Researching livelihoods and services affected by conflict

Jaffna

Sri Lanka

Colombo

Access to water and sanitation in Jaffna, Sri Lanka: perceptions of caste

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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. 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 and international efforts at peace-building 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 Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Sri Lanka, Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University), Focus1000 in Sierra Leone, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Humanitarian Aid and Reconstruction of Wageningen University (WUR) in the Netherlands, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan.

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Acronyms

EPDP	Eelam People's Democratic Party
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
IDSN	International Dalit Solidarity Network
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
JMC	Jaffna Municipal Council
KII	Key Informant Interview
LTTE	Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoR	Ministry of Resettlement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Class
PHI	Public Health Inspector
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

1   Introduction

The equitable provision of and access to basic services is a concern in most developing societies. Structural inequalities based on class, ethnicity, gender and caste can hinder access to such services for some social groups. In most post-conflict contexts, groups that are traditionally marginalized tend to be worst affected and to be those that are excluded from reconstruction and development processes. Equity in provision and access to services is particularly pertinent in post-conflict contexts, to ensure such groups are actively included in the reconstruction process. Violent conflict may also leave distinct experiences for men and woman, belonging to marginalized groups and reconstruction processes need to take these into account. Equitable provision would also help address some of the underlying structural inequalities that are often the cause of such conflicts.

The current development strategy of the Sri Lankan government focuses on providing infrastructure to the northern and eastern provinces as part of the post-war recovery and reconstruction process. This includes mainly laying out highways and re-establishing rail networks between these provinces and the rest of the country. While the emphasis on an infrastructure-based development approach is under debate in the media and among social researchers in Sri Lanka, very little is known about how services vital to the everyday welfare of the people, such as water and sanitation (W&S), are being distributed among the population of the previously war-affected north-eastern region.

In Jaffna, Sri Lanka, one particular concern is caste-based discrimination in the provision of and access to services to traditionally marginalised communities. Such caste-based discrimination, particularly in post-conflict contexts, can stall recovery; inhibit men and women's (and especially woman headed households) ability to build safe and resilient livelihoods, and reinforce the *status quo* – that of systematic marginalisation and chronic poverty.

It has been five years since the end of the war between the Sri Lankan state and the separatist Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In this time, access to services has improved in the conflict-affected north for a number of reasons, such as the end of armed conflict, reduced security restrictions and increased infrastructural development. Data on W&S show there has been significant progress in access in the country in the past two decades.[1] Access to improved water supply has grown from 67% to 93% of the population and access to sanitation from 68% to 91% (WHO and UNICEF, 2013). In urban areas, access to both W&S consistently improved between 1990 and 2010, with the improvement greater in water supply than in sanitation. However, for the conflict-affected region, data on access to W&S are sporadic at best. The government has undertaken efforts to provide clean W&S to war-affected internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north and east (MoR 2013), but current reports allege that 49,509 resettled families in the area are without access to toilets[2] (The Island, 2014).

Historically, life in Jaffna was defined primarily by caste identity (Suseendirarajah, 1978). That is, an individual's livelihood, place of residence, socio-cultural relations, religious practice and the like were largely determined by caste. Until the LTTE came to power, caste-based discrimination was commonly practised in Jaffna society (Silva et al., 2009a, 2009b). Nonetheless, movements against caste-based discrimination began as early as the 1920s. Political reforms under colonial rule, the policies of a welfare state, the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of caste[3] and a number of struggles for equal treatment by low-caste groups over the first half of the 20th century helped dilute caste as the fundamental basis of societal formation and social interaction.[4]

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[1] However, there is a lack of consistent data on access to W&S in Jaffna through the same period.
[2] Districts in the north include Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya. In the east there are three districts: Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee (MoR, 2013).
[3] The 1957 Disability Act prohibited caste-based discrimination in Sri Lanka.
[4] The 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 lower 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.

However, in the last stages of the war, caste-based discrimination against IDPs belonging to low-caste groups is alleged to have hindered their access to water and acquisition of land in Jaffna (Silva et al., 2009b). There has been no inquiry subsequent to Silva et al.'s book into how caste-based discrimination shapes access to services in post-war Sri Lanka. 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 on caste and caste-based discrimination in Jaffna. The first, more common, response was that caste-based discrimination was no longer practised. In this view, caste practice is a phenomenon of the past. It is associated with movements, protests and agitations by lower caste groups, and the LTTE's anti caste discrimination stance has eliminated caste-based discrimination. Thus, in the post war context caste is considered only in times of marriage (here too, less strictly than before); in some personal family and community rituals; and it no longer exists (as an inhibitor or enabler) in access to public services. The other view was that caste continued to shape daily life in Jaffna, and that the LTTE did not really eradicate caste. Those expressing this view thought that, with the LTTE no longer in power, people had begun to reassert caste. However, they acknowledged that caste practice had changed, moving from explicit expression to become subtle and less visible.

In light of this context, it is of value to explore further the role of caste in post-war Jaffna society and its implications for communities that have suffered from centuries of marginalisation. This working paper explores *what role caste plays in the access to and provision of W&S services in a low-caste community in Jaffna Town.* It also contributes to the analysis of caste and caste-based discrimination in contemporary South Asia, most prominently in India (Thorat and Nueman, 2012) and Nepal (Bhattachan, 2009), where caste-based discrimination continues to hinder access to services for poor and marginalised communities. More broadly, the study raises the concern on the behalf of communities that are marginalised and discriminated against on the basis of their identity, where a large number of people continue to experience discrimination in ways similar to the form of discrimination this study discusses.

This working paper is divided into six parts. Section 2 reviews the literature on caste and Section 3 provides the research methodology and limitations. Section 4 introduces the setting. Section 5 presents the research findings and the discussion of these, organised through the description of three underlying conditions: location vs. isolation, insiders vs. outsiders and the vicious cycle. Section 6 puts forward concluding remarks.

2 Literature review

There are two broad streams in the literature on caste. Some anthropological research (Banks, 1957, 1960; Leach, 1960, 1961; Roberts, 1984; Ryan, 1993; Silva, 1982, 1992; Yalman, 1967) observes caste as an important social institution determining social order and patterns of social interaction. The other position looks at caste as a hierarchical set-up that perpetuates active discrimination and marginalisation of the lower castes by the higher castes (Pfaffenberger, 1982, 1990; Ravikumar, 2002; Silva et al., 2009a, 2009b; Thanges, 2008).

A broad definition of the caste system by the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)[5] combines these two perspectives. This definition 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. 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 the least duties, and those at the bottom being forced to perform most duties that are considered impure, coupled with no rights. The system is maintained through the rigid enforcement of social ostracism (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 part of Jaffna society for centuries. It is divided into three broad social groups. The high castes are the *Vellalar*. 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 the untouchable castes. These include barbers (*Ambattar*), bonded labourers (*Pallar*), tree tappers (*Nalavar*) and drummers (*Parayar*). Castes are further divided into sub-castes and arranged according to social hierarchy. For example, the *Akampadiyar, Madappalli, Thanakarar, Chettimar and Chempeda Vellalar* sub-castes are considered to have the same social status as the *Vellalar* (Silva et al., 2009b). The *Parayar* are the lowest caste group within the overall caste hierarchy as well as within the *Panchamar* caste group. The *Parayar* caste group is the focus of this study.

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

Lower caste groups are on the lowest social tier and tend to have the lowest socioeconomic status. That is, they tend to be the poorer and more vulnerable segments of society. Consequently, in conflict and/or disaster contexts, lower caste groups are more vulnerable to shocks than are people from the higher castes (Silva et al., 2009b; Thanges, 2008). During the tsunami recovery phase in Jaffna, rehabilitation and recovery are said to have been the most challenging for the people belonging to the lower castes (Thanges, 2008). In conflict and disaster situations, generally lower caste groups either are barred or find it extremely difficult to access goods provided during the stages of recovery and rehabilitation (Gill, 2007; Goonesekere, 2001;Thanges, 2008).

