

# **ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA: THE ROLE AND RESPONSE OF WOMEN**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to Certify that the dissertation entitled "***Ethnic Conflict In Sri Lanka: The Role And Response Of Women***" submitted by **Jyotirmayee Tudu** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master Of Philosophy** is her own work, and has not been previously submitted for any other degree to this university or to any other university.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*for*

*those, who work for  
women's empowerment.*

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## PREFACE

The traditional mainstream historiography, for long, by relating women to peace (passivity) and men to war (aggression), has denied women their rightful place as (active) agents in conflict and peace building. The dominant trend of narrating women in violent conflict has been that of the 'grieving mother' or 'women of sorrow'. Women have been painted as 'mere' victims. Though slowly, but steadily, this dominant trend is being challenged by the newly emerging paradigm, which integrates the question of gender in the studies of violent conflict. Hence, now we are having a women – centered approach to conflict for lighting up areas of historical darkness.

In fact, the emergence of feminist scholarship on war and peace, since the late 1980s, has been crucial in highlighting the role and response of women. Though, the three different feminist approaches (i.e. Liberal, Difference and Post-Modern) explain gendered war roles in different ways, their analysis has helped in crystallizing the most significant question for this study: 'is femininity inherently peaceful?' This has helped in guiding the effort for seeking a logical progress of the study. The discussion on 'essentialism' and malevolent nationalism helps in understanding the 'hegemonic theorizations' relating to women, nationalism and war. On the other, 'social constructionism', reflective of a changing paradigm, is used to explore women's agency, which is beyond victim-hood.

The study on the role and response of women in the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis tries to build itself up on such an approach. Though the constraints of limited scholarly literature and related data is there, the study strives to focus on the active participation of Sri Lankan women, both as supporter and perpetrators of violence and as peace builders.

In South Asia, where we have nation-states composed up of diverse ethnic groups, the protracted ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is a classic example of how ethnicity can be a major problem, if different ethnic groups are not reasonably represented or accommodated in the democratic framework.

The study tries to present a historical analysis of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Here, it is found how differences in interpreting history and myths, the British colonial policy of divide and rule, discriminatory policies in the field of language, education and employment, the Sinhala – Buddhist ethno-centrism, the policy of land colonization have combinedly contributed to the emergence and persistence of this conflict. The failure of the polity to accommodating the interests of Tamil community combined with the violence by the security forces exacerbated a political conflict into communal violence and ethnic strife, which then resulted in an armed struggle by the LTTE for a separate state hood.

This protracted ethnic conflict has devastated the Sri Lankan society and polity. This has caused more than 60,000 deaths and several thousand cases of human rights abuses. However, this study specially focuses on how this has impacted on the Tamil women, who have suffered the worst. They have become victims of rape and other kinds of physical insecurity, become refugees and internally displaced, been forced into conditions of socio-economic disempowerment. And they have also been pushed into such desperate situations, where in they had no option but to head their households. Beyond this story of victimization and suffering, the study tries to explore how women, to avoid all kinds of insecurities, have become agents of conflict. Their participation in the LTTE and its historical and socio-cultural factors has been discussed. The Women Tigers organized as *Vitutalaip Pulikal Makalir Munnani* (Women's Front of the

Liberation Tigers) have been motivated by two objectives: 'to fight for the national liberation and the social emancipation of women'. In fact, they have a global reputation as the most fierce, highly disciplined and courageous women combatants. Though a question arises on their recruitment and empowerment, they are asserting themselves within and outside the LTTE.

Apart from this, the study tries to highlight the role of those women, who have been active in peace making efforts. They believe that only 'positive peace' can bring in equal life chances and emphasise on human security. These women peace activists, coming from various sections of the society, focus on issues like violence against women, their rights, legal reforms, awareness building and peace efforts. The organisations like Women for Peace, Women's Action Committee, Mothers and Daughters of Lanka and Northern Mothers' Front are working for women victims and demanding the end of ethnic violence. A significant factor in such movements is that though these women activists belong to different communities and have love for their own brand of nationalism (Sinhala or Tamil), the devastation creates a sense of realisation among them to work together to bring real peace to the Sri Lankan society.

Though the two categories (warriors and peace-makers) represent two different modes of feminist thinking, their objectives have been similar. Besides such activism, the study finds it necessary to create some more new spaces for women's activism in the social and cultural spheres. This can give a new thrust for women's empowerment and help in building a peaceful society and healthy polity in Sri Lanka.



# *CHAPTER - I*

# **WOMEN IN CONFLICT AND PEACE-MAKING: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Conflicts, particularly the violent ones, are deep rooted in the human experience. They make serious impact on gender relations and gender equality. This trend is now emerging as a core issue. The earlier literature on conflict ignored the participation of women in conflict or war. There is a limited scholarly literature on women in conflict. Because many scholarly studies on conflict bypass the question of gender.

According to Showalter, "Women have been left out of history not because of the evil conspiracies of men in general, but because we have considered history only in male-centered terms. We have missed women and their activities, because we have asked questions of history, which are inappropriate to women. To rectify this, and to light up areas of historical darkness we must, for a time, focus on a woman-centered inquiry, considering the possibility of the existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by men and women."<sup>1</sup> Thus, to make an objective analysis on the issue of conflict, it is necessary to adopt a women-centered/oriented approach to conflict, which will provide an insight into the varied experience of conflict or war by women.

## **Women in Conflict and Peace-making: The Traditional Understanding**

In the mainstream historiography, the dominant trend of narrating women in violent conflict is the 'grieving mother' or 'women of sorrow'<sup>2</sup>. While the mainstream historiography painted her as a victim, particularly of sexual abuse and forced abduction,

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Showalter, "Feminist criticism in the wilderness", in D. Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory* (London, 1988), p.345

<sup>2</sup> R.Manchanda, "Where Are the Women in South Asian Conflicts?", R. Manchanda, ed., *Women, War, and Peace : Beyond Victimhood to Agency* (New Delhi, 2001), p.9

at the same time, men occupy the ongoing role of a warrior or perpetrators of violence (in defense of their nation and family), even in peaceful societies.

In every violent conflict or war, the civilians are the sufferers. Among these civilian victims, women and children constitute a major portion. And, they are the worst sufferers. According to the UNHCR, about 80 per cent of international refugees are women and children<sup>3</sup>. Basically in sectarian and ethnic conflicts, they are the victims of violence by the state, the opposing community or the warring groups. In such violent conflicts, women are victimized by a segment of society and the state. The United Nations General Assembly defines violence against women as, “any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including the threat of such an act, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

The Declaration also lists the following abuses as falling into the category of violence against women:

- Physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the community, including battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women;
- Non-spousal violence;
- Violence related to exploitation;
- Sexual harassment and intimidation at work;
- Trafficking in women;
- Forced prostitution;
- Violence perpetrated or condoned by the state.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, *The State of World's Refugees: The Challenges of Protection* (Harmondsworth, 1993), p.87

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, *Women: Looking Beyond 2000* (New York, 1995), p.24

In the traditional mainstream historiography, women are related to peace (passivity) and men to war (aggression)<sup>5</sup>. When men are killed on the battlefield or become victims of war, they are portrayed as omnipotent and masculine heroes. But when women become victims, they are discarded or rejected by the society. Women experience violent conflicts in many different forms. The impact of conflict on women varies from society to society or country to country on the basis of their intensity, nature and breadth. Broadly, the impact can be seen in three major forms. They are briefly discussed as below:

### **Social Impacts:**

Women are socially and psychologically affected by war or conflict. They have to face problems like physical insecurity, psychological trauma, and displacement.

(i) *Physical Insecurity*: The common factor, which affects women during conflicts, is physical insecurity. They have to live in constant fear and terror. Even they feel trapped in their own homes. Due to fear of violence and sexual abuse, they are restricted from their wider social and economic activities. In rural areas, a woman is prevented from doing her daily work during the period of a conflict. In the case of El Salvador and Guatemala, though human rights violations decreased with the end of the civil war, violence against women increased, posing higher risks for those who worked up to late in the evening.

Another form of violence that specifically occurs against women is *rape*. Sometimes rape is used as a strategy of war. The conflict in former Yugoslavia has attracted particular attention because of the use of rape as a war strategy. In the case of

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<sup>5</sup> C. O. N. Moser and F. C. Clark, "Introduction", in C. O. N. Moser and F. C. Clark, eds., *Perpetrators or Actors? : Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence* (New Delhi, 2001), p.3

Sri Lanka, many women were raped and murdered during the period of conflict. Even the period of Indian military operations in the northeastern Sri Lanka (1987-1990) was marked by hundreds of rapes, assaults on women by Indian troops. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, all the warring parties have been implicated, though to a varying degree, with the charge of using rape as a weapon to further their war aims.<sup>6</sup> In 1972, over a period of nine months, Pakistani soldiers raped 2,00,000 women in the breakaway Eastern Pakistan, which became Bangladesh. After this war, the government of Bangladesh had the greatest difficulty in trying to persuade the husbands of the raped women to accept their wives.<sup>7</sup>

(ii) *Psychological Impact*: The patriarchal societies categorize women on the basis of their virtue. When a woman is raped, or physically assaulted, she is said to be losing her virtue. Many communities reject these women. Such rejection or hatredness creates psychological trauma in the women's psyche. During war times, many women are physically assaulted and discarded by the society. Physical assault is not the only brutality that war or conflict brings for women; it further causes loss of their male members and loved ones, forced migration, death and starvation. The fear to lose loved ones, their own 'virtue' and reputation makes many women emotionally and mentally imbalanced. Thus, the terrors of conflict traumatize the psyche of women. Such insecurities and trauma prompted a Mozambican woman to state, "What security are you talking about? The conditions (law and order) have gone bad after the peace accord. Even I do not feel safe in my own home."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, no.3, p.70.

<sup>7</sup> S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York, 1975), p.75

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Krishna Kumar, "Introduction", in Krishna Kumar, ed., *Women and Civil War* (London, 2001), p.8

(iii) *Displacement*: Similarly, when conflict occurs, many people become refugees and are displaced from one place to the other. This is the common phenomenon in the explosion of conflicts. Among the displaced people, majority are women and children. In this situation, they become more vulnerable to violence, because they are deprived of protection of their families, community, and the state. The UNHCR estimates that 23 million refugees and 26 million internally displaced people have been forced to leave their homes. Again, the proportion of women and children constitute 90 per cent in the refugee population, as many of them have lost their husbands and parents.<sup>9</sup>

### **Economic impact:**

In conflict prone regions or countries like Cambodia, Rwanda, El Salvador and Sri Lanka, conflict has taken many lives. Many women have lost their male members, which have brought serious repercussions on their economic status. Usually, it is the man who earns for his family. Hence, after the death of their male members, many women become economically dis-empowered. This forces them to live in a condition of poverty. The absence or loss of male members suddenly puts all the responsibilities of the family and children on the women folk. In post-conflict situations, this responsibility becomes a daily phenomenon for them. Thus, in the aftermath of a conflict, we encounter many female-headed households in the conflict prone regions. For example, the female-headed households in Guatemala now constitute 30 to 50 per cent of the total households of that country. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, more than 21 per cent of the total households are headed by women.

Women, who head the household face new economic and social challenges during the post-conflict transitional period. Even the government and customary laws

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations, no.4, p.107

create many difficulties. A major problem for them is the lack of property rights. In Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique and Rwanda many women face difficulties in acquiring legal rights to the land owned by their husbands. A Rwandan woman said: "I cannot inherit land. If I stay on my father's land, I am put in to prison. I have already been beaten. My life is very bad since my parents died. I cannot even grow a potato or cut down a tree."<sup>10</sup>

Even when women have access to land, the lack of male workforce has a very negative impact on the level of agricultural production and hence, the availability of food. Those women, who don't have land, work as landless labourers and sharecroppers. They receive a minimal wage or compensation for their hard work and could barely manage to feed their families. The desperate economic condition forced many of them to work as daily labourers and maids in urban centers. Sometimes they become easy targets of labour contractors who recruited them.

Further, " among the women headed households, those headed by widows face a series of particular problems and hardships. Widows are disadvantaged due to Virilocal residence patterns, the tendency to patrilineal inheritance, the sexual division of labour, and a lack of employment opportunities for women. The high level of loss of male kins suffered by some households only exacerbated these problems. The war widow, and those close to her, became stigmatized and isolated; her children often labeled as children of guerrillas".<sup>11</sup> Besides, the long persisting conflicts caused the breakdown of the traditional socio-political fabric of a community.

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Krishna Kumar, no.8, p.15

<sup>11</sup> Sean Loughner and Vicente, Gema, eds. Population Issues and the Situation of Women in Postconflict Guatemala (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1997), P.41.

### **Political Impact:**

In a conflict situation, a sense of political consciousness develops among the people, both at the community and national level. Women, as members of a society or polity, are also influenced by the same process of awareness. Such awareness process strengthens the idea of membership or citizenship of a group or a political community among the women. This encourages them to participate (actively) in organizational and several other decisions-making processes. Similarly, the absence of male members and other challenges during conflicts compel them to take up many extra responsibilities, and hence, causes an expansion in their public roles.

In the absence of their men folk, many women often take charge of local political institutions. For example, in El Salvador, during 1985-88, 33 out of 262 mayors elected (nearly 13 percent) were women<sup>12</sup>. This was possible, because they had organized politically before the peace accords and their involvement in the formation of political parties. Similarly, in Cambodia, women refugees have played leading roles in grassroots advocacy organizations due to their skills and organizational experience.

Moreover, they also take active part in devising survival strategies and rehabilitation plans and programmes for their groups or community. At the local level, women take up leading roles in strengthening group solidarity. Many of them form women's associations, bringing together women of various ethnic groups. Even in many cases, they undertake income-generating schemes by forming different community groups. Through such efforts, the women's leadership seeks to heal the physical, moral and psychological wounds of the victims of violent conflicts.

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<sup>12</sup> Krishna Kumar, no.8, p.22.



Thus, conflict not only affects women physically but also socially, psychologically, economically and politically. However, the process of their victimization is always ignored by the traditional historiography. It ignores as inconsequential the differentiated way violence impacts on their lives, their survival strategies and modes of resistance, and the process of social transformation. Due to the fear of insecurity, or whatever it may be, for them peace has been a major demand. The demand for peace is due to the direct impact of war or conflict on them as women. They organize themselves in the everyday life during wartime or social conflicts, as mothers of hurt and wounded children who are often hostages in the conflicts; as wives of killed and injured soldiers; and as civilians<sup>13</sup>. Thus, this is a paradox of traditional historiography, which gives us ideas only from a male-centered approach. It overlooks an insight that lies in the inner side of conflict.

### **Emergence of Feminist School of Thought:**

Theoretically, this traditional picture of women has been changing since the emergence of feminist school of thought. The rise of feminist theory and its systematic assault on male-dominated paradigm has modified this outlook in recent times<sup>14</sup>. This school of thought criticized the traditional picturisation of women and claims that gender inequality is still pervasive in much theoretical literature. It focuses on the role that assigns women their deserving place in the socio-economic, politico-cultural spheres. It challenged the dominant traditional doctrine like realism, whose basic conception revolves around the state. The central figure and main actor in the state is a “sovereign man” or the “hero warrior”<sup>15</sup>. Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbs constructed this

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<sup>13</sup> A. M. Chenoy, *Militarism and Women in South Asia* (New Delhi, 2002), pp.1-2

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.40

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.42

'sovereign man' as the symbol of power while Morgenthau explained it in terms "nature of man". Thus, this traditionally dominant picture of social hierarchy positioned men in a superior level and excluded women in the study of international political order. These men-centered theories overlooked or ignored the gender perspective in conflict and peace-making. Always male occupy the role of a potential fighter, even in peaceful societies. This trend has been challenged by the feminist scholars. This challenge is based on the new and changing role of women in conflict and peace making.

Since the late 1980s, feminist scholarship on war and peace has been rapidly growing. As in other fields, feminist researchers often try to bring out the role of gender in the perspective of conflict and peace-making. Most of the feminist approaches share a belief that gender matters in the understanding of conflict or war. They also share a concern with changing "masculinism" in both scholarship and political-military practice. They see women as a disadvantaged class, unjustly dominated and exploited by men<sup>16</sup>. There are three different approaches, which explain gendered war roles in different ways<sup>17</sup>. These are discussed as below:

### **Liberal Feminism:**

Liberal feminists argue that, both women and men are equal in ability. The gendering of war reflects male discrimination against women. They frame gender inequalities in terms of classical liberalism emphasizing on individual rights. She has every right to participate in all social and political roles. The exclusion of women from the mainstream historiography is not only unfair or unjust, but also prevents the contribution of better half of the population to the society. Though, this approach to

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<sup>16</sup> J.S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and vice-versa* (Cambridge, 2001), p.38.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.38.

feminism does not believe that women's inclusion would bring any fundamental change but it pays homage to women who succeeded in nontraditional positions, despite the obstacles due to the sexist discriminations. To them, women's experience of being excluded as soldiers is similar to their exclusion, through history, as doctors, lawyers, politicians and other high-status professionals.

After Vietnam War, when the US military shifted from conscription to an all-volunteer force, it became necessary to integrate more women in to the military. Starting in the late 1970s, liberal US feminists supported extension of the military draft to include women: "Liberal feminist...(argue that) the best way to insure women's equal treatment with men is to render them equally vulnerable with men to the political will of the state"<sup>18</sup>. This perspective rejects the idea that women are more peaceful than men by nature.

### **Difference Feminism:**

According to 'difference' feminists, the experience of women is fundamentally different from men. The sexist culture or the patriarchal societies devalue or ignore 'feminine' qualities instead of valuing, celebrating and promoting them. Regarding war, difference feminists argue that women, because of their greater experience with nurturing the human relations, are generally more effective than men in combat<sup>19</sup>. Difference femininists advance two theoretical claims relevant to war: *first*, men are relatively violent and women are relatively peaceful. *Secondly*, men are more autonomous and women are more connected in their social relationship.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>20</sup> S. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards A Politics of Peace* (London, 1989), p.141

Regarding the first one, women give life due to her care-giving roles and potential for motherhood. Women have unique abilities to make themselves as peacemakers. As an agency of peace activists, women have a long history. During World War-I, pacifist women organized the women's peace party. This party helped to win the Test Ban Treaty in the early 1960s and US dis-engagement from the Vietnam War in the 1970s. Even the 1980s women were playing a leading role and launched a movement against nuclear war.

Secondly, men and women experience differently in social relationships. In the social hierarchy, male dominate the military, business, religion and other spheres of life. In this view, men tend to see their position in terms of a competitive hierarchy, while women tend to see their position in terms of mutual support. Men take decisions that solely belong to them, while women agree to it without any botheration for their own decision, rank or honour. Thus, men construct social relationships in terms of autonomous individuals in interacting to formal rules, whereas women construct social relationships as network connections.

### **Postmodern Feminism:**

Postmodernism, in general, rejects the idea of a single, objective reality. This makes postmodernism itself difficult to describe. Various 'postmodern' writers describe themselves as post- structuralists, post-positivists, post-behavioral or some times 'constructivists'. All share a general skepticism about established categories and methods of knowledge, all emphasize the role of culture in shaping experience. Though the idea of 'postmodern feminism' may not be viable as a coherent category, sometimes it has been used to represent the views that differ from both liberal and difference feminism. Such a view, rather than taking gender as the categories of people (that really exist), sees

gender itself, and gender roles in war, as fairly fluid, contextual and arbitrary. To them, gender shapes how both men and women understand their experiences and actions in regard to war. Similarly, they reject the conception of women as a homogenous category and emphasize their plural character<sup>21</sup>. For postmodern feminists interested in war and peace, women play many roles in war, some of them even seemingly contradictory. As postmodern feminists view this diversity as important, they also delve in to the connections among gender, race, ethnicity, nation, class, and other aspect of identity. Thus, postmodern feminism embodies a tension between the postmodern emphasis on the diversity of women's experience and the feminist assumption that women constitute a meaningful category.<sup>22</sup>

Some postmodern feminists have analyzed the place of gender not just as women in literary representations of war from both contemporary and historical periods. Another version of postmodern feminist analysis claim that all gender roles are arbitrary and runs into some trouble with war. In such view, "what is considered masculine in some societies is considered feminine or gender- neutral in others and vice-versa; the only constant appears to be the importance of the dichotomy<sup>23</sup>.

After analyzing the three strands of feminist theorization of war and peace, one important question arises, which is essential for this research : **is femininity inherently peaceful?** Regarding the answer, theoretically, there are two views:

- a) Essentialism
- b) Social constructionism

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<sup>21</sup> Chris Beasley, *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory* (London: 1999), p.81.

<sup>22</sup> J.S. Goldstein, no.16, p.50.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.51.

According to essentialists, gender identities are unchangeable. Gender identities and differences are perceived as the result of stable underlying factors, and biology is the primary sources for understanding differences in male and female behaviour, attitudes and thinking. To them, the position of men is related to power and status, while women to staying at home and taking care of the house and children. Thus, gender difference becomes a matter of nature rather than nurture. But the essence of social constructionism is based on the epistemological understanding that our social worlds are constantly changing. Social constructionism argues that the locus of gender identity is not within the individual but in the transaction between individuals<sup>24</sup>. Nothing is fixed, everything is changing. Changes occur in socio-economic as well as in religion, ethnicity, and class, which determine the meaning and implications of gender identity. The major strength of the social constructionists' position is that, it conceptualizes the possibility for change. Its optimistic potential makes this position attractive as a rationale for analyzing conflict from gender perspective<sup>25</sup>.

