

# Measurement of Bankariya Identity

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## Abstract

*Ethnic identity is a concept that is based on the feeling of the community, cultural heritage, traditional values and beliefs, ritual practices, mother tongue, specific geographical territory, and religion and can be measured by using different techniques and methods. Anthropologists and identity specialists developed various methods for the measurement of ethnic identity. This research examined the newly developed ethnic identity measures of the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS), the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), and the revised (MEIM-R) from anthropological perspectives. Exploration, commitment, and affiliation are the major factors for the measurement of identity and this article has used these factors. Data gathered from the field of Bankariya habitats in Dhading district were analyzed for identity measurement. For the calculation of Bankariya's identity, only 65 respondents out of 79 were selected. Most of them have identity feelings and pride in their ethnic group. More than 90 percent of Bankariya people have actively participated in their cultural practices but only 3 percent of people are active in ethnic organizations. The research also explores the demographic and geographic features of the Bankariya people, the theoretical framework of identity, and measuring techniques.*

**Keywords :** Multi-group, acculturation, endangered, cultivation & homeland.

## Introduction

There are ten endangered ethnic groups based on the population in Nepal. According to NEFIN (2005), Kusunda; Bankariya; Raute; Surel; Hayu; Raji; Kisan; Lepcha; Meche; and Kusbadiya are the endangered people whose language, rituals, festivals, and other cultural components have been lost. Bankariya has the least population among the other ethnic groups of Nepal and belongs to the endangered and marginal community. Most of them live in the Manahari Rural Municipality of Makwanpur district. According to Rashtriya Samachar Samiti (2021), the total population of Bankariya is 81. Among them, 63 people belong to 13 families and live in Twangra Dada village and Musedhap of Hardikhola. The other two Bankariya families live in Lamitar village, Thari Rural Municipality in Parsa district. But from my field research, the total number of Bankariya residing in the research area is found 79 only. Among them 36 were male and the rest 43 are female. Out of this population, the percentage of males is 41 and females is 59, which indicates the gender imbalance but positive sign to increase the population (Field study, 2021). The age composition of Bankariya shows that the age group 10-20 has the highest

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population i.e. 31.51 percent, whereas the age group 1-10 has only 20.55 percent. Due to their reproductive age, these age groups indicate the likelihood of substantial population expansion shortly, as they tend to marry between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three. The household composition shows that 23 percent live in a joint family, whereas 77 percent live in a nuclear family (Field study, 2021) and it indicates that they prefer nuclear family to a joint one.

There exists an inextricable link between nature, tribe, and cultural communities as well as their livelihood patterns. The nature-culture relations are inseparable in the ethnic communities, for example, Raute indigenous peoples of the Mid-western and Far-western regions of Nepal still has enjoying hunting and gathering nomadic lifestyles. They make wooden products for domestic use such as bowls, plates boxes, drums, etc., and barter with cereal food crops or sell them to meet their daily needs (Sneha, 2012). But Bankariya and Kusunda have abandoned their hunting and gathering lifestyles but largely depend on forest resources. Similarly, Chepang has practices shifting cultivation. In the context of the world, about 80% of the indigenous people are 'marginal cultivators' who has with less than 1 acre or small cultivators having 1-2 acres of land (FIAN, 2015) and produce food just sufficient for less than 3-6 months. To supplement their diet, they either depend on edible roots of wild forest vegetables or sell medicinal and aromatic plants, non-timber forest products or engage in wage labor (Bhattachan, 2012). Most of the Bankariya people have no land and depend upon the forest and are also invaded by other ethnic or caste or linguistic groups, they are in numerous deprived situations and speak a minority nearly disappearing language. Bankariya have Mongoloid features and a nomadic character. They like to eat forest-based food like *Kandmool*, *Tarul*, *Bhyakur*, *Githa*, etc. Earlier their number was three to four hundred, but now this number has substantially reduced. Their religion and dialect in many ways are similar to that of the Chepang community. They have been practicing silent trade and often exchange forest-based products for food grains in the surrounding villages where they live (Jha, 2019). They have no separate ethnic identity and CBS included them in Chepang cultural group but they always rejected this concept. Now they are on the verge of extinction and losses most of their cultural identities.

### **Objectives**

The overall objective of the article is to find out the identity situation of the Bankariya people of Nepal. The specific objective is to measure and analyze the identity issues by using the various cultural aspects of Bankariya like clan, language, rituals, feelings, and some material culture.

### **Research Method**

Regarding the objectives, analytical and descriptive methods are applied in the study. The data used in the study are both quantitative and qualitative collected from the Twangra Dada village, Musedhap of Hardikhola Makawanpur district. Field research was carried out within three months (July to September 2021). The total population of Bankariya in the study area is 79 and 65 people are selected by using purposive random sampling for data

collection. Some secondary data has been used for cross-checking from the Central Bureau of Statistics, journal articles, newspapers, and reports related to the Bankariya people. Anthropologists have developed various methods for the measurement of identity at the individual and group level. The 12-item MEIM criteria and Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R) have been applied for the measurement of Bankariya Identity.

