

# Political Representation and Human Rights: Identity and Inclusion of Tharu Community

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## Abstract

*Human rights, as the cornerstone of dignity and equality, include the right to identity, which extends beyond individual recognition to affirm a community's cultural and social heritage. This research explores the critical intersection of political representation and human rights, focusing on the Tharu community's fight for identity and inclusion in Nepal. Political representation is not merely a matter of numbers but an essential recognition of a community's voice and aspirations, vital for ensuring equality and protecting cultural heritage. The Tharu community's ongoing struggle for representation highlights the systemic challenges marginalized groups face in achieving meaningful inclusion within democratic frameworks. This study delves into the historical context, current challenges, and legal frameworks impacting the Tharu community while proposing that true equality demands active acknowledgment of distinct identities in the political and social fabric of Nepal. Addressing these dimensions, the research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on indigenous rights, democracy, and human dignity.*

**Keywords:** Tharu community, political representation, human rights, identity, inclusion, Nepal, cultural heritage, democracy, equality.

## I. Introduction:

In the diverse tapestry of Nepal's ethnic landscape, the Tharu community stands out as a significant indigenous group with a rich cultural heritage and a complex history. Despite their substantial population and deep roots in the country, particularly in the Terai region, the Tharu people have long faced challenges in asserting their identity and securing adequate political representation. This struggle is not merely a local issue but resonates with broader global concerns about indigenous rights, political inclusion, and the fundamental human right to identity. The intersection of political representation and human rights forms the core of this article's exploration. Political representation, in its essence, is more than just a numbers game in legislative bodies; it is

a profound expression of a community's voice, aspirations, and place within the national narrative. For marginalized communities like the Tharu, achieving meaningful political representation is intrinsically linked to the recognition and protection of their human rights, particularly their right to identity (Lawoti, 2006). The right to identity, as enshrined in various international human rights instruments, encompasses far more than individual identification. It extends to the collective identity of communities, their cultural practices, languages, and ways of life. For the Tharu community, this right is particularly salient given their distinct cultural practices, traditional knowledge systems, and historical relationship with their ancestral lands in the Terai. This article aims to delve deep into the multifaceted struggle of the Tharu community for political representation and the recognition of their identity examining the historical context, current challenges, and the legal and policy frameworks that shape this struggle, we seek to illuminate the complex interplay between political processes and human rights principles. Furthermore, this exploration will shed light on how the fight for representation is not just about political power but about preserving and promoting a unique cultural identity in the face of modernization and national homogenization efforts. As Nepal continues to navigate its path as a federal democratic republic, the case of the Tharu community serves as a critical lens through which to view the broader challenges of inclusivity, representation, and the protection of minority rights. This article will argue that ensuring adequate political representation for the Tharu is not only a matter of democratic fairness but a fundamental human rights issue that speaks to the core principles of dignity, equality, and cultural preservation. Through a comprehensive analysis of these interconnected themes, this article aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on indigenous rights, political inclusion, and the evolving nature of democracy in multiethnic societies.

## **II. Methodology:**

This article employs a doctrinal research method to examine the complex issue of political representation and human rights for the Tharu community in Nepal. The doctrinal approach, also known as the "black-letter" law approach, focuses on analyzing legal texts, principles, and concepts to understand the current state of the law and its application to specific issues. The research involves a thorough examination of primary legal sources, including the Constitution of Nepal, relevant statutes, and case law pertaining to political representation and indigenous rights. It also analyzes legislative debates, committee reports, and other parliamentary documents to understand the intent behind laws affecting Tharu political representation. The methodology includes a jurisprudential review, examining judicial decisions and interpretations related to political representation and indigenous rights in Nepal, with a focus on cases involving the Tharu community. Additionally, the

research reviews authoritative legal commentaries, textbooks, and journal articles to gain insights into the interpretation and application of relevant laws. A comparative legal analysis is conducted, comparing Nepal's legal framework with international standards and practices, particularly focusing on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO Convention 169. Finally, the research traces the legal history, examining the evolution of laws and policies related to political representation and indigenous rights in Nepal, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current legal landscape affecting the Tharu community's political representation and human rights.