Generally, conflict or war can be regarded as the cornerstone of masculinity. Participation in decision making, war or military service is considered as significant in the social identity-construction process of men. But for a woman, this is 'motherhood', which gives her a mature womanhood. If motherhood is the central maker of transition from girlhood to adult womanhood, and war-related activities as makers of the transition from boy to man, then it becomes particularly relevant to study motherhood in the context of war<sup>26</sup>. Motherhood can be regarded as the core aspect of femininity. When motherhood is conceptualized as anti-thesis to violence, this is based on an essentialist

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<sup>24</sup> J.S. Bohan, "Regarding Gender: Essentialism, Constructionism and Feminist Psychology", *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Vol.17, 2002, p.7

<sup>25</sup> I.Skjelsbaek, "Is Femininity Inherently Peaceful?: The Construction of Femininity in War", in I.Skjelsbaek and D.Smith, eds., *Gender, Peace and Conflict* (London, 2001), p.52

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p.61

understanding of motherhood. According to Reardon, "the mothers of the world, who provide the care for the most young children, are fundamental and formative to peace-education".<sup>27</sup> He supports the essentialist claim that women are more peaceful than men.

If we analyze the constructionist view, it is the mother who encourages her son and husband to participate in war. Infact, many women get disappointed and even embarrassed if their men do not fight. 'Everywhere that men fight, mothers support them.'<sup>28</sup> Ruddick argues that maternal non-violence is an intoxicating myth, which prevails even in the face of massive historical contradictions. In Elsalvador and Vietnam, women wish to protect and ensure their children a better future, but they made them eager and willing to participate in combat and support the war. In the former Yugoslavia, the Albanian women who were the victims of rape want safe future for their children but they do not want a future where their children have to live together with Serbs. Similarly, in Nepal, women constitute one-third of the combatants in the Maoist insurgency group. Women in Rwanda, Liberia, Somalia and the LTTE women in Sri Lanka have been actively playing as perpetrators in ethnic violence. But in the iconography war, the 'woman of peace' is the 'mother'. This 'motherist' or testosterone logic provides no empirical evidence, which proves that there is nothing essential or inherently peaceful about women

Thus, these patterns show two things: *one*, in conflict, women express a rationality of motherhood, which is based on protection and care; but at the same time she preserves the images of an enemy, on their own and on their children's behalf. *Second*, beyond this character of motherhood, they are directly playing the role of

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p.61

<sup>28</sup> S.Ruddick, no.20, p.219.

combatants in army and guerrilla groups. Not only they are conscious of their own protection but also acting as the perpetrators of violence and conflict.

These examples are indicating that women can be equally war-prone as men. Though there is a general agreement that war is male-related, which dominate the discourses and value systems, they are not essentially male. The value system relating to war (to a large extent) might coincide with gender, but it is observed that some women might also be exponents of militant and war-prone values, even besides their role of motherhood and care<sup>29</sup>.

### **Women and Nationalism:**

*'All nationalisms are gendered'*<sup>30</sup>. If the relationship between women and nationalism is analyzed, one cannot escape from the conclusion that it is a male crafted conception of nation and national identity. Historically, the very construction of the concept of the "male" was linked with the notion of power<sup>31</sup>. Similarly, the very construction of nationalism has promoted the image of male domination and leadership. The literature on war emphasizes on men's association with combat and violence, while women with peace and passivity. In the hierarchy of nationalism, everyone has a fixed place. Nationalism obfuscates the pluralities and particularities that differentiate people on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class, caste, religion etc<sup>32</sup>.

Moreover, as Pettman observes, 'in a complex play, the state is often a gendered male and the nation a gendered female'. This means, women are commonly constructed

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<sup>29</sup> I. Skjelsbaek and D. Smith, no.24, p.65.

<sup>30</sup> Mc Clintock, quoted in R. Wilford, "Women, Ethnicity, and Nationalism" in R. Wilford and R.L. Miller, eds., *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London, 1998), p.1

<sup>31</sup> A.M. Chenoy, "Bringing Gender into National Security and International Relations", *International Studies*, Vol.37, No.1, Jan-March, 2000, p.20

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p.25



as the symbolic form of nation whereas men are represented as its agents. Similarly, “the language of nationalism is also sexualized and gendered -- terms like ‘love of the country’ (where the country becomes co-terminus with mother) are transformed into images where women serve as the repository of group identity. The nation is often depicted as the body of women about to be violated by foreigners. National identity is equated with the ideas of specific race, gender, and religion.” Thus, it is logical that as women bear the burden of being treated as the mothers of the nation that they become “signifiers of national difference.”<sup>33</sup>

Again, most of the “hegemonic theorizations” about nation and nationalism, even including, sometimes, those written by women (i.e. Greenfield), have ignored gender relations as irrelevant. In such theorizations, the intelligentsia and the bureaucracy or other state apparatus are credited with producing and reproducing national (as well as ethnic) identities or ideologies. Women are usually ‘hidden’ in such theorizations of the nationalist phenomena, while it is they – and not just the bureaucracy or intelligentsia -- who reproduce nations—biologically, culturally, politically or symbolically. Infact, there are different dimensions of the national project, such as the ‘ethnic-genealogical’ and the ‘civic-territorial’ or *Staatnation* (nationalistic ideologies which focus on citizenship of specific states or territories); *Kulturnation* (those which focus on specific cultures or religions); and *Volknation* (those which are constructed around the specific origin of the people or their ‘race’ or ethnic group). But more importantly, different aspects of gender relations play a significant role in each of these dimensions of the national projects – whether it is the dimensions of *Staatnation*, i.e. the gender dimensions of the construction of citizenship; *Kulturnation*, i.e. the gender

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<sup>33</sup> D.Kandiyoti, “Identity and Its Discontent”, cited in A.M.Chenoy, *Family Fends: Gender, Nationalism and the Family*, *Feminist Review*, no.30, 1993, p.26.

dimension of the cultural construction of collectivities and their boundaries; or *Volknation*, in which the control of women as biological reproducers has been aimed at controlling the size of various majority and minority collectivities.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, when measures designed to manage conflict do fail and violence does erupt, martial values are prized and symbols of separate nationalist identities exalted. In such context, women are invariably marginalized by a condition of 'armed patriarchy'<sup>35</sup>. Enloe makes a broad point eloquently while discussing anti-colonial nationalism: 'Typically (it) has sprung from masculanised 'memory', masculanised humiliation and masculanised hope, only rarely taking women's experiences as a starting point. Further, Enloe states, 'when a nationalist movement becomes militarized, male-privilege in the community usually becomes more entrenched with near deadening finality'<sup>36</sup>. And its primacy on national survival can silence women critical of patriarchal practices. Even when women have been active as warriors in many struggles or conflicts, the patriarchal value system has ignored their such roles.<sup>37</sup> Above all, the intermeshing of sexism and racism is, as Anthias and Yuval-Davis stress, of particular relevance to ethnic minority women.

Hence, the relationship between women and nationalism can be likened to an unhappy marriage, or at least one that has not yet been suitably developed. Further, it can be a complex and sometimes a volatile one, when situated in the context of an ethnic minority (with a demand for a separate state/nationhood) engages a majoritarian state in a fierce conflict, as in the case of Sri Lanka.

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<sup>34</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation" in R. Wilford and R.L. Miller, no.29, pp.23-35.

<sup>35</sup> Mc Williams, *Struggling for Peace and Justice: Reflection on Women's Activism*, in Northern Ireland, *Journal of Women's History*, 1995, in R. Wilford and R.L. Miller, no.29, p.2.

<sup>36</sup> C. Elonel, *Bananas, Beachs, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (London: 1993), P.43.

<sup>37</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis, *Racialised Boundaries*, 1993, cited in R. Wilford and R.L. Miller, no.29, p.15.

## **From Victim hood to Agency: Changes in Paradigm**

Usually, women are projected as victims of war and their activism is undervalued. In other words, theorizations positioned women primarily as victims and marginally as agents. But after the emergence of feminist school of thought, the problem of understanding women's agency in relation to war became prominent. Previously, the women's agency in conflict has not been explored in a systematic manner. The concept of agency has been arising due to the changing nature of economic and social structures in late-capitalist societies. Similarly, debates on many concepts like modernity, post-modernity, modernization, globalization etc. address issues in a different manner regarding the changing nature of society. It has pronounced effects on the political, economic and social-cultural structure of the society. These pronounced effects are bringing about transformation and de-traditionalisation, which also influence the gender relations. Such transformations and de-traditionalisation question the traditional positions of men and women, and have brought many changes in the social status of women in the last few decades. The restructuring of gender relations, primarily the issue of women's agency in every field – economic, social, political and also in military services – has been focused by many socio-political theories. This process has been an emancipatory one and has brought changes in the (value) orientation of women, making them to act as agents in various fields of life. So far as the question regarding women's agency in conflict or war is concerned, now many of them serve in militaries and guerrilla forces in direct combat roles.

Earlier they were portrayed as victims but not as agents by mainstream historiography. Now an understanding is emerging that a continuous picturisation of

women as victims constitutes a denial of women's agency in conflict<sup>38</sup>. The new forms of autonomy and constraints that are emerging can no longer be understood through the dichotomies of male domination and female subordination. The social disruption caused by war may not seem to be an ideal context to analyze the un-equal power relations between women and men or attempt to re-assign gender roles, but the reality of the matter is that the condition of war forcefully creates new roles<sup>39</sup>. This new role portrays women as agent in war or conflict. Beyond this passivity and powerfulness of victimhood, women have now come out to mobilize resistance, confront the security forces, the administration and the courts. When the question of survival became prominent in conflict, it opens the door for women to public sphere, which is predominantly controlled by male. Women have intervened during conflict situations by becoming 'citizens', combatants, heads of households, war-munitions workers, producers of soldiers, opponents of war, and political leaders at the local and national levels. Women have formed Mother's Front and Coalition for Peace; they have become guerrillas, soldiers, and emerged as agents of social transformation and conflict resolution.

Women play two types of roles in violent conflicts: *supportive* and *direct combat roles*. Earlier, women in the military were confined to playing supportive roles, i.e. providing medical, secretariat, clerical, transport and communication assistance. Now many women participate in direct combat roles. Fighter women are serving in several defense forces and guerrilla armies, though their numerical strength is less. In this context, Enloe states: "one of the most important striking characteristics of militaries

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<sup>38</sup> Lizkelly, "Victim And/Or Agent: Women's Use and Support of Violence", in S.Jacobs, et.al., *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance* (London,2001),p.61.

<sup>39</sup> N.Palmer, "Women in War: Importance of Gender in Humanitarian Responses", *Parvada, Vol.8, No.3, 2002*,p.24.

themselves is that they are almost exclusively male-oriented because of their sheer number and traditional culture". But this traditional culture, which by nature essentially male, is slowly changing. Now, over 5,80,000 women serve in the forces of several countries.<sup>40</sup>

In many countries like Australia, Canada, China, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa, India, and the US many women serve in the defense forces. The US and Israeli armed forces deploy women in direct combat roles. Even many insurgent outfits have deployed women as combatants. In Sri Lanka, many Tamil women have worked with the LTTE as agents of conflict. Now, there are more than 3,000 women fighters in the LTTE, while in the Sri Lankan armed forces there are more than 1,000 women fighters.<sup>41</sup> In Nicaragua, the Sandinista Forces deployed women both during the insurgency against Somoza in 1978 and 1979, and in the 1980s war against 'Contras'. Even the Bosnian government recruited women in combat roles in some of its units. The political instability in Liberia has a history of women in arms during its 14 years of conflict under Charles Taylor. The image of the woman holding a rifle and a baby found in liberation movements across the Third World. It combines the role of mother hood and war, harnessing women for war without altering the fundamental gender relations<sup>42</sup>.

On the other hand, many women choose peace as an instrument to deal with conflict by taking part in various organizations. There are many women's organizations that are playing an important role both during conflict resolution and peace building. During the World War-I, many pacifist women in the US organized the Women's Peace Party and protested against war. Women's peace groups from Europe and the US helped

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<sup>40</sup> I. Skjelsbaek, "Introduction" in I.Skjelsbaek and D.Smith,no.24, p.6.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> J.S. Goldstein,no.16,p.81.

to win the Test Ban Treaty in early 1960s and the US dis-engagement from the Vietnam War in the 1970s. The Quit Kashmir Movement and the Nupiwars in the North-east are some of the examples from India. Similarly, Mother's Front, Women Action Committee, and Mothers and Daughters of Lanka are some of the organizations in Sri Lanka believing in the path of peace to resolve the long-standing conflict.

However, this new face of women, which is focusing on the issue of 'beyond victimhood', appears in many countries of the world and Sri Lanka is one of them. So far as the issue of gender perspective on conflict and peace is concerned, Sri Lanka has its own uniqueness. In this conflict-prone country where women are politically active, they act as the agents of both conflict and peacemaking.

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# *CHAPTER - II*

# ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Sri Lanka is known for its long history of ethnic conflict. The perils of ethnic conflict haunt the whole Sri Lankan society. Many people have suffered and many others will bear its burnt if an amicable solution is arrived at. Before analyzing the factors behind the emergence and persistence of this conflict, it is pertinent to understand what constitutes an ethnic group and ethnicity.

In every ethnic society, ethnicity is an important phenomenon. In such societies, ethnicity has been expressed in many ways: as an assertion of culture, socio-political tensions, communal upsurge, autonomy movements, religious revivalism, protest movements of marginalized communities, and also struggle for a separate political entity. Ethnicity represents affirmation of diversity, of indigenous authenticity, of organic as against televised or classical cultures. In the contemporary world history, ethnicity has taken on both dominating and liberating forms of culture. Its humane version includes other identities and thus, respects plurality. Its defiant version excludes other identities.<sup>1</sup> While its humane version brings the concepts like 'secular', its defiant version creates conflicts, particularly in the form of secessionist movements. More than its humane form, its defiant form became prominent in the context of multi-ethnic societies where political and economic structures are competitive, various groups and communities mobilize their members in order to seek power and resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Archana Upadhyay, "Ethnicity: Issues and Approaches", *Social Change and Development*, October 2002, p.9.



In the process of competition, when communities which remain underprivileged or discriminated in terms of seeking and availing political rights and shares in social goods and services begin to assert themselves, it becomes the cause of ethnic conflict.

The term ethnicity was first used in social sciences in 1953 to denote the characteristic of an ethnic group.<sup>2</sup> Derived from the Greek word *ethnikos*, the word ethnic refers to:

- i. Nations not converted to Christianity: heathens, 'pagans'
- ii. Races or large groups of people having common traits and customs.
- iii. Groups in an exotic primitive culture.<sup>3</sup>

Anthony Smith speaks of an ethnic community as 'a named human population with a myth of a common ancestry, shared memories and cultural elements, a link with a historic territory or homeland, and a measure of solidarity'<sup>4</sup>. To Michael E. Brown, six criteria should be met before a group can be called an ethnic community:

*First*, the group must have a name for itself. This is not trivial; a lack of name reflects an insufficiently developed collective identity.

*Second*, the people in the group must believe in a common ancestry. This is more important than genetic ties, which may exist, but are not essential.

*Third*, the members of the group must share historical memories, often myths or legends passed from generations to generations by word of mouth.

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<sup>2</sup> T.H.Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism : Anthropological Perspective* ( Sterling, 1993), p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Urmila Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation-building in South Asia* (New Delhi: 1990), p.13.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Michael E. Brown, "Causes and Implications of Ethnic Conflict", in M.Guibernau and J.Rex, eds., *The Ethnicity Reader : Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*( Cambridge, 1997),p.81.

*Fourth*, the group must have a shared culture, generally based on a combination of language, religion, laws, customs, institutions, dress, music, crafts, and architecture, even food.

*Fifth*, the group must feel an attachment to a specific piece of territory, which it may or may not actually inhabit.

*Sixth*, the people in a group have to think of themselves as a group in order to constitute an ethnic community; i.e., they must have a sense of their common ethnicity. The group must be self-aware.<sup>5</sup>

Generally, an ethnic group has been viewed as a substitute for a minority. Many social scientists rejected or refuted to accept such views because it only indicates towards ideological persuasions. To them, it is neither size nor status but the group distinctiveness or the subjective-objective criteria, which is critical for ethnic group identification.<sup>6</sup> A broad definition of ethnicity as defined by a UNESCO team, INTERCOCTA (International Committee on Conceptual and Terminological Analysis). It interpreted, 'ethnic' as subject that would 'include problems of minority groups, nationalities and race relations, at both intra-state and inter-state levels'<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the study of ethnic groups includes the study of communities, which is bearing the process of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>8</sup>

After the end of the Cold war, the heat wave of ethnic conflict has been felt in every corner of the world, with every individual or group becoming conscious about

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>6</sup> Phadnis, no.3, p.

<sup>7</sup> P.S.Ghosh, "Indias Relations with its Neighbours:The Ethnic Factor", cited in Upadhyay, no.1, p.9.

<sup>8</sup> T.Vayrynen, "Ethnic Communalism and Conflict Resolution", *Cooperation And Conflict*, Vol.33, No.1, March 1998, p.61.

their status and rights, i.e., political, economic, religious and social. This consciousness led several mobilizations posing different challenges to many countries, developing as well as developed. There are many factors that are responsible for this inequality in power-sharing, fear about the future, economic and social deprivation; and even the roots of colonial and post-colonial rule are responsible to sow the seeds of ethnic conflict. Now, ethnic conflicts are a regular feature of ethnically plural democracies, if, there are many groups, naturally conflicts occur over the ownership of resources, identity, patronage and policies.<sup>9</sup> In the South Asian context, for instance, it is often argued that ethnic conflict is a strategy for political mobilization that brings gains to leaders in terms of consolidation of electoral constituencies. The ethnic violence is considered as class-violence because it is used as an instrument by newly emerging classes, often the bourgeoisie and the middle class, to displace, from power and status, the older landed gentries.<sup>10</sup> Though commonality exists among the South Asian countries on the cause of ethnic conflict, the case of Sri Lanka is unique. The uniqueness of the Sri Lankan case lies in its long unending ethnic conflict that has persisted for more than two decades.

### **Ethnic Composition of Sri Lankan Society:**

To understand the persisting conflict in Sri Lanka, it is necessary to know the ethnic composition of the Sri Lankan society. Sri Lanka is a home to an ethnically diverse population. Out of 17.5 million population, Sinhalese are 74.6 %, Sri Lankan Tamils are 12.6%, Muslims are 7.4% and Indian Tamils are 5.5%. Otherwise known as the Estate Tamils, the Indian Tamils are the descendants of labourers brought from southern India to Sri Lanka to work in the tea estates by the Britishers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A.Varshney, *Ethnic conflict and Civil Life* (New Heaven, 2002), p.25.

<sup>10</sup> P.B.Mehta, "Ethnicity, Nationalism and violence in South Asia", *PacificAffairs*, V.71, No.3, 1998Fall, p.317.

century. In terms of religious affiliation, approximately 70% of the people are Buddhists, 15% are Hindus, 8% are Muslims and 7% are Christians (mainly Roman Catholic).

Basically, the Sinhalese people belong to the Indo-Aryan group. Most of the Sinhalese are Buddhists. It is generally believed that Sinhalese are the descendants of migratory Aryans from northern India. Traditionally, they trace their ethnic origin to king Vijaya Singha who was an Indian by birth. He came to Sri Lanka with his seven hundred followers from the eastern India to Sri Lanka two thousand five hundred years ago. Though in the initial period, they got assimilated with the indigenous inhabitants of the island, in the later period they developed their own distinct identity.

The Sri Lankan Tamils are the second major group in the island. They are also the descendants of those who were migrated from India. The period of arrival of the Sri Lankan Tamils is disputed by the historians. In the first century A. D., there were evidences of Tamil incursion from South India.<sup>11</sup> During the Chola invasion, many Tamils migrated to Sri Lanka. Such Tamil migration took place from 700-1300 A. D. In the later period, the migration culminated in the establishment of a Tamil kingdom in the northern province of Sri Lanka. These people are the followers of Hinduism. They are claiming as indigenous inhabitants of Sri Lanka as the Sinhalese. There has been a major controversy among between the two communities regarding the original inhabitants of the island. It is a generally accepted fact that both of these ethnic groups migrated from India mostly in the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6th centuries B.C.<sup>12</sup> This controversy has now led to the violent conflict in Sri Lanka.

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<sup>11</sup> V.A. Leary, "Ethnic Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka", *Report of International commission of Jurists*, 1992, p.8.

<sup>12</sup> Mehrotra, "Ethnic Strife in Sri Lanka", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.21, No.10, January 1998, p.1520.

Apart from these two groups, there is another group known as Indian Tamils. These people are distinguished from the Sri Lankan Tamils along caste and regional lines. These people are the descendants of Tamil plantation workers who went to Sri Lanka during the period of British colonialism. In the initial period they did not have any link with the Sri Lankan Tamil population. The Indian Tamils are mostly concentrated in the mountainous areas of the south-- the "hill country"- where tea is grown.<sup>13</sup> The Sri Lankan Muslims, who constitute 7.4 percent of the population, are mostly concentrated in the eastern part of Sri Lanka. Most of them speak Tamil language. They identify themselves in terms of religion not by language. Besides Muslims, Malayas and Burghurs are very small in number. They are maintaining harmonious relations with the Sinhalese and, therefore, they do not support the idea of the division of the country.

### **Emergence of ethnic conflict:**

Sri Lanka has a long democratic tradition. It is the first Asian colony of Britain, which got universal adult franchise in 1931. Since 1956, the country has experienced the ethnic conflict. It occurred between two groups: the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority. While the former is now dominating the political scene of Sri Lanka and the latter is claiming for a separate statehood or more autonomy. The violent conflict has steadily escalated between the Sri Lankan State and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) since 1983. This has caused around 60,000 deaths and incalculable damages to personal and public property. There are many factors which have contributed to the long persisting ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Some of the factors are : language policy, religious policy and discrimination in education and employment of the Tamil

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<sup>13</sup> *Sri Lanka: Extra Judicial Executions, 'Disappearances' and Torture, 1987-1990*, Amnesty International (London, 1990), p.5.

population. The roots of the conflict lie deep in the social, political and economic conditions at a given point of time. The conflict also took shape due to the existence of sharp divisions within the Sri Lankan society, along regional, ethnic, linguistic, religious and communal.

