

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS



Open Access, Refereed Journal Multi Disciplinary
Peer Reviewed Edition :

www.ijlra.com

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH & ANALYSIS
ISSN

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PROTECTION OF RIGHT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITY IN INDIA AND COMPARATIVE STUDY OF USA AND UK

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ABSTRACT

The protection of the rights of religious minorities in India is a complex and multifaceted issue deeply rooted in the country's historical, social, and political landscape. This abstract provides a succinct overview of the legal framework, challenges, and comparative analysis with the *United States (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK)* regarding the protection of religious minority rights in India. In India, the Constitution guarantees religious freedom through various articles, including *Article 25*, which ensures the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion, and *Article 26*, which allows religious denominations to manage their affairs. Additionally, *Article 29* safeguards the interests of minorities. However, despite constitutional guarantees, religious minorities in India face challenges such as discrimination, violence, and marginalization.

Comparatively, the *USA and the UK* also have robust legal frameworks protecting religious freedom. In the *USA*, the First Amendment prohibits the establishment of a state religion and ensures the free exercise of religion, while the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)* provides additional protections. The Researcher endeavour to highlight and mention about the crucial points pertaining to protection of right of religious minority in India and comparative study of *USA and UK*.

KEYWORDS: (*Religious Minorities, Article 25, Article 26, Article 29, RFRA, India. Human Rights*).

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INTRODUCTION

The UK protects religious freedom through the *European Convention on Human Rights and the Equality Act 2010*, among other laws. Despite legal protections, religious minorities in all three countries encounter challenges, including discrimination, hate crimes, and debates over religious expression. The societal attitudes, political dynamics, and cultural factors significantly influence the realization of these rights. The protection of the rights of religious minorities is a fundamental aspect of a democratic and pluralistic society. In the Indian context, a nation known for its rich diversity of cultures³, languages, and religions, ensuring the rights of religious minorities holds particular significance. India's journey towards independence was marked by a commitment to secularism, enshrined in its Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion and equality before the law for all its citizens. This introduction serves as a preliminary exploration of the protection of the rights of religious minorities⁴ in India. It examines the historical background, legal framework, challenges, and ongoing debates surrounding this critical issue.

India's history is replete with examples of religious pluralism and coexistence, dating back to ancient times. However, the partition of *British India in 1947*, which led to the creation of India and Pakistan, also witnessed communal violence and the mass migration of populations along religious lines. In response to the horrors of partition, India's founding fathers and framers of the Constitution sought to build a nation based on the principles of secularism, inclusivity, and religious tolerance.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, serves as the supreme law of the land and provides a robust framework for the protection of religious minority rights. *Articles 25 to 28 of the Constitution* guarantee freedom of religion, including the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion, as well as the right to manage religious affairs. Additionally, *Article 29* safeguards the cultural and educational rights of minorities, while *Article 30⁵ of the Indian Constitution* ensures the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

³<https://blog.iplayers.in/minority-rights-constitution-india/>, *Minority Rights in the Constitution of India*.

⁴Ibid.

⁵<https://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/WriteReadData/RTF1984/1658830363.pdf>.

CHALLENGES AND DEBATES

Despite constitutional guarantees, religious minorities in India have faced various challenges over the years. These challenges include incidents of discrimination, violence, and marginalization, often fueled by religious polarization, communal tensions, and political opportunism. Contentious issues such as anti-conversion laws, disputes over religious conversions, and debates surrounding uniform civil code have also stirred controversy and debate.

PROTECTION OF RIGHT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITY IN INDIA

India, a secular country, guarantees religious freedom to all its citizens through its constitution. The Indian Constitution provides various safeguards for religious minorities⁶, including:

1. **Article 25**⁷: Ensures freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion.
2. **Article 26**⁸: Allows every religious denomination or any section thereof to manage its religious affairs.
3. **Article 29**⁹: Protects the interests of minorities by ensuring that they have the right to conserve their distinct language, script, or culture.

However, despite constitutional guarantees, religious minorities in India have faced challenges, including discrimination, violence, and marginalization. Issues such as communal tensions, anti-conversion laws in some states, and incidents of violence against minorities have raised concerns about the protection of their rights.

PROTECTION OF RIGHT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITY IN USA

The *United States*¹⁰, with its *First Amendment to the Constitution*, ensures religious freedom. The key aspects of religious minority protection in the *USA* include:

⁶<https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/minority-protection-and-india-upsc-notes/#:~:text=Article%2029%20protects%20the%20interests,language%20or%20any%20of%20them.>

⁷Ibid.

