

# **Tamil Tiger Women Writing**

*Translated by N Malathy*

## Contents

Tamil Tiger Women Writing .....	1
Introduction .....	3
I will wait ... ..	7
Koolam.....	8
My pen...! .....	9
My unwritten poem... ..	11
Oh Freedom.....	13
Oh the UN ... ..	14
Rise up for the new dawn.....	16
We want beautiful minds .....	17
The world is yours.....	19
Whisper in their ears .....	21
You – Night – Us .....	22
A cup of tea .....	23
Channel-4 .....	28
Fire within .....	33
How far would you go?.....	45
My doors are open.....	49
New stories for our times .....	51
Paakkiam amma .....	59
What price .....	73
Search for the Tiger’s tail.....	82
Into public space .....	88
Stats .....	94
Bibliography.....	97

## Introduction

Women have partaken in large numbers in various armed struggles around the world for about 40-50 years. Invariably women have joined these armed struggles a few years after the armed group had been formed and the struggle had been waged by the males. Women's emancipation is often promoted by such groups. One reason, of course, is to increase female recruits which some emphasise is the main reason. They also insist that whatever women gain during such participation in the armed struggle is gradually lost once the armed struggle comes to end, even if it is a successful end. In the case of the Tamil Tiger armed movement the end is alleged to be genocide; thus the gains that were made by women is lost forever. That is how most people would perceive this end. Does it have to be lost?

The overarching Tamil narrative on the Tamil Tiger women is military focused. Masked by this military focused Tamil Tiger narrative is a narrative on women empowerment. This narrative was strongest within the Tamil Tiger movement compared to what existed before and what exists now in the Eelam Tamil society. It is also important to acknowledge that it will take several decades, if at all, to achieve what was achieved with respect to women within the Tamil Tiger run Tamil Eelam defacto-state which is now destroyed. This alone is a good reason to draw out from the writings of Tamil Tiger women that what is relevant to contemporary times. This is the aim of this work.

A selected writings in the form of poetry and short story that are inspirational for contemporary women are included here. All the poetry appear first followed by the short stories. This selection is deemed to convey five major themes which when internalised by women can be inspirational for social justice struggles. These five themes convey narratives on: 1) the feats of the women and the price they paid; 2) the hurdles they acknowledge in their struggle; 3) the positive societal outcomes of their struggle; 4) the fire within which took them to those heights and above all 5) the call to rise up for social justice struggles.

Kasthoori's poem "Oh Freedom" and the Malaimahal's story, "What price" convey the pride in achievements and the price they paid. Kasthoori laments the high price paid by Eelam Tamils and how it has gone so cheap elsewhere. Malaimahal also underscores the huge price they have paid in the struggle.

Three poems, "Oh the UN", "My pen", "You-night-us" and the story "My doors are open" all speak of the different hurdles Eelam Tamil women face. Barathy identifies the UN and compares it to both a hen trying its best to protect vultures and an ostrich hiding behind catch phrases. Vaanathi in her poem "My pen" challenges those who again use empty words to decry the struggle for social justice. Nila's poem "You-night-us" takes on male chauvnism, be it very mildly. Malaimahal in her story, "My doors are open" is more forthright in challenging historical as well as contemporary male chauvnism.

The positive achievements of these women are expressed mainly through the short stories they have penned. In the

stories of Malaimahal as well as the two stories by Ampuli and Vettichchelvi one can sense the free and joyful interactions of women on battle fields. Vettichchelvi probably unintentionally shows how this has permeated the Vanni civilian women even post-2009.

Ampuli's "Fire within" attempts to tell the readers the burning desire of pooralis to win freedom and also reiterates the huge price they are paying for it. Kasthoori's "Paakiam amma" also brings to us the fire that was burning even within civilian women like Paakiam.

Finally many of the poems is a call to rise up for that freedom. There is a legend popular in the Vanni about a woman named Ariyaaththai who tamed an elephant that all the men failed to tame. Ariyaaththai was found dead the day after her feat. Her story is cited even today as a source for inspiration. Her feat, the price she paid and her name still used to kindle fire within. Even more impressive than Ariyaaththai's story are these selected writings of the Tamil Tiger women convey.

At the end of this anthology additional translated writings of Tamil Tiger women relating strictly war time emotions are also included. These include a few more poetry and two more short stories. Also included are three excerpts from the history document, "Viluthaaki Veerumaaki", about the largest women's military regiment of the Tamil Tigers – Malathi Regiment.

Three further sections at the end are written by the translator of the anthology. The first of these sections describe the historical process through which Eelam Tamil women entered the public space leading to their participation in the armed struggle. The second section is statistical data on the Eelam Tamil women who carried arms. The last section is a comprehensive bibliography of works by Eelam Tamil women who either carried arms or who have worked closely with them.

The following Tamil words are used in this text:

- Maaveerar(s)* -refers to Tamil Tiger member(s) killed in battle; means Great Hero.
- Pooraali(s)* -Refers to living Tamil Tiger member(s), meaning warrior or fighter for justice;

## I will wait ...

*by Samarvili (“Kaaththiruppu” in “Velichcham” Pearl Issue marking 25 years of publication, 2001. Note: Kin in this poem refers to fellow comrades.)*

Midnight...

Vultures surrounded the village.

Dozing villagers sacrificed to demon.

My eyes blinded in anger.

A silent war within me.

Have I not been called a terrorist?

Do I not have Tamil Eelam blood?

I joined the list of the disappeared.

My name in hand-cuff

Together with our departed kin

I will wait for the freedom .

## Koolam

*by Ko. Si Kalaikkathir (“Koolam” in “Velicham” Pearl Issue marking 25 years of publication, 2001. Note: Koolam is the design women make every morning on the ground in front of their homes with flour)*

Amma handed the tradition of making koolam.  
She loved watching amma making koolam.  
As she got older , when she felt shy  
She made koolam with her big toe.  
When time came for her to make koolam  
There were termite mounds in her yard.

Her hands picked up the spade and  
There are no more termite mounds.  
Her blood had made koolam in her yard.  
An enduring koolam that will not be erased.



## My pen...!

*by Vaanathi ("Enathu peenaa" in "Vaanathiyin Kavithaikal",  
LTTE Publication Division, 1992)*

My pen is sharp like the gun in my hand.  
My gun spits only bullets.  
My pen will spit everything.

My poems are disallowed in competitions  
But where our feelings are disrespected  
My pen will enter without permission.

My poems rejoice not the flatter  
Since it had received the top adulation.

My pen will challenge any expert  
My pen has emotions that are alive.

An appeal to those pens that deride our feelings  
Reveal your identity so my pen can rip your mask.

My pen is sharp like the gun in my hand,  
My gun only aims at the enemy but  
My pen will aim at everything.

My pen's thoughts of past  
Are the events of the present.  
My pen's thoughts of present  
Are the events of the future.

Do you not understand?  
Do you not understand my poetry?

This is not a victory for me  
This is not a victory for my poem  
These are victories of my pen.

My hands may rest or be destroyed  
My pen will never rest just like our guns.  
My pen is sharper than the guns in my hand.

## My unwritten poem...

*by Vaanathi (“Eluthaatha en kavithai” in “Vaanathiyin Kavithaikal”, LTTE Publication Division, 1992)*

*(This was Vaanathi’s last poem written just before she was killed in the attack on the Elephant Pass on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1991.)*

Write my unwritten poem  
That is my plea to you.

So many thoughts...  
But I cannot come since  
My gun is at the boarder  
So write my unwritten poem  
That is my plea to you.

Behind my fuming gun  
My body may be crushed  
My emotions will remain  
Making you reflect, then  
Write my unwritten poem  
That is my plea to you.

Memorials may rise in our name  
In our liberated land,  
Not for you to cry over  
Nor for flowers and incense.  
It is to strengthen your resolve.

So...

Write my unwritten poem  
That is my plea to you.

In my purposeful death  
In the Tamil Eelam that rises  
You will roam for certain.

Then...

My unwritten poem  
Will stand before you.

Those...

Who knew me  
Who understood me  
Who embraced me  
Who loved me  
Look within my unwritten poem.

There...

You will find all the *maaveerar*  
Smiling at you.

## Oh Freedom...

*by Kasthoori (“Suthanthiramee” in “Kasthooriyin Aakkangkal”, LTTE Publication Division, 1992)*

We wanted to walk  
Holding your hands  
Ever present death  
Has become cheap  
Your price keeps going up  
Elsewhere you go cheap  
We paid by heaps – but  
We only get bullets

To the bullets we say  
You cannot swallow freedom  
You cannot put out that fire – so  
Leave the brave souls  
And surrender to the  
Enemies of humanity

## Oh the UN ...

*by Barathy (“Ainaa sapaiyee” in “Kaathoodu Sollividu”,  
Publication Section – LTTE Women’s Division, 1993)*

The tall buildings of UN  
Stands strong and high  
On the strength of human bones  
Its colourful flags flutter – like  
Countless lives it swallowed

You talk betterment of life  
But look down under the red carpet  
Human bodies wriggle like worms  
Portends your blinded eyes to open

Hen protects its young  
But you protect the vultures  
Bloated with lives of the poor  
The vultures belly peaks out  
Unable to hide under your wings

Like an ostrich hiding its head  
You hide behind ” world peace”  
Your face is not visible  
But your body is so naked.

You claim the right to declare  
The rights of all humans  
Our people, our rights, we declare

When our strength grows – with  
Our skill and dedication  
You will come to set things “right”  
We will then teach you  
Our experience of freedom

## Rise up for the new dawn

*by Barathy (“Vidivitkaai eluvoom” in “Kaathoodu Sollividu”,  
Publication Section – LTTE Women’s Division, 1993)*

Early dawn awaits round the corner  
Bird songs welcome the new dawn  
Trees come alive shaking off dew  
Dry bushes too look afresh  
Sound of explosions nearby  
Bombs eager to embrace us.

Comrade next to me – her hand  
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.

The land is silent  
Grieving for her young daughter  
Crushed trees, wingless birds  
And the burning bushes  
Stand up straight with their injuries  
Their marks of freedom struggle.

On the soil muddied by blood  
Our feet speed towards the goal  
Memory filled eyes await  
The next dawn.



## **We want beautiful minds**

*by Ampuli (“Alagiya manakal vendum” in “Erimalai” issue of June 2004)*

We want minds more than people  
Because we know the power of minds.  
What cannot be achieved  
By training or numeric strength  
The power of the mind has.

In our time we have seen many,  
Whom we thought would  
Shrink away limbless and armless,  
Spread their wings with power of mind.  
Therefore, we want such beautiful minds.

More than a luscious green garden  
More than the stream that runs through  
More than the rainbow in the sky  
More than a beautiful face  
We want those beautiful minds.

To nurture empathy  
To sculptor the nation  
To strip the falsity  
To bury the differences  
We want beautiful minds.

Drilled by bombs  
Shattered to pieces  
Overgrown with weeds  
Burnt into empty spaces  
Filled with headless trees  
To beautify this homeland  
We want such beautiful minds.

## The world is yours...

*by Thamilaval (“Vaiyakam Vasappadum...” in “Velichcham”  
Issue marking 25 years of publication, 2001)*

Living stretches, empty and long  
Kitchen smoke, taste of food  
And the man's welfare - these  
Determines or is it cursed as living.

The competence to send roots  
To seek water in the rocks is wasted  
As sandy surface roots of  
Skyward looking colourful plants

Woman;  
All that competence to achieve  
Why this tragedy? whose deception?  
Asphyxiating masks of  
Daughter, wife and mother,  
The longings to throw the masks  
Supressed into the unconscious.  
Enough is enough - these staged façade  
It is not wrong for woman to be woman.

Be not satisfied with the breeze  
That comes through the window.  
Learn the feat of breaking the lock.  
Open the door and possess all.

