

## **Partners in Arms: LTTE Women Fighters and the Changing Face of the Sri Lankan Civil War**

### *Introduction*

The reopening of road and air links to rebel-held areas in the north and east of Sri Lanka after the February 2002 ceasefire made it easier for outsiders to spend time with one of the world's deadliest and most successful insurgent groups, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Their campaign for a separate state for Sri Lanka's Tamil minority has claimed over 60,000 lives and displaced about 1 million people since 1983.<sup>1</sup> The Tigers are notorious for pioneering the use of the suicide vest and have conducted over 200 suicide bombings, leading several countries—including India, the U.K. and the U.S.—to ban the LTTE as a terrorist organization.<sup>2</sup> Over the years the LTTE also built up a formidable conventional military capability. With less than one-tenth the troop strength of Sri Lankan government forces, LTTE cadres fought the combined arms of the Sri Lankan military to a bloody stalemate. The two war-weary sides agreed to talks at the beginning of 2002, and a fragile peace continues despite the rebels' decision to halt talks in April 2003. The LTTE developed its dominance and effectiveness through both brutal consolidation of power within Sri Lanka's Tamil community and effective conventional and asymmetric warfighting. As an estimated 30% of the LTTE's fighting cadres, women have played an unprecedented role in this effort.<sup>3</sup>

While women have regularly shored-up war efforts in many parts of the world—and occasionally taken combat roles in various struggles—the Tigers raised women to a new status. The Women's Military Unit, also called the “Birds of Freedom,” is integral to the LTTE and run by a separate but parallel administrative structure to that of the male fighters.<sup>4</sup> The women live in their own camps and train to fight both alongside men and in all-women units that attack Sri

Lanka's military and police. The "Birds of Freedom" started out as a ragtag force of a handful of women in 1986 but is now well-trained, well-equipped, and deadly. The first few women fighters were trained in India with covert assistance from India's government in 1985.<sup>5</sup> The women's wing was officially inaugurated at this time and first engaged the Sri Lankan military in combat in 1986.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, through a complex turn of events that led to war between the LTTE and Indian peacekeepers in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990, the first LTTE woman to fall in battle was killed by an Indian soldier in 1987.<sup>7</sup>

Since these early days, the women fighters grew to be a vital part of the LTTE fighting apparatus. Fierce in conventional battle, the women also form a crucial element of the LTTE's asymmetric tactics as suicide bombers. Drawn from the rebel's elite "Black Tigers," these women are dedicated to the use of suicide attacks to strike political, economic and military targets. Despite LTTE rhetoric to the contrary, their suicide attacks have often struck civilian targets as well. The Black Tigers work as key parts of standard military operations and in specialized assassination or terrorist missions. They have assassinated two heads of state: Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993 and former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 in addition to a Sri Lankan naval commander, scores of politicians, military and police personnel, and civilians. Both Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga—who narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in 1999—were attacked by women suicide bombers during public election rallies. President Kumaratunga lost her sight in one eye. Through the 1990s, rebel women took on increasingly prominent roles in major combat operations. Tiger propaganda and training videos and the frontline stories of government soldiers document how women fighters engaged in combat with government forces on land and at sea. Women operate artillery and heavy weapons, crawl through frontline trenches, and engage Sri

Lankan forces with small arms and grenades. The videos contain stirring speeches by women commanders rousing their young troops and are available through Tamil diaspora groups worldwide.

The ceasefire gave me a unique chance to openly engage with rank and file women of the LTTE. Drawing largely on visits in late 2003 and early 2004 to Jaffna and Kilinochchi in the north and Batticaloa in the East, this paper explores questions about women fighters through the women's own reflections. Many lessons have been learned by people studying the LTTE. The Tigers demonstrate how costly it can be when states allow the legitimate grievances of a large minority to fester into violent struggle. They show the effectiveness of asymmetric tactics against both the military capability of a superior power and the political will of a majority population. The LTTE clearly demonstrates that suicide bombing can be a tactical decision implemented for precision, cost-effectiveness, and psychological impact without religious extremism as a motivating factor. This paper seeks to draw some additional lessons from the LTTE's extensive use of women fighters. Following some background, this paper discusses the making of an LTTE woman fighter and how including women in the fight has benefited the LTTE. It also explores the impact of combat on Tamil women and the complex challenges of their reintegration into society should peace endure.

While a large part of the analysis is based on my long experience in Sri Lanka, several of the women mentioned in this essay were interviewed specifically for this paper in January 2004. Only one interview was officially sanctioned by the LTTE. The others were carried out in several towns and villages, generally coordinated by people working in local non-governmental organizations or by my journalism contacts. To the best of my judgment, the women spoke freely

and candidly about their lives and their role in the LTTE. Additional information was drawn from interviews I conducted in August, 2003.

### *The Roots of the Tamil Insurgency*

Young Tamil men surged to join several rebel outfits after ethnic riots in 1983 claimed hundreds (if not thousands) of Tamil lives across Sri Lanka.<sup>8</sup> The government portrayed the riots as a spontaneous response triggered by the killing of 13 soldiers in an ambush by the fledgling LTTE in the north.<sup>9</sup> But much evidence of official complicity later surfaced: mobs roamed with official voter registration lists that identified Tamil residences and businesses, and President J.R. Jayawardene let four days of carnage pass before appealing for calm.<sup>10</sup> The government's refusal to protect Tamil civilians from the murderous mobs had a massive impact on the community and convinced many moderate Tamils that cohabitation with the majority would not be possible. The riots tipped simmering antagonism between the Sinhalese and Tamils into outright war.<sup>11</sup>

Nineteen eighty-three marked the apex of a spiral of communal tension that existed under British rule and grew markedly after independence in 1948. With their significant majority, post-independence Sinhalese politicians set about redressing British discrimination (perceived and real) against their people.<sup>12</sup> New governments abolished English and Tamil in all government work and established discriminatory recruitment practices to favor Sinhalese in government jobs and university admissions. The government also began internal colonization schemes to resettle Sinhalese families in areas of the north and east in an effort to dilute the regional Tamil majority.