In Jaffna, the *Panchamars* have had a troublesome history regarding access to services. Lower caste groups have often protested and even engaged in violent confrontations against upper caste groups for equal rights and equal access to services (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 the late 1920s, there were agitations by lower caste groups for equality in seating and eating (Silva et al., 2009b) in schools, as low-caste children were forbidden from learning or eating with higher caste children (Kuganathan, 2014).

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[5] http://idsn.org/caste-discrimination/
[6] Ibid.

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

The rise of Tamil militancy was a watershed in terms of people from lower caste groups empowering members of the lower castes and destabilising the hegemony of *Vellalars* in the socio-political landscape in Jaffna. Many of the lower castes were attracted to the radical policies of the militant groups against the caste system (Shanmugathasan, 1997). For example, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the LTTE recruited a significant number of personnel from the depressed castes (Roberts, 2011). However, according to Ravikumar (2002) and Silva et al. (2009b), although the LTTE recruited mainly from lower and intermediate caste groups (Silva et al., 2009b)[7] and forbade caste-based discrimination, it did not take a proactive role in preventing discrimination or empowering people from the lower castes, and its nationalist goal of establishing an overarching Tamil identity may actually have silenced a potential lower caste struggle (Ravikumar, 2002).

The prevalence of caste-based discrimination has been highlighted in the literature from South Asia, including India (Thorat and Neuman, 2012), Pakistan (Gazdar, 2007),[8] Nepal (Bhattachan et al., 2009) and Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2009). However, research attempting to measure correlations (using empirical data) between caste and provision of and access to basic services is largely from India (Thorat and Neuman, 2012).

Efforts to measure inequities in access to health (Acharaya, 2010; Boorah, 2010), education (Desai et al., 2008; Nambissan, 2009) and W&S (Johns, 2012; Keskin, 2010; Prakash and Singh, 2012) suggest caste-based discrimination is embedded in systemic features of service provision and practised by service providers as well as between recipients. In South Asia, people belonging to the lowest 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., 2009b). For example, in Jaffna Town, under the British, people belonging to the *Parayar* caste were employed as cleaners.

Studies from India have highlighted the prevalence of caste-based discrimination against the Dalits (the overarching identity ascribed to low caste groups in India) in schools located in urban and rural settings (Desai et al., 2008; Nambissan, 2009) and in health centres (Acharaya, 2010; Boorah, 2010). A report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) argues that Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India have poorer access to drinking W&S facilities than non-STs and non-SCs and that there is a 'deep rooted caste-based inequity in the distribution and availability of infrastructure for SCs […] in water provision and sanitation' (Johns,2012: 3). In India, for example, violence between Dalits and other caste communities over access to services is not uncommon. Water access is usually dependent on the goodwill of the dominant caste, and the 'most inhumane form of discrimination and untouchability is seen when it comes to water […] violence starts […] as Dalits try to access the public well or hand pumps' (Johns, 2012: 3).

In this working paper, 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).

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

[8] Also http://idsn.org/caste-discrimination/

Compared with research on caste in the larger region, research on caste in Sri Lanka has been sporadic at best. Caste in Sri Lanka was explored primarily by foreign anthropologists between the 1950s and 1990, with the exception of McGilvray (2008), and socio-political writings on caste during the war are from India (Ravikumar, 2002). A few Sri Lankan scholars (Silva et al., 2009a, 2009b; Thanges, 2008; Weeratunge, 1988) have pursued studies of the caste system (as the primary subject matter) and its practice in Sri Lanka. On the whole, caste remains invisible and largely undiscussed in contemporary Sri Lankan society, likely for the following reasons.

1   Sri Lanka does not have an affirmative action policy for lower castes like those seen in India[9] 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)
3   Caste was subsumed by Sinhalese and Tamil nationalist discourses (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 paucity of literature on caste in contemporary Sri Lanka, Silva et al. (2009b) have shed some light on caste-based discrimination in Sri Lanka in their book, *Casteless or Caste-Blind?*, providing a timely entry into 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 facing low caste communities in Jaffna. First, owing to limited assets and a lack of social networks, the lower caste groups were unable to leave Jaffna in the lead-up to and during the war, whereas most high castes with money and connections in Colombo or abroad could (Sidhartan, 2003, cited in Silva et al., 2009b). This suggests most IDPs in the north belonged to the lower castes.

Second, members of the lower castes (*Panchamars*) were also the last group of people to leave the IDP camps in Jaffna. This is because, traditionally, people of low caste did not own land or owned landholdings of miniscule size that were located in rural areas at the time under state security forces. These people 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 mechanisms (Silva et al., 2009b).

Third, lower caste groups were subject to caste-based discrimination by higher castes during displacement. 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 (*people).[10] Access to temples was denied, and the purchase of land was refused or offered at inflated prices to the lower castes by the higher castes.

Lastly, access to basic necessities such as water was also problematic for the lower castes (Thanges, 2008). Owing to the limited supply of water at the IDP camps, low caste people were dependent on water from wells owned by higher caste groups in the surrounding areas. Caste practice in accessing water is ruled by notions of purity and impurity, where water from the well of a higher caste is said to

[9] In India, 'Dalits' (Thorat et al., 2009), or lower or depressed castes – namely, SCs, 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, in 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 lower 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).
[10] The term Mukal has several derogatory meanings, such as 'low caste', 'poor', 'bad behaved' and 'aggressive' (Silva et al., 2009b: 72).

become impure if touched by a lower caste person. People of higher caste would not allow people from lower castes to draw water for themselves; instead, lower caste people would have to wait for the higher castes to give them water (ibid.).

Because a low caste identity was (and remains) a barrier to social mobility, conversions to Christianity were not uncommon among the lower castes: adopting this alternate religion promised a casteless and non-discriminatory society. Conversion from Hinduism to Christianity was a way lower caste people sought to rid themselves of their low caste status, access education and enable upward socioeconomic mobility.[11] Many traditionally low caste people have been able to rise out of the constraints attached to a low caste identity through upward social mobility founded on church-run schools. However, local power relations that continue to favour higher caste groups have constrained the adoption of new social identities (Mosse, 1999). The church too has been co-opted in reproducing these power relations and has not been able to rid itself of caste-based discrimination (Kuganathan, 2014).[12]

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[11] 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 lower castes to serve the upper castes (Hoole, 2003).
[12] In Jaffna, during colonial rule, the church is said to have shown ambivalence towards caste-based discrimination, which maintained the hegemony of the Vellalars. The influence and power of the Vellalars 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).

3 Research methodology

Anthropological studies have used ethnographic methods to provide a rich understanding of caste mechanisms in multiple contexts in 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 in this tradition, to reach a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms of caste in the provision of and access to services, the study draws on tools from both focused ethnography and conventional or 'anthropological ethnography' (Knoblauch, 2005). Focusing on the role of caste in provision of and access to services in Thirunagar in Jaffna Town, a focused ethnography approach drew attention to sites of interactions and activities related to accessing and providing W&S services rather than an in-depth investigation into the social, cultural, political and economic make-up of the community.

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. This meant that I did not make daily visits to Thirunagar; sometimes, I spent only three to four days in a week in Thirunagar. Despite the relatively short time in the field (in terms of a conventional ethnography), over the fieldwork period 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.

Informal and unstructured interviews with men, women and children from different parts of the community enabled a deeper understanding of how caste is connected with daily socioeconomic, cultural and political realities in Thirunagar. Informal chats and conversations along with observations are represented here as field notes. We were consistent about not mentioning caste in interviews or interactions, only probing the subject if the respondent explicitly mentioned caste. Introducing questions *on* caste would have been leading, potentially causing interviewees to address subsequent questions using a caste lens. This approach helped untangle the relationships between caste and other identity markers, such as gender, class, livelihood and location, which are inextricably bound together in historical, social, cultural and economic relations. Conversations on the history of the community, cultural norms, traditional livelihoods and, more specifically, access to W&S gave an alternate entry point approach to community perceptions on caste-based discrimination in general and with respect to accessing W&S.