### III. Objective of the Research:

The objective of this research is to examine the intricate relationship between political representation and human rights, with a particular focus on the Tharu community in Nepal. It aims to explore how the recognition of the right to identity, coupled with meaningful political inclusion, serves as a foundation for safeguarding cultural heritage, promoting equality, and fostering democratic participation. This study also seeks to identify challenges and propose solutions for achieving effective representation of marginalized communities within a federal democratic framework.

### IV. Research Question:

- How does political representation impact the recognition and protection of the Tharu community's right to identity in Nepal?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities for ensuring meaningful political inclusion of the Tharu community in the context of Nepal's democratic governance and legal framework?

### V. The Right to Identity:

The right to identity is a fundamental human right that goes far beyond simply acknowledging an individual's existence. It encompasses a complex web of cultural, social, and ethnic affiliations that form the core of a person's or community's sense of self. This right is particularly crucial for indigenous communities like the Tharu, whose very essence is intricately woven into their cultural practices, traditional knowledge, and ancestral lands. Article 6 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights states that everybody has the right to a legal identity (United Nations Development Programme, n.d)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Compilation1.1.en.pdf>

For the Tharu and similar indigenous groups, identity is not just a personal matter but a collective one that spans generations and ties them to specific geographical locations. Their cultural practices, passed down through centuries, are not mere customs but living traditions that shape their worldview and daily lives. Traditional knowledge, often misunderstood or undervalued by outsiders, forms the backbone of their survival strategies and their understanding of the world around them. Their connection to ancestral lands goes beyond mere ownership; it's a spiritual and cultural bond that defines their place in the universe.

The right to identity encompasses several key elements, each vital in its own way:

- **Legal recognition as a person before the law:** This ensures that individuals and communities are not rendered invisible in the eyes of the state, granting them access to basic rights and services.
- **The ability to maintain and practice cultural traditions:** This allows communities to keep their unique ways of life alive, preserving knowledge and practices that might otherwise be lost to time.
- **Recognition of collective identity for distinct communities:** This acknowledges that some rights and identities are held collectively, not just individually, which is crucial for many indigenous worldviews.
- **The freedom for individuals and groups to define their own identity:** This prevents the imposition of identities by outside forces and allows for self-determination.

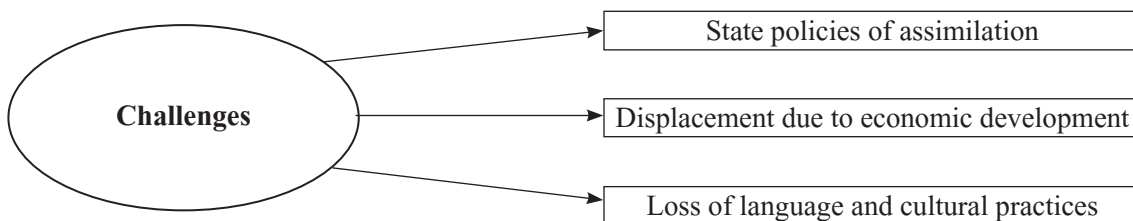
The international community has recognized the importance of this right through various instruments. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights goes further, protecting the rights of minorities to enjoy their culture and practice their religion (United Nations, 1966). The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples represents a significant step forward, explicitly acknowledging the right of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their distinct identities.

For indigenous communities like the Tharu, the right to identity is not an abstract concept but a vital necessity for their survival and flourishing. It serves multiple crucial functions:

- **Preserving culture:** It allows them to maintain their unique worldviews, traditions, and knowledge systems in the face of homogenizing global influences.
- **Asserting land rights:** Many indigenous identities are inextricably linked to specific territories. Recognition of identity can be a powerful tool in land rights struggles.