By the early 1970s, a few groups of radical Tamil youths started to stage hit and run attacks in the north, blowing up railroad lines, setting fire to buses, setting off bombs in several

public venues and also holding up banks in Jaffna to fund their operations.<sup>13</sup> Several senior Tamil politicians, local policemen and soldiers were targeted with increasing and deadly precision. Convinced the state discrimination could only get worse, many Tamils citizens started to quietly support these young insurgents, affectionately called, "the boys."<sup>14</sup> The government met each incident with increasing force, and it is likely that President Jayawardene hoped that the 1983 pogrom would break the will of the Tamil population to agitate. With smoke hanging over many Sri Lankan cities and towns, over 300,000 Tamils fled the country in the days after the riots, finding asylum in India, Canada, the United States, Australia and several European countries. This Tamil diaspora, made up largely of skilled professionals, quickly began to support the armed resistance at home with hard currency. The insurgency grew rapidly in the months after the 1983 riots, and as early as 1984, the first Tamil girls were ready to join "the boys."

### *Making a Tigress*

Like men in the LTTE, women go through extensive training in the use of weapons and explosives. They specialize into various combat and combat support roles. Women fill supporting roles such as in video and camera units, which document battles, and battlefield medical units. They run LTTE "Sea Tiger" gunships, operate artillery, and participate in close combat operations. They train new recruits, give motivational speeches and lead public affairs and political projects. They are suicide bombers in the elite "Black Tigers". LTTE videos provide startling evidence of the very real equality women have obtained in the LTTE's warfighting structures. This is not the life traditionally expected of a Tamil daughter.

“We learned to carry weapons and gear that weighed 200 pounds in some cases and run and fight with our weapons,” says Thamilvili (many people in Sri Lanka use one name), a woman fighter who is now in a prominent political position with the LTTE. While 200 pounds may be an exaggeration, women fighters carry as full a load as possible into combat, just as the men do. The physical and endurance training of all new recruits is exhaustive, even for those that will not fill combat roles. Though the first weeks of training were grueling, Thamilvili and other women say they were surprised to discover their potential for physical and mental strength.

In her first few months in the organization, a woman is put through “basic training,” three months of mainly physical exercises to build her endurance and physical fitness and small arms training. According to the women I spoke with the first round is mainly running, climbing and crawling under barbed wire fences, which starts before dawn each day. They said this physical conditioning, which is repeated at intervals throughout their time in the LTTE, holds them in good stead when conducting attacks against Sri Lankan military installations. The women then progress to “advanced training” in the use of an array of more sophisticated weapons and long-range weapons including mortars and artillery. Indoctrination and propaganda are important components and include an effort to teach Tamil history anew and to instill a tangible sense of mission and purpose.<sup>15</sup> Specialized training is conducted for recruits in the areas they seem best at, including intelligence work, mine laying and detection, and political work. While Thamilvili describes women being taught political science, diplomacy and battle tactics, others had less substantial education in the LTTE. According to Nila, a 31-year-old ex fighter in Kilinochchi, the LTTE provided few skills useful for the outside world during peacetime. Darsa, who joined at age 14 and left the LTTE two years after losing her leg in battle in 2000, recalls a lot of general knowledge classes and the provision of books and technical manuals and Tamil

magazines. Given the variance in ages of girls joining, it is difficult to gauge how much education the women receive beyond combat training. Those recruited as children have their normal education radically disrupted. But women that join after completing their Advanced Levels (high school equivalent) have a different experience. All, however, carry the training and education they receive into a unique universe while they live with and fight with their comrades.

The fighters live in either large camps or "compounds", houses that have been configured into hostels to house 15-20 fighters. The women wear a uniform of baggy pants and shirt held together with a distinctive broad belt high on the waist. This dress identifies them clearly as they move in public. At home in their hostels they often wear regular but modest clothes, generally long dresses or skirts with loose, short-sleeved blouses. They wear the rebels' trademark cyanide capsule around their necks, which they are trained to take upon capture. This tactic to prevent interrogation and revelations about the rebel outfit has helped the LTTE successfully maintain its secrecy over the years. In one high profile case in the late 1980s, a group of senior LTTE cadres committed mass suicide when they were captured by the Sri Lankan navy. They all consumed cyanide to avoid being sent to Colombo for interrogation. Of the 17 fighters who consumed cyanide, 12 died, including two senior leaders revered by the LTTE for the exploits in battle, Kumarappa and Pulendran.<sup>16</sup>

The cyanide capsule is a striking symbol of the dedication and discipline demanded by the LTTE. All fighters must abide by a strict code of conduct that includes bans on smoking, alcohol, and even premarital sex. The leadership hierarchy is rigid and intolerant of insubordination. According to Adele Balasingham "From the outset of the basic training program classes are given setting out clearly the codes of conduct of the LTTE and the nature of punishment. This discipline is vigorously maintained by all those in charge of the LTTE

cadres.”<sup>17</sup> Anyone who quits the group to join or form a rival group does so under the threat of summary execution.<sup>18</sup> The rigidity of the LTTE structure is viewed by members as necessary for the maintenance of an effective fighting force. Unlike the Sri Lankan military, the LTTE is thought to have few problems with desertion.<sup>19</sup> The hardships of training and the discipline on mind and body have helped the LTTE focus its forces on fighting as a means to a political end: an independent homeland. The discipline starts with the basic training described above and continues throughout a fighter's service and into all aspects of life.

Though they discouraged marriage early on, the rebels eventually realized the benefits of encouraging marriage, especially between cadres. Making the organization more responsive to the emotional needs of its fighters and more reflective of society at large served to broaden its influence. In keeping with the uniformity and ideals of the LTTE, marriage ceremonies are simple and bereft of religious symbols or rites. However, the tools of religious ceremony have been appropriated. Modified traditions locate authority for the union with the LTTE. Khila, a woman lawyer, who obtained her degree at the LTTE law school, said the bride wears simple attire and not elaborately worked saris of the past. The traditional *thali* (necklace) worn by women from their wedding day as a symbol of marriage has been retained, but – as Khila showed me hers – refashioned in the shape of two tiger teeth set on a rectangle of gold intersected by a sword and a symbol that looks like a sun; it is tied around the neck with a simple yellow cord, instead of an expensive gold chain.<sup>20</sup> Marriage ceremonies are conducted by a special unit of the LTTE set up for civil ceremonies.

