WOMEN AND WITNESSING WAR: POETRY OF TAMIL WOMEN IN SRI LANKA

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

in fulfillment of the requirements

for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

A. APARNA ESWARAN

CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

NEW DELHI-110067

2017

CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES
School of Social Sciences-II
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067
Tel. : 91-11-26704166
E-mail : wonmenstudiesprogramme@gmail.com

Date: 19.07.2017

DECLARATION

I, A. Aparna Eswaran, hereby declare the thesis entitled **"Women and Witnessing War: Poetry of Tamil Women in Sri Lanka (1981-2009)"** submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

A. APARNA ESWARAN

CERTIFICATE

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

DR. LATA SINGH

(Chairperson, CWS)

Chairperson
महिला अध्ययन केन्द्र/Centre for Women's Studies
सामाजिक विज्ञान संस्थान/School of Social Sciences
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय/Jawaharlal Nehru University
नई दिल्ली-110067/New Delhi-110067

PROF. G. ARUNIMA

(Supervisor, CWS)

प्रो. जी. अरुणिमा / Prof. G. Arunima
महिला अध्ययन केंद्र/Centre for Women's Studies
सामाजिक विज्ञान संस्थान/School of Social Sciences-I
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
Jawaharlal Nehru University
नई दिल्ली/New Delhi-110067

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor and guide Prof. G. Arunima who encouraged me constantly and provided me with valuable support and guidance throughout the period of the PhD.

I would also like to thank all the members and staff of the Centre for Women's Studies. I am especially indebted to the course work done under Dr. Papori Bora and the conversations I have had with Dr. Navaneetha Mokkil.

The idea for this PhD was borm from an interview with R. Cheran in New Delhi. It was that conversation that inspired me to start working on this topic. I cannot thank him enough for being the warm person he is, and for readily putting me in touch with many poets from Sri Lanka.

I am deeply indebted to V. Geetha, who was the first person I had met after I registered for my PhD. She deftly charted the path this thesis would eventually take. Every conversation I have had with her has opened vistas for this work. I would also like to thank A. Mangai who has brought her incomparable enthusiasm to the discussions around the work. She encouraged me continuously and helped me clear lot of my doubts.

Sumathy Sivamohan, poet and a wonderful person, deserves a special mention as she was very frank from the start about the thesis and encouraged me to think critically about many issues. I would also like to thank Malathi de Alwis for agreeing to meet me in Sri Lanka and for the stimulating conversation that followed on the work.

I am indebted to my translators: Ramya Ramalingam, PhD student in the Tamil Department, JNU; Eswaran Arumugam, PhD student in Tamil Department, JNU; Sornalatha Narayanan, Biotechnology student from Thoothukudi; and A. Aundeeswaran, from Nagercoil.

I would like to thank ICSSR for the PhD research grant they had provided me with at a crucial juncture during the writing of this PhD. I also would like to thank the staff and members of the French Institute of Pondicherry for letting me access their invaluable resources. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Kannan M. for readily sharing

rare poetry anthologies from his personal collection. I would also like to thank the staff and members of Women's Education and Research Centre, Colombo for their help and support in accessing materials.

This PhD wouldn't have been written if not for the friendship of Agastaya Thapa, Hameeda C.K and Rejeni Philip. They were a source of constant support and incessant encouragement. Special thanks to the comradeship of Arun John, Sandeep E.M and Vidu Vijayan who are also on their PhD journeys. Friends and teachers from Mar Ivanios have always remained excited about this work and were always encouraging; especially the exceptional women of Pancharamukku. I would also like to thank my friends in Sabarmati hostel: Surabhi Singh, Ramya B and Krithi for making the process of writing less tedious.

I would like to thank my fellow colleagues in Centre for Women's Studies: Kavita, Shazia, Prashant, Mamata, Manoj, JP, Geeta, Aswathy and Lakshmi.

This PhD is also indebted to the love and encouragement of my family members. I would like to thank my parents, A. Aundeeswaran and Meena S.R, for their patience and support, both financially and emotionally, without whom this thesis would not be completed. My brother Eashwar was very helpful during dire periods of uncertainty; I thank him for his patience. My aunt Shyamala Velayudhan and her husband C.M Velayudhan provided me with accommodation, food, and unconditional support during my material collection in Chennai and during the translation work in Thoothukudi. My nieces Malu and Nandu were a source of immense joy and delight throughout the period of my PhD. I dedicate this thesis to my grandmothers Karunavathy and Somavathy who form my tenuous links to Sri Lanka. Lastly, and most importantly, I thank Ananth for being a partner in this journey, from start to finish.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

On June 1st, 1981, the famous Jaffna Public Library was set on fire by the police forces of Sri Lanka. The library which housed 97,000 volumes, innumerable manuscripts, and invaluable archival material was reduced to a pile of ash. Rare resources, like the only extant copy of *Yalpana Vaipavam* (A History of Jaffna), microfilms of *Udhaya Tharakai*, the bilingual journal published by missionaries in the early 20th century, miniature editions of Ramayana, scrolls of palm leaf inscriptions that were earlier held in the temples of Jaffna, were burned.[1] Between a sunset and the next sunrise, an important part of the cultural history of the Tamil people was incinerated. As if to confirm Heinrich Heine's words "Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings", a period of much bloodshed and violence followed this brutal act of arson.[2] Terrible atrocities were committed on the civilian population of Sri Lanka, through the next thirty years of civil war, by both parties involved in the war: the Sri Lankan state forces and the LTTE. The scale and nature of this conflict reached its horrific zenith in the period between January 2009 and May 2009, at the end of which the Sri Lankan government declared its victory over LTTE.

The final stages of the war which came to a bloody halt in Mullivaikkal[3], was infamously dubbed by the media as a "war without witness"[4]. The Sri Lankan government had restricted the access of humanitarian agencies and international media, and with impunity bombed the government declared 'No Fire Zones', including hospitals, while denying the use of air strikes.[5] Thousands of civilians were held hostage and used as human shields in

---

[1] Sundar Ganeshan, "A Requim for the Jaffna Library," *Himal South Asian*, January 12, 2014, accessed May 12, 2017, Himal magazine/requim-jaffna library/.

[2] Henrich Heine, *Almansor: A Tragedy* (1823), trans. Graham Ward (Oxford:Blackwell Publishers,2003),142.

[3] Mullivaikkal is a village in Mullaitivu District, Vanni, Northern Province Sri Lanka.

[4] Frances Harrison, "Dubbing Sri Lankan Conflict as 'War Without Witness' is Simply not True", *DBSJeyaraj Blog,* 17 May, 2011, accessed February 28, 2014, http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/6482.

[5] "Human Rights Watch World Report 2010: Sri Lanka , Events of 2009," Human Rights Watch, accessed, May 2017, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2010/country-chapters/sri-lanka

these areas by the LTTE. Huge discrepancies existed in the accounts of people killed in May, 2009, with the government blatantly lying about the number of civilians killed in the war and the human rights agencies like the International Committee of Red Cross providing much higher estimates of human casualties.[6] But the claim of "war without witness" proved false; the Jaffna based University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) published a report in December, 2009 titled 'Let them Speak: The Truth About Sri Lanka's Victims of War'[7] which provided details of the last phase of the war using eye-witness accounts from people who were trapped in the war-zone and later Channel 4 released its investigative documentary titled 'Sri Lanka's Killing Fields' which detailed the atrocities committed in the final stages of the war, with ample video and testimonial evidence.[8]

The period which is bookended by these two brutal events of erasure, the years between 1981 and 2009, is the historical period that is held to scrutiny in this work. This period of history in Sri Lanka, punctuated with events of spectacular violence as well as permeated with everyday violence inherent in living through war, led to a variety of cultural responses, including those by poets – men and women. This thesis, however, does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the poetry produced between 1981 and 2009. Instead, this thesis tries to locate poetry as being in conversation with the various experiences that marks an existence through a war which was fought over "competing nationalisms"[9]. Within this repertoire of works, the thesis concentrates specifically on the poetry written by Tamil women. The two questions which inform this work are: How does poetry act as a witness to women's experience of the war in the period 1981-2009, a

---

[6] Ravikumar, "Apocalypse in Our Time", in *Waking is Another Dream*, ed. Ravikumar (New Delhi: Navayana Publishing), 10.

[7] "'Let them Speak: The Truth About Sri Lanka's Victims of War," UTHR, accessed 10 March 2015, http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/Special%20rep34/Special_Report_34%20Full.pdf

[8] "Sri Lanka's Killing Fields", Channel 4, accessed 13 March 2015, http://www.channel4.com/programmes/sri-lankas-killing-fields.

[9] Qadri Ismail, "Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalisms", in *Community, Gender and Violence: Subaltern Studies XI*, ed. Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan (New Delhi: Permanent Black and Ravi Dayal Publishers, 2000), 223.

period which was also crucial to the Tamil nationalist movement? How was the gendered construct of the 'Tamil woman' tackled by women living through this period as expressed through the medium of poetry?

Witnessing War through Poetry

In my dream, last night,
Lord Buddha lay, shot dead.
Government police in civilian clothes
shot and killed him.
He lay upon the steps
of the Jaffna Library drenched in his own blood.
...
The plain-clothes men
dragged the corpse inside
and heaped upon it
ninety thousand rare books
and lit the pyre with the *Sikalokavada Sutta*.

So the Lord Buddha's body turned to ashes
and so did the *Dhammapada*.
("Buddha Murdered", M.A Nuhman, 1981)

Over our single mass grave
they are hoisting the General's loin-cloth

as the national flag.

In the memorial built by our tears

Someone writes empty words.

Many people weave dreams.

Unruffled, never breaking his silence

He writes a poem.

("Homage", R Cheran, 2009)

Poetry as a mode of witnessing war can be traced in the works written by Tamils during the period between 1981 and 2009. Since the publication of the widely read '*Maranathul Vazhvom*' in 1983 (We Will Live Amidst Death) which inaugurated what could be called a genre of poetry of political protest which included poets like Cheran, Jayapalan, Aravindan, Thirumavalan and Ahilan[10], various anthologies and collection of poems have appeared in Sri Lanka written by Tamils. As illustrated by the excerpts of two poems quoted in the beginning of this section- 'Buddha Murdered' written by M.A Nuhman in 1981 after the burning of the Jaffna library and 'Homage' written by R Cheran describing the genocide of 2009- the poetry produced in this period is marked by the important events during the war and the act of writing through it. The important events during the war- the burning of the Jaffna library in 1981; the anti Tamil pogrom of 1983 which started in Colombo and then spread through the island altering Tamil lives forever; the deployment of the Indian Peacekeeping Force in 1987 which quickly exceeded its

[10] M.A Nuhman, "Ethnic Conflict And Literary Perception: Tamil Poetry In Post-Colonial Sri Lanka," *Colombo Telegraph*, August 19, 2012, accessed February 12 2014, https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/ethnic-conflict-and-literary-perception-tamil-poetry-in-post-colonial-sri-lanka/.

purpose of peacekeeping and engaged in its own brand of brutal violence leading to also the bizarre act of camaraderie where the Sri Lankan army clandestinely passed over consignments to the LTTE to fight the Indian army; the increase in the violence perpetrated by LTTE targeting the other minority community, the Muslims, leading to the forceful eviction of Muslims from the North of Sri Lanka in October, 1990; the uneasy cease-fire brokered by the Norwegians between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government in 2002; the devastating tsunami in 2004; the resuming of armed conflict which escalated in 2008, and culminated in the official end of war on 18th May, 2009- are all inscribed in the poetry of witness.[11]

Yet these poems are not ordinary records of important events; it is a collection of multiple responses, differing views, different experiences that shun the objectivity of a singular history. It also bears the struggles of confronting a world marked with the brutality as well as banality of wartime violence. In order to convey the pain and trauma of war in which the everyday is marked with experiences of death, disappearances and displacement, new poetic forms were devised. In certain poems, like Urvashi's 'Do You Understand?' and Cheran's 'I Could Forget Everything', the spoken voice was used which addressed the reader directly to convey the immediacy and urgency of what needs to be conveyed.[12] Forms like the lyric which were traditionally used to convey the subjectivity of the poet, now is used also to articulate the violence of the politics which attacks the sovereignty of self.[13] Some of these poems mimic the formal elements of other 'records' and then subverts the form to convey ideas and to hold images that are unconventional for these forms. For e.g. the poem '21 May 1986' written by Cheran mimics the formal elements of a diary entry as a report of events, marked with staccato

[11] Lakshmi Holmström and Sascha Ebeling, "Introduction", in *Lost Evenings Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War*, ed. Lakshmi Holmström and Sascha Ebeling (Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2016), 9.

[12] Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K Srilata, "Introduction," in *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, ed. Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K Srilata (New Delhi: Viking by Penguin Books, 2009), xxxiii.

[13] This is a point which Susan Gubar makes for the poetry after Aushwitz, which is applicable to the poetry of war in Sri Lanka as well.

rhythm of an enumerative account while the poems like 'Corpse No. 182' and 'Corpse No. 183, New Born No. 2'[14] written by Ahilan reads like hospital records of death and birth, while conveying the brutal violence of war and miracle of birth amongst this violence. Poetry written during the war also disrupted the notion of continuous time that is privileged in other methods of recording war. Evenings marked by ennui or by waiting and the absurdity of passing time find expression in many of these poems. For example, Sivaramani's poem 'Oppressed by Nights of War' marks the time of war through the changes in the experience of childhood. She writes

> In these fore-shortened days
> they have long forgotten
> to play hop-scotch
> and to make temple carts from palm-fruit shells.
> Now they only learn
> to shut the gate in good time
> to listen when dogs bark strangely
> …
> They pluck away
> the wings of dragonflies
> they shoulder sticks for guns
> their friends become their foes
>
> Oppressed by nights of war
> our children
> have grown up.[15]

[14] Ahilan, "Corpse No. 182," in *Lost Evenings Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War*, ed. Lakshmi Holmström and Sascha Ebeling (Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2016), 125.

Ahilan, "Corpse No. 183, New born No. 2," in *Lost Evenings Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War*, ed. Lakshmi Holmström and Sascha Ebeling (Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2016), 127.

[15] Sivaramani, "Oppressed by Nights of War," in *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, ed. Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K Srilata (New Delhi: Viking by Penguin Books, 2009), 185-187.

These poems also reinscribed the traditional poetics of landscape found in ancient Tamil poetry which divided the themes of all poetry into *akam* and *puram*. *Akam* which is the poetry of the 'inner world' is the poetry of love, while the *Puram* poems connote the 'outside' and are about the praise of kings' valour, and about war and the death of warriors.[16] These poems within the *akam* and *puram* are further divided into five different typologies based on the *tinai* or the landscape. Each *tinai* has its our characteristics and is associated with certain seasons, flora and fauna, a set of metaphors and specific emotions.[17] The poetics of landscape also underwent changes during war. The poetry of wartime in Sri Lanka records the injuries to the collective social psyche of Tamils, by depicting a bruised landscape marked by metaphors like burst up palmyra trees, rising agitated sea or a sea drained of water[18]. With experiences of alienation and displacement attendant in the experiences of war, poets have also developed "cityscapes of alienation, snowscapes of exile and diaspora, landscapes of the imagination, fantasy worlds".[19]

Though the period 1981-2009 produced works across genre, poetry constituted the dominant form of expression. The flourishing of poetry as a genre in the time of war seems to be in disregard of Adorno's famous remark: "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric."[20] Firmly believing that "when people die/to shroud in silence/to withdraw in

---

[16] Holmström et.al. "Introduction," in *The Rapids of a Great River*, xi.

[17] Lakshmi Holmström, "Changing Landscapes and Identities: An Introduction to Tamil Writing," *Words Without Borders*, April, 2015, accessed November 11, 2015, http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/changing-landscapes-and-identities-an-introduction-to-tamil-writing.

[18] As seen in the poems included in the anthology "Time will write a Song for You: Contemporary Tamil Writing from Sri Lanka" edited by Kannan M et.al.

[19] Holmström, "Changing Landscapes and Identities: An Introduction to Tamil Writing."

[20] Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, by Theodor Adorno (MIT Press, 1949) 17-35.

Also, in his book "Negative Dialectik" he takes back this claim. He wrote that "*Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems.*"

Theodore Adorno. *Negative Dialectics (*Routledge Chapman and Hall, 1973).

silence/is not for the poet",[21] poetry was written about living through the war. One of the features of poetry that makes the genre amenable to articulate the extreme violence of war is its abrogation of narrative coherence. Susan Gubar in her study of poetry written about Holocaust argues that poetry in its form can facilitate different discourses about violent events without claiming to have experienced or understood the effects of the event in its totality.[22] In order to illustrate the disruption of narrative coherence which poetry renders possible, she draws a parallel between the aftermath of trauma and poetic utterances. She draws on the explanation of the phenomenon of flashback in survivors of trauma, analysed by psychologists as a form of recall that recovers a horrific past which could not be assimilated into the narrative memory of a person.[23] She then explains that "like symptoms in the aftermath of trauma, lyrical utterances often announces itself as an involuntary return to intense feelings about an incomprehensible moment. But recollected in relative safety, if not tranquillity, such a moment rendered in writing allows authors and readers to grapple with the consequences of traumatic pain without being silenced by it".[24] The resistance of poetry toward narrative closure, she argues, thus allows it to articulate the "unrepresentable loss" involved in contexts of extreme violence. She also describes poetry as a genre that demands an act of attention. In order to illustrate this point she quotes C.K Williams and writes "The precision with which poems can deal with time can provide an access to a calamity that can neither be forgotten nor remembered because the moments of a poem are very intense, very discrete and vivid: you have moved through them and through time, in a formal way, with a kind of double consciousness, that makes you very aware of other realms".[25] It is this attention, both to the verse and the metanarrative of the verse, demanded from those reading poetry

---

[21] R Cheran, "Last Words," in *You Cannot Turn Away*, ed. Chelva Kanaganayakam (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 2011), 99.

[22] Susan Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 6

[23] Ibid. 8

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid. *10*

produced during the war which formulates reading and writing of this verse into an act of witnessing.

Chelva Kanaganayakam in his appraisal of the poetry produced between the years 1981-2009 writes that the dominant aspect of the poetry produced during the war is its commitment to political realism. He writes that "experience rather that form" became the major concern of poetry. [26] In poetry where experience is given importance, the verse simultaneously bears the marks of the experience of war as well as *becomes* the evidence for the experience of war. This evidentiary quality of poetry seen in the time of conflict is examined in Neloufer de Mel's review of the poetry written by Sumathy Sivamohan to formulate an idea of the poet as witness. She says drawing on Agamben that the writer acts as a witness in two senses, as derived from the word's etymology. The first meaning of witness is derived from the Latin word *testis*, from which the word testimony comes, signifying a person who in a trial between two parties, occupies a third position. The second meaning derives from the word *superstes* which designates a person who has lived through an event and, therefore, can bear witness to it. For Agamben, such a person becomes a superstite or supervisor "in every sense". So while the first role of the writer as a witness could mean the occupying of a median ground, the second role is not of neutrality, but that of 'robust moral questioning.[27] The poet plays the role of the witness in both the senses of the term - of disagreement through distancing, as well as one of empathetic engagement. These two functions of the poet as a witness may seem contradictory at first, but on deeper examination reveal a unique yet challenging role for the poet. One can interpret poetry as a private experience, where writing is the means to combat personal despair, removed from the interferences of the outer world. But as de

[26] Chelva Kanganayakam, "Introduction to Postcolonial Sri Lankan Tamil Poetry," in *Mirrored Images: An Anthology of Sri Lankan Poetry*, ed. Rajiva Wijesinha (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2013), 131.

[27] Neloufer de Mel, "Mourning Sri Lanka: The Writer as Witness." *Himal South Asian*, July 2008, accessed January 26, 2014, http://old.himalmag.com/component/content/article/773-mourning-sri-lanka-the-writer-as-witness.html.

Mel points out, poetry can also be read being alert to the relational framework of the vulnerable individual (poet) to her surroundings.[28]

Judith Butler in her book 'Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence' explains this relationality of the vulnerable individual to her surroundings. She claims that this vulnerability follows from our being socially constituted bodies attached to others. Because of our exposure to others and the concomitant risk of losing those attachments, we are constantly at risk of violence. Hence, Butler recommends that we look at grief and mourning not as "privatising, solitary and therefore depoliticising experience, but rather as sources from which a complex political community can emerge".[29] On similar lines, Azade Seyhan in her work on Assia Djebar and Nazim Hikmet argues that women's poetry of witness "acts as interlocutors which moderate a delicate and critical exchange between self's experience of trauma and representation of trauma, and the emphatic identification with the trauma of others who are voiceless by choice or circumstance".[30] In witnessing through poetry, we can argue that the poet's articulation of private experiences can be a metonymic representation of the concerns and experiences of a larger community, as evidenced in a testimonio. Testimonio is generally defined as "a first-person narration of socially significant experiences in which the narrative voice is that of a typical or extraordinary witness, or protagonist who metonymically represents others who have lived through similar situations and who have rarely given written expression to them".[31] There is a kind of representativity implicit here in its metonymical function where one expects "polyphony of other possible voices and experiences".[32] George Yudice clarifies this by saying that "the speaker does not

---

[28] Ibid.

[29] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (*New York: Verso, 2004).

[30] Azade Seyhan, "Enduring Grief: Autobiography as 'Poetry of Witness' in the Work of Assia Djebar and Mazim Hikmet." *Comparative Literary Studies* 40, No. 2 (2003): 159-172.

[31] Marc Zimmerman, "Testimonio," in *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods, Volume 1*, ed. Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Alan E Bryman and Tim Futing Liao (London: SAGE, 2004), 1118.

[32] Ibid. 1119.

speak for or represent a community, but rather performs an act of identity formation that is simultaneously personal and collective".[33]

This idea of the witness's relationality and proximity also subjects the witness to the possibility of being wounded. Carolyn Forché writes that this will be reflected in the language of the poetry as well. She argues that "The witness who writes out of extremity writes his or her wound, as if such writing were making an incision. Consciousness itself is cut open. At the site of the wound, language breaks, becomes tentative, interrogational, kaleidoscopic. The form of this language bears the trace of extremity".[34] Poetry examined in this thesis also reveals how in poetry bears the traces of war through the new idioms and metaphors that are coined. Susan Gubar also makes this point when she writes "When the wrong suffered cannot be signified in accepted or extant idioms, new idioms must be found to express how what remains to be said exceeds what can be presently articulated."[35]

One should clarify here that though the word testimony in the legal context is largely concerned with the 'crisis of truth' and on reaching a verdict that establishes the truth, poetry as testimony of war shouldn't be treated as factual texts. As Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub writes, testimony should not be understood as a mode of truth, but as a mode of access to truth.[36] Ann Kaplan assesses the contribution of testimonies through the affective knowledge produced in it as opposed to truth established by it.[37] She argues that "such knowledge is mediated by the vicissitudes of memory shaped by fantasy, desire,

---

[33] George Yudice, "Testimonio and Postmodernism," *Latin American Perspectives* 18 No .3 (1991): 15-31.

[34] Carolyn Forché, "Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art," *Poetry Magazine,* May 2, 2011, accessed July 26, 2015, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/detail/69680.

[35] Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz,* 13.

[36] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 8.

[37] Ann E. Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

subsequent events and a fusion of old and new ones, where one's senses are ruptured on a daily basis in the context of incessant violence".[38] The affective knowledge is necessary in the complex task of working through a loss where one has to try and transcend the loss as well as strive not to forget the loss. Hence as Forché says, the poetry of witness "will be judged as Ludwig Wittgenstein said of confession, by its consequences, not by its ability to verify the truth".[39] A similar vein of argument is adopted by Ana Douglass when the celebrated testimonio of Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchu faced accusations of inauthenticity by David Sode. She says that what is true in Menchu's testimony is the claim of her politics upon us, not the contents itself.[40] Another quality that poetry as a genre sometimes exhibits, and as seen in the poem 'Apocalypse' by R Cheran and poetry by Sivaramani, is its prophetic quality to foresee the consequences of war in its absurdity as well as its horror. As Felman and Laub writes, unlike the "witness statements in the courtroom, poetic language speaks ahead of knowledge and awareness and breaks through the limits of its own conscious understanding."[41]

Poetry can also be "an unsuspected medium of healing".[42] In a war which prohibited mourning deaths and devastating losses suffered, writing poetry can be also be seen as an act to survive through mourning and remembering. Freud in his influential 1917 essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' defines the work of mourning as "the servitude that the mourner performs in the long and intense process of detachment from the lost object".[43] This work is composed of a slow and painstaking working through of each of the memories and strands attaching the dejected subject to the object, which Freud defines as

---

[38] Ibid.

[39] Carolyn Forché, "Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness," *American Poetry Review* (1999): 17.

[40] Pradeep Jeganathan , "In the Ruins of Truth: The Work of Melancholia and Acts of Memory," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (2010): 9.

[41] Quoted in Antony Rowland, *Poetry as Testimony: Witnessing and Memory in Twentieth-century Poems* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 176.

[42] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 6.

[43] Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 237-258, 1917.

a "thousand links".[44] However difficult this work maybe, it nevertheless ends with the ego becoming free and "continuing to live". Here Freud makes an important distinction between mourning and melancholia. While in the former there is an acceptance of loss, the latter signifies a refusal of loss. In melancholia not only does the subject not detach himself from the object, but he internalizes and forms an identification with it, preventing the possibility to detach. Hence, only mourning can be work; i.e. positive psychic work and not melancholia.[45]

Pradeep Jeganathan, using this as an entry point, departs from Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia and claims that melancholia can also be considered as productive. This, he says, is especially of importance when one is mourning the loss of the possibilities of a nation; a loss which cannot be mourned in an ordinary way.[46] He defines the idea of the 'work of melancholia' as a "concept that attempts to capture some of the psychic and social acts that are part of the lives of those who grieve without "recovery", those who have incorporated their identification of the lost object within themselves, unlike the paradigmatic normal mourner who can work away or out of the identification with the lost object. As such the 'work of melancholia' could include 'acts of memory, actions that are reproducing what is forgotten and repressed, which are distinct from the work of recollections".[47] This thesis also tries to see if the poems of loss and commemoration of death could be seen as 'work of melancholia' undertaken as a result of witnessing war.

---

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

Also; Pradeep Jeganathan, "In the Ruins of Truth: The Work of Melancholia and Acts of Memory," *Inter Asia Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2010): 6-20.

[46] Pradeep Jeganathan, "The Post national, Inhabitation and the Work of Melancholia," *EPW* 44, no. 1 (2009): 54-57.

[47] Jeganathan, "In the Ruins of Truth," 6-20.

Tamil Nationalism and Poetry

The witnessing of the war in Sri Lanka through poetry is inflected by the fact that the war in Sri Lanka was fought over competing nationalisms: Tamil and Sinhala. Soon after Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, the majoritarian impulses of the Sinhala nationalism which emphasized the practice of Theravada Buddhism and the superiority of the Sinhala language manifested itself in the Sinhala Only Language Bill that was passed in the year 1956. In the general elections held in 1956, the language policy was a major event. People United Front led by S.W.R.D Bandaranaike promised the implementation of the Sinhala language as the only official language of the country if brought to power. This promise also led to a revival of Tamil nationalism in the North and the East under the aegis of the Federal Party, who won majority in the 1956 elections in these Tamil dominated areas.[48] There were widespread protests against the language policy, and ethnic tensions prevailed through the late 1950s and the early 1960s as witnessed in the riots of the year 1958. This period also saw the rise of the leftist parties like the Communist Party of Ceylon who believed in the united organization of all the working classes in Sri Lanka. These two strands of politics influenced the Tamil literature produced in Sri Lanka between the 1950s and the 1970s. The poets and writers influenced by socialist ideas went by the identification as 'Progressive writers'. Ilankeeran, S. Ganesalingam, K. Daniel, Dominic Jeeva, Neervai Pannaiyan and NK Raghunathan were some of the prominent Progressive writers. They wrote extensively on caste oppression and social inequalities based on class, and wrote for national unity and ethnic integration. At the same time, anthologies like *Tamil Enkal Aayutham* (Tamil is Our Weapon) and *Uyir Tamillukku* (Life is for Tamil) were produced that emphasized on the ethnic sentiments of the Tamils.[49] Poets like Mahakavi, Neelavanan, Sillaiyur Selvarajan and Kasi Ananthan wrote emphasizing the issues of Tamil linguistic nationalism.

---

[48] Nuhman, "Ethnic Conflict and Literary Perception."

[49] Ibid.

But the year 1977 turned to be a landmark which turned the tide in favour for the nationalistic underpinnings of Tamil literary production in Sri Lanka. In the year 1971, the Sri Lankan government implemented the policy of standardization which put the Tamil students at a disadvantage in the entrance exams to institutions of higher education and the recruitment to government service.[50] Also in the new constitution of 1972, drafted by the leftist Minister Colvin R de Silva, Buddhism was elevated to the status of state religion, and Tamil wasn't even accorded the status of one of the national languages.[51] This led to an increase in Tamil nationalistic sentiments; the Tamil United Liberation Front was formed and in the Vaddukoddai conference of 1976, a resolution demanding a separate Tamil homeland, Eelam, was passed. In the elections of the year 1977, TULF emerged victorious with an overwhelming majority in the North and East. In the centre, the incumbent left oriented United Front government was defeated and the right wing United National Party came to power in Sri Lanka signaling a phase of ruthless Sinhala chauvinism. The year 1977 signaled the start of ethnic riots against the Tamils by the Sinhala, and the phase of militant Tamil nationalism was inaugurated which captured the imagination of the Tamils in the North and East.[52] The government also introduced the reprehensible 'Prevention of Terrorism Act' that gave unlimited power to the armed forces. In the Tamil literary production as well, nationalism emerged as major concern. This is seen in the publication of the volume, 'Maranathul Vazhvom'. As written by Chelva Kanaganayagam, one can trace three modes of writing within the Sri Lankan Tamil poetry that followed in the period of 1981-2009.[53] First, there is the triumphalist, celebratory mode of writing that marks the supposedly successful journey from nation to quasi nation state, from a group of people united by a sense of common language and heritage to a strong sense of territory that marks their distinctiveness. Secondly, there is a large corpus that deals with resistance in its multiple forms:

[50] Kannan. M. et. al., "Introduction," in *Time will write a song for you: Contemporary Tamil Writing from Sri Lanka, ed.* Kannan M et al. (Gurgaon: Penguin Books, 2014), xii.

[51] Nuhman, "Ethnic Conflict and Literary Perception."

[52] Kannan M et. al., "Introduction", xiii.

[53] Chelva Kanaganayakam, "Configuring Spaces and Constructing Nations in Sri Lankan Tamil Literature," in *Pathways of Dissent*, ed. R. Cheran (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), 81-92.

resistance against forms of political hegemony, opposition to patriarchy and caste and a refusal to accept conditions of oppression. Third is the literature of diaspora that often entails loss, fragmentation, displacement, exile and loss. Kanaganayakam claims that all these differences do not obscure the central concern with nationalism[54].

However Tamil nationalism in its efforts to create a unified *Tamil Eelam*, which was imagined as a confluence of the linguistic category of Tamil, and the geographic category of the North and East of Sri Lanka, inadvertently excluded the experiences of many. Poetry written between the years 1981-2009 also reflected the difficult negotiations that different sections of people had with the overarching singular concept of what being Tamil is. Different communities like Sri Lankan Tamils, the Muslims and the Malayaha (Hill country) Tamils all shared the Tamil language. But all of them did not share the same understanding or identification of being Tamil. These distinctions and dissonances were not recognized within the militant brand of Tamil nationalism which established its hegemony from the 1985 onwards. But the literary production of the period accommodated the pluralism. Poetry as a genre was used to forcefully articulate the violence inherent in the exclusionary impulse of Tamil nationalism. For e.g. a major theme that pervades the poetry of Muslim poets after 1985 is the violence and insecurity that the rise of Tamil militancy created for them. Muslims speak the Tamil language and they are residents but not inhabitants of the North and East. They also articulate a different history from that of the Tamils[55]. Tamil militancy tried to include Muslims within their concept of Eelam by denying their difference.The militant groups in the late 1970s onwards were content with calling the Muslims “Islamic Tamils” insisting against the will of the Muslims themselves.[56] When such an appropriation was resisted by the Muslims, LTTE termed Muslims as ‘traitors’. The forceful expulsion of the Muslims

[54] Ibid.

[55] The history of the differences between the Muslims and Tamil militant nationalism is discussed in Chapter 1.

[56] R. Cheran, "Pathways of Dissent : An Introduction to Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka," in *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, ed. R. Cheran (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), ix-xiii .

from the North in 1991 bears testimony to the chauvinistist trait of the Tamil militant nationalism. The poetry of Muslim poets marked the betrayal they felt at the hands of Tamils. An anthology of Muslim poets titled '*Meesan Kaddaikalil Mela Ezhum Padalgal*' (Songs that Arise from the Grave),edited by Ashraf Shihabdeen, A.G.M Sadaqa and S Naleem, was published in the year 2002 which echoed the difficulties that Muslims had to face under the oppressive violence of the LTTE. Testimonies of violence suffered can be seen in the poetry of witness of Uwais Gani who started writing poetry after he was expuled with other Muslims in the North by the LTTE, and in the poetry of H.M Jabir, who wrote the evocative poem 'A Letter to My Father' after his father, Hayathu Muhammad, was murdered by the LTTE along with other Muslims in Batticaloa in 2002.[57] In both these cases, writing of poetry followed the experience of violence-poets were born not from pleasant experience, but as poetry of witnessing, from uncontainable hurt and anger, from the need to articulate the violence experienced. M. A. Nuhman's poem 'They and You' is a fierce critique of militant nature of Tamil nationalism in which he exposes the slippage between the violence perpetrated on Muslims by the nationalism of Tamils, and the violence perpetrated by the Sri lankan army on Tamils. He writes,

They came in a jeep
knocked on your door
and dragged you
for investigation.

Your mother cried
screamed and pleaded
when she went to their camp

[57] Nuhman, "Ethnic Conflict and Literary Perception."

and asked for you

No, they said

denying that they had taken you

Your flesh torn, bones crushed

Your blood mixed with the soil

Now it is your turn

You came from the forest on foot

and knocked on my door

and dragged me for investigation

My mother cried

screamed and pleaded

when she came to your camp

and asked for me

No, you said

you denied that you had taken me

My flesh torn, bones crushed

my blood too mixed with the same soil. [58]

[58] M.A. Nuhman, "They and You," in Mirrored Images: An Anthology of Sri Lankan Poetry, edited by Rajiva Wijesinha (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2013), 195.

Poetry written by the Malaiyaha (Upcountry Tamils) also articulates their experiences within Tamil nationalism. The Malaiyaha Tamils were brought to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu, India to work in the plantations owned by the British and were referred to as Indian Tamils and sometimes derogatorily as '*thotta kadan*' (Plantation brute). With independence, the 'Indian Tamils' were deprived of their citizenship and did not regain it until the 1970s and 1980s. These 'Indian Tamils' have since then developed their own ethnic identification as 'Up-country Tamils or 'Malaiyaka Tamils'. This new identity puts their connections to India behind and stresses their desire for a permanent home in Sri Lanka. Interestingly, when many Sri Lankan Tamils asserted their separateness from the Sri Lankan nation, Up-country Tamils have declared their belonging to Sri Lanka. They have come to agree that their future is within a multiethnic Sri Lanka, and not within the Tamil *Eelam* which excludes in its conception the central highlands, the home of Up-country plantation Tamils.[59] C. Vellupillai's 'In Ceylon's Tea Gardens' and Kurinchi Thennavan's 'Dawn'[60] are some poems which reflect the identity formation of Upcountry Tamils. In list of lacunae inherent in Tamil nationalism of 1981-2009 also included a critique of the nationalism as a gendered construct. Poetry written by women during the period critically engaged with the experiences of the Tamil women which were not given a space of articulation within the discourse of militant Tamil nationalism.

The 'Tamil Woman' and the Poetry Written by 'tamil women'

The story of Tamil nationalism is usually narrated based on the simple binary between Sinhalas and Tamils. This dominant 'bipolar ethnic imagination' constructs Sinhalas and Tamils as "mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive of the Island's diverse and hybrid communities, rendering all other groups as culturally invisible and politically

[59] Daniel Bass, "Making Sense of the Census in Sri Lanka: Up-country Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism," in *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, ed. R. Cheran (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2009).

[60] In Cheran R, A Yesurasa, Pathmanabha Iyer and P Nadarasan edited anthology of the year 1985 Maranththul Valvom.

inconsequential to the national imagination".[61] But the narrative of Tamil nationalism and its origins can be located at different temporal points as well as rooted in different reasons. While an explanation of the origins and development of Tamil nationalism as a defensive reaction to the hegemonic Sri Lankan nationalism is a preferred narrative, there have been other accounts of its genesis. For example, the account given by Bryan Pfaffenberger describes the emergence of Tamil nationalism as a defensive movement to unify the caste fragmentation that came with the Temple entry movement led by the oppressed Dalit people in Jaffna in the year 1968. Similarly, R. Cheran linked the notion of Tamil nationalism with the notion of space and showed how in the case of Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora, the cyberspace has emerged as part of the Tamil nationalism and has created a hyper-spatial nationalism. Tamil nationalism has been narrated in multiple voices and has been experienced differently linked with the temporality and movement of people. One among these multiple voices and narratives that risked being marginalised in the dominant logic of nationalism is that of the women.

An important feature of nationalism is that it is a gendered project. The nationalist project forges a national subject and agent that is singularly male which denies a space for women. As Sitralega Maunaguru has written, nationalism produces a construction of women which is subordinated to that of men.[62] This is because nationalism has typically sprung from "masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope".[63] Hence as a regulatory device which excludes and includes, it is argued that nationalism can only be seen as unreservedly good from a masculinist perspective.[64] Though some

---

[61] Darini Rajasingham Senanayake, "Buddhism and the Legitimation of Power: Democracy, Public Religion and Minorities in Sri Lanka" (ISAS Working Paper No. 99 – Date: 26 November 2009).

[62] Sitralega Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism : The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control," in *Unmaking the Nation : The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995), 158-175.

[63] Cynthia Enloe, *Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

[64] Qadri Ismail, "Unmooring Identity," in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (Colombo: Social Scientist's Association, 1995), 55-105.

scope for social transformation is granted for women in nationalism, it remains an inherently a limiting discourse for women.

Urvashi Butalia has argued that since nation is a gendered as well as patriarchal construct, the activities that define the making of a nation are also seen as male activities and women therefore inevitably fall outside this realm. She argues that women's position and their personhood may become subjects of heated public debate or they may be subjected to certain kinds of diktat in the course of nation making, but seldom would she be given full entry into these processes of nation making, or be recognized as full national subjects.[65] Hence from a feminist perspective, nationalism cannot be seen as enabling and feminism will always be at variance with nationalism.[66] As Cynthia Enloe famously claimed, living as a feminist nationalist is one of the most difficult political projects there is.[67]

Even as women fall outside the realm of the nation, ideas about the 'ideal woman' are also simultaneously the central pivot of this construct. Women are then appropriated into the gendering process of nationalism in very different ways from that of men.[68] Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias have located five major ways in which women participate in ethnic and national processes: as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; as participating centrally in the ideological production of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; as signifiers of ethnic /national differences; and as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.[69] They give emphasis on women's role in

---

[65] Urvashi Butalia, "Gender and Nation: Some Reflections from India," in *From Gender to Nation*, ed. Rada Ivekovic and Julie Mostov (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2002), 99-112..

[66] Radhika Coomaraswamy and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham, "Being Tamil in a Different Way : A Feminist Critique of the Tamil Nation," in *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, ed. R. Cheran (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), 107-138.

[67] Enloe, *Beaches and Bases.*

[68] Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000), 251.

[69] Nira Yuval -Davis and Floya Anthias, "Introduction," in *Woman-Nation-State*, ed. Nira Yuval Davis, Floya Anthias and Jo Campling (London: Macmillan, 1989) , 6-11.

reproducing national and ethnic categories. Yet women's 'belonging' in the nation which they are called on to reproduce is precarious. As Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin argue, "'Belonging' for women is uniquely linked to sexuality, honour, and chastity; family, community and country must agree on both their acceptability and legitimacy and membership within the fold."[70] This phenomenon where women are appropriated for reproducing the nation while at the same time her belonging to the same nation is mediated by many rules and restrictions on her individuality can be seen in both Sinhala and Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka.

The manifestation of woman as reproducers of nation can be seen in the origin stories which both these ethnic centred nationalisms articulated through their different versions of the Vijaya legend. The Sinhalese version of the Vijaya legend claims that Prince Vijaya, a Bengali married the first Sinhala woman and produced the Sinhalese race in Sri Lanka. The Tamils expound the view that Prince Vijaya was a Saivite who married a Tamil wife and was the first inhabitant of the island.[71] These different legends reiterate the role of the woman as the conduit for the formation of the nation. It is thus not surprising that one of the key constructions of women in nationalism is the figure of mother as reproducer of the nation. "Motherhood" in Sri Lanka should be seen as including all practices of nurturance; including of one's husband and hence encompasses also the supportive wife.[72] In the late 1980's, the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Sri Lanka had published a poster, which had the visual image of a Sinhalese woman breast feeding her baby whilst dreaming of a soldier accompanied with the caption "give your life blood to nourish our future soldiers". This poster illustrates how the mother was seen as a producer of brave sons for the nation.[73] Similarly, Tamil nationalism produced the

---

[70] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries,* 251.

[71] Neluka Silva, *The Gendered Nation: Contemporary writings from South Asia (*New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004).

[72] Malathi de Alwis, "Gender, Politics and the 'Respectable Lady'," in *Unmaking the Nation*, ed. Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (Colombo: Social Scientist's Association, 1995).

[73] Neloufer de Mel, "Body Politics: (Re)cognising the Female Suicide Bomber in Sri Lanka," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies 11:1* (2004): 75-93.

construct of the Tamil woman as *Veerathayar* (Brave mothers). In order to glorify the nurturing role of Tamil women, mythic characters from old legends and classics were reconstructed. This concept of brave mother underwent transformation under the militant Tamil nationalism of LTTE where women were recruited as combatants. The Tamil mother then also donned the extra responsibility of being a combatant.[74]

Women often also symbolise the nation; they embody the characteristics of the ideal 'pure' community. Seen as cultural carriers, women act as primary signifiers of the national identity. Women are expected to be carriers/bearers of their cultural and ideological traditions and are often required to signify that identity with a careful policing of their body and behaviour.[75] This is true of Tamil nationalism and its efforts to construct an essential 'Tamil woman', which in this process overlooks the lived realities of many women. One of the key cultural values that the Tamil community upholds for the Tamil woman is chastity or *Karppu*. The figure of Kannaki[76] from the epic Silapathikaram was reconstructed and constantly evoked to convey the power of chaste Tamil women.[77] An almost fanatic anxiety revolved around the chastity of the Tamil woman which if violated by men from the 'Other' community was considered equal to the castration of the nation's masculine power.[78] This anxiety can be seen from the time of the rise of ethnic-centred nationalisms of Sri Lanka, even in the early years of anti colonial resistance when Christianity, Westernization and British rule were placed along one continuum, and it was felt that all three had to be rejected. We can trace the use of this concept to the Tamil revivalist movements before the independence of Sri Lanka which formulated and tried to consolidate the Tamil identity. Arumugam Navalar (1822-79) who was a prominent figure in Tamil nationalism of the period condoned the strict

---

[74] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism," 158-175.

[75] Yuval -Davis and Anthias, *Woman-Nation-State*;
Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism," 158-175.

[76] Kannaki challenges the king of Madurai who wrongly orders the killing of her husband, and she burns the city of Madurai with the power of her chastity and devotion to her husband.

[77] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism," 158-175.

[78] Ibid.

monitoring of women and their chastity as he considered sexual purity as an essential trait for Tamil women. He wrote that women should never be independent because a woman who likes to be on her own without father, husband and son will bring disrepute to the family.[79] This feature of the ideal Tamil woman percolated through time in Tamil nationalism with some changes, but with a similar degree of emphasis on her chastity which can be seen in LTTE's construction of its combatant woman as the 'virgin warrior woman' and also in its script of the raped woman as a defiled woman who has to extract revenge through death in her role as combatant to be reinstated as the good chaste woman. [80]

As Yuval -Davis and Anthias wrote "women do not only teach and transfer the cultural and ideological traditions of the ethnic and national group; they very often constitute their actual symbolic figuration".[81] Hence women's dress, manner and code of behaviour were utilized to establish the ethnic boundaries. Advocacy of the Kandyan sari as the appropriate garment was done to mark the Sinhala woman from the Tamil woman clad in her Indian sari with a *pottu*[82] and a nose ring. A Sinhala woman's ethos is rooted in the Buddhist faith and the Sinhalese language and culture, while the Tamil woman is iconic of Tamil language and the Hindu faith.[83] While women's dress represented both national

---

[79] Ibid.

[80] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism,";

Sumathy Sivamohan, "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, Its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women," in *Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalization : Struggling to Create a New Social Order*, ed. S. H. Hasbullah and Barrie M. Morrison (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), 126-149;

Radhika Coomaraswamy, and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham. "Being Tamil in a Different Way : A Feminist Critique of the Tamil Nation," in *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, ed. R. Cheran (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), 107-138.

[81] Yuval -Davis, Nira, and Floya Anthias. "Introduction." In *Woman-Nation-State*, edited by Nira Yuval Davis, Floya Anthias and Jo Campling, 6-11. London: Macmillan, 1989.

[82] *Pottu* is a Hindu ornamental mark that women who are married wear on their foreheads. Widow's bodies are marked by an absence of this "pottu".

[83] Silva, *The Gendered Nation.*

identity and resistance, the bourgeois male apparel in Sri Lanka remained unmarked by ethnicity and nationality.[84]

Also, in the construction of nation as woman, the image of the 'pure' woman imagined is predicated upon the existence of an 'Other', a figure which is 'central to the conscious or subliminal construction of an exclusionary, discriminatory identity'.[85] The dominant discourse of nationalism excludes this 'Other', and the issue of national fragmentation is concomitant with the anxiety to produce a 'pure identity'. The only space accorded to hybridity, then, is outside this discourse**.**[86] Here the ideal mother is posited against its opposite, either the woman of mixed ancestry, or the Westernised woman. The ideologues of nationalisms register their racial purity by accentuating the racio-cultural "hybridity' of those who cannot lay claim to such purity. [87] Young says that the generation and degeneration of nations, their historical movement of homogenization and dissipation, of totalisaton and detotalisation are produced by crossing of blood which must result from sexual attraction. As 'disgust always bears the imprint of desire', the 'Other' then returns as the object of nostalgia, longing and fascination.[88] This can be seen in the way, the Burgher woman (the descendant of Dutch and the Portuguese) is treated in the literary productions with contempt or humour, or as characters breaking chaos in "idealized familial paradigms".[89] A fear of miscegenation with the degenerate outsider is exemplified in such representations. Important in the above mentioned "idealised family paradigm" is the assumption of the bind between home and nation. Nationalism promises the security of the ideal home within its single and exclusive identity; but home is also the site for claustrophobia and dysphoria.[90] Like Rosemary George has theorised, home is

---

[84] Qadri, "Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalism".

[85] Silva, *The Gendered Nation.*

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

[89] Silva, *The Gendered Nation.*

[90] Qadri, "Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalism."

not a neutral place; it is not equally available to all and hence has to be fought for to be established as an exclusive domain of few.[91] Hence communities are not counter constructions to home, but the extensions of home providing the same comforts and terror on a larger scale. Coupled with this is the notion of respectability enshrined in 'home'. Malathi de Alwis has shown us with her study how bourgeois Sinhala women like Sirimavo Bandaranaike have sought to escape the confines of home using the very identity of respectability conferred on them by being the ideal woman. They do this by donning philanthropic roles and acting as wives of public personalities. But she also explains that these vocations merely replicated and publicised the private, and hence are still severely circumscribed by the constraining patriarchal relations that operate in the domestic sphere.[92]

Similarly the respectability attributed to the pure Sinhala/Tamil woman effaces the reality of a majority of women. The figure of whore/prostitute/loose woman is another construction which was wrought in opposition to the 'pure' Tamil woman in order to facilitate the emergence of the ideal Tamil woman. Arumugam Navalar, the ideologue of Tamil nationalism in the pre-independence era, harangued the Nallur Kandaswamy temple because it was compromised by "prostitutes squat[ting] in the temple, masquerading as sacred dancers (*devadasis*)" , and because "the milk donated for the anointment of images (*abhisheka*) was fed to their illegitimate children".[93] He talked of the strong temptations to sin and let vice assail when Tamils come in contact with "those world known whores, the dancing queens and similar disreputable characters".[94] Similarly, when LTTE imposed restrictions on the movement of persons and goods from North to South, a woman who merely travelled to South was connoted as 'sexually loose' and this anxiety betrayed a fear of her sexuality coming in contact with men from the

---

[91] Rosemary George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and 20th century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[92] de Alwis, "Gender, Politics and the 'Respectable Lady'."

[93] Coomaraswamy and Perera-Rajasingham. "Being Tamil in a Different Way," 107-138.

[94] Coomaraswamy and Perera-Rajasingham. "Being Tamil in a Different Way," 107-138.

other community.[95] Prostitutes were punished and chastised and sent to jail in the LTTE governed area. In the Penal Code of Tamil Eelam, Prostitution (*parathaimai*) was a crime only for women, with four years of rigorous punishment. Hence women's bodies become sites where the male self confronts the 'others'; Women's bodies separated the 'one' nation' from its enemies.[96]

While the nation tried to script the lives of women, the poetry of women written between 1981-2009, reflects the varied experiences of the 'tamil women' who negotiated lives amongst a war fought over nationalism. The mid 1980s saw a very productive period in poetry by Tamil women in Sri Lanka. In 1985 an important anthology of women was published titled '*Sollatha Seithigal*' (Unspoken Messages). This anthology was edited by Sitralega Maunaguru who herself is a poet and wrote under the pseudonym Sankari. The anthology brought together thirteen Sri Lankan women poets, some of them who became very well known in the following years like Urvashi, Selvi, Sivaramani, Sanmarga, Avvai and Ranga. Maunaguru writes in the introduction to this collection that this work espouses a new awareness by women of themselves, their bodies, their lives and their role in society.[97] This literary production was facilitated by the women's movements attached to the growth of national movements in the 1980's; the Women's Study Circle composing of women in and around the Jaffna University provided an atmosphere of discussion and debate. In this anthology we can trace an emergence of a "tentative feminism arching its way out of a blasted, yet dramatic space".[98] By the 1990s, with the power struggle between militant groups yielding to the dominance of a single extremist group LTTE, the poetry of women also changed in its tenor.[99] On the one hand there was

---

[95] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism,"

[96] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*.

[97] Maunaguru, Sitralega. "Arimukham." In *Sollatha Seithigal*, edited by Sitralega Maunaguru. Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1986.

[98] V. Geetha, "*Life worlds: War, Desire and Labour in contemporary Tamil Women's Writing"* (Occasional paper 2. Centre for Advanced Study in Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, 2010).

[99] Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K Srilata, "Introduction," in *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*.

the poetry of woman combatants like Ambuli, Captain Bharati, Captain Vanathi, Thamizhaval, Namangal, Kasturi who wrote poetry about their experiences as a combatant for militant nationalism. This corpus of literature which is marked by the persistence of heroism is interesting as they wrote of what moved them to shoulder guns, of the loss of friends and comrades to the war and the "tragic freedom" that they experienced which was linked to their abilities to wield guns; "at once enabling and death dealing".[100] On the other hand starting with Sivaramani, Selvi and Avvai, a tract of poetry recognized the tragic and violent turn of the nationalist struggle in its militant phase. In a turning away from the rhetoric of heroism, their verses did not signify a celebration of military valour, instead it fronted an uncomfortable and anguished questioning of the struggle, implicit in it a critical approach to the construct of nation as well.[101] The period of militant nationalism in Sri Lanka was marked by displacement which led to the emergence of women's writing from the diaspora. This strand of poetry brought to the fore questions of sexual independence in foreign land, different conceptions of home linked to 'a literature in transit', and different articulations of displacement, some of which are devoid of a nostalgia for the Tamil homeland. Tamil speaking Muslims from the East as well as Muslim refugees forcefully exiled from the North also produced a distinctive corpus of poetry. Muslim women like Penniya, Anar, Sharmila Saeed and Faheema Jehan wrote about the predicament of being a woman within a minority community which faced violence also from the LTTE.

---

[100] V. Geetha, "*Life worlds: War, Desire and Labour in Contemporary Tamil Women's Writing*."

[101] V. Geetha, "*Life worlds: War, Desire and Labour in Contemporary Tamil Women's Writing*."

Sivamohan, Sumathy. "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women." 2004.

Writing Liberation

The thesis is organized on the basis of the various themes that have emerged from the poetry of women. The first theme that is explored is the idea of liberation as articulated by women in their poetry. The thesis examines the nodes of agreement and departure of their ideas of liberation from the ideas of liberation contingent on the Tamil nation as propounded by Tamil nationalism. It looks at how the endorsement of Tamil nationalistic liberation as espoused in some of the early poetry of women changed through time. Women writers have written about liberation with attention to the discourses of Tamil nationalism, yet departed from it in crucial ways. The first chapter of the thesis tries to map the alternate visions of liberation which are aspired for in poetry. The chapter examines if we can trace a feminist concept of liberation in their poetry. This is done keeping in mind that various women came into the nationalist struggle at various points in time. Those who did so in the early 1980s and until the end of that decade, were mostly politicized students, including large numbers of women. Large-scale recruitment of women into the armed struggle belongs to a slightly later period, especially the post-IPKF time, when the experiences that women had to endure at the hands of the IPKF scarred them enough to want to fight back. The early 2000s saw an efflorescence of writing from the East, with increasing number of Muslim women writing rich, sensual poetry, but also about their predicament of living a Muslim woman subject. In each of these contexts, liberation was understood and articulated differently.

Witnessing Death

The second theme traced within the corpus of women's poetry is their attention to death articulated through memories. In poetry women's memory acts as a sojourner in coping with loss. The chapter specifically looks at elegies written for people, both known and unknown. An attempt will be made to trace different ways of memorialisation and how the concept of "martyr" is made, broken and re-made in different moulds. It will also look at how an elegy or obituary is used to talk about the living left rather than the dead. The loss is not just of the departed, but is also a loss of self. The chapter starts with a brief framing note on martyrdom and Tamil cultural expressions. In the context of Tamil

nationalism, the martyr figure is invoked in contrast to that of the traitor. Taking into account this binary pair we also realize that memory is not only mobilized to cope with loss, but also to indicate who is a legitimate nationalist, and martyr and who is a traitor and a non-person. The chapter also looks at how in a material-historical sense, the martyr is constructed in and through the following tropes: death acts and rituals like cult of the cyanide capsule carrying woman and man and in acts of treason. These tropes both linguistic and cultural evolve over time and acquire fixity through iterative usage, proclamation.

The chapter will also examine how different poetic devices are used by Tamil women to take a political stand for and against Tamil nationalism through the memories of the dead. Dissent is marked in the poetry through figures which don't easily fall into the categories of "martyr-traitor". The chapter analyses the gendered figure like mother, whose reproductive role is appropriated by nationalism, but is being recast in poetry through acts of remembering and mourning.

