Chapter I
Nationalism, Gender and the Politics of Representation

"I have no country but self." - Jean Arasanayagam, Reddened Water Flows Clear

"As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world." - Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas 113.

Nationalism in Sri Lanka

Nationalism in post-independent Sri Lanka mainly rested on ethnicity rather than on a notion of superiority of one’s own country over another and is called “ethnonationalism” by Stanley Tambiah (1996, 124). This was probably due to the fact that Sri Lanka is an island nation and has very clear national boundaries and other nations have not posed as a direct threat to its sovereignty after the British colonizers left. The earliest phase of nationalism in the modern period was anticolonial in nature, being mainly against the British colonizers. However the case of nationalism in Sri Lanka is rather unique for the fact that it gained momentum only after independence from the British in 1948. D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke’s view is that independence was granted “mainly as a consequence of the freedom struggle in India” (139). Jayadeva Uyangoda too points out that although the nation state is by definition violent, “the initial phase of the formation of the nation state of Sri Lanka in the twentieth century was essentially a non-violent one” (173-174). However this does not mean that there was no anti British movement at all. M. Roberts is of the view that, “Though inspired in substantial ways by the political developments in British India, these Ceylonese nationalists were also hoisting the British with their own petard: arguments drawn from British constitutional history and enlightenment philosophy” (Roberts 2005b, 2).

Anderson calls this type of nationalism, “anticolonial nationalism” (153)

This unusual upsurge during post independence was due to the way in which politicians used nationalist jargon to attain their votes. For example the Sinhala only policy of 1956.
Nationalism is probably the strongest factor in the political spectrum, much more than religion, class, caste or any other such aspect but it is usually coupled with race and religion to make its case stronger as was the case within Sinhalese nationalism. As Aijaz Ahmed pointed out in his work *In Theory- Classes, Nations, Literatures*, nationalism is a complicated issue because it is "... no unitary thing, and so many different kinds of ideologies and political practices are involved" (7).

Sri Lanka has undergone various phases of Tamil and Sinhalese nationalism which ultimately reached the devastating war that lasted for almost thirty years which finally came to an end on 18 May 2009. One of the earliest and prominent figures of the Sinhalese nationalist movement that comes to mind is Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) who began a process which Ranjini Obeysekere calls "identity affirmation", which is a "conscious process whereby an ethnic group is impelled to display its unity through visible symbols and overt symbolic actions..." (Silva 97). In the late 19th century the *Mahavamsa* version of history was used consciously as it buttressed the idea of Ceylon being the place blessed by the Buddha and the Sinhalese race as those chosen to uphold its tenets.

The emphasis on Sinhala Buddhism by the Sinhala nationalists was counteracted by an emergent Tamil identity. The Tamils, who were also victims of British cultural colonization, felt that it was important to assert a distinct Tamil uniqueness. Arumugam Navalar (1822-79) and other nationalists and scholars used their literary output in a way similar to the Sinhala nationalists. This propaganda agitated against the alien religious and cultural practices of the colonizers also assisted the rise of a greater divide between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

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12 Yuval-Davis has pointed out how there is an "inherent connection that exists between nationalism and racism. It constructs minorities into assumed deviants from the 'normal', and excludes them from important power resources" (*Gender and Nation* 11).

13 The *Mahavamsa* was written in the 5th century B.C by a Buddhist monk called Mahanama Thera. This chronicle is considered the most important book to study the history of Ceylon. Some historians feel that the racist ideas prevalent in today's society are because of this chronicle. Written as a veera kavyya which belongs to the *Maha Kavya* genre (literally a heroic epic poem), its hero is King Dutugemunu and its main focus is on how he defeated King Elara: a Tamil King from India.
In the first decades of the 20th century, English educated Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims came together to agitate for territorial representation to replace the communal system which was maintained by the British (Wilson 2). According to Michael Roberts, in the pre-independence era one can see a strand of “anti colonial Ceylonese nationalism” which had a significant input from the Burgher community as well (2005b, 2). However, as Roberts points out:

More or less at the same time, anti colonial reactions also emerged in the nineteenth century among Tamil and Sinhala speakers who responded to the proselytization work of Christians by developing counter movements of Hindu rejuvenation and Buddhist revivalism respectively. The Sinhalese response, however, had many strands: the work of religious revivalists interlaced with those Sinhala nationalists who focused on the decline in status of their language and the overwhelming diffusion of westernized lifeways to the detriment of their sirit virit (customs) and gunadharna (virtue, ethics). (2005b, 2)

Roberts points out five strands of political ideology running in parallel and interlacing at points in the period 1840s-1940s; that of Ceylonese nationalism, Sinhala nationalism, Buddhist revivalism, Hindu revivalism and Sri Lankan Tamil communitarianism. The Sri Lankan Tamil communitarianism did not subscribe to the concept of “nation” but had a clear notion of their group identity in differentiation from the others. I agree with Roberts that, “the story of the latter half of the twentieth century is a tragic one” (2005b, 3) as it saw the upsurge of Sinhala linguistic nationalism in the 1950s, the decline of Ceylonese nationalism (multi-ethnic Sri Lankan) and the establishment of militant Tamil nationalism.

Ram Manikkalingam is of the view that Tamil nationalism “began as a reaction to Sinhala nationalism” (3-4) and reached, with the rise of the LTTE in the late 1970’s, what he calls “Tamil ultra-nationalism.” The emergence of this kind of nationalism can be traced to the dilemmas of a nationalist movement. A nationalist movement usually takes
recourse to a dual approach to oppose a dominant power. It invokes the violation of
democratic norms, such as individual liberties and freedoms, in the status-quo, while it
seeks to mobilize a community on the basis of ties of ethnic solidarity. While these ties
are often strong enough to maintain unity in the face of struggle, they can weaken as
differences of opinion evolve into rival political programmes and strategies. At this point
a tension arises between internal democracy and the need for unity in the struggle for
collective emancipation. This tension may be resolved in different ways, ranging from
democratic dialogue and non-violent confrontation to violent coercion (Manikkalingam
3-4). The brand of nationalism which the LTTE stood for represented “an extreme
aberration of the emphasis on ethno-national solidarity at the expense of democracy”
(Manikkalingam 4) in which individual agency and freedom was compromised and at
times forbidden in the name of ethno-national solidarity.

The divide between the Tamils and the Sinhalese which took place to the furthest
extent in mid twentieth century, is given voice to by the character Sita, in Ernest
Macintyre’s play “Rasanayagam’s Last Riot,” when she says to her husband Philip, “I
have never been conscious of being a Tamil” while she is waiting to migrate to
Melbourne after the 1983 riots (166). The riots suddenly make her feel that she is from a
certain ethnic group, an identity which she never gave prominence to before. Such ill
effects of ethno-national solidarity was felt by many writers, one of them being Regi
Siriwardena who was a journalist, film critic and playwright. In retrospect, on his
eightieth birthday, Siriwardena writes in his poem, “Birthday Apology and Apologia,”
“I’m glad, too, I never caught, as my late brother did, the Sinhala nationalist flu”
(Canagaratna 703).

Nationalism and Gender

“Everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as he or she ‘has’ a gender”

- Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities 14.
When a group operates on a framework in which “political identity is directly derived from one’s ethnic identity then class, caste, gender, individual aspirations and broader social issues are relegated to the periphery” (Manikkalingam 4). Therefore the question of women’s emancipation does not get space within a national movement although many such movements have given women an opportunity to break away from their traditional roles assigned to them. Women cadres such as Vanathy, feels that national freedom implies freedom from gender oppression. Vanathy’s poem "Come forward" reinforces this perception and the need for a space for women to organize independently of the national struggle is not recognized.

We all long for,

The freedom of our land,

The day we achieve it, then,

Women's oppression

Will be buried in its grave. (qtd. in Sornarajah Part II)

Sumathy Sivamohan makes a mockery of this concept when she writes in Like Myth and Mother:

women,

in the name of this soil, this land,

we call out to you!!!

... where is your daughter

she wants freedom!

we go on with our struggle

in war we survive!
woman bearing arms!

come hither!
give us this day

our daily body!! (106-108)

Freedom for the woman is achieved only by offering her body to the movement in an ironic circumstance in which she will not be alive to enjoy the freedom she has given her life for. The 1991 manifesto of the Women's Front of the LTTE reads, “Secure the right of self-determination of the people of Tamil and establish an independent democratic state of Tamil” after which the specific demands of women are listed (De Mel 2001, 208) which makes it clear that they believe that women will only be free once a new state is established and also how the woman question is secondary to the national one.

Prabhakaran made the following statement on the occasion of International Women's Day in 1992. Remarking on the achievements of the LTTE women, he addresses Tamil nationalism as an essentially liberatory process when he states that it” ...marks a revolutionary turning point in the history of the liberation struggle of the women of Tamil Eelam, Women can succeed on the ideal path towards their (own) liberation only through joining forces with a liberation movement” (qtd. in Somarathe Part II). Here women’s freedom and emancipation are being posited as bait, so that more women will join the movement. Also in this way modernity is being subversively appropriated to suit the nationalist project. During the freedom struggle and post independence, the west was considered superior in the material world but not the spiritual. So the aim of nationalists, who wanted to be progressive and modern, was to keep the spiritual the way it was and to imitate the west in the material domain. “The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and the women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what changes in the external conditions of life for women, they must not, in other words, become essentially westernized” (Chatterjee 243).
In the first phase of the nationalist struggle, the LTTE did not raise the woman question at all. Women were unwilling or seemed to have been unable to raise the question of gender equality as they may have been accused of creating divisions in the Eelam nationalist cause. In an interview which Rajasingham-Senanayake had in 1987 with Dhanu (who launched the suicide attack which killed Rajiv Gandhi) and another senior woman cadre, at the LTTE headquarters in Jaffna, they both had expressed that the woman problem would “detract from focusing on the cause and hence could be sorted out later” (Manchanda 114). However, it is ironic that Dhanu’s ‘woman problem’ which is her alleged rape by the IPKF, was used by the nationalists to justify her suicide attack.14

Other answers to the question of emancipation have come in the form of “faith in their leader’s ability to solve all problems” (Hoole et al. 328).