Subject to the vagaries of war, married fighters are allowed to spend a few days each week with their spouse. Former women fighters with children often serve in non-combatant roles. Kayarvali, a senior woman fighter in the east and Thamilvili both said women leave their



children in crèches during the day to work with the LTTE. According to Thamilvili, married cadres work the hardest. She described one former fighter with 6 children who continues to work for the LTTE in non-combat roles. This is possible, according to Thamilvili, because of their disciplined way of life. By encouraging its fighters to marry other fighters the LTTE can allow family life without depriving the organization of trained personnel. According to Mrs. Pathmanathan (name changed), a women's activist, it often makes for easier matches as many Tamil families remain reluctant to have their sons marry an LTTE woman. This openness to marriage and family also builds an image of the LTTE as tradition-friendly back in the civilian world. Every former woman fighter I interviewed vowed to return to duty at any time if asked. Thus the "ex-cadre couples" also form an LTTE reserve component of sorts.

As they adjusted marriage to fit the nationalist and political goals of the organization, the LTTE also extended control over its ranks by modifying religious norms. The Tamil population in Sri Lanka is religiously diverse, with approximately 85% Hindu and 15% Christians.<sup>21</sup> Wanting to form a nationalist struggle rather than a religious one, the LTTE has discouraged—though not banned—religious practice by members. Every fighter I interviewed shared this assessment. Adele Balasingham, the Australian-born wife of senior LTTE leader and chief negotiator Anton Balasingham, defines Prabhakaran as a "patriot nationalist."<sup>22</sup> Understanding the power of religious symbols and practices, Prabhakaran incorporates them into ceremonies associated with the LTTE's vision of Tamil nationalism. Religious symbolism takes a prominent place only in ceremonies that commemorate LTTE heroes. Many LTTE martyrs are honored on their death anniversaries. Rebels, community leaders, or family members light traditional oil lamps and garland pictures and statues of the fallen to celebrate their devotion and sacrifice to Eelam, the "Tamil Homeland." Similar religious-like ceremonies mark otherwise secular LTTE

funerals.<sup>23</sup> Such nationalism-as-religion is rooted to the notion of Eelam and overtakes religious- and family-sphere activity, leaving most social and religious ceremony to be channeled through group loyalty.

The involvement of women in advancing this zealous, devout nationalism throughout Tamil society in LTTE-held areas cannot be overstated. The movement is avowedly secular and none of the women fighters and ex-fighters I interviewed showed any desire to follow conventional religions beyond superficial practice. But they shared an almost religious faith in the LTTE and in themselves. Nila, who spoke in detail about the LTTE's stance on religion, said it was more important for her to follow her conscience than religion. Thamilvili went so far as to assert that she believed more in herself than even in God. Such notions shatter long-held beliefs in communities familiar with oppression and hardship. LTTE promises to deliver freedom and justice overshadow religion, which though long central to life in Tamil areas, offers mainly solace in the face of state oppression. Thus in addition to their ability to fight, LTTE women are set apart by their official stature in an organization viewed with reverence and awe. These young women, free of many traditional social constraints and comfortable speaking their mind about religion represent a new phenomenon in Tamil culture and a powerful component of the LTTE's military, political, and social influence.

#### *Consolidating the LTTE's Influence*

Many young women in their 20s are now in midlevel leadership positions in both the LTTE's women's wing and in its political wing. Though the LTTE officially denies it, many fighters joined between the ages of 12 and 16.<sup>24</sup> While political leaders and spokespersons like 26-year-old Thamilvili insist they joined at 18 (the legal age for combat in Sri Lanka) many

current and former cadres admit to joining in their early teens. The deception by those briefed to deny the LTTE's use of child combatants is often thinly veiled, but it reveals the political savvy of a group used to managing its international image. It also indicates how the nuances and truths about the organization will long remain inaccessible to outsiders. Recruiting young clearly enhances the LTTE's ability to shape its fighters' opinions and by extension its influence on society. The use of children in combat is a gross human rights violation. It is also very effective. Women who have left the LTTE rarely have anything negative to say about the "movement." Even those who had been forced into service, or beaten or punished for asking to leave the group say they are better off for having joined. Among the benefits most often cited are self-confidence and a sense of autonomy. While it is impossible to assess how reluctant ex-women cadres living in LTTE-controlled areas are to criticize the group (little happens in these areas without the LTTE's knowledge and approval), there is no doubt of their self-confidence. Many of these women travel around the region on their own, take care of their children, and work outside the home. Current and former LTTE women do not fit into the stereotype of the rural Tamil woman bound by numerous cultural constraints and submissive to her father, husband, and brothers. While Tamil women are traditionally seen as nurturers and caregivers, the women fighters have forced a major shift in roles over the last two decades. They are aware of this change and proud of it. This shift, according to the women combatants is a product of women participating in warfare and the LTTE's policy of equality in all things.

The fighters have an array of duties in addition to battle, especially in the current ceasefire environment. Many run what are loosely termed "awareness programs." According to Thamilvili and Kayarvali, men and women go out to the Tamil populations in their areas and teach them how to deal with threats like AIDS, alcoholism and a gamut of social ills. Many of

these young women carry out their role as the public face of the organization with a maturity far beyond their years. The women I spoke to said they provide food supplies and medicine to the people in the areas controlled by the LTTE and are involved in all aspects of civic life, including mediating conflicts that arise between individuals or families. Thus their power in the community is more than that of an armed militant. They derive authority through multiple roles they occupy as helper and provider as well as enforcer and fighter. The LTTE recognizes its need to be the source of service and well-being for the population if it is going to parlay military dominance into long-term political power. Thus women fighters are compelled by their leadership to work to support the people and maintain goodwill. And "public affairs" allows the LTTE to promote its welfare and social activities among the people and also measure public sentiment and support. On their own, in the vast rugged land of the Wannu and through the scorching plains of the eastern lowland, these women travel on bicycles and motorbikes, carrying out their duties. They exude confidence in their own abilities and in the righteousness of their work on and off the battlefield.

"We are responsible for every aspect of the people's lives," says Thamilvili, "for their food, for their nutrition." She adds that if they fail to attend to even one person over whom they have been given responsibility, they get reprimanded by the leadership. This is a testament to the LTTE's efforts to continuously develop its influence in the areas it controls through the operation of everyday social institutions like clinics and training centers.

