

# INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL CASCADE-BASED SYSTEMS: AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE FROM SRI LANKA

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**Abstract:** Being an advanced water management mechanism, Sri Lankan tank cascades are popular for its well-known approaches to ecological resilience and sustainability. These ecological systems harmonized very well with the traditional governance system of ancient Sri Lanka, guaranteeing the smooth overall functioning of the social organization. However, the integrated strategies that powered the harmonization between water management systems and socio-economic systems have yet to be adequately explored. Thus, the present study explores the indigenous governance strategies that integrate cascade-based ecological systems with social organization. With its exploratory nature and inductive approach, the present study employs a qualitative methodology, where data from ante-narratives were collected from literary sources, including research findings, seminal writings and archival records. Collected data were coded and categorized to identify the themes focussing on governance strategies. Accordingly, 34 initial codes emerged, which were later sorted into 14 categories and summed up in three themes. It was found that the caste and Rajakari systems were the key structural arrangements that systematized the occupational engagement of the people in traditional administration system. At the same time, people willingly assume the responsibilities of preserving, maintaining and upgrading the common resources they utilized, including cascade-based system, forming a unique communal work system. Thus, the governance strategies identified in the present study include participatory decision-making, shared accountability and responsibility, mutual survival and benefits, self-sufficiency, and coexistence with the environment. Further, it was observed that collective property rights were upheld over individual rights in times of necessity. Most importantly, the rewards were attached to the service performances, fostering strong connectivity between rights and obligations. Thus, it can be concluded that the traditional social organization of Sri Lanka had unique governance strategies that integrated the social organization. These integrated strategies are directly relevant to core concerns of sustainability.

**Keywords:** Good governance; Indigenous knowledge; Integrated strategies; Sustainability