### **Historical Factors**

The ethnic violence in Sri Lanka has resulted from the different interpretation of Sri Lankan history by the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. While the Tamils are continuously opposing the legal basis of discrimination, on the other hand, the Sinhalese have their own prejudices that the Tamils are not the real inhabitants of Sri Lanka. And the discrimination is the only right way to end the dominance of Tamils in Sri Lanka.<sup>14</sup> Basically, in the views of Sinhalese, Sri Lanka is the *Sinhaladvipa* or the land of the Sinhalese and *Dhammadvipa* or the land of Buddhism. This group of people have prosperous agricultural economy. Due to the frequent invasions from South India, the Sinhalese hegemony in Sri Lanka began to decline. Historically, the Sinhalese people recognized Tamils as invaders due to the invasion of the Chola king. The historical context of the Sinhalese-Tamil interaction is characterized by the intermixing of each other's cultural constructs and political ideologies. They invented and migrated from south India.<sup>15</sup> The Tamils interpreted history in an entirely in a different perspective. According to them, because the south India is nearer to Sri Lanka, they are the first inhabitants of Sri Lanka. The Sinhala dynasty of king Vijaya came later. While proving themselves as the original inhabitants of the island, they claim that the Tamil name of Sri Lanka is 'Eelam'. This name is mentioned in the pre-Christian era of the Tamil classics. The Tamils in Sri Lanka are mostly Hindus. They argue that, "the majority of the

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<sup>14</sup> V. P. Vaidik, *Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka: India's Options* (New Delhi: 1986), p.1.

<sup>15</sup> U. Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation building in South Asia* (New Delhi, 2001), p.292.

civilized people in pre-Buddhist Ceylon were followers of Hinduism in one form or the other.”<sup>16</sup> Apart from it, they perceived that there existed powerful kingdoms in the north-eastern province of the Sri Lanka. Before the arrival of Portuguese, these kingdoms acted as the motivating forces for Tamil nationalism. However, an adversarial relationship has been existing between the two communities, which imply a threat perception of the Sinhalese vis-à-vis the Tamils. Even the myths and legends of both communities presented the triumph of one over the other and the heroes of one community have tended to be the foes of another, with their victory and defeat overlapping.<sup>17</sup> One scholar said: “History and historiography have created an emotive climate of ethnic animosity which often results in violence, preventing compromise and a negotiated settlement of ethnic difference”<sup>18</sup>

The legacy of British colonialism had sown the seeds of this conflict. It can be better to say that the fallout of the long colonial rule culminated into the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Though during British Colonialism the whole administration of Ceylon became centralized or unitary, it was they who brought the idea of divide and rule into the island nation. The British divided the whole island into 5 different provinces. All these provinces were subjected to a single English speaking administration in Colombo. During those periods, many Christian missionaries steered their missions in Ceylon, basically in the north. They established schools, churches and hospitals. Many Tamils came in direct contact with these organizations. Thus, they adopted the western system of education and language. Apart from it, the geographical location of Ceylon pushed them to take English education. The Northeast province of the island is dry zone while the south, which is known as low country dominated by the Sinhalese, is known as the

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<sup>16</sup> Vaidik, n.14, p.16.

<sup>17</sup> Phadnis, no.15, p.292.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in V.A. Leary, no.11, p.8.

fertile wet zone. Many Sinhalese adopted Plantation and agriculture for lively hood but for Tamils there were no such avenues. So they opted for state employment, which facilitated the spread of higher education among Tamils. During the period of the colonialism, most of the Tamils were enjoying government employment and professional jobs. The British rule had also somewhat favoured the Tamils who were brought to the island primarily for plantation work. The emergence of this plantation owners' group created a vast differences in the societal order.<sup>19</sup> Even many Tamils held higher positions in administration, bureaucracy and other government services and professions. They had enjoyed a comfortable position in the colonial system. In the political scene, though the elite of both groups had joined hands in demanding greater political autonomy from Britishers, the Tamil leadership was leading the movement. Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a Tamil, was the first Ceylonese to be elected to the legislative council in 1912. His brother Sir Ponnoambalam Arunachalam was the first President of the Cylone reform League (1917) and of the Cyclone national congress (1919), which was founded jointly by the Sinhalese and Tamil elites. In this period, the Tamils did not regard themselves as minority but aspired to equality with Sinhalese as one of the majority groups. But the political difference between the two communities led to the rupture of the CNC in 1922.<sup>20</sup> This marked the beginning of the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic rivalry.

Though Sri Lanka has been enjoying universal franchise since 1931, the electoral politics of the island projected and propagated certain fears, i.e. who will dominate the political scene of the island nation. On this, a tussle started between the leaders of the two communities The Tamils felt insecure because of their numerical weakness while, on

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<sup>19</sup> P.R.Rajeswari, "Ethnicity, Its Causes and Possible Solutions: The Case of Sri Lanka", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.23, No.3, June 1999,p.486.

<sup>20</sup> K.M. de Silva, *Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies in Sri Lanka-1980-1985*, cited in U. Phadnis, "Role of State in Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka", *Lanka*, December 1990,p..



the other hand, the Sinhalese were threatened due to the presence of several minority groups. Again, in the end of 1936 elections, the formation of all Sinhalese ministry intensified the fears the Sri Lankan Tamils, which culminated in their demand for 50-50, i.e. parity of representation of the majority communities with all the minorities<sup>21</sup>. However the relationships between the two communities moved from a co-operative to a competitive- cooperative phase.

The Sinhalese have a notion that they have no motherland other than Sri Lanka. Though they constitute the majority group, they have a minority complex when compared to the Tamils in South Asia. There are more than 50, 000, 000 Tamils in Southern India, only a few miles across the sea from Sri Lanka. This complexity, to some extent contributed to the ethnic tension in the island. Apart from these factors, the championing of the Jaffna Tamil elite of Tamil literature and art, and their propagation of Saiva doctrines heightened the cultural and linguistic consciousness among Tamils, which leading to of the local Tamil revivalism<sup>22</sup>. This distinctiveness has implications for the majority-minority relations in the political realm.

Both the communities are showing the historical dominance over each other. The disagreement over the historical dominance has a negative impact on the Sri Lankan Society. This was visible in the initial period of independence. Sri Lanka gained its independence in 1948, but the situation didn't improve due to successive Sinhalese dominated governments. The post-colonial Sri Lankan State advanced the idea of a monolithic, unitary sovereignty. There is no corresponding development of equal

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<sup>21</sup> U. Phadnis, no.18, p.293.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

citizenship over the exclusive rights of the majority community.<sup>23</sup> Therein lie the roots of the Sri Lankan conflict. Since 1948, successive Sinhalese dominated governments have passed several legislation to discriminate the Tamils in various fields, including language, religion, educational and employment. The governments have encouraged Sinhalese settlers to colonize the traditional Tamil territories. The inability or lack of willingness of the Sinhalese political elites of the to share power equitably (with the Tamils) led to the creation of mistrust between the two communities.

Broadly speaking, the Sri Lankan political system, as it has evolved since independence, has not been that of an 'ethnically dispersed' (as in India) but 'ethnically centralized' system.<sup>24</sup> Briefly stated, this connotes:

- i. The presence of two or more large groups in constant interaction in the structure of power and authority.
- ii. The nature of such an interaction even when cooperative, having a competitive edge with often the premise being that of a zero-sum game and not otherwise.
- iii. The pattern of interaction implying the majority-minority relationship perceived and projected as that of dominant-subordinate relationship. The effectivity of such a perception and projection is heavily contingent on the level of the minority group consciousness, the nature of its expectations vis-à-vis the state and its actual as well as expected share in the institutions of power and authority of the state.<sup>25</sup> However, in ethnically centralized system, the discriminatory policy of the government occurred in many areas.

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<sup>23</sup> S.Bose, States, Nations, Sovereignty : Sri Lanka, India and the Tamil Eelam Movement( New Delhi, 1994), p.48.

<sup>24</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, 1985, cited in Phadnis, no.15, p.240.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*,p.241

## **Language Policy:**

The language policy, which was used as an instrument by the Sri Lankan government to discriminate the Tamils, became a major bone of contention between the two communities. Before independence, the colonial language was the official language. But the government in the aftermath of independence noticed the dominance of English educated Tamil community in the administration, the so developed in English language. Thus, the Sri Lankan government passed a legislation with the intention to reduce the dominance of Tamils in government jobs. A 'Swavasa' movement was going on to replace English, the official language, by both Sinhalese and Tamils. But this movement turned into a 'Sinhalese only' movement after the national resurgence among the Sinhalese. The slogan of 'Sinhala only' was the strategy of the coalition of parties set by the S.W.R.D. Bandarnaike for the general election of 1956. This policy brought a formidable or favorable changes for the Sinhalese people and ignored other communities of Sri Lanka especially the Tamils. Teaching in native language (*swavasa*) had been an issue from the early 1940s, but the slogan that won the elections was not 'native languages', but 'Sinhala only'. This was possible due to the intermingling of Buddhism and Sinhala, and from those days Sri Lanka was explicitly known as a Sinhala-Buddhist state. The Bandarnaike government introduced the Official Language Act in 1956, which was passed on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1956. This act became the cause of first ethnic riots in Galoya in 1956.

The language policy was adopted to combat the advantage of Tamils. Earlier, Tamils who constituted 10 percent of the population but held 31 percent of the posts in universities, administration, and in professional fields due to their proficiency in English. This language act was also the cause for direct attack on an essential element of Tamil

identity, their language and literature; while on the other hand it reduced the possibilities for Tamils to compete with Sinhalese for administrative jobs.

### **Religious Factors:**

Sri Lanka is regarded as a major world center of Buddhism. The religious factor is dominated by myths among the Sinhalese. According to this myth, there was a war between the Arayan king Dutthagamani and the Tamil king, Elara. While the former ruled in the south, the later was in the northern province of the Sri Lanka. In this war, the Arayn king Dutthagamani fought to protect Buddhism from the Tamils. The Arayan king defeated the Tamil king and united the entire kingdom in to one. But the Arayn king felt guilty over the death of many people. At that time, the Buddhist monk consoled him that the dead persons were the unbelievers of the Buddhism.<sup>26</sup> The Buddhist religion is identified with Sinhalese nationalism, because Prince Vijaya Singha's (the founder of the Sinhala dynasty) arrival in Sri Lanka coincided with the *Parinibbana* (the passing away of Lord Buddha)<sup>27</sup>. In this context, Silva says that this is a deliberate attempt to emphasize "the historic role of the island as a bull work of Buddhist civilization"<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, to perpetuate the justification of the myth, a recent Sinhala pamphlet explains the relationship between the Sinhala race and Buddhism that: "The link between the Sinhala race and Buddhism is so close and inseparable that it had led to the maxim, 'there is no Buddhism without the Sinhalese and no Sihalese without Buddhism.' This is an undeniable fact. The literature of the Sinhalese is Buddhist literature. The history of Sinhalese is the history of Buddhism. The language of the Sinhalese is enriched by the doctrine of Buddhism. The 'Era' of the Sinhalese is the 'Buddhist Era'. The culture of

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<sup>26</sup> V.P.Vaidik,no.14,p.3.

<sup>27</sup> H.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Ethnic Unrest in Modern Sri Lanka* (New Delhi, 1994), p.27.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

the Sinhalese is the Buddhist culture. The flag of the Sinhalese is the Sinhalese-Buddhist flag. With the establishment of Buddhism, the Sinhalese culture and civilization took on a new orientation. Yet, a few years ago, there has been an organized movement of anti-Sinhala, anti-Buddhist barbarians to destroy our invaluable archeological ruins and Buddhist shrines. It is undoubtable that the future generations, as well as our forefathers who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of their race and for the glory of their religion, shall curse for our silence. At least, now in the name of our race, our forefathers and of unborn generations, let us all direct our attention in this direction.”<sup>29</sup>

After independence, the Sinhala-Buddhist ethnocentrism was boosted by the design of the national flag of Sri Lanka. At that time, the Sri Lanka was emerging as a modern nation with ethnic, linguistic and religious difference. The different communities of Sri Lanka, demanded their own kind of flags relating to their own religion or myths of origin. But the primacy was given to the Sinhala lion flag. The constitution of 1978 states that, “The National Flag of the Republic of Sri Lanka shall be the Lion flag depicted in the second schedule.”<sup>30</sup> The national flag, which was adopted in 1948 comprised of the lion and two strips. This explains that: “the lion flag has a highly stylized yellow standing lion, with a sword aloft in its front right raised paw, against a red background with corners indented by four leaves of the pipal tree, under which the Buddha attained enlightenment at the Bodh Gaya. And outside the lion flag, there are a saffron stripe for the Tamils and a green stripe for the Muslims. The whole flag is surrounded by a yellow boarder.”<sup>31</sup> But the existence or relevance of the two stripes was omitted in the later constitution of Sri Lanka. Though freedom of religion is guaranteed under the Soulbury

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<sup>29</sup> S. Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: the National Question and The Tamil Liberation Struggle* (London: 1983) p. 73.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted by K. Jayawardene, “Ethnic Consciousness in Sri Lanka: Continuity and Change,” *Lanka Guardian*, Vol. 6, no. 22 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1984, Pp. 11-12.

Constitution, there was no mention of any other religion except Buddhism. The constitution lasted till 1972. The Sri Lankan government adopted a new constitution in 1972, which provided that the Republic of Sri Lanka would give to Buddhism the foremost place and it is the duty of the state to protect and foster the Buddhist faith. Most of the Sinhalese are Buddhist and this provision in the constitution placed them in a most privileged position. But, for the other communities like Hindus, Muslims and Christians, this provision created a sense of insecurity. However, the Buddhist revivalist movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which started as an anti-imperialist movement but ended in the reconstruction of a Sinhala-Buddhist identity, claims to have political and ideological hegemony.<sup>32</sup>

### **Discrimination in the field of Education & Employment:**

The northern zone of Sri Lanka is agriculturally backward in comparison to the southern zone. Due to its non-fertile soil, the northern zone is considered as a dry zone. Hence, education and government employment gained attraction in the Sri Lankan Tamil society. In the pre-independence period, the Tamil community was considered as the English educated community. Many of them were in the administration, universities and other professional jobs. At the time of independence, they held a disproportionately high percentage of employment in the prestigious Ceylon civil services and occupied most important faculties in the educational institutions. In the aftermath of independence, there have been discriminatory policies by the Sri Lankan government against the Tamils in the arena of education and employment. The dominance of Tamils was countered by the Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan government. The Tamils had dominated the field of

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<sup>32</sup> K. Samuel, "Gender Difference in Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka", in I. Skjelsbaek and D. Smith, eds., *Gender, Peace and Conflict* (New Delhi, 2001), p. 186.

higher education and also the technical and scientific education. But the 1956 legislation ended such domination. This legislation has caused serious impediments to the economic status of the Tamils. After the 1956, the percentage of Tamil students at the universities fell from 31 percent at the time of independence to 16 percent in 1970. According to the report of a study on ethnic recruitment, conducted by the University of Ceylon, between 1970 and 1975, the percentage of Tamil entrants had declined from 40.8% to 13.2% in the engineering course, and from 37% to 20% in medicines. In the agricultural course, the decline was even sharper.<sup>33</sup>

Though the Tamil students were intellectually better equipped for admission, they lagged far behind their Sinhalese counterpart in respect of admission as the government policy restricted such admissions and regulated it through a quota system on the basis of race, referred to as “standardization” for entrance to university faculties. Due to the discriminatory policies based on language, many Tamils were restricted from accessing education, which constitute the most important route to economic development. It became difficult for them to enter the government services, armed services and the police force. In 1983, the unemployment among the Tamils was 41%, while among the Sinhalese it was 29%.

### **Land Colonization:**

The policy of land colonization of the Sri Lankan government were also affected many Tamils of the island. This policy of land colonization was a state-sponsored colonization scheme. Through this scheme, a large number of Sinhalese peasants were resettled in the north-eastern province of Sri Lanka, which constitute the majority of

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<sup>33</sup> *Asian Recorder*, 1983, cited in H.P.Chattopadhyay, no.24, p.27.

Tamil populace. The north-eastern province of Sri Lanka is considered as the traditional homeland of the Tamils. The implementation of such schemes compelled many Tamils to think that, the Sri Lankan government was undermining their right to live in their own homeland. Basically, this scheme was implemented in the districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Batticalao, and Trincomalee. It also affected the demographic composition of these districts. While the Sinhalese constituted only 3 per cent of the population in Trincomalee in 1921, by 1946, it became 20.6 per cent, in 1971 it was 28.8 per cent and in 1981 it was 33 per cent. Similarly in Amparai, it has been 78 per cent.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the colonization policy of successive governments has exaggerated the divide between the Sinhalese and Tamils.

These are some of the major factors, which contributed to the growing animosity and ethnic divide culminating in the ethnic conflict. Above all, Sri Lanka is a majoritarian state since Lord Soulbury established a unitary state on the Westminster model for Sri Lanka. This centralized administration ignored other communities in every sphere. Though it is a multi-ethnic country, the monopoly of centralized administration and its discriminatory policies sharpened the ethnic divide, which culminated in the armed conflict. Thus, there are interlinkages among all the factors for the development of ethnic cleavages among the two major communities of Sri Lanka. Basically, the dominance of the Tamils before the period of independence was not tolerated by the Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan government. The Sinhala intellectuals hardly had any influence in the past.

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<sup>34</sup> Phadnis, no. 15, p.300.



## **Rise of Tamil Militancy in Sri Lanka:**

In the initial years of independence, the Sri Lankan government accused the Tamil Federal Party of seeking federalism. Such a demand was seen as a first step towards the way of secession. Even the Tamil minority supported the system of unitary state. But, afterwards, policies of the Sri Lankan government, (the Sinhala only act, Buddhism as state religion and discrimination in the arena of education and employment) enforced the Tamils to rethink their identity in the island. The discriminatory policies of the government, especially during the period of 1960s and 1970s encouraged the demand for separate statehood. This discrimination brought negative impact on the interest of the Tamils. In the initial years, they were demonstrated against these discriminations in a peaceful way. But the continuous discrimination and anti-Tamil riots created a sense of insecurity among them and hence, they demanded a separate state. A resolution calling for a separate state, 'Tamil Eelam', was passed in 1976 at the first national conference of the TULF(Tamil United Liberation Front). The TULF declared to achieve this objective in a non-violent way or within the established democratic framework.. In spite of such non-violent resolution, militarism spread its tentacles among the Tamil youths. After a long suppression, the young Tamils forced to choose militarism as the only way to achieve their interest.

It is difficult to locate the exact date for the eruption of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. After the 1956 riot, a group of Tamils attacked the Sri Lankan army in the eastern district of Batticola. This was the first instance, which encouraged the subsequent Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. Again the failure of 1961 satyagraha encouraged some of the members of Federal Party to leave the path of non-violence. By choosing the path of violence, they decided to fight for separate state. They named their group, Army of

Tigers in a meeting at Colombo.<sup>35</sup> Though, this group was ruined in the later years, it raised the hope that, militancy can be the way to achieve the objectives of Tamil Eelam. The origin of militancy goes back to the period of seventies, when Tamil New Tigers (TNT) was formed. The TNT was later renamed as LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). Since 1975, it has been in the forefront of the freedom struggle of Tamils. After the anti-Tamil riots of 1983, the movement for Eelam got another boost. Without Eelam, the Tamils thought that cultural and ethnic existence would be at stake. The concentration of Tamil population in the northeast provided them a strong demographic (distinction) and territorial and geographical basis to demand a separate statehood for the Tamils.<sup>36</sup>

There were thirty seven Tamil militant groups. Out of these groups five were important. These are the LTTE under the leadership of V. Prabhakaran, the PLOTE (People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam) headed by Uma Maheswaran, the TELO (Tamil Eelaam Liberation Organization) controlled by Sri Sabratnam, the EPRLF (Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front) led by K.S. Padmanabha and the EROS (Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students) headed by V. Balakumar. These militant groups had two objectives: the achievement of the Tamil Eelam and this achievement can be possible through armed struggle.<sup>37</sup>

Among these groups, the LTTE has been in forefront of freedom struggle. This organization have got a wider support and sympathy from majority of Tamils. Its formulated policy and constructive nationalist ideology and emphasis on the preservation of Tamil culture enabled it to win massive support from the Tamil community. The plans

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<sup>35</sup> M.R.Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka : From Boys to Guerrillas*(Delhi :1994),p.24.

<sup>36</sup> K.S. Khajuria, " The Sri Lanka Imbrolio", *AAKROSH*, Vol.3, No.8, July2000, p.23.

<sup>37</sup> A.JJeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origin and Development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries*(U.K.:2000),p.300.

and policies of the LTTE not only countered the Sinhalese but also represented the real issues, problems and feelings of the Tamil people. In an interview in 1986, Prabhakaran said that, “ The government of independent Tamil Eelam will be a socialist government; there will be only one party supported by the people; I do not want a multi-party democracy. Under one-party government Tamil Eelam can develop and change much faster. In a socialist constitution the needs of the people will have priority.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Emergence of Armed Conflict:**

The discriminatory policy of the Sri Lankan government sharpened the ethnic divide between the two major communities. In the initial years, Tamils had launched *satyagraha* or peaceful protest against these discriminatory policies. But afterwards they were compelled to choose the path of violence to counter the continuous discriminatory policies of the Sri Lankan government. The violent conflict in Sri Lanka appeared in three forms: communal, political and violence by security forces.

