Chapter II

En-gendering Suicide Attacks

“To the general public, ‘Tigresses’ are among the three most striking features of the LTTE, the other two being the cyanide capsule and the suicide killing”

- Margaret Trawick (151)

I have tried to analyze particularly the concept of the ‘Tigress’ within the nationalist angst in Sri Lanka in the previous chapter. This chapter will look at how suicide killings are engendered as well as gendered and how they are located within existing religious and cultural practices. The discourse surrounding women militants and female suicide bombers tend to get attached to notions such as sacrifice, marriage and filial devotion. It is such discourses which engender suicide bomb attacks as well as suicide bombers through the ideology of martyrdom.

Suicide Attacks in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a country which is not devoid of violence and the people are very much socialized to it to an extent that it is accepted as the norm. Despite this atmosphere each suicide bombing which occurs in the country shocks people as to how one can want to kill oneself while killing others because between murder and suicide, the latter is considered more ‘crazy’ than the other but both these aspects are present in the suicide bomber. The motive to kill is something that society is able to understand but it is the desire to give up one’s life in the procedure is what is incomprehensible to people. Other groups with such capabilities are the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Hamas in Palestine, the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) of Turkey, the Groupe Islamique Armee (GIA or the Armed Islamic Group) of Algeria and the Islamic Group of Egypt (Gunaratne, 2000). The LTTE could claim the use of the highest number of suicide bombings from all twelve organizations which took recourse to this tactic until over taken by Palestinian groups in 2003 (Bloom 60).

When looking into the history of LTTE suicide attacks in Sri Lanka, one first comes across the suicide attack carried out by an LTTE male cadre Wasanthan who was
also called “Captain Miller” on 5 July 1987. Captain Miller, who was a teenager according to Bose (111), drove a truck full of explosives into a Sri Lankan army camp at Nelliady in Jaffna resulting in the death of 40 soldiers31 (Swamy, 2003, 241-42). The use of suicide attacks emerged “at a time when there were several opposition groups competing for leadership of the Tamil community” (Bloom, 44). By having followers of the group sacrificing themselves thus, the group could gain prominence among the Tamil community as well as reaffirm its power. “The spectacle of a suicide bombing is a way in which violence is used to mobilize and radicalize the polity” (Bloom, 44). Women were sent on suicide missions a couple of years after this first incident. The stage for the female suicide bomber was thus given over to the woman once it was tried and tested males.

When scholars consider suicide within the LTTE they take the first suicide attack of Captain Miller as an important mark in history. It is the first suicide operation to be carried out but not the first time that the concept of suicide was put to a practical test in a very important episode in history. That is the suicide of Charles Anthony, alias Seelan, which triggered off a chain of historical events, not only within the LTTE but throughout the whole country. It was the suicide of one person which led to the events of the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983. It was Seelan’s suicide, his request to his childhood friend Aruna to shoot him, which was a precursor for the cult of suicide as well as it’s glorification within the movement.

Seelan’s death is narrativised thus by Narayan Swamy:

Seelan kept running painfully realizing that the bullet wound he had suffered in the knee during an earlier attack on a police station was slowing him down… ‘Shoot me please’ he begged gasping for breath. The friend had no choice, and time. His hands trembling, he aimed his rifle at Seelan’s forehead. He saw tears welling up in the eyes of the self-

31 This attack was a reaction to the army capturing Vadamaarachchi which was the cradle of the Liberation struggle.
condemned man. Seelan though begging for death, seemed wanting to be alive to continue to fight on for the cause. (2003, 3-4)

Seelan was a very close friend of Prabhakaran and his death on 15 July 1983 was a huge blow as well as a personal loss to him. As an act of revenge for this death the LTTE launched an attack in Tinneveli, Jaffna (Bloom 52) which killed 13 Sri Lankan Army personnel resulting in the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 when 600 to 1000 Tamils were killed and 80,000 ended up in refugee camps (Swamy,2003, 82). Seelan was respected and valued for his action and a regiment of the LTTE was called Charles Anthony Regiment and Prabhakaran’s eldest son was named Charles Anthony after Seelan’s Christian name. Swamy records that it was after the Tinneveli attack in which he lost Chellakili that Prabhakaran ‘broke down sobbing inconsolably’ and that was the “first and the last time anyone saw him cry” (2003, 9).

The order from Prabhakaran to commit suicide by taking recourse to the cyanide capsule also came from the idealization of a young Tamil militant called Sivakumaran who had tried to assassinate a Sri Lankan minister visiting Jaffna in September 1970. Sivakumaran swallowed a cyanide pill when surrounded by the police while robbing a bank in Jaffna in 1974. However this suicide does not count in the history of the LTTE as Sivakumaran belonged to another militant group.

Captain Miller’s attack was only the beginning of the suicide bombing cult, a cult which does not only expect the individual to take ones own life to escape torture and interrogation but to kill as many while destroying oneself. After Captain Miller’s attack the LTTE deployed suicide bombers to destroy the Joint Operations Command, the nerve-centre of the Sri Lankan security forces (21 June 1991), the Central Bank (31

32 Other estimates say around 2000 were killed. O’Ballance writes that the government admitted to 402 deaths in The Cyanide War 25. As in the case of riots the amount of people who were affected and killed is always a matter of debate.

33 Dayan Jayatilleke views this ambush as an attempt to disrupt peace talks. He feels that there seems to be a pattern in which, whenever there seemed to be a chance for a negotiated solution, the tigers launched an attack to abort that possibility and “the attack on the 13 soldiers in July 1983 took place in a context in which President Jayawardena had finally invited the TILF to a Roundtable-discussion on Tamil grievances and terrorism. Prabhakaran pre-empted it by the ambush” (324-25).
January 1996), the World Trade Centre (15 October 1997), the Temple of the Tooth Relic, the most hallowed Buddhist shrine (25 January 1998), and the oil storage installations in Kolonnawa (1995). The group used suicide bombers to kill a number of service personnel, apart from political leaders and outstanding intellectuals such as Neelan Thiruchelvam (29 July 1999). Sri Lankan Navy chief Admiral Clancy Fernando was killed by a suicide bomber on a motor cycle soon after he returned from India after discussing Indo-Sri Lankan naval cooperation (16 November 1992). Brigade commander of the Jaffna peninsula Brigadier Larry Wijeratne (14 May 1998) and Jaffna town commandant Brigadier Ananda Hamangoda, (4 July 1996) were killed in two independent suicide attacks. In order to paralyze the security apparatus, the LTTE singled out and targeted individuals who were at the forefront of counter-insurgency operations. For instance, Chief Inspector Nilabdeen, the head of the anti-terrorism unit in a suburban police station, escaped with injuries (1999) but Razeek, a former Tamil militant who had been integrated into the Sri Lankan Army, was killed in May 1999 (Gunaratne, 2000). President Premadasa too was a victim of a suicide bomber in May 1999.  

Michael Roberts calls suicide bombers “precision bombs” (2005a, 497) due to the fact that they can reach the target closer than a bomb planted in a particular place and make sure that the target is destroyed. It was first used in battle and later as a weapon to assassinate leaders of the enemy group in the heart of enemy territory, especially in Colombo while also unsettling the economy.

Instead of regulating the environmental factors like poverty and group dynamics, “states respond to the threat in different ways. For instance, Israel responds reactively to the effects of suicide terrorism by destroying the homes of the suicide bombers and prosecuting potential suicide bombers” (Gunaratne, 2000). This kind of state violence only produces more of them. For example the number of Tamils who joined and supported the LTTE increased tremendously after the 1983 riots. Dayan Jayatilleka says that “The anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 gave tremendous impetus to this struggle and  

34 The dates of these suicide attacks have been taken from <http://www.satp.org/countries/shrilanka/database/data_suicide_killings.htm> accessed on 1 August 2009.
caused a leap in the recruiting and military capacity of all the major Tamil guerrilla organizations- particularly the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)” (1995, 2).

Concept of Suicide

For them as for rebels before them, murder is identified with suicide...therefore they do not value any idea above human life, though they kill for the sake of ideas. To be precise, they live on the plane of their idea. They justify it, finally, by incarnating it to the point of death...They will then put an abstract idea above human life, even if they call it history, to which they themselves have submitted in advance, and to which they will decide, quite arbitrarily, to submit everyone else...The greater the value the estimator places in this final realization, the less the value of human life. At the ultimate limit, it is no longer worth anything at all. (Albert Camus, The Rebel. qtd. in Bose 117)

Suicide is a phenomenon that is entrenched in the lives of all LTTE cadres equally, not only in suicide bombers. It is a symbol of their dedication which is worn around their necks in the form of the cyanide capsule which will end their lives if captured by the enemy to ensure that torture, rape and extortion of information will not take place. This is a paradox that in a fight for a better life without discrimination from anybody, to give birth to their homeland and live free, they are expected to bite into the cyanide capsule if captured. Other reasons given to Kevin Site’s in his interview of LTTE cadres for using the cyanide capsule is to ensure that they are not “humiliated in front of the enemy.”

In Psychiatry, suicide is looked at as a symptom of a condition which is usually depression and not as a condition in itself. It is depression which leads to suicide, but in the case of suicide bombers in Sri Lanka there are other reasons. Emile Durkheim posited three basic categories of suicide:

1. Egoistic suicide- when a person is unable to find his/her place in society
2. Anomic suicide- when a person suffers a personal loss of orientation
3. Altruistic suicide – when an individual is willing to sacrifice their life for the benefit of their group (Charny 69).
Kenneth Thompson has described how altruistic suicide is a result of “too much” integration into one’s society which is very different to the other two kinds of suicide in which the individual cannot connect to one’s society (Charny 69).

Terrorist organizations find suicide attacks very convenient for mainly the fact that it can create more casualties and get to the target more precisely and in the case of a female suicide bomber this task becomes even easier as women can get through without attracting too much attention. The negative psychological impact of a suicide bombing is also part of the goal of the perpetrators even more so than the death of the targets. It also attracts the media and the international community and proves the cause as worthy because someone gave his/her life for it. It is also a better way of attack as it is very difficult for the enemy to counter suicide attacks. They require no escape plan and there is no fear of being caught and interrogated afterwards. For the LTTE this method of attack has also been useful in getting rid of people who oppose them and not claiming responsibility for the death. This way they do not maim the image of the organization in the eyes of the international community as well as those who support them locally. This utility value is apparent in the Sinhalese movie Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers) when Gauri who is in charge of the mission to kill “Double X”, tells Dilip and Nirmala who are the two suicide bombers, “No one must know that our organization is involved in this. So whoever is involved must die.” It is a convenient strategy as they cannot be traced to the organization. This was clear in the instance when a young female cadre exploded her self in Kollupitiya Police Station in July 2004, a day after Black Tigers day was celebrated during a cease fire period. The suicide bomber was meant to kill the Tamil politician Douglas Devananda who was the Minister of Hindu Cultural affairs at the time. The LTTE condemned the attack saying such acts caused “severe damage to the peace process” although there was little doubt that the LTTE was involved in it.

“On 5 July 1999, Black Tiger day, the LTTE erected a monument for the Black Tigers who killed themselves in operations in Puthukuthirippu in the Wanni. A statement issued from its political headquarters in Mallavi in the Wanni said that the LTTE had conducted 147 suicide operations since 1987. This number does not include the suicide
attacks carried out on non-military targets, such as politicians and economic infrastructure, in which civilians were killed or injured” (Gunaratne, 2000). The LTTE does not claim responsibility for attacks on non-military persons such as Rajiv Gandhi, Ranasinghe Premadasa and Gamini Dissanayake. By adopting such a position, the LTTE seeks to project to the international community that it is a liberation movement that targets only military personnel, and that they are not a terrorist group. 30 year old Thamilini, who was the head of the female cadres, pointed out to Amy Waldman in her interview that they are different from the Palestinian bombers as their targets are only the military and not civilians. The target of the bomber and where the attack takes place and the number that are killed seem to be very important to judge the suicide attack in a moral sense.