Exits and Returns

The third chapter deals with the articulation of different types of exits from Tamil nation- forced and voluntary- and also the articulation of the concept of return. Closely linked to this is the limbo that accompanies the period between the two; a period of waiting characterized by ennui. A disruption of the traditional concepts of Time can also be seen in the poetry written by women. Poetry uses different ways to record the passage of time and describes the nature of existence within war time. There are also different types of exits, marked in time as well as through the naming of possible scenarios for exiting. Migration is also different based on the caste and class and only a few could actually afford to leave. The chapter looks at how this process of leaving was gendered differently for women. While there is poetry of nostalgia for the homeland left behind, there is also a distinct poetry that is traced of making place in newer contexts.

Traces

The last theme dealt within the thesis is the concept of Traces. It examines how identities are forcefully produced through a regime of official documentation and how it doesn't allow for the articulation of certain narratives of existence in war. These narratives, I argue can be found in the poetry written by women, as traces. This chapter critiques the skewed dynamics of visibility during wartime. While on the one hand there is a forced visibilization through identity cards, there is also widespread censorship on speech. Many losses, forced disappearances loom large but could not be articulated within a militarised environment. Poetry marks these ineffable experiences as traces.

A Note on Translation

The thesis used available translated works of Tamil poetry in English as found in the anthologies, 'The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry', 'Lost Evenings, Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lanka Civil War', 'Mirrored Images: An Anthology of Sri Lankan Poetry', 'Uprooting the Pumpkin: Selections from Tamil Literature in Sri Lanka', 'Time will Write a Song for You' and 'Waking is Another Dream: Poems on the Genocide in Eelam'. The rest of the work available in Tamil was translated taking the help of four native speakers of Tamil.[102] Though I can read Tamil, I neither have a formal training in Tamil language and literature, nor am I a native speaker of Tamil; hence the translation process was a collaborative one. The poetry was read together with each of these translators, who helped me with the meanings and the syntax of the poem. I later translated the poem into English, keeping in mind the conversations and notes provided by the translators. As the thesis is a thematic study, the emphasis was on articulating the content of the poem with the myriad cadences and not so much on trying to be faithful to the formal element of the original poem. Hence the translations provided are imperfect in nature, but attention has been given to emulate as much as possible the overall rhythm of the poem.

[102] Ramya Ramalingam, PhD student in the Tamil Department, JNU; Eswaran Arumugam, PhD student in Tamil Department, JNU; Sornalatha Narayanan, Biotechnology student from Thoothukudi; and A. Aundeeswaran, a former governmental official from Nagercoil.

Secondly, the poetry translated has taken into account the difficulties of the "translationality of experience" [103] of living through war. All the four translators and I have not experienced the violence of war. As South Indians, all of us occupy a position of privilege because of the complicated history of exchanges between South Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils as well as because of the devious role the Indian army and State had in the Sri Lankan Civil War. The lesson I took from my interaction with poets and researchers from Sri Lanka was to be constantly reflexive of my position vis a vis my work. One way I tried to do this was to destabilize the understanding of the category of "Tamil woman" by paying attention to the different voices of women that came specifically from the poetry. Adele Murdola's argument that there is a distinction between "difference as benign diversity and difference as disruption" was a useful guide in this process.[104] Hence, instead of starting with a homogenized received understanding of what Tamil is from the Indian context, the thesis examines the different strategies in writing poetry used by women to disrupt a unitary understanding category of the 'Tamil woman". The thesis also contextualizes the poetry of women as coming from specific moments in the history of Sri Lanka. While giving importance to the "experience" as evidenced in the poetry, the thesis is also attentive to the idea that these experiences are rooted in specific material and social conditions, which are constantly in flux. Though reading of poetry is a subjective experience, the selection of poems to be included in the thesis did not only depend on the emotional response it evoked in the researcher; instead the selections of poems were based on how deeply it engaged with the questions the thesis is trying to ask.

---

[103] Term used by Sumathy Sivamohan in personal discussion.

[104] Adele Murdolo, "Warmth and Unity with All Women? Historicizing Racism in the Australian Women's Movement," *Feminist Review* (1996):69

CHAPTER ONE

WRITING LIBERATION

The title of this chapter is inspired from one of the poems published in the first anthology of Tamil poetry written by women in Sri Lanka, '*Sollatha Sethigal*'. Written by Sivaramani, the poem 'Write Liberation' is an earnest engagement with the question "*Naam Ethai Peruvom?*" (What Will We Achieve?). The poem advances a nuanced understanding of liberation that is also an overt critique of national liberation. For Sivaramani, the answer given to the question at the end of endless struggles, having lost happiness and youth, burdened with yearnings and poverty is 'We'll achieve freedom, liberty, our nation, our soil' is not satisfactory. She is disappointed with such high sounding but vacuous promises. She reminds us,

> There are nations many,
>
> which have achieved liberation,
>
> Yet people still employ begging bowls.
>
> Friends, will we too win
>
> freedom with a begging bowl?[105]

She writes against a liberation that promises freedom only for a few and declares that once "we make a manacle for all the manacles, then we shall attain liberation".[106] The inclusive concept of liberation that alludes to a classless society makes this poem a favorite clarion call for many left leaning organizations and has led to multiple

---

[105] Sivaramani, "Write Liberation", in *Sollatha Seithigal*, ed. Tamizh Thesiya Aavana Suvadikal (Chennai: Rasakili Printers/ Silikuyil), 23.

[106] Ibid.

reproductions of the poem in the cyberspace.[107] To the interest of this chapter is the title of the poem 'Write Liberation' and the act of 'authoring' liberation implied in it. What is it to author one's own liberation? This chapter examines how women articulated their understandings of liberation and how they authored their struggles with liberation as framed by Tamil nationalism, the selves they inhabited in the process and dreamt of remaking.

In the poetry written by women, as selves are created through the act of authoring, they also fracture the monolithic idea of a 'Tamil woman'. The work of poetry has to be analysed keeping in mind that it is produced within a civil war fought over competing nationalisms. The period 1981-2009, encompasses the rise and fall of militant Tamil nationalism and these poems are written within the discursive fields that nationalism constructed for the woman. The poetry is varied in its responses to its engagment with this discursive field, but are situated within it. This chapter, divided into three sections, looks at the specific category of liberation as articulated within the works of poetry and the subjectivities that were produced. The first section deals with the poetry emerging in the early 1980s, which constitutes the early phase of militant Tamil nationalism. Here I will look at the first collection of women's poetry in Tamil published in Sri Lanka, *'Sollatha Seithigal*'. The second section looks at the poetry written by combatant women in the militant phase of nationalism where LTTE enjoyed dominance. The third section looks at the poetry written by Muslim women who wrote about liberation as a resistance against doctrinal and bodily disciplining of Muslim women by religion and patriarchy.

In the act of authoring there is an implied authority as well as agency. Do women writing about their conceptions of liberation automatically ensure their agency? Will writing about liberation constitute feminist resistance? Liberation carries with it images of freedom and resonances of struggle to achieve it that can be erroneously conflated with

[107] Interestingly in the magazine 'New Democracy' which is termed as the 'theoretical organ' of the New Democratic Party published this poem of Sivaramani fused incorrectly with stanzas from another poem of hers from the same anthology, Sollatha Seithigal.

New Democracy, May 2010, No 37, pg 1
https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/sri-lanka/new-democracy/ND37.pdf

feminist consciousness and resistance. Here, the need for historizication and contextuality that Saba Mahmood stressed in her engagement with women's agency in the piety movements of Egypt is important. In her articulation of docile agency, she forewarns us that "If the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific, then the meaning of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility and effectivity."[108] Therefore it is important to look at the spacio-temporal contingencies that produce these articulations of liberation.

To unravel the dilemma of attribution to these texts a feminist agenda, it is productive to engage with Leila Abu Lughod's work. Abu Lughod in her 1986 analysis of women's poetry among the Bedouin tribe recognized their poetry as an expression of women's resistance and protest against the strict norms of male domination in which Bedouin women live.[109] But in a later essay which reflected on her earlier work, Abu Lughod asks a very pertinent question which is very important for this chapter as well; "How might we recognize instances of women's resistance without misattributing to them forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of their experience-something like a feminist consciousness or feminist politics".[110] She says that in our tendency to "romanticize resistance" we "collapse distinctions between forms of resistance and foreclose certain questions about the working of power".[111] She goes on to say that in order to describe the

---

[108] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 14.

Saba Mahmood's work also has been critiqued for not addressing the power dynamics of the Salafi movement, yet the point she makes about spacio-temporal contingency in analysis of agency is important.

[109] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled sentiments : Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986)

[110] Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17 No. 1 (1990): 47.

[111] Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women,"

specific forms that acts of resistance take, they need to be located within the fields of power rather than outside it.

A similar concern of understanding of resistance as rooted in explorations of the nature of power can be traced in Judith Butler's notion of 'subjection'. This idea is her reformulation of Foucault's idea of subjectification- the ambivalent process of becoming a subject in, and through, power relations. Foucault here sees power that subordinates as being simultaneously producing its contestations. Foucault recognizes that "there is a plurality of resistance, each of them a special case, resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant or violent. Still others that are quick to compromise, interested or sacrificial; by definition they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations."[112] Butler in "The Psychic Life of Power" expands this notion to encompass an analysis of ways in which subordinated individuals become passionately attached to and hence becomes psychically invested in their own subordination.[113] Butler reminds us that "if the disciplinary apparatus produces subjects, but as a consequence of that production, it brings into discourse the conditions for subverting that apparatus itself."[114] She writes that "if Foucault could argue that a sign could be taken up, used for purposes counter to those for which it was designed, then he understood that even the most noxious terms could be owned, that the most injurious interpellations could also be the site of radical reoccupation and resignification."[115] She argues that since we are brought into being through the injury caused to us, we are psychically attached to it. For Butler only through an occupying of and occupying by that injurious term can one resist and oppose it, "recasting the power that constitutes me as the power I oppose".[116] Sharika

[112] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power (*California: Stanford University Press, 1992), 98.

[113] Ibid. 100.

[114] Ibid. 99-100

[115] Ibid. 104

[116] Ibid. 104.

Thiranganama in her book on civil war in Sri Lanka, titled 'In My Mother's House' found this "ambivalent passionate attachment" in those she interviewed in Sri Lanka, "where war is injurious, yet productive and constitutive where new forms of identities and categories are produced".[117]

Udaya Kumar in his scholarly engagement with the autobiographical agency, writes that one way to desist from attributing agency to the acts of self narration, is to bring into focus genres of writings that do not always privilege a narrative unfolding of events. By delving upon the two meanings of the word agency: one as the capacity to act or exert power and the other as the authorized performance of certain acts for another, he suggests that "rather than extend the scope of *autos* to cover the author's originary self, it might be useful to explore structures of authorization in autobiographies. Under what authority does one gain the right to speak about one's life?"[118] This is one of the questions that is fronted in the analysis of poetry in this chapter. What do the texts of poetry, whose forms defy an easy straightforward narration of events, tell us about the structures of powers within which these women were writing in? In the specific dismantling and reworking of significations within poetry, how do these texts engage or critique the discourses of nation and patriarchy?

***SOLLATHA SEITHIGAL* & SPEAKING OUT UNTOLD MESSAGES: POETRY OF EARLY 1980s**

The period of late 1970s and the 1980s was a period of intense engagement with structures of the Sri Lankan society in the discourse of Tamil nationalism. The non-violent methods of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) were being rejected, followed by the popular demand for a separate Tamil homeland, Eelam, through militant

[117] Sharika Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 12.

[118] Udaya Kumar, *Writing the First Person: Literature, History and Autobiography in Modern Kerala* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016), 16.

means. It was a period of questioning of old modes of societal existence and subsequent bold imagining of an egalitarian future. This period saw young men and women, especially students showing an avid interest in Tamil nationalism. As Sumathy Sivamohan writes, the national liberation struggle destabilized hierarchical structures of class, caste and particularly gender.[119] The engagement of people from different strata of society in the imagining of the Tamil nation ensured that the period saw the scope for a constructive remaking of Tamil consciousness. Sivamohan traces here the formation of a space for the militant consciousness to emerge which she opposes to the militarism of the mid 1980s when LTTE came into dominance.[120]

Inspired from the fervent mobilization of energy towards the goal of national liberation, the period of early 1980s also witnessed a new enthusiasm among women, which was reflected in their engagements in the political and the literary sphere. They attached themselves to political struggle as members and supporters of different political groups. Nationalist groups also started forming their own women's wings like *Tamil Eela Mahalir Peravai* (Women's Organization of Tamil Eelam) which was started by PLOTE[121] and *Eela Mahalir Munnani* (Eelam Women's Front) which was the women's wing of EROS[122]. EPLRF (Eelam People's Liberation Front) was one of the first groups to attract women and started the Eelam Women's Liberation Front (EWLF). "Its avowed socialism and openness to discussing the women's question brought several young

[119] Sumathy Sivamohan. "Territorial Claims, Home, Land and Movement: Women's History of Movement and Resistance" in *The Search for Justice: The Sri Lanka Papers,* ed. Kumari Jayawardena et al. (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2016).

[120] Ibid.

[121] The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) is a former Tamil militant group that had become a pro-government paramilitary group and political party.

[122] The Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS), also known as the Eelam Revolutionary Organisers, is a former Tamil militant group in Sri Lanka. Most of the EROS membership was absorbed into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1990.

women, many of whom were still studying, to join its ranks."[123] Soon these young women were out speaking, travelling and holding all night meetings in villages.

There were also independent women's groups which were not affiliated with nationalist groups that sprouted along with national liberation struggle like the Mother's Front (1984-87), Jaffna University Women's Forward Group (1980-82), Women Study Circle, *Maathar Marumalarchi Perani* (Women's New Revolutionary Group), *Theevaka Maathar Ani* (Theevaka Women's Group), Poorani Women's Home and Jaffna University Women's Circle. Many women's magazines were also published during this period like *Penn Viduthalai, Dhagam, Thozhi, Vilak, Senthanal, Nangai, Suthanthira Paraivagal, Nangai, Maruthaani* (Muslim Women's Magazine), *Penkalin Kural* which carried essays, poems and articles written by women. It seemed like a new eagerness was displayed in writing and reading among women.[124] Debates and exchange of ideas on women's status and women's standpoint were discussed and these discussions found an acceptance within the Tamil nationalist groups as well. Many women poets entered the literary fray during this period, including Urvashi, Selvi, Sivaramani, Avvai, Ranga, Sankari, Maithreyi, Mythili, Darshini, Nalayani and Mazeera Majeed. This period also saw women entering the arenas of art which were not deemed as "womanly" like Modern art[125]. For example, in 1986 Jaffna University held an art exhibition exclusively of three woman painters. This was also the period when artists like Arunthathy Sabanathan and Vasuki Jegananathan gained prominence as artists of promise in Colombo. Women entering the field of art and literature molded new forms of expression and expanded the field of literature.[126] While earlier discussions on women's issues were restricted to dowry and female illiteracy (as important as these issues are), in the early 80s,

---

[123] V Geetha, "Life Worlds: War, Desire, and Labour in Contemporary Tamil Women's Writings." (Occasional paper 2. Centre for Advanced Study, Department of Comparative Literature. Kolkata: Jadavpur University, 2010)

[124] Sitralega Maunaguru, "Sivaramaniyin Vaazhvum Kavithayum: Oru Arimukham." In *Sivaramani Kavithaigal* , ed. Sitralega Maunaguru (Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1993), iii-xxviii.

[125] Ibid. iii-xxviii.

[126] Ibid. iii-xxviii.

relationship between men and women, the inequality that is inherent in the various stages of this relationship, women's point of view about the effects of such patriarchal relations on their daily life were talked of, even if sparsely.[127] Patriarchal dominance, control of women through the institution of marriage, love, constraining ideas like chastity and predestined roles marked out for women according to social customs were also questioned. These issues were not just addressed in the writings of women, but also in general as themes in art and literature. For example, in the field of theatre, plays like *Mannsumantha Meniyar, Thiyaga Thirumanam, Seri Paathi* (Equal Half), *Maathoru Bhagam* (Woman, A Half), *Thaayumaay Naayumaanar, Shakti Pirakathu* were staged to wide acceptance.[128] Hence, the early 1980s, for all the horrors that were witnessed with respect to the heightening of ethnic conflict, were still largely hopeful years. It is in this background that the first collection of women's poetry in Tamil, *Sollatha Seithigal*, was brought out by the Women's Study Circle in Jaffna. Many of the poets in this collection closely worked with the Women's Study Circle, which acted as a space for feminist organizing and discussions. Some of them were part of the Poorani Women's Home which provided education and support to rural and poor women who had lost access to daily subsistence; some others were active in the working of 'Santhiham', a psychiatric help centre in Jaffna which provided counseling and rehabilitation help to warn affected women and children.[129]

The poetry that came out through '*Sollatha Seithigal*' reflects and ponders on the social situation of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and was especially resonant with the voices of women who were witness to the turbulence and churning of this period. Sitralega Maunaguru in her foreword to this collection of poetry points us to the male dominance and patriarchal controls prevalent over women in Tamil society in Sri Lanka. She places the anthology as a necessary corollary, a much needed intervention from the side of the

[127] Ibid. iii-xxviii.

[128] Ibid. iii-xxviii.

[129] Ibid. iii-xxviii.

women to a predicament which reduces them to being 'objects' under a patriarchal gaze or bodies meant only for reproduction.[130]

Sollatha Seithigal is important not just as the first compilation of Tamil women's poetry in Sri Lanka, but for its clear vision of being a feminist intervention in a society saddled by both the burden of patriarchal structures and the violence engendered by ethnic conflict. The title draws our attention to the many types of silences, the many messages that remain unspoken which are crucial for the perpetuation of women's subservience. There is a recognition that speaking out through writing is also a means for the formation of a "reverse discourse", a claiming of the terms of being a woman and re-signifying it. One of the chief strategies in feminist research is bringing women's voices out of obscurity and silence, where women's history is seen as political rather than archival work. It is useful here to turn to the introductory chapter of 'We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in Telangana People's Struggle' in which the authors reminds us of the two fallacies commonly seen in creating women's history: as compensatory history and contributory history. In compensatory history the effort is to locate and place alongside great men of history, great women who were left out; a history of exceptional women. Here the cultural biases, the political commitments and disciplinary strategies that excluded women in the first place remained unquestioned. Women as a whole still remain hidden. In India, the authors argue, most of the work in the area were contributory histories. Emphasis here is on describing and assessing the quality and extent of women's participation in historical events. The problem here is that women are seen contributing to something that exists independent of them, and this denies a recentering of knowledge necessary for a women's history.[131] In order to write a history that takes women seriously one needs to allow an emphasis on telling as opposed to asking. One has to be astute in noticing the language of public/ macro history which has established itself as transparent because of the legitimacy it gets out of being uncontested and sanctioned by authority.

---

[130] Sitralega Maunaguru, "Arimukham," in *Sollatha Seithigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru (Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1986)

[131] Lalita K, et al., *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle*. (London : Zed Books, 1989).

Hence one should train oneself to hear the 'language of silence'. In hearing the efforts at articulating what was hitherto unspoken and perhaps remains unspeakable, one has to understand "the pauses, the wavering, the incoherences, questions that are avoided, and tales that are obsessively repeated".[132] In the poems included in *Sollatha Seithigal*, we can trace an effort in listening closely to the 'language of silence', and turning those 'unspoken' to active speaking beings. Most of these poems are written in first person, and have voices of women who are speaking of the inconsistencies underneath the deceptive even surface of a Tamil society, united in the purpose of Tamil nationalism. Breaking the silence is also a fracturing of the representations of women, exposing the cracks within the icons of Tamil femininity celebrated within Tamil nationalism and revealing the daily violence hidden within the metaphors that the Tamil society has created to bridle the Tamil women.

The first poem in this collection, A. Sankari's 'In Their Eyes' sets the tone of the collection by placing the gendered violence on women as unexceptional, routine and all pervasive. Woman in Tamil society is depicted from the point of view of the patriarchal gaze[133] as a sum of her body parts which has the burden of social reproduction. The poem places patriarchy in different planes, starting with the strictures on her labour and her body. The acute hypocrisy contained in the constant reminders to her of being the bearer of Tamil cultural idioms like chastity while being subjected to the intrusive looks of the same preachers of Tamil culture is highlighted. This poem shows how the subject of Tamil woman is not just formed against some impersonal static cultural yardsticks, but is also formed in the 'looks' of variegated men as well. Her body is not a whole in the looks of men, but exists in parts which evoke erotic desire. But the desire of the woman is threatening and hence has to be curbed using the idealistic attribute of female chastity. The shackle that women have to break to liberate themselves is the whole process of signification which simultaneously sees them as Kannaki, the reproducer of the nation

[132] Ibid.

[133] The idea of gaze here is not to be confused with the concept of male gaze forwarded by Laura Mulvey or the critique of her work.

and a sexual object; a signification in which the meaning making is wrested away from her.

I have no
Face
Heart
Soul.

In their eyes-
two breasts
long hair
slight waist broad hips-
is all I have.

Cooking,
spreading beds,
bearing children
are my tasks.

They'll talk about chastity
of Kannaki,
and while they
talk so,
They'll keep on looking
at my body

This is habitual

starting from husband

to shopkeeper. [134]

The evocation of Kannaki in this poem is very pertinent considering the cultural currency this figure from the Tamil epic *Silapadikaram* (The Lay of the Anklet) has in the Tamil society. She is the icon of the ideal Tamil womanhood who takes on a Pandyan King and questions him on justice and burns the city of Madurai in revenge for her husband's unjust death because of the power of her chastity. Purity or *Karupp (Katpu)* of the woman is the cornerstone of Tamil cultural and moral regulation in constructing the Tamil woman. An almost fanatic anxiety thus revolves around the chastity of the Tamil woman, which if violated by men from the 'Other' is equivalent to the castration of the masculine power.[135] Sumathy Sivamohan writes that the understanding of *Katpu* in Sri Lanka is mediated and received from various cultural and popular mediums like South Indian cinema.[136] She traces to Kannaki an antecedent to the notion of *katpu*, which is later used to mobilise women into Tamil nationalism. In Jaffna society Kannaki is not regarded as a real woman, but a saintly figure as well as a goddess. Yet her *katpu* is a characteristic which unmythical, real women should also emulate.[137] Sumathy Sivamohan rightly opines that the martial revenge of Kannaki on the city of Madurai is conveniently

---

[134] Sankari, "Avarkal Parvayil," in *Sollatha Seithigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru (Jaffna : Women's Study Circle, 1986), 9-10.

[135] Sitralega Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism : The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control," in *Unmaking the Nation : The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995) 158-175.

[136] Sumathy Sivamohan. "Territorial Claims, Home, Land and Movement: Women's History of Movement and Resistance".

[137] Ibid.

forgotten and the mythical power of her chastity is remembered and propagated.[138] Sankari's poem also reveals this selective glorification of 'the chastity of Kannaki', a selection of a single aspect from many complexities of the figure of Kannaki which suits the purposes of reigning in of women's sexuality, while still seeing her as an object to be 'looked at'. We can look to C.S Lakshmi's differentiation between Tamil culture and Tamil identity to understand better why it is the power of Kannaki's chastity which is chosen to be celebrated. According to C.S Lakshmi, Tamil culture is an amalgamation of certain myths, symbols and language conventions that 'continue to exist and dominate', while Tamil identity is about a politics of choice.[139] She writes that when certain images dominate, they obscure certain other images or certain other aspects of the same image. There is a process of selecting certain elements of culture and transfixing them as a part of identity. Hence while Kannaki's attribute of chastity is selected to form an integral part of the Tamil woman's identity, Kannaki as a symbol of righteous anger is overlooked. This prioritization does not necessarily mean that there are binary oppositions in these attributes, but that an inclusion of these various other aspects would have broadened the script, 'giving more depth and perspective' to the image of Kannaki.[140] This 'widening of angle' of an icon would also lead to recognition of other aspects of the 'tamil women's' lived experiences.

Sankari also deftly collapses the predatory public and the safe private space binary in violence on women by drawing a spectrum of violating men, from shopkeeper to the husband. In a similar register, Ranga's poem '*Unmayilum Unmayaay*' (Truth Within Truth)[141] talks of sexual violence of a woman at the hands of a man who belongs to the same *ur*. She describes the lack of comprehensibility of such violence within a concept of chastity, which is invoked to demarcate 'our men' from the 'other men'. Hence, when an

---

[138] Ibid.

[139] C.S. Lakshmi, "Bodies Called Women: Some Thoughts on Gender, Ethnicity and Nation," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32, No. 46 (Nov. 15-21, 1997), 2953-2962

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ranga, "Unmayilum Unmayaay," in *Sollatha Seithigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru (Jaffna : Women's Study Circle, 1986), 32.

"*uravan*" or a fellow man from her *ur* rapes a woman, the woman is blamed by her kin. *Ur* which can mean natal village carries the connotations of home as well within it. Valentine E Daniel contrasts *ur* from the concept of *kiramam* (village) and *tecam* (nation) both of which he terms as ' bounded, standard universally accepted and constant spatial units'.[142] As opposed to this *ur* is 'person-centric, contextual and fluid' and encompasses a notion of similarity among the inhabitants of the *ur*. Hence people from the same *ur* are considered to have similar personality traits.[143] Knowing the other person's *ur* is acts as a prejudgement on the nature of relationship you will share with the him/her.[144] It is interesting to note here Sharika Thiranagama's departures in the conception of *ur* from Daniel's, which she formulates from her explorations of the work which the concept *ur* does in large scale displacement in the context of war. She writes "*Ur* became about an everyday language of love, affection, sentiment and memory...was highly mutable, was highly potent but also a generator of contradictions...People sought to fix and make larger meanings out of this fluid person centric discourse of assumed love and affinity".[145] In Ranga's poem, it is the assumption of this shared love and affinity, the fixity of the *ur* that is dismantled by the woman who is raped. "The truth which is more than the truth"[146], the truth that exceeds the common sense of community is the unspeakability of violence against women that is inherent within the *ur*. Such messages which remain 'unspoken' form *Sollatha Seithigal*.

In a parallel register to sexual violence, Sankari in her poem ' *Indru Nann Periya Penn*' (Today I Am A Grown Woman) writes of the suffocation that is an intrinsic part of being a grown woman using some stark yet straightforward metaphors. She writes;

I am,

---

[142] Valentine E Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 102.

[143] Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* , 18.

[144] Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way,* 102.

[145] Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* , 19.

[146] Ranga, "Unmayilum Unmayaay," 32.

flower turned into stone,

breeze hardened into rock,

flowing water turned into ice.[147]

Sankari equates womanhood with a loss of movement, a loss of freedom. Being a 'grown up' woman requires her not to 'laugh loudly', to embody qualities of humility, calmness and patience, and to be circumscribed by diktats that govern her speech, her walk, her vision and her attire. As opposed to the freedom inherent in the metaphors of breeze and flowing water, womanhood is described in terms of rigidity and immobility. It is from this constraining experience of being a woman that Sankari forms her concept of liberation. In her poem '*Viduthalai Vendinum*' (Liberation Wanted) she writes:

I wish

for a thousand wings

to open and fly

touching the sky.

...

In that expanse

beyond earth

I want to roam

as a spaceship

from "Space Odyssey"

I wish

I was all the birds

[147] Sankari. "Indru Naan Periya Penn" in *Sollatha Seithigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru (Jaffna : Women's Study Circle, 1986), 11.

that roam the sky.[148]

Sankari finds liberation in the space of her yearnings and desires which are depicted in metaphors of free floating spaceships and flying birds. She demands freedom from the reality which is 'shackles at her feet' made from social customs and marriage. When she desires the sky, she is instead pushed deep into the *paathalam* or the netherworld. It is from this absolute denial of a space to dream and pursue dreams that Sankari demands liberation. Reading both these poems of Sankari together shows that a lack of liberation as expressed in metaphors of stone, hardened ice shows a precipitation and a limitation of space of movement, all deeply constraining. Hence, violence is also an establishment of power through control of space and control over the expressions of womanhood that gives her the freedom to be malleable, change forms to expand one's subjectivity. Thus liberation here is a breakaway from concepts of static womanhood that deny the woman a chance to construct it, change it, mould and remould it and perhaps throw it away and roam endlessly without being tethered to the ground. The spaces she marks out in the poem are expanses that defy gravity of curtailment. The wish to roam around in the space is the oppositional space imagined from the reality of '*paathalam*'. The trope of roaming is something one can trace in the poetry of alternate imaginations of space in the poetry of women; the violent force in confinement, deftly conveyed through the act of being pushed to the netherworld is brought out in relief when juxtaposed to the yearning to roam. For this wish to translate into reality, the poetry in *Sollatha Seithigal* emphasises the need to let go of certain aspects of Tamil femininity.

Dearest friends,

still searching for mirrors to comb your hair?

---

[148] Sankari. "Viduthalai Vendinum." " in *Sollatha Seithigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru (Jaffna : Women's Study Circle, 1986), 13.

Much time goes waste adjusting the sari.

No, friends. No.

Let us put off for a while

eye shadow and lipstick

for our younger sisters to have love and music.

Let our young shoulders bear the burden of duty.

Let us forget the days

when we shed tears

because the pleats of our dresses were not pretty.

Let us put behind us those shame filled days. [149]

Sivaramani's poem 'Our Liberation' considers a break from conventional femininity as a prerequisite for a movement of women's emancipation. In the poem 'Our Liberation', Sivaramani is also reversing the attributes of shame. The Tamil text *Tolkappiyyam* prescribes for the Tamil woman ideals like *accam*, *madam*, *nanam*, and *payirppu* which can be loosely translated into English as timidity, innocence, bashfulness, and conscious behaviour that upholds her chastity.[150] Deviations from these qualities in a woman are a source of shame, and are considered dangerous to the moral fabric of the community. This does not mean there were no deviations; instead the deviations themselves have to be justified by the occasions by which it was made imperative. For e.g., Kannaki's

[149] Sivaramani. "Our Liberation." *New Democracy*, May 2010: 1.

[150] Premalatha Karupiah, "Have Beauty Ideals Evolved? Reading of Beauty Ideals in Tamil Movies by Malaysian Indian Youths," *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 85, No. 2, (2015): 239–261.

C.S. Lakshmi, "Bodies Called Women: Some Thoughts on Gender, Ethnicity and Nation,"

destructive rage is brought forth by the circumstances of injustice to her husband. In other contexts there is a continuous valourization of ideal femininity in the cultural texts as well as in the everyday lives of the Tamil society. Sivaramani's poem is radical in redrawing the contours of shame away from a deviancy from cultural codes to that of adherence to beauty ideals of Tamil femininity. I argue that the movement for Tamil liberation inaugurated a space for reimagining attributes of femininity.

The poetry in the collection also recognises the need to write in a new language that will be suffused with ideas of women's liberation and her experience. For instance, Sivaramani's poem written in 1985 is about a new language which is furious, a poetry which "won't see beauty in the morning sun or blooming lotuses".[151] She denies that she is a "born poet", but says that it is the thousand injustices around her which makes her a poet. Hence the woman poet is not born, but made from her circumstances.[152] Sivaramani recognises that her emergence as a poet is from the field of suppression that encompasses her, but her resistance is also inherently born from these circumstances. The poet that emerges is resignifying the process of writing poetry from being an act of describing beauty to an act of retrieving the ugliness that surrounds her. Here the woman poet, as opposed to the 'born poet' is drawing attention to the responsibility of witnessing that should be inherent in her language. The function of the poet is called into question and the moment of the 'birth' of the poet is also a moment of fury and recognition of injustice. But from this act of writing impelled by injustice and the subsequent birth of the woman as a poet, we can trace a concept of liberation which is at the same time a process of turmoil, but also creative. In Sivaramani's conceptualization of the woman poet, the creative process is not triggered by external beauty, but from the reality of lived women lives. The authorial process is depicted as a struggle to articulate the unspoken devoid of any hyperbolic celebration of the act of creativity. She also differentiates her work from the poetry produced from inebriation and writes that as opposed to 'black ink',

---

[151] Sivaramani. "Untitled." in *Sivaramani Kavithaigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru(Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1993), 27-28.

[152] Ibid.

she essays her 'inner being' with 'red ink'.[153] The poetry produced by the woman poet is hence produced from her flesh and blood, from the affect of fury coming from perceiving injustice and is seen to be a part of her being. It is also articulated as a process which is inevitable; the poet in her has to write. The poem ends with the statement "I am not the soothing breeze of 20th century".[154] This is a firm refusal to remain as a metaphor, and this is where the poet in her rises.

The poetry in *Sollatha Seithigal* is emblematic of the hope that was prevalent in the early 1980s that the Tamil liberation movement will be an opportunity to forward women's liberation. In this sense, *Sollatha Seithigal* and the poetry written in 1980s reflects the enthusiasm and an accepting environment for new ideas to be raised by women and the desire and will among women to conceive ideas of their emancipation. The poetry also shows the imaginings that were made possible in this period by the rise of the demand for Tamil Eelam. These texts are the hopes and expectations that women had from Tamil Eelam as a space of homeland. But sadly this period of enthusiasm and determination was not to last. While the woman in Sankari's poem '*Idaiveli*' chides her lover and says that he can't even try and "come to the heights she inhabits" because she is a "liberated woman", the Tamil society in the late 1980's was not ready to accept this liberated woman on her terms.[155] It increased the surveillance on women, and raised obstacles on women who imbibed the struggle for women's liberation in her life. The latter half of 1980s also saw the militant struggle reach a stage of infighting among different Tamil militant groups, with the LTTE attaining supremacy. An atmosphere of democratic discussions was lost and in its place an authoritarian and militaristic regime was instituted which was intolerant of dissent.[156] In the next section I will look at the corpus of poetry

---

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Sankari. "Idaiveli." in *Sollatha Seithigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru (Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1986) 7-8.

[156] Sitralega Maunaguru, "Arimukham," 3.

written by combatant women, which was a new addition to the literature from the late 1980s onwards.

WOMAN COMBATANT AND HER POETRY

In the mid 1980s, women were recruited to militant nationalism, creating widespread interest in the figure of woman as a warrior. Though women were involved in the militant nationalism from the early 1980s, they were limited to propaganda work, medical care and fundraising.[157] But with the increasing demand for fighters, women were given training to fight in combat. The Tamil militant groups differed in their views on women's liberation. While the nationalist LTTE claimed that their vision of Eelam was that of a socialist state in which a "radical transformation of women's lives and social attitudes towards women" will occur, the women's wing of EPLRF expressed the view that liberation of women cannot be automatically achieved through national liberation.[158] EPLRF saw the subordination of women as stemming from economic dependency linked to private ownership in the society. However, there were no debates on cultural traditions as reproductive sites for patriarchal relations within the women's front of these organisations.[159]

LTTE though late in the recruitment of women into their group, were the first to provide them with military training. Prior to the recruitment, there was a fear that inclusion of women into the movement would damage the image of the 'LTTE boys' as ascetics.[160] The organization had built a reputation around discipline and abstinence from worldly pleasures, devoted ardently and solely to the cause of national liberation. It was felt that

---

[157] Sitralega Maunaguru ,"Gendering Tamil Nationalism : The Construction of 'Woman'" ,163.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Qadri Ismail, "Boys will be Boys: Gender and National Agency in Franz Fanon and the LTTE," *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, No. 31-32 (1992): 1677-1679.

recruitment of women would prove to be a dangerous distraction.[161] The 'dangerous sexuality' of women, it was believed, would cause dissent among men, and when LTTE had to retreat to the forests in the face on IPKF onslaught, there was a talk among the Tamil community that women's involvement had sullied men's dedication.[162] But the LTTE had to recruit women as there were huge casualties among men in the conflict with the Sri Lankan army as well as in the fratricidal war between the militant groups. At the same time the circumstances that war opened for women included increased mobility and assertiveness and women demanded their inclusion in the fight against Sinhala chauvinist nationalism.[163] At first, in the year 1984, a small unit of women were trained in India and then allowed to participate in the conflict against Sri Lankan army. Their first involvement in combat was in the battle of Mannar under the guidance of Col. Victor. This was followed by further recruitment in 1986 and training within the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka. In 1987, there was a setting up of a women's military unit and all women training camps under the name of '*Suthanthira Paraivagal*' (Birds of Freedom) were established[164].

There was immense interest in this new Tamil woman subject, the combatant woman, who was a perpetrator of violence and hence went against the Tamil ideals of calmness and humility for women. In an attempt to assimilate and come to terms with this new deviant, yet important role of Tamil women in the militant liberation struggle, there was a construction of the Tamil woman as a 'woman warrior'[165]. Recruitment of women into

---

[161] Tahira Gonsalves, "Gender and Peacebuilding: A Sri Lankan Case Study," *Tamil Archives.* November 11, 2007, accessed August 17, 2014, http://tamilhelp.wordpress.com/2007/11/28/gender-and-peacebuilding-a-srilankan-case-study-tahira-gonsalves/

[162] Rajani Thiranagama, "No More Tears Sister: The Experiences of Women," in *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka- An Inside Account*, ed. Rajan Hoole (California : Claremont, 1990), 305-330.

[163] Nanthini Sornarajah, "The Experiences of Tamil Women: Nationalism, Construction of Gender and Women's Political Agency." *Lines* 3, No. 1 (2004).

[164] Adele Balasingham, *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers* (Jaffna: LTTE Publications, 1993).

[165] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism : The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control.", 163.

combat led to an active engagement and debate on their independent political agency. While LTTE promoted an understanding that the induction of women within their organization had resulted in an increase in the freedom of women, the feminist engagement with the issue was far less congratulatory in response. One of the responses was the view of women combatants as only 'cogs in the wheel" who were not initiators of ideas, but only implementers of policies made by somebody else.[166]

Nevertheless a liberatory potential can be traced in the construct where the docile femininity and domesticity of the Tamil woman were discarded for a more assertive consciousness. It was recognized that nationalism did open a space for reconsidering gender relations in the Tamil society. As Rajani Thiraganama, noted social activist and feminist of the period wrote;

> "One cannot but be inspired when one sees the women of the LTTE, two by two, in the night, with their AK's slung over their shoulder, patrolling the entrances to Jaffna. One could see the nationalist fervour and the romantic vision of women in arms defending the nation. This becomes a great draw for other women. Our social set-up, its restrictions on creative expressions for women and the evils of the dowry system are some of the social factors that led to their initial recruitment. Moreover, the political climate created by the struggle in the past decade, and the increasing loss of men to state terrorism and the world at large as refugees and emigrants, are some of the contributing factors necessitating women's recruitment." [167]

However, the liberatory potential of the figure of combatant women was soon co-opted by a deeply gendered Tamil society. The LTTE women were soon conceptualised as 'virgin armed warriors'. Drawing from the Hindu thought, Peter Schalk argues that it is the *karppu* (chastity) of the armed virgin which gives her the moral strength and energy for self sacrifice.[168] Schalk used the category of 'martial feminism' to denote women's

---

[166] Radhika Coomaraswamy, "Tiger Women and the Question of Women's Emancipation", *Pravada* 4/9 (1997) :10.

[167] Thiranagama, "No More Tears Sister: The Experiences of Women." 305-330.

[168] Peter Schalk, "Birds of Independence: On the Participation of Tamil Women in Armed Struggle," *Studies in Lankan Culture* 7 (December 1992): 92-96.

participation in LTTE. According to him, martial feminism was a struggle that has local roots which he valourised as more authentic and non-western as opposed to 'the western feminism' of women who stood outside the rubric of the LTTE notion of national struggle.[169]

Along with stressing the local emergence of women as warriors, they were portrayed as still retaining the feminine nurturance roles. Adele Balasingham writes "The LTTE woman remains behind the appearance of a uniformed female fighter, a tender, gentle and passionate young woman with all the qualities attributed to femininity".[170] Women fighters still followed the old patterns of interaction with men and strict separation of spheres of work were created and maintained with separate training camps.[171] It is well known that the LTTE hierarchy reserved the right to control the sexual conduct of its members and the moral codes set by them were to be obeyed at all times. Prior to Prabhakaran's own marriage, marriage and sexual intercourse were prohibited within the organization. Women soldiers, when adulterous, were given punishment and sexual relations were only tolerated within institutionalized marriage.[172]

Hence the agency enjoyed by combatant women is judged at best as 'an ambivalent agency', an agency restricted in its manifestation as it is rooted within a militarized environment. For e.g., when asked by Rajani Thiranagama, women in the LTTE "confessed to much confusion within the movement regarding the women's question. But they ultimately ended the argument with an expression of faith in their leader's ability to

---

[169] Sivamohan. "Territorial Claims, Home, Land and Movement: Women's History of Movement and Resistance".

[170] Balasingham, *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers.* 289.

[171] Margaret Trawick, "Reasons for Violence: A Preliminary Ethnographic Account of the LTTE," in *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'?* ed. Siri Gamage and IB Watson (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999) : 151--3 and 157.

[172] . Radhika Coomaraswamy and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham, "Being Tamil in a Different Way : A Feminist Critique of the Tamil Nation," in *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, ed. R. Cheran (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), 107-138.

solve all problems".[173] Leading Thiranagama to conclude, "If in a society like this, the dominant ideology under which the struggle is organised is itself an even more narrow, revivalist and romantic one, well sprinkled with images of male heroes and male valor, and if nationalism is a type of aggressive patriotism, then a concept of women's liberation would be working against the inner core of such a struggle".[174] It is in this context that Sumathy Sivamohan makes the important distinction between militarism and militancy in women organization. She quotes the Mother's Front, Poorani Women's Home (for sexually assaulted women) and the Women's Study Circle of Jaffna which opened a space for discussion and debate in universities as militant because of its partial subversion of the status quo. But she sees no such militancy in the LTTE women and terms them as militarized.[175]

The dominant narratives on the combatant women concentrate on them being marked by their body and sexuality. But how do combatant women mark their selves and articulate how the experience in combat or always having to be prepared for combat changed them? What were their motivations and aspirations when they joined the movement for national liberation? Neloufer de Mel argues that because the combatant's own voice is silenced in guerrilla warfare and/or expropriated by militant movements and state force, the inner self of the combatants can only be portrayed "in fictionalized treatments of their stories, in the discursive contradictions of their own martial poetry or caught at a moment of hesitancy in conversation".[176] This, de Mel warns is not to forward a notion of authenticity as available only in autobiography and that a suicide bomber's narrative of

---

[173] Thiranagama, "No More Tears Sister: The Experiences of Women," 305-330.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Sumathy Sivamohan, "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, Its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women," in *Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalization : Struggling to Create a New Social Order*, ed. S. H. Hasbullah and Barrie M. Morrison (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), 126-149.

Sivaramani. "Our Liberation,"1.

[176] Neloufer de Mel, "(Re)Cognising the Female Suicide Bomber in Sri Lanka," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, (2001): 79.

herself would also be a carefully considered representation. The feminist approach, according to de Mel, would demand a broadening of this script to include the material and historical conditions that produce the woman combatant /suicide and efforts to make visible her agentive moments as articulated by her. It is in this spirit that the poetry written by women will be analyzed in the following sections. I will begin by looking at how women's liberation was articulated by the leader of LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran and then analyze the poetry written by women who were part of LTTE to look at the departures they had from the official LTTE understanding of women's liberation.

Women's liberation: "Volcanic Child" of the Tamil Liberation Movement

When LTTE first recruited women, they used the rhetoric of liberation and empowerment of women to attract women, but for the LTTE the only way for women to gain their liberation was through the Tamil national movement. The primacy of the national struggle for liberation was always emphasized and gender equality was seen as being contingent on the successful attainment of this goal. This is evident when one looks at the rhetoric that Prabhakaran employed in his speeches. In his 1992 speech on the occasion of the International Women's Day, he starts by saying that "It is only the women with a revolutionary consciousness who could become a revolutionary force".[177] He hastens to add that "the struggle against male chauvinistic oppression is not a struggle against all men. It is an ideological struggle against the ignorance of men. This ideological struggle should be aimed at the mental transformation of men, at the distorted perceptions of men about women".[178] He also employs the rhetoric of 'humanism' to counter feminism. He says that "human dignity is beyond all sexual differences. Beyond manlinism (*sic*) and feminism there is humanism" and "Feminism is making a fervent appeal to manlinism to honour humanism, beyond gender differences and beyond feminism and manlinism"[179]

[177] Prabhakaran. "Women's International Day Message." *Tamilnation.* March 8th, 1992, accessed Oct 3, 2014, http://tamilnation.co/ltte/vp/women/vp9203.htm

[178] Ibid.

[179] Prabhakaran. "Women's International Day Message." *Tamilnation.* March 8th, 1993, accessed Oct 3, 2014, http://tamilnation.co/ltte/vp/women/vp9303.htm

For Prabhakaran, "men–women relationship" is the foundation of human existence and the differences between them are only biological and for human reproduction". In the 1993 celebration of International Women's Day, he goes a step further and says that "The ideology of women's liberation is a child born out of the womb of our liberation struggle…The Tamil Eelam revolutionary woman has transformed herself as a Tiger for the liberation of our land and the liberation of our women. She like fire that burns injustices, has taken up arms."[180] For him "the ideal of women's liberation is the fervent volcanic child that has its genesis in the matrix of our national liberation movement."[181]

In the poetry of combatant women, we can trace a reproduction of this idea of women's liberation being an offspring of national liberation where the goal of women's liberation is firmly located in the context of the "national reality, nationalist ideals and within the broader Tiger strategy of armed struggle to achieve Tamil Eelam".[182] Poems pledging allegiance to Prabhakaran the "Big Brother", thanking him for guidance and hailing him as an able leader to be reckoned with is not rare as LTTE invests heavily in the leadership cult of Prabhakaran.[183] As Nanthini Sornarajah correctly opines, the figure of Prabhakaran represented both a patriarchal figure in the Tamil family/nation as well as the military head of the Tamil struggle. She writes that Prabhakaran celebrated as '*Thalaivar*', which she translates as leader or love-lord, is a repository of male privilege.[184]

Some of the poems also perpetuate the image of the woman warrior as a continuance of her nurturance roles. In the poem '*Vallavan Thunai*', Thamizhkavi, sees the woman

---

[180] Ibid.

[181] Prabhakaran. "Women's Struggle in Thamil Eelam: The Volcanic Child of the Liberation Movement" *Tamilnation.* March 8th, 1996, accessed Oct 3, 2014, http://tamilnation.co/ltte/vp/women/vp9603.htm.

[182] R. Cheran, "Pathways of Dissent : An Introduction to Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka." in *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, ed. R. Cheran, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), xIiii.

[183] Thamizhaval. "Vaiyakame Kathiru." in *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil eezha penkalin Kavithai*, (Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001), 04.

[184] Nanthini Sornarajah, "The Experiences of Tamil Women: Nationalism, Construction of Gender and Women's Political Agency,"

warrior construct as a continuance of her role as a good wife at home who till yesterday had taken care of her children and relatives, but now will proceed to the borders as her home has come under risk.[185] It is interesting how the trope of border, which brings into mind a secure zone of home on the one side and the figure of enemy on the other, is used in this poem. The insinuation of encroachment into the home, the feminine space, is what makes a combatant out of the nurturing woman. The crossing of border between home and the beyond takes place. Also it is the conceptualization of Tamil nation as the home at threat which enables the woman a change in her role, as it is then transformed into a space that is to be protected and nurtured by the woman.

However, the poetry written by combatants also displays the desire for liberation from strictures of patriarchy as the reason for them joining the liberation struggle and not vice versa. Most of the incentives and motivations for joining the liberation struggle are painstakingly noted in their poetry and they reflect a yearning to break free from the social limitations that are entailed in being a woman. For e.g., Vannila, a new recruit when she wrote the poem '*Irul Vilahum*' (Darkness will Leave), writes about the subjugation that women faced inside their homes and society as a reason for them emerging as Tigers. She writes;

> We boiled
>
> along with the food
>
> on the kitchen stove,
>
> All our dreams burnt
>
> along with the firewood.
>
> Men tasted us
>
> along with the food.

[185] Thamizhkavi. "Vallavan Thunnaivi," in *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil Eezha Penkalin Kavithai*, (Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001), 46.

We fear the darkness

till yesterday,

Today we emerge

as flowers of fire[186]

Fire is a recurring motif in the poetry of women combatants, with connotations of both purgation as well as destructive devouring. In the above poem they are fire, but they are still blooming as flowers. This is a curious metaphoric femininity with an admixture of their destructive potential. It speaks of an emerging, a formation of another self. In the poem by Tamizhkavi, the woman is still in the *Pattini* mode; there is only continuance. C.S. Lakshmi has defined the *Pattini* conception of Tamil femininity as "a woman who gains moral strength by adhering to a strict code of conduct and who maintains the purity of her marital status".[187] The woman in Tamizhkavi's poem is hence acceptable within the Tamil conception of the woman-ideal, Kannaki as the *Pattini*, the woman as a reservoir of anger, which can be unleashed against injustice that threatens her household. *Pattini* is someone "who holds in check a reserve energy" which can never be unleashed against her own husband.[188] But in Vannila's poem the woman is unleashing her anger against her own home and the men in it as well. Joining the liberation struggle is then not a continuance, but an emerging of another self. Another combatant in LTTE, Thamilaval in her poem '*Vaiyakam Vasapedum*' published in the LTTE publication, "Velichcham" in the issue marking 25 years of its publication in 2001, points to the other possibilities and capabilities that being a woman holds other than labouring in reproducing and producing for the home. She points that it is the patriarchal society, forcing women to don ideal

[186] Vannila. "Irul Vilahum," in *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil Eezha Penkalin Kavithai*, (Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001) 48.

[187] Lakshmi, "Bodies Called Women: Some Thoughts on Gender, Ethnicity and Nation", 2955

[188] Ibid.

gender roles, which deceives them of their own abilities. Her blueprint for women to achieve the world is through taking agency of their own thinking and loving one's freedom.

Living stretches, empty and long
Kitchen smoke, taste of food
and the man's welfare –
fated or cursed as living.

Sending roots
to seek water within hardened rocks
Spreading roots,
over sand, of a
skyward looking colourful plant,
Losing it all.

Woman;
Living as a woman
is of such utmost achievement.
Then why this tragedy?
Whose deception was this?
Wearing asphyxiating masks of
Daughter, wife and mother,
The longings to throw the masks
suppressed into the unconscious.

Enough is enough – these staged façade

It is not wrong for woman to be woman.

Be yourself, be for your self.

Be not satisfied with the breeze

that comes through the window.

Learn the feat of breaking the lock.

Open the door and possess it all.

Thinking freely

loving freedom

these are not crimes to fear.

For the world to be yours

Think for yourself, love yourself.[189]

Thamilaval in this poem is marking woman as a being in freedom. She is exposing the sacralising of women's roles within society while their lived existences are tragic. She is evoking a return to being a woman who lives for her own sake, who thinks, who is ready to throw away masks. The Tamil used in this poem is straightforward and non-literary. In many conversations with Tamil researchers, I found the implication that these poems cannot be treated as literary works. Yet, women poets chose the medium of poetry to articulate, to etch their lives and to articulate gendered experiences. The aesthetic judgement on these texts should take to account not just the lack of poetic words and imagery, but how writing within combat leads to a sparseness, a hastening to mark their selves.

[189] Thamilaval, "Vaiyakam Vaspedum" *Velichcham*, (2001).

Combatant poets wrote in detail chronicling their bravery and what their work entailed in the time of war. For e.g. S. Puratshika writes in her poem '*Oyatha Alai Moontril*' (In These Endless Waves) about the crossing of the sea, the narrow escapes from missiles rushing past and walking on in spite of everything with weapons in their hands.[190] This new subject, the 'Tamil Eelam woman', the one who fights for Eelam, is used to vociferously attack the patriarchal notions of the Tamil society. In Nila's poem, 'You-Night Us', the poet enumerates the works that women perform in battlegrounds like firing 'artilleries non-stop from stationary launchers', driving and moving the heavy launcher, chasing escaping enemies.[191] Establishing the capabilities of women in the warfront, Nila rebukes the 'Tamil brothers' who hold on to regressive patriarchal notions.[192] In a society which traditionally did not allow women combatant roles, these women fighting for Tamil Eelam prided themselves in setting apart a womanhood which comprised not only a difference in appearance (lack of makeup and hair cut short), but also crucial differences in comportment and courage. The difference is most poignantly marked in the metaphors they use to describe themselves in poetry. As mentioned earlier, metaphors of fire and volcano are widely used in the place of traditional metaphors like flowers to describe themselves. Most significantly, the pride in the ability to wield the gun is written down as an important part of their subjectivity. In the poem '*Thuppaki*' (Gun) by Captain Janaarthini, who was a part of the prestigious Black Tiger Squad from which suicide bombers were recruited, talks to the gun like she is conversing with a friend. She understands that the weapon is her comrade, a part that will remain with her till her end. She writes:

> Gun!
>
> Some enemy remains
>
> to claim your bullet.

---

[190] S. Puratshika "Oyatha Alai Moontril," in *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil Eezha Penkalin Kavithai*, (Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001), 64.

[191] Nila, "You – Night – Us," *Suthanthira Paravaikal* , Oct-Nov (2002)

[192] Ibid.

You are our strength

You make us courageous

We will send across messages

to our enemies through you.[193]

But along with the obvious pride in handling weapons and being an active combatant woman, the poetry also traces moments of doubt, hesitation and uncertainty. While the gun is a constant companion imbuing her body with courage, it is also a constraining companion. In her 'Unwritten Poem', Vanathi talks of the disciplinary effects of weapons on her.

Unwritten poem

Write- Write the poem

that I left unwritten

Write my poem.

The thoughts

Plenty, plenty- I can't start

To write them,

in the borders

my gun stands risen,

Hence I am unable to rise up.

[193] Captain Janaarthani. "Thuppahi," in *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil Eezha Penkalin Kavithai*, (Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001), 52.

Therefore

Write, Write my unwritten poem.[194]

In this verse, Vanathi articulates an inability to "rise up" because her weapon constrains her. In a way the militaristic rigidity of her gun seeps into her body, paralysing it. Interestingly, this paralysis is addressed as an inability to write her thoughts. The unspeakability denotes that there is a denial of speech, even though she has an access to a public sphere conditioned by LTTE's quasi state mechanisms. She is signified in this public sphere as a combatant, where the materiality of her body as a weapon takes precedence over other representations. Hence, instead of a linguistic excess[195], she writes of an inability to write. The "unwritten poem" garners attention as she is killed in the battlefront and her exhortation to write her thoughts is not unheeded.

In the year 2000, when LTTE for the first time in the history of the Tamil Eelam War seized the Elephant Pass (Anai Iravu)[196], combatant Nathini wrote a poem entitled '*Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai*' (Your Unwritten Poem). Nathini was with Captain Vanathi when she wrote her 'Write my poem' which would turn out to be the last poem Vanathi wrote. Notably, this is the first poem that Nathini writes:

More than the sharpness of your gun

It is because of your sharp words,

to write your unwritten poem

they fashioned their lives into pens

---

[194] Vanathi, "Ezhuthatha En Kavithai," in *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai*, (Eezham: Captain Vanathi Veliyeeddakam, 2001) 1.

[195] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Scandal of the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[196] Elephant Pass is the strategic narrow isthmus linking Jaffna with the rest of Sri Lanka.

and their blood into ink.[197]

…

As your thoughts shall be written

so shall the continuance of your poem

written without cease.