Nationalism which goes hand in hand with conservatism and traditionalism, has on no account been very friendly towards feminism. This is due to the fact that nationalists feel that women should be the carriers of their culture while the aim of feminists has been to break away from these very traditional roles cut out for women. However this does not mean that nationalism and feminism cannot coexist together. They find ways to accommodate each other in various ways. “When a religious philosophy or discourse does not have a prominent female icon, as in the case of Buddhism, existing icons are modified to suit the requirements of the nationalists- as in the case of the Mother Buddha- or goddesses are borrowed and reinvented from Hinduism to fill this absence, for example, the Sri Lankan modifications to the Kali and Pattini images” (Silva 230). Despite nationalist agendas involving women and ignoring the woman question, it is important to note that, as Kumari Jayawardene points out, that loyalty to one’s national liberation movement does not necessarily mean that women do not fight within it for the improvement and transformation of the position of women in their societies (Yuval-Davis 1997, 118).

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14 The IPKF came to Sri Lanka in 1989, following the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987 between President J. R. Jayawardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to disarm the militant movements and to ensure the transition of the north and east from war to peace but it came to naught when events lead to a war between the LTTE and the IPKF.
One of the connections between women and nationalism is that women are supposed to contribute to the creation of an ethnic or national identity by keeping a check on their sexuality and producing children of the same ethnicity. Coomaraswamy says in *A Question of Honour* that "Good women that protect the honour of their community by curtailing their sexual desires for marriage within the community ensure that generations of the community are of pure ethnic origin." Women are also the first to introduce children to their ethnic identity while embodying it herself externally through her dress code etc. However when women step out of their gendered roles to fight with arms for a nationalist agenda, it makes nationalists uncomfortable and they attempt to make up for this loss in various other ways. In fact Partha Chatterjee points out how in Bengal, nationalism does not ignore the woman's question but solves it "in complete accordance with its preferred goals" (237). Such a case is also visible within the LTTE organization where nationalists feel that they have liberated the woman and use it to valorize their cause. The 1993 International women's day message by Prabhakaran reads as, "The ideology of women's liberation is a child born out of the womb of our liberation struggle." Both Cynthia Enloe and Malathi de Alwis have commented on the way in which "idealization of feminized sacrifice" becomes exaggerated in times of national crisis (De Alwis 1998, 254).

Gender is not a fixed notion although it is perceived to be so. "Different patterns of gender relations are found in different spatial locations" (Walby 7). It changes or is made to change according to the circumstances. Similarly even 'nations are not an eternal and universal phenomenon' (Yuval-Davis 15) and the "natural" status which gender roles take on is also present within nationalism. Anderson pointed out that people feel their membership in the nation is 'natural' and it allows the nation like the family to ask for the ultimate sacrifice of killing or being killed (7). A. J. Wilson agrees with Anthony D. Smith that "the sense of national identity is often powerful enough to engender a spirit of self sacrifice on behalf of the nation in many, if not most, of its citizens. This is especially true of crises and war time. Here one can witness the degree to which most citizens are prepared to endure hardships and make personal sacrifices, 'in defense of the

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15 Anderson, Hobsbawm and Gellner subscribe to this view as well.
nation' to the point of laying down their lives willingly, often in vast numbers” (Wilson 163).

“The discourse on gender and that on nation tend to intersect and to be constructed by each other” (Yuval-Davis 4) just as much as biology and culture are interdependent and cannot be taken as two wholly separate entities. The dichotomy between culture and biology (gender and sex) was initially constructed to deconstruct gender roles which have been seen as part of one’s inherent nature (Goldstein 2). National or ethnic identity sometimes seem to compete with gender identity, as when women feel pressure to subordinate their feminism to a national liberation struggle or ethnic rights movement (Goldstein 227) as in the figure of the woman militant. Julie Wheelwright says that “rebellion against the constraints of being a woman does not translate into a broader social analysis of oppression when women join institutions such as the army because they are rather allying themselves with the most hierarchical and authoritative ideology of the day, embracing an extreme form of masculinity” (11). Coomaraswamy sees it as a “complete eradication of femininity” (1996, 10) and cautions against this because “women have never fought for the complete annihilation of the feminine identity, only for its recognition and empowerment” (1996, 10). A demand for androgyny by women’s movements has meant that all personalities develop both their feminine and masculine sides and not for women to simply imitate men.

Yuval-Davis thunders that “it is women- and not (just?) the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia- who produce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically” (2) but in all cultures women are less valued socially than men. Simone de Beauvoir argued that ‘It is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal: that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills” (qtd. in Yuval-Davis, 1997, 6). But women have also killed and risked their lives but after the war is over women have been treated the same way or much worse. Many women may have joined believing that if they ‘killed’ too that they will be valued the same as men. What ever reason they join for, the fact that they join the armed forces has been debated about among many including feminists.
Women and War

Kingsley Browne, law professor at Wayne State University in Michigan, has being called a male chauvinist by many. In a previous book he argued that biological differences between the sexes, rather than injustice, explains the existence of the glass ceiling. His new book, *Co-Ed Combat: The New Evidence That Women Shouldn't Fight the Nation's Wars*, argues that women are physically and psychologically not suited for combat. His contention is that their presence on the front lines endangers the military. Such arguments are very common regarding this issue.

Browne also points out that women’s issues are used as a platform to gain more votes and more popularity. He feels that those who are against women being part of the military would not say so and those who say they are not against it are actually saying it not out of conviction but for political gain. “For the last couple of decades one doesn’t advance very far up the ladder without demonstrating a clear commitment to the advancement of women. There are a lot of military people who think women in combat is a horrible idea, but it’s career suicide to say it.”

War and defense is always considered an exclusively male sphere. The gendering of war is similar across war-prone and more peaceful societies, as well as across very sexist and relatively gender-equal societies. “War is probably the only sphere in social life in which women are excluded or in which the exclusion is so formalised” (Goldstein 19). Amazon myths aside, in only one documented case (Dahomey- 18th and 19th century kingdom in West Africa, today called Benin) did women make up a substantial fraction of combat forces in a regular standing army over many years (Goldstein 57). Even the Dahomean army was not primarily female. In it military service was required of men but was voluntary for females (Goldstein 63). It came into being by default in 1727 when King Agadja, faced with a great military threat, added women to the corps so that his army would look larger but realized that they actually fought well (Goldstein 61). Among modern armies, the most substantial participation of women in combat has been in the Soviet Union during World War II, when attacked by Nazi Germany in 1941 (Goldstein
Here too it was out of desperation that this inclusion was made and they were nicknamed “the night witches” as they participated as pilots for bombing missions (Yuval-Davis 1997, 103). The Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE too incorporated women under similar circumstances.

Nanthini Sornarajah argues that the LTTE did not recruit women in a bid to include a section of the community that had not been represented but because of other advantages to the cause. She is convinced that rival militant groups such as the Ealam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) who had a more Marxist orientation and People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) which had populist leanings began recruiting women in large numbers and the LTTE did not want to be left behind (Part I). However, Adele Anne, wife of Anton Balasingham: a LTTE theoretician, says,

The emergent aspirations of Tamil women to join the armed struggle brought increasing pressure on the LTTE leadership to step up its policy of inducting women into the armed struggle. Young women demanded their right to self-defense and their right to exercise their patriotic sentiments. The LTTE leadership, committed to the emancipation and equality of women, welcomed such demands and expanded its military programme for training women. (1990)

The fact that when the EPRLF was crushed many EPRLF women cadres were beaten up while a prominent member of the LTTE said “What, liberation for you all. Go and wait in the kitchen. That is the correct place for you” (Hoole et al. 327). Such comments reflect gender norms within the organization which are put into practice unlike the politically correct statements put out about how women should be treated equally.

In the Sri Lankan Army women were recruited in 1979 and formed as an unarmed, noncombatant support unit only to provide telephone operators, computer operators, nursing personnel and clerical assistants primarily with an aim of releasing their male
The fact that this recruitment took place in the years that the militants in the north were creating trouble is significant. The women recruits were given physical training similar to the men's program, with the exception of weapons and battle-craft training. Women recruits were paid according to the same scale as the men, but were limited to service in nursing, communications, and clerical work. It was only when more physical power was needed on the battle field that they let the women actively take part in the battle as late as 1996. In 1997 the army had about 1600 women soldiers deployed in combat zones and another 800 in administrative positions (Ranawana 20). The first women’s corps officer to command the women’s unit was Lt. Col. Kumudini Weerasekara in 1992. There are also records of the first class of women graduates from the Viyanini Army Training Center being certified to serve as army instructors in 1987. The Air Force recruited 50 women on 14 May 1982 and the navy first recruited women in 1985. New recruits were given six weeks of training with the Sri Lankan Army Women’s Corps. Although they were trained in the use of weapons and procured the same salary as the men, they were not assigned to combat positions or shipboard duty. Instead, they assisted in nursing, communications, stores, and secretarial work.

In April 2006 in a major break through Sri Lankan Muslim women gained permission from Islamic clerics to join the exclusive Muslim Unit of the Sri Lankan army. This unit was formed so that they could protect the Muslim people from LTTE attacks in the East which is home for many Muslims as well. This permission was granted one month after the Army began to recruit men for this exclusive Muslim Unit. Chamy points out that the fundamentalist Islamic terror groups have “never let women take part in their terrorist activities, let alone in suicide terrorism” (82). Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who was the political and religious leader of Hamas said, “We have no need for suicide operations by women now because preserving the nation’s survival is more important” (Charny 48). For him women should only produce more children to

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17 The Muslims have been caught in the violence in many ways as most of them lived in the eastern part of the island. The Muslims of Jaffna were given 24 hours by the LTTE to leave the north. They have settled in places such as Puttalama in the western coast of the island.
strengthen the nation. However when they began to use women for suicide attacks Yassin changed his stance on women and said "Even though the use of women is considered unusual, jihad is an obligation of all Muslims, men and women" (Charny 48). This change in attitude was seen by many as a way for competing for popularity within the Palestinian community. Moreover it only goes to show how nationalists change their stand on women according to what is favourable for their political career.

