Chapter III
Female Rationale

When representing people who belong to an armed group of any kind, it is usually seen as important to justify their being a part of it and to give the reasons as to why they join. Are the reasons of women different to those of men? Do these texts harp on why a woman joins or do they try to justify the participation of men as well? How do gender biases work when this aspect of the woman combatant is portrayed? These are some of the questions that I will try to answer within the space of this chapter.

The documentary No More Tears Sister: Anatomy of Hope and Betrayal portray Dayapala and Rajini who are husband and wife, in love with each other in University and decide to get married across “the ethnic language divide.” Both of them are leftwing activists although fighting for two different causes. Dayapala is a Sinhalese who becomes part of the JVP insurrection while Rajini joins the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The reasons as to why Dayapala joined the revolution are given as “eradicating poverty” and unemployment. There is no apology from him for leaving his two children and fighting for his cause unlike for Rajini. He says, “I never wanted to have a permanent committed relationship... There are other people who needed us more than my wife or children.” When Rajini joins the Tiger women’s wing she writes to her parents saying “If I have never fulfilled your dreams of being a good middle class child please forgive me. I am as much worried and more aware of my responsibilities to my dearest children.” For a woman her role as a mother is constructed as being more imperative than any additional role where as a man who neglects familial duties for a ‘higher cause’ is acceptable. Therefore while fighting for the freedom of her people she still feels guilty for neglecting her children. Due to such internalized notions of motherhood and womanhood she has to always justify her role outside the home. The other pertinent question is as to why Dayapala got married if he does not want a “permanent committed relationship” and when the movie talks about Rajini having met someone else he says that she was very liberal and he did not agree with such behaviour.
In the novel *The Road from Elephant Pass* the exact reason as to why Wasantha joined the army is not specified. Although he is from a very poor family, he gets financial assistance to finish his higher education. So even though poverty is not given as the main reason, there is a reference to how his family back at home is dependent on the salary he gets from the army. Why is the reason not given clearly and why are the reasons given not given much importance to unlike for Kamala? Kamala’s reasons for fighting for a separate state for the Tamil people with the LTTE are clearly given which is revenge from the Sinhalese for what the Sinhalese mobs did to her family in July 1983. Their house was burnt to ashes and her father was assaulted in a way that he was never the same again. It is not only mere revenge that makes her join the movement as she later admits that she had nothing to live for. ‘‘Whatever they did to me, in the end I would die. Then it would be over’ she said calmly. ‘I knew all that when I accepted the mission’…I had nothing to live for, then,’ she went on. ‘Only the mission mattered. I am expendable’ (402).

*The Road from Elephant Pass* shows that the reason for the women cadres to fight so is personal hatred. Captain Wasantha’s conscience tells us that “Their cadres, especially the women, had perfected the art or science, of suicide bombing. They hated us, the Sinhala majority, with a ferocity that would not have comprehended had I not seen and experienced it in the battlefield” (4). These lines echo the woman combatant Sita’s comment to Trawick that she thinks of how much she hates her enemy when she fights as that helps her to fight better. It is this hatred that Wasantha has experienced in the battlefield.

Sarvan does not give any reason in the short story, “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi” as to why Dhanu is willing to go ahead with her suicide attack or the reason as to why she joined the movement although it was declared by the LTTE that she was raped by soldiers of the IPKF and her killing Rajiv Gandhi who dispatched the IPKF to
Sri Lanka, is to avenge this crime. There is no reference to her rape in the short story even when she is talking about the sexual encounter she has just experienced with the person who is sleeping next to her. There is only a reference to “other armies, real, very real in their cruelty” (357) which arrived in her homeland. The short story though paints for us, using the stream of consciousness, a perturbed mind going through various emotions and moods but does not give us an insight into how she became part of the movement or why she is on such a macabre mission. Poverty is suggested as a reason through her musings about her difficult life in a rural village in which her father tilled the “stubborn brown soil” of the land (357). She justifies her death as giving her mother peace, a peace in which she is no more and her mother then will not have to worry about her. “Soon I’ll be safe, beyond all dangers, and mother won’t have to live in uncertainty and perplexity; will not have to worry herself sick” (358). The fact that she justifies her death and the brutality she is about to perform by such a naive excuse maybe an indication from the writer as to how she has got into this mission.

In the Sinhalese movie _Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers)_ no references are made to the past of Dilip and Nirmala except for the fact that they have served the movement with dedication which was the reason as to why they were chosen for this mission. This lack has been pointed out in its reviews as a short coming of the movie which makes the characters lack depth. The need for reasons from the audience and the lack of it in the movie leads to a vacuum which the audience is uncomfortable with as they cannot fix the characters as a certain kind of person (“Eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase”- Eliot). The reasons for them to join the cause may have not been included as it may have made the movie look like it is an attempt to justify the cause. Showing the ’83 riots or the protagonists families being harassed by the army etc would not have been very palatable for Sinhala society. Therefore Niyaz may have not included the reasons of their joining on purpose as he had many problems getting actors for the controversial script from the onset.

