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Nepali Lesbians Harassed While Registering Marriage

Police Should Offer Protection, Uphold Court Order
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After two years together, Ramita and Shilu—both pseudonyms to protect their identities—traveled to Sindhuli this month to register their marriage under Nepal’s June 2023 Supreme Court ruling which allows for same-sex marriages. But instead of recognition, the couple reportedly faced harassment, delays, rejection, and were forcibly separated, with police complicity and family hostility exacerbating their ordeal.



The Supreme Court of Nepal in Kathmandu.

© Supreme Court of Nepal

As local officials stalled the registration process, citing uncertainty about legal procedures, Ramita’s family reported her “missing.” Despite Ramita’s insistence that she felt unsafe with her family and wanted to marry Shilu, police handed her over to relatives she described as abusive. According to both women, police mocked their relationship and subjected them to verbal harassment. One officer allegedly made demeaning comments questioning the legitimacy of their relationship.

The 2023 Supreme Court interim order instructed the Nepali government to create a separate register for marriages between people of the same sex as well as third gender people, who have been recognized in principle based on self-identification for over a decade. The intention was to give queer couples interim legal recognition while the court deliberates a pending marriage equality case. But officials have been inconsistent in applying the order.

Since 2023, a handful of same-sex couples have successfully registered their marriages. Additionally, two same-sex couples in which one partner was Nepali and the other a foreigner were able to obtain spousal

visas, but both had to take their cases to the Supreme Court.

Ramita and Shilu's experience also reflects a broader pattern: lesbian women often face pressure, frequently enforced by their families, to conform to "compulsory heterosexuality," a societal expectation that women should be in relationships with men. Ramita has said she fears being sent to a faith healer. "Even if you die or become disabled, I'll still make you marry a man," her sister-in-law reportedly told her. Shilu remains in fear and grief, unable to contact Ramita, whom she described as being held in a "hostage-like condition" since the attempted registration.

Rights advocates have condemned the incident as a grave human rights violation, calling for immediate protections and an investigation into local authorities' conduct.

Same-sex couples who want to marry in Nepal have the legal right to do so. But the prolonged period under the interim order and lack of accountability for officials' actions are undermining Nepal's reputation as a global LGBT rights leader.

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