In the novel The Road from Elephant Pass, Kamala’s target too is the military and not civilians, which makes it difficult for the reader to judge her as inhuman. She is posing as someone who wants revenge from the LTTE to trick the Sri Lankan army into launching an attack which will kill a highly respected social worker from India and a few Indian journalists. The fact that she does not simply want to blow herself up with other civilians portrays her in a more positive light. Since Kamala is not a suicide bomber what the army would have done to her after her false information is revealed, is unknown. She says, “Whatever they did to me, in the end I would die. Then it would be over” (402). Her courage and her honesty at the end makes her a perfect heroine for the novel in which many female readers would be able to idealize and identify with her which may have added to the popularity of the novel.

Suicide terrorism is distinctive because it entails individual self sacrifice, the “principle of self sacrifice at the alter of a higher collective cause” (Bose 118). Joining any armed force entails this sacrifice but death is not as certain in this instance as it is for suicide bombers. This total willingness to die has been questioned by many and looked at as irrational. The very first question when referring to a suicide bomber is “what makes them do this?” as every human being desires to live and not to die. The individual believes that his/her actions glorify both him/herself as well as the cause and the truth of
the cause is established by the willingness of individuals to sacrifice everything including their life. For someone whose life otherwise has little significance, transcendent fame can be a powerful motive.

In the documentary *My Daughter the Terrorist* (2006) which is based on two women suicide bombers, one of them being Dharsika says, “Even one person alone can destroy a big target. You must have self determination and courage for that. And also be able to do what the leader says... We have training for that.” Her statement about the destruction that one can cause is true and possible only through a suicide attack. Rohan Gunaratne too acknowledges this when he says that “One suicide bomber can have a profound effect on the political, military and economic contexts, especially in peace-building situations” (2000). Waldman quotes S. Thamilchelvam, the Tigers political head, “The goal, was to ensure maximum damage done with minimum loss of life.” The minimum loss of life is a reference to their cadres and not civilians or army personnel.

When Judea was occupied by the Romans, ancient Jewish sects of Zealots and Cicarri were among the earliest practitioners of a suicide killing form of attack (Charny 18). Other early practitioners of this include the Islamic Order of Assassins during the early Crusader times. The roots of the word assassin derive from the Shiite ‘hashshashin’ or ‘hashish user.’ The 20th century Japanese Kamikaze (‘divine wind’) is also famous for acts of suicide which began in 1944 (Charny 18-19). One of the first modern day suicide bombers belonged to the Hezbollah in Lebanon who carried out an attack in April 1983 (Schweitzer 76). The LTTE followed them. Between July 1987 and February 2000 it carried out 168 suicide terror attacks in Sri Lanka and India (Schweitzer 78). In Israel, suicide terrorism began in 1993 by the Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Schweitzer 79). In Egypt there came about 2 groups: Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Gama’a al-Islamiya (Schweitzer 80).

Among these organizations women have got a prominent role in organizations with a nationalist orientation. Charny says that these organizations, especially the LTTE and PKK exploit women’s desire to prove themselves as equal to men. Since women feel
they are physically weaker than men, they opt for suicide to make up for this lack at the battle front. But Thamilini, “rejected any comparison with Palestinian Suicide bombers, who she suggested are more often dejected.” As told to Amy Waldman, “People dejected in life won’t be able to go as Black Tigers’ she said. ‘There must be a clear conception of why and for what we are fighting. A deep humanitarianism is very necessary- a love of others, for the people’ ” (qtd. in Charny 21).

Gendered Suicide

According to the *Time*, out of 217 suicide attacks in Sri Lanka until 2004, 64 have been carried out by women (qtd. in de Mel, 2004, 75). Among the suicide attacks that have taken place on the island within the last two decades there was an increase in the use of women for this purpose. This choice is made very evident in the play *Forbidden Area* by Chandrasekaram (2000, first performed in 1997 in Sinhalese) which was a joint winner of the Gratiaen Prize in 1999. The play depicts for us Urmila, a woman cadre of the LTTE, who is waiting with her escort Raman, for the right moment to carry out her suicide mission and kill the president. Among the three characters of the play, it is Urmila who has to blow herself up and not Raman: or Supremo: the leader of the liberation organization. It is made evident that Urmila was very faithful to the cause unlike Raman so it would have been more appropriate for Supremo to assign the task to Raman as his life is worth less to the movement, but he does not. It is because women attract less suspicion and can easily get closer to the target.

In all three texts, “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi,” *Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers)* and *Forbidden Area*, the three female suicide bombers Dhanu, Nirmala and Urmila respectively can get closer to the targeted person as she draws less suspicion. Using women to fool the enemy has been a ploy used by the LTTE for a long time and now that this strategy has been identified by the enemy, women suicide bombers pretend to be either pregnant or suffering from polio as we saw in the attacks launched in 2006-2007.35 Why is it that a woman generates less suspicion? Is it because the assumption is

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35 An unsuccessful suicide attack to kill Douglas Devananda was carried out by a woman who was pretending to be pregnant on 25 April 2006. The woman who pretended to be suffering from Polio blew her
that she is by ‘nature’ kind, loving and peaceful and would not be involved in such activities? Why is it so easily assumed that women will not be part of a struggle in which civilians are rising up against a government? In the short story “Maya My Daughter, Maya the Heroine” by Gnana Moonesinghe (2005) Maya is to accompany three other boys who are going to assassinate some “officials” because “Maya’s presence would make them look like a foursome on an outing together” (108). It is also Maya who has to carry out the instructions of opening the door of the room in which the officials were supposed to be in. However she loses her life in a spray of bullets as their plan had reached the ears of the Army and they were ready for this attack.

Maya’s mother Arundhathi cannot fathom how her daughter can be involved in this movement. “For Arundhathi the struggle was the responsibility of men- men with strong minds and firm convictions. A territory, she felt, from which women were excluded. These were the images that arose in her mind when she tried to conceptualize persons who fill the role of freedom fighters. Certainly not young girls like Maya” (emphasis mine 103). This imagery in the minds of the military personnel is what is banked upon in suicide attacks by women.

It is possibly this attitude which made Rajiv Gandhi say “Relax. Take it easy” (Sharma 39) to the woman constable: Anusyua who wasn’t allowing Thenmuli Rajaratnam alias Dhanu36 to come closer to him. These became the last words of Gandhi’s life. “According to the eye witness account, while bending the woman assassin smiled at Anusyua” (Sharma 39). No one will know for sure what this inscrutable smile meant. Was it Dhanu’s way of saying to Anusyua that she should know better the capabilities of a woman or was it her moment of sweet revenge for her rape which was made public only after her death? The possibilities are endless.

self up while she was being checked by security personnel at Douglas Devananda’s office on 28 November 2007.

36 Mia Bloom informs that Dhanu was also known as Gayatri (57)
Indeed, one of the reasons to choose women for suicide attacks is because they evoke less suspicion. A woman is not expected to destroy life as she is by nature a life giver. It is not only the LTTE which exploits this notion but also the author of the novel *The Road from Elephant Pass*: Nihal De Silva. It is not only the protagonist Captain Wasantha who eventually trusts Kamala Velaithan but also the reader who gets a surprise at the end of the novel when she reveals what her real intention is. In spite of the fact that the reader gets to hear the story only through Wasantha’s conscience the reader is cleverly tricked to believe that Kamala is being honest about her intentions.

This conditioning of the human mind is made apparent when Kamala points out that both of them together are two human beings and not one who is weak and the other strong. In the incident when Wasantha decides to scare away the leopard to get what the leopards had hunted down, she insists on accompanying him saying, “Two people will look more intimidating than one,…The leopard won’t know I am a woman” (125). It is quite disappointing that the movie does not include this line even though this scene has been included in it. Ana Christina Ibanez says, “When camouflage and intelligence work were required, their skill at hiding the truth and tricking the enemy was acknowledged and celebrated; in times of peace, however, such behaviour was censored” (emphasis mine. Moser et al. 128).

In the BBC television documentary Prabhakaran says, about the Black Tigers, “We have people prepared to give up their lives. We make up a list of these people and train them” and calls the training programme a great secret (Swamy, 2003, 234). When Andrea, in the novella *One More Sunrise*, goes to the LTTE controlled areas as a journalist she is told that she cannot have access to the Black Tigers. Selvam says “They have a special status in our struggle. Details of their identity, operations and training are kept secret” and he warns her saying, “You are our guests and we will treat you well. Don’t betray that trust and suffer the consequences” (92) just in case she has any ideas to get information about the suicide squad.

‘The Black Tigers’ which was the suicide bomber squad of the LTTE maintained an utmost level of secrecy. Even after been selected for a mission, only Prabhakaran, the
trainers and members of the Black Tiger intelligence wing knew the identities of the bombers (Swamy, 2003, 235). Although her “subjectivity is unavailable to the public before her death, she becomes the object of literary and visual portrayal, public speculation and fascination” (De Mel, 2007, 192). As there are only very few publicly available interviews or personal accounts of Black Tiger women, it is the representation of these women in fiction and film, which creates the image of the female suicide bomber which is prevalent in today’s Sri Lankan society.

Although Mohan Niyaz, the director of the movie *Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers)*, talks about the theme of suicide bombing as “not an alien experience for us” in an interview, to portray the suicide bombers he had to take recourse to others who had met such personnel. Niyaz said "I had to do a lot of experiences at the pre-production level. I went on speaking to people who had the experiences in handling this unique section of people who dared to pay with their lives for a cause...I closely associated with some senior police officers who had talked to the suicide killers who had failed in their attempts," said the young director on the novel theme he had selected to base his film on (Fernando).

These representations are the only means through which the public get glimpses of their political and personal lives. This raises the question of “Subaltern representation”- but can “the suicide bomber who also expropriates other people’s voices by her violent action” be termed subaltern in the first place? (De Mel, 2007, 200). Due to these complexities, it is not so important nor is it possible to analyze if these representations are true but to locate the sites of power and speech which produce her for the public (Abu- Lughod, qtd. in de Mel, 2007, 200) and which stereotypes they enforce or which ones they try to break away from.

**Gender Benders**

In the Sinhalese movie *Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers)* the two suicide bombers, Nirmala and Dilip, are given a house in Colombo to live in before they carry out their mission. While they are living here their neighbour’s dog creeps into their house
and Dilip kills it as he feels that they should not at all interact with any of their neighbours. A review of *Kalu Sudu Mal* (*Colourless Flowers*) noted that:

One of the sequences which showed a little boy from the neighbourhood (which Nirmala and Dilip moves into) appeared very stupid, what harm could have come to the young couple if that dog was returned? That whole scene looks irrelevant, if the director used those scenes to convey how aloof that couple wanted to be in that house spoke volumes because it appeared isolated every time it was shown, not even a dog will want to get in there. *(Bakr)*

The intention however of including this scene was not only to show how aloof the couple wanted to be but also to show that Dilip killing the dog was “irrelevant” and not that the scene was “irrelevant” as Dilip’s extreme reaction is totally unnecessary. The movie through this scene tries to show how Dilip is trying to be a harsh and strong male under the burden of masculinity. His cruel role gives him much worry and restlessness afterwards. Nirmala tells him to stop being a hero and get his thoughts together in the scene in which they are practicing to shoot on the beach. This is in contrast to Nirmala’s reaction which shows her in a more humane light even though she is ready for the deadly suicide mission. In contrast to Dilip she is very docile, as a woman militant it is quite the opposite of what one expects. However his exterior machismo cannot be kept for long as his conscience keeps bothering him and it is she who tells him that they have to be strong and complete the mission.

The review also criticizes Niyaz for casting Yasodha Wimaladharma in a minor role and giving the role of the suicide bomber to Dilhani Ekanayake. The reviewer does not realize that the some of the explicit scenes in the movie would have limited his choice of an actress who would take up this role, not to mention the controversial nature of the theme of the movie being one of the first Sinhalese movies to deal with suicide bombers and one which tries to empathize with them. It is a well known fact that this theme kept many actors and funding agencies away from this script. It was only five years after the
script was written that the National Film Corporation decided to finance the film. Then the movie was filmed in 1999 and finally released in 2002 (De Mel, 2002). The casting of the actors such would have also been a result of the image of a suicide bomber in the mind of the director. Yasodha Wimaladharma’s image may have been too feminine for the director to imagine her as an ex-terrorist and therefore fit in better with the character of Mala who has broken away from the organization due to ideological differences. Even for the movie *Alimankada*, Suranga Ranawaka was told to play the part of the LTTE cadre because she had “the features and mannerism” to fit into this role. Nanda Wanasundara in a review says that this choice was perfect because she is not an absolute beauty but had sharp clear features.