Whenever the battlefield is opened out to women there has been much debate about the reasons as to why women should be allowed in combat positions and whether they should be allowed at all. Women were admitted to the military because as M.S. Kimmel says, "She can enter his world" (246) but the other way around is far more threatening and unacceptable. Many theoreticians and feminists feel that women were allowed into the military to relieve the men of their technical jobs so that they could be at the war front. "It was only after they incurred heavy casualties after June 1997 that there was an influx of women" in the LTTE (Chenoy 111). Chapter 5 of The Broken Palmyrah includes that "The recruitment spur came after the Vadamaratchi operations of the Sri Lankan Army and the massive arrests of men that followed." 18

Some feminists link men's violent nature with male sexuality. Observers have noted the "phallic quality of many weapons, from spears to guns to missiles." Other writers see in war not so much an extension of men's sexuality but "an attempt to compensate for men's innate inability to bear children." Militaristic discourse plays on men's fears of meaninglessness, as when Mussolini said "War is to man what maternity is to women" (Goldstein 44).

However for feminists, "The feminist theory" of war does not exist. Rather a number of feminist arguments provide sometimes contradictory explanations and prescriptions. Feminist political theorist Jean Elshtain describes it as a "polyphonic chorus of female voices... At the moment [1987], feminists are not only at war with war

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18 Many feminists such as Nirmala Rajasingham, Neloufer De Mel, Radhika Coomaraswamy adhere to this concept.
but with one another" (Goldstein 38). Liberal feminists feel that denying women combat positions is sexist discrimination as women can be capable warriors. This stand has been criticized for asking women to exchange major aspects of their gender identity for the masculine version- without prescribing a similar ‘degendering’ project for men (Goldstein 41). Difference feminism takes on the attitude that it is deep rooted and partly due to biological gender differences while postmodern feminists feel that it is an arbitrary cultural construction favoring those men in power (Goldstein 39). Difference feminists feel that women, because of their greater experience with nurturing and human relations, are generally more effective than men in conflict resolution and group decision making, and less effective than men in combat” (Goldstein 41). This has brought about a lot of criticism for linking women with peace movements, further reinforcing patriarchal notions of women. Difference feminism and liberal feminism are not so different in that, they both believe that the abilities of an individual are not determined by her or his group (Goldstein 49).

In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft argued that women deserved equal rights with men, but should not participate in war (Goldstein 43). However in the case of Sri Lanka many civilians are relieved to see a woman soldier at a check point. Human rights activists have noticed a decline of sexual harassment cases at check points since female soldiers took up their posts. “Civilians also tend to relax when they see a woman officer” says Sunila Abeyesekera.19

Goldstein questions as to why the connection between war and gender is the same in almost all countries while other aspects of war are very diverse in different cultures. He says that, “The answer in a nut shell is that killing in war does not come naturally for either gender, yet the potential for war has been universal in human societies. To help overcome soldier’s reluctance to fight, cultures develop gender roles that equate “manhood” with toughness under fire. Across cultures and throughout time, the selection of men as potential combatants (and of women for feminine war support roles) has helped
shape the war system. In turn, the pervasive war in history has influenced gender profoundly- especially gender norms in child rearing” (Goldstein 9). Therefore war engenders gender roles while gender roles engender the combat system.

One line of argument explains the gendering of war by the divided loyalties of women in inter-group conflicts. In the majority of cultures women move to another community and men stay with their family (patrilocality). In such a case, in the event of war, women might have mixed loyalties- to their current husband’s community and to their birth families and therefore are seen as dangerous to be let out on the battlefield. An alternative way to resolve this dilemma is to draw marriage partners from within one’s own community (endogamy) (Goldstein 225). But this way of life, marrying only from your own clan, is another kind of ghettoisation which we subscribe to today.

Changes Brought on by War

"The influence of the costume penetrates to the very soul of the wearer"- Oscar Wilde. (Qtd in Gilbert xvii)

War has certainly opened up many possibilities for women. War conditions have forced women in to roles such as being the head of the household when the men go to war or go missing. The other is that of the woman warrior. “Tamil women like Kokila, who is a principal of a displaced school in Jaffna, have spoken of empowerment of women participating in the militant struggle: ‘Instead of dying screaming, being raped by an aggressor army, it is a relief to face the army with [your own] weapon’” (Chenoy 110-11). Both Nirupama Subramaniam and Neloufer De Mel are of the view that the freedom which these women achieved will be put to a true test only once the war is over. Ironically even Adele Anne says, “The overall impact made by the fighting girls on Tamil society is yet to be assessed. It is also too early to predict the future in relation to the position in Tamil society after the war is over” (1990). De Mel points out how history is full of examples of women who have faced the “after the revolution, back to the kitchen” phenomenon (qtd. in Subramaniam). This debate is opened up for discussion in
S. E. Ganesalingam’s novel *Bitter Honey* among the characters: Maragatham, Malathy and Mala who realize that “In a war, even the two genders merge together with no line of distinction.” But the final conclusion is that if “such a condition would last until the war continues” is doubtful (45). Since women play roles which are already constructed for them, women militants will go back to traditional society and assume those roles. Now that the war is over most female cadres in rehabilitation camps do not want to go home as they are not accepted back into the family.²⁰ It is important to remember that after the Indo- Sri Lanka peace accord the cadres were allowed to return home for a brief period and parents were uncomfortable welcoming back home their daughters who had joined the movement (Tambiah, 1992, 11). Such sex based discrimination of their families and kin have not changed by their ‘revolutionary’ action of leaving home and consorting with male militants. Being away from “domestic surveillance and strict control of interaction with males” brought about “suspicion of their possible sexual transgressions” (Tambiah, 1992, 11).

Traditionally militaries depend on the logic of women needing protection and being protected by men and the women become the reason to go to war. This view has changed because women too have taken up arms and proved that they too can fight as well as men. The question to be asked is if this is progressive as they have been able to break the traditionally drawn out boundaries of the domestic space or is it a further militarisation of society? Is it not an upholding of male values such as aggression, authority and violence as well as being “cogs in the wheel” of the male leadership of the LTTE as Radhika Coomaraswamy calls it? (Rajasingham-Senanayake 113). Nirmala Rajasingham is of the view that, “They are simply cannon fodder as part of the war machine basically” (*No More Tears Sister*). However Rita Manchanda problematises this way of looking at the woman combatant because she says it takes away the notion of agency from them.

Whether this change has given women more agency and power is indeed an old debate. I agree with Miranda Alison when she says that using Rajasingham-Senanayake’s

²⁰ Personal interview with a teacher who met female cadres in a rehabilitation camp in Jaffna. Many women cadres had told her that they cannot go back home as they will not be accepted by their families.
term 'ambivalent empowerment' is appropriate. It is more important to see how these roles are created, viewed and produced and how women as well as society come to terms with them, appropriating them or subversively appropriating them. The concept of agency will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

The war has also brought about what Bose calls a "leveling process" in terms of not only gender but caste, class and status in Tamil society. Bose says that an eyewitness account of the ground situation in the Jaffna peninsula observed how "adversity has been a great leveller of Jaffna's stratified hierarchical society. Everyone, from the upper-class government servant down to the humblest labourer, stands in the same queue for kerosene and cooking oil. Everyone, from the Government Agent [district administrator] downwards, travels by bicycle" (104-05).

Backlash and Blame

De Mel points out, how when the established order is challenged there comes about a backlash by conservatives whether it is in terms of gender, class, or caste which "reinforces the most conservative aspects of its culture" (2001, 212). One such example is a poster called the Ten Commandments for women posted on the walls of Jaffna in late 1984 signed by a group that professed interest in Tamil culture. The dictates were that young women should wear sari, they should wear their hair long and not ride bicycles etc. Women who did not abide by these rules were threatened with being whipped. The LTTE denied responsibility for this poster but a statement issued by it two years later expresses similar views. (De Mel, 2001, 215-16). The second poster reads as:

It is important for women to take care in their dress, in their pottu and make up. It doesn't mean that we are enslaved if we

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21 Miranda Alison points out that a pamphlet suggesting appropriate clothing for women was released in the Eastern province and not in Jaffna although Colombo newspapers carried rumours of a LTTE dress code for women in Jaffna. However it is not clear if she is referring to this particular poster which de Mel talks about.

22 The Red vermillion dot on the forehead which mostly Tamil Hindu women adorn their face with. In Sri Lanka there are many Christian Tamils who wear the pottu as a sign of their ethnic group.
are dressed according to tradition. Some married women say that it is expensive to wear saris. This is not acceptable. Women should dress simply, and they should not attract men by their way of dressing... We are engaged in a struggle for national liberation. But the changes that have been taking place in our culture will only demean our society. (De Mel, 2001, 216)

Therefore we see that even if the women who join armed struggles are able to shift the parameters of patriarchy, there has been a backlash which tries to reinforce the very norms which they have tried to break away from. Military set backs are also blamed on the women. Rajini Thirangama reports the words of some women in the Jaffna community as saying that "The Tigers were all right till these women joined them. They have spoilt the movement and the boys' dedication" (Hoole et al. 329). Adele Ann too recounts in The Will to Freedom, how Tamil society reacted initially to the woman warrior in a negative sense as they did not like the new role constructed for the woman (270-271). Margaret Trawick too, after spending time with LTTE combatants says that, "In non-combat situations ordinary gender relations obtain between combatants. Sexual hierarchies have not been erased over night" (158).

No Way Out: Trapped in Militant Nationalism

Although nationalism seems to liberate women, like all extreme ideologies seem to do, it traps the very people who take recourse to it. This is very clearly shown in the Sinhalese movie Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers 2002) through the two main characters of Nirmala and Dilip. Directed by Mohamud Mohan Niyaz Kalu Sudu Mal is the first Sinhala movie to portray a suicide bomber. Nirmala and Dilip, played by Dilhani Ekanayake and Kamal Addararachchi respectively, are chosen by the LTTE and sent to the south of the country to kill a prominent figure named as ‘Double X’ in the movie. They are given strict orders to live together pretending to be husband and wife in a house provided for them and then die with ‘Double X.’ However they fall in love and Nirmala gets pregnant with Dilip’s child and they decide to carry out the mission and run away.
afterwards but is hunted down by Gauri, played by Veena Jayakody, who is in charge of this mission.

