Researching livelihoods and
services affected by conflict

"Don't tell them where we live" – Caste and access to education in northern Sri Lanka

cepa
centre for poverty analysis

About us

Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) aims to generate a stronger evidence base on how people make a living, educate their children, deal with illness and access other basic services in conflict-affected situations (CAS). Providing better access to basic services, social protection and support to livelihoods matters for the human welfare of people affected by conflict, the achievement of development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and international efforts at peace- and state-building.

At the centre of SLRC's research are three core themes, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase:

- State legitimacy: experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state and local governance in conflict-affected situations
- State capacity: building effective states that deliver services and social protection in conflict-affected situations
- Livelihood trajectories and economic activity under conflict

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the lead organisation. SLRC partners include the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Sri Lanka, Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University), the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan, Disaster Studies of Wageningen University (WUR) in the Netherlands, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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SLRC Working Papers present information, analysis and key policy recommendations on issues relating to livelihoods, basic services and social protection in conflict affected situations.

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Contents

Acronyms

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
JMC	Jaffna Municipal Council
KII	Key Informant Interview
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MoE	Ministry of Education

1 Introduction

Equitable access to basic services is a concern in most developing societies. Structural inequalities based on caste, class, ethnicity, and gender can hinder access to such services for social groups. In most post-conflict contexts, traditionally marginalised groups and those that get excluded from reconstruction and development processes tend to be the worst affected. Equity in provision and access to services is particularly important in post-conflict contexts to ensure that marginalised groups are actively included in the reconstruction process. Equitable provision also helps address some of the underlying structural inequalities that are often the cause of conflicts.

The development strategy of the Sri Lankan government has been focused on providing infrastructure to the north and the east as part of the post-war recovery and reconstruction process. This mainly includes building highways and re-establishing rail networks between the north and rest of the country. While the emphasis on an infrastructure-based development approach is debated in the media and among social researchers in Sri Lanka, there is very little critical insight into how services vital to the everyday welfare of people, such as education are accessed among the population of the previously war-affected north-eastern region.

In Jaffna, in the Northern Province, a particular concern is caste-based discrimination in the provision of and access to services in traditionally marginalised communities. It threatens to stall recovery, inhibit people's ability to build safe and resilient livelihoods, and reinforce the status quo of systematic marginalisation and chronic poverty.

It has been seven years since the end of the war between the Sri Lankan state and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Over that period, access to services has improved in the conflict-affected north for a number of reasons, such as reduced security restrictions and more infrastructure development.

The United Nations Development Programme's 2014 Sri Lanka Human Development Report, *Youth and Development*, however, observed 'uneven quality and access' to education that continues to affect those who belong to 'marginalised communities' and those who struggle due to 'poverty, marginalisation and exclusion' (UNDP[1]).

Access to school or getting through the school gates does not ensure that students are receiving good quality education, even at the better schools. A student from an oppressed caste background can face systematic and long-term verbal and physical abuse by teachers or fellow students, causing grave harm to their wellbeing and severely impeding their ability to learn.

There is no disaggregation of data by caste for access to schooling. If there was, anecdotal evidence suggests it would show that most boys and girls from oppressed castes have a poor quality of education and higher drop-out rates than children from higher caste groups.

Historically, life in Jaffna was defined by caste identity (Suseendirarajah, 1978). An individual's livelihood, place of residence, socio-cultural relations and religious practice were largely determined by caste. Caste was a part of people's everyday lives, and until the rise of the LTTE caste-based discrimination was practised openly in Jaffna society (Silva et al., 2009a; 2009b). However, the position of caste identity as the fundamental basis of societal formation and social interaction was gradually being weakened by political reforms under colonial rule, the policies of a welfare state, the prohibition of discrimination on

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[1] While the Human Development Report does not discuss the nature of marginalisation and exclusion, its mere mention suggests that the challenges faced by the government are not merely technical but those that are situated within localised socio-political institutions such as caste discrimination.

the basis of caste,[2] and a number of struggles for equal treatment from low caste groups over the first half of the 20th century.[3] Movements against caste-based discrimination began as early as the 1920s.

In the last stages of the war, caste-based discrimination against internally displaced persons (IDPs) belonging to low-caste groups is reported by Silva et al to have hindered their access to water and acquisition of land in Jaffna (2009a). However, there has been no real inquiry into these claims of caste-based discrimination shaping access to services. Caste as a barrier to access to basic services in post-war Sri Lanka remains under-researched.

A scoping visit for this study identified two contrasting views of men and women on caste and caste-based discrimination in Jaffna. The more common response was that caste-based discrimination was no longer practised in Jaffna. Caste practice was seen as a phenomenon of the past, eliminated by a combination of anti-caste movements, protests by oppressed caste groups themselves, and the LTTE's stance against caste. Caste was only considered a factor in times of marriage (here, too, less strictly than before) and in some family and community rituals; it no longer inhibits or enables access to public services. The opposing view was that caste continues to shape daily life in Jaffna. Those expressing this view thought that, with the LTTE no longer in power, caste was reasserting itself.

Women on each side of this contrasting perspective would add the fact that they had felt far safer during LTTE rule – in public spaces and within the home. However, they acknowledged that caste practice had changed, from being explicit it had become more subtle and less visible.

This study explores the role caste plays in the access to and provision of education services for a low-caste community in Jaffna Town. As such, it contributes to the analysis of caste and caste-based discrimination in contemporary South Asia, most prominently in India and Nepal where caste-based discrimination continues to hinder access to services for poor and marginalised communities[4]. More broadly, the study raises concerns on behalf of communities that are marginalised and discriminated against on the basis of their identity.

The research findings are presented in section 2. These are presented through the analysis of location, livelihood, and how broader socio-economic phenomena intersect with caste as community members negotiate access to education. Concluding remarks are presented in section 3.

1.1   Literature review

The International Dalit Solidarity Networks (IDSN) definition of the caste system provides an apt framing within which the discrimination faced by the oppressed caste group in this research can be understood. The IDSN describes the caste system as a form of social and economic governance based on principles and customary rules that involve the division of people into social groups (castes) where assignments of rights are determined by birth and work is fixed and hereditary.[5] The assignment of basic rights between various castes is unequal and hierarchical, with those at the top enjoying the most rights and privileges coupled with least duties, and those at the bottom without rights and being forced to perform most duties that are considered impure. The system is maintained through the rigid enforcement of social ostracism

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[2] The 1957 Disability Act prohibited the caste-based discrimination in Sri Lanka.

[3] The Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are said to have given the strongest blow to caste-based discrimination, and open discrimination on the basis of caste is said to have come to a complete end in Jaffna. Leaders and cadre of the LTTE belonged to the oppressed castes and challenged the hegemony of higher castes in control over economic and political resources. The LTTE was also known to hand out severe punishments to those found guilty of discriminating on the basis of caste. With the defeat of the LTTE, however, the fear factor that ended open caste-based discrimination has subsided.

[4] Contemporary research on caste and access look up Thorat and Nueman, (2012) Bhattachan et al 2009)

[5] See International Dalit Solidarity Network, www.idsn.org.

(a system of social and economic penalties) in cases of any deviation. The doctrine of inequality is at the core of the caste system

The caste system has been a feature of Jaffna society for centuries. It is divided into three broad social groups. The high castes are the *Vellalar*s. Traditionally, they are known to be cultivators and landowners. The middle caste comprises a number of professional groups including fishers (*Karaiyar*) and crafts people (*Panchalas*). Those belonging to the lowest caste group are known as the *Panchamars*. The *Panchamars* are considered untouchable. These include barbers (*Ambattar*), bonded labour (*Pallar*), tree tappers (*Nalavar)* and drummers (*Parayar)*.Castes are further divided into sub-castes and arranged according to social hierarchy. For example, the sub-castes *Akampadiyār, Madappalli, Thanakārar, Chettimār* and *Chempedā Vellālar* are considered as *Vellalar* (Silva et al., 2009b).The *Parayar* is the lowest caste group within the *Panchamar* caste group, and this group is the focus of this study.

Previous work has found that people in Jaffna hold differing interpretations of the divisions between and among caste groups. However, all describe a broad hierarchy with the *Vellalar* caste at the top and the *Panchamar* at the bottom (Silva et al., 2009b).

The 'oppressed' caste groups are those on the lowest social tier. They tend to be the poorer and more vulnerable segments of society. Consequently, in conflict or disaster contexts, oppressed caste groups are more vulnerable to shocks than are people from the higher castes (Thanges, 2008; Silva et al., 2009b). During the tsunami recovery phase in Jaffna, rehabilitation and recovery was most challenging for people belonging to the oppressed castes (Thanges, 2008). In conflict or disaster situations, generally, oppressed caste groups are either barred or find it extremely difficult to access goods provided during stages of recovery and rehabilitation (Goonesekere, 2001; Gill, 2007; Thanges, 2008). This is partly because most oppressed caste groups are the poorer sections of society (Zacharias and Vakulabharanam, 2013) and that it is likely that this poverty is due to their 'discrimination…and unequal treatment' (Borooah, 2005).

In Jaffna, the *Panchamars* have had a troublesome history regarding access to services. Oppressed caste groups have protested for equal rights and equal access to services and sometimes become involved in violent confrontations with upper caste groups (Kuganathan 2014; Thanges, 2014). Forms of discrimination have included the prohibition of wearing garments covering the upper body (for men and women), the denial of access to public transport and the refusal of entry to temples and teahouses.[6] In schools, low-caste children were forbidden from sitting or eating alongside higher caste children (Kuganathan, 2014)[7].

The transformation of caste practice from explicit to hidden in Jaffna can be attributed to a number of factors. These include reforms under British rule (Bastiampillai, 1988; Rogers, 2004), indigenous political movements (Pfaffenberger, 1990; Ravikumar, 2002), welfare policies (Silva et al., 2009b), caste-based discrimination becoming a punishable offence under the Social Disabilities Act 1957 (Thanges, 2008) and, most recently, the war between the LTTE and Sri Lankan state (Kuganathan, 2014).