43 “Nalini said in her confession to the SIT that Dhanu had convinced her that the IPKF men had raped her and killed her two brothers” (Sharma 61). Nalini has been given a life sentence and is in a jail in Vellore. She is the only surviving member of the group which plotted the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.
Gendered Violence

It is significant that among the female combatants that Miranda Alison interviewed, half of them had joined in 1990, a year of heavy military attacks. Out of the fourteen, thirteen of them had joined voluntarily while one had been forcibly conscripted. The LTTE asks for the participation of at least one member of each family in its armed struggle (Trawick 143). In spite of this demand and forced conscription, most recruits volunteer to join. As mentioned before, the LTTE started recruiting women not because they believed in women's equality but due to a lack of man power. However as Miranda Alison points out, the lack of a male in the house and having no one to live for or to avenge the death of the man who went to fight may be reasons which motivated women to join the movement (2003a 44). There are many explanations as to why they joined the movement but some reasons are gender specific while some are common to both sexes.

In speculations about the personal life of the female militant, especially the reasons as to what led her to join a militant movement; we find that many narratives give sexual violation as a reason. As De Mel has pointed out, this discourse does not apply to the male suicide bomber (2007, 199) or to the male cadres and tends to revolve around the woman suicide bombers and the woman cadres. Women feel that they need to be able to protect themselves or they want revenge for violations which they have experienced.

In fact it is the fear of rape more than the cases that actually occurred which have led women to join the movement as they know that if they are raped they will not be accepted in society. This is not to say that not 'many' cases of rape have occurred. Thamilini has told Miranda Alison that the fear of sexual violence was part of her motivation. She says that although there were only a few women and girls who were actually raped or assaulted, “this created such a climate of fear that all girls and women were afraid of it” (2003a 51-52). Many felt the need to protect themselves even if they were not direct victims of sexual abuse because of the value given to notions of purity and virginity for girls. This hype was created by the LTTE when ever a rape case was reported. Adele Ann says that the entrance of the IPKF into the war front was water shed.

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44 Pointed out by Hoole 326, M de Silva 28. I have discussed this issue in chapter I.
in the recruitment process of women into the LTTE, as the rapes and molesting made a bitter impact. These instances are documented in *The Broken Palmyrah* by Thirangama in Chapter Five.

In *The Broken Palmyrah* this stigma prevalent in society is recorded by one story which reads, "At the checkpoint even if army men just brush or even make a comment, the old ladies of the village would gather and gossip - 'Poor girl she has been spoilt, how will they get her married off.' To avoid all this I shut myself inside the house" (Chapter Five). Here ironically it is women who are reinforcing patriarchal notions of female purity and marriage as the only and ultimate goal for a woman.

**Inspiration from other Women**

One cannot but be inspired when one sees the women of the L.T.T.E., two by two, in the night, with their A.K.s slung over the shoulder, patrolling the entrances to Jaffna city. One cannot but admire the dedication and toughness of their training, seen in the video films put out by the L.T.T.E. One could see the nationalist fervour and the romantic vision of women in arms defending the nation. This becomes a great draw for other women to join the militant movements. — Thirangama, *The Broken Palmyrah* 325

In Alison’s interview with Thamilini she confessed to having been inspired by other women who were part of the movement. She says, “...a small suspicion was in my mind whether I am capable of doing these things, because of the way I was brought up in my house... But I was able to see the other military cadres, the girls, who were doing all sorts of things. So then I thought, if they can do, why I can’t do these things?” (2003a 59). Seeing other women perform actions which were said impossible or unnatural for women to perform gave such women the courage to step into these roles.

**Revenge**

In “Selvi’s Revenge” De Silva “narrativises two critical moments of struggle in the lives of Selvi and Pavalamma” (10). She focuses more, as is evident in the title as well, on Selvi, who was a child recruit, abducted at the age of ten by the LTTE and re-
abducted by the Sinhala state (11). Selvi’s words are recorded as told to De Silva in this paper. She is abducted and forced to fight for the cause and therefore while fighting for the cause seeks revenge from the very people she is fighting for. Suresh’s story documented in Tigers of Lanka as “A Lone Testament” has many similarities with Selvi’s. He too seeks revenge from the LTTE while fighting for them. Suresh too like Selvi decides to fight for the LTTE even though he despised them. He says, “I have never forgiven the LTTE for the 1986 massacre. When we set out from our homes in 1983, we had great ideals, big dreams...But after the massacre I began to question my own ideals. By the end of 1986 I had only one aim—revenge” (Swamy 1994, 05). Revenge for torture and murder seem to be a common feeling among men and women who were involved in the movement.

Selvi is forced to fight for the LTTE under the threat that they would kill her father and brother if she does not. She seeks revenge from them because they kill her brother for selling vegetables to the army and for refusing to join the movement. When she tries to run away from the LTTE camp, she is arrested by the army. The other woman cadre Ajantha, who promises to help her run away, is killed by the LTTE when their plans are discovered. As shown in the Sinhalese movie Kalu Sudu Mal (Colourless Flowers), such women have no way out. Many women join the movement to find freedom but Selvi waits for what she calls, “the moment of my own liberation” so that she can avenge the murder of her brother. “It was a duty towards my brother. It had to be done. He took my brother’s life. He had no right to live” (Mangalika De Silva, 2005, 23).