Another role women are called on for is "law enforcement." The LTTE has its own penal code, court system, and police force. Many former women fighters are now serving as LTTE police constables. They direct traffic on the roads in rebel-held areas, deal with neighborhood disturbances, and investigate crimes. They also respond to civil disputes, domestic violence and

abandonment. Again supplanting the role of religion, the LTTE penal code has a moral component. It criminalizes adultery and even "false promises" by men towards women. Former women fighters are also training in increasing numbers to become lawyers in the LTTE's Law College. Several judges in rebel-controlled Wanni are women. Placing women in such roles helps the LTTE weave itself into the normalization of society and post-war realities. LTTE women will be key to the group's transition from war to lasting peace. The rooting of women's involvement in the struggle in concepts of liberation set the stage for this significant role today.

### *The Woman Warrior and Society*

The key part of the women's experience in warfare and combat is the violence they perpetrate both as regular combatants and as suicide bombers. Like other combatants, LTTE women fighters root their role as killers in the bringing of justice to the oppressed. LTTE leaders say the brutality of the Sri Lankan state, certainly from the 1983 riots on, aided recruitment as girls and boys traumatized by the loss of family or friends to government violence would seek revenge. Certainly some joined out of economic need as Tamil communities grew more impoverished under the weight of destructive warfare and economic blockades. But unlike men, the women's military movement is rooted in something beyond "fighting for justice" and "avenging the Tamil dead." Women's participation is also rooted in rhetoric of emancipation and empowerment. By defining this aspect of the debate on women combatants, the LTTE positions itself as the progressive leadership structure for a future Tamil state.<sup>25</sup>

LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran sets the tone of the debate with his consistent assertions that women who fight with the LTTE are emancipated, empowered agents of their own destiny enabled by the LTTE. In an annual "hero's day" speech Prabhakaran proclaimed:

The ideal of women's liberation is the fervent child that had its genesis in the matrix of our national liberation movement. Its rise and progress is an incomparably unique chapter in history. For the awakening of the nation and the salvation of the women, the Tamil Eelam revolutionary woman has transformed herself into a tigress! Fierce and fiery, she has taken up arms to fight injustice.<sup>26</sup>

The rhetoric is part motivational technique, but the strenuous emphasis on violence as a means toward empowerment is complex. According to Adele Balasingham, “Women’s participation in armed struggle is for both national and social emancipation. Their participation itself constitutes a step towards their emancipation, a step toward their empowerment.”<sup>27</sup> Yet women in the LTTE are essentially soldiers obeying orders, a position that though instrumental to the cause is not inherently empowering. One hardly sees the male foot soldier as someone in control of his destiny. Empowerment through combat results from the substituting of one type of subjugation—the traditional one in a patriarchal system—with another, that of the soldier, obliged to live and die on the leader’s orders. Perhaps they are emancipating a people, but what of themselves? This question becomes more significant when analyzing the former women combatants, who are re-entering civilian roles.

In the northern and northeastern regions of Sri Lanka (perhaps in all of Sri Lanka) violence and killing with impunity have become part of the inescapable reality, a feature of the rarefied space of war-torn societies. According to Carolyn Nordstrom, in these situations violence is not something “simply formulated in terms of historical conditions of conflict played out along a conflict trajectory to affect the present. Violence is culturally constitutive. Its enactment forges, in fact forces, new constructs of identity, new socio-cultural relationships, new threats and injustices that reconfigure people’s life-worlds, new patterns of survival and resistance.”<sup>28</sup> The liberation of Tamil women and perhaps all Tamils by extension is a new socio-cultural construct forged by violence. These women walk through their worlds with modern

ambitions and non-traditional confidence because their worlds have been rent by violence. They uphold the view of empowerment as something hard won but do not admit or perhaps realize that it comes at the cost of thousands of lives and often their own brutalization and subjugation to forces and people beyond their control. The result is certainly a form of empowerment, but one that is wrought with complexities and problems.

LTTE women fighters and ex-fighters I have interviewed reinforce this. They believe that they are blazing a path not only toward their own emancipation but also that of all Tamil women. These women say that they are better off for having joined the LTTE. Former cadres like Girija, a stately 34-year-old, who now runs an orphanage, points out that she is the product of the LTTE's training. She said that in the past women like her did not assert themselves. But now she says: "I am out of my shell. I am capable of expressing my views. I have the ability and power to manage and be a leader." Even women like Kanchana (name changed), who was kidnapped and forced into the LTTE at age 12, says now that she developed courage and confidence after being part of a strict and disciplined environment.

The LTTE abducted Kanchana in 1995 shortly after her family fled Jaffna to avoid the advancing Sri Lankan troops.<sup>29</sup> She was taken to an LTTE women's camp shortly after her family relocated to a new town in the island's north. Kanchana says she pleaded to be allowed to leave the LTTE camp. She was told by the women in charge that she had nothing to return to, that the war had spread everywhere and that the best thing for her was to stay and fight with the rebels. For the first few days, she was kept under tight surveillance. The women would accompany her even to the bathroom. When she refused to undergo training, the women assaulted her, and these beatings left her partially deaf. Eventually she gave in. She managed to leave within a year and a half when a cousin convinced a local LTTE leader to release her. As an

example to others she had to undergo three months of punishment for wanting to leave.

According to several of the women, cadres allowed to leave without completing at least five years in the group have to undergo various punishments. Kanchana had to work in the kitchen cooking and cleaning, and serving other fighters during mealtimes.

Despite this ordeal, Kanchana (now 21) insists that joining the LTTE is beneficial for women. "I have lost my fear and gained self-confidence," she said. "The LTTE has helped me stand on my own feet." Unlike Kanchana, Darsa fought with the LTTE for 10 years, the last few as a district leader. "There's nothing we cannot do." Darsa told me, "We Tamil women can achieve anything. The LTTE has given [us] courage, inner strength, confidence, and helped us to grow." This inner strength and confidence, of course, is rooted in combat training, autonomy and responsibility. It is also bolstered by absolute certainty about their cause. The women are unwavering in their commitment to the fight for their leaders and their national liberation.