- **Gaining political recognition:** A recognized identity is often the first step towards political representation and a voice in decision-making processes.
- **Protecting against discrimination:** A strong sense of identity can provide resilience against discriminatory practices and policies.

However, the path to asserting this right is often fraught with challenges. Many indigenous communities face:



- **State policies of assimilation:** Governments may push for cultural homogeneity, viewing distinct identities as threats to national unity.
- **Displacement due to economic development:** Large-scale projects often force communities from their ancestral lands, severing crucial ties to their identity.
- **Loss of language and cultural practices:** Globalization and modernization can lead to the erosion of traditional ways of life, especially among younger generations.

For the Tharu community specifically, the right to identity holds particular significance due to their unique circumstances. Their distinct history sets them apart from other Nepalese communities, shaping their worldview and social structures (NepalBase. (n.d.)). Their deep connection to the Terai region is not just geographical but forms a core part of their identity. The Tharu language, with its unique vocabulary and expressions, encapsulates knowledge and concepts that may not exist in other languages. Additionally, addressing the historical marginalization of the Tharu requires first acknowledging their distinct identity and the specific challenges they have faced.

*Governments play a crucial role in upholding the right to identity. Their obligations include:*

- **Providing legal recognition:** This involves officially acknowledging the existence and rights of indigenous communities.
- **Ensuring non-discrimination:** States must ensure that recognition of distinct identities does not lead to discrimination or exclusion.

- **Taking positive measures:** Governments should actively protect and promote the cultural identities of indigenous communities through supportive policies and programs.
- **Ensuring community participation:** Indigenous communities must be involved in decisions that affect their identity and rights, following the principle of free, prior, and informed consent.

However, states also face the challenge of balancing the recognition of distinct identities with the need for national unity. This requires promoting a multicultural national identity that celebrates diversity while still fostering a sense of shared nationhood. It's a delicate balance that requires careful policy-making and ongoing dialogue with all communities.

### ***Writ Filed in Supreme Court:***

Recently, a writ was filed in the Supreme Court **challenging the constitutionality of the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act**. The writ was argued that the Act wrongly categorizes the Tharu community as part of the Adibasi Janjati group. According to the Constitution, the Tharu community should be recognized as a distinct and separate identity. The petition seeks to declare the relevant provisions of the Act void and to officially recognize the Tharu as a separate entity<sup>2</sup>.

The right to identity is a identical concept that lies at the heart of human dignity and cultural rights. For communities like the Tharu, it's not just about recognition but about survival, dignity, and the ability to thrive in a rapidly changing world. The struggle for political representation is inextricably linked to this broader fight for recognition and respect of distinct identities. Addressing these issues comprehensively is crucial not just for the well-being of indigenous communities, but for creating more just, diverse, and vibrant societies for all. As we move forward, it's essential that we continue to evolve our understanding of identity rights and work towards systems that can truly accommodate and celebrate the rich tapestry of human diversity.

## **VI. The Tharu Community: Background and Identity**

The Tharu community, one of Nepal's largest indigenous groups, boasts a rich and complex history that is deeply interwoven with the land and culture of the Terai region. Archaeological evidence and oral traditions suggest that the Tharu are among the oldest inhabitants of this area, with a history stretching back thousands of years. Their longstanding presence in the Terai is attributed

2 The Writ Filed in the Supreme Court of Nepal( constitutional bench) ,with objective to declare the Act null and Void as it was getting inconsistent with the constitution and call for legislation to make separate law for Tharu Community Writ No : 080-WC-0060.