In addition, we conducted focus group discussions with men, women and children. These focus groups made it possible to see multiple perspectives of how caste plays a role in people's lives and how it comes to bear on access to W&S.

Data gathered through individual interviews and focus group discussions were triangulated with participant observation and key informant interviews (KIIs). Time was divided between water access points, people's homes, interactions with outsiders such as government officials and people from neighbouring communities. Spending time around water access points during water drawing hours made it possible to triangulate perceptions on the practice of caste within the community; observing interactions with outsiders (belonging to higher castes) also provided an informative lens of caste practice. More structured KIIs on caste were conducted with people outside the community and service providers such as international and national non-governmental organisations (NGO) members, political activists, representatives of the Catholic Church and academics in Jaffna and Colombo.

All of the interviews and focus groups in the community were conducted in Tamil. Two Jaffna University graduates, Lakshan Neethirajah (male) and Prasha Uthayarajah (female), helped with Tamil to English interpretation, translations and transcriptions throughout the study. Having one male and one female assistant ensured flexibility during interviews. Girls and young women felt more comfortable making eye contact with a female during the interview, and young males found it easier to share their thoughts with a male. The presence of the Tamil-speaking male and female assistants made the research team more approachable to men, women, girls and boys. Both assistants played a more active role in the research than their title suggests. Their grasp of the surroundings and confidence helped me feel at ease in an

unfamiliar environment. Their input during brainstorming sessions was also crucial to moving forward in the research.

In addition to the recognised complexities involved in measuring caste-based discrimination (Acharya, 2010), 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 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.

3.1 Limitations

I did not live in the community and therefore deep immersion was not achieved. One night was spent with a family (in one of the bigger houses), but it was clear 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. I also had reservations about living in a single household because of the possibility that this could create an impression of favouritism towards my hosts within the community. Living outside the community served to reduce possible biases.

Another research difficulty was that the consumption of alcohol and use of foul language in the community made the assistants uncomfortable. Both of the 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, although the presence of an interpreter would have allowed for richer conversations, studying body language and a basic understanding of Tamil had to suffice.

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. Nor were statistical data regarding access to services collected. The findings and analysis are closely tied to the perceptions of respondents and observations on the particularities of caste, location, livelihoods and time of year.

4   Setting

The underserved area (UNDP et al., 2004) of Thirunagar is situated to the south of Jaffna Town. It is located within the larger coastal village of Gurunagar, which is inhabited mostly by fishermen. It consists of 512 households and is within *grama sevak* division J67, which also includes neighbouring communities. It is composed largely of the *Parayar* caste, although an increasing number of inter-caste marriages (within the *Panchamar* castes) have led to people from other caste groups living alongside the majority *Parayar* caste. There are also two households that belong to the fishing castes from Point Pedro on the north-eastern coast of Jaffna that have lived in Thirunagar for more than three generations (Interview, senior community member).

The Jaffna Municipal Council (JMC) employs the majority of the men and a smaller number of women.[13] Of those working for the JMC, almost all work as sanitary workers; women clean the streets and men clean the sewage system. Few men hold clerical positions.

Thirunagar is also Christian. 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 Thirunagar was during the scoping visit. This was before the community had been selected for the study. An NGO contact who had conducted some workshops on alcohol abuse in Thirunagar helped arrange a quick motorbike trip through the area, entering Thirunagar by means of Rajasingham Road (refer to Fig 1). This is the arterial road that runs through Thirunagar and, compared with other access lanes, its tarred surface makes it convenient for residents and those passing through on cycles or motorbikes. It is one of the most frequented and well-known entrances to Thirunagar.

Figure 1: Entrance to Thirunagar from Rajasingham Road (left of map)

To the left of the entrance to Rajasingham Road there is a long line of corrugated metal sheets about a metre and a half high providing privacy for eight houses/households. A thin corrugated metal sheet separates each house from the next. The houses are not more than 1.5 sq meters. The walls are made of concrete and the roofs are made of corrugated metal sheets. Building materials are consistent in all of the housing in Thirunagar (apart from for two families of the same caste community), but plot sizes differ.

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

To the east of the entrance to the road stands a 2-metre high wall separating Rajasingham 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 Thirunagar. Young men living on Rajasingham Road climb over the wall into the cemetery, where they go to defecate. Over time, it became apparent that the households on Rajasingham Road were (on average) worse off than the rest of the community in terms of plot size, they lacked ownership of land,[14] their inhabitants had relatively lower education qualifications, they lacked toilets and they were characterised by more significant drug and alcohol abuse.

Situated within a larger residential area and nestled between high walls to the north (St. Patrick's College) and the south, Thirunagar remains hidden from the nearby arterial roads. Apart from Rajasingham Road and a few back alleys that run through, the four lanes that house about three-fourths of the community end in *cul-de-sacs*.

The war between the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka was fought over many phases and in multiple locations in the north and east. By the mid-1990s, the LTTE had been driven out of Jaffna, and the Sri Lankan armed forces took complete control of the peninsula soon after. All households in Thirunagar were displaced for between one and four years, returning to Thirunagar by the early 2000s. These families were displaced within Jaffna district, living either with relatives, with the church or in IDP camps. A few households lost family members in bombing raids, and some people carry marks of wounds sustained by shrapnel. Although most households had recovered or obtained reissued documentation, some families still did not have their identity cards and birth certificates at the time of this research. Following the war, some family members had migrated and had taken up foreign nationality.

Many households had to rebuild their homes, which were mowed down during the Sri Lankan army occupation. People on Rajasingham Road, however, were displaced twice from their homes. The second instance was in 2004, when members of the neighbouring community burned down houses along the road. We heard varying narratives of this latter conflict. Notably, all of the narratives reported that caste identity played a central role in fuelling tensions with the neighbouring communities.

The protracted nature of the war differentially affected institutions providing services. Although service-providing bodies were financially constrained, basic service provision remained operational during the war (Interview, JMC officers). In fact, some service providers claim that, under the LTTE, service provision was more efficient and staff members had a better work ethic (ibid.).

Reflecting on access to basic services during and after the war, people felt that, with the (unwritten) prohibition on caste-based discrimination under the LTTE, access to schools was fairer and based on merit, whereas caste reshaped access to education in the post-war era. Access to W&S, in contrast, improved with the end of violent conflict.

The government-led resettlement process that included efforts to resolve land disputes and provide access to services in the immediate aftermath of the war did not include people displaced and resettled during the earlier stages of the war. At the time, such efforts were left largely in the hands of NGOs.

The legacy of the war created a landscape of multiple service providers – especially NGOs– and added to the Jaffna Tamil diaspora. Most toilets in Thirunagar were funded and built under NGO programmes, while remittances from family members who have migrated abroad have helped households cover costs, including obtaining access to basic services (Field notes).

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

5   Findings/perceptions on the role of caste

Three underlying conditions help explain how perceptions of caste shape access to services in Thirunagar, and these are used to organise the presentation of findings in this working paper. The first section, 'isolation vs. location', discusses the implications of physical layout and exclusive access to services for caste identity. The following section, 'insiders vs. outsiders', draws out perceptions of discrimination from the people of Thirunagar and service providers. The third section, 'the vicious cycle', explores how norms and behaviour create perceptions among service providers that may shape the provision and quality of service; provision or lack of access to services may reinforce or maintain the *status quo* of habits and norms.

5.1   Isolation vs. location

5.1.1   Findings

Thirunagar is isolated from its immediate surroundings. It is located not more than 5 km from the central Jaffna bus station, from where it can be reached by bus, *tuk tuk* (three-wheeler) or a half hour walk. It is in close proximity to large schools, St. Mary's Church (Jaffna's largest church) and the Divisional Secretariat. Consequently, the area receives considerable footfall. Therefore, the feeling of being isolated took time to seep in for the research team: it was only after a couple of weeks that it was possible to sense the lack of interaction with people outside the community.