Even though revenge is a very common driving force among both male and female cadres, Selvi’s revenge is quite different. For Selvi her familial ties are stronger than her ties to the family ‘nation.’ It is ironic that Sritharan is her foster brother and not her own brother. While her father left her mother “when she was in hospital for delivery” (23) and her mother committed suicide afterwards, Selvi was adopted by her foster father and she got very close to two brothers, one of them being Sritharan. In an arena of a nation where the nation is looked upon as family, there are other kinds of family ties that

45 He is referring to the massacre of TELO members by the LTTE.
are built which for citizens like Selvi are more important than the nation as a family. “For Selvi, the perpetrators were oppressive men undaunted by the Andersonian angst; the will to kill and die for the nation” (11). This ‘will’ goes hand in hand with Selvi’s will to kill and die while avenging the death of her brother. In Selvi’s consciousness her brother replaces the nation. “I valued his life more than I cared for mine. I wasn’t afraid of death...I had to sacrifice my life for the sake of my brother” (23). This discourse is very similar to what many combatants say about their will to kill and die. But for Selvi, she is dying for someone who is already dead. She is willing to take the risk of being killed not caring for the fact that nothing is going to bring her brother back to life. “By returning the humiliation on his killer, Selvi returns the honour denied to the dead” (32). In keeping with the cultural practice of honouring the dead which is believed to put the soul to rest, Selvi tries to bring honour to her dead brother’s soul and memory. Sangam Tamils believed that the dead “did not go either to heaven or hell but resided permanently in the tombstones” (Mangalika De Silva 2005, 32).

Selvi’s revenge converges with the notions of revenge among the other female cadres she is fighting along with at some point. Their fury extends only to the Sinhala enemy and to the Tamils who are so called “traitors” to the movement. Selvi’s fury extends to the very people she is fighting with (Mangalika De Silva 2005, 33).

De Silva also talks about Pavalamma, who is treated with contempt by the LTTE. Pavalamma’s body is mutilated by Tiger women because her sons are “engaged in politics of resistance aimed at challenging the dominance of the LTTE in the field of Tamil politics” (Mangalika De Silva 2005, 12). She does not fit into the mother warrior category which the nation has carved out for women. Even though she is a Tamil mother who has given her sons for a movement which is fighting for a separate homeland for the Tamil people she does not fit in to the ideal mother warrior for the LTTE. She will only be so if her sons were subservient to the political party through which she is viewed. This illuminates the fact that such images are purely politically motivated images of women for furthering their political power. Her body becomes a site on which they can unleash their anger against their rivals.
Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers is dedicated to “the women fighters of Liberation Tigers who have sacrificed their lives in the struggle for the liberation of their homeland and for the creation of a new society where women can live with equality, honour and dignity” (1993, 3). If a gender equal society is what they aim for then where do women like Selvi and Pavalamma fit in? De Silva says that, “As the struggles of Selvi and Pavalamma well illustrate, nation is a lived reality for women” (13) but nation is a lived reality for men as well. It is however experienced in different ways.

Trawick’s essay carries Sita’s story of how both her brothers were killed. One of her brothers was killed in 1985 by the Special Task Force of the Police and the other brother was killed in 1990 at Vantaramoollai University. Sita and her sister join the LTTE in 1990. “My brothers were killed and out of rage I joined the movement” (157). Sita even describes how “she harnessed that anger to turn herself into an effective killer” (151). She has to think of the way her two brothers were killed to be a better fighter.

Frances Bulathsinhala’s article describes woman militant Selva who saw both her parents being killed, caught in a cross fire between the army and the LTTE. “The trauma had driven her to the Tigers who promised salvation through bloody revenge and a life of grim sacrifices.”

Taking over the cause that the dead brother was fighting for seems to fall on the sister as a duty or as an excuse to join the movement. The poem “A Few Tears for the Darling Resting in the Sepulchre” by Cevvanam which was published by the LTTE for Great Heroes Day in 2001 reads thus:

Brother when you became a soldier
I was just a little girl- but
Now the feeling
You had, all the courage
Are for me now- Did you
Really forget that- that time-while I as a soldier
Walked into the camp
Why did you come
With eyes swimming in tears
Close to my ear
You came and asked!
Oh... Brother the meaning
Of the words asked that time
Now you understand, do you not?
Brother even though you perished in
the war
For the liberation of the country, your
goal
And your weapon already your own sister
Took for herself
Having thought about that tears of joy
You shed, did you not?

Brother! Then indeed
You knew- You
Forever to kiss the ground
You go, having said that,
Because of that indeed from the string
of poison
Shaking at your throat
Having put one around my neck
After embracing me tightly and kissing
Me

Even if you were no longer your
Goal to fulfill was necessary
Because you said that your name
I had to adorn
With a handshake you received
From me the leave to depart

Now where are you
Unending rest you take, do you not
Brother?...Not even once your
Glorious face you show?

Near your tomb
Having given you leave to depart
As the little sister have I come to linger
here, have I not?

