

Issues at Own Backyard: Caste Based Socio-Economic Inequalities as “Unseen Hurdles” in Post-conflict Northern Sri Lanka

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Abstract

There are “unseen core causes” such as existing socio-economic structures protruding as “unseen hurdles” in post-conflict peacebuilding in northern Sri Lanka. Tamil caste system, caste based land ownership, education, employment opportunities and social recognition are ongoing challenges to reconcile grassroots intra Tamils rather than Sinhala and Tamil communities. The aim of this article is to reveal how the Tamil community’s own caste issues triggered and later escalated the Sri Lankan protracted conflict. The article also emphasizes the importance that should be given to addressing the caste-based structural issues and its existing challenges to achieve positive peace in post-conflict northern Sri Lanka.

Key words: Positive peace, Tamil caste system, Post-conflict peacebuilding, Horizontal Inequalities, Caste based socio-economic inequalities

1. Introduction

Conventional reading of the Sri Lankan protracted conflict as “an ethnic conflict” ignores complex nature of socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the Sri Lankan society. Apart from generalized ethnic line, there are “unseen core causes” such as existing socio-economic structures protruding as unseen barriers to bring positive peace. Tamil caste system, caste based land ownership, education, employment opportunities and social recognition are ongoing challenges to reconcile grassroots in intra Tamil community rather than inter Sinhala and Tamil communities. Even though it is not prominently visible at present, the caste based divisions of intra Tamils have strongly but naturally persuaded Tamils to be frustrated in inter community. Due to the caste based inequalities and discrimination in the community itself, lower-caste Tamils are/were frustrated. To emancipate themselves from these frustrating issues, the majority lower-caste Tamils voluntarily joined and were mobilized to conduct violent activities under organized militant groups. Military termination of the protracted conflict ensured negative peace in the country. Now in the process of post-conflict peacebuilding remaining social issues in different forms must be addressed to achieve the goal of positive peace.

Though the original agenda of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was to fight for a “casteless Tamil community”, in the process of the development of LTTE, the goal of fighting against the caste discriminations by the privileged upper-caste Tamils elapsed and was conveniently ignored in order to group ‘all Tamils’ into the goal of protective nationalism. As a result of the politically motivated military agenda of the LTTE, the caste based socio-economic inequalities was kept under the “carpet of ethnicity” over Sinhala dominated state policies. Due to generalized ethnic deviation, both national and international research rarely pay attention to the northern Tamil community’s grassroots socio-economic inequalities of rigid caste system.

Therefore, the argument is that the caste based inequalities were not addressed by neither the LTTE led militant groups nor Tamil politicians who hailed from so-called upper-castes. At the military end of the conflict, as Tamil militants and politicians, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL)’s post-conflict efforts are also mainly focused on popularized political issues rather than to respond for the intra Tamils’ caste-based inequalities and frustrations in terms of resettlement and reconciliation.

The aim of this article is to reveal how the Tamil community’s own caste issues caused and later escalated the Sri Lankan protracted conflict. It further addresses the importance that should be given to addressing the caste-based structural issues and its existing challenges to achieve positive peace in post-conflict peacebuilding in northern Sri Lanka.

Section two of the article highlights the theory of Horizontal Inequalities as one of significant conflict analysis frameworks for protracted conflicts particularly in developing countries on the basis of socio-economic, cultural and politically divided group identities and basic principles of positive peace. Apart from the general understanding of the HIs, the article identifies Dual Horizontal Inequalities in the context of Sri Lankan case in order to analyze caste based socio-economic inequalities in intra Tamil community. The next section gives a brief glimpse of the Sri Lankan protracted conflict in orthodox ethnic line in order to develop the main topic of discussion of the article, Tamil caste based socio-economic issues. The fourth section discusses Tamil caste system, caste based socio-economic inequalities in the northern Tamil society and its existing nature based on historical human narratives. The fifth section of the article attempts to analyze caste based socio-economic inequalities and their influence on lower-caste Tamils in the context of post-conflict peacebuilding. Finally the article draws its conclusion as the Tamil caste system-based social structure in a hidden manner and naturally (re)victimize the conflict affected northern Tamils. Therefore, identification of the caste based socio-economic inequalities will make a significant impact post-conflict peacebuilding, especially in achieving the goal of positive peace.

2. From Horizontal Inequalities (HIs) to Dual Horizontal Inequalities (DHIs)

The theory of Horizontal Inequalities (HIs) can be recognized as a relatively new approach to analyze the root-causes of contemporary protracted conflicts in order to build positive peace in the process of peacebuilding. As a result of long term inequalities, frustrations and deprivations of basic needs of the people in a society which are more likely to cause violent conflicts (Stewart, 2000, 2008 and 2010).

Theories of conflict analysis significantly show conflicts erupt as a result of political, socio-economic and cultural inequalities in a specific society. Those diverse inequalities are traditionally identified among individuals particularly economic dimension (Collier and Hoeffler, 1999, 2001). The literature of conflict resolution particularly in 1990s pays attention on individual inequalities in the society and their relation to erupt conflict. Collier and Hoeffler (1999) and Soderbm (2001) bring the theory that economic inequalities among individuals (Vertical Inequalities - VIs) are more likely underling cause of conflict. However, it ignores widely divided social groups in the society as a whole based on socio-economic, political and culturally formed identity (Collier and Hoeffler, 1999, 2001). It further defines as greed and grievances of individuals.

The significant fact here is that the formation of a group is a collection of individuals who experience similar feeling of inequalities in the society (Gurr, 1995). To overcome group based common inequalities, the group is more likely to turn towards violence due to its established identity. The group perception is relatively difficult to change when its compares to individual (Gurr, 1995, 126-130). However, HIs say that the eruption of protracted conflicts is more likely in societies where socio-economically and culturally divided groups are living. Those groups are mainly divided in line with ethnicity, religion, language, caste and other socio-economic and cultural identities (Stewart, February 2010). These pluralistic societies have their own perceptions to be in a specific group (Gurr, 1995, 126). Therefore, the group based socio-economic and cultural perceptions are directly affected by the social life of the members of each group.

Horizontal Inequalities (HIs), a term introduced by Frances Stewart, is a more pernicious type of inequality whose main feature is that it exists between (culturally defined) groups (Stewart 2000, 2001, 2002, 2008, 2010 and 2011). The discussion of HIs is continuing and expanding in the literature of conflict resolution and peacebuilding to achieve goal of positive peace by addressing diverse root-causes of the conflict (Stewart 2000; Stewart 2001; Østby 2004; Stewart, Brown and Mancini, 2005; Stewart 2011, Langer, Stewart and Venugopal, 2012). It creates the feeling of “severe HIs can provoke feeling of frustration and discontent, which may cause violent group mobilization and conflict” (Langer, Stewart and Venugopal, 2012: 1) in line with diverse identities. Due to historical or traditional socio-economic and cultural conditions, mobility from a specific group to another group is limited or impossible (Gunewardena, June 2011). “HIs are conceived of as inherently multidimensional social and encompass economic, social, political and cultural status dimensions” (Langer, Stewart and Venugopal 2012, 6). Therefore, a socio-economically structuralized inherent group like ethnic and caste has low intensity to change its own group identity (Gurr, 1995, 126-127). In particular, the caste can be recognized as a systematically organized social group which naturally adopts person’s own identity beyond his/her own qualities.

