

Rights of Minorities Background Sheet

The position you have been assigned in the Constituent Assembly is to draft an amendment that addresses the concerns of the rights of minorities in Nepal.

Nepal is the only nation in the world where Hindu is the official state religion, 80% of the population claims Hindu as their religion. However, Nepal is a complex and ethnically diverse nation as well, with some experts calculating 31 different cultural groups and over 50 language groups. Nepal has been politically and economically dominated by the Hindu based upper caste Brahmins and Chhettris, but the new Constituent Assembly has been given a mandate to create a more equitable and ethnically sensitive constitution.

Language is a crucial but controversial issue in Nepal. The major political parties in 2008 have advocated for a 3 tiered language program with Nepali as a national language, English as the international language and one provincial language. The 1990 constitution recognized 'all languages spoken as the mother tongue ...as the national languages of Nepal', but which language(s) education will be conducted in, civil service exams administered in etc remains a contentious issue.

Other issues for minorities are past land losses to Brahmins and Chhettris who had the advantage of literacy and knowledge of the law to take over once common land. This includes the creation of national parks in land formerly used by rural peasants.

Dalits and other members of the lower caste feel poverty eradication should be a priority for the Constituent Assembly, as 68% of Dalits live below the poverty line and suffer severe social discrimination due to their status as outcasts.