Thinking freely and loving freedom  
These are not crimes to fear.  
Think yourself, love yourself.  
The world should be yours.

## Whisper in their ears

*by Barathy (“Kaathoodu sollividu” in “Kaathoodu Sollividu”, Publication Section – LTTE Women’s Division, 1993. Note: This poem is about the black tigers of the movement)*

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  
When you touch the shores  
Whisper in the ears of our people  
When freedom is won they will be back.

## You - Night - Us

*by Nila ("Neenkalum Iravum Naankalum" in "Suthanthira Paravaikal" Issue, Oct-Nov 2002)*

Your hands would stretch to stop us speeding.  
"Can we come too brother?" you would say.  
We would speed without words.

If we had forgotten to dim the lights  
You would scold in the gendered tone.  
A sad smile would come over us.

Oh brothers, we are your sisters.  
We fired artilleries non-stop  
From stationary launchers.  
Then we drove moving launchers  
Chasing the escaping enemies.  
How then do you decide that  
All who drive at night are males?  
Throw away your foolish assumptions  
And observe the coming changes.

Tomorrow your big sister may drive a Hiace van.  
Your little sister may pilot a plane.  
Your niece may become the naval commander.  
Your daughter may drive the heavy vehicles  
To renovate the Tamil Eelam roads.  
Hope you would live to see your granddaughter  
Roll along this struggling world with one hand.

## A cup of tea

by Malaimahal

*(“Oru kooppai theeniir” in “Velichcham” issue of Dec 1999, republished in “Malaimahal Kathaikal”, Capt Vaanathi Publishers-LTTE Women’s Division. Note: Pittu is a carbohydrate food made of flour.)*

Pittu and curry for breakfast, rice and curry for lunch, pittu and curry for dinner. That is ok. Then pittu and curry for breakfast, rice and curry for lunch and dinner. That is also not too bad. A few days later, rice and curry for all three meals. That too, rice and eggplant curry for breakfast, eggplant curry and rice for lunch, and rice and eggplant curry for dinner. The dinner and lunch meals delivered together. A few more days later, rice water for breakfast, eggplant curry and rice for lunch and dinner.

Cursing those who grew eggplant we swallowed our food. Our taste buds were given compulsory rest. Having reached a detached state with respect to food, we were gratified with one cup of tea. Our attention was focused on the military in front.

“It is because of you we are in this situation. Wait a while. We will also return to our old state because of you.”, we groaned to ourselves. Anger swelling within we immersed in our duties.

Because of our friendship with eggplant curry, the food parcels hung on the tree branches above us. If we look up, it brings

anger and sadness. Sadness because we could not bring ourselves to throw the food while our people were starving without even one meal a day. We did not have the heart to bury all that food. Our stomachs could not let go of it either.

While looking up at the food parcel a bright idea occurred. Is it not how Isaac Newton also had a bright idea. He looked at the falling apple and discovered gravity. We are like that too.

Once a bright idea is hatched, the next step is to put it into action. We took the cleanest of the bags that were given to us to strengthen our security posts as sandbags. We washed the bag clean and spread it under the sun. We spread the cooked rice on it and allowed it to dry. We roasted this in the pot we use to make tea and crushed it into finer bits in the same pot. We did the same to the pittu that arrived on rare occasions.

If we put a handful of it in the mouth. The crunchy rice tasted delicious. The evening snack is now ready. What evening snack? Whenever we felt hungry a handful of this and a cup of tea will fill our stomachs.

We did not waste even a single grain of the cooked rice. The plan to convert left over rice into snack was implemented across all our security posts at the frontline. With the energy obtained from a plate of this rice powder and a cup tea, one can dig a one and a half feet trench in one hour. It does not matter if those in Colombo embargoed food coming to us. We had created the situation where we will not be affected by these embargoes.



As the food shortages worsened outside, the sugar ration was reduced. We could not have tea with sugar. We started licking the sugar while we drank the tea, when this was also difficult we mixed the rice powder with sugar and licked that while we drank tea. The rice powder which started as an accompaniment for tea became one of its raw material.

During different seasons of forest fruits, we made fruit syrups with these fruits and drank our favourite tea with this. With the highs we got with the cups of tea and the strength we got from rice water and eggplant curry we focused on our duties.

The people of the civilian based border unit that took over some of the security posts nearby were shocked to see the type of food we were living on.

“Children! is this the food you eat and fight like this?”, they were aghast. They shared with us the toffees they had brought with them to eat in between meals. We thanked them and put the toffees in our pant pockets. We did this once or twice. They must have been intrigued by our action. They could not resist asking.

“Why are you putting it in the pocket. Eat it now. We will give more to take it to your people.” We could not stop laughing.

“We drink our tea with this because we do not have any sugar”, we told them.

“How can you drink a cup of tea with four or five tiny toffees. How many toffees do you need to drink a cup of tea?” they asked.

They were dumbfounded by our reply, “We can drink tea four or five times with one toffee”.

The thought of the many girls out of their sights, facing hardships and fighting at the frontline, like these girls here, must have moved them. They handed over to us all the sweets, snacks and biscuits they had brought with them and said with tears in their eyes,

“We are here just for a week. When we get back home we can eat. You must eat these things”.

For a few days it was lucky stars for us. With different varieties of snacks our tea time was like a festival.

Implementing our leader’s plans our teams kept moving forward, Oddusuddan, Nedunkerni, Karippaddamurippu, Olumadu, Mankulam, Kanakarayankulam... All along where the enemy had vacated, there were what he had left behind: footwear, raincoats, belts, cheese tins, packaged date cakes, burnt curries on the stoves, plates on the table served with high quality food items, fridge stacked with green vegetables, skinned chickens, pricy liquor, fizzy drinks....

We followed chasing the enemy. We drank the fizzy drinks and washed our face with it. We took a mouthful of the food on the

plates, we ran behind the enemy not having the time to wash our hands.

The rice water drinking Tigers chased. The lions fed on cheese and meat ran – drove away in their vehicles leaving everything behind all the way back to Omanthai.

## Channel-4

*by Vettichchielvi ("Chanal 4" in "Kaanaamal Poonavanin Manaivi" short story collection, Chozhan Padaippagam, 2012, India )*

Muhuntha had no inclination to watch the Channel-4 documentary. Are there going to be anything in it that she does not know already, that she has not seen or that she has not heard about. Though three years had passed after claiming that the war is over, the scenes of death she had seen have stayed on. They are permanently registered in the brain to torment the souls forever, even after death. She wanted to forget. At least for a few days she would like to experience a restfulness. That is what she wants but can she?

Nimalan's voice sounds agitated and demanding on the phone, "I know you don't like to watch these things, Muhuntha. But please see it once. Our Aruna's brother is there. Please watch it once for Aruna's sake."

Aruna, their friend, is one of five children to her parents. Maran is her only brother and he had joined the movement. He was among those considered "disappeared" at the end of the war. Has he now "displaced" with those who are "dead". Will Maran's family bear this truth? No it won't. That family survives by praying daily for his existence if not for his return to the family. They have faith that he is alive somewhere. It is such faith that helps these families deal with grief.

Muhuntha gave up her stubborn refusal to watch the Channel-4 documentary. She put her shoulder bag on and ran to the nearby internet shop. She tapped on the keyboard and the Channel-4 scenes played before her eyes. The same smell of blood pierced her nose. Pain pricked her heart like a thousand thorns. The scenes she resisted to even think about was presenting itself in front of her eyes. She put her head in her hands and began searching for Maran.

There Maran! Yes, it is Maran. Brother of her dearest friend Aruna. The video scenes were announcing that Maran was not only dead but also how he was killed.

Muhuntha quickly closed the page showing the video. She felt dizzy. She sat down again and put her head in her hands. Her heart ran to Aruna. It cried with Aruna on Aruna's shoulders. It consoled Aruna's mother. Her heart made everyone in that family's village to come to the family's home to cry for Maran. It made the family serve a meal to the village to end the grieving period. Her heart told Maran's mother the confirmation of his death and pleaded with her to stop the search.

Muhuntha got up, paid at the counter and came out.

She called Nimalan, "It is Maran."

"See I told you. He looks just like Aruna. That is how I guessed. Muhuntha, how are you going to tell this to Aruna?"

“I have to tell her. I am going to their place straightaway. I will talk to you later.”

“Ok. If I could, I would come too.” Nimalan who was made a quadriplegic in the war shows concern for everyone else as if he has channeled all the lost feelings in his body to his heart.

“Yes, I know. Talk to you later”, said Muhuntha

Muhuntha came home, stuffed a change of clothes in her bag. “I am going to Maran’s house. I will come back only tomorrow”, she told her cousin. There was no response from her cousin. Muhuntha knows that her cousin will be grumbling, but she was in no mood to be concerned about it. Muhuntha, having lost all her family in the war has sought shelter with her cousin.

Muhuntha hurried to the road and caught the bus to Kilinochchi. Perspiration on her forehead was running down the side of her face. She wiped it off with the back of her hands and tried to keep calm.

After traveling for a few hours she got off at the Kilinochchi bus stand. She caught a three-wheeler and arrived at Maran’s house. People there were delighted to see her and the welcome was warm.

“Why didn’t you call before coming”, scolded Aruna holding Muhuntha’s hand. She playfully punched Muhuntha’s shoulder

with her other fist. Muhuntha gave a shout that brought Aruna's mother from the kitchen.

"Welcome child. How come you have come without informing" said Aruna's mother giving Muhuntha a kiss.

"I felt like it so I came. Should I not come without informing?", Muhuntha tried to smile, controlling her tears.

"What is the matter? Did you have a fight with your cousin?" Aruna's query made Muhuntha angry.

"Will you be quiet" said irritated Muhuntha.

Aruna's mother also joined in querying Muhuntha's situation. Muhuntha controlled herself.

"No, no nothing. The traveling had given me a headache" said Muhuntha putting her hand on her forehead.

She could not bring herself to tell them that she came to inform them of Maran's death. She could not imagine the tears and cries that will pervade this family which now appears to be in a state of settled calm,

"Get up. Go and wash your face first", ordered Aruna. Then Aruna told her mother to make a hot cup of tea for Muhuntha.

Muhuntha held Aruna's hand tight.

“What is it Muhuntha?”, queried her concerned friend. Yet, there was a happy smile on her face. The days when she cried endlessly for her disappeared brother had passed. She has just regained that smile on her face. Should this smile be wiped out again?

“Just not feeling right?” said Muhuntha, trying to smile.

“Give away five of those heavy burdens you are carrying, give one to me and just keep one” joked Aruna and laughed uncontrollably.

Muhuntha just could not think of bringing sorrow back into her friend’s face. She played along. Throwing her arms open she demanded “Carry me to the well”. That was her attempt to hide her state of mind.

Aruna picked up her friend like a bundle and carried her to the well. Aruna’s two sisters who were sitting under a tree near the well burst out laughing seeing the antics of the two grown up friends.

Why should Muhuntha dampen this laughter, yet again?



## Fire within

by Ampuli (“Ullee eriyum thee” in “Vali” short story collection, Capt Vaanathi Publication – LTTE Women’s Division, 2005)

### *Translator’s note*

*In late 1995, Lankan military launched the operation which was code named “Sun rays” (Riveresa in Sinhala and Sooriyakathir in Tamil) to recapture Jaffna peninsula which was mostly under the Tigers control at that time. The battles mentioned in this short story indirectly describes how the Tigers gradually lost the south-west parts of the Jaffna peninsula. The Tigers eventually withdrew completely from Jaffna peninsula. This short story is set during these battles. The story shows that the author has had first hand knowledge of these battles.*

*For those readers who may have difficulties distinguishing the male and female names, all the names in this story are female names except the following, Kannan, Ranjan, and Hari. Some of the Colonel level male military leaders who are mentioned here are Banu annai and Balraj annai – annai being the term for older brother and also used as a term of endearment. Similarly the Colonel level female military leader Vithusha mentioned here is post fixed with acca meaning older sister and also used as a term of endearment.*

\*\*\*

Artillery shells were coming non stop. The military had stationed all sizes of cannons and were firing towards the Tigers side.