Although the title of the movie has been translated as “Colourless Flowers”, it literally translates as ‘black and white flowers.’ However “Colourless” does denote the dreariness of Nirmala’s and Dililp’s lives and how they cannot lead a peaceful life like others. The extreme duality which the two colours black and white denote in the title Kalu Sudu Mal refers to the fact that in a militarized world everything is in black and white and there is no way out or nothing in between. For Nirmala and Dilip, even if the mission assigned to them is completed they are not allowed to lead a free life. Even Mala, the other important character in the movie played by Yasodha Wimaladharma, who has run away from the LTTE, and trying to live a normal life in the south is not spared. They are hunted by both the army and the rebels. Mala is arrested by the government forces and Nirmala and Dilip are hunted down by the LTTE while trying to run away to India, as they were supposed to die carrying out their mission of killing ‘Double X’ so that there is no trace of the assassins.

The restricted life that the people in the north have lived through because of the conflict is given voice to by the LTTE woman cadre Kamala Velaithan in Nihal De Silva’s novel The Road from Elephant Pass (2003). Kamala asks Captain Wasantha, “How can we think of marriage and children in that hell hole…?”(225) referring to the chaotic situation in the North and East, which stands as a rhetorical question to which Captain Wasantha does not answer. The Captain think about this even later in the novel as these words echo in his mind. Both Captain Wasantha Ratnayake of the Sri Lankan army and Kamala Velaithan of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) belong to two opposite parties who are fighting a bitter war in which they have to sacrifice their personal and private lives. They are both unquestioningly doing their ‘duty’ at the beginning of the novel. The captain is carrying out Major Kiriella’s orders by taking Kamala to Jaffna as she was a cadre of the LTTE and is now willing to hand over important information about the LTTE because her brother was executed by them. Kamala too, although we do not get to know till the very end, is carrying out her leader’s
orders. When Elephant pass is taken over by the rebels, they start their journey towards Colombo through the dense Wanni forest and Wilpattu sanctuary. Although they despise each other from the beginning their journey together to Colombo from Elephant Pass in the North brings about a major change in their outlook towards the ideologies which they inhabited before meeting each other. While the Captain realizes that his outlook of seeing every Tamil as a terrorist is unacceptable, Kamala realizes that not all Sinhalese are murderers.

The text embodies three kinds of journeys. The physical one in which the two characters are experiencing, which is their journey to Colombo. The other is their inward journey, one which transforms the very reason for which they are undertaking this strenuous journey. The third but the most important is the reader’s journey; the transformation which this book can bring about in the reader, even in the most prejudiced ones is phenomenal at a time when building bridges between the two communities is crucial.

Nalini, in the novella One More Sunrise (2002) by Maurice Perera, faces a similar predicament. Nalini joins the LTTE after her parents are killed by a “mob of fanatics” (95) but gets disillusioned after many years of fighting. After she loses a leg to a shell which blew up in front of her, she joins the intelligence unit. “Her vision of a perfect world had become jaded and her belief in the cause for which she pledged her life was waning” (97). When the Australian journalist Andrea asks her what she feels about the movement she cannot tell her what she feels about it because talking about feelings is “taboo” (95). When Andrea offers to help her run away, she knows she cannot do so because even if she manages to escape she “will be a prisoner of the Sri Lankan army” (96) and “Even if the Sri Lankan army would show her mercy, the tigers would hunt her down because there was no where to hide” (98). The capsule around her neck is a sign that there is no way out. Being part of the Intelligence Unit makes it even more difficult for Nalini to escape as her knowledge is valuable and should not be available to the enemy under any circumstances. When she runs away with Andrea, Selvam orders the soldiers, “I don’t care about the foreigner. But we need to make sure Nalini does not fall
into enemy hands” (105). Nalini once surrounded by the LTTE takes recourse to the cyanide capsule.

Unlike the fictional character of Nirmala in the movie *Kalu Sudu Mal* (*Colourless Flowers*), Nirmala Rajasingham who was part of the LTTE women’s wing at one point of time in her life, managed to escape the vengeance of the Tigers but experienced a deep loss when she lost her sister Rajani Thirangama who was gunned down by the LTTE for “getting too big for her boots” as one member of the LTTE had told her. In the documentary *No More Tears Sister: An Anatomy of Hope and Betrayal* (2005), which is based on the life of Rajani Thirangama, Nirmala Rajasingham says that after her stay for six months in Chennai she was disillusioned as there was no space for any “progressive values” for the cadres and she could not come to terms with its “cut throat ruthlessness.” Simultaneously her sister Rajani also gets disillusioned in London and her ‘questions’ threaten the LTTE. Rajani writes to her husband in a letter, “Dear Dayapala, I have left the Tigers…” which would have been a difficult task for a lady who as Dayapala says, believed that the “Tigers were the only force to liberate the Tamil Nation.” Dayapala, who was affiliated with the JVP, says that Rajani “challenged the political oppression of women” in his organization which goes to show that Rajani thought that within the LTTE women are equal and liberated. She may have felt this way because women get to fight on the same level as men. Her admiration for these women is expressed in *The Broken Palmyrah*. Nirmala too is “completely mesmerized” by the dedication of the combatants but soon like Rajani realizes that they “couldn’t question any of the military leadership” and that the cadres were not given any political knowledge. In *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas*, M. R. Narayan Swami writes that Prabhakaran was furious at an interview when an academic argued that it was important to politicize people before taking to the gun. Prabhakaran’s reply was, “What people, people, you talk about? We have to do some actions first. People will follow us” (69).

Although many incidents show that there is no way out of the organization, Trawick and Alison say that it is possible to break away from the movement. Trawick
says that her experiences “believe the claim that the LTTE suppresses all dissent” (158).
Alison says that two of the 14 women she interviewed had left the movement (2003a 4).
One of them being Shanthi whose mother recalled her to the village while she was an
area leader for the LTTE political wing for a village in the Jaffna peninsula (2003a 50).
The other is ‘K’ who was forcibly conscripted but sent home when she fell extremely ill.

The Body of the Woman as/and the Nation

“Most men and women we spoke to agreed that honour, for losing and preserving, is
located in the body of women”

- Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon. Borders and Boundaries, 58

“The more homogenous the ideology, the more women’s bodies are policed by the guardians
of the nation-state”

-Coomaraswamy & Perera-Rajasingham “Being Tamil in a Different Way: A
Feminist Critique of The Tamil Nation.”

The body of the woman is important in various ways in a nationalist context. A
woman cadre’s body is made productive to nationalism as she joins the battle in terms of
physical power, but “The locus of cultural investment is in the sexual body, which is also
the national body” (De Silva 2005, 15). Yuval-Davis shows how it is very often women
who are used as markers of ethnic difference. Women are compelled to wear the national
dress and “carry ethnic markings on their body” (Coomaraswamy 1999), while men
world over dress very much alike. With the use of the female body in this manner it
becomes a cultural symbol of ethnic worlds that keep an ethnic identity alive in a visual
sense.

Neluka Silva in The Gendered Nation says that she began writing her book
because of a comment made by a woman who was a victim of domestic violence. This
woman named Kamala compares her physical abuse to the rape of the motherland. She
says, “My husband drinks very heavily and beats me up at least two or three times a week. After he beats me, he forces me to do it. I have no choice. Anyway, why should I complain when our mavrata [motherland] is being raped by the enemy” (9). Here her suffering and her physical trauma is being equated with the fate of the nation. Silva observes how the nation is signified in gendered terms which is symptomatic of the ideological underpinnings of ‘nationalism’ and how its “violent vocabulary has percolated into everyday parlance” (9).

The concept of the mavrata (motherland) has been used very often by politicians since the war was officially declared over in Sri Lanka and also especially during the presidential elections of January 2010. In fact the Sinhalese movie Alimankada23 which was released in October 2009, based on the novel The Road from Elephant Pass, has included this word in a dialogue of Captain Wasantha, which is not in the novel. When Kamala questions him about his role in the conflict as an officer in the army, he shouts at her that he is only fighting for his “mavrata” (motherland), “mage amma” (my mother) he says. The fact that the movie was released four months after the war was declared a victory by the Sri Lankan government, changes the way the movie is interpreted by the viewer and thereby used well as a tool of political propaganda with its final note that the Government has won back Elephant pass from the rebels in 2009 and unified the country. Calling the movie Alimankada and not Alimankada sita (literarily ‘from Alimankada’) which is the title of the Sinhalese translation of the novel, the movie erases the importance of the journey and focuses on the strategic importance of the place in a political and militaristic sense.

Ranjan points out in Shining Water Flowing Light how men projected onto nature their desire to master women and this is the reason that nature is conceptualized as female. “Failing to master the female within themselves and failing to ‘domesticate’ women to the extent their repression demands, they project the female on to nature and tried to subjugate nature. In psychology this is called displacement activity.”

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23 Alimankada is the Sinhalese name for the place called Elephant Pass: the strategic isthmus between the Jaffna peninsula to its north and the dense Wanni forest to its south.
displacement activity takes place in the form of trying to portray the land as a woman and vice versa.

Sumathy points out how dowry used to be considered primarily in the form of land but “land as dowry has lost its significance” due to the war which has disrupted their lives in every way (2004, 135). However the connection between woman and land still exists in various ways. “The containment of the sexuality of LTTE women, the discourses of chastity and rape, of land and woman and the spectacle of the suicide bomber’s death rehearses over and over the Tamil middle class sexualised desires of land as dowry, brought along by the wife-woman, and recruited into the narrative of the nation-land-woman continuum” (2004, 136).

Within the amalgamation of nationhood and women, the focus is very often on her body and therefore inevitably on her sexuality. In the LTTE, women were at first seen as the seductress who will lure away the men from the cause. According to Thirangama, they were first seen as “evil” within the movement and were “said to make men lose their sense of purpose” (Hoole et al. 327) Therefore they were not allowed to fight together with the males. Even after the movement was open to women, there were strict rules of morality and ethics, which forbade sex or marriage. In both the JVP and the LTTE, it was only when their leaders, Rohana Wijeweera and Prabhakaran respectively, themselves wanted to get married was the ban lifted (De Mel 2001, 219). In the army, enlistment entailed a five-year service commitment for women (the same as for men) and recruits were not allowed to marry during this period. It seems that now it is even more important to have such control over women in an environment which has dissolved the boundaries that segregate the male and female spaces. As De Mel rightly points out, therefore we have here “an exact replication of the sexual taboos that exist in the outside world” (2001, 219).

