

Impact of the caste system on Reconciliation

This is a study of the impact of the caste system on Reconciliation in the Southern part of the country. This analysis considers caste impacts on employment, social mobility, marriage, education and their day today life.

The Caste system is the world's longest surviving social hierarchy. Caste encompasses a complex ordering of social groups on the basis of ritual purity. A person is considered a member of the caste into which he or she is born and remains within that caste until death, although the particular ranking of that caste may vary among regions and over time.

Caste discrimination is caused by the caste system. In caste discrimination there could be harassment and certain prejudices. This discrimination of lower caste people is often perpetrated by people of higher castes.

There are several caste systems are existing in Sri Lanka.

1. Caste among Sinhalese: Kandiyani (Up-Country)
2. Caste among Sinhalese: Southern (Low-Country)
3. Caste among Sri Lankan Tamils: Northern Caste
4. Caste among Sri Lankan Tamils: Eastern Caste
5. Caste among Tamils: Hill Country Tamils (Indian Origin)

Caste System in Southern province.

Name of Caste Group	Occupation(s) of Caste Group
Salagama	Cinnamon tapers, Soldiers & Weavers.
Karawa	Traditional fishermen, naval warriors, seafaring traders, boat builders, carpenters & pioneering planters.
Durawa	Traditional Soldiers and toddy tappers.
Navandanna	Artisans (Many subcategories)
Goyigama	Traditional cultivators, land workers and herdsmen
Wahumpura (Dewa)	Merchants, Confectioners, Military personals.
Berava	Tom-tom beaters (traditional drummers)
Badahala (Kumbal)	Potters

Hannali	Tailors
Pamunu	Tenant farmers
Porowakkara	Wood cutters
Rodiya	Outcastes
Gattara	Cultivators
Hinna	Washers
Pannikki	Barbers
Rajaka (Hena)	Washer-men
Ahinkuntaya	Gypsies

Table 2: Caste based Occupation

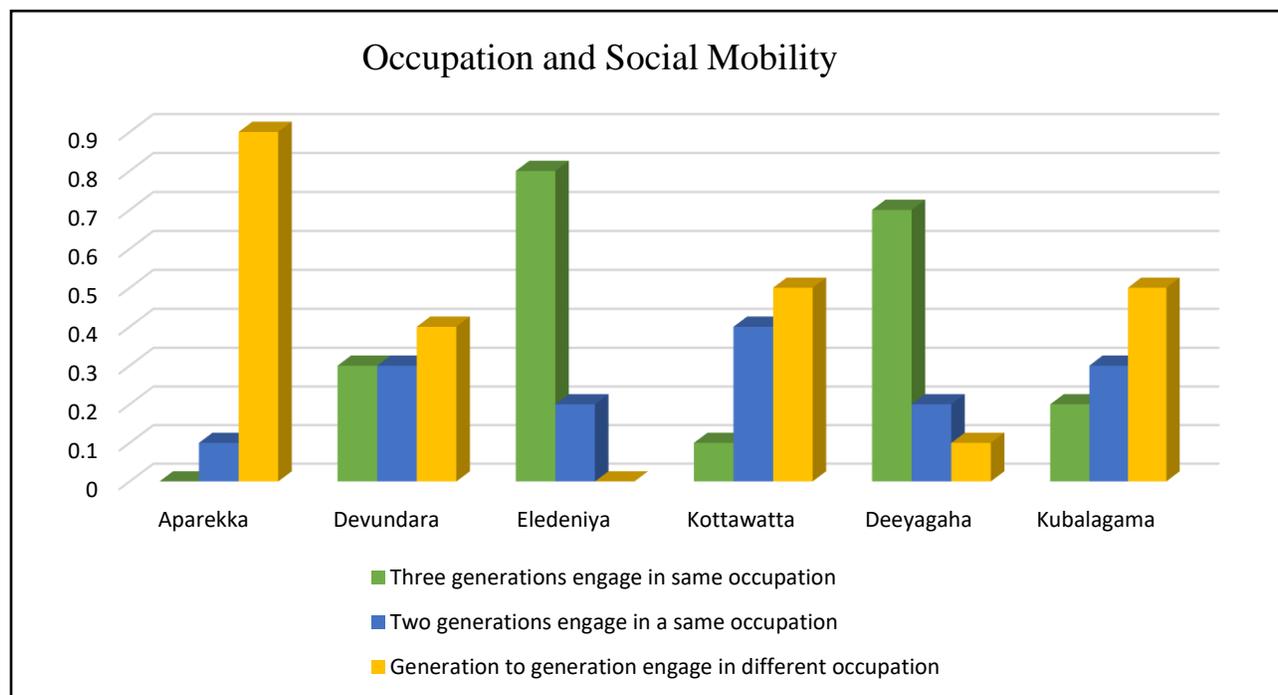


Figure 1: Occupations and social mobility

Three generations are considered under this: the respondents' occupation, his fathers' occupation and his grandfathers' occupations. Above clustered column chart shows that two generations ago, occupations were closely linked to their Caste. But now situation has changed. In Goigama, most of their occupation had changed. Among the Govi (high caste), the emergence of numerous

