

ABSTRACT

Civil society is a foundational sphere which collectivises interests and negotiate claims to bargain for power from the rigid institutionalised structure and processes of the state. The understanding of the concept is far from fixed definitions, and its meanings and functions have evolved as a socio-political identifier that is contingent upon power, ideology, social struggle and global influences. The doctoral thesis titled “*Civil Society Narratives in Sri Lanka: Exploring the Intersection of Domestic and Global Factors*”, traverses the delicate juncture that studies the evolution, character and contemporary transformations in the understandings of civil society, particularly in the case of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka forms a unique study in this context that has emerged as post-colonial volatile society experiencing prolonged civil war, post- civil war centralisation of power, and recent political and economic crisis, leading to unprecedented civic mobilisation popularly called the Aragalaya movement.

The thesis critically evaluates the western conceptualizations of civil society and argues that the euro centric lens, while exhaustive in its scope and ideas, fails to adequately explain the nuances of the post-colonial South Asian context. Discussing the observed lacunae in these western definitions, the thesis then proceeds to closely examine civil society in Sri Lanka. The second chapter onwards the dissertation delves into the historical and political transformation of civil society in Sri Lanka and tries to situate it within its historical legacy, bouts of economic crises, political contestations and the impact of global forces such as the presence of dominant regional powers like India, extra regional actors like and US and China and the effects of transnational advocacy networks, INGOs, diaspora and so on. The research also focuses upon the effects of post-civil-war militarisation, surveillance, and security-oriented governance, along with the role of international bodies that have pushed for norms diffusion, transnational advocacy and motivated developmental assistance rooted in geopolitical interests, which have contributed to shaping the civic space and organisational practices in Sri Lanka since 2009.

This is a qualitative research that amalgamates both primary and secondary sources to analyse and interpret historical processes, global-local interactions, the impact of post 2022 politico-economic crisis revealing the fragility of state-structures and the emergence of mobilization beyond the registered civil society organizations. The thesis urges for further in-depth research on civil society in South Asia and emphasises on the need for a context-sensitive understanding of Sri Lankan civil society which is continuously being shaped by negotiations, adaptations, constraints and contestations especially in postcolonial and post-conflict settings.