Your pen which has reached our hands

Will know no rest from now on[198]

In this poem, Nathini is talking of a transference and the continuation of the unwritten poem for eternity. However, while Captain Vanathi's poem writes of an immobility wedged by unwritten thoughts, Nathini sees writing as something to be translated in a sphere of action. Hence, lives become pens, and blood is turned into ink. The "addresivity"[199] of Captain Vanathi's poem, the notion that her poem is oriented towards a listener, a fellow combatant woman, is given recognition through Nathini's poem and is appropriated for a cause. The thoughts that are written are for the nationalist cause. It is interesting how a poem, which is seen as a medium largely individualistic in purport, is used to forge connections across the movement. Captain Vanathi's poem, an utterance of the unutterable thought, when read along with Nathini's text, the concept of writing turns into a housing of different voices; a hybridity of selves and meanings residing and invested in the act. There is also the inherent continuity implied in a combatant's poetry, like a never ending fabric scroll, it has to be constantly updated with incessant effort and exertion and more importantly sacrifices on the battlefront. The poem that Vanathi writes gives rise to a whole collection of poetry titled "*Ezhuthata Un Kavithai*". The slow

---

[197] Nathini. "Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai." in *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai*, (Eezham: Captain Vanathi Veliyeeddakam, 2001) 02.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays.* Translated by Vern W.Mc Gee. Austin, 94. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1986.

snowballing of words, rolling over one another, encompassing voices of many tenses, many different textures results in the collection. Poetry, in this instance, becomes a collective act of telling and retelling of what a combatant's life entails.

As in most nationalist liberation struggles, there is also an eagerness to write down one's version of history. The poetry of the combatant is also a poetry of witnessing. A combatant is also a 'blood filled pen'; her body writes on the battlefront, but also chronicles the atrocities of the 'other' that she is fighting. The body is constantly swinging between two instrumental acts. The act of sacrificing one's self and chronicling the war, writing down one's life in this war. For e.g., combatant and poet Sudhamati writes:

> I shall sing loudly,
>
> holding
>
> my rifle aloft …
>
> for as long as my blood's
>
> pulse-beat lasts.[200]

This simultaneous need to sacrifice one's life and yet also write one's life, is reflected in their poetry in the tentativeness of words which describe an anticipation of death, and their description of a life working towards a liberation that they might not witness in their lifetime. This vacillation between the desire to witness the liberation they are fighting for and the acceptance that their sacrifice is a necessary precondition for liberation is captured in Captain Gnanamathi's poem titled 'Sacrifice'.

> Darkness will lose its meaning,
>
> brightness will fill.

[200] Sudhamati. "In Scorched Earth, My Roots Shall Spread," in *Indian Literature; Tamil Woman's Poet: A current of Contemporary Poetry*, ed. Kutti Revathi and Kalyana Raman (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 2009), 52.

We who carried darkness

will spill light all across,

In each birth of this land

will be the meaning of life,

Will I be alive to witness this?

Or for that will my life be sacrificed tonight? [201]

Poetry written by women combatants etches out for us the grip of uncertainty that pervades the reality of a combatant's existence. Though the poetry is strewn with acts of consistent rebellion and courage, of women in war being "an unstoppable force", some of the poems show us glimpses of frustration and absurdity that they experience. In her poem titled 'Understanding', combatant Alaiyisai writes of the absurd nature of reality that surrounds her. She writes "awake and alone in a blanket of darkness":

With an empty mind

I take the ink and

draw circles and squares,

Fill the blank paper

I look at it intently

They showed the reality [202]

[201] Captain Gnanamathi, "Samarpananam," in *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai: Tamizh Penkalin Kavithaiykal*, (Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedu, 2001), 03.

[202] Alaiyisa, "Purithal," in *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai: Tamizh Penkalin Kavithaiykal*, (Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedu, 2001), 09.

Similarly the poem ‘When Will My Night End’ by Senthanal, speaks of a crucifixion of her feelings. Cold nights in search of enemy leaves her cold from inside, but on the other hand the cruel reality of what she has left behind haunts her.

When will my night end?

Outside dew drops are falling on leaves

But inside me

An intolerable heat

Burns

I burn and melt ceaselessly

When will this night end?

Within these four walls

Are trapped, not just me

But my feelings are crucified as well.

When will this night end?

Mornings that rise with no end

Nights when the chill

Enters my skin and freezes my insides

Journeys to find our prey

When will my night end?

In memories shadow play

Thoughts of my mother,

Sister waiting for her wedding

Poverty which allows me

To see stars from inside our homes.

Always burning

My body pains

When will this night end?[203]

For Senthanal, the life of a combatant is a long, dark, cold night. It is burdened with endless, frustrating days and nights of work, but also the crushing reality of poverty and familial responsibilities that she has to shoulder. For her, liberation is an end to this night of hers. Hence the idea of liberation that the combatant poet narrates is not restricted to the achievement of a Tamil nation. Their poetry talks of a liberation which is multilayered, which is contingent on an expression of the feelings and thoughts, on freedom from patriarchal stranglehold on their lives, on an end to carrying lives of 'darkness'. Liberation is thus bursting and blooming into fire, it is an incineration of the bondages of familial oppression and racial discrimination. It is "a spilling of brightness", a stepping out from darkness into visibility.[204] There is an obvious pride in their role as fighters, breaking conventions through being a combatant. But there is also recognition of the frustrations and uncertainties that their journey is strewn with.

Liberation in most of these poems mostly rests on a point in the future, a future and a liberation they may not witness, but can be laid claim to through their sacrifices. In this recognition of liberation as something that exists after their lives, they are not bogged down by resignation or defeatism, but instead a strengthened longing for action. The act of writing here can also be seen as claiming a part in the future where they are not alive. It will be productive to see poetry as autothanatography- where a person is writing about one's own death. In these poems the act of writing is not explicitly about the act of dying, but death looms large in these poems, and the impending death compels the fashioning of

[203] Senthanal. "Yepothu Vidiyum En Iravu" in *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai: Tamizh Penkalin Kavithaiyka* , (Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedu, 2001), 10.

[204] Ibid.

a self and writing of that self: a sacrificial self that prefigures the liberated Tamil nation. This fashioning of a self through writing is a concomitant part of forming the nation through their death. When Captain Gnanamathi writes "Will I be alive to witness this?/ Or for that will my life be sacrificed together" she is simultaneously writing the impossibility of witnessing the nation coming into existence as it demands her death, as well as calling into being a witnessing of her life which will be always marked through her death.[205] Hence her self marked by sacrifice and the conception of liberation through sacrifice is actually prefigured in the authorial process in the space of the poem. So in a sense, their liberation can only be lived within the act of writing, as the liberation they dream of lies outside of their lives, after their death.

AGAINST A DISCOURSE OF DOMINATION: POETRY BY MUSLIM WOMEN

Muslims as Second Minority

Muslims constitute 8.9% of the total population in Sri Lanka, and can be termed as the 'second minority'[206] within a Sinhala majoritarian political structure, where Tamils constituting 12% of the population is the other significant minority section. Though both Tamils and Muslims form minorities, they have had different responses to the politics of Sinhala majoritarianism in the post-colonial evolution of the Sri Lankan polity. While the Tamils pushed for self government in the Tamil majority areas of North and East of Sri Lanka, imagining the construct of a separate Tamil homeland, the Eelam, the Muslims had chosen mostly to remain and negotiate bargains within the Sinhala majoritarian Sri Lankan state.[207] The Muslims, though largely a Tamil speaking community, foregrounds

---

[205] Gnanamathi, "Samarpananam,", 03.

[206] Farzana Haniffa, "Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 42, No. 2/3, Islam in South Asia (Mar. - May, 2008): 349.

[207] K M. De Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998).
A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The Breakup of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict* (London: C Hurst and Company, 1988).
Ameer Ali, "Politics of Survival: Past Strategies and Present Predicament of the Muslim Community in Sri Lanka," *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 7(1)1147-170.
Farzana Haniffa, "Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka".

their religious identity while the Tamils and Sinhalese have emphasized their ethnic difference chiefly based on language.[208]

Since the Tamil concept of the homeland, Eelam was imagined as a contiguous geographical entity stretching from the north to the east of Sri Lanka, Muslims within this area also had to be co-opted as Tamils. But Muslims did not identify themselves with the Tamil ethnic label. This refusal has to be read along with the different identitarian formations that Muslims constructed for themselves to survive in Sri Lanka from the time of their arrival in the island, at least thirteen centuries before.[209] When the Arab Muslims arrived in Sri Lanka, which was already a pluralistic society consisting of Sinhala Buddhists, Tamils who were predominantly Hindus, and the indigenous Veddas, they were welcomed by the hosts as an invaluable resource. This was because the Muslims brought the opportunity of trade to a fundamentally agrarian economy.[210] Islam followed the traders to Sri Lanka and its practice was not disallowed in Sri Lanka on the condition that it does not hurt the religious sentiments of the majority. In the tenth century, when Islam started winning converts from the local populace and when the need for teachers for imparting Islamic knowledge was recognized, the Caliph of Baghdad had dispatched learned persons to Sri Lanka, and this was also paralleled with the construction of mosques in Colombo.[211] The rise of influence of Muslims in the Vijayanagara Empire of South India and the friendly relations that King of Jaffna, Arya Chakraborthy, had with the Muslim rulers of Madurai resulted in the arrival of Tamil and Malayalam speaking Muslims who eventually settled in the North of Sri Lanka.[212] This period also was of the transformation of Muslims from being purely an Arab race to that of an Indo-Arab ethnic

---

[208] Dennis B McGilvray, "Arabs Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective" *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32(2):433-483.
Farzana Haniffa, "Piety as Politics Amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka,"

[209] Ameer Ali, "Muslims in Harmony and Conflict in Plural Sri Lanka: A Historical Summary from a Religio-economic and Political Perspective," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* Vol. 34 No. 3 (2014), 1.

[210] Ibid. 228
[211] Ibid. 229
[212] Ibid. 229

character as a result of the intermarriages between the Muslims and the locals.[213] But the eventual Portuguese conquering of the island's maritime districts in the sixteenth century and the Dutch takeover in the 17th century affected the fortunes of the Muslims drastically. Muslims were considered as infidels and mosques were destroyed and restrictions were placed on their religious Hajj pilgrimage.[214] But the Portuguese repression of Muslims resulted in an important identity formation for Muslims, that of the Ceylon Moors. Due to the isolation of the Ceylon Muslims from Arabia and the Indian subcontinent coupled with the derogatory epithet of Moors given to them by the Portuguese, the identity of 'Ceylon Moor' was formed who were seen as distinct from their religious counterparts in Arabia or India.[215]

The negative connotations of the term Moor was transformed into positive attributes under the British regime who had taken over the whole of the country in 1815. The British saw in the Muslims a hardworking and active community as opposed to the Sinhala community whom the British perceived as indolent and non-enterprising.[216] Also, this period saw an influx of the Indian Muslims who were termed as 'Indian Moors' and were looked down upon as intruders and usurpers of business opportunities by both the Ceylon Moors (who were business men) and the local Sinhala population. It was pent up resentment against these Indian Moors which resulted in the Sinhalese-Muslim riots of 1915, where these Muslims from India were targeted.[217] But it has to be kept in mind that the influence of Islam brought forth from India, which was largely ritualistic and syncretic created within the religious atmosphere of South India, had a major influence on the religious beliefs and practices of Sri Lankan Muslims until the 1970s.

---

[213] K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 181.
Ali, "Muslims in Harmony and Conflict in Plural Sri Lanka,"

[214] Ali, "Muslims in Harmony and Conflict in Plural Sri Lanka," 232.

[215] Ibid. 232

[216] Ibid. 234

[217] Ibid. 234

The period of British colonialism also saw the Muslims asserting their difference from the Tamils, and their refusal of the Tamil assertion that Muslims are ethnically Tamils. The Tamil leaders had forwarded this argument against the colonial administration's move to appoint a Kandyan and a Muslim member to the legislative council in 1889. But Muslims protested such a definition of themselves and the British created a Muslim seat, thus institutionalizing the Tamil-Muslim difference.[218] At this point, the Sri Lankan identitarian discourse was marked by race, where language was seen as only one aspect of the difference.[219] Hence the Muslims asserted the fact that they were racially Arab, the Moors. This construction was not a stable identity, as mentioned earlier, the differences between Indian Moors and Ceylon Moors existed in this period as well. In the post colonial period, the formations and assertions of Muslim identity were influenced by the ways in which Sinhala and Tamil nationalism emerged in relation to each other. But Qadri Ismail in his work 'Unmooring Identity: The Antimonies of Elite Muslim Self-Representation in Modern Sri Lanka' argues that the "Muslim social formation cannot be only seen as a passive victim of a discourse over which it has no control over" and that in fact the subordinate position of Muslims were also a result of the politics of the 'Muslim elites'.[220] Even as late as the 1970s, the Sri Lankan elites articulated their identity in terms of their roots in the Arab race. But the terms of the Sri Lankan identitarian discourse had shifted its emphasis from race to language in the post-colonial period. As a result there were assertions that the Tamil which Muslims speak is inflected with Arabic, which they termed as Arabic-Tamil.[221] But these assertions were not very effective, and the Muslims had to accept their significant term of difference from Tamils as that of religion. In the period soon after the independence of Sri Lanka, the Muslim elites made a decision to align themselves with the Sinhalas. Their allegiance was first expressed at the time when the new state disenfranchised all non- Sri Lankan nationals, or the Up-country

---

[218] Haniffa, "Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 351.

[219] Ismail, "Unmooring Identity," 70.

[220] Ibid. 73.

[221] Ibid. 73

Tamils who were brought from South India to serve as indentured labour on the plantations by the British. This move also meant that the Indian Muslims among them would also be disenfranchised.[222] At this time, in 1948, the dominant Muslim politician and member of Senate, Razik Fareed, pledged his support to the move, effectively demarcating the Sri Lankan Muslims as both native as well as in support of the new state.[223] The next instance when the Muslims asserted their difference from the Tamils, and also allied themselves with the Sinhala state was in 1956, when the Sinhala Only Act was passed, which replaced English with Sinhala as the only official language, while excluding Tamil language altogether. Here again, Fareed comes in support of the Act, while assuring the Muslims that the Ceylon Moors can continue with the use of English. Even after the 1983 pogroms against the Tamils, the Muslim elites and political leaders were at pains to convey that the Muslims are not looking for a division of the country.[224] These articulations of Muslim identity by the elites in the South are replete with blind spots. In their racial assertions of being born to a race of Arabs, they have conveniently forgotten the Tamil mothers they were born to. This gendered invisibilization of women can also be seen in the construct of Muslims as a business and trading community, profession which were not available to the Muslim woman.[225] Similarly in their jubilation over being granted rights to the use of English language, they have elided the interests of the Muslims in the East, who spoke Tamil language and also lived in close proximity to Tamils.

As the conflict heightened between LTTE and the Sri Lankan State, the precarity of Muslim lives in the North and the East of Sri Lanka became more acute. The Southern Muslims were inept in addressing the specific problems of the Northern and Eastern

---

[222] Ibid. 84

[223] Ali, "Muslims in Harmony and Conflict in Plural Sri Lanka," 234.

Ismail, "Unmooring Identity," 84.

[224] Ismail, "Unmooring Identity," 89.

[225] Ibid.

Muslims.[226] The Southern Muslims, constituted the political elites of the community and they had pursued a "politics of pragmatism" by using the strength of their numbers to bargain with the two major national political parties, the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).[227] But in 1985, the first Muslim party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) emerged as an alternative formation of the eastern Muslims under the leadership of M.H.M Ashraff, signalling a break from the previous practices of the Southern Muslims.[228] Other than the SLMC there were two other major Muslim groups, the East Sri Lanka Muslim Front (ESLMF) and the Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF). [229] All these groups signalled the rise of a strong articulate voice of the Eastern Muslims as a new political grouping.

In the first phase of Tamil Militancy, the Tamil militants actively tried to incorporate the Muslims in the North and the East into its fold. While the Muslim community in the North was small and hence not a significant threat, the Muslims were a significant presence in the East and were seen as a powerful ally to have. In response to the State's intensification of military campaigns in the North and East of the country, some Muslims joined the major militant Tamil movements. Some of them also attained significant positions within the cadres of these movements like Jaan Master of PLOTE, Kader of EROS, and Farook of LTTE.[230] This period of alliance between Tamils and Muslims was extremely short-lived. In the mid-1980s, the ethnic divisions became stronger and the Tamils increased the taxes levied from the Muslim business men and the Muslims in the East, who were always assertive of their identity as separate from the Tamils, started fearing for their lives. In April 1985, the East saw its first riots between the Tamils and

---

[226] Farzana Haniffa, "Sex and Violence in the Eastern Province: A Study in Muslim Masculinity", accessed 23 Feb 2017. https://www.academia.edu/32995467/Sex_and_Violence_in_the_Eastern_Province_a_Study_in_muslim_masculinity

[227] Ali, "Muslims in Harmony and Conflict in Plural Sri Lanka," 236.

[228] Farzana Haniffa, "Sex and Violence in the Eastern Province: A Study in Muslim Masculinity"

[229] Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*, 124.

[230] Ibid. 265.

Muslims, beginning in Kalmunai and spreading outwards. In 1986 there was an attempt of reconciliation brokered by the then Minister of Education, and the most powerful Muslim politician of the time, Mr. Badiuddin Mahmud, between the LTTE and the MULF. However after IPKF and the withdrawal of the Indian army, the LTTE went back to their antagonistic stand with regard to the Muslims in the east. This move, which led to an exacerbation of the ethnic differences in the region, was also because of SLMC's successful win in the 1989 elections. LTTE looked upon the SLMC as the foremost representation of the resistance of Muslims to the idea of the Tamil Eelam.[231] In June 1990, as the war began between LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE conducted a series of massacres in the towns of Kattankudy and in Eravur in the eastern province of Sri Lanka. In 1990, the LTTE also forcefully evicted Muslims from the north.[232] The State also exacerbated the violence by recruiting Muslims into the State Task Force, naming them the "Muslim Home Guards".[233] During the cease fire of 2002, the LTTE cadres had ready access to the east and many incidents of intimidation were reported. In the Post Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) which was created to address the reconstruction needs in the North and the East following the devastation wrecked by the Tsunami of 2004, the agreements were produced with only the LTTE and the government as the parties. Muslims who suffered majorly in the devastation were only given a symbolic position in the powerless apex body, while the LTTE was given the veto power, a move which caused major disappointment within the Muslim community.[234] With the election of Mahinda Rajapakshe as the President in the November 2005, a new anti-minority, anti-peace government was in place that led to a steady deterioration and a calling off the ceasefire and resuming of the military confrontation. A major incident in the ensuing military confrontation which drastically affected the Muslims in the East was LTTE's attempt to take over the town of Mutur, a

[231] Ali, "Muslims in Harmony and Conflict in Plural Sri Lanka," 238.

[232] More detailed in Third Chapter.

[233] Farzana Haniffa, "Muslims in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict," *ISIM Review*, 1 9 (2007): 53.

[234] Ibid.

prominently Muslim town in the Eastern province. After suffering various casualties as both LTTE and the Sri Lankan army fought for control over the town, the town came under the control of the LTTE, but the military did not cease shelling the town. On assurances given by the LTTE, the Muslims decided to leave the town as the shelling had continued for three days. But on their way to Kantale, their bus was taken to Kiranthimunai, a diversion off the A 15 main road. Here the LTTE separated those Muslims they suspected to be working along with the government. The fate of the 66 men who were tied up and taken away in Kiranthimunai is still unknown.[235]

Muslim women

Till the 1980s, the construction of the Muslim subjectivity within the identitarian discourses of Sri Lanka was marked by an elision of women. This, as mentioned earlier, can be seen in the construction of the community as that of businessmen/traders as well as one formed of the direct descendants of Arab fathers. The 1980s was a period which saw a revival of Islam, which was concomitant with the rise of Sinhala nationalism and Tamil separatism.[236] This period of Islamization, though still was not inclusive of women in its discourse formation, had nevertheless chalked out an important role for female piety and modesty in the maintenance of a good Muslim community. The open market policies of the late 1970s had led to a large number of Muslims travelling to the Middle East as both skilled and unskilled labour. This was also a period when the embassies of Iran and Saudi Arabia were providing funds for Islamic events and were donating Qurans.[237] A process of transformation was set into motion. There was a move to purge Islam of rituals and so called outside influences (*bidat*/innovations); for example the *thali* which Muslim women also wore was seen as an Indian cultural import and deemed as unimportant to the Sri Lankan Muslims.[238] Adherents to more orthodox reformers emphasised the Quran and

[235] Ibid.

[236] Farzana Haniffa, "Power Dressing: Choices of Attire amongst Contemporary Urban Muslim Women," *Options*, No 31. 3rd Quarter (2002).

[237] Ibid. 1.

[238] Ibid. 1.

the Hadith as the sole arbiters of all knowledge and practice.[239] There were moves to transform the Islamic dress as well the practice of segregation of sexes was emphasized. Photography was seen to be *haram* (forbidden) as it was considered idolatorous.[240] In the context of Sinhala and Tamil assertions of nationalism, the Sri Lankan practices of dress represented an assertion of a uniform Muslim identification across the country.[241] This transformation of the way to be ethical Muslims gathered varied reception within practicing Muslims. Many Muslims found these measures welcome and inspiring, and as a sign of a "more committed and authenticated form of practice"[242]. But to others these changes were seen as a capitulation of personal beliefs to the will of the majority and a rolling back from the benefits of the modernity.[243]

These differences in opinion can also be seen in women's narratives of the impacts of the revival of religion on their lives. Farzana Haniffa's repertoire of work on women's narratives about *hijab* and her study of piety as politics amongst women through an exploration of the Muslim women's da'wa (preaching) groups are important in this context. The piety movement in Sri Lanka encompassed a plethora of groups like Tablighi Jamaat, Sunnat Jamaat, Tauheed Jamaat, each having different interpretations of Islamic practices, and each disagreeing strongly with each other on these differences.[244] Against this background, Farzana Haniffa situates the work of Al Muslimaat, a Muslim women's da'wa (preaching) group in Colombo. Farzana Haniffa sees her work in conversation with other works on similar informal piety group consisting of women that

---

[239] Farzana Haniffa, "Under Cover: Reflections on the Practice of Hijab amongst urban Muslim Women in Sri Lanka." *Gender, Society and Change,* Center for Women's Research, Colombo, 1.

[240] Haniffa, "Power Dressing", 1.

[241] Haniffa, "Under Cover: Reflections on the Practice of Hijab amongst urban Muslim Women in Sri Lanka.", 62.

[242] Farzana Haniffa, "The Discourse on the Hijab: Transformations from the 1990s to Contemporary Times." (Regional Center for Strategic Studies conference on The Veil and Security Colombo, October 2015)

[243] Ibid. 12

[244] Farzana Haniffa, "Piety as Politics Amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 362.

have come up all over South Asia, South-East Asia as well as in the Middle East. Following Azam Torab's work[245] on Iran, which looked at the negotiations of gender identities occurring in the suburban women's participation in the Shia *Jalesh* rituals, Haniffa suggests that there is a transformation in gender relations in the acceptance of pious practice by Muslim women in Sri Lanka.[246] She also draws on the work of Suzanne April Brenner on women's participation in prayer groups in Java.[247] Brenner argues that the transformation of self that women experienced in practices of veiling is both informed by as well as transformative of the social changes happening in Indonesia.[248] On similar lines, Farrzana Haniffa argues that the personal transformation of women brought out by the piety groups must be evaluated also as a response to the militarization of the country and also in the context of the marginalization of Muslims in the conflict fought between two nationalisms.[249] Haniffa's work also draws inspiration from Saba Mahmood's analysis of Women's mosque movements in Egypt, but differs from her as well. Saba Mahmood's work[250] judges the women's practice of piety through a cultivation of *Sabr* (patience) and *Haya* (modesty), as a form of self-making. She attempts to critique the liberal feminist understandings of agency which sees practices within the binaries of subordination and subversion. Mahmood reads a form of agency in the desire and the intention of women in their strict adherence to pious practices. Farzana Haniffa critiques Mahmood's analysis as being heavily dependent on a 'fetizhization of intent' which is keeping in with the liberal notion of choice, while not scrutinizing its effect on the larger

---

[245] Azam Torab, "Piety as Gendered Agency: A Study of Jalasen Ritual Discourse in an Urban Neighbourhood in Iran," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2(2):235-252; as quoted in Farzana Haniffa, "Piety as Politics Amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka".

[246] Haniffa, "Piety as Politics Amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 348.

[247] Suzanne A Brenner, Reconstructing Self and Society: Javanese Muslim Women and "the veil". American Ethnologist 23(4):673-697; as quoted in Farzana Haniffa, "Piety as Politics Amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka".

[248] Haniffa, "Piety as Politics Amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 348.

[249] Ibid. 348

[250] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject.*

contexts within which such a self is desired, as well as the consequences of such a desire on the social context in which the subject is being formed.[251] Farzana Haniffa in her work on the women participating in Al Muslimaat, concentrates on the remaking of community which these women perceive themselves as participating in, and also on the new gender roles that these women fashion or desire to fashion in this process. Haniffa is not as interested in studying the techniques of personal practice, but is involved in understanding how these practices of personal piety is impacting the relationship of Muslims within their community, as well as transforming their place in a multiethnic polity which is in midst of a conflict fought over competing nationalisms. For example, Al Muslimaat women opposes the old practice of covering one's head while serving food to your husband, which they see as a misinterpretation of the injunction to cover themselves in front of men outside the family. They argue that one's husband is the only person who can see their *awra* (defined as the part between the neck and knees); no other person, not even another woman sees another's *awra*; a man cannot see his mother's *awra* as well. Here there is a reorientation of the hierarchies of kin relations which Farzana reads along with the rise in companionate marriage and nuclear families brought forth with globalization. Here the meaning of head cover is "no longer practiced in the service of hierarchised marital relations, but rather in the service of a particular public Muslimness that wearing *hijab* entails."[252]

Farzana Haniffa also critiques the practices that cultivates a Islamic religious specificity among Muslims of Sri Lanka, which creates a dehumanized 'other', seen in figure of *kafir*, infidel, a category inaugurated by the piety movements. Work of groups like Al Muslimaat emphasises a notion of community, referring to the Muslim *Ummah* that lies outside the bounds of the Sri Lankan state, while devaluing a local context of shared beliefs. Haniffa gives the example of devaluing of the practice of seeking protection on one's journey through placing alms at shrine, a shared practice of all communities in Sri

[251] Haniffa, "Piety as Politics Amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 355.

[252] Haniffa, "Piety as Politics Amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 359.

Lanka as an illustration of her argument.[253] This formation of a pious self, formed in idioms that are recognizable only to Muslims, a recasting of Muslimness in a manner exclusive of ethnic others, Haniffa argues, has affected the relations Muslims shared with the other two major communities in Sri Lanka[254].

The *Hijab* is an important marker that symbolically differentiated the Muslim community from the other communities and also transformed the subjectivity of Muslim women within the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.[255] The debates on the *hijab* are varied across contexts and different scholars have interpreted the practice differently: the practice is seen in certain contexts as an outcome of the masculinist interpretations of the Quran and the *hadith* which results in the sexual segregation of spaces mostly disadvantaging women; In certain other contexts it is read as a sign of protest to the western civilization missions on the Islamic populations. An example of the former reading is provided in the works of Leila Ahmed[256] and Fatima Mernissi. Fatima Mernissi has argued that the gendered controlling of female sexuality using Islam in the late 20th century is a representation of both the fear of changes being experienced and as a reaction against the greater participation of women in the public space. In her view, the Muslim ideal of the "silent, passive, obedient woman" has nothing to do with the authentic message of Islam.[257] Rather, "it is a construction of the male jurists-theologians who manipulated and distorted the religious texts in order to preserve the patriarchal system."[258] Veiling and segregation was seen as one of the mechanisms through which female sexuality was controlled. Donning of the veil as an emblem of protest was used in Algeria, colonized by

---

[253] Haniffa, "Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 368.

[254] *Ibid.* 368.

[255] Farzana Haniffa, ""Under Cover: Reflections on the Practice of Hijab amongst Urban Muslim Women in Sri Lanka," 61

[256] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

[257] Amal Rassam and Lisa Worthington, "Mernissi, Fatima" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World,* ed. John L. Esposito (2009)

[258] Ibid.

France, as well as famously during the Iranian Revolution against the Shah Reza Pahlavi in 1979.[259] In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the US Pentagon, the US intervention of Afghanistan was partly justified as a rescue mission to save Muslim women from Taliban. In this context, Lila Abu-Lughod wrote criticizing a narrow interpretation of the practice of veiling by the Western feminists. She writes against a reductive interpretation of veiling, which only sees it as the "quintessential sign of women's unfreedom".[260] She says such an understanding of veiling should be opposed even as we object to the imposition of it by the State forces. She asks us to enquire into how we will gauge the parameters of freedom if we were to accept that all human beings are social beings whose desires and expectations are formed in the historical contexts and the particular communities they belong to.[261] She writes that the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women should not be reduced to a single item of clothing, and that the significant political-ethical question that veil raises is "how to deal with cultural others".[262] After the conflict in Sri Lanka was brought to a halt brutally in May 2009, with the annihilation of the LTTE by the army, it didn't take long for the Sinhala majoritarian Bodu Bala Sena to turn its wrath towards the Muslims in 2013. The question that Abu-Lughod fronts about understanding cultural others is still pertinent.

Unlike in Afghanistan, the practice of veiling was not a practice widely accepted and followed in Sri Lanka until the 1990s. The period of late 80s and the 90s were thus marked by the struggle of ethical and personal transformation for Muslims in Sri Lanka. This transformation was carried forth also in a context where the gender relations within the community were skewed to the disadvantage of the women. An example of this is seen in how women have been fighting against the community acting as gate keepers to

---

[259] Haniffa, "Under Cover: Reflections on the Practice of Hijab amongst urban Muslim Women in Sri Lanka., 71.

[260] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist*, 104 (2002): 786.

[261] Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really need Saving?," 786.

[262] Ibid.

reforms of women. The Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum has been working towards an inclusion of the provision of optionality, where the women have a choice either to follow community or general law.[263] Their efforts to introduce women *qazis* into the *qazi* court system were also met with disappointment.[264] This also meant that the acceptance of *hijab* and the reformist turn in religion were not accepted evenly. In her work Farzana Haniffa, looks at the different narratives of women's experiences with the advent of the practice of *hijab*. Women involved in the reformist movements, termed *hijab* as a *wajib* and a *farl*, terms indicating practices that are required of Muslims.[265] Some also claim that *hijab* is a part of the history of the Muslims in Sri Lanka, lost only during the 30 years between the 1950s and the 1980s.[266] But there were also a lot of women who disagreed with the notion that unveiled women will cause chaos in the community and argued instead that men themselves should control their desires.[267] There were also others who accepted *hijab* as a pious practice, worthy of emulation, but articulated their not wearing *hijab* to their inability to undertake such a difficult ethical practice. Haniffa also traces an articulation that borders on the discourse of martyrdom in the narratives of women who have taken on the practice of *hijab*. The practice was never talked of as an easy transformation, but in the register of sacrifice that one undertakes for God.[268] This is seen in an example Haniffa cites, where a woman quotes a *hadith* stating that "this world is heaven for the unbeliever and a prisoner for the believer" in order to convey the struggle involved in adoption of pious practices.[269] It is this period of

---

[263] Haniffa, "Under Cover: Reflections on the Practice of Hijab amongst urban Muslim Women in Sri Lanka." 71.

[264] Ibid.

[265] Ibid. 63

[266] Haniffa, "Power Dressing," 3.

[267] Haniffa, "Under Cover: Reflections on the Practice of Hijab amongst Urban Muslim Women in Sri Lanka." 79.

[268] Haniffa, "Power dressing," 3.

[269] Haniffa, "Under Cover: Reflections on the Practice of Hijab amongst Urban Muslim Women in Sri Lanka." 83.

transformation, and the notions of freedom and liberation that it entailed as reflected in the poetry of Muslim women that will be examined in the next section.

Poetry Written by Muslim Women

Muslim women did not only write of their struggles with respect to their community. The scars of the war are laid bare in their poetry. The civil war frames their poems and they reflect on the wrecks of lives left in the wake of war's violence. The landscape left behind by the scourge of war is captured in Faheema Jehan's haunting portrayal of it in 'After Catastrophe'[270] and in Sharmila Seyyid's 'Three Dreams'[271]. They also wrote of the precarious conditions of Muslims being caught between the nationalisms of LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army, and the constant displacements and disruptions they had to encounter in their lives resulting from this.[272] There is also a poetry of love, distinct in each poet's articulation of the emotion. As V. Geeta writes, in Anar's poetry of love, the female persona "engages the erotic playfully" and "conjures an entangled sense of experienced passion", while Penniya's poetry is "less sensuous, more wistful…and searches out a measured and critical self-possession".[273] In short, there is a vast variety of themes dealt within the rubric of poetry written by Muslim women; a multiplicity of voices, different, disagreeing. For the purpose of this section, I have culled out from the enormous repertoire of subjects these women have dealt with in their works, a single strand. I look at their engagement with the difficulties involved in their belonging to a community. The poems examined in this section speaks with the issues of freedom, the sense of struggle against a stifling constraining of space and thought which were reflected also in the poetry presented in the previous two sections.

---

[270] Faheema Jehan, "After Catastrophe," in *Time will Write a Song forYou*: Contemporary Tamil Writing from Sri Lanka" ed. Kannan M (Pondicherry: Penguin Books India with French Institute of Pondicherry, 2014),172.

[271] Sharmila Seyyid, "Three Dreams," in *Lost Evenings, Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War* ed. and trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom and Sascha Ebeling. (UK: Arc Publications, 2016), 141.

[272] The poetry dealing with displacement will be dealt with in the third Chapter of this thesis titled Exits and Return.

[273] Geetha, "Life Worlds: War, Desire, and Labour in Contemporary Tamil Women's Writings." 8-9.

Poets Anar and Zulfika in their personal narratives on why they choose to write poetry, emphasise poetry as a sphere of articulation of difficult truths. They say that experiences that cannot be articulated in other spheres of life, either because of the fear of reprimands from within the community or because of the hurt it can cause to loved ones, can be accommodated within the ambiguous language of poetry. This follows from a belief that words in poetry have powers to both contain hurt yet liberate truths, poisonous when withheld. Zulfika Ismail says that she started writing as a refuge to voice out opinions that won't be tolerated by an orthodox community, "from a knowledge that she couldn't speak about everything that she was thinking".[274] Poetry became both a confessional and a place of resistance. Similarly Anar articulates how poetry was her refuge from loneliness that she experienced from being born to a conservative Muslim family in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, Sainthamaruthu. As she had to discontinue her schooling, she marks her knowledge of Tamil as her only source of confidence during that time which she describes as "a limbo in the dark".[275] She says that "If language can be described as wings, then poetry is freedom. So, I provided that freedom for myself and language became my wings." [276]

Yet this space of poetry as freedom is threatened by the intolerance of patriarchy and is fraught with dangers. Even when the poets turned to their chosen medium to escape censorship of views and to articulate what is rendered inarticulate in other public and private spheres of their life, they were not completely safe in writing poetry. Anar points out very poignantly that the "The gap between the space that a society provides for a woman and the space in which the woman wants to exist is dangerous".[277] Anar reminds us that the dangers are acute for a Muslim women deciding to write as her "religion

---

[274] Zulfika Ismail. *Behind The Veil.* Toronto, November 29, 2012.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fICYNN42XS8; Retrieved on 6th Oct 2014

[275] Ibid.

[276] Anar, "If language is wings, poetry is freedom" Accessed on 11 May 2017http://www.generallyaboutbooks.com/2015/05/if-language-is-wings-poetry-is-freedom.html

[277] Ibid.

begins in her hair and end in her toes".[278] Writers tried to write in obscure language or in English to escape the scrutiny.[279] Yet the poetry written by Muslim women, which will be examined in this section, are brave in its language and confront the danger in writing openly, criticising community and religious domination. While adapting a medium like poetry which can be beguilingly innocent of militancy, these women vociferously attack the discourses of domination that religion and community impose on them. As Anar poetically puts it, "my poetry is about that fire known as language, which a woman carries under water."[280]

Zulfika Ismail, who had also turned to poetry to voice her opinions, ran into trouble with her community. Her poem 'Behind the Veil' was not well-received within her community, and she had to leave her hometown in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka and shift to Colombo, fearing for her safety. This poem was written in the late 1980s, when it was made mandatory for Muslim women in the East of Sri Lanka to don the veil in public places including schools and workplace. Zulfika remembers groups going from school to school and office to office instructing women to wear *hijab* from the following week on. In 'Behind the Veil', Zulfika declares that "she cannot sit by and simply be"[281]. For her, the hijab is the last among the various obstacles that are strewn as obstructions on a woman's life path. She asks:

> How can we be
>
> hiding all, hidden behind the shroud?
>
> Dead we are not![282]

---

[278] Ibid.

[279] Ibid.

[280] Ibid.

[281] Zulfika, "Behind The Veil"

[282] Ibid.

For Zulfika, the veil is symbolic of death, the death of a woman's public existence. It is a cloak of invisibility over women's lives, on their ways of living. The "shadows" that the veil casts on the woman's being disconcerts her immensely. For Zulfika, the *hijab* is a shroud when forced upon women. This invisibility behind veil is seen one among many other ways to erase women's existence. For example Penniya, writes very powerfully in her poem 'Unwritten Histories' about the erasures of women's lives from official history. She claims that,

> Histories
>
> etched in blood and sweat
>
> are not read by men, nor
>
> written by them.
>
> they are written on the walls
>
> of bedrooms and cooking rooms, by
>
> phantoms that work like robots,
>
> for posterity, not to be destroyed.[283]

Penniya shifts the site of history making from the battlegrounds to the insides of the kitchen. This shift is imbued with pathos, because while the woman is scripting a certain history, it is hinged on a labour that is alienating. The women doing these tasks are compared to being robots and phantoms, figures which are mechanical as well as removed. Yet this shift becomes important because it is shifting our attention to what remains unseen. Written in the midst of a war which is essentially a battle for the supremacy of one nation over the other, where one hears endless tales of the labour of

[283] Penniya, and Sumathy Sivamohan (trans). *The poems of Penniya: the task of a translator.* April 5, 2009. http://sahasamvada-forum.blogspot.in/2009/04/poetry-of-penniya-task-of-translator.html (accessed September 13, 2012).

men, this poem acts like a recognition of the unpaid domestic labour that women perform. She writes,

> Their lives are bounded
>
> by performing ceaseless tasks
>
> spreading creaseless beds
>
> and inventing novelties
>
> in the kitchen for consumption.[284]

Penniya in this poem traces the roots of the unrecognised labour in the ignorance of women about the power their labour commands; they also remain unaware of the bonded nature of this work. The strength of Penniya's poem lies in her feminist recognition of the politics of power that patriarchy wields when women themselves are kept unaware of their own labour. She also recognises how the inscription of the ideals of beauty and modesty on to the women's body keeps her imprisoned in the drudgery of this unrecognised domestic labour. She writes how the "weight of the broad shoulders and sinewy arms of the mankind" has to be borne by the beauty extolled in "the bowed heads of doe-eyed women".[285] This process of oppression reflects what Benhabib described as the simultaneous process of treating homes and nations as ahistorical constructs existing from 'a time immemorial', and a simultaneous dehistoricising of the private space which condemns women to remain in the "timeless universe of domesticity".[286] It represents how it is the subordination of women which sustains the existence of dominating masculinity and their histories.

---

[284] Ibid.

[285] Ibid.

[286] Seyla Benhabib (1987) as quoted in Maithreyee Chaudhari, "Gender in the Making of the Indian State." in *Sociology of Gender*, ed. Sharmila Rege (New Delhi: Sage India, 2004) , 353-354.

The subordination of women which is effected through such erasures is also maintained through insidious methods of disciplining acts. Patriarchy has its own repertoire of disciplining acts, one among which is the disciplining of the female body to such an extent that the bodies imbibes the discipline and acts in this discipline even without force needing to be applied. As Foucault says, discipline in its attention to the "micro practices of the body produces subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies".[287] The poem '*Vizhuth*' (Branch), written by Sharmila Saeed describes the disciplining effect that culture, lineage and knowledge has on a woman's body. While the poem opens with a bold resolution to break away the knots and obstacles of discipline that has seeped into her body, an almost involuntary act of her hand of pulling the sari to cover her waist surprises her and she is awakened to the rude knowledge of how braided discipline is in her body.

I glow like the *Thumpa* flower,

In my eyes there is a shine never seen before.

The discipline that has seeped with me

from birth,

from lineage,

heard and passed through generations

through stories from history,

through Textbooks

through religious preaching

I remove,

I try to come out

[287] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison* (New York : Vintage Books, 1979), 138.

Slowly from the boundaries it had created.

My feelings

try to defy

the lines of proper behavior

and soften me

I am she who broke all knots and obstacles!

The wind that scatters breaking all fences,

The clouds that roam whole skies!

With completely new desires

I take a walk down the road.

My hands were careful

in adjusting the sari,

pulling it to cover my waist.

I am surprised!

The discipline,

Which I very proudly had thought

I had destroyed and removed!

I am surprised when its roots sprouted again? [288]

[288] Sharmila Seyyid, "Vizhithu," in *Cirakku Mulaitta Penn*, ed. Sharmila Saeed, (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publication, 2012), 31.

In her work, 'The Reproduction of Femininity', Susan Bordo writes that the two different registers of the body, namely, the 'intelligible body' and the 'useful body', that Foucault conceptualizes is important for the feminist discourse.[289] The intelligible body includes our scientific, philosophic and aesthetic representations of the body. It encompasses the cultural conceptions of the body, our normative understandings about what a beautiful and healthy body is. Foucault says these same representations can also be seen as forming a set of practical regulations; a set of practices through which the living body is "trained, shaped, obeys responds" and is adapted into the "useful body".[290] Bordo reminds us that "our conscious politics, social commitments, strivings for change may be undermined and betrayed by the life of our bodies...not the craving instinctual body…but what Foucault calls the docile body, regulated by the norms of cultural life".[291] In the lines of the poem '*Vizuth*' we see how the aspirations of a woman, who craves independence and consciously decides to defy the disciplinary boundaries prescribed to her, are thwarted by the docility of her own body.

But this does not mean that avenues for resistance are foreclosed for the Muslim woman. Instead the poetry of Sharmila Saeed, tells us to pay more attention to the ways power acts to understand the limits and the expanse of liberation and resistance. An analysis of power "from below" is especially important when most of what constitutes femininity "depends on the seemingly willing acceptance of various norms and practices".[292] As Foucault has said, the subject produced through subjection is not produced in an instant in its totality, but gets repeatedly produced in the process of subjection. This process of repetition does not consolidate the dissociated unity of the subject, but instead by a proliferation of effects undermines the force of normalization in a discourse.[293] As Judith

---

[289] Susan Bordo, The Reproduction of Femininity, in *Writing on the Body :Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory,* ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury,(Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1997), 90-113.

[290] Ibid. 103.

[291] Ibid. 91.

[292] Ibid. 92.

[293] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power.* 92.

Butler reminds us, "this repetition or iterability becomes the non-place of subversion" where "the possibility of reembodying the subjectivating norm" can happen.[294] Hence, while the disciplinary apparatus produces subjects, it also produces the conditions for subverting that apparatus itself. Sharmila Saeed's another poem, 'Wind that blows in the Opposite Direction', talks of the ways a discourse of domination is formed around a Muslim woman. But it also points out the contradictions and endless debates surrounding the discourse which forms the Muslim woman subject and how in the endless reiteration of the discourse there is an exceeding of the normalizing norms, there is a "growing over the fence"[295].

They kept debating and discussing
How to cut the blossoming buds
That grew over the fence.

Those who failed without success
in lessons in Reason
and those who tried to establish
and fix the rate of truth.

With the underlined sentences
from ancient palm scrolls
and dialogues from holy scriptures
they continued their debate

[294] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*. 99.

[295] Sharmila Saeed, "Ethir Disayilaana Kaatru." in *Cirakku Mulaitta Penn*, ed. Sharmila Saeed (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publication, 2012),15 .

about building barricades to shield the
revolution waged by verdant branches,
to each, a different opinion.

Some suggested a complete covering up,
Some suggested just the face,
Some suggested till the wrists.

Within them contradictions crop up,
because of opinions at loggerheads.

I pass as wind that blows
against the direction of Power

I am the blossoming bud
which grows ,
peeping its head over their fences[296]

As seen in the poetry of Sharmila Saeed, within the disciplinary discourse of religion, the Muslim ceases to be the woman she is and is reduced to a representation of a good Muslim woman. She becomes a pure signifier of the religion and becomes a representative of the values of the community. The decisions about her life are vested

[296] Ibid.

away from her; in the poem one gets the feeling that the woman is always outside, overhearing the conversations. She is only a liminal presence, staying outside the realm where rules regarding her life are being formulated. But here again, the resistance of women are depicted in the poem through metaphors of excess; overgrown verdant branches, wild and untamable. Even when the branches are being cut down and the blossoms are nipped from crossing over the fences of their restrictions, the poem doesn't end in a note of despair, but with an image of defiance.

Sharmila Seyyid's poetry is a searing critique of the stifling effects of certain interpretations of Islam. In most of these poems of hers there is a 'they', whom she holds on trial. It is interesting that Sharmila is not renouncing her religion, instead is fronting another way of being a Muslim woman. Her rebellion also includes reinterpreting what a good Muslim woman is. In her poem '*Adaiyalam*' (Identity/Mark) she is writing against a presupposed incompatibility of the woman having the freedom of choice over how to live her life and her remaining a Muslim woman. Her poem starts with a statement of misrecognition: "I don't know them/ They don't know me either". [297] In "their" understanding she is a "*mukkaatti ittaval*", one who wears the veil which means she is someone who walks with her head bowed, one who speaks with her voice low, and someone who won't ever raise her voice in disagreement. The poem then goes on to record the woman she actually is: one who wears the hijab when she feel like, otherwise only covering with a dupatta, one who puts kajal and wears lipstick, one who takes evening strolls, visits markets to buy snacks, selecting what to wear, reading little magazines under the shade of trees, driving on one's own. When 'they' see her doing these things they call her '*murththa aanaval*'(the one who leaves Islam or gets converted from Islam), and as lover of '*Ibileez*' (Devil).[298] The final stanza of her poem is a powerful rebellion against their efforts to see her as a woman not belonging to Islam. She writes that while they accuse her thus, her wide forehead has marks (*adayanlangal*) from

[297] Sharmila Seyyid, "Adailyalam," in *Ovva,* ed. Sharmila Seyyid (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 42.

[298] Ibid.

doing *sujudh*[299] every day. Sharmila in this poem is asserting other ways of being Muslim woman which doesn't require her to relinquish her desires and rights over her life.

In another poem of hers, '*Irund Ottrai Niram*' (Single, Dark Colour), she talks of how a woman is constantly asked to cover up, citing many reasons, like the devil will tempt her or that the weak will devour her. She is asked not to laugh aloud, talk only in whispers as her voice might intoxicate others. Sharmila is critiquing the idea of *fitna* which in Islam is the idea of chaos that can be caused. While some Islamic sects consider the injunctions on women's behavior as a way to preserve harmony within the community, Sharmila terms these rules as '*mundhandanai*' for the women, which can be roughly translated as pre-punishment; punishment for all the chaos that could be caused by the woman. The darkest facet of this is brought forth in the final stanza where she writes

> You can of course open yourselves for them,
>
> Lie naked for them.
>
> On certain days,
>
> On certain nights,
>
> On certain dew filled dawns,
>
> Filled within you will be that dark, single colour.[300]

While the woman is asked to be covered in black in the public, the times she is allowed/asked to be naked, she is filled with that same dark single colour; there's is no escape for her from this monochrome darkness that pervades her existence. In her poem '*Hoorul Eengal*' (The Hooris of Heaven), Sharmila revisits the tyranny on women's bodies reduced to the function of giving pleasure in the myth of hooris and the concept of

---

[299] Prayers to Allah offered touching one's forehead to the floor.

[300] Sharmila Seyyid, "Irunda Ottrai Niram," in *Ovva,* ed. Sharmila Seyyid (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 52.

Heaven. The poem is an elaborate description of Heaven, where there is wine, meat, date trees and luxurious high beds. And then there is in this heaven the *Hoorul Eengal*, the nymphs who are the "wages for men for having done good deeds on earth"[301]. Sharmila terms *hooris* as "a recasted version of the female body"[302] and exclaims, "Aha! Even in Heaven, the woman remains a corpse".[303] The woman's predicament, even in the myths of afterlife is that of a corpse, lifeless as the right over her own body is still in the hands and minds of men; her only purpose is to provide pleasure as a prize for men's pious lives on earth. Sharmila has written a poem titled '*Avalukana Anjsali*' (An Obituary for Her) where the death of a Muslim woman who doesn't confirm to regulations of the community is seen by 'them' as a death that is to be celebrated. Among her sins are taking the train by herself, showing her face, conversing with friends including men over coffee, loving freely, and asking for *Pasahu*[304]. A woman like her deserves to die according to the community, and those who killed her are then deemed as the "Guardians" of the community.[305] The poem is very prescient as Sharmila also had to face a murder of sorts, in the realm of cyberspace because of the intolerance towards her independent views. In 2012, Sharmila released a book of poems in Colombo titled '*Siragumulaiytha Penn*'(Woman with Wings). In an address to her poems, the person who released the book, the Justice Minister Mr. Rauf Hakeem, mentioned a poem which was about a sex worker. Seyyid in an interview to BBC soon after the book release was asked for her opinion on the legalization of sex work. Seyyid replied that since it was already in existence, legalization won't be bad idea as it would provide the women with some legal protection. Her comments caused a huge furore in her hometown in Eravur, in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka. Her parents were threatened, their family house was stoned,

---

[301] Ibid.

[302] Ibid.

[303] Sharmila Seyyid, "Hoorul Eengal," in *Ovva,* ed. Sharmila Seyyid (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 60.

[304] In Islamic Rules of Divorce, when the woman asks for divorce.

[305] Sharmila Seyyid, "Avalukana Anjsali," in *Ovva,* ed. Sharmila Seyyid (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 55.

threats of kidnapping her sister were issued and handbills were pasted in some parts of the town with Sharmila Seyyid's phone number terming her a prostitute.[306] A seemingly true report of her death with a gory photoshopped picture of Seyyid was circulated online. Seyyid had to go into exile fearing for her safety and that of her child.

Faheema Jehan in her article titled 'Sex and Violence in the Eastern Province: A Study in Muslim Masculinity' reads this incident along with another incident that happened in 2011, where two teenage Muslim girls from Kattankudi in Batticaloa district in Eastern Sri Lanka were accused of watching pornography for visiting tuition classes in the neighbouring village and were abducted and brought before an informal governing body in the mosque and tried for their crime. Jehan says that in both these instances of violence, there was no discourse of family honour as the families stood steadfast behind the women, but instead it was the members of the community who perpetuated the violence.[307]

One of the reasons cited for the vitriolic attack in cyberspace on Sharmila was that she was not wearing a *hijab* in certain photos on her online pages. It has to be noted that Sharmila Seyyid is not against *hijab* per se. She had wriiten, "I am not anti-hijab. Some of my closest friends and family wear the *hijab* and I respect that. I am aware that it is one of the most visually recognizable symbols of Islam, and that it allows some women to feel empowered and united. Everyone is on a different journey, and hijab will have a different meaning to each person"[308]. What Sharmila is doing, both through her poems and her life as an independent single mother, is challenging the imposing of the hijab on women by the men quoting religion. She is asking for the choice to be given to the Muslim woman. She is also emphasising that there is no one way to be a Muslim woman, and she is fighting through her words to broaden the script of what a Muslim woman is, to include women like her, who are independent and takes charge of their lives without

---

[306] Haniffa, "Sex and Violence in the Eastern Province: A Study in Muslim Masculinity".

[307] Ibid.

[308] Sharmila Seyyid; Facebook post dated 29th April.

succumbing to the violence of the community. She is refusing to circumscribe her life according to the community's ideas of Islamic woman. She deftly teases out the misogyny that underlies most of these regulations. Her challenges to the community are taken from her position of a practicing Muslim, who also recognises other ways of being, different from what she has chosen.

I would like to close this section by looking at two poems, 'Swing' written by Anar and '*Aval Avalaha*' (She, Being Herself) written by Faheema Jehan. Anar's poem is a wistful longing for the simple pleasure of childhood, swinging in the *Oonjal*, while Faheema's poem is a strong rebuke against the controlling of women. Anar's poem starts with a set of vignettes that a girl on swing sees. The poem reproduces the rhythm of the swing, the approaching and the receding, the world seen upside down, 'the unsteady skies/the moon worn out by all the running around.'[309] The poem describes the mirth and the freedom of a girl on a swing.

> The girl on the swing
>
> knows only to laugh
>
> The swing teaches
>
> what it is like to be a bird.[310]

Anar contrasts this one happy episode from childhood to the world of adulthood which is fraught with violence. This world of the adults to which they are thrust into is a world of fractures, a world where dreams and aspirations are crushed "like the glassy wings of the red dragonfly/that crashed into everything."[311] What marks this world of adults from the world of the swing is the separation of the 'we' into 'men and women'. [312] Anar's poem

---

[309] Anar, Swing, https://www.facebook.com/natarajan.srivatsa?fref=nf

translated by Sri N Srivatsa, 25 April, accessed 12 may 2017.

[310] Ibid.

[311] Ibid.

[312] Ibid.

is a yearning for a past where this gendered separation does not exist, where the girls know only laughter and where she learns to be as free as a bird. While Anar's poem conveys her disillusionment with a world that separates men and women through a nostalgic longing for a time gone past, Faheema Jehan's poem reads like an assertive warning against controlling women through masculinist myths, institutions and representations. It is useful here to keep in mind Deepti Misri's re-engagement with Wendy Brown's notion of gender. Wendy Brown reminds us that while "gender identities" are fluid, and cannot be generalised, "the particular modes of gender power may be named and traced with some precision at a general level".[313] Hence, Misri reminds us, what we term maculinist is not reducible to certain behavioural aspects of men, but should be seen as "mechanisms of domination".[314] In Jehan's poem she talks against the masculinist tendencies of consecrating women into certain signs, like angels, goddess or temptress. She writes,

> In your dreams of angels
>
> She doesn't want crowns
>
> In your temple of hearts
>
> She doesn't want abodes
>
> In the centres of your vulgarity
>
> Don't even let her shadow touch.[315]

Her poem also recognizes the power inherent in representation as a tool of subordination. She disagrees with the practice which sees in woman's eyes the sun and the moon, in her

---

[313] Deepti Misri, *Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence and Representation in Postcolonial India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2015), 127.

[314] Ibid.