Their commitment – and the need to reconcile this commitment with the reality of their actions – results in skewed interpretations of violence. When asked about suicide bombings that target civilians, these women reject that the LTTE targets civilians. Killing civilians would not be keeping with the pure, sacrificial ideals of their struggle. "We only perform self-sacrifice on military targets. We have not killed civilians, and have no intention of killing any Sinhalese civilians," Thamilvili said. She added that the LTTE may be being blamed for bombings that some other group may have carried out. "We are very clear in our thoughts and deeds." Another fighter Kayarvali, insisted in the same vein: "We don't kill civilians, only police and military personnel."<sup>30</sup> Thamilvili sees suicide bombing—"self sacrifice" as she calls it—as a necessary and efficient tactic. "If we have a target and use conventional operations we normally lose 15 or 16 fighters. With self sacrifice we can achieve the same objective and only one dies."



Kayarvali echoed this, saying, “In attacks on camps we need a lot of soldiers to go in, but it’s better to have one person go in and kill a lot of them.”

Beyond effective tactics lies the simmering debate on whether and how these women have progressed as individuals.

While Adele Balasingham views women’s active participation in the war and violence as a natural progression in the Tamils’ struggle for justice in Sri Lanka, others dispute her description of empowerment. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the former UN Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women and current head of Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission, rejects the LTTE's view of violence as a path to emancipation and empowerment. According to her, the coercion of women into the roles of fighters only leads to a militarization of society in which women are pawns in some else’s plan. Coomaraswamy also argues that inducting women into the battlefield destroys “important human rights values of due process, non-violent resolution of disputes and the celebration of humane values of compassion and tolerance.”<sup>31</sup> These societal values cannot easily be reconstructed. According to Coomaraswamy, the emancipation of LTTE women, whose greatest accomplishment is martyrdom, comes through celebrating death rather than life. “This preoccupation with death is a major transformation from the earlier life paradigm of woman whose *shakthi* (power) was meant to prolong and nurture life. Woman as nurturer is a concept which is completely lacking in the LTTE ideology, a concept which is the basis for solidarity among women’s movements throughout the world.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, violence and suicide define women’s empowerment through the LTTE far more than life giving and nurturing. While the LTTE can be applauded for removing stringent social constraints on women, the new roles too include vast structures of control over sexuality, freedom and careers. Neloufer de Mel, a leading Sri Lankan feminist scholar, describes the role of Tamil women and girls as both

traditional (in the sense of sacrificing for the family or community) and radical or liberating (in the sense of assuming a level of control that recasts societal norms). She says that sacrifice in the form of suicide bombing follows an already gendered pattern in that women have traditionally been called upon to make sacrifices for the family and community.<sup>33</sup> According to de Mel, “These acts of victimhood transformed into agentive moments mark their protagonists as those who have broken rank, dispensed with or reinvented tradition and redrawn their roles in society.” She sees these women as operating in an environment in which normalcy has been suspended. For example, few women fighters have traveled outside of rebel territory, where every aspect of life is somehow tied to the LTTE. Even those who have left the LTTE live largely in areas that are controlled by the group. Vast populations in these areas have been traumatized physically and mentally by two decades of fighting and deprivation. Though a semblance of normalcy is growing under the ceasefire, the institutions that create a sense of nationhood like the police, courts and educational institutions are exclusively based on the Tamil struggle as defined and conducted by the LTTE.

De Mel says this suspension of normality arises out of complete obedience to the will of the leadership on whose behalf the fighters struggle. The Tamil leadership with exclusive control over the process of rebuilding these areas is the LTTE leadership. The LTTE has consolidated its control, not merely by fighting the Sri Lankan government apparatus, but also by annihilating large numbers of members of rival Tamil groups.<sup>34</sup> Given this hierarchical structure that demands loyalty above all, whether women’s status will change dramatically in an enduring peace remains an open question. If the women are acting with agency, then how radically have they been able to transform their societies to ensure greater social justice and gender equality and more importantly are they able to carry these improvements with them into non-combatant roles?

Nationalist violence, de Mel says, “draws on the most noble human qualities such as sacrifice for the collective good,” and simultaneously “expropriates agency.” Violence then “acts to silence both the individual and a majority, and speak on their behalf.”<sup>35</sup>

This tight control is exactly what makes the LTTE a success story. The rebel group is neither the majority nor the individual, but the architect of the violence and the terms of the struggle. The question of whether LTTE women are truly empowered or not has little bearing on how their contribution to the violent resistance bolsters the LTTE's role as the voice of the Tamil people. The women of the LTTE, including those who left the movement, accept their place in the LTTE power structure and by doing so further increase the LTTE's legitimacy. Thamilvili, for example, suggested that there were no women in the LTTE senior leadership mainly because men pioneered the movement. With their unique authority in Tamil society as a whole and their acceptance of the organization's mission and methods, women fighters enable the LTTE to set the social agenda of the future Tamil polity.

The limits to women's empowerment and emancipation are shaped by this LTTE agenda. In their day-to-day lives and intimate dealings, the nationalist ideals of the LTTE have replaced these women's religious and family traditions. The nation of Eelam is the religion, the leadership is the family to which loyalty is owed and from which permission must be sought for most actions. Had this structure been exclusively male, it would have had more difficulty in spreading effectively through society. The LTTE and the new women's roles defined within LTTE structures, now establish tradition for the areas under their control. So although the women assert their new levels of freedom, they also are pulled back towards tradition that is negotiated for them through the LTTE leadership. Most assert that this is an overall improvement of their lot. According to Girija "The whole concept of a Tamil woman's life used to be caring for her

husband and children, and cooking. That is gone now. I work, my husband works." While reluctant to share details of her five years with the LTTE, she insists the skills and confidence she gained enable her to live a full life. "The movement has created job opportunities and paved the way for women to enter professional life. We have no fear now. Women will not go back. Society is moving forward."