Hidden between high concrete walls to the north and the south, Thirunagar is not visible from any of the larger/arterial roads. All inner lanes, where about three-fourths of the population live, end in *cul-de-sacs*. Here, the sense of isolation from the outside can be felt more acutely than along Rajasingham Road. While people living on Rajasingham Road share space with passers-by (and at times exchange pleasantries), people living in the *cul-de-sacs* lack such interaction.

The lack of interaction with people from the outside, and from within the community, owes also to the location of water taps. The placement of water taps within *cul-de-sacs* means women do not have to leave their immediate surroundings. Interaction between women as compared with men living in different parts of the community is far less, because men tend to meet over sports or card games in the evenings, while women stay at home to cook the evening meal and/or look after children.

The physical layout and the positioning of water access points in Thirunagar create insular spaces on an inter- and intra-community level. The high walls on either side of Rajasingham Road emphasise separation from the outside. To similar effect, roads leading into the *cul-de-sacs* do not receive footfall from other community members.

Living in the *cul-de-sacs* provides a feeling of safety and privacy but also creates isolated and insular spaces that are separated 'socially and physically from the larger world' (Southworth and Ben-Joseph, 2004: 28). The lack of interaction owing to living in *cul-de-sacs* is more evident for women and girls, because gender norms dictate that they spend most of their time doing housework and staying within the confines of the community.

Less time spent outside the community makes community members (especially women) less visible in public spaces, and this lack of visibility and interaction may have implications for how outsiders perceive the community. For example, government officials' perceptions were devoid of personal experiences or interaction with community members and drew from upper caste discourse on people belonging to lower castes (see Section 5.2).

Apart from a couple of cases (detailed in Section 5.3), exclusive access to water from taps and common wells for the people of Thirunagar has altered negotiating access with other communities. That is, prior to having separate access, the community experienced caste-based discrimination when having to share wells located in areas inhabited by higher caste communities (Field notes). However, caste-based

discrimination in access to water in Thirunagar has not been overcome, because water in the community continues to be drawn along caste lines (see Section 5.3).

The provision of wells and taps within the community has resulted in women not needing to leave the community for water (other than those who go to the church well, which is also exclusive). While exclusive access makes water collection more convenient, it also narrows the space women occupy outside the community.

5.2   Insiders vs. outsiders

There were similarities, as well as differences, in the way insiders and outsiders considered the marginalisation and/or discrimination of people in Thirunagar.

5.2.1   The insider view

Insiders include men, women and children from Thirunagar. People from Thirunagar consistently articulated that, as a community, they felt discriminated against by other communities. The view that caste is the fundamental basis for being discriminated against was held among the least number of people. Many more thought a number of other issues took precedence over caste. The community's perceptions can be divided three ways. The following excerpts were gathered from a mix of formal structured and unstructured interviews and informal conversations.

One group asserted that caste was the primary reason for being discriminated against. Other concerns, such as lack of education and lack of income, were also expressed, but these were secondary to the matter of caste. This view was expressed by a small number of men between the ages of 25 and 35 who worked in JMC and was the least common response. Women who worked in JMC did not articulate caste-based discrimination as the most apparent form of discrimination.

Speaking about the feeling of being discriminated against, a young man (aged 27) said in English,

> **The main problem for this area is caste. There is no other problem; the only problem is caste.**

Respondents espousing this view did not mention caste name(s), nor did they explicitly articulate who was discriminating against whom. It is implicit that they were talking about the people of Thirunagar in general, including themselves, as victims of marginalisation and discrimination because of their caste.

Another group's response illustrated caste as one among many reasons for the perceived sense of discrimination and that caste identity was tied to other aspects of people's perceptions of the community. A considerable number of people expressed this view.

> **Everyone who lives here is our relative. We are called Parayar. No one allows us to live in other places […] because caste is a big problem […] Our caste people are not neat. They don't keep their houses neat; [they] drink alcohol, smoke, use foul language. Because of these habits, we are discriminated [against] by other caste people (Female, aged 58).**

People espousing this view associated being low caste with having certain cultural traits and therefore not being respected in society. Consumption of alcohol and drugs is a big taboo, and etiquette (especially respect towards elders) is a normative cornerstone of Jaffna society.

A third group, articulating the most frequently expressed response, asserted that people held discriminatory views of them because of the behaviour and culture of their community.[15]

> **Children sell ganja and marry early because they are from poor families. If they have some money, they will spend it on drinking and smoking (Female, aged 41).**

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[15] Drugs (specifically marijuana) were cited as a *new* problem that had *entered* the community in the last stages of the war and had grown after the end of the war (Interview, Divisional Secretariat).

> **There was a lot of fighting here (Man, aged 48).**

> *People use bad words* (Man, aged 64; woman, aged 54).

This group of respondents did not mention caste.

5.2.2   The outsider view

Outsiders are government and non-government actors.[16] Though the name Thirunagar (which means sacred/respected) was coined under the LTTE to remove its caste association (KII, 24 September 2013), the area continues to be more commonly known by its colloquial name: *Thitti*.[17] Government and non-government actors were confused on hearing the name Thirunagar. However, when it was noted that most of the members of the community were employees of JMC, they would respond by saying that they were familiar with *Thitti* or had heard of *Thitti*.

Outsiders identified people from Thirunagar as 'very poor people', 'alcoholics', 'thieves', 'uneducated people', 'uncivilised' or 'low-caste people' or 'depressed caste people'. At times, respondents would mention two or three of these terms to describe the community and would say these words with an intonation that suggested feelings of sympathy or disapproval. The feeling of sympathy was conveyed more often; disapproval was expressed less frequently. What was perceived as sympathy, however, could also be interpreted as government officials being patronising, in which case the comments reinforce notions held by people in higher castes and higher classes about people from lower caste groups. The perceptions of service providers mirrored the most common perception held within the community that discrimination owed to objective characteristics of the community.

> **They have a different culture. Illegal marriages, drinking [and] fighting are all their community traits (Divisional Secretariat).**

Interviews with service providers revealed a palpable sense of concern regarding or abhorrence of these 'behaviours'. Government officials saw their persistence as a symptom of poverty; caste was not explicitly mentioned. Poverty was described in three ways: lack of facilities, poor living conditions and lack of ownership of land.

> **The people (of Thirunagar) are so poor they don't have the facilities of toilet and water (Public Health Inspector, male, aged 28).**

> **That is a very high-density area. They are very poor people and they are not neat (Midwife, female aged 36).**

> **There are many problems as they are landless, houseless [...] and had to depend on IDP camps. They are still very poor (Divisional Secretariat, male, aged 44).**

Government officials pointed out that sanitation workers employed by the JMC are not below the poverty line.[18] In contrast, almost all people from Thirunagar (insiders) described their situation as *kastham* (poor/difficult) citing lack of income as the reason for not being able to send their children to better schools and build proper homes. A few households also highlighted inability to construct toilets or pay for their water connection.

The most common association service providers made was with the community's livelihoods. Service providers identified them as 'cleaners', 'sweepers' and 'scavengers'. Similarly, members of neighbouring communities differentiated themselves on the basis of livelihood and/or caste. To discover the boundary lines for Thirunagar, households in the area were asked whether they belonged to Thirunagar. People would respond with a straightforward 'No', a vehement 'No!' or an urgent shaking

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[16] Government actors include service providers such as government officialsfrom the Divisional Secretariat, JMC officials and field officers. Non-government actors include journalists, political activists, civil society and people in neighbouring communities.
[17] The word *thitti* means mound of earth but continues to be associated with the area occupied by the low caste community.
[18] As government employees, those from Thirunagar employed by the JMC are not illegible for Samrudhi which is the governments pro poor benefit programme (food and income transfer) (Interview with Samrudhi Development Officer, Thirunagar).

of the head to signal the negative. Immediately after giving one of these responses, people would state their livelihood ('We are fisherman') or, in some instances, their caste name ('We are *Vellalar*) before giving the location of Thirunagar's boundary.