The rise of Tamil militancy was a watershed in terms of giving voice and agency to oppressed caste groups and destabilising the hegemony of *Vellalars* in the socio-political landscape in Jaffna. Many of the oppressed castes were attracted to the radical policies of the militant groups against the caste system (Shanmugathasan, 1997). Both the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the LTTE recruited a significant number of personnel from the oppressed castes (Roberts, 2011: 84). However, according to Ravikumar (2002) and Silva (et al., 2009b), though the LTTE mainly recruited from

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[6] See International Dalit Solidarity Network, www.idsn.org.

[7] In the late 1920s, there were agitations by oppressed caste groups for equality in seating and eating (Silva et al., 2009b; pp. xvi)

oppressed and intermediate caste groups (Silva et al., 2009b)[8] and forbade caste-based discrimination, it did not take a proactive role in preventing discrimination or empowering people from the oppressed castes. In fact, the LTTE's nationalist goal of establishing an overarching Tamil identity silenced a potential Dalit struggle (Ravikumar, 2002).

The prevalence of caste-based discrimination has been highlighted in literature from South Asia, including India (Thorat and Neuman, 2012), Pakistan (Gazdar, 2007),[9] Nepal (Bhattachan et al., 2009) and Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2009). Research attempting to measure correlations (using empirical data) between caste and provision of and access to basic services comes largely from India (Thorat and Neuman, 2012).

Efforts to measure inequities in access to health (Acharaya 2010; Borooah 2010), education (Nambissan 2009; Desai et al. 2008) and water and sanitation (Keskin 2010; Prakash and Singh 2012; Johns 2012) suggest that caste-based discrimination is embedded in systemic features of service provision and practised by service providers as well as between recipients. Studies from India have highlighted the prevalence of caste-based discrimination against the Dalits[10] in schools located in urban and rural settings (Nambissan, 2009; Desai et al., 2008) and in health centres (Acharaya, 2010; Boorah, 2010).

In South Asia, people belonging to the oppressed caste groups have largely provided sanitation services such as street and sewage cleaning. With the establishment of modern townships under colonial rule, low caste groups were employed as sanitary workers for the townships (Silva et al. 2009a). For example, in Jaffna Town, under the British, people belonging to the *Parayar* caste were employed as sanitation workers.

The community under study is located in an urban setting. A study on caste in urban contexts (Johns, 2012) questioned the argument that urban spaces 'offer the ambience for nurturing fraternity among people of different castes' (*The Hindu*, 2004). The study contends that urbanisation is not a remedy for socially and economically deprived segments of society. It argues that fault lines between castes remain because low-caste groups prefer to live where their neighbours are from the same community because they would feel insecure if they were to move to another area (Johns, 2012). Harinagar (name changed) is a case in point, where community members preferred to stay within the community unless there was an opportunity to go abroad.

1) Sri Lanka does not have an affirmative-action policy for oppressed castes like those seen in India[11] or Nepal, and caste has not been included in an official census since the mid 19th century.

2) Caste seems to have been subsumed by broader ethnic or racial markers adopted by the British in their censuses (Silva, n.d.). These were reinforced with the start of the war (Silva et al., 2009b).

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[8] With the rise of militancy and violence in 1990s, many upper caste elite Tamils and their relatives fled to other countries and to the south, and many of the oppressed caste Tamils remained and eventually became the human resources to fight the war (Hoole et al. 1992; Hoole, 2003). Hence, poverty, vulnerability and the inability to leave the region could have been reasons (or incentives) for low caste persons to join the militant movement(s).

[9] Also see www.idsn.org.

[10] An overarching identity ascribed to low-caste groups in India.

[11] In India, 'Dalits' (Thorat et al. 2009), or oppressed or depressed castes – namely, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) – are officially recognised and are beneficiaries of reservations policies governed by constitutional law, statutory law, and local rules and regulations. In Sri Lanka, by contrast, affirmative action has not been sought by higher caste political leaders because it was believed that Sri Lanka's welfare policies would eliminate caste prejudices and inequalities (Silva et al. 2009b). Meanwhile, the lack of support to oppressed caste groups struggling against caste-based discrimination in Jaffna is said to be because of the caste prejudices held by Tamil political leaders, all of whom belonged to the upper *Vellalar* caste (Ravikumar 2002).

3) Caste was subsumed by Sinhalese and Tamil nationalist discourses (Pfaffenberger 1990; Roberts, 2014; Jayasundra-Smits, 2011).

4) Caste is a taboo and politically sensitive subject and is not open to public debate and discussion.

Despite the limited literature on caste discrimination in contemporary Sri Lanka, Silva et al., (2009b) have shed some light on the subject. Silva and his colleagues provided a timely entry to the issue of caste-based discrimination in Sri Lanka during the last stages of the war. The book questioned the popular belief that LTTE rule rid Jaffna society of caste-based discrimination and established a platform to launch further inquiries, raising several questions: What role does caste play in the social, economic and political spheres in Jaffna? What were the LTTE's policy and practice regarding caste? How did caste transform during LTTE rule? What kinds of caste discrimination are practised in Jaffna's post-war context?

The accounts of low-caste IDPs in the north illustrate three ways in which caste is entwined within the economic and social spheres of people's lives that perpetuate the marginalisation faced by low-caste communities in Jaffna. First, with limited assets and a lack of social networks, the oppressed-caste groups were unable to leave Jaffna in the lead-up to and during the war, while most from high castes had money and connections in Colombo or abroad and were able to leave Jaffna (Sidhartan, 2003 cited in Silva et al., 2009b). This suggests that most IDPs in the North belonged to the oppressed castes.

Second, *Panchamars* were the last group of people to leave the IDP camps in Jaffna. This is because, traditionally, people of oppressed castes either did not own land or owned landholdings of miniscule size that were located in rural areas controlled by state security forces. They lacked social support networks outside their communities and were dependent on state support for basic services. Most did not have the resources to purchase land or build temporary shelters. Low-caste groups also preferred to live together within or outside the IDP camps for reasons of security and mutual support (Silva et al., 2009b).

Third, when displaced, oppressed caste groups were subject to discrimination by higher castes. These forms of discrimination took shape in the form of verbal abuse, where communities surrounding the camps referred to the people in the camps as *Mukam Aakkal/Sanangal*, terms with several derogatory meanings including 'poor', 'badly behaved' and 'aggressive' (Silva et al., 2009b: 72). Access to temples was denied, and the purchase of land was refused or only offered at inflated prices.

Because an oppressed-caste identity was and remains a barrier to social mobility, conversions from Hinduism to Christianity have been common among the oppressed castes. Conversion is seen as a way to be rid of low-caste status, access education and enable upward socioeconomic mobility.[12] Many traditionally low-caste people have been able to avoid the constraints attached to their identity through upward social mobility founded on Church-run schools. The few authors to have addressed the impact of missionary-led schools on caste dynamics in Jaffna have argued that missionary education further consolidated caste status, while those from oppressed castes who did have access to schooling did not have the means of building on that foundation due to their marginalised and stigmatised status (Mahroof, 2000; Madavan, 2011). However, the adoption of new social identities has been constrained by local power relations that continue to favour higher-caste groups (Mosse, 1999). The lack of proactive support towards oppressed caste groups in schooling may partly trickle down from the Church itself,

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[12] The Hindu religious ideology strongly supports the notion that the privilege of the upper caste is naturally ordained and that it is the obligation of the oppressed castes to serve the upper castes (Hoole, 2003).

which has been co-opted in reproducing existing power relations and has not been able to rid itself of caste-based discrimination (Kuganathan, 2014).[13]

1.2   Research methodology

Anthropological studies have used ethnographic methods to provide a rich understanding of caste mechanisms in different parts of South Asia. In Sri Lanka, Silva et al. (2009b) used ethnography to study caste identity in the IDP camps in Jaffna during the war. Following this tradition, I drew on tools from conventional ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005) combined with focus group discussions[14] to look at the role of caste in the provision of and access to services in Harinagar.

My fieldwork took place over just under three months (September to December 2013) with some follow-up visits in January 2014. My time was divided between visiting the community, government offices and meeting with key informants, which meant I spent three to four days in a week in Harinagar. In the course of my fieldwork my position shifted from that of an observer to that of a participant as I built deeper relationships and spent more time with certain people in the community. I made good friends with a group of six boys with whom I played football. I developed closer ties with two of them, both of whom who could speak relatively fluent English.

Informal and unstructured interviews with men, women, boys and girls from the community allowed me to get a deeper understanding of how caste is connected with daily socioeconomic, cultural and political realities in Harinagar.

We visited four schools (all names changed to maintain anonymity). Most of our time was spent at St. Michael's government school, which had the largest representation of students from Harinagar. At St. Michael's we interviewed the students, teachers and principal and spent time observing students and teachers during school hours. At St. Francis primary school we were able to talk to both teachers and students. The interaction at Mount Caramel and Whitewings International were very limited – we only got to talk with the principal and headmistress, respectively – but we did manage to speak with students outside the school premises.

Informal chats and conversations along with my observations are marked as 'field notes' in the paper. I was consistent about not mentioning caste in interviews or interactions, only probing the subject if the respondent explicitly mentioned caste. Starting an interview or conversation questions *on* caste could potentially have caused interviewees to address subsequent questions through a caste lens. This approach helped me untangle the relationships between caste and other identity markers, such as, class, livelihood and location, and gender, which in turn are inextricably bound up with historical, social, cultural and economic relations in Harinagar. Conversations around the history of the community, cultural norms, and traditional livelihoods gave me an alternate entry point to approach community perceptions on caste-based discrimination in general and with respect to accessing education.[15]

Discrimination on the basis of caste in Jaffna was seldom apparent and never openly practised by service providers or recipients. Consequently, analysis in this paper is based heavily on people's perceptions and less on the evidence gathered through participant observation. The data collection methods used in this

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[13] In Jaffna, during colonial rule, the church is said to have shown ambivalence towards caste-based discrimination, which maintained the hegemony of the *Vellalar*. The influence and power of the *Vellalar* in Jaffna forced favouritism towards them by the missionaries for whom it was important to maintain a stable presence in the region. In fact, the Church of South India, to which the Jaffna Diocese belongs, continues to be dominated by *Vellalars* (Kuganathan, 2014).

