

Access to Services in Jaffna: Perceptions of Caste

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The equitable provision of and access to basic services to traditionally marginalized communities is a concern in post conflict contexts. One particular concern is discrimination based on caste. In Sri Lanka, caste is a taboo subject and the subsequent silence around issues of caste and how it continues to exclude, marginalize and discriminate people in Sri Lanka need to be urgently addressed through dialogue, debate and research.

This paper will be the second in a series that looks at the role of caste in accessing and delivering basic services with a particular focus on health, education and water and sanitation. It explores the ways in which caste shapes the provision and access to education in a low caste community in post war Jaffna.

In Jaffna, caste identity continues to shape access to educational institution - both government and private. Barriers to entry to better schools not only limit options in further studies or employment but also prevent school going children from completing secondary education; and reinforce historical legacies of marginalization and exclusion. I will show how access to education in a low caste community is shaped by the intersection of caste with local and national factors. At a local level caste intersects with communities' livelihood and location while at the national level, the phenomenon's of nationalism, globalization, class and religion intersect with caste and create opportunities and barriers to access education.

Using ethnographic tools (staying in Jaffna for 3 months), coupled with unstructured and informal interviews with service providers at district, divisional and local level; focus group discussions with men, women and children in the community; and participant observation, I have been able to unpack some of the ways caste shapes access to education.

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