### **Communal Violence:**

Sri Lanka is a country of multi-lingual, multi-racial and multi-religious in nature. The growth of communalism in Sri Lankan history goes back to the date of British rule. In the initial period of colonialism, the Britishers tried to govern the country according to the ancient customs. They governed the northern and eastern province according to the Tamil and Muslim laws, while in the lower country to the customs of the Sinhalese. At that time, the Britishers emphasized on or encouraged to establish a large number of English school. The establishment of English schools was the necessity to promote English-educated people to British administration. In 1908, those people who were became English-educated middle class demanded territorial electorate. To avoid their

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.,p.132.

demand, the British government established communal electorates. Again in 1921 and in 1924, this system of communal electorate was further extended.<sup>39</sup> Thus the communal feelings of the different communities got a major backup. In 1958, the first communal violence occurred in Sri Lanka. Though the ancient myth and history of Sri Lanka depicted the war between the two communities, the conflict of 1956 had its own significance, because it was the first communal violence after independence. In this communal riot, the dominant Sinhalese group attacked the minority Tamils. In 1956, the Sri Lankan government passed a legislation on language or Sinhala only Act. As a part of this language policy, the Sri Lankan government introduced the system of registration of government vehicles in the name of 'Sri'. Some of the vehicles were also sent to the northern part of the Sri Lanka. Due to the Sinhalese letter of 'Sri', the Tamils started a campaign against the letter. Apart from it, the strategy of discrimination adopted by the language policy of the government was not unknown to the Tamils. This anti-campaigning soon developed into communal violence. Against the Official Language Act of 1956, the Tamils launched *satyagraha*, which resulted in certain concessions for them. But the extremist Sinhalese did not tolerate this, so they led violent attacks on Tamils. Hence, it was no longer possible for the Tamils to confine themselves to only peaceful protests. And in the ensuing clashes, hundreds of persons, primarily, Tamils were killed. In the aftermath, many Tamils became refugees; over 25,000 Tamil refugees were relocated from Sinhalese areas to Tamil areas in the north.<sup>40</sup> The violence is regarded as the pride of Sinhalese political consciousness. To them, this violence was against those Tamils who had exceeded the behavioral limits of an ethnic minority and they could be put back to their subordinate place. In a society, where ethnic relations are

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<sup>39</sup> G.C.Mendis, *Ceylone Today and Tommorrow*, The Associated Newspaper of Ceylone, cited in S.R.Dubey, *One-day Revolution In Sri Lanka* (New Delhi, 1987), p.24.

<sup>40</sup> V.A. Leary, no.11, p.32.

hierarchically ordered, ethnic violence was also a structural mechanism of reestablishing domination and submission.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, the next communal violence occurred immediately after the elections of 1977. This violence was directed against the loosing political party and soon it turned into a communal violence. After the election, the UNP government of J.R.Jayawardene came to power. This government started its term with the anti-Tamil violence of August 1977. In this violence nearly 400 Tamils were dead.<sup>42</sup> According to the Sansoni Commission (a commission of enquiry appointed by the Sri Lankan government to investigate the 1977 violence), the communal violence was immediately occurred due to the shooting of two policemen in the north Sri Lanka by Tamil youths.<sup>43</sup> The Tamil youths accused the Sri Lankan government for such violence due to the latter's discriminatory policies. The horrors of this conflict was described by *The Observer* that, "it is clear that subsequent violence in July and August, which was directed against Sri Lankan Tamils in the east and south of the country, and Indian Tamils in the central region, are organized by the members of the ruling UNP( United National Party) and the intimates of president. Many people were dead, many women were raped, and thousands were made homeless by loosing their belongings. But the summer madness, which served the dual purpose of quietening Tamil calls for Eelam, that is a separate state and taking the minds of the Sinhalese electorate off a deepening economic crisis is only one of the blemishes on the face of the island. Since Jayawardene came to power, a system of

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<sup>41</sup> J.Uyangoda, "Militarisation and Violent State, Violent Society: Sri Lanka" in K.Rupesinghe and K. Mumtaz, eds., *Internal Conflict in South Asia* (New Delhi,1996), p.122.

<sup>42</sup> D. Somasundaran, *Scarred Minds: The Psychological Impacts of War on Sri Lankan Tamils* (N. Delhi: 1998) P. 40.

<sup>43</sup> V.A. Leary, no.11, p.20.

what his critics call 'state terrorism' has brought an Ulster-style situation in the Tamil majority areas of. This period was marked as the detention of hundreds without trial."<sup>44</sup>

Again in August 1981, the third major communal violence broke out between the two ethnic groups. This violence occurred due to terrorist attacks against the police in northern Sri Lanka. In this case, the police detained some Tamil youths. Tamils were assaulted in government offices and fire was set on Hindu temples. In this conflict, even teachers and students of Tamil schools were attacked. In the later days of the conflict, the Sinhalese also attacked several Tamil colonies. In this conflict, ten Indian Tamils were killed, numerous shops were burnt, and more than 5,000 Indian Tamils had to flee to refuge camps.<sup>45</sup>

### **Political Violence:**

Most of the political violence occurred in the north-east and southern Sri Lanka. While the Tamil youths led most of the political violence in the northeast region, the Sinhalese perpetrated violence in the south. The political violence occurred in the north during 1970s. The political violence refers to the use of extra parliamentary violent method for achieving the militants objectives. The hard core militants used this method for achieving their objectives. In this method, they adopted large-scale robberies( including the arms and weapons), the assassination of political leaders of Tamil community, who were wishing to collaborate with the majority community and violence against the security officials and armed forces of the Sri Lankan government.<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>44</sup>The Observer, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1981, Cited in S. Ponnambalam, no. 28, p. 210.

<sup>45</sup> Militant, July 29 1983 cited in A Quarter Century of Racism and violence. Against the Tamils of Sri Lanka, The Hindu, p. 6

<sup>46</sup>G. Gunatilleke, et.al., "Violence and Development in Sri Lanka: Conceptual Issues", in G. Gunatilleke, et.al., *Ethnic Dilemmas of Development in Asia*( Lexington, 1983), p.155.

political violence by the Tamil youths goes back to, 1974, when Tamil militants assassinated the mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiappah. Many Tamil youths were, inspired by two factors to resort to political violence: the Sinhalese insurgent unit, the JVP's (Janata Vimukti Peramuna) violent acts against the Sri Lankan government to achieve their objectives and the formation of Bangladesh. Hence, a small group of Tamil youths decided to form the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) in 1972, which in later years became LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) in 1976 under the leadership of Vellupillai Prabhakaran.

In June 1981, a government pamphlet was published by the Sri Lankan government stating that a group of terrorists was involved in 200 acts of violence in the previous three years, including the killing of politicians, 18 police officials, acts of homicide and robberies of banks.<sup>47</sup> This government pamphlet indicated the violent activities of the LTTE. Such activities of the LTTE were criticized by the leaders of the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front). Though the objectives of both the LTTE and the TULF are the same, they differed from each other on the issue of the means to achieve their goal. The TULF criticized the violent acts of the LTTE and emphasized on the non-violent means to achieve a separate state of Eelam.

Violence further increased during the elections for the District Development councils. These elections were aimed at decentralization and were regarded as a positive step taken by the government in responding to the Tamil problem. But the assassination of Mr. A. Thiagarajah, a Tamil who headed the UNP (United Nationalist Party) list of candidates, nipped in the bud any prospective solution. This killing was perceived as a threat to Tamil politicians not to join hands with the UNP. From the mid 1970s onwards,

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<sup>47</sup> Ponnambalam, no.28,p.26.

the armed component of the conflict in the form of guerrilla and anti-guerrilla warfare sharpened the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka.

### **Violence by the security forces:**

In the 1980s, a new form of violence occurred in the Sri Lankan society, i.e., violence by the security forces. This form of violence was used as a policy of the Sri Lankan State to counter Tamils, particularly in the north-east region of Sri Lanka. When the Sri Lankan Government adopted this violent policy, the long ethnic conflict turned in to a civil war. The security forces and Police are the major part of this conflict. They were the main causes of violent conflict on account of professional mal-performance, unlawful operations, and grave human and social misbehavior. The Sinhalese community has dominated the army and police forces due to the discriminatory policies of the government in the field of recruitment. Hence, they gained more freedom to lead the violent, homicidal, and predatory and other harmful acts against the Tamils. In 1974, during a session of an International Tamil Cultural Conference, the police attacked a large group of Tamil people and prevented them to carry out the conference in a fruitful manner. Basically, in the north-east Sri Lanka, they detained many Tamil youths and tortured, in the name of terrorist attack. The anti-Tamil riot, which is known as the state sponsored violence against Tamils gave enough opportunity to the police and army officials to act in a highhanded manner. In this conflict more than 200 Tamils were killed and many Indian Tamils were severely affected by it. The *Daily Telegraph* claims that, during the riot of 1983, several army vehicles who were inducted for controlling the violent situation, also inciting the violence. Even, the army officials were responsible for the harassment of the Tamils in the northern province of Sri Lanka.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>*The Hindu*, no. 45, p. 11.



The movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality, reported that, with the adoption of the 1972 constitution, “hundreds of Tamil youths were arrested and left to languish in jails for long periods of time without being charged and convicted in accordance of law. Several of them were taken in to custody, ostensibly for questioning, but most of them were treated in an inhuman manner. The high handed action of the police on the final day of the Fourth International Tamil Research Conference held in 1979 at Jaffna, showed when nine lives were lost which left bitter memories among the Tamil youth.”<sup>49</sup> However, the war between the Sinhalese state and Tamil guerrillas is not only a matter of blood and bones, it is also a matter of beliefs.<sup>50</sup> The historical and literary document of Sri Lanka has depicted the conflicting relation that had existed between two communities.

Thus, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has its own roots in history. With the arrival of modern age, every one is conscious of his or her rights and interests. This consciousness create animosity among different ethnic communities. Though this consciousness provides a better life, in many cases it leads to the long standing ethnic violence, which is very true in case of Sri Lanka. The conflict between the two communities (Sinhalese and Tamils) has created massive human rights violations in Sri Lanka. The continuation of human rights violations has eroded the values, essence and uniqueness of the plural society of Sri Lanka. The violence is strongly condemned by the human rights activists and peace activists in the national and international sphere. But still this process is continuing and no body knows when it will end. Now, every community or group has its own culture and distinctiveness. It is the duty or responsibility of every community to preserve its own culture. The essence of multi-

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<sup>49</sup> Prof. V.A. Leary, no. 11. p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> L.Sabartanam, *Ethnic Attachment in Sri Lanka* (New York, 2001), p.3.

structured and democratic society lies in the maintenance of such preservation. And this can be possible through cultural assimilation, which works as a stepping-stone for the development of the society in every sphere socio-economic and political.

# *CHAPTER - III*

## **IMPACT OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT ON SRI LANKAN TAMIL WOMEN**

The long-standing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has made the Sri Lankan society to accept that violence is a legitimate mode of political behavior whether by the state or anti-state forces. The conflict, which is political in nature in the initial years of independence, has turned Sri Lanka into a violent society. Violence has become a norm in the contemporary political culture, and has been practiced in politics by the state as well as anti-state formations in Sri Lanka. The justification and tolerance of political violence delineated three perspectives:

- i. State as well as mob violence directed against ethnic minorities, particularly the Tamils, as just and legitimate;
- ii. Organized violence against the state as an act of heroism by minority Tamils against Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan government;
- iii. The use of excessive political violence (by the state) was undesirable and responsible for other outcomes i.e., the devastation of socio-economic structure of the society.<sup>1</sup>

Among these three perspectives, two perspectives are already discussed in the last chapter. So far as third one is concerned, the long ethnic violence has affected every one because of attack, counter-attack, killing and fleeing, which resulted in widespread human rights abuse, gendered crimes, and militarization of both the state and society.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Uyangoda, "Militarism and Violence in Sri Lanka", in K. Rupasinghe & K. Mumtaz, eds., *Internal Conflicts in South Asia* (New Delhi: 1996), p.121.

<sup>2</sup> A. Chenoy, *Militarism and Women in South Asia* (New Delhi: 2002), p. 101.

The use of excessive force by the successive government has culminated into the escalation of internal conflict in the Sri Lankan society. A UN special rapporteur on States of Emergency has noted in his second annual report of December 1988: "It is not desirable that measures taken under a state of emergency should be excessive, since they are liable to provoke a reaction that might create a more serious crisis than the crisis with which the measures are supposed to be dealing".<sup>3</sup> Thus the violation of human rights constitutes the core of the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. The violence affected every one in many ways. The violence has taken in the form of killing, torture, disappearance and extra judicial execution. Both men and women and people from every segment/group of the society have been affected by this violence, whether directly or indirectly.

Many people and particularly the people from the Tamil community were killed in this ethnic violence in a large scale. In the 1983 anti-Tamil violence, the government reported the killing of 387 people and Tamils were the majority among them. According to the government figures, 116 Indian Tamils owned large business were damaged. As many as 3,100 Tamil shops were damaged or destroyed, and thousands of Tamil-owned or occupied homes were burned or looted. At the height of this violence, more than one lakh Tamils sought refuge in camps set up by the government.<sup>4</sup> Abductions and killing have been widely reported since 1988. Most of the security officials and plainclothes armed men were responsible for this. The killing of Tamil prisoners has been widespread. Some deaths in custody apparently occurred as a direct result of injuries and tortures.

"Disappearances" have been regularly reported from Sri Lanka since mid-1983. Until July 1987, over 680 cases of "disappearances" were recorded by the Amnesty

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<sup>3</sup> *SRI LANKA: Extrajudicial Executions, Disappearances and Torture, 1987 to 1990*, Amnesty International (U.K: 1990), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> E.Marino, "The Armed Component of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka", *PRIO Report* (Oslo: 1987), p. 3.

International. This occurred in the northern and eastern provinces, the area claimed by Tamil nationalist as their homeland. In the south, after the mid- 1987, an increasing number of “disappearances” have been reported. The disappeared are those people who were taken into custody, but whose fate thereafter is unknown. In many cases the authorities have refused arresting people who were responsible for this, despite the existence of eyewitnesses.<sup>5</sup>

During the period of conflict, extra-judicial executions were common phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Extra judicial executions were numerous and occurred in several contexts, as defenseless prisoners, unarmed demonstrators and curfew violators. They were deliberately killed by the state as well as counter-state forces. The regular attribution of probable extrajudicial executions to “Pro-government vigilante groups” began in March 1989, when many thousands of people were killed in southern Sri Lanka. In this process of regular extra-judicial executions, the Tamil speaking people of north eastern Sri Lanka are directly attacked by the security officials of the Sri Lankan government. In the south, the security forces use the plainclothes operations to hide their identity. To suppress the JVP violence, the use of plainclothes became the easy way to undertake politically motivated killings and other human rights violations.<sup>6</sup>

However, “disappearances” and extrajudicial executions are related because many prisoners who have “disappeared” are believed to have been secretly extra-judicially executed with their bodies being dumped or burned. Many of the bodies found in public places, could not be identified because they were been mutilated or burned. Amnesty International received information on over 3000 people who were initially reported to have “disappeared” or to have been extra-judicially executed in southern Sri Lanka

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<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, 1990, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-5.

during 1989. But this organization believed in that the true figure was substantially higher.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in this context of massive human rights violation, what is the role and status of women in Sri Lanka? While the LTTE continues to use the terrorist methods, the Sri Lankan army has been attempting in a ruthless manner to track down LTTE militants and treating the Tamils as potential terrorists. This has led to human rights abuses. The loose of human life, security forces, civilians and militants has been calculated at over 60,000. A study sponsored by the Norwegian Peace Council on the economic and human cost of the war has said that direct military spending by both the government and the Tamil Tigers rebels totaled rupees 295 billion (US \$3.2 Billion), while additional war expenditure by the government amounted to rupees 213 billion.<sup>8</sup> This chapter focuses on how women, especially the Tamil women are reacting to this violence and what are the impacts on them.

### **The Status of Tamil Women in Sri Lankan Society**

It has been widely reported that throughout South Asia women have played a more prominent role in the society than it has normally been expected, given the low cultural value placed on them.<sup>9</sup> During the colonial period many South Asian women joined the social reform and national movement by breaking the traditional barrier of the society and proved that they have capabilities to be the nationalist leaders. During the post-independence era, women have largely succeeded in implanting themselves in the educational and administrative sectors of their nation. In case of Sri Lanka, it is the first

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Chenoy, no.2, p. 107.

<sup>9</sup> B.E.Ward, "Women in New Asia", cited in *Status of Women: Sri Lanka, University of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: 1979), p. 4.

country to elect a woman Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandarnaike. Before political independence in Sri Lanka, the universal franchise was introduced in 1931 and both men and women over 21 years of age were given the right to vote. After one decade of political independence, the ethnic conflict became a major factor in the society and polity. The conflict between the two communities (Sinhalese and Tamil) devastated the Sri Lankan society. This indicated that most of the common people are affected and more particularly women. Of the two communities, the Tamil women were the major victims of this conflict. They became victims both of the armed conflict and the domestic violence in their society.

Generally, the position of the women is determined by the cultural and ideological factors in the Sri Lankan society. As a traditional society, the cultural and ideological sentiments dominate the Sri Lankan society. According to the ideological and cultural factors, the place of women should be in the domestic sphere. The duty of women is confined to her household, i.e., to take care of the children's and elders, to cook food for them and to manage the whole family. Similar to this notion is the *Kutumba ideology* of the Tamil society. This ideology indicates that, every member of the Tamil family should manage or operate themselves within certain rules, norms and values. This ideology defined the duties, responsibilities and limitations of every one in the Tamil family. This *Kutumba ideology* restricted women into the private sphere and men in the public sphere. Above all, the Tamil social organizations are based on a strict, hierarchical caste system with religious overtones. As a Hindu, Tamil women should be unmarried virgin and follow the rules of chastity and purity. Apart from it, in this orthodox patriarchal system, marriage bound woman irretrievably to her husband even



after his death. Thus, divorce and remarriage do not fall within the move of a Hindu marriage.<sup>10</sup>

However, the ethnic violence has devastated the social fabric of the Sri Lankan Tamil society. As an opposing community against the Sri Lankan government, the Tamil community has faced the atrocities and brutalities of the Sri Lankan state forces. In this process of atrocities and brutalities, the social structure of Tamil society came into peril. Many Tamil women became victims of this process. The conflict makes their life miserable on the one hand and breaks their traditional or cultural barrier, on the other. This has brought many challenges before them.

### **The Impact of Ethnic Conflict on Tamil Women**

In every war or ethnic violence the common people are the victims and among them women and children constitute the majority. This is also true in case of Sri Lanka, where the protracted ethnic violence affects both men and women. But in the perils of conflict the worst victims are women. The conflict has made them suffer in many forms, i.e. physically, psychologically, socially and also economically. Even in an ethnic divided society like Sri Lanka, the ethnicity became the cause of their suffering, which is very true in the case of Tamil women. Women of different communities in Sri Lanka, i.e., Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim, are affected in a different manner by the conflict. The experiences of Tamil women are different from that of Sinhalese and Muslim women. The experience of Tamil women in the northern rural Sri Lanka is not same as the experience of urban educated Sinhalese women. As an opposing community against the Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan government, the Tamil women in the north are directly

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<sup>10</sup> W. de Silva, "The Family: Continuity and Change" in S. Jayaweera (ed.), *Women In Post-Independence Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: 2002), p. 214.

affected by the civil war. During the period of conflict they were in continuous negotiations with their own and their families for survival, while the urban educated Sinhalese women had the option to disassociate themselves from the conflict.<sup>11</sup> Because the Sri Lankan government sponsored violence against the Tamil community, the life of Tamil women is insecure. The Muslim women faced more cultural restriction and loss of freedom.

In the northeastern of Sri Lanka, the reality of war for the Tamil women has been the loss of their men folk, physical safety, psychological security and a struggle for the survival and sustenance of their family. During the period of conflict, with the maintenance of their social rule, i.e. to hold the family together, they take care of their children, the sick and the elderly and they have to carry the economic burden also. This makes them the worst sufferers of the conflict. As a result, women have crossed the private or public-barrier to contend with military, to compete in the market and to survive economically. In this process, many women have been forced to take on various new roles within their families and communities during the years of armed conflict. They have also gained greater self confidence and decision-making power.<sup>12</sup>

The violence occurred in the form of assassinations, disappearances and tortures. Basically, the Tamil young men were the victims of such form of violence. However, many Tamil women had a very painful experience of deaths and disappearances of their loved ones. Many times, they don't have any idea/information about their male members. According to a mother, whose son was the victim of this form of violence:

“I am the luckiest mother in Sri Lanka, because at least I got my son's body back. I could give my son a decent funeral and as hard as this sound, at least I know he is really

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<sup>11</sup> Chenoy, no.2, p.108.

<sup>12</sup> D. Rajasingham-Senanayake, “Ambivalent Empowerment: The Tragedy of Tamil Women in Conflict”, in R. Manchanda, ed, *Women, War and Peace in south Asia* (New Delhi: 2001), p.109.

dead. There are thousands of other mothers out there who just don't know, who are still simply sitting their and waiting."<sup>13</sup>

However, the survivors of this violence were chiefly the women and children who despite the cessation of violence six years ago, still bear the scares of their experiences. Thus the psychological effects of torture, disappearance of spouses and children, finally, disruption and reduction of destination have created trauma and psychosomatic disorder within them. The widows who belonged largely to the age group of 20-40 years were vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence by men in their community as well as by security forces.