Neela was carefully listening to recognize the noise of the shell leaving the firing barrel. For each such firing sound she lowered her head into the trench. The shells fell all around them, in front of her, past her, and on her side. The exploding shells dug into the Urumpirai red soil and threw red mud all around. The trench was muddy after the rain and her team had spread the large banana leaves on top of the mud and were sitting on it. Her team, the “carrier team”, was observing the situation. The carrier teams are responsible for, carrying away the injured and the dead, distributing food to the frontline *pooraalis* and carrying ammunition to the frontline.

“Keep your heads down in the trench” said their leader, Sobana, and she ran around making sure everyone was safe and then lowered herself in one trench. She awaited for a message on her walkie.

Neela, Kalai and ten others had been just sent to the spot to replace the losses in the defensive battle to stop the military advancing towards Urumpirai. Because they had been with other frontline battle teams for some time they had been now placed with a carrier team.

Within three days of their arrival the battle had intensified and thus the non-stop artillery shells.

“You there, lower your head ”, Neela scolded Kalai just in time as a shell landed very close to them.

“Lucky that it did not explode. Or else it is either you or me”.

Kalai laughed as Sobana’s walkie came alive.

“Send two people with a stretcher to Ramani’s position. Run and be careful”.

“As if they were waiting for Sobana’s orders, Neela and Kalai jumped out of their trench, picked up the stretcher and began running one behind the other towards Ramani’s position, two hundred metres away.

Noise of tanks and armoured trucks could be heard very near. Trees, broken by the exploding shells lay all around. Concrete pieces from buildings were scattered everywhere. They ran along footpaths and jumped over coconut leaf fences. Neela’s rubber jandals kept getting stuck in the mud. She left one and ran with one jandal.

The legs hurt with the bruises made by the stones on the street and the scratches caused by the thorns of the broken branches that were strewn around. Ramani’s position was a heavy weapon mortar position. Because this mortar fire was supporting the Tiger side, the military artillery shells were focusing in that direction. As Neela and Kalai were running towards this position, the injured *pooraalis* from a team further

at the frontline were being carried away by another carrier team *pooraalis*.

At the mortar position Kokila's body lay in ruin. Blood running from her head made her entire head look red. The smell of blood pierced Neela's nose. Neela and Kalai bent over and arranged her body. The body was in such a state that they could not just lift it.

Neela untied the green batik sarong that was tied around her waist in preparation for battles. They put Kokila's body in it and tied it up. They placed the body on the stretcher and raised the stretcher to their shoulders. Their legs started running. They ran past the medical unit behind the frontline and ran a further half a kilometre down the path used by the vehicles. They put Kokila in the vehicle and ran further to collect another stretcher.

That day they had carried six or seven injured. When they attempted to return to their original position, they found that the position was moving backward. The forward defense lines had been breached by the military. Many at the frontline were either killed or injured and had been sent back. The remaining few had been ordered to move back their positions. The tiredness from a day of heavy battle weighed down on the *pooraalis*. Before they had time to think about the dead and the injured, their duty with spades and guns awaited them.

Kalai and Neela were not injured despite the many shell explosions near them as they carried the injured. Two others

from their team who were injured had been sent to the medical unit behind the frontline.

The battle that started at 6.00am that morning did not cease till dusk. There was no time even to drink water. Now they must await for the next delivery of food and distribute it to the frontline teams. It will be 10.00pm at night by then. No rest even at night. Their legs covered in bruises were hurting. That pain is not noticeable now. Tomorrow morning it will be difficult to raise the legs. These thoughts ran through Neela's mind. She had borrowed a jandal from one of the injured *pooraali*.

Radha was drawing water from a well nearby. Neela and Kalai filled themselves up to their throat with water. Hunger was neither there nor not there. They had no urge to eat. The smell of blood was still inside their noses. The blood had dried up on their hands. Their clothes also had blood stains everywhere.

The sky was fully dark now. Military was firing their night time long distance artillery. It tore through the silence of the night, passing them and landing somewhere past the Kopay junction.

Sobana gathered everyone and was handing out the spades for digging trenches at the new positions.

“Mm.. it will be another four or five days before he makes another move. Have to keep digging till then” said Kalai.

Under the cover of thick darkness their team continued with the task.

Next morning the teams were brought together. The numbers were replaced and new teams were formed. Neela was given nine new people, a walkie and a gun. Kalai had been put into a fighting team.

Their leader announcing the new teams continued, “Do not start asking that you want to be there or here. All of you are at the frontline fighting. Everyone will get chance to fight. All jobs have equal value at the frontline”.

The long days together with Kalai earlier and at the battle line the day before had now come to an end. No more frequent contacts with each other. No more loud laughter together even before the smoke from the shell explosion had subsided. No more listening together to the reprimands from the leader. Neela was feeling the separation. Will she see Kalai alive again? The heart ached. She may even end up carrying the injured Kalai or even her dead body. Neela was disturbed by these thoughts more than the battle situation they were in.

Neela now had the responsibility to guide the new *pooraalis* under her. Everyone was occupied with the tasks involved in breaking the next move by the military. Taking safety from the frequent roaring of bombers from the sky they came together again and continued with the tasks. Kannan guided the carrier teams of Raji, Sabari and Neela to various teams stationed in

the area. Neela's team was following last and Neela was at the end of the line.

“This is Ranjan's section. On the other side of the bush is Murali's”, Kannan was explaining.

In battle they would have to carry the dead and injured men and women. How many of the *pooraalis* here will be there at the end of the next battle?

They were at the last post of Murali's section. Neela's eyes caught the eyes of one digging the trenches. He had just straightened after throwing the soil on the spade. The legs refused to move. His eyes were fixed by hers. The teams were moving. Yoga who was in front of her had crossed over to the next yard. This is not the time to talk. She cannot talk. She moved fast to join her team. Her mind was still going around him.

Hari. How did he end up here? Was he not under a different division in the north of Jaffna peninsula. Like Neela, the Sooriyakathir battle must have brought him also here. She would now be so consumed with that sight.

Those days she could see him at her home four or five times in a day. She could talk. They were neighbours and they were in love. On the battleground they had been separated. Hari is eight years older than Neela. He went to join the movement in 1990 after informing her and she followed immediately after. In

between they had stopped seeing each other though their love was recorded in the Tigers bio-data of the members.

They met once when both had gone home on a break following battle injuries.

She may have to carry him too like how she may have to carry Kalai. Death and injury had become natural in this struggle. It did not scare her. Would she know whether he is alive or dead at the end of the battle? It was hard for Neela to live with this possibility of unknowing.

The teams moving with Kannan to identify sections had now reached the Koondavil depot junction.

\*\*\*

The battle for Jaffna town was drawing near. The military was moving in an L shape from Ariyaalai and the battle with the Tigers in town had started. The military was firing from Palaali in the northern parts of the Jaffna peninsula, Kolumbuthurai and also from Mandaitheevu. Tigers were in the middle surrounded by the military. It was the peak of the Sooriyakathir battle.

Neela's team was under a tamarind tree.

“For now, the food is only for us at the battle lines and the injured” that was Savithri as she distributed the food in shopping bags. Thought of people struggling for food after



running away from their farms came to mind. But the mind refused to dwell on the dire situation of the people and the *pooraalis* among them.

“Given that it is far better that we are here”.

Neela took the bread from the shopping bag and made a well in the middle. She poured the gravy in the smaller bag into the well and dipped the bread and started to eat. The life that was drained off from the body due to hunger and tiredness came and stuck back. That is how it felt.

“ What delicious food”.

Even in this intense battle line the rice soup or the bread that they got once a day tasted heavenly. Only the hungry taste buds know the true taste of food. Before they could finish the food Kajani came running,

“ Everyone is asked to come to the St Johns College grounds for line up” and she ran away.

Halfway through their food everyone hastily got ready. Neela checked out everyone.

“Thamilarasi, you come to the front. You won’t run fast”.

Letting the short and plump Thamilarasi in the front and letting the others run in a line she joined at the end of it.

Male and female *pooraalis* from the other streets were also running in line to the school grounds.

“Must be some attack plan”, she thought.

Just before reaching the school entrance, she saw in the opposite side, a moving line of male *pooraalis*. Among them the tight faced Hari wearing the same checked green shirt. Before their eyes could meet and acknowledge the other, the lines moved on. She was relieved. He is alive. Even if she cannot see him or talk to him that is enough for her.

Everyone went under the Vaahai tree and sat in lines. Banu annai, Balraj annai and Vithusha acca and all the other top Tiger military leaders were busy with the plans for Ariyaalai counteroffensive.

That evening faded away in taut tension.

\*\*\*

Many of those who were on the battle lines with Neela in the recent intense battles are no more. She saw Kalai once or twice after their separation but nothing after that. Someone said she was stationed near Kolumbuthurai. It was comforting to think she is still alive.

The “para’ light of the military was lighting up the night sky. The military at Mandaitheevu, Kolumbuthirai and Jaffna town

were all alternatively focusing their artillery towards Paasaiyuur coast.

The military would have liked to boast that the Tigers were either wiped out or had drowned in the sea. But *pooraalis* who fought the military were safe in the five story building in Kurunagar. The *pooraalis* minds refused to accept that they must leave Valigaamam (The western part of the Jaffna peninsular where the battles described in this story were being fought). The RPG shells from Mandaitheevu were falling along the coast.

The *pooraalis* boarded onto the Sea Tiger motor boats and they were set down on East Ariyaalai coast. The boats continued this transportation several times.

“Has Mathangi’s group arrived yet. Why has it not come?”

“They are coming”.

“Neela go and ask that group to hurry up”.

Few more minutes passed with checking.

“Visu ask your people to board”, a leader ordered.

The female *pooraalis* began boarding and Neela, Poomahal, Vithusha acca and a few more boarded the last boat. The howling of a pack of dogs that followed them fill the coastline. The heart was unwilling to leave that coast and the five story building.

The “para” light of Mandaitheevu military kept lighting up the sky and then dying out. Hari would have left in one of the boats that left this morning thought Neela.

Where would he be? Still in Valigaamam? Or somewhere else in Jaffna? Or in the sky? He, who was mostly out of sight, only occasionally came within sight and rarely came face to face for a few minutes, would he be alive?

The rocking boat splashed the salty water on the back. He must be alive in some corner thought her heart. Neela turned back and looked at the coast. Shells were still exploding along the coast. Carrying the *pooraalis* and their emotions that elude words, the boats moved closer to the coast on the other side.

## How far would you go?

*by Malaimahal (“Ethuvarai” in “Velichcham” issue July-Aug 1999 – republished in “Malaimahal Kathaikal”, Capt Vaanathi Publication – LTTE Women’s Division, 2004)*

Everyone was busy working to shift the front line security posts further to the front. These are loud mouth women even in ordinary times. That day the noise and the frolicking had increased many folds. The fence made of palmyra leaves was growing high by the minute. They were running to the palmyra grove nearby to cut young leaves and were using it to make the fence. They did not bother to flatten the leaves first with their feet. Surely, the military is not going to wait for us to take the time to flatten the leaves. There was no rule as such on what material can be used to raise the fence. Whatever they could put their hands on went on the fence. The raincoats that the military had discarded during the Unceasing Waves-02 operation, the corrugated iron sheets bent by falling artillery which were then flattened by our ‘delicate’ fingers – all these became material for the fence. To tie them together, broken cables, strips of sarongs, and shoe-laces recovered from shoes discarded by the military were being used. Together with these material these active birds were building the fence at great speed.