There are contradictory reviews of Dilhani Ekanayake’s performance in *Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers)*. She is known to be a good actress. Just a year before this film was released her performance in Asoka Handagama’s Sinhalese film *Me Magai Sandai (This is My Moon)* 2001 was highly praised by many. But why were people unsatisfied with her acting in this movie? According to Neloufer de Mel “Nirmala is portrayed in the film extremely skillfully by Dilhani Ekanayake” (2002). While De Mel appreciates this portrayal for the fact that it shows us “that humanity can live side by side with militancy” (2002) viewers such as Prasad Abu Bakr are quite puzzled as to why Dilhani Ekanayake could not do justice to this role. This dissatisfaction comes from the image in mind of a suicide bomber as ruthless and aggressive. The viewer expects a much more aggressive violent portrayal and when Dilhani Ekanayake does not act so the spectator is disappointed. This portrayal is understood by De Mel who has an in depth knowledge of suicide bombers. It is partly the fault of the script which does not explain to the viewer why particularly Nirmala and Dilip were chosen for this deadly mission, except for the fact that their past records were considered. Neither do we get an insight into their personal lives. Unlike Dilhani Ekanayake’s acting Suranga Ranawaka is much more aggressive and ruthless in the Sinhalese movie *Alimankada*, in her portrayal of the women cadre, Kamala. Therefore everyone appreciated her performance.
Nirmala’s reaction to her pregnancy in *Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers)* is a sharp contrast to Malli’s in the Hindi movie *The Terrorist*. Nirmala says that she got more strength for the mission once she realized that she was pregnant and says, “If I can sacrifice my life, let my child also sacrifice its life for the movement.” It is Dilip who tells her that as a mother she should know to protect the life of her child and she gives into Dilip when he becomes violent and restless over the matter. His violent behaviour towards Nirmala, in a bid to convince her to let their child live, is ironic in the circumstances in which they are supposed to be violent to kill. In contrast Malli in the Hindi movie *The Terrorist* finds it difficult to choose between her roles as life giver to a new homeland and as life giver to the life within her. A further contrast to Nirmala is Dilip who changes everything about himself in preparation to be a father. We suddenly see a changed Dilip who cooks and feeds Nirmala as well as someone who is willing to change his plan to go against the organization to enjoy family life. In this sense the film tries to show the burdens of masculinity to a certain extent.

There is a tremendous change in Dilip after he gives up his macho image and makes love to Nirmala. It is similar to Urmila’s condition in the play *Forbidden Area*, but none of the reviews of the movie objected to the fact that Dilip’s change is due to his sexual encounter although this was a great matter of contention among reviewers of the play *Forbidden Area* in respect to the character Urmila. This is probably because in this case it is a man and also reviewers assumed that it is fatherhood which brings about this change in Dilip which shows that it is not only motherhood which is always an overbearing presence. Dilip stresses on the importance of the child after Nirmala gets pregnant but a close look at the movie and the characters show that his metamorphosis happens after he makes love to her for the first time. In fact Neloufer de Mel protests that “Nirmala's pregnancy alone is not sufficient to convince us of how and why Dilip changes from self-contained, dogmatic, intolerant and sexist male to a man capable of jealousy, love and tenderness. If his internal crisis is produced by the stress of impending self-annihilation, we are not given a chance to witness that development, that deeply intimate moment in his character” (2002).
Nirmala’s balanced characterization stands in stark contrast to Gauri who is absolutely cold-blooded and stands for the typical stereotype of a militant woman. Gauri’s image undermines Nirmala’s balanced portrayal. The movie seems to sympathize with the suicide bomber but it does not adhere to the idea that women are always more emotional. The story line creates no sympathy for Gauri, through whom the message is very clear that women can be perpetrators of violence as well and as manipulative and cruel in a political scenario. In fact Gauri is responsible for the deaths of Nirmala and Dilip as well as Maya’s fate.

Unlike Dilip who plays the strong ruthless male at the beginning of the movie, Raman is a character embedded with many ‘feminine qualities’ throughout the play Forbidden Area. His life is even more pathetic than Urmila’s as he joined the movement by default and not even by conviction like Urmila. He is unlike the typical male and feels guilty about having sex with Urmila in spite of boasting that he does “lots of forbidden things” (12). He worries about his mother and is very concerned about her. In fact Urmila says “I have never met anyone as sentimental as you” (13). Is it possible for him to show what is termed ‘feminine’ qualities only because Urmila “is not going to be alive to tell...” as he says to her? Therefore he gets the space to expose what society has forbidden in a man. A male cadre would usually not speak about his mother or show such guilt openly when he has been sent to assist a suicide mission. It is Urmila who should be sentimental as she is about to die but that is a ‘forbidden area’ for her and she takes on the role of the courageous “heroine.”

Secular Martyrdom

The naming of Prabhakaran’s son as Charles Anthony shows that homage to the dead begins at a personal level with the leader himself and has become a practice within the movement ever since (Roberts, 2005a, 495). The homage is paid to the dead to raise the value of sacrificing ones life for the cause and to raise them as Martyrs. As Martha Crenshaw points out, “Unless martyrdom were valued by society or at least by a subculture, individuals would not seek it” (emphasis mine. Moser et al. 25). Therefore this value has to be created within society if one wants to engender martyrs.
Bose points out that “What brings the Tamils together as a ‘nation’ is not only the fact that they have been victims of the violence of the state. The cement that solidifies the national bond is also derived from the violence that Tamils themselves perpetrate, and the death they encounter and the ‘martyrdom’ they achieve while doing so” (122). Therefore martyrdom acts as a binding force within the movement. Sumathy sees a “glorification of and preoccupation with militarism instead of militancy” due to martyrdom being the desirable end for women (2004, 129).

A LTTE text which Schalk refers to reads that ‘alappariya tiyakam’, ‘an immeasurable abandonment’ of life, or martyrdom, will lead to the ‘tayaka vitutalai’, ‘liberation of the motherland’. This is the logic which asks people to give up their lives for the land. ‘The LTTE does not bury its dead, it plants them’, to quote a LTTE leader (1997b). The fighter’s body compared to a seed that grows again and again is a metaphor not for his physical and spiritual resurrection, but for his life being a source of inspiration for others. This ‘plantation’ is a confidential death ritual consisting of recitation of a special text called ‘declaration at the sepulcher of the great hero.’ Then there are innumerable commemoration rituals on the occasion of a martyr’s death.

However unlike other militant groups such as the Hamas, the LTTE propagates a notion that their martyrdom is secular and this is why Rohan Guneratna points out that “The mindset of the LTTE suicide bomber is distinct from his or her West Asian counterpart” as he or she is motivated by her socio-political environment (2000). As Schalk points out,

The LTTE’s main concept of heroism is the concept of tiyakam, ‘abandonment’ (of life). The heroic element within this concept of tiyakam was reinforced and differentiated by the glorification of a Tamil martial past. The LTTE tiyaki ... receives no reward and is without compensation in cuvarkkam, ‘heaven’, or elsewhere, for his voluntary and representational dying. The LTTE hero is a ‘secular’ hero who expects no reward for himself... (1997b)
Prabhakaran too stressed that they are a secular group and not religious fanatics like the Al Qaida. In his speech in November 2001 he makes this distinction by saying that “We are not mentally demented to commit blind acts of violence impelled by racist and religious fanaticism” (Swamy, 2003, 275). All beings who carry out violent acts justify it in their own way. None of them would admit to the fact that they are fanatics of any kind. Dhanu is conscious of the fact that she will be called a fanatic in “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” when she thinks to her self that “the world will think me ugly in what it’ll call my fanaticism” (360).

Trawick strongly feels that the LTTE is secular and has no religious underpinnings. The female militant Sita who is a Christian wears sacred ash on her forehead which is a Hindu ritual and she tells Trawick that there is no religion within the movement. Therefore Trawick says that “When one contrasts the secularism of the LTTE with the Buddhism of Sri Lanka, one concludes that while Sri Lankan violence may be spurred by religious fanaticism, the violence of the LTTE is derived from other sources” (160).37

Although on the outside it looks very secular, the religious sphere has been replaced by a sacred space which is a discourse that stems from religion. The secular rhetoric has religious underpinnings. Everything that can be said of the sacred domain is said of the organization, its leader, the fallen heroes and the cause. Therefore the religious is not totally exclusive from the whole discourse concerning the movement. Prabhakaran himself said that the dead cadres “will be worshipped in the temple of our hearts throughout the ages” (emphasis mine. qtd. in Bose, 120). A. J. V. Chandrakanthan too says that “Hymns and devotional bhakti songs have been appropriated to celebrate the yaga (sacrifice) of the martyrs. There is prolific use of religious terms: martyr, renunciation, sacrifice, offering, self-immolation, self-gift, victim, grave, temple and shrine” (Wilson 170).

37 This comment is referring to the myth that the Buddha chose Sri Lanka as the island in which Buddhism will be protected and therefore some Buddhists justify violent means within a non violent philosophy like Buddhism by using this myth.
Schalk himself points out that there are six main ideological sources for the LTTE concept of martyrdom and they are not very secular either. There is the revival of a sacrificial language as expressed in the term *arppanippu*, meaning ‘dedication (of man to God)’. Secondly, there is the Tamil *bhakti* tradition from the Gita providing concepts of dedication and ascetism and a cosmic perspective in which the battle for independence takes place. Thirdly, there is a Christian element expressed in the concept of a *catci*, ‘witness’, ‘martyr’. Fourthly, there is Subhasism, expressed in the justification of armed struggle and in the concept of *balidan*, ‘gift (of life) as sacrifice.’ Fifthly, there is Dravidian nationalism providing martial concepts to the LTTE and the concept of a linguistic Tamil nation-state. Sixthly, there is the martial feminism of the female Tamil fighters adapted to Tamil male concepts of female behaviour adopted by the female Tamil fighters (1997b).

Religious beliefs on suicide were not discarded. Rather suicide was constructed in a different way to suit the mission of the organization. The LTTE consciously interprets suicide through cyanide in the situations mentioned as an act of *tiyakam* (abandonment). This kind of suicide is regarded as an anticipation of death inflicted by the enemy. The cause of death and responsibility for getting killed through cyanide is the enemy’s, and therefore it is not regarded as a suicide in the strict sense. Especially Catholic cadres need these distinctions to overcome scruples about this suicidal practice. Axel Michaels has pointed out that in Hinduism ritual suicide (for example by starvation) is not a stigma as it is in Christianity and Islam (qtd. in Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 2005, 114). Therefore as long as death is welcomed consciously for a cause, it counts as voluntary self sacrifice. Hellmann-Rajanayagam also points out that “planned death rarely features in classical ideology” but in LTTE poems images from Cankam and Bhakti literature are explicit (2005, 116). The *tiyakam* meaning ‘abandonment’ is not a suicide, but a gift of oneself, according to the LTTE. It should be noted that from the terms *Thatkolai* in Tamil which means ‘to kill yourself’ and *Thatkodai* which means ‘to give yourself’, the Tigers use the latter term (Waldman 12). It is interesting how the term that is used for one action can be of importance for the ideology of the movement. Roberts says that the LTTE is not as secular as it claims to be and has included religious or a certain kind of mystical potency.
in their practices and that this points to how a “modern organization can effectively mix a measure of enchantment within its rational methods” (“Tamil Tiger Martyrs” 495).

The martyr is viewed in various ways in which some would deny the martyrdom of a LTTE tiyaki (martyr) because s/he uses violence. Others would say that these people are martyrs because of their representational death on behalf of others. There are some who say that the word martyr is only a persuasive term and has no meaning at all in an LTTE context. Finally, there are those who say that the LTTE has no martyrs, it has only terrorists, and only the soldiers from the other side can be called martyrs (Schalk, 1997b).

