

ABSTRACT

This research critically examines the assertion of identity by the Indian Nepali community within the Indian nation-state, analysing both historical and contemporary factors that shape this process, with particular emphasis on the role of *othering*. It seeks to explore the material and cultural challenges confronting the community and investigates the strategies employed in negotiating and reproducing its identity amidst these challenges. The study aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of identity politics in the context of marginalized communities in India, shedding light on broader implications for social cohesion, policymaking, and cultural recognition in a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse nation. Employing a comprehensive theoretical framework, this research engages with Postcolonial Citizenship, the Politics of Recognition, Theories on Othering, as well as Instrumentalist and Primordialist perspectives, alongside broader studies on nationalism, nationhood, and the state. The study is structured into four distinct chapters, each addressing a critical aspect of the Indian Nepali community's identity formation.

The first chapter examines the role of Indian Nepali literature as a significant instrument of cultural production and the standardisation of the Nepali language in India. Through an analysis of various literary texts, this chapter explores their relevance in reflecting and shaping the socio-political developments within the community. The second chapter focuses on the tea industry in Darjeeling as a lens through which to analyse the significance of land (*bhoomi*) and its sociopolitical implications. It investigates how policies concerning land ownership and usage affect the Indian Nepali community, given that land remains intrinsically linked to citizenship and, consequently, to identity formation. Building upon this foundation, the third chapter examines the ways in which citizenship claims, often rooted in connections to land, manifest in ethnic movements and alternative assertions of identity. It engages with theories on the state to study how communities negotiate their place within the national imagination, often by leveraging state mechanisms. The final chapter delves into identity formation through the process of othering, tracing its historical roots to the colonial construction of the "martial race" theory and critically assessing its enduring contemporary implications. It further investigates the micro-narratives of everyday experiences of othering and how these coalesce into broader macro-narratives that shape communal identity.

Ultimately, this study endeavors to provide a nuanced analysis of the identity politics surrounding the Indian Nepali community, exploring the diverse challenges it faces and strategies employed in response. By doing so, it aims to offer critical insights into the dynamics of ethnic identity, and recognition within the Indian nation-state.