Brother, once open your eyes
With your name- and
With the poison garland you gave and
With your weapon---and with
Whatever ideal you carried- with the
Pursuit of that same ideal near to you
Have I come to linger.

My desire oh Brother!...
Do you rest in loneliness?...

Do not worry- near you
Your comrades also sleep—moreover
In a few days near to you I also
Shall come to my rest—for me, too,
Near to you a place has been marked.
In your footsteps I, too…(qtd in Hellman-Rajanayagam, 2005, 148)

Becoming a hero by embracing death by choice is what is valorized in this poem. The poem gives value to the idea of sacrificial death. It is not in killing or defeating the enemy that they become heroes but in the willingness to give up ones life. The speaker's brother knew that he was going to die and accepted it and now she too accepts it and is ready to lie next to his grave in the near future. The brother, while he was alive has not only accepted her into the armed struggle, but has been proud of what she has decided to do with her life. This taking over of the brother's struggle is reminiscent of the woman JVP militant whom Neloufer de Mel refers to as ‘Juliet’ in Women and the Nation's Narrative. Juliet functioned as a “mnemonic of her dead brother” who was the district leader before he died fighting for the cause. Juliet has said “I had always to set an example as my brother's sister. I understand now that I was nothing more than a symbol of my dead brother. I felt burdened by it, but I also accepted it” (219). Juliet’s acceptance in the movement is tied to her brother’s memory. She is seen as carrying on what her brother began and not as an individual with her own idea about the movement. Such activism although is not seen as simply avenging the dead, falls into the discourse of appeasing the dead through carrying on their mission which many women even in the political arena have done.

The '83 riots was a push factor for many to join the militants. Nalini in One More Sunrise joins the movement when her “parents were brutally murdered by a mob of fanatics.” “They were driving home one evening when they were confronted by the mob who attacked them, torching their car” (95). Just as Kamala does in The Road from Elephant Pass, Nalini too gives voice to the injustice of such attacks when she says, “My
parents had no political leanings and were never involved with any Tamil organization… It was that day in 1983, which changed my life. I decided to join the LTTE” (96).

Set at the time when the armed struggle in Jaffna was being formed, the short story, “Maya My Daughter, Maya the Heroine” depicts the life of an eighteen year old girl who gets involved in the movement. Maya’s initial attraction to the “discussion class” is purely because of the charismatic stranger, Nirmalan, who she keeps passing on the road on her way home. However once she goes for one class she realizes that “she had trodden on a landmine, and that there was not going to be any retreat for her” (90). She is unable to question their violent methods and she is finally assigned to go on a mission which she cannot refuse. The writer brings our attention to this when she says, “No one would ever know of the youthful fancy for which Maya sacrificed her life!” (111).

Violent revenge becomes a possibility for women when they become militants and this makes them feel more powerful and empowered. On 15 August 2001, LTTE women killed 15 policemen and injured 20 in Amparai, to avenge the rape of their associate Koneswary Murugespiallai. One LTTE female leader proclaimed that she was “…proud that we were able to destroy the police station where she was raped and killed” (Subramaniam).

**Retaliation and Equality**

For the Sri Lankan born British singer M.I.A the reasons are very clear. In an interview she says “You can't grab someone by the neck and choke them and then complain they're kicking you. If you're going around oppressing people, they will fight back.” In the song “Bucky Done Gun” the lyrics read as:

I'll fight you just to get peace,
I'm armed and I'm equal.

M.I.A’s music is very provocative and controversial which is probably why she was denied entry into the U.S.A in 2006 June when she wanted to perform for a U.S
audience. Her work is infused with many violent revolutionary imagery and lyrics. Being a daughter of one of the founding members of the armed struggle in Sri Lanka she has faced many difficulties living her childhood in Jaffna. Due to the war her family went to England to live in a racist housing scheme in Acton. This place has influenced the initials M.I.A which stands for ‘missing in Acton’ as well as ‘Missing in Action.’ Her initials too are closely connected to her full name which is Mathangi Arulpragasm but she is also called Maya for short.

The album ‘Sunshowers’ has a picture of her amongst the female militants of the LTTE. Another comprises of a few soldiers of which the backdrop is a few palm trees which is mostly found in LTTE controlled northern parts of the country. The portrait of the tiger very frequently occurs in her posters as shown below.

Sunshowers

Bucky Done Gun

46M.I.A’s father Arul Pragasam, politically known as Arular was one of the founding members of EROS. (Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students).
Sunshowers

As her songs belong to the hip hop kind the lyrics do not flow into one another. They are a series of statements which go well with the militaristic atmosphere and visuals. In the album “Arular” which is named after her father’s rebel name, the song “Fire Fire” reads as:

You shoulda been good to me
Then I wouldn’t get so rowdy rowdy
You shoulda kept ya eye on me
Then I wouldn’t get so baddy baddy

For Maya violent retaliation is justified if you have been oppressed and not been given a fair hearing. She is part of the Tamil diaspora which contributed immensely to the war. She is contributing to its ideology through music and not by taking up the gun but justifying the acts of those who have taken up the gun. Smith and Stares point out that “Diasporas intervene in conflict because they can. Diasporas without access to power of some sort, whether direct or surrogate, do not intervene in conflicts” (3). This intervention can be in many different ways. If one is financially supporting a war in ones homeland then they may not be someone who is politically powerful but who is intervening in the conflict indirectly. It is well known that most of the funding for the LTTE came from Tamil expatriates.
The extent of Maya’s LTTE approval is almost purely speculative, as most of it involves over-analytical dissections of her lyrical output. The fact that she has named an album *Piracy Funds Terrorism* (2004) adds to this confusion. The song “Pull Up the People” in the album “Arular” has lyrics such as:

Every gun in a battle is a
Son and daughter too.