“Indeed Schalk is careful to draw out the distinction between the Tiger’s connotation of martyr and that in the west, thereby confirming the opinion conveyed to me by several Tamils, namely, that ‘mavirar’ is an innovation” (Roberts, 2005a, 497). Before the 1980’s ‘mavirar’ (great warrior) was differentiated from ‘tiyaki’ (liberator/martyr), ‘catci’ (witness/martyr) and ‘ratacatci’ (blood witness). The first LTTE ‘mavirar’ in their martyrlogy is Lt. Shankar who died on 27 November 1982 after being wounded in one of the Tiger ambushes in July whereas the first woman ‘mavirar’ is considered to be Malati, who committed cyanide suicide when wounded fatally (Roberts, 2005a, End note 30, 509).

According to Schalk, the Tamil word Tiyaki / Tiyachi is one of the terms used by the LTTE to convey the idea of martyr although other words are also used and this concept ‘does not exactly correspond to what in Judeo-Christian tradition is meant by ‘martyr’ and ‘martyrdom’” (1997b 67) which is denoted better through the term ‘catci.’ Christian missionaries and Christian Tamils use the terms ‘catci’ (pronounced ‘satsi’) or ‘ratacatci’ as the term for ‘martyr” (Roberts, End note 28, 2005, 508). The term ‘Tiyaki’ is related to the Sanskrit word ‘Tyagi’ and both were deployed in colonial India to describe the Indian freedom fighters of the anti-British struggle. It is from this notion and
the representation surrounding the life and times of Subash Chandra Bose\textsuperscript{38} that Prabhakaran and his associates adopted this term for their personnel.

The projection of the concept of martyrdom into public ‘state-sponsored’ rituals and the bureaucratization and institutionalization of them started in 1989 (Schalk, 1997b). The epitaph of the first cyanide case, translated from Tamil is as follows: “Having been surrounded in a hideout in Valvettiturai by Sri Lankan soldiers and having enjoyed cyanide, he died heroically” (emphasis mine. qtd. in Schalk, 1997b). The LTTE taps the sense of ethnic pride in an individual. This was done by hanging a garlanded picture of every suicide bomber on the wall of his/her training camp to be revered by other teenagers who want to sign their lives away for the movement. The pictures of martyrs were printed in a pamphlet and distributed all over the Vanni on Heroes’ Day. The booklets include the name, age, date of birth, time of the attack and where the attack occurred. “Young Tamils know the names of the martyrs the way young American kids know the names of sports stars. They look up to them and want to emulate what they have done” (Bloom, 64).

Sardeshpande who was the commander in Sri Lanka for the IPKF in 1988 notes that when they suffered setbacks “The LTTE shrewdly increased the content and frequency of honouring their dead and lionizing their patriotic deeds in order to strengthen public sympathy and morale” (30). Swamy points out how “LTTE videos show, with chilling effect, young suicide bombers leaving the coast in motorboats, beaming and waving to their colleagues on the shore, including Prabhakaran at times, before setting off on a damage wrecking death” (2003, 273). These images of suicide bombers are used to generate more volunteers and to reinforce the idea that these people are very happy and take pride in undertaking suicide missions for the movement, thereby further legitimizing it and inviting others to do so.

We see that Selvi who was part of the LTTE unconsciously battles against the symbol of a martyr in “Selvi’s Revenge.” “Unlike the tiger women whose familial

\textsuperscript{38} Subash Chandra Bose (1897-1945), played a major role to overthrow the British empire from India.
devotion is replaced by a filial devotion to a fraternal community, Selvi embraces a ‘sheltered’ domesticity, abrogates the virtues of martyrdom” (De Silva, 29).

Engendering Martyrdom through Symbols

The influence of these architectural symbols and the pictorial imagery deployed in LTTE websites and publications cannot be understood without attending to the insidious power of visual and oral modes of cultural transmission in such societies as India and Sri Lanka. Storytelling, poetry, films, and ritual practice in South Asia are all characterized by enormous redundancy. That is, message and patterns of representation are endlessly repeated. This means that the populace absorbs the ambience and/or message of a rite, picture, building or pandal unreflectively because of a familiarity gained by endless exposure to the style or representation. (Roberts, 2005a, 498)

It is through this method of representation of repetition that the status quo gains. Even death does not escape the repetitive use of symbolism. In fact the occasion of death is used to further reinforce prevalent notions in society. “Death an intensely powerful transfer point of meaning provides a prime locus for the challenge and reinforcement of national and religious ideas. Paradoxically death can spur two opposite reactions. First death can banish what Heidegger refers to as ‘inauthenticity,’ a mindless self alienation in the tranquility of the surrounding culture...Second, death can serve as a staging ground for the indoctrination of large groups of people into the dominant national and religious discourse on the value of war” (Gamburd 169). Elaine Scarry examines the larger social significance of death and “argues the apparently counter-intuitive idea, that while the causes of conflict legitimise death in war, so the deaths serve to legitimize the conflict” (Gamburd 169). Bose says that the ceremonies “serve, above all, a mobilizing and recruiting purpose. This is a tactic which is deliberately and systematically employed to whip up mass sentiment in favour of the right to self determination, and attract new cadres by surrounding the movement with an aura of romance” (120). An LTTE woman
leader thus lectured a gathering at a funeral of three fallen fighters in the following terms: “Many of you will pick up the weapons left by these martyrs... thousands and thousands of Tigers will be created as a result of their supreme sacrifice” (BBC telefilm Suicide Killers qtd. in Bose 120).

Death is posited, or to use David Clark’s term, “the social distribution of death” (4) takes place as an achievement for a “promotion.” For years most LTTE fighters were unaware of their ranks, which were made public only when they died (Swamy, 2003, 202). It is only later that the LTTE began giving its cadres ranks while they were alive. The paradox of death as a final closure, as well as a new unfolding (David Clark 3) is acknowledged but more attention is given to what is to unfold out of the death. It is constructed as something which can be conquered. “Death has surrendered to them. They keep eagerly waiting for the day they would die” (Prabhakaran 1993 Black Tiger Day speech). People usually wait for certain occasions in their lives. Certainly not for death. Mellor points out how “...factors such as death can call into question the social constructed picture of reality” (14) but an over emphasis of death and a glorification of it will lead people to value their lives less.

Cemeteries

Martin Heidegger suggests that people carry out their day-to-day activities without thinking much about death. The ritual of a funeral, and the presence of a corpse, according to Heidegger brings home the ‘ownmost’ and certain quality of death for each participant and onlooker at a funeral, shaking their complacency and prompting a thorough re-examination of the principles and “priorities imposed by the surrounding culture, which Heidegger refers to as ‘they-self’” (Gamburd 169). Therefore cemeteries serve as a reminder to people of the impermanence of life and puts them out of their complacency. Cemeteries were used by the LTTE for strengthening their cause.

The body is so important that even after death it is given a special place to become a powerful symbol. The LTTE gave up the practice of cremation which is the accustomed funerary practice of Tamils, and introduced the concept of cemeteries. The
dead body too in this way is used to create a symbolic space which represents the cause it self. Roberts calls this a “strategic use of rituals” (2005a, 494). This way the cause does not die although the fighter and believer of it has and the cemetery which acts as proof of the number of people who have sacrificed their lives for the cause is a source of self motivation, justification of the cause, as well as a method to mobilize supporters.

Cristiana Natali explores this new burial practice in her research on funerary practices and nationalist discourse among the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka. Mr. Pontyagam, in charge of the cemetery in Puthukudiyiruppu has stated to Natali that “Before 1991 we burnt [the fighters] according to Hindu rituals. If the parents asked for the ashes, we gave them. But Christians and Muslims didn’t want to burn them. A meeting of the leaders was organized and they decided to study what other countries like America and England did for their soldiers. They saw that they used to bury their soldiers. Then they decided to proceed in the same way” (qtd. in Natali 288). It is very unlikely that this was the only reason as to why they changed their burial custom as this would not have been acceptable to Hindu families. However this has probably been possible because of the mystical deified status which has been given to the dead body.

The cemeteries which are called Tuilum Illam literarily means ‘sleeping houses.’ The very meaning denotes that they are not dead, never to be again which death connotes, but that they are alive in the memories of the people who they have died for. It is important to note that none of the people who Natali spoke to referred to the above mentioned official reason for this change in the burial practice but talked about the need for the ‘heroes’ to be remembered or connected the burial practice to Hinduism because ‘sanyasis’ (ascetics) are buried instead of being cremated.

Natali points out its peculiarity in the way the graveyard is considered a ‘holy place.’ Roberts says that, “The cemeteries are symmetrical in design and kept in immaculate order, in effect indexing and replicating the regimented character of the LTTE. These sites are augmented on ritual days by arched billboard pandals and pictures of specific heroes placed at nodal points in the populated areas” (2005a, 498). As Schalk
observes, the “LTTE has produced an elaborate symbolism of death and metaphors for the survival of the holy aim and a sacrificial commitment to the nation” (1997b). They even set up an office of Great Heroes in 1995 to oversee the memorial sites and mold the ‘mavirar’ cult (Schalk, 1997a 40; Roberts, “Tamil Tiger Martyrs” 498).

The ‘sleeping houses’ of female cadres, which are seen as shrines are akin to the temples dedicated to the Goddess Kannnaki. Both, the goddess’s temple and the cadre/martyr’s grave become a shrine which is a source of power symbolizing an amalgamation of bountiful giving as well as wrathful vengeance. They are both seen as chaste and sacrificing and therefore worthy of worship. Chandrakanthan says that “Prabhakaran...requests the people to venerate those who died in the battle for Eelam as sannyasis (ascetics) who renounced their personal desires and transcended egoistic existence for a common cause of higher virtue. I have seen hundreds of shrines erected in Jaffna by the friends and relatives of those LTTE cadres who have died in various actions; and the rituals performed with offering of flowers and lighting of oil lamps are those normally reserved to Saivite39 deities and saints” (164-165).

Peter Schalk states that “a LTTE martyr never ‘dies.’ His body is planted as seed to be reborn” (qtd. in Roberts, 2005a, 500). The idea of rebirth is in any case prevalent in Hindu culture so this is not a very alien notion to the Tamil community. Although there is no notion of rebirth in Christianity, the notion of propitiation of divine forces in order to gain protection and strength is part of their religious worship as well. Therefore this cult spread among both communities. Trawick states that “among the most prevalent theme[s] in Eelam poetry is the regeneration of life from death” (qtd. in Roberts, 2005a, 505). A poster issued by the LTTE depicting a red rose had the saying in Tamil ‘The sepulchers of the Tigers shall glimmer as cornerstones for the new land which is to be born’ (Schalk, 1997b).

The Kuppi

39 The Hindu society can be broadly divided into two categories as Saivites and Vaishnavites. Saivites worship the God Shiva while Vaishnavites worship God Vishnu.
In a movement where one has to continuously uplift the morale of the fighters and project a certain image of the movement to society, the symbols that are chosen to do so are of paramount importance. Roberts points out how "any old symbol plucked out from within Tamil culture would not work" and that "the ramifications of these symbols and rituals go beyond the intentions of the composers" (2005a, 494). For example the cyanide capsule called Kuppi in Tamil was also made compulsory in the early 1980's at the same time that the changes in burial customs were taking place. It was initially worn for practical purposes, so that a cadre could kill his or her self to avoid being captured and tortured. However the capsule itself has transcended this utility and taken on a meaning of its own. It has become a symbol of their commitment to the cause. Peter Schalk states that "The vial is fully and consciously exposed hanging around on a chord around the neck in processions and in daily encounters [with] LTTE cadres and civilians...The vial is dear to the LTTE fighters and there is even an LTTE song praising the taking of cyanide." The Kuppi "is regarded as a friend especially by woman fighters" (qtd. in Roberts, 2005a, 496). "The LTTE leadership was also convinced that the kuppi gave them a motivational edge in battle. 'As long as we have this cyanide around our neck, we have no need to fear any force on earth!!...In reality this gives our fighters an extra measure of belief in the cause'" said Kittu during his interview with Peter Schalk (qtd. in Roberts, 2005a, 509). Roberts says that this comment "points to the indoctrination of recruits, while yet revealing how the commanders are themselves true believers and had internalized these attitudes" (2005a, end note 30, 509).

