

Ethno-Nationalism in India

Interdisciplinary Perspectives



ATLANTIC

Edited by
Debajyoti Biswas

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Politics of Identity and Home in the Context of Indian Chinese in India: A Study of *Chinatown Days* and *The Palm Leaf Fan*

Doyir Ete

The complex dynamics of home, nation, and nationality most often raises the existential crisis of the most marginal of the minority communities within a Nation-State. India houses several designated minority communities like Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Sikhs and Indian Jews. These communities enjoy rights that the Constitution guarantees to the citizens of the country. But there are also communities who are not designated as minority communities but nevertheless marginalized within the socio-political discourse of the nation because of their precarious position entailed by a checkered history of migration, settlement, and experience in India. The Chinese community settled in India is an exemplary of such a group whose history presents an intriguing insight into a journey that is rich yet turbulent, joyous yet heart wrenching at the same time. It becomes imperative to interrogate and present an overview of the writings and the social context of stories narrating the complex journey of the Chinese community settled in India. Every minority community like the Parsis and Indian Jews have their own history of migration and settlement in India. Like them the Chinese Indians also has a history that narrates their arrival during the colonial period and subsequent settlement predominantly in Calcutta and Makum in Assam. The Chinese Indian experience in India

voices contests, contradict and complement each other, and what results is no cacophony but the essential composite nature of the collectivity called nation. (xii)

The Chinese Community in India is a community that exists in a space of 'in-between' a space full of engagements of identity, politics, nation, and nationalism. Nonetheless, their stories and perspectives are as much a part of the national discourse as any mainstream narrative. Yes, the community grieves the darkest period of their history in India and they look forward to an acknowledgement of this by the state agencies. But most significantly they are open to reconciliation and social acceptance since many of them still reside in India and know no other home. The discourse of nationalism and nationhood which became a part of their very existential identity was the result of the 1962 Indo-China war in which the community was caught in between. They were forced to confront their Chinese ancestry and their outsider status even after decades of co-existence in India. 'Home' as a physical space was no longer the one that they had known for so long; rather 'home' had to be constructed at a designated place where they were deported back by the government. So, they had no control anymore about what they could consider as home, nation, or nationality. Therefore, to understand the dilemma of the Chinese-Indians and their interstitial position one must acknowledge the stories of their checkered history in India.

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