[14] These focus groups with men, women and children allowed me to see multiple perspectives of how caste plays a role in people's lives and how it comes to bear on access to education. Data gathered through individual interviews and focus group discussions was triangulated with participant observation and key informant interviews (KIIs).

[15] I divided my time between speaking to parents and students in Harinagar, teachers and principals at schools and government officers at relevant ministries, with members of the church and people from neighbouring communities. More structured KIIs on caste were conducted with people outside the community and service providers such as I/NGO members, political activists, representatives of the Catholic Church and academics in Jaffna and Colombo.

study (multiple types of interviews, focus groups and participant observation) were used to triangulate the data to help identify patterns and/or incongruities and paradoxes.

1.3   Limitations

An important limitation of the research relates to the limited access I (nor my research assistants) were allowed to schools. In three of the four schools I was not able to get permission to spend an entire day in school or sit inside the classrooms and observe student-teacher interactions. This had implications for opportunities to observe any caste-based references or discrimination or to triangulate accusations of caste-based discrimination within school.

Living outside the community served to reduce possible biases. I had reservations about living in a single household because of the possibility that this could create an impression of favouritism towards my hosts as well as practical difficulties for them.[16]

Another research difficulty was that the consumption of alcohol and use of foul language in the community made my research assistants uncomfortable. Both of my assistants were urged by their parents to return home before dark. This meant that I was by myself in the community in the late evenings. This tended to be an interesting time of the day, because some men and women would drink and converse freely with me. In such cases, I was limited by my basic understanding of Tamil and the presence of an interpreter would have allowed for richer conversations.

I built relatively close ties with some of the boys in Harinagar by playing sport and hanging around with them but my relationship with the girls was far more formal and my interactions with were always in the presence of others. Even interviews were conducted in the presence of a family member (usually the mother, mother in law, or neighbours). This is one of the main reasons that most of my anecdotal evidence relates to boys and not girls. However, I was able to build close relationships with some of middle-aged and elderly women and men.

The analysis and conclusions arrived at in this study cannot be generalised to other low-caste communities in Jaffna or to the larger Northern Province. Neither have I collected statistical data regarding access to services. The findings and analysis are closely tied to perceptions of respondents and my observations on the particularities of caste, location, livelihoods, and time of year.

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[16] After spending one night with a family (in one of the larger houses), I realised that, to make space, three people would have to move out of their usual sleeping quarters and sleep in a hallway. Family members (especially the girls) had to adjust to my presence.

2   Findings

Harinagar is situated near the coast, to the south of Jaffna Town. It is located within the fishing community of Samudranagar, which is one of the most dense urban settlements in Jaffna. Harinagar consists of 512 households and is within the *grama sevak* division number J BLOCK, which also includes neighbouring communities. The caste composition of Harinagar is dominated by the *Parayar* caste, but an increasing number of inter-caste marriages (with persons within the *Panchamar* castes) have led to people from other caste groups living alongside the majority *Parayar* caste. There are also two households belonging to the fishing castes of Point Pedro on the north-eastern coast of Jaffna that have lived in Harinagar for more than three generations (Interview with senior community member, 26 November 2013, Harinagar).

The Jaffna Municipal Council (JMC) employs the majority of the men and a smaller number of women in Harinagar.[17] Almost all work as sanitary workers: women clean the streets and men clean the sewage system, while very few hold clerical positions.

Harinagar is also a Christian community, where the majority is Roman Catholic and the non-Roman Catholic minority includes Protestants and other denominations such as Assembly of God.

My first visit to Harinagar was during a scoping visit to select a community for study. An NGO contact who had conducted some workshops on alcohol abuse in Harinagar took me on his motorbike for a quick spin through the area. We entered Harinagar by School Road, an arterial road that runs through Harinagar whose tarred surface makes it one of the most frequented and well-known entrances to Harinagar.

To the left of the entrance to School Road there is a long line of corrugated metal sheets about a metre and a half high providing privacy to eight households. A thin corrugated metal sheet separates each house from the next. The houses are not more than 12 feet by 12 feet and are closely packed, one next to another. The walls are made of concrete and the roofs are made of corrugated metal sheets. Building materials are the same in all of the housing in Harinagar (apart from two families of a particular caste community), but plot sizes differ.

To the east of the entrance to the road stands a two-metre high wall separating School Road from a cemetery. This cemetery belongs to the Catholic Church and has been used for generations by the Catholic community in Jaffna, including the people of Harinagar. Young men living on School Road climb over the wall into the cemetery, where they go to defecate. Over time, it became apparent that the households on School Road (on average) were worse off than the rest of the community: they lacked toilets, had smaller plots, did not own their land,[18] had lower education levels, and there was significant drug and alcohol abuse.

Situated within a larger residential area and nestled between high walls to the north (Mt. Carmel College) and the south, Harinagar remains hidden from the nearby arterial roads. Apart from School Road and a few back alleys that run through, the four cul-de-sacs that house about three-quarters of the community have a feeling of isolation from the outside world.

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[17] Other occupations include security (as guards at banks, hospitals etc.); embalmers (at funeral houses); fruit-sellers; auto-drivers. Some jobs (such as auto-driver) are done alongside jobs in the JMC.

[18] The perception that people on School Road, as compared with the rest of the community, do not have ownership of land is contested. According to the Divisional Secretariat records, no households in Harinagar own the land, which is actually owned by various government bodies.

School profiles (names of schools have been changed)
St. Michaels is attended by most number of children from Harinagar. It is a Tamil-medium co-educational government school. It recently upgraded its grades from 1-8 to 1-11. The school is a 5-minute walk from Harinagar. Boys and girls both walk to this school, sometimes accompanied by mothers or elder siblings.

St. Francis is another Tamil-medium co-educational government school in close proximity to Harinagar. It is the second most popular school in Harinagar. It offers schooling from primary level to grade 13.

Mount Carmel College is registered as a private non-fee-levying school in Jaffna. It is a Tamil-medium boys' school offering grades 1-13. It is in close proximity to Harinagar. While a few members of the community have attended the school, the barriers to entry for most children remain high.

Whitewings International School is a private co-educational English-medium school. It is located far outside Jaffna Town, making it the furthest away of the other three schools. It provides the GCE and GCSE examinations. It also has grades from 1-13. The boys and girls who attend this school take the school bus to school.

History of conflict and access to education

> *'Bombs fell on the playing field. There was a huge crater here... students were around...we were very fortunate that no one got hit.'* (Principal, Mount Carmel College)

During the fighting, many schools moved temporarily to areas where people had been displaced. According to the Ministry of Education (MoE) officials, schools had temporarily been set up in many of the IDP camps. There were around 23 schools in Manik Farm with around 63,000 children in the camps. Between Jaffna, Pulmodai and Mannar, there were 85,000 students attending some sort of schooling facility.

At the end of the war, the government's development programme in the north, *Vaddakil Vasantham* (with NGO and multilateral partners), supported the rehabilitation of nearly 298 schools in their places of origin. By the end of 2010, around 70% of displaced children had been resettled and reinstated in schools and study materials provided.

Through most of the fighting in Jaffna, the three of our four schools that already existed remained open and shut only on days or periods of heavy duress.

The LTTE's recruitment drives posed also a threat to children. The principal at Mount Carmel School recounted how one of the boarding students had run off to join the LTTE. According to the parents and teachers, both boys and girls were liable to be recruited by the LTTE.

Education under the LTTE – implications for caste
While government officers maintain that not much changed under the LTTE and the syllabus and teaching methods remained the same at schools, teachers we spoke to revealed a change in 'teaching attitude and behaviour' among teachers and students. Teachers recalled an environment where 'punctuality', 'respect' and 'discipline' were strictly adhered to and that teachers taught with a 'sense of purpose' (interviews with teachers at St. Michael's and St. Francis). The teachers themselves complained that in the post-war situation the teaching profession had become a way to secure a pension and enjoy the benefit of holidays and easy working hours.

Education under the LTTE remains an under-researched area. Bits of information about educational institutions and schooling is scattered across varied autobiographical and anecdotal accounts in both English and Tamil, but to build a coherent narrative would require more time than available for this research. The popular account of schooling under the LTTE is that it was impossible for school administrators or teachers to discriminate on the basis of caste: 'There was no [refusal of admission on

the basis of caste] during the LTTE period. If we complained to the area head [the LTTE representative), he would take up the matter with the priest of the church' (male, Harinagar).

This is a good example of how caste discrimination was subverted under the LTTE but also demonstrates the problematic nature of the claim that the LTTE rid Jaffna society of caste discrimination. The need for the LTTE to coerce schools into admitting children from Harinagar suggests that schools remained averse to taking them. Those who discriminated on the basis of caste had to acquiesce out of fear of the LTTE,but today these voices are raising their heads more assuredly.

2.1   Shaping access: underlying factors

There are two main underlying factors that shape access to education in Harinagar: livelihood and location (i.e. area of residence). The intersection of caste with these factors strongly shapes the experience of schooling for children in Harinagar.

The common livelihood in the community – working in sanitation – poses barriers to enrolling children in the prestigious schools in Jaffna. Sanitation work carries a strong taboo in Jaffna society and reinforces the high-caste narrative of *Parayars* as a polluted race that must be kept at a distance from mainstream society.