public servants indicates a growing inclination towards white-collar jobs. Nawandanda and Berawa caste people still engage in the occupation that is the same as their caste system. A moderate number of Karawa and Badahela castes have sought new occupations. In kottawatta, Rada people are shifting towards other occupations. Nowadays Laundry workers have disappeared and it's hard to find someone who engages in that occupation.

Findings confirm that the importance of caste is reducing among both the higher and the lower caste groups within the Sinhalese community in Sri Lanka. A large percentage of persons were no longer occupied in caste-based employment as they move on to do their higher studies. There is a stigma associated with caste based occupations, therefore they tend to reach higher education and move from their caste based occupation.

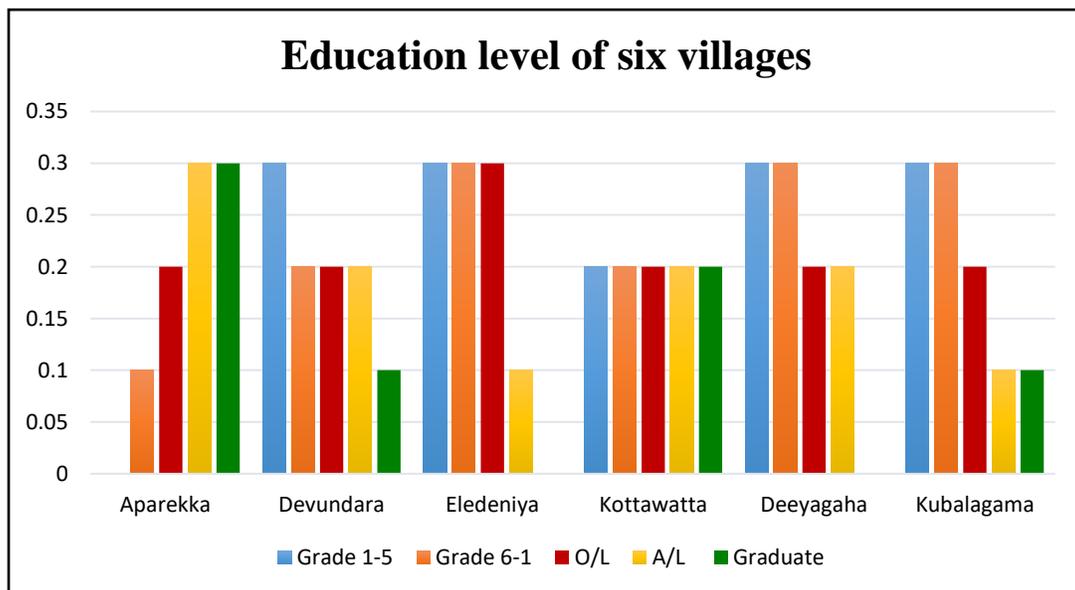


Figure 2: Education level of six villages

According to this clustered column graph, 80% of people at least studied until O/L s in village Aparekka. This means, it improved their education level than in the past and now they are not engaged in farming according to their caste. Eladeniya and Deeyagaha people still engage in the occupation relevant to their caste. Because of that, many of them do not attempt higher studies and they practice their fathers' and grandfathers' occupation and engage in it. A moderate amount of Devundara and Kumbalgama people abandoned their caste based occupations and attempt to do higher studies.

The high drop-out rate of school children in rural villages among the lower caste communities may be linked to their economic status. In rural villages some schools are segregated based on their caste. Some of these schools provide only primary level education and if parents want their children to continue their education, they have to send them to a school four kilometres away from the village. Since the majority of the parents are poor, sending their children to a secondary school in town is often costly and children are more likely to drop out of school during this period due to economic problems. So low caste people have fewer opportunities for higher education among those with economic problems.