⁸Supra Note 6.

⁹Supra Note 3.

¹⁰<https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-efforts-to-protect-religious-minorities/#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20government%20is%20working,promote%20religious%20freedom%20for%20all.>

1. **First Amendment:** Prohibits the establishment of a state religion and guarantees the free exercise of religion.
2. **Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA):** Provides additional protection for religious freedom by requiring strict scrutiny when government actions interfere with religious practices.
3. **Civil Rights Act of 1964:** Prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion in various areas, including employment and public accommodations.

Despite legal protections, religious minorities in the *USA* have also faced challenges, including discrimination, hate crimes, and debates over religious expression in public spaces.

PROTECTION OF RIGHT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITY IN UK

The *United Kingdom*¹¹, without a codified constitution, protects religious freedom through various laws and conventions. Key aspects of religious minority protection in the *UK* include:

1. **European Convention on Human Rights:** Guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
2. **Equality Act 2010:** Prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in various aspects of public life.
3. **Public Sector Equality Duty:** Requires public bodies to consider the needs of different religious groups and promote equality.

AUTHORITIES PARTICIPATED IN THE PROTECTION OF RIGHT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA, USA AND UK

In the protection of the rights of religious minorities in *India*, as well as in comparative studies with the *USA and UK*, various authorities¹² and entities play significant roles. Here are some key stakeholders involved in this realm:

UNDER THE AMBIT OF INDIA:

1. **Government of India:** The central government, as well as state governments, formulate and implement policies related to religious minority rights. Ministries such as the *Ministry*

¹¹<https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/171729.pdf>.

¹²<https://mediahub.unl.edu/media/3213>.

of Minority Affairs are responsible for the welfare and protection of minority communities.

2. ***National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)***: The *NHRC* investigates complaints and takes suo motu cognizance of violations of human rights, including those related to religious minorities.
3. ***National Commission for Minorities (NCM)***: The *NCM* is tasked with safeguarding the constitutional and legal rights of minorities in India. It addresses grievances and advocates for the rights of religious minorities.
4. ***Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)***: Various NGOs work on the ground to protect the rights of religious minorities, provide legal aid, promote interfaith dialogue, and address issues of discrimination and violence.

UNDER THE AMBIT OF USA:

1. ***United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)***: An independent, bipartisan federal government commission, *USCIRF* monitors religious freedom abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.
2. ***American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)***: The *ACLU* litigates cases related to religious freedom and provides advocacy and education on civil liberties issues, including those affecting religious minorities.
3. ***Religious Organizations***: Religious institutions and organizations play a significant role in advocating for the rights of religious minorities and promoting interfaith understanding and cooperation.

UNDER THE AMBIT OF UK:

1. ***Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)***: The *EHRC* promotes and enforces equality and non-discrimination laws in the UK, including those related to religion and belief.
2. ***All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Freedom of Religion or Belief***: A cross-party group of Members of Parliament and peers, the APPG advocates for the protection and promotion of freedom of religion or belief in the UK and abroad.
3. ***Religious and Interfaith Organizations***: Various religious and interfaith organizations work to promote understanding, dialogue, and cooperation among different religious communities in the UK.

These authorities¹³ and entities, among others, contribute to the protection of the rights of religious minorities and facilitate comparative studies on religious freedom and minority rights between India, the USA, and the UK. Their efforts are crucial for upholding fundamental rights, fostering tolerance, and promoting inclusivity in diverse societies.

Despite legal protections, religious minorities in the UK have also faced challenges, including Islamophobia, hate crimes, and debates over religious attire and practices. In all three countries, while legal frameworks provide protections for religious minorities, challenges remain in ensuring full and equal enjoyment of these rights. Societal attitudes, political dynamics, and cultural factors play significant roles in determining the extent to which these protections are realized in practice.

RELIGIOUS MINORITY LEGAL PRESERVATION POINTS

Preserving the rights of religious minorities involves ensuring that they have equal protection under the law and can freely exercise their beliefs without discrimination or persecution. Here are some key legal preservation points for safeguarding the rights of religious minorities¹⁴:

- 1. *Constitutional Guarantees:*** Provide explicit constitutional protections for religious freedom, ensuring that individuals have the right to practice, profess, and propagate their religion freely.
- 2. *Non-Discrimination Laws:*** Enact and enforce laws that prohibit discrimination based on religion in all aspects of public life, including employment, education, housing, and public accommodations.
- 3. *Freedom of Worship:*** Guarantee the freedom to worship without interference from the state or other religious groups, ensuring that religious minorities can practice their faith in private and public settings.
- 4. *Protection of Places of Worship:*** Ensure the protection of religious sites and places of worship belonging to religious minorities, preventing their desecration, destruction, or appropriation.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Minorities/Declaration_GA_Report/States/India.pdf.