### **Identity: A Conceptual Framework**

The term identity is a keyword of contemporary society and a central focus of socio-cultural and socio-psychological theorizing and research. Identity wasn't that much of an issue in the early historic periods. When society became more stable, identities were largely assigned rather than selected or assumed. In modern times, the concept of identity bears the overwhelming pace of change in the surrounding social context, the total weight of the need for a sense of who you are, along with changes in the groups and networks in which people and their identities exist. What is embedded in the social structure and practices in which these networks themselves are embedded?(Howard, 2000). Identity is a concept that neither imprisons nor detaches persons from their social and symbolic universes, it has over the years retained a generic force that few concepts in our field have (Davis, 1991). Identity is never a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality (Bhabha, 1992). According to Goffman (1959), ego identity or sense of identity is the subjective sense of (one's) own situation and (one's) own continuity and character that an individual comes to obtain as a result of (one's) various social experiences. From these definitions, we can say that the sense of ethnic identity is the subjective sense of one's situation, one's steadiness, and character that an individual acquires as a result of those social experiences that reflect the individual's psychology, thoughts, feelings, attitude and behavior toward the biologically and/or culturally defined group(s) to which he/she presumably belongs (Verkuyten, 2005).

Similarly, Phinney (1992) reviews more than 70 studies of ethnic identity. The great majority of these articles assume that identity development is particularly complicated for those belonging to women, ethnic peoples, and cultural minority groups, owing to negative societal stereotypes and discrimination. He considers the major theoretical frameworks of ethnic identity formation (social identity, acculturation, and developmental theories), key components of ethnic identity (ethnic self-identification, a sense of belonging, attitudes toward one's ethnic group, social participation, and cultural practices), and empirical findings on self-esteem, self-concept, psychological adjustment, ethnic identity concerning the majority of cultural groups, changes related to the generation of immigrant people, gender, and other contextual factors.

The Social Identity Theory proposed by Tajfel & Turner (1979) mentioned that social comparison with the out-group is a decisive element in the process by which social categorization can turn into the creation of positive in-group distinctiveness. Our self-concept or the social concept of another person or persons becomes closely meshed in with perceptions of a group membership. Self-esteem or the estimate of another person or

persons is enhanced or detracted from by perceptions of how in-groups and out-groups are held to behave or are held to be able to perform or to rate in society. The formation of the personal and social identity and their relation with in-group and out-group is related to “we” and “they” as well as intergroup composition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The definition given by Saharso (2020) is consistent with the writings of the sociologist, Barth (1969), who argued that ethnic identity was a means to create boundaries that enabled a group to distance themselves from one another. Barth was quite forceful about his position as he strongly maintained that ethnic boundaries define a group and not the cultural stuff that encloses it (Sollars, 1996). But Guitart (2011), mentioned the two different theoretical approaches i.e. social identity and developmental perspective which stress two important components of ethnic identity. These are the self-identification as a member of a particular social group and the developmental aspect of the ethnic identity throughout the exploration process respectively. Similarly, Akerlof and Kranton (2000) define identity as a person's sense of self or self-image, and how their identity is linked to social categories; individuals who identify with people of certain types and distinguish themselves from others. Ethnic identity is a measure of the sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group. Hence, ethnic identity is a complex theoretical approach that describes and measures the membership of the community as well as the feeling, attitudes, and behaviors toward the community.

### **Measuring Criteria of Ethnic Identity**

There is no unanimous view on the components of ethnic identity and it is also a more debatable issue. Various anthropologists describe the multiple components of ethnic identity. According to Weber (2009), ethnic groups are groups of people who share a subjective belief in a common ancestor, either because of physical categories and/or traditional practices or because of the memory of colonization and migration. This belief must be important for the dissemination of group formation (quoted in Hutchinson & Smith 1996, p. 35). On the contrary, it doesn't matter if there is an objective kinship or not. He defines the concept of ethnic group very broadly but it has some problems in concretization. Another two social anthropologists, Hutchinson & Smith (1996) mentioned the following features of an ethnic group.

1. A common proper name to identify and express the essence of the community
2. A myth of common ancestry
3. Shared historical memories
4. One or more elements of common culture
5. A link with a homeland will create an attachment to the ancestral land
6. A sense of solidarity among the people of the community (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996).