In fact, many women have witnessed the brutalities of the long ethnic violence in Sri Lanka in some form or the other. The process of horror and victimization can be seen in three distinct but inter related forms:-

### **Victims of Rape and Physical Violence:**

In the long ethnic violence in Sri Lanka, many women in the affected areas are subjected to rape and murdered. Generally, the sexual harassments or physical abuses are not new to women. Sexual harassment is always present in the society but the abuses or harassments are intensified during the period of conflict or war. In war or conflict, rape is used as a weapon against women and is a part of the act of humiliating the enemy. In the war women are more likely to find themselves in a situation where abuses can take place because the war imposes a label of social control which can affect women rather than protect them. In the Asian society women are categorized on the basis of their virtue or honour and rape is inextricably linked to the concept of women's honours or virtue. When

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<sup>13</sup> R. Hoole, et. al., *The Broken Palmyra*, 1990, cited in Chenoy, no. 2, p. 116.

a woman is raped, it is considered that she loses her virtue or honour. This is similarly prevails in Sri Lanka.

As a part of the conservative society many Tamil women live on the notion of chastity and virginity before marriage and have restrictive notion of purity. They are placed in an extremely difficult position when many of these notions violated in case of rape. The stigma of rape makes the victim suffer long after the event is over and after that incidence, she is considered to be “spoilt goods” by her own community. A raped woman quoted in the Broken Palmyra that “the soldiers destroy ones. But the villagers destroy us a thousand times”.<sup>14</sup> Thus, they are victimized by more than one aggression, i.e., firstly, by the rapist and then by their own society. On this problematic situation in Tamil society, Hoole and others say:

“In our cultural setting, sexual violence has a serious, psychologically traumatizing effect on the victim and her close relations including her husband. Chastity is traditionally considered as one of the supreme virtues of women to be safeguarded with a sense of diligence. The loss of virginity in a young girl, even if against her will would mean that she could not aspire to marry in our society, and if already married, there is a good chance that she will be abandoned. All rape victims are socially ostracized.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Tamil women who have been the victims of rape by militant personnel (both Sri Lankan and Indian) faced social ostracization vis a vis traditionally cultural norms in their society. During the period of the anti-Tamil riots more than 5, 000 Tamil women were severally brutalized by physical violence. The political violence from 1987

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<sup>14</sup> R. Hoole, et. al, *The Broken Palmyra* (1990), cited in Sasanka Perera, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka: Dynamics, Consequences and Issues of Democratisation* (Colombo: 1998), p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> R. Hoole, et. al., op. cit., p. 116.

to 1989 affected more than 20, 000 women in Sri Lanka.<sup>16</sup> The worst period of rape was under the occupation of IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Forces) in the northeastern Sri Lanka (1987-1990). The period was marked by hundreds of rapes and assaults on Tamil women by the Indian soldiers. Rape by the soldiers in Jaffna has sharply restricted the mobility of Tamil women in Sri Lanka. In this context, a Tamil woman said that, “now, with all these incidents of molestation and rape, we can not go any where without male escort and most of the time we are forced to remain inside”.<sup>17</sup> In the conflicts areas of Sri Lanka, even the sexual violence and the rape was committed by the law enforcement authorities. Custodial rapes and violence can also be committed by officials in institution like hospitals. The Women’s rights watch reported in August 1997, that there were total of 134 incident of violence against women.<sup>18</sup>

Besides it, many women are the victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse in the war zone of Sri Lanka. In many refugee camps in Sri Lanka, the gendered violence, alcoholism and domestic violence are high. Basically, their low socio-economic status can expose them to physical and mental depression. Above all, the lack of self confidence and cultural factors also make many women not to be assertive. A study in the urban slum community revealed that 60 percent of women have been the victim of the domestic violence.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, except Tamil women, the other civilian women were also the victims of rape and killed by the security forces in custodial violence or cross fires or in an aerial bombardment. Many Sinhalese women, who were living in the border areas, have also been killed by the LTTE. News by the *Sunday Leader* on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1995 tells the terrible story of an 18 year old girl who was detained at the Kaithiadly Army

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<sup>16</sup> *The Tamil Times*, 15 March, 1992.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.116.

<sup>18</sup> R. Coomaraswamy, “Violence, Armed Conflict and the Community”, in S. Jayaweera, ed., no.10, p.89.

<sup>19</sup> *Women in Sri Lanka*, Report of Asian Development Bank, 1999.

check point and was gang raped by 17 army men before she was killed. On 28<sup>th</sup> October 1995, the LTTE attacked the village Bo-Atte where 11 Sinhalese women and seven Sinhalese girls under the age of 18 were killed.

However, rape is not the only cause of physical violence but it has psychological repercussions also. After being raped it is seen that many women became mentally imbalanced. This physical violence creates psychological disorder among them. The psychological repercussions of rape, particularly, in the northern areas of Sri Lanka were described by the Broken Palmyra in the following words:

“The psychological impact on the rape victim and her immediate family is quite severe. Initially, there is a period of shock lasting from hours to a day or two during which she is unable to speak and is coughing and gasping; later a deep depression sets in with withdrawal syndrome, quietness and crying. Usually the incident leaves a permanent scar and she may be unable to rejoin the main stream of social life.”<sup>20</sup>

Until the late 1980s, violence against women was seen as a taboo subject in Sri Lanka. Women who raised these issues were counted as family brokers and trouble makers. Generally, the physical and domestic violence on women by men are considered as a routine affair. This is because, in the patriarchal society, woman is considered as the property of man. In this sense he has every right to do whatever he feels to do with his property. If physical violence in the form of rape is committed by any other male towards the wife of another person, it is considered as the loss of respect or virtue of the wife. In such a situation, how can a man accept the raped wife, who loses her virtue? Similar patriarchal notions prevail among the Tamil community of Sri Lanka. The period of conflict in Sri Lanka intensified such physical violence, which was committed by the

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<sup>20</sup> R. Hoole, et. al., 1990, op. cit., p. 18.

security forces and the male members of the other community. Even other people and Tamil women accepted this notion as the right way to lead a dignified life. To them, rape affects the dignity of the women and how a woman without dignity led her life in society. By 1990s, the attitude changed due to the occurrence of massive scale of rape in conflict. The social rejection and humiliation compels many women to protest against such type of activity. The violence against women became an important social concern due to the arrival of feminism and human rights movement in Sri Lanka. Though the constitutionalism and the legal system of Sri Lanka have the responsibility to take action against such activities, it has contributed less to the law and its effective enforcement. The Donoghmore Constitution, which created the system of universal franchise, only emphasized on the educational and health policies for women and nothing more. Though changes were introduced to the constitution of 1948 and 1972, the gender issues were not given special priority.<sup>21</sup> Again the constitution of 1978 provided a balance policy formulation and legislation to promote gender equality. But it was only restricted to the citizenship, family laws and land ownership in agricultural settlement. This creates a gap in the legislative intervention in the arena of gender violence. This also shows the apathy of the Sri Lankan government towards the victimized minority Tamil women of Sri Lanka.

The intensive violent attitude of the Sri Lankan security forces was highlighted at the global level. Prior to this, similar cases from the countries like, former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and other parts of Asia and Africa were also highlighted. Due to such occurrences, the UN passed a resolution about rape as a crime. After passing the resolution in 1994, Radhika Coomaraswamy was appointed as the first UN special

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<sup>21</sup> S. Jayaweera, (ed.), no. 10, p. 34.

rapporteur on violence against the women in Sri Lanka.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the women's charter that was written in the early 1990s incorporates the various provision of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women). This charter includes a specific provision on the right to protection from gender-based violence.

### **Refugees and Internally Displacement:**

The long civil war between the Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE has caused a lot of humanitarian problems. In this humanitarian problem, the lives of the women were worst in Sri Lankan society. Apart from the victim of rape, death, murder, they became refugees or internally displaced in their own country. In this conflict around 7,00,000 have been repeatedly displaced and an estimated 1,72,000 persons are living in government welfare centres. About half a million person are part of the Sri Lanka Tamil diasporas.<sup>23</sup> In such a situation, the condition of women and particularly Tamil women were the worst. In a patriarchal society like Sri Lanka, they have found many difficulties to adjust during the time of conflict because they have to uphold cultural codes and act according to the culture and tradition of their nation and families.

The 'internally displaced' is a UN term for refugees who have not left their countries. Instead of using the term 'internally displaced', Joke Schrijver speaks of 'internal refugee' because he emphasises that they are refugees entitled to protection and support, and active subjects rather than passive objects of an abstract fate.<sup>24</sup> Most of the internal refugees are the direct victims of physical, political and economic insecurity in

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<sup>22</sup> R. Manchanda, (ed.), no. 12, p.111.

<sup>23</sup> SRI LANKA: Recapturing Missed Opportunities, Documents of Sri Lanka (2002), pp.12-13.

<sup>24</sup> J. Schrijvers, "Internal Refugees in Sri Lanka: The Interplay of Ethnicity and Gender", *The European Journal of Development Research*, vol. 9, no. 2, December 1997, p.63.



their own area of origin and for that reason they are unwilling to come back to their own place. This also happens in the case of Sri Lankan Tamils. Many of the displaced are settled in camps, especially in Colombo, Amparai, Trincomalee and Wanni region. They were living in an extremely vulnerable condition, where their future was uncertain. Majority of them were determined to create a good life with more dignity and security, not only for themselves, but for their children also. In Sri Lanka, by the end of 1997, about 1, 97, 413 peoples were displaced. According to the estimates, women and children outnumbered men in refugee camps, though Sri Lankan statistics did not differentiate by sex.<sup>25</sup> In 2001, this number has increased into 7,04,000.<sup>26</sup>

The experiences of women of different communities i.e., Tamil, Muslims and Sinhalese, were different. Tamil women had their own fixed space according to their caste and socio-economic background. In many camps, Tamil women who came from the lower economic strata had been separated and lived according to the norms of the caste. Many Tamil women were responsible for the day-to-day survival of their families.

Generally, women in refugee camps are particularly exposed to sexual violence or physical abuses due to lack of space and security. Separated from the male members of their families, they are often victims of rape and sexual harassment by the guards and other refugees. Similar things also happen in case of Tamil women in Sri Lanka. They are subjected to extortion. They lacked the freedom of mobility due to their physical insecurity. Even it is difficult for them to find a place to change clothes and to have a space to sleep.

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/slasia/sri\\_lanka.html](http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/slasia/sri_lanka.html).

Their basic needs were not always met. Usually, they were provided below the minimum requirement for a healthy living. Thousands of Tamil women were staying in an unhygienic condition. Due to the lack of doctors, they were not given proper medical care. In most cases, the absence of gynecologists made many women helpless with their reproductive system. In many cases, they had to share toilets with men. There were not many psychologists to deal with their trauma and depression. The camps often face outbreak of epidemics and diseases. Anthonicam, a Tamil widow, said that, "The most affected (by the situation) are the women."<sup>27</sup>

The Tamil women who were staying in refugee camps hide their ethnic identity while going out of the camps. This was a general tendency among the Tamil women in the war zone of Sri Lanka. They were avoiding wearing such clothes and colours that immediately distinguished them from Sinhalese women and avoided to put the dark dot (*pottu*) between their eyebrows, which indicated their status as a Tamil married woman. The Sinhalese and Muslim women do not mark such dark dot.<sup>28</sup> By doing this, they were rescuing themselves from the police and security forces of Sri Lanka. In Colombo, many Tamil young people, including both men and women, were regularly picked up by the security officers of the Sri Lanka and questioned for one or two days on the grounds of being Tamil or suspect citizens. They have to face many difficulties if the camp is in the Sinhalese dominated area, because they are recognized as state enemies. The Tamil concentration in the capital is considered as a threat to the political stability and peace process. However, many refugee camps and welfare centers are set up by the Sri Lankan government lack sufficient facilities. These camps have made the lives of people vulnerable. In 1997, in Trincomalee district, there were 13 camps, and nine camps were

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<sup>27</sup> Schrijvers, no. 23, p. 70.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.

situated outside Trincomalee.<sup>29</sup> In 2001, about 5,28,000 were staying with their family and friends, while the remaining 1,76,000 people were living in 384 government run camps known as welfare centres in the north eastern Sri Lanka.<sup>30</sup> In the Jaffna Peninsula, the conflict has created 18,000 displaced widows.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, among these internally displaced and refugees, maximum are women. In these camps, they were continuing their mothering tasks and domestic responsibilities and also contributing economic support to their families. This has contributed to their sense of self-confidence and control over their lives, which is more prominent in the case of Tamil women refugees in Sri Lanka.

### **Socio-Economic Disempowerment:**

Women in Sri Lanka are affected by the armed conflict in another form, i.e., many of them lost their husbands or male members and became economically and socially disempowered. The economic and social interests of these affected women, particularly in the northeastern Sri Lanka are in peril. They experience a substantial decline in their standard of living and have become a part of the most impoverished segment of the society. According to R. Hoole,

“During the period of conflict, many young men migrated to other countries, while many of them became victims of disappearances and killing. While citing the testimonies of women in the period of conflict, they show that the majority of the emigrants were men between the ages of 14 to 40. Many young men left, leaving behind the women, children and the elderly to keep life going on in there homeland”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Sely Thiruchandran, *The Other Victims Of War: Emergence of Female-headed Household in Eastern Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: 1999), pp. 135-136.

<sup>30</sup> no. 26.

<sup>31</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 11 May, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Chenoy, no. 2, p. 109.

The absence of men has meant that women had to shoulder greater responsibility for sustaining the household. Again Hoole and others cited the words of a woman from Jaffna, “.... especially after the operations of the Sri Lankan army (which had been taking men into custody), we women had to shoulder more tasks.”<sup>33</sup>

In the war zone, many women are facing serious loss of livelihood. While taking the lives of many people, the armed conflict simultaneously brought structural damages. Thousands of farms and work places have been destroyed. The irrigation system, the traditional occupations, schools, hospitals, and basic infrastructure got damaged, particularly in northeastern Sri Lanka. This devastation brings ecological degradation and direct economic production has been severely affected. There have been acute shortages of food and essential items in the north. This ecological degradation and economic displacement culminated into sociological and political fallout in the northeastern Sri Lanka. In such a situation, many Tamil women have to bear the burden of disasters long after the conflict is over.<sup>34</sup>

The oppressive power relations, sexual assault, attack and disappearances of the family members and the general insecurity in the streets, led to an overall loss of freedom for Tamil women in Sri Lanka. Many Tamil women are the direct victims of enormous socio-political hardship; they struggle to ensure their families' economic survival. Their quality of life and employment conditions have deteriorated during the period of the conflict. Statistics indicates that some 3,00,000 women have been widowed and traumatized by the civil war in Sri Lanka.<sup>35</sup> The fear of physical violence basically makes women in war zone to face the economic hardship. The earlier source of income

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<sup>33</sup> R. Hoole, et.al., cited in Chenoy, no. 2, p. 109.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.110.

<sup>35</sup> *Sunday Observer*, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

which was earned by the male members of the family is lost. The immediate repercussion of this has dragged the victimized women into poverty. Even they do not have sufficient skill to join the labour market. The lacuna of skill and fear of physical violence makes them economically disempowered. Reports indicated that most of the 10 to 15 thousand widowed women, who are Tamils, are living below the poverty line in the eastern Sri Lanka. They have very painful experience of economic and social marginalisation. Women who have been displaced from their homes are living in psychological trauma. Many times they do not have adequate resources to cope with the changes or economic constraints and in such situation, by bearing the burden of their families, they became a part in the process of “feminization of poverty”.<sup>36</sup> Apart from it, many women are not aware about their legal rights. However, given their lower educational status, limited access to land, and victims of gender inequality in wages in employment, they are forced to economically and socially disempowered. A study conducted by the CENWOR states that, among the female-headed households, nearly three-fourth plunged into the further economic deprivation after an event that changed their lives. They were compelled to work outside and in the informal sector to support their families but they have no prospects of escaping from the poverty situation.<sup>37</sup>

Socially, they had faced many challenges from their own communities. The Tamils who are widowed or raped are vulnerable to the double complex of the stigmatized victims in their own communities. Many of those who have been widowed in the course of the armed conflict and those widows who go out to work to sustain their families are considered as inauspicious beings (*amangli*), because they lost their husbands. They are challenging the conventional Hindu construct of the ‘good woman’

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<sup>36</sup> R. Manchanda (ed.), no.12, p. 113.

<sup>37</sup> *Women in Sri Lanka*, ADB, 1999, p. 15.

as one who is married and auspicious (*sumangali*). Even to avoid the hatredness of the society, many women also don't confess that they were being raped by someone else. Thus, the conflict brought many women into the socio-economic disempowerment in Sri Lanka.

This situation is expressed in the language of Lei Brouns, the South Asia Director of *Terre des Hommes*, "They were lacking in adequate skills to procure jobs to keep their home – fires burning. Socially and economically, they were the marginalized groups and due to existing cultural norms and patterns, the society too had neglected and unfavourably disregarded them. Due to isolation, misery, frustration and abject poverty, they had been plunged into destitution and acute financial distress".<sup>38</sup>

### **Female-headed Households:**

During the period of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka, many women lost their husbands or male relatives, who were the breadwinners of their families. In the traditional framework, a woman not only needs the physical or psychological security from her husband but economic support also. Generally, the husband earns money and the wife manages the family and takes care of the children. The absence and loss or death of the husband pushes the wife into an economic crisis. With the disappearance of the husband, the economic support from the husband and the source of material organization of the household also disappears, but the ideology of femininity, responsibility for domesticity and of motherhood continues.<sup>39</sup> Thus the ethnic violence or the civil war in Sri Lanka brought such situations in the experiences of many women and particularly, the Tamil women. In this ethnic violence, most of their husbands or male relatives were

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<sup>38</sup> *Daily News*, 24 August, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> S. Thiruchandran, "The Family and the households of the Females", *Nivedini*, vol. 9, no. 1, June 2001, p. 37.

the victims in the form of deaths, disappearances, desertions and separations, which compelled them to hold the whole responsibility of their family. However, the female-headed households are not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. During the period of colonialism, and also in the first two decades of postcolonial Sri Lanka, many Tamil households were run by female heads because of the outside job of their male members. Again the fear of ethnic violence, both by the state and the militants in Jaffna compelled many young men leave their villages.

In Sri Lanka, the female-headed households emerged in various ways. These are:

- i. State violence
- ii. Violence perpetrated by the armed forces
- iii. Deaths due to natural causes
- iv. Suicides
- v. Desertions, separations and divorces<sup>40</sup>

In spite of these classifications, Samuel observes certain reasons for the emergence of female-headed households within the period of conflict in Sri Lanka:

- i. The death of a spouse killed in action as a combatant, killed by either of the forces engaged in combat: killed as a result of being caught in the crossfire, bombing or in explosions.
- ii. The death of a spouse subsequent to arrest or abductions
- iii. A spouse disappears with no eye-witness present

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<sup>40</sup> S. Thiruchandran, no. 28, p. 19.

- iv. A spouse flees to escape harassment, arrest, detention, forced conscription
- v. Families have been separated in the course of fight and thus, the spouse can't be located.<sup>41</sup>

The concept of 'the head of the household' indicates the person who is the breadwinner and the chief decision maker of the family. There are many cases where the wife has been the breadwinner but the decision-maker is the husband. But here, the female-headed household means that the female is both the breadwinner and the decision maker.<sup>42</sup>

Since the 1980s, women-headed households in the northeastern Sri Lanka have increased. While the industrialization, urbanization and modernization leave their impact on the composition of the nuclear and also joint family, at the same time, militarisation led to the increasing number of women-headed households in Sri Lanka.<sup>43</sup> The census of 1981 has recorded 4,05,336 female-headed households in Sri Lanka. These figures excluded those women who were divorced from their husbands. According to the gender indicators of Sri Lanka (published by the Department of Census and Statistics in 1995) the women-headed households have increased to 19% from 16% in 1992. Again, in 1994 it had increased to 21%. Since 1994, there is a phenomenal increase in the number of women-headed households in Sri Lanka.<sup>44</sup> Now, there are more than 30,000 Tamil women, who head their house holds.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> S. Kotttegoda, "Female-headed Households in Situations of Armed Conflicts", *Nivedini*, vol.4, no. 2, December 1996, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> S. Thiruchndran, no. 28, p. xv.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Lancet*, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2003.



Traditionally, the Tamil families are guided by the *kutumba* ideology. According to this ideology the whole household should be managed by woman. The primary responsibility of a woman is to manage the internal affairs of the household. Her role should be within the vocabulary of love, emotions, sacrifice, duty, obligation and good conduct. But the impact of ethnic violence expanded and created many new responsibilities for women. As woman is considered as secondary in the traditional Tamil society, the emergence of these new responsibilities contributed, in a significant way, to the enhancement of the status of women in Sri Lanka. The impact of conflict on the emergence of female-headed households can be categorized into two types: i) to fulfill the personal and emotional needs; ii) public concerns and needs.

At the personal level, the sudden death of husband pushes the wife into a state of helplessness. Without the support of the husband, the woman feels difficulties. Usually women are socialized to accept and regard as a privilege of male protection and his bread-winning role. The male protection provides them social security and also creates the condition of authority, which makes the behaviour of children socialized. But the sudden death of her husband leaves woman alone as the main decision maker and economic support for the family. Women are forced to take the whole burden of the whole family in a sudden stroke. While taking the whole responsibility in the initial period, they don't have any knowledge about the sources of earning.

