of administration and learning from best practices for implementing reform in India. Countries like Pakistan, Turkey, and some other Middle Eastern countries have evolved their own systems of Waqf property administration, depending on the laws of these countries and the social environment of these countries. For example, in the case of Pakistan, the administration of Waqf properties is heavily influenced by the government and is administered by the central authority.

Turkey, on the other hand, represents a very institutionalized form of the Waqf governance model because the management of the Waqf assets is done through a central directorate with extensive regulatory power and effective management systems. This has proven to be rather effective in ensuring proper utilization of the resources, thus raising significant revenues for public welfare activities. Nevertheless, such a centralized system might restrict local autonomy and the participation of local stakeholders in the decision-making process. There are also some other Middle Eastern states that have applied a hybrid model combining the oversight of the state and different levels of autonomy of religious organizations.

A number of insights can be gained from the above comparisons about how to develop Waqf governance in India. First, it becomes obvious that the issue of institutional capacity and managerial expertise is essential for efficient Waqf property governance. This is evidenced by the successful experience of states like Turkey that show that well-trained staff, established procedures, and sound finance management systems play an important role. On the other hand, the experience of centralized governance in some states shows that there are dangers in that approach -less accountability and less religious freedom. Therefore, India should find a way to create better regulation without destroying the community-based nature of Waqfs.

The other important lesson for India is the necessity to create uniform conditions for Waqfs across different regions since the differences in administrative capacities and enforcement capacities of local governments may have a negative effect on governance efficiency. Also, there is great potential for cooperation between countries to exchange experience and good practices in the field of regulation and asset management. Such cooperation will allow creating better governance and better adaptation of the model.

In conclusion, from a comparative standpoint, it becomes apparent that there is no perfect model of Waqf management, but there are valuable lessons from other jurisdictions that should be taken into account in reforms. Through taking into account good practices and the particular socio-legal environment of India, the country will be able to make the Waqf management more efficient and serve its purpose of social well-being.

5. Reform Proposals

Although the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 is a huge leap towards better governance, its long-term success is highly contingent upon adopting other complementary reforms that will deal with the issues of structural and operational weaknesses. The most critical need at the moment is to strengthen accountability through establishing an independent mechanism of audit for the Waqf Boards. Whereas the amendment stipulates financial disclosure and auditing, the process may benefit even further by making sure that audits are done by independent and professional organizations that are completely devoid of administrative or political control. Independent auditing will not only increase the level of transparency but also build up public trust in the administration of Waqf resources through identifying and addressing any inconsistencies.

Similarly, capacity building of the beneficiaries of the Waqf is also an equally important aspect, which could be addressed through legal literacy programs. The recurrent problem in the management of Waqfs is the lack of knowledge amongst beneficiaries about their rights and how they can use legal means to enforce these rights. The lack of awareness has perpetuated the dependence of beneficiaries upon intermediaries and thus limited their involvement in the process of governance. Through legal literacy and outreach programs, beneficiaries could be enabled to participate more in institutional processes, claim their rights, file complaints about mismanagement, and thus enhance the accountability within the system.

Another crucial area where reforms could be instituted is the issue of dispute resolution mechanisms in the Waqf administration. While Waqf Tribunals have been set up to deal with the disputes arising out of the management of the Waqf properties, they have not functioned due to lack of time and manpower. Thus reforms in this area would entail making dispute resolution mechanisms efficient by providing proper staffing and establishing processes of resolving disputes on a time-bound basis.

Moreover, there is a need for increasing the participation of community members in governing

Waqf institutions. Since Waqf is an institution that focuses on communities, the involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process will increase transparency and make sure that the governance is in line with the needs of the beneficiaries. Various means, such as advisory boards, participatory management structures, and consultation processes with the community members, may serve as the bridge between the administrators and the beneficiaries. Increased participation will not only ensure accountability but will also increase the level of ownership and responsibility of the stakeholders. All the above proposals show the need for taking a holistic approach to reforming the governance of Waqf institutions that should go far beyond legislation.

6. Conclusion

In this research paper, we have explored the dynamic structure of Waqf administration in India, with specific reference to the impact of Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025. The analysis has emphasized the importance of Waqf as a socio-religious institution and the evolution of law related to Waqf through different legislative measures. Further, the paper has also considered the critical provisions of the amendment, such as increased state supervision, greater transparency in financial dealings, and better protection of beneficiaries. In light of the socio-legal approach, the paper has examined the fine line between the religious independence and state supervision and discussed the overall impact of reform in terms of beneficiary empowerment. The exploration of judicial and institutional reaction, along with practical examples and comparative approach, gives us an insight into the possibilities and constraints of the existing system.

One of the important lessons from the analysis of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 is the understanding that even though it has made attempts to overcome some of the problems in the area in question, it has created new challenges as well. One of the most important aspects of the reform process in relation to Waqf institutions is the attempt to reconcile the maintenance of its traditional and religious essence and the achievement of accountability. Balancing between these two aspects is crucial for making the institution effective and legitimate.

The main determinant of the future development of Waqf institutions in the country is related to the successful implementation of the reform and the readiness of the institutions to respond to new challenges. Legislative changes in itself are not enough; it is necessary to have strong administrative capacity and efficient mechanisms of control. The application of the best

practices will help to increase the effectiveness of the institution.

In essence, the success of Waqf management reforms is in their ability to bring tangible gains to the beneficiaries, especially from the marginalized communities that depend on these institutions for assistance. This will be achieved through a continuous effort of ensuring transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability as well as monitoring of the results of the implementation. Policymakers need to stay alert to new challenges and make sure that not only good reforms are made, but also implemented. In this regard, the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 needs to be seen as not a final achievement, but rather as a necessary step in a process of reform.

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