When someone ordered, “Hey, the sound is getting too much. Quiet. He is going fire a shell”, the noise level will go down and then gradually it will rise again. An experienced one reprimanded them for their irresponsible conduct.

A younger one retorted back, “Why do you keep grumbling like a ripping cloth”.

“Don’t talk like an idiot. You will know when a shell explodes on your head”, came the reply.

Another one dropped the work she was doing and lay down on the heap of soil created by those digging the trench. With her legs crossed she suggested seriously, “OK, ok. We are tired. Bring those meat rolls and tomato sauce. We will work after we have eaten.”

The one standing near kicked her and said very irritated, “Why the hell are you reminding us what is not there.”

The one who was in the trench digging dropped her spade and climbed out saying, “Wait. I will put this one in the trench and cover her.” She tried to roll her into the trench.

The one lying down twisted herself so that she landed in the trench standing up and immediately climbed out and made faces at the one who pushed her. A great chase followed. Everyone dropped their work and cheered the two who were chasing.

\*\*\*

These moments in the life of frontline fighters are wonderful. Outsiders will have difficulty in understanding their feelings. Such noisy frolicking at the frontline will invariably be

followed with some of us being laid down on this land of ours. A stone will then be raised. Then too our emotions are not easy for others to understand. Loss of one of us would only make us stronger. It will not make us fearful. We are able to bear the loss of our family and friends whom we had known as far back as we can remember. But we are unable to bear the loss of our frontline comrades or the frontline fences bearing the memories of our frontline comrades.

\*\*\*

The noise that followed the chase was brought under control by one voice. "Don't make noise. The ground is going to crack. Would you be frolicking like this if you were at home? You would all be sitting quietly in a corner." The reply from a rattle came immediately, "That is why we have chosen to end up here." The laughter that followed this comment raised the noise level again.

The two chasers came back holding hands after making peace. "Let us start work" said one voice which was immediately drowned by the one returning with food. "Dum dum dum...I gave my tail and got a knife dum dum dum...I gave my knife and got a gun dum dum dum...I gave my gun and got a special...dum dum dum."

The one with the food was making up a random song and was dancing equally randomly. She had a shopping bag in her hand. It was clear that after a long time we were going to eat some

snacks. Imagine the state of affairs among us who made such frolics even when there was nothing to frolic about....

“See, I mentioned the rolls today and that is why there is snacks”, boasted that one.

“I have heard a cock saying that the sun rises because he crows”, teased another.

“Call the medics we have to stop the bleeding”, said one creating real concern among some.

“She had given her tail to bring us snacks”. Everyone laughed and looked inside the food bag.

One took a snack and put it in her mouth nodding appreciatively. “Tasty. I could walk on my head for this” she said and distributed the snacks to all.

“If you would walk on your head for one snack, does that mean you would do anything for good food?”

“No” came the immediate response and everyone turned to her, keen on hear what she was going to say.

“Our leader has placed great confidence in us. He knows that we frolic and fool around. But he also knows that we are clever and dedicated. He knows that he can trust us with any job. I will not do anything to destroy that confidence. I do not like to do anything that will affect his confidence in all of us.



## My doors are open...

*by Malaimahal (“Kathavukal thiranthuthaan ullana” in “Sarinihar” issue of Oct 14-27, 1999 – republished in “Malaimahal Kathaikal” Short Story Collection, Capt Vaanathi Publication – LTTE Women’s Division, 2004)*

I am sensing that over the generations my intelligence and my competence are being denied. I have always been capable of achieving anything to which I put my mind. I have always had the leadership capabilities to manage large enterprises. Yet, what I see in large numbers in front me, are people who refuse to meet my intelligence with theirs but who try to control me with the power given to them. The greatest regret I have is that it is so hard to find people who are willing to respect my intelligence and competence and understand my feelings. Ever since the matriarchal societies were destroyed I have been searching for such good people. I am yet to meet them.

The people I see either want to control me with their power or try to restrict me with their protective love. When neither succeeds they call me “uncontrollable” or “strange” and they throw criticisms at me to blunt me. For a long time they had this longing that I should be at least a step below them. They could never acknowledge in front of others that I have wisdom. They are greatly satisfied when they are able to show them off as wise while I remain silent and pretend ignorance. When by some chance it is revealed that women are capable, the outrage they show is astounding. At such times if they could they would kill me. How can I shake hands with them?

<follows a list of male characters in ancient Hindu literature who failed to treat women with respect>

These people, who failed to defeat me with intelligence, who disrespected my feelings , who cruelly stepped on me, now say that they are giving their voice for my rights. That they are going to pave the way for my freedom. They want me to follow them? Big chance.

Get lost you mad man! I identified you from that day when you shouted at me that my head will fall off when you could not defeat me in debate. You do not determine my path. It will be good if you do not jump and fall across my path. I know my path. I am not pushing you away and say that we must always travel in separate paths for ever. My path is not blocked for you to travel.

Those people who understand my feelings, respect my skills, and value my competence are always free to walk with me along my path. If you are ready to walk hand in hand with me you can come. If you want to tie my hands and drag me behind you, then you must go in own your path. It has been a long time since I spread my wings wide and flew. I am not ready to be held in the cage even if it is made of gold. So many green fields and lush trees and river banks and beaches are there for me to come down and rest. Yet my doors are always open for the arrival of the good people.

## New stories for our times

*by Malaimahal (“Puthiya kathaikal” in “Velichcham” issue July-Aug 2002 – republished in “Malaimahal Kathaikal” Short Story Collection, Capt Vaanathi Publication – LTTE Women’s Division, 2004)*

### *Translator’s note*

*In this story Malaimahal strings together a few milestones in the history of women’s participation in the armed struggle. These milestones she uses are separated in time by several years. She uses it to highlight a new awakening among the people.*

*Adampan battle in October 1986 was the first battle in which female pooraalis took an active role.*

*According to the official Tamil Tiger narrative, Malathi was the first female pooraali to die in battle in Oct 1987. In reality Shoba of EPRLF – Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front, was the first female pooraali to die in battle in Feb 1985.*

*Sea Tiger women wearing shorts and swimming was breaking the taboo of the time.*

*Angkayatkanni was a female Black Sea Tiger who died in action.*

\*\*\*

They feared no one. They lacked frontline battle experience. But they were not concerned because they were inspired by the liberation struggle. They laid out the trap at Kopaay.

The Indian Peace Keeping Force had started to move out from Jaffna city. Unable to believe what is going on, the people had locked their doors and stayed indoors. A team of women *pooraalis* including 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Malathi, Kasthuri, Thaya, Viji and a few others were readying for a counteroffensive in Kopaay.

It was the October rainy season but the stars still shone in the sky. The moon was floating straight above. The vehicles turned into Kopaay with their blinding headlights. The one at the security post stood up to identify the vehicle. The vehicle stopped and Indian military jumped out. Shouting like a hundred howling jackals they ran towards the female *pooraali* team. Gunfire welcomed the Indian military. A battle ensued breaking the silence of the night. The Indian military for the very first time in their history, battled an all women unit. The battle was intense. It was destroying all the imagined ideas on women held by the Indian military.

Malathi was injured in her thigh. She handed her gun to Viji and said, “Give this to our leader. I am going to bite the cyanide.” Viji was not prepared to leave Malathi. She tried to drag her away. But Malathi’s will prevailed. She demanded again, “Give this to our leader.” Her words were influenced by the knowledge of the leader’s effort to provide all of them with M16 weapons. It was a rare weapon loved by all the women

*pooraalis*. She knew the task waiting for it in the battle against the fourth largest power in the world.

\*\*\*

Those gathered in front of the house for “the-conference” found it difficult to believe.

“Do you think these women would have really shot at the Indian military?”

Though they had already heard of the Adampan battle where women had taken an active role, the battle in which Lt. Col. Victor was killed, those at the “the-conference” were still not ready to believe it. With the above question the conference was launched.

Time: 1993

Venue: Pointpedro harbour area

Viewers: Those attending “the-conference”

Actors: Heads in the sea of some people swimming.

They were wearing pants. “Are they men?”

But they had buns of hair on the head, “Are they women? But wearing pants?”

“The sea is going surge seeing this anarchy?”

“In that case, shouldn’t the white-man’s sea also surge?” asked another.

“Their sea is shameless but not ours”, came another voice.

While this fiery debate was going on in “the-conference”, the women sea tiger unit had just started their sea operation, after completing the four kilometres swim. But “the-conference” was not finished.

\*\*\*

The sea tiger boats raced in the Kilali strait challenging the Lankan Navy which was killing at will, the civilians who were using the strait. A female sea tiger team, under the command of Lt Col. Bama, was also on duty in the Kilali strait. Their boats sped back and forth in that strait threatening the enemy boats and stopping it from approaching the civilian boats.

The participants of “the-conference” were now among the civilians crossing the Kilali strait without fear of attacks by the Lankan Navy. The Kilali strait could not stop laughing at the sight.

\*\*\*

An important southern town in Jaffna, Chavakachcheri, was in our possession. Sri Lankan military was trying hard to recapture it. Between the huge Sri Lankan military stationed there and a limited number of us there was intense clashes.

Among the forest of buildings, the two sides clashed. Each of our security post announced its situation as it battled on.

“One person injured among us.”

“Two were killed.”

“I am injured.”

“...”

“...”

Most of our security positions had fallen. They were still bringing down enemies even as they fell. One security post resisted without falling into the enemy hand. From that post a counteroffensive continued against the enemy. Major Kayalvili was in that position.

Kayalvili had not yet been surrounded by the military. One route to our area of control was still in our hands. Kayalvili refused to follow the order to retreat along that route and regroup and then move forward to take back the positions lost. She stood by her team’s request not to let Chavakachcheri fall.

“I will not retreat. Send the team along that route to my position. We will retake from here. If I leave this place it will be difficult to retake.”

Kayalvili knew that it will take time for the teams to arrive from Ariyaalai, Vaatharavaththai, and Columbuthurai. Kayavili

and those with her had decided to resist enemy advance, however long it takes.

Now the military had surrounded them.

“We are inside a roundup. We will manage. Send the teams.”  
The heads of the military could now be seen over the fence wall of the house where they were.

“We are shooting at those at the fence wall. Send the team.”

The military jumped the wall and climbed down into the trench dug between the fence wall and Kayalvili’s position.

“They have come near. We are shooting.”

Everyone could hear through Kayalvili’s walkie the PKLMG of the military hitting the wall of Kayalvili’s security post. The cry of a soldier in Sinhala, who was hit by a grenade they had thrown could also be heard through the walkie. Everyone understood the situation of Kayalvili and her team. The last words of Kayalvili standing unmoved in her determination not to let Chavakachcheri fall,

“He has come very close. You would have no contact with us now.”

The breeze paid its homage.

\*\*\*



Her father could not believe what he was hearing. “Is my daughter dead already? She joined only recently. How could she be a Major already?” His daughter’s body was not there for him to cry over. Those who knew his daughter came and described her feats at the battle.

“My daughter? My daughter?” It was not just him who had the questions. All “the-conference” participants had the same questions. They thought they understood but then they felt they didn’t. They had started to realise that there were happenings in their land that were beyond questions and answers. When did these events started to happen? Was it since Angkayatkanni’s time? Capt. Angkayatkanni’s mother once she was exhausted with crying began expressing her utter astonishment.

“Did she go in the 45 feet deep sea all by herself. It will be dark under that water? How did she go? When she was here with me, even to go outside at night I had to go with her. She...how...?”

\*\*\*

“The-conference” participants who were earlier surprised had now reached a natural state of mind.

Suddenly the father of the house heard noises coming from inside the house. The sound of a stick beating on the floor. He stood up shocked. Is that little boy trying to kill some small insect? The older girl who was studying is going to be

frightened. He ran inside and let out a cry of fear at what he saw. His daughter was carrying a half dead snake on a stick.