In the words of D. S. B. Jeyaraj, a leading Sri Lankan Tamil journalist:

From the Tiger perspective it is this readiness to die for the cause that elevates the LTTE member from his surroundings. It is the cyanide capsule that symbolizes the Tiger's superiority to others and signifies the dedicated mission in life...a curious blend of rational obscurantism, absolute nihilism and revolutionary commitment has succeeded in making a fetish of the cyanide capsule principle and a cult of suicide killing missions. (qtd. in Bose, 118)
The first Tiger to swallow the cyanide *kuppi* was Celvam Pakin on 18 May 1984 (Schalk, 1997b). “An estimated one-third of the LTTE’s combat deaths between 1983-90 are supposed to be by this mode of suicide…” (Kaushalya Perera 27). ‘The whole meaning of life: freedom alone, indeed, is greatness (won) by the cyanide vials, holding them with assurance’ (Schalk, 1997b). Contrary to this glorification of “freedom” and “life” the cyanide capsule however is also a symbol of how these cadres’ life style as well as death itself is ordered by the leader. To the question as to why Prabhakaran weakened the Tamil groups instead of uniting with them and why he antagonized the Sinhalese even more instead of neutralizing or dividing them, Dayan Jayatilleka says, “The only explanation is that if there is anything that Prabhakaran wants more- or more urgently and imperatively- than he does Eelam, it is dominance, *the power of life and death* within and over his own community” (emphasis mine. 1995, 88).

Cyanide suicides have also been used for political purposes. Dayan Jayatilleka points out that when seventeen LTTE cadres were captured by the Sri Lankan Navy, “a political campaign throughout the North and East and Tamil Nadu would have forced the Indians into securing their release in order to save the Accord” (1995, 91) but this was an opportunity for Prabhakaran to break out into war and not give into the demands of the IPKF. So he ordered the seventeen to commit suicide to provide him with an excuse to begin the war once again. As a result the IPKF found itself at war with the LTTE instead of bringing about peace between the state and the LTTE.

When asked “It has been reported that all your fighters carry cyanide capsules strung around their necks. Is this an exaggeration? Prabhakaran said:

Yes we have adopted this measure from the start. As a consequence many comrades have sacrificed themselves…Our fighters through laying down their lives, protect our sympathisers and contacts, the people who give us support and assistance…But that is not the only reason for this practice. It is this cyanide that has helped us develop our movement very rapidly. Carrying cyanide on our person is a symbolic expression of our.
It gives our fighters an extra measure of belief in our cause, a special edge; the cyanide has instilled in us a determination to sacrifice our lives and our everything for our cause.

(In an interview to The Hindu Madras 5 September 1986. qtd. in Bose 117)

The primary function of the capsule is to shield information and thereby the supporters from being arrested. The other reason is that it has helped to develop the "movement very rapidly" as it strengthens people’s faith in the cause. This way there is no space for doubt or questions because when people are willing to die for it how can one question it? Kaushalya Perera states that women are given two cyanide capsules and the men only one (27). Bose too points out that women wear two “to symbolize their dual commitment to national liberation and women’s emancipation” (108). Sunthari, the assistant general secretary of LTTE’s women’s wing gave voice to this concern when she said “We have a dual objective; to fight for national liberation and the social emancipation of women” (qtd. in Bose 112).

It is ironic that both Nalini in One More Sunrise and Raman in the play Forbidden Area bites the cyanide capsule to avoid being taken alive not by the army but by the LTTE. Nalini takes recourse to this because she knows that her efforts to escape will not go down well with the LTTE and she will have to “suffer the consequences” (92) in Selvam’s words. He says “As an intelligence officer she knows too much. We need her alive” (105). Even Nirmala in Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers) bites the capsule to get away from the LTTE after Dilip is shot dead. Her dreams of marrying Dilip and having their child which she is carrying ends right there.

Bose says that the martyr cult is linked to “the egalitarian strand of LTTE ideology and to the leveling process in Tamil society” (121). The fact that all members in spite of class, caste gender, rank, religion or seniority are dying for the cause is a force which makes the movement egalitarian and expresses the value of ‘national identity’ above others. Hereby women and men are both equal and do not feel that they are being
discriminated. This way, women get the same platform as the men to prove themselves. This is why Malini; chief of the Jaffna district women’s wing says, “Our women have proved better fighters than the men. Ask the Indian army” (qtd. in Bose, 112).

The attitude of the Tamil people in the north about suicide bombing is unclear according to Mia Bloom due to the lack of research institutions which can collect data on such issues. The Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and the Social Scientists Association have carried out research to analyze Tamil people’s attitudes about the peace process but they have not included questions about suicide bombing. There is not only a lack of data collection, but these subjects remain taboo which people are unwilling to discuss. However from the research that has been done it is clear that unlike the two third support for suicide terror in Palestine, Tamil attitudes about violence are varied and nuanced. The Tamil people who spoke to Bloom differentiated between attacking military personnel or politicians from attacking civilians (Bloom 67).

Although the suicide bomber may symbolize selflessness etc for those who support the movement for others it only reverberates disaster. Charny strongly feels that “...they represent the darkest forces of death masquerading as a legitimate way for solving the problems of the living” (17). Sumathy says in Militants, Militarism and the Crisis of (Tamil) Nationalism that the self destruction of the suicide bomber is symbolic of the “nihilism” which Eelam has brought about for the Tamil People of Sri Lanka (25). “It also underlines the gaping distance between the expressiveness of the ‘nation’s peoples, including that of the militants, and the rhetoric of the LTTE. The cause of Eelam itself, supported much more by the Diaspora than by the people of ‘Eelam,’ is a dream that has soured and turned into a nightmare” (25).

The very first line “The day has come but its night” of the short story “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” starts the ominous mood of the narrative reminding us of the myriad paradoxes in this situation by the mere contrast and play of the words which denote darkness and light. It encompasses the paradox of the suicide bomber who is in a situation in which she has to kill herself to gain freedom. “There is a powerful paradox in self annihilation that is simultaneously regarded as life giving to a
community” (De Mel, 197). Self annihilation and the role of life giver would be more familiar to a woman than to a man. Besides isn’t this what is expected of a woman anyway? Once a woman gets married or gives birth to a child she is expected to disregard her needs and attend to the other’s needs completely and this is constructed in society as something that comes ‘naturally’ to a woman and individuals internalize this notion. If you do not sacrifice your life for your family, a woman is considered unwomanly and unnatural. The only difference is that a suicide bomber’s self annihilation is a much more ruthless and direct one.

“Prabhakaran also said that Rajiv Gandhi deserved to die at the hands of a woman” (Kaarthikeyan 75). From this statement it is clear that to be killed by a woman is shameful because she is a weaker being and shows that the person who dies at the hand of a woman is someone who cannot even protect ones self from such a weakling.

In Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict, the chapter titled “Figure of Speech; The Female Suicide Bomber, Censorship and the Literary-cinematic Site” deals with “the domain of speech that governs the figure of the LTTE female suicide bomber” (De Mel 192) and looks at the relationship between militarization and censorship. However this domain of speech that governs the figure of the female suicide bomber is also a key to the relationship between militarization and gender issues.

De Mel analyses how “the rhetoric of ‘terrorism’ shapes the way we can talk about the female suicide bomber or not, and how the grammar of security deployed by both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state expropriate her voice” (192). “The secrecy that surrounds the LTTE suicide bomber makes her subjectivity available to the public only at the precise moment in which she is silenced and silences herself through her final act of violence” (De Mel 192). Although silent, her mutilated body which is left behind speaks for her and for the movement she belongs to.

Suicide as Protest
When it became difficult to get to important people and important places, suicide bombers blew themselves up in public places to instigate terror. This has been seen as extremely ruthless by many but supporters of the cause feel that blowing up one’s self is a way of protest and not just to terrorize. It is a way of showing society how unhappy and disillusioned they are with that particular society.

If committing suicide is a vehement protest against the oppression of society Sivaramani’s suicide is one such protest. Her death was not a suicide attack but a taking of one’s own life unable to live in a society which allows no space for criticism. Her act of burning all her poems before she committed suicide on 19 May 1991 at the age of 23 in Jaffna is a statement in it self. Sitralega Maunaguru rightly points out that “Sivaramani lived and died in a place where the act of suicide is glorified and praised as the ultimate symbol of patriotism but her action will go unnoticed and even be ridiculed as an act of cowardice” (1992, 21). Sumathy shows in her one-woman performance Thin Veils how women are categorized into two as “The life that is glorified or is not talked about; the stories that go unheeded and questions unanswered” (14). Dhanu is supposed to have volunteered for the mission to kill Rajiv Gandhi as vengeance of her rape by the IPKF. Therefore the suicide is posited as a protest. This was simply an excuse as the political underpinnings of this attack were obvious. They wanted to eliminate Rajiv Gandhi before the elections, which might have brought him back to power, to pre-empt a reintroduction of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) in the island.

The narrator’s opening speech in the play In the Shadow of the Gun by Sumathy recalls the female suicide bomber in the following lines:

Can you hear her explode in a laughter of love
Into tiny smithereens of atom, the suicide bomber. (12)

The blowing up of ones body is a refusal to be ignored and a repudiation of defeat and a statement which gives this message sans words. Sharif Abdullah who was once a terrorist himself and now an activist for peace says that “There are some very, very angry

\[40\] Sivaramani was also know as Thiagarajah Selvanity.
people in the world. Part of their anger is in not being heard. People who feel unheard will do anything to get attention. In their minds, any attention, even negative attention is better than no attention at all” (135).

Sexuality and Suicide Bombers

De Mel very rightly points out that the female suicide bomber is very often linked to her sexuality which is absent in the discourse concerning the male suicide bomber (2007, 199). Various “domains of speech coincide to cast the figure of the female suicide bomber in ways that sexualize her…” (De Mel, 2007, 193).

The purity of a woman’s body is to be protected by any means and this idea is brought out very clearly in nationalist movements. Tanika Sarkar points out in reference to Indian literature that there was “an obsessive preoccupation in early patriotic literature with Sati- through her own self destruction she preserves this concealed independence from being usurped” (171). This adheres to a concept which propagates death as an answer to the problem posited by a polluted body of a woman. This is the reason that the cyanide capsule is more precious to women cadres than to the male cadres. The woman who opts for a cyanide suicide is seen as someone who is divine as she did not allow the enemy to rape her or ‘pollute’ her body. “The body becomes a site of power for production, violence and conquest” (Mangali De Silva, 2005, 15).

In “Gendering Tamil Nationalism…” Maunaguru views suicide killings by raped women as an act of purification of the body of the woman. “A raped woman is considered one who has lost her chastity; the ‘super virtue’ of a Tamil woman. She is not only violated but polluted. She cannot regain her purity by any means except by negating her polluted body… In other words, by killing Rajiv Gandhi, she not only tackles revenge against the enemy, but also performs an ancient purification ritual- the agnipravsam (immolation by fire)” (171). Sumathy referring to this argument takes this concept further by saying that the suicide bomber commits an act of purification of not just the body but of the “body of the land-nation” as did “Kannaki in the Tamil Epic, The Lady of the
Anklet- cited by the federal Party in euphoric nationalist rhetoric- in her self annihilation” (Militants 25).