Simons is of the opinion that the album “Arular” tends to be more concerned with “conjuring up striking militant imagery rather than making blatant political declarations.”

Nationalist Sentiments

Miranda Alison makes a pertinent point in ‘Uncovering the Girls in ‘the Boys,’’ that when it comes to the reasons as to why women join an armed struggle, it is assumed by many that they are simply fighting for a man’s cause and do not have ‘nationalistic aspirations’ as well (65). Miranda Alison’s article is a much more neutral one compared to Shenali Waduge’s article on militants as Waduge feels that they are all irrational and brain washed. Alison’s research which was a result of interviewing fourteen female combatants and ex-combatants showed that women do feel that they need to fight for the nation which is one reason for them to join the struggle apart from others like personal experiences of oppression. But this is a reason common to both men and women who join armed forces. They feel they need to fight for the nation and are being heroic and above the rest by being prepared to give up their life for their country or cause. Are there other underlying reasons for men as well as women? Alison calls nationalist fervour a ‘meta-reason’ for joining and points out how there are other personal reasons at work. It is also important to keep in mind that all except two of her interviewees were selected by the LTTE and were not of her choice.
Lois. A. West too assumes that women do not really care for nationalism when she says that “From women’s standpoint, sovereignty, identity, self-determination are more than nation-state, they are family and peace” (xiii). She not only assumes that women do not have ‘nationalistic aspirations’, she also assumes that all women want “family and peace” over their allegiance to the nation. It may be true that all women may want peace as all human beings want to live in a peaceful place. As Bloom stated that in many conflict zones men supported violence much more often than women” (68) but it is definitely only an assumption that all women want a family. However women’s roles in peace building cannot be ignored.

There is little doubt that the LTTE women, like the men, are primarily motivated by nationalist fervour. It is also likely that some of them have, again like men, been drawn to the movement by personal or family suffering at the hands of ‘state terrorists’, or by the aura of romance surrounding the social image of the freedom fighter’. ..It is probable that many women have joined the movement at least partly because they see their participation as a means of breaking taboos, and, in particular, destroying the stratifying straitjacket of conformity and subservience traditionally imposed upon them by a rigidly and self righteously patriarchal society. (Bose, 111)

Miranda Alison agrees with Bose that for many women ‘nationalist fervour’ is an important factor in their decision to join the movement. Six of the thirteen women that Alison interviewed who had voluntarily joined the LTTE cited nationalist ideas of freedom for joining (2003a 44). However Alison feels that behind the nationalist fervour are more important personal reasons (2003a 45) like the death of a family member, displacement and the sufferings of others in the community (2003a 46-47).

Nirmala and Rajini’s lives are examples which show that women too get affected by nationalist sentiment. In No More Tears Sister the two sisters; Nirmala and Rajini both join the LTTE believing that it was only through radical means and the group’s
unconditional dedication that they could make the government listen to the voice of the Tamil people. However this view withers away when their ideologies clash with those of the group and the group resorts to “cut throat ruthlessness” (*No More Tears Sister*). After spending six months in Chennai Nirmala decides to leave the organization and Rajini too gets disillusioned in London. However Rajini is shot dead in Jaffna while cycling back home from the University for criticizing the movement.

On the issue of women recruitments *The Broken Palmyrah* states:

Our social set up, its restriction on creative expressions for women and the evils of the dowry system, are some of the social factors that led to their initial recruitment. Moreover, the political climate created by the struggle in the past decade, and the increasing loss of men to state terrorism and the world at large as refugees and emigrants, are some of the contributory factors necessitating women's recruitment. However, it would be an overstatement to say that it is the climate of "liberation," the kind of literature that is available, the knowledge of the experience of women in other struggles from far flung corners of the world, or the rebelliousness against being kept out of the centre of the struggle, that was drawing the fertile minds of young women to active participation. (Hoole et al. 326)

In the play *Forbidden Area*, of the two main characters, one male and one female, both are militants. Urmila believes in what she is doing with all her heart and soul to the extent that she is willing to give her life for the movement. She is full of ‘nationalist sentiment’ and sees it as the only reason as to why she is doing what she is doing. It is only later that the personal reasons are unearthed. In contrast to her is Raman who is serving the organization “reluctantly” because he had no choice but to join when the LTTE was killing all the members of the revolutionary group that he belonged to. “There was nothing else to do but join the liberation group. They were killing all of our members” he says (10). Even the reason that he joined the movement is not very heroic neither is it fuelled by any nationalist sentiment. He joins the revolution when the army comes looking for him because he had once run away for no reason after seeing an army
jeep. It is in fact Urmila who tells Raman that he should think of the greater needs of their society. She retorts, “Don’t be so selfish! To think of only your family. Your own small needs. When we get back our homelands, we are going to build a paradise” (15). This enthusiasm stands in stark contrast with the tragic end that they both meet at the end of the play through which Chandrasekaram gives out a strong message against militant nationalism.