At the public level, there were many beneficiary programmes initiated by the Sri Lankan government for the affected families. The centres like, Family Welfare Service and Diya Prakash are some of the welfare scheme initiated by the Sri Lankan government to help the victimized women. This programme provides health facilities and assists to recover from the psychological trauma. There are also counseling centres

set up by the Ministries of development, rehabilitation and reconstruction of the north, rural housing development and women's affairs. The objectives of these centres are to receive complaints of women and to combat violence against women. These complaint centres were established in 1999 and now it is improved and about 200 women seek assistance at these centres.<sup>46</sup> The Women's Affairs Ministry has also opened the '*Diri Piyasa*' centre in Vavuniya for assisting the war affected women of north-east region. The Ministry also provides to this centre a Lady Doctor, a female Attorney at-law, a female counseling officer. This centre offers several services to Tamil women including solution for their mental and physical problems, medical and legal advice for sexually harassed women. It also implemented a special programme, known as 'Relief Sisters' (*Sahana Soyuriyo*) for providing basic requirement to the Tamil widows.<sup>47</sup> Even the Ministry has a peace mobile service in Jaffna. This is the first time when the Jaffna people got mobile service by the Sri Lankan Government. Many war affected widow women are also the members of the social security and pension scheme which operates under the social security board of the social welfare service of Sri Lanka

Due to the lack of knowledge regarding these beneficiary programmes, women could not be able to access to these programmes. Even many women did not have any idea about their legal rights. Basically, the illiterate women have no idea about their legal rights. The patriarchal social structure of Tamils made them dependent on their husbands and male members. The sudden loss of this dependency confuses them as how to manage the household. Some women are conscious about their legal rights, but the Sri Lankan government officials and the laws and regulations became huddles in their way, and

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<sup>46</sup> *The Island*, 12 December, 2001.

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Women Affairs, 2000.

insensitive to their needs. In many cases, the lack of social acceptance compels many female-headed households to move to other geographical locations or refugee camps.

In a case study of Trincomalee, altogether 100 women were interviewed. Among them many were widowed as a result of the killings of their husbands by the state armed forces, the LTTE, cross-fires, and disappearances.<sup>48</sup> Even the neighbours and close relatives didn't support them. But women of Trincomalee don't have any anger and frustration regarding the lack of interest of their relatives; and they accept such situation as a social reality. They didn't have any physical and social protection. In the work places they have faced many physical advances from strange persons. By overcoming these hurdles they have to survive themselves and for their children.

Similarly in Amparai, many women became economically deprived due to the violent conflict. The intensity of violence and the continuation of conflict made their life insecure. In such circumstances, many women are forced into new life experiences; and they learn new attitudes, abilities and skills for their survival in the society. In Amparai, both Muslim and the Tamil women were subjected to sexual violence, but the Tamil women are more in number.<sup>49</sup> These incidents leave a sense of insecurity among the Tamil women because they have to manage themselves within the cultural norms of their society. They have faced many difficulties while maintaining these cultural norms with their new role as female-headed households.

In the refugee camps of Trincomalee and Amparai, many Tamil displaced women are very poor, due to the death of their breadwinners. These women are both

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<sup>48</sup>T. Suveendran, "A Reconstruction of the Trauma and the Post-war Syndrom of Women in Trincomalee", *Nivedini*, vol. 7, no. 2, December 1999, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup>Getsy Shanmugam, "Trauma in Female Headed Households in Amparai", *Nivedini*, vol. 7, no. 2, December 1999, p. 9.

economically and socially vulnerable and suffering as victims of both gender and class inequality. While men tried to regain power and authority or continuing their traditional positions, the women are tried to increase their social space in refugee camps. Though many Tamil women, who had previously depended financially on their husbands, in refugees camps, they are compelled to work for money outside the camps. Traditionally, the place of women in Tamil families is confined to home and doing domestic work only. But the conflict situation in Sri Lanka has expanded and changed the restricted and traditional prescriptions of the patriarchal Tamil society. This change also expanded the responsibility of many women. With the continuity of domestic work, many women became economically active and earn money to provide material support for their families. However, the changing notion of gender prescription makes many Tamil women to act as the co-providers of their families and by doing this, they also gain some sort of economic autonomy and control over their own lives. This has strengthened their positions vis-à-vis their husbands and increased their self-confidence. On the other hand, men lost the responsibilities to manage property and status they used to have and were confronted with a complete rupture with the past.

Thus, the armed conflict in Sri Lanka affects the entire social structure of the Tamil society and the Tamil women are the worst sufferers of this conflict. The conflict brings different experiences to them and enforces them to bear the responsibilities in both the private and public sphere. The variety of experiences which already have been discussed not only widened the responsibility of Tamil women but also makes them psychologically strong to hold these responsibilities. There is a say that, 'the situation teaches you every thing', which also happens in case of Tamil women in Sri Lanka. Though the impact of conflict put them in a state of helplessness, it teaches them how to survive or manage in such situation. In spite of it, they became the sole bread winner and decision makers of their families. This indicates towards the important role they play in their family life, which positioned their status equal to men.

# *CHAPTER-IV*

# WOMEN AS WARRIORS AND PEACE-MAKERS IN SRI LANKA

Women are the worst sufferers in every violent conflict or war. In the story of war, violent conflict, generally, women are confined to the process of victimization. They are known as the victims not as an agent in the conflict. Even the main stream historiography speaks that, women are the affected segment of the society during the war and also ignored or underestimated the women's agency in conflicts. This patriarchal notion prevails every where. However, the story of victimization ignores the experiences of women in violent conflict and also their agency in managing survival and reconstruction and their notions of security and peace. Beyond their passivity and powerlessness of victim hood, the conflict opens up for them a new space in the public sphere which is predominantly controlled by man. The long process of victimization compelled them to resist and to find a solution of this process and then, a new face creates which is beyond victim-hood. This new face of women is also visible in case of Sri Lanka's longstanding ethnic violence.

Structurally, women are excluded from decision-making on security issues and from politics also. Culturally, militaries need men and women to behave like binaries, i.e., women always need men to protect them and men go to war to protect them.<sup>1</sup> This indicates that it is the man who has the capability to protect a woman from all types of violence. This notion is failed in case of Sri Lanka. According to a women activist, "During the operation of IPKF (Indian peace keeping forces), Many women were quite

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<sup>1</sup> Rita Manchanda, "Where are the Women in South Asian Conflicts?", ed. , *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency*, (New Delhi: 2001), p. 17.

isolated with few neighbors being around. It provided ample opportunity for the soldiers to rape".<sup>2</sup> Even the male member who used to protect the female members of his family is murdered by the forces of the Indian and Sri Lankan State. This situation enforces many women of Sri Lanka to think that, it is necessary to confront these activities and to find a proper solution of the violence. The long standing violence creates a new awareness or experiences among the Sri Lankan women. So far as the confrontation of the conflict is concerned, many women organize themselves and built the organization according to their own ideologies or perspectives. Regarding their perspectives, Vidyamali Samarasinghe classifies them into two mutually supportive categories - situational or strategic. In the situational role, women are more active in private functions like life-sustainer, life-saver, life-giver, and even the victims are included in this category. While in the strategic category, the role of women is determined by their relation to war, soldiers martyred mothers and peace makers.<sup>3</sup> However, the new faces of women in Sri Lanka are confined into the strategic category. This strategic role emphasizes the concept of women's agency in conflicts. This new face of women in Sri Lanka makes them more confident about their status and abilities. The new picture of women can be broadly classified into two categories. Women as warriors and women as peace makers.

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<sup>2</sup> Hoole, et. al, *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka* (1990) cited in Sasanka Perera, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka: Dynamics, Consequences, and Issues of Democratisation* (Colombo: 1998), p.32.

<sup>3</sup> Vidyamali Samarasinghe, "Ethnic Conflict and Gender in Sri Lanka", *Ethnic Studies Report* (July 1996) cited in A Chenoy, *Militarism and Women in South Asia* (New Delhi: 2002), p. 108.

# I

## **Women as Warriors**

Generally, this concept of warrior is associated with man. This notion marginalised or ignored the women's experiences and their perspectives of conflict and women's agency in conflict transformation. Challenging this notion, the concept of women's agency in conflicts arises and focuses not only on the gendered aspect of social and political life but also provides an insight into the other forms of structural inequalities at the heart of conflict. The concept of 'women as warrior' is based on the idea that to avoid all type of physical violence or for physical security and for gender equality in the context of conflict, there is an imperatives to become an agent of the conflict. The woman who prefers to counter violent conflict through violence thinks that it is necessary to be a warrior rather a victim in the conflict and only by accepting the path of violence, she can get her due. However, women have varying degrees of experiences during the period of conflict. Except female-headed house holds, war munitions workers, producers of soldiers, they have negotiated conflict situation by becoming combatants and agents in conflict. The horror experiences of conflicts compelled them to take arms for the protection of their own and their nation.

In Sri Lanka, the atrocities of long standing ethnic violence developed such feeling among many of the Tamil women that they should take arms to counter this violence by the Indian and Sri Lankan state forces. Such psychological development of the Tamil Women got a measure boost from the Tamil militant organization, known as LTTE (Liberation Tiger of Tamil Elam). Many Tamil women were deployed as the warriors and known as the women of violence as represented by the armed virgin of the



LTTE. At the political level, the concept of 'women as warrior' also got a major boost from the conventional leftist format, which aimed at first eliminating the barriers for women to participate in the national liberation struggle. It was also argued that women would be equal in a society that would eventually emerge out of the conflict. Though, the issue of oppression of women did not get recognition within the movement of liberation, the acceptance of the concept of women's liberation provided an important space for issues relating to gender, power and oppression.<sup>4</sup> To Sitralega Maunagura, "the category of 'women warrior' has been marked to distinctive phases of its mobilisation by the militant groups. In the first phase, spearheaded by the LTTE, which owed more to its militarism than to do an ideological allegiance with feminism. And the second phase, was facilitated by the women's wings of the most progressive Tamil militant groups (which have since disbanded or been decimated by the LTTE), such as the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), enabled a formulation of the 'new women' who contested 'patriarchal aspect of Tamil cultural ideology' and insisted on linking national liberation with women's liberation."<sup>5</sup> However, in the later phase, this concept has been addressed by the De Alwis, M. de Silva, Coomaraswamy and de Mel as the 'masculinised virgin warrior'.<sup>6</sup>

### **Women in the LTTE**

The rapid growth of Tamil militant organization with the objective to establish a separate Tamil state also influenced many women of Tamil society. With the growth of the size of the militant organization more fighters were needed. When more fighters were

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<sup>4</sup> S. Mawnguru, *Gendering Tamili Nationalism: The Constructyion of 'Woman' in projects of Protest and Control in Pradeep Jagannathan and Qadri Ismail, eds, Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo: 1995), p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.209.

<sup>6</sup> K. Jayawardena, and M. de Alwis, "The Contingent of the Womens Movement", in S.Jayaweera (ed.) *Women in Post Independent Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: 2002), p. 265.

needed to safeguard the “traditional home land” from the occupation of the Sri Lankan forces, women could not just remain at home after sending sons, brothers and husbands to war. These women themselves had to involve as fighters. Many appeals were made to women to join this struggle by the LTTE. To the LTTE, “women are half of our population and hence, their participation in the national liberation is very necessary. In this national movement, the level of participation of women in the Eelam struggle including armed combatants will prove the revolutionary potentialities of Tamil women.”<sup>7</sup>

In the initial years, they were only involved in propaganda work, medical care and fund raising. In later years, they were trained to hold all modern weapons accessible to the militant organization and were active in combat situation. The LTTE was in the forefront of providing military training to women. However, the role of women as the biological reproducers was not abandoned after the recruitment in LTTE. Woman was not only considered to be a reproducer of male heroes, but also as fighter herself, which was culminated into a categorical shift in the construction of women from ‘brave mother’s’. This construct of Tamil women as one of the supernatural beings, perform two different but interconnected duties of the ethnic group.<sup>8</sup> Above all, the LTTE asked Tamil women not to be fooled by the state’s family planning policy on the grounds that, this policy was a conspiracy to reduce the demographic size of the Tamil population. The Tamil nationalism and the construction of the romantic image of the Tamil women with guns for defending the nation become a powerful magnet for drawing their attention to the Tamil liberation movement. Rajni Thiranagama who was killed by the LTTE for her outspokenness, explains women’s cadre of the LTTE in her analysis that, “One could see the nationalist fervour and the romantic vision of women in arms, while defending their

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, P. 265.

<sup>8</sup> P. Jagannathan and Qadri Ismail, eds., no. 5, p.210.

nation. This becomes a great inspiration for other women. Our social setup, its restriction on creative expression for women and the evils of the dowry system are some of the social factors, which led to the recruitment of women in LTTE. Moreover, the political climate created by the struggle in the last decade, and the increasing loss of the men in the form of fighting, refugees and immigrants, are some of the contributing factor necessitating women recruitment.<sup>9</sup>

While giving her interview, Kokila, a Tamil woman principal of displaced school in Jaffana, have spoken for the empowerment of women participating on the militant struggle “instead of dying and being, raped by an aggressor army, it is a relief to face the army with (your own) weapon .”<sup>10</sup>

There are some factors which were responsible for compelling many Tamil women to join the LTTE. This factor creates the strength and determination among them to take arms. There are two factors responsible for it:- Historical & social-cultural .

### **Historical Factors**

The political history of Sri Lanka led to the active participation of the Tamil women in the armed struggle against the Sri Lankan government. These resistance movements have been shaped by specific historical process of state oppression. After the independence from British colonialism, the successive Sri Lankan government adopted the discriminatory policies which were aimed to undermine the national identity of Tamils. This Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan government enacted repressive legislation against the Tamils and this poses a serious danger or challenge to the national existence

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<sup>9</sup> Hoole. et al., “The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka (1990)”, cited in A. Chenoy, *Militarism and women in South Asia* (New Delhi: 2002), P.110.

<sup>10</sup> O. Bennet, et .al., “Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect; Women speak out About Conflict (1995)” cited in Chenoy, no. 9, p. 111.

of the Tamil people. The Tamil community resisted the state oppression through non-violent political struggle. With adaptation of the Gandhian principle of Ahimsa, the Tamil leaders were Mobilised the entire Tamil nation and organized mass Tamil protests. Women were crucial actors in these campaigns. Basically, in the late fifties and early sixties, the Tamil women were participated in demonstration, picketing and protest. During the early years of agitation for the rights of Tamil language was carried out by the Federal party (The major Tamil political party of the 1960s). In this agitation, women were participating in Satyagrahas and protest marches. In The political meetings, they were used as speakers and crowd pullers. There was a transitional period of politics from non-violence to armed struggle, from parliamentary politics to guerilla warfare, from demands for federation to demands for succession and separate Tamil state. In the nationwide civil disobedience campaign, which began in February 1967 and continued over a period of three months, thousands of women joined in the national protest? Though Tamils were using the non violent or the means of Satyagraha for demonstration, the Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan government responded to the non violence of *Satyagrahis* with violence. Armed state forces were deployed to attack the peace full protestors. Even the women *Satyagrahis* were subjected to beatings with batons and rifle butts by the racist armed forces of the state. The political consciousness of Tamil women on the national conflict led to their active participation in non violent campaign against the Sri Lankan government. However, history shows that, this political consciousness gave strength to them to make an enormous leap in the mode and depth of their participation in the nation's struggle for self-determination and in their struggle for independence, they have moved from non-violent politics into the armed struggle against the Sri Lankan government.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Adele Ann, *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers* (London: 1993); P. 13.

## **Socio-Cultural Factors**

Apart from the historical factors, the socio-cultural factors also responsible for creating women carders in the LTTE .During the anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka, many Tamil women are the victims of this violence. They were direct victims of rape and atrocities by both the Indian peace keeping forces and Sri Lankan state forces. The long standing violence creates a revolutionary attitude among them against these forces and this attitude compel them join in the LTTE. By joining the LTTE, they can fight against both the Sri Lankan and Indian armies. According to the LTTE “the trauma created by the barbarous practices of Indian troops against Tamil women gave a new impetus to the development of women’s political consciousness and with it, the adherence of more and more Tamil women to the guerrilla movement and its auxiliary organizations.”<sup>12</sup>

Basically, Tamil society is a conservative society. In this society, where patriarchy prevails, the status of the women is considered as secondary. As a secondary segment of the society, they have to obey the rules and regulations of their rigid caste structure and their roles are confined to the private sphere. Even in the private sphere they don’t have any role in the major decisions of their families. Most of the major decisions of the families are taken by the male members. In such situation, LTTE provides them a big opportunity to break the shackles of the rigid conservatism. To the LTTE, Mass participation (including the participation of women) is necessary for the liberation struggle and women constitute the most remarkable feature of their struggle. As the LTTE’s programme for women’s liberation puts it:

Tamil women are subjected to dual modes of oppression, national and social. Tamil women bore the burnt of national oppression and have suffered

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<sup>12</sup> LTTE, 1992a, cited in Sumatra Bose, *State, Nations, Sovereignty*, (New Delhi: 1994), p. 110.

immensely at the hands of the state terrorist. And at the same time, Tamil women are also victims of oppression emanating from their own social structure. The notorious dowry system and other forms of male chauvinist domination that degrade women and deprive them of human dignity are typical features of our repressive social system. The LTTE assures that the dowry system will be legally proscribed, and the equality of status and opportunity for women will be constitutionally guaranteed. Education will be made compulsory for all girls, and the practice of the sexual division of labour will be abolished. Our organization will encourage the formation of a radical women's movement to organize women on a national level and agitate for improvement in these conditions."<sup>13</sup>

However, the agenda and propaganda of the LTTE create a ray of hope among the oppressed women of the Tamil society. This encouraged them to participate in the LTTE. A young tiger woman guerrilla in the eastern district of Batticaloa, however, spoke of her motives of joining the movement in more philosophical terms: "In our society, women are the numerical majority. We have also historically 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."<sup>14</sup>

Above all, the other factors like, the violent conflict compels many women to join the LTTE. During the period of ethnic violence the Tamil women were affected by the disappearance or death of the male members of their families. This sorrowful event left them alone in the world. In this process of social distress and trauma, they prefer to join the LTTE. In this period of violence, many women were raped. After being raped they had no option to lead a dignified life in the conservative Tamil society. At that time, the LTTE propagated and emphasises on the empowerment of women. The LTTE assured them to provide a good life after the independence of the Tamil Eelam. Thus, many

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Interview of a Tamil Woman in a BBC TV Films on the strife in the eastern province of Sri Lanka, May 1991, cited in Sumantra Bose, no. 12, p. 110.

Tamil women participated in the independent struggle in the Tamil Eelam with the hope; they will lead a good life in future. And for this, a separate and independent Tamil Eelam is necessary.

In the initial years of its emergence, women were not recruited in the LTTE. The recruitment of women on a large scale is a relatively recent feature of the tiger movement. Earlier, the movement's leadership has been characterized by the ideology of patriarchy and this attitude prevented the recruitment of women cadres in the LTTE. Though, the armed resistance campaign of the Liberation Tigers has a history extending to more than 19 years, the women's wing originated around 8 years ago. The conservative nature of the Tamil social formation, its oppressive structure in relation to women, the pernicious dowry system, and the pervasive gender discrimination, which was legitimized by so called cultural tradition, contributed to the delayed the recruitment of Tamil women in the national struggle Tamil movement.<sup>15</sup>

After the 1980s, this situation has changed. At that time, many young Tamil women too experienced the horror of racial riots. The forces of social constraints which had obstructed their deeper participation earlier had left them exposed and defenseless in the face of violence. The oppression of the Tamil society propelled or enforces them to get rid of their established social life into a new revolutionary world. Many young women have broken the shackles of social constraints and joined the armed struggles which increase pressure on the LTTE leadership to set up its policy of inducting women into the armed struggle. While on the other hand, young women demanded their right to self-defense and right to exercise their patriotic sentiments.<sup>16</sup> Apart from it, by

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> *Adele Ann*, no. 13, pp. 15-16.

participating in LTTE, they can able to break the social taboos, the oppression, rigidities and restrictions of the Tamil society, which is traditionally imposed upon them.<sup>17</sup>

However, the credit goes to the leader of the liberation tigers Velupillai Prabhakaran for creating the facilities and opportunities for women to complete a comprehensive military training programme. According to Adele Ann, he was confident that women had the potential for military training and combat. Unlike many of his fellow cadres caught up in male chauvinist conceptions of women and their place in society. Prabhakaran was determined that women should have equal opportunity for participation in all aspects of freedom struggle. To quote him: “today young women have taken up arms to liberate our land. They have made supreme sacrifices to this cause, to the amazement of the world. I am proud to say that the birth, the growth and expansion of the women’s military wing is a remarkable achievement of our liberation movement, an achievement which marked a historical turning point in our struggle”.<sup>18</sup>

The history of Tamil women in the arms struggle for national liberation waged by the liberation tiger of Tamil Eelam which constitutes both an extension of women’s participation in the national struggle and the history of its own. Subsequently, the women fighters of the liberation tiger have earned an international reputation as the most fierce, highly disciplined and courageous women combatants, the world has ever produced. Constituted as a fully fledged military and structured within the overall organization of the LTTE, these young women fighters have carried out extraordinary military feats in their struggle for the freedom of there homeland.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> S. Bose, no. 12, p.111.

<sup>18</sup> V. Prabhakaran cited in Adele Ann, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Adele Ann, 1993, p. 9.