These norms also include a collective silence about sexual harassment that women faced as a result of fighting for a cause. Very few cases of rape or sexual abuse while in custody have been reported by the women who were part of the JVP insurrection, and the JVP male leaders were at pains to deny the incidents except when
they could use such incidents to further their cause. Despite their silence on the atrocities committed to women who were alive they made icons out of women who were raped and those who were dead. The rape and murder of Premawathie Manamperi by the army in 1971 was constantly recalled and represented in JVP posters and pamphlets. The JVP discourse of her rape and murder was used to transfer the blame for the acts of violence solely to the state and to portray itself as a victim of violence. In the incident of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi the LTTE spoke about Dhanu’s rape by the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) only once she was dead.

The LTTE however addresses the issue of rape to its female cadres who are ordered to bite the cyanide capsule around their neck if they are captured to avoid rape and torture. The woman’s body is not to be defiled by the enemy. However when women members leave the LTTE due to ideological differences, they are subjected to sexual shaming to degrade them. Both Rajini Thirangama and her sister Nirmala Nityanandan were attacked as “loose women” (De Mel, 2001, 221) and as ‘westernized feminists’ (No More Tears Sister) when they distanced themselves from the LTTE. There have been LTTE women combatants who have left the movement with the blessings of the LTTE leadership, although it is difficult to ascertain how independent they are of it. De Mel says that there are reports of such women who have had to continue helping the movement in which ever way they can (2001, 225).

It is in this light that Dharmi’s story narrated by Vasuki Nesiah in an article called A Woman and a Nation: Battle over the Meaning of Death becomes very interesting. Dharmi’s body was found in a well on the 16th of December 2004. Rumours say that she was a sex worker whose primary clientele were Navy personnel and that this relationship led to her death. It was not clear as to whether she had been killed by the Navy or by the LTTE who punish sex workers that service the armed forces. Barely a week after Dharmi’s death, a child soldier detonated a landmine that killed more than a dozen Naval personnel in Mannar. The LTTE claimed responsibility for this attack for a killing of a Tamil woman, i.e., Elaiyathamby Dharmi by the Sri Lankan armed forces. It is very ironic as Nesiah points out, how a socially marginalized sex worker “is now a vital protagonist in a historic drama over territory and nationhood; control of her body, in
death even if not in life, is vaulted into military ambitions of national scope.” Nesiah
draws from this story to expose the nationalist hypocrisy that values lives like Dharmini’s
only in death which is very similar to the prerogative of the female suicide bomber. The
ultimate irony is that if Dharmini was not already dead she would have been killed, for
being a sex worker, by the very party who avenged her death.

The irony lies in the fact that, in the LTTE, women who use their bodies for sex
work are killed and devalued while women who destroy their body to kill others in
suicide attacks are valorized and celebrated as heroes by LTTE supporters. For the
Sinhalese majority sex workers are of no value at all and a curse to society, while suicide
bombers are looked upon as an aberration and ‘Kalakanni’. Such attitudes were made
clearer in the incident when a sex worker called Sriyalatha, was stripped by military
personnel on the road in broad day light under the suspicion of being a suicide bomber on
19 March 2000. This incident was taken lightly by many because she was a sex worker
and justified in the name of national security. De Mel points out that the way we can talk
about the suicide bomber is determined by the way “militarization has normalized certain
forms of violence and pathologized others” (2007, 195).

In the play In the Shadow of the Gun (2003) by Sumathy, we witness the murder
of a Tamil sex worker through which the double standards of those who have shot her are
brought to light in her words, “They shot me through the belly- the womb that gave birth
to the sons of this soil. I carry the seeds of this nation here” (19). She uses the very
rhetoric which the nationalists use, in order to bring out their hypocrisy. She is shot for
being with “A soldier with broad young shoulders” (19) who fell in love with her. She is
a Tamil woman involved with a Sinhalese soldier and therefore has to be done away with.

“The woman was late” is the very first sentence in the novel The Road from
Elephant Pass which gives the reader the impression that it is a pick up of a prostitute. It
certainly, in a very De Silva style makes the reader want to know more, but the
comparison is very interesting as Kamala, through this act is prostituting herself, giving

24 A Sinhalese word used for people who do not value time and life. Those who cannot make the most of
what they have received.
up her life, her body for the movement. Although she does not know what the Sri Lankan army would do to her, once her true motives are discovered, she is willing to take this risk. However, in this instance Kamala is not a sexual bait as this tactic has never been utilised by the LTTE which was very strict on morality and had banned sex for cadres. But one instance in the novel is an exception which is also included in the movie *Alimankada*. When desperately in need of a bike to get to Colombo and hand over important information, Kamala uses her sexuality too to her advantage although not as blatantly as Nirmala does in the Sinhalese movie *Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers)*. This incident reads as, “When the rider was about fifteen yards away from her, she stepped out of cover and onto the road. She smiled brightly and raised her hand. A woman, young and pretty, standing there in the morning sun. When he went past the tree I was hiding behind, he was already slowing down” (74-75). In a war torn area no one would stop their vehicle otherwise. However the LTTE has not used women as baits for any purpose in accordance to their policy on sexual conduct.

**Representation / Images**

In the splurge of nationalist feelings during post-independence in Sri Lanka, existing notions of gender were further reaffirmed in a way to suit the nationalist agenda. The methods of resistance adopted by the pre-independence Sinhalese and Tamil nationalists converge in their views on gender relations. The Sinhalese as well as the Tamils felt that it was up to the woman to carry on their traditions and embodied her as a symbol of cultural pride while the male stood as the leader and defender of the nation. The nationalists felt that western influence had corrupted indigenous women and the purity of the entire race was at stake because western alien values would be handed down to their progeny. It was mainly during colonial times that the woman’s space was specifically defined according to Victorian ideology, as the inner domain which gave birth to what Coomaraswamy, borrowing Yuval-Davis’s term, calls “The burden of representation” (1997, 45). The woman had to be the carrier of the markers of that particular culture and this holds true for both Sinhalese and Tamil Communities in Sri Lanka. Therefore the woman became an important part of nationalist discourse for both communities and continued to be the same. The burden of representation is not only a
burden on women but what they are supposed to embody produces further burdens, especially for the next generation to carry on these representations through their bodies and in the manner that they dress.

Sarala Emmanuel talks about the representation of the woman militant who is romanticized in two ways. One as a beautiful woman who has suffered and the other as “an unwavering fighter”. She points out with reference to the article by Bulathsinhala on women cadres that there appears to be a desire to represent only the feminine characteristics of women militants. It is interesting to look at the representation of the woman militants in texts in this light. Is there a difference in the way she used to be portrayed and the way she is portrayed now? Many stereotypes come into play here, as well as an effort by some authors at times to break away from the usual stereotypes. The change in the way she is represented is not very distinct as the time period in which they have appeared in texts is a mere 12 years, the oldest being the Hindi movie The Terrorist in 1998 which was also the year in which the short story “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” was published. Both these works of creativity have been inspired by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. In The Terrorist, directed by Santosh Sivan, a woman cadre Malli, who is a ruthless killer is sent on a suicide mission to kill an important political leader. She is trained to put a garland on the political leader and to press the detonator when she bends down to touch his feet but Malli is unable to do so as she does not want to die after she finds out that she is pregnant.

Adele Ann points out that the image of the woman was more important to society than what was reaped out of what she was doing. When women began to join the movement “the wider objectives of women’s involvement in the struggle were initially lost” and Jaffna society only “focused on the representation of armed women” she says. Women in male clothes and short hair, was not an image which society could digest very easily. LTTE women “with short-cropped hair” caused an uproar and “allegations of attempts to sabotage or destroy the culture were leveled at the women fighters” (2001, 270-71).
Images of Women in the Early Tamil Struggle

"Tamil nationalism has called the woman several names" -Sumathy, Thin Veils 3.

In the first phase of Tamil resistance to Sinhala domination and discrimination, women's participation as propagandists was central. “They were used as speakers at public meetings, where they constructed women as victims of the Sinhala state and exhorted their sisters to raise brave sons who would fight to restore the pride of the Tamil community” and the “concept of ‘Pudumai Pen’ - the ‘New Woman’ was constructed” (Dhanraj et al).

According to Maunaguru a large number of women took part in the civil disobedience movement of the Tamil citizens. But they were primarily seen as mothers and wives (1995, 160). Even Coomaraswamy and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham point out that “Despite women’s participation in political protests at the time, they did not come forth on their own without the support of their spouses to fight for various rights.”

Till this time, the figure of the woman was portrayed only as a mother and as a victim. Coomaraswamy and Perera-Rajasingham say that in the second phase of Tamil nationalism which they say is 1970-1980, two significant understandings of the woman came to operate during this time. One was the understanding of woman as mother; the other was that of woman as raped victim. The idea of women directly being part of the struggle did not exist. Her role was fixed as nurturer, under the assumption that this is her ‘nature’. Later, to add to these images, emerged the image of the armed-virgin. It is ironic how even after she became part of the struggle she was not represented in texts, which is also seen in the case of Bengali literature during the nationalist movement against the British which Sarkar has pointed out. It is only recently that women in the militant struggle have been given a voice and that too for political reasons. In fact, “the women's wing of the LTTE known as Suthanthirap Paravaikal (Birds of Freedom) has acquired almost as much notoriety as their male counterparts since a female suicide bomber killed Rajiv Gandhi, the former prime minister of India, in 1993” (De Alwis, 2002).
The two constructions of gender of passive mother and martyr are as Nanthini Sornarajah states "inflexible and monolithic" (Part III). The political space has been narrowed down for women by these two constructions\(^{25}\) and to play a different role other than these two roles, has been denied to women reflected in the suppression of groups such as The Mother’s Front, Poorani Women’s refuge, and as well as individual women such as Rajini Thirangama and Selvanity Thiagarajah (also known as Selvy).\(^{26}\)

In Sri Lanka, very few women’s active participation in the JVP struggle is documented and none are literarily represented. Women’s roles in the army, navy and air force are invisible in today’s literature. Although some women participated in the JVP youth insurrection of 1987-1989, the issue of women militants got more attention in the 1990’s with the increased participation of Tamil women in combat. However there has been an obsession among the Sinhalese with the figure of Vihara Maha Devi which has been used as a symbol of a great woman who contributed to the war by King Dutu Gemunu against King Elara, a Chola king from India.