### *What Lies Ahead?*

But the move forward is cluttered with traditions and elements of Tamil culture that bind these women to the LTTE. According to Darsa, traditions are important and LTTE women "still follow custom and tradition." With their years of battle experience and their self-confidence, most of the ex-cadres I met viewed themselves as empowered agents of their own destiny. Most of them—even those with serious injuries like amputations or partial paralysis—are married with at least one child. Their husbands are often former or active LTTE cadres. In significant ways, these women show signs of returning to old societal norms for Tamil women. They wear either *shalwar* (long blouse with long loose pants) or *sari*. Some stay at home to care for their children. When asked to explain their shift from battle fatigues and pants to traditional garb, these women insist that they are expressing Tamil solidarity by observing their cultural norms. Some reveal a yearning for traditional motherhood and marriage. Darsa and Nila, who are both married to ex-cadres, said they regretted not getting married earlier in their lives because they would then not be as old as they will be now when their children reach adulthood. "I would have been quite young when my child grows up, if I had married young, but we didn't think of such things then," Nila explained. She also said that she now had to convince her husband to let her work. She had to impress on her husband, a laborer, that her work was important for their family and not a

threat to his status. "I told him I would continue to treat him with love and respect," she said. Many of these women negotiate ways to remain active in broader society and independent. Nila said that she traveled outside of her home several times to attend workshops of her women's development organization. But women's "empowerment" as seen through ex-combatants is elastic and constantly evolving in terms of its cultural and personal implications.

It has long been noted that women allowed into new spheres during war or other strife are expected to return to their traditional roles when the crisis passes. Neloufer de Mel says that Tamil women fighters too will be pulled back into more normal lives, though they will retain a difference that society will have to contend with. "Patriarchy still puts in place strictures that will pull these women back into the domestic sphere once the struggles are over, but most women never quite go back to square one. It is in this gap between the point from which they started and the point to which they return that the transformation of women's lives and its processes are signified. It is also in this gap that women's movements can mark their achievements and assess how far they could have pushed to re-imagine the nation and when, and where, they failed to do so."<sup>36</sup>

Women in the north and northeast who were not combatants also had to fend for themselves during the war and have also gained self-confidence and broken with tradition. Many civilian women have lost husbands and other male family members to the war, often during government aerial bombings or to the crossfire between the LTTE and Sri Lankan government troops. Many Tamil men have "disappeared" after being rounded up by government troops, the LTTE, or other Tamil militant groups that have fought with both sides. Some of these women are the beneficiaries of assistance through programs set up by various women's development organizations. Many have stepped into more public roles, often to facilitate their families'

survival. Their new freedom and independence comes through civilian channels rather than through participation in violence. Saila, an attractive 29-year-old widow in Jaffna told me that the Sri Lankan Navy shot and killed her husband in 1996. She has one child in school. In a brilliant yellow sari with a cluster of small jasmines pinned neatly in her hair, she described living with the stigma of widowhood for some time after her husband's death. Now she works for a development organization helping other women like her. "Being independent," she says, "means I am confident of speaking in public and because of that I can also help other women in similar circumstances." After leaving her home to work and support her child, Saila started wearing flowers in her hair again, a taboo for widows in her community and a clear sign of her independence. She is not afraid to speak out publicly against such cultural restrictions.

In some ways these non-combatant women may have an easier transition to normality than the ex-fighters. While the former women fighter Girija says "society looks on us with tremendous respect," the reality below that surface respect can be less clear. Mrs. Pathmanathan said former fighters who come to work for her as seamstresses and clerks try very hard to hide their LTTE linkages because they fear they will not be able to get married. Civilians, she says, may hide any disdain they feel under a veneer of respect because they fear the LTTE. Nila explained that after she returned from serving with the LTTE she was treated differently by her neighbors and friends. "After I returned home people treated me with honor and respect. Often they did not quite know how to treat me," she said. "I felt separate. They treated me like I was special. I asked myself why they didn't treat me like an ordinary person." Special but separate, perhaps respected out of obligation, perhaps resented. Like veterans of many wars, these women combatants will likely find that peacetime society is not quite sure how to handle them. Nila

added that she felt driven to usurp her parents' authority. After being in the LTTE, she said, "I felt I had to take charge of my siblings to discipline them."

Some of the more negative aspects of these women's reintegration into society involve having to hide their past from the Sri Lankan authorities if they live in government-controlled areas. Mrs. Pathmanathan recounted how former women fighters were sometimes blackmailed by their neighbors or simply revealed to the authorities. She narrated the story of one such woman in government-controlled Jaffna city, who claimed she was blackmailed by a male relative who demanded she have sex with him to avoid being informed on. Mrs. Pathmanathan said this and other stories discouraged many women combatants from leaving the protective authority of the LTTE. One other reason she cited was the ceding of power. "When these women return to society they have to give up their power and independence, and they also have to revert to more feminine roles like looking for a husband, all the while living in fear of being betrayed." Former fighters may also have difficulty returning to regular civilian life for the conventional psychological reasons faced by most combatants around the world. While their lives with the LTTE are not easy, women fighters share a sense of camaraderie and security within the group. In their public interactions with each other they are respectful, but often they interact with each other, cook together in their hostels and overall spend long periods of time with each other. The LTTE provides like a family, regulates like a family, and enforces like a family, while the fighters may see their actual families only a few times a year. Many say they feel distant from their families when they visit. Tamilvili described how whenever she goes home her grandmother applies sandalwood paste on her forehead (a sign that she is a follower of Hinduism and a devotee of the Hindu God Shiva). Tamilvili said, however, that she would wipe off the paste as soon as she leaves home to return to her compound.

While the women are negotiating the current “normality” created by the ceasefire, they are doing so as women who have fought, killed and are trained to return to the battlefield if called. They consider themselves the agents of their own destiny. For the LTTE, this change in the women is crucial. This is also where the women’s usefulness is most apparent. For a group that has undergone the most dramatic of transformations, the women are poised to take the rest of society with them toward the changes that are being prescribed by the LTTE.

Twenty years of war has had a brutalizing effect on Sri Lankan society. Young men and women in the Sri Lankan government forces and the LTTE, and non-combatants throughout the country affected by the war have had their lives shaped by extremely vicious combat and terrorism. Young LTTE women exist within a violent group, which acts as leader, protector, and caretaker. Though noble nationalist goals and empowerment are the most cited motivations for combat, vengeance and a desire for personal justice probably play more of a role on the battlefield. These women talked to me about the violence they committed as revenge for the violence they, their families and their society endured at the hands of the Sri Lankan state. Women like Darsa and Kayarvali told of the anger they felt when confronted by soldiers, representatives of what they see as the oppressive majority Sinhalese government. This anger, they said, helped them destroy as many enemy combatants as possible whenever they could. Often initially motivated to join because of the deaths of family or friends, their experience with the death of fellow fighters removed all their fears and made them eager to kill as many soldiers as possible.