HIs are socio-economically, politically and culturally multidimensional in a society (Stewart, February 2010). “Economic HIs include lack of access to and ownership of assets- financial, human, natural resource-based, and social dignity (Langer, Stewart and Venugopal, 2012, 6). Participating in economic activities, land ownership, ability to access natural resources and employments are restricted or banned due to the identity of group display economic HIs. Being members of lower-castes, prohibition of buying lands, access to water, limiting employment opportunities are visible example of economic HIs in Jaffna peninsula.

Based on the group identity, if the members of a specific group are discriminated in accessing basic needs particularly in

accessing basic services in the society, it leads to social HIs. “Social HIs include inequalities in access to a range of services such as education, health care, and housing, as well as inequalities in educational and health status” (Langer, Stewart and Venugopal, 2012, 6). Apart from the above mentioned HIs, there are generalized HIs such as political and cultural status HIs.

Conflict resolution and particularly post-conflict peacebuilding projects mainly focus on political issues as key causes that lead to re-occurrence of conflict. Many cases of peacebuilding do not properly identify the HIs particularly in socio-economic and cultural basis. As a result of that the majority peacebuilding efforts have focused on political HIs and their politicized economic objectives. Stewart argues that there are more dimensions in a specific conflict, though one dimension is dominant (Stewart February 2010). According to Stewart, in fact the political inequality is predominantly dominated over other dimensions. Therefore, socio-economic dimensions are hidden and neglected. As a result of that many peacebuilding efforts are politically oriented. It further reveals the case of Sri Lanka that focuses politically dominated ethnic agenda while ignoring socio-economic inequalities of the intra Tamils. Therefore, to bring a comprehensive answer to causes of a protracted conflict, addressing diverse issues of HIs are required than one dimension. It is a visible challenge to reach the goal of positive peacebuilding in any context of conflict.

However, taking advantages of the theory HIs, this article significantly demarcates its original position beyond the simple socio-economic inequalities between generally defined two groups under the theory of HIs. It is an established fact that the Sri Lankan conflict was a result of HIs between the majority Sinhala and the minority Tamils as the defined two ethnic groups. However, the article observes that there were dual socio-economic HIs apart from the generalized or simplified ethnic based HIs. The ethnic discourse of Sri Lankan conflict ignores other minorities including 9% Muslims and their HIs. In particular, as the article’s main objective, the caste based socio-economic inequalities were hidden and existed underneath the surface in a hidden manner particularly in Northern intra Tamils community, fundamentally they were deep-rooted. Those intra community inequalities were never discussed or surfaced during the British colonial administration and in the post-independence era and were less powerful when compared to the ethnic issue. As a result, intra Tamil community HIs issues were hidden in the generalized discussion of the ethnic based HIs. Furthermore, the majority conflict experts did not pay the attention on hidden but deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities (which are unpopular in academic discussions) in intra Tamil community’s issues. However, the study identifies that there (are) more complex socio-economic inequalities in intra Tamil community and at least a dual socio-economic inequalities which overlapped each other. The most prominent was been ethnicity.

Therefore, the article observes that HIs is not sufficient to illustrate the complex nature of socio-economic inequalities in the case of Sri Lanka. In particular, the Sri Lankan case reveals that dual structure in the Tamil community which created dual socio-economic inequalities in intra Tamil community. Therefore, the dual socio-economic deprivation made the lower-caste Tamils to be the most frustrated and under privileged group in the intra Tamil community.

It is accurate to state that this model of HIs goes beyond politically motivated economic inequalities and creates new perspectives to analyse the protracted conflict. For instance the model recognizes the importance of demographic factors or socio-economic inequalities as a potential causal factor in protracted conflict particularly in former British colonies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. However, the study observes that HIs theory is not sufficient to analyse great complexities of the protracted conflicts particularly in the former colonies as the above mentioned.

Therefore, to analyse the structure of duality in the case of Sri Lanka, the direct application of HIs is not sufficient. Based on this basic observation, the article explains the duality in the case of Sri Lanka’s socio-economic HIs. And, he study observes that the need of the expansion of HIs into Dual Horizontal Inequalities (DHIs). The DHIs are more complex than just simplifying inequalities between two groups or few more groups. Stewart mentions that the Sri Lankan case is very complex under the HIs. However, she does not analyse how and why the case of Sri Lanka is so complex. Taking a step further from Stewart the article will analyse how and why the case of Sri Lanka is so complex.

There are diverse dimensions, visible and invisible in a plural society. In the context of Sri Lanka, though there are multiple group dimensions in the society. The ethnic based group dimension is prominent due to nationalized and internationalized political interests among different ethnic groups. On the other hand, the historical evidence is that diverse ethnic groups were politically used by the Colonial Masters in their administration in order to overcome unified challenges against them. Therefore, the other dimensions became invisible though they affect well-being, sense of injustice and actions of other members of the society.

The caste based group dimension particularly in Tamil community has invisibly affected well-being of Tamils in northern Sri Lanka for centuries. Caste based social setting creates diverse inequalities among inter-Tamils. At the end the existing unfair and discriminative social structures and practices lead to direct and structural violence among inter-Tamil groups in the society. These caste based inequalities were hidden aspects due to the fact that the identity of Tamil was under pressure, and then the caste differences were less important than the collective status of ethnicity against the battle of Sinhala majority (Gurr, 1995, 127).

However, the negative peace is not positive peace. The existing social structures which deprive basic needs of the people in the society which leads to structural violence will still remain. To eliminate structural violence in a society, it requires the

establishment and restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict. "Peace is not merely absence of direct violence but also absence of structural violence" (Grewal, 2003, 3). This is what Galtung (1969) called as positive peace in a society of which the ultimate goal to prevent occurrence of conflicts.

This is why it is necessary to reflect further on the terminated Sri Lankan protracted conflict from the national political perspective to local or grassroots socio-economic perspectives for post-conflict positive peacebuilding. Then it is possible to investigate the socio-economic issues including equal opportunities in education, employment, livelihood activities and social dignity among other members of the society which caused Tamil frustration and deprivation. The majority grassroots level Tamils in Jaffna Peninsula has been experiencing hard reality of inequality locally as well as nationally because of their traditional caste system and ethnicity.