The use of the name Urmila for the suicide bomber who indulges in sex before her mission is significant in the play Forbidden Area. This may be a reference to Urmila: a relative of Uma, who Swamy says was the chairman of the nine member central committee of the LTTE (2003, 48). According to Rohan Gunaratne, Urmila Kandiah joined the LTTE after serving as a prominent youth wing member of the TULF and she became the first “female member” of the LTTE (1999, 110). An LTTE member complained to Prabhakaran that Uma was sleeping with a young female cadre called Urmila. This was considered a serious violation of the LTTE’s strict code of chastity under which all forms of sex were to be eschewed (Swamy 2003, 51). Prabhakaran asked them both to leave the movement but Uma refused. Balasingham tried to bring peace between the two but Prabhakaran was adamant. However when Prabhakaran fell in love with Mathy he listened to Balasingham who convinced Prabhakaran to get married and explained to Prabhakaran that the “LTTE’s strict bar on love and marriage was too strait laced” (Swamy 2003, 114). Whether Uma and Urmila were having an affair is not clear in the first place because Balasingham requested the two to admit their affair and get married but they “insisted that they were being framed” (Swamy 2003, 54). This incident has been narrativized by Adel Balasingham in The Will to Freedom as:

An apparent cause of the crisis was a sexual affair relating to the violation of the moral code of conduct of the organization. The codes of conduct were viewed as crucial and essential to the discipline and integrity of the organization to which the members had committed and subordinated themselves for the purposes of achieving the noble cause of liberating the oppressed people. Anyone who violated these moral codes were subject to disciplinary action. On this occasion, Uma Maheswaran, an unmarried man, was charged with having a sexual affair with the earliest female LTTE cadre, Urmila, a divorcee. (51)
The fact that Urmila was a divorcee has no connection to this incident and Balasingham need not have pointed this out. Swamy has even recounted that Prabhakaran spat on Urmila when she was brought to him and refused to apologize to her (1994, 70). These only highlight the attitudes of the LTTE towards women’s sexuality.

In the play Forbidden Area the sexual is aroused by the divine which stands in contrast to the views of the LTTE on sex. The day before she is supposed to carry out a suicide mission, Urmila goes in search of a Kali temple but finds a Vishnu temple as there were no Kali temples in the area. It is only after seeing Lakshmi and Vishnu together that she gets “possessed by a kind of madness” (26) and then expresses her need for a sexual encounter with Raman. The scene, in which Dilip first sees Nirmala in her night gown in Kala Suda Mal (Colourless Flowers), makes it rather apparent that she is trying to get his attention. This role of the seductress is further carried out in her relationship with Chathura who they exploit to carry out their mission. Nirmala uses her body here again before using it to kill their target who is named Double-x in the movie. Her body is deadly in more than one sense. Her body is also used to seduce the audience.

The woman’s body is an object of desire and voyeuristic pleasure whether she is a suicide bomber or any other role that has been assigned to her by society. In the poem “Avargal Parvaiyil” (“In their Eyes”) by Maunaguru written under the name of Sangari she says:

...............  
I have in their eyes,

two breasts

long hair

slight waist

broad hips.

...............  
They talk

of chastity

of Kannaki
And while they
talk so
They keep on gazing
at my body
This is habitual
from shopman
to husband. (qtd. in Sumathy, “The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism” 144)

A woman is seen as seductress or object of sexual pleasure even if they are playing masculine roles such as militants. The incident in Colombo in which a sex worker was thought to be a suicide bomber was very revealing of stereotypes and attitudes prevalent in society. The woman Sriyalatha was a Sinhalese sex worker waiting for a client near the President’s residence at the time (De Mel 2004, 87).

Her story as reported in the Sunday Times of 26 March 2000 (8) said that she was not very sure of the area and walked along waiting for a client when two air force men stopped her and under gun point asked her to strip. Many citizens wrote to the newspaper declaring their outrage at this incident as a woman was asked to strip on the road. The title of Nihal Corea’s article “Not a suicide Bomber but a sex worker” (30 March Island) as De Mel points out suggests that “stripping Sriyalatha was permissible because as a sex worker that’s what she did for a living anyway” (2004, 88).

It is not only the sexuality of its cadres that the organization tried to control but also the sexual activities of others. As referred to in the earlier chapter Dharmini was killed by the LTTE for using her body to get some means while suicide bombers who use their bodies for suicide attacks are glorified. Before going to her death Leyla Kaplan of the PKK in a video speaks of ‘giving up her body to the organization and its cause” (Arad 124). Is there a difference between prostituting ones body for a cause and prostituting ones body as a way of earning a living? Sugunawathi in the short story “Swayanwaraya” [Self-sufficiency] becomes a sex worker once her husband disappears after the movement began, to earn some money to keep her children alive. Her name ironically means one who has good values. Her eldest daughter empathizes with her mother and Sugunawathi
says to her daughter, “It isn’t a bad vocation. If only they treat me right” (125). Unlike Sugunawathi, her daughter takes to the same vocation but makes sure that her clients pay her. Sugunawathi is sad that her daughter too has had to take to this occupation, but at the same time is also proud that her daughter will not let anyone use her body without having to pay for it. This is the method in which they can be self sufficient.

Tambiah too makes a connection between the roles of the sex worker and the female militant when she says, “In Sri Lanka armed conflict, gender, sexuality, and sex work are intermeshed with militarized nationalism. Militarization entrenches gender performances and heteronormative schemes while enabling women to transgress these—whether as combatant or as sex workers” (2005, 243). Sexuality in both these roles for women are controlled and constructed in the interest of militarized national projects.

In Like Myth and Mother Sumathy writes:

woman bearing arms!

come hither!

give us this day

our daily body!!”(108)

Apart from the addition to physical power in the battle, the pun on the last line of ‘body’ instead of ‘bread’ illuminates that the woman’s body which is used as cannon fodder gives them their daily bread as well because it is the body which allows the war to go on and those who make money out of it will further do so. The woman’s body feeds the war machines as well as those who are continuing with the war.

Besides the fact that both the prostitute and the suicide bomber use their bodies, for them both, it is war circumstances which give space for these roles. This does not mean that prostitution does not happen in peaceful areas but large armies concentrated in one area have always given rise to prostitution. Although Nirmala prostitutes her body to seduce Chathura in the Sinhalese movie Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers) she is unable to use her body for the suicide mission when her body starts carrying another life.
However in the case of Sugunawathi and her daughter they are not harming anyone but using their bodies to earn a living although it is considered ‘immoral.’ Besides Sugunawathi is actually a victim who is used and abused. Can this kind of sympathy be felt for a suicide bomber? Is Urmila a victim or victimizer or is she both at the same time? “...cultural works, despite their serious engagement with her complexity, can come to resonate with a moral public discourse about her” (De Mel 2007, 193).

The Cat’s Eye review of the play objected to Urmila’s representation in Forbidden Area, as a vacillating woman who changes her mind after a sexual encounter (qtd. in De Mel 2004, 85). Although a close reading of the play shows that it is not only “a one night of passion with Raman” that makes her abandon the cause and the mission (qtd. in De Mel 2004, 85) it was read thus. The review objected to the fact that the play portrayed the woman militant in such a light and asks writers to “respect” (qtd. in De Mel 2004, 85) women and not show them as so fickle. This respect was uncomfortable for people who felt that there was no way that one could respect anyone who opts to be a suicide bomber and kills people. This same feeling is expressed by Chamy when he says “Personally I hate a cultural relativism and deconstructionism that end up understanding and accepting the normality of people who were socialized to be totalitarian killers” (Chamy 83).

Nalin Swaris’s response to the Cat’s Eye review accused the writer for trying to give value to the suicide bomber’s political convictions and by doing so, giving value to the LTTE. The Cat’s Eye effort to show women in a better light, or as beings capable of political conviction and not fickle (which is a deep rooted stereotype of women) goes against the nationalist and humanitarian sentiments of people like Swaris who cannot understand why a suicide bomber should be shown any sympathy or respect. Swaris feels that women, or men, even if they are fighting for liberation should not support violence in any way and the Cat’s Eye review is contradictory as it is denouncing any support for violence of the organization but is asking for respect for the suicide bomber.
However Swaris’s discontent with the play that it does not bring to light the devastation caused by Urmila’s final act is a fact to be considered and the spectator ends up identify and empathizing with her. We do not blame her as she blows herself up unwillingly finally. Unlike Urmila, the speaker in the short story “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” is very conscious of the destruction she is going to unleash when she thinks “and now, ironically I add to the destruction and sorrow” (358). She also thinks of the victim’s family, about his wife and children. She is too uneasy to even enjoy the final love making that has just occurred. She wonders if she has behaved “like a corpse” (359) while making love to the man who is sleeping next to her who she does not name. She also tries to justify killing Rajiv Gandhi by telling herself that “I am sure he’s had a much, much happier life” (360) and is aware that she is trying to justify killing him. Urmila does not show such a conscience. She was prepared for the violent act from the very beginning of the play and we forget Urmila’s violent nature due to the last episode of the play. It becomes a case of the victimizer been shown as the victim. This was probably Chandrasekaram’s intention but not to give out the message that they are simply helpless and should be accepted in society. The message is loud and clear that within a violent system there is no way out but more violence, especially in the last scene where Raman reaches for his cyanide capsule just before the black out. The violence is finally directed towards both Urmila and Raman.

Besides as Swaris points out “Sexual union is a life affirming act,” and isn’t a night of love making for a woman who has had next to nothing in her life, a valid reason to want to live? Sex is considered inferior in the mind matter hierarchy but at a ground level it can be an opening to a new way of thinking. Desire can fuel spiritual and emotional development. Even Foucault asked “why is sexual conduct, why are the activities and pleasures attached to it, an object of moral solicitude?” (1980, 10). Swaris accuses Cat’s Eye for being moralistic. He also says that “It can be life changing for Urmila.” According to Swaris, “libidinous energies held in abeyance and concentrated on the Supremo breaks out in a flood of passionate love making with Raman.” In psychoanalytical terms this is a case of transference in which sex with Raman may have
made Urmila see the Supremo in a different light which she becomes conscious of when
she realizes that she is being used by him for his own political motives.

Forbidding sexual pleasures is a common trait in organizations such as the LTTE
(Swaris). The ‘Fuhrer Princip’ (‘leader principle’) in which all the idealizing and worship
is directed towards the leader in fascist ideology is personified by Hitler and Mussolini.
This is very much the case with Prabhakaran too who is always referred to as the leader.
Sumathy too acknowledges that “channeling of sexual energy toward the cause and, more
importantly, also toward the male leader” (2004, 136) is a method which curbs multiple
possibilities of women’s desire and in this way desire is “merged into the strategies of a
gendered discourse of nation, family and struggle” (2004, 136). Such a quasi-sexual
devotion is seen in Sita who Margaret Trawick interviewed in Batticaloa in March 1996.
Trawick describes how Sita and Nirmala play a song about Prabhakaran and then Sita
asks Trawick, “Have you seen him? He is beautiful, isn’t he? She quietly sings together
with the song” (146). 41 This awe is very well brought to life by actress Ayesha Dharkar
in the movie The Terrorist in the scene in which she meets the leader for a meal with him
before setting out on her mission. This aura is built around the leader in the northern part
of Sri Lanka, not only through songs but also through visuals. Large images of
Prabhakaran were present in Jaffna until Operation Rivirasa in December 1995. This is a
common trait in many guerilla organizations which create this kind of cult.

James W. Prescott, a neuropsychologist, contends in an article called “Body
Pleasure and the Origins of Violence” that the greatest threat to world peace comes from
those nations which have the most depriving environments for their children and which
are most repressive of sexual affection and female sexuality. He believes that the
depprivation of physical pleasure is a major ingredient in the expression of physical
violence. He asks his readers “How many of us feel like assaulting someone after we
have just experienced orgasm?” He argues further using theories of Freud and Wilhelm
Reich and this argument in the light of the strict rules on sex in the LTTE can be seen as

41 De Mel points out that “In the volume of inspirational Tamil Eelam songs entitled ‘Songs from the Red
Blossomed Garden,’ released by the LTTE, ...Prabhakaran is invested with the aura of a deity”
(Militarizing Sri Lanka 221).
simply not maintaining discipline but a way to also help the cadres be more violent. Ranjan explains in *Shining Water Flowing Light* that sex is not meant for pleasure or for procreation but primarily for neural stability of the human body.

However exponents of this concept like Schalk say that containing the woman fighter’s sexuality allows her to take on the role of an avenging female empowered by her chastity. *Katpu* (chastity) is believed to give Tamil women *sakti*, their strength and power. “In the notion of virginity is embodied the idea of power” (Mangalika De Silva 2005, 27). This is the constructed inner strength of women which the “Lower middle class woman” in *Like Myth and Mother* refers to when she says, “We as women should be careful and cherish our inner strength” (17). However the male cadres of the LTTE are not allowed to indulge in sex as well, but this does not mean that they get more power to fight in the battle field due to abstinence. For the male sex is simply a distraction. The woman is seen as an embodiment of sexual distraction.