Teachers in all three schools held the view that the nature of the student is determined by the nature of their parents, which in turn is determined by their livelihood or occupation, which is also a signifier of caste. Parental occupation continues to be a significant factor in successful admission. In the prestigious schools, most parents belonged to the government sector, business and professional classes of higher caste groups (field notes). While there is less distinction made between occupations of caste groups falling within the middle and upper classes, occupations traditionally ascribed to oppressed caste groups carry a strong stigma in the Jaffna society. The limited scope for promotion and salary increases in sanitation is also a barrier to entering the prestigious schools and a reason why most children at Harinagar attend schools that cost less. Admission or donation fees for entry into the prestigious schools were between 40,000 to 200,000 rupees depending on the school and grade to which the student was seeking entry. In addition, parents have to bear costs associated with new infrastructure additions at school, school functions, school uniforms, shoes, text books, stationary and tuition.[19] The 2,000 rupee 'donation' expected at the nearby St. Michael's government school is far easier to afford.[20]

The second underlying condition that carries a strong association with caste and identity and significantly shapes access to schools is location. Residential location in Jaffna continues to be drawn along caste lines (key informant interview [KII], Jaffna).[21] Aware of the negative perceptions of their community in Jaffna, parents thought that writing Harinagar as the place of residence on school application forms lowered the chances of their children gaining entry into more prestigious schools.

The overlapping association of caste and residence was not lost on the children either. Children were aware of the derogatory perceptions about Harinagar and sought to hide this part of their identity. Two boys attending the international school asked me not to share their residential location when speaking to their teachers or headmistress, but instead to mention an alternate address of a neighbouring mixed caste area.

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[19] Students are provided with uniform material. The parents complained that they still had to purchase another uniform/more material since the material given was enough for one set and that they needed at least two sets of uniforms. Shoes were not provided by the school and were considered a major expense. This could explain why at the government school most children wore slippers. Another cost was for private tuition, which seems to be ubiquitous among school-going children in Jaffna.

[20] Government schools have the facilities fees. These are relatively small amounts of 26 rupees per year and additional 5 rupees a month (FGD with MoE officers).

[21] There has been a rise in the number of mixed neighbourhoods in Jaffna but some (especially poorer) areas remain strongly demarcated along caste lines (field notes).

On the other hand, state-enforced institutional norms in education streamlined access to government schools and reinforced caste identity. It is compulsory for all children aged 6-14 to attend school.[22] Parents or guardians are encouraged to admit their children in schools in close proximity to their neighbourhoods, while government schools are obliged to give preference to children who reside within their neighbourhoods (Ministry of Education, 2015). Proximity to both government schools had made these schools a popular choice for parents to send their children to. Consequently, the fact that majority of the students at St. Michael's are from Harinagar has given the school a low caste identity – the school that is attended by *Parayars.*

The obligatory nature of the contract between residents and schools has reduced transport costs and travel time, which is perceived by the parents as safer, especially for girls for whom travelling long distances was considered hazardous.

The semi-private schools are not obliged to admit students from the locality. While all students at one of the government schools came from within a 2 kilometre radius, many students attending the semi private school in the neighbourhood resided more than 10 km away (interview with Principal at Mount Carmel).

The location of Harinagar is of strategic importance with regard to gaining access to schools. As a Christian community, access to the surrounding Christian schools is possible since faith-based schools give preference to students from their particular faith (focus group discussion [FGD] at MoE). In the case of Mount Carmel and St. Michael's, preference was given to Catholics (interview with principals at both schools).

The local parish is St. Mary's, whose cathedral is the largest in the peninsula. The seat of the Jaffna diocese, it also neighbours the Bishop's residence and represents the power of the Catholic Church in Jaffna. A significant part of the influence of the Church in schools comes from its ownership of the land on which three of the schools is built, and also from the presence of practising Christians among teachers and administrative staff. The principal of Mount Carmel is a senior clergyman while the principal at St. Michael's is a practising Catholic who attends St. Mary's (interview with principal at St. Michael's).The Church owns the lands on which the private school of Mount Carmel sits and it has donated land to the government which consists of the large playground used by Harinagar residents and the two government schools: St. Francis and St. Michael's (interview with Principal of Mount Carmel). The influence of the Church is apparent in the running of the schools as well. For example, when we asked the principal at St. Michael's whether he would request a transfer at the end of his term, he replied that it depended on what the Father at St. Mary's had decided for him.

The close proximity and the historical tie with St. Mary's and the schools has consolidated a sense of belonging among community members. However, this sense of belonging is not consistent in terms of access to schools. While entrance to St. Michael's is relatively straightforward, entrance to Mount Carmel is more problematic. A few parents complained that the principal did not permit children from the community because they 'are from Harinagar' (field notes).

Coincidently, according to community members, the principal at Mount Carmel prevented them from constructing toilets in shanties that were lined along the school wall. In retaliation, female household members of those shanties allegedly disposed their human waste over the wall into one of the two playgrounds.[23] However, the community has never directly confronted the principal: he is not only higher caste, but he also embodies the real and symbolic power of the school-Church nexus that has held sway in the area over many generations.

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[22] Not attending school is a punishable offence and parents can face imprisonment if their child is not attending school.

[23] The women in these households would dig temporary pits in their backyards and defecate inside plastic bags. This playground is no longer used by the students and the entrance to the playground from road outside is padlocked.

The principal argued that he was weary of allowing children from Harinagar because of their 'bad habits' (interview with Principal, Mount Carmel). 'They throw their garbage into the school ground ... Why should I allow such people?'

In the international school, on the other hand, the headmistress's stance was more sympathetic (if bordering on patronising). According to her these problems are rooted in community members' lack of education . Awarding scholarships to students from poor communities is part of the service and mission of the school.

Teachers' perceptions of the community are based on their varied personal interactions with the parents, and either reinforced or challenged by general discourses about low-caste groups in Jaffna society. The main difference in perceptions among teachers from different schools was that in the semi-private and international schools, personal interactions with the teaching staff were said to be cordial and that the parents attended parent–teacher meetings and came to school when called upon, whereas the teachers in government schools had experiences of confrontation and intimidation by the parents from Harinagar. 'They come drunk and shout at us' (primary grade teacher, St. Francis School). Meanwhile, the mothers in Harinagar defended their actions, saying that they were standing up to the teachers who beat their children (FGD with women).[24]

The difference reflects the power dynamics of the relationship between the community and different types of educational institution. The community has a longer affiliation with the two government schools, so the parents who had attended the schools were much more familiar and comfortable with confronting the teachers. In contrast, the pleasant exchanges the principal and headmistress of the two prestigious schools had had with the parents from Harinagar could be due to the parents adopting middle class norms of 'civility'. 'Civil' behaviour is cast within power dynamics where the parents consider themselves fortunate to have their children in the prestigious school and won't risk an altercation with the school staff.

The parents who send their children to the prestigious schools see it as a way to rise out of poverty and climb the social ladder. This is probably true for marginalised groups across the world, but in post-war Jaffna, opened to the world for the first time in decades, entrance into prestigious schools has become a matter of utmost significance.

A mother from a relatively affluent household in the community whose son was attending the international school stated:

> *'We have spent a lot of money for our son's education... My husband didn't have education... He lived in poverty and has come to know the importance of education... [Our son] can do whatever he wants to... We just want him to be able to speak English.'*

The reference reveals that the status the mother wishes for her son to attain is not shaped by money but the acquisition of the English language. The defeat of the LTTE put an end to any aspiration of a Tamil cultural renaissance and reinstated the colonial language as the language of power (FGD with MoE officials). More broadly, post-war Jaffna has become part of not only the nation's market economy but also subject to regional and global market forces.

The emergence of international schools providing foreign degrees is symbolic of post-war Jaffna – a Jaffna that is now open to global market forces, and a service sector economy to which these schools cater.

The mother in the above quote is very clear about the importance of being able to speak English. For her, her sons ability to speak English would put him on a path that not only gives him access to higher

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[24] In Harinagar it is mostly women who interact with school staff.

caste/class groups within Jaffna but one that opens opportunities to the (global) world beyond the peninsula.

While access to prestigious schools gives children from Harinagar a better chance to climb the social ladder and distance themselves from characteristics attributed to their caste, the majority who remain in schools with low capacity and resources are more likely to remain within the community's geographical and occupational boundaries. The nearby government school which is attended by the highest number of children from Harinagar is a case in point.

2.2   Shaping choice in Harinagar

Taking this case I will illustrate how the nexus between livelihood, location and schooling creates a vicious cycle that impedes access to better quality education. This not only curbs livelihood options for children but also reinforces a low-caste identity.

Women and men in the community have been working as sweepers and sanitation workers for the municipality for five generations.[25] There are multiple forces at play that shape this choice of livelihood and push them towards employment in the Jaffna Municipal Council (JMC). These include the qualification requirements to apply for sanitation work at the JMC, the barriers to continue secondary and/or tertiary education, and social and gender norms in the community.

Before 2012, St. Michael's provided classes up to 8th grade, and since then it has been able to provide classes up to 11th grade, or to O-level. At the same time, the minimum educational qualification required by the JMC for work in sanitation had been pushed up from the 8th grade to O-level qualifications. It is difficult to see the relationship between the two as anything but symbiotic. Finishing school at St. Michael's enables access to the JMC.

To continue secondary education grade 12 and 13 (A-levels), students at St. Michael's have to gain entry into other schools. There are three significant reasons that surfaced from interviews with government employees (including teachers), parents and students as to why this transition often resulted in the children dropping out. First, teachers said that the students found it hard to adjust to the new environment in the new schools. The largely homogenous environment at St. Michael's (most students were from Harinagar and a few from the surrounding Samudranagar) means that students are used to studying with children they have grown up with and who are mainly of the same caste.

