

IMPACT OF WAR ON OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS OF THE SO-CALLED LOW CASTES IN JAFFNA

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Caste is often seen as a cornerstone of the Tamil Hindu society of the Jaffna Peninsula. The caste system continued to hold sway over the economic, social, and religious life of the people of Jaffna. This situation has now changed due to the social transformation, social mobility, social dynamics and social movements among the people. The main purpose of this study was to understand the dynamics of the caste system, and its transformations, consciously or unconsciously, among the Jaffna Tamils due to the impact of war from 1983 onwards.

For many years the Jaffna Tamil caste system denoted rigidity, pollution, purity and obligations. Obligations mean the domestic services of *Kudimai* and *Adimai*. These services were traditionally performed for generations. The so-called low castes of *Kudimai* and *Adimai* services were attached to the so-called high caste of *Vellalar* somewhat like the *Jajmani* system in North India. *Adimai* (slaves) castes consist of *Koviyars*, *Nalvar* and *Pallar* and *Kudimai* castes consist of Gold smith, Black smith, Carpenters, Barbers, Washermen and *Paryars*

The Impact of war, displacement, and social movements are major factors for those social processes. This paper examines how the caste based Jaffna social system functions in spite of this type of changing scenario. Key social changes are going on in Jaffna society. Some of these changes are bitterly resented by the conservative part of the population. The so-called low castes are becoming richer, and having acquired property, most of them naturally decline to follow old customs. In this context this paper examines changing obligations and rights of the so-called low caste.

I examine the applicability of M.N.Srinivas's approach of *Sanskritization* and Westernization to understand this social mobility and social transformation. I coin the concept of *Vellalarization* to understand the changing scenario. Both change and continuity exist, but this paper mostly emphasizes changes, because for a long time Jaffna society has maintained the status-quo of *Vellalar* with the support of a caste base social system in a manner explicable in terms of M.N.Srinivas concept of the dominant caste. Qualitative research methods especially participant observation and focus group discussion and secondary sources were utilized in the study.