In the short story “Appointment with Rajiv Gandhi,” Sarvan does not instill any patriotic or nationalist sentiments in the speaker. “I do not feel brave; nor frightened, nor fiercely patriotic” (358). She feels that it is destiny. “It is my fate; my destiny” (358). There is no reference to her motherland or her duty towards her people.

Within this nationalist fervour are myths which act as a push factor for women to join the movement. “The myth of the ‘valiant mothers’ who go to war or send their sons/husbands/lovers to fight has propelled women to swell the ranks of the militants. The myth of the ‘valiant mother’ is shattered by poems such as “Stop to All the Killings” which was put out by the Mothers and Daughters of Lanka (MDL) on the 1st of October 1999 of which an extract reads as:

Tell me my children
how can I,
your mother,
remain silent any longer?

The blood that flows
over village and town,
on the roadside and in the rivers,
is the blood that once flowed in my veins
as I suckled you, my child.

Wait.
Heed your mother’s cry.
Poverty

Alan. B. Krueger points out that many people blame economic deprivation or lack of education for reasons as to why people become terrorists and that a closer look at society shows that this is not so. One needs to understand that terrorism is different to ordinary day to day crimes. “Most terrorists are not so desperately poor that they have nothing to live for. Instead they are people who care so deeply and fervently about a cause that they are willing to die for” (4). Contrary to this view Gunaratna says that “…widespread poverty and underdevelopment exist in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, southeastern Turkey, and northeastern Sri Lanka, which form the recruiting ground for a bulk of the suicide bombers” (2000).

It is not surprising that Urmila in the play Forbidden Area does not wish to live. She has nothing and no one to live for. When Supremo asks if she and Raman have a final request Raman expresses his concern about his mother but Urmila says, “There is no need to look out for anyone for me” (20). From what we get to know of her life from the play she has lived a life of disappointments and failures. She needed ‘just eight more marks to go to university” and says that even if she got in she would not have had the money for books. She belongs to a ‘lower caste’ and has been treated badly by the ‘upper castes’ who would not even give them “a chair to sit on” (15). She couldn’t marry Jemini because his mother asked for a dowry which they did not have. Her father dies unable to get to a hospital due to curfew and her mother is still trying to get his pension. So she feels “I did the best thing for my mother by going away from them” (16). In this series of tragedies which is her life story the gun gives her a notion of value and importance. “I have nothing else but this gun. The only thing that I like is its metallic smell” (17).
However this does not mean that she does not have any political convictions. She has a mind of her own and is not simply carrying out orders. This is reflected in her rebellion when she decides to go against the Supremo’s orders and kill the President.

In a letter found on a dead woman combatant in the northern part of Sri Lanka, she says, “Amma what can I do? When all those at home in the area were taken away, I too had to go with them.” Another militant said that her parents had to “hand me over to the organization in spite of my objections. What else can I do here other than dying?” (The Times of India, 30 January 2008).

A critic of the LTTE pointed out to Mia Bloom during her research that Prabhakaran is “better able to manipulate young people or those who have suffered from a personal grievance” (Bloom 65). This manipulation is very explicitly shown in the play Forbidden Area in the way Supremo convinces Urmila to go ahead with the suicide attack through emotional black mail and referring to all that he and the movement has done for her against what she has suffered. The fact that she was poor and had nothing to live for is her weak point.

In Alisons’ research four women mentioned the death of a family member as being a reason for their joining the movement. Six women said their families were displaced or their areas attacked in the war. Eight of the thirteen women said another reason was the suffering of others in their community. Disruption in their education was mentioned by eight of them. So unstable lives seem to be a major driving force to join armed forces. When the men have gone away and they are either living their lives as refugees, it seems more desirable to join an armed force and be part of a group than alone.

**Religion**

Does religion play a role in this decision? Can the concept of the woman warrior be connected to Hinduism? Roberts points out that the Goddess Kannaki (Kannagi) has a character both of chastity as well as of an avenging goddess. There are temples dedicated
to this goddess in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka. There are several temples in Sri Lanka dedicated to Kannaki Amman and she is a figure familiar to most Tamils. Therefore it is not surprising yet significant that Kannaki in her militant and yet chaste form has been incorporated into Tamil literature to inspire and motivate the female fighter (Roberts, 2005a, 500).

Then there is also the goddess Kali who represents feminine power. In the nationalist mobilization of the new woman, it is Kali’s image and Kali’s malevolence that Tiger women appropriate in the nationalist punitappor (sacred war) to protect the tayakam (motherland) (“Selvi’s Revenge” 42). Tanika Sarkar points out how there were two images of the goddess Kali in Bengal during the struggle for freedom against the British. She was seen as an image of the “shame, deprivation and exploitation” of the country who has aimed her violence against herself (163). Other scholars saw her as a source of power which can “destroy evil and transcend death” (163). Sarkar says that this duality points to “an inner tension within nationalism about the principle of female strength and about the violence and destructiveness latent in it” (163).