The armed women in the LTTE known as the Cutantira-P-Paravaikal which means “Birds of Independence” or “Birds of Freedom”. There was a journal in the same name and there were a group of women who issued it. These women were the first to receive military training in India in 1985, and therefore it is not quite correct to use this group name as a general designation for all female fighters of LTTE. However, in common usage it has become such a general designation.<sup>20</sup> There are two principal motives behind those Tamil women who are joining the LTTE. Firstly, many of the Tamil women fighters joined in the armed struggle of LTTE with the hope that it will bring those advantages in future, in a society at peace. This means there will be opportunity, freedom and equality for them. The aftermath of conflict should abolish all the evil practices of the caste rigidities, dowry system and their secondary status in the Tamil society. Secondly, due to the oppression of the Sri Lankan forces, the security of the Tamil women was always in threat. To get out these threats, many Tamil women were influenced by the armed struggle of the LTTE for the independence of the Tamil Eelam. This nationalist fervor compelled them to join the LTTE and they also got training to be the armed women. As armed women, they can protect themselves from all the oppression by the state forces. As a warrior with the mission of the independence of the Tamil Eelam, they signaled in their designation that they are “Birds of Independence”. Thus, the two objectives are connected, which indicates that, there will be no equality for women without an independent state and the independent state will provide a better and dignified life to them.<sup>21</sup> Sunthari, a woman fighter of Tamil Eelam was the assistant general secretary of LTTE’s women’s wing, informed a some what

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<sup>20</sup> P. Schalak, “Women Fighters of the Liberation Tigers in Tamil Eelam”, *South Asia Research*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1994, p. 163.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.163.

bemused Indian journalist: 'We have a dual objective: to fight for the national liberation and the social emancipation of women.'<sup>22</sup>

In LTTE, there is a proper dress code and behaviour for women. Women should dress themselves in a simple manner and they should not attract men by their way of dressing. While the LTTE woman's internal make-up is "expected to be 'pure', 'chaste' and 'virginal', her outer body is marked as masculine; her hair is cut short and she wears a beret, combat fatigues, boots and cyanide capsule around her neck (just like her male counterpart), but no makeup of jewelers".<sup>23</sup> The make-up of the LTTE women expressed in the poetry of Vanati, a female martyr of the LTTE. In this poetry, she described the desire of woman warrior to transform her biologically as well as culturally marked body (as feminine) to heroic (masculinity), while simultaneously proclaiming her virginity and chastity. She also refuses to wear the red *Kumkum* and *Thali* and eager to embraces weapons, not men.<sup>24</sup> The armed women of the LTTE have evidently carried out frontline tasks and even they acted as the suicide bombers. They have been assigned the most difficult tasks and have been used as the advanced guard to protect the more experience male fighters. Dhanu, who has been raped by the soldiers of IPKF, was the "human bomb" in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.<sup>25</sup> They are proved to be the effective fighter than men. Malini, chief of the Jaffna district women's wing spoke, "women have proved better fighter than the men. Ask Indian Army".<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> S. Bose, no. 12, p. 112.

<sup>23</sup> R Coomaraswamy, 1996, cited in K. Jayawardena & M. de Alwiss, "The contingent politics of the Women's movement", in S. Jayaweera, (ed.), *Women in Post-Independence Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: 2002) p. 265.

<sup>24</sup> P. Schalk, 1992, cited in S. Jayaweera, (ed.), no.23, p. 266.

<sup>25</sup> Chenoy, no. 11, p. 111.

<sup>26</sup> Padmanabhan, 1990, cited in S. Bose, no. 12, p. 112

The LTTE has a special section for women called 'Vitulalaip Pulikal Makalir Munnani,' women's front of the liberation Tiger,' which was founded in 1983. There are certain objectives of the women's front of the LTTE, which was formulated in 1991. These are:

- i. To secure the right to self-determination for the people of Tamil Eelam and establish an independent democratic state of Tamil Eelam.
- ii. To abolish oppressive caste this orientation and division, and semi federal custom such as the dowry system.
- iii. To eliminate all discrimination to secure social, political and economic equality, that is equal pay, equal opportunities in employment and education.
- iv. To ensure that Tamil women control their own lives.
- v. To secure legal protection for women against sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence.<sup>27</sup>

However, the basic idea behind this objective is to change the traditional roles and position of Tamil Women. To Prabhakaran, the struggle for independence is the base or background for the struggle for women's rights. The agenda or propaganda of liberation and emancipation enforces many young women to join in the armed struggle of LTTE. Now there are more than three thousand women fighters in LTTE. Apart from their number, the death of female tigers made their proportion small in LTTE. The number of Tamil female fighters who die for the LTTE between 1982 and 1991 was 296, or 6.8 percent of the totals of 4353 fighters killed.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> P. Schalk, no. 20, P. 165.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 166.

Thus, the women cadre of the LTTE considered as a separate force of the military structure of the LTTE. It has its progressive aspects and has a positive development for the women of the Tamil Eelam. The evolution of the women fighters into a self-reliant structure have broken the traditional notion of female dependency and gives the young women tremendous opportunities. By joining the LTTE, the female cadre learns administration, decision-making and leadership. Consequently, the young cadres have developed tremendous self confidence and acted as the determined cadre prepared for supreme sacrifice to achieve their political objective – a liberated home land.<sup>29</sup>

However, regarding these recruitment and the thinking women combatants, many question raised by many feminist in Sri Lanka. How far LTTE fulfills the dreams of the women combatants or is LTTE, the actual representative of the issues like women empowerment and gender equality or how can the women combatants of LTTE hopes for equality in the independent state of Tamil Eelam, when female images are reproduced in the form of sacrifices. These questions bring doubts on LTTE regarding the real intention lies behind the recruitment of the women.

In the initial year of the emergence of the LTTE as a militarist force or a organized guerilla outfit, is hierarchal in its structure. Earlier, LTTE was dominated by the men. It was only after the June 1997, many Tamil women were recruited in the LTTE in a large scale. Peter Schalk describes that women are recruited into the fighting cadres of the LTTE in the same martial tradition as men and on the basis of martyrdom and sacrifice for the nation. Women are recognized as the important element of the LTTE and also playing an active role. But this role is supplemented and subordinated to that of

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<sup>29</sup> Adele Ann, no. 13, p. 10.

men. Though, they are used as the suicide bombers, still they are not recognized as the frontline fighters of the LTTE. They have been only used by the LTTE.

The opinion of the Tamil women is divided regarding the recruitment of women in the LTTE. While one section of the women believes and favours this recruitment, the other denounces it by claiming that it will jeopardize their interests. By joining LTTE, many women believe that they have achieved personal liberation. Many combatants say that they felt like that of men. In this context, Kokila, a woman cadre of the LTTE speaks that, “before the struggle started, our society was very conservative and rigid. Women had no place among men .....but in the last ten years there has been a tremendous change. We see women in the battle field fighting equally with men ....”.<sup>30</sup> Adele Ann in her book *women fighters of liberation tigers* describes that there is no difference between the women and men militants in combat. Due to the women recruitment in the LTTE military programme brings a major social change in the Tamil society. It is the LTTE, who can give the women combatant a public status which is contrary to their ordinary or traditional situations. Thus, the LTTE believes that militancy empowers women, which is also accepted and supported by many Tamil women, who were the victims of violence in some form or other.

On the other hand, there is another section of women who believes that these types of recruitment will not necessarily bring liberations to the Tamil women. The entry of women into the LTTE raised the cloud of anxiety and skepticism. The older women who are hardliners in their attitude, critical about the young women in LTTE. Rajni Thiranagama records an older woman’s articulation of patriarchal norms and attitudes: “the Tigers were all right, till women joined them. They have spoiled the movement and

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<sup>30</sup>A. Chenoy, *Militarism and Women in South Asia* (New Delhi: 2002), p.112.

the boy's dedication".<sup>31</sup> Apart from it, after the liberation, women have to return to their tradition roles. Again they have to maintain, manage and follow the aforesaid norms of the Tamil society. Thus, it becomes imperative for women not to put thrust too much on the gun. By arming themselves and crying for nationalist slogans, they are only preserving and protecting the patriarchal structure of the Tamil society, which is debar and peripheralise them and also hamper their interests.

However, while Adele Ann and Peter Schalk support the women recruitment in the LTTE, as the liberation of the Tamil women, Radhika Coomaraswamy has described them as 'cogs in the wheel' of the male leadership of the LTTE.<sup>32</sup> In reality, the position of women fighters of the LTTE probably lies somewhere in between. Many feminists deny the displayed reason of revolutionary spirit compel women to join LTTE. To them, when more male cadres were killed during the periods of fighting, the LTTE emphasizes on the recruitment of the women or it can be said that to improve the numerical strength of the LTTE cadres. Women's willingness to participate in terrorist activities is used both on an internal and an external level. On an internal level, the leaders or men of the LTTE use women's eagerness to kill other and themselves. On an external level, women become exploited at the world at large. The media too becomes a player, portraying female guerillas as the symbols of the utter despair of the freedom fighters rather than mere cold blooded murder of civilians. Analyst like Neloufer de Mel has also argued against the participation of women in the militant armed arm struggle. She argues that, the women combatant in the militant arm struggle do not enjoy full agency on their recruitments, positions and also their actions are confined within the parameters

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<sup>31</sup>M.de.Silva, "Women in LTTE: Liberation or Subjection", *Parvada*, November, 1994.

<sup>32</sup> D. R. Senanayke, "Ambivalent Empowerment: The Tragedy of Tamil Women", in R. Manchanda (ed.), *Women, War and Peace in South Asia* (New Delhi : 2001),p.110.

of the patriarchal domain. The concept of motherhood has a key construct within the female sexuality continues in the process of nation building. The primary role of the women as the reproducers is also continuing. There is no change regarding the notion of Sri Lankan women as sexually chaste and virgin. The concept of warrior mother has not replaced the deep seated images of the female identity in the LTTE struggle. But still hope lies there. The new thing, which is to be noticed that they are breaking the traditional shackles of the society. By breaking the social taboos, they claim that they are not happy with the system. Though question arises on their recruitment and their empowerment, they are now trying to fight against the oppression committed against them. At least they are now realizing 'silence' or 'not to do anything' is not a matter of solution. There is the need to involve in this process.

## II

### Women as Peace Makers

Apart from women as warriors or women of violence, there are another section of women who believes in the path of non violence. To them, to confront violence, peace is the best option. According to Rita Manchanda, the cultural argument rests on the psycho-social construction of femininities and masculinities in patriarchal societies which connects women to peace. The cultural logic focuses on women's socialization as primary child rearers and nurturers, which privileges value such as ethics of care and cooperation and not competition and conflict.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> R. Manchandan, 2001, p. 14.

Generally, peace is considered as an absence of conflict. Peace for the women in Sri Lanka is much more than an absence of conflict or an absence of fear of direct physical violence which Brock – Unte called a ‘negative peace’<sup>34</sup>. The ‘positive peace’ indicates towards the absence of structural inequalities where, there should equal life chances and a healthy economic opportunity. In this context, many Sri Lankan women peace activists emphasises on the real human security that lies in protection against harms of all kinds. There should be a healthy environment which is capable of sustaining all life and respect for human dignity of all.

In Sri Lanka women had have long and active history of participation in civil life. The first wave of feminism was seen in Sri Lanka, during the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This wave was closely related to the movement against British rule. Feminist scholars Kumari Jayavardhane writes that: “The women’s movement in Sri Lanka in its origins and development was essentially a result of the movement for national independence and therefore, reflected most of its characteristic. Independence was achieved through a process of peace full negotiation and gradual advancement. In association with this movement, women were able to win rights to education, suffrage and judicial equality.”<sup>35</sup>

There are many organizations who are working for the women development in Sri Lanka .In the initial years, the work of many organizations has been confined to the issue of women in development. After the ethnic violence, the arena of focus has been shifted to the issues like violence against women and their rights, legal reforms, awareness buildings and peace efforts. Even many groups are also addressing the issue of cultural sub ordination. In this context, Kumari Jayavardhane notes that: “At the

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> K. Jayawardena, “Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World”, (1985), cited in C. Keating, “The Womens’ Movement in Sri Lanka: An Overview”,



ideological level (Sri Lanka) is very patriarchal. The general attitude are feudal and patriarchal- feudal in that there is caste, there is dowry, you have to do that your parent say, at how you can't go out after six. Then there are a lot of rule for women which come from the old tests such as don't laugh and smile, don't walk too fast, whom you can talk to and not talk to- all that is laid down. Then the religions are telling you to be clean and chaste and quite and obedient, that your husband is the lord".<sup>36</sup>

However, in such a situation, many women organizations come to the front line with their peace initiatives and demands against such rigidities and violence. Apart from it, in the human rights movements, women were the major activists. Female lawyers, academicians, educationists, journalists, writers and politicians have played an important role in the direction of its work. Among the women activists, many are from the peasantry, students, church workers and trade unionists. An appreciable number of women also hold leadership position within human right organizations and interact closely with male colleagues. Thus, the human rights movements serve a spring board from which women can make significant contribution to the conflict resolution in Sri Lanka.

### **Women for Peace**

In the climate of fear, intimidation and insecurity fostered by increasing ethnic chauvinism on the part of the executive and the state, warmongering was the preferred policy and in this climate, the 'women for peace' was born.<sup>37</sup> Basically the women intellectuals of Sri Lanka, including academician and professional women with the collaboration of WAC (Women Action Committee) gave a call for peace. This is a multi-

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> K. Samuel, "Gender Difference in Conflict Resolution: The case of Sri Lanka", in I. Skjelsbaek & D. Smith, eds., *Gender, Peace and Conflict* (New Delhi: 2002), p. 112.

ethnic group of Sri Lanka, formed in October 1984, with objective to agitate for a peace- full and politically negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict. For the peace initiative they have needed the support from every ethnic groups of Sri Lanka and for this support they published articles in news papers in different languages of various ethnic groups, i.e., the Sinhala, Tamil and English. This group was initially begun with a signature campaign which called for the cessation of hostilities in north eastern Sri Lanka. The original petition was signed by hundred women among whom there were many feminist activists. By 8 March, 1985, the signature has increased to 10,000 women from all walk of life, religion and ethnicities.<sup>38</sup> This organization was the outcome of anti Tamil riot of 1983, when feminist who sought to question the pervasiveness of Sinhala hegemony within the Sri Lankan society. They also criticized Sinhala nationalism and militarism and diverse drastically from those who refuse to perceive these issues as being as central to conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.<sup>39</sup>

Through out the second half of the 1980s, 'women for peace' organized marches, vigil and protests, calling for peace and denouncing the anti Tamil and distributed the news papers, pamphlets, posters, postcards against the undemocratic practice of the state. It also consistently spoke out against the increasing militarization of Sri Lankan society. It organized peace education programmes in school and worked among Tamil women refugees and prisoners. This organization made a committed effort not only to call for an end to the war but also to highlight shared sufferings of both Tamil and Sinhala women. These sufferings also highlighted by the work of many other activist and research organization. They also stressed the shared histories and cultures of the Sinhalese and Tamils, through articles, songs and videos as well as to foster greater understanding

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>39</sup> S. Jayaweera, (ed.), no. 23, p. 212.

between the two groups by offering free Tamil classes and organizing goodwill mission to the north.<sup>40</sup> They have also increased great concern with Tamil women refugees, prisoners and detainees, as well as with Tamil women civilians in the north eastern part of Sri Lanka, who were been raped and abused by the Sri Lankan militaries. Their campaigning also involved in the call for the repeal of the draconian prevention of terrorism act, the freeing of political detainees, the dismantling of security zones in the north, humanitarian assistance for the displaced and protests against illegal detention and disappearance.

### **Women in Need**

'Women in need' were formed in 1987, to deal with the increased incidence of violence against women. In its first six years, it has 4700 'drop-in' clients who visited its office for advice, as well as 2530 postal enquiries.<sup>41</sup> It provides free, confidential, listener-friendly service to the victim or battered women in ethnic violence. This was an outcome of the rapid militarisation of Sri Lankan society, which has triggered a marked increase in violence against women, be it rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence. In the light of such troubled and dangerous circumstances it provides services and help them to combat abusive relationship and situation. The women activists of this organization also protests against the mass rapes of the Tamil women by many Sri Lankan and Indian soldiers. Many feminist activists are also now making for the assistance of support of the internal displaced women in Sri Lanka. They have observed an alarming increase in domestic violence as a result of new insecurities and

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> K. Jayawardena and M. de Alwis, "The Contingent Politics of the Womens' Movement", in S. Jayaweera (ed.), no. 23, p. 215.

marginalization faced by the internally displaced population and in particular, the male members. To cope with this situation, they even gave advice to many women.

### **Women's Action Committee**

During the initial years of 1980s, Women's group in Sri Lanka have been increasingly challenged by the issue of human rights, ethnic politics, the armed conflict and their impact on women. Prominently, the numerous violations of human rights by both the state and militant groups in the north-eastern Sri Lanka led many feminists to concern themselves with the issues and to be actively involved in monitoring and advocacy work. Among the autonomous women's organization in Sri Lanka, which have been primarily concerned with human rights issues, the 'women's action committee' is one of them. This was formed in 1982. Now this organization recognized as the forefront organization of Sri Lanka. One of the central platforms of the WAC was the establishment of a democratic culture that respects women's rights and human rights. The WAC consistently linked the ethnic conflict and the politics of violence to the deterioration of democracy and its consequences for all ethnic communities and marginalized groups.<sup>42</sup> For the solution of the conflict, it was called for political negotiation as opposed to military confrontation. The work of the organization focused on two parts:- Micro-level and National level. At the Micro-level, it focused on awareness-rising and at the national level; the ethnic conflict was discussed at WAC national conventions and was taken up in public campaign- demonstration, marches, public appeals and pickets.<sup>43</sup> It was one of the many coalitions that welcomed the signing

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> no. 34, p. 189.

of Indo-Lanka peace accord in 1987, as a right step towards a political solution of the ethnic conflict.

Throughout the 1980s, the WAC continued its call for a solution to the ethnic conflict, joining with other women's groups. It propagated and developed awareness about the consequences of war among people, demand the right to self-determination of the Tamil people and the need to redress Tamil grievances. It also highlighted in particular, the human rights violations perpetrated against the Tamil people, the institution of non-democratic structures and the abuse of state power. These groups actively involved, assisted sheltered and worked for the displaced Tamil population. It condemned the invoking of the PTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) and emergency regulations by the state to crush the Tamil movement and the illegal detention, extrajudicial assassinations in the north-eastern of Sri Lanka.

### **Mother's and Daughters of Lanka**

The aftermath of Indo-Sri Lankan accord and the advent of the Indian peace keeping force intensify the violence against the women. Apart from it, the JVP and ethnic violence were also intensified. This has resulted into extrajudicial killings on a mass scale and the 'disappearance' of thousands of young men. At that time, the JVP engaged in a campaign of unmitigated violence that included widespread assassinations of members of the security forces, MPs, leading members of the ruling party and also those who belonging to opposition parties. The state responded with counter-violence and repression against anyone suspected of belonging to the JVP or sympathizing with its politics and also uses the same repressive mechanisms against the Tamils.

Initially, the WAC (women's action committee) had welcomed the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord as a first step towards a political solution to the ethnic conflict, but it had to cease its activity due to the violent threats from the JVP and it was disbanded in 1989. Again it reconstituted itself with broader participation, to form a new coalition- the mother's and daughter of Lanka (MDL). This new coalition mobilized many women to speak out against human rights violations by both the state and the militants, and launched a signature campaign in December 1989, to 'stop All Killings Now'.<sup>44</sup> Many women groups represented in the Mother's and Daughters of Lanka (MDL), including the women's for peace. These groups set up trauma counseling centers and programmed to help women and children to cope with psychological problems arising from the 'disappearance' of their relatives, the experience of the displacement and the trauma of rape, domestic violence and other kinds of sexual abuse. Several representatives of this coalition also visited Jaffna in November 1989, to participate in a march protesting the LTTE, due to the killing of a feminist Rajani Thiranyagama.<sup>45</sup> They also protested against the in discriminatory arrest of many Tamil civilian women in the city of Colombo. They have consistently linked women's rights with human rights and propagated it by the popular slogan, 'women's rights are human rights'.

### **Mother's Front**

Mother's front is one of the well known feminist organizations of Sri Lanka. The decade of the 1980s & 1990s, witnessed the political mobilization of motherhood in the context of civil war in Sri Lanka. The mother's Front is divided into two fronts: (i) Northern mother's Front, (ii) Southern mother's front.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>45</sup> Lankadeepa, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1992 cited in M de Alwis, "Motherhood as a space of protest : women's political participation in contemporary Sri Lanka", *Nivedini*, vol. a, no. 1, June 2001 (women's education and research centre, Colombo), p.5.

The mother's front phrased their protest in a vocabulary that was most available to them through their primary positioning within a patriarchal structured society- that of motherhood, which Malathi de Alwis defined as encompassing women's biological reproduction as well as their interpellation as moral guardians, care-givers and nurturers.<sup>46</sup>

The southern mother's front was the first branch of the mother's front which was formed in 15 July 1990, in the southern district of Matra. The formation of southern front was inspired by the mother's front established by Tamil women in the northern part of Sri Lanka in 1989, as well as the mother's of the plaza Delmayo in Argentina. In response to continuing abuses of human rights, especially disappearances in the district, over 1,500 women attended an inaugural meeting.<sup>47</sup> And it was organized under the auspices of the main opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Many of its members were from the members of SLFP, but there were also women with no party affiliation. The majority of these women were from rural and semi-rural areas and of the lower and lower middle classes and living under poverty and hardship.

One Tamil middle-class woman who came to symbolize the front was Dr Manorani Saravanamutta, the mother of assassinated journalist Richard de Zoysa, strove to keep the movement non-partition and aimed at seeking peace. She emphasized, 'make no mistake', our aim is peaceful. Stressing that the mother's front was in no way "anti-government", she said, it would act as a peaceful watchdog on whatever government was

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<sup>46</sup> Malathi de Alwis, "Motherhood as a space of protest: women's political participation in contemporary Sri Lanka", *Nivedini*, vol. a, no. 1, June 2001 (women's education and research centre, Colombo), p.3.

<sup>47</sup> R. Hensman, "A Feminist Movement in Sri Lanka: The Potential and the Necessity", *Parvada*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1998, p.23.

in power'.<sup>48</sup> However, the mothers demand calling for justice and accountability and the demand for the return of their children.

### **Northern Mother's Front**

The origin of the Northern Mothers' Front goes back to the days of 1984, when a large number of Tamil youths were transported to Jaffna and against this activity of Sri Lankan government; many Tamil mothers organized themselves for the demand of release of their sons. They staged a peaceful protest until the government agent successfully communicated with the central government and secured the release of most of the young men. Unlike the southern front, it was controlled by and consisted of women from all classes who mobilized mass rallies and picketing public officials demanding the removal of military occupation, protesting against arrests.<sup>49</sup> And they gave a call for a political settlement to the ethnic conflict, and condemning human rights violations perpetrated against their community.