In this context Lois A. West’s theory that, “Women are constructed as citizens 'differently' than men” (xii) is very accurate. In Sri Lanka when all women and men obtained the right to vote in 1931 under the Donoughmore constitution, women were given the right to vote but it has taken a long time for women to achieve the right to fight. This is ironic in the light of the fact that it was a women’s organization called “Mallika Kulangana Samitiya” which first demanded for women’s right to vote which was later taken on by the Women’s Franchise Union (WFU) through which Sri Lanka became “the first British colony to gain universal franchise unlinked to property and educational qualifications” (De Mel, 2001, 26). Once Tamil nationalist fervour boiled over to militant nationalism, the image of the woman warrior was invoked and a new role for women was

\(^{25}\) However it must be pointed out that three of the LTTE’s ten-member Central Committee, the movement's top decision making body, were women (Bose108-109).

\(^{26}\) Thiagarajah Selvanity, a former member of PLOTE, was detained by the LTTE in early 1990 for staging a play critical of Tamil nationalism. She was taken into custody once again in 1991 and was killed. She was awarded the "Freedom to Write" by International PEN in 1992. The award honours poets who have suffered due to their writings.
created. Tanika Sarkar says that there was a rise of patriotic themes in Bengali literature in India from about the 1880's and “a constant preoccupation as a whole was with the figure of the woman…” (159). However although the movement opened up new spaces for the reordering of gender relations and a space for mingling of the male and female, there exists a fissure between the reality and the way women were represented and idealized. Although “in their political practice Gandhians had embarked on a far more dangerous enterprise bringing women out in the public to engage in strident, militant protest, implying, ultimately, a violent erosion of the privacy of the female space and rough assaults on deep-rooted behavioral norms about modesty or propriety” (Sarkar 172) there was hardly any literary representations of the militant woman. Therefore there is a gap between “political practice and imaginative representation” (Sarkar 172) as in Sri Lanka. Further, Sarala Emmanuel is right when she points out that “Though there maybe similarities in analytical concepts used by the different writers... there is a qualitative difference in representation and analysis between the writings on women militants and those on women in militaries” (2006, 29).

The way the female suicide bomber or the woman militant is represented becomes crucial as it is also a reflection of how the war is represented. “Creative writers and film makers have not only attempted to ‘give’ the figure of the female suicide bomber a ‘prior’ voice but also contour the war itself in alternative ways that go against the grain of official narratives. In doing so, they have become the targets of censure in a struggle over how the war should be represented” (De Mel 2007, 193).

**Earliest Representations of Women in Battle**

A very common image of a woman warrior which has been used by the Sinhalese is that of Vihara Maha Devi. Her image is used by nationalist to reaffirm the importance of being a mother warrior. The Pali chronicle; Mahavamsa, which was written in the 5th century by the Buddhist monk Mahanama Thera, is one of the main texts used for studying Ceylon History which portrays her as the perfect daughter, wife and mother. The narratives about Vihara Maha Devi have been further disseminated and reiterated through school text books, newspaper articles, poems, dramas and political speeches. She
is seen as the epitome of a mother warrior because she encouraged her son to go to war even at the risk of losing him even when her husband King Kavanthissa warned his son not to do so. De Alwis calls this the “moral mother syndrome” which is the “frequent recourse to a moral and maternalized role model from the past” (1998, 17).

Mythical or historical figures of women in battle, like Boadicea or Jeanne d’Arc exist in the Western collective imagination as well (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 95, Goldstein 116). Like the Amazons they too have been used more to highlight how unnatural it is for a woman to be part of an act of aggression rather than to enumerate that even women are able to carry out the same tasks as well as men on the battlefield. Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran is willing to give them this recognition when Narayan Swamy says that “During the two and a half years sojourn of the Indian army in Sri Lanka, the women tigers proved as deadly as their male counterparts” (190). It is ironic that in spite of women playing such an important role in the LTTE it was always very frequently referred to as “the boys” or as “our boys.” Qadri Ismail traces the trajectory of the term “the boys” and says that it was first used by “upper class and upper caste Tamils” and very rightly because from the beginning, the Tigers “were male in constitution and gendered in ideology” (6).

Within the anti-British movement there were many women who actively participated. Kumari Jayawardene, shows that women were part of anti imperial struggles and did take interest in nationalist projects (1981, 127-128). Women have actively participated in the anti imperialist struggle through the Suriya Mal Movement. There have been activists like Selina Perera (1909-86) who went to India from Sri Lanka to fight for independence. She was one of the founding members of the LSSP and her political activities gained her a reputation for militancy (Abhayavardhana 19). Vivienne Goonewardena (1916-96) too militantly challenged the state. Mary Rutnam, Agnes Nell,

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27 Miranda Alison also points this out in her article “Uncovering the Girls in the Boys.” This paper is a result of her interview of 14 female combatants and ex combatants and over 20 non LTTE Tamil and Muslim women in the North and East of the Island in August and September 2002.

28 The Suriya Mal Movement was launched on Armistice Day/ Poppy Day in 1933. On this day poppies were sold to raise funds for British soldiers. The movement named is campaign after a local flower called Suriya.
Nalamma Murugesan and Maheshwari Segarajasingham were some of the women who actively participated in politics in the pre-independence era (De Mel, 2001, 26).

The Mother Warrior

The mother figure has been closely linked in various ways to all forms of nationalism, (mother tongue, mother land, mother earth) out of which one is the mother figure which is the source of inspiration. Lines such as,

Mother, I am your son
You have not taught us to be afraid

in Pelpita Ratnayake’s poem, constructs the mother as the source of inspiration.

One of the oldest mother figures recalled by nationalists is the figure of Vihara Maha Devi who supported King Dutu Gemunu to defeat the Cholas from India and unify the island. She was not only a mother warrior but also a very brave and patriotic princess who sacrificed her life to the sea to appease the wrath of the Gods because her father King Kelanitissa killed a Buddhist monk (De Alwis, 1998). Therefore her image is even now recalled with pride because she was willing to sacrifice not only her self but also her son for the sake of her people.

Even within the Tamil nationalist movement the figure of the mother was important. The importance of motherhood at this juncture, according to the writings of Nanthini Somarajah, comes from the inspiration that Sri Lankan Tamil politics obtained at the time from the Dravidian movement in South India where through films, songs and poetry, the ideal of Thami thai was invoked into the politics of the federal party in the 1960s (Coomaraswamy and Perera-Rajasingham).

The LTTE publication Women and Revolution: The Role of Women in Tamil Eelam National Revolution (1983) carried a photograph of a Palestinian woman holding a gun with one hand and a baby in the other. De Mel says, “The woman guerilla with a baby in one hand and a gun in the other has been used in revolutionary recruitment and
iconography from Latin America to Asia and Africa” (2001, 215). De Mel quotes Cynthia Enloe who comments on this image that, “interweaving the images of woman as combatant and mother so tightly suggests that as soon as the ‘war is over’, the woman in the picture will put down the rifle and keep the baby” (2001, 215). This image is also meant to convey a message to society that she will not give up her role as a mother just because she takes up the gun. Not only will she not give up motherhood but it also means that as a mother she should take up the gun to protect her child from the enemy.

In the short story “All is Burning” (1995) by Jean Arasanayagam, Alice is out looking for her intended son-in-law Sena who has been taken away by a group of armed men. The story does not refer to any particular time but due to a few hints in the story, it seems like the time of the JVP insurrection. Alice does not have a son but is still looking for Sena, as a mother, not of Sena but of Seela her daughter who is supposed to marry Sena. She says, “Yet I have to do this for my daughter, look at the faces of the dead and dying. No Seela couldn’t do it. I’ll do it for her. I am her mother. Who else has she had all her life? Myself and her grandmother. Two women” (170). The story ends on a note of the women taking over as all the men have been killed. However this taking over is only through re-enacting the role of the mother by bearing more sons. The last line of the story reads as, “But the women would bear more sons. Life had to, would go on” (176).

Writing in 1985, soldier poet Pelpita Ratnayake draws on the image of the mother warrior in his poem “Soldier Son to the Mother.” “I will become a courageous son, with the taste of your milk” is a line from “Dearest Mother” written by another soldier poet; Palitha Hegoda (1999). The mother although a woman who is not allowed on the battle front, is the source of inspiration to help the soldier bear the difficulties of such a life. The figure of the woman has not only been used in a physical sense as armed combatants but as a mother figure that has also always been thus appropriated to strengthen the cause through ideological means. She is valorized because she is so magnanimous to send her children to war to fight for the nation.
As nationalist discourse is inherently gendered, its call on women to mother, nurture and give birth to a new nation through sacrifice and courage makes the amalgamation of mother-warrior an easy elision. In reference to the mother warrior Frances Bulathsinghala says “it can be argued that the militant mother is a common image in the war poetry of the Tamil Golden Age or the Sangam period, where mothers rejoice when they hear tales of the brave deaths of their sons.” In an interview with BBC television, the mother of Captain Muller, a hero of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam expressed unreserved joy that her son had died for the cause. Stories of mothers asking messengers whether their sons were killed by a bullet in the front or the back before they begin mourning is another archetypal legend found in war stories (Coomaraswamy 1999). In 1986-87, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs issued a poster that depicted a Sinhalese woman breastfeeding a baby and dreaming of a man dressed in a military uniform. The caption under this picture reads as, “Give your life blood in breast milk to nourish our future soldiers” (De Alwis 1998, 254).