Moving to another government school, private or international school, even if it is in proximity to Harinagar, means mixing with a much larger pool of students from higher caste and class backgrounds. While some students gave explanations such as, 'I don't like that school', interviews with higher-caste government officers who had attended school alongside students from Harinagar revealed how children from Harinagar were ostracised and marginalised within the classroom in prestigious schools. More explicit caste tensions were articulated by the teachers and the principal of St. Michael's himself. For example, students did not like attending a neighbouring government school (St. James) as it was primarily attended by children from Samudranagar and popularly perceived to cater to the Karayar community.[26]

The second push factor is the cost of admission (donation, text books, etc.) at O-level, which was considered steep by the parents. At the prestigious schools this ranged from 40,000 to 200,000 rupees. The opportunity cost for admitting children to school was considered far too high compared to getting

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[25] They were first employed under the British administration which also gave the first few settlers land at subsidised rates in the area. Sweeping is done by the women while the men clean the garbage and gutters.

[26] There has been a history of caste-related violence between the two communities with one incident turning especially violent which ended in the burning of a number of houses in Harinagar.

girls to help out with household work and boys to provide an extra source of income though daily wage labour.

The third push factor was shaped by social and gender norms in the community. The need to earn a living and be financially independent was important for male youths. Female youths, on the other hand, gave the impression they were taken out of school rather than having left on their own choice. Those who had not pursued their schooling had dropped out for various (overlapping) reasons, such as having to take care of a younger sibling, to get married, an unplanned pregnancy, or having repeatedly failed end-of-year examinations.

The implications of not going to school were different for male and female youths. Male youths moved in and out of the community, going out for work or just riding their cycles or motorbikes. The body language of boys was far more casual and at ease while traversing the surrounding area. The movement of women was far more controlled in terms of leaving the community. The few times they went outside, including to school, they travelled on foot, walking swiftly, sticking to one side of the road and seeming much more restrained. Most of their time in the community was spent at home helping their mothers or mothers-in-law at home cooking, cleaning and taking care of infants or the elderly. Interestingly, when outside Harinagar, both boys and girls moved in groups of two or more. [27]

From an economic, socio-cultural and religious perspective, Harinagar is well located and provides a strong incentive to remain in the area. The JMC, Jaffna Town market, the main bus stop, St. Mary's cathedral and government and private schools are all within a 5-kilometre radius. Other livelihoods, such as domestic work for women, working at funeral homes (as body balmers) for men and daily wage labour are all accessible in Jaffna Town.

Sanitation jobs at the JMC are monopolised by community members. The premise of this arrangement is fundamentally caste based, since sanitation work is 'what these people (*Parayars*) do' and is something that 'other people won't do' (interview with PF officers at JMC). The arrangement with the JMC is based on informal institutional setup where caste-based selection trumps the formally institutionalised merit-based application. Employment, according to a JMC official, is 'on a cultural basis' where preference is given to applicants whose father or mother worked there. Echoing a similar sentiment, a woman in Harinagar drew a causal relationship between the kind of job and a level of education.

> 'They take people for cleaning jobs only from our area. As everyone is uneducated they go and join the MC at age 14 or 16.'

The word 'uneducated' must not be taken to mean children have never attended school, but that they haven't completed their schooling. What is implicit in the statement, however, is that the nature of schooling – the fact that the children attend these schools – pushes them into sanitation work at the JMC.

Representation of the community at the JMC is not limited to sanitary work. More recently, younger and more educated members of the community have been able to secure administrative posts as managers of sanitation workers, clerks, and personal assistants to white collar officials at the JMC.

The legacy of caste-based politics also plays a strong role in maintaining their livelihoods and protecting them from being forcibly displaced. The consolidation of jobs within the JMC is the outcome of long-

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[27] The history of violent conflict between Harinagar and the neighbouring Samudranagar is another reason why women's mobility is more restricted and controlled than the boys. However boys too moved in groups or pairs, possibly also as a safety mechanism and drawing on a marginal identity in a space with a history of violence, Also, young females from Harinagar are harassed by Harinagar male youth quite openly and on a regular basis.

established political networks that have helped to secure access to land and access to services for the community in Harinagar.[28]

Meanwhile, the proximity to schools and St. Mary's adds to a strong sense of belonging to Harinagar, and more implicitly, belonging to the *Parayar* caste.[29] Leaving the area or moving out of the JMC might weaken the job security that was consolidated and continues to be maintained on the basis of caste identity. In other words, moving out of Harinagar and/or leaving the sanitation sector (both of which have very high barriers to *exit*) may dilute or transform the current caste-based identity where the community and its members may have to re-calibrate their networks and overall social standing – a risky proposition compared to the relative security their current status allows them.

However, change in caste identity is more likely than ever before for the community. The post-war environment is marked by palpable changes in society, economy and the polity: migration to western countries, alternative livelihoods, and entry into the prestigious schools are all symptoms of broader processes of change.

2.3   Intersection of caste and discourse

Schooling in Harinagar is not fixed solely around an axis of caste identity. Widening the analytical lens allows us to see myriad discourses that intersect with caste and shape the experience of children and parents accessing education.

I have identified four discourses – nationalism, religion (Roman Catholicism), globalisation and class.[30] Crucially, the intersections of the discourses and caste help situate the experience of schooling in Harinagar within a broader context. It also helps illustrate how everyday phenomena are constantly interacting with phenomena at the national, regional and global level.

These discourses are co-constitutive: that is, they are not only linked together but also draw on each other to confirm and consolidate a meta-discourse of homogeneity. The discourse on homogeneity claims *sameness* as well as *equality* and *inclusivity* across caste and class divisions in post-war Jaffna, and thus is also political.

The nature of the relationship between the four discourses is best brought out by coupling discourses on the basis of a shared narrative. Nationalism and religion in post-war Jaffna subscribe to a discourse of *victimisation* that claims that irrespective of caste or class people in Jaffna suffered the same consequences due to the war.

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[28] The Eelam People's Democratic Party (as part of the United People's Freedom Alliance, which was in power then) was perceived to have influence over local administrative decisions. However, this could have dwindled since the 2015 Presidential elections where the party contested as an independent party and won just one seat from Jaffna.

[29] Location is central to encounter between the community and their visits for Sunday mass. Located to the south of the cathedral, the community commonly uses the entrance to the south to enter and occupies seats in the southern section.

[30]*Nationalism*: In this paper I refer to 'nationalism' as conceptualised by Anderson 2006 to mean a territory 'imagined as a community [where] regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that [prevails] in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal *comradeship*...for millions of people...[willing] to die for such limited imaginings' (2006: 7). While this concept is fitting to explain the rise of the LTTE separatist movement in the north I also find it apt to describe the ethos in post war (2013/14) Jaffna. The idea that a horizontal comradeship brushes over inequality and exploitation provides a strong conceptual backing to explain the implications of the national discourse and its intersections with caste. I use Anderson's conceptualisation to bring forth the ideational or conceptual meanings attached to nationalism rather than focus on its political tone. That is, the word 'imagined' suggests a collective consciousness that I too intend to illustrate by unpacking my respondents' *perceptions* along caste and class groupings. Also, the idea of territory that is central to Anderson's argument is pertinent here as well since my respondents explanations of 'community' were territorialised along markers of caste and class.

Religion: its legacy of prozelytisation and education during the colonial era and its role as an agent of recovery and rehabilitation in war-affected Jaffna contribute to the discourse that masks segregation along caste lines.

Globalisation: here I borrow from a spectrum of definitions (Al-Rodhan, 2006). It is the flow and integration of world markets in terms of capital, ideas, knowledge, products and services. I specifically refer to the integration of western ideas, institutions and capital in education in Jaffna and the implications it has for the discourse (of these ideas) and its implications for caste identity.

Class: denotes status or rank in Jaffna society. The white collar workers constitute the middle class who are mainly from upper and middle castes. The oppressed classes are the blue collar workers in Harinagar who belong to the lowest caste of Parayars.

On the other hand, the shared discourse underlying globalisation and class gives a more optimistic view of post-war Jaffna. It argues that *consumption* of material and social wealth not only provides equal opportunities for social mobility but in doing so mitigates and even erases social barriers of caste and class.

These discourses remain hegemonic and attempt to conceal and disavow ideas or realities that contest them. To conceal the disjunctions within these narratives there is a simultaneous masking and silencing of caste speak[31]. Masking caste remains discreet, whereas silencing can be tacit or overt and explicit.

The discourse of nationalism and religion framed a narrative that all people in Jaffna suffered the same fate at the hands of the Sri Lankan army and LTTE (field notes). Being a *victim* of war was therefore imagined to be not only a shared experience but something that had affected all people *equally.* The discourse on victimisation may be an attempt to maintain (and rebuild) a sense of belonging. However, casting all people as victims masks the difficulties oppressed castes face in drawing on the material, social and political resources needed to recover and rebuild their lives.

Meanwhile longstanding and widespread relief efforts by the church to Christians and non- Christians belonging to all castes has fed off and reinforced the idea that people irrespective of intra ethnic markers are the *same* – part of the war-affected. It is important to keep in mind the Jaffna Diocese's link with the global economy since the capacity to play the role of caregiver to the war affected was fuelled by global aid, primarily from Christian organisations in the West.

The territorialisation of Jaffna hence becomes another factor that binds these two discourses together. The territory of Jaffna functions not only as a symbol of 'othering' from the Sinhala state in the south (and from districts in the north) but as a space where ideas of belonging and homogeneity were given birth to and consistently re-imagined.

Wider connectivity and more accessibility to areas within and outside the north in the post-war era has been accompanied (and underpinned) by the global market's entry into the peninsula. The increased availability of goods and financial services has created a legion of *consumers* of housing loans, micro credit loans and household consumer products (Romeshun et al 2014, Guganeshan, 2015). The peninsula-wide access to and availability of goods and services has therefore significantly contributed towards building a homogenous identity of the *consumer* that masks caste and class distinctions.[32] Consumers are drawn along class lines which appear relatively more permeable than caste barriers – giving the impression that people in post-war Jaffna have equal opportunities and are on the same footing.