In 1986, the eastern mother's front took to the streets with rice ponders to prevent a massacre of members of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELU) by the LTTE. In 1987, one of its members, Annie Parathion, fasted to death to protest the presence of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF). She was subsequently immortalized by the LTTE (it was common knowledge that the LTTE had forced her to keep at her fast) who now offer a scholarship in her memory.<sup>50</sup> Thus the increasing hegemony of the LTTE and their suppression of all independent, democratic

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<sup>48</sup> no. 34, p. 192.

<sup>49</sup> no. 23, p. 268.

<sup>50</sup> Hoole, et. al. 1990, cited in M. de Alwis, *Nivedini*, no. 42, p. 23.



organization pushed the Mother's Front in the north-east of Sri Lanka in to the political conformism.

However, the members of the Mother's Front were not motivated by any ideology but the circumstances compelled them to participate in a protest campaign against the state. The political participation of so many women articulating a specific subjectivity that is motherhood had been unheard of until the Mother's Front in the north-east took to the street in 1984 and 1986, and the southern Mother's Front also demonstrated their despair and anger through public, collective and ritualized curses.

Thus, these are some of the women's organization of Sri Lanka, who are working for the women victims of the violence and demanding the end of the ethnic violence, through peace initiatives. As the women of peace makers protesting non-violently against the violence against women and the undemocratic practices of the government and also demanding the rights and securities for the women. The contribution of these organisations can be categorized into two; firstly, the contribution towards the victimized Tamil women in the north-eastern Sri Lanka and secondly, towards the peace process.

As a believer of peace or non-violence, these organisations strongly demonstrated against the long term ethnic violence. They condemned the discriminatory policies of the Sri Lankan government towards the Tamil community of the Sri Lanka. Basically, those who are working for the Tamil victims are against the LTTE. Because, they are opposing the women recruitment in the LTTE. They think that it leads to the militarization of the Sri Lankan society. In 1983, the feminist journal *Voice of Women* reported that: "many years ago Prof. T. L. Green, who worked on education in Sri Lanka remarked that Sri Lankan were a nation of wife beaters. Coming from a foreigner, this remark produce the usual righteous indignation and led to pronouncements that Sri Lankans were the gentle

people with Buddhist and Hindu traditions, which precluded all violence, even to the extent of not harming a fly. As usual, there was difference between the idealized image and the reality, and today the stark reality of increasing violence against the women can not be ignored.”<sup>51</sup>

The uniqueness of the women’s movement in Sri Lanka is that, they raise the issue of human rights violation and the atrocities against the women of the minority Tamil groups irrespective of their ethnicity and religion. After the Vienna Declaration of World Conference on Human Rights, the women’s movement in Sri Lanka got a major back up to demonstrate against the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. This declaration proclaims that, “the human rights of women and of the girl child are inalienable, integral and invisible part of the universal human rights”.<sup>52</sup> After the declaration, the women’s groups have played an important role in the conflict zone of Sri Lanka. The organization like, Women Action Committee and Women for Peace made coalition to campaign against the anti-Tamil policies of Sri Lankan government. While the Northern Mother’s Front, protested against the illegal arrest and disappearances of young Tamils. Now, twelve women’s organisations are working for the rights of Tamil women in Sri Lanka. These organisations not only focusing on the violence against the women but also emphasising on the women’s rights in Sri Lanka. These organisations prepared the Women’s Manifesto 2001. This manifesto indicates towards the political rights of the women of every community in Sri Lanka. This manifesto especially emphasises and calls for the eradication of oppression against the Tamil women. It focuses on the representation of women in Parliament, local bodies and at the decision making level. It

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<sup>51</sup> R. Hensman, no. 44, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> K. Jayawardena, “The Women’s Movement in Sri Lanka, 1985-1995: A Glance Back Over Ten Years”, *Options*, Second Quarter, 1998, p. 4.

also put forward the issues of violence and gender inequality in the Sri Lankan society.<sup>53</sup> The basic motto of this organisation to eradicate the atrocities against the women and to bring reforms in the social structure in Sri Lanka. Simultaneously, they are working to diminish the massive human rights violation and to bring the real or positive peace to the Sri Lankan society.

Secondly, they have a big share in the contribution towards the Sri Lankan peace process. Though, this contribution does not have strong recognition in the governmental level, the women peace activists still continuing their work. The establishment of the Sub Committee on the Gender Issues (SCGI), during the fourth round of talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE in Thailand. This meeting notices certain recognition of the women's movement in Sri Lanka. This committee is composed by the ten members from different communities of Sri Lanka. They are nominated by both the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. The objective of the body is to lobbying the important issues of gender irrespective of the different communities of Sri Lanka. As the activist of the peace process, they are portraying the real devastated picture of the Sri Lankan society. They are emphasizing to bring a proper solution which can restructure the Sri Lankan society in a new form. This new form should bring a new morning to both the men and women and every community of Sri Lanka, where there is no place for any violence or discrimination.

Eighteen years of armed conflict and the culture of ethno-nationalist and political polarization has indicates that women peace activists and secular women's group have made little progress in peace building across the ethnic lines. There are many ethnic organisation of Sri Lanka developed their linkages across the ethnic lines and also made

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<sup>53</sup> *Daily News*, 29 November, 2001.

coalitions for particular issues. The organization like, Mother's Front (southern and northern), which came together to stop the disappearances of family members arising from military violence and state brutality. But these organizations are subsequently co-opted by the members of political parties. The lack of a pro-active vision for strategic action has made secular women's group vulnerable to cooption. The 'Women for Peace', which emerged in 1983, faced many difficulties while working across the ethnic lines. During its period of working, the language of peace had been appropriated by the state, in the name of 'war for peace', which made this organization inactive in 1997. The SCGI has no mandatory power and its role is restricted to provide advice on the peace process. But at the first meeting. It identified six areas, sustaining the peace process resettlement, personal security and safety, infrastructure and service, livelihood and employment political representation and decision-making<sup>54</sup>. It provide support to the sub-committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) for two very important projects:- the Accelerated Resettlement programme for the Jaffna district and the Fast-Track Resettlement programme in Mannar district. It strongly provides support to the Tamil traumatized women.

Women have played a major role in de-escalating the conflict. Their initiatives led to the establishment of Sri Lanka's Commission of Investigation into the involuntary removal or disappearances of persons. Many women's organizations monitor human rights violation and continue to act as the watch-dog to prevent these violence. The continued importance of their works is visible by the recent actions in the form of protests, demonstrations and pickets. In 1997, their demonstration puts the state into investigating the rape and murder of a school girl (Krishanthi Kumaraswamy), in Jaffna

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<sup>54</sup> Sarala Emmanuel, "Where are the women in the Sri Lankan Peace Process?", *Himala*, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2003, p. 53

by the armed personnel. The rapists were brought to the trial and the case was concluded in 1998, with the sentencing of one police man and five soldiers to death. Many peace activists are involved to strengthen civil intervention in the conflict areas by campaigning for humanitarian actions, safe evacuation and resettlement of civilian population. The continuous displacement of civilian population, among whom majority are women needs greater attention. In their need period, many women peace activists tried their best to fill up their needs. Except it, they continued their demand to the international humanitarian laws and norms be obeyed by all parties to the conflict. They are also actively involved in humanitarian assistance at the levels of decision making and implementation. Thus, the confidence building and reconciliation are the key factors in the process of conflict reduction and resolution.

The women, who are working as peace activists have belonged to different communities of Sri Lanka. Though they have love for their own nationalism (like Sinhala or Tamil nationalism), the devastation of the violence creates a sense of realisation among them to work together and to bring the real peace in Sri Lankan society. Because the long standing violence can not make their life comfort. Thus, the UN High Commissioners for Refugees, Ruld Lubbers emphasises that, “women can play a stronger role in conflict resolution. The way the women address the conflict is different because, they find a practical way to resolve conflict.”<sup>55</sup> And this practical way lies in the dialogue of compromise and sharing feelings of each other, which has better done by these women’s organisation in the conflict zone of Sri Lanka.

However, the objectives of both categories of women in Sri Lanka are same, but, their paths for getting their objectives are differed from each other. In these two roles the

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.hrea.org/lists/hr-headlines/markup/230103.php>

women is working as the warrior or fighter against the unjust or oppressive system of the society. The ultimate aim of both is to get the peace. While one opted for the 'agent of conflict', another one prefers to be a non-violent protestor or the 'agent of peace' for setting their objectives. In other words one can say, both are ultimately speaking about the women empowerment in a conflict prone society like Sri Lanka by breaking the traditional notions of patriarchy, that women are the victims of conflict and nothing else. Despite many hurdles, their women did manage to create a space for protest in the context of terror and violence in Sri Lanka. Both the categories represent different mode of feminist thinking. This mode of thinking shows a feminist vision of the Sri Lankan society, where the essence of a woman's emotions and values lies. This vision should not be ignored because it borne within the society and a better society should appreciate or respect such mode of thought.

# *CHAPTER - V*

## CONCLUSION

The study provides a new perspective of women regarding conflict and peace making. Generally, ethnic violence devastates the socio-economic and political structure of every society. So, how come the conflict prone Sri Lankan society escaped from this devastation? The ethnic violence makes the lives of Sri Lankan women worst. This violence has brought a variety of experiences among the Tamil women. The variety of experiences in this protracted violence force them to take up own responsibilities, i.e., physical, economic and social. It also brings a new attitude and mode of thinking or changes in their perspectives towards society. They are now more awakened about their rights. Daring the traditional rigidities of the Sri Lankan society, they have now come up as front-liner combatants and peace activists. They are now falsifying the notion that, they are the secondary segment of the society, who essentially needs the protection of men. Usually, in normal times, they don't claim about their rights and do not fight their oppression. They had to live with certain norms of the society. Even, many women accepted hegemony of the patriarchal society, its oppression and domestic violence as the casual way of living. But the period of conflict begets many more forms of violence on Sri Lankan Tamil women, which has already been discussed. The ethnic conflict has created conditions for dismantling of the aforesaid norms and regulations of the society, which many women were used to. Besides domestic violence, they have faced atrocities of the society. They have become the prey of the security forces and the male members of other communities. The repeated atrocities, psychological trauma and insecurities, both physical and economic, bring new changes or give birth to a 'new woman'. This 'new woman' can demand her rights, fight against the injustice and also claims that, she is equal to man, not the secondary segment of the society.



The various chapters of this study provide an account of impacts of conflicts on women, their different positions, roles and responses in the context of conflict and peace-making. While the first chapter deals with the theoretical interpretation of women in conflict and peace-making; the other three chapters analyse the real nature of conflict in case of Tamil women in Sri Lanka. The first chapter gives a general idea of a feminist approach on the issues of conflict and peace, which is different from the patriarchal approach and has its own distinctiveness. This distinctiveness is undermined by the dominant patriarchal historiography. The second chapter deals with the eruption of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. It basically focuses on how the emergence of ethnic violence culminated into the rise of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. It also focuses on the nature and different forms of violence in Sri Lanka. Due to the direct confrontation between the Tamil guerrillas and the Sri Lankan state forces, the common people have suffered. The confrontation causes a lot of human rights violation. A large number of killings and widespread violence degraded the Sri Lankan society. In such degraded situation, the experiences of the horrified and affected Tamil women are the main themes of the third chapter. While analyzing the impact of the conflict, the third chapter focuses on how the conflict makes them helpless and also brings a new perspective in their life. The fourth chapter discusses their strength and confidence to tackle the conflict. This new perspective brings an optimistic attitude towards life. The analysis of this chapter revolves around the perspective of the 'New Tamil Woman'. This 'new woman' has five characteristics.

Firstly, Tamil women in Sri Lanka are claiming equal status with men. They think that, man is not the only one who can provide security to them. The experiences of the conflict opens up new scope for the Tamil women in Sri Lanka to take the whole responsibility of their own and their families, which was predominantly the men's

concern. The conflict prone Sri Lankan society makes many women as the head, the sole bread winners and decision makers of their families. Generally, women are considered as secondary in status because of their physical and economic dependency upon men. The nationalist LTTE claims about their vision of socialist state of Eelam in which there will be a radical transformation in women's lives and social attitudes of men. The women's wing of the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) believes that, the subordination of women occurs due to their economic dependency. The violence made them alone in the world. The loss of male breadwinners compelled them to learn the new survival strategy to live in the society. Though the conflict brings candid memories and loneliness, the basic instinct in human beings pursued them to live and to create new ways of living. Thus, this basic instinct to live on forces many Tamil women to become self-sufficient in the economic sphere. The period of conflict showed an absence of earlier economic dependency in case of Tamil women in Sri Lanka. The socio-cultural norms, rules and regulations, which were widely practiced by the women of the Tamil community, become less visible / enforced during the period of conflict. Usually, widows in Tamil society considered as inauspicious or polluting. They are not invited to many occasions. A married woman is considered auspicious because her name associated with the name of her husband. It is considered that husband is the only one who give the social name or status to a woman by marrying her. Society looks at a married woman in a respected manner. The death of the husband invites a loss of respect for the woman and she becomes inauspicious. This traditional notion of the Tamil society has been challenged by the 'new Tamail Woman' of the Sri Lanka. By taking the responsibilities of the household and generating income, many Tamil women challenged the traditional seclusion of married Tamil women and the construct of Tamil widow as inauspicious and polluting.

Secondly, it is believed that, women are primarily victims in conflict and marginal as agents. But the warrior Tamil women in Sri Lanka contradicted this traditional notion. They are now proving that, they have the capability to be the agents of conflict and peace-making. The longstanding impact of the ethnic violence creates new spaces for the Tamil women to become active agents as combatants or peace makers. The persisting atrocities of the conflict, creates a new idea to hold weapons for their own protection and to take revenge. When atrocities were committed against them, no body was there to protect and assist them. Countering such horror situation alone makes them depressed and traumatized. The continuity of this situation forces them to think that depression only makes them psychologically weak. Hence, there is a need to develop a strong psychology to cope with such situations. The horror and atrocities which they experienced fuels a rebellious attitude in them against their enemies. And this rebellious attitude encourages them to take up arms. Though in war or conflict, women are restricted to the humanitarian sphere, i.e., nursing and taking care of the injurious soldiers, the LTTE provides them a base to become violent women guerrillas. As fighters of the LTTE, they became agents rather the victims of the conflict. The women who are playing the role of peace activists also act as the warriors against the oppressive system and practices committed against them. If one analyses the role of these women peace activists, the only visible picture is the image of a warrior, who continuously fights against the injustice in a silent manner. Here the warrior doesn't possess arms but she has the strong commitment to fight against such oppressive system in a non-violent manner. The basic nature of a warrior is to fight. By possessing this basic nature, many women peace activists of Sri Lanka are continuing their fight against the long standing ethnic violence. They are adopting the way of demonstration, protests and marches through

non-violent means; they are opposing the violent practices against them. They are demanding the solution to the ethnic violence, which is eroding the Sri Lankan society.

Thirdly, many Tamil women proved that, they have the same nationalist fervor as in men. The patriarchal society associates the concept of nationalism with men. Generally women are excluded from this sphere. Their role is confined within the family. This role makes them ignorant about the nation and its security. Even in the practical life many women think only about the management of the household. They tend to think that the outside affairs are the concerns of man. In the nationalistic sphere, men constitute the maximum portion of security forces and hence, they are considered as the protectors of the country. As a protector of the nation the male soldiers are acknowledged as the harbingers of nationalism. But this does not imply that, the women, maximum of whom, are restricted within the four walls of the house lack nationalistic fervor. The instance of Tamil women in Sri Lanka proves that the concept of 'femininity' is also a part of nationalism. The prevalence of the masculine approach over the feminine approach makes the concept of nationalism incomplete. The essence of nationalism lies in each and every member of the community irrespective of caste, class and sex. This feeling makes a nation successful. The issues of identity and nationalism were noticed by the Tamil women when they faced the brutalities of ethnic violence. The intensive violence against them and their community brings in a realisation on the essence of nationalism. This realisation was suppressed by the norms and regulations of the Tamil patriarchal society. Earlier the Tamil women were ignorant about the nationalistic feelings and sentiments. But when violence was committed against them by the Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan forces, they felt neglected. This violence creates a sense of hatredness among them towards the majority community of Sri Lanka. Though these Tamil women are a part of Sri Lanka, the violence creates a feeling among them for the need of a separate

state. Their nationalistic sentiments encourage them to participate in the LTTE because of its struggle for an independent Tamil Eelam. In an independent state of Tamil Eelam, they feel / hope to get their due rights and this will give them freedom from all types of oppression.

Fourthly, it is believed that women are not involved in conflict because they are inherently peaceful by nature. The warrior Tamil women in Sri Lanka contradicted this notion. The patriarchal values adore the dominance of 'hard' qualities over the 'soft'. The hard qualities are identified with power, aggression and masculinity while the soft qualities are identified with weakness, powerlessness and femininity. Hence, the patriarchal society associates the qualities of power, aggression and masculinity with men and women as weak and peaceful. The concept of 'masculinity' finds its ultimate expression in war, while 'femininity' expresses itself peace. But the Tamil women of Sri Lanka have challenged such traditional notion. Basically, a woman wants peace. This does not mean that she wants to avoid conflict because she will be the only victim. In spite of it, the conflict brings poverty, devastation of the societal order and loss of basic values of life, which affects the whole society. As a human being women have the emotions towards their loved ones. This emotion encourages them to care for the security of their loved ones during the period of conflict. Objectively, no qualities are essentially male or female because all are human beings. The difference exists only at the biological level. A man can be compassionate, loving and kind as a woman can be tough, aggressive and brave. Women want peace but this does not indicate that they tolerate the devastating consequences of violence. They have the same feelings as in men. While the societal order gives them the role of nurturing, caring and sacrificing, the societal disorder makes them aggressive to counter or confront this disorder.

Fifthly, the study of women in conflict and peace in Sri Lanka emphasises on new perspectives of peace. This perspective is based on the feminist ideas. Generally, peace indicates the return to the earlier normal situation. But now a new trend arises regarding the concept of peace. The women peace activists of Sri Lanka are now demanding 'positive peace' which should be different from earlier normal situation. This understanding of peace recognized them all over the world. Due to the patriarchal nature of the Tamil society, women of the community manage themselves according to the 'code and conduct' of the patriarchy. This code and conduct regulates the woman's behaviour and her activity in the Tamil society. The social custom and traditional rigidity suppressed the women's vision of the Tamil community. In every society, there is women oppression. In the conflict period this oppression is exacerbated. By tolerating the domestic violence, they also become victims of external violence. These two types of oppression have already been experienced by the Tamil women in Sri Lanka. If one looks at it from domestic angle, all types of domestic violence like, beating and physical violence is going on in normal times. Besides, the dowry practices make their life hell. The demand for dowry creates many problems in the marriage of a Tamil girl. At the external level, the long standing ethnic violence made their life worst. However, besides these sufferings, the conflict period placed them in non-traditional roles. These non-traditional roles have created a significant level of confidence and independence among them. This confidence and independence was absent in the normal period. By accepting such non-traditional roles, they realize that they are no more the subject of oppression. They have the capability to lead a dignified life with self satisfaction, which was lacking earlier. They are suspecting that whatever experiences they gained on non-traditional roles during the social stress, conflict or war, may not exist when peace is established. To return to peace is indicating the gender status-quo, where there will be no social

recognition for them. They want to legitimize their transformed roles. To them the real peace is the one in which such transformed roles will be acknowledged or respected. Hence, the main objective of the 'new women' in Sri Lanka is to promote 'real peace' by ending all forms violence, traditional rigidities and patriarchal code and conduct. Thus, this feministic vision of peace is reflective of the ideas of the Tamil women in Sri Lanka.

The above findings tell about the women empowerment in the context of conflict and peace making. But the question is: have these multi-faceted roles in response to the conflict contributed, in any way, to real and substantial empowerment of women in the discriminatory power structure of the Sri Lankan society? Or, are these changes in the position and roles of women superficial and quite marginal? These questions raise doubts about the new role of women, which has been already discussed in the section relating to 'Women as Warrior' and 'Women as Peace-maker'.

This empowerment can be explained from three angles; social, economic and political. Conflict teaches them to develop their own social status without the name of their husbands. They are now challenging the traditional practices of the so called Tamil patriarchal society. In the economic sphere, they are developing the skills to earn their living which makes them confident and strong. And, also in political sphere, they are becoming conscious about their rights. They have now enough courage to fight against the injustice. These women are now realizing that, the capability of decision making does not fall in the exclusive domain of men, even they can exercise such power.

Thus, the 'new women', which consisting of the two categories of women (warriors and peace makers), have one mission, i.e. the mission of women empowerment and gender equality. In these roles, women can gain empowerment and gender equality, but the question is about its continuity. The paradox of this movement is that, the violent

deaths and armed conflict open up ambiguous spaces of agency and empowerment of women within their families and communities, which is similar in both categories of women. Though the LTTE recruited Tamil women as direct combatants and suicide bombers, the whole credit goes to the male leaders of the organisation. This indicates that the efforts of the male leaders resulted in creating strong efficient women guerrillas in the organisation. Nevertheless, the recruitment of women also increases the numerical strength of the organisation and the wider support of the whole Tamil society. The politicians support the multi-ethnic women's politics for acquiring vote banks and personal power at the cost of national peace. Moreover, the lacuna in understanding the conflict and its impact has much to do with the conceptualization of peace, which signifies a return to pre conflict normalcy of gender status-quo. Therefore, it is necessary to have a better and positive understanding of these issues and to create some new spaces for women's activism in the social and cultural sphere, which can give them new roles. This can contribute for women's empowerment and help in creating conditions for a peaceful and progressive society.



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