Different Narratives in Times of Uncertainties: Identity Politics at the Contested Heritage Site in Kurundimalai, Sri Lanka

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This study mainly explores the dynamics of identity politics surrounding the contested heritage site of Kurundimalai in Mullaitivu, Sri Lanka. The historic significance of Kurundimalai as a pilgrimage site and its association with multiple religious and ethnic communities have resulted in a complex interplay of identity politics, fuelled by historical narratives, cultural symbolism, and territorial claims. This study aims to shed light on the various dimensions of identity politics in Kurundimalai, the underlying factors contributing to the contestations, and their implications for social cohesion and sustainable peace building in the region and the country. This research employs the mixed-method approach, combining desk research, interviews, and participant observation. The desk research involved a comprehensive review of existing literature, reports, and historical accounts related to the contested heritage site in Kurundimalai. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including religious leaders, local communities, and relevant authorities. Participant observation was carried out to gain first-hand insights into the socio-political dynamics and interactions at the heritage site. In the conceptual framework of this study, fundamental theoretical examination of the four notions of power, nationalism, contested heritage, and heritage conservation have been used to understand the behaviour of identity politics around the contested heritage site.

Keywords: Contested heritage, Historical narratives, Identity politics, Nationalism, Territorial claims