



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Nepal – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 3 November 2011

Information on the treatment of Hindus in Nepal.

The 2011 *US Department of State* religious freedom report for Nepal, in “Section I. Religious Demography”, states:

“According to the government, Hindus constitute 80 percent of the population.” (US Department of State (13 September 2011) *July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report: Nepal*)

In “Section II. Status of Religious Freedom” this report states:

“There were no specific laws favoring the Hindu majority, nor did the government control the expression of Hinduism.” (ibid)

See also “Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom” which states:

“Adherents of the country's many religious groups generally coexisted peacefully and respected places of worship, although there were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Hindus generally respected the many Buddhist shrines located throughout the country; Buddhists accorded Hindu shrines the same respect.” (ibid)

A report from *Freedom House*, in a section titled “Political Rights and Civil Liberties”, states:

“Members of the Hindu upper castes dominate government and business, and low-caste Hindus, ethnic minorities, and Christians face discrimination in the civil service and courts.” (Freedom House (18 July 2011) *Freedom in the World 2011 – Nepal*)

A report published by *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, in a section titled “Political developments” (paragraph 3.3), states:

“Nepal was officially a Hindu country, ruled by the “King of all Hindus”, until 2006. The restored parliament’s declaration in May 2006 that Nepal was now a secular state, and the vote of the newly elected constituent assembly in May 2008 to abolish monarchy and to change Nepal’s status to that of republic were actions of huge significance. In Nepal, these iconoclastic decisions resulted in relatively few denunciations or condemnations from royalist or Hindu leaders. Surprisingly, the angriest denunciations came from extremist Hindus in India, whose ‘King of All Hindus’ had been deposed without their having any influence over the debate and outcome. Such extremist Hindus appeared to have little support in Nepal.” (Christian Solidarity Worldwide (October 2009) *Nepal: Emerging threat of Hindu extremism*)

An article from *The Guardian* states:

“Freedom of religion is not often an issue at the very heart of a constitutional debate, but things have shaped up differently in the new republic of Nepal. Notwithstanding rising political turmoil, the deadline is looming for a new constitution, which will complete and formalise Nepal's transition from Hindu monarchy to secular republic. The constituent assembly has declared Nepal a secular state, but there is an increasing resistance to the nation's new identity, seemingly fuelled by Hindu nationalists in India. In the most dramatic gesture so far, a popular Nepali holy-man, Kali Baba, recently threatened to burn himself alive in protest unless Nepal is once again established as a Hindu nation.” (The Guardian (27 April 2010) *Religious freedom in Nepal*)

A *Compass Direct News* article, in a paragraph headed “Hindu Identity”, states:

“Thapa of the fundamental rights committee indicated that religious conversion could become a contentious issue if the proposed restriction is removed. Even the notion of a secular state is not wholly accepted in the country. “If you hold a referendum on whether Nepal should become a secular state, the majority will vote against it,” Thapa said. Most Hindus see their religion as an essential part of the country's identity that they want to preserve, he added. Dr. K.B. Rokaya, the only Christian member of Nepal's National Commission for Human Rights, said Nepal's former kings created and imposed a Hindu identity for around 240 years because it suited them; under the Hindu ethos, a king should be revered as a god. Most of the numerous Hindu temples of Nepal were built under the patronage of the kings. Rokaya added that Christians needed to be more politically active. The Assembly does not have even one Christian member. According to the 2001 census, over 80 percent of Nepal's 30 million people are Hindu.” (Compass Direct News (29 March 2011) *Prospects Dim for Religious Freedom in Nepal*)

The 2011 *Minority Rights Group International* annual report on Nepal states:

“While overall 2010 saw relatively peaceful coexistence between the majority Hindu community and Buddhist, Muslim and Christian communities, there have been incidents of intimidation reported, largely attributed to Pashupati Sena, Shiv Sena Nepal and Nepal Shivsena (affiliated to the Indian Shiv Sena – a Hindu fundamentalist party). These groups are unhappy with the former Hindu kingdom's move towards secularism and greater inclusion of other faiths, as guaranteed in the 2007 interim Constitution. Two incidents that were reported included the 23 May attack on a Christian church in Dhobighat, in which three people were killed, and the beating of two Christians for refusing to offer donations for a Hindu puja in Kapilvastu on 25 May.” (Minority Rights Group International (6 July 2011) *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 – Nepal*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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