The Tamil movie *Kannathil Muthamittal (A Peck on the Cheek)* captures a suicide attack for the viewer. The suicide bomber hangs on to a moving car carrying an important official until the car explodes with him. The irony of the situation is that the very people with whom Shyama is fighting for, inadvertently wounds her own daughter. In the Sinhalese movie *Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers)* the serene backdrop of the bridge on which they are supposed to carry out the assassination is in contrast to what is going on in their minds, and Nirmala is shown looking at the surroundings and she says “so this is where we will die....”

Moreover women who cannot prove their identity are instantly taken to be suicide bombers in Sri Lanka. In the play *The Wicked Witch*, when the witch enters the city and she cannot prove her identity as she has no “pass” or “ID” she is thought to be “a suicide bomber” (51) by the guard and she is arrested and stoned by onlookers.

De Mel is of the opinion that the portrayal of Urmila in *Forbidden Area* “reflects no more or no less the ‘true’ subjectivity of the female suicide bomber” (2002, 203). What is this true subjectivity? Her reluctance when the target is changed is shown and her
reasons for joining the movement are given. The reactions to the representations of women militants seem to prove that the viewer or reader has a certain image of her in their minds and when these representations differ from them they are disappointed.

Death and Marriage

Suicide attackers gain martyrdom within the LTTE. The suicide act to gain martyrdom is achieved by either a suicide attack or by a cyanide suicide. These two forms of death are valorized and an aura of divinity is created by representing them as martyrs. This is primarily done through the usage of the body as a symbol which has been discussed above. There seems to be not only an obsession with the body but with death itself and a death that is compared or connected to marriage for the female cadres as evidenced in the interview of Sita (an LTTE woman cadre) by Trawick:

Trawick: You don't want a life with husband and children?

Sita: (Almost inaudibly) No.

Trawick: Why not?

Sita: As soon as you get married, you have to look after children. We will raise our children and grow old. When we grow old we will die. There is a difference between that kind of death and the death of a fighter. Rather than that kind of death, I would prefer this kind of death. It is a heroic death. A historic death. A sacrificial death. Having joined the struggle, gone into battle, for the sake of the people going into battle...we are happy at the thought of our death in battle, because then we become part of history (154).

In the above section of an interview when Trawick asks Sita about her life, she talks of death. Is this obsession with death due to the hype created around death by LTTE ideology for the cadres? Or is it because she has seen so many deaths and is surrounded by death that she has no hope for a good life and she wants to have a meaningful death and not a meaningful life? Trawick concludes, “I would suggest that the emotional
The significance of violence to LTTE combatants lies much less in the killing than in the dying... A person who kills is just doing his job. A person who dies is a hero” (158). Also for Sita, a heroic death seems to be an alternative to married life. However in the end notes Trawick says that Sita did get married. “After I returned to New Zealand, I received a letter from one of the villagers saying that Sita and Alagar had been married” (163). Trawick does not ask the male cadres about marriage and children. For instance, with Inpam, a male cadre, she discusses the movement and its hierarchichal structre etc. (143). The importance of marriage is only reserved for the women cadres.

In the documentary *No More Tears Sister: Anatomy of Hope and Betrayal*, Nirmala says in reference to the women cadres, “These young women are being manipulated in believing that they should embrace death. They should marry death because of their allegiance.” “We are married to our cyanide” said one LTTE publication in Tamil (Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 1994, 67). The Arab media glorifies Palestinian female suicide bombers as ‘Brides of Palestine” (Waltman). There are no references to the male cadres marrying the cause or the land in an ideological sense, even though the land is conceptualized as a woman.

The Amazon corps of the Dahomean army, which Goldstein says is the first group of women to fight a war, was ‘married’ to the King in a metaphorical sense but they did not have sex with him. They were forbidden to have sex with any man and segregation was very strictly practiced to such an extreme that their approach was announced by a bell and the men had to turn their backs or move away (Goldstein, 63).

Sumathy talks about the ‘wanted’ nature of the Tamil woman in *Like Myth and Mother: A Political Autobiography in Poetry and Prose*. She is wanted “as a bride, as suicide bomber, looked for by the security forces in the streets of Colombo, in lodges and as domestic workers in the homes of Colombo middle class of all hues and ethnicities” (105). The woman is wanted “in the name of this soil, this land” which is the title of the poem. She is wanted for all these roles in the name of the land. The “woman bearing arms” is called to “come hither” to “give us this day our daily body”. The use of the word
body is very ironic because even as a bride or as a combatant it is the body which she has to offer, be it to satisfy ones husband or to serve the cause by becoming a suicide bomber.

In the novel, *The Road from Elephant Pass* marriage is not an option for Kamala. She says, “How can we think of marriage and children in that hell hole……?” (225) in reference to her relationship with a university lecturer. Ironically this is true of her relationship with Captain Wasantha as well who she is speaking these lines to and with whom she falls in love. These words have been replaced with “it is not in my future” in the movie. Kamala in the movie *Alimankada* does not say that she was in love with a teacher or anyone else but says that it is not a possibility for her. The focus of the movie is more on the larger issue at stake such as the political issue but it does not focus so much on the personal in this aspect. When she says, in the movie, that marriage is not there in her future it only adds to the suspense of the movie as to what her real motives are in offering the army important information about the LTTE.

“The interaction between the notions of marriage or life's pleasures and death is aimed to heighten the sense of sacrifice and of how death is seen as a viable alternative to life” says Sornarajah. Even in the case of the ‘virgin warrior’ where marriage has no space, we see that the discourse of matrimony creeps in somehow. They are seen as either married to the cause or their death is seen as an alternative to marriage. The following poem by Captain Vanathy of the LTTE women’s wing who died at the age of 27 in 1991 exhibits this notion. It connects all symbols of a married woman’s body to things that are associated with the woman militant. Titled “She, the Woman of Tamililam” it reads:

Her forehead shall be adorned not with

*Kunkumam* (but) with red blood.

All that is seen in her eyes is not the sweetness

of youth (but) firm declarations of those

who have fallen down.
On her neck will lay no tali, (but) a
Cyanide Flask!

Her legs are going and searching,
Not for searching a relationship with relatives
(but) looking towards the liberation of
the soil of Tamililam.

Her gun will fire shots.
No failure will cause the enemy to fall!!
It will break the fetters of Tamililam!!
Then from our people’s lips a national anthem
Will tone up!!\(^{42}\) (qtd in De Mel 2001, 206-7).

The connection between marriage and death is very consciously drawn upon in the short story “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” by Charles Sarvan. Dhanu, awaiting her suicide attack on Rajiv Gandhi, talks of her impending death in terms of a marriage very explicitly when she says, “On this morning of marriage and death...” She hereby compares her suicidal death to marriage. It is noteworthy that Dhanu assassinated Rajiv

\(^{42}\)Nanthini Sornarajah’s article (part II) has translated this poem as
“It is not kunkumam (5) that decorates her forehead, Its red blood!
Her eyes do not carry the dreams of youth,
But the graves of the dead! Her lips murmur not useless utterances, but
the determined oaths of those who died in battle! What is tied around her neck is not the Thali (6)
but the cyanide capsule! She embraces not men, but weapons
Her feet go in search of
not kinship ties,
but the freedom of this land!
The bullets that fire from her gun will defeat the enemy without fail!
It will break the shackles of Tamil Eelam! Then our people's lips will
sing the nation's song!!!"
Gandhi while pretending to be one of those who want to garland him. Exchanging of garlands is a very important ritual in a Hindu wedding. Urmila too in Forbidden Area garlands the victim before blowing herself up. This garland, which is to be used for the assassination, goes from Raman to Urmila through Supremo symbolically representing the barrier between Raman putting the garland on Urmila which was her wish before she died (38). Supremo stands between her desire to marry Raman and has to finally garland someone who the Supremo has chosen, marrying death. Urmila is forced to choose death over marriage.

We get to know from Swamy that Dhanu did have a “fit on” before her wedding-funeral. Swamy says that Shuba, who was the stand by human bomb “put the killer vest on Dhanu one last time on 21 May. It fitted her perfectly” (2003, 228). An extract of her thoughts in the short story “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” reads as,

Soon they will come to dress me... Mother and others were so serious and self important when they dressed a bride for her wedding... Much time and care and love; perhaps a little sadness too at the parting to come; a beginning marking an end. The bridal lamb to be pierced on the marriage bed. I too will be dressed with care, but by the hands of men... In this arranged marriage, it’s the groom who doesn’t know: hasn’t given his consent. (359-60)

The writer draws a similarity between getting married and being a suicide bomber. Not only does there seem to be a difference between the two but the latter is perceived to be more empowering. However the empowerment has to be achieved only through negation of ones self. Although there is a sense of empowerment in this kind of ‘marriage,’ the contrast in the lives of Rajiv Gandhi and Dhanu negates this agency. She has had a very hard life compared to his. Her life, which she compares to a landscape of “nondescript plains; painful valleys and wonderful energising peaks,” has not had many “wonderful energising peaks” unfortunately (358). “Poor privileged me” is how she describes herself in spite of having the privilege of knowing when she is going to die
Finally she admits “No I don’t feel powerful, a maker of history. Rather I’m one of its victims” (358). Death is the price that has to be paid to attain this freedom. “It doesn’t matter. Nothing does anymore, except those last dreadful steps I must walk, naturally and with perfect calmness” (361). But she is aware of the stereotypes that a woman can fall into and wonders if she should get up or wait because if she gets up they might think she “was afraid and couldn’t sleep” (361) but if she sleeps they might think that she is not taking her mission seriously. Just like at her wedding the bride is not supposed to be over enthusiastic and happy nor is she supposed to be too sad or question the fact that she is being married off.

In the Sinhalese movie *Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers)* we see a different connection between marriage and death being made. Nirmala and Dilip face death because of their desire to get married and live a normal life away from the military struggle. In the short story “Maya My Daughter, Maya the Heroine,” it is love and marriage that Maya dreams about and goes for the “discussion class” (88) led by her fascination for Nirmalan but gets killed while trying to carry out a mission which she could not refuse. She is dressed as a bride in her coffin. It is only in her coffin that she gets to be a bride.

The LTTE has control over both death and marriage of its cadres. Marriage was allowed only after Prabhakaran wanted to get married in 1984. The cyanide capsule was first introduced to the LTTE gear in 1984 (Swamy 2003,109) which is also ironically the year in which Prabhakaran tied the *thali* around the neck of his wife Mathivathanil Mathy on the 1st of October (Swamy 2003, 115).

In eulogizing the first suicide bomber Miller, Kasturi says,

........................

The Tamil warriors

befriended death.

But you, entered into *a marriage with death* and slept restfully in its lap.
Similarly Vanathy pays homage to Aniththa, a woman cadre from the eastern province, who died by taking cyanide in a confrontation with the armed forces. She is being lauded in this poem for following the lead of Kumarappa, one of the LTTE leaders of the seventeen men who died by taking cyanide when the Sri Lankan Army apprehended them, triggering off the conflict between the IPKF and the LTTE in 1987.

You were inducted into the battle field

by lieutenant Kumarappa. You followed in his footsteps,

With the same determination and idealism

And finally paid your highest tribute to him,

Taking cyanide and marrying death.... (emphasis mine, qtd. in Sornarajah Part II)

In another poem about yet another female comrade Vanathy writes,

"..................

When dying, embraced death

with happiness!" (qtd. in Sornarajah Part II)

In the play, *In the Shadow of the Gun* by Sumathy, the character Savithri refuses to take recourse to the gun saying “I don’t know to carry out orders and welcome death” (22). For Savithri, dying is not an option. She wants to live to tell the stories of the women she has met and to make a change while living. Her character is based on Rajini Thirangama who said “Life is worth much more than being just fluffed out like a candle flame” (*No More Tears Sister*).