Describing her early combat, Darsa says that fear gave way to focus: "When we remember the army atrocities this fear goes away and our main intention is to kill the enemy." Many of the women told of moments of horror and trauma in the face of mass Sri Lankan



government air bombings that killed dozens of people, and then led them join the fight.

Kayarvali watched her friend die in a government air raid. This incident convinced her that she had to be proactive and do her part for her [Tamil] nation. "I thought 'this can happen to me'," she said. "I knew I had to do my duty by the nation and fight rather than wait to be killed". Darsa also described how she continued fighting during her first attack on a military camp after seeing a comrade's limbs blown off in an artillery barrage. "I was fully involved in the battle. We had the army boxed in and surrounded. One mortar barrage blew off my friend's limbs as I watched. We kept on fighting and killed many soldiers."

These women are "survivors" in every sense of the word, like many combat veterans they likely suffer from post traumatic stress disorder. Indications of the impact of conflict came from many women's comments. For example, Darsa said that she and others like her never really considered what their future would be, "We had no wish to live, we wanted to fight," she said. The young women are unanimous in their belief that their active involvement in violence has furthered the Tamils' cause. Only Kanchana, the former abductee, was even vaguely critical of the high levels of violence used by the LTTE both in their battle with the state, against Tamil opponents and sometimes on the fighters themselves. In accepting and condoning violence, most of the women engage in complex justification strategies. Those who served for long periods were often dispassionate about the violence they perpetrated. Kayarvali, who is an 11-year veteran, when asked about it, talked about the Sri Lankan soldiers she had dispatched: "I have killed so many... I have lost count of those that I killed," she said.

*Conclusion: The well-rounded insurgency.*

Women have enhanced the LTTE's successes in ways yet unseen. At the most obvious level, incorporating women contributed to the group's startling military success in the battlefield and through unconventional attacks and terrorist strikes. But the women of the LTTE are about more than just war and terror; they make the LTTE's struggle a well-rounded one. Women help bolster the LTTE claim to be the savior and nurturer of the Tamil population. And in the intellectual debate about women's role in Tamil society, female fighters make the LTTE central to the formation of ideas about future Sri Lankan Tamil society. The extensive use of women provides the LTTE broad-based legitimacy and leaves it better positioned to take over political power. Women in social and political roles enhance this legitimacy in ways that an exclusively male cadre could not.

Women in other conflicts are taking increasingly complex roles. Groups like the Chechen separatists and Hamas have started deploying female suicide bombers. Whether any of these will reap the benefits seen by the LTTE through the use of women fighters is difficult to predict. But if they do, the governments confronting these groups will have a difficult road. Like the Sri Lankan state they will have a difficult time combating such multi-layered and sophisticated opponents who can draw on deep support in their populations. They will also find a gender-sensitive rebel group more difficult to de-legitimize. The women lend credibility to violence by portraying and vocalizing it as regenerative and necessary for the survival of a community and as a liberating and modernizing influence.

In many ways the LTTE's success in inspiring and indoctrinating Tamil women resulted from the draconian policies of successive Sri Lankan governments. The LTTE made itself the indispensable bulwark between Tamil civilians and an increasingly discriminatory and violent

state. As the conflict proved intractable, successive Sri Lankan governments made efforts to redress Tamil concerns. But such efforts, always difficult once violence takes hold, have been hampered by the politicking of the rival Sinhalese-dominated political parties. Extremist voices in Sinhalese politics remain ever ready to call for continued warfare to defend the motherland. The LTTE steadily points to all of this as Sinhalese insincerity about remedying Tamil inequality.

But the women in the LTTE also help mask the group's own brutalization of the Tamil population. During the ceasefire the LTTE murdered more than 100 Tamil political rivals and abducted or forcefully recruited more than 3500 children.<sup>37</sup> The women are a key part of deflecting criticism from the group as it continues such gross human rights violations. They help focus domestic and international attention on de-mining and reconstruction projects, on "transit centers" intended to reintegrate former child soldiers, and by their very presence imply that the LTTE is progressive and egalitarian. The women of the LTTE challenge observers to contradict rebel claims to be freedom fighters and the only potential source of justice for Tamil citizens. They easily ignore facts about child recruitment and suicide bombings that target civilians. As the LTTE prepares for peace, it expects to make these ugly "necessities of wartime" forgotten things of the past. As women fill all roles in the LTTE, they have doubtless been part of the mechanism to silence critics.

Similar dichotomies exist around women fighters' roles. On the one hand the women are empowered: they have more freedom, more independence than an average Tamil woman. Yet their empowerment is forged through violence and subject to the dictates of a male-dominated hierarchy. The women inhabit a world where they are fighters, political and social activists, and providers, but also revert to traditional dress at home and articulate a desire to return to more

traditional civilian roles. Having gained respect, if not acceptance, as fighters, though, may not guarantee their success in these domestic roles. Externally, society's respect may be a product of fear that fades as life returns to normal. Internally, like other ex-combatants, these women have been agents of violence and may not be emotionally prepared for normal life.

Questions of LTTE women's empowerment and about their future reintegration will be important as Sri Lanka tries to rebuild a functioning and peaceful society. But the value added to the LTTE from having women participate in its nationalist struggle is the main component of the story. As they transition away from combat these women remain tied to the LTTE. They are an unofficial standing cadre and in many cases they work in "civilian" jobs arranged by the LTTE. They also provide confirmation that the benefits to an insurgent group of forcible recruitment and the use of child soldiers—in other words the brutalization of young women—carry military gains that outweigh any perceived costs. The primary focus of Sri Lankan society should now be peace, followed by disarmament and reconciliation. The logic of war, once entrenched, is difficult to escape. The reintegration of women fighters into peacetime society and the shape their reintegration takes will be a key indicator of Sri Lanka's shift to the logic of peace.