Nationalism creates an ethos of 'belonging' (Barber, 1995; Friedman, 1999: 31-4 cited in Rieffer 2003) through identification of common cultural, religious, economic, political and territorial denominators (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; and Anderson 1983 cited in Rieffer 2003). Under the LTTE's parallel state-building project, a sense of belonging was constructed along a common language, a single ruler, an insulated economy, a strongly demarcated territorial boundary, and by othering the Sinhala Buddhist state. Thus LTTE-controlled territory could be 'imagined as a community [where] regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that [prevails] in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal *comradeship*...for millions of people...[willing] to die for such limited imaginings' (Anderson, 2006: 7).

The military victory of the (Sinhala) Sri Lankan state over the (Tamil) LTTE under an autocratic and ethno-centric regime cemented the re-unification of the country under a Sinhala Buddhist identity. The immediate post-war ethos was saturated by a triumphalism that spoke of the war as a victory for Sinhala

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[31] A language that either explicitly or implicitly embraces caste identity as part of the divisions (and social hierarchy) in Jaffna society. For example, asking a person where they live is also to ask (implicitly) what caste do they belong to.

[32] The post-war consumer in Jaffna (and in the Northern Province) also shares the status of being a highly indebted consumer – overall indebtedness has been steeply rising in Jaffna (Guganeshan 2015, CEPA 2014).

Buddhism and firmly established it as the hegemonic identity (Jayatilika, 2015). The end to the armed conflict only redefined the conflict in conditions of no war (Keerwella, 2013). Therefore recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation continue to be shaped by ethnicised contestations along social, cultural, economic and political arenas.

The military victory over the LTTE has reconfigured Tamil nationalism such that 'horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 2006) is built within a narrative of victimisation. This equally shared experience was articulated by both people in Harinagar and white-collar workers: 'everybody was equally affected by the war (director, Whitewings International School); 'bombs fell on everybody' (woman, Harinagar); or 'in the camps all different groups had to live together' (KII, Jaffna). References to a shared experience conveyed two messages. One, that the war (the bombs and bullets) did not discriminate between caste and class, age or gender. Two, that the shared experience of war did not allow for maintaining discriminatory practices along caste or class lines and in fact bridged differences between groups by having them 'live together'. While this might have been so in the case of multiple displacements and life in welfare camps, with the return of people to their place of origin, the spatial segregation along caste lines was re-drawn.

The sense of shared suffering was reprised by officers at the MoE in Jaffna. The officers emphasised the number of students – 180,000 out of 250,000 – that were in the camps during the last stages of the war. This was to suggest that many students were affected in the same way and faced the same fate of losing out on proper education. With regard to post-war recovery the officers stated:'Nearly 298 schools were reopened and resettled ... In 2010 more than 70% of the children were resettled and had the opportunity to study' (interview with senior officers at MoE, Jaffna).

This gave the impression that that these schools suffered a similar fate (and hence were on par with one another) and that all returnee students had the opportunity to access schools and get the same quality of education.[33] This masks the fact that the students in the camps or the schools did not all start on the same footing. The MoE officials themselves later admitted that some schools had far better access to capital and human resources that enabled their recovery at a much faster rate.

The church in Jaffna has played a central role in recovery and rehabilitation of Tamils in the north both during and after the war.[34] Almost all faith-based NGOs working in the north stated explicitly that they did not discriminate on the basis of race, religion or gender when providing services (Nolan, 2005). The church provided assistance to both Christians and non-Christians irrespective of their caste or class (KII, Jaffna).

At Mount Carmel school the principal said the school had a mix of Hindu and Christian students from different backgrounds. At the time of research, the school was providing scholarships for children in the Vanni who were orphaned in the war, many of whom may have belonged to oppressed castes and class.[35] At Whitewings International, the headmistress claimed that in order to give equal opportunity to children from underprivileged backgrounds (from oppressed castes and class), the school supported them through heavily subsidised school fees.

Both nationalism and religion in post-war Jaffna cater to the same imagined community of war-affected Tamils who lived within the homogenised territory of the north and east under the LTTE. However, the shared sense of loss masks the unequal distribution of that loss and subsequently the unequal state of recovery of Tamil people who remain divided by caste and class. Before illustrating how caste practice

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[33] The disparities between schools was highlighted during our discussion on the differences between schools in urban and rural areas. Schools in rural areas face far greater shortages in terms of both infrastructure and technological and human resources (FGD at MoE).

[34] As of 2005 Christian, faith-based organisations dominated the NGO landscape in north and east Sri Lanka. Of the faith-based organisations, one was Jewish, one Buddhist, four Muslim and 44 Christian. A total of 43 worked in education.

[35] Most of the poorest and those who belonged to low caste groups who were affected by the war either lived, or had been displaced or resettled in the Vanni (KII, Jaffna).

dents these homogenising narratives, I will lay out how globalisation and class inter-relate with the other two discourses and construct an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006).

In Jaffna, the advent of the global market has witnessed the gradual rise of the service sector economy and the setting up of finance institutions, national and international banks, factories and national and regional retail chains. In a similar fashion there has been a mushrooming of private educational institutions including English-medium international schools.[36]

The Whitewings International School is a case in point. The school is funded by Humedica International, a Christian international humanitarian organisation based in Germany.[37] It is illustrative of how global capital and religious institutions join to set up a brand of international schooling to meet global standards in education. The school offers the UK-based International General Certificate of Secondary Education and A-levels and has made speaking English on campus compulsory for all teachers and students.[38]

It is argued that globalisation, the flow and integration of world markets in terms of capital, ideas, products and services, or otherwise the global 'market place', weakens robust spatial divisions and forces connections between upper and oppressed caste groups (David and Kandy, 2006). Whitewings International School, which is set up through the integration of global capital and western ideas of faith-based education is one such space that provides a common space for students from different castes.

Speaking in English at Whitewings International is assumed to create a level playing field not only within the school but among the broader English-speaking global community as well. For example, when one of the children attending the international school spoke in English with me (an upper middle class outsider), he was momentarily elevated in sharing a higher class identity of a global 'English speaking middle class' (Little and Sabates, 2008: 713). The aspiration to belong to this English-speaking class was highlighted by his mother who wanted her son to learn English irrespective of what profession he took up, since it would place her son (even partially) among the middle class. This was probably one reason she encouraged her son to *hang out* with me whenever I was in Harinagar. Her desire also reflected the changes in structures of aspirations and opportunities in post-war Jaffna and that proficiency in English (and less so in Sinhala) increased opportunities in the global market (Little and Sabates, 2008: 720).

According to some civil society members in Jaffna, though, there have been shifts among the upper tiers of the caste hierarchy – the lowest castes have remained marginalised and unable to get a foothold in well-paying private sector jobs, the higher ranks of local administration and the top positions in educational institutions (KII, Jaffna).[39] Past efforts by English and American missionaries to provide access to schools for oppressed caste groups were unable to break caste boundaries policed by powerful high-caste groups. The missionary forces found it nearly impossible to subvert or operate outside the hegemonic caste-based institutions in Jaffna (Kuganathan, 2014; Mahroof, 2000). This meant missionaries had to open separate schools for students of low and high caste. Though less rigidly applied, this legacy continues to function in post-war Jaffna.

It was not surprising then, when the Samurdhi officer in the area stated that 'the [Christian] schools were divided by caste…[and] there is caste discrimination even now', or that children from Harinagar who moved from St. Michael's to other schools to complete their secondary education dropped out from those (mixed caste) schools because 'they were discriminated by others and had few friends there' (teacher, St. Michael's school).

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[36] However, six years since the entry of global market forces in Jaffna the economy remains in the rural sector primarily based on (non-mechanised) agriculture and fishing.

[37] See www.humedica.org.

[38] While Tamil was taught as a subject, children were also made to chose between German and French as a third language.

[39] Top national schools and Jaffna University are known for discriminating against low-caste applicants for high positions such as principal or permanent lecturer respectively (KII, Jaffna).

Even though the three schools in proximity to Harinagar advertise that they give priority to (Catholic) Christians, it is predominantly along caste lines that children from Harinagar (and Samudranagar) apply to school. That is, *Parayar* Catholics would not submit an application to St. Johns, which is attended by *Karava* Catholics from Samudranagar , or vice versa (principal, St. Michael's).

The mixing of caste groups has taken place within the higher strata of Jaffna society. The middle class in post-war Jaffna is more mixed in terms of caste than it has ever been (KII, Jaffna). This is attributed to the fact that many people belonging to middle castes have broken into the sectors initially dominated by the *Vellalas*. This job sector consists of a large number of white-collar government workers, professionals (doctors and teachers) and to a lesser extent NGO workers.

Many of the white-collar government workers and professionals I talked with belonged to a generation that grew up under LTTE rule and they believed that caste discrimination had been wiped out due to the severe punishment handed out by the LTTE to those alleged to have discriminated on grounds of caste.[40] In my interviews with people in these professions, the most constant refrain was that caste was no longer an issue (field notes). By this they meant the end of caste discrimination in public sector jobs and society in general. That is, *no one saw caste* in the government sector while practices of unequal seating and eating were no longer adhered to or permissible. The only time respondents said that caste was practised was at the time of marriage and religious functions.[41] By making the distinction between the public and private they implied that caste in the private sphere is not political and therefore has no bearing on the public sphere.

In addition to my own observations, the class characteristics of these white-collar service providers can be drawn from what they said about the community at Harinagar. This group was establishing its own identity by setting themselves apart from the people at Harinagar by way of othering. For example, the labels they used to describe the community – 'poor', 'uneducated', 'uncivilised', 'dirty', [smelling], and 'alcoholic' (Lall 2015) were to imply their own *middle class* characteristics – that they were not-poor, educated, clean, civilised and so on. As I have explained elsewhere (Lall 2015), that these labels were a code for caste and that the condescending and patronising tone that accompanied the responses was a way of reiterating both their class and caste superiority over people in Harinagar. This needs to be highlighted again to show the intersection of caste and class and also how caste speak has taken on a more universal class based description. As a result, while these labels of class enable a wider audience to relate to social stratification in Jaffna society, they mask the far more localised legacy of caste discrimination.