Responses from within and outside the community show that caste does not hold a prominent role in perceptions of discrimination. Instead, the majority of people recognise behaviour and norms within the community as reasons for discrimination by outsiders. Meanwhile, the second most popular response, where a causal relationship is seen between caste and behaviour, illustrates how caste is enmeshed within identity markers such as gender, class, livelihoods and area of residence (henceforth referred to as location).

One reason for young men (in the first group described) to articulate caste over other perceived forms of discrimination might be personal experience of being discriminated against on the basis of caste. These men work as sanitary workers (a livelihood that carries a strong taboo in Jaffna society) in the JMC and have to negotiate with people belonging to other (higher caste) groups. Therefore, they may have had experience(s) of caste-based discrimination. The male respondents did not mention caste name(s), nor did they explicitly articulate who was discriminating against whom. Nevertheless, it was implicit that they were talking about the people of Thirunagar and themselves as victims of marginalisation and discrimination owing to their caste. In contrast, women who worked in the JMC did not articulate caste-based discrimination as the most apparent form of discrimination. Similarly, older men and women who habitually did not leave the premises of the community were adamant that caste-based discrimination was no longer active.

The feedback from the second group illustrates that people associate being low caste with behaviour that is not respected in society. The statement, '*Our caste people are not neat,*' reveals how norms are fixed around a particular low caste identity and suggests an internalisation by low caste groups of a higher caste-led narrative of what it is to be low caste (Jaspal, 2011; Vasavi, 2006). Similar narratives could be seen in the responses of government officials who juxtapose norms and caste status (described in Section 5.2). Meanwhile, the respondents' assessment, '*Because of this behaviour we are discriminated [against] by other caste people*' suggests two things: first, people perceive a causal linkage between behaviour and discrimination; second, that caste remains an identity marker.

The most popular response (from the third group) suggests lines of discrimination are being drawn on the basis of class rather than caste. However, caste, though not explicitly mentioned by the respondents, continues to be linked to class factors such as poverty (income and non-income).

These findings also illustrate that poverty is articulated in two contrasting ways. One view (held by both outsiders and insiders) is that poverty in Thirunagar is an outcome of a 'culture of poverty' (Lewis, 1966), whereby poverty is said to be inherent in the way of life of the community. In other words, the norms or '*different culture*' (Interview, government official)of the community is seen as a reason for their condition. The idea is that, over many generations, practices of not going to school, child marriage, open defecation and alcohol consumption keep communities in a cycle of poverty. The other view locates poverty in terms of income poverty and structural factors that combine to debilitate access to services and create poverty traps. Structural factors include lack of land ownership, lack of proper housing and poor access to services. The comment made by a senior government official in the Divisional Secretariat that '*As they are landless* [...] *they are still very poor*' implies that structural factors (such as landlessness over multiple generations) are partly the reason for poverty over many generations in the community.

Links between norms and caste are clearly articulated by people within the community but are less obvious in the responses of government officials. Nevertheless, labels such as '*uncivilised*', '*uneducated*' and '*alcoholics*' can be interpreted as references to caste identity, because some officers mentioned one or more of these labels and that they were '*low caste*'. While the correlations between caste and norms remain tenuous, the links between caste, income poverty and structural factors in Jaffna are more certain (Silva et al., 2009b). Being low caste, not owning land and having few financial assets (ibid.) is evident in the context of landless households in Thirunagar, which have remained landless and poverty stricken over multiple generations.

Livelihoods and location are also two aspects with strong links to caste status. These can be understood in terms of historical legacies.[19] According to caste tradition, a person's work is fixed and hereditary. The present generation at the JMC is the fourth, or in some cases fifth, generation of sanitary workers from Thirunagar. Meanwhile, with regard to location, it is common to find people living in homogenous caste blocks.[20] Attempts to delink caste–location associations have not been successful. Even though the name Thirunagar was coined under the LTTE to remove its association with caste, outsiders (and insiders) continue to refer to the area by the caste-affiliated name of *Thitti*.

The following quote from a young male (aged 32) echoes a popular perception held by both men and women in the community and shows how perceptions of discrimination are shaped by the intersection of caste, location and livelihood.

> **The Karayar people get much more respect than us. As we are from Thirunagar, everyone sees us in a wrong light.**

'*Karayar*' is a loaded term. It functions as a caste name, livelihood practice and location. *Karayar*, considerably higher than *Parayar* in the caste hierarchy, is the caste name for the fishing people who are inhabitants of the surrounding colony of Gurunagar,[21] and the terms '*Karayar*' and '*Gurunagar*' are often used synonymously. Hence, '*We are from Thirunagar*' is likely a reference to the respondent's (*Parayar*) caste with associations to their livelihood and location. There is a more implicit reference to the hierarchy between the two groups along lines of caste, livelihood and location. Similarly, the assertion '*we are fishermen*', by people in neighbouring communities to differentiate themselves from people from Thirunagar also shows perceptions of caste, livelihood and location are strongly tied together.

Certain livelihoods and locations carry strong negative connotations for outsiders. At face value, responses suggest an aversion to sanitary works and the location (Thirunagar) without the mention of caste. However, as historical legacies bind livelihoods, location and caste, biases against livelihood and location are drawn closer to a caste identity: the *Parayars* of Thirunagar. Hence, the traditions of working and living along caste lines combine to marginalise the people of Thirunagar and to reinforce their caste identity.

These perceptions support Silva et al.'s (2009b) findings that people belonging to lower caste groups continue to experience caste-based discrimination in Jaffna, that caste remains a sensitive subject and that caste is fused with other factors such as class. Adding to Silva and colleagues' illustration of caste discrimination by the highest caste, *Vellalar*, towards the lowest caste, *Panchamar*, this working paper demonstrates how caste discrimination, such as that seen between the *Parayars'* of Thirunagar and *Karayars'* of Gurunagar, is prevalent between and within castes that constitute the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy.

5.3   Vicious cycle: linking norms, perceptions and service delivery

After a preliminary round of interviews with government officials at the Divisional Secretariat and the JMC, it seemed reasonable to test whether perceptions held by community service providers affected service delivery in terms of provision of W&S. This meant finding out who has access to which services and why.
The cycle has three stages: norms within the community, perceptions of service providers and service delivery on the ground. Norms create perceptions among service providers that may shape the provision

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[19] In post-war Jaffna society most livelihoods associated with the upper castes (such as teaching, medicine and high-ranking government service) are occupied by lower and intermediate castes as well. In white collar jobs, the correlation between a person's caste and livelihood is no longer obvious. However, livelihoods traditionally practised by members of the lowest castes (for example, toddy tapping, sanitary works, funeral drummers) have not experienced the reverse phenomenon, because these livelihoods carry a strong stigma and are less lucrative. Therefore, people who continue to practice traditional livelihoods of the lowest caste groups are likely to belong to the corresponding caste and carry that stigma.

[20] To date, roads, streets and residential areas carry caste names despite gradual changes in class dynamics that have resulted in people living in mixed caste groups.

[21] Gurunagar was formerly known as Karainagar. The name was changed under the LTTE to remove the caste association. The fishing or Karayar caste does not carry as strong a stigma as does the Parayar caste, because the activity of fishing is less taboo than doing sanitary works or being funeral drummers (traditional livelihoods of the Parayar caste).

and quality of service. The provision of or lack of access to services, in turn, may reinforce or maintain the *status quo* of behaviour and norms.

This section is divided into three sub-sections. Each presents findings followed by a discussion. The first two present the layout of W&S infrastructure in the community and a description of norms and practices. The final section explores the perceptions held by service providers and service delivery on the ground.

5.3.1   Water and sanitation infrastructure

5.3.1.1   Water

There are 18 water taps and 3 community wells located in Thirunagar. A fourth well used by people from Thirunagar is near the church, which is a five- to ten-minute walk from Thirunagar, depending on the household's location. The taps are connected to an underground piping system provided by the JMC that carries potable water to the larger coastal area. Four taps are along Rajasingham Road, and the rest are located within the lanes and *cul-de-sacs*. Further in, there are taps in close proximity to surrounding houses (these include houses that belong to the community leader and some of his relatives) with pipes connected to the taps leading into the compounds of those homes. As a result, women in those households do not need to leave their compound to get water and are rarely seen outside their home.[22] Overall, women and men were satisfied with quality and quantity of water supplied to the community. There was one woman who said that high calcium content in the drinking water had caused an ulcer in her stomach for which she got operated. However she had continued to use the tap water for herself and her family.