in part to their natural resistance to malaria, which allowed them to thrive in the region's dense, mosquito-infested forests while other groups avoided the area (Nepal Tourism Board, n.d.). This geographical isolation played a crucial role in shaping their unique culture and identity. The Tharu's connection to their land goes beyond mere habitation; it forms the very core of their identity. Their traditional practices, social structures, and spiritual beliefs are all intimately tied to the rhythms of agriculture and forest management. The Tharu have developed sophisticated farming techniques adapted to the local environment, including complex irrigation systems and sustainable forest use practices. This deep ecological knowledge has been passed down through generations, forming an integral part of their cultural heritage. Demographically, the Tharu comprise approximately 6.6% (Adhikari, 2024) of Nepal's total population, making them one of the country's largest indigenous groups (IWGIA, 2024). While they are primarily concentrated in the Terai region, Tharu communities can be found across several districts in southern Nepal, from the western border with India to the eastern plains. It's important to note that the Tharu are not a homogeneous group; rather, they consist of several subgroups, each with its own distinct dialects, customs, and cultural practices. This internal diversity adds layers of complexity to their collective identity and political representation. The Tharu people, an indigenous ethnic group, have been residing in the Western Terai districts of Nepal since ancient times. Their unique history and culture have been shaped by their long-standing relationship with the land and natural resources of this region. For centuries, the Tharu lived relatively isolated lives, protected from outside influences by the malarial jungles of the Terai. This isolation allowed them to develop a distinct society with unique language, religion, and cultural practices. The Terai was known as the rice basket of Nepal, and the fertile lands of the Western Terai were cultivated by the Tharu, who were the primary inhabitants of this region. However, the last seventy years have seen significant changes for the Tharu people (NepalBase, n.d.). The eradication of malaria and subsequent development initiatives led to an influx of hill people into the Terai. This migration resulted in many Tharus losing their traditional lands and being forced into exploitative labor conditions to repay debts they had not incurred. They often worked for minimal or no wages for the so-called high-class people who had taken over their lands (NepalBase, n.d.). The socio-economic impact of these changes was profound. The Tharus faced exploitation, poor health conditions, and lack of access to natural resources, limited political voice, and poverty. They were often blamed for their own socio-economic backwardness by other communities, who attributed it to social and cultural factors. In 1951, the Government of Nepal enacted a progressive land reform act that centralized non-registered land (Uprety, 2021). The use of Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) in the late 1950s and 1960s further facilitated the



migration of hill populations to the Terai . Before these government actions, the Tharus had their own administrative system, known as the Praganna system, which managed justice, development, and religious rituals.

The Tharus' traditional way of life was further disrupted by the Rana aristocracy, who claimed legal ownership of parts of the land. The Ranas used a few Tharu individuals, known as Chaudharyas to collect revenue from the Tharu population and send it to the central government. Despite this, the land was effectively free for the Tharus to use for cultivation, provided they paid the required revenue (Bist & Bist, 2022). The Tharu population in Nepal, as per the 2011 census, was 1,737,470 people, with half residing in the six districts of Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Surkhet, Kailali, and Kanchanpur. These lands were highly productive and sought-after agricultural areas, and the Tharus' traditional agricultural practices were well-suited to this environment. The Tharu people have faced numerous challenges over the years, but their resilience and cultural heritage remain strong. Their history is a testament to their enduring connection to the land and their ability to adapt and survive amidst significant socio-political changes (Bist & Bist, 2022). The multimedia exhibition 'Daule Daule' at Patan Museum offers an evocative portrayal of the Tharu community's suppressed history and vibrant culture. Curated by Erendina Delgadillo and others, it underscores how the Tharus have been marginalized and misrepresented over the years. Tharu individuals were historically classified as "paani chalne masinya matwali" under the Muluki Ain of 1854<sup>3</sup>, making them vulnerable to exploitation and land dispossession. Key historical events, such as the malaria eradication campaign in the 1960s and the Maoist conflict, further disrupted their lives. Despite these challenges, the Tharu community has maintained a wealth of traditions and wisdom. The exhibition features compelling images depicting various aspects of Tharu life, including farming, pottery, fishing, and political movements, offering visitors a glimpse into their rich heritage. A notable highlight is the role of Tharu women in social and political movements (Ray, 2024). They are shown not just as passive symbols of beauty but as strong, active individuals leading grassroots efforts. The exhibition also showcases the artistic culture of the Tharu, with intricate wall paintings and traditional crafts. 'Daule Daule' calls for a reevaluation of Tharu history, advocating for a complete and accurate representation of their past. It emphasizes the need to listen to and support Tharu voices, ensuring their struggles and achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. Exhibitions like this are crucial for indigenous communities, providing spaces for cultural celebration, education, and documentation. They challenge stereotypes and promote