3. Terminated Sri Lankan Protracted Conflict

The problem of ethnicity arose as a byproduct of the British colonization and again soon after the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948 (Bose, 2007, 6-54; Wickramasinghe, 2006; Wilson, 2000; Silva, 1981). The British colonial administration employed "the policy of divide and rule" to overcome unify challenges against its own implementations (Bandarage, 2009). As a result of that there were visible ethnicity based HIs in pre and post-independence Sri Lanka. It originally came out on "the distribution of power, income, land, education, language, and gradually has taken an ethnic form. Ethnic divisions have tended to disable class politics with ethnicity at the ideological level" (Goodhand et al., 2005, 30). However, ethnic based HIs were more visible in post-independent Sri Lanka rather than during colonial period. "From 1956 to 1983 Tamil political thinking shaped under the impact of the anti-Tamil riots of 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983 together with mounting discrimination and a series of broken promises by successive Sinhala governments" (Hoole et al., 1992, 16).

In the year 1947 and throughout 1960s, government colonization projects and settlement of Sinhala people in Tamil occupied lands in northern and eastern Sri Lanka had negative impacts on the Tamil community (Wickramasinghe, 2006; Wilson, 2000). It is also important to note here that the northern and eastern regions are relatively lacking of natural resources compare to the other provinces. Moreover, the "Sinhala Only Act" and the Act of "Sinhala as the Official Language" in 1956 were two attempts of discrimination regarding language of minority Tamils (Wickramasinghe, 2006; Gunawardana, 2006; Swamy, 1996). Furthermore, 1972 constitutional reforms played a major role in not only defining the place of the Sinhalese and that of Buddhism in Sri Lankan society, but also took away the language rights of the Tamils by not mentioning Tamil in the constitution (Sivathamby, 2004).

In and after the 1960s, the discrimination based on ethnicity in the state administrative system was increased (Sivathamby, 2004). Education was a major area in which discrimination began to assert itself in a very pronounced way (Sivathamby, 2004; Phandis, 1976; Bastiampillai and Wanasinghe, 1995). The state education policies (1956 and 1970s) such as ethnic based university admission procedure (district quota and standardization) and decrease in the recruitment of Tamil teachers resulted negatively in contributing to enhance socio-economic deprivation in the Tamil community.

As Stewart (2001) states that the case of Sri Lanka reveals a complex situation of HIs though she does not focus the diverse groups other than ethnic. During the British colonial administration according to the divide and rule policy they adopted, the minority Tamils had been privileged compared to majority Sinhalese. Most top level employment opportunities, access to education and other services were favorably enjoyed by Tamils (Wilson, 2000).

On the contrary, in post-independence period, Sinhala majority who dominated the state apparatus had established new socio-economic policies in favor of the majority Sinhalese. As mentioned earlier, those state policies led to deterioration of the socio-economic situation of the 'Tamil community'. In the 1960s to 1970s, unemployment increased among Tamils and their income decreased. However, this paper significantly highlights that those deterioration severely affected certain groups of Tamils who lived in the periphery of Jaffna peninsula, Vanni area, and eastern province of the country. In contrast the privileged Tamils who lived in Urban Colombo and Jaffna enjoyed highest socio-economic status in the Tamil community. However, those deprived Tamil groups were neglected and hidden under the generalized ethnicity in the Sinhalese led state policies.

Sinhalese were able to get more job opportunities, privileged education and other socio-economic resources compared to Tamils. Therefore, Sinhala led state policies "introduced new horizontal inequalities" (Stewart, 2000, 21). The result was that Tamils segments of the society experienced their exclusion from the mainstream of Sri Lankan society and were deprived socio-economically. Following the pre-independence era, Colombo elite Tamils (Arumuganathapillai Coomaraswamy, Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Ponnambalam Arunachlam) led Ceylon Tamils demand political rights from the British administration (Wilson, 2000) but not equal rights for all Tamils. It is a commonly accepted fact that there are social differences among Tamils. Caste is a factor that divides Tamil society into distinctive groups (Wilson, 2000).

Vellālar caste becomes a powerful group in the society though there are some regional and social differences between Mukkuwas in Batticaloa and the eastern Tamils due to their socio-economic and regional diversities. The distinctively different group is the up-country Tamils who have lower socio-economic reputation among other Tamils because they belong to the lower-caste in the caste based social setting in India. Though these caste divisions are in the Sinhala community too, the rigidity of the differences is higher in Tamil community. The differences in social status in Tamil community are clearly based on the caste system. The caste system has influenced every relation in the society at different levels. It was highly visible in Tamil politics in the beginning of the 20th century (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001).

Wilson (2002) states that certain groups of Tamils who lived in Jaffna peninsula enjoyed exclusive benefits from the colonial administration in its socio-economic activities. As a result of American and British Christian missions, some prestigious English medium secondary schools were opened in Jaffna and the upper-caste Vellālar were privileged to study at those schools.

It was a little different from Sinhala community's Govigama caste which enjoyed a similar social status to Vellālar. Those upper-caste Vellālar did acquire highest education skills with English language ability which the Sinhala Govigama did not (Bandarage, 2009). It was totally different from Tamils who lived in the east. The socio-economically privileged upper-caste Tamils became main actors of Tamil politics from the 19th century. It is interesting to note here that those elite upper-caste Tamils did not cooperate with other lower-caste Tamils in Jaffna peninsula as well as the eastern and up-country Tamils due to their inherent caste barriers (Wilson, 2000, 13-26). At the beginning of the 20th century, these elite Tamils became frontline of Sri Lankan politics under the principle of democracy. Hoole (2003) observes that the elite Vellālar Tamils become a very powerful force in Sri Lankan society due to their professional contribution to the British Empire in east. “The Jaffna Vellālar Tamils were treated as a loyal community with privileged access to employment not only in Sri Lanka, but also in other British colonies, specially Malaya and Singapore” (Bandarage, 2009, 32). However, “the Colombo Tamils referred to above (though not the Wellawatte Tamils-Wellawatte is the area which is located in southern coastal belt of Colombo) tended to look down Jaffna Tamils” (Wilson, 2000, 16).

It is important to examine why Wilson mentions that “Colombo Tamils looked down other Tamils including Jaffna Tamils” (Wilson, 2000, 20-24). Furthermore, it is evident that Wilson in his book titled *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the 19th and 20th Centuries* descriptively discusses the caste differences of Colombo Tamils and rest. Even though Wilson's book aims to discuss the establishment of the Tamil nationalism, the second chapter of the book describes *Social Structure and Ethnography of Sri Lankan Tamils* in line with the caste system. This reveals Tamil caste and its social influence on Tamil politics. The lower-caste Tamils were discriminated against in inter-Tamil society beyond ethnic divisions. This paper significantly argues here that the reason to keep other Tamils away from their elite society was the identity of lower-castes. Though Wallawatte Tamils were economically successful, as Wilson indirectly points out, they belonged to lower-castes or at least were not upper-castes. Upper-caste Tamils used Sinhala oriented state policies as a timely valued solution to hide the caste based inequalities in diverse Tamil groups (Wilson, 2000). It is important to note here that majority of elite Tamil politicians represented upper-caste who were not willing to see equal rights of lower-caste Tamils at any reason.