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<sup>1</sup>Human Rights Watch. 'Sri Lanka', *World Report 2002*, at <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k2/asia10.html> and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 'Summary of UNHCR's Current Position on Repatriation of Refugees to Sri Lanka, *News: Current News*, May 21 2001, at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/may2002/curr034.htm>

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2002*, Department of State Publication 11038 (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of State), p. 12. Also, Council on Foreign Relations Terrorism Answers Fact Sheet, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," available online at <http://www.terrorismanswers.com/groups/tamiltigers.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Estimated figure by several groups for women fighters: Dissanayake, Tharuka, 'Sari, Skirt or Combat Gear: Women Defy Stereotypes as Sri Lanka Embraces Peace', Panos London Online at <http://www.panos.org.co.uk/newsfeatures/featureprintable.asp?id=1095>, also at South Asia Terrorism Portal, 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)' 2001 at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/terroristoutfits/Ltte.htm>.

<sup>4</sup>Ann, Adele, *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers* (Jaffna: Thasan Printers, 1993), p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Balasingham, Adele, *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance* (England: Fairmax Publishing Ltd., 2001), p.72 and p.269.

<sup>6</sup> Balasingham, Adele, *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance* (England: Fairmax Publishing Ltd., 2001), p.277.

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- <sup>7</sup> Ann, Adele, *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers* (Jaffna: Thasan Printers, 1993), p.33.
- <sup>8</sup> Estimates of deaths during the 1983 riots range from under 500 to about 2000. See Jagath P. Seneratne, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1977-- 1990* (Amsterdam: VU University Press), p.46.
- <sup>9</sup> By 1983 when the LTTE staged this attack, several insurgent groups were operating in Tamil areas of Sri Lanka.
- <sup>10</sup> Tambiah, Stanley J., *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (California: University of California Press, 1996), p.96-100.
- <sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Background Note: Sri Lanka* Online at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5249.htm>
- <sup>12</sup> De Silva, K.M., *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., 1998), pp.11-12; Wilson, A.J., *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., 2000), pp.52-3
- <sup>13</sup> Narayan Swamy, M.R., *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1994), pp.21-46.
- <sup>14</sup> Narayan Swamy, M.R., *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1994), p.31.
- <sup>15</sup> Gunaratna, R. *LTTE Child Combatants* at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/sinhala/child.htm> and Gunaratna, R. *War and Peace in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Institute of Fundamental Studies, 1987) pp.15-16.
- <sup>16</sup> Balasingham, Adele, *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance* (England: Fairmax Publishing Ltd., 2001), pp.136-9.
- <sup>17</sup> Ann, Adele, *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers* (Jaffna: Thasan Printers, 1993), p.12.
- <sup>18</sup> Narayan Swamy, M.R., *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1994), p.59.
- <sup>19</sup> Sri Lanka Army. De-listing is heading for success, 6 December, 2004, at [http://www.army.lk/News\\_Reports/2004/December/061.htm](http://www.army.lk/News_Reports/2004/December/061.htm) Agence France Presse. Sri Lanka Raises Army Pay by 55 Percent to Attract Recruits, 14 August, 2003, at [http://www.publicinternationallaw.org/docs/PNW/Sri\\_Lanka](http://www.publicinternationallaw.org/docs/PNW/Sri_Lanka). There is no detailed information available on LTTE desertions.
- <sup>20</sup> Khila allowed the writer to see her necklace, but refused to have it photographed, during an interview on Jan. 7, 2004.
- <sup>21</sup> Calculations based on Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics, 'Statistical Abstract 2002', Chapter 2, available online at <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/abstract/index.html>.
- <sup>22</sup> Balasingham, Adele, *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance* (England: Fairmax Publishing Ltd., 2001), p.335.
- <sup>23</sup> Trawick, Margaret, 'Reasons for Violence: A Preliminary Ethnographic Account of the LTTE', in Siri Gamage and I.B. Watson (ed.), *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Pearl of the East or the Island of Tears*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1999, p.160.
- <sup>24</sup> Report of the Secretary General of the United Nation, 'Children and Armed Conflict', (A/58/546-S/2003/1053), at <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/269c3e3b5d3abf4b85256ddc006d829d?OpenDocument>.
- <sup>25</sup> Since the ceasefire, the LTTE has stepped down from its demand for a separate state to one of autonomy.
- <sup>26</sup> Prabhakaran, Vellupillai, speech given on March 8 1996 to mark International Women's Day available online at <http://www.eelamweb.com/leader/messages/women/1996/>.
- <sup>27</sup> Balasingham, Adele, *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance* (England: Fairmax Publishing Ltd., 2001), p.291.
- <sup>28</sup> Nordstrom, Carolyn, *A Different Kind of War Story* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) p. 141.
- <sup>29</sup> Troops took over Jaffna from LTTE: Balasingham, Adele, *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance* (England: Fairmax Publishing Ltd., 2001), p.291.
- <sup>30</sup> The usual LTTE policy is not to claim responsibility for terrorist attacks.
- <sup>31</sup> Coomaraswamy, Radhika. 'Tiger Women and the Question of Women's Emancipation', *Pravada*, vol. 4, no. 9 (10 August 1996), p.8.
- <sup>32</sup> Coomaraswamy, Radhika. 'Tiger Women and the Question of Women's Emancipation', *Pravada*, vol. 4, no. 9 (10 August 1996), p.10.
- <sup>33</sup> De Mel, Neloufer, *Women & the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, Inc., 2001) p.225.
- <sup>34</sup> Narayan Swamy, M.R., *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas* (Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1994), pp.81-91; Wilson, A.J., *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

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<sup>35</sup> De Mel, Neloufer, '*Women & the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka*', (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, Inc., 2001) p.205.

<sup>36</sup> De Mel, Neloufer, '*Women & the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka*', (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, Inc., 2001) p.19.

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch. 'New Killings Threaten Ceasefire' July 24, 2004, at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/07/27/slanka9153.htm> Human Rights Watch. 'Living in Fear Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka', November 2004, at [http://hrw.org/reports/2004/srilanka1104/5.htm#\\_Toc86826243](http://hrw.org/reports/2004/srilanka1104/5.htm#_Toc86826243).