But these are Hindu mythologies. There are also Tamil women cadres who are Christians. In the documentary My Daughter the Terrorist Dharshika’s mother says, “She was different. She dreamt of being a nun” but she ends up joining the suicide squad. Her need to devote her life to her religion turns to devoting her life to the movement. However there is a huge disparity between being a nun and a suicide bomber. A celibate life doing charity is distinct from blowing your self up and killing everyone around you. Where do these two roles converge? Dharshika seems to have lost faith in face of the chaos around her. She says, “If there is a God, Why does he keep us in this endless misery? Even those who came to church for protection ended up in pools of blood” (Arnestad).

The Sinhalese woman can only dream of being in battle. Her gender does not allow her to be on the battle field. Pelpita J. Ratnayake’s poem Soldier Son to the Mother reads thus:
'Why was I born a woman
If not I could now be in battle'
Receiving such letters from all four sides
Seeing these letters, tears of joy filled my eyes

Gendered Sacrifice

The role of the 'sacrificer' has always been attached to the woman in many ways. Many have argued that this makes it easier for women to sacrifice their lives in an act of suicide. Margarethe Mitscherlich-Nielsen (1978) who was asked to explain the reason for the harshness and tenacity of the women in the RAF, notes that "love of the death game may be seen as a shared trait of all terrorists but that the women in that game tended to assume in their own eyes and in the eyes of their companions the role of martyrs, precisely because of the sacrificial conduct society has always imposed on women" (De Cataldo et al. 83). In the case of the women of the LTTE the 'sacrifice' becomes more visible and public and not in a private sphere as it normally is for a woman.

Vasantha, a young LTTE cadre, says, "This is the most supreme sacrifice I can make" which is giving up his life for the cause (Bloom, 63). Although women are always expected to sacrifice their individual needs for the family's needs, the notion of sacrifice here applies to men as well. Is sacrificing one's life different for a woman than it is for a man?

Some women decide to sacrifice their lives for a cause as they do not want to go back to their homes. "Women who leave the traditional household feel that they cannot go back as they will not be accepted into mainstream society." It has also been pointed out that "it was easier to convince women and keep them under control as 'chosen' individuals. They want to make up for their lack of physical strength on the battle field" (Arad 121-122).
“Selvi’s ‘sacrifice’ in the name of the familial, stands for profanity unlike the sacrifices of Tiger women in the interest of an illusory ‘nation,’ the ideal that symbolizes sacredness and purity” (Mangalika De Silva 2005, 37). For Selvi avenging the death of her brother is more important and a matter connected to her religious beliefs than sacrificing her life for her nation.

A young Tiger woman guerrilla in the eastern district of Batticaloa spoke of her motives for joining the movement in philosophical terms:

In our society women are the numerical majority. We have also been the single most oppressed segment of Tamil society. If we do not come out of our homes and take up arms in the struggle for liberation, there can be no progress either for the nation or for us women. (qtd. in Bose, 110)

**Oppression/ for Emancipation**

Girls are often treated as domestic servants within their own family or extended family which also gives them reason to run away and join armed struggles. Abarimi says, “When I was older, the wife kept me home and didn’t allow me to go to school. I had to work at home. I did all the work at home from cooking to cleaning, washing, and everything I could possibly do, and what I could not do was forced on me” (Brett & Specht 88).

Punitha runs away from home and joins the LLTE. She says, “I wanted to get away from the marriage my parents were planning to force me into. I really got disturbed, they were forcing me...About ten days before the marriage, I started to plan to leave the house. I waited, tried to convince my parents, they were very adamant and would not listen to me. I tried to inform them about my wishes through my good friend and even through a relative. The day before the marriage everything was ready. I ran away” (Brett & Specht 89). She realizes that running away from her problems has put her in a worse situation. “I ran away to escape a marriage I didn’t like. I ended up in a worse setup now and that’s what I have earned” she admits (Brett & Specht 97).
Joining a movement is a way of getting away from other fears as well. For Kavitha it was a way to free herself from the pressures of what was expected of her by her parents. “My parents had very high hopes regarding my future. I was afraid that I would let them down because I knew that I was not clever student. ..Before the exam- I knew I would never be able to fulfill their desire, so I had plans to leave and run away” (Brett & Specht 96). She too confesses, “Now I realize that it is worse than failing an exam” (Brett & Specht 97).

The honour and power of carrying a gun vanishes when the cadres find themselves in dire circumstances. Suresh, whose story Swamy narrates in Tigers of Lanka says that when he was in the forest hiding from the LTTE, “It was terrible. I thought many times about my family, my past and the ideals with which we had taken to the gun” (2). They take to the gun with so many dreams and hopes, an instant empowerment, but it does not last for long and are soon disillusioned.