[315] Faheema Jehan, "Aval Avalaaha," in *Aatit Tuyar*, ed. Faheema Jehan (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, 2010), 86.

walk the swaying breeze, and vehemently asserts that "She is definitely not a flower/ nor a blossoming bud!"[316] She is also attacking the rules and discourses that seek to confine and strangle her. According to Foucault, "a discourse simultaneously constructs, positions, and represents subjects in terms of norms and deviations posited by the discourse, representations cease to be merely representations, but is importantly constitutive of subjects and the world in which they operate. Thus, representation is never innocent of power, but is rather a crucial field of power."[317] Representations can also tell you the conjugations through which power expresses itself. It can also "make private feelings and images public".[318] Faheema's poem is recognition of the play of power in the representations of women in masculinist imaginaries. Her poem ends with a strong rebuke to such seemingly innocent, but effective mechanisms of power and asks them to let the woman to be "herself".[319] Her poem ends with a command, "Give way!"[320]

CONCLUSION

The idea of liberation produced in the poetry written by women is varied according to the different positions and time periods of nationalism which are addressed. The poetry produced in the early stage of the rise of militant Tamil nationalism, as seen in the anthology '*Sollatha Seithigal*', is influenced by the opportunities presented by the political climate of the time. It is a reflection of the possibilities which were offered in the nascent period of Tamil nationalism: a time marked with hope and optimism over the possibilities that they thought a separate Tamil homeland might offer. This space that opened up was being used to articulate a stringent critique of the pervasiveness of gender

---

[316] *Ibid.*

[317] Wendy Brown. "Power After Foucault." in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science* , ed. Bonnie Honig, Annie Phillips John Dryzek, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 89.

[318] Charu Gupta. "Representing Dalit Bodies in Colonial North India." Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Occasional Paper, History and Society New Series, 1: 1-35, 2013.

[319] Jehan, "Aval Avalaaha," 86.

[320] *Ibid.*

violence. Misogyny in Tamil culture and society could be criticized and the concept of liberation forwarded in the poetry was vehemently against the existing restrictions placed on women by the Tamil society. In comparison, the articulation of liberation in the poetry of women combatants reflected a curious juxtaposition of anxiety as well as pride. While there was an emphasis on the liberation of Tamil nation, their articulation of the reasons for joining the movement were overwhelmingly articulated on the basis of the gendered violence they had faced or witnessed. The Muslim women, writing in the 1990s, wrote of a notion of liberation from the discourses formed from misogynistic interpretation of the scriptures which were used to fetter and enslave women. This poetry is framed by the period of reformation of Islam in Sri Lanka and the introduction of new restrictions on women's movement and dressing. The critique is articulated also in a language that marks their subjectivity as Muslim women.

CHAPTER TWO

WITNESSING DEATH AND MEMORY

Introduction: Martyrs and Traitors

Nation as a concept demands an ideal 'national' for its existence. While purity is an important component in the conceptualization of an ideal national, it is also predicated on the construction of an abhorred "Other". An important way in which the support for the nation is assured is by fetishing its purity and by condemning deviancy from the dominant norm. Even though the nation in its end form can only exist in the realm of imagination, it demands real men and women and their lives for its never ending journey into existence. The concept of a martyr aids itself to the creation of the nation by constituting the ideal national. The martyr is the most ideal constituent of nation as s/he is ready to give their life for the logic of nation. Death (for the nation, and as demanded by the nation) is the ultimate sacrifice and one shall be rewarded with eternal adoration by being honoured as a martyr. In the continuum of the constituents of a nation, if the martyr forms the most ideal, then the traitor falls at the opposite and its abominable end. But the traitor remains an important figure that has to be created and demonised to galvanise the counter category of the patriot and the ideal 'national'. Hence the nation is justified in taking the life of the traitor in its coming into being. These deaths are unmourned and unglorified, yet a nation is also built on these deaths and absences.

This chapter will start with a framing note on the concept of martyrdom as forwarded by LTTE. It will then look at other deaths, other ways of mourning and remembering that happens through the poetry of women and their lives. The chapter will examine the speech that is made possible through the act of witnessing the death of a person. This witnessing is not literal, in the sense that the person sees the death of the person, but how certain deaths are marked with the ethics of acting witness to the lives they have lived as well. From this act of witnessing, certain speeches of dissent can be articulated. The first section will look at the death of poets and the questions and debates that this can elicit

about the concept of martyr. The second section will look at how dissent is articulated through the mother's lament. The final section will look at the act of acknowledging and knowing a person through the act of mourning, especially the death of strangers. The chapter will end with a postscript that will briefly look at the present situation in Sri Lanka and the obstacles to remembrance.

MARRIED TO DEATH: LTTE AND MARTYRDOM

Every 5th July of the year was celebrated by the LTTE as the Black Tigers' day (*Karumpuli Dinam*) to commemorate the first LTTE suicide attack which was carried out by Captain Miller. On 5th July 1987, Cpt. Miller had driven a truck full of explosives into a school that had been taken over as a Sri Lankan army camp in Nellliady, Jaffna, killing himself and at least forty soldiers. A statue of Miller was erected on the site. Cpt. Kasturi, a poet and an LTTE cadre wrote this poem commemorating him.

> The Tamil warriors
>
> befriended death.
>
> But you entered into a marriage with death and slept restfully in its lap.
>
> `Warrior,
>
> We shall not tarnish your grave with tears
>
> Or by lighting lamps
>
> For we know what resides there is the sun! `
>
> `In our land once freed,

> If our graves are one day built, it would not be to receive your Salutations of tears or flowered wreaths respectfully laid. It is for you to crown our land with your determination, a rebirth...
>
> After my most
>
> Meaningful death
>
> You shall certainly walk about In Tamil Eelam.[321]

The poem evidences a fetish that has been created around *Veeramaranam* or the brave death among the LTTE cadres. Being a martyr is described as an entering into a marriage with death. The image is deeply sexual, but also has to be read within the concept of chastity, the bedrock of Tamil femininity. As Oivind Füglerud has written, though chastity literally translates into conjugal fidelity, it refers to a repertoire of feminine qualities which demands out of the Tamil woman a strict and restricted existence according to a code of conduct. Fuglerud writes that this code of conduct entails a segregation of sexes as well as a demand of a "prudish public performance" from the side of the woman. He goes on to argue that the sexual energy of the woman is tamed through marriage and ensconced into the figure of the '*cumangali*', "a real or potential mother, and the most auspicious being in the Tamil Universe".[322] Kasturi's invocation of marriage to death should be seen within this conception of the exalted position of a marriage within the rituals of producing Tamilness; hence being married to death is step higher in her conception to befriending death. There is also an erasure of boundaries in this sexual imagery, where one is becoming death as well. This is emblematic of the death of a Black Tiger, who is not only dying for the nation, but is being an embodiment of death as well.

---

[321] "In the Traditions of a Six Yard Cloth." *Lanka News Papers.* June 1, 2008. http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2008/6/28682_space.html, accessed March 5, 2013.

[322] Øivind Fuglerud, "Aesthetics of Martyrdom: The Celebration of Violent Death among the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," in *Violence Expressed. An Anthropological Approach*, eds. Nerina Weiss & Maria Six-Hohenbalken (Ashgate: Kapittel), 71 - 88

Semantic and Material Discourse around Death in LTTE

Before we embark on the status of Black Tigers within the structure of LTTE, it will be useful to understand how ideologically and materially, death and an active relationship to it is established within the LTTE discourse of achieving Eelam. In the above poem by Kasturi, she calls her death for the nation 'the most meaningful death'. It is so, because she envisions a regeneration, not only of the nation, but of her dead comrade as well. Here the death for the nation is an active principle of life as well; in life you are actively courting death, because in death you are rebirthing. Death here is hence not an end of possibilities, but is imagined as inaugurating of other lives, lives in a liberated Tamil Eelam. Hence death is liberation in many different registers. This principle of regeneration is an important element of meaningful death for those believing in the LTTE ideology of Tamil nation which is evident in the usage of the term *vithaiythal*. The act of martyrdom is called *vithaiythal* or the process of sowing. This term is one of many that has been carefully selected from Tamil tradition as well as newly wrought to form the semantics of the ideal Tamil subject: the martyr.

Peter Schalk has worked extensively on the semantic formations that go behind the formation of the sacrificial ideology of LTTE. In his exploration into the literature and discourses of LTTE, he traces a terminology that is being repeated and reified. According to Schalk, terms like *arppanippu* (sacrifice), *virar* (heroes), *maram* (bravery, strength), *tiyakam* (abandonment), *catci* (witness) together forms the semantic backbone of LTTE ideology. Of these terms '*tiyakam*', '*tiyaki*' and '*catci*' strike as important for my study. The Tamil word for martyrdom is '*tiyakam*' which translated means voluntary abandonment. The element of personal will to die adds more aura to the figure of the martyr who is called as *tiyaki*. It has to be noted that no living fighter will be called *tiyaki* or *veerar*. It is reserved only for those who die for the "motherland".[323] Also LTTE does

[323] Peter Schalk, "Revival of Martyr Cult among Ilavar," *Tamil Nation.* 1997. accessed May 19, 2014. http://tamilnation.co/ideology/schalk04.htm

not consider the suicides for nation as *thatkollai* (killing oneselves), but was called *thatkodai* (giving oneself).[324] Schalk emphasizes that *tiyakam* is a reaction on encountering death. That is, *tiyaki* is one who is killed while killing, but after being confronted with the death of his/her comarade.[325] Schalk terms it "as a specific type of aggressive mourning behavior in the martial culture of LTTE".[326]

Schalk also emphasizes that the idea of tiyaki as suffering a representational death for the people of Eelam is well established. Another concept which highlights this aspect of representational death is the term '*catci*'. This is the Tamilised word for the Sankrit word *Saksin* meaning witness. Schalk traces this word to the pre-colonial usage of it in *Saivasidhantham*, where it refers to the mental ability in the mind of the man, and to the transformation of its meaning "to one who dies for their conviction" in the colonial period.[327] The word which then gets the meaning of blood witness is made prevalent in the Tamil society with the translation of New Testament into Tamil, and its usage in Christian preaching. Catholics form an important constituent of LTTE cadres and Schalk finds the usage of both blood witness and truth witness to denote LTTE men and women who died for the cause. Hence, according to Schalk, an LTTE tiyaki is a martyr not because he employs violence, but because of his representational death on behalf of others.

This idea of death is subtly highlighted in a poem by major Bharathy in her collection of poems, '*Kathodu Solli vidu*' titled, 'Rise up for a new dawn'. She writes in a vivid description of a battle with "Bombs eager to embrace us";

> Comrade next to me – her hand

[324] Ibid.

[325] Ibid.

[326] Ibid.

[327] Ibid.

That held the gun falls still

Her blood paints new picture on the soil

The young daughter's lifeless body

Fills our fiery eyes with tears

Her gun now blasts in another hand

Our pace goes up

The explosions still heard afar.

…

On the soil muddied by blood

Our feet speed towards the goal

Memory filled eyes await

the next dawn.[328]

Here Barathy is elucidating the idea behind representational death. The death of the fellow combatant is escalating the pace of the war, her weapon is taken on by another and it is her memory that drives the rising up for a new dawn. The semantics of the ideology that Schalk has brought out is a carefully constructed discourse by LTTE with careful thought put into it. In fact they had instituted an Office of the Great Heroes of Tamil Eelam (*Tamililamvirar panimanai*) which delved systematically into the martial ideology of LTTE, produced propanganda materials and organised commemoration events for the Great Heroes.[329]

Miller is only one among the heroes commemorated by LTTE; the cult of martyrs is established with a systematic distribution of calendrical events. For e.g., 27th November

[328] Barathy, "Rise up for a new dawn" in *Kaathoodu Sollividu*, (Publication Section – LTTE Women's Division, 1993)

[329] Schalk, "Revival of Martyr Cult among Ilavar."

is celebrated as the The Great Heroes Day (*Maaveerar Naal*) in the memory of the death anniversary of Shankar, who was the first LTTE combatant to die in the war. As the LTTE supremo Prabhakaran's birthday falls on the 26th of November, the celebrations start at midnight.[330] This day was prolonged into a whole week of celebrations in the year 1990 and the day was also celebrated as the '*elucci naal*' which has the double meaning of the 'day of edification' as well as the 'day of rising'.[331] The celebrations included literary and art gathering, including martial poetry recitation, singing of 'Tiger songs' (*pulipattukal*) and street plays.

Similarly LTTE also memorializes the 10th of October as Malathi Day. On 10th October 1987, 2nd Lt. Malathi had died in Kopay, Jaffna in a confrontation with the IPKF. As told by a fellow comrade Janani, Malathi was shot in both legs by the advancing Indian troops. When she realized she was mortally wounded, she swallowed cyanide. She thus earned the epithet of 'the first woman warrior who embraced heroic death', even though she was perhaps only one among the first women to die during the confrontation.[332] In the LTTE office for Great Heroes at Kokkuvil, Yalppnam (Jaffna) a big painting of Malathi is symmetrically placed on the left side of a Tiger emblem. The text accompanying the painting proclaims "The first woman being a Great Hero (muthal penn mavirar)".[333] On her 17th death anniversary a memorial was constructed on the site of her death and a memorial statue was erected in Kilinochchi. The statue of Malathi portrays her standing with her legs a little apart, holding a rifle in her right hand, a symbol of martial feminism. A prestigious battalion of women fighters was also constituted in her memory called the Malathi Brigade.

---

[330] Neloufer de Mel, *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict.* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2007).

[331] Schalk, "Revival of Martyr Cult among Ilavar."

[332] Peter Schalk, "Malathi - First Woman Martyr", *Tamil Nation,* 11 October 1996, accessed on 13 March 2015, http://tamilnation.co/tamileelam/maveerar/malati.htm

[333] Ibid.

Heroes were not only those who died fighting in the battleground. For e.g. 23rd October is celebrated as the 'Tamileela Mahalir Dinam' in honour of the death fast of Thileepan and Annai Poopathi. During the period of IPKF occupation, Amirthalingam Thileepan, a political leader of LTTE died following a rigorous twelve day public fast based on five demands: the release of all Tamils detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act; the cessation of the colonisation of Tamil areas by Sinhalese under the guise of rehabilitation until the formation of an interim government; a ban on new Sri Lankan police stations and camps in the Northeastern province; the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan army and police from schools in Tamil villages; and the withdrawal of the weapons given by the Sri Lankan government to 'homeguards' under the supervision of the Indian army.[334] Around the same time, Annai Poopathy, the mother of an LTTE combatant, fasted to death in 1988, protesting against the violence of the Sri Lankan armed forces, the LTTE and the IPKF in Batticalao. But her death was appropriated by the LTTE as a singular statement against the atrocities of the Sri Lankan State.[335] LTTE also acknowledged the martyrs of the EROS and the early TELO fighters in 1991 and integrated them in their body count or hero count. LTTE had also published a 96 page memorial souvenir called the Soorya Puthalvargal in 2003 with the basic details of 240 black tigers of LTTE.[336]

Similarly, after the battle of Elephant Pass in 1991, all dead bodies of fighters were buried in a special place called '*Tuyilum Illam*' or the sleeping abode. These were permanent structures and the official reason for burial was that martyrs have to feel close to the soil they had defended. Also a common burial ground signified that the martyr has ceased to be an individual with affiliations to his or her family but instead belonged to the community. This final act of common burial can be seen as a continuation of a soldier's

---

[334] Tisaranee Gunasekara, "18 Years After Thileepan." *Asian Tribune.* September 18, 2005, accessed December 14, 2014, http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2005/09/18/18-years-after-thileepan.

[335] de Mel, *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict.*

[336] Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, "And Heroes Die: Poetry of Tamil Liberation Movement in Northern Sri Lanka." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 112-153.

journey from the initiation regime of giving nom de guerres which signified that the individual was being reborn and renamed. The burial rituals of LTTE are devoid of signs of the religion that the person was born into as well as the tomb stones are etched with their movement names, the names given to them when they joined LTTE and not the names they were born with. Hence there is a complete erasure of what the person was before h/she joined LTTE. It is her identity as a martyr for the cause of Tamil Eelam that is celebrated and remembered. Her identity as a martyr becomes her only one. As Elizabeth Jelin says, "In a broader sense, all policies for conservation and memory, by selecting which artefacts and traces to commemorate, have an implicit will to forget."[337] These burial grounds eventually became places of pilgrimage for the Tamils. So is the '*ninaivvucinnams*' or the tokens of commerations which were ubiquitous in the LTTE controlled area.[338]

Willing death is an important component of the martial ideology of LTTE and the body of the LTTE cadre also carries special significance in their ability to embody death. The conjoining of death and nation in LTTE ideology is materially constituted by the cyanide vials and the body of the Black Tigers. The wearing of cyanide vials, called '*kuppi*', is mandatory for all the cadres of the LTTE and eventually became the hallmark of their recognition. The induction of person into the LTTE requires an oath of allegiance and wearing of the cyanide capsule. This is an open statement that one is willing to die if found in danger of being caught. Black Tigers on the other hand are an elite force of trained combatants marked by high levels of secrecy. A Black Tiger is known publicly only with his or her death. Unlike the rest of the cadre, the Black tiger comes into his/her existence only through death. Also while the rest of the cadre dies in battle, the Black

[337] Ibid.

[338] Øivind Fuglerud, "Aesthetics of Martyrdom"; Schalk, "Revival of Martyr Cult among Ilavar."

Tiger uses her body as a precision tool to inflict death through suicide attacks.[339] An apt description of the fascination around them to those outside the conflict and also the reasons for LTTE's veneration of Black tigers can be seen in this poem written by major Barathy.

Another explosion

Tore away from gravity

Sliced through the cosmos

Light waves ahead of sound waves

Elucidate that brightness to the stars.

In the heat of their last breadth

Of those unique souls

Destroying the destructive ship

The ocean heaved once more.

Keep looking sons and daughters

The footprints of freedom sculptors

The true allies of humanity

You will find them here.

Let the interpreters on this globe

Interpret their heart.

Let the researchers on this globe

Research their dedication.

Oh, the waves that kissed them last

[339] Michael Roberts "Pragmatic Action and Enchanted Worlds: A Black Tiger Rite of Commemoration," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 73-102.

When you touch the shores

Whisper in the ears of our people

When freedom is won they will be back.[340]

But unlike the rest of the heroes, the acts of Black Tigers are not usually claimed by LTTE. Some opine it is to avoid scrutiny into their women cadre's former selves.[341] But LTTE has used gendered notions around women to their tactical advantage in suicide attacks. For e.g., In the suicide attack attempt against Lt. Gen Sarath Fonseka on April 2006, the woman suicide bomber pretended to be pregnant.[342] Similarly, the discourse behind the use of cyanide capsule is also fraught in its gender dimensions. It is frequently emphasized that the wearing of cyanide capsules gives a sense of protection for the women especially.[343] This discourse reveals the notions of purity for Tamil women as death by cyanide is seen as an escape from the demeaning experience of torture and rape. This reasoning has to be read in conjunction with LTTE's own discourse around the female suicide bomber as avenging through her death the sexual violence committed on her or her close female relatives. As this script is not usually produced around the death of the male suicide bomber, the figure of the raped woman merits our further attention to understand the gendering of Tamil nationalism.

---

[340] Barathy, "Kaathodu Sollividu", 21. trans. N Malathy accessed on 21 Jan 2017, https://tamiltigerwomen.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/tamil-tiger-women-writing1.pdf

[341] Alisa Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds: How and Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Employs Women", *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol. 19 (2007): 43-63.

[342] Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, "Female Warriors, Martyrs and Suicide Attackers: Women In The LTTE," *International Review of Modern Sociology* Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring 2008): 1-25.

[343] Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds: How and Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Employs Women"; Roberts "Pragmatic Action and Enchanted Worlds: A Black Tiger Rite of Commemoration."

The Raped Woman

As Sitralega Maunaguru writes, one of the gendered constructions of women in Tamil nationalism is that of the raped woman.[344] Women's bodies are sites for the enactment of a pure subjectivity of Tamil woman on whom the Tamil nation is predicated on. Hence, there is an anxiety to protect and police women bodies. This notion of the woman body as a representative of the whole nation makes her especially vulnerable to sexual violations during war. At the same time, her body is seen as a release where the anxieties and fatigue of war can be relieved, a transference of frustrations which is deemed legitimate within the context of war. Here the female body is reduced to a receptacle, a 'mere body'. This mere body remains unarticulated while the fighting body of the soldier is venerated and 'his' discretions are written off as war fatigue. For example, during the IPKF war in 1987, there were many reported incidents of rape and sexual violence committed by the IPKF forces from India on the Tamil women in Jaffna. When women en masse protested to a senior Indian military official, he responded by saying "I agree that rape is a heinous crime. But my dear, all wars have them. There are psychological reasons for them such as battle fatigue".[345] Heartbreaking testimonies by women who survived this violence are recorded by the UTHR in a report titled 'No More Tears Sister'. In one instance, a woman talks of how she endured rape by three men silently so that her old parents and her 11 year old daughter will be spared of the trauma. Here the raped woman is seen trying to endure the trauma of the whole family.[346] As Tamil woman is the repository of the Karppu, the cornerstone of Tamil nationalism, how does the Tamil nation reclaim the raped Tamil woman? As the narrative of a loss of honour tries to silence open articulations of the raped woman, she exists as humiliation for the Tamil nation leading also to revenge narratives. One such site for reconciliation and accommodation of the raped woman is through the figure of the female suicide bombers.

---

[344] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control." 170.

[345] Ibid. 170.

[346] Thiranagama, "No More Tears Sister: The Experiences of Women,"305-330.

Neloufer de Mel writes that due to an absence of information on the suicide bombers, "an a priori subjectivity is thus conjecturally produced at the site of her death. In these speculations, motives of reclaiming lost honour and revenge for a sexual violation appear as reiterated, circulating narrative. This is a discourse that does not accrue around the male suicide bomber".[347] When the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was killed in a suicide attack by Dhanu in 1991 in Sri Perumbadur, in Chennai, LTTE true to their history of not claiming suicide attacks by Black Tigers denied that Dhanu was part of LTTE, but suggested that the assassination might have been carried out as revenge by an IPKF rape victim. In this context, Sitralega Maunaguru provides an incisive analysis of LTTE's insinuation that the female suicide bomber was a revenge for rape. She enjoins this narrative to the importance given to chastity in the Tamil moral world. As a woman who has lost the virtue of chastity, the act of self death through suicide bombing is a entwining of two acts: the political act of taking revenge against those who have violated the Tamil nation, as well as an act of self purification.[348] Maunaguru sees the act of suicide bombing in the same register as the ancient ritual of agnipravesham: immolation and purification through fire.[349] In such a reading, death is a ritual of self regeneration, where the raped woman reclaims her place as a pure subject of the Tamil nation. Here while rape of a Tamil woman is a crime against the nation, the idea of it being a private wrong committed on the woman is also given importance. In such narratives, the patriarchal underpinnings of the Tamil nation are again exposed when the onus is again on the woman to reclaim her chastity for a crime committed on her. While the Tamil nation appropriates the raped woman by building narratives of revenge, we can turn to poetry to examine how within the form of poetry women have responded to the rape of women. In the following section, we will look at three poems that are written as responses to the rape and sexual violence suffered by women: *Koneeswarikal* written by Kala, *Mannamperikal* written by Aazhiyaal and *Krishanty* written by Vinothini.

---

[347] de Mel, *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict.* 199.

[348] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control," 171.

[349] Ibid. 171.

Koneeswari was a Tamil woman, gang raped and murdered by security forces in 1997 in the Amparai District. She was visited by security forces at her house and after the brutal rape, was killed by throwing a grenade into her genitals. The incident led to an outpouring of rage within the Tamil community and media, while the Sinhala and English press kept largely silent. One of the responses to this incident was a poem by Kala titled *Koneeswarikal* which appeared in the Tamil tabloid Sarinikar on July, 1997. The poem, in its idioms, is a scathing outcry against the ethnic conflict and the use of sexual violence as a heinous weapon in the war.

Koneeswaries

Her death didn't give me pain

How can it shake me

When my feelings are numb?

Dears, my Tamil women

What have you done

for the peace for this Island?

So, come

Remove your dress

and be naked

You too, my mother,

Open your yoonis

for those who follow the Buddha's path

And fight for peace

Pity them

Where can they release their perversity?

Heroes, come on

Fulfill your perversity

My school-going sister is also behind me.

Have you finished?

Don't stop there

Tomorrow's generation

May sprout out from our yoonis

So, smash them

Throwing grenades

Collect the pieces and bury them

To prevent our race sprouting any more

Sinhala sisters,

Your yoonis are free now.[350]

The publication of the poem elicited polarizing opinions from the readers of Sarinikar. Prof. M. A. Nuhman has chronicled the responses that the poem elicited from the Sri Lankan women as appeared in the comments section of the newspaper. He highlights the response of renowned feminist Selvi Thiruchandran and her trenchant critique against the use of idioms that amounted to an ethinicization of women's sexuality in the poem in order to bring home a point about sexual violence. She wrote;

> "The poem Koneeswarikal disgusted me deeply. Rape is a violent act in relation to female sexuality. When it is used as a subject of poetry, we cannot say that it is obligatory to express only its violence, its gendered nature, its content, the unrighteousness of the state and the agony of the women. There should at least be a civilized quality. Even though there

[350] Nuhman, "Ethnic Conflict And Literary Perception: Tamil Poetry In Post-Colonial Sri Lanka."

> might be no delicacy in the use of words, the meaning should be decent. What is the meaning of the racial use of the phrases "O Tamil women" and "O, Sinhalese sisters"? … women's sexuality has no caste, religion, class and ethnic differences. In the violence of male chauvinism these differences disappear….No woman should open anything to satisfy another's perversions…Do not seek justice for Koneswari by degrading femininity to such an extent".[351]

There were also opinions which saw merit in the poem as it succeeded in conveying the anger and disgust felt by Tamil women. Nuhman contrasts this poem with the poem 'Krishanthy' written by Vinothini and highlights how rape can be written about without ethinicizing the issue. In 1996, Krishanthy a school going girl was raped and killed at an army sentry point and the poem by Vinothini was written as a response to the incident.

Krishanthy

As the birds sang

And the sun fell into the sea

Her death took place

at the open space of white sand

No one knew about it.

When she was born a female child,

she wouldn't have thought of such an end,

Her mother neither.

First their look pierced her like a thorn,

then their terrible hands seized her arms,

No sound arose.

She fell in a faint

[351] Ibid.

They raped her senseless body

It happened

At the open space of white sand

She was buried

At the edge of the salty cremation ground

When she was born

Would she have thought of such an end?

According to Nuhman's reading of the two poems, he finds in Kala's poem an importance given to the ethnic identity of Koneeswari while Vinothini in her work gives more importance to the gender identity of Krishanthy. In Kala's poem he finds that gender is rendered secondary where the female genitals are also marked ethnically.[352] Nuhman believes that because Vinothini is a feminist rather than a nationalist as opposed to Kala who is openly a Tamil nationalist, the poetry is marked by their ideologies. In my reading of the debates that were generated by the publication of the poem as it appeared in the subsequent issues of Sarinikar, I found that the main issue brought up was the language and the idioms used in the poem and the message brought out through this. Sanmarga in her response to the poem writes that the poem has erased the whole of womankind into abjection. She contends that in the space of the poem Koneeswari is raped again.[353] In another response, the language in the poem is termed as *Abhasa mozhi* as opposed to the *nagarika mozhi*, the civilized language. Even while attacking the language used in the poem, a response by Siras Laktilaka asks ''Why did Sarinikar roll out their mats for such creations". [354]

[352] Ibid.

[353] Sarinikar, July 1997, Letters to the Editor.

[354] Ibid.

This question, "*Paayy virithahthu en?*" has explicit sexual connotations. So "the civilized language" is not devoid of sexism. In my reading, Vinothini's poem is a memorializing of the event of a rape. It is Krishanthy's life story read from the event of the rape. The violence is brought out by juxtaposing the girl's dreams and aspiration to the actuality of rape, which is the fate war presents her with. For me, the interesting part of Kala's poem was the pluralizing of Koneeswari, and the creation of a collectivity through the raped woman. Another poem which does the same is *Mannamperikal* by Aazhiyaal. It is these two poems which I would read together.

Mannamperi in the title of Aazhiyaal's poem "*Mannamperikal*" was a former beauty queen who was the head of the women's wing of the JVP insurgencies[355]. On April 16 1971, she was arrested paraded naked, sexually abused and killed by the Sri Lankan army. In Aazhiyaal's poem, the woman protagonist of the poem talks about the violence meted out to women and recognizes the sexual thirst and the violent language that Mannamperi and Koneeswari must have suffered. But the volta of the poem is presented in the final couplet where the reader realizes that the language of violence which she recognizes with both Koneewari and Mannamperi, is perpetuated by her husband sleeping beside her. In both these poems, the rape of woman has led to a speech which cannot be simply accommodated in the registers of revenge. Instead of the exclusion and a spectrality of the lone raped woman, the multiplicities of violence and responses are highlighted. In the poetic medium both the rage and the inclusion of the woman is evident. In both the poems the writers identify themselves with the raped woman, they embody and become them. In the poem by Aazhiyaal the identification leads to bringing the violations of war into the home, the ubiquity of the patriarchal violence, termed as a language in itself, is recognized. In the poem by Kala, it is the act of revolt from an affect of revulsion; the violence of rape is embodied into the words and phrases, where violence is articulated in its monstrosity by drawing on the terms of kin (amma, sister being asked to open their yonis), producing shock. While Kala speaks that Sinhala women are safe because of the violence perpetuated on Tamil women, more than an ethinicization of the

[355] Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna is a Marxist Party that led two revolts against the Sri Lankan government in 1971, and during 1987-89.

violence, I feel she is pointing towards the inherent violence of certain men which will eventually hurt the women of the same ethnicity as well.

While these were the poetic responses, LTTE had its own script of revenge for the death of Koneeswari. It was reported that the women's wing of LTTE attacked the police station where Koneeswari was allegedly raped, killing 15 police and leaving more than 20 injured. Nirupama Subramaniam who interviewed one of the combatants who were involved in the operation, Bhanuka, opines that in the LTTE discourse around women, Koneeswari and Bhanuka represent the main representations of women: either they are victims of oppression by the Sinhala state whose death has to be avenged or they are fighting against it as combatants.[356] This script of revenge should be read in the backdrop of the semantic and the material formation of the martial ideology of LTTE.

Jonathan Spencer has argued that LTTE and JVP are pursuing a politics of certainty in which death is "the mysterious, but unambiguous point of reference upon which to build a moral world and a sense of community".[357] So, LTTE painstakingly remembered the death of their heroes, avenged certain deaths for creating a community built around the logic of death for nation. Dilip Menon's work about the revolutionary violence in North Kerala and his engagement with Walter Benjamin's essay, 'Critique of Violence', on the relationship between law, justice and violence is useful in trying to understand the politics of death in LTTE as well.[358] Menon draws upon Benjamin's formulation of an understanding of violence which is not limited to the realm of law and which is put forward from the space of a plea for a just existence. He observes that "by removing the idea of justice from the realm of the law, the idea that violence generated its own law

---

[356] Nirupama Subramaniam, "How enabled?" *The Hindu*, Mar 10, 2002. accessed Feb 23 2015, http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2002/03/10/stories/2002031000010100.htm

[357] Jonathan Spencer, "On Not Becoming a Terrorist: Problems of Memory, Agency, and Community in the Sri Lankan Conflict," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 134.

[358] Dilip M. Menon, "A Prehistory of Violence? Revolution and Martyrs in the Making of a Political Tradition in Kerala," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 3 , Iss. 3 (2016): 662-677

became a dominant narrative structuring politics in North Kerala".[359] In LTTE's employment of violence that came from the demand for justice for the wrongs done to Tamils by the Sri Lankan State and LTTE's use of death and its adjunct construction of martyrs to right this wrong, it creates a law of its own. But in the creation of a community based on the logic of meaningful death which could only happen in the service of the Tamil nation (which exists in the future), some other deaths were forgotten or simply treated as collateral damage.

The LTTE had banned celebration of memorial events of other militant organizations and there were strict punishment also for claiming the deaths which LTTE committed. Along with its conceptualization of the '*tiyaki*', the Tamil ideal that LTTE propounded also led to the terming of dissidents as '*trohis*' or traitors. For the LTTE, refusing to pay taxes, to be recruited, saying public criticisms among other activities were all marks of selfish individuals who chose themselves over the greater good of the Tamil nation and its necessary collective sacrifices.[360] This of course did not mean that there were no other forms of memorialisation. For e.g. on August 15th, 2007, the Muslims in the East of Sri Lanka marked 'martyrs day' in memory of 120 Muslims who were massacred by the LTTE on August 12th in 1990. Muslim shops in Batticalao remained closed and white flags flew over their houses in remembrance.[361] The so called Tamil traitors also have their ways of commemoration, mourning and refusals to forget. These are evidences of different and radical ways of narrating the history of the nation from outside the narrative of death put forward by LTTE.

---

[359] Ibid. 15.

[360] Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka.* 26.

[361] "Lankan Muslims Observe Martyr's Day." *Dawn.* August 16, 2007, accessed Dec 18, 2014, http://www.dawn.com/news/261391/lankan-muslims-observe-martyr-s-day.

DISAGREEING DEATHS

The period of Tamil militant nationalism was a period of suffocation for independent thinking and expression. In an atmosphere where dissent was equated with an act of betrayal to the national cause, any act of disagreement could transform you into a traitor. The figure of the traitor was mobilized within the discourse of Tamil nationalism as the most abhorred epitome of betrayal. Sasanka Perera's formulation of 'The Shadow of Death' in his work on spirit possessions and ghost stories in the context of Sri Lanka, and Sharika Thiranagama's engagement with the figure of 'Traitor' and its political implications in the formation of the Tamil self within a conflict ridden Sri Lanka frames the further enquiries in this section. Sasanka Perera defines 'the shadow of death' as a particular stage in the lives of those within societies of terror; a phase which is pervaded with uncertainty as to which form death will assume or if survival will be possible or not.[362] The survival of the shadow of death has its own consequences; Perera argues that the experiences of those who did not 'transcend the shadow' will have to be experienced by those who did. In fact, for the continuance of a society in terror, it is necessary that a section of this society survives the shadow of the death. Perera contends that:

> "In any event, if terror is supposed to play a coercive function in a society, the perpetrators of terror must ensure that some of their victims actually transcend the confines of the shadow of the death. If not, some of the necessary foundations of a society in torment cannot be properly established. Experiences of terror therefore necessarily have to be transmitted to others, who as a result can be coerced into submission, making the task of torturers and political prisons easier" [363]

It is my argument that the figure of the traitor is housed in this ephemeral place of abjection, a space which has its own effect on the constitution of Tamilness. The fear of death and torture are transmitted through the survivors, through the structures of traitor prisons, through public remnants of violent death for traitors. The purging of Tamil

---

[362] Sasanka Perera, "Spirit Possessions and Avenging Ghosts: Stories of Supernatural Activity as Narratives of Terror and Mechanisms of Coping and Remembering," in *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery,* ed. Veena Das et al. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 157-200.

[363] Ibid. 164.

spaces from traitors, *Trohi Olippu*, was an integral part of not just LTTE, but also of the Tamil militancy.[364] The fear of traitors within their movements led to many intra-group killings and there was an atmosphere of distrust and doubt regarding the intentions of fellow Tamils. LTTE in its functioning and its discourse entrenched an understanding of traitors as the most dangerous constituent in the Tamil society. For e.g. LTTE supreme, V. Prabhakaran talked of traitors as more dishonorable than the enemy Sri Lanka enemies. In practice there were widespread killings of dissidents as well as members of rival Tamil militant outfits. The members of other movements were also branded as traitors which pushed their killings outside the realm of moral reasoning. The terminology of traitor assured that certain Tamil lives are dispensable within the logic of the nation and loyalty to it. LTTE became the only admissible symbol of Tamil nation, and acts against the LTTE automatically amounted to treason against the Tamil nation.[365]

The ability to transform certain deaths as unquestionable is a part of the horror of the Tamil nation. These deaths but had its own symbolic significance in the discourse of Tamil nation; they existed as warnings, as a disturbing inkling of what awaits those who differ and disagree. The infamous lamp post therapy of tying the dissidents to lamp posts and shooting through their heads is only one among the many such acts of warning.[366] Interestingly, among the other Tamil militant outfits, an opposition to LTTE that did not involve retributive killing came from the women's wing of EPLRF who took out an all women's march on 12th December 1986 appealing for a Tamil unity and for ceasing killings between militants groups. LTTE responded to this by issuing a ban against EPLRF the very next day.[367] There are other sporadic, brave instances of dissent from women which were public in nature as well. Thiranagama reports about the women from oppressed caste villages in Keerimalai and Mallakam who defended their family

---

[364] Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka,* 26.

[365] Ibid.

[366] MSS Pandian, "On the Sri Lankan Tragedy,'' *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 22, Issue No. 9, 28 Feb, 1987 http://www.epw.in/journal/1987/9/reviews-uncategorised/sri-lankan-tragedy.html

[367] Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka,* 203.

members by protecting the entry to their villages arming themselves with kitchen knives and chilli powder.[368]

Thiranagama has argued that the LTTE was able to exert power over the Tamils because it operated from within a sense of the intimate. LTTE recruitment was both voluntary as well as forced and Tamil families were asked to send at least one member to fight in the LTTE. This provided a civilian face to LTTE as the LTTE then became an extension of one's own family as well. Hence traitors epitomized the "betrayal of the intimate by the intimate".[369] Thiranagama argues that the traitor is for Tamils not the "other'', but a potential self that has to be guarded against. Hence the Tamil community was conceptualised by LTTE as "a community of potential traitors" and the figure of the traitor is "simultaneously both inside and outside the community".[370] The LTTE also maintained a widespread web of intelligence networks, official and unofficial. This meant that the next Tamil you meet could be an informer too. Hence LTTE governed Tamils by making either informers or traitors of them. The Tamil society was then founded on both the fear of traitors among them as well as the fear of being termed a traitor.

A gendered reflection of this fear of traitors creeping into spaces of intimacy can be seen in the construct within Tamil nationalism of 'women with loose morals'. Sitralega Maunaguru has delved into this construct of "Loose Women", and opines that those who deviate from the community norms are usually termed as sexually immoral. Sexuality of women, when argued along these lines, is then seen as something that has to be controlled and policed. Maunaguru quotes of an instance in April 1991, when the LTTE's official newspaper *Eelanatham* published an unsigned letter where women travelling to the South of Sri Lanka were termed as a cause for degeneration.

---

[368] Ibid.

[369] Sharika Thiranagama, "In Praise of Traitors: Intimacy, Betrayal, and the Sri Lankan Tamil Community," in *Traitors: Suspicion, Intimacy, and the Ethics of State-Building*, ed. Thiranagama Sharika and Kelly Tobias (Philadelphia: University Of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 127-49.

[370] Ibid.

> "Young women who travel to Colombo come into contact with the military at various points. They are physically handled by male soldiers on the pretext of checking. In Colombo these women become friendly with policemen from Sinhala and Muslim communities and lose their morals. In addition they pass on information on the struggle that is taking place in the North" [371]

Here we can see a conflation of the figure of traitor with a sexually loose woman, both to be abhorred. What is it in the sexuality of woman that is deemed dangerous? The untameable woman is to be scared of, worried about. What about this figure allies with the figure of traitor? This again can be read as a fear of sexual intimacy and the notion of betrayal embedded within the knots of desire. When the ownership of bodies one desires, especially of those bodies and selves which refuse insignias of purity, an attendant anxiety develops which is seen in the easy collapse of women's ownership of their sexuality into categories of betrayal. One can also trace a categorization of legitimate desires here. Within the script of Tamil nationalism, love for the Tamil motherland triumphs the rest of the desires. But the desire of the motherland, in its conceptualization as love for the mother attempts to drain from this desire connotations of sexual nature or otherwise produces guilt. Yet this desire for the mother nation threatens to be hegemonic. This is evident in the fear that sexual intimacy and love will be a threat to the love for the nation. An apparent example of nation's possessive demands of its nationals' unending and singular desire is LTTE's discourse of terming its male combatants as great ascetics and its women combatant as virgin warriors. Within the construct of the nation, only the desire for the nation and the desire which will produce and reproduce pure nationals are admitted. LTTE's fear of sexual intimacy is famous with its strict segregation of sexes, dress codes for Tamil women, and infamous injunctions against adolescent boys and girls freely interacting terming it to be against 'Tamil culture'.[372]

---

[371] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control," 172.

[372] Subramaniam, "How enabled?".

Neloufer de Mel in her work has chronicled many instances where LTTE's fear of sexual intimacy is evident. One of the early instances of factionalism within LTTE was a result of allegations of sexual profligacy. Prabhakaran's close associate Uma Maheswaran's relationship with a woman named Urmila invited intense scrutiny and criticism. When both of them refused to co-opt into the "normalising mechanism of marriage", they had to leave the organization.[373] Another instance that de Mel cites is about a couple who were guards at Prabhakaran's Base One Four camp. They were executed even though the woman was pregnant. In another instance in the Amparai district, a woman cadre committed suicide by biting on her cyanide capsule after she found out about her pregnancy as a result of a relationship with a male combatant.[374] While within the movement, the sexuality of the cadres are evidently controlled, even in the broader Tamil society, there is a fear of miscegenation. As in the instance quoted by Sitralega Maunaguru, this resulted in a restriction of mobility of women. Neloufer de Mel in her work cites the example of the execution by LTTE of a 29 year old Tamil woman from Batticaloa who had first married a Tamil and then a Sinhala soldier and had left both the husbands, based on suspicions of being a decoy. Neloufer de Mel opines that the woman's body in this instance became a site of contestations as her sexuality threatened a strict demarcation of ethnic boundaries. There were also reports of executions of sexual workers in Jaffna who had clients in the Sri Lankan army. Deaths of these women are rendered as deserving deaths within the discourse of the nation. The fear of intimacy, in less obvious ways, is also evident in the experiences related by women in traitor prisons of LTTE. UTHR has reported that LTTE has many prisons meant for traitor women with as many as 200 women as prisoners including middle aged and old women. In the testimonies of these women they talk of the violence committed on them for having relatives in the rival militant movements or for having spoken to other militant groups. Acts like cooking for them or talking to 'traitors', acts of intimacy, transform these women also into traitors. Of interest at this point is how the tag of traitor can inaugurate

---

[373] de Mel, *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict.* 208

[374] Ibid.

other ways of thinking about being Tamil.[375] The final section of Sharika Thiranagama's work titled 'In Praise of Traitors' is of particular significance here. Thiranagama moves from the fear of being marked as a traitor to making it crucial to one's own sense of political purpose. Thiranagama outlines three ways in which those who are termed traitors react: By refusal of the term, by reversal of the charges onto the accuser (the LTTE) or third by 'sublation' of the term and maintaining it as a core of a new social form. In the third instance, there is an owning of the term traitor and an exploration of the possibilities that this interpellation offers.[376]

The term traitor figures in the Sinhala nationalistic discourse of the Sri Lanka state as well. We can look towards the murder of Lasantha Wickrematunge and the discourse he had produced before his death, to understand how the owning of the term 'traitor' was productive of certain speech which could otherwise not be articulated. Lasantha Wickrematunge, trained as a lawyer, was the founder editor of the weekly newspaper "The Sunday Leader" which went on to become popular for its unconventional takes on issues and its staunch criticism of the government. The newspaper with its motto 'Unbowed and Unafraid' was also known for its investigative journalism which made the paper a thorn in the side for those in the power. Wickrematunge was uncompromising in his criticism of both the extremist measures of the Tamil militant outfit LTTE, as well as of the terror tactics perpetrated by the Sri Lankan State. Wickrematunge was gunned down by armed assailants as he made his way to work. It was reported that he did so, despite his wife's requests as their car had been followed earlier in the day. He had accused the brother of the then President Mahinda Rajapakshe and the defence secretary, Mr Gotabhaya Rajapakshe of receiving kickbacks for an arms deal. He was due to testify in court in relation to this, when he was murdered. Wickrematunge's death was a

[375]UTHR, "Women Prisoners of the LTTE", Information Bulletin No.5, 8th March 1995, accessed on 15 October 2014, http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul5.htm.

[376] Sharika Thiranagama, "In Praise of Traitors: Intimacy, Betrayal, and the Sri Lankan Tamil Community," 146-148.

continuation in a long list of atrocities committed against journalists under the leadership of the Mahinda Rajapakshe regime. At least nine murders of journalists were committed under his rule, as well as the disappearance of the cartoonist Prageeth Eknelygoda and the abduction of the journalist Keith Noyahr. In the Global Impunity Index published by the Committee to Protect Journalists, in the year 2014, Sri Lanka was placed in the fourth place taking into consideration the deaths committed with impunity on journalists. [377] In May 2015, the new President, Maithripala Sirisena, pledged to reopen the investigations into the unsolved murders and atrocities committed against media personals by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID). Wickrematunge's body was exhumed in August 2016, and on 19th Feb, 2017, five military intelligence officers were arrested.

The murder of Lasantha Wickrematunge acquires special significance as he had foreseen his own death, and had written that "I hope my assassination will not be seen as a defeat of freedom, but an inspiration for those who survive to step up their efforts".[378] Here the murder as foreseen by him will never attain its purpose of silencing, instead his death he hopes, will inaugurate more speech, more pursuit for truth. In Lasantha Wickrematunge's last editorial we can see an example of owning the term of traitor and from this subjectivity inaugurate possibilities of dissent. He writes

> "we often voice ideas that many people find distasteful. For example, we have consistently espoused the view that while separatist terrorism must be eradicated, it is more important to address the root causes of terrorism, and urged government to view Sri Lanka's ethnic strife in the context of history and not through the telescope of terrorism. We have also agitated against state terrorism in the so-called war against terror, and made no secret of our horror that Sri Lanka is the only country in the world routinely to bomb its own citizens. For these views we have been labeled traitors, and if this be treachery, we wear that label proudly."[379]

---

[377] Committee to Protect Journalists. "Getting Away with Murder" , 2015, accessed on 17 Oct 2015, https://cpj.org/reports/2015/10/impunity-index-getting-away-with-murder.php#6

[378] Lasantha Wickrematunge, "I Hope My Murder Will Be Seen Not As A Defeat Of Freedom But An Inspiration," *The Guardian,* January 13, 2009, accessed March 12 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/jan/13/wickrematunga-final-editorial-final-editorial

[379] Steve Coll, "Letter From the Grave," January 12, 2009, accessed March 12, 2015, http://www.newyorker.com/news/steve-coll/letter-from-the-grave

It's interesting how the articulation of dissent is made from the wake of death. The Sri Lankan state under Mahinda Rajapakshe was facilitating the attacks on media and deaths of journalists with impunity by actively encouraging the view that the journalist by talking against his military methods were being unpatriotic and going against the cause of Sri Lanka's well being. It is in this context that Lasantha Wickrematunge reclaims visibility of the deaths of journalists by embracing the term traitor. With ingenuity he had equated the profession of journalism with the army by saying these are the two professions in Sri Lanka that demands dying to save their art. He recalibrates the meaning of being a traitor and uses an anticipation of his own death to articulate dissent. He fights the erasure of his death and defeats the silencing of voices of liberty through state committed murder by writing a note which will read as a note from beyond the death. He deftly calls on the moral realm of the Sinhalese by evoking the principles of Dhamma and also confronts Rajapakshe by invoking a justice that awaits after death. He writes directing it to Rajapakshe "Although you are now so drunk with power that you cannot see it, you will come to regret your sons having so rich an inheritance of blood. It can only bring tragedy. As for me, it is with a clear conscience that I go to meet my Maker. I wish, when your time finally comes, you could do the same. I wish." [380]

Wickrematunge's note written as if from beyond death makes sure that his death is not erased. It is at the same time an act of memorialisation as well as an act of dissent. Using death for a profession as an act of conscience, he shook the moral grounds of the Sri Lankan society. His death could not be ignored. In a war, where countless disappeared and many deaths are forgotten, remembering the death of a journalist committed to writing truth is a small start to reverse memorialisations that only remember deaths made for the nation as martyrs. Aazhiyaal's poem *'En Annan Lesanthavukku Avangal Kuriyathavathu'* is one such memorialization.[381] The title 'My Brother Lasantha, As Told By Him' gives importance again to speech of dissent that was his life. The poem

[380] Ibid.

[381] Aazhiyaal "En Annan Lesanthavukku Avangal Kuriyathavathu" in *Karunavu,* ed. Aazhiyaal (Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2013,) 51

reproduces "the scathing critique of intellectuals, and fake smiles, and peacetalks"[382] as despised by Lasantha. The poem is a speech-again, not just a reproduction, but a reminding, also a reiteration of dissent.

An erasure of dissent was a tactic of LTTE in its efforts towards the establishment the ideal Tamil homeland, the Eelam. Even though the expression of dissent and differences from LTTE's politics of Tamil nationalism was fraught with danger, the political situation also led to conceptualizations of alternate ways of being and feeling Tamil. Art was an important platform to do this. Writers, artists and activists who expressed their discontentment with the militant form of nationalism also had to pay a heavy toll. Most of them had to go on exile or were summarily disposed of. The list of artists and activists who died includes Rajani Thiranganama, Sabalingam Sabarathinam[383], Neelan Thiruchelvam,[384] Selvy Thiyagarajah, and indirectly Sivaramani Sivanandan. Rajani Thiranganama was a doctor, a professor in Jaffna University, a human rights activist and an ardent feminist. She was killed while she cycled back home from Jaffna University on 21st September 1989. This was the period when armed confrontation between LTTE and IPKF was at its peak and any form of dissent was not tolerated. Her husband Dayapalan Thiranagama, a Sinhala Geography professor whom she had met through her affiliations with Left politics in Sri Lanka wrote about her death thus:

> "They came behind and called her by name. Then she was still sitting on the bike, turned back and looked at them. Eyewitnesses say that she tried to cover her forehead with her bare hands seeing the gunmen pointing the pistol at her head. They demonstrated extraordinary cruelty against a woman who had only her bare hands to cover her head against the bullets. Even after she fell on the ground they shot the back of her head with two bullets to make sure that she would not be alive to criticise them again. They showed no mercy towards the woman who had showed them such compassion and had treated

[382] Ibid.

[383] He was executed in Paris where he was purportedly writing an anti-LTTE book based on his close affiliations with V. Prabhakaran

[384] Neelan Thiruchelvam was an internationally acclaimed academician and the founder director of International Center for Ethnic Studies. He was a member of the TULF and a consistent critic of LTTE. He was assassinated by an LTTE suicide bomber in 1992.

> them when they were injured. Her young daughters hearing the gun shots wondered who the victim would be this time." [385]

Both Rajani and her sister Nirmala were early supporters of the LTTE who parted ways with the organization in the mid 1980s as they both had disagreements with the way the organization was functioning, and also because it was at odds with the socialist principles they supported.[386] Rajani was also harassed by the Sri Lankan army and the IPKF. Though Rajani knew her life was at risk, she refused to be cowed down or leave Jaffna. She co-authored the book 'Broken Palmyra', which brought forth the atrocities of the IPKF, but also provided a scathing critique of the LTTE. The Palmyra was a symbol of the Tamil Jaffna society and the book reflects the deep agony that she faced at its deterioration and the eventual breaking up. The chapter in Broken Palmyra, 'No More Tears, Sister', is a feminist appraisal of the conflict by Rajani. She co-founded the University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna (UTHR-J) which published reports, bulletins and testimonials throughout the conflict and also co-founded the Poorani Women's Shelter in Jaffna for women affected by the conflict. Rajani had written that she wanted to prove that ordinary women like her also have the courage to fight alone and hold her inner selves together. Her assassination is an intolerance to such independence where a woman shows the courage to express her convictions. She was dangerous because she set an example of dignified defiance sans violence and she rooted herself in the realm of 'ordinary' day to day life of a woman.

Rajani Thiranagama's diary entries and poems, which were edited by her sisters Sumathy Sivamohan and Nirmala for the magazine *Outrite,* bring out her voice of dissent in all its strength and tragedy. The poem refuses to see civilian deaths as collateral damage and holds the Tamil militants guilty of turning civilians into "sacrificial lambs". She wrote:

---

[385] D.B.S.Jeyaraj. "Rajini Rajasingham Thiranagama: Unforgettable Symbol of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tragedy," *dbsjeyaraj,* accessed November 21, 2014, September 24, 2014. http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/33112

[386] Hensman, Rohini. "A Tribute to Rajani Thiranagama." *EPW* Vol - XLIX No. 49 (December 2014): 4.

Our great brave defenders and freedom fighters

lure the enemy, right to our door-step,

to the inside of the hospital,

start a fight,

ignite a land mine,

fire from near each and every refugee camp,

escape to safety.

And then comes the shells, whizzing whizzing

Bloody hell,

Tigers have withdrawn, while

We the sacrificial lambs

drop dead in lots.[387]

Dissent is sometimes most poignantly articulated through a language of disillusionment. Such a language of disillusionment is evidenced in the poetry of Chelvy Thiyagarah, a student of Drama and Theatre Arts in Jaffna and a former member of PLOTE. She was the recipient of the International PEN award in 1992 and wrote under the name 'Selvi'. Selvi was engaged in the cultural space of Jaffna very actively and founded the Tamil magazine *Thozhi*. She also articulated through dramatic plays and engaged deeply with issues like dowry and rape in her plays. Selvi was arrested on August 30, 1991 by the LTTE and disappeared without much evidence. It is believed that she was executed along with another dissident Manoharan, a day before she was supposed to act in a play on

[387] Sumathy Sivamohan, "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, Its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women," in *Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalization : Struggling to Create a New Social Order*, ed. S. H. Hasbullah and Barrie M. Morrison (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), 145-46.

Palestine Intifada. Her poem 'In Search of Sun' is an important portrayal of the time she lived in.

> In Search of Sun, My Soul,
>
> Full of despair, yearns for life,
>
> Primitive humans yellow toothed, ugly mouthed, thirsting blood slit flesh, saliva a dribble
>
> Cruel nails and horrifying eyes,
>
> Bragging and jubilating over victories are not new,
>
> Legs lost from long walks
>
> for miles and miles in search of a throne,
>
> Days wasted waiting for a full moon,
>
> Only boredom lingers.[388]

The poem articulates a sense of despair, a suffocation resulting from disillusionment, and predicts a return to primitive savagery. Selvi's poem is a critique of the loss of critical thinking and judgment where mindless celebration by LTTE tolerates no dissent. The poem also encompasses a tragic loss of hope and a resulting residue of ennui and dejection. The search for a new dawn is characterized by fruitlessly long journeys and the poem reads like a balance sheet of the inevitable defeat of the reductionist and reactionary concept of the Tamil nation forwarded by the LTTE.

Another powerful voice of critique of the concept Tamil nation was Sivaramani Sivanandan, a young poet from Jaffna who also used the language of disillusionment to

---

[388] "In the Traditions of a Six Yard Cloth." *Lanka News Papers.* June 1, 2008. http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2008/6/28682_space.html (accessed March 5, 2013).

articulate the futility of the tactics of militant nationalism. Sivaramani was an active member of the Jaffna Women's Group and participated enthusiastically in the literary and political debates and discussions in the 1980s. A feminist activist and an associate of Poorani Ilam and Santhiham, the psychiatric centre for women in Jaffna, Sivaramani held progressive views about women's position in the Tamil society. But the society at the time couldn't keep pace with the independent and electric thinking of brilliant women like her and continued to raise obstacles in her way. The militant struggle for dominance among Tamil groups and the IPKF War with LTTE in 1987 killed independent expressions and sought to extinguish feminist debates. A retreat into misogynist thinking was also evidenced in the space of education and in the University of Jaffna where Sivaramani was also a student. During this period of degeneration and retrogression which sought to reverse the feminist gains from the earlier period of active discussion and debate, misogynist posters came across the University campus trying to police the dress code of women students.[389] Wall posters were put up condemning feminists and feminism; Sivaramani was also personally targeted and harassed.[390] Sivaramani who in the early 1980s of heady feminist activism had written, "Come Friends, Let's Win the World", in 1989 wrote with dejection;

> …We got up,
>
> not to change the world,
>
> But to enter another darkness.[391]

The fatigue and boredom that marked Selvi's poems can be witnessed in Sivaramani's latter poems. In her words, there is a discernment of defeat that awaits them as well as the

---

[389] Maunaguru."Sivaramaniyin Vaazhvum Kavithayum: Oru Arimukham." iii-xxviii.