But not all mothers are happy about their daughters joining the movement. Daya Somasundaram refers to a case of a woman whose eldest daughter joined the militants and she kept going to the camp asking to see her daughter. “However, the female militants were unimpressed. They made sarcastic remarks, treated her with contempt, even beat her and generally ignored her antics outside the camp, refusing to show her daughter to her. Apparently there were several mothers in this condition outside the camp” (186).

Another inconspicuous way in which mothers are involved in the creation of ethnic and nationalist identity is as ideological reproducers of the myths and legends of the community. In fact research has shown that it is not the men who first introduce children into the ethnic imagination of their community but it is done by the women through songs, stories, legends, folk tales etc. (Coomaraswamy 1999). An article in the newspaper Sithumina of 25 January 1936 proclaimed that respect should be accorded to Vihara Maha Devi who was the mother of King Dutugemunu who freed the country from Tamil invaders and unified the country for the first time in history. The article
claims that she should be respected because she is the one "who embedded (nidan kale) noble ideas (udara adahas) in her son when nursing him (akayehi kiri ura bona kalhi)" (qtd. in De Alwis 1998, 17).

Soldier poet, Palitha Hegoda's poem "Dearest Mother" is witness to this role that women take on.

From the days fed me by your blood turned into milk
You put stories of courage into my heart
Those valuable gems of country, race and peace
To protect these I go- my life is secondary. (qtd. in Kaushalya Perera 3)

In the following poem "Amma, Do Not Weep" by Cheran, translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom, it is the responsibility of the woman to make sure that her son will avenge the death of her husband. The idea that she could avenge the death does not exist in the poem. The poem suggests that this is what a woman needs to do not just to overcome her sorrow but also as a moral responsibility towards the community. It besieges the woman not to be peace-loving and forgiving which she is likely to do. The poem reads as follows:

Amma, do not weep.
There are no mountains
to shoulder your sorrow
no rivers
to dissolve your tears.

The instant he handed you
the baby from his shoulder,
the gun fired.

In the heat of the splintering bomb
all your bright dreams withered.
What splattered from your anklet
were neither pearls
nor rubies:
there is no longer a Pandyan king
to recognize blood guilt.

On sleepless nights
when your little boy stirs restlessly
screaming out, ‘Appa’
what will you say?

When you pace the night, showing him the moon
and soothing him against your breast,
do not say,
‘Appa is with God.’

Tell him this sorrow continues
tell him the story of the spreading blood
tell him to wage battle
to end all terrors.

Bulathsinghala, gives an account of Raji, after her visit to Vatakatchy, near Kilinochchi. Raji worked as the hostel mistress of the LTTE girl's hostel which served as a training school for the girls. She explains that it provides an 'opportunity' for girls, which they would have otherwise missed, ending up languishing in some welfare camp or other. Raji had fled Jaffna at the height of a battle and spent almost a year at a welfare camp in Jaffna with her husband and therefore has first hand experience of the paucity and depression that a welfare camp provides. “Today, she is looked upon by the girls as the closest thing to a mother.” So Raji plays the role of the mother within the movement, a biological role which has been denied to her because of the circumstances in which she is situated. This is referred to as “maternal affective mode,” which is a mode in which one is like a mother and sees the cause as her child. She is willing to forgive and accept
anything from the child/ cause and unable to resist the demand of love from it (De Cataldo et al. 91).

One of the themes that the Tamil movie Kannathil Muthamittal (A Peck on the Cheek 2002), directed by Mani Ratnam, deals with is adoption. A Sri Lankan Tamil woman Shyama, played by actress Nandita Das, gets married but her husband joins the LTTE and she hears no more of him. A pregnant Shyama comes as a refugee to Rameswaram in India but goes back to her country without her baby daughter. A writer cum engineer called Tiruchelvam, played by Madhavan, writes a story about this baby and his neighbour Indra who is in love with him asks him to take her to see the baby. When Tiruchelvam cannot adopt the baby as he is unmarried he asks Indra to marry him and be a mother to Amudha. They both decide to tell Amudha the truth about her parenthood on her ninth birthday. After Amudha gets to know the truth she is desperate to meet her biological mother and her adopted parents take her to Sri Lanka in search of Shyama who is now a militant. This role of taking on the other cadres as one's children is echoed in the words of Amudha’s biological mother: Shyama, when she says, “These are my children now” when trying to explain to her brother why she cannot meet her nine year old daughter who has come looking for her from India. Ironically it is her brother, a male militant, who appeals to maternal love and says, “She is your daughter.” As a woman she is supposed to instantly feel for her own child above anything. These words uttered by a woman who we have seen earlier in the movie praying for a baby and telling her husband that she wants to have “eight children” is a drastic change. This indifference is made up for in the last scene when she cries her heart out when she meets Amudha, her daughter and says, “I came determined that I won’t cry.” However the viewer is hopeful that blood ties may triumph over others and she will not leave her daughter when Amudha calls her “Amma” and she responds with, “Don’t call me that. Then I can’t go.” She leaves her biological daughter while Indra who goes back to India with Amudha to her own biological children whom she has left to fulfill her adopted daughter’s wishes.

In the novella One More Sunrise Andrea adopts Ananda who she educates and leaves all her possessions for in her will. “You are my son, despite the legal barriers. This
is an act of a mother who loves her child" (84). She calls herself his mother but she has not had any children. Families are formed in an unconventional manner. Even within the movement, it is referred to as a family. Prabhakaran himself was called 'Thambi' meaning 'younger brother'. Once a cadre joins the group, the movement becomes the family (qtd. in Bose, 127).

Just as the land can be converted into a mother figure, these texts show that even other women can become another’s mother. Indra in A Peck on the Cheek is shown to be more attached to Amudha than to her two sons who were born afterwards. During their stay in Sri Lanka, while searching for Amudha’s biological mother, Indra tells her husband that they have left two children behind in India for the sake of one. They leave behind their biological children for the sake of the adopted one. Similarly Amudha’s biological mother; Shyama has left her child to be with the other cadres who she says are her children now. Times of war do not only create new roles for women but also creates spaces for various kinds of motherhood and redefines it entirely. In these instances the mother is not the one who has given birth to them but the one that has cared and nurtured them or to whom they feel attached. This goes to show that motherhood too is a construct and that motherhood has multiple meanings.

Feminists such as Malathi De Alwis have scrutinized the concept of the mother mythology where mothers are seen as life-givers and therefore opposed to war. The Mothers Front and Women for Peace are such examples. Coomaraswamy points out the contradiction in women being seen in “Hegelian images of the 'beautiful soul' innocent, pure and trusting in peace” while “in other cultures such as Hinduism, Goddesses such as Durga are seen as fierce warriors, riding a lion, avenging their community and its honour. This contradiction in the portrayal of 'mothers' during armed conflict as both the fearless supporters of war or the courageous campaigners for peace is only an indication as to the power of mother imagery and its resonance in ethnic and nationalist culture. The decision to appropriate this image for political causes is therefore not unusual in an era of manipulative semiotics” (Coomaraswamy, 1999).

45
The Armed Virgin

Tamil women were usually seen and talked about as only victims of war which has changed in the last couple of years. They were first seen as victims mainly due to the several brutal rapes committed by the Sri Lankan Army and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) when they controlled the conflict zones. This is more so for Tamil women “as they live within a more patriarchal and caste ridden Hindu cultural ethos in comparison to Sinhalese women” who are less controlled by caste ideologies and purity/pollution concepts and practices, says Rajasingham-Senanayake (113). The figure of the armed virgin is one of the exceptions to the representation of Tamil women as victims.

The ideal of the armed virgin is considered “purely as an innovation by the LTTE” (Bulathsinghala). Coomaraswamy too gives voice to this contention that ‘No where in Tamil Literature is there a role model of a virgin armed to kill. This is pure LTTE innovation” (1996, 9). She says, “…in Hindu society generally, and Tamil Hindu society in particular, the privileged woman is the auspicious married woman with many children and material wealth” and that this is a perversion of Tamil culture (1996, 9). Sornarajah disagrees with this view and says that it is not a perversion of Tamil culture as the same ideas are been replaced within a nationalistic ideology, where the virgin although unmarried is looked upon as being married to the cause. The LTTE uses the same notions of sacrifice and devotion to place the woman in this image so that the ideology remains within accepted notions within Tamil culture. Just as the role of the mother for women was not done away with but was incorporated into the mother-warrior phenomenon, the married woman too was incorporated thus into the image of the armed virgin. In a culture that values virginity this image of the armed virgin would not be a totally alien concept.

However Sumathy points out that virginity and chastity although valued is not what parents would wish on their daughters because there are no women that she knows in Jaffna society who are named after goddess Kannaki.29 (“The Rise of Militant Tamil

29 Kannagi is the beautiful wife of Kovalan in the Tamil epic Shilappadikaram of the Sangam age. Kovalan spends all his money on the dancing girl Madhavi. After quarrelling with Madhavi, a penniless Kovalan
Parents do want their children to be married. The fact that about 15% of Tamils are Christian and of these 75% are Catholic may have contributed to the glorification of virginity. Hellmann-Rajanayagam who has studied Tamil poetry published by the LTTE, says that the poems reverence and praise of the ‘mother’, whether Tamilittay or the mothers whose sons have fallen in battle, combines elements of the worship of the virgin with much more ancient female images in the Purananuru (2005, 117).

‘Virgins’ were expected to stay at home so that they could be protected and the image of the armed virgin seems to say that she will protect her own virginity. So there is not such a drastic change in ideology because virginity is still valued. The very word ‘virgin’ connects her role to her sexuality once again. Instead of being trapped in her biological role now she is trapped in a different kind of role which gives her chastity importance. However for most women it is the masculinised image of the warrior which is very appealing. It is the idea of being able to protect your self without having to depend on a man which is attractive to many.

Coomaraswamy rejects this inversion as the earlier Tamil notion of the ideal woman was “a celebration of life” (1996, 10) in which prosperity, sexuality were all important aspects of the married woman paradigm. But now, “Self-sacrifice, austerity and androgyny are put forward as ideals. Death not life, is celebrated” (Coomaraswamy, 1996, 10).

The vow of celibacy went down well with moralistic Jaffna society. However this elision was not so smooth or easy. Adele Anne gives a list of issues that the Jaffna community had with the woman combatants at the beginning in The Will to Freedom.