Marriage and death are both “a beginning marking an end” in “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” for a woman which makes a connection between her death and her
marriage (359). However De Cataldo and Valentini are of the view that “...women tend to sublimate sexual desire much more than men...” (77). If this is true maybe that is how women find it easy to make connections between marriage, the cause and sexual abstinence. Freud has pointed out the intimate relationship between Eros (libidinous drive) and Thenatos (the death drive). This is enacted for us in the scene in which Urmila wants to make love to Raman with the deadly jacket on (Swaris).

Shamindra Ferdinando in his article in the newspaper The Island reports the finding of a body of a woman cadre and asks many questions about her. The questions that arise in his mind are very interesting. He writes, “What was her name? Was she among the hundreds of child soldiers recruited over the years? Was she married to an LTTE cadre? And most importantly did she have children?” (emphasis mine). A woman is primarily placed within marriage, child bearing and her role as a wife and a mother, even when she is part of a militant group! These questions which rise in the mind of the author are very revealing of the way in which a female cadre is looked upon.

Shyama, the woman militant is first shown as a bride in the Tamil movie Kannathil Muthamittal (A Peck on the Cheek) which is the very first scene of the film. However weddings, celebrations and such joys end soon.

The days when
We went on a wedding procession
with accompanying music are now gone. My sister's
Charred body returns
from the battle field in its last procession
still embracing her weapon. (Bharathy. qtd. in Sornarajah Part II)

The funeral of a female cadre is very often connected to a wedding procession as in the above poem. The weapon takes the place of the husband. She “embraces” the weapon and not a man which is an image used to valorize her sacrifice. The fact that she
gave up her life and her material and emotional longings for the cause is what makes her heroic.

The Eleventh Hour

In “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” the speaker is shown to encourage herself, as she cannot sleep the night before she is to commit suicide but at one point she is neither “courageous” nor “afraid”. Simply doing what she has to do. She questions herself as to whether she is “reliable” and “good”. “It doesn’t matter. Nothing does anymore, except those last dreadful steps I must walk, naturally and with perfect calmness” (361). This is her eleventh hour.

She is conscious of the fact that she joined the movement to change the way things are, to make things better but she is adding to the “destruction and sorrow” (358). It is the destruction and sorrow around them that makes them do what they do. But how many realize that they are only adding to the chaos is questionable. It is quite natural that she asks existentialist questions while waiting to explode herself. She does not see why she would hold on to her life but she also questions as to how much anyone really knows her and if we can ever know anyone really well (358).

Rajeev Sharma points out that, “A day before the assassination, Dhanu showed signs of nervousness. She complained of severe headache and running nose” (16). But in spite of her twisted ankle “she assured Sivarasan that Subha; the standby human bomb, would not be required for the operation” (Sharma 17). “We are determined to attain our objective” wrote Dhanu and Shuba in the letters they sent to Sri Lanka after they reached India (Swamy 2003, 227). Their faith in the cause has to be reaffirmed at all times. This reaffirming of ones faith in the cause to one self is present in Dhanu’s conscience in the short story “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi.”

The only one example of suicide bombers developing cold feet at the eleventh hour is of Zahir who disappeared on the day he was supposed to blast the Joint Operations Office in Colombo in June 1991 (Sharma 124). As yet there is not a single
woman on record who has backed out of a suicide attack at the last minute. Is the burden of masculinity now on the women where they need to prove themselves, that they are as brave as the men?

In the play Forbidden Area, Urmila’s nervousness is shown in her repeatedly questioning Raman five times in the play as to “How much longer?” she has to wait to carry out the mission. Even though disillusioned at the last minute, Urmila still goes ahead and carries out the mission. The play depicts for us the last “hour or so” (9) of Urmila’s life. Within the span of these few minutes the playwright is able to question many things. Urmila is a suicide bomber for a Tamil freedom movement and although it is not mentioned it is obvious to the reader that it is the LTTE. A lot is revealed through flashbacks which Urmila and her escort, Raman, talk about or in a practical sense will have to enact on stage.

If there are any doubts in the mind of the spectator that Urmila’s bravery is a put on or a fake heroism she is trying to portray, they are banished by her long speech about her encounter with the Navy. She gives a detailed description of how she fought back and survived. Unlike Dilip whose unemotional cold ways are exposed as a mere image Urmila’s character is much more complicated. She undergoes a genuine metamorphosis during the play. What leads to her change has been argued about by many but this web is what contributes to the intensity of the play. The very confident Urmila becomes the role that Raman was playing before she receives her final instructions from the Supremo.

Her disillusionment at the last minute has been the subject of a lot of debate. The fact that she is scared is ruled out by the narration of her experience with the Sri Lankan Navy in which she was “supposed to die two months ago” (11). The fact that it is not her sexual encounter with Raman which makes her change her mind is made clear when she pacifies a disturbed Raman saying, “Treat it as if nothing happened. We have an important task to complete” (29). However to Supremo at the last minute she says “I want to marry. I want to marry Raman” (37). But we see a clear change in her attitude only after she realizes that the target she is supposed to kill is not the president but an
"old man" (32) who is a Tamil politician. However as we have already seen, the *Cat’s Eye* reviewer read it as Urmila changing her mind due to her intimacy with Raman and was uncomfortable with the fact that the play suggested this reason for her change (De Mel 2004, 85).

There is a drastic change in what Urmila wants to be or identifies with in the latter half of the play. She is an ‘armed virgin’ inspired by the goddess Kali but ultimately gives voice to her desire to be a married woman. Her inability to find a Kali temple the day before she is to die is significant of this change in her. She says, “I went in search of Kali but found Vishnu and Lakshmi” (26). Her desire and act of having sex with Raman was considered a serious violation of the LTTE’s strict code of chastity under which all forms of sex were to be eschewed.

Foucault, in *The Use of Pleasure* says his intention is to “analyze the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and among themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen” (5). Is this what we see in Urmila’s change? A sudden focus on her needs and herself after experiencing desire may be the same phenomenon that Foucault points to.

However in *The Road from Elephant Pass*, although not a suicide bomber, Kamala decides to tell Captain Wasantha at the end that her information is a hoax as she does not want him to feel that she betrayed him. It is quite similar to committing suicide as she decides to betray a ruthless organization from which she knows she cannot escape but she takes that chance. She ultimately values his career, his opinion of her and their relationship more than her own life. When asked as to why she is informing him at the last minute she says, “If the operation goes through, your involvement in bringing me here will ruin your career…and you will know that I betrayed you. I could not bear that” (403). It is in her eleventh hour that Kamala decides to go against the organization and save the man who brought her safely to Colombo.
In contrast to Dhanu’s smile before the explosion is the inability of Malli to press the button of the detonator in the Hindi movie *The Terrorist*. In spite of the movie portraying Malli as a ruthless killer, she finds it difficult to kill herself in the process of killing someone else. She is shown hacking a soldier to death and killing and spraying bullets on a middle aged, injured army personnel which shows that she has no qualms to kill. Is it the inability of the producer to accept and understand this kind of suicide that makes them portray the suicide bomber as not completing their suicide missions? This is a very complex question as she cannot kill herself only when she finds out that she is pregnant. She is shown to like children in the movie. The affectionate way she looks at the young boys in the camp while waiting to meet the leader of the organization, is shown explicitly and once she loses her lover, he gets replaced by the child she is carrying.

Sarala Emmanuel points out how when the movie *The Terrorist* was shown to a group of women activists in Sri Lanka their reactions brought to light many prejudices, assumptions and notions which they have about the female suicide bomber. She says that at the conclusion of the film, many women in the audience dismissed it as unrealistic, stating that LTTE women suicide bombers would never experience doubt or weakness in their resolve to carry out their liberation struggle. Emmanuel points out that none of these women could claim to have known the elusive suicide bombers hidden in the very heart of the militant movement. It was clear that they had all held a strong concept of the militant woman that did not allow for any possibility of wavering in her political commitment. This viewpoint was challenged by other women who argued that the woman suicide bomber’s change of heart was due to her burgeoning motherhood and the memory of the dead father of her baby which are essentially feminized concepts. “It is perhaps significant to note that the women who identified the militant as essentially a political being were from regions and communities where the movement’s ideology and influence was very strong. Perhaps not coincidentally, the women advocating for a more feminized individualized understanding of the female militant were from outside these communities” (2002).
The reaction of the women who felt that she could not press the button of the detonator because of her being pregnant is not only due to internalized stereotypes of women but also due to the fact that the movie portrays Malli in such a light. In the movie she can look into their eyes and kill people but at the end cannot carry out her mission. The way she picks up the bird nest in the garden in the rain, the way she holds a baby of another woman outside the temple, the way she holds her stomach and the flash backs of her lover make it apparent that it is in fact “her burgeoning motherhood and the memory of the dead father” of the baby, which holds her back from carrying out the suicide mission.

“Would one of these fanatics really turn against their cause?” wonders Captain Wasantha with regard to Kamala in *The Road from Elephant Pass* (5). However she ultimately does betray the cause, although for very different reasons and saves Captain Wasantha’s career. Even Captain Wasantha chooses her over his country. The novel reads, “At that moment I stepped over the edge. ‘I could get you to Colombo and let you go I said recklessly’” (355). In this way the novel shows that human bonding can be stronger than nationalist fervour, no matter how strong one feels about it. In the movie *Alimankada*, Kamala cries only at the end of the movie, before the betrayal which shows her dilemma. She doesn’t say why she decided to tell him at the last minute but the silence between the two of them is more powerful than any dialogue.

Adel Sadeq is an Egyptian psychiatrist who believes that when a suicide bomber dies he or she attains “the height of bliss” (Charny 97). He is a well known psychiatrist who was honored with the 1990 Egyptian State Prize, Chairman of the Psychiatrists Association and head of the Department of psychiatry at Ein Shams University in Cairo (Charny 96). He says:

The psychological structure [of the perpetrator of a suicide attack] is that of an individual who loves life. This may seem strange to people who see the human soul as most sublime. They are incapable of understanding because their cultural structure has no concepts such as self-sacrifice and honor... When the martyr dies a martyr’s death, he attains the height of
bliss. As a professional psychiatrist, I say that the height of bliss comes with the end of the countdown: ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. And then you press the button to blow yourself up. When the martyr reaches ‘one’ and then ‘boom’ he explodes, and senses himself flying, because he knows for certain that he is not dead...They want to impose the term ‘suicide on them, but they are not suicides, rather ‘those who sacrifice their souls.’ (Charny 97)

Disillusionment is given voice to in Sumathy’s poem “we have come a long way” in which the women cadres feel they have been fighting for so long but “are lost in our quest” which is led on by “our feat astounding fire eating youth.” “In a quest for words wielding swords, renouncing life” is what Sumathy compares the life of a cadre to (2008, 114). The female cadre Nalini too, in the novella One More Sunrise, reluctantly admits to Andrea that she has lost hope in what they are fighting for and finally decides to take the risk of trying to run away when Andrea volunteers to help her.

Both Dilip and Nirmala try to carry out their mission without having to kill themselves in the movie Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers). Although they have been given strict orders that they should not be alive after the attack they decide to do so in the hope that they may have a life together and become parents to their unborn baby. It is Dilip who insists on finding a way to protect their lives and have the child although Nirmala feels that this is to betray the organization. The dilemma that they face in the eleventh hour is evidence enough to disprove notions that they are either brain washed lunatics or that they are ruthless killers.

Suicide bombers however are a phenomenon that is no more in Sri Lanka and they have suddenly become a part of history since the war was declared over in May 2009 but are alive in the texts in which they have been represented as well as in the memory of the people who have lived in fear of such attacks. The representations of the suicide bomber namely in the texts of the play Forbidden Area and the short story “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi”, as well the movies The Terrorist, Kalu Sudu Mal [Colourless Flowers] and My Daughter the Terrorist bring out various aspects of her
according to the intention of the writer or producer. While the first four above mentioned texts try to understand as well as problematize the suicide bomber, the documentary *My Daughter the Terrorist* valorizes their bravery. In this chapter I have analyzed the figure of the woman suicide bomber in the light of these representations. Notions such as marriage, death, martyrdom and sexuality in relation to the suicide bomber shows that these notions attached to women in a specific way remain the same even within a militaristic atmosphere.