[390]Ibid.

[391] Sivaramani, "Come Friends, Let's Win the World," in *Sivaramani Kavithaigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru, (Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1993).

Tamil project. For example, in the poem, 'My Lineage and Me', Sivaramani writes of an "ageing of her time" that doesn't wield itself to straightening.[392] She writes:

> In this extraordinary initiative,
>
> among those who keep sleeping and dying,
>
> I keep losing a battle with my beliefs…[393]

The poem is not just recognition of personal defeat at the hands of her beliefs, but is a social commentary on the mores and conventions of a time where independent expression is rendered impossible, and if possible only through a language that bears the wounds of defeat. In understanding the language of dissent as articulated through boredom, it will be helpful to turn to an observation made by Valentine Daniel with newly freed victims of terror in Sri Lanka. In his interactions, he finds that there is a level of unshareability about experiences of torture. While these men shared in detail about their capture, the cells they were kept in, they spoke very little of torture. Even when they were asked to, "Brutalities were wearisomely enumerated…in flat toned recitations devoid of conviction" and further attempts to elicit information were met with listlessness.[394] Daniel argues that it is actually not boredom that weighs the victims down, but "the overwhelming sense of sheer worthlessness of all attempts to communicate something that was so radically individuated and rendered unshareable".[395] This unshareability is what is evidenced in the poetry of Selvi and Sivaramani as well, the fatigue and boredom are indications of the sheer incommunicable nature of the frustration they feel. The images of horror and savagery that saturates the poem of Selvi is an attempt to convey the desperation, a desperation that is mostly met with defeatism, with boredom. In

---

[392] Sivaramani, "My Lineage and I," in *Sivaramani Kavithaigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru, (Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1993).

[393] Ibid

[394] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies*, 143

[395] Ibid.

Sivaramani's poem, we still can see glimmers of rebellion, a refusal to live thus, losing a battle to one's own beliefs. Moreover her poetry is a strident critique of the Tamil nation which in the garb of culture silences all dissent.

> Finally,
> our last human is dying, slowly.
> The door is closed to all
> dissent.
> You leave your children
> the legacy of darkness;
> the crumbs of culture
> preserved in the traditions
> of a six-yard cloth.[396]

In one of her last poems before her death she wrote,

> My days
> You cannot snatch away,
> Like a small star
> that descends
> between your fingers

[396] Sivaramani, "Vizhippu," in *Sivaramani Kavithaigal*, ed. Sitralega Maunaguru, (Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1993) 58 as quoted and trans. in Sumathy Sivamohan. "Territorial Claims, Home, Land and Movement: Women's History of Movement and Resistance".

that covers my eyes,

my existence is certain."[397]

On May 19th, 1991, Sivaramani committed suicide after burning all her poetry. In her suicide note she says that her act of suicide is a well thought out decision and that she still is in awe of life and living. For her, death is throwing her flaming grief and rage to wind. She writes " Till my hand's reach/ I have erased all my identity". She pleads to the survivors to destroy everything that they might own about her.[398] Her suicide is a text of defiance in itself; her burning of poetry has to be read not just as a destruction of identity, but also as a continuation of her self- expression. When she is burning her words and erasing her self, she is in a way protecting her identity. She is holding to her beliefs and ending existence before it will be claimed for appropriation. As Sumathy Sivamohan reminds us, Sivaramani committed suicide a few days before Dhanu committed suicide in an entirely different way by blowing herself up to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi.[399] But as Sitralega Maunaguru astutely comments, Sivaramani and her death did not receive the same attention as she did not bite on a cyanide capsule.[400] Her death lies outside the script of the nation, like the death of Rajani and Selvi.

So, what does an act of death which does not yield itself to martyrdom become? To what space is Sivaramani's suicide then relegated? Can we see her death not as an end, but as a continuation of the life she had led till then? As Cheran, wrote in his poem 'Apocalypse';

Kafka did not get the chance

---

[397] Ravikumar. "Apocalypse in Our Time," in *Waking is Another Dream*, ed. Ravikumar (New Delhi: Navayana, 2010), 57-58.

[398] Maunaguru."Sivaramaniyin Vaazhvum Kavithayum: Oru Arimukham." iii-xxviii.

[399] Sivamohan, "Groundviews." 03 22, 2009. http://groundviews.org/2009/03/22/three-poems-by-sivamohan-sumathy/ (accessed 03 24, 2013).

[400] Sivamohan, "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, Its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women,"

to feed his writings to fire,

But Sivaramani burnt hers.

A poem is destroyed in an uneasy space

and the composition of others

refuse to come alive.[401]

Her death can be a description of the uneasy space where a poem gets destroyed. It can be a precursor of death of speech of others. The act of suicide can also be a preservation of a defiant self, a moment of complete independence before death. Burning one's words is not a cessation of one's speech, but a start of a speech in another realm. After her death her near and dear ones have sought different ways to remember her. Her mother, Sugirthamma Sivananthan, instituted the Sivaramani Gold medal in the Department of Linguistics and English in Jaffna University where Sivaramani was a student. Sitralega Maunaguru who was closely associated with Sivaramani in the working of Jaffna Women's Circle and the publication of the first compilation of Tamil women's poetry in Sri Lanka, *Sollatha Seithigal*, compiled her poetry in a collection entitled '*Sivaramani Kavithaigal'*. Sivaramani's poems have been published, republished, and circulated on the internet through sites like oodaru.com and online magazines like Bomb, Himal amongst others. New Leftist organizations publish her earlier poetry in their magazines like New Democracy calling forth a women's revolution. She is also remembered in poetry of others like Sumathy Sivamohan. There is a refusal to forget her strong and clear headed opposition to the construct of the Tamil nation in these poems. In short, her act of suicide has enabled an unending conversation with us. She is remembered in the realm of words of remembering, as evidenced in the following poem written by Sumathy Sivamohan at the end of the conflict in the May 2009.

19th may. you have nothing

[401] Cheran. "Apocalypse." in *A Second Sunrise*, ed. Cheran. (New Delhi: Navayana Publishers, 2012).

to say? i can only

falteringly

mouth, nothing. [402]

nothing begets nothing, a king says, and

launches a war

against garrulous daughters and sulking ones;

and i think of an

other daughter, too too loud or too soft,

of other wars and other deaths, slipped between

a pillow and its case, a letter, a bomb, a whisper, slipped

between the familiar and the family, the nation and its engender.

on 19th may, 1991, sivaramani,

took her own positive life, her cry strangled

with that strenuous cord, blazing a trail of blood

of the nation and its many stories;

300, 000 slipped between

a miserable soul-dead wretch, who

would not take his life and the dark

of a storm shelling sky, a black and blue sea,

dotted with doom, a king

without daughters striking those

'crushed between sea and sky',

[402] The poem is written completely in small letters, reminding one of bell hooks and e.e.cummings.

a tale slipped between waiting and waking,

an impossible 30-years;

18 years later.[403]

With a clear reference to Shakespeare's King Lear, Sumathy Sivamohan reminds us of that one forgotten daughter "too too loud or too soft" who is emblematic of other wars fought and deaths which do not form a part of the official history of conflict on Sri Lanka. She reminds us that in the official rendering of the nation's many stories, one has very comfortably sought to forget Sivaramani's death and with that her critique of the nation. In the engendering of the nation's history, May 19th will be remembered as the day of the cessation of a conflict or the final apocalypse according to which "nation" you belong to. The Sri Lankan government celebrates the day as the Victory day and the Tamils mourn the day as the Remembrance Day. But "an impossible 18 years before", May 19th is also the day Sivaramani died. Here poetry acts as a space of remembering a dissident poet and also re-membering the history of the conflict. Sivaramani might not be remembered through the official history of LTTE's war for Tamil nation, but it shall be remembered in a dissident poet's voice. Where history fails to record, poetry writes in remembrance. In certain ways, this poem, it is a continuation of Sivaramani's life and beliefs. Sumathy Sivamohan had written elsewhere that Sivaramani "attempts to displace the discourse of nationalism from struggle to dissent, nation to gender and thereby from martial feminism to critical consciousness."[404] In the above poem what Sumathy does is a continuation of the unsettling that Sivaramani had started. Here poetry in remembering is an enabler of travelling of ideas and signs that falls outside of the nation, in the space relegated to the traitor.

---

[403] Sumathy. "May 2010." *Groundviews.* May 2010. http://groundviews.org/2010/05/19/19th-may-2010/ (accessed December 3, 2014).

[404] Sivamohan, "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, Its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women."

In the same space of dissent voiced from the death of another dissenting woman, can be seen in the poem by Auvai titled '*Rajani Uniddamenna Kuttram Kandanar*' (Rajani, What Wrong Did They Find In You?') written in 1988. The poem starts with the receiving of the news of Rajani's death. As a friend, Auvai laments that Rajani had to die like an orphan on the same streets they both had roamed singing and flittering like free birds. Auvai is also lamenting the despicableness of survival in the face of Rajani's death. She writes;

> What can we do?
>
> We have lost our tongues
>
> We have lost our arms
>
> We live solely with stomachs intact.[405]

From this disgust of meaningless existence, Auvai builds up a stringent critique of the militarism and foregrounds the meaningful death of Rajani. From the question, Rajani what wrong did they find in you, Auvai goes on to criticise her killers. She asks what else can one expect from those whose minds are of iron and brains are carrying guns. What Rajani did, according to Auvai, was that she did not sit in a corner, saying she is just a woman; she also refused to fritter her life away by just existing to eat and sleep. Instead Rajani took the hands of fellow women and wished to show them light. Auvai frets over the loss of senses to call one's own in a nation that is being ruled by the guns. For Auvai, Rajani's death is but not a cessation; in fact it is a moment to assert dissent again. Auvai writes in a language that is determined and resolute in its dissent:

> They shot you and
>
> strew the bones on the paths,
>
> hoping it will close down these paths.

[405] Auvai, "Rajani Uniddamenna Kuttram Kandanar" in *Etai Ninaintazhuvathum Caattiyamillai*, 48.

They took your ashes and threw it to the breeze,

ordering the winds also to remain silent.

There is a life beyond silence,

There is struggle beyond death

Will you understand?[406]

It is the struggle beyond death that is an important space for housing dissent when the nation refuses space for critique. In this poem, the ability to speak in difficult times comes from the space of mourning for a friend, but also mourning for a dissenting activist. There is a shock and a space that opens immediately after a death that throws open an articulation of difficult truths. This space structured around loss leads to outbursts and conveying of hurtful knowledge, knowledge which if articulated outside the space of mourning will either cause offence to the beholder or harm will be afflicted on the speaker. But the space of mourning can be a space for difficult conversations. From the position of having lost a loved one, certain unspeakable and hurting knowledge can be conveyed. Here it is the warring nations which are subsuming speech; even if these nations will not recognise the dissent, the dissent is put forward in a public domain. From this utterance of mourning, the speech of dissent can circulate. Even if it doesn't circulate, the utterance initiates at least the recognition of the existence of a community of dissent. In the poem of Auvai, it is this transient space of mourning which is secured and solidified into permanence. Auvai recognises the rebellion of Rajani, and her uneasy presence within the Tamil nation forwarded by militarism. Her being an assertive woman is also a part of the uneasiness that is caused. On another tangent, women have also used conventional gendered figures like mother, sister, wife and lover to convey unconventional discourses on nation. In the next section I will look at how the much

[406] *Ibid.*

beloved construction of Tamil nationalism, the Tamil mother is subverted within the genre of poetry about mourning.

A MOTHER'S LAMENT AS DISSENT

One of the key constructions of women in nationalism is the figure of the mother as reproducer of the nation. As Assia Djebar claimed, it is solely as reproducer and nurturer that the "woman as the being" is legitimated by the nation, to the extent that "the mother monopolized the only authentic expression of cultural identity".[407] But the figure of the mother in experiential terms is not monolithic, even though nationalism tends to view the mother as a mythic figure invested with certain powers that ensures the coming into being of a nation and its continuance. This power of the mother lies in her consecration; this consecration is linked to certain responsibilities which are demanded of her. Motherhood within the Sri Lankan context incorporates the function of biological reproduction with other practices of nurturance like being moral guardians and care givers, and hence encompasses the acts of a supportive wife as well.[408] Also, while one is deemed to be a mother through the act of reproducing, there are injunctions that accompany mothering practices. These rules decide if they have been responsible mothers or not. Hence, not all mothers are good mothers of the nation; they become so through certain mothering acts. The context decides which mothering acts are important. This in turn will decide which mothers shall be valorised, and which of them shall be forgotten. Within the particular context of Tamil nationalism, in order to glorify the nurturing role of Tamil women, leaders of the early phase of Tamil nationalism referred to the construction of *Veerathayar* (Brave mothers) as one of the ideals for Tamil women to follow. The construct of *Veerathayar* is based on mother characters from *Puranaanuru*, an anthology

[407] Djebar, Assia. *'Post face' in Women of Algiers in their Department.* Charlostteville: University of Virginia, 1992.

[408] De Alwis, Malathi "Motherhood as a Space of Protest: Women's Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka" in Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and the Politicization of Religion in South Asia, eds. Amrita Basu & Patricia Jeffrey London/NY: Routledge/Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997.

of Tamil heroic poems from the first century A.D which idealizes mothers who send their sons to the battlefields with pride.[409] In these texts of classical Tamil literature, mother's bodies are turned into sites of divinity and purity, which derives their power from their capability to produce brave sons. Their wombs become "lairs for tigers" from which brave sons are produced and their lactating breasts are endowed with magical capacities which pour forth "milk of valour".[410] The 'Mother' was thus reduced to being a sum of her reproductive parts. Mothers were thus alienated from their own bodies, its desires and were co-opted into a system that produced brave sons for the nation.[411]

In the context of Tamil nationalism, the moral cornerstone which informs this loose, putting together of reproductive parts is *Karuppu* or chastity of the woman. Chastity of the woman, which is important in Tamil cultural and moral regulation in constructing the Tamil woman is implied in the brave mother construct as well. Hence the figure of *Kannaki*, the heroine of *Silapadikaram* and the epitome of the chaste wife goes hand in hand with the paradigm of the brave mother. The chastity of the Tamil woman is important in her function of reproduction because she is the instrument to reproduce a "pure" nation. A woman's chastity and she being an identifiable reproductive agent of Tamil ethos and culture is thus necessary parameters for her to be considered a good Tamil mother. Of course, this erased many other mothers' lives, "like the mother of daughters, or the 'whore mother'".[412]

Hence, in the 1960s, the satyagrahas organised by the Federal party in their agitations for language rights saw women participate in rallies, sit-ins and picketing, and their roles were described in reference to the mythic figure of *Veerathayar* and the chaste woman of

---

[409] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control." 160-162.

[410] C.S. Lakshmi,. "Mother, Mother-Community and Mother Politics in Tamil Nadu." *Economic and Political Weekly* XXV (1990): 42-43.

[411] *Ibid.*

[412] *Ibid.*

Kannaki. [413] Nanthini Sornarajah says that the importance of motherhood at this juncture also takes inspiration from the Dravidian movement in South India, where through films, songs and poetry, the ideal *Tamil Thai* was absorbed into the FP politics.[414] The idea of motherhood which combines aspects of reproduction of brave sons with the moral requirement of chastity casts them primarily in terms of vulnerability; this has given rise to moral dilemmas for these women. Yet, women are yoked into this gendered conception of motherhood by attributing to them an inchoate agency which is constructed around rewards of affection and power which they will receive within the personal space of the household. But theses rewards are contingent on the responsibilities that mothering requires of women. For e.g. Joke Schrivers in her study of the peasant women of Sri Lanka has looked at how women who were main subsistence cultivators were manipulated into a position of complete marginality using traditional gender conceptions that are centred on motherhood. She says that the vulnerability of women as mothers in this scenario is three pronged. They are physically vulnerable straddling the double burden of managing households with reproductive labour; they are socially vulnerable because they are restricted in their mobility; they are also mentally and morally vulnerable because their mothering makes them responsible for the preservation of those cultural values and ideas which ironically enough confirms their inequality.[415] In the script of militant nationalism, the cultural importance attached to the Veerathayars was emboldened. But with the advent of women warriors the concept of the brave mother underwent a change to include these women within its fold. Interestingly the role of women as biological reproducers was also not abandoned; instead the inductions of women into the militant nationalism led to a construction of 'Tamil woman' performing two different but interconnected duties to the nation.

---

[413] Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism", 162.

[414] Sornarajah, "The Experiences of Tamil Women: Nationalism, Construction of Gender and Women's Political Agency."

[415] Joke Schrijvers, "The Marginalization of Peasant Woman in North Central Province of Sri Lanka." *Development and Change* 14, no. 2 (1988): 185-209.

An image of a "supernatural woman" who is at once both a mother and a fighter was forwarded to suit the demands of the changing constitution of the militant struggle.[416] The warrior mother thus not only reproduces bravery through her warrior sons, but uses her body in a militant capacity as well. The LTTE in its publication "Women and Revolution: The Role of Women in Tamil Eelam National Liberation" carried photographs of Palestinian freedom fighter women with a gun in one hand and a baby in another to forward this concept of the militant mother. Poster campaigns were also carried out by LTTE to "warn" Tamil women against family control programmes conducted under the aegis of the Sri Lankan state.[417] This move should be seen as entrusting upon the mother an additional responsibility to protect the nation for her children, while not diverging from her responsibility to ensure the continuance of the family (and the nation by extension) through reproduction. While we have looked at the ways in which militant nationalism of LTTE sought to incorporate mothers into their ideology, the women themselves have used their subject position as mothers in creative ways in their attempts to negotiate lives in a war torn landscape.

One such radical positioning of the mother figure was seen in the 1980s with the construct of 'social motherhood'[418]. Social motherhood sought to socialise the mothers' pain regarding the disappearance and killing of their sons into a collective act of protest. This concept of social motherhood, which was central to other motherist movements like the 'Mothers de Plaza de Mayo' in Argentina and the 'Mutual Support Group for the reappearance of our sons, fathers and brothers' (GAM) of Guatemala, redefines the practice of motherhood as a communal experience in which mothers share their grief of disappeared children instead of seeing them as private property.[419] While such protests

---

[416] Maunaguru, Sitralega. "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control", 164.

[417] *Ibid.*

[418] *Ibid.* 167

[419] Alicia Partnoy, "Textual Strategies to Resist Disappearance and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo." *Comparative Literature and Culture* 9, No. 1 (2007).

are framed in a vocabulary that was most available to women through their primary positioning within a patriarchally structured society, the radicalism in the position is drawn from making the experience of motherhood into a public act from which mothers demand recognition as right bearing citizens. This aspect can be elucidated with further clarity when one examines the Mother's Front of the north and east in Sri Lanka.

Women in North Sri Lanka when confronted with the repressive Sri Lankan state practices organised themselves as a political force under the banner of the Mother's Front and the Association of Mothers of Missing Youth in the mid 1980s. They battled against the government of Sri Lanka to secure the release of youth held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) by taking to the streets with a public display of their motherly grief. Here women confront the state by revealing the contradictions between the state's own rhetoric and practice by appealing for a return to the natural order of the family and motherland. By accepting the responsibility to nurture and preserve life which is valorised by the state, they revealed the ultimate transgression of the state as it was denying women the opportunity to mother.[420] Similarly, in 1986, when the LTTE banned all militant groups not allied with it, and indulged in public killings and exhibition of the bodies of TELO members on the street, the eastern Mother's Front was constituted to protest the killings.[421] In an atmosphere where their experiences were forced to fade away into the private/ domestic realm, the mothers forced themselves into the state's and LTTE's zones of visibility. As Malathi de Alwis writes in the context of the Mothers' Front of the South which was moulded around the Mother's Front of the North, mothers indulged in a very public and theatrical display of grief which blurred the distinction

---

[420] Jennifer G. Schriver, "Those who die for Life Cannot be Called Dead: Women and Human Rights Protests in Latin America." *Feminist Review*, 1989: 3-29.

de Alwis, "Motherhood as a Space of Protest: Women's Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka", 185-192.

de Mel, Neloufer. *Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in 20th century Sri Lanka*.

[421] Thiranagama, Rajani. "No More Tears Sister: The Experiences of Women," 305-330.

between male as public and the female as private.[422] In the public manner in which the grief and anger of mothers were aired shows an intermingling of protest with lament.[423]

The manner in which the anger of the mothers is used publicly drew heavily on the stereotype of woman as hysterical and emotional and thus can be argued to be mired in an essentialist conception of mother as being the emotional being as opposed to the rational being. But the context in which this particular version of femininity was invoked is very strategic. The hysterical mother while panders to the popular notions of a grieving mother, uses her grief towards claiming a public space to air grievances of a volatile nature, a space which is denied to her within an authoritarian climate perpetuated by both the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE. As Werbner argues in her work regarding the 'motherist' social movements, women's active citizenship starts from pre-established cultural domains of female power and rightful ownership. This concept of women's citizenship, which is used to challenge authoritarian structures of power usually controlled by men is always conjectural. Hence, they valourise maternal qualities (caring, compassion, responsibility for the vulnerable) and see these as being anchored in democratic values. Werbner argues that these early forays of women into citizenship should be seen as efforts to force the State to accept the values of nurturance as legitimate democratic values whereby conditions for the feminization of citizenship is created by women progressively moving into the public sphere.[424]

---

[422] de Alwis, "Motherhood as a Space of Protest: Women's Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka", 185-192.

[423] Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham, "The Politics of the Governed: Maternal Politics and Child Recruitment in the Eastern Provincee of Sri Lanka." in *Constellations of Violence: Feminist Interventions in South Asia*, by Radhika Coomaraswamy and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham, 121-148. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2008.

[424] Pnina Werbner, "Political Motherhood and the Feminisation of Citizenship: Women's Activism and the Transformation of the Public Sphere." in *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, ed. Nira Yuval-Davis and Pnina Werbner, (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2005), 221-245.

Similarly, the Tamil women from the Eastern part of Sri Lanka used the power inherent in the construct of mothers as nurturers to gain legitimacy in their demands to know the whereabouts of their missing children in the aftermath of the disbanding of the Eastern wing of LTTE after an internal split was orchestrated under Col. Karuna in 2004. While on the one hand, the mothers refused the call of Tamil nationalism to send their children to war, they also asserted that mothers are privy to knowledge unavailable to other family members. Perera Rajasingham in her study of the Eastern mothers of disappeared children finds that the construct of the mother as a figure to be revered was used to shame LTTE whenever they used violence against mothers looking for information, which led the LTTE to render an apology to these women.[425] The women's insistence that they were 'merely' mothers seeking their children's return to the family fold, and that they were not "political", posed a conundrum to the Sri Lankan state as well. The State was forced to respect their protests against the government in which they demanded information on their missing children. Also, mothers formed informal linkages in an extremely volatile situation to exchange information; they also went en masse to camps forming solidarity groups at their village level in order to gather whereabouts of those who had gone missing.[426]

While it is true that the above construction of motherhood appealing for a cessation of violence as opposed to calling for war is important, it is also important to ask if this led to a change in the position of women within the idea of the Tamil nation. As Sumathy Sivamohan argues, the possibility of a positive motherhood is denied in these instances of motherist movements in Sri Lanka as they are hamstrung in their efforts by the LTTE.[427] The Mother's Front lasted only for a brief period of time and had become a yet another

[425] Perera-Rajasingham, Nimanthi. "The Politics of the Governed: Maternal Politics and Child Recruitment in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka."

[426] Ibid.

[427] Sivamohan, "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, Its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women,"126-149.

YWCA, notes Thiranganama, and its central structure which was mainly made up of middle class women began to confine its activities to works of charity.[428]

While on one hand the state employed counter-rhetorics painting them as bad mothers by appropriating the responsibility of motherhood by claiming to be rehabilitating their children, on the other hand LTTE worked to appropriate the mothers within their movement. An example of this is the LTTE's appropriation of Annai Pupathi who fasted to death for an unconditional ceasefire between the LTTE and the IPKF. Her death anniversary is memorialised by the LTTE and a scholarship was instituted in her name. It was public knowledge that the LTTE had forced her to stay on fast against her wishes.[429] In his speech on her second death anniversary, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, the founder and leader of LTTE terms her as a martyr in the history of their liberation struggle. Prabhakaran spoke:

"As a woman, as a mother, as the maternal head of the family, Poopathi Amma transcended her ordinary life and the bonds of existential attachment in sacrificing her life for the emancipation of her nation".[430]

For Vellupillai Prabhakaran, Annai Poopathi is a martyr because she "transcends" her existential attachments for the cause of the nation. Her heroism lies in the act of death; it is through the public act of death that Poopathi gains agency in Prabhakaran's eyes. This public act of dying is very similar to the death through cyanide capsule, which is the prescribed way to die for LTTE cadres. But Poopathi's fast to death is termed as a sacrifice and attains increased prominence because it is as a mother that she transcends her existential bonds. This appropriation of the mother figure occurred when the political mother had reached a threatening proximity in LTTE's public life. It is also significant

[428] Thiranagama, "No More Tears Sister: The Experiences of Women." 305-330.

[429] Sivamohan, "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, Its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women." 126-149.

[430] A Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism : Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000).

that at the time of Karuna faction's breaking ranks with LTTE in 2004, there was an increased interest in celebrating Annai Poopathi's death anniversary by LTTE on a grand scale in Batticaloa, the home town of Col Karuna in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka.[431] The Mothers from the Eastern part as mentioned earlier were unwilling to send their children back to LTTE and had used their position as mothers to enable this agency. It is in this context of dissent that the widespread celebration of the Annai Poopathi Remembrance day was called forth by LTTE. In a release by Velupillai Prabhakaran for the occasion, he wrote "She did not die as a human being. Her sacrifice symbolized the uprising of Tamil Eelam motherhood".[432] Here again we see a denial of the human aspect of the person and her being termed as a superhuman martyr mother. This is evidence of how an individual act of protest is contorted to fit a nationalist conception of heroic motherhood. The difference between the social motherhood of the Mother's Front and the LTTE's appropriation of Annai Poopathi is that while the former socialised individual grief into a collective protest, the latter erases an individual act of protest by consecrating the individual into an embodiment of a monolithic notion of femininity.

Tamil women in Sri Lanka who aspired to make their experiences of war into public stories were restricted by the gendered tropes that nationalism created for them. In order for their experiences to be deemed legitimate, they had to couch their multiple and variegated experiences within a conventional narrative that sapped away the richness of their tales. As Sumathy Sivamohan argued, "for the Tamil people, the mother conceived as the mother of the nation's sons and possibly as the chaste Kannaki, avenging the death of her husband by burning the city of Madurai, offers a choice between just two possible directions of development for women".[433] The choice here is actually a restriction of other possibilities of selfhood. But an important formulation of motherhood that can be witnessed in the writing by women is the figure of the dissenting mother. This figure of

---

[431] "NorthEast to Observe Annai Poopathi Anniversary" *Tamil Net***,** April 18, 2004, accessed January 20th, 2014, http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=11773

[432] Ibid.

[433] Sivamohan, "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, Its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women." 126-149.

the dissenting mother places herself within the conventional role of the mother who has the responsibility for the well being of her children, but from this responsibility she frames her critique of the militant nationalism. She draws upon the rewards of filial protection and respect that nationalism promises her and focuses on its denial as a potential site to mark her dissent. She relies on concepts like mother's intuition and mother's grief to cast her scepticism about Tamil nationalism.

We can see the figure of the dissenting mother in Sanmarga's poem 'A Mother's Lament.' This poem is written in the form of *Oppari,* a form of lament which has a ritual status and is peculiar to Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils. Oppari is the prerogative of the women and acts as an indirect intimation of a person's death. Flowing poetically, Oppari is symptomatic of grief and an important tool of mourning.[434] Sanmarga's poem using the poetic form of lament demands a hearing from us by using the voice of a mother who witnesses her son's death, but can't claim his body lying in the streets. From this position she interweaves a powerful critique of the militant nationalism with a lament for her son. It is the entrenchment of militancy which is evidenced in her son's unclaimed corpse lying in the street. The poem which in its line breaks and images resembles a spontaneous wail is not just a lament for the son, but for the mother as well. While militant nationalism had exhorted mothers to send their sons bravely to the battlefront, it did not address what happens to these mothers when their sons are martyred. While mothers of martyrs are commemorated, emotional turmoil related to a child's death can only be expressed within the idioms of pride. In opposition, the mother in the poem fronts her identity as a single mother who raised her children in much hardship in the anticipation of the subsequent duty of her sons to grant her shelter.

> The boy who died for the land
>
> Lies in the street dirt

[434] Selvy Thiruchandran, *Feminine Speech Transmissions: An Exploration into the Dirges and Lullabies of Women.* (New Delhi: Women's Education and Research Centre & Vikas Publishers, 2001).

While those who held forth on the stages

Demanding a separate state

Enjoy their feasts

And live in safety

My heart breaks

To leave him there

So ill-fated I am that I could not

Declare that you are my son. [435]

As Thiranagama has written, LTTE had cultivated an influence on the Tamil society which was mediated by a particular kind of intimacy. Each family was to contribute a member to the fighting forces, which made an LTTE soldier one's own kin. But on the other hand, once the cadres were recruited, they were sealed off from families, given a new identity and their loyalties were reoriented towards the movement.[436] Also cadres partook in the civilian space by living among them undercover forming "a loose network of long-term and short term loyalties and informers".[437] As we had discussed earlier, Sharika Thiranganama observes, "This intimacy of the LTTE presence among the civilian population led to a situation where networks of trust were increasingly shrinking while fear of other Tamils expanded".[438] It was also considered important to have a position, if you were a Tamil, which was either pro or anti LTTE. Hence, in short LTTE became the axis around which the political identity of a Tamil could be constructed.

---

[435] Sanmarga. "Lament of a mother." *New Democracy*, September 22, 2006.

[436] Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka.* 25-31

[437] *Ibid.*

[438] *Ibid.*

This poem while talks of a mother's grief, also talks of the potency of mother's curses to incinerate. The space of the curse allows the mother to voice a narrative critical of nationalism "in these times".[439] The poem exposes through the vehicle of curse the hierarchical nature of LTTE and its working. It highlights the irony of how the boy who died for the nation lies in the streets while the ones who held forth stages demanding a separate stage enjoy their feast. While mother's tears are a familiar emotive trope in literature, songs, films, etc., mother's curses were familiar yet less discussed practices that were mostly restricted to the private and religious domains.[440] The poem by changing the medium of her wrath enhances the visibility of her suffering from within a domestic space to the nation. The poem is at the same time a lament in secret, and a public denouncement, the possibility of the latter is accorded by the former. This is also a good example of how an individual pain gets collectivized through literary witnessing. An important function of the poetry written and circulated in time of war is this, to give recognition to those who are invisible. In an atmosphere which leaves many wounds open to fester, recognition through reading gives a possibility of healing, however tenuous it might be.

This poem is also important in its recasting of the mother figure Kunti from Mahabharata. Kunti as the mother of the Pandavas can easily fit into the mould of the brave mother as she actively encourages and masterminds her sons return as heirs of Indraprastha. But in this poem she is recast as a grieving mother who couldn't own her first born Karna until the day of his death. By evoking Kunti as a character who had to bear secrets about her first born, a secret she lets out when her son lies dying on the battlefield, the predicament of the mother in the poem is rendered as acute, because she is even denied that acknowledgement of her son's corpse. The poem also very tactically uses symbolism from the epic to put forward issues that implicate a commoner in times of war. So self exile of Pandavas is contrasted with disappearances in the wartime Sri Lanka. She traces

[439] Sanmarga. "Lament of a mother."

[440] de Mel, *Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in 20th century Sri Lanka.*

in exile an element of abandonment and cowardice, a luxury only a few rich can afford in Sri Lanka. Mobility was a very precarious under the scrutiny of the LTTE and the Sri Lankan State. As Thiranganama writes, "the opposite of internal displacement is not resettlement, but greater mobility".[441] The poem also gives credence to historically silenced realities like the Chemmani mass graves, the existence of which has been continually denied by the Sri Lankan government. The historical legitimacy, it can be argued, in this specific case is derived from being the words of the mother who was a witness to her son's death.

KNOWING THROUGH DEATH

> How we must grieve for a life
>
> known only through death![442]

These lines taken from A. Sankari's poem '*Iruppum Irappum*', writes about the strange predicament of mourning for an unknown. Sankari is the pen-name of Sitralega Maunaguru who is a well known poet, critic, feminist and activist and a crucial figure in the women's movement in Sri Lanka since the late 1970s. She compiled and wrote the foreword to the pathbreaking collection '*Sollatha Seithigal*' in 1986 and has been active in organizations like Poorani which provided shelter and support to women affected by the conflict. She is currently a professor of Tamil at the Eastern University in Batticalao. As suggested by the title of the poem, which can be translated as 'Living and Dying', this poem of hers brings into relief the strange predicaments and reversals that a period of conflict brings with it. As opposed to knowing a person when he was living, wartime sometimes introduces us to people only through their death. The poet finds herself mourning a person who is a stranger, yet the process of grieving is as acute. She writes;

---

[441] Thiranagama, Sharika. *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka.* 441.

[442] A.Sankari. "Living and Dying." In *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Subashree Krishnaswamy and Srilata K., 129. New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2009.

Today when I saw
the notice of your terrible death
on the library walls
and the science faculty entrance
I was struck to the heart.

Young man,
all day today
your features
and your just-learnt name
have slowly eaten into me. [443]

The process of mourning in this instance is undertaken by thinking through the various ways they might have met: under the shade of the widespread *vaagai* tree, or on the steps of the library, in the university foyer, or behind these buildings, somewhere in Paalali Road. But even if they have met this way, she hadn't 'known' him then. It is the notice of his death that announces to her his name, his town and tells her of his life. In a way, Sankari is grieving many things through this poem. The most obvious of them, the death of a man she didn't know, but also the loss of opportunity of having known him alive. She is grieving for a time where one didn't have to glean a person's whole life through a poster announcing his death. Also the poem talks of a bond that has been formed, a relationship that is forged through death. In the time and space the poet lives, death initiates a knowing, demands mourning. Mourning here is an act of recognition, a witnessing of a man's life through his death. Martha Minow writes that the "obligation of witnessing includes the practice of 're-memory' which is Toni Morrison's term for

[443] Ibid.

practices that concretely encourage people to affirm life in the face of death, to hold onto feelings of both connection and disconnection, and to stay wide enough awake to attend to the requirements of just recollection and affirmation and the path of facing who we are and what we become".[444] This poem is also an act of 're-memory' where the author is holding on connections, those which could have been in the life preceding death, and those which are formed from the knowledge of another's death.

Sometimes this act of recognition through death can be unusual and atypical and can be across divides of ethnicity, race and gender. Ilaneetha's poem 'Split into Two Nations', published in 2001, comes with the recognition that enemies of nations are constructed on differences that are perhaps not that stark. The poem is a thought journey into the commonalities that she shares with the first army man she had killed on the war front. She realizes that he might have planned on going home the following week, perhaps with his first pay check, with gifts for his sister. The poem is interesting for the associations she draws between the enemy she killed, and her brother who was killed in the war. She ends the poem by saying that her brother must have known there won't be a return for him again and that the soldier whom she killed must have known the same.[445] The poem here is an act of reminiscence where boundaries of ethnicity and race that divided the poet and the person she killed in the war is rendered unimportant in the space of recounting and remembering. It is as much an elegy for her brother as it is for the person she killed. While the poem does not voice repentance per se, the gesture of kinship that is forwarded through remembrance does much more. The space of the poem here resembles memory, travelling back and forth, amorphous and changing shape, an unsettling of the divisive frontlines that the construct of the nation has erected for its nationals. Yet the mourning is undertaken by the murderer, of a murder committed for the nation. It is an act of recounting her first murder and the difficult negotiations involved in that act. In a

---

[444] Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History After Genocide and Mass Violence.* Beacon Press, 1998, 174. As quoted in "Remaking a World", ed. Veena Das et al., (University of California, 2001), 13.

[445] Ilaneetha. "Iruthesamaay Piranthaayittru." In *Peyal Manakkum Pozhuthu*, by A. Mangai, 51-52. Chennai: Maattru Publications, 2007.

curious way it is the memory of the brother that intermediates the act of remembering the killing. The act of the killing is performed within the demands of the nation, but the act of remembering is done in a space that exceeds the nation. When an enemy that you killed evokes memory of your kin, and also a provides one with a space of coming to terms with what the last moments of one of your loved ones might have been like, memory 'splits into two nations', each half constructing the conditions for the mourning of the other.

Vinothini's '*Un Maranam Manathil Ezhuthiya Kavithai*'[446] and '*Kennedy*'[447] are two poems where death initiates a remembrance. The reading of these two poems together is not required because it is written by the same author, but because both these poems are about men who died fighting for the nation. Even when the poems are about martyrs, these are written very differently from the official acts of remembrance or how martyrs are remembered in poetry written by combatants. While in the acts of remembrance mediated by LTTE, it is the act of death as a liberation tiger that is emphasized, in the layers of Vinothini's poetry there is an unraveling of the person behind the tag of the martyr. Yet both the poems are written in different registers: The first poem is about a person who remains unnamed and the act of recounting his life begins with receiving the news of his death; the second poem specifically names her friend, Kennedy and a recounting of his life ends with the news received after his death. However, both these poems allow us glimpses into the persons her friends were, a knowing which is otherwise armoured from view by the protective army fatigues on their identities and shielded even after their death by their glorification within the figure of martyr. For example, in the first poem '*Un Maranam Manathil Ezhuthiya Kavithai*', Vinothini writes of the silence that surrounds her friend's dead body when she visits his home to pay her condolences thus;

> Surrounding you is deep meaningless
>
> silence.

---

[446] Vinothini, "Un Maranam Manathil Ezhuthiya Kavithai" in *Mukhamoodi Seypaval,* ed. Vinothini (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2007), 21-22.

[447] Vinothini, "Kennedy", in *Mukhamoodi Seypaval,* ed. Vinothini (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2007), 58-59.

Whenever you visited my house,

you walked in holding hands

with weighty silence

Heavier than rifles,

that silence

announcing your bravery,

it still remains the same.[448]

As the title suggests it is the death which makes her write the poem. In the rest of the poem, Vinothini deftly records the impressions and marks of remembrance he had left: memorial engravings for him by college mates, kisses of his footprints on the long paths in their village, the signatures by him on the enemies' bodies made with bullet marks, the innumerous titles he received for his heroic deeds. She writes how he preferred the title of '*Maveeran*', the great hero who is a martyr, to the titles of 'Lieutenant Colonel'. Here she marks his desire to die for the nation than to just remain a fighter. She notes how "like enjoying good poetry", he enjoyed fighting for the nation. The other poem by Vinothini, *Kennedy*, is less celebratory of martyrdom and is marked with the pathos of leaving to fight for the movement. The poem marking Kennedy as "a man like any other in those days, my friend who liked the colours green and red", Vinothini marks the transformation that eventually leads to his leaving for the movement, against the protesting cries of his mother. She writes;

Forgetting about lessons,

[448] Vinothini, "*Un Maranam Manathil Ezhuthiya Kavithai*," 21-22.

you composed songs of liberation,

drew pictures of guns and portraits of heroes.

From your eyes pride and mischief vanished,

and anger & void unfurled.[449]

This transformation eventually leads to him joining the world of forests, camps and guns where the meaning of flowers, birds, and rain are lost to him. And then, Vinothini as well, like others around her, comes to terms with his death. The pathos and tragedy of her friend's death is driven home in the final stanza of the poem:

On another day, in a letter

that arrived already opened,

He had written:

'On my tomb stone, please spread the green coloured leaves

and the red flowers that I loved'.[450]

Here her friend is requesting a remembrance not in the league of the martyr, but as a friend and according to the likes he had once. Remembering following death can be seen here as a fulfillment of the desire to return to earlier joys and delights and also as a desire to be remembered and recounted as a person they knew him before leaving for the movement. Vinothini has described the transformations in Kennedy's self for cause of national liberation. Yet, Kennedy's last letter is a wish to be remembered in the registers of his pre-war self. This stanza also reminds us of how certain everyday desires are rendered inexpressible in the time of the war. The self before the war can only be expressed through an imagining of one's own death.

---

[449] Vinothini, "Kennedy," 58-59.

[450] *Ibid.*

In her political autobiography written in poetry and prose, 'like myth and mother', Sumathy Sivamohan writes of her continuous struggle with death. She writes that after the death of her sister Rajani Thiranagama, death had become "a regular event, a myth making certainty", a reality from which she has no escape. She says that most of her poems are about death- "death not carefully prepared for by a process of painful ageing- but as sudden, violent, blood-gushing acts; death that is always , always about nation".[451] In Sumathy Sivamohan's poems, though death and nation are a constant presence, it is not willful deaths for nation which are regarded. Instead she looks at the blind spots in nation's memory: deaths that are rendered invisible so that the nation stands out in relief. In one of the poems from 'like myth & mother' titled 'to kugamoorthy', she marks the time of civil war in Sri Lanka also a time always for mourning. The poem mourns not only the loss of a friend, but also of a partner in mourning. She writes;

its true we mourned together
watching death pass by,
held hands, embraced
and wept,
as family and friends and memories of long
lost figures known, unknown
drawn indelibly in the
fullness of our lives,
speeding along the high-technology
of our social days, political gossip,
and the laughter of survival
passed away, one by one,

[451] de Mel, "Mourning Sri Lanka: The Writer as a Witness''.

in the shock of death

in an agonizing unity of purpose.[452]

Kugamoorthy who worked in the state run broadcasting service SLBC, had disappeared in the year 1990. There were eye witnesses who saw him being picked up in front of his workplace in an armoured truck without a number plate. Sumathy writes that government parties and the Tamil parties aligned with the government denied involvement, but Kugamoorthy never returned. Sumathy's requiem for him is framed by her memory of him from another memorial. Sumathy who is also a renowned documentary maker uses idioms from cinematography ("in the wide angle of my lens i turn") and remembers Kugamoorty, who had returned from a long journey for a memorial service, stands at a distance stifling a cry. She then writes,

we did not know then that loss would touch us all

again and again, that i would

mourn you too, when

i am not others.[453]

From this unimagined predicament which Kugamoorty's disappearance and mourning presents, Sumathy writes of her own relationship with death. Death is a finality that is accepted, but it is the act of mourning that is painful and not anticipated. Again by recounting the different ways death visits in the war-time, she establishes that death's finality is mediocre, but during the time of war the different ways of death are extraordinary.

---

[452] sivamohan, "to kugamoorthy" in *like myth and mother,* ed. sumathy sivamohan (wattala: Sirahunni, 2008), 40.

[453] *Ibid.*

now they have all passed away

in the silence of detention,

the mystery of the cold cloistered prison

cell; the torture chamber

a plane shot down; a suicide

bomber ransacking the skies for her identity.

disbelief,

i continue to carry in me

amidst the blare of curious triumph; the mediocrity

of death's finality. i am afraid

once more.[454]

Poetry in 'like myth & mother' also holds to scrutiny the period of cease fire as a time when violence ends or is put on hold. Two poems from this collection, titled 'to the memory of the three-wheeler driver purportedly shot dead by the ltte for being familiar with police' and 'a two part ode to death' are important to understand how certain deaths have to be rendered invisible for the fiction of 'ceasefire' to hold its centre. These two poems were written during the ceasefire between 2002 and 2006. Sumathy writes that in the years of ceasefire brought forth by a MoU was signed between LTTE and the government in February 2002, a lot of murders started taking place. People including three wheeler drivers suspected to be spies were killed by LTTE for going against their strictures. She also reminds us that this was also a period which saw an increase in the killing of civilians, especially of Muslims, by the LTTE. These violent deaths which occurred in a period that was supposedly marked by a cease in violence had no scope for mourning, as the deaths themselves will never be acknowledged. The poems here deal with such murders of those who were seen as betraying the nation, the deaths that go

[454] Ibid.

unrecognized. The Tamil three wheeler drivers were targeted because of their mobility and their interactions with the enemy. The death of the people have to be forgotten so that the talks on peace can be carried on.

we will not mourn you
auto-man, nameless
in my address book,
for you have turned
a spy and i a yuppie
activist; you spun yarns
in war and peace
and i took a vow of silence.

Who dared to cross borders and language marches
Carried messages of peace
Across enemy lines
In war time.

But now that we have
The chatter of peace
All around us
We are on
An epic journey

To mother land, to sattahip[455],

We will not mourn you.

I will not mourn you, three legged guide,

For I too have caught the germ;

I have sealed my body

Against your truth; I pack

My thoughts tight

In six yards of lack;

Wave flags at

Peace vigils,

Supplicate

In a long unbidden prayer,

Haunted by winding memories of

Your courage, love, caring, intimacy, struggle.[456]

In the prose section accompanying the poem, Sumathy Sivamohan writes that she hopes the poem announces vehemently her denunciation of the civil society in the south of Sri Lanka. This civil society, which she says consists of "erstwhile left wingers and new age professional ngo wallahs", had conveniently disregarded the murders of Tamils and Muslims by the LTTE in the jungles and in the cosmopolitan areas of Colombo, Paris and

[455] The first round of peace talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government was held in Sattahip in Thailand.

[456] sivamohan, "to the memory of the three- wheeler driver" in *like myth and mother,* ed. sumathy sivamohan (wattala: Sirahunni, 2008), 44.

Toronto.[457] She sarcastically quips that their criticism of state excesses were welcome; criticism which was forthcoming "only when the funds permitted it".[458] Sivamohan is drawing our attention to the inconsistencies of the criticism of violence within Sri Lanka during the cease fire. By emphasizing the nameless victims during this period, she is attentive to the logic of the nation that depends on the construct of the traitor for its continuance. The acts that go against the strictures of the Tamil nation are not forgotten, instead those who couldn't be punished within the time of war, get deferred deaths in the time of supposed peace. But in the space of her poem, there is a haunting of memories in a different register from that of the category traitor assigned by the nation. These memories of 'courage, love, caring, intimacy and struggle' can be spectral presences only within the verse-scape of her poetry. Her poem 'a two part ode to death' with two sections namely 'death by (cease)fire' and 'death by water, death by identity' is a critical appraisal of the difficulty of memory within the cease-fire period . She conveys in this poem the loss of language when one is faced by the certainty of death by assassins, a certainty which is 'unceasing' in the ceasefire days. The second section of the ode marks the countless unidentified bodies which were washed ashore during 2005, bodies of those murdered for bearing the identity of the 'tamil traitor'. An ode can be addressed to a thing, an event, a person or even an abstract concept, and usually is encomiastic or written in glorification. This form was preferred by the Romantics where an outer stimulus and a description of it led to a meditation on a personal or a human problem and to an attempt at its resolution. The poem in its title refers to the section 'death by water' in T.S Eliot's 'The Waste Land'; here the form of the ode is used to think about death itself, the ever present yet absent presence: absent because the deaths are treated with impunity, made unrecognizable by the insignia of traitor.

death by water, death by identity

2005,

[457] Ibid.

[458] Ibid.

the year of the tiger;

bearing down on waves of water

washing ashore

bodies unidentified.

unidentified men,

waving guns in a delirious salute,

dance the masque of death around

a ring of bodies,

riddled with

bullets

of identity:

tamil, traitor.[459]

Neloufer de Mel in her review of 'like myth and mother' addresses the idea of political grief and mourning through poetry. She recognises two types of vulnerability that a poet who chooses to mourn and bear witness to violence has to face. One is the personal risk involved in the writing of names, places and modes of violence in an environment charged with militarization. The other risk which she invites our critical attention to, is the risk attendant in mourning which requires us to acknowledge one's own vulnerability to one's surrounding. To explain this risk, she borrows the relational framework of the individual to her surroundings as explained by Judith Butler in her book 'Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence'.[460] Judith Butler writes that we are socially constituted bodies exposed to the vulnerability of losing our attachments. She goes on to argue that we should look at mourning as not "a privatising, solitary and, therefore, de-

[459] sivamohan, "death by water, death by identity" in *like myth and mother,* ed. sumathy sivamohan (wattala: Sirahunni, 2008), 52.

[460] de Mel, "Mourning Sri Lanka: The Writer as a Witness''.

politicising experiences (a view that is commonly held), but rather as sources from which a complex political community can emerge"[461]. Neloufer de Mel also uses Agamben's idea of the writer as a witness to look at the role of the poet during times of violence. She says, drawing on Agamben that the writer acts as a witness in two senses derived from the word's etymology; the first meaning which derives from the Latin word *testis*, from which testimony comes, signifies a person who in a trial between two parties, occupies a third position. The second meaning derives from the word *superstes* which designates a person who has lived through an event and, therefore, can bear witness to it. For Agamben, such a person becomes a superstite or supervisor "in every sense".[462] So while the first role of the writer as a witness could mean the occupying of a median ground, the second role is not of neutrality, but that of "robust moral questioning, which includes the questioning of the commonsensical ideas of nationhood, race, post coloniality" etc.[463] We can argue that the work of mourning undertaken by the writer with its inherent risks can be seen not in the attendant notions of neutral truth making, but instead it inaugurates possibilities to question.

The addressing of the dead within the poetry can also be read as a means to articulate a concept of justice derived from our responsibility towards those who have passed away. Mark Sanders' work on the testimony of witnesses in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa is important in examining this purpose of mourning. He links the testimony of women witnesses in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa with Antigone through the specific nature of 'work of mourning' they perform. The work of mourning undertaken by both women witnesses and Antigone is the "hearing the other in the law"[464]. He notes that the appeal for funeral rites by both the witnesses and Antigone does two things; "first, it hearkens to an appeal of the other in the

[461] Ibid.

[462] Ibid.

[463] Ibid.

[464] Mark Sanders, "Ambiguities of Mourning: Law, Custom, and Testimony of Women before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission" in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L Eng and David Kazanjian(California: University of California Press, 2003), 77-98.

other- the other of the law in the law; second, responding to the call of this other- from the place of the deceased- can be read as an instance of responsibility before the death".[465] Sanders terms the responsibility before the dead as what Derrida calls the "precondition of justice"[466]. Drawing on Derrida, Sanders writes that "having named the addressee as the dead one, we perceive in such testimony- be it oral or written, heard or read- the instantiation of justice as exceeding, in a relation to the nonliving, the the calculus of law and rights...where law is provoked and alterity is broached"[467]. Poems which address the dead are also calling forth an inauguration of justice from the readers. The laws that exist within the wartime have to be exceeded and a justice in relation to those who had to die will have to be considered by the survivors, within a realm that exceeds law.

Poetry in its repeated addressing to the dead, I argue is also indicative of a work of melancholia, a concept forwarded by Freud and reworked by Pradeep Jeganathan through a reading of Butler's critique of Freud. Freud in his influential 1917 essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' defines the work of mourning as "the servitude that the mourner performs in the long and intense process of detachment from the lost object".[468] This work is composed of a slow and painstaking working through of each of the memories and strands attaching the dejected subject to the object, which Freud defines as a "thousand links".[469] However difficult this work maybe, it nevertheless ends with the ego becoming free and "continuing to live".[470] Here Freud makes an important distinction between mourning and melancholia. While in the former there is an acceptance of loss, the latter

---

[465] Sanders, " Ambiguities of Mourning," 90.

[466] Ibid.

[467] Ibid. 91

[468] Freud, S. *Mourning and Melancholia. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 237-258, 1917.

[469] Ibid.

[470] Ibid.

signifies a refusal of loss. In melancholia not only does the subject not detach himself from the object, but he internalizes and forms an identification with it, preventing the possibility to detach. Hence, only mourning can be work; i.e. positive psychic work and not melancholia.[471]

Pradeep Jeganathan, using this as an entry point, departs from Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia and claims that melancholia can also be considered as productive. This, he says, is especially of importance when one is mourning the loss of the possibilities of a nation; a loss which cannot be mourned in an ordinary way.[472] He defines the idea of the 'work of melancholia' as a "concept that attempts to capture some of the psychic and social acts that are part of the lives of those who grieve without "recovery", those who have incorporated their identification of the lost object within themselves, unlike the paradigmatic normal mourner who can work away or out of the identification with the lost object". As such "the 'work of melancholia' could include 'acts of memory, actions that are reproducing what is forgotten and repressed, which are distinct from the work of recollections'".[473] The naming of the dead and continuous engagement with the dead in certain poems included in this section can also be thus considered as work of melancholia. The poetry is not trying to move on and come to terms with the deaths witnessed during the war, but it is to continuously remember and not just recollect them and their lives.

CONCLUSION

Differing from the concept of the brave deaths of martyrdom as celebrated within the discourse of Tamil nationalism forwarded by LTTE, poetry gives attention to those deaths deemed invisible by this discourse. This chapter reads the lives and death of poets

---

[471] Ibid.

Jeganathan, Pradeep. "In the Ruins of Truth: The Work of Melancholia and Acts of Memory." 6-20.

[472] Jeganathan, Pradeep. "The Post national, Inhabitation and the work of melancholia." *EPW* 44, no. 1 (2009): 54-57.

[473] Jeganathan, Pradeep. "In the Ruins of Truth: The Work of Melancholia and Acts of Memory." 6-20.

and activists as an owning up of the category of traitor, which is seen as most abhorred within nationalism. This subject position is creatively used to forward difficult and hurtful truths about living through war. At the same time, within the genre of poetry there is also a reconceptualization of received categories like the brave Tamil mother and the raped woman. Using the genre of *Oppari*, a personal lament is turned into a site of articulation of public critique of Tamil nationalism. Similarly by turning the experience of rape as not a creating an isolated bruised silenced subject, but a community of women speaking against violence, poetry turns away from the redemption narratives necessary to readmit raped women again into the ideal Tamil women through her death for the nation. The constant reference and addressing within poetry of those who have passed away is read in this chapter as an inaugurating of a concept of justice which cannot be approached within the realm of wartime law. The repeated addressing of the person passed away can also be considered as work of melancholia, where the emphasis is not to get over the loss but an intricate entanglement with the person/object of loss which separates these poems from being mere recollections.

CHAPTER THREE

EXITS AND RETURN

The witnessing of the Sri Lankan war in poetry is a witnessing of multiple dislocations and relocations. It is a witnessing of the anxieties of leaving and of alienation in unfamiliar lands. It is a witnessing of the struggles involved in making a place in a new land while yearning for the home you have left behind. It is also a witnessing of the personal struggles involved in reshaping one's identity in a new country while also holding on to the selves that were inhabited in the homeland. It also marks the reimagining of Tamil Eelam within diasporic imagination in the form of 'long distance nationalism' and the difficult negotiations that the migrant women had with this reimagining. This chapter looks at three experiential categories as delineated in the women's poetry dealing with movement/mobility during war: Exits, Return and Waiting. These experiences have not been uniform and poetry manifests the diversity in the reasons, struggles and possibilities involved in these acts.

