

## **ASSIMILATION OR INTEGRATION: A STUDY OF INDIAN DIASPORAS IN SRI LANKA IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND MULTICULTURALISM**

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Indian Diasporas in Sri Lanka are comprised of more than fourteen microscopic communities of Indian origin. They are descendants of various business communities from many parts of India who have migrated to Sri Lanka for centuries and of indentured labourers drawn from agrarian classes in South India who played a crucial role in the economic transformation of the island under European colonial rulers. When Sri Lanka became an independent nation in 1948, citizenship rights of these communities emerged as a controversial and crucial issue in the composition of the Sri Lankan community. Some of the members of these communities were expatriated on the basis of high citizenship requirements under the Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949. Others who remained in the island confronted a complex situation with regard to safeguarding their economic interests and political status and also their diasporic identity. This research study investigates how the universally accepted human rights regime unfolded in the evolution of a multi-cultured plural society with a number of communities of Indian origin in post-independent Sri Lankan society. The research problem addressed here is the struggle of these communities in safeguarding diasporic interests in contemporary Sri Lankan society, particularly in respect of minority ethnic and cultural rights from the perspective of the liberal concept of multiculturalism. The analytical and conceptual guidelines for this research study are derived from the ‘liberal cultural approach on multiculturalism’ as explicated in Will Kymlicka’s 1995 study *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Sri Lankan multicultural society can be recognized as a multinational society composed of a majority and many minority nations. The Sinhala-Buddhist culture of the majority community is recognized as the predominant culture of the Sri Lankan nation. Applying Kymlicka’s hierarchical classification, other Sri Lankan ethnic groups can be identified as national minorities and non-national minorities or ethnic minorities. According to this classification, Indian diasporas fall into the category of ethnic minorities since they are ‘voluntary immigrants’ in the Sri Lankan society and are therefore the weakest in relation to cultural rights. Therefore, they face the challenge of either assimilation or integration into the majority culture.

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