“Bring some kerosene. Let us burn this.”

## Paakkiam amma

by Kasthoori (“*Idam maariya thuppaakkikalaal...*” in “*Kasthooriyin Aakkangal*”, LTTE Publication Division, 1992)

*Translator’s note:*

*This true story is set during the time when Indian forces were stationed in the Tamil homeland. Paakkiam is from Jaffna. Paakkiam’s three children later joined the Tamil Tigers and all three became maaveerar in battles.*

*A word “Thalaiyaaddi” is used in this story. In Tamil it means one who nods his head. In common usage during the time of the armed struggle it referred to hooded Tamil informers used by the Lankan and Indian Military to pick out the Tamil Tiger members and supporters from a line-up by nodding their head. The purpose of the hooded mask was to protect the informer from Tamil Tiger assassination.*

\*\*\*

Paakkiam was drawing water from the well. She did not hear her son calling out to her. The barking of the dogs was drowning his voice. “Someone must have escaped from the military camp. Otherwise they would not be out so early in the morning” thought Paakkiam. Prayers for the safety of the escapee ran through her mind. Her thoughts ran over another recent incident when the military got out early like this.

That day the military got out looking for a young man in her neighbourhood. They went on to arrest people, from the streets and from their homes. They even arrested those who were fast asleep. They made them all sit under the large Tamarind tree in an empty land nearby. Around 11.00am they were all paraded in front of the “*Thalayaaddi*”. When the young men paraded with their heads down, the military shouted ordering them to look up. The parading young men looked pathetically at the “*Thalayaddi*” fearing that “*Thalayaddi*” may otherwise become angry. Indeed the fate of many young men are today re-written by these “*Thalaiyaaddi*”. Brave they may be but when parading in front of the “*Thlaiyaadi*” they turn white with fear.

Paakkiam picked up the water pot that she had just filled with water from the well. The hens from next door came cackling, crashing into her yard. Paakkiam’s heart filled with sadness at these Indian soldiers who had come all the way to chase hens for their dinner. She was about to enter her kitchen...she paused and put down her water pot and walked around to the front of her house. Suddenly...she had to press herself hard against the wall to save her from an unexpected attack. The large cow from next door ran through her fence on seeing the military with guns. It was about to crash into her but she managed to avoid it. The big cow with its big eyes looked at her for sympathy. It appeared to fear greater danger to itself than the dangers faced by the humans at the hands of the military. She went to open the gate to let the cow out but in its state of fear the cow ran to the gate knocking her down as it went.

Cursing the cow she looked up and saw the reason for the cow's fright. A military man with gun in one hand and a hen in the other walked towards her with a foolish smile. With palpitating heart she turned to look at her house and froze. Two military men were walking out of her house with her eldest son in front. Her heart aching she prayed, " Oh God, were they inside all this time...what could they have found ...". She tried to remember what was on the table and other things around the house. She feared that something left behind somewhere would bring troubles for her.

The "boys" came last night around 1.00pm...with their flyers, newspaper cuttings, books, and many more.... from the manner in which they were carrying the bundle she could figure that it was heavy. She did not ask questions though it posed danger to her. At her home many nights were spent like this with these boys. This time she knew beforehand that they were coming and she had already made food for them. She made "idli" (a sort of bread made by steaming thick watery mix made of rice and urid dhal). She does not make idli often these days. When her husband was living with her she had to make whatever he demanded, whether she liked it or not. He would come home drunk and start demanding and beating her. Then her heart would cry silently for the effect it would have on her children. Her husband would come to know whenever she leaves home or whenever people visit her. He used these excuses to leave her. Paakiam lived in peace after her husband had left her. She found great satisfaction making idli for these boys who would otherwise be eating just bread or rotti and sleep under the sky in open plots.

When the boys left after finishing the job it was 3.00am. They were careful to remove all the items. She helped too to clear the place of all pieces. Yet, the presence of the military was making her nervous. Nothing happened as she feared. Her three children came running to her. One military man pointed to the children and asked whether they were her children. Saying something to the fellow military man in a language she did not understand, they all laughed and left.

Days past. Each day brought more sad events. There was no change in the firing of shells as if it was according to some time schedule. People being killed in these shelling became a common event. What happened in the Jaffna hospital and the Chavakachcheri market were indeed great tragedies with many lives lost. But what about the many tragedies taking place in the smaller towns and villages.

It appears that the contemporary world order is to wage war to bring peace. It has become their policy to kill to bring peace. These days, there is no sign of people on the streets. Everywhere there is military snooping among bones and skulls. Like gods they pervade every nook and corner. People had forgotten the habit of eating three meals a day. Shops do not stock items. When stocks do come the prices are exorbitant. The rich is able to use their hoarded money but the poor are forced to shrink their stomachs and remain starved. Among such tragedies and dangers, these good hearted young people are waging a struggle for their country. Paakiam's heart cried for these young souls.

Anzar had told her that he will come to collect the food parcels at lunch time. She had started cooking earlier. In earlier days there were many in the village who were ready to give food and lend a helping hand to these young souls. How many of them used the commemoration meetings and stages organized by the young people to show off their status and colors.

Paakiam came out on hearing the barking dogs. Anzar had come to collect the food. He had lost weight and he looked wasted. He also has parents and brothers and sisters. He could have stayed with his family and lived comfortably.... Then why has he left all life and is leading this life – foodless, sleepless and ever in danger of death. She served food for Anzar and began parcelling the food for Anzar to take away. While she was making the food parcels she thought of the others like Anzar hungry and living in the open space.

“No one lets these boys into their houses now. Then why on earth are you giving them food? Do you know what happened to those who gave food?” A relative reprimanded Paakiam one day.

“Do not think about the problems in the country and what you can do to help? But only research about who came to take food parcels in the neighbourhood.” this is how Paakiam wanted to respond but she controlled herself and responded with a smile, “I am not giving food anymore. When they go past, the familiar faces, what can you do? Can I run and hide? I just offer a cup of tea and manage. That is all.”

If that same woman sees Anzar here she might even go and inform the military thought Paakiam. Desperately hoping that the food parcels should reach those young men she packed the parcels in a box. Suddenly the noise of barking dogs were heard. Paakiam's heart raced fearing that the military is coming. She came out to look on the lane. One military man was looking over the fence into her yard. As soon as he saw her, he shouted loud. Another shorter man looked at her from below the gate. She understood the situation she was in. Her thoughts were about Anzar getting caught. He cannot get out of the yard. The military was standing all around. None of the military has yet entered her yard.

For a moment she thought that they may have come for something else. Still she decided to tell Anzar to jump the fence near the well where he will jump into the tall manioc plants which will give some hiding space to escape. Thinking these thoughts she went to the back to see if there were any military there. Anzar was there too ready to run. They both did not see the military men in the back yard.

“Run my child, there are no military in the back” saying this she ran into the kitchen without waiting to see if Anzar had safely escaped. In the kitchen she dumped all the food in the parcels under the fire place used for cooking and covered it with the firewood that was there.

She heard the guns. Anzar was not carrying a gun. She ran towards the well and there....Anzar was on the ground bleeding profusely. He was still alive. Paakiam's heart cried



out, “My child.. you are dying what am I to do?” Anzar slowly died right in front of her eyes.

“Anzar will not come asking for food. These young souls that wanted freedom... is this how they must die along the fences and in the streets” she forgot the danger she was in and cried out loud. The military that waited for just such a moment surrounded her and pushed her with vengeance. She fell hitting her head. Blood from the cracked head ran down her cheeks. Her children who were frozen until then now began to scream seeing their mother’s condition.

One of the military men outraged at the crying children approached them yelling in an unknown language. He began beating the children with a stick till it broke into two pieces. He then kicked the eldest son with his boots. The youngest that had never seen such sights ran to the mother. Unable to console her child with an embrace, because the military had tied her hands at the back, Paakiam mumbled something to the child. Tears ran down her cheek and her child put its arms around her neck crying and showed the places where he had been beaten. Her heart broken to pieces, with trembling lips she kissed her child. She signalled with her head to her eldest to come near her. He was unable to stand up. He too was crying inconsolably. Paakiam’s mother, the children’s grandmother, who could have consoled the children was away at that time.

The military ignoring all of this dragged away the child from Paakiam and pushed her into the jeep as her children screamed. The thought that she may not see her children again crushed

Paakiam. Are they going to be orphans? The jeep drove away and her children disappeared from her sight. Paakiam tried to calm herself. “How many Tamil children have been made orphans. So, my children will also join them. As long as we live as slaves, this country will be filled with refugees and orphans. One day there will be freedom and my children will live free in that free land. Let them be orphans until then.” Ignoring the torments of the military, she readied her mind to face the terror she will soon be put through. Jeep kept going.

The days became weeks...months. The villagers were heard saying things such as these.

“How many times have I told her. One must listen to the advice of those in the know. If one tries to act as they please, this will be the fate.”

“You know that the military is taking away those giving food to the boys...Now she is there.. who is to look after her children...?”

“That old grandma, it is so pathetic.”

“Why should the old woman be put through this in that age. She has to carry the burden of three children.”

Then villagers gradually stopped talking about Paakiam. Those who visited to show sympathy also reduced their visits.

The military visited the children and left only after beating them. The children missed their mother's embrace during the shelling and gun fire. Paakiam's relatives and community leaders tried their best to get Paakiam released. Sometimes Paakiam's mother would take the children to see her. The children would be overjoyed to see her and cry when parting. The youngest would refuse to leave.

Paakiam would plead with her mother, "Amma you may be angry with me... but the children are too young. Even if they make mistakes do not beat them. If you also beat them where can they go?"

Everyday Paakiam's children will talk at home about their mother. They cry talking about the day when their mother was taken away. Yet, they had learnt to manage without their mother. Unexpectedly Paakiam was released and she arrived home one day. Seeing the sight of the joyous reunion of the mother and the children, tears ran down the grandmother's face.

Paakiam experienced and had seen too much of the torture by the military. More than her own torture, it was what was done to the young men and their screams that affected her most. She had seen young men hung upside down and beaten, blood running down from their cracked skull, but the beating continued till they fainted. She would hear the screams of those being beaten in the middle of the night. The screams will get less and less as those beaten become weaker. Paakiam would

sit up crying and listening to the screams and she prayed that the young men would die.

After her release Paakiam was not prepared to forget about the young men and mind just her own business. She continued to secretly help them including preparing food parcels for them. When her mother reprimanded her she would say, “Why should I not do what I think is for the freedom of my country? Can I give up my duty because of fear of death and danger?”

This despite the fact that traitors were watching her day and night as if they will get her punished even if the military is willing to ignore her activities. Paakiam had gone to the meetings organized by these enemies of the community and questioned them about their killings and indiscipline. Unable to justify their actions they had made Paakiam their enemy. These same enemies of the community are now going around killing supporters and members of the movement. Anything could happen to her anytime. Her mother and her relatives tried to make her leave and go overseas. Her response, “Why should I run away fearing these traitors who had sold my country?”. Her mother held back her sorrow realising that she cannot change Paakiam.

It would be around 9.00am in the morning. Paakiam was not home. She had taken her youngest and gone out. Taking her youngest with her wherever she went was a technique she used to avoid the harassment by the military. A vehicle arrived at her home. Her eldest who was collecting some leaves to feed the goats came running to the front. A van was parked outside

their gate. Armed young men pushed the gate open and came inside. One of them held Paakiam's eldest and demanded to know the whereabouts of his mother. The boy shook in fear when he said his mother had gone out. The young man slapped the boy on the face and again demanded. "Ammama had gone to the hospital" said the boy. He was instructed by his mother to say that when people ask about her whereabouts. "When would she be back?" demanded the young man. The boy, "She did not say when she will be back." The young man raised his hands again to hit the boy when the boy said "She would be back by noon."