Mia Bloom after her research in Sri Lanka says that “the personal sense of outrage is often expressed through means of violence (64). Individual bombers connect their personal loss to the movement and are willing to become a martyr. She quotes one who says, “The harassment that I and my parents have suffered at the hands of the army makes me want to take revenge….It is a question of Tamil pride, especially after so much sacrifice. There is no escape” (Charu Lata Joshi. qtd. in Bloom 64). The personal is connected to greater sacrifices made by those who have died for the same cause.

Many parents fear that their rations will not be given to them if they do not allow at least one child to be recruited. Recruiting and kidnapping from schools has led many Tamil families to keep their children at home. Groups such as ‘Mothers of Stolen Children,’ which were formed in 2000, have voiced their anger toward the LTTE with leaflets and graffiti across the north and east (Bloom 65).
The dowry system which is considered an evil of society is used in rhetoric to persuade women to join the movement. A male voice says in *Like Myth and Mother*

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............
we have taken a vow against
dowry
we want only our home
land, to fight
and die. (108)
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In the light of this poem it is interesting to remind ourselves of how Luce Irigaray questions the meaning of statements like “I want what’s good for my country” in reference to election speeches (85). She says they are mere rhetoric which does not address the real issues at stake.

However, the fight for liberation does recognize that there are other issues at stake. Discussing the caste system Wilson states that although there are many caste differences the Tamils have united “to obtain their rights. They appear to ignore the social discrimination that exists, in the expectation that a settlement of such grievances will be negotiated after their people as a whole have secured their place in the Sri Lankan polity” (25).

Adele Anne says, “Normally young women remain under the control of the father and brother. Male control follows them throughout their lives. The decision to break-out of this cycle of suffocating control is a refreshing expression and articulation of their new aspirations and independence” (1993, 8). She points to the oppressive system on women in the northern and Eastern Tamil societies. In Alison’s research four cadres expressed “social restrictions on women such as not riding bicycles, not going out alone, not going in the sea or on boats; they were all happy that within the LTTE they have had the opportunity to do these things that were raised to believe were inappropriate or dangerous for women” (2003a 58). Krishna described to Alison how she was not allowed to go into the sea as the sea will ‘take’ her and women in boats on the sea were believed to make the sea more rough (2003a 59). It is only once given an opportunity to do what was
forbidden to them that they realized that these are ways of controlling women. The majority of the women cadres whom Alison interviewed stated that they had been unaware of the problems Tamil women faced in society before they joined the LTTE.

The article on terrorists in *The Times of India* (Jan 2008) says that letters retrieved from bodies of women militants show that “Every LTTE cadre is anxious to see his or her parents.” The letter also says, “I will come home for pongal though I do not know what my fate will be” and “every fighter cries ‘Amma’ or ‘Appa’ at the time of their heroic death.” The article says that these women were forced to join the LTTE.

It is ironic that a Sinhalese army personnel, the epitome of Sinhalese chauvinism for the LTTE, gives Kamala a reason to want to live in the novel *The Road from Elephant Pass*. She says, “‘I volunteered for this mission because I had nothing to live for,’ she said gravely. ‘I have a reason now’” (424). *The Psychology of Terrorism* (Vol I) points out that a terrorist has “Nothing to lose” (12) and this is what empowers them. But suddenly Kamala has Captain Wasantha in her life, for whom she cares for deeply and feels is a good man in spite of the fact that he is a Sinhalese.

Dharshika in *My Daughter the Terrorist* says that she joined as a twelve year old after losing her father and suffering abuse and humiliation at the hands of the military attack. The other woman militant Puhalchudar says, “I thought that if I didn’t join the movement, our people will be forced into slavery” (Arnestad).

Nirekha De Silva’s research includes interviews of five women soldiers, five ex-women soldiers, six ex-LTTE cadres and three women prisoners. She has not interviewed female combatants serving in the LTTE unlike Miranda Alison and Margaret Trawick. This may have been due to practical problems or the fact that her research is only on “women Ex-Combatants.” However she has included case studies of women soldiers of the army. From these interviews it is clear that many of them have joined the army due to unemployment and among the LTTE combatants many of them were...
forcibly taken. Five out of the six ex-combatants have stated that they live in fear of being recruited once again.

The ex-LTTE combatant whom De Silva has named Yamuna has pointed out that one of her biggest fears when going back home was whether her family will accept her and recognize her with short hair. Yamuna’s experience with the LTTE seems to suggest that she did not have a choice of having her hair long or short and had “mourned for days” after her hair was cut very short. However Adel Anne in *Will to Freedom* says that the fact that the women were allowed to choose how they would like to have their hair was a sign of their freedom and agency (271). While the masculine and empowered image of the woman combatant is attractive to most women, they are skeptical to go back to their families in this manner.

Therefore we see how there are many reasons for which women join militant movements even though it is not considered a suitable role for them by society. It is because of this view, of it being unsuitable or unnatural that all the texts which represent women militants make it a point to mention the reasons as to how she is in such a situation. This is not the case for male militants. It is assumed that nationalist sentiments lead the men to battle, as we have seen in the novel *The Road from Elephant Pass*. In this chapter I have also looked at how religion, poverty and notions of sacrifice play a role in these choices that women make.