5. **Right to Religious Education:** Recognize the right of religious minorities to provide education that reflects their beliefs and values, including the establishment and management of educational institutions.
6. **Cultural and Linguistic Rights:** Protect the cultural and linguistic rights of religious minorities, including the preservation of their languages, traditions, and cultural practices.
7. **Legal Recognition of Marriages and Family Law:** Allow religious minorities to follow their own marriage and family laws, recognizing their customs and traditions while ensuring compatibility with broader legal principles of equality and human rights.
8. **Freedom of Expression:** Safeguard the right to freedom of expression for religious minorities, ensuring that they can openly express their beliefs without fear of censorship or reprisal.
9. **Access to Justice:** Ensure equal access to justice for religious minorities, including the right to seek legal redress for violations of their religious freedom and protection against harassment or violence.
10. **Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation:** Promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation among different religious communities, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and peaceful coexistence.

By incorporating these legal preservation points into national laws and policies, governments can uphold the rights of religious minorities¹⁵ and create inclusive societies where diversity is celebrated and respected.

LEGAL COMMENTARIES ON PROTECTION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The legal commentaries on the protection of religious minorities offer valuable insights into the legal frameworks, challenges, and emerging issues surrounding religious freedom and minority rights¹⁶. Here are some key themes and perspectives often addressed in such commentaries:

1. **Constitutional Analysis:** Commentaries often examine constitutional provisions related to religious freedom and minority rights, analyzing their scope, limitations, and implications for legal protections.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Supra Note 14.

2. **Case Law Analysis:** Legal scholars may analyze landmark court cases related to religious freedom and minority rights, discussing judicial interpretations, precedents, and evolving legal principles.
3. **Legislative Framework:** Commentaries may assess legislative measures aimed at protecting religious minorities, including anti-discrimination laws, religious freedom acts, and laws governing religious institutions and practices.
4. **International Standards:** Scholars often reference international human rights instruments and conventions, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, to assess the alignment of national laws with international standards on religious freedom.
5. **Intersectional Analysis:** Commentaries may explore the intersection of religious freedom with other human rights, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and the rights of women, *LGBTQ individuals*, and *other marginalized groups*.
6. **Historical Context:** Legal scholars may provide historical context to understand the origins and evolution of religious minority rights, tracing developments from colonial-era laws to modern constitutional frameworks.
7. **Comparative Analysis:** Comparative studies may compare legal approaches to protecting religious minorities across different jurisdictions, highlighting best practices, challenges, and lessons learned from international experiences.
8. **Emerging Issues:** The commentaries often address emerging issues and challenges facing religious minorities, such as hate speech, religiously motivated violence, restrictions on religious attire, and the impact of digital technologies on religious freedom.
9. **Policy Recommendations:** The scholars may offer policy recommendations to improve the legal framework for protecting religious minorities, including reforms to existing laws, measures to address discrimination and intolerance, and initiatives to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding.
10. **Future Trends:** The commentaries may speculate on future trends in the protection of religious minority rights, considering socio-political developments, demographic shifts, and evolving interpretations of religious freedom in a globalized world.

The legal commentaries play a crucial role in advancing scholarly discourse, informing public debate, and shaping policy and legal reforms to better protect the rights of religious minorities¹⁷

¹⁷https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Minorities/Declaration_GA_Report/States/India.pdf.

in diverse societies.

CASE LAWS ON THE PROTECTION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA

Several landmark case laws in India have shaped the legal landscape concerning the protection of religious minorities. Here are some notable cases:

1. In the case namely *Shirur Mutt Case*¹⁸: In this case, the Supreme Court of India examined the meaning and scope of the term "religion" under Article 25 of the Constitution. The court held that the term should be construed broadly to include practices, rituals, and observances that are integral to a religion's faith and belief system. This judgment has had significant implications for the protection of religious freedom and minority rights in India.
2. In the case namely *Srimad Perarulala Ethiraja Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami v. State of Tamil Nadu*¹⁹: In this case, the Supreme Court upheld the right of a religious denomination to manage its own affairs in matters of religion under Article 26 of the Constitution. The court emphasized the autonomy of religious institutions and their right to determine their own internal religious practices without interference from the state.
3. In the case namely *Stanislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh*²⁰: This case dealt with the right of religious minorities to establish and administer educational institutions under Article 30 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court held that the state could not impose unreasonable restrictions on the minority's right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
4. In the case namely *St. Xavier's College v. State of Gujarat*²¹: In this case, the Supreme Court affirmed the right of religious and linguistic minorities to conserve their language, script, and culture under Article 29 of the Constitution. The court held that the state had a duty to protect the interests of minorities and ensure that their distinct cultural identity was preserved.