The brutality of the war led to large scale displacement within Sri Lanka as well as an increase in migration to other countries. Migration from Sri Lanka to other parts of the world underwent a qualitative difference in the years following the 1983 riots as the reasons for migration became less voluntary in nature, and reflected much more diversity in the caste and class positions of the migrants. Though these refugees who left Sri Lanka fleeing the atrocities of the war were mobile compared to those Tamils left behind, there were very few opportunities of 'upper mobility' available to them as compared to the earlier migrants.[474] Also the change in the caste-class nature of migration in the period of the war led to tensions between the earlier migrants and the refugees fleeing war. For e.g., Valentine Daniel in his study of migration of Tamils to Britain identifies three phases of migration according to the nature of the immigrants which he terms as the Elite

[474] Sharika Thiranagama, "Making Tigers from Tamils: Long Distance Nationalism and Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto," *American Anthropologist*, (2014): 271

phase, the Student phase and the phase of Refugees.[475] The first phase of migration of Tamils from Sri Lanka consisted of immigrants from an upper class background, consisting of Sinhalas, Tamils and Burghers, who identified themselves as 'Ceylonese'. They held a deep nostalgia for the colonial days of the past as well as held pride in their nation, Ceylon. The Tamils who arrived in this phase came from the Vellalar caste, which was an agricultural caste group who considered themselves the most superior in the Sri Lankan Tamil society. Daniel finds that the migrants of this phase tried to inculcate in their children a sense of pride in their nation, carefully demarcated from other nations in South Asia as well as ingrained in them a caste consciousness where Vellalar's self identity as a high caste was emphasized. This phase was also conspicuous by the absence of the Estate Tamils/Malaiyaha Tamils. The immigrants in the second phase were more varied in their class and caste positions, and this phase was characterized by the "unavailableness of the nation" to the Tamils.[476] In Sri Lanka, the government had implemented a biased quota system which disadvantaged the Tamil youth and also reduced drastically their intake into the civil services as well as the armed forces. The nostalgia experienced by these immigrants was qualitatively different as they did not harbor any notions of privilege that a return to Sri Lanka would hold for them. The Phase three of migration started with the Sri Lankan government's imposition of the infamous 'Prevention of Terrorism Act' in 1979, in response to the Tamil demand for a separate state. The choices for the Tamil youth were either fleeing the country afraid of the Sri Lankan State or the "flight into" the membership of one of the militant groups. The refugees were characterized by a strong sense of cynicism towards the nation state as well towards international laws which always disadvantaged them. These phase three migrants were received by the first phase of elite migrants with discomfort and they resented the refugee's 'ungentlemanly' presence.

Øivind Fuglerud's study of Tamil migrants in Norway also documents the tensions between the early migrants who migrated before the war and the later asylum seekers. In

[475] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies*, 155.

[476] Ibid. 167.

this context, he traces two competing modes of Tamilness among the migrants in Norway: the 'traditional' and the 'revolutionary' modes. The early migrants who came to Norway looking for jobs approached their existence in exile through the traditional model, where they tried to replicate in Norway the hierarchies of class, caste and gender as existing in Sri Lankan Tamil society through rituals like marriage. On the contrary, the LTTE sympathizers, adopted a 'revolutionary' model which emphasized the need to reclaim the lost homeland, the Tamil Eelam and also 'a stepping out into chronological time, locating the self in a world of temporal development' which meant a dismantling of the traditional hierarchies.[477] Hence the Tamil life in Norway during the war was a continuous negotiation of these two modes of being. Sharika Thiranagama in her article 'Making Tigers from Tamils: Long Distance Nationalism and Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto', tries to nuance Fuglerud's argument to further understand why ordinary Tamils subscribe to an 'LTTE framed world' in the diaspora.[478] She points to the contradictions inbuilt within the Tamil nationalism of LTTE which on the one hand had established new roles for women as combatants within their cadres, and on the other hand insisted on Tamil civilian women to embody and represent Tamil cultural values, and argues that they were not dismantling old hierarchies as it seemed. Thiranagama writes that the "LTTE ideology presented people with the deferment of radical action to its cadres while maintaining status quo" and thus the practices of migrants who both support LTTE ideology while also tries hard to raise dowries for their sisters were not as 'contradictory' as Fuglerud seems to argue.[479] Further Thiranagama argues that in Toronto, the LTTE constituted the "social space of the community".[480] LTTE through its emphasis on preserving and teaching proper ways of being Tamil also used individual remittances from migrants into the 'public politics of LTTE nationalism' back in Sri Lanka.[481] She

[477] Oivind Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside:Tamil Diaspora and Long Distance Nationalism (*London*:* Pluto Press, 1999),177.

[478] Thiranagama, "Making Tigers", Pg 270

[479] Ibid. 272.

[480] Ibid. 273.

[481] Ibid. 273.

also argues that in a situation where the Tamil migrants faced very few opportunities of upward mobility in their host country, LTTE imaginatively enables 'a cultural myth of respectability and dignity'.[482] But this also meant that LTTE framed the memories of the migrants within its brand of militant Tamil nationalism, where the violence suffered at the hands of the Sri Lankan army was recounted in the diaspora with an element of publicity involved, while the atrocities perpetuated by the LTTE were pushed into the realm of the private.[483]

Sumathy Sivamohan in her work focuses on the negotiated positions of the displaced women which produce constructs for a postcolonial space both within the diaspora and the homeland. She critiques Arjun Appadurai's conception of disjunctures as he does not in his conceptualization deal with the specifics of class, gender and ethnic relations in disjuncture. Sivamohan says that the women migrating from Sri Lanka has to contend with the double bind of borders and boundaries, "where borders can be crossed, but boundaries are circumscribed".[484] She furthers the concept of borderlands coined by Gloria Anzaldua as a vantage space of the disadvantaged, the marginalized and the disenfranchised. Sivamohan argues that for the migrant woman, the importance of the borderland does not lie so much in its transgressive power but in the unavailableness of the nation for the migrant woman.[485] The transnational migrant woman in her loss of all claims to the nation is still called on to reimagine it: it is here that Sivamohan finds Anzaldua's concept of borderland useful. Sivamohan argues that this process of negotiations involved in crossing borders and boundaries, which she terms as middle passage, is also productive of a new feminist consciousness.[486] In the poetry examined in this chapter, we can trace the many negotiations women are involved with in the middle

---

[482] Ibid. 275.

[483] Ibid. 275.

[484] Sumathy Sivamohan, "The Middle Passage: Migration and Displacement of Sri Lankan Tamil women of the Diaspora," *Socio-Legal Review*. 2010:3

[485] Ibid, 3.

[486] Ibid. 4

passage. The chapter is also attentive to the attributes of border as delineated by Etienne Balibar. Balibar emphasizes the polysemic and heterogeneous nature of the border: the border signifies different things for different people, and also they are heterogeneous in function, which is to say several functions of demarcation are fulfilled simultaneously by borders.[487] Most importantly, Balibar notes the ubiquity of borders: They have ceased to be only external realities and argues that invisible inner borders abound. Within poetry also we can delineate depictions of fracturing of the selves, which is concomitant to the middle passages of migration. The chapter also adopts the insight of Øivind Fuglerud in his comparative study on space and movement in the Sri Lankan conflict entitled 'Space and Movement in the Sri Lankan Conflict' where following Torsten Hagerstrand, Fuglerud analyses migration as only one of the several 'time-space' strategies available along with staying, commuting, and circulating and many other strategies. He writes against the tendency of considering moving as the only phenomenon to be explained while other strategies like staying are considered natural.[488] Agreeing with this perspective, the chapter starts by looking at the category of waiting which on the surface resembles a sedentary mode of being, but underneath the obvious holds multiple layers of negotiations.

WAITING

Pradeep Jeganathan in his work 'On Anticipation of Violence' claims that a repertoire of practices is produced by Tamils in Sri Lanka given an 'anticipation of violence' through which "Tamilness' is produced.[489] In this section on waiting, the poetry written by

---

[487] Etienne Balibar, "What is a Border" in *Politics and Other Scene*. (New York: Verso Books, 2002), 78-79.

[488] Øivind Fuglerud, "Space and Movement in the Sri Lankan Conflict" in *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Policies, Ethics, and Politics* ed. Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks, Joke Schrijvers (NY: Berghahn Books, 2004), 42-53.

[489] Pradeep Jeganathan, "On the Anticipation of Violence," in *Anthropology, Development and Modernities: Exploring Discourses, Counter Tendencies and Violence,* ed. Alberto Arce and Norman Long,(London: Routledge, 2000), 111.

women displays an anticipation of exits and displacement; I argue that through an articulation of such anticipation using the trope of 'waiting', women poets illustrate what it is to be a 'tamil woman' in the time of violence. The waiting as seen in their poetry is of various kinds: some present the emotional and physical turmoil involved in the process, while some present the opportunities and hopes.

I start with the poetry of Urvashi whose works display the element of waiting in most of her poems. Urvashi's poetry is an engagement with the inner self of a woman – her long mornings and endless midnights are continually brought into our conscience through her poems.[490] Having emerged as a poet in the period of intense participation of university students in the call for a separate Tamil nation, Urvashi's poetry assumes mostly the voice of the friend or lover of those who have left to fight the separatist war. Urvashi imbibes those experiences of women, which are otherwise in the sidelines of the narrations about the experiences of war. While the ideals and dreams of liberation occupied the consciousness of youth in Jaffna in the late 1980s and resulted in an energetic interest to participate in the Tamil separatist movement, Urvashi's poems interrogated the complex predicaments of those who are left behind to wait. Her poetry talks of ordinary women in a language that reminds one of daily conversations, retaining an element of orality, but these women are continuously dreaming of flying into a new sky[491]. In her poetry "home" figures as a space from which these dreaming of a different space happen. While the dreams are important in itself, the space from which these dreams of an 'open sky' are dreamt into being is important. As Bhagyanathan Akilan writes in the foreword to Urvashi's collection of poetry *'Innum Veratha Seithi'*, while her images draw upon the domestic sphere, the time of conflict is continuously pulling her outside.[492] Urvashi's poems, though starts with the woman being situated within the home, hints at a threshold, an invisible syncretic space between the private and public

---

[490] Bhagyanathan Akilan, "Foreword: What Happened Yesterday: Urvashi's Minority Politics." in *Innum Varatha Seythi (Message Still Unrecieved)*, ed. Urvashi (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 10.

[491] Ibid. 11

[492] Ibid. 11.

which she might or might not transcend, but exists as a force of reality in her life. Urvashi's poems, hence really exist in the contiguous space between the inside and outside, which is not just a commingling of characteristics of both these spaces, but also has attributes of its own. This space, as seen in Urvashi's poems serves as a metonymic representation of waiting. Waiting can also be seen as an intermediate space between leaving and arriving, but is a complex space that has its own characteristics.

In the poem *Veli* (Fence), the fence is the literary image of that moment of yearning to cross the inner world of home into the "open space" of the outer world. In this poem, like the women of ancient Tamil *akam* poetry, the protagonist in her poem sends messages to her lover. In her world, small birds and butterflies act as messengers, flowers like wild jasmines, red *aralis* and *natchithira* flowers abound. But unlike the traditional Tamil *akam* protagonist, the women in Urvashi's poetry don't live in a situation of peace. They address their lovers who have gone underground, or are missing or killed in a war fought over the nation. So the 'inner' world of the woman in Urvashi's poems is closely pursued, haunted and influenced by the 'outer' world of war. An intermingling of *akam* and *puram* happens in this poetry on waiting.[493] This intermingling is brought forth through metaphors suggestive of both the difficulties in crossing of the inner world, but also the possibility that exists of such a crossing. So she writes;

> Even the barred windows,
>
> High,
>
> Yet open.[494]

Waiting for the lover is described by Urvashi as "Like looking for new promises/ in old almanacs"[495]. Waiting here is laced with hope, but the act of hoping is made within old

---

[493] Ibid. 13.

[494] Urvashi. "Veli." in *Innum Veratha Seithi*, ed. Urvashi (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 20-21.

contexts. Also the waiting woman in the poem is constantly thinking about the outer world in which her partner, a man is a part of. The wait here is not for the man to come back home, but the wait is for her to leave home to join her lover. She wonders aloud

> When will I join,
>
> the open space which you inhabit?
>
> The place you inhabit,
>
> Is it very far from here?[496]

In another poem titled '*Kathirippu Etharkku*' (Why Must We Wait), Urvashi describes the unfamiliar uncertainty of the times she lives, through the familiar impatience of lovers to physically consummate their love. Written in 1983, at the time when the Tamil nationalist movement had reached a stage where a national separatist movement became to be seen as inevitable after the July 1983 riots, the woman in this poem presents the futility of waiting. The woman is seen persuading her lover with these words.

> But,
>
> when this earth, these times,
>
> and everything that is ours is lost,
>
> such an hour as this
>
> may never be ours again.
>
> In the darkness of the night to come
>
> anything could happen. So, my love,
>
> in the deep silence

---

[495] Ibid.

[496] Ibid. 13

of this day break

let us be one."[497]

Waiting here is portrayed as a process devoid of hope and as a pointless exercise. In this poem the voice of the woman is an advocate of *carpe diem*, seizing the moment. The 'seizing of the moment' is endowed with a sense of urgency because of the uncertainty that marks the period of war. Her justification for her persuasion is illustrative of the time of war. Unlike an aubade where the lovers part at the break of the dawn, this poem portrays dawn as the only time that the lovers have "to be one".[498] "The darkness of the time to come", the unpredictability of the future and also a premonition that the future won't hold much hope thrusts the woman to declare "I cannot wait so long".[499]

The early 1980s was also a period of voluntary leaving to join the movement. Urvashi's poem '*Naan Ezhuthuvathu Purikirutha Unkalukku?*' (Do You Understand What I Write?) written in 1983, is a poem in the form of a letter. Like the traditional '*tutu ilakiyam*', the epistolary poem or poem send as a message, the woman talks of "jasmines in full bloom" in the courtyard, "honey birds by day" and the "scent laden breeze by night" and is sending across to her lover a message. But unlike the traditional form of *tutu ilakiyam*, because of the specific political situation in which Urvashi writes, her women do not have a messenger. Instead, she writes;

It is of no use

to send this letter

to any address that I know.

Nevertheless, somehow or the other

---

[497] Urvashi "Why must we wait? in *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, ed. Lakshmi Holstrom, Subashree Krishnaswamy and Srilata K. (New Delhi: India, 2009), 148.

[498] Ibid.

[499] Ibid.

it must reach you.

That you will certainly receive it

is my unshakeable belief.[500]

The change around her after her lover has left her is conveyed in images that reek of something inauspicious and dreadful that might fall upon them; images that convey a shadow of dread, a foreboding. She talks of small puppies running in circles around the house without reason, its tail raised high as if to catch someone; of people she doesn't know who walk past their house, but yet have not come in and interrogated her; his mother's letters which she has left unopened because she knows she can't endure the mother's grief for her sons. Even through the "imprisoning sorrow"[501] she feels because of her separation from her lover, the letter is the medium to express how much she has changed after he has left.

One thing more:

it is this, most of all

I wanted to say.

I am not particularly a soft-natured woman

nor am I as naïve as I once was.

Our current state of affairs

gives me no signs for hope.

It is certain

that for a long time

we must be apart.

---

[500] Urvashi. "Do you Understand." In *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, by Subashree Krishnaswamy and K.Srilata Lakshmi Holstrom, 146-147. New Delhi : Viking Publishers, 2009.

[501] Ibid.

Then,

Why should I stay within this house

any longer?

Well,

Do you understand what I write to you?[502]

The poem, as most of Urvashi's works, is about the woman being on the threshold of her journey into the outer world. The question "Do you understand what I write" hangs heavy on the reader because a message when conveyed through poetry is dense and packed with many nuances; here it points to the limits of empathy as well. When the question is posed to the lover, she is urging him to read between the lines, to decipher the many hidden messages that a language shared between lovers can hold. The poem in the form of a letter acts here as a secret coded message. But I think when the final question is addressed to the readers, as much as it reads as a plea for understanding, it is also a challenge thrown our way. It is forcing us to recognize that there are personal turmoils that will always remain out of the grasp of our understanding; the task to understand is ours. It is not the woman's burden to explain to us the many conundrums she faces at the juncture of a personal crisis, especially a crisis from where she is starting a new tangent of her life. The burden rightly falls on us the readers. At the same time, in a conversation of anxiety, which precedes a final decision, a speaking being is also being born. It is a deeply internal conversation which the woman is having with herself, even when it is 'written' to a lover. It is a conversation where a woman who will eventually leave her previous circumstances is conceived.

While Urvashi's heroine has come to terms with her lover's leaving and is hinting at her own start of a journey to the outside world, Maitreyi Sabaratnam's poem 'Waiting' shows a woman who is still expecting her lover to come back. While in Urvashi's 'Do you

[502] Ibid.

Understand' the protagonist consoles herself that her lover has left for "our people's sake"[503], Maitreyi's heroine confesses that she thought she could change her lover after marriage. She confesses; "Today I regret that I once even thought/ I could make you stay//Now I know/the sureness of your goals//". She talks of her endless waiting, of nights that are not anymore for sleeping, but waiting for the sounds of footsteps. But,

> Sometimes those footsteps
>
> are of heavy boots
>
> planting mines
>
> in my very heart.[504]

Her innumerable nights of waiting are marked with metaphors from the domestic sphere. Hence the flowering of the lime tree which they had planted together on their wedding day acts as the reminder of her waiting. Her son constantly asks her why she keeps the back door open while she insists on keeping the front door always closed. She writes;

> It will be some time
>
> before he understands
>
> why I wait.
>
> And then
>
> he will not ask again.[505]

While the above poems deal with voluntary leaving and the nature of waiting that elicits, Sri Lanka witnessed a lot of displacement which was forced and involuntary. The

---

[503] Urvashi, "Do you Understand".

[504] Maitrayi Sabaratnam, "Waiting." in *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, ed. Subashree Krishnaswamy, K.Srilata Lakshmi Holmstrom (New Delhi: Viking Publishers, 2009),160-161.

[505] Ibid. 160.

harshest of such displacement is forced disappearances. The waiting for those who have disappeared is conveyed through metaphors of temporal dislocations. The waiting in such situations conveys a sense of endless ennui and hopelessness. Sivaramani in a poem written in the 1990s wrote of such a difficult accounting of the passing time;

> Flying insects fall, one by one,
>
> by the light bulb,
>
> Which would it be wiser to count?
>
> The flying insects?
>
> Or the stars
>
> whose messages are as inscrutable
>
> as the eyes of the dead?[506]

Urvasi's poem "Their Evening" also records the forced arrest of her lover. The forced disappearance is conveyed through the metaphor of a claiming of time. Here the poem acts as a testimony to her experience of witnessing a forceful arrest which cannot be articulated freely otherwise. The poem starts with a description of the loneliness that accompanies waiting through metaphors like the "*murungai* shedding leaves silently on the fence", "the lapwing screeching in loneliness", and his "*veshti* swinging on the clotheslines" as a reminder of his absence. This is followed by a detailed account of the evening when the disappearance occurred; a memory within a poem.[507]

> Five jeeps together stirred dust.
>
> The south westerly wind blew hard –
>
> they dragged him away, fear gathering deep in my heart.

---

[506] Sivaramani. "Untitled." In *The Rapids of a Great River*, by Subashree Krishnaswamy, K.Srilata Lakshmi Holmstrom (New Delhi: Viking Publishers, 2009), 188-189.

[507] Urvashi, "Their Evening" *New Democracy* May 2010, Pg 32 https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/sri-lanka/new-democracy/ND37.pdf

Only the gecko on the wall uttered something.

In fear, the roof sheets clattered softly.

The child at my feet screamed –

neighbours gathering in curiosity.

He walked away with them –

outstretched rifles pressing at his back.

The impressions made in me by the hands

bearing fifty rifles made a burden of sorrow.[508]

This section of the poem reads like a visual testimony, a reliving of the event, each moment, its sound and visual forced into our imagination. The poem ends with the poet saying how "that evening was theirs".[509] In a similar yet different register Sivaramani in her untitled poem has claimed the nights as important for her. The nights are termed important because of the attendant anticipation of disappearance.

Night is important to me.

This darkness in which

-like last night-

another friend might disappear-

this darkness is most precious to me.[510]

[508] Ibid.

[509] Ibid.

[510] Sivaramani. "Ūntitled", 189.

Aazhiyaal, a poet residing now in Australia, in her poem 'The Mother and the Goddess of Night' writes of a mother's search for her disappeared daughter through a transposition of the Persephone myth in the context of the ethnic war. The mythic representation of the mother of the disappeared daughter as Demeter, who searches the whole earth, wishing upon everybody "wastelands of snow" and the Goddess of the night, Hecate as helping her find her daughter, is a poignant portrayal of the plight of the mothers of the disappeared. The poem marks the change in landscape to denote also the diasporic experience. The poem writes of the lack of information, the inability as well as refusal of people to speak up about the disappeared.

> No one spoke up on her behalf,
>
> no eye shed one tear,
>
> no living creature came forward
>
> as witness[511]

Then there are other forms of leaving following marriage as brides to join the husband in foreign lands. In Nirupa's untitled poem in the anthology *Peyal Mannakum Pozhuthu*, is a letter addressed to the husband who is waiting after having send the requisite money of 1000 marks for his wife's passage. The wife's letter reads as a chronicle of her journey and the migrant women she meets at the transit point, Russia, and their arduous experiences in transit. In her particular experience, she talks about having to please the 'agent' with whom she has to spend a night to secure her forward journey. The letter ends with her promising her *athan* that she will be joining him on the coming 10th of the month. Her recounting of the experiences with the agent is very matter of fact, an issue that was expected of her if she had to join her husband, an issue she expects her waiting

[511] Aazhiyaal,"The Mother and the Goddess of the Night" *Words without Borders.* April 2015, accessed June 25, 2015, http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/the-mother-and-the-goddess-of-night

husband to understand.[512] In Loonukalai Haseena Puhar's poem, "Mother Please Come" [513]from the same anthology is about a daughter waiting for her mother to come back home. The mother is a migrant mother in the Middle East, and the daughter says she does not want the riyals and dinars her mother sends her, but waits to sleep on her mother's lap. The daughter writes of her elder brother-in-law's inappropriate touches, the neighbour uncle's stares and the abuse at the hand of her drunkard father. While reading this poem, I couldn't help but wonder about the predicament of the mother who receives such a letter. A migrant woman's labour is not only in the geographical foreign lands she lives in, but the emotional labour associated with home follows her, especially if she is the mother who had to leave behind a young child. V.Geetha in her paper 'Life World: War, Desire and Labour in Contemporary Tamil Women's Writing', writes that poetry dealing with the missing is an enduring theme in women's writing from the 1980s. She says that waiting becomes a way of obdurate survival and that this waiting has other dimensions too. In her analysis of poetry of Vijayalakshmi Sekar and Vasuki Gunaratnam in the anthology compiled by Sitralega Maunaguru titled 'Kannadi Mukangal' (Faces of Glass) published in 2009, she traces other dimensions of waiting. She writes, drawing upon the metaphors that is found in this anthology, "women wait in line for food in refugee camps, for dusk to relieve themselves…They wait, as they had waited all along, like wind trapped in bamboo, tree bark pushed into the swampy mud, beaten like cloth that the washerwoman throws into smoking starch, and like the common plantain tree that pushes its young out and waits to grow again, women wait and persist so that others might eat and live".[514]

---

[512] Nirupa. "Untitled." in *Peyal Manakkum Pozhudhu*, ed. Mangai A. (Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2007) 158-159.

[513] Loonukalai Haseena Puhar, "Amma vanthuviden (Mother, Please Come)." in *Peyal Manakkum Pozhuthu*, ed. Mangai A., (Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2007) 260-261.

[514] Geetha, "Life Worlds: War, Desire and Labour in Contemporary Tamil Women's Writing."

LEAVING

In the previous section, we looked at the experiences of people who are left behind to wait. This section will deal with the experiences of leaving. Leaving in the period 1980-2009 happens within different registers, for different reasons. This section looks at how different moments within the political articulation of Tamil nationalism and its reception by the Tamil public has given rise to different narratives of leaving.

The 1980's was a period of leaving to join movements of liberation struggle marked with a sense of optimism and assertion of Tamil identities. Auvvai's poems '*Sollamal Pokum Puthalvarkal*' written in 1984 and '*Pokiren Amma*' which was written in 1986 are testimonies of active involvement in the social and political fabric of those times. This period saw all strands within the liberation movement recruiting members in large numbers. Leaving to join these movements was mostly spontaneous and devoid of goodbyes. As Auvai recalls in an interview, this was the time when many of her friends on their way to their tuition classes would lock their cycles under the trees and go join the movement. In between classes, recruiters from different factions of the liberation movement would come in unexpectedly and mobilize students to join the movement. The principal or teachers couldn't interfere in this process.[515] Such a leaving though most of the time was impulsive, it was also a result of thinking through the violence that Tamils had to face as a minority. One such questioning is seen in Auvvai's poem '*Sollamal Pokum Puthalvarkal*' where a young boy questions his mother as to why his father had to die, why war happens and why his sister's hair has grayed so fast. But as this poem proceeds, we do know that such a leaving for the movement is closely linked to notions of pride and duty. While the mother is telling her son to take care of himself, and be careful of the army, she is also advising him to never let go of humanity. The pride that the mother has in the son's leaving even when it is laced with trepidation is emblematic of the early and mid 1980's.

---

[515] Karunakaran. *Kalachuvadu.* March 2013. accessed September 13, 2015, http://www.kalachuvadu.com/issue-160/page40.asp.

While '*Sollamal Pokum Puthalvarkal* ' (Sons Who Leave Without Goodbyes) is written from the standpoint of the mother, '*Pokiren Amma*' was written from the standpoint of the leaving daughter. The daughter takes on courage from the figure of goddess Durga, refers to the goddess and asks her mother how she could have forgotten that the mighty goddess is also a woman. She openly articulates her disappointment with the circumscribing of her sphere of freedom to the premises of her home just because she is a daughter. But her resistance against this predicament comes from the specific historical moment she is living through. The urgency of the time of struggle for liberation, where "there is blood and fire surrounding their daily lives", she realizes it is impossible to live within the confines of her house.[516] She also realizes it is impossible to live as a singular separate individual. This statement again is a reflection of the thinking about the Tamil liberation movement, where there was recognition that one was a part of the fabric of the Tamil political whole. Each person was infused by a duty that had to be performed for the Tamil nation. Leaving for the daughter is an emotional process because she has lived through a change in herself as the world around was also changing. Thus, she tells her mother of how her dreams have changed:

> Today,
>
> like back then…
>
> I don't dream of
>
> the stars in the sky,
>
> of marrying Lord Shiva,
>
> I don't dream of my dead father
>
> waving at me from behind the clouds. [517]

---

[516] Auvvai. "Pokiren Amma." in *Ethai Ninaithezhuvathum saathyamillai*, ed. Auvvai, (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 44.

[517] Ibid.

From this change of dreams she bids her mother goodbye to join hands with her people to form a new world. The goodbye is again not an asking for permission. Instead, it is a communication of the urgency and her determination. She writes, as many daughters of that time announced to their mothers;

> Amma
>
> I have to leave
>
> Bid me goodbye. [518]

While both the son and the daughter are leaving "home" for their right to "homeland" the emotional turbulences and questioning they go through are different. For the woman, this leaving for the movement is also a leaving behind of oppressive gender mores that tie her down to the home. The opportunity to leave is made possible through a linking of her subjectivity to the struggle for the Tamil liberation. The legitimacy for a woman to leave is hence acquired through an assertion of her being inseparable from the turmoil of the whole liberation movement for Eelam. The subject of the assertive daughter is hence formed and then irreversibly linked to her moral duty to act for the cause of the Tamil nation. Even then, this particular version of leaving displays a moment of possibility, a moment of escape and opportunity.

While the above two poems reflect leaving as a process of hope, pride, albeit emotionally dense, the last few years of 1980s and the 1990's inaugurates a period where there is an impossibility of living within Sri Lanka. There were internecine fights between the different factions of the liberation struggle, resulting in rampant killing, disappearances and forced exiles. This was also the period when the IPKF forces were deployed in Sri Lanka from India who perpetrated violence on a population already riddled with inter-factional disagreements and oppression by the Sri Lankan army. The recruitment process slowly had become involuntary and even children were kidnapped and forced to join the

[518] Ibid.

movement. As Auvai says, the same mothers who prided in their sons' leaving, took to the streets searching for them.[519] Leaving in this period ceases to be a voluntary decision, but a forced decision devoid of pride for the nation. The emotional distress involved in such departures and exits is essayed in the poem '*Ellai Kadathal*' (Crossing the borders) by Auvvai. The imperative to leave is recognized when:

> The soil,
>
> Which cradled me in its lap
>
> when I fell in it and cried,
>
> Today shows me
>
> who is searching for a way out,
>
> Paths that lead to the burial grounds [520]

When the land and the nation that once protected you is now strangling you and leading you only towards death, the decision to leave has to be taken, but with a sense of having been betrayed. Also, as opposed to the excitement of leaving for a liberation struggle, where one is setting out on a journey with a strong belief that her situation within society will improve, leaving as your nation in itself ousts you is filled with unspeakable trauma. Auvvai, hence writes about the parched throats, of the impossibility to speak. Also, while leaving for movements emphasized how the leaving individual was henceforth becoming a part of a collective history, the exit from nation is striking in the loneliness of the sojourner. Also, it is not a tidal wave of enthusiasm that carries forth the leaving individual in its wake. Instead such an exit is subjected to the actual step by step crossing of one's landscape. The poem "*Ellai Kadathal*" takes the reader on a journey through the landscape, making one experience the suffocation of not being able to cry out aloud. But,

---

[519] Karunakaran. *Kalachuvadu.* March 2013. http://www.kalachuvadu.com/issue-160/page40.asp (accessed September 13, 2015).

[520] Auvvai. "Ellai Kadathal," in *Ethai Ninainthazhuvathum saathyamillai*, ed. Auvvai (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 51.

this path that crosses her land into the unknown is also termed the path of liberation, a painful liberation. Crossing the borders is essential in a life of freedom. It is heavy with the emotional labour of leaving behind an idea of home for ever. This emotional turmoil is physically manifested in the poem through the depiction of the arduous journey she had to undertake to leave. So with the poet we traverse her village, the fields in her village, the tall palm trees which give the village company in the darkness: the tall palm trees which are now staring down at her in fury. We travel with her across arid regions, cross ponds, and walk on with heads bowed never lifted up. As Auvvai writes, to revive a life that was ripped off all its certainties, she has to cross the borders of her land. She writes:

> At last,
>
> dust off
>
> the soil that sticks to the sole of my shoes.
>
> Leave the red soil,
>
> Leave our soil,
>
> Go. [521]

This emotional work of leaving does not end with a crossing of borders, but it follows those who have left in the countries they have chosen to settle. Bhanubharathy's poem "*Netrilirunth Indrillaiyaki*" writes from the lived experience of having crossed borders. The poem begins with the recounting of the early days after having left for "an alien land and an alien way of life". She recounts the waiting for the blue inland letters from back home that came with the news of the complications from back home, with its tales of losses. But as time passed, her heart no more palpitates as she waits for these letters, she is habituated to this. She writes

> Or,

[521] Ibid. 53

As I wait for their replies,

In some newspaper

Their obituary may appear [522]

The experience of being in exile while your country is at war involves being habituated to the continual anticipation of bad news. There is continuous distress involved in such emotional investments in a country that was left behind. But the habituation is also reminiscent of a numbing, where your body also has accustomed to anticipating and receiving bad news. It is also an acceptance of her helplessness. As she writes, by the time the blue inland arrives with the news it carries, it would have become old news back in her home. Also, people you have left behind, news of them have to reach you through other impersonal mediums. The narratives of numbing and habituation are a recurring trope within the poetry regarding witnessing of war. Habituation to violence is not a discontinuation of violence. But it is a continuation of violence in a subtler and more distress filled ways. Habituation is not a cessation of pain, but it is an acceptance of the pain as an unavoidable part of one's life. Here in the poem we see, once you have "left", one also lives with the acts of normalization of one's life, a normalization to violence, an end to reactions or an end of the mediums to react out to violence. As opposed to the usual connotations of naturalization and normalization, it is actually a new mode of violence. This mode of violence is oppressive in the everydayness of having to labour with news of violence.

IDENTITY

In this section we will look at the different ways through which a person in Diaspora experiences shifts in her identity in a foreign environment. The section is an attempt to understand how these shifts are articulated.

---

[522] Bhanubharathy, "Netrillirunth Indrillaiyaki," in *Pirathiyal (Alien Woman)*, ed. Bhanubharathy (Karuppu Pirathigal: Chennai, 2009), 50.

In her poem "*Adaiyalam*", Vinothini writes of the many identities that she had to don in her life. The poet recognizes that the process of determining one's identity is unending and fluid. The process of interpellation starts from the day of her birth and follows her throughout her life and the list of her identities only keeps growing. These identities are given to her and an introduction to her 'self' begins with these received identities from different phases of her life. She writes about the many names she was called while in school and how she was called 'black beauty' in her office. In the capital city she says, some identify her as an Indian, while a few calls her "Paraya Tamil Woman".[523] But it is the question that she faces in her hometown that elicits an assertion of an identity from her part. In her hometown, she is identified as headstrong and obstinate and constantly rebuked by the question "Are you even a woman?" The poem ends with the poet's assertion, "Yes, I am a woman!"[524]

In the space of poetry, it seems, there can be more forceful forms of assertions of self that are perhaps not possible in the realm of reality. The poem is not just a space for articulation of received notions of identity, but also a space for assertion of identities that are otherwise questioned. Here the identity of the poet as a woman is questioned because of her seemingly non-womanly qualities like obstinacy and arrogance. And the poem acts as a space to claim these parts of her identity as well as broaden the concept of the woman.

In a similar vein, the poem, titled *Adayalam*, written by Aazhiyal talks of the various interpellations a woman in her journey from home to abroad have to bear. Each broad identity category is further splintered as one travels. But interestingly in Aazhiyal the process is also circular and it is in the refugee home in a foreign land that she returns to her original identity. Here the dislocation to a foreign country is akin to a return to an original identity. Here the poem acts as a chronicle of the fluctuations in the woman's

---

[523] Vinothini, "Adaiyalam," In *Mukhamood Seypaval*, ed. Vinothini (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, 2007), 24.

[524] Ibid.

identity formation and marks the immense relief when she can go back to her original self. But this return to the original identity is not accompanied by a territorial return to the homeland. Hence, while territorial mobility plays an important part, the identities cannot be predetermined according to territories. Hence it is within the refugee home, ironically in a land that has been seized from its original inhabitants, the indigenous population of Australia that the poet goes back to her identity received from her "land of birth".[525]

I am

'The dark one'

in my land of birth.

In the land across the seas

I am that Ceylon Refugee girl,

In Lanka, I'm Damala,

In the island north, the woman from the east.

On the eastern shores where the fish sing

I am that hill-girl,

and in the hill country, the woman from Muthur.

In this island, stolen from the original people

In this refugee home,

Thank God, I am like before

The dark one.[526]

[525] Aazhiyal. "Adaiyalam (Identity)." in *Peyal Manakum Pozhuthu*, ed. A. Mangai (Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2007), 48.

[526] Ibid.

Pratheeba Thillainathan in her foreword titled 'Unwritten Imaginations' for the collection of poetry written by Sri Lankan Tamil women in the diaspora, marks out the anxieties around a Tamil woman's sexuality which follows her even in the land she has migrated to.[527] Most of those in diaspora talk of the frustrations that come with the loss of one's birthplace and culture. But there is also the fear of their women marrying a "*Kappili*" (a derogatory word used to denote a black person), of them disregarding signs of jati (caste) while marrying a person from the same place of origin/community. In the foreign land, more than language, religion, prayer groups or sects, Bharathanatyam and classical music gains prominence with parents pushing their kids to do the same. Male poets discuss the difficulties of return to the homeland and bring to scrutiny nostalgia. But while discussion abounds on breaking of traditional conventions, the category of the 'poet' is held intact through male created epics. There is no room in these writings for women, minorities or the younger generation born outside Sri Lanka.[528]

In the poem entitled '*Tamizhan*', Vinothini tackles the issue of the constant surveillance of the Tamil woman's sexuality abroad. In this poem Vinothni writes of the experience of a woman who on a hot day, tired from walking for long, goes in for a drink of avocado juice with her co-worker John, a foreigner. As she drinks, somebody whispers to her from behind, "Didn't you get a Tamil man?"[529]. In an instant, the wrath of all the women in the world dawned on her, but the man had already escaped. She says like Indran, she wants to curse him into a being whose body is covered with genitals, and then she wants to chop one genital at a time, off him.[530] Here we see an interesting reversal of the epic of

---

[527] Prateeba Thilainathan, "Foreword: Unwritten Imaginations." in *Olikatha Ilavenil*, ed. Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan, (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 7-14.

[528] Ibid.

[529] Vinothini. "Tamizhan." in *Mukhammoodi Seypaval*, ed. Vinothini (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, 2007), 25.

[530] Vinothini, "Adaiyalam," 24.

Ahalya[531]. For a moment her whole body is frozen like Ahalya when the intruding Tamil moralist whispers in her ears; but it is the woman who then punishes the intrusion on her sexuality. It is not Ahalya or her waiting for redemption that is given significance, but the punishment meted to the man that is highlighted. While in the epic Ramayana, Indra is also cursed to be covered in female genitalia, it is later changed into being covered with thousand eyes which eventually falls off him. In the poem it is being covered with male genitalia that is considered shameful. In the poem, in the remark made by the Thamizhan, we see how a Tamil woman is the site for preservation of the imagined nation and the cultural codes of this nation which they had left behind.

Darmini's poem, '*Enneyum Valarthen*' (I Was Also Brought Up), also talks of how women's sexuality is a cause of anxiety in the experiences of migration. To bring into relief the ways through which a woman is controlled within her ethnic lines, the poet compares her predicament with her parent's pet Pomeranian dog in Jaffna. The Pomeranian dog is a symbol of prosperity and status of her family and its bark is a proclamation of their wealth. But when the Pomeranian dog is in heat and is excited by the sight of the neighbourhood stray dog, she is put to chains and taken to the other end of the town to mate with a suitable dog of the same breed and made to bear pure breed puppies. According to Darmini it is the same sort of controlled breeding that is imposed upon a Tamil immigrant girl who comes of age in a foreign country in Europe. The woman assumes the same function, of ensuring purity of her high bred lineage. Her parents are anxious about whom she will love, so she is married off to her relative in the nearby town to ensure "the birth of unadulterated children from our ethnicity". [532] While the poem brings to our attention the anxieties around safeguarding, ethnic, racial and caste purity, it also subtexually reminds us of the potential of love to transcend and perhaps break these constructed notions of purity. It is because of this potential of love

[531] Ahalya , the wife of sage Gauthama, was seduced by Indra disguised as her husband. When the sage walks in on them making love, Ahalya is cursed and transformed into a stone. Her redemption was to follow after the touch of God Ram.

[532] Darmini, "Ennaiyum Valarthanar," in *Saavukaana Pirbhalamaana Ur*, ed. Darmini, (Chennai: Karuppu Pirathigal, 2010), 31.

that it is feared as well. In Nirupa's poem '*Maraiyatha Marrupaathi*', the Persistent Half is another poem that articulates the difficulty of the migrant woman who has to constantly re-imagine the Tamil homeland in the diaspora. She writes:

> Nut
>
> Whore
>
> Unwomanly, virago they fling words to wound me.
>
> To redeem the land
>
> And the nations rights![533]

Nirupa's poem shows how the woman is still the bearer of the cultural identity of Tamil nation in diaspora. She discusses the irony involved in the slogans of national liberation which valourises heroism of women, while engages in creating a prison for the woman who goes beyond the script of nationalism. Even in diaspora, the woman who disagrees with politics of nationalism will be demeaned by labels that are considered as obscene and falling outside the femininity of the ideal Tamil woman. Terming a woman, unwomanly seems to be the highest form of insult that the supporters of hegemonic nationalism has for the vocal woman.

Dislocation from one's home also results in dislocations within one's self. In her poem '*Mukhamoodi Seypaval'*, Vinothini writes of masks being woven as the concomitant process of living through war. She writes that:

> When a woman's love is forgotten,
>
> When she is raped,
>
> When children forget to cry in fear,

[533] Sivamohan, "The Middle Passage: Migration and Displacement of Sri Lankan Tamil women of the Diaspora".

When gunshots shake birds' nests

When exile without a reason

A man worries for his life,

When a house stands alone, devoid of its people,

When a village is given up

And there a dog dies with no-one to feed him,

When one realizes with certainty

That our gods who feed on honey and milk don't exist,

In that instant

She creates masks.[534]

The masks here are layers which imbricate our true selves, layers of falsity that slowly sap away our 'true being and happiness'.[535] Masks are external layers, false selves that one fabricates when one's belief from the world that they live in slowly erodes. In Vinothini's poem, the masks, "adorns the walls of one's home", it is for public consumption, a tool to survive in a society marked by violence.[536] But the mask is not an extension of one's identity, but is a gradual departure from the true identity, a distancing from one's own self.

While the mask is a symbol of an artificial addition made for various reasons to one's self, the self can also be fragmented into many parts. For example, Tanya's untitled poem in the anthology '*Olikatha Ilaveyil'* sees madness as the index of the dislocation caused by war. In the poem, the schizophrenic self is the mark of the destruction that war

[534] Vinothini, " Mukhammoodi Seypaval " In *Mukhammoodi Seypaval*, ed. Vinothini (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, 2007), 66.

[535] Ibid.

[536] Ibid.

impresses on the psychic health of the person. She writes about the inability to see the other self as a pathological aberration, a sign of mental deterioration. Her dilemma in dealing with the other part of herself is expressed in the following verse;

> You are a mark of being broken,
>
> Mark of war, society's mark,
>
> My mark!
>
> How can I ignore you?[537]

For Tanya, the fragmented self shouldn't be discarded. The dislocated part of her identity born through her experiences of war and her association with an apathetic society is her entry point into speaking. She urges others like her, as she herself eggs on, to write "injury's first note" from dislocation.[538] The dislocated self is also marked in this poem as the resilient self; a part which survived all circumstances of confusion and dislocation. Hence the beginning of the ability to speak and share the experiences of violence, to be a witness to the time of war and the subsequent dislocations that it wrought, is only possible through her 'mad' self.

But mobility and movement in itself is not vilified. It is seen as a positive imagination of a women's freedom to have the freedom to move without any boundaries. In Indira's untitled poem she gives recognition to the 'gypsy' that resides within her. This gypsy, who is part of her self, strongly desires to fly like a dove breaking all barriers- without country, without land, without a life of "un-freedom". This anxiety to break free and

---

[537] Tanya. "Untitled." in *Olikaatha Ilavennil (Silent Spring)*, ed. Tanya and Piratheeba Thillainathan (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 144.

[538] Ibid.

roam is also seen in the conflicting ways of how home is imagined by women poets in Diaspora.[539]

For e.g. Darmini's poem '*Veedu*' is a poem about leaving behind the home. It tells of how at the time of war, home ceases to be a secure place and is transformed into "death traps".[540] The poet wishes for a home like the snail's which can be carried on her back. In the time of war, her home made of mud, stones, cement and iron rods is a static figure that cannot be rescued. Only the men and women who wait with their travel bags ready for those inhuman voices feeding on lives can run away. Leaving homes they run, looking at some direction. In this running, in this leaving, one is leaving a permanent structure in what will be an impermanent life behind. Wishing for a home that can be carried with you is a desire for a talisman that ensures its safety and security. In most experiences of leaving, home is usually transformed into a totem of nostalgia. But when one is leaving one's home in the time of war, one is also witnessing its destruction, it being consumed in war. So the home is one that reminds you of destruction, it is a totem of loss and pain as well.[541]

In a similar vein, another poem of Darmini's titled '*Parakkum Koodarangal*' is about temporary habitations. Life in makeshift structures and refugee camps is an integral part of the experience of displacement during war. A refugee devoid of home spends his nights listening to the exploding gunshots, with "fire of hunger in his stomachs, but his mind spilling over fields and streets"[542]. In such spilling over he/she finds a home that flies beyond closed doors and barriers, which can transcend guarded constructions and

---

[539] Indira, "Untitled" in *Olikatha Ilavenil*, ed. Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 104.

[540] Darmini. "Veedu." in *Saavukaana Pirbhalamaana Ur*, ed. Darmini (Chennai: Karuppu Pirathigal, 2010), 7.

[541] Ibid.

[542] Darmini, 'Parakkum Koodarangal,' in *Saavukaana Pirbhalamaana Ur*, ed. Darmini, (Chennai: Karuppu Pirathigal, 2010), 28.

barbed wires.[543] Here again we see how freedom of movement is seen as essential to imagine normalcy within a displaced state of being.

Aazhiyaal whose poetry talks about people who left for the movement, people who went missing is also known for her imaginative use of images that strikes you in its paradoxes like children playing hide and seek behind barbed wires. Her conceptualization of home is also unique in that she rejects the idea of houses that keep away light and rain, and dream up an open house with unlocked doors and windows that can never be closed. Her house is circular with the circumference of the sky and hence the world itself. This imagining of a home is resonant with Indira's recognition of her desire through the figure of a gypsy.[544] Aazhiyaal in another poem of her's titled '*Amma*' complicates the idea of movement further through a clever juxtaposition of the mother within the landscape of migration. The mother in her poem is constantly moving like she has "wheels attached to her feet".[545] So the mother keeps running through vacations, holidays and festivals. In countries where trees stand naked losing its leaves in autumn, the mother keeps running crushing the dry leaves. In winters frozen with the whiteness of snow, like a magician, she skates on the ice. She keeps running like spring buds forth, she still keeps running, looking back at her and her brother waving. [546] Here the idea of movement is complicated because it trains our attention to the problems inherent in an uncritical attribution of freedom to movement. She tells how within the trope of mother, there is a lack of rest, a constant work, movement required from women. This doesn't change because of her being transported from her homeland. In fact the "foreignness" of the environment brings into sharper relief how the notions of mother remain stagnant. The expectations of physical and emotional labour linked to the traditional roles of woman travels with her.

---

[543] Ibid. 28.

[544] Aazhiyaal, "Veedu," in *Karunavu*, ed. Aazhiyaal (Chennai: Maattru, 2013), 27.

[545] Ibid.

[546] Aazhiyaal, "Amma," in *Karunavu*, ed. Aazhiyaal (Chennai: Maattru, 2013), 9.

RETURN

As Prathiba Thilainathan writes in her foreword to the book '*Olikatha Ilavenil'*, most of the male poets writing from the diaspora reflect nostalgia for a return to their "motherland".[547] In this section I look at poems which articulate different nuances of return which don't fall in the easy category of nostalgia. As discussed in the previous section, the pangs of displacement have left real and difficult repercussions for women. But the articulation of an unrestrained uncritical yearning to return to the homeland is missing in the poetry I looked at. This is not to say that women don't miss their home or homeland, but that they are also attuned to the violence inherent in these categories for returning women. In this context Aazhiyaal's poem '*Kumarathi*' strikes me as important because it talks about the closure of a possibility of return back home for daughters who have left their homes. She writes,

> The doors to my father's house
>
> Always remain open for me[548]

But she warns her father not to expect her to return back to her home like a son gone wayward. She says she is not his son, but "*Kumarathi*", the daughter who won't be swayed by entreaties made or promises of a comfortable living. She declares to her father that a return home is not possible for her and tells him to not to wait. It is striking how she refers to the home where she grew up in as not her home but her father's house. It is this distinction that forecloses a return. The father's house comes with his injunctions, his rules, as open it always is for the daughter, it comes with its restrictions. It is in the denial of a compromise that this non return of the daughter stands out. Hence some returns are poignant because of its refusal.[549]

---

[547] Thilainathan, "Foreword: Unwritten Imaginations," 7-14.

[548] Aazhiyaal, "Kumarathi," in *Karunavu*, ed. Aazhiyaal (Chennai: Maattru, 2013), 15.

[549] Ibid.

The second poem that I will examine in this regard is a poem by Avvai titled 'The Return' where one can trace a figure of dissenting mother who is upsetting the concept of the proud mother of the nation. The mother in this poem is lamenting the return of a son as opposed to his disappearance. It is this paradox which causes one to pay careful attention to the dissenting mother's words. The motherly love is seen as the epitome of the most pure and unconditional love in Tamil culture. It is this love that the mother withdraws to show how a rigid and non inclusive version of militant nationalism can make enemies of mother and son. So she writes;

He returned to me

heart turned iron

brain become gun

friend turned foe:

and I was thrown off-guard

all my love and affection

disappearing.

He had shot his friend:

he spoke of bravery

and sacrifice

and weapons,

of killing people across the boundary.

I was silent,

forgetting entirely

about human kind

and liberty.

But now I know
I cannot any longer
be a mother.

Won't he, one day,
believe me to be his enemy
and bury me too?"[550]

It is a common assumption that in separatist wars home and homeland are congruent emotive and political concepts. Home is assumed to be a smaller version of the homeland, the latter a scaled up imagination. But as Sharika Thiranganama finds for people she worked with in Sri Lanka, homeland and home do not always exist on the same layers of imagination. The homeland, Tamil Eelam is "a firmly mono-ethnic concept, enforced by ethnic cleansing, occupying a different emotional terrain from ideas of home". [551] Hence, when the son becomes the embodiment of militaristic values, it is the emotional terrain of the home that is shown to be at risk. In this poem the "return" of the son is not a happy occasion, but a reminder of the fraught relations of power, love and ambivalence within families as well as the ongoing tensions concerning reproducing the family in the midst of war and immense violence. The mother is refusing to continue with her role as a mother who promotes Tamil nationalism. She uses the category of motherly intuition to make a prescient statement of how the militant nationalism in its non-inclusive ideology will result in an endgame, where there will be no mother or son but the

[550] Avvai, "The Return ," in *The Rapdis of a Great River*, ed. Lakshmi Holstorm, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K.Srilatha (New Delhi: Viking/Penguin, 2009), 171.

[551] Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka.* 19.

nation becomes the end in itself. It is the return of the militant son which gives rise to a productive moment of resistance from the mother.

Similarly, Darmini's poem "*Sethevve, Saakaathave Mattravaiyum Viduppu Paarthal*" deals with sons who had earlier left home, but now want to return because they think they "need a country to call their own now"[552]. It is a satire on those who leave home, and come back in pangs of nostalgia, and go back satiated on home food and news of terror at home while not having to live the trauma of those left behind. Written from the standpoint of the mother who sees her sons return from their migrated lands, it is also a scathing observation of how her sons behave now. They keep reiterating how cooking and cleaning are not humiliating chores. It reveals the anxiety of men who have had to do what is considered duties of the woman. There is a questioning of masculinity of migrated men in the lands they migrate to and a continuous effort to come to terms with such questioning. For her sons, the "stories" of the arrests of neighboring boys by the army, deaths of children by a shell strike at their former school, of girls unreturned from Tiger's questionings are exactly that, stories. When the mother who has had to live through the atrocities narrates these, as a matter of conversations, the sons heave a sigh of relief as to how they were "safe". The poem ends by the mother saying, "they enact stories meant for many, the talent to act is there within everybody".[553] Here, the return of people who left and the politics of nostalgia for a home are called into scrutiny. It is important, how the time of the period of return is termed as "another vacation wasted" by the sons[554]. Nostalgia has marked out home and problems of a land to be dealt with in the period of 'vacation'. I think it is the uselessness of uncritical nostalgia that is flagged by Darmini, especially as in the previous section we saw how women have to live with the embodied and emotional struggles of displacement. Nostalgia is in a way an easy writing

---

[552] Darmini, "Sethevve, Saakaathave Mattravaiyum Viduppu Paarthal," in *Saavukaana Pirbhalamaana Ur*, ed. Darmini (Chennai: Karuppu Pirathigal, 2010), 31.

[553] Ibid.

[554] Ibid.

off of such layered experiences of living in diaspora as well as living with the constant reminder of the sufferings of the land one has left behind.

Valentine Daniel in his 'Suffering Nation and Alienation' writes perceptively and intricately about the connection between the nation state and nostalgia. He writes that "nation state is aestheticized by the nationalization of past'', which then for the purpose of appeasement of the present is projected on to the future.[555] In the background of chaos and disorder, Nation through this aestheticization, constructs a collective consciousness and moral order. Nostalgia is the nation state's healing mission. Tamils through various ways imagined a past, and once they are in foreign lands, their tie to the healing mission of the nation is through nostalgia for home and imagined home-lands. As evident in the poetry, the women are burdened with the safekeeping of this imagined space of nostalgic yearnings. Maithili Thayanithy, in her work on short stories written by immigrant Tamil women from Sri Lanka finds a similar absence of nostalgia. Thayanithy recognizes in this absence of nostalgia a strong resistance against the patriarchy that the women had faced in their homeland and a determination to forge an identity in the present that is not tied to the past.[556]

In the Sri Lankan war, there were impossibilities of return for the Muslims from the North created by LTTE's brand of militant Tamil nationalism. In October 1990, LTTE had forcefully evicted about 70,000 to 80,000 of Muslims from the north in their efforts to create Tamil Eelam as a homeland only for Tamils. These Muslims were displaced from their homes to eke out an existence in the refugee camps set up in Puttalam in the north-central part of Sri Lanka.[557] The East also was mired in violence between Muslims and Tamils. The losses suffered and the impossibility of return are poignantly noted in the poem 'Keys to an Empty Home' by Sharmila Seyyid. She writes with pathos;

---

[555] Valentine Daniel, Charred Lullabies, 155.

[556] Maithili Thayanithy "Absence of Nostalgia in the writings of Immigrant women" (paper presented at Traces of The Past - Seventh Annual Tamil Studies Conference, University of Toronto, May 11-12, 2012.

[557] Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*, 16 and 149.

There. That was my home,

the house where my mother gave birth to me

where my father carried me on his shoulders

and played with me.

They broke up this house;

we don't know why.

Yet the keys to the house we locked up

are still with us.[558]

Here the yearning of the Muslims, internally displaced, unable to return to their home is qualitatively different from the nostalgia. The home is lost to them in a violence that they cannot comprehend. She writes how her father died yearning to lean against at least the walls of the house which was once their home. They keys to the empty houses still remain with her even after both her father and her home is lost to her. The inability of Muslims to return back to their homes does not have a place in the overarching narrative of nostalgia that is created in the discourses of Tamil nationalism.

CONCLUSION

The chapter encapsulates the uncertainty of living through the war; an uncertainty that is marked by an anticipation of not only violence, but also movement and mobility. The poems included in the first section on waiting, illustrates the dilemmas and possibilities that confront and invite women who are faced with the uncertainty of tomorrows in wartime. Through the use of the poem as a letter, poets like Urvashi and Maitreyi have simultaneously articulated the inner turmoils of the waiting woman as well as depicted

[558] Sharmila Seyyid, "Keys to an Empty Home," in *Lost Evenings, Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War*, ed. Lakshmi Holmstrom and Sascha Ebeling (UK: Arc Publications), 143.

the violence of the war that surrounds them. The atmosphere of constant anxiety is described in detail and the loss of time is manifested in the descriptions of passing time filled with ennui and uselessness or in the representations of the myriad ways through which control over one's days and nights are wrested away from them. Addressed to people who have either gone underground or are missing, the formal elements of the epistolary poem are used to converse with those with whom communication is restricted by normal means. Yet these poems are also addressing the readers, constantly making us aware of our responsibility to attempt an understanding of their experience, while also warning us of the limits of such an understanding. Yet the women who are waiting are not passive beings; instead waiting is a space that allows them to consider a crossing over of boundaries and inaugurates a subjectivity of the woman who considers leaving.