Those who had come in the van discussed something among themselves. Not satisfied with the answer given by the boy, one of the young men went inside and came back. The four of them then left.

Paakiam's mother who had also gone to the shops came running. "What is the matter thambi, whom are you looking for..?" she asked the young men about to leave. One of the young men came back and stared at her displaying his anger. Then without saying anything he got into the van. The confused old woman turned to her grandson who explained what had happened. The old woman cried aloud.

When Paakiam arrived at noon, her mother crying loudly told Paakiam what had happened. Her son also filled in crying all the while. Paakiam realised the situation but trying to display calm she embraced her son and tried to calm him too. "Do not

be afraid son. I will talk to them when they come” she said. She went to the well to wash up.

The sound of a van arriving could be heard. The group must have learnt of her arrival. They immediately surrounded the house. Paakiam’s dog barked at them as if it was ready to attack them. One of the men saw Paakiam at the well and rushed there and held her hand. She shook him off angrily and pushed him to the ground. The man on the ground shouted, “Come here you all. The woman is here.”

Some of the neighbours looked over the fence. They must have known the situation but no one had the courage to come into her yard. Two of the young men who were inside the house came running and held her. They tied her hands at the back. She tried to free herself but their hold was too strong.

The one on the ground got up. Glaring at her he started slapping her again and again till his anger was spent. Her children screamed at the sight of their mother being beaten. Paakiam’s mother came running and pleaded and begged not to beat her. One man in the group, probably its leader ordered, “What are you doing without dragging her away?” Then he began dragging her to the van. Her children ran behind the mother. Paakiam turned and looked at them... tears were running down her face.

When they reached the van he ordered, “Get in.” She didn’t. They forced her in. The van sped taking her away from her mother and her children. The neighbours had not gathered.

Paakiam's mother was rolling on the ground crying. Children too cried pathetically.

The van turned into a lane and stopped. One of the men ordered Paakiam to get down. She did not. He ordered again and she looked at him with revulsion. One of the men then pushed her off the van. The van door hit her hard but she did not show the pain. "Why did you bring me?" she asked.

"Mm.. to shoot you."

"That is what I am asking. Why?"

"Don't act for us you dirty woman. Do you think we do not know that you give food to the Tigers?"

"So what? What is wrong in helping those fighting for their country?"

"Shut you woman. Don't start talking about right and wrong." He dragged her and tied her to the fence.

She closed her eyes and she could only see her crying mother and her crying children.

Then...

Two gun shots were heard across the village.

Paakiam's mother standing at the gate of their house understood. She beat her head and wailed "My daughter...".

Holding to their grandmothers' saree those orphaned children...



## What price

*by Malaimahal (“Vilai” in “Malaimahal Kathaikal” short story collection, Capt Vaanathi Publication – LTTE Women’s Division, 2004)*

I couldn’t describe what was going through my mind. Was it sadness? Was it pride? Something was churning inside me since morning. My friend, Isaichelvi, she never failed to drop by to see me at least once a week. She was always cracking jokes and making us laugh. She was here this morning too and she asked whether I remember? That question was the reason for my state of mind. The question may seem ordinary to others but to me...?

I controlled the tears that was threatening to pour out. I did not want Kayalvili, reading in the next bed, see me crying. I will not be able to tell her why I was crying.

Sitting alone outside under the periwinkle tree (a six feet tree with abundance of small white flowers) seemed preferable to sitting here. I called out to Vathani and asked her for the wheelchair. When she came I transferred myself to the wheelchair. I used to find this a demanding process for the body as well as for the mind. Those days I would get up at nights with a sudden shock that my body was missing below the waist. I would touch my legs to make sure. Sometimes, I used to be amazed at Thaarani, who was with us there, who had lost all feelings below her neck. She would be singing enthusiastically. Now I too have got used it.

Kayavili did not move even when my wheelchair was making noises as Vathani moved it towards the steps. She was reading a popular Indian history book. Our leader recommended it to us last time he visited us. She had managed to obtain a copy of the book by asking each and everyone who visited her. She has not taken her eyes off the book since. If only she would raise her head I could ask her to come with me to the periwinkle tree. It is always comforting to talk with her.

She was still reading despite the noise of the wheelchair going down the steps. I decided not to disturb her. I told Vathani who had helped me down the steps to go. I then moved my wheelchair to the periwinkle tree.

The white flowery abundance on the tree moved for the wind gently rubbing on each other . They appeared to be talking secrets and laughing – like us. What else do they have to do except laughing?

\*\*\*

It was like this when the preparations were being made for the Kilinochchi battle. We never stopped laughing even when last minute hasty preparations were being made – dividing the groups and moving them to positions. The weaponry section was running around taking the details of the weapons and supplying ammunition. The report writers were repeatedly rechecking the details of the groups. Others were running around asking whether everyone had their gunny bag hats and their water cans. We continued talking secrets and laughing.

There were a thousand things for us to talk and laugh about. We continued to talk and laugh despite the order from the leaders to keep quiet. We talked and laughed as if we will not get another time to talk and laugh like this, as if this was our last chance to laugh. We laughed uncontrollably.

It is true that it was not our last chance to laugh. But it was our last chance to laugh together. Among those of us who were laughing that day only a few including Isaichelvi, Kayalvili and I remain to carry those memories. It was this Isaichelvi who came this morning and suddenly asked that question and left soon after.

“ Hey Mayoori, can you remember the last position where you were stationed during the Sathjeya military operation? Your piece of real estate with the built-up-well was sold last week for six lakhs.”

How can I forget? The poovarasu tree fence (*Thespesia- a very common tree used for putting live tree fences*), the paddy field, the built-up-well.... Everyone who came to the well to take water would pause at my position for ten minutes to chat and laugh. They would also demand tea and finish my one month sugar ration in ten days. My security post was nick named “Mayoori tea café”. How can I forget?

I am unable to pull myself out from those memories.

\*\*\*

I can recollect those events clearly. Suruthi's RPG position was close to the A9 road. On her right was the built-up-well. Straight ahead was my position. Since that morning artillery rain never stopped. We realized that the "big brother" was planning to make a move and we too got ready. The noise of spy-planes filled the ears and Suruthi shouted above it,

"There is going to be such a big fight today. Let them come. I will break the skull of each and everyone."

The artillery rain was now falling past us which means the "big brother" is coming closer. The noise of the tanks could be heard not only from the A9 road but also from the paddy fields. We readied ourselves for an expansive battle. Suruthi loaded the shells and was tuning her ears to the noise of the tanks. Our guns had nothing to do. What could they do when no one got off the tanks? It appeared as if Suruthi had seen a tank. She waved to me and aligned herself against the poovarasu fence ready for firing. AH.. now I can see a tank too. Before I could blink, the rotating top of the tank flew in the air. Before I could see what Suruthi was doing next, her assistant was loading the next shell. With the second firing the entire tank flew in the air. Smoke was everywhere. Suruthi tiptoed to look at me and then holding up her launcher jumped once. Before her feet touched the ground, the whizzing sound of a shell came towards us. I fell face down to the ground. Two shells exploded, as if it was just above my head, tearing my ear drums. Blocks of soil and tree branches fell covering me. I raised my head to look. The poovarasu tree where Suruthi was leaning was missing. It was dust all around.

“Surutheeee” I yelled. I do not know if my voice actually came out but there was no response. I could not see her assistant either. Her assistant who was standing next to her was lying flat on her face. She looked up at me in a state of shock. There was no time to delay any further. I send one of my assistants to Suruthi’s post to help Suruthi’s assistant. I cannot remember much else, except that the rest of those with me and I started fighting back.

Two or three days later I found a single jandal with the initial SI. It was Suruthi’s and I had initialed it for her in white ink. It stayed in my security post till we had to abandon the area to the enemy.

\*\*\*

I did not cry that day. Not sure if the heart had become too frozen. Even the tears that threatened to pour out a while ago had dried up. Yet, something kept disturbing me. Those days, we were continually in battles, and all the memories might have got pushed back way down. Now, restricted to wheelchair and bed and with time on hand, are those memories coming to the fore? How can one forget all those memories.

\*\*\*

A week before that battle, an old man stood on the road looking at that land. He was crying uncontrollably as if he had lost all the meaning of his life. It was Suruthi who saw him first. She was returning after hunting for some drumstick

vegetable to make a curry. I heard her talking to someone and ran to her position to find out what was going on.

Suruthi explained, “He started crying when I asked him why he came here where a battle was going on.” I felt awkward. I had not seen old men/fathers cry. Our father would come home only for the weekends and other holidays. He will do all the work at home and even help ammaa with her cooking. He will draw water from the well for us to bathe. In the evening he will wear freshly washed sarong and shirt and go for a walk along the beach. He will eat with us at dinner time. He will talk a lot. But I have never seen him crying.

When I saw the old man cry, I thought of my father. I felt miserable. He had covered his mouth with the towel on his shoulder and as he cried his body shook. Tears ran down his face. He looked older than my father. His children would also be much older than us. This land must be his. But would his children not look after him? I was wondering when one of girls came with a cup of tea and said,

“Do drink this iya(respectable reference to men) . You would have come from afar”. He took the cup with both his hands and drank the tea. He wiped his face and he looked a little relaxed now. With a big sigh he started talking.

“I have seven daughters. Six of them are settled. My eldest is still at home. She is 32 years old. Her horoscope is hard to find a match. No matches could be found till now. I am a farmer with a lot of land in Paranthan and here. I brought up all my

children well. I have divided all my land to the children. This land and the mill is for my eldest. Just recently we have found a match for her. The groom's family is poor. They agreed because of this land and the mill.

Now the land is gone, the mill is gone and my daughter's life is also gone. I just felt like having one last look at the land and the mill. I came without even knowing whether it is with you or the army. I came not caring even if the army shot me. What is the point in my living when I cannot do anything for my child?"

The old man stood up ready to leave. Suruthi asked him for the location of the mill. Old man pointed to the area where the army was stationed.

"I will take leave now children. Bless you." said the old man and pushed his bicycle looking tired. Suruthi ran after him, "Army will be shelling. You must go fast." He climbed on his bicycle and rode away. Suruthi came running back.

"Is there no man in this country to marry a woman without a land and a mill" asked Suruthi.

"Isn't that why that iya is crying" I said.

Suruthi nodded her head and continued, "I have two older brothers. I am going to write to them and say they must forget that they have a sister if they intend to take dowry in

marriage.” I could not decode the expression on her face. Was it anger or pain? Or was it a combination of the two emotions?

We did not cook the drumsticks that day. The whole day we talked about that old man, his daughters and the life they would have lead. In the meantime Suruthi wrote those promised letters to her brothers and gave to someone, who went away for some outside work, to be posted.

“From today this is our land. It is our responsibility to protect this until we hand this over to that iya and his daughter. We should not let this fall into army’s hand. Even if it does we must recapture it”, Suruthi said as if she was taking oath.

This story became known to most of us who were at that frontline. Everyone started to call us the landowners of the land with the built-up-well. Is that land going for sale only now?

\*\*\*

When we recaptured Kilinochchi in 1998, that land and mill were also recovered. Only last year, after completing the demining, those lands were handed over to the owners. If the iya’s daughter was 32 years old in 1996, she would be 38 years old now. If that land is going for sale now, is she going to get married only now? Or did that same man marry her without the dowry and are they putting it for sale now? My thoughts ran wild.



Suruthi who had said, “We should not let the land go and even if we did we should recapture it”, gave her life as price for protecting that land. Kayalvili and I lost movements in half our body; some lost their limbs, and few more gave their lives. We had given a lot.

I have not met many of those faces that became familiar during those days. Who among them are still alive? In which division are they now working? If we could all suddenly meet again?