30 The Purananuru is a work of classical Tamil Literature, divided into verse written by different authors, and translates as “The Four Hundred Poems about Puram.” It belongs to the heroic genre of Tamil literature and contains much historical information.
“For sections of the conservative Jaffna Tamils, the sight of young unmarried Tamil women in military fatigues patrolling the Jaffna streets with rifles, was in stark contrast to the historic image of demure, long-haired Tamil women in saris or dresses, and thus signified a death knell to tradition and a threat to their culture” (2001, 270). The issue of sexuality became even more acute when the women were being trained for combat. Therefore the strict rules on sexuality have helped to gain the support of society as well. To make a point, those who did not abide by this rule were shown no mercy. Once when Prabhakaran noticed that a woman cadre had an unusual bulge in her stomach she was sent to Tamil Nadu for a medical check up. It was reported to him that she was pregnant and immediately her partner was traced. The young man admitted to having sex with the woman once while on duty. They were both executed while their pleas for mercy fell on deaf ears. Therefore there is no mercy for those who flout the law of chastity in the movement. Indulging in sex was considered worse than stealing from the organization because a man who stole Rs. 25,000/= was once brought before Prabhakaran and was ordered to be executed. When the senior members pleaded for the young man arguing that he had served the organization for nine years Prabhakaran relented and asked him to quit the movement (Swamy, 2003, 204).

However Sumathy puts forward a third image of a woman who in her play In the Shadow of the Gun is fighting and willing to fight for herself but unwilling to take to the gun. This character named Savithri says, “But I will fight to the marrow to protect my body from the plundering hands of aliens” (21) but tells the men who are trying to corner her ‘You want to give me the gun- the mighty symbol of power and take my stories away from me? But that is not what I want to do. I heal-Yes, Heal” (22). Those who come looking for her tell her, “Fill your heart with hatred. Wear the cyanide near your heart and die with the nation's oath on your lips. Sing the praises of the leader and ask for blessings from the priest” (22). Savithri is unwilling to take recourse to violence no matter what atrocities have happened to her. Taking to the gun would mean that she will be silenced, under a male leadership in which she will not be able to give voice to her “stories.” She is a woman not without a political consciousness and patriotic feelings. She says “When I see the spirit of the oppressed moving you all toward national glory martyrdom and
death, I am moved too. I want to do my bit for the land and my people” (21). Here Sumathy is offering a third option/image/role which women can take recourse to. That is one of strength, individuality and courage and neither passive nor violent. This outlook is echoed in the poem “I am a Dangerous Woman” by Joan Cavanagh which reads as:

I am a dangerous woman
Carrying neither bombs nor babies
Flowers or Molotov cocktail
I confound all your reason, theory,
realism
Because I will neither lie in your ditches
Nor dig your ditches for you
Nor join your armed struggle
For bigger and better ditches. (55)

The same attitude in Savithri is built on the stand that Rajini Thirangama took to the war situation. Rajini collected stories and put together many stories of women in The Broken Palmyrah in the chapter “No more Tears Sister.” The character of Savithri too is collecting stories of women which resonate with the stories of women in The Broken Palmyrah and the narrator introduces her as “an activist, academic, a doctor” (12). The cadres have come “in search” (21) of Savithri because they do not want her stories to be known. She retorts “I cannot give you my stories. They are mine. They are women’s stories; given in confidence” (22). As her actions are not befitting to the movement they come looking for her to co-opt her into the movement but she resists. Thirangama felt that this way she and a few others had made a difference. She writes in The Broken Palmyrah that “There is powerlessness, disappointment and disillusionment, but also hope. We have done it …a little bit…(330). Her bravery and commitment is praised by Regie Siriwardene in the following poem titled “Garland for Rajini” after she was shot by the LTTE.

You refused to eat the exile’s bread, bounteous
and bitter; returned to live with the hot breath
of death pursuing you, yet held your head high.
They shot you like a dog in the street, but that
death
will be remembered as their shame, your pride.
I bring you no wreath, but flowers as for a bride. (Canagaratna 713)

Woman Represented as Murderer

In the short story “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” (1998) by Charles Sarvan, Dhanu thinks to herself, “Murderess sounds worse than murderer. Or does it? Wonder why.” One is instantly reminded of Lady Macbeth who has to “unsex” herself before the murder of Duncan. Why does Lady Macbeth have to ‘unsex’ herself to encourage Macbeth to carry out the murder? Is the idea of a woman murderer so unacceptable to the audience that Shakespeare had to make her unsex herself to prepare her for murder? In the light of the witches whose sex cannot be determined in the play, this makes for a very interesting phenomenon. This notion of unsexing oneself is reverberated in the play The Wicked Witch by Sumathy, when the witch yells out “Unsex me!” to the three wheel driver after she has been abused by the crowd (57). The underlying notions are that women are weak or life givers by nature and therefore killing is unnatural to them. The stereotype of women as evil and dangerous is ignored in this instance. Although women as murderers are a taboo when women are part of such activities, society assumes that she would have had ‘a really good reason’ to do so. De Mel points out that in the context of the LTTE, “given a woman’s symbolic role as nurturer of society, her participation in violence signals the ultimate moral sanction that can be accorded to it” (2001, 206).

The stereotype of women militants as being totally ruthless in the mind of Captain Wasantha as well as others is countered in the novel The Road from Elephant Pass, because when Captain Wasantha is about to kill the man who tries to rape Kamala, she screams “No, Wasu. Don’t do it” (270). However in the movie Alimankada, based on this novel, Kamala does not tell Wasantha not to shoot. In the novel, this scene undercut the image of a militant who is not only considered to be ruthless but also willing to give up
her life to take revenge on those who hurt her family. She is forgiving unlike what he thinks of her at the beginning that “I would be foolish to trust her. She would support me only as long as our objectives were the same. If they should diverge, I had no doubt that she would slit my throat with the same detached unconcern with which she had handled every other situation” (70). This stereotype is later broken by Kamala’s decision to tell the Captain the truth about her mission. Prejudices on either side are broken as even Kamala has a fixed notion of her enemies. Kamala asks the Captain, “You’ve been to university?” and Wasantha thinks to himself that “She must have thought only savages joined our army” (120).

Another incident in the novel The Road from Elephant Pass when Wasantha “...noticed that Velaithan was limping and the sleeve of her kameez was torn” he asks “Are you hurt?” She stared at me as if I had made an indecent proposal and shook her head angrily. I suppose LTTE cadres are not allowed to feel pain or maybe they simply shoot their wounded. I was sorry I had asked” (76). What the Captain does not realize is that her reaction has little to do with the LTTE and more to do with the fact that she is a woman playing a role which traditionally belonged to men. This is what Christine in Congo refers to when she says “When you are a girl you have to be harder, or the men they don’t respect you” (Brett and Specht 85). For Kamala, she has adorned a masculine garb, a masculine role and therefore does not want to be ‘protected’ by a man and that too an enemy. It is gender playing an unconscious role here. Her reaction is similar to the Captain’s when she tells him what to do. “I felt anger erupting in me. I hated it when someone argued tactics with me. Especially subordinates. Especially enemies. Especially women” (The Road from Elephant Pass 95).

This image changes when she starts projecting herself in a different way once she realizes that the Captain is not a demon. The novel reads as, “Kamala saw me and smiled. The whole bus station sparkled. Where had the sullen angry woman gone? I tried to picture her, as I had seen her on the first day, and found it hard. Had I changed too?” (The Road from Elephant Pass 370) Nihal De Silva’s conviction that interaction between the communities can change the situation is brought out here as it is their interaction which
has put an end to many prejudices. In an interview he talks about how he grew up with many Tamil friends but it wasn’t the same for his sons.

Another scene in the novel reads as “‘You might even find a snake or two underneath.’ She dropped the log as if it had scalded her. ‘You’d better collect the firewood,’ she announced calmly. ‘I’ll prepare the food.’” *(The Road from Elephant Pass* 113). Wasantha is unconsciously aware that Kamala is playing a role. This consciousness shows that even he is playing one: the role of a brave soldier who does not want to show that he is afraid of bears. After telling Kamala about man eating leopards the Captain thinks to himself, “I wondered if I had managed to make her a little nervous. Even if I had, she wasn’t going to let me find out” (136). He realizes very early in their relationship that “She was not going to sit around and let me play the dominant male” (98). If this attitude in Kamala is due to the fact that she has been a militant and this experience has given her self confidence to stand up for herself, or if her defiance is due to the fact that she is with a man from enemy territory is not clear.

In the novel she is first a “woman” and then everything else- informant, militant, sister, daughter and lover. If Kamala was waiting for Captain Wasantha, can the first sentence of the book be “The man was late”? Wouldn’t the word ‘man’ be replaced by “Captain” or ‘soldier” or something of the kind? It would at least be “‘he’ was late.” Not “the man was late”. Afterwards she is referred to as “a senior woman activist” (2) and recognized as the sister of a boy who was with a combat group in the East” (3) by Major Kiriella. She approaches them through another man who is the “informant.” All negotiations are between men. She is simply carrying out orders. But this does not mean that she has no agency or portrayed as one who has no nationalist aspirations. She is very conscious of what she wants to do with her life.

Therefore we see how within the parameters of nationalism and militancy, women are engendered in a gendered manner and viewed in ways which are suitable to the dominant ideas of the time. She is expected to take part in the nationalist project but in a passive sense by being an inspiration and by sacrificing her children for the nation. In
such an instance she is seen as synonymous with the land and thereby becomes a representative of the motherland. When she is let into the physical space of war from the ideological, for reasons which were discussed above, she is expected to be a mother warrior or an armed virgin. The figure of the mother warrior rests on the notion that she should fight the enemy as a mother to protect the land for her children while the men fight for the women and children who are the real heroes of the war. The image of the armed virgin is to be simulated to channel female sexuality towards violent energy against the enemy. These roles for women have been created by attaching them to already valourised existent notions such as chastity, motherhood, and virginity, in the wake of a situation where women have had to participate in war. The next chapter will look at how the idea of sacrifice for a woman has been co-opted into self-sacrifice to engender the suicide bomber.