Limited socio-economic benefits which were entitled under the state policies for minority Tamils did not reach the minority lower-caste Tamils. Lower-caste Tamils were not able to reach limited benefits as they were obstructed by the upper-caste Tamils as a consequence of caste practices. The minority lower-caste Tamils were unskilled in professions such as doctors, engineers, administrators and lawyers. Due to low standard of education, or being uneducated, they were not able to acquire those professions other than providing labour for farming in the lands of upper-caste and be in servitude for upper-caste Tamils. On the other hand, the upper-caste maintained their socio-economic status over-lower castes. Furthermore, those upper-caste Tamils were benefitted exclusively from those limited resources due to their education, skills and other social relations.

Moreover, from the 1920s to 1970s, those elite Tamil politicians worked hard to maintain their privileged socio-economic status in the Tamil community over lower-castes. The elite Tamils also demanded equal socio-economic and political rights on the basis of ethnicity. However, Hoole et al. (1992) states that “democratic politics” of the Tamil community were limited to one segment of the society which is the educated, wealthiest upper-caste group. The elite Tamil politicians in the front line of Tamil politics worked for an independent state for Tamils through non-violent means (Vaddukoddai resolution in 1976). In 1970s those elites were recognized as “enemies of the Tamil nation” (Hoole et al., 1992, 17) due to their ignorance of the caste based socio-economic discrimination in the Tamil community.

Democratic movements to demand equal rights from the state, led by elite Tamils before the post independent era, have not been successful. As a result of that ethnic violence started in 1983. This could be seen as emergence of diverse Tamil militant groups with diverse agendas to demonstrate and mobilize ethnically deprived Tamils against the majority Sinhalese led state policies in the name of “struggle for self-determination”.

Development of militant groups in the Tamil community significantly increased in the 1970s under Marxist and socialist

radicalism which helped to attract socio-economically backward members from diverse lower-castes (Roberts, 2011; Tanges and Silva, 2003). There were number of militant groups such as Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS), Eelam Revolutionary People's Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), People's Liberation Organization for Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and the LTTE (Wilson, 2000; Swamy, 1996). Tamil militancy was significantly increased in 1990s and upper-caste elite Tamils and their relatives who had means fled overseas and to the southern parts of Sri Lanka while thousands of lower-caste Tamils who remained in the northern region due to their poor socio-economic incapability, ultimately became the human resource to fight against Sinhala state policies under the "LTTE fascist rule" (Hoole et al., 1992; Hoole, 2003).

Therefore, a majority of lower-caste members were attracted to the radical and equal policies of the militant groups against the historical caste system (Shanmugathan, 1997). "The EPRLF had a significant number of personnel from depressed-castes..." (Roberts, 2011, 84) were less educated or probably uneducated and underprivileged among other Tamils. However, this paper concentrates on the LTTE and its formation since the LTTE was able to eliminate other militant groups (Bose, 2007, 24).

LTTE leadership and other prominent leaders came from lower-castes. "Prabhakaran, Mahattaya, Kittu, Seelan, Victor, Kumarappu, Baby Subramaniam and Soosai are believed to be Karaiyar" (Roberts, 2011, 85) and Thamil Chelvan from Ampattar (barber) (Tanges and Silva, 2009, 62). There is evidence some of the LTTE members were of upper-caste-Vellālar, some of them are Uma Maheswaran, Ponnamma, Kerdelz, Yogi, and Rahim. However, the LTTE leaders were able to keep those members away from the top ranks of the organization isolated due to personal rifts with Prabhakaran (Roberts, 2011). Therefore, the paper argues that those political demands did not address the majority lower-caste Tamil people's socio-economic needs rather than that of upper-caste political needs.

4. Tamil Caste based Socio-economic Inequalities

Human Rights Watch report in 2001 reveals that caste discriminations and inequalities are existing and "caste divisions also dominate in housing, marriage, and general social interaction-divisions that are reinforced through the practice and threat of social ostracism, economic boycotts, and even physical violence" (Human Rights Watch, September 2001, introduction). In line with the above mentioned statement, Tamil caste based socio-economic inequalities of the Sri Lankan conflict are not significantly analyzed in the literature of the Sri Lankan conflict analysis. However, there are some academics who identify various root-causes of the Sri Lankan conflict beyond the ethnicity (Bandarage, 2009; Silva and Tanges, 2009; Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009; Orguela, 2008; Swamy, 2006; Wickramasinghe, 2006; Hoole, 2001; Wilson, 2000; Pfaffenberger, 1990; and Pfaffenberger, 1982). "A host of other factors characteristic of the heterogeneous groups within the 'Tamil people' such as class, caste and regionalism..." (Orguela, 2008, 7) but it is the caste system in the Tamil community that has mainly cause socio-economic frustration since the pre-independence period of Sri Lanka.

Before examining the caste based socio-economic inequalities among Tamils in northern Sri Lanka, it is necessary to briefly define "caste". The original meaning of the word "caste" is breed, race or kind which was used by Portuguese. Encyclopedia Britannica defines caste as "group of people having a specific social rank, defined generally by descent, marriage and occupation. Caste, most common in South Asia, is rooted in distant antiquity and dictates to every orthodox person the rules and restrictions of all social intercourse and occupation" (1995, 348). Human Rights Watch describes that "caste is descent-based and hereditary in nature. It is a characteristic determined by one's birth into a particular caste, irrespective of the faith practiced by the individual" (September 2001, introduction). Following Mill's statement on the caste reveals that "The classification instituted by the author of the Hindu law is the first and simplest form of the division of labour and employments" (Quoted in Inden, 2000, 57). Caste is a significant social structure in the region of South Asia and "denotes a system of rigid social stratification into ranked groups defined by descent and occupation" (September 2001, introduction).

As a legacy of the Indian historical links and socio cultural influence, the caste system is instilled in both Sinhala and Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. "Caste, the distinctive social institution attributed to India, is assumed to be its utter manifestation" (Inden, 2000, 49; Sirinivas, 2006, 60; Driks, 2001, 8). It is further said that "the spirit of division and mutual opposition which seems to us to be one of the constituent elements of the caste system" (Paris, 2006, 37).

The caste based societies' social power relationship is contrary to the class-based societies where "rights of ownership are the prerogative of minority groups which form privileged elites" (Leach, 1960, 5). Privileged upper-caste elites represent the minority of the society where under-privileged low-caste majority members are exploited in the socio-economic and political relations in the society. Furthermore, "economic roles are allocated by right to closed minority groups of low social groups are bound, generally from a numerical majority and must compete among themselves for the services of individual members of lower-castes" (Leach, 1960, 5). However, the caste based demographic structure is different from the Indian structure of the caste. In Sri Lanka, the upper-caste represents the majority while lower-caste represents the minority in the society. Caste based socio-economic, political

and cultural practices and functions are systematically unequal and discriminate against certain groups in the society (Gwinn, Swanson, and Goetz). The exploitation of minority lower-castes by the majority upper-caste is abundantly severe in the society where ethnic deviations have socio-economically and politically existed. This is what the case of Sri Lanka reveals.

Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges (2009) clearly state that 90% of total population recognizes the existence of the caste system and its social influence in the society though there is a caste blindness which describes caste as an “old fashion” or “out dated concept”. Most anthropological studies on Sri Lankan caste system emphasized positive factors of the caste existence towards “a unified social system to the neglect of any consideration of caste discrimination, social injustices and human right violations, including the plight of the bottom layers in society” (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 1). It is well recognized fact that the existence of caste system in northern Sri Lanka can be seen as the established social structure which discriminates and unequally treats members of the society (Banks, 1960; Pfaffenberger, 1982; Pfaffenberger, 1990). It further describes that the Jaffna caste system “the most rigid and the one with clearly defined patterns of inequality, discrimination and social rejection driven by a religiously articulated notions of untouchability” (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 6).

As Stewart and others explore the VIs generalized economic inequalities though there are diverse groups. “Stark economic disparities between low and high-caste communities also get buried under a seemingly homogenous landscape of poverty” (Human Rights Watch, September 2001, introduction). The general conclusion of poverty does not show the real portion of inequality in a society where diverse groups are living. As a result of that the caste based society reveals that the lower-caste is more likely to discriminate “in the allocation of jobs, land, basic resources and amenities, and even physical security” (Human Rights Watch, September 2001, introduction). Human Rights Watch report further states that “a closer look at victims of violence, bonded labor, and other severe abuses also reveals disproportionate membership in the lowest ranking in the caste order”.

Pre and post-independence Sri Lankan politics have revealed how the caste system has influenced national politics among elite Sinhalese and Tamils (Roberts, 2011; McGilvray, 2008; Jiggins, 1979; Yalman, 1971). Pfaffenberger (1990) further states that all socio-economic activities are centered on the caste system in Jaffna. Though there are many classifications, it is reported that there are nearly 21 caste groups in northern Sri Lanka. They are accordingly hierarchy Piraman (Brahman), SaivaKurukkal (Siva priest), Vellālar (land holder), Pantāram (temple helper), Cipacari (temple sculptor), Koviya (domestic servant), Thattār (goldsmith), Karaiyar (fisher), Thachchar (carpenter), Kollar (blacksmith), Nattuvar (auspicious music), Kaikular (weaver), Cantar (sesame oil maker), Kuyavar (potter), Mukkuvar (lagoon fisher), Vannār (washer man), Ampattar (barber), Pallar (bonded labour), Nalavar (bonded labour) and Parayar (drummer) (Banks, 1960; Rasanagaiaam, 1971; Pfaffenberger, 1982). All castes are again divided into “touchable and untouchable”. Lowest castes such as barber, bonded labour and drummer are considered as untouchable or “Panchmar”. “Equality in seating and in eating” (Tanges and Silva, 2009, 58) was the main reason for the struggle by the untouchable castes Pallar, Nalavar and Parayar.

There are two main divisions which include high-castes and depressed-castes in northern Sri Lanka (Shanmugathan, 1997). These lower-castes were not allowed to enter tea boutiques or to use the same cups as used by the upper castes. Also lower-castes were not allowed inside the temple to worship the same god. Furthermore, “...the social and economic hierarchy with the land-owning Vellālar caste having a hegemonic control over many of the Hindu rituals and the labouring castes in Jaffna society being identified and treated as ritually unclean castes well” (Tanges and Silva, 2009, 50).

“The bottom layer of the Jaffna caste system is collectively referred to as “Panchmar” consisting of Vannar, Ampattar, Pallar, Nalavar and Parayar” (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 6). These five castes are under privileged and represents 18% of total population of Jaffna peninsula. It further reveals that these Panchmar group is the minority among upper-caste and professionalized “good-castes” (Pantāram (temple helper), Cipacari (temple sculptor), Koviya (domestic servant), Thattār (goldsmith), Karaiyar (fisher), Thachchar (carpenter), Kollar (blacksmith), Nattuvar (auspicious music). These castes are also discriminated in “in matters such as temple administration, education, employment and land ownership (market)” (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 6) by the upper-castes. Socially excluded lower-caste Tamils are ultimate product of both ethnic and caste based socio-economic inequalities. Though there are significant discriminations in Jaffna peninsula based on the caste identity.

Fundamental caste discriminations are “prohibitions against any kind of respectable clothing to denial of access to public transport, drinking water, temples, tea shops and like” (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 6). Apart from that it is well established social practice that Panchmar is not eligible any government or other respectable employment with upper-castes. Even contemporary Jaffna peninsula reveals that the majority Panchmar members are labours in the government and private companies or daily waged labours. Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges (2009) further state that majority of Panchmar castes “continue to exist and continue to experience caste-based discriminations in areas such as education, lank market, access to resources, and access to social welfare, and obstacles to upward social mobility...” (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 14).

Anthropological Tamil literature reveals that social struggle against the caste system in Jaffna started in the 1920s. The upper-

caste in the northern Sri Lanka had established customary prohibition to continue its social power over the lower-castes more than 90 years ago. In particular, a series of 24 customary prohibitions (Males and female of lower-caste should not wear an upper garments, untouchables must not wear any jewelry and cannot tie the wedding necklace, they must bury the dead without cremation, they should not use the ponds of the upper-caste, they are barred from upper-caste temples, they are prohibited to ride bicycles or drive cars, they are not allowed to sit while travelling in buses and even after permission was granted to study in schools, they were not allowed to sit on chairs) (Tanges and Silva, 2009). The enforcements by the upper-caste on lower-castes escalated the caste struggle among intra Tamils in the northern Jaffna. Caste based Tamil struggles in the northern Sri Lanka reflect how the caste system deprived Tamils' socio-economic needs in inter-Tamils well before the emergence of ethnic disputes.

Anti-caste movements against caste discrimination are "rarely mentioned in the continuum of Tamil nationalism, although they became very active in the 1940s and reached a zenith in the 1960s, because they offered a counter narrative that attacked Tamil elites rather than the oppressive Sinhala dominated state" (Wickramasinghe, 2006, 275). In the 1960s, harsh social discrimination by the upper-caste led to increased nonviolent protests among lower-caste Tamils. There was a significant protest in front of a holy Skanda temple in Maviddapuram, Jaffna in 1968. The protest was organized by Arumuka Navalar. "Hindus of high-caste rank (Vellalars and other their domestic servants, Koviyaars), hit the minority Tamils with iron rods and sand-filled bottles" (Pfaffenberger, 1990, 79-80). The lower-castes' protest became violent and spread over the entire peninsula. Ultimate results of that were one lower-caste person was killed and number of people was injured (Frontdgalland, 1968). Moreover, Maviddapuram Temple barricade was not opened to lower-caste Tamils further. However, Shanmugathan observes that though the legislative body of the state worked against caste discriminations "since the high castes formed the majority of the electorate, no political party- not even a Left-party was willing to offer them by espousing the cause of the untouchables" (Shanmugathan, 2008, 107).