The poetry also depicts the many challenges women face while in transit. The violence on women's bodies by middle men, and also patriarchal constructs which prescribed restless work for the woman even as she moves are criticized. Different experiences of leaving at different times of the war are considered to understand that leaving is differently gendered for women. The poetry also contrasts the splintering of identity categories as one travels within one's homeland, to the possibility of inhabiting of one's original identity as one migrates. The poetry also marks how women are still burdened with the responsibility to represent Tamil culture even in a foreign land. The nation has followed the migrant Tamil woman as she moved across continents. The violence involved in the restrictions placed on the behaviour of Tamil women and the continuous monitoring of her sexuality is vehemently criticised in the poems. The chapter closes with the analysis of the difficulties of return which does not prescribe to the nostalgia for the home/homeland. The experiential category of return is complicated by looking at the difficulties for a daughter to return back to her father's home which for her will forever be marked with the restrictions placed on her, as well as by looking at the experiences of mothers whose sons have become strangers to her either because of the changes militancy has brought forth in them or because of the mother's incomprehensibility of the nostalgia felt by sons who have returned home on vacation as the mother occupies the position of those left behind with no choice of leaving. The chapter also hints at the incapability of

Tamil nationalism to include experiences of loss suffered by Muslims at their hands. The chapter thus tries to upset the unitary categories of exits and returns by considering the various types of leaving and returns and the incommensurability of experiences even when these experiences are framed within wartime.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRACES

The 'everyday' in wartime Sri Lanka was fraught with negotiations for recognition of living through a conflict that is fought along the dividing lines of nations. The everyday in such circumstances is a minefield of both subtle and overt oppressive displays of power. The nation does not recognize all lives and there is a continuous negotiation for visibility and recognition. In these negotiations, certain aspects of the everyday life are also left as unrecognizable. Unrecognizable because of the violence it contains (sometimes the violence inherent in revisiting / reminiscing about these aspects) and also because of the dangers inherent in such recognition from the disciplinary forces of the State and the legitimizing apparatuses of the nation. Sri Lankan Tamils have had to produce various official documents to gain visibility as legitimate citizens in the period of the civil war that spanned more than two decades. But negotiations of visibility are always on the slippery terrain of surveillance as well. The deployment of identity cards display power dynamics involved in fixing of certain identities which in turn are called in to persecute the "Other". But the official discourses of citizenship, which are produced through ID cards, have traces of mis-recognition imbibed in them. There are traces which "dislocates, displaces and refers beyond itself".[559] In such a situation, I argue that as evidenced from the works written by women, poetry acts as one of the few mediums of exposing these traces of mis-recognition. Also, within poetry there is scope for recognition and acknowledgment of aspects of the everyday living through conflict and violence which are otherwise deemed unrecognizable.

---

[559] Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs.* (Evanston: NorthWestern University Press), 156.

The chapter will look at poetry written by Tamil women from Sri Lanka between 1980 and 2009 that writes about the official production of identities through production of documents. My aim will be to look at the sort of subjects that are formed in the production and furnishing of identity cards and how through poetry women have produced alternative histories of survival and given attention to experiences otherwise unspeakable within official documents of recognition.

IDENTITY CARDS AND ANTICIPATIONS

Sri Lanka through the years of civil war, have seen different representatives for an authentic nation and their claims towards it. The moves taken to authenticate a militant outfit as a genuine representative of the Tamil nation challenging the Sri Lankan Sinhala State also ironically meant a mimicking of the same oppressive administrative structures perpetrated by the Sri Lankan government. The requirements of a citizen of the Tamil nation as represented by LTTE was not an imaginative reconstruction or moving away from the exclusionary politics of citizenship that the Sinhala State was firmly and violently imposing. Living through the war meant a tightrope walk encountering the questioning structures of all these different mechanisms of the nation; being Tamil was also a continuous negotiation between "parallel governments" and the mechanisms of terror of LTTE, Sri Lankan State, and the horrifying repercussions of the intervention of the Indian State.[560] ID cards are one such documentary representation of the State structure's mechanisms to absorb/ encrypt a varied body of people as an identifiable population. They are "mobile versions of the 'files' states use to store knowledge about the subjects…crucial in state's efforts to embrace their citizens".[561] LTTE also has mimicked these mechanisms as a means of legitimizing the notion of Tamil Eelam. Each

[560] Daya Somasundaram, "Parallel governments: Living between terror and counter terror in Northern Lanka (1982-2009)," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 45 (2010): 568-583.

[561] J. Torpey, "Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate 'Means of Movement'," *Sociological Theory*, 16 (1998): 239–259.

identity document serves a specific official requirement and also produces an identity or subjectivity, sometimes forcibly. While they are 'mobile files', ironically, they are also mechanisms to curb mobility of those who are suspect in the eyes of the nation. ID cards exemplify the almost fanatic desire of the nation-state to produce recognizable subjects: the hybrid, the heterogenous, those whose desires and individualties spill beyond the rigid closure of categories, those who are difficult to recognize, the mis-recognised all become suspect. The onus is then on them to prove their faithful adherence to the state. Hence the command to produce an identity card is an invitation to be a supplicant to the nation's rhetoric, an order to be willing to be read/mis-read by the nation-state.

But sometimes markers of identities are juggled and manipulated by the people in an effort to survive. The ID card then is a space where the non-citizens seek the legitimacy of citizenship; it is also a space where people "meet, confront, tolerate and sometimes challenge" the state.[562] In the politics of the everyday in Sri Lanka, between 1980-2009, where there is a constant struggle to manage different aspects of one's identity so that it appeases the nation-state's structures of surveillance, one single individual in her life will have to house different official requirements of different nations. A person is marked and made and unmade through these impersonal documents, but simultaneously there is a play of identities and the possibilities it generates. In this section I will look at poems written by Darmini, Nivedha, Nirosha and a collaborative work done by Sumathy Sivamohan to see how these texts chronicle the different ways through which the violence of the imposition of official identities works in the everyday life and the different subjectivities it produces.

Darmini's poem 'Identity Card' is a poem that chronicles the shift of official identities for a single person for different reasons through the war. She writes about how when she turned sixteen, she was given an ID card by the Sri Lankan government. On enquiring why one needs this, her mother says it is to be used in examination centres and to vote in

[562] Helga Tawil-Souri, "Coloured Identity: The Politics and Materiality of ID Cards in Palestine/Israel," *Social Text* 29 (2), 107(2011): 67-97

elections. After some years, the "Tigers" (LTTE) give her an ID card, (*Adaiyala Attai*), which they say is the evidence of her having undertaken training. After some more months, Sri Lankan Army gives her an ID card, and says the ID card is necessary to live within the army discipline. She then goes on to write,

> Photographs,
>
> Serial Numbers,
>
> Nationality
>
> District
>
> Weapons
>
> Jails
>
> Without all this
>
> A plan to steal a small island,
>
> looking up at the sky for a
>
> huge bird's wings.[563]

Darmini in this poem forcefully articulates a facet of living through a war fought over ethnic lines. The contestation for power is also a contestation to name and mark out one's citizens. As Sidharthan Maunaguru elucidates "Tamils living in Sri Lanka have to produce a range of documents as a part of their daily life and that these documents are used to fashion the socio-cultural and political identity of Tamils".[564] As he writes, "There are layers of meanings in these documents where state(s) intersect with marriage and/or family among the Tamils. Documents in Tamil life are linked to mobility.

---

[563] Darmini. "Adaiyala Attai." in *Savugalal Pirabalamana Oor*, ed. Darmini (Chennai: Karuppu Piradhigal, 2010), 48.

[564] Sidharthan Maunaguru, "Brides as Bridges? Movements, Actors, Documents and Anticipation in Constructing Tamilness," in *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, ed. R. Cheran (New Delhi: Sage Publications) 77.

Therefore, there is an affect towards documents in the everyday life of the Tamil."[565] The poetry written around the official production of identities expresses a range of sentiments towards it. In the above mentioned poem of Darmini, the poet locates ID cards as an index of the ever changing nature of the bearabilty of identities. In this particular poem, the identity of Tamils living in war is marked as temporal in nature. At different moments in time, the same individual's identity shape shifts according to the "nation" that is exerting power over her at that point. But the bearing of these identities is not represented as an uncritical acceptance; at each juncture the poet is demanding a reason for carrying an ID. It is significant that the reasons are not articulated overtly as a matter of citizenship to a nation, but expressed in terms of "living".

The logic of ID cards is to control a populace through a forced marking out as well as a simultaneous refusal to deem recognition. It is an important tool in delineating "our" people from the other. But the inevitability of ID cards lies in its ingenious incorporation into the everyday. It is, as Helga Tawil-Souri writes, the "mundane manifestation of state processes".[566] It is a requirement to survive, to live through the everyday and in this process a population is created that will fit into the different categories that the nation has to invent for its continuance. It is a way by which nation states legitimize its "meaningful presence".[567] It is also therefore a mechanism to discipline a populace that might house different identities. Hence, people are reduced to certain indexes and certain meanings are scripted on their bodies by the nation through impersonal documentation. In this process, certain markers gain prominence in the matrix of requirements for a genuine citizen. A person is condensed into a serial number, a photograph, an ID card. The impersonality of these indexes serves to erase the complexities of living with identities that are deemed dangerous. But life in war cannot be condensed; poetry is a writing against this forced

[565] Ibid.

[566] Helga Tawil-Souri "Coloured Identity: The Politics and Materiality of ID Cards in Palestine/Israel", 67-97.

[567] A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural dimensions of Globalization*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

conscription into impersonal markers and the subsequent abridgement of one's life stories. It is therefore poignant that Darmini's poem as much as is a chronicle of the temporality of different identities she has to bear through her living through the war, is also an imagination of a fearless future. She marks out those specific aspects of disciplining in militarization that are imposed on her and imagines an island without all that. The poem is hence a writing against the hegemonic meaning making processes of the state apparatuses.

The carrying of an ID card while entitling one to certain kinds of mobility, also produces constant anxiety, what Pradeep Jeganathan has termed as an "anticipation of violence".[568] This anticipation can begin or can be triggered in different locations. Pradeep Jeganathan forwards an important conceptualization of violence as as being in the cusp of things, in the moment of emergence, in the possibility of it, hence embedded in recollection and anticipation. One of the sites he locates the notion of 'anticipation of violence' is in the boundaries of checkpoints. He writes, "The citizen who carries a card, anticipating that it will be checked, is subjected through that very act. It ties the citizen to the state, the card always pointing towards the margin of the state."[569] Pradeep Jeganathan says that the question which the soldier confronts the holder of the ID card with when he demands to see his ID is actually "What is your political identity? …Do you represent a politics that lies outside the bounds of the state… The answer to this question is read off a series of interpretations of what are taken to be social or cultural signs on the card".[570] Here the State reads the ID cards and by extension the individual, through the lenses of boxed categories. Hence the name, the region and by extension religion and supposed nationalities are read from identity documents that can decide the extent of your mobility and rights. But this space of the ID, tactile and rigid as it might be, holds possibilities of play. The carrier can play with the card through his/her interactions with the state. Hence,

---

[568] Pradeep Jeganathan, "Check Points : Anthropology, Identity and State," in *Anthropology in the Margin of State,* ed. V. Das & P. Deborah (Oxford: School of American Press, 2004).

[569] Ibid.

[570] Ibid.

while state authenticates[571] the identity in the ID cards, this condition of "anticipation of violence" gives way to the production of "a repertoire of practices" by the Tamils, which Jeganathan terms as "tactics of anticipation".[572]

The poetry that I examine in this section, displays the anxieties that surround the carrying of ID cards, which indirectly points towards the difficulties that a non-possession of such objects imposes and the subjectivities produced at the moment of the state demanding the ID. The anticipation is identified as originating at different loci; sometimes the state, sometimes the self. Darmini in her poem, 'Identity Cards', displays this anxiety when she writes about the countless times she had to return home, midway in a journey, because she had forgotten to take her ID card. Here while the disciplining is imposed by the State, the anticipation starts with the self; one is already disciplined through the carrying of the card and the attendant anxiety. The anxiety is marked as something related to performativity, like gooseflesh before a performance, but in a much more acute and violent form, one is anxious before performing the identities imposed by surveillance mechanisms.

A poem which most forcefully attests to the anxiety and ubiquity surrounding ID Cards is expressed in the poem '*Yesuvukku Oru Madal*' written by Nirosha. This poem is written as a letter addressed to Jesus, asking him to return to our world again and redeem it. The poem is an effort to acquaint the God to the changed ways of the world. She writes,

> But please, not even in a moment of forgetfulness
>
> claim in public, you are for peace.
>
> Back then there were only nails,
>
> but now they have guns.[573]

---

[571] David Lyon*, Identifying Citizens: ID Cards as Surveillance* (Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press, 2009), 208.

[572] Jeganathan, "Check Points : Anthropology, Identity and State"

[573] Nirosha, J. "Yeshuvukku Oru Madal (A Letter to Jesus)." in *Peyal Manakkum Pozhuthu*, ed. A. Mangai, (Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2007).

But the most important advice that she imparts and one which has become a hallmark of the existence in time of war is regarding the ID card. So she reminds him,

> Oh, I forgot something important
>
> When you indeed return,
>
> make sure you carry your identity card. [574]

Nirosha's poem articulates a sense of urgency in her plea to Jesus to come redeem the mankind; the urgency conveyed through the form of an epistolary poem. Through the use of the figure of Jesus, she at once articulates the extent of redemption that is required of man, as well as is ironically implying that even the son of God requires assistance in manoeuvring through the war ridden landscape. In the 'Second Coming of Jesus', the world has changed to a point where even Gods will have to furnish documentary proof of their identity. In her scathingly satiric poem, Nirosha is articulating the loss of control over one's existence, where one's whole lives are controlled by agencies of militarization. Through the figure of Jesus, Nirosha deftly entwines two modes of anticipation- the Second Coming and the anticipation of constantly being asked to furnish proof of one's identity, highlighting in its mythic proportions the violence inherent in militarization and its attendant regime of documentary identity formation. But of interest is also the production of another subjectivity through this anticipation: the mortal woman because of her living through war transforms as a holder of knowledge and a transmitter of the pragmatics of survival. The genius of Nirosha's poem lies in its personal tone embodied in the form of the epistolary form. The anecdotes of war are replete with memories of mothers constantly reminding their sons and daughters to take their ID cards as they leave for school and work.[575] Here the woman adds another aspect to the

---

[574] Ibid.

[575] Maunaguru, Sidharthan, 2009 "Brides as Bridges? Movements, Actors, Documents and Anticipation in Constructing Tamilness." 77.

conventional nurturer role, the transmitting of knowledge, the languages of caution; the son of God has to be appraised of the changes that are wrought by war, and the appraiser is the woman who has lived through the war.

EXPERIENCING SURVEILLANCE

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, lives flickering between visibility and invisibility are negotiated in the slippery slopes of surveillance. As Elia Zureik has written, surveillance implies intrusiveness into one's private domain, and "as a feature of power…is involved in the constitution of subjectivities at the level of desire, fear, security, trust and risk".[576] The processes of surveillance are also deeply gendered. As Jennifer Hyndman and Malathi de Alwis remark, "People's bodies are perhaps the finest scale of political space. Bodies are the sites at which gender and national identity may be marked in Sri Lanka and performed in particular ways."[577] This is seen in instances of gender violence, where women's bodies as holders of cultural values and embodiments of nation are exposed to violence. An articulation of such violence finds its way into poetry as well. For e.g. Sexual violence, perpetrated by the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) is addressed in the poems of Bhanubharathy whose works are a vociferous shriek of resisitance though poetry. She doesn't mince her words when she blames the femininity of the construction of Mother India, which has brought forth "such sons".[578] In her poem '*Vedikundu Pisayum Pandavar*' she describes the violations on her body by the ubiquitous "Indian Green" who in the pretence of looking for hand grenades squeeze women's breasts.[579]

---

[576] Elia Zureik, "Strategies of Surveillance: The Israeli Gaze" *Jerusalem Quarterly* 66, 12.

[577] Jennifer Hyndman and Malathi de Alwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads: Violence, (Im)mobility and Displacement in Sri Lanka," *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 11 (4) (2004): 535–57.

[578] Bhanubharathy, " Vedikundu Pisayum Pandavar," in *Pirathiyal (Alien Woman)*, ed. Bhanubharathy (Karuppu Pirathigal: Chennai, 2009), 528-29.

[579] Ibid.

While the bodies of women passes through the checkpoint, passing through bodily violence and harassment, the bodies also have to pass through the gaze of surveillance. The poem called 'Identity' by Aruljothy Ramaiyah which talks about the violence of forced visibility and scrutiny imposed by ID cards disrupts the idea of a Panopticon of surveillance and disintegrates this all encompassing gaze of the disciplining state into its horrific details; each gaze is of a different quality, different in its abhorrability, different in its purposes, different in the ways it is felt by the woman.

Unspeakable agonies at the checkpoints

Tell us tales

Looks that check

Your face against the space

(in your ID card)

Where your address is noted

Looks looks

That scrutinize

Your real and reel images

Clandestine looks

that separate your wear

from the body you bear

Dubious looks

that tear your parcels and food apart

Revolting looks

needing to touch and feel your femininity

To confirm your identity

Looks upon the identity cards

Seeking to affirm your identity.[580]

It is through the looks and the gaze that violence is being perpetrated at the checkpoints. The gaze, "the looks" in the poem are represented in its tactile qualities, the seeing eye is also the marauding eye, it is also the violating eye: in the gaze lies a repertoire of means of violence, felt and singed on the body that moves through, in and out of the space of gaze.

Interestingly, the body of language as well passes through a transformation through the experiences of surveillance. Talal Azad talks in his work on medieval judicial torture and confession and draws a connection between pain and truth.[581] He says that pain applied to the body reconstitutes the body in some way, allowing for a truthful confession. Carolyn Forche in her conceptualization of poetry of witness talks about a similar connection between pain and the language of the poet. Poetry after trauma is written in "languages that had also passed through these suffering; languages that also continued to bear wounds, legible in line breaks, in constellation of imagery, in ruptures of utterance, in

[580] Aruljothy Ramaiyah, "Identity" in Let the Poems Speak, Suriya Women's Development Centre ed.and Translation by Thava Sajitharan (Batticaloa: Suriya Women's Development Centre, 2010), 29. (Sourced from Malathi de Alwis, Laments from a Lacerated Terrain, Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies Vol 4, No.2, 2013)

[581] Talal Asad, "Pain and truth in medieval Christian ritual," in *Genealogies of Religion,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999): 83–124.

silences and fissures of written speech".[582] One gathers that as the body is reconstituted as it goes through trauma, language is also recast as the poet goes through trauma. In the poetry of love during war, new metaphors of anticipation are called into use, which pertains to living through war. For example, Nivedha in her untitled poem uses ID cards to denote the heaviness inherent in the pangs of separation among lovers. She writes:

> As
>
> Identity cards that grow heavier,
>
> while passing through Khaki uniforms
>
> and Security guards,
>
> Memories of you are unavoidable.[583]

Here the constant reminiscence of a lover is denoted by the heaviness of anxiety that one experiences as she passes through surveillance. Here the surveillance gives rise to an anxious subject; this experience of subjection is recalled in the context of a constant intrusion of a lover's memory. Nivedha's poem is an example of how the poetic language takes on and adopts the experience of living through war. The vocabulary of experience is expanded and newer forms of expressions are created. The history of the war in Sri Lanka is also about articulations of the intrusive seeping of violence, disciplining through different means, into one's daily use of language, everyday means of communication.

DISRUPTING MEANINGS

Poetry also alerts us to new contexts of subject formation that are mediated through Identity cards. In an essay titled 'Displaced and Displeased: Fragile Fragments of

---

[582] Forche, Reading the Living Archive: The Witness of Literary Art.

[583] Nivedha . "Untitled ." in *Olikatha Ilavenil*, ed. Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 31. Translated by Rahul Thangaraj and Aparna Eswaran

Conversation', Sumathy Sivamohan presents her story "mediated and disrupted" by the story of Nazeera, a woman evicted from Jaffna in 1990, and staying in Puttalam camp. In an interesting use of testimonio, two life stories are narrated together. Through this narration, Sumathy Sivamohan draws our attention to how ethnicization of identities are invented and reinvented through place and displacement. As a poet, in most of Sumathy Sivamohan's work, one doesn't know where poetry begins or ends. Even an essay has the sensibility of a poem; there is a constant disruption and reinvention of form in all her writings.

For example, the essay starts with a fragment of conversation titled "Purse" where a purse becomes the object to articulate one's predicament of displacement and dispossession and this fragment of conversation reads like a prose poem;

> Purse
>
> Will hold anything, everything. Will hold money. Will hold the identity Card also. I too have a purse. When I was ten my father bought me a purse. What I have now is what I got in a shop in Puttalam.
>
> A purse is useful in many ways. It fits inside your palm and you can take it anywhere. My heart likes this purse here. It is like another hand to me. I can take it anywhere, when I travel, to take what I have- it is useful.
>
> My son and daughter, they both have a purse each. I bought my daughter a purse. When I came from Jaffna, I did not bring any purse. I did not bring any money.
>
> Nadheera- the one who can speak.[584]

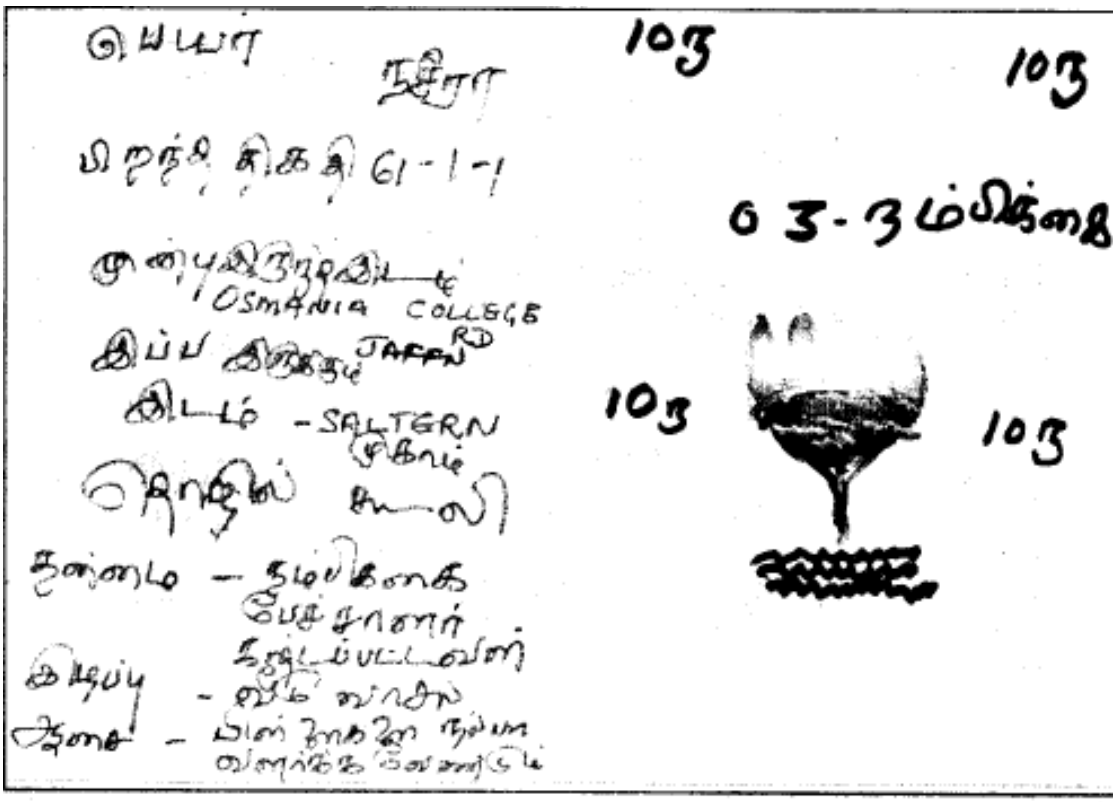
Here the subject Nazeera has to become Nadheera for her to become a subject capable of speech. Also, interestingly, in identity card, the identity part is in lower case, while Card

[584] Sivamohan, Sumathy et.al., "Salt, Sand and Water: Movement and Citizenship" *Social Identities 15(1)*, (2009): 11-42.

is in upper case. It draws our attention to the importance of the evidentiary part of the official document, while their identities are in permanent flux in official discourses that follow their displacements. Here the purse denotes a carrier of identities which is in turn linked to mobility and freedom. This narrative is significant in how displacement as a Muslim by LTTE is conveyed through a loss of purse. Of significance to this section of the paper is an image entitled 'Identity Card' in the essay.

The poet produces an image of a fictionalised identity card of a displaced North Sri Lankan Muslim woman currently residing in Puttalam camp, formed after the forced expulsion of Muslims by LTTE in 1991. In addition to the usual columns of name, occupations, residence, there are additional columns; in the column of "loss" is written "house and home or house and property", and in the column called memory is written "the photo of my mother".[585]

[585] Ibid.



Identity Card

name	Nazeera
other names	Nadeera; courage
date of birth	61. 01. 01
previous place of residence	Osmania college Road, Jaffna
current place of residence	Saltern camp I, Puttalam
Occupation	Coolie
Loss	veedu, vaasal; house and home or house and property
Qualities	hope, orator, woman who has suffered much in life
dislikes	hopelessness in my heart
Desire	to bring up my children well to wear nice clothes
Memory	the photo of my mother

It is in this new space of the image that mimics an ID card that a constitution of identity as different from that which nationalism usually marks her with gets articulated. It was subsequent to my reading of this essay that I read Sumathy Sivamohan's article "Salt, Sand and Water: Movement and Citizenship in Narratives of Displaced Women" in the journal Social Identities, where the context of the image's origin, places it as " a view of the centre from the periphery" where displaced Muslims and Tamils come together into difficult, but productive conversations, conversations which assert that "the displacement and marginalities do not produce homogenous identities."[586] My primary reading of the image shifted when I encountered it in an essay where it was placed among other parts of conversation and other images of articulation. But what I took from Sumathy Sivamohan's self narration disrupted and mediated through the self narration of Nazeera, is also the kinds of displacements a reader goes through in encountering works of art within other genres in different places. Even when Sivamohan was articulating through the academic genre, as a reader of her poems, I encountered the displacement and disruption that she beautifully and hauntingly portrays in her poems, disrupting and displacing the genre of academic writing as well. For e.g. in the poem 'i seek, i seek' by Sumathy sivamohan we can trace the concept of the poet seeking truth in times of conflict. Here the poet is seen in her role as the archivist who is prodding for voices and "tales true" to hold it in her hand and ensure it is heard. The poet here is seen endued with the capacity to recognize "true" voices.[587]

> "the seven worlds shake/with the tumult of war and peace/and yet i seek in all corners of this world/your voice, far and away/ i seek, i seek/ in the wind/ in this moment/ to hold in an urgent embrace/ your tale true /i seek, i seek/to hold in my hand/ your tale true."[588]

---

[586] Ibid.

[587] Sivamohan *Groundviews.* accessed 24.03. 2013, http://groundviews.org/2009/03/22/three-poems-by-sivamohan-sumathy/

[588] Ibid.

It is in the background of this poem that I read the article. The artwork that accompanies the conversations which was the result of a series of workshops carried out in Sri Lanka in 2004, disrupts the hegemonic meanings occupied in the staid material construct of an Identity card and brings to fore the traces of experiences of mobility, displacement, dispossession and changing notions of place within the mimicked form of an ID card. Her work reminds me also of the status of an outsider looking and reading and mis-reading these conversations and self narration- the issue of "translationality of experience" which Sumathy Sivamohan had alerted me to.

While the official production of documents can tell the story of dislocation and dispossession, it can also be the means to an escape from the country, an access to mobility. Here, Sidharthan Maunaguru's work is important, occupied with the question of an anticipation of hope and possibility and where such an anticipation begins. Instead of the checkpoint, he identifies different locations where such anticipation can originate, for example, in the family or the embassy. While looking at three phenomena- the movement of people, production of documents and notion of anticipation, he argues that the combination of the three has yielded new forms of marriages, new forms of family and new figures of women in the Tamil community that emerge in the constantly change of 'temporality'.[589] Looking at the movement of Tamil brides who go to Canada and the circulation of people closely linked with the production of documents, Maunaguru goes a step further from Jeganathan and claims that it is not just the notion of an anticipation of violence that works, but also an anticipation of hope. New agents other than LTTE and the Sinhala State are at work in the subject formation of these young women, for e.g., the Canadian embassy. Maunaguru says that this notion of anticipation is not tied up with

[589] Maunaguru, "Brides as Bridges? Movements, Actors, Documents and Anticipation in Constructing Tamilness." 55-80.

the notion of victimhood of women due to ethnic conflict, but rather intersects with the anticipation of social mobility and independence.[590]

Vaitheki's poem 'Green Card' is pertinent in this context. She writes,

> Look!
>
> The pious bridegroom dressed
>
> like a white man
>
> The bride, young graduate
>
> Sits
>
> with crowding thoughts of her
>
> Parent's struggle
>
> to buy
>
> this
>
> CANADA GROOM.
>
> "Do you know his price?
>
> Eight!
>
> Eight lakhs in cash
>
> with house and property"
>
> Boasted a proud relative
>
> A blunt spoken woman inquired
>
> "What is he?"
>
> "……"

[590] Maunaguru, "Brides as Bridges? Movements, Actors, Documents and Anticipation in Constructing Tamilness." 77.

"CANADA"

"Err….m…m…with Green Card"[591]

This poem displays the cost of the anticipation of hope and mobility and its potential in liberating women. Age old customs like dowry persist, albeit the qualifications expected from the groom has changed. So dowry is seen as the costs incurred to get married to a green card holding person and the attendant hope of migration for the woman. While an anticipation of hope is operational vis-a-vis the future opportunities that the bride can get with her escape from a war torn region, this escape is not without guilt as well as burden for the bride along with her family. More interestingly the identity of the groom is subsumed in the official document of Green Card and the opportunity it represents: Here it is not the LTTE or the Sri Lankan government that is the arbiter of identity, but the Canadian embassy and the Green Card it issues. There are, but, multiple instances of women harassed in their pursuit of documents to travel, sometimes by middle men, sometimes reduced to human contrabands, with experiences of flushing down passports on their way to other possibilities.[592] A perusal of the narratives of dislocation, displacement and opportunities and possibilities of movement beyond nation-state can be done through women's articulation of their experiences with travel documents like LTTE passes, Sri Lankan passport etc through poetry and other forms of art. This section of the chapter in concentrating only on identification documents and women's experiences in their contact with the disciplining forces contained within it is only a start to a wider study.

As evident from the poetry, the proliferation of official objects of identity is a prominent feature in the experience of war in Sri Lanka. As Mythiri Jeganathan writes in the context

---

[591] Vaitheki. "Green Card." *Third Eye*, December 1994.

[592] Sivamohan, 'The Middle Passage: Migration and Displacement of Sri Lankan Tamil Women of the Diaspora,' 11.

Darmini. "Adaiyala Attai." in *Savugalal Pirabalamana Oor*, ed. Darmini (Chennai: Karuppu Piradhigal, 2010), 48.

of Hill Country Tamils in Sri Lanka, "identity cards, checkpoints determine where one can travel; certificates of life rituals determine one's ownership rights and where one can reside and work; hospital records govern one's bodily treatment and wellbeing. The absence of these objects presumes different modes of existence outside those experiences formally recognized by the Sri Lankan state and its institutional counterparts."[593] There are also experiences, memories of the past, traces of one's identity which cannot find recognition in the official discourses of war. These life experiences are articulated in terms of traces that one leaves behind which finds place in poetry. Poetry houses these traces that are unmentionable either because of the violence that still emanates or because of the dangers inherent in its recalling. Hence, through poetry, women act as witnesses and through intelligent and subtle traces refers to a reality which is left unrecognized by the structures of IDs. As much as the Sinhala Sri Lankan State is implicated and the Indian State is criticized, the modes of Tamil nationalism are also held to scrutiny. A layered and nuanced understanding of the different aspects of being a Tamil woman during the war when confronting and sometimes resisting the material confines of identity formation through ID cards is evidenced in the poetry of women writing during this period; the readers are also implicated in this arduous journey of tracing the unrecognizable.

IDENTIFICATION MARKS

Malathi de Alwis in her article 'Tracing the Absent Presence' suggests that a "reinhabiting of the world" in the context of forced disappearances is a constant tracing of traces given the ambiguous nature of the disappeared's status of absence and thus presence. She compares La Capra's and Butler's idea of grief. La Capra is concerned that allowing oneself to be caught up in the thrall of one's own grief is intellectually

[593] Jeganathan, "Check Points : Anthropology, Identity and State".

unproductive.[594] Butler, on the other hand traces a space for politics in the relational undoing in grief. As de Alwis notes in this essay, this undoing for Butler is both physical and psychical. For Butler, "at the same time as we struggle for the autonomy of our bodies, we are also confronted by the fact that we carry 'the enigmatic traces of others'".[595] Malathi de Alwis following her reading of Butler points to the possibility of reconsidering her earlier work on political communities being formed under the aegis of motherhood and look at how political communities can be formed around the grief.[596] While de Alwis is concerned about the disappearances of people, war enforces disappearances of other sorts. Disappearance of ways of life, of privacy, of people we once were; disappearances which are not always corporeal in nature. This loss is incomplete because there is a constant tracing back. But this tracing is markedly different from nostalgia. More than a yearning for a past that is gone, it is marking of a past that is difficult to confront, pierced with pain.

We can find such an engagement with the traces of identity we leave behind in most of Darmini's poetry. This can be seen most powerfully in her poem "*Adaiyala Suvadukal*" or telltale footsteps. Through this poem, Darmini shows us how the traces of our lived lives through war are scattered across in different forms and different mediums. Sometimes we leave traces in our surrounding landscapes. So a pit in the trunk of a mango tree is remembered because an uncle of hers hid political pamphlets and guns in it. The well, which was climbed down to escape from the Indian army will be told in stories by neighbours as they narrate your life story. The heaps of uprooted peanut saplings are where a sister is raped by the "army vultures".[597] The blood and flesh from a bomb blast

---

[594] D La Capra, D. " Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?,"*History and Theory*, 55: 375–400.

[595] Malathi de Alwis "Tracing Absent Presence: Political Community in the Wake of Atrocity." in *States of Trauma: Gender and Violence in South Asia*, ed. Parama Roy, Piya Chatterjee and Manali Desai (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2008).

[596] Ibid.

[597] Darmini. "Adaiyala Suvadukal." in *Savugalal Pirabalamana Oor*, ed. Darmini, (Chennai: Karuppu Piradhigal, 2010), 5.

will smear one's whole body and also become a part of the margins of the field. The traces are sometimes sounds. So she hears the cries of her raped sister muffled and then hardened in a parade of militants. The news of her sister's eventual death and "being transformed into an epic" is brought forth by the wind. Sometimes memories and its traces are imbibed in objects. So when a loved one disappears, the note crumbled and left in the sugar tin acts a trace of him. When one leaves for a foreign country as a refugee, a mother finds happiness by marking her son/ daughter out with her fingers in a photograph, send by them from exile. Hence, tangible and intangible traces are left behind as tell-tale footsteps of one's existence in war and the poem is tracing of traces to one's own self.[598]

In another poem written by Darmini titled *Vilankulal* (Fetters), she describes the constant vigilance under which lives in war have to be led. The poem begins with the visits of army men, one of whom announces that they have shot her husband. She marks out and identifies in "his hand gun and authority".[599] The absoluteness of the authority is inscribed in her lines,

> My child and me,
>
> we didn't say a word.[600]

Another gunman smirked, which revealed that the earlier man was telling a lie. This was followed by inquiries and warnings. After six months, as "a skeleton wrapped in skin", the husband returns. On his feet there were marks of the fetters. Darmini calls these the

---

[598] Ibid.

[599] Darmini. "Vilangugal." in *Savugalal Pirabalamana Oor*, ed. Darmini (Chennai: Karuppu Piradhigal, 2010), 18.

[600] Ibid.

'*adayalangal*', the identification marks of having crossed the forest path without a Pass.[601]

Another poem which deals with the indelible marks that state violence leaves on individuals is powerfully brought forth in Urvashi's poem 'Their Night'. The poem graphically describes the pain of witnessing an event like the capture of a loved one. Urvashi talks of a loss of their days and nights, which are claimed by violence when she writes

> What made a deep impression in my mind
>
> early this evening returns:
>
> fear begins to tug –that evening with darkness frozen within.
>
> Five jeeps together stirred dust.
>
> The south westerly wind blew hard –
>
> they dragged him away,
>
> fear gathering deep in my heart.
>
> Only the gecko on the wall uttered something.
>
> In fear, the roof sheets clattered softly.
>
> The child at my feet screamed –
>
> neighbors gathering in curiosity.
>
> He walked away with them –
>
> outstretched rifles pressing at his back.
>
> The impressions made in me by the hands
>
> bearing fifty rifles made a burden of sorrow.
>
> That night was theirs.[602]

[601] Ibid.

The poem unsettles the reader through a reproduction of the entire evening in its horrors. The sounds: first the silence broken only by the gecko on the wall, then the south-westerly wind blowing hard, the child screaming hard all convey a sense of impending dread. The images that are described all point to a corrosive intrusion; Neighbours looking in curiously, outstretched rifles pressed against her husband's back. It is important that this poem is a recollection of an evening that has already occurred and the recollection is fraught with fear. Here the evening which the armed men have claimed as "Their night" is a trace of a loss, saturated with sounds and images of dread. This loss of a night indirectly speaks of the many unutterable losses of one's agency in times of war. It speaks of a colonizing, a cold spreading of militarism's tentacles over a person's time where the person is also marked and claimed because impressions are left on her to carry. When the trace of a singular event is entrenched in memory, capable of evocating fear, the trace metonymically represents the larger forces of military occupation. The armed men have not just claimed an evening, but every other evening in which its memory haunts. While the trace in itself is hardened within one's memory, "with darkness frozen inside", and marked with heaviness creating "a burden of sorrow", the evocation of the trace only leads to a realization of a loss.[603] Hence, here the trace is not ephemeral; yet it is like the loose end of a yarn, a trail leading to an ultimate undoing.

Another poem that talks of the loss of time is Selvi's poem 'The Time That Shall Not Return'. Here the loss is of peace and the traces of that loss is spread everywhere around her. Here the loss is reminded not in absence, but in constant presence. She says how the same breeze, the same cawing of the crows, the colour of the dawn sky had all changed because what she lost was peace, and with peace the ability to enjoy something as simple as the passing time of the dawn.[604] So all elements that had once contributed to her

---

[602] Urvashi. "Avarkalude Iravu." in *Innum veratha Seithi*, ed. Urvashi (Chennai: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 22.

[603] Ibid.

[604] Selvi. "Time That Won't Come Again," *Shakti* (1990): 12.

happiness still exist, but her circumstances have changed. What is missing is peace in her land. In contrast, in a poem written by Anar titled 'Absence' the trace of presence is engrained in the absence of the lover. In the poem which essays the tumult and the struggle involved in the act of forgetting and moving on, she asks of others:

> Are they troubled ever
>
> by burning memories
>
> kept secret,
>
> by the yearning for someone not there,
>
> by the dice game played
>
> between Memory and Forgetfulness
>
> using thoughts for counters?"[605]

She claims "You are in front of me/without fail, and at all times/always in your absence. [606] This poetry shows the predicament of a woman in war dealing with her absent lover, a predicament heightened in its tragedy by the secrets she has to keep in the time of war. But the loss that the poet suffers is asserted precisely by its very absence, the void that remains vacant yet open like a wound. The complex process of memory is described as a dice game, a constant to and fro between remembering and forgetting. Yet through it all she claims that the lover is a constant presence. The constant presence is felt through the constant reminders of his absence. What does one do with traces of this nature?

The trace sometimes chronicles a loss which is sometimes an intangible essence, a part of our selves. Anar in her poem, "My sister's laugh was like a bird in flight" captures a loss of this nature. She writes:

> I never heard again that laughter,

[605] Anar. (2010). Absence. in L. Holstorm, *Talisman: A Selection of Modern Tamil Poetry*.

[606] Ibid.

like the wing-beat of a bird in flight.[607]

She writes

I was too little then to fathom the riddle:

we had given my sister as prey

to the fish-hook.[608]

The heavy sadness in Anar's poem's title is because of its tense. The laugh of her sister exists in the past. It is a trace of a freedom that is lost to her sister forever. This trace from the past is what reminds her in a later realization what had actually happened to her sister. These fleeting memories of a person's personality, lost forever are also a casualty of war that remains unaccounted for.

Unlike a tracing back that is enabling for the survivor, certain traces remind one of the indelible marks that violence encrypts on us which haunts us. Anar's poem 'Blood Notes' is such a poem which interrogates the different expressions of blood that a woman encounters. She starts with the familiarity of blood in a menstruating woman's life, but the power of blood to still shock her. She writes of how the blood oozing out of a child's wound can still shock her like she is seeing blood for the first time. For her, 'blood' is longing for mercy, it represents despair. The blood of a raped woman, rumbles out like "her soul's greasy colour", while the blood from a murdered child pours out very quietly, very "child like".[609] It is the quality of haunting in the trope of blood that is highlighted in this poem. She writes;

The blood scent of vengeance,

---

[607] Anar. My Sister's Laugh was Like a Bird in Flight. *Talisman*, (2010): 21.

[608] Ibid.

[609] Anar, "Blood Notes" accessed on 24 May 2014. http://vigil-lanka.blogspot.in/2006/12/anar-poem.html

The blood stench of predation,

The same blood that congeals

on the crazed streets,

the same blood that has seeped and dried

on the walls of mausoleums

as death's indelible traces,

they stalk me endlessly.[610]

This haunting is represented in other poems, especially as figures of women haunting and being haunted. In her poem titled '*Velikelil Thorkum Pinangal*', Jepa talks of the ubiquity of women's corpses everywhere: in the open spaces, in verandas, corners of houses and the vast outside.[611] The corpses, she reveals in the last stanza, are dead, but still keep living. In this poem woman's existence through the oppression she faces from sexual violation is marked as that of the living dead, a zombie existence. Another pertinent poem in this context is by Saranya titled as '*Oppari*'.[612] Here the elegy is for the poet herself, who had nourished dreams: an elegy for her body which is violated by men, and for her mind violated by a continuous string of lies. While the body lies dead as a corpse, the dreams keep flying somewhere, in search of something. In these poems we see the bodies transform into a kind of numbness marked by bodies that have died, but dreams still flutter in anguish. Also the reverse, where the numbness has frozen dreams, but the bodies keep living in a daily existence. In another poem by Saranya titled '*Unnathu araiykul enne azhaiykaathe*', the narrator of the poem is haunted by the sobs

[610] Ibid.

[611] Jepa . "Velikelil Thorkum Pinangal " in *Olikatha Ilavenil*, ed. Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan, (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 56.

[612] Saranya, "Oppari" in *Olikatha Ilavenil*, by Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan, (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 63.

and whimpers of women in her room which she shares with her lover. She says the sighs of women who had trusted the man are now gushing forth like a storm.[613] Here the poet is resisting all attempts to become a ghost and join the wailing voices of women by remaining locked in oppressiveness of the room which is not hers.

Conclusion

The official regimes of identity production through documents and surveillance mechanisms try to produce recognizable citizens of the state. In Sri Lanka, living in the midst of war as an everyday reality meant negotiating both the state structures of surveillance and quasi state mechanisms of LTTE. The poetry written during war also registers these difficult negotiations of living with documentation. At the different temporal moments the same individual has to shift according to the different state mechanisms exerting power over them. The poetry also marks the anxieties that both possession and the non-possession of documents produces. The chapter has considered how within this regime of selective visibilization poetry houses traces of othered experiences of violence. Poetry was a medium to articulate grief over losses and disappearances of ways of life within wartime. These traces are evident in the imagery of the poems as well. Tropes like blood and haunting are used to convey the nature of traces that remain. Poetry as seen in this section also acts as evidence, especially in circumstances where no other evidence can be provided. The traces of one's self, one's yearnings, one's lives are housed within the metaphors of dreams and metaphors from the landscape. The trace in most of these poems is a journey to one's self, a self that cannot be articulated. Poetry in itself hence here acts as a collection of traces.

[613] Saranya, " Unnathu Araiykul Enne Azhaiykaathe " in *Olikatha Ilavenil*, ed. Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan, (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 64.

CONCLUSION

The poetry by Tamil women in Sri Lanka has borne witness to the violence and brutality of the war. Wartime is marked in this poetry as experienced by women, in its varied nuances, in an attempt to bring out the gendered nature of living through war. The Sri Lankan war in the period 1981-2009 is framed by the rise and fall of militant Tamil nationalism which came into prominence as a response to the atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan State. The poetry of women is attentive to this framing and engages with the discourses on the position women in the Tamil nation while forwarding a political critique from the realm of the aesthetic. Yet this critique is not homogenous in nature; instead it is conveyed in different registers and in different forms. While questioning as well as diversifying experiential categories, the poetry disrupts most prominently the notion of a singular voice as well as a singular representation of the 'Tamil woman'. Written in different accents, carrying traces of their location within the island and the time they were writing in and of, the poetry of Tamil women constitute a rich and diversely gendered witnessing of a historical period.

The thesis has tried to bring out the differences within the articulations of women about various experiences of the Sri Lankan war highlighting the specific spacio-temporal contingencies that have produced these conceptual critiques. As analysed in the first chapter, the poetry produced in the early stage of the rise of militant Tamil nationalism, as seen in the anthology '*Sollatha Seithigal*', is influenced by the opportunities presented by the political climate of the time. It is a reflection of the possibilities which were offered in the nascent period of Tamil nationalism: a time marked with hope and optimism over the possibilities that they thought a separate Tamil homeland might offer. This space that opened up was being used to articulate a stringent critique of the pervasiveness of gender violence. Misogyny in Tamil culture and society could be criticized and the concept of liberation forwarded in the poetry was vehemently against the existing restrictions placed on women by the Tamil society. In comparison, the articulation of liberation in the poetry of women combatants reflected a curious

juxtaposition of anxiety as well as pride. While there was an emphasis on the liberation of Tamil nation, their articulation of the reasons for joining the movement were overwhelmingly articulated on the basis of the gendered violence they had faced or witnessed. The Muslim women, writing in the 1990s, wrote of a notion of liberation from the discourses formed from misogynistic interpretation of the scriptures which were used to fetter and enslave women. This poetry is framed by the period of reformation of Islam in Sri Lanka and the introduction of new restrictions on women's movement and dressing. Similarly the experiences of displacement during war are differently accentuated in different concepts of leaving and return. For e.g. the experiences of leaving in order to join the political movements were differently marked from the experiences of forceful exile. Yet almost all the poetry analyzed in the chapter on exits and returns emphasize the gendered nature of the struggles involved in leaving as well as returning in wartime. Women's poems largely exhibit a lack of nostalgia and instead stress the complications involved in return. By displaying a measured mistrust in their reception of sons who return back from various circumstances, the poetry also complicates the notion of home and homeland.

Poetry also bears witness to the forced erasure of certain lives lived in dissent. In the poetry included in the chapter on witnessing death, there is a stringent criticism of the politics of memorialization followed by the LTTE for the purpose of a creation of a united Tamil nation. The fetish for purity is seen in the construct of the martyr for the nation as an ideal type to be emulated and venerated. Simultaneously, any difference in opinion or criticism to the LTTE's politics was silenced through the branding of the dissenting individuals as traitors. Poetry included in the thesis forms a counter-narrative to these erasures by memorializing figures that were termed as traitors by both the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE. Poetry of remembrance is also a medium used to express those aspects of war which were censored in daily speech. The addressing of those dead within the genre of poetry delineates a concept of justice which starts from a responsibility towards those who have passed away. The repeated invocation and addressing of those who have passed away can also be seen as a work of melancholia as opposed to only an act of recollection. Different conceptualizations of the woman writer

are also presented within poetry. For e.g. in the first chapter, we have seen the poet Sivaramani presenting a view of the woman-poet as somebody who is not born as a poet, but someone who becomes a poet from her experiences of gender violence. In the second chapter, the combatant poet Captain Vanathi has written about a transference of the process of writing, which places women's poetry as a series of links where what is unwritten by a combatant woman is then later written by another. This analogy is influenced by the concept of martyrdom forwarded by LTTE where death of a combatant is one link in a chain of brave deaths, inspiring the next, towards attaining the Tamil nation.

The poetry while reconceptualizing ideas like martyrdom, liberation, movement and identity, also critiques the representation of women within the discourses of nationalism and coins new metaphors of femininity that express their experiences within war. In the second chapter we have seen how the 'raped woman' as a category of representation has been rethought. Poetry has formulated a concept of a collectivity formed around women who are raped as well as women who could be raped. By not isolating the violence of the raped woman and her bruised body, the poetry stresses the ubiquity of violence on women, even within family, and forms a bond of empathy with the raped women of war. Poetry has also taken idealized roles of women in nationalism like the mother and used this figure to articulate critiques of nationalism. Poetry has also been used to mark new experiences that war has exposed women to. In the poetry of combatant women, there is an attempt to chronicle the arduous work they are involved in and the ambiguous nature of agency they feel while operating weaponry or fighting in the battlefield. Similarly in the poetry written by the women in Diaspora, there is a registering of both the possibilities as well as difficulties involved in making home in new contexts. Movement to a new place has allowed a critical questioning of received notions of the Tamil identity and a space for denunciation of the various regulations placed over women's sexuality. Women writers have also critiqued the appropriation of female figures from Tamil myths like Kannaki and Ahalya to perpetuate the regulation of women's sexuality for nationalistic ends. They have also highlighted certain otherwise obscured acts of certain mythical figures, like Kunti's lament over her inability to mourn over her son Karna in

Mahabharata, in order to convey the experience of forced disappearances and murders which cannot be acknowledged otherwise during wartime. The poetry also invites the reader to engage deeply with the diverse nature of experiences that war has made women witness to. Yet it also constantly hints at the limits of this understanding while also conveying to the reader the difficulties in such a conveying of injuries.

The thesis has tried to be attentive to the formal innovations that are seen in the poetry of women. Through ingenious ways, forms of poetry like lament, lyric and the epistolary poem have been recast to convey at the same time both the personal turmoil and the inner thoughts of the speaker in the poem while also forcing the reader to acknowledge the violence of war in the public sphere within which the poet is situated. Yet the thesis is severely limited by my lack of knowledge of the various nuances of the metrical elements of Tamil poetry. Though the study is largely thematic, a simultaneous engagement with the aesthetic value of poetry would have enriched this study further. The reliance on translators for an understanding of the material also meant that I had to overlook some important literature in Tamil language which would have aided the study further. For example, the *Pengal Santhippu* meetings of Tamil women in diaspora have led to literary publications which have not been included in the study. Also a much more nuanced reading of the gendered nature of the Sri Lankan war could have been done if the poetry written by men were also examined.

After the end of the war in the year 2009, the dynamics of the processes of memorialization within Sri Lanka underwent a drastic change. The Sri Lankan state destroyed the cemeteries of the LTTE martyrs and undertook a rampant destruction of all the remnants of the Tamil nationalist struggle. The landscape of the war destroyed regions in the North was then inundated with the flags and war memorials of the Sri Lankan state. May 19, 2009 is celebrated by the Sri Lankan army as the Remembrance Day of the capitulation of LTTE which was later changed into the War Heroes Day in 2017. The same day is remembered as a day of mourning by the Sri Lankan Tamils, but severe restrictions are placed on their rituals and ways of remembrance. The thesis though stops at the year 2009, a comprehensive understanding of the war can only be

possible when we consider the aftermath of the war. The study can be extended to look at how Tamil poetry has marked these restrictions on memory after the war.

Within the period of the study, 1981-2009, there are two important strands of poetry which needs to be included in furthering this research. The first strand of poetry omitted from the study is the poetry of the Malaiyaha Tamils or the Upcountry Tamils. A rich oeuvre of poetry exists which mark the loss of citizenship of the Malaiyaha Tamils and their particular struggles as descendants of plantation workers who were brought from South India by the British. Their poetry is enriched by the influence of forms like ballads that were used in the oral poetry of their ancestors. The second strand of poetry that is not included in this thesis is the poetry written in the aftermath of the tsunami in 2004. The destruction of the landscape and the unexpected loss of loved ones as the natural disaster struck have also been represented in the Tamil poetry. The work started in this thesis will be complete only when both these strands of poetry are read and analyzed.

Lastly and importantly, there has to be an analysis of the politics of the widespread readership and publication of Tamil poetry from Sri Lanka within India. This then brings us to the question of writing being shaped by the demands of publication in a country that has a complicated and hegemonic relationship with Sri Lanka. There are dangers of appropriation of the voice of the Sri Lankan Tamils by subsuming it as a branch of Tamil literature mainly influenced by Tamil Nadu. There are also possibilities of collaboration and solidarity that disturbs the logic of nation-state. Tamil writers from Tamil Nadu, like Kutti Revathy, Malathi Maithri and Sugirtharani have written about the Sri Lankan war. It will be interesting also to understand the dynamics of solidarity through the medium of poetry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aaron, Freida W. *Bearing the Unbearable: Yiddish and Polish Poetry in the Ghettos and Concentration Camps.* SUNY Press, 1990.
- Aazhiyaal. "Amma." In *Karunavu*, edited by Aazhiyaal, 09. Chennai: Maattru, 2013.
- Aazhiyaal. "Kumarathi." In *Karunavu*, edited by Aazhiyaal, 15. Chennai: Maattru, 2013.
- Aazhiyaal. "Veedu." In *Karunavu*,edited by Aazhiyaal, 27. Chennai: Maattru, 2013.
- Aazhiyaal. “En Annan Lesanthavukku Avangal Kuriyathavathu.” In *Karunavu,* edited by Aazhiyaal, 51. Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2013.
- Aazhiyaal. “The Mother and the Goddess of Night” *Words without Borders,* April 2015. Accessed May, 12, 2015. http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/the-mother-and-the-goddess-of-night.
- Aazhiyal. "Adaiyalam (Identity)." In *Peyal Manakum Pozhuthu*, edited by A. Mangai, 48. Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2007.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17, No. 1 (1990): 41-55.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others.” *American Anthropologist*, 104 (2002): 783–790.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Veiled Sentiments : Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin society.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Adorno, Theodor. "Cultural Criticism and Society." In *Prisms*, by Theodor Adorno, 17-34. MIT Press, 1949.
- Adorno, Theodore. *Negative Dialectics.* Routledge Chapman and Hall, 1973.
- Agamben, Giorgio . *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans.). New York: Zone Books, 2005.