I longed to talk to Kayalvili about all this. I must talk to her immediately. I must recover all those memories with her. I called to Vathani and began moving the wheelchair towards the entrance to the house.

## Search for the Tiger's tail

by Malaimahal (“Puli Vaalai Theedi” in the short story collection “Vali”)

### *Translator's note*

*The Indian government had been involved in a long series of tactics to destroy the Tigers. To this end it had supported the other Tamil Eelam armed movements. This interference worsened the armed confrontations between the Tamil Eelam armed groups. From 1987 till 1990 was the time of direct involvement of the Indian government in the Tamil Eelam matters. A 40,000 strong Indian force was brought to Tamil Eelam. Tigers ended up fighting this Indian force. In the one and only united action of the Lankan government and the Tigers, the Indian forces were ordered to leave the island in 1990.*

*This story is set during those years when the Indian forces were stationed in Tamil Eelam. The story captures the impossibility of fighting an armed rebellion that has the support of the people except of course through a genocidal war as it happened in May 2009. This story also captures the uncivilised conduct of the Indian forces, a common experience of people whose land is occupied by forces that is seen by the people as its enemy.*

*This story has one thread that is set in a day in February 1989. The author also traverses other times and these are italicized for easy comprehension.*

\*\*\*

Waiting to sit the first public examination at the age of sixteen generated a flood of anxiety and excitement. It was good that there was no disturbing announcement in the 6.00am radio news. Yet, it would not be unusual if there was a sudden loudspeaker announcement that a curfew had been imposed.

\*\*\*

*That was what happened in 1988 December. That year too, I had put on my white school uniform ready to sit the same exam. My mind filled with dreams of expectations of a new phase in my life. I was also gratified that the examination centre was my own school. Familiar environment relieved the anxiety.*

*6.00am news said, "The examinations are starting today throughout the country". But as I was putting on my shoes the news reader was reading something.*

*"From today until further announcement a curfew will be in place".*

*If so, the exams? We waited near the radio for the 12.45pm news.*

*“Since the Indian forces have announced a curfew in the Jaffna district, no examinations were held there. Examinations will continue in the other districts”, said that news.*

*This Indian forces have come to destroy us. The same thing happened even in 1987 to our senior batch. They announced a curfew during the examination time. The day after the curfew was lifted, all the students from Vadamaradchi (the northern part of the Jaffna peninsula) put on our uniforms and sat in front of the Indian military camp near Manthihai junction, blocking the camp. We did not allow any of the military to enter or leave the camp. In front of us inside the camp and behind us outside the camp, jeeps and trucks were revving up the engines threatening us. We stayed put silently daring them to run over us. The Indian military leader who claimed that he was in charge of the Vadamaradchi area gave assurance to our school principals that he will make arrangements for the exams to be held. It was only after that we returned home.*

*Their exams was held in 1988 April.*

*\*\*\**

Our exams which should have been held in 1988 December was about to be held now February 1989. It was the result of hard work of the our principals and our education officials. I walked down the lane and started on the main road. School

friends nodded and walked past. There was no sign of the ones who had grown the tail. I wondered where they would be hiding.

These disgusting military, on the other hand, would be squatting in the lower grounds just to see our legs exposed below the knees. When we are cycling, it is common for our uniform to flutter in the wind. They will wait from very early morning just to see that sight. To protect us from these uncivilised brutes we started to wear socks above our knees.

\*\*\*

*One windy season at 5.45am, my friend and I were going on our bicycles for a 6.00am tuition class. My friend had sensed something. She has a good nose. She said, "I can smell their peanut oil. Wait and see what will happen if the brutes dare to try to talk".*

*I couldn't see those dogs as far as my eyes could see. We held down our dresses with one hand as we rode. Suddenly there was noise from the side of the road. My friend threw the pair of old jandals she had ready in her bicycle basket. She let go of words that cannot be written down. I did not see them hiding under the bridge. My friends eye sight is also sharp I thought.*

\*\*\*

I was thinking of those events past as I walked to school. I wrote my social studies paper and was returning home.

Military was everywhere as I walked back. That is the norm. During school starting time and finishing time they come out to look at us. They will go on their rounds just to rub against us. But today seemed more than the usual number.

I wondered if they are about to declare a curfew just to interrupt the examinations. I turned my bicycle from the main road into our lane. The lane was filled with military. No one else was to be seen. The military was concentrated in the house next door to ours. That house used to be one of the first-aid centres of “Suthanthira paravaikal” a female un-armed section of the Tigers. It was also used as a library. Now only Kanthi aachchi, an old single woman, was there. I felt sorry for Kanthi aachchi. She had to listen to these brutes questions and demands.

One of them stopped me by clapping his hands. I pointed to my house and said I am going home. I went to my front door and knocked two or three times. No answer.

“Ammaa”, as soon as I called the door opened and ammaa dragged me inside and locked the door.

“Why did you come at this time? You could have stayed somewhere else.” ammaa reprimanded.

“Ammaa, how would I know when they would be doing their roundup? They also did not stop me so I came. Why are they here?”

“They searched in Kanthi aachchi’s house for Tiger things. Apparently they did not find it there. So they came and asked me. I said I know nothing and went on to cook in the kitchen. They left,” said ammaa.

Tigers must have brought something last night. The military would not have come otherwise. When we sleep at night, from our home we can sense the boats coming ashore, the boat’s engine stopping, and the noise of people walking carrying heavy things. But last night I did not sleep in our house because of a story that one of the military had tried to drag a woman at night. Thus, for safety, a few of the women slept together in a different house in the company of older people.

“They think they can find the Tigers things. I like to see that.”

Ammaa’s grumbling confirmed my doubts. Ammaa slept in our house and did not come with me to sleep in the other house. Ammaa would know. She might even know the place where it was hidden. But she will not open her mouth about it. Sometimes ammaa behaves like a top level diplomat or an experienced intelligence officer. I would have difficulties figuring out what she was up to.

\*\*\*

*Once in 1984, Sri Lanka military suddenly entered our house and turned it inside out looking for something. Ammaa sat unmoved and let them do what they pleased. They found nothing. After they had left Kutti maaaa jumped over the fence*

## Into public space

The political struggle of the Eelam Tamils began even before the end of colonialism in 1948. Over the following decades, this struggle gradually unified the Eelam Tamils who were fragmented until then. There is no evidence that women took part in this struggle until after the 1970's.

Another struggle took centre stage in the Tamil homeland during the 1960's spearheaded by the Community Party. This struggle against "untouchability" peaked in 1967 in what is known as the "October Revolution". Obscured in the documentation of this revolt is one report involving a woman. *In this incident a woman named Sellakili was apparently on the search warrant of the police for throwing a grenade*[\[1\]](#). *Could she be the first armed militant Eelam Tamil woman in contemporary times?*

Parallel to the struggle against "untouchability", the impetus for an armed political struggle against the Sri Lankan government had been building up, throughout the 60's. The introduction of the 1970 university entrance scheme which required higher performance from areas with higher educational facilities was the initial impetus for the Tamil youth, in particular the Jaffna youth to seriously consider armed struggle. These youths were the worst effected by this scheme. They formed the Tamil Students Union (TSU) in 1970. The aim of this body was armed militancy. The young Tamil women, even though they too were affected by this university entrance scheme, did not have any active role in this



group that was espousing militant politics. This is an indication of the conservative Jaffna society that promoted education and work for the young women but maintained strict societal codes that otherwise kept them in the private space.

The TSU proved to be an important body mainly because many of the future male leaders of the various Tamil armed movements started their militant activities in this body. Two persons among them was Pon Sivakumaaran and Pirabaaharan. Pon Sivakumaaran acted without a formal group and in 1974 became the first militant to take his own life by biting the cyanide capsule to avoid being in the police custody. Two young women, Valli and Atputham, who were friends of Pon Sivakumaaran's sister had joined him as assistants to his militant acts. These two women appears to be the first Eelam Tamil women to participate in the Tamil Eelam armed struggle for independence. Thus as early as 1973 the spirit of armed militancy had begun the process of crossing the gender boundary in Tamil Eelam.

With the dissolution of the TSU of the 1970, a new group of young men came together to form the Tamil Youth Union (TYU) in 1973 also with the intention of armed militancy. Pushparaaja a key player of this body had published its history in his memoirs in 2006[2]. Uma Maheswaran who was to later lead one of the five main armed groups was active in TYU but operated mostly from Colombo. TYU had many female members. Notable were Urmila, Pushparaaja's sister Pushparaani, Kalyani and several others noted in Pushparaaja's memoirs. Many in this group, including Pushparaaja, were

disillusioned that this group was coming under too much influence of the moderate leadership of the Tamil political party, TULF. They left the TULF to form the more militant Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TLO) in 1975. According to Pushparaaja and also Pushparaani who also published her own brief memoirs in 2012 women were active in the TLO, though there is no documentation suggesting that women in TLO handled arms.

Urmila, Sivakumaaran's helpers, Pushparaani and several other women who were involved with TLO can be considered the pioneers of female participation in Eelam Tamil armed militancy. Although none of them is known to have used arms themselves. Within two years of its formation the TLO itself was disbanded due to arrests and exile of its members.

The early 80's saw the solidification many Tamil armed groups including, Kuttimani's group as Tamil Eelam Liberation Organizatio (TELO), the formation of Peoples Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) due to split in the Tamil Tigers and the formation of the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) due to split in the EROS. These are the five armed groups that dominated the Tamil political scene during the 80's. During this phase, especially after the 1983 pogrom, young women began enlisting in all five groups in substantial numbers. Tamil Tigers was a late comer in enlisting women. Eventually their role in Tamil Tigers grew. Besides the July 1983 outrage which pushed many of the women into armed militancy, there were

many other push factors, the ongoing and pervasive Sri Lankan military sexual violence was one of them.

The Tamil independence struggle, briefly outlined above, provided many types of catalyst for social reconstruction. The practice of caste system and the position of women in the society saw the most noticeable changes. The struggle provided different paths for the women to burst into the public sphere. Paths that would have been hard to walk in the absence of the atmosphere of an intense struggle. The women who came out in the public space fell into two broad categories: by far the largest section were those women who took part in the armed struggle of the various groups. The other group of women became disillusioned with the military focused struggle of the Tamil Tigers and became anti-war campaigners.

By the time the IPKF, the very large contingent of Indian military, landed in the Tamil homeland in 1987, the Tamil Tigers were dominating the scene after having virtually destroyed or absorbed the other groups. Women in the Tamil Tigers had already taken part in combat roles and this continued when the war started between the Tamil Tigers and the IPKF. Sexual violence by the IPKF became rampant in the Tamil homeland. These crimes by the IPKF became the strongest push factor for women to join the Tamil Tigers in even greater numbers. When the Indian military departed from the homeland the vacuum was seized by the Tamil Tigers and for the first time sufficient space became available for the state building project. Women too, who had already entered the public space, now had greater freedom to act in this public

space. Women could do things that they could not do before and demonstrate their abilities in the public sphere. Drive against the practice of dowry giving through law as well as through theatre and the recruitment of large number of women into the police force gave the emerging de-facto state a strongly pro-woman character. In 1996, the Tamil Tigers were evicted from Jaffna by the Sri Lankan military. The Tamil Tigers now set up Kilinochchi as their administrative centre and continued the de-facto state building project amid constant military battles with the Sri Lankan military.

The women in this defacto-state: the Tamil Tiger women, civilians employed by the Tamil Tigers, and self employed women interacted closely in a manner that did not exist outside Vanni. Through this close interaction they managed to create a network to pick out the women who needed a helping hand. Be it in the spheres of economic assistance, domestic violence, child educational negligence or housing need, they were on the lookout. There were established channels and institutions to which they could turn in order to bring this to the attention of those who can help. Because of these available mechanisms, women did not hesitate to be watch-full and they did not turn their face the other way as women must do in most parts of the world. This culture more or less permeated the entire female population. That was the unique feminism – elimination of destitution through universal women's action.