The impact of caste on marriage

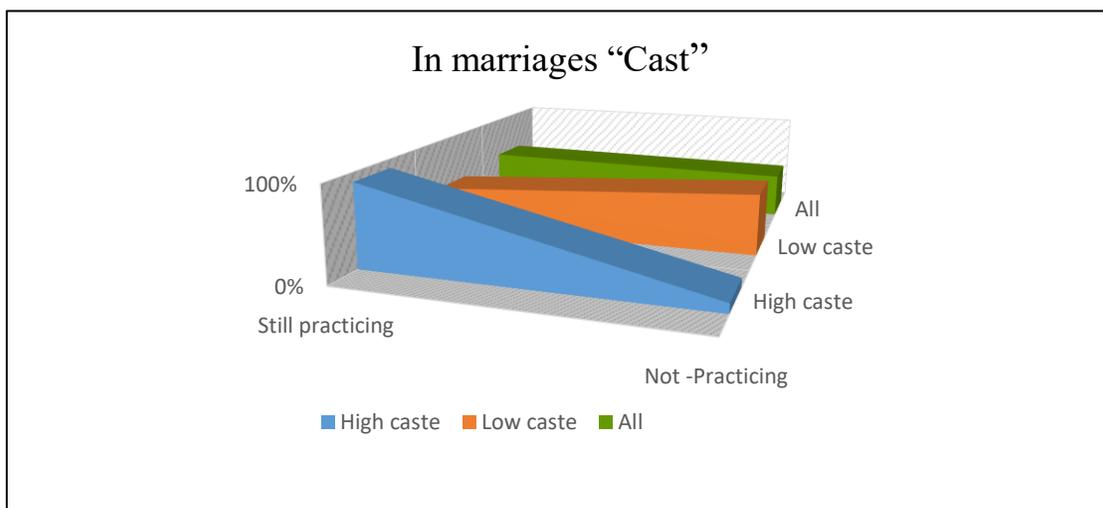


Figure 3: Practice of caste in marriages

Among lower caste communities choosing a partner and getting married is not a complex process as it is a simple matter of obtaining the consent of the families for marriage. In such cases, the caste of the partners is not a strong determinant. On the other hand, for a high caste person of a higher income, marriage is a more complicated process and they are conscious of factors such as caste, wealth and status of the prospective marriage partner. So 90% of high caste people are still prejudiced about caste in marriages. Contrastingly 66% of the low caste people do not practice caste in their marriages. Overall, however both high caste and low caste people consider the caste in marriages than in any other situation of their lives.

Impact of caste on access to public and religious places

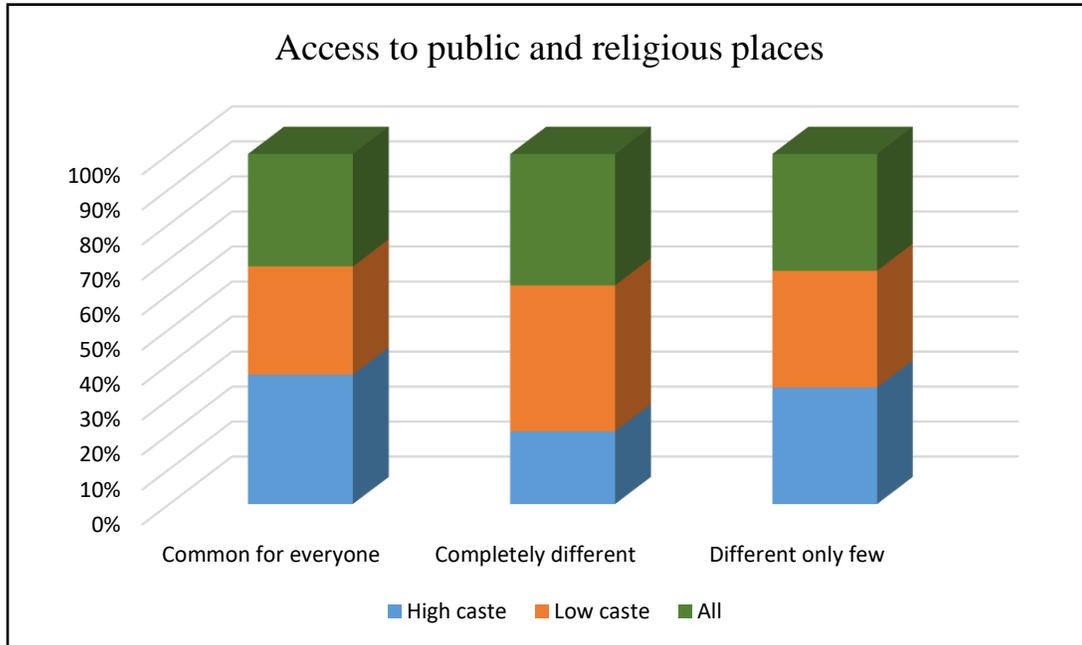


Figure 4: Access to temples, Religious ordination and Common facilities

According to this chart there is equal access to religious and public places to both high caste and low caste people.