When interviewed on 20 March 2012, the chief priest of the temple and assistant priests (family members) expressedly describe the violent events of Maviddapuram incident and it was justified under the Hindu religious concept of purity. Furthermore, the chief priest explained that even today also they have the caste divisions and practices when they conduct religious activities. The chief priest further rejects the LTTE "fake" attempt to overcome those divisions in the society. The chief priest significantly highlights that the LTTE used lower-caste young Tamils as combatants by taking their caste status. Ultimate result was thousands of young Tamils were killed and caste divisions are remained. Finally the priest brought a descriptive booklet, *Barricades at the Royal Temple* which was written by a British writer, Guy de Frontdgalland on the entire movement of Maviddapuram caste struggle for the temple entry. "The Satyagrahis had many communists among them, many of them more convinced about their fight for social equality than the philosophy of Moscow or Peking" (Frontdgalland, no date, 15).

Maviddapuram struggle was a result of years of long upper-caste discriminations against Panchmar (Wickramasinghe, 2006; Shanmugathan, 2008). Shanmugathan further observes that "Entry into the temple would also speak of successful struggle for entry into tea kiosks, barber saloons and other public places where they were being discriminated against especially in the remote village of the North" (Frontdgalland, no date, 16). During the conflict between the GoSL and the LTTE, the caste based discrimination issues were ignored by the LTTE in order to demonstrate their political goals in the name of Tamil nationalism. The LTTE's ignorance or blindness on the issue of the caste allowed the discriminated lower-caste Tamils to mobilize into the organization while upper-caste Tamils (educated) contribute to establish the ideology of Tamil nationalism. However, the lower-castes' socio-economic demands on equal ground were not addressed and put under the "ethnic carpet". Even in the setting and division of labour in the LTTE were based on the caste hierarchy. Most top level posts of the LTTE were given to Karaiyar or other professional castes which are not included in Panchmar.

The LTTE's aim of "a unified ethnic consequences among all Tamils...mass displacement of Tamils in Jaffna...eliminated more or less traditional Vellalar political leadership...thereby leaving a political and social vacuum in Jaffna society" (Tanges and Silva, 2009, 60) influenced to ignore the socio-economic discrimination based on the caste. When interviewed on 10 April 2011, some of civilians and ex-LTTE combatants explained that the lower-castes including bonded labour groups were economically vulnerable and their livelihood were unstable due to spirals of political violence conducted by the state while socio-economic discrimination on land ownership and employment. Finally, the socio-economic frustrated lower-caste Tamils turned into violent militancy for searching solutions for their years of long social frustration. Tanges and Silva (2009) further states that the caste system has had multiple influences to the conflict.

5. "Unseen Hurdles" in Post-conflict Peacebuilding

As the above discussed the ultimate goal of any peacebuilding project is to bring positive peace in conflict affected communities by solving root-causes of the conflict. Giving a comprehensive solution for structural violence not only includes absence of direct violence or political goal oriented macro level economic activities but addressing many other structural causes.

Therefore, the paper argues that the post-conflict peacebuilding activities have to reach grassroots through diverse socio-economic activities which address root-causes of the protracted conflicts.

Since the 2002 peace process in Sri Lanka, the majority of IDPs came from lower-castes rather than upper-caste or professionalized intermediate castes. Panchmar castes are not allowed to buy land particularly in Jaffna peninsula. Limited land for those lower-castes has been given for bonded labour by the upper-castes. “The lower-caste did not own much land other than their ancestral landholdings of miniscule size” (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 7). As a result of that the welfare camps are totally occupied by IDPs from lower-castes.

Those lower-caste IDPs’ limited lands are also located in high security zones where military sensitive and security forces are being. Stationed Lack of social network out of Jaffna peninsula for lower-castes is another reason to keep the IDPs in welfare camps. The majority of upper-caste Tamil IDPs have well established national and international social networks, therefore, those upper-castes Tamils managed to get out the welfare camps relatively sooner than the others. As Hoole (2000) mentions that established social networks helped upper-caste to escape from the peninsula since 1990s. Moreover, demining activities are not completed to resettle those lower-caste IDPs in the government granted new areas.

Lower-caste IDPs belongs to the poorest category in the society. Therefore, the IDPs do not have financial capability to buy new lands (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009). On the other hand even if they find the financial means there is difficulty to buy lands due to caste restrictions in the society. Post-conflict efforts in Sri Lanka were completed three years ago. However, the northern peacebuilding efforts do not visibly show any comprehensive policy initiatives to overcome the above mentioned caste based socio-economic inequalities particularly in periphery of Jaffna peninsula. “The absence of any open discussion on caste and total ignorance of state policies and programmes on caste to non-government actors” (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 13) reveal the issue of the caste based socio-economic discriminations is uninformed.

In particular, the military forces led post-conflict activities are not sensitive on caste issues due to their technical limitations (language, limited authority to access civilian’s sensitive socio-economic issues). Most activities are aimed to meet their quantitative objectives which sometimes make situation for the resettled groups worse. The field observation and interview which were conducted in Pooneryn, Paranthan, Maviddapuram and urban Jaffna¹ revealed how the caste divisions and its rigid practices exist in rural Jaffna. Based on both contemporary and past evidence this paper clearly highlights the caste discrimination has directly affected reconciliation of the conflict affected civilians in the peninsula.

The macro economic development projects and reconstruction of infrastructure (roads, shelters) have heavily demonstrated lower-caste Tamils as daily waged labourers. A top level officer for UN HABITAT Asian Region during a recent academic conference, *Emerging Sri Lanka: Development and Reconciliation* held in Sri Lankan embassy in Tokyo on May 27 2012 reveals that existing caste issues are really challengeable particularly in ongoing housing reconstructions due to inability in the mobilization of diverse caste groups. A JICA volunteer who worked in northern area from 2010 to 2012 (interview conducted in Colombo on March 28, 2011) reveals that existing caste practices negatively contribute to on-going construction of permanent shelters and other welfare activities due to upper-caste technical officers are reluctant to work where lower-caste are living. Therefore, mobilization of human resource into those areas is challenging. Moreover, an officer of UNDP Sri Lanka revealed that the UNDP had conducted a pilot project to reconciliation intra Tamils because the UNDP found out that caste based socio-cultural discriminations as an obstacle to bring positive peace in northern Sri Lanka.