Sustaining this female culture was several Tamil Tiger institutions of health, welfare, banking-development, police, law and media. They all had more than fifty percent female

representation. Some of them were run solely by women, both LTTE and civilian. The extensive and intensive women's network in Vanni drew even the poorest of women in, bringing to them the awareness of the women's work in the public domain. It encouraged women to enter the work force as self employed often in traditional areas such as small scale retailing, farming and sewing but also into small boat fishing, mechanics and driving. Though their ventures were small scale their participation in large numbers promised greater things to come.

[1] “இலங்கையில் சாதியமும் அதற்கெதிரான போராட்டங்களும்”, வெகுஜனன்-இராவணன், சவுத் விசன், தமிழ்நாடு, page 173

[2] “ஈழப்போராட்டத்தில் எனது சாட்சியம்”, சி. புஸ்பராஜா, அடையாளம் வெளியீடு, தமிழ்நாடு

## Stats

There is no recorded statistics of women who were active in the armed struggle, except of those who were active in the Tamil Tiger movement.


The extent of women's role in the Tamil Tiger movement can be gleaned from the official statistics of maaveerar, shown in Table-3, published by the Tamil Tigers in Augusts 2008 less than a year before they were destroyed . Table-2 is the summary of the Black Tiger statistics published by the Tamil Tigers. Table-1 summarises the data in Table-3 on a regional basis together with the distribution of Eelam Tamil population as per 1981 census.

This data reveals the follows points.

1. Women represented 20-30% of the Tamil Tiger membership and this is proportionally represented in the maaveerar statistics as well as in the black tiger statistics.
2. 5-10% of Eelam Tamil women were members of the Tamil Tiger movement.
3. On a per capita basis Vanni districts have given the highest number to the struggle both among men and women. Given that this is where the Tamil Tigers fought its biggest battles this is not surprising.
4. The male maaveerar from the eastern districts is comparable to the Vanni districts. This is very

impressive given that the Tamil Tigers hardly administered a region in Batt/Am

5. The low participation of women from the eastern regions is a surprise for many people. This may in fact be because the Tamil Tigers did not fully administer a region here.
6. Every women who was a member, that is 5-10% of women, would have known another 10 or more women in her life who was not a member. When viewed in this manner it is possible to imagine the extent to which women came under the influence of the Tamil Tiger women.



East  
L.Vanni  
Jaffna

**TABLE-1**

	1981 census	Maaveerar total	1 in population who is maaveerar	Male maaveerar	1 in Male population who is a maaveerar	Female maaveerar	1 in Female population who is a maaveerar	% female among maaveerar
East	410000	6944	59 (17%)	6254	33 (30%)	690	297 (3%)	11
L.Vanni	302000	6503	46 (21%)	4659	32 (31%)	1844	81 (12%)	40
Jaffna	700000	7666	91 (11%)	5615	62 (16%)	2051	170 (6%)	27
Total	1410000	21458	65 (15%)	16808	42 (23%)	4651	151 (7%)	21

**TABLE-2 Black Tigers**

	Male	Female	Total	%F
Land	82	21	103	19
Sea	180	77	257	30
Total	262	98	360	27

TABLE-3

Year	Jaffna		Batti/Ampara		Vanni		Trincomalee		Mullaitteevu		Mannar		Outside		Total		All total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
1982	1														1		1
1983	11					4									15		15
1984	20		7		3	8					6				50		50
1985	46		60		14	41	8				14		5		188		188
1986	91		94		20	48	21				36		9		319		320
1987	247	5	76		46	3	55	17			48		5	15	504	14	518
1988	127	7	114	1	39	1	39	18			18		1	16	371	11	382
1989	147	2	86		56		47	37			27		18		418	2	420
1990	277	41	181	4	140	11	124	2	74	11	64	1	33	2	893	72	965
1991	511	104	312	19	180	33	173	18	114	19	101	15	22	1	1413	209	1622
1992	224	45	243	9	83	6	67	1	40	7	48	6	13		718	74	792
1993	215	49	280	18	110	28	78	6	55	11	61	12	5		804	124	928
1994	90	11	162		30		42		18		1	22	2		366	12	378
1995	420	177	433	15	150	43	83	6	60	25	64	19	10	3	1220	288	1508
1996	448	142	320	31	179	53	85	13	54	26	55	14	4	4	1095	285	1380
1997	522	227	643	65	168	92	120	19	91	52	46	44	15	8	1605	507	2112
1998	564	270	429	94	134	141	102	36	58	69	54	22	17	16	1158	648	1806
1999	862	203	323	71	144	118	80	19	86	57	51	23	7	5	1053	496	1549
2000	475	318	228	79	234	179	100	27	106	78	62	45	35	17	1240	743	1983
2001	171	117	122	28	76	58	45	12	41	27	31	22	8	6	492	270	762
2002	11	5	5	5	6	1	6		2	3		1		1	30	16	46
2003	31	5	10	1	6	2	6	1	4	1	3	1	1	1	61	11	72
2004	9	4	41	10	5	1	5	3	3	2	0	0	0	0	63	17	80
2005	9	4	20	10			11				1	1			42	15	57
2006	170	111	178	13	130	81	174	24	40	19	35	9	20	2	767	259	1006
2007	332	62	170	10	248	42	69	5	147	28	52	12	19		1037	159	1196
2008	284	142	49	5	278	153	56	11	181	80	51	29	6		905	418	1323
Total	5615	2051	4546	490	2627	1044	1668	200	1282	519	950	281	280	66	16808	4651	21459
All Total	7666		5076		3471		1868		1801		1231		346		21459		
Jaffna																	Total
																	Outside



## Bibliography

This is a bibliography of all known published works by Eelam Tamil women who had carried arms during the armed struggle and the writings of Eelam Tamil women who had first-hand experience living and working with the Tamil women who were carrying arms[1]. A good collection of such past publications have been archived at the padippakam and noolaham archive sites. These are listed in eight different categories below.

### 1. Works by Tamil Tiger Women

There is a vast collection of publication by both the Tamil Tigers as well the Women's Division of the Tamil Tigers that contains writings of the Tamil Tiger women. Some of which are:

**1.1** "Suthanthira Paravaikal", Women's Division of the Tamil Tigers. This is the foremost collection of publications that were issued regularly that contains mainly the writings of the Tamil Tiger women. Currently these issues appears to be unavailable.

**1.2** "Naatru", Women Research Centre of the Tamil Tigers – a regular issue that also appears to be unavailable

**1.3** "Veliccham", Arts and Culture Division of the Tamil Tigers – a regular issue.

**1.4** “Erimalai”, International branch of the Tamil Tigers – a regular issue.

**1.5** “Vaathanaiyin kavithaikal” – poetry collection, Vaanathy, Publication Division – Tamil Tigers, 1991.

**1.6** “Kasthooriyin Aakkankal” – writings, Kasthoori, Publication Division – Tamil Tigers, 1992.

**1.7** “Kaathoodu sollividu” – writings, Barathy, Publication Division – Women’s Division of the Tamil Tigers, 1993.

**1.8** “Eluthaatha un kavithai” – poetry collection by various women, Capt. Vaanathi Publication – Women’s Division of the Tamil Tigers, 2001

**1.9** “Viluthaaki Veerumaaki” – history of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Malathy regiment, authors: A Kantha, S Puradchikaa and Malaimahal, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Malathy Regiment publication, 2003.

**1.10** “Malaimakal kathaikal”- short story collection, Malaimakal, Capt. Vaanathi Publication – Women’s Division of the Tamil Tigers, 2004.

**1.11** “Meendum thulirkkum vasantham” – poetry collection, Ampuli, Capt. Vaanathi Publication – Women’s Division of the Tamil Tigers, 2004.

**1.12** “Vali” – short story collection, Capt Vaanathi publications – Tamil Tiger Women’s Division, 2005.

Another collection of poetry that has appeared in the various Tamil Tiger publications was re-published by a Women's group, Oodaru, operating from among the diaspora Tamil women.

**1.13** “Peyaridaatha nadchaththirankal”, poetry collection by various LTTE women, Oodaru-Vidiyal publication, 2011

**1.14** “Pooraaliyin kaathali” – novella based on the pre-2009 period, Vettichchelvi, Cholan Padaippakam, Tamil Nadu, 2012

## **2. Adele Balasingam's writings**

Based on the qualification that this bibliography is of writings by Tamil women, Adele Balasingam will not qualify. However, she occupies a special place because her book on LTTE women remains to date the only authentic writing in English about LTTE women. This work, however, only describes the military achievements of the LTTE women.

**2.1** “Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers”, Adele Balasingam, Tamil Tigers, 1993.

## **3. Work by women in other armed groups**

No works by women in the other armed movements have been identified so far.

## **4. Women's Research Circle (WRC) based in Jaffna University**

**4.1** “Sollaatha seithikal”, collection of poetry by many civilian anti-war women, 1986.

**4.2** Rajani Thinaragam who was a key member of the Women’s Research Circle co-authored a book “Broken Palmyra” with three other male authors during the IPKF presence. In this work her name is not distinctly associated with any of the content.

**4.3** Regular issues of “Pen” continues to this day by Surya Women’s Development Centre based in Colombo and Batticaloa. Surya Development Centre was closely associated with WRC until WRC became defunct during the late 1980’s following the assassination of Rajini Thinaragama allegedly by the Tamil Tigers.

## **5. 2009 experience**

**5.1** “Eelap poorin iruthi naatkal” – first-hand experience of end-war, Vettichchselvi, Cholan Padaippakam, Tamil Nadu, 2012

**5.2** “Oolikkaalam” – novel based on first-hand experience of end-war, Thamilkavi, Thamilini Publishers, Tamil Nadu, 2013.

**5.3** “A fleeting moment in my ..” – first-hand experience of last years, N Malathy, Clarity Press, USA, 2012

**5.4** “Enathu naatil oru thuli neeram” – the above in Tamil translation, Vidiyal Publishers, Tamil Nadu, 2013.

5.5 “Aaripoona Kaayankalin Vali” – first hand experience of Tamil Tiger women taken as POWs, Vetrichelvi, Thavamani Pathippakam, 2016.

## **6. Post 2009 publications of much earlier experience**

**6.1** “Tamil Tigress” – Author’s experience of less than one year (1987-88) membership in the Tamil Tiger movement, Niromi de Souza, Allen & Unwin, 2011. Though touted as memoirs there is evidence that many of the sections in the book are fictitious.

**6.2** “Ahaalam” – 1970’s experience of activism and torture, Pushparanee, Karuppu Pirathikal, 2013

**6.3** “Oru Koor Vaalin Nilali” – Memoir of the ex-leader of the Women’s Section of the Political Wing of the LTTE, Thamilini, Kalachuvadu Pathippakam, 2016. Writing this memoir living in Colombo, Thamilini’s narrative twisted the truth according to many others who were with her in many of the incidents she describes.

## **7. Post 2009 experience of LTTE women**

**7.1** “Kaanaamal poonavanin manaivi” – short story collection, Vettichelvi, Cholan Padaippakam, 2012.

**7.2** “Ummath”- novel based only on post-2009 experience with Tamil Tiger women, Sarmila Seiyith, Kaalachuvadu

publishers, 2013. Authour does not describe any experience with arms carrying women.

[1] A category of Tamil women based either in Colombo or in the Diaspora with very limited exposure to the arms carrying Tamil women have written articles/books about them. Some among them are: Radhika Coomarasamy, Darini Rajasingam-Senanayake, Nanthini Sornaraja, Ambika Satkunanathan and Nimmi Gowrinathan.