Thippala Viharaya, which is located Aparekka, is an ancient temple. Until the early 1980s, the temple had a separate side for the low caste members and another side for the high caste members. Although the division does not exist any longer, today this temple is visited solely by the Goigama caste. For the low caste people they have their own temple in their villages.

When concerning the ordaining of monks, lower caste villages ordain only low caste laymen. In high caste villages, high caste laymen are ordained. There is clear discrimination in the ordaining of monks in temples which are segregated based on caste.

For example, when considering Siyam Nikaya, Amarapura Nikaya and Ramanya Nikaya all monks in the temple of Aparekka village are from Siyam Nikaya. They only ordain Goigama caste for the Bhikku order. In Amarapura Nikaya, both castes are ordained but there is a preference to ordain those of a higher caste.

Inter and intra caste relations in society

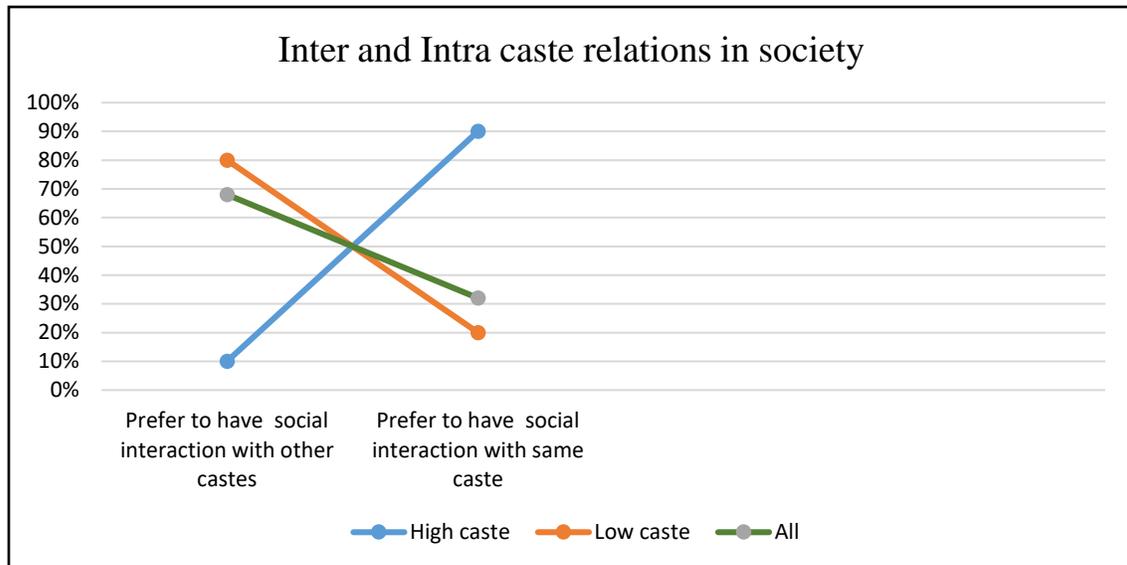


Figure 5: Inter and Intra caste relations in society

According to this line graph, 90% of the higher caste respondents expressed their unwillingness to have any social interaction with the lower castes. 80% of the lower caste people expressed their willingness to have social interaction with the high caste people. Among lower caste people there is an expression of willingness to enter inter caste relationships. In certain social occasions like weddings, funerals and other ceremonies high caste people do not like to see the presence of low caste people, but low caste people welcome the high caste people for their special occasions. 10% of the high caste people are not willing to have any social relationships with low caste people because they think it as a shame for them. 20% of the low caste people often change their surnames due to the stigma on their caste and later on are unwilling to associate those of the same caste. Some are also afraid to have relationships with high caste people, because they fear rejection from high caste people. Interestingly, nowadays young people have changed a lot and they make new relationships via new technologies such as Facebook, Twitter or other types of social media irrespective of caste differences.

