

Behind Closed Doors: Redefining Up-Country Tamil Community's Political Identity as a Distinct Minority Group

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The migration of Up-country Tamils to Sri Lanka occurred during the colonial period and was characterized by the movement of millions of Indian Tamils brought to work on the plantation estates in the hill stations of Sri Lanka. Over time, this community faced numerous challenges, including significant cultural and political marginalization within Sri Lankan society. Their ancestral homeland in India became culturally and politically inaccessible to them over successive generations, leading to a complex process of identity formation as they navigated their socio-political status in Sri Lanka. This historical migration and subsequent integration into Sri Lankan society have been marked by a process of ethnogenesis, compelling Up-country Tamils to redefine themselves as a distinct ethnic group within the broader context of Sri Lanka's diverse population. This article examines whether the identity of Up-country Tamils has shifted from being poly-ethnic to that of a national minority and thereby enabling them to establish a strong claim of distinct political identity in the political arena. By doing so, the article aims to navigate the communities' power-sharing negotiations at the second tier of governance with clearer demands based on this redefined political identity. The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing an interpretative approach with primary and secondary sources. The article seeks to address critical questions about the community's geographical attachment, its evolution from a poly-ethnic group to a national minority, and ways to present their political identity more robustly. Additionally, the research explores the potential impact of territorial segregation caused by current administrative divisions and proposes methods to redefine the territorial boundaries regionally. With the analytical expansion, the article draws insights and strategies for the Up-country Tamil minority to enhance their political and social standing to place their demands as a strong minority community integral to Sri Lanka's development.

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