- Ahilan, “Corpse No. 183, New born No. 2.” In *Lost Evenings Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War*, edited by Lakshmi Holmström and Sascha Ebeling , 127. Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2016.
- Ahilan. “Corpse No. 182.” In *Lost Evenings Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War*, edited by Lakshmi Holmström and Sascha Ebeling, 125. Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2016.
- Ahmed, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures.* NY:Verso, 1994.
- Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Akilan, Bhagyanathan. "Foreword: What Happened Yesterday: Urvashi's Minority Politics." In *Innum Varatha Seythi (Message Still Unrecieved)*, edited by Urvashi, 10. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014.
- Alaiyisai. "Purithal." In *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai: Tamizh Penkalin Kavithaiykal*, 09. Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedu, 2001.
- Ali, Ameer .“Muslims in Harmony and Conflict in Plural Sri Lanka: A Historical Summary from a Religio-Economic and Political Perspective.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* Vol. 34 No. 3 (2014): 1.
- Ali, Ameer. “Politics of Survival: Past Strategies and Present Predicament of the Muslim Community in Sri Lanka.” *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 7(1) (1986): 1147-170.
- Ali, Nosheen. "Poetry, Power, Protests: Reimagining Muslim Nationhood in Northern Pakistan." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, No. 1 (2012).
- Anar, “Blood Notes.” *Lanka Blogspot*, Accessed on 24 May 2014. http://vigil-lanka.blogspot.in/2006/12/anar-poem.html
- Anar. “The Queen.” *SAARC Writers’ Foundation*. Accessed on July 22, 2013. http://www.foundationsaarcwriters.com/literature/saarc-writers-intellectual/poets/sri-lanka/217-issath-rehana-mohamad-azeem
- Anar, “If Language is Wings, Poetry is Freedom.” Accessed on 11 May 2017. http://www.generallyaboutbooks.com/2015/05/if-language-is-wings-poetry-is-freedom.html Anar, and (trans.) K.S. Sivakumaran. *Poems of an Islamic Woman Poet.* January 11, 2001. http://anarsrilanka.blogspot.in/2011/01/personal-poems-of-islamic-woman-k.html (accessed May 15th, 2013).

- Anar, Swing, https://www.facebook.com/natarajan.srivatsa?fref=nf translated by Sri N Srivatsa, 25 April, accessed 12 may 2017.
- Anar. My Sister's Laugh was Like a Bird in Flight. *Talisman*, (2010): 21.
- Anar. "Absence." In *Talisman: A Selection of Modern Tamil Poetry*, by Lakshmi Holstorm. 2010.
- Anar. "My Sister's Laugh was Like a Bird in Flight." *Talisman*, 21, 2010.
- Amrithanayagam, Indran. "Quiet Epiphanies." July, 04, 2002. Accessed on July 16, 2012. http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/lr/2002/04/07/stories/2002040700150400.htm
- Anantharatnam, Anita. "Engendering the Nation: Women, Islam and Poetry in Pakistan." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2009: 208-224.
- Appadurai, A. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Asad, Talal. 'Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual'. In *Genealogies of Religion,* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999:83-124
- Auvai. "My Little Daughter, The Frightening World and Ourselves." *Third Eye*, 2000: 20.
- Auvvai. "Ellai Kadathal." In *Ethai Ninaithezhuvathum Saathyamillai*, edited by Auvvai, 51. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014.
- Auvvai. "Pokiren Amma." In *Ethai Ninaithezhuvathum Saathyamillai*, editedby Auvvai, 44. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014.
- Avvai. "The Return ." In *The Rapids of a Great river*, by Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K.Srilatha, 171. New Delhi: Viking/Penguin, 2009.
- Avvai. "The Return." In *The Rapids of a Great River*, edited by Lakshmi, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K.Srilatha, 171. New Delhi: Viking/Penguin, 2009.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays.* translated by Vern W.Mc Gee. Austin, 94. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1986.
- Balasingham, Adele. *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers.* Jaffna: LTTE Publications, 1993.

- Balibar, Etienne. “What is a Border?” In *Politics and Other Scene*, edited by Etienne Balibar, 78-79. New York: Verso Books, 2002.
- Ball, Anne. *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective.* New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Barathy. “Kaathodu Sollividu.” Translated by N. Malathy. Accessed on 21 Jan 2017, https://tamiltigerwomen.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/tamil-tiger-women-writing1.pdf
- Barathy. “Rise up for a New Dawn.” In *Kaathoodu Sollividu*, Publication Section, LTTE Women’s Division, 1993.
- Bass, Daniel. "Making Sense of the Census in Sri Lanka: Up-country Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism." In *Pathways of Dissent : Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka* , by R. Cheran. New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2009.
- Bernard-Donals, Michael and Richard Glejzer. *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.
- Beverly, J, and M. Zimmerman. *Literature and Politics in the Central American revolutions.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.
- Bhabha, Homi. *Colonial and Post Colonial Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Bhanubharathy. " Vedikundu Pisayum Pandavar." In *Pirathiyal (Alien Woman)*, edited by Bhanubharathy, 528-29. Karuppu Pirathigal: Chennai, 2009. Translated by Ramya B. and Aparna Eswaran
- Bhanubharathy. "Netrillirunth Indrillaiyaki." In *Pirathiyal (Alien Woman)*, edited by Bhanubharathy, 50. Karuppu Pirathigal: Chennai, 2009. Translated by Ramya B. and Aparna Eswaran
- Bibby, Michael. *Hearts and Minds: Bodies, Poetry and Resistancein the Vietnam Era.* Rutgers University Press, 1996.
- Bleiker, Roland. *Aesthetics and World Politics.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

- Bordo, Susan. “The Reproduction of Femininity.” In *Writing on the Body :Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory,* edited by Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, 90-113. NY: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Brown, Wendy. "Power After Foucault." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science* , by Bonnie Honig, Annie Phillips John Dryzek, 89. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Butalia, Urvashi. "Gender and Nation: Some Reflections from India." In *From Gender to Nation*, edited by Rada Ivekovic and Julie Mostov, 99-112. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2002.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2010.
- Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence.* New York: Verso, 2004.
- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Captain Janaarthani. “Thuppahi.” In *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil Eezha Penkalin Kavithai*,52. Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001.
- Chatterjee, Partha. "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." In *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, 233-255. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006.
- Channel 4. “Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields.” Accessed 13 March 2015. http://www.channel4.com/programmes/sri-lankas-killing-fields.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Politics of the Governed.* New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.
- Chaudhari, Maithreyee. "Gender in the Making of the Indian State." In *Sociology of Gender*, edited by Sharmila Rege, 353-354. New Delhi: Sage India, 2004.
- Cheran, R. "Pathways of Dissent: An Introduction to Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka." In *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, edited by R. Cheran ix-xiii. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009.
- Cheran, R. "Last Words." In *You Cannot Turn Away*, edited by Chelva Kanaganayakam, 99. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 2011.

- Cheran. "Apocalypse." In *A Second Sunrise*, by Cheran. New Delhi: Navayana Publishers, 2012
- Cheran. "Last Words." In *You Cannot Turn Away*, by Chelva Kanaganayakam, 99. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 2011.
- Coll, Steve. “Letter From the Grave,” January 12, 2009. Accessed March 12, 2015. http://www.newyorker.com/news/steve-coll/letter-from-the-grave
- Committee to Protect Journalists. “Getting Away with Murder” , 2015. Accessed on 17 Oct 2015. https://cpj.org/reports/2015/10/impunity-index-getting-away-with-murder.php#6
- Conway, Christopher. "Sisters at War: Mexican Women Poetry and the U.S-Mexican War." *Latin American Research Review*, 2012: 3-15.
- Coomaraswamy, Radhika ‘Tiger Women and the Question of Women’s Emancipation’, *Pravada* 4/9 (1997):10.
- Coomaraswamy, Radhika, and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham. "Being Tamil in a Different Way : A Feminist Critique of the Tamil Nation." In *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, edited by R. Cheran, 107-138. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009.
- Dagmar, Hellmann-Rajanayagam. "And Heroes Die: Poetry of Tamil Liberation Movement in Northern Sri Lanka." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 112-153.
- Daniel, E. Valentine. *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Darmini, "Sethevve Saakaathave Mattravaiyum Viduppu Paarthal." In *Saavukaana Pirbhalamaana Ur*, edited by Darmini, 31. Chennai: Karuppu Pirathigal, 2010.
- Darmini. "Adaiyala Attai." In *Savugalal Pirabalamana Oor*, edited by Darmini, 48. Chennai: Karuppu Piradhigal, 2010. Translated by Ramya B and Aparna Eswaran
- Darmini. "Adaiyala Suvadukal." In *Savugalal Pirabalamana Oor*, edited by Darmini, 5. Chennai: Karuppu Piradhigal, 2010.

- Darmini. "Ennaiyum Valarthanar." In *Saavukaana Pirbhalamaana Ur*, edited by Darmini, 31. Chennai: Karuppu Pirathigal, 2010.
- Darmini. "Veedu." In *Saavukaana Pirbhalamaana Ur*, edited by Darmini, 7. Chennai: Karuppu Pirathigal, 2010.
- Darmini. "Vilangugal." In *Savugalal Pirabalamana Ur*, edited by Darmini, 18. Chennai: Karuppu Piradhigal, 2010.
- Darmini 'Parakkum Koodarangal' In *Saavukaana Pirbhalamaana Ur*, edited by Darmini, 28. Chennai: Karuppu Pirathigal, 2010.
- Das, Veena. "The Act of Witnessing : Violence, Poisonous Knowledge, and Subjectivity." In *Violence and Subjectivity*, edited by Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and et.al., 205-225. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- de Alwis, Malathi. "Motherhood as a Space of Protest: Women's Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka." In Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and the Politicization of Religion in South Asia, edited by Amrita Basu & Patricia Jeffrey. London/NY: Routledge/Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997.
- de Alwis, Malathi . "Tracing Absent Presence: Political Community in the Wake of Atrocity." In *States of Trauma: Gender and Violence in South Asia*, edited by Parama Roy, Piya Chatterjee and Manali Desai. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2008.
- de Alwis, Malathi. "Gender, Politics and the 'Respectable Lady'." In *Unmaking the Nation*, edited by Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail. Colombo: Social Scientist's Association, 1995.
- de Alwis, Malathi. "Sexuality in the Field of Vision." In *Embodied Violence*, edited by Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis, 89-112. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996.
- de Mel, Neloufer. "Body Politics : (Re)cognising the Female Suicide Bomber in Sri Lanka." *Indian Journal of Gender Studies 11:1*, 2004: 75-93.
- de Mel, Neloufer. "Mourning Sri Lanka: The Writer as Witness." *Himal South Asian*, July 2008.
- de Mel, Neloufer. "The Cinematic Suicidal Body and its Politics: Review of Kalu Sudu Mal." In *Cinesith*, edited by Robert Crusz, 45-48. Colombo: Asian Film Centre, 2002.

- de Mel, Neloufer. *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict.* New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2007.
- de Mel, Neloufer. *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict.* New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2007
- de Mel, Neloufer. *Women and the Nation's Narrative : Gender and Nationalism in 20th century Sri Lanka.* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2001.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs.* Evanston: North Western University Press, 1973.
- De Shazer, Mary K. *A Poetics of Resistance: Women Writing in El Salvador, South Africa and the United States.* Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- de Silva, K.M. *A History of Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- de Silva, K. M. *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998.
- Djebar, Assia. *'Post face' in Women of Algiers in their Department.* Charlostteville: University of Virginia, 1992.
- Ebegan, Afan. "The Spirit of Agony: War Poetry from Biafra." *Research in African Literatures* 23, no. 4 (1992): 35-49.
- Eco, Umberto. *The Role of the Reader.* Bloomington: Indiana University, 1979.
- Enloe, Cynthia. *Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics.* Berkeley: University of Californai Press, 1989.
- Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Forché, Carolyn. "Reading the Living Archive: The Witness of Literary Art." *Poetry Magazine*, (2011).
- Forché, Carolyn. "Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness." *American Poetry Review* (1999): 17.
- Forché, Carolyn. “Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art.” *Poetry Magazine,* May 2, 2011. Accessed July 26, 2015. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/detail/69680.

- Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison, New York : Vintage Books, 1979.
- Freud, S. *Mourning and Melancholia. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 237-258, 1917.
- Fuglerud, Øivind. "Aesthetics of Martyrdom: The Celebration of Violent Death Among the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam." In *Violence Expressed. An Anthropological Approach*, edited by Nerina Weiss & Maria Six-Hohenbalken , 71-88. Ashgate: Kapittel, 2011.
- Fuglerud, Øivind. "Space and Movement in the Sri Lankan Conflict" in *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Policies, Ethics, and Politics* ed. Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks, Joke Schrijvers (NY: Berghahn Books, 2004), 42-53.
- Fuglerud, Øivind. *Life on the Outside:Tamil Diaspora and Long Distance Nationalism (*London*:* Pluto Press, 1999),177.
- Gana, Nouri. "War, Poetry,Mourning: Darwish, Adonis, Iraq." *Public Culture*, (2010): 33-65.
- Ganeshan, Sundar. "A Requim for the Jaffna Library." *Himal South Asian*, January 12, 2014. Accessed May 12, 2017. Himal magazine/requim-jaffna library/.
- Geetha V. *Life worlds: War, Desire and Labour in Contemporary Tamil Women's Writing*. Occasional paper 2. Centre for Advanced Study in Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, 2010
- Geetha, V. "Cultural Guerrilla Warfare in Tamil Eelam." *Journal of Eelam Studies*, 1989.
- George, Rosemary. *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and 20th century Fiction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Gnanamathi, Captain. "Samarpananam." In *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai: Tamizh Penkalin Kavithaiykal*, 03. Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedu, 2001.
- Gonsalves, Tahira. "Gender and Peacebuilding: A Sri Lankan Case Study." *Tamil Archives.* November 11, 2007. Accessed on August 17, 2014.

http://tamilhelp.wordpress.com/2007/11/28/gender-and-peacebuilding-a-srilankan-case-study-tahira-gonsalves/

- Greene, Gayle. "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory." *Signs* 16, No. 2 (1991): 290-321.
- Gubar, Susan. *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- Guha, Ranajit. "Discipline and Mobilize." In *Subaltern Studies VII*, by Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey, 72. New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Gunasekara, Tisaranee. "18 Years After Thileepan." *Asian Tribune.* September 18, 2005. Accessed December 14, 2014. http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2005/09/18/18-years-after-thileepan
- Gupta, Charu. "Representing Dalit Bodies in Colonial North India" Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Occasional Paper, History and Society New Series, 2013.
- Haniffa, Farzana. "Power Dressing: Choices of Attire Amongst Contemporary Urban Muslim Women." *Options*, No 31. 3rd Quarter 2002, Women and Media Collective, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- Haniffa, Farzana. "Under Cover: Reflections on the Practice of Hijab amongst Urban Muslim Women in Sri Lanka." *Gender, Society and Change*, Center for Women's Research, Colombo.
- Haniffa, Farzana. "Muslims in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict." *ISIM Review*, 1 9 (2007): 52-53.
- Haniffa*,* Farzana. *"*Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka." *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 42, No. 2/3, Islam in South Asia (Mar. - May, 2008): 347-375
- Haniffa, Farzana ."The Discourse on the Hijab: Transformations from the 1990s to Contemporary Times." Paper presented in Regional Center for Strategic Studies Conference on The Veil and Security Colombo, October, 2015.
- Harrison, Frances. "Dubbing Sri Lankan Conflict as 'War Without Witness' is Simply not True," *DBSJeyaraj Blog,* 17 May, 2011. Accessed February 28, 2014. http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/6482.

- Heine, Henrich. *Almansor: A Tragedy* (1823), trans. Graham Ward. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003.
- Hensman, Rohini. "A Tribute to Rajani Thiranagama." *EPW* Vol - XLIX No. 49 (December 2014): 4.
- Higonnet, Margaret. "The Great War and the Female Elegy: Female Lamentation and Silence in Global Contexts." *The Global South* 1, No. 2 (2007).
- Holmström, Lakshmi and Sascha Ebeling. "Introduction." In *Lost Evenings Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War*, edited by Lakshmi Holmström and Sascha Ebeling, 9. Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2016.
- Holmström, Lakshmi. "Changing Landscapes and Identities: An Introduction to Tamil Writing." *Words Without Borders*, April, 2015. Accessed November 11, 2015. http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/changing-landscapes-and-identities-an-introduction-to-tamil-writing.
- Holmström, Lakshmi; Subashree Krishnaswamy and K Srilata. "Introduction." In *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, edited by Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K Srilata , xxxiii. New Delhi: Viking by Penguin Books, 2009.
- Holmström, Lakshmi. "Introduction." In *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, edited by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Subhashree Krishnaswamy and SriLata K., xi-xxxviii. New Delhi: Viking/Penguin, 2009.
- Holst-Warhaft, Gail. *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature.* Routledge, 2002.
- Hopkinson, Amanda. *Lovers and Comrades: Women's Resistance Poetry from Central America.* Women's Press, 1989.
- Human Rights Watch. "Human Rights Watch World Report 2010: Sri Lanka , Events of 2009." Accessed, May 2017. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2010/country-chapters/sri-lanka
- Hyndman, Jennifer, and Malathi De Alwis. "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads: Violence, (im)mobility and Displacement in Sri Lanka." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography 11(4)*, 2004: 535-37.
- Ilaneetha. "Iruthesamaay Piranthaayittru." In *Peyal Manakkum Pozhuthu*, edited by A. Mangai, 51-52. Chennai: Maattru Publications, 2007.

- "In the Traditions of a Six Yard Cloth." *Lanka News Papers.* June 1, 2008. Accessed March 5, 2013. http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2008/6/28682_space.html

- Indira. “Untitled” In *Olikatha Ilavenil*, edited by Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan, 104. Chennai: Vadaly, 2009.

- Ismail, Qadri. "Boys will be Boys: Gender and National Agency in Franz Fanon and the LTTE." *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, no. 31-32 (1992): 1677-1679.

- Ismail, Qadri. "Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalism: The Southern Tamil (Woman) and Seperatist Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka." In *Subaltern Studies XI: Community, Gender and Violence*, by Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan, 212-282. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000.

- Ismail, Qadri. "Unmooring Identity." In *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, edited by Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, 55-105. Colombo: Social Scientist's Association, 1995.

- Ismail, Qadri. “Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalisms.” In *Community, Gender and Violence: Subaltern Studies XI*, edited by Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan, 223. New Delhi: Permanent Black and Ravi Dayal Publishers, 2000.

- Ismail, Zulfika. *Behind The Veil.* Toronto, November 29, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fICYNN42XS8; Retrieved on 6th Oct 2014.

- Jama, Zainab Mohamed. "Fighting to be Heard: Somali Women's Poetry." *African Languages and Cultures* 4, No. 1 (1991).

- Jayawardena, Kumari, and Malathi de Alwis. "The Contingent Politics of the Women's Movement in Sri Lanka after Independence." In *Women in Post-Independence Sri Lanka*, by Swarna Jayaweera, 245-280. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002.

- Jeganathan , Pradeep .“In the Ruins of Truth: The Work of Melancholia and Acts of Memory.” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (2010): 6-20.

- Jeganathan, Pradeep. "Check Points : Anthropology, Identity and State." In *Anthropology in the Margin of State*, edited by Veena Das and Poole Deborah. Oxford: School of American Press, 2004.

- Jeganathan, Pradeep. "On the Anticipation of Violence." In *Anthropology, Development and Modernities: Exploring Discourses, Counter Tendencies and*

Violence, edited by Alberto Arce and Norman Long, 111. London: Routledge, 2000.

- Jeganathan, Pradeep. "The Post national, Inhabitation and the Work of Melancholia." *EPW* 44, No. 1 (2009): 54-57.
- Jehan, Faheema "Aval Avalaaha." In *Aatit tuyar*, edited by Faheema Jehan, 86. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, 2010.
- Jehan, Faheema. "After Catastrophe." In *Time will Write a Song for You: Contemporary Tamil Writing from Sri Lanka*. edited by Kannan M et.al., 172. Pondicherry: Penguin Books India with French Institute of Pondicherry, 2014.
- Jepa . " Velikelil Thorkum Pinangal " In *Olikatha Ilavenil*, edited by Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan, 56. Chennai: Vadaly, 2009.
- Jeyaraj, D.B.S. "Rajini Rajasingham Thiranagama: Unforgettable Symbol of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tragedy." *dbsjeyaraj.* September 24, 2014. Accessed November 21, 2014. http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/33112
- Kanaganayakam, Chelva. "Configuring Spaces and Constructing Nations in Sri Lankan Tamil Literature." In *Pathways of Dissent*, edited by R. Cheran, 81-92. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009.
- Kanaganayakam, Chelva. "Introduction to Postcolonial Sri Lankan Tamil Poetry." In *Mirrored Images: An Anthology of Sri Lankan Poetry*, edited by Rajiva Wijesinha , 131. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2013.
- Kannabiran, Vasantha, and K Lalitha. "That Magic Time: Women in the Telengana People's Struggle." In *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, by Kumkum Sangari and Sudhesh Vaid, 180-203. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006.
- Kannan. M. "Introduction." In *Time will Write a Song for You: Contemporary Tamil Writing from Sri Lanka,* edited by Kannan M. Rebecca Whittington , D. Senthil Babu and David C Buck, xii. Gurgaon: Penguin Books, 2014.
- Kaplan, Ann E. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature.* New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005.
- Karupiah, Premalatha. Have Beauty Ideals Evolved? Reading of Beauty Ideals in Tamil Movies by Malaysian Indian Youths', Sociological Inquiry, Vol. 85, No. 2, May 2015, 239–261.

- Kumaran, Na. "Yaazin Avali: A Review of Lutesong and Lament - Tamil Writings from Sri Lanka." *Sangam.* March 03, 2001. Accessed June 10, 2015. 2012)http://www.sangam.org/BOOKS/Lutesong_12_03_2002.html.

- La Capra, D. " Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?" *History and Theory* 55 (2016): 375–400

- La Capra, Dominick.*History and Memory after Auschwitz*. Ithaca and London: University of Cornell Press, 1998.

- Lakshmi, C.S. "Bodies Called Women: Some Thoughts on Gender, Ethnicity and Nation," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32, No. 46 (Nov. 15-21, 1997): 2953-2962

- Lakshmi, C.S. "Mother, Mother-Community and Mother Politics in Tamil Nadu." *Economic and Political Weekly* XXV (1990): 42-43.

- Lalita K, Vasantha Kannabiran, Uma Maheshwari, Susie Tharu and Veena Shatrugna**.** *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telengana People Struggle. New Delhi:* Stree Shakti Sanghatana, Kali for Women, 1989.

- Langah, Nukhbah Taj. *Poetry as Resistance: Islam and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Pakistan.* Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2012.

- Lasantha Wickrematunge, "I Hope My Murder Will Be Seen Not As A Defeat Of Freedom But An Inspiration," *The Guardian,* January 13, 2009. Accessed March 12 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/jan/13/wickrematunga-final-editorial-final-editorial

- Latha. "Celeberating Rememberance." In *Waking is Another Dream*, by Ravikumar, 55. New Delhi: Navayana, 2010.

- Latha. "Forgetting Death ." In *Waking is Another Dream*, by Ravikumar, 57-58. New Delhi: Navayana, 2010.

- Latha. "Untitled." In *Waking is Anther Dream*, by Ravikumar, 50. New Delhi: Navayana, 2010.

- Laub, Dori. "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle." In *Trauma: Exploratios in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, 61-75. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

- Lawrence, Patricia. "Violence, Suffering, Amman : The Work of Oracles in Sri Lanka's Eastern War Zone." In *Violence and Subjectivity*, edited by Arthur Kleinman et.al. Veena Das, 171-204. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Lyon, David. *Identifying Citizens: ID Cards as Surveillance*. Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press, 2009.
- Mack, Beverly B. "'Metaphor is a Bridge to Ultimate Reality': Metaphor in Hausa Women's Poetry." *Research in African Literatures* 37, No. 2 (2006): 43-60.
- Majrouh, Sayed. *Songs of Love and War: Afghan Women's Poetry.* New York: Other Press, 2003.
- Maunaguru, Sidharthan. "Brides as Bridges? Movements, Actors, Documents and Anticipation in Constructing Tamilness." In *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanks*, edited by R. Cheran, 55-80. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009.
- Maunaguru, Sitralega. "Arimukham." In *Sollatha Seithigal*, edited by Sitralega Maunaguru. Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1986.
- Maunaguru, Sitralega. "Gendering Tamil Nationalism : The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control." In *Unmaking the Nation : The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, edited by Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, 158-175. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995.
- McGilvray, Dennis B. 1998. Arabs Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective. Contributions to Indian Sociology 32(2):433-483.
- McGilvray, Dennis B. *Tamil and Muslim Identities in the East*. Colombo: Marga Institute, 2001.
-
- Mdemeb, Achille. "African Modes of Self Writing." *Public Culture* 14, No. 1 (2002): 272.
- Menon, Ritu and Kamala Bhasin. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition.* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000.
- Menon, Ritu, and Kamala Bhasin. "Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour : Three Perpectives on the Recovery Operation in post-Partition India." In

Embodied Violence : Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia, editing by Malathi deAlwis and Kumari Jayawardena, 1-31. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996.

- Michael Roberts "Pragmatic Action and Enchanted Worlds: A Black Tiger Rite of Commemoration," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 73-102.
- Minow, Martha. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence. Boston:* Beacon Press, 1998.
- Milosz, Czeslaw. *The Witness of Poetry.* Harvard: the President and Fellows of Harvard College (The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures), 1983.
- Misri, Deepti. *Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence and Representation in Postcolonial India*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2015.
- Muhawi, Ibrahim. "Introduction." In *Memory for Forgetfulness*, by Mahmoud Darwish, xi-xxx. California: University of California Press, 1982.
- Murdolo, Adele. "Warmth and Unity with All Women? Historicizing Racism in the Australian Women's Movement." *Feminist Review* (1996):69.
- Nathini. "Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai." In *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai*, 02. Eezham: Captain Vanathi Veliyeeddakam, 2001. (Translated by Sornalatha Narayanan and Aparna Eswaran)
- Neloufer De Mel, "(Re)Cognising the Female Suicide Bomber in Sri Lanka." *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 2001: 79.
- Nila, "You – Night – Us," *Suthanthira Paravaikal* , Oct-Nov (2002)
- Nirosha, J. "Yeshuvukku Oru Madal (A Letter to Jesus)." In *Peyal Manakkum Pozhuthu*, edited by A. Mangai, 160-161. Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2007. (Translated by Sornalatha Narayanan and Aparna Eswaran)
- Nirupa. "Untitled." in *Peyal Manakkum Pozhudhu*, ed. Mangai A. (Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2007) 158-159. (Translated by Ramya B. and Aparna Eswaran)
- Nivedha . "Untitled ." in *Olikatha Ilavenil*, ed. Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 31. (Translated by Rahul Thangaraj and Aparna Eswaran)

- Nuhman, M.A. "Ethnic Conflict and Literary Perception: Tamil Poetry in Post-Colonial Sri Lanka." *Colombo Telegraph*, August 19, 2012. Accessed February 12, 2014. https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/ethnic-conflict-and-literary-perception-tamil-poetry-in-post-colonial-sri-lanka/.

- Nuhman, M.A. "They and You." In Mirrored Images: An Anthology of Sri Lankan Poetry, edited by Rajiva Wijesinha, 195. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2013.

- Partnoy, Alicia. "Textual Strategies to Resist Disappearance and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo." *Comparative Literature and Culture* 9, No. 1 (2007).

- Penniya and Sumathy Sivamohan. *The poems of Penniya: the Task of a Translator.* April 5, 2009. Accessed September 13, 2012. http://sahasamvada-forum.blogspot.in/2009/04/poetry-of-penniya-task-of-translator.html (accessed September 13, 2012).

- Perera-Rajasingham, Nimanthi. "The Politics of the Governed: Maternal Politics and Child Recruitment in the Eastern Provincee of Sri Lanka." In *Constellations of Violence: Feminist Interventions in South Asia*, edited by Radhika Coomaraswamy and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham, 121-148. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2008.

- Pfaffenberger, Bryan. "The Poilitical Construction of Defensive Nationalism : the 1968 Temple Entry Crisis in Northern Sri Lanka." *Journal of Asian Studies* 49, no. 1 (1990): 78-96.

- Prabhakaran. "Women's International Day Message." *Tamilnation.* March 8th, 1992. Accessed Oct 3, 2014. http://tamilnation.co/ltte/vp/women/vp9203.htm

- Prabhakaran. "Women's International Day Message." *Tamilnation.* March 8th, 1993. Accessed Oct 3, 2014. http://tamilnation.co/ltte/vp/women/vp9303.htm.

- Prabhakaran. "Women's Struggle in Thamil Eelam: The Volcanic Child of the Liberation Movement" *Tamilnation.* March 8th, 1996. Accessed Oct 3, 2014, http://tamilnation.co/ltte/vp/women/vp9603.htm.

- Puhar, Loonukalai Haseena. "Amma vanthuviden (Mother, Please Come)." In *Peyal Manakkum Pozhuthu*, by Mangai A., 260-261. Chennai: Maatru Publications, 2007.

- Puratshika, S. "Oyatha Alai Moontril" In *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil Eezha Penkalin Kavithai*, 64. Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001.

- Rahman, Najat. *Literary Disinheritance: The Writing of Home in the work of Mahmoud Darwish and Assia Djebar.* Lexington Books, 2008.
- Rajasingham-Senanayake, Darini. "Democracy and the Problem of Representation: the Making of Bi polar Ethnic Identity in Post colonial sri lanka." In *Ethnic Futures: The State and Identity Politics in asia*, edited by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, 209. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999.
- Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Scandal of the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- Ramaiyah, Aruljothy, "Identity, Let the Poems Speak, Suriya Women's Development Centre ed., Translation by Thava Sajitharan (Batticaloa: Suriya Women's Development Centre, 2010), 29. (Sourced from Malathi de Alwis, Laments from a Lacerated Terrain, Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies Vol 4, N0.2, 2013)
- Ranga, "Unmayilum Unmayaay," in *Sollatha Seithigal*, edited by Sitralega Maunaguru (Jaffna : Women's Study Circle, 1986), 32.
- Rassam, Amal and Lisa Worthington. "Mernissi, Fatima." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World,* edited by John L. Esposito. 2009.
- Ravikumar. "Apocalypse in Our Time ." In *Waking is Another Dream*, by Ravikumar, 9-21. New Delhi: Navayana, 2010.
- Rege, Sharmila. *Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women's Testimonios.* New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006.
- Rowland, Antony. *Poetry as Testimony: Witnessing and Memory in Twentieth-century Poems*. New York: Routledge, 2014), 176.
- Rudhramoorthy, Cheran . Living and Writing the War. New Delhi: Penguin, Forthcoming.
- Rudramoorthy, Cheran. *The Six Genres: Memory, History and the Tamil Diaspora Imagination.* Colombo: Marga Institute, 2001.
- Sabaratnam, Maitrayi. "Waiting." In *The Rapids of a Great River*, by Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K. Srilata, 160-162. New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2009.

- Sabaratnam, Maitrayi. "Waiting." In *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, by Subashree Krishnaswamy, K.Srilata Lakshmi Holmstrom, 160-161. New Delhi: Viking Publishers, 2009.
- Sanders, Mark. " Ambiguities of Mourning: Law, Custom, and Testimony of Women before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission" in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L Eng and David Kazanjian, (California: University of California Press, 2003) 77-98.
- Sankari, A. "Living and Dying." In *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, edited by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Subashree Krishnaswamy and Srilata K., 129. New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2009.
- Sankari. "Avarkal Parvayil." In *Sollatha Seithigal*, by Sitralega Maunaguru, 1. Jaffna : Women's Study Circle, 1986.
- Sankari. "Idaiveli." In *Sollatha Seithigal*, edited by Sitralega Maunaguru, 7-8. Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1986.
- Sankari. "Indru Naan Periya Ponn" In *Sollatha Seithigal*, edited by Sitralega Maunaguru, 2-3. Jaffna : Women's Study Circle, 1986.
- Sankari. "Viduthalai Vendinum." In *Sollatha Seithigal*, edited by Sitralega Maunaguru, 4-5. Jaffna : Women's Study Circle, 1986.
- Sanmarga. "Lament of a Mother." *New Democracy*, September 22, 2006.
- Saranya . " Unnathu Araiykul Enne Azhaiykaathe. " In *Olikatha Ilavenil*, edited by Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan,64 . Chennai: Vadaly, 2009.
- Saranya, " Oppari" In *Olikatha Ilavenil*, edited by Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan,63 . Chennai: Vadaly, 2009.
- Saranya, " Unnathu Araiykul Enne Azhaiykaathe " In *Olikatha Ilavenil*, edited by Tanya and Prateeba Thilainathan, (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 64.
- Sasanka Perera, "Spirit Possessions and Avenging Ghosts: Stories of Supernatural Activity as Narratives of Terror and Mechanisms of Coping and Remembering." In *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery,* ed. Veena Das et al. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 157-200.
- Schalk, Peter. "Birds of Independence: On the Participation of Tamil Women in Armed Struggle." *Studies in Lankan Culture* 7 (December 1992): 92-96.

- Schalk, Peter. “Malathi - First Woman Martyr”, *Tamil Nation,* 11 October 1996. Accessed on 13 March 2015. http://tamilnation.co/tamileelam/maveerar/malati.htm

- Schalk, Peter. "Birds of Independence: On the participation of Tamil women in Armed Struggle." *Studies in Lankan Culture* 7 (December 1992): 92-96.

- Schalk, Peter. "Revival of Martyr Cult among Ilavar." *Tamil Nation.* 1997. http://tamilnation.co/ideology/schalk04.htm (accessed May 19, 2014).

- Schrijvers, Joke. "The Marginalization of Peasant Woman in North Central Province of Sri Lanka." *Development and Change* 14, No. 2 (1988): 185-209.

- Schriver, Jennifer G. "Those Who die for Life Cannot be Called Dead: Women and Human Rights Protests in Latin America." *Feminist Review*, 1989: 3-29.

- Schweik, Susan. "Writing War Poetry Like a Woman." *Critical Inquiry* 13, no. 3 (1987): 532-556.

- Selvi. "Time that Won't Come Again." *Shakti*, (1990).

- Senanayake, Darini Rajasingham, “Buddhism and the Legitimation of Power: Democracy, Public Religion and Minorities in Sri Lanka.” ISAS Working Paper No. 99, November 26, 2009.

- Senthanal. "Yepothu Vidiyum En Iravu." In *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai: Tamizh Penkalin Kavithaiykal*, 10. Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedu, 2001.

- Seyhan, Azade. "Enduring Grief: Autobiography as 'Poetry of witness' in the work of Assia Djebar and Mazim Hikmet." *Comparative Literary Studies* 40, no. 2 (2003): 159-172.

- Seyyid, Sharmila. "Ethir Disayilaana Kaatru." In *Cirakku Mulaitta Penn*, edited by Sharmila Saeed, 15. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publication, 2012.

- Seyyid, Sharmila. "Vizhithu." In *Cirakku Mulaitta Penn*, edited by Sharmila Saeed, 31. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publication, 2012.

- Seyyid, Sharmila. “Adailyalam,” In *Ovva,* edited by Sharmila Seyyid (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 42.

- Seyyid, Sharmila. “Avalukana Anjsali,” In *Ovva,* edited by Sharmila Seyyid (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 55.

- Seyyid, Sharmila. "Hoorul Eengal," In *Ovva,* ed. Sharmila Seyyid (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 60.
- Seyyid, Sharmila. "Irunda Ottrai Niram," In *Ovva,* ed. Sharmila Seyyid (Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014), 52.
- Seyyid, Sharmila. "Keys to an Empty Home" In *Lost Evenings Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War*, edited by Lakshmi Holmström and Sascha Ebeling,143 . Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2016.
- Shoaib, Mahwash. "A Dictionary to Define My Dreams: The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetting in Kishwar Naheed's poetry." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3&4 (2011).
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing.* London: Virago, 1978.
- Silva, Neluka. *The Gendered Nation: Contemporary Writings from South Asia.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004.
- sivamohan, sumathy ."to kugamoorthy." In *like myth and mother,* edited by sumathy sivamohan (wattala: Sirahunni, 2008), 40.
- Sivamohan, Sumathy. "Displaced and Displaced: Fragile Fragments of Conversation." In *Arbiters of National Imaginary: Essays on Sri Lanka*, by Chelva Kanaganayakam. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2008.
- Sivamohan, Sumathy. "Groundviews." 03 22, 2009. Accessed March, 24 2013. http://groundviews.org/2009/03/22/three-poems-by-sivamohan-sumathy/
- Sivamohan, Sumathy "The Middle Passage: Migration and Displacement of Sri Lankan Tamil women of the Diaspora," *Socio-Legal Review*. 2010:3
- Sivamohan, Sumathy. "Territorial Claims, Home, Land and Movement: Women's History of Movement and Resistance." In *The Search for Justice: The Sri Lanka Papers,* edited by Kumari Jayawardena, Kishali Pinto-Jayawardena. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2016.
- Sivamohan, Sumathy. "The Rise of Militant Tamil Nationalism, Its Assumptions and the Cultural Production of Tamil Women." In *Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalization : Struggling to Create a New Social Order*, by S. H. Hasbullah and Barrie M. Morrison, 126-149. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004.

- Sivamohan, Sumathy. *The Poetry of Penniya: the task of the translator.* May 5, 2009. Accessed May 17, 2013. http://sahasamvada-forum.blogspot.in/2009/04/poetry-of-penniya-task-of-translator.html
- Sivaramani. "Our Liberation." *New Democracy*, May 2010: 1.
- Sivaramani, "My Lineage and I," In *Sivaramani Kavithaigal*, edited by Sitralega Maunaguru, Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1993.
- Sivaramani, "Vizhippu." In *Sivaramani Kavithaigal*, edited by Sitralega Maunaguru, 58. Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1993.
- Sivaramani. "I." *Bomb*, Summer (1992).
- Sivaramani. "Oppressed by Nights of War." In *The Rapids of a Great River*, edited by Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K.Srilata,185-186. New Delhi: Viking/Penguin, 2009.
- Sivaramani. "Untitled, In *The Rapids of a Great River*, edited by Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K.Srilata 186-187. New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2009.
- Sivaramani. "Untitled." In *Sivaramani Kavithaigal*, edited by Sitralega Maunaguru, 27-28. Jaffna: Women's Study Circle, 1993.
- Smith, Stan. *Poetry and Displacement.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007.
- Somasundaram, Daya. "Parallel governments: Living between Terror and Counter Terror in Northern Lanka (1982-2009)" *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 45 (5), (2010): 568-583.
- Sornarajah, Nanthini. "The Experiences of Tamil Women: Nationalism, Construction of Gender and Women's Political Agency." *Lines* 3, No. 1 (2004).
- Spencer, Jonathan. "On Not Becoming a Terrorist: Problems of Memory, Agency, and Community in the Sri Lankan Conflict," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, edited by Veena Das, 134. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Stack-O'Connor, Alisa "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds: How and Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Employs Women", *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol. 19 (2007): 43-63.

- Stone, Carol. "Elegy as Poltical Expression in Women's Poetry: Akhmatova, Leverton, Forche." *College Literature* 18, No. 1 (1991).
- Sudhamati. "In Scorched Earth, My Roots Shall Spread." In *Indian Literature; Tamil Woman's Poet: A Current of Contemporary Poetry*, edited by Kutti Revathi and Kalyana Raman, 52. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 2009.
- Subramaniam, Nirupama .“How enabled?”, *The Hindu*, Mar 10, 2002. accessed Feb 23 2015, http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2002/03/10/stories/2002031000010100.htm
- sumathy. "i seek, i seek." In *like myth and mother*, edited by sumathy sivamohan, 110. Colombo: Sirahunni, 2008.
- sumathy. "in the name of this soil, this land." In *like myth and mother*, edited by sumathy sivamohan, 106-108. Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya, 2008.
- sumathy. "we have come a long way." In *like myth and mother*, edited by sumathy, 114-115. Colombo: Sirahununi, 2008.
- Tanya. "Untitled." In *Olikaatha Ilavennil (Silent Spring)*, edited by Tanya and Pratheeba Thillainathan (Chennai: Vadaly, 2009), 144.
- Tawil-Souri, Helga, 2011, ‘Coloured Identity: The Politics and Materiality of ID Cards in Palestine/Israel’, *Social Text* 29 (2), 107: 67-97
- Thamilaval, “Vaiyakam Vaspedum” *Velichcham*, (2001).
- Thamizhaval. "Vaiyakame Kathiru." In *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil Eezha penkalin Kavithai*, 04. Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001.
- Thamizhkavi. “Vallavan Thunnaivi” In *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil Eezha Penkalin Kavithai*, 46. Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001.
- Thayanithy, Maithili. “Absence of Nostalgia in the writings of Immigrant women.” Paper presented at Traces of The Past - Seventh Annual Tamil Studies Conference, University of Toronto, May 11-12, 2012.
- Thilainathan, Prateeba. "Foreword: Unwritten Imaginations." In *Olikatha Ilavenil*, by Tanya and Pratheeba Thilainathan, 7-14. Chennai: Vadaly, 2009.

- Thiranagama, Rajani. "No More Tears Sister: The Experiences of Women." In *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka- An Inside Account*, edited by Rajan Hoole, 305-330. California : Claremont, 1990.

- Thiranagama, Sharika."In Praise of Traitors: Intimacy, Betrayal, and the Sri Lankan Tamil Community," In *Traitors: Suspicion, Intimacy, and the Ethics of State-Building*, edited by Thiranagama Sharika and Kelly Tobias, 127-49. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fj4qf.9.

- Thiranagama, Sharika. "Making Tigers from Tamils: Long Distance Nationalism and Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto," *American Anthropologist*, (2014): 271

- Thiranagama, Sharika. *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

- Thiruchandran, Selvy. *Feminine Speech Transmissions: An Exploration into the Dirges and Lullabies of Women.* New Delhi: Women's Education and Research Centre & Vikas Publishers, 2001.

- Seyyid, Sharmila. "Three Dreams" in *Lost Evenings, Lost Lives: Tamil Poems of the Sri Lankan Civil War* edited and translated by : Lakshmi Holmströmand Sascha Ebeling.UK: Arc Publications, 2016.

- Trawick, Margaret "Reasons for Violence: A Preliminary Ethnographic Account of the LTTE." In *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'?* edited by Siri Gamage and IB Watson, 151-157. New Delhi: Sage Publications 1999.

- Torab, Azam. 1996. Piety as Gendered Agency: A Study of Jalasen Ritual Discourse in an Urban Neighbourhood in Iran. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2(2):235-252.

- Torpey, J. (1998), "Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate 'Means of Movement'". *Sociological Theory*, 16: 239–259.

- Udaya Kumar, *Writing the First Person: Literature, History and Autobiography in Modern Kerala.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016.

- Urvashi. "Avarkalude Iravu." In *Innum veratha Seithi*, edited by Urvashi, 22. Chennai: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014.

- Urvashi. "Do you Understand?" In *The Rapids of a Great River*, edited by Lakshmi Holmström, Subashree Krishnaswamy and K.Srilata,146. New Delhi: Viking/Penguin, 2009.
- Urvashi. "Veli." In *Innum Veratha Seithi*, edited by Urvashi, 20-21. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2014.
- Urvashi. "Why we must wait." In *The Rapids of a Great River*, by Holstrom Lakshmi, Subashree Krishnaswany and K. Srilata, 148. New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2009.
- Urvashi, "Their Evening" *New Democracy* May 2010, Pg 32 https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/sri-lanka/new-democracy/ND37.pdf
- UTHR. "'Let them Speak: The Truth About Sri Lanka's Victims of War." Accessed 10 March 2015. http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/Special%20rep34/Special_Report_34%20Full.pdf
- UTHR, "Women Prisoners of the LTTE", Information Bulletin No.5, 8th March 1995, accessed on 15 October 2014, http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul5.htm.
- Vanathi, "Ezhuthatha En Kavithai." In *Ezhuthatha Un Kavithai*, 1. Eezham: Captain Vanathi Veliyeeddakam, 2001.
- Vannila. "Irul Vilahum" In *Ezhuthata Un Kavithai: Tamil Eezha Penkalin Kavithai*, 48. Eelam: Captain Vanathi Veliyeedakam, 2001.
- Vasquez, Edith. "Poetry as Survival of and Resistance to Genocide in Lorna Dee Cervante's Drive: The Last Quartret." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 10, no. 4 (2009): 290-300.
- Vasuki. "Women in Search of Dawn." *Shakti*, (1990).
- Vinothini, "Kennedy." In *Mukhamoodi Seypaval,* edited by Vinothini, 58-59. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2007.
- Vinothini, "Un Maranam Manathil Ezhuthiya Kavithai" In *Mukhamoodi Seypaval,* edited by Vinothini, 21-22. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Publications, 2007.
- Vinothini. "Adaiyalam." In *Mukhamood Seypaval*, edited by Vinothini, 24. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, 2007.

- Vinothini. "Tamizhan." In *Mukhammoodi Seypaval*, edited by Vinothini, 25. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, 2007.
- W.Adorno, Theodor. *Can One live after Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader.* California: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Walby, Sylvia. "Violence and Society: Introduction to an Emerging Field of Sociology." *Current Sociology*, 2013: 95-111.
- Weissbort, Daniel. *The Poetry of Survival: Post-War Poets of Eastern Europe.* Anvil Press Poetry, 1991.
- Werbner, Pnina. "Political Motherhood and the Feminisation of Citizenship: Women's Activism and the Transformation of the Public Sphere." In *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, edited by Nira Yuval-Davis and Pnina Werbner, 221-245. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2005.
- Wilson, A Jeyaratnam. *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism : Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* London: Hurst & Company, 2000.
- Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race.* London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Yudice, George. "Testimonio and Postmodernism." *Latin American Perspectives* 18 No .3 (1991): 15-31.
- Yuval -Davis, Nira, and Floya Anthias. "Introduction." In *Woman-Nation-State*, edited by Nira Yuval Davis, Floya Anthias and Jo Campling, 6-11. London: Macmillan, 1989.
- Zimmerman, Marc. "Testimonio." In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods, Volume 1*, edited by Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Alan E Bryman and Tim Futing Liao. London: SAGE, 2004.
- Zureik, Elia. “Strategies of Surveillance: The Israeli Gaze.” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 66 (2016):12.

GLOSSARY

- *Abhasamozhi* - Vulgar language
- *Abhisheka* - Milk anointed for gods
- *Accam*- Timidity
- *Adaiyalam*- Identity/ Identification mark
- *Akam*- Inner world (Poetic genre of classical Tamil poetry)
- *Arali*- Oleander flowers
- *Arppanippu*- Sacrifice
- *Athan*- Husband
- *Catci/sakshi*- Witness
- *Cumangali*- Auspicious woman who is married
- *Devadasis*- Temple dancers
- *Ellai*- Border
- *Hoorul Eengal*- Hooris of Heaven
- *Karppu/ Katpu*- Chastity
- *Kathirippu*- Waiting
- *Kavithai*- Poem
- *Kumarathi*- Girl
- *Kuppi*- Cyanide vials
- *Madal*- Letter
- *Madam*- Innocence
- *Malaiyaha/Malaiyaka* - Hill Country
- *Maram*- bravery
- *Mavirar*- Great Hero
- *Mukhammoodi*- Mask
- *Mukkatti*- Veil
- *Murungai*- Drumstick tree
- *Nagarika mozhi*- Civilized language
- *Nanam*- Bashfulness
- *Ninaivvucinnam*- Tokens of commemoration
- *Oppari*- Lament
- *Paathalam*- Netherworld
- *Parathaimai*- Prostitution
- *Payirppu*- Behavior upholding chastity

- *Pokiren*- Leaving
- *Pottu*- Hindu ornamental mark on the forehead for women
- *Puli pattukal*- Songs of the Tamil Tigers
- *Puram*- Outer world (Poetic genre of classical Tamil poetry)
- *Puthalvarkal*- Sons
- *Suthanthira Paraivagal*- Birds of Freedom
- *Tamil Eelam*- Tamil homeland
- *Thalaivar*- Leader
- *Thamil Thai*- Tamil mother
- *Thatkodai*- Giving one's self
- *Thatkolai*- Suicide
- *Thotta kadan*- plantation brute
- *Thuppaki*- Gun
- *Tiyakam*- Abandonment
- *Tiyaki*- Martyr
- Trohi – Traitor
- *Tutu ilakiyam*- Epistolary literature
- *Tuyilum Ilam*- Sleeping abode
- *Ur*- Natal village
- *Veedu*- Home
- *Veeramaranam*- Brave Death
- *Veerathayar*- Brave Mother
- *Veli*- Fence
- *Veshti*- Lungi
- *Viduthalai*- Liberation
- *Vilankukal*- Fetters
- *Virar*- Heroes
- *Vithaithal*- Sowing
- *Yalpanam*- Jaffna

NOTE ON THE POETS

Aazhiyaal (1968-) is a Sri Lankan poet now living in Australia. She hails from Trincomalee. She has a degree in English Literature from Madurai University. She has published collections titled *Uraiythu Pesu* (2000), *Dhuvidham* (2006) and *Karunaavu* (2013)

Anar is the pen name of Issath Rehana Azeem. She has been writing poetry in Tamil since the 1990s. Her works include *Oviam Varaiyathe Thurikai*, *Enakkuk Kavithai Mukam*, *Perunkadal Podukiren*, *Utal Paccai Vaanam* and *Potupotuhtha Mazhaiththoothal* (a collection of Tamil folk songs from Sri Lanka). Several of her poems have been translated into English and have appeared in journals that include Beyond borders – the SAARC journal (2008) , Talisman - a journal of contemporary poetry and poetics (2010) and Tamil woman's poetry: A current of contemporary voices (2009, Sahitya Akademi).Her books have won several awards, most notably the Government of Sri Lanka's National Literature Award , the Tamil Literary Garden's (Canada) Poetry Award and the Vijay TV Excellence in the Field of Literature (Sigaram Thotta Pengal) Award. Anar writes regularly on her blog, anarsrilanka.blogspot.com. She lives with her husband and son in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka at Sainthamaruthu.

Avvai (1964-) hails from a distinguished lineage of poets; both her father Mahakavi, and brother Cheran are well known poets from Sri Lanka. She belonged to the younger women poets who came into prominence in the 1980s. Her anthologies include *Ellai Kadattal* (2010*), Ethai Ninaith Ezhuvathum Saadhyam Illai* (2014).

Bhanu Bharathy is an ex-combatant poet who was forced into exile in the latter half of the year 1990. She has written vociferously, in an effort to chronicle the time of the war and as well as the period of her exile after 1991. Her poems along with letter she wrote to her friend are compiled in the collection *Pirathiya*l which was brought by Karuppu Pirathigal.

Darmini is a poet from an island within the island of Sri Lanka, Allaippitti, now living in Exile in France. She writes in websites like www.thoomai.wordpress.com and www.ehir.org. She has complied published almost all of her poems written during her stay in Sri Lanka and in exile in her book of poems titled *'Saavugalal Pirabalamana Oor'* in 2010.

Faheema Jehan (1973-) is a mathematics teacher hailing from Melsiripuram in Kurangal district, North-western Sri Lanka. She has published three collections of poems including Aparathi, and *Aathi Tuyar*.

Jepa is one of the editors in the magazine Exil which comes out from France. She resides in Canada and writes both poetry and plays.

Maitrayi Sabaratnam (1960-) was born in Karampon, Jaffna district, Sri Lanka. She began writing poems in the 1980s, inspired by the Tamil liberation struggle, and later, by the women's movement. Because of the civil war she left for Norway in 1985, where she received a PhD from Norwegian University of Science and Technology. She currently lives in Norway and works as a software professional.

Nivedha is the penname of Yazhini, a poet residing in Colombo while also pursuing her studies in Canada. She writes in the blog http://rekupthi.blogspot.com.

Penniya is the penname of M. I. Najeefa. She hails from Kathankudy, a Muslim town in the East. Her collection of poems is titled *En Kavithaiku Ethirthal Endru Per.*

Sankari is the pen-name of Sitralega Maunaguru who is a well known poet, critic, feminist and activist and a crucial figure in the women's movement in Sri Lanka since the late 1970s. She compiled and wrote the foreword to the pathbreaking collection '*Sollatha Seithigal*' in 1986 and has been active in organizations like *Poorani* which provided shelter and support to women affected by the conflict. She is currently a professor of Tamil at the Eastern University in Batticalao.

Saranya writes from the year 2000, but is not published widely. Her poems are included in the anthology *Olikatha Ilavenil*.

Selvi was a Tamil poet from Jaffna in Sri Lanka. A third-year student in Theatre and Drama Arts in the University of Jaffna, She founded the feminist journal called *Thozhi*. Selvi also produced two plays, one about dowry payments and the other about rapes. She won the International PEN award in 1992.

Sharmila Seyyid is a journalist, poet, writer and activist from Eravur, in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province. Since 2001, Sharmila has been working as a journalist and a writer and as an activist for women in the Batticaloa District since 2006. In 2009, she founded the Organization for Social Development, a community-based organization in Eravur. She has been working closely with the minority women in the East, for the last three years, following the war. Her interest includes printing, writing and media collaboration about women, child issues, humanitarian issues, youth activism, women rights and gender. Sharmila is the author of a poetry collection called *Siragu Mulaitha Pen*. She received two awards for her contributions to literature: the Tamil Nadu Progressive Writer and artists association presented Master Gorkki Memorial Award for Poetry Literature and the Tamiliyal Award presented by the Writers Motivation Centre. *Ummath* is her latest book.

Sivaramani (1968-91) was a well known poet even as she was a student at the University of Jaffna. She committed suicide in 1991 after burning all her poems. Her remaining work was collected and published by the Women's Study Circle, Jaffna in 1993 with an introduction by Sitralega Maunaguru.

Sumathy Sivamohan is a versatile artist who is an acclaimed poet as well as film maker who teaches in the English Department of University of Peradeniya.

Tanya resides in Canada and writes about the issues which Canadian refugees face. She is one of the editors of *Attram* magazine which came out of Toronto University.

Urvasi (1956-) is the penname of Juvaneswari Arutpragasam, is from the Karukampanai village in Jaffna. Starting writing from the late 1970s, her short story had first appeared in the magazine of the Mahajana Higher Secondary School. She holds a degree in science and mathematics from the University of Jaffna and is currently a lecturer in the

college of Education in Batticaloa. In the period 1982-1985, her poems appeared in literary magazines like *Puthusu*, *Alai* and *Shakti*. She came into prominence in the 1980s and her poetry was featured in anthologies like *Sollatha Seithigal*, *Maranuthul Vazhvom*, Lutesong and Lament, The Rapids of A Great River etc.

Vinothini Sachidanandan (1969-) hails from Thellippalai, Jaffna and started writing in the 1980s, both in English and Tamil. Her collection of poems is titled *Mukhamoodi Seypaval*. She is currently residing in the USA.

Zulfika Ismail is currently working as a Counsellor at the Vasantham Tamil Seniors Wellness Centre. She completed her doctorate in Psychosocial Wellbeing and Education in post-disaster scenarios at the University of New England, Australia. She has been actively involved in community level peace activism in Sri Lanka and social development projects. She has extensive experience in working with different ethno-cultural groups. As a writer, poet and researcher she has published many articles and books and done numerous presentations nationally and internationally. She is one of the executive directors of Muslim Women Research and Action Forum in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Kasturi, **Thamilaval**, **Nila**, **Puratshika**, **Captain Janaarthini**, **Captain Gnanamathi**, **Captain Vanathy**, **Senthanal**, **Nathini**, **Sudhamathi** were combatants and part of LTTE.