On the other hand the upper-caste project supervisors exploit lower-caste labourers by sending and forcing them to work in hard climate conditions (especially Pooneryn and Paranthan) without appropriate basic facilities to prevent from hard climate conditions. Meantime, upper-caste dominated middle level management is enjoying those facilities. “The exploitation of low-caste laborers and the rigid assignment of demeaning occupations on the basis of caste keep lower-caste populations in a position of economic and physical vulnerability” (Human Rights Watch, September 2001, introduction).

Due to invisibility of these socio-economic issues on the ground of ethnic based political interests, the paper argues that achieving positive peace for grassroots victims of the northern Sri Lanka is a huge challenge. “The state and non-state actors responding to relevant humanitarian concerns appear to be unaware of caste dimensions involved even though they have serious implications for access to resources and services among the affected people”(Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 15). This fact is invisible evidence in the military led post-conflict peacebuilding in Jaffna peninsula.

Though Sri Lankan security forces work for rural lower-caste civilians, urban Jaffna upper-caste Tamils do not recognize those activities as for reconciliation of conflict affected Tamils. Upper-caste Jaffna Tamils do not want to see security forces involvement in lower-caste socio-economic developments in grassroots levels. Some of the interviewed upper-caste civilians revealed that those activities do not address years long political demands of Tamils, rural poverty and related issues that inherent to the lower-caste.

Recent observations in March 2012 reveal that the majority security personnel are not aware on the caste issues in the

peninsula. Therefore, military efforts further increase caste-based inequalities among Tamils. Military tasks mainly focus on material targets rather than dealing with socio-economically sensitive issues based on the caste. IDP welfare centers are managed by the military officers and they found soon that upper-caste IDPs do not eat what lower-caste IDPs cooked in the centers. Then military has taken action to provide cooking utensils separately for each caste groups. However, this kind of implementation creates the existence of caste based divisions rather than reconciliation among diverse caste groups. It clearly reveals that the military and other state and non-state actors do not have a comprehensive tool kit to deal with issues of reconciliation of diverse groups in inter-Tamils.

Upper-caste Tamil politicians, academics and community leaders practices on caste issues. When the caste issue is taken to the forefront they argue that the government is attempting to break the unity of Tamils by discussing outdated social practices. Therefore, the caste based socio-economic inequalities has directly affected lower-castes rather than the entire Tamil community in the northern Sri Lanka. "Certain Panchmar and Kuttimai caste groups in northern and eastern Sri Lanka appear to be some of the worst victims of the war" (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009, 15).

However, the important fact is that bureaucratic state and other stakeholders including non-state actors ignore the caste based socio-economic inequalities while bringing the ethnic based political issues at the forefront. Some of Tamil academics reveals that the caste based socio-economic inequalities are accepted traditions in the existing society in Jaffna. Even the LTTE could not remove the caste practices. Some of interviewed people from lower-castes revealed that though the LTTE banned the caste practices, in the middle of the conflict the LTTE used castes to demonstrate their political ideology through upper-castes. As a result of that the LTTE kept blind eye on upper-caste discriminations on lower-castes.

The interviewed people further revealed that they joined the LTTE because of the upper-caste oppression in schools and inadequate basic needs in family life. Parents caste oriented labour jobs do not meet the basic needs in day-to-day life. Therefore, free education is far from day-to-day socio-economic needs in family basis. On the other hand lower-caste children's inborn talents and skills were not recognized in the many schools. Most of the time student leadership and other leading positions were given to upper-caste by the upper-caste teachers and school management. These humiliating caste practices psychologically affected many lower-caste students and their social dignity. The LTTE's political propoganda in village levels was ultimately attracted by the lower-caste children.

A recent documentary video on *YouTube* (see the reference) on young leaders for *Sri Lankan Unite* (a Non-Governmental Organization) reveals the existence of caste based discriminations in Jaffna peninsula among young people. They highlight that even in Catholic churches in Jaffna peninsula caste inequalities are maintained and sometimes lower-caste people are not allowed to take leading roles in religious activity. Catholic churches managed schools restricted admission only to Panchmar castes. In particular, the interviewed people revealed that there was no path to overcome their caste based discriminations, frustration and depressions other than joining the LTTE. However, the LTTE too were not serious on caste discriminations except few public punishments for upper-castes on their severe discriminations over lower-caste. However, those LTTE led punishments for caste issues were identified as surface solutions for deep-rooted castes issues particularly in Jaffna peninsula.

On the other hand there is no policy or mechanism to deal with caste issues because majority upper-caste led Jaffna politicians and state agents ignore and hide the caste discriminations and inequalities from the mainstream society in Sri Lanka. For decades long caste based discriminations are hidden by the majority Tamil politicians as well as militant groups in order to reach opportunistic political goal of Tamil nationalism. Also very few opportunities were given to the lower-caste Tamils to participate in mainstream politics in the country (Shanmugathan, 2008). During the period of national, provincial and local elections, the upper-caste politicians purposely misuse the concept of minority Tamil ethnicity to overcome diverse caste discriminations against the minority lower-castes. At the end of the election campaigns, it was a historically visible fact that the upper-caste Tamil politicians have been elected and continue the traditional practices of the caste.

Even though there are few Tamil politicians who came to power from the lower-castes, their legitimate authority did not extend to established caste practices in the peninsula. Recently Sri Lanka Broadcasting Coperation (SLBC)'s morning Sinhala programme called *Dasa Desin Hatata* reveals the limited political power of the lower-caste Tamil politicians by refereeing to the prohibition of admission to temples which are highly limited to the upper-caste Hindus. Following that one of prominent Cabinet Ministers in the government reveals that reconciliation efforts are facing a community level challenge due to socio-economic and cultural differences.

Meantime, it further reveals that the upper-caste Tamils do not follow any political advocacy and policy initiatives of the lower-caste Tamil politicians. The observation and interview on 22 March 2012 further revealed that the lower-caste Tamil politician who serves as one of cabinet ministers of the present government was defeated by the majority upper-caste voters at the local election particularly in Jaffna Urban Council. Moreover, it reveals that even the opposition party in the area had all candidates from upper-castes. Therefore, the main opposition Tamil political party won the local government election in 2011.

Gootdhand et al. (2005) state that ethnicity and religion have had direct influence to drive the vehicle of violence. However, it does not emphasize Hindu religion based rigid divisions of the caste system in Jaffna peninsula. Though it was very clear from the beginning of the conflict in 1970s. “Both the LTTE and JVP recruit youth from similar social backgrounds - low caste, rural, Swabasha educated - with similar sets of grievances” (Gootdhand et al., 2005, 32). The paper fundamentally argues that many research on the conflict and peacebuilding in Sri Lanka ignore the significant influences of the caste based socio-economic discrimination and its influence in mobilizing marginalized Tamil groups in the northern Sri Lanka.

To obtain equal socio-economic and political rights, fights for self-determination and Tamil homeland or life sacrifice for Tamil liberation (suicide) were popularized slogans that ignored caste discrimination between lower-castes and upper-caste. Limited successes of ethnic based demand did not reach to the lower-castes (Hoole, 2003). As a result, still the majority lower-caste Tamils are uneducated and socio-economically vulnerable due to caste barriers.