Figure 2: Location of water taps (marked in red)
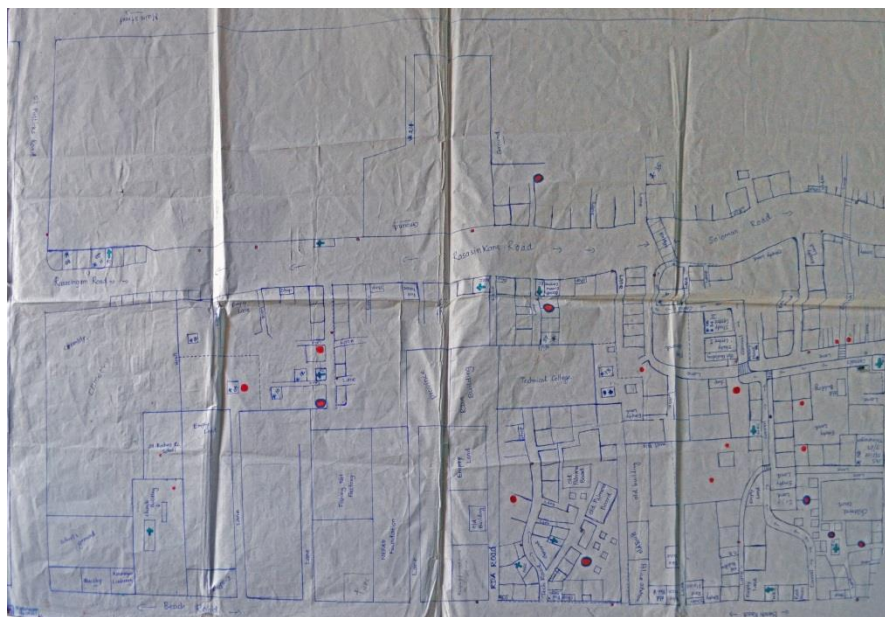
The number of households drawing water from taps varies by location. The less populated Rajasingham Road has five to seven households that draw water from each tap, whereas taps further in are used by as many as thirteen families. Households pay a fee of Rs.60 per month to the JMC for the water connection.

The positioning of the taps near the community leader's house illustrates how access to services is negotiated by power holders in the community to suit their interests. Meanwhile the change in accessing water (using public space vs. private space) reveals how the geography of the public

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[22] I saw older women from these homes only at St. Mary's Church for Sunday mass. In contrast, younger girls were seen walking around the community.

provisioning of water can alter norms – women from certain households no longer join other women to collect water (Field notes) – and lead to segregation between and within a community.

5.3.1.2 Sanitation

Open drains have been built along one side of Rajasingham Road and along the four lanes that run off (to the right) into *cul-de-sacs*. These provide equal access to drainage for all households. Drain water usually remains stagnant and moves only in times of excessive rain. There is a faint smell of effluent coming from the drains. Households living along the drain empty their water and food waste (but not their toilet waste) into the canal. Toilets are located within the household compound but outside the living quarters. Toilets are also shared between households.[23] However, a number of households located on Rajasingham Road do not have toilets.

In contrast with the provision of water, multiple actors provide the infrastructure for sanitation. The majority of the toilets were provided by NGOs[24] after their return to Thirunagar in early 2000s. The church-led NGO Caritas Human Development Centre provided the most assistance (Interview, clergy and community member). NGO activity around W&S seems ongoing: we encountered NGO staff conducting surveys on W&S.

Political parties such as the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the (now terminated) People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) have played an important role in the provision of sanitation infrastructure in Thirunagar. The provision of these services was the result of negotiations between community members, service providers and political actors (Interview, community member). The drains were initially made of mud and were remade in concrete by the JMC, sanctioned by the EPDP.[25] Meanwhile, the PLOTE is thought to be responsible for commissioning toilets in the early 2000s.

Compared with NGOs, the involvement of political actors remains invisible. This study did not uncover the exact nature of the role of the political parties in providing services. However, we were informed that 'politics' (Interview, JMC official) influenced decisions on budget allocations to and within the JMC. Respondents also implied that, in the post-war context, those political parties representing minority communities that were allied with the government had the power and resources to provide support to their vote banks, unlike the parties in the opposition.

In terms of caste, it is more helpful to view NGOs and the EPDP as stakeholders rather than service providers. This is because both groups are historically linked to the community, in terms of duty and vote banks, respectively. While assistance from the church-funded NGOs remains tied to legacies of proselytisation of the low caste Hindus, the involvement of the EPDP reaffirms caste–polity relations. The involvement of both groups continues to sign-post the community as low caste.

Provision of sanitation infrastructure by political parties speaks to the broader trend of patron–client relations that are tied to caste-based politics in Jaffna (Hoole, 2013). The support for the EPDP in the community is a combination of the legacy of caste-based politics (ibid.) and people's recognition that getting access to services has to be negotiated with those who hold power and influence over resources – those parties/political actors allied with the present government.[26] This continued assistance from the EPDP is founded on strong electoral interests of the party and dependence created by lack of support from the local administration. Assistance from the church and the EPDP, ironically, is founded on the community's caste identity, which allows them to garner assistance from these actors. The ability of the EPDP to provide facilities shows the EPDP can influence decision-making processes in local service-providing bodies and has the ability to surpass technocratic and bureaucratic processes.

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[23] Households use either pour-flush toilets or pit-toilets. The type of toilet seems to correlate with the economic status of the household. People with more income built pour-flush toilets within cement structures; people with less income had pit toilets.

[24] Some of the NGOs, such as Caritas, are church-funded NGOs that provide support to Christian communities.

[25] The EPDP is also alleged to have paid for the construction of the Montessori school and for electricity connections to Thirunagar.

[26] Alliances with the present government (under a national climate of centralisation) enable minority parties to access resources needed to maintain loyal vote banks.

5.3.1.3 Norms and practice

Norms and practices relating to water and sanitation are linked to caste in several ways. Women are exclusively responsible for the collection of water from taps and wells. Water is available in one-hour time slots in the mornings (6-7am) and evenings (4-5pm). In the evening, children assist their mothers at the water taps. Water is collected in large, open-top plastic canisters and plastic bottles. The canisters are kept outdoors next to the kitchen.

Within the community, there were two instances where caste was flagged as the reason for inhibiting or enabling access to water. One female respondent (aged 47) who belonged to another caste (within the *Panchamar*) but had married into the community said,

> **There is a tap next to our house. But we don't take water from it because of fear of those people [...] The people who live next to us are not our caste people. They fight in the queue while taking water.**

Consequently, this female respondent drew water from another tap at the entrance to Rajasingham Road. This tap is used by families from Point Pedro, which belong to a different caste community. What is apparent is that her status as an outsider (different caste) and the aggression displayed by her neighbours both played a role in creating a perception of being discriminated against and determined the location from which she drew water.

The second instance was with respect to accessing water at the church well. The publicly accessible well is used exclusively by people from Thirunagar; the water is thought to be 'dirty' (Field notes) by neighbouring communities because it is used by people from Thirunagar.

Access to water from outside the community is shaped by a combination of two salient factors: willingness/ability to pay for water and gender relations. There are three households on Rajasingham Road, two of which are women-headed households that draw water free of charge from taps located in the neighbouring community:

> **We have to pay Rs.60 per month for the drinking water. But three families among us do not pay. The tap we access is located on St. Patrick's Road. The people from that area know our situation and so they don't take money from us. We can't manage without their help (Woman, aged 54).**

The switch by the woman who belongs to another caste to the tap accessed by families from Point Pedro (also from another caste) shows that access to water is along caste lines. This example suggests that, although caste can potentially impede access, it also enables support networks along caste lines in the form of alliances among minority castes within the dominant caste group. In fact, caste discrimination has given the community in Thirunagar exclusive access to the church well that is open to the public.