The denial by white-collar workers that caste discrimination exists in the public sector silences and naturalises the dominance of a *superior* caste/class identity of white-collar workers over an *inferior* caste/class identity of blue-collar work force service providers in Harinagar. The silence around caste discrimination by the more powerful is bound to favour and consolidate the interest of the emerging middle caste/class, those that hold positions of power in educational institutions while groups such as the *Parayars* will continue to struggle to have equal access to education.

Complementing the assertions made by middle-class respondents that caste discrimination no longer plays a role in daily life, a respondent in Harinagar stated: 'now money is everything… if we have money we can hide our caste' (male, Harinagar). He was highlighting a shift where caste/class has apparently lost its salience in daily life and that money has trumped caste identity. Many parents held a similar view regarding access to education – that is, if they had enough money then they would be able to get

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[40] Other less common reasons were attributed to social movements, leftist politics and universal access to education.

[41] While acknowledging that caste practice continues to exist and perform a vital role in Jaffna society (marriage) the practice was not seen as discriminatory. They implied that family matters of marriage and religious ceremonies/rituals had no influence on creating, reproducing or reinforcing inequality or discrimination in the economic or political aspects of life.

admission for their children in any school. The comment also highlights that caste identity (in its need to be hidden) remains a source of vulnerability. As I show later, caste identity for the community continued to surface in interactions at schools resulting in discrimination, marginalisation and physical violence.

In the case of St. Michael's and St. Francis being working class (or poverty stricken) brought oppressed-caste *Parayars* at Harinagar and higher-caste *Karayars* at Samudranagar into the same space. The principal at St. Michael's explained that it was the poorest families from Samudranagar that sent their kids to St. Michael's, whereas most children from Samudranagar attended the more prestigious *Karava*-dominated St. John's school. The result of this was mixed. Children from both communities had forged friendships but at the same time children from Harinagar were accused of being 'violent' (boy, St. Michael's), 'disobedient' and 'dirty' (teacher, St. Francis).

Caste at the seams: ruptures and fragmentation of the homogenising discourse
Intersecting with nationalism, religion, globalisation and class, caste continues to reveal the ruptures in the idea of belonging as well as the estrangement experienced by low-caste groups in Jaffna. Bringing caste identity to the fore, I will illustrate how, for the community in Harinagar, the unifying or homogenising ideas do not hold in terms of building a true sense of belonging, while they re-articulate, reinforce and resurrect power among an emerging caste-class stratum that continues to discriminate and marginalise those belonging to the lowest castes. The intersection of caste and the discourses helps illustrate how everyday events constantly (to greater and lesser extent) interact with and are shaped by phenomena taking place simultaneously at the national, regional and global level.

Talking to the MoE officials about caste discrimination in schools revealed the officers' aversion towards tackling caste-based marginalisation and discrimination within educational institutions in Jaffna. The officers shared two written complaints by parents who had alleged that their children were discriminated against by their teachers by calling them by 'their caste name'. In a reassuring tone, one of the officers told us: 'This department has 967 schools and we have received only 2 or 3 incidents about caste from Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi.' (FGD at MoE).[42] They reiterated that the incident took place in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi and that they hadn't received any such complaints in Jaffna. They said they had: 'talked to the principals…and informed them not to address the subject of caste at all. Because if one talks about it, even to raise awareness, it brings up the issue, hence, it's best not to talk about it at all'.

The response illustrates two aspects on caste dynamics and how they intersect with the homogenising discourse in post-war Jaffna. Demarcating Jaffna from other districts in the north is the first aspect. In their attempt to absolve Jaffna from the *backward practice* of caste-based discrimination they seemed to be recasting the popular myth of Jaffna's cultural superiority where such practices could only take place in the backward Tamil districts (Pfaffnberger, 1981). Ironically, the self-attributed cultural superiority of Jaffna over other Tamil-inhabited regions strongly echoes the hegemony of a Jaffna-based upper caste discourse. The distinction also problematises discourses of a homogenous northern region and a homogenous Tamil identity in the post-war north.

The second aspect is with regard to the officers' silencing of dissent against caste-based discrimination of children from oppressed castes by principals in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi. Their response shows a failure to address caste-based discrimination on two accounts. One is an institutional peculiarity where the ministry officials' discretion seemed to trump a legal process against the principals. Telling the principals not to talk about caste failed to hold the principals accountable for their disturbing actions and nor did it seem to have addressed (or compensated) the students who were discriminated against. Second, the collusion of middle and higher caste/class persons (the MoE officers and school principals)

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[42] Contrasting the number of complaints to the number of schools in the Northern Province was an attempt to vindicate the severity of caste based discrimination. Although common sense would suggest that if a couple of formal complaints had been submitted then it was likely that caste-based discrimination exists in other schools and other districts as well. The absence of any formal complaint is worrying and suggests that caste-based discrimination in Jaffna is not being addressed at the institutional level.

in protecting their power at the expense of marginalised low-caste groups. It is clear that the incident of caste based discrimination was highly troubling for the officers. However, their way of addressing the problem was by actively silencing the issue – 'it's best not to talk about it at all'. The decision makes the officers complicit in a higher/middle caste/class discourse that both suppresses and silences caste-based discrimination. Silencing the discriminatory nature of caste in education is also an attempt to protect the institution (and its higher caste/class legacy) from the *backward* and *tainted* image of caste discrimination and thereby preserve the status quo of upper and middle caste/class constituencies that continue to hold power in educational institutions in the peninsula.

Experiences from India highlight how the global market (alongside the withdrawal of the welfare state) can strengthen upper caste and class sections of society and simply reinstate their hegemony in the new economic set up (Gerard, 2008). That is, the *free market* is by no means accessed freely by all sections of society.

With barriers to enter private education remaining high for the oppressed caste/working class, the makeup of private and international schools is likely to remain confined to the upper caste/class sections of Jaffna society who would gain access to the best jobs and opportunities.

Even in the case of children from Harinagar attending prestigious schools, their aspiration to be part of the English-speaking class is fraught with tensions and discontinuities, particularly due to their caste identity. Recalling the request by two boys attending Whitewings International School not to reveal their residential location to the school staff is illustrative of how caste identity can easily infiltrate class structures (a homogenising English-speaking environment) and expose legacies of marginalisation and discrimination faced daily by children from oppressed caste groups.

Nonetheless, children from Harinagar at prestigious schools studied among students from higher castes and participated in a *middle class* environment. According to the principal at Mount Carmel, admission was given to those children from Harinagar whose parents 'spoke politely' and 'dressed well'. This was done keeping in mind that parents of children from other areas (from higher caste/class) would not want to send their children to a school that admitted children who were 'dirty' or 'fought a lot' (interview with Principal at Mount Carmel). Ascribing to middle class norms (and ability to meet higher costs) allowed children from Harinagar to study alongside children from higher castes at better schools. However, caste discrimination within school remained unchecked.

At St. Michael's school we witnessed two boys from Samudranagar physically bullying a younger boy from Harinagar accusing him of belonging to *Thitti* (Harinagar).[43] In another instance, a mother told us that her daughter (who attends a different mixed caste/class school) gets bullied by her classmates: 'My daughter told me that others would scold her and beat her. And scold her calling out her caste name…because she came from Harinagar' (Female, Harinagar).

The economic development officer for Harinagar (in her late 30s, from a higher caste) who had studied at a prestigious girls' school recalled a classmate from Harinagar: 'She was very silent. She wore a dirty uniform; didn't eat with us. No one was ready to interact with her…the teacher also disliked her. Almost every day the teacher would beat her. She had no friends.'

Such instances suggest that access to better schools on account of similar class characteristics does not mitigate or conceal tensions borne out of caste identity. So, as long as the girl and her parents continue to live in Harinagar (or her father continues to work in sanitation), her caste identity would continue to disrupt the homogenising thrust of class. The same was possibly true for the economic development officers' classmate who had to endure very severe discrimination. The officer's recollection also

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[43] *Thitti* was a colloquial expression for Harinagar. It was used only by the community members and people in neighbouring areas.

illustrates that even during the latter end of LTTE control in Jaffna caste discrimination continued within classrooms.

Meanwhile, caste-based discrimination faced by children leaving St. Michael's to other schools to complete their secondary education strengthens the assertion that the schools in the area are spatially segregated along caste lines.

Meanwhile, I came across instances of resistance to change and appropriation of caste identity from male youths in Harinagar. However, these youths did not assert caste in a political sense, as *I am Parayar,* but as a more silent retreat into their cultural foundations of which caste forms a central pillar. Hence, much like the masking that takes place in the denial of caste, even in its appropriation caste can remain subliminal.

In one case, a male youth gave up on the opportunity of studying in English at Whitewings International and chose to study at another prestigious school but in Tamil medium. The reason he had given for not wanting to study in the international school was that he 'hated English' and wanted to study in Tamil. By doing so he was potentially giving up the opportunity of (partially) accessing a new class status and distancing himself from his caste identity. By choosing not to study in English he was consolidating his caste identity within a broader Tamil identity. While Tamil-based education is likely to give him a range of job opportunities, his livelihood options would be limited to working in a Tamil set-up where his caste identity is more likely to be noted.

The second case of resistance was a male youth more directly asserting his *Parayar* identity. Recently married, he had decided against doing sanitation work and instead taken up the traditional livelihood of funeral drumming. The youth told us that he enjoyed playing the drum and the vocation gave him adequate income.[44] The retreat to traditional language and caste-based livelihood demonstrates how caste identity is both a vehicle of agency and resistance in the face of global forces that attempt to homogenise inherently diverse cultural and socio-economic institutions.

2.4   Re-locating the discourse

As and when caste identity comes to the fore from within these discourses, it is expressed and denied on the basis of the underlying factors that shape caste identity – livelihood and location. The territorialisation that underlies the nationalist and religious discourse and the material and social consumption that underlies the discourse of the global market and class ascribe to ideas of location and livelihood, respectively.