Types of caste based conflicts

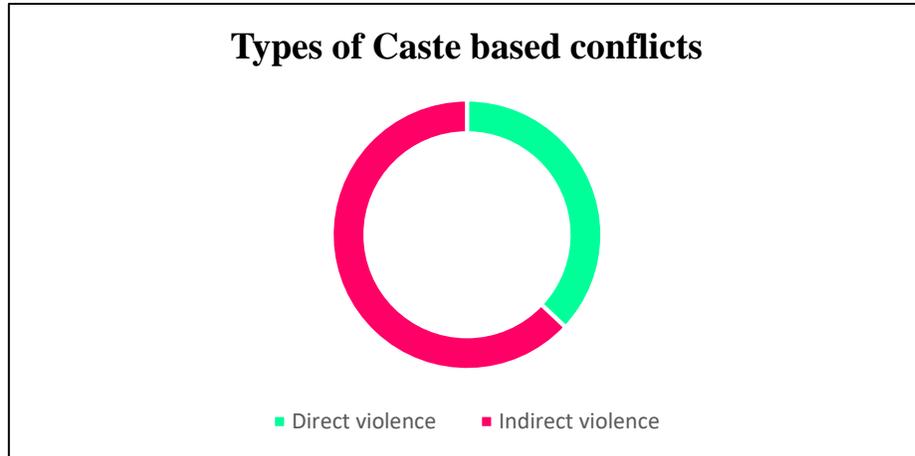


Figure 7: Types of Caste based conflicts

Physical violence comes under the direct violence. Mental or psychological discrimination as well as verbal harassment comes under indirect violence. According to this chart 63% of caste based conflicts are indirect violence and only 37% of caste based conflicts are direct violence. Most conflicts are mental and psychological.

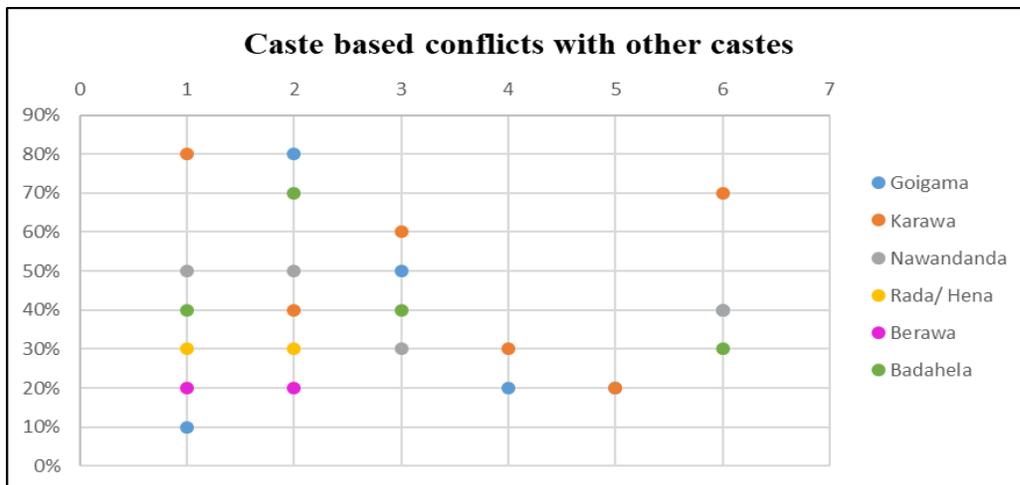


Figure 8: Caste based conflicts with other caste people

	Goigama	Karawa	Nawandanda	Rada	Berawa	Badahela
Goigama	X	X	X	X	X	X
Karawa	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nawandanda	X	X	X			X
Rada/ Hena	X	X				
Berawa	X	X				
Badahela	X	X	X			X

Table 3: Caste based conflicts with other caste people

Most of the time conflict arises between different castes than people of the same caste. Most conflicts arose between high caste people and low caste people For example: between Goigama and Karawa, Nawandanda, Rada, Berawa or Badahela people. There is increased conflict among Goigama and Karawa people. There is a perception that Karawa people are more aggressive than other low caste people. Goigama people have more power in society and lower castes fear them to an extent.

Karawa people spend most of their time on the sea and are engaged in a dangerous occupation to earn their income. Berawa people are dancers, drummers, shamans and charmers. Other people due to superstitious beliefs are scared of charmers and shamans and void conflicts with them. Even the high caste (Goigama) people are afraid to have conflicts with them. These caste based conflicts have a direct effect on social harmony.

The popular view that caste no longer matters in Sri Lankan society is not always accurate when considering the condition of the lower castes especially those who are economically disadvantaged. Due to the presence of the caste system in society people's rights are obstructed and they face difficulties in their day today life. Although caste is not prominent as before, the situation has changed from generation to generation. The lower-caste groups have been enhanced of upward mobility from these communities through education, trade, marriage, employment and other avenues. Explicitly address the invisible social impact of the caste and must treat the causes of the caste based issues and challenges before it highly impact to the reconciliation.