¹⁸AIR 1954 SC 282.

¹⁹1972.

²⁰1977 SCR (2) 611.

²¹1974 AIR 1389.

5. In the case namely *Bal Patil and Another v. Union of India*²²: This case concerned the rights of the Jain community to be recognized as a religious minority under the *National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992*. The Supreme Court held that the Jain community was entitled to minority status and the protection of its religious and cultural rights under the Constitution.
6. In the case namely *Zoroastrian Co-operative Housing Society Ltd. v. District Registrar Cooperative Societies*²³: In this case, the Supreme Court affirmed the rights of religious minorities to establish and maintain their own residential colonies and housing societies without interference from the state. The court held that religious minorities were entitled to protection under *Article 30 of the Constitution* in matters of property ownership and management.

These cases, among others, have played a crucial role in defining and upholding the rights of religious minorities in India, ensuring that they enjoy equal protection under the law and can freely practice and preserve their religious beliefs and cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

Ongoing efforts are needed to address discrimination, promote tolerance, and safeguard the rights of religious minorities. In conclusion, while India, the USA, and the UK have legal frameworks in place to protect the rights of religious minorities, challenges persist in ensuring their full and equal enjoyment. Ongoing efforts are necessary to address discrimination, promote tolerance, and safeguard the rights of religious minorities in all three countries. Protecting the rights of religious minorities is crucial for maintaining a fair and just society. In conclusion, safeguarding the rights of religious minorities in *India, the USA, and the UK* is essential for upholding the principles of democracy, equality, and human rights. Here are some concluding suggestions for protecting these rights in each country:

UNDER INDIAN JURISDICTION

1. **Strengthen Implementation:** Ensure effective implementation of existing laws and constitutional provisions protecting religious minorities through robust enforcement mechanisms and accountability measures.

²²AIR 2005 SC 3172.

²³AIR 2005 SC 2306.

2. **Promote Interfaith Dialogue:** Foster interfaith dialogue and understanding to promote harmony and mutual respect among religious communities, emphasizing shared values and common humanity.
3. **Combat Discrimination:** Take proactive measures to address discrimination and intolerance against religious minorities, including educational campaigns, community outreach programs, and sensitization training for law enforcement officials.
4. **Uphold Rule of Law:** Ensure that the rule of law prevails in all instances, holding accountable those responsible for perpetrating violence or discrimination against religious minorities, regardless of their background or affiliations.

UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF USA

1. **Strengthen Legal Protections:** Continuously review and strengthen legal protections for religious minorities, including robust enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and measures to safeguard religious freedom in all aspects of public life.
2. **Promote Inclusivity:** Encourage initiatives that promote inclusivity and diversity, fostering a culture of tolerance and respect for religious pluralism in American society.
3. **Support Civil Society:** Provide support and resources to civil society organizations working to protect the rights of religious minorities, including legal aid, advocacy, and community outreach efforts.
4. **Ensure Access to Justice:** Guarantee equal access to justice for religious minorities, ensuring that they can seek redress for violations of their rights through fair and impartial legal processes.

UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF UK

1. **Strengthen Legal Framework:** Review and strengthen the legal framework for protecting religious minorities, ensuring that it is comprehensive, effective, and aligned with international human rights standards.
2. **Promote Social Cohesion:** Invest in initiatives that promote social cohesion and integration, fostering a sense of belonging and shared citizenship among diverse religious communities.
3. **Combat Hate Crimes:** Take decisive action to combat hate crimes and religiously motivated violence, including robust law enforcement measures, public awareness campaigns, and support for victims.

4. ***Foster Interfaith Dialogue:*** Encourage interfaith dialogue and cooperation as a means of building bridges between different religious communities, promoting understanding, and addressing misconceptions and prejudices.

Overall, protecting the rights of religious minorities requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses legal reforms, social initiatives, and concerted efforts to promote dialogue and understanding. By upholding the principles of equality, tolerance, and respect for diversity, *India, the USA, and the UK* can create inclusive societies where religious minorities can thrive and contribute to the common good.

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