Ashmore et al. (2004) attempted to identify the major components of group identity and provided a useful framework for understanding ethnic identity in its broadest sense. According to him, ethnic identity has the following dimensions:

1. Self-categorization
2. Commitment and attachment
3. Exploration

4. Behavioral involvement
5. In-group attitudes
6. Ethnic values and beliefs
7. Importance of group membership
8. Ethnic identity concerning national identity.

These dimensions of ethnic identity refer to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership. The National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities is the leading institution established by the Government of Nepal. It works on multiple issues related to the ethnic groups of Nepal. It also developed some criteria for ethnic identification. According to the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN, 2003), the following are the major criteria of ethnicity in Nepal:

1. A distinct collective identity
2. Own language, religion, tradition, culture, and civilization
3. Own traditional egalitarian social structure
4. Traditional homeland or geographical area
5. Written or oral history
6. Having 'We' feeling
7. Has had no decisive role in the politics and government of modern Nepal
8. Indigenous or native peoples of Nepal
9. Declares oneself as Janajati.

But some of the ethnic groups and indigenous people of Nepal like Newar, Raute, Kusunda, Chepang, Bankariya, Tharu, etc. disagree with the above-mentioned criteria and demand new criteria to integrate the ethnic communities of the country.

Therefore, a theoretical model is necessary for ethnic identity and its research. From the previous theoretical and empirical study, we can say that ethnic identity is a multifaceted construct that includes several dimensions. Furthermore, it is a dynamic and fluid concept that changes over historical circumstances and must therefore be considered concerning its formation and variation (Phinney, 2003). Ethnic identity is separate from one's identity as an individual, although the two may reciprocally influence each other. Hence, ethnic identity is composed of ethnic awareness, self-identification, self-attitudes, and behavioral patterns. The article is based on the measurement criteria and indicators developed by Phinney (1992) i.e. 12-item MEIM criteria and Phinney (1992) & Roberts et.al. (1999) Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM -R).

### **Measurement of Bankariya Identity**

The CBS could only record 42 Adibasi/Janajati groups with their population size in the census of 2001 (17 groups were not identified) but in the 2011 census added 6 more Adibasi/Janajati groups with their population size in Nepal. Yet, the CBS (2011) has not reported the Chairotan, Tin Gaule Thakali, Thudam, Free, Bankariya, Barah Gaunle, Tabe, Marphali Thakali, Larke, Siyar, and Surel. There are two reasons for not reporting these groups in the 2011 Census. First, the number of these groups is small, and second, they

were not found at the time of census enumeration. The first reason is likely more plausible as CBS has recorded many sub-groups with small numbers as well (CBS, 2014). Earlier the number of Bankariya was three to four hundred, but now this number has substantially reduced. Their body structure, festivals, rituals, religion, and dialect in many ways are similar to that of the Chepang. So, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) does not separate Chepang from Bankariya. Often, they exchange forest-based products like the kilo in exchange for grains in the surrounding villages where they live. From the existing reports, we see that the Bankariya people are in a crisis of existence and they are recognized as a Chepang sub-group. The Gurung Commission (2010), has also noted that the Bankariya are a subgroup of the Chepangs.

These examples show that the ethnic group is not a fixed and unchanged category but it is produced and reproduced in fluctuating historical, political, and economic contexts. The Bankariya people have rejected the report given by the Gurung commission and believe that they are a separate ethnic group and have a distinct cultural identity. In contrast to the demographic data, the linguistic data of CBS (2011), the language of Bankariya has been included as a separate linguistic group. According to CBS (2014), languages like Athpariya, Lhopa, Dolpali, Lhomi, Sonaha, Manange, Phangduali, Surel, Malpande, Kurmali, Kagate, Dzonkha, and Bankariya, were missing in 2001 and have been returned as separate languages in the census of 2011. But in the same report, Bankariya is not mentioned as a separate ethnic group which also shows some contradictory facts about the Bankariya people of Nepal.

By studying the many theories of ethnic identity, multiple measures have been developed and used in ethnic identity research. It has been created for the study of specific ethnic groups like African, Asian, Mexican, and American. One of the disadvantages of having multiple measures for each ethnicity is that the results of these measures cannot be compared. Seeing this difficulty, Phinney (1992) developed the MEIM with the belief that ethnic identity could be measured as a single construct across all ethnic groups. In 2004, Umaña-Taylor and colleagues also developed a universal ethnic identity measure, the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS), based on three domains of ethnic identity: exploration, resolution, and affirmation.

However, MEIM is the most widely used measure of ethnic identity in all types of ethnic groups. Out of these various techniques, I have used the following two techniques for the measurement of Bankariya's identity. For the calculation of Bankariya's identity, I have used only 65 respondents out of 79. It is a population of more than 10 years of age and not included the other linguistic population which is not a member of the Bankariya ethnicity.