3 The law code with constitutional features drafted at the initiative of Prime Minister Janga Bahadura Rana which is regarded as the foundational legal text for modern Nepal



solidarity, helping to preserve and uplift the heritage of marginalized groups like the Tharu (Ray, 2024).

The Tharu language, with its various dialects, serves as a crucial marker of their identity. It encapsulates unique concepts, traditional knowledge, and worldviews that may not have direct equivalents in other languages. The preservation of this language is thus not just about maintaining a means of communication, but about safeguarding an entire way of understanding the world. Similarly, Tharu customs, rituals, and festivals form an intricate tapestry of cultural expression. These include elaborate wedding ceremonies, harvest festivals, and spiritual practices that often blend indigenous beliefs with elements of Hinduism and Buddhism (Ray, 2024). Tharu art forms are another distinctive aspect of their culture. Their homes are often adorned with vibrant wall paintings depicting scenes from daily life, nature, and mythology. Intricate woodcarvings and colorful textiles also showcase their artistic traditions. These art forms are not merely decorative; they serve as visual representations of Tharu identity and history, playing a crucial role in cultural transmission.

Achieving adequate political representation at all levels of government remains a key challenge for the Tharu community. While there has been some progress in recent years, with more Tharu representatives in local and national government bodies, many feel that this representation is still not proportional to their population or sufficient to address their specific needs and concerns.

Tharu identity has become a crucial rallying point for political mobilization within the community. Calls for political representation are often framed in terms of recognizing and respecting Tharu identity, with demands for cultural autonomy and self-governance closely linked to the assertion of their unique cultural heritage. This struggle for political representation goes beyond merely gaining seats in legislative bodies; it's about ensuring that the Tharu voice, shaped by their distinct identity and historical experiences, is heard and respected in the political discourse of Nepal.

## **VII. Political Representation and Its Importance:**

Political representation is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance, ensuring that diverse voices and interests are heard and considered in decision-making processes.

Political representation, on almost any account, will exhibit the following five components (Christiano, 2018):

- Some party that is representing (the representative, an organization, movement, state agency, etc.);

- Some party that is being represented (the constituents, the clients, etc.);
- something that is being represented (opinions, perspectives, interests, discourses, etc.); and
- A setting within which the activity of representation is taking place (the political context).
- Something that is being left out (the opinions, interests, and perspectives not voiced).

For marginalized communities like the Tharu, it is not just about democratic participation but a crucial mechanism for protecting their rights, advancing their interests, and preserving their identity. Political representation can take various forms, including elected representatives, proportional representation systems, and reserved seats for specific groups, occurring at local, provincial, and national levels. There are several theories of representation, including **descriptive representation** (representatives reflecting the demographic characteristics of their constituents), **substantive representation** (representatives acting in the interests of their constituents), and **symbolic representation** (the presence of representatives from certain groups having symbolic value and impact). Likewise there a new form of representation which is of **legal representation** (Representatives acting in the interests of their laws and codes). The importance of political representation lies in its ability to protect rights, influence resource allocation, shape policies, and hold governments accountable (Acharya, Dhungana & Guragain, 2022).