When compared to the upper-caste, the lower-castes are experiencing the obstacles in a bulk of socio-economic issues such as land ownership, unemployment, and reestablishing of family lives. At the above mentioned interviews, majority of ex-LTTE carders and newly resettled civilians explained their desire to have a block of land, construction of a house, find a livelihood activity, wake a family and gaining the social dignity as other members of the society. Some of the young men and women in Pooneryn and Thellipalei explain that they wanted to re-start their education to overcome their traditional socio-economic barriers.

Those conflict victims and stakeholders reveal that they did not know why and what they fought for and who got benefited from conflict. However, they explained that their life conditions were not positively changed. Therefore, the paper argues that according to the post-conflict scenario the rigidity of the Tamil caste system and its influences are not exposed in the Tamil community at national and international levels in order to gain political power to each ethnic group in post-conflict peacebuilding. This is one of many issues that cannot be solved by means of national or local political perspectives. Therefore, the paper raises the validity and importance of dealing with the caste based socio-economic issues as one of hidden causes of the terminated Sri Lankan conflict to achieve the goal of positive peace.

Ongoing peacebuilding activities of the GoSL reflect the caste affected socio-economic issues in the Tamil community as an unsolved puzzle. In particular, resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) is severely affected by the caste system based land issues (Narendran, July 2011; Rasalingam June 2011). The upper-caste Tamils have not been among direct victims of the conflict because they are the bulk of the Tamil diaspora. Otherwise they were based in Colombo, or at least urban Jaffna where the government control prevailed during the conflict.

According to the social hierarchy of the caste system, the lower-caste people particularly untouchable do not have a caste right to possess a block of land. Most of lands in the northern Sri Lanka belonged to upper-caste people who left the area at the beginning of the conflict. As land in Jaffna was the most highly priced land next to Colombo, at the end of the conflict, particularly upper-caste Tamils wanted to return to their own homes and claim their lands which were under control by the LTTE and the security forces of the GoSL. The lands which the LTTE controlled were given to the members of the LTTE as a reward for their contribution to the organization under the LTTE de facto legal system.

During the period of the LTTE controlled, upper-caste Tamils were forced to flee the peninsula and their lands were captured by the LTTE. Those captured lands were distributed among the cadres who came from lower-castes. With the termination of the LTTE and abolishment of LTTE legalities, the ex-LTTE members and their families became victims of the conflict and lost the privileged lifestyle they enjoyed. Land issue is very crucial due to upper-caste claims on inherent land ownership while the IDPs demands new land to resettle. The state owns lands with land mines and other explosives have been abandoned for long time. On the other hand where the areas of the lower-caste IDPs newly resettled are located in the periphery of Jaffna peninsula suffer from natural resources (water) and other infrastructure facilities. In particular, area like Pooneryn and Paranthan heavily suffer from shortage of water. Therefore, this paper further argues that the physical resettlement of the IDPs does not address long lasting caste issues.

On the other hand some of the upper-castes are antagonistic and organize campaigns against the government resettlement efforts against ignorance of their traditional socio-economic demarcations. Following these developments, there is no concrete solution for the GoSL and other stakeholders to deal with the issue to resettle thousands of the IDPs who have been remaining in interim camps without any land or other social assets.

6. Conclusion

Even though caste issues are not prominently visible, the caste based socio-economic divisions have strongly but naturally led inter Tamil community discrimination. Therefore, the article argues that the caste based socio-economic inequality issues in the lower-caste Tamils were not addressed neither by the LTTE led militant groups nor by the so-called Tamil politicians who hail from

upper-castes. Even though the LTTE's original agenda set for the casteless Tamil community, finally the LTTE transformed into politically profitable ethnic resort in order to reach the majority upper-caste's financial and ideological supports both nationally and internationally. During the election periods, the Tamil politicians collect their votes by using the slogan of ethnicity. In particular, lower-castes socio-economic inequalities and discriminations are easily framed as inability of the state to implement policies and deliver social goods equally in intra Tamils.

Though the LTTE did not emerge from upper-caste, the caste identity of the LTTE leadership and other top ranks are not worse than lower-castes of Panchmar. Therefore, this article significantly highlights that the view point of the LTTE was to use both lower-castes and upper-castes to reach their politically motivated military goal by using the established social structure of the caste in northern peninsula by means of human resource for the conflict. The LTTE practices in the northern society demonstrate that the exploitation of the lower-castes frustration over oppressed caste based inequalities in the name of unification of ethnic Tamils. That is what the Tamil politicians have been doing since 1950s.

The observations and interviews of this article clearly reveal that at least the policies exercised to overcome the generalized ethnic barriers positively do not reach the marginalized lower-castes due to socio-culturally deep-rooted caste barriers. Ongoing state dominated, but also diverse non-state actors led post-conflict peacebuilding policies and activities do not recognize the importance of the issue of caste particularly in northern Jaffna. Though there are some policies to overcome the caste based socio-economic discriminations and inequalities, there is no mechanism to overcome the caste based issues at the delivery point of the designated policies. GoSL's post-conflict efforts are also mainly focused on popularized political issues rather than to respond to the caste-based frustrations among the Tamils in terms of resettlement and reconciliation. Therefore, the article concludes that these implementing policies of the post-conflict northern Sri Lanka indirectly accept and enhance the caste deviations and discriminations in the context of the generalized ethnic reconciliation. However, the paper further argues that if those lopsided policies may fuel to raise frustration in lower-castes Tamils to mobilize another phase of violence against their socio-economic inequalities.

Finally, the article reveals that the GoSL's military conclusion of the conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding efforts have neglected the importance of the caste based socio-economic issues of the re-victimized northern Tamils due to its politically popularized general understanding of the conflict. Furthermore, it is evident that caste is one of the highly required qualifications even to enter mainstream Tamil politics. Moreover, "lopsided development" does not consider Tamil community's caste based land ownership and its effects on the lower-caste civilians who have been discriminated for years. The article finally concludes with the importance that should be given to address the caste-based structural issues and its existing challenges to achieve positive peace for Tamil victims in post-conflict peacebuilding in Sri Lanka.

Endnote

¹ The article employs 40 ex-LTTE combatants' socio-economic information as the main informants of this article. The author interviewed 40 Ex-LTTE combatants out of 200 ex-combatants in both the rehabilitation centres in Thellipalei and in Pooneryn, they were resettled in these areas. By April 2011, 243 families were resettled in Pooneryn. In order to cross check the combatants' information, the article also secured information from civilian and other stakeholders who directly dealt with post-conflict peacebuilding activities. Intellectuals, Government Administrative Officers, religious leaders, school teachers, undergraduate students, newly resettled former IDPs and security forces personnel were among other informants.

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