### **I. The 12-item MEIM Criteria**

First I applied the method developed by Phinney in the period of 1990s. In that method, the researcher uses a form in which Participants must fill up the 12-item MEIM criteria. The MEIM included seven items that are designed to assess the affirmation, belonging, and commitment components, and five items that assessed the exploration component (Roberts, et al., 1999).

**Table no.1: 12-item MEIM Measurement**

S.N.	Items	Responses			Total
		Yes	No	Neutral	
1	Happy to be a member of Bankariya	20	35	10	65
2	Feel good about Bankariya culture	25	30	10	65
3	Pride in ethnic group	55	10	-	65
4	Understand group membership	-	65	-	65
5	A clear sense of the ethnic background	-	65	-	65
6	Strong attachment to the group	30	20	15	65
7	Sense of belonging to the group	30	20	15	65
8	Active in ethnic organizations	2	60	3	65
9	Participate in cultural practices	58	-	7	65
10	Talked to others about the group	30	25	10	65
11	Think about group membership	35	25	10	65
12	Spend time learning Bankariya culture	12	35	18	65

*Source:* Field Study, 2021

Indicators presented in table no. 1 are more abstract and some of them are incalculable. But ethnic identity is mostly composed of some objective and subjective cultural, social, and political components that realize in a certain humane group (Burton, 2001) that distinguishes it from other counter-groups because its identity needs to be consistent with the reality of that particular group. The table shows that most of them are unknown of their ethnic identity and group attachment in the context of social, cultural, geographical, and language. Castles (2001) writes that ethnicity as a source of identity is declining not of ethnicity, but the state and gender. However, the notion of ethnic identity among the people of Bankariya reveals many restrictions imposed on the parts that can be exchanged for applicable roles, despite their eternal nature. Most of the members of the Bankariya ethnicity have group consciousness and group attachment but they are inactive and have no concept of organizational power.

## **II. The Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure—Revised (MEIM—R)**

It is the revised form which has only six criteria. It is a widely used and short-cut method based on the concept of Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) and developed by Phinney (1992) and Roberts et.al. (1999). It is also called MEIM-R.

**Table no. 2: MEIM—R Measurement**

S.N	Items	Responses			Total
		Yes	No	Neutral	
1	I have spent time in finding out more about my ethnic groups, such as their history, traditions, and customs.	12	35	18	65
2	I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group.	25	25	15	65
3	I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.	25	25	15	65
4	I have often talked to other people to learn more about my ethnic group.	20	25	20	65
5	I feel a strong attachment to my ethnic group	15	30	20	65
6	I have often done things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.	12	35	18	65

Source: Field Study, 2021

Table 2 indicates that items 1, 4, and 5 assess exploration; Items 2, 3, and 6 assess commitment. The usual response is calculated here on the number of respondents to these criteria. Bankariya has more explorations than commitment because of the lack of ethnic awareness and lack of organizational attachment. Above mentioned data also shows that most of the Bankariya people are unknown of their traditional habitat, language, festivals, and clan/sub-clan patterns. They are unknown of their traditional norms, values, dress, belief system, and religion but they fully celebrate their traditional festivals and ritual practices like birth, marriage, and death. Most children and adults are unknown in their identity components but old people with 50 years of practicing and teaching their cultural traditions. These all cultural patterns and traditional knowledge systems of the Bankaria people are more or less extinct because of the impact of globalization, Christianization, and Hinduization but now they are trying to revitalize these components. A leading organization like Bankariya Mahila Bikash Sangh and Bankariya Bikash Samaj has been working to re-establishing and revitalize these cultural patterns, language, and traditional knowledge.

### Conclusion

The Bankariya community is one of the highly marginalized and endangered ethnic groups in Nepal. They hold a considerably low population and are on the verge of extinction. They have a poor quality of life and are backward in every aspect of social life like educational, social, economic, and cultural aspects. Due to it, they are excluded from the social and developmental mainstream. They do not have a regular source of income except for government allowance nor do they have other economic activities and a good job. Nor do they possess good paternal assets. Similarly, they do not have good knowledge and skills which apply to modern society. While socializing in modern societies Bankariya community is facing various problems and hurdles. Bankariya community is the latest ethnic tribal group of Nepal who is justly adopted common social life. The identity of the



Bankariya people is in crisis because they do not know about their traditional habitat, language, festivals, and clan/sub-clan patterns. They are unknown of their traditional norms, values, dress, belief system, and religion but they fully celebrate and practice their rituals like birth, marriage, and death ceremonies. In course of abandoning nomadic life and acclimatizing to modern societies, they have been facing various problems like food shortage, lack of agricultural land for cultivation, problems with health and sanitation, illiteracy, and so on. They have idiosyncratic culture, norms – values, language, territory, and history therefore government and other ethnic organizations must recognize them as a distinct ethnic group of Nepal.

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