Political representation for the Tharu community goes beyond mere numbers in legislative bodies. It's about ensuring their voice is heard, their rights are protected, and their unique perspective shapes the policies that affect their lives. As Nepal continues to evolve as a democratic nation, the quality and effectiveness of Tharu political representation will be a crucial indicator of the country's progress towards true inclusivity and equality. The ongoing struggle for meaningful representation underscores the deep connection between political processes and the protection of human rights, particularly the right to identity and cultural preservation.

### **VIII. Intersection of Political Representation and Human Rights:**

The struggle for political representation by the Tharu community is deeply intertwined with the broader framework of human rights. This connection emphasizes that political participation is not merely a matter of governance, but a fundamental human right that enables the protection and promotion of other rights. The human rights framework, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, all affirm the right to political participation and equal access to public service. For the Tharu, the right to political participation is crucial in shaping policies

that affect their community and cultural identity, though they face structural, social, and economic barriers in fully realizing this right. Political representation serves as a means to protect and promote Tharu cultural identity, affirm their status as a distinct community within Nepal, and exercise their right to self-determination. It also acts as a tool to combat historical discrimination and marginalization, with measures like quotas and reserved seats aiming to achieve substantive equality.

## **IX. The Impact of Political Representation on the Tharu Community:**

The ongoing struggle for political representation has had profound impacts on the Tharu community, influencing various aspects of their social, economic, and cultural life. This section examines the tangible and intangible effects of increased political representation on the Tharu community, as well as the challenges that remain.

### ***Empowerment and Self-Determination:***

Increased political representation has significantly boosted the Tharu community's confidence in asserting their rights and identity. With more Tharu individuals in positions of power, there has been a noticeable increase in their influence over local and national decision-making processes. This shift has empowered the community, spurring broader involvement in social and political issues. The sense of empowerment has also facilitated community mobilization, encouraging the Tharu to take active roles in advocating for their rights and addressing their concerns {Sit Study Abroad. (n.d.)}.

### ***Cultural Preservation and Promotion:***

Political representation has played a crucial role in preserving and promoting Tharu culture. Advocacy by Tharu representatives has led to initiatives aimed at protecting and revitalizing the Tharu language, ensuring its continued use and transmission to future generations. Increased visibility in the political sphere has raised national awareness about Tharu culture, leading to greater recognition and appreciation. Additionally, political representation has helped safeguard traditional Tharu practices and customs, integrating cultural preservation into broader national dialogues.

### ***Economic Impacts:***

Increased political representation has led to a focus on development projects in Tharu areas, driving economic growth and improvement in living standards. Advocacy for fair representation in public service has opened up new employment opportunities, helping to address economic disparities. Additionally, there has been some progress in addressing historical land alienation

issues through political channels, contributing to greater economic stability and land security for the Tharu.

### ***Legal and Policy Changes:***

The inclusion of specific provisions for indigenous rights in the 2015 Constitution marks a significant legal advancement for the Tharu. This recognition has been bolstered by increased Tharu participation in local governance structures following the implementation of federalism, ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making processes. Additionally, anti-discrimination measures have been enacted to combat discrimination against the Tharu and other marginalized communities, promoting greater equality and justice.

### ***Political Awareness and Participation:***

Increased political awareness within the Tharu community has led to higher voter turnout, reflecting a growing engagement with the democratic process. There is a growing understanding of political processes and rights, which has been crucial in fostering political literacy. This enhanced awareness has also led to the emergence of new Tharu political leaders at various levels of governance, ensuring that the community is represented and their interests advocated for. The impact of political representation on the Tharu community has been multifaceted, touching various aspects of their lives. While significant progress has been made in terms of recognition, cultural preservation, and policy influence, challenges remain in translating these gains into substantive improvements in the everyday lives of Tharu individuals. The ongoing process of political representation continues to shape the community's trajectory, offering both opportunities and challenges as the Tharu navigate their place in Nepal's evolving democratic landscape. As this process unfolds, the interplay between political representation and the realization of broader human rights for the Tharu community remains a critical area for continued observation and analysis.