As in Harinagar, here too, location, while stretched over a larger expanse, is central to the construction of the idea of belonging. Therefore, both the construction of homogeneity and the ruptures in nationalist and religious discourse (when and where caste is brought to the fore) appear along the axis of *location* – of physical and imagined boundaries. Homogeneity is constructed through the narrative of victimisation. Meanwhile, the ruptures appear when the MoE officials attempt to segregate Jaffna from other *backward* districts in the north, and in the way caste identity underlies segregation of students in Christian schools.

Similarly, the desire expressed for social mobility through material and social consumption (for e.g. by attending international schools) appears along the axis of livelihoods – where the kind of work you do (or aspire to do) is intrinsic to the proximity a person establishes with their caste/class identity. Learning English or attending prestigious schools are ways in which students from Harinagar participate in a homogenising discourse that attempts to screen identity-based disparities. This consumption is

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[44] During LTTE rule, funeral drumming had been banned and it was one of the reasons that older generations in Harinagar had given up drumming altogether. Resistance to the LTTE sentiment suggests that the caste was pushed under the surface by coercion and the lack of a threat has allowed caste identity to resurface. This case exposes the problems with the popular narrative that the LTTE got rid of caste-based discrimination in Jaffna.

simultaneously an attempt to distance oneself from one identity and reach out into another. However, the ruptures show themselves in the classroom where children from Harinagar continue to be discriminated against.

The retreat into traditional caste-based livelihoods such as funeral drumming or the refusal to learn the English language are outliers to the general aspirations in the community and more readily reveal and admit their caste identity. The retreat into their caste identity could be understood in two ways. One, that the legacy of marginalisation and discrimination of low-caste groups has been internalised by people in Harinagar. That is, under the LTTE rule they were never emancipated from caste discrimination, and caste surreptitiously remained a part of people's lives. Meanwhile, post-war Jaffna is witnessing a resurgence of caste-based discrimination of low-caste groups by higher-caste/class groups. This leads to the second aspect, where due to a resurgence of caste-based discrimination upward social mobility for the community at Harinagar is not a smooth ascent. It is met with resistance, confrontation and even violence[45] along caste lines by those who hold more power. On the other hand, instead of livelihood and location being symbols of marginalisation and low self-worth, they can simultaneously gain a sense of preservation and agency. That is, while livelihood and location may be reminders of what the community does not have or cannot have, they also demonstrate that the community has a legacy, a history, and a role in society. It is then possible that these attributes combine to resist changes that are perceived as a threat to tradition, a safeguard from the *modern* world that has the potential to uproot their identity.

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[45] This is a reference to the alleged beatings endured by a girl from Harinagar attending a mixed caste school.

3   Conclusion

At first, silence and sensitivity around caste presented a barrier to gathering information on how caste shapes access to services for a low-caste community. In due course, however, the silence around caste formed the very basis for understanding how caste operates in the daily negotiations with regard to accessing education. This paper demonstrates how caste operates within the historical, social, cultural and political make-up of the community and educational institutions to reproduce structures that marginalise and discriminate against children from low-caste groups.

The duration of the fieldwork and the data collection methods chosen made it possible for me to engage with the community and enabled me to discern caste practice in a way that would not otherwise have been possible.

This study contributes to a broader discussion on communities that are marginalised from development, and more specifically raises concerns over the need to target traditionally marginalised communities in areas affected by conflict that get excluded from reconstruction and development agendas. Reconstruction efforts that do not take social inequalities into consideration are in danger of reinforcing and perpetuating power hierarchies that keep traditionally marginalised groups marginalised and in poverty in the post-war era. The question then, is how should post-war reconstruction efforts in Sri Lanka tackle the more deeply embedded structures of marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion in a political culture that is averse to ideas of affirmative action?

The length of this paper and its reliance on conceptual and theoretical arguments underline the complex nature in which caste operates in post-war Jaffna society. The process of trying to understand how caste shapes access to schools meant that caste had to be both untangled from the daily interaction of the community and schooling, as well as examined as an inextricable component of the experience of going to school in Harinagar.

The narrative of caste's eradication by the LTTE is one of the modern myths in post-war Jaffna society. There is evidence, both substantive and anecdotal, that caste was not eradicated by (or during) the LTTE rule. The open mention of caste in the matrimonial sections of Tamil newspapers (newspapers were banned from mentioning caste in the matrimonial section under the LTTE) is evidence that in the absence of the LTTE, people who held back from showing their caste have gone back to openly asserting their caste prejudices.

Two axes along which caste operates in Jaffna are livelihood and location. For oppressed caste groups, such as the *Parayars* of Harinagar, working in sanitation is viewed (by themselves and others) as their caste occupation. The low status of the caste and the nature of the work have been constructed and forcefully applied (by hegemonic high-caste discourses) and appear to be not only normal but appropriate. Both boys and girls seem to be victim to where they come from and feel marginalised in schools with mixed caste and class groups. In the meantime, areas in Jaffna continue to be drawn along caste lines and Harinagar is known to be the area where sanitation workers come from.[46] Although livelihood and location both independently carry strong caste associations, it is at their intersection(s) that caste operates to keep the community working at the JMC and living in Harinagar, thereby simultaneously reproducing and maintaining the structures that marginalise them.

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[46] The idea of 'coming from' somewhere is different from idea of residing or living somewhere. To come from a place is to trace a groups *cultural ancestry* (or caste identity) to a place.

Having schools in close proximity makes Harinagar a pretty ideal location. A significant benefit for parents with children attending the two government schools was that they are a stone's throw away and ticked the boxes in terms of safety and saving time and money. The proximity has definitely contributed to a high enrolment rate especially at primary school level in the community. In other words, *access* to school appears to be satisfactory. However, the consistent dropping out of both girls and boys (at a secondary level) demonstrates that *access* needs to be understood in broader terms than just enrolment. It is imperative to couple *quality* of schooling and *access* in order to move beyond the narrow measure of enrolment. The classification of schools into categories ranging from 'very congenial' to 'very difficult' by the MoE is a measure of a certain kind of *quality* – gauged in terms of amount of human, capital and infrastructure resources.

This categorisation does not show an understanding for the *environment* a child enters when attending school. For example, getting a handle on the nature of teacher-student and peer-to-peer interaction will give a better chance of capturing the otherwise unseen practices, including caste-based discrimination, that play a significant role in shaping the experience of schooling for children and teachers. The dangers of policing schools are obvious and may (depending on who is policing) reformulate or even exacerbate discrimination endured by children. A sudden turnaround in attitudes towards caste discrimination is unlikely and hence finding a balance between keeping a certain freedom and autonomy in the way schools are run and ensuring a safe and nurturing environment for children is of utmost importance.

A change in attitude on caste-based discrimination in Jaffna will also depend on how closely people subscribe to the discourses upholding the idea of a homogenous community. Including the inter-related ideas of nationalism, religion, globalisation and class into the analytical frame allows for a more nuanced explanation for why and how these broader phenomena intersect with caste and shape the experience of schooling for the community in Harinagar.

Subscribing to the discourse of victimisation where all people are perceived to be *war-affected* silences the history and masks the layers of victimisation experienced by marginalised groups that have been playing out in Jaffna far before (during and after) the onset of War. Inversely, the discourse that normalises social mobility through the consumption of *wealth* – by studying at international schools, learning English or buying modern consumer products – masks the caste-related barriers mediated by higher caste/class groups that prevent marginalised caste groups from being treated equally in schooling.

In my attempt to articulate the intersection of these broader discourses with caste at a local level, I sought to draw linear links between discourses that helped bring some clarity to these complex linkages. However, the linkages go across discourses as well. The role of victim in the post-war national discourse remains pertinent to the discourse around class identity as well – and an apt precursor to the discourse of social mobility. Christianity and its development and modernising paraphernalia too has begun to shape the communities' aspirations towards a socially upward 'English speaking' lifestyle. These interconnected discourses are also inextricable from the physical and imagined space they occupy – that is the land on which Harinagar sits and the community's perception of their space and the implications of inhabiting that space.

I hope that locating these broader ideas at the point of daily negotiations of schooling for children in Harinagar has helped illustrate that the concerns of this community are not an isolated case – born out of their own fate – but are connected to a wider history of social, economic and political relationships that run across local, regional, national and international boundaries.

It is important to highlight that both Harinagar community members and white-collar workers in education mask and silence caste speak. Nevertheless, it is the masking and silencing by higher caste/class people in positions to plan and implement education policy that plays a far greater role in the marginalisation and exclusion of oppressed caste groups.

While policy change and change in attitudes in educational institutions in Jaffna might involve negotiations with middle/high caste individuals, it is important (for researchers or any spokesperson for marginalised communities) to remain receptive to the voices and agency of marginalised groups. The cases of the two male youths actively resisting the tide of *modernity* and retreating to a more traditional identity pose both real and conceptual problems in locating the line where assertion of caste identity draws upon both resistance as well as acceptance of one's place in society.

Girls and boys dropping out of school can also be viewed as a form of resistance against an educational system that has not done enough to gain the trust of the community. The time and money required to complete tertiary or even secondary education are literally impossible to meet for most households in Harinagar, while a better life after schooling is far from guaranteed. Hence, the decision to drop out of school must be seen in the context of identity, gender, and socio-economic realities that shape their lives.

It might then be helpful to pose questions such as – why are children who are eager to continue their education forced out of school, while those who are not so eager to go to school forced to stay in school for a certain period? To what extent do conditions and dynamics in the household and/or/versus the access and quality of education determine the longevity of a child in school? These questions are intended to push both research and policy to think of the space and relationships that operate within and between the household/community and school/educational institutions. A deeper look into household and in-school activity will also allow for a more meaningful way to contrast the experiences of schooling for girls and boys. It was only by closely examining the 'in-between' – the intersection of the local, national and global that I began to understand how caste discrimination operates in access to schooling for children in Harinagar. However, much more can be learnt about the nature and intensity of caste discrimination by examining the experience of children during school hours

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