In contrast, access to water is also made possible by support networks across caste groups. Here, gender relations have overcome caste boundaries to help women in the community gain access to water. Women-headed households in Thirunagar have managed to access water with the help of woman belonging to a higher caste from neighbouring communities who give them free access to water.

In the case of sanitation, most households on Rajasingham Road do not have toilets. The most cited reason for not having a toilet was lack of money and lack of ownership of land. The latter reason was interesting given that households had built houses on the same land and lack of ownership of land had not prevented some households on Rajasingham Road from constructing toilets. Unlike households that had received NGO or government support, these households had put in their own money. These households have not been impeded or restricted by the JMC when constructing their toilets. However, the JMC expressed concerns about the lack of toilets along technical and legal lines. First, digging toilet pits is not possible because of the water pipes that run under the road; second, the JMC is obligated to prevent illegal construction.

In households without toilets, the men go to the cemetery to defecate and the women use the toilet at neighbours or relatives' houses. Although this support network prevents women from defecating in the open, the arrangement comes at a cost.

> **There is no toilet facility at my home. I go to my brother's home [...] I go only in the mornings. This is a big problem and sometimes I don't have dinner at night (Woman, aged 54).**

> **We [respondent and her daughter] have to go next door to use the toilet. We pay Rs.1,000 a month! (Woman, aged 57).**

Some women on Rajasingham Road dig ditches in their compounds and defecate into plastic bags (Focus group discussion with women). These bags are then thrown over the wall into the neighbouring St. Patricks College playground.[27] This practice prevents children from getting into the school. An interview with the principal of St. Patricks College revealed that such behaviour discouraged him from admitting children from Thirunagar.

The construction of toilets (and homes) on Rajasingham Road (land owned by the JMC) illustrates the grey area around land rights and ownership and the complexities involved with regard to IDPs and land reform in post-war Jaffna. Meanwhile, the inaction shown by the JMC on the *illegal* construction of toilets suggests that 1) the JMC is taking its own time to negotiate land issues with regard to post-war transition; 2) political stakeholders ensure safety from the destruction of homes and toilets and/or eviction; and 3) networks between the JMC and the community allow for the construction of toilets.

Gender relations, especially support to women-headed households, ensure women access toilets in private. Men and boys from the same households, however, do not receive this support and have to defecate in the open.

The throwing of waste into the school compound by men and women from the community and open defecation seem to narrow the chances of boys from Thirunagar being admitted to one of the better schools in the area.[28] The perceptions of the community have also inhibited girl children whose parents wish to send them to bigger or prestigious girls schools in Jaffna (Interview with male, aged 35 and female, aged 32). This phenomenon is significant for two reasons. First, it shows how access to different types of services is interdependent. That is, lack of access to one service (toilets) can hinder access to another service (education). Second, it illustrates the vicious cycle: the practice of throwing waste into the school premises creates a negative perception held by service providers (the school principal) and creates a barrier to accessing education reinforcing perceptions such as people from Thirunagar are '*uneducated*' (Interview, Divisional Secretariat).

Barriers to entry to better schools not only limit options in further studies or employment but also prevent children in Thirunagar from completing secondary education.[29] Consequently, a lack of education is less likely to change certain norms, such as not going to school or dropping out of school, and ways in which service providers perceive the community.

5.4   Perceptions of service delivery by service providers and delivery on the ground

This section looks at the different perspectives of service delivery relating to sanitation from the point of view of the public health inspector (PHI) and sanitation workers.

5.4.1   Public health inspector

The PHI assigned to J67 is employed by the JMC. Tasks include ensuring levels of basic sanitation, which include access to water and toilets; separation of wastewater from solid waste; and monitoring personal health, food and hygiene (Interview, Senior PHI). These however, are more specific than the broadly laid out the duty of 'control of communicable diseases and environmental sanitation' mentioned on the Public Health Inspectors Union of Sri Lanka website.[30]

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[27] The people of Thirunagar confirmed the alleged complaint by the principal regarding the throwing of human excreta in plastic bags into the St. Patrick's College grounds.

[28] St. Patrick's College is an all-boys school. However, a handful of boys from Thirunagar (belonging to relatively better-off families) attend St. Patricks College.

[29] This phenomenon will be discussed in depth in a forthcoming working paper exploring how caste shapes access to education.

[30] www.philk.org

However, the PHI for Thirunagar stated that his responsibilities included preventing infections, preventing the spread of mosquitos, checking the drinking water and studying land for safe building construction. He did not mention that his tasks included ensuring basic sanitation, the separation of wastewater from solid waste or monitoring personal health, food and hygiene. The PHI claimed to visit Thirunagar three times a week, but this is not corroborated by our observations: we did not see the PHI in Thirunagar during visits to the community, nor did people confirm his presence. Most community members did not seem to know the PHI or differentiate him from other health service providers. Only a few senior community members, such as the community leader, were familiar with the PHI.

According to the PHI in Thirunagar, the '*main problem*' for the area was that households did not have toilets. Although issues of '*poor health*' were ascribed to '*teenage pregnancy*', '*living in close quarters*' and '*dingy behaviour*', open defecation was not explicitly underlined as being a cause of health issues by the PHI in the community. The PHI gave the same reason as community members for the lack of toilets, and added that community members also missed out on pro-poor benefits because they were civil servants.[31] The PHI claimed households that had constructed toilets either had money or had '*connections*' at the Divisional Secretariat.

The PHI pointed out that there were fights in the community over access to W&S and revealed a history of fear and distrust between himself and community members. This brought to light the underlying power dynamics between community members and political actors. Connections with political actors have a restraining effect on the PHI.

> I was unable to do my work properly […] I did not scold them because of fear. If I scold them, they will go to the minister […] At the beginning I had some difficulty [but] there is no problem now as I am one among them.'

Tensions between service providers and recipients and, more specifically, the underlying link between community members and political actors in service provision were brought up during a discussion on the history of sanitation facilities.

> There were no canals [drains] before […] Under avarhal's [Douglas Devananda – founder and secretary of the EPDP] leadership, the canals were built […] They (field officers) only fight and they haven't done anything for us. They come and tell us that you should be like this, you should be like that. If they use such an approach, we do not listen to them. These problems were there before but not now (Woman, aged 41).

It was difficult to measure the impact of perceptions held (especially along caste lines) by the PHI. This would have required close monitoring of the PHI and his interactions with people, which was not possible because the PHI was absent from the community. Lack of familiarity with the PHI among community members has implications for access to information, participation, trust and accountability between government actors and institutions.

While larger-scale tasks of checking on sanitation infrastructure do not involve constant consultations and negotiations with community members, checks on personal health and hygiene require more consistent and personal interaction (Interview, PHI). The overlapping nature of sanitation and health/hygiene-related tasks can be problematic in Thirunagar, where there is a history of conflict between civil servants (field officers) and the people.

The reference to community members making complaints to political actors by the PHI illustrates that patron–client networks double up as a grievance mechanism. Sidestepping grievance mechanisms set up at the local administrative level implies that political actors are able to influence change and get things done, whereas regular mechanisms are likely to be caught up in bureaucratic red tape.

The cultural practice of building toilets outside the house discourages households that do not have enough space outside their house and do not want to construct a toilet very close to their living space.

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[31] Households with a government employee cannot be beneficiaries of pro-poor programmes such as Samrudhi.

Legal restrictions on building on encroached land prevent NGOs and local government from assisting in construction.

5.4.2   Solid waste collectors and street cleaners

Rubbish is gathered to one side of Rajasingham Road near the storm drain and collected every Tuesday at 9am by JMC sanitary workers. The workers belong to the *Parayar* caste but are from a different area/community (Field notes) and are accompanied by a supervisor (who does not pick up the garbage). These workers work barefoot and switch between their bare hands and cardboard pieces to pick up the garbage, which is deposited into an open carriage driven by a tractor.