## **X. Legal and Policy Framework:**

The legal and policy framework surrounding political representation for the Tharu community in Nepal is both complex and evolving, reflecting the nation's broader efforts to ensure inclusivity and equity for all its citizens.

A cornerstone of this framework is the 2015 Constitution of Nepal, which formally recognizes the Tharu as an indigenous nationality (Nepal Law Commission, n.d., Art. 42). This recognition is not merely symbolic; it is embedded with provisions for the proportional inclusion of marginalized communities, including the Tharu, within state structures. The Constitution explicitly

guarantees the right to participate in state bodies for all citizens, with additional, specific provisions to ensure that marginalized communities are adequately represented. Furthermore, it acknowledges the cultural and linguistic diversity of Nepal by recognizing all mother tongues spoken in the country, including Tharu, as national languages. This recognition helps preserve and promote the linguistic heritage of the Tharu community. Electoral laws further bolster Tharu representation through a mandated quota system. This system requires that a certain percentage of seats in various electoral processes be reserved for marginalized communities, including the Tharu. Political parties are legally bound to ensure that their internal structures and candidate selection processes reflect inclusive representation. These measures are crucial for fostering a political environment where the voices of marginalized communities can be heard and their interests represented. Additionally, local election provisions include specific mandates to ensure that marginalized communities are represented in local government bodies, further decentralizing power and representation. In the realm of civil service and the public sector, reservation policies play a pivotal role. These policies include quotas for the recruitment of indigenous nationalities, including the Tharu but under Adibasi/Janjati, into civil service positions (Nepal Law Commission, n.d.). Alongside these quotas, there are guidelines designed to promote diversity and inclusion within public sector institutions. Such policies are essential for creating a public sector workforce that reflects the diverse makeup of Nepal's population and for ensuring that the governance of the country is inclusive at all levels.

International commitments also play a significant role in shaping the political representation of the Tharu community. Nepal's endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the ratification and implementation of ILO Convention 169 underscore the country's commitment to upholding international standards for indigenous rights<sup>4</sup>. These commitments include provisions that directly impact political participation, thereby reinforcing domestic legal and policy measures.

## **XI. Conclusion:**

The struggle for political representation by the Tharu community in Nepal exemplifies the complex interplay between democracy, human rights, and cultural identity in a diverse society. This exploration has revealed several key insights and areas for future consideration. The Tharu community's quest for political representation is not just a minority issue but a fundamental

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4 In 2007, Nepal was one of the countries that voted in favor of UNDRIP during its adoption by the UN General Assembly, highlighting its support for the rights of indigenous peoples globally. Nepal ratified ILO Convention 169 in 2007, becoming the first country in South Asia to do so. This convention specifically addresses the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, obligating Nepal to recognize and protect their rights to traditional lands and resources.

aspect of Nepal's democratic evolution, underscoring the importance of inclusive participation in building a truly representative democracy. Political representation for the Tharu is intrinsically linked to the realization of broader human rights, serving as a mechanism for protecting cultural identity, ensuring non-discrimination, and promoting equitable development. There is an ongoing need for capacity building within the Tharu community to develop political leadership, enhance civic engagement, and effectively utilize existing legal and institutional mechanisms. The Tharu struggle for representation offers lessons for other marginalized communities in Nepal and beyond, contributing to the global discourse on indigenous rights and inclusive governance. Future directions include continued refinement of legal and policy frameworks, enhanced focus on implementation and monitoring, greater emphasis on education and awareness-raising, exploration of innovative representation models, and increased engagement with international human rights mechanisms. Ongoing research and documentation of the impacts of political representation on the Tharu community are needed to inform future policy decisions and advocacy efforts. The role of media in shaping public perceptions and political narratives around Tharu identity and representation remains crucial. Future efforts should focus on linking political representation with economic empowerment, recognizing that political voice is closely tied to economic security and opportunity.

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