



## **The Plurality of Governance as a Threat to Citizenship Rights: An Investigation on Hill Country Tamils in Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

The right to nationality is a fundamental human right that encompasses the capacity to acquire, alter, and retain nationality. Citizenship rights are cultural products, and when rights are not accepted by the cultural structure of a society, they are less likely to be realized, especially by excluded and vulnerable communities such as the hill country Tamils in Sri Lanka. Before 1986, plantation Tamils were denied citizenship and considered stateless; even after citizenship rights were granted, estate residents experience some difficulties. Therefore, the present study was conducted to understand the reasons behind not realizing citizenship rights of estate Tamils. Sixty-eight participants (in selected seven estate communities in Nuwara Eliya, Rathnapura, Kandy, and Badulla) participated in an embedded-single case multiple unit grounded theory research with data gathered from in-depth interviews, empirical observations, and focus group discussions. Data were fed to MAXQDA and analyzed thematically. Three theoretical perspectives were developed. Hill country Tamils are governed by five distinct governing processes, including trade union influence, the public sector, plantation management, the Kangany system (local leadership), and local government agencies. Each governing body has divergent objectives that are not aligned with a shared goal, such as the realization of citizenship rights and the promotion of well-being. The daily decisions of individuals are filtered by these controlling bodies, and decisions appear to be inauthentic because individuals have neither choice nor accountability for the outcomes of their actions. Citizenship rights of hill country Tamils are difficult to actualize because communities are isolated from other communities, preventing the development of social capital links. In conclusion, the present study demonstrated that it is difficult to protect the citizenship rights of the most disadvantaged groups when diverse governmental entities with competing interests participate in decision-making related to individuals' well-being.

*Keywords: Citizenship Rights, Decision Making, Governance, Hill-country Tamils, Well-being.*

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