The link between caste status and livelihoods remains explicit: low caste persons (insiders and/or outsiders) collect rubbish. The lack of proper equipment and the use of bare hands to collect rubbish are dehumanising and perpetuate (discriminatory) perceptions of people belonging to low castes. In the case of Thirunagar, the tradition of working in sanitation at the JMC reinforces this perspective but also shows how employment in the JMC has established networks that allow the community special access to W&S provision.

For up to five generations, men and women in Thirunagar have been employees of the JMC,[32] mostly as sanitary workers (men) and street cleaners (women) for Jaffna Town. The men clean the drains and sewage systems and the women sweep the streets. They are also service providers for their community.[33] While the formal criteria for hiring staff include having to pass the Ordinary Level exam (this was implemented in 2012; before this the requirement was education through Grade 8) and work experience, '*family background*' is also considered in the decision to grant employment.

> **The job is given on a cultural basis [...] the priority will be given to those whose parents have been Municipal Council employees (Interview, JMC).**

Having a large representation and familiarity with staff and operations at the JMC allows people to call for services (by mobile phone) such as the cleaning or construction of toilet pits and the cleaning of drains. People who have a personal rapport with JMC officials (primarily through many years in service) have been able to negotiate the positioning of taps closer to their homes.

However, people from Thirunagar without a contact at the JMC have to go through someone who has connections in the JMC, make a request or complaint at the JMC office or write a formal letter and submit it to a senior (retired) representative of the JMC in the community who submits it to the JMC.

The former process allows the person to fix an appointment and negotiate a suitable time with service providers. The latter procedures take more time, as they include negotiation through a representative, and the appointment is scheduled at times that may not be convenient.

The nature of recruitment shows how caste norms are enmeshed with formal institutional processes. This suggests processes based on ideas of meritocracy are overlooked because of the deep-set traditions, norms and beliefs that shape service provision (Wild et al., 2013).

Employment at the JMC reinforces a caste identity in two ways. First, working in sanitation reinforces a low caste identity because sanitary work is linked to low caste status. Second, access to jobs at the JMC discourages people from migrating, again reinforcing the inter-linkages between location and caste. Conversely, employment in an administrative capacity in the JMC has the potential to distance people from their low caste status.

The colonial legacy of being *Parayar* and doing sanitary work has meant a low caste identity has also provided employment in the community. Employees of the JMC are civil servants, which gives them access to the basic benefits enjoyed by all civil servants in Sri Lanka. These include a steady income

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[32] The JMC is the sole provider of drinking water, storm water drainage and rubbish collection in Thirunagar.
[33] However, with the rotation policy of the JMC, the cleaners who come to Thirunagar would sometimes be from other communities (but from the same (Parayar) caste).

and access to low-interest loans and pension. Jobs that draw a pension are highly valued in Jaffna, because they provide security for men and women in old age (Field notes). The community has been able to leverage the social status of being civil servants against other power structures. For example, on the allegedly unlawful arrest of a community member, workers are said to have gone on strike, resulting in the prompt release of that person (Field notes).

In contrast with the nature of recruitment at the JMC, the role or nature of caste in the provision of services on the ground is more ambiguous. Access to JMC services on short notice and the sidestepping of formal processes may be attributable to the intersections of many factors, including caste, gender, kinship, patron–client relations and/or financial incentives. In other words, in the provision of services, JMC staff (insiders or outsiders) may be carrying out the service not simply because of caste affiliation but also because of a number and combination of additional factors.

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 is practised in accessing services. This research provides new understandings of how caste is located within the historical, social, cultural and political make-up of the community as well as in day-to-day practices with regard to W&S, and of how caste shifts from the centre to the periphery of identity depending on the social location of the community and the individual.

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. A lengthier stay and fluency in Tamil might have produced a richer understanding of caste dynamics, but the time spent in the field was sufficient to gain an understanding of the role of caste in service delivery and access.

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 period. 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 three underlying conditions illustrate the mechanisms at play in the negotiation between identity and access. Isolation vs. location draws attention to how space reinforces the politics of segregation and marginalisation that are manifest as physical demarcations. The interaction between gender norms and physical space (and location of water access points) has implications for the daily lives of women and their interaction with the outside world.

The second condition, contrasting perceptions of insiders and outsiders, shows how caste intersects with various other markers of identity such as class (norms and behaviour), livelihoods and location. Perceptions were divided into three broad groups, depending on the identified source of discrimination against their community: caste; caste and norms; and norms. Most respondents perceived that their community was discriminated against on the basis of norms, while the least number of respondents said that discrimination was because of their caste. The fact that only males raised caste identity as the primary reason for being discriminated against shows perceptions of caste are strongly gendered and require further investigation.

Perceptions of outsiders strongly suggest any policy to improve access to W&S services has to be complemented by a change in attitudes among service providers. The mind-set among service providers that the challenges of service provision and access owe to the *nature* of the community itself are embedded deeply within the socio-cultural hierarchy of caste relations in Jaffna society, and will require a sensitive policy intervention. Meanwhile, the more practical measures of facilitating land tenure, access to toilets, identity cards and documentation also depend on relationships with service providers but should be taken up more proactively at the divisional (or even national) level.

The vicious cycle linking norms, perceptions and service delivery suggests how perceptions of service providers about the community can inhibit access to services and how the denial of access to one service can impede access to another service, preventing the community from rising out of poverty. This underlying condition consists of three stages: W&S infrastructure; norms and behaviour of community members; and perceptions of service providers and service delivery on the ground. Causal linkages between different stages of the cycle cannot be drawn, because neither perceptions nor service delivery take place in isolation from multiple social, political and economic factors that interplay at different stages of provision and access.

The layout of water access points reveals how power relations (based on status and relationship with service providers) in the community give privileged access to some while leaving others out, and the sanitation infrastructure gives insight into the complexity that arises when multiple stakeholders mediate service provision. The involvement of a church-based organisation and the EPDP demonstrates how caste identity continues to shape provision of services and that caste continues to be salient in religion and politics in Jaffna.

Norms and behaviour around access to W&S show how intersections of caste and gender both impede and enable access to W&S. With respect to inter-community relations, gender seems to overcome caste boundaries and provide support to women in the community. Similarly, gender relations within the community ensure women and girls get privacy while going to the toilet, whereas men and boys are forced to defecate in the open.

The lack of toilets also highlights the need for financial support for the construction of toilets, and clarity around land ownership in post-war Jaffna. There is an urgent need for local authorities to provide long-term solutions preceded by temporary measures for safe and hygienic access to toilets. The health implications arising as a result of open defecation are obvious but need to be made explicit within the community and complemented by assistance to build toilets. Until then, temporary measures such as portable/makeshift toilets should be put in place. The less obvious implications in terms of lack of access to other services, such as education, must be noted.

In contrast with the strong correlation drawn from the example of the perceptions of the school principal barring access to the school, the correlation is much weaker in the case of the PHI. That is, it was not possible to gauge how the perceptions of the (high caste) PHI influenced his official duties. Nevertheless, the history of a lack of interaction between the PHI and community members suggests perceptions (of the community being aggressive and having connections with political actors) may influence service delivery.

Lastly, the dual role of community members as recipients and service providers highlights how caste forms the fulcrum around which people in the community negotiate their employment with the JMC. However, accessing services from the JMC cannot be attributed to caste affiliation alone; factors such as patronage networks and/or financial gain might create incentives to provide services to the community.

The signs that caste continues to play a role in social, economic and political life in Thirunagar is evident from this study. The modern state and market economy have significantly changed the social, political, economic and cultural landscape of the country and relations between its people. However, these relatively recent changes have not led to the elimination or disappearance of caste, but instead have transformed it from being explicit and openly practised to being something more hidden and subtle. There must be a concerted effort to understand this transformation and how caste continues to prevent people – specifically those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy – from availing themselves of access to basic services, livelihoods and their fundamental rights.

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