

THE OTHER VICTIMS OF WAR

EMERGENCE OF FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN EASTERN SRI LANKA

VOLUME II



SELVY THIRUCHANDRAN

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This book makes an attempt to capture both the structural and emotional disturbances that affect women and children during times of war. Female headed households in Sri Lanka emerged as a social phenomena in substantial numbers only after the two youth uprisings, one in the south and the other in the north, one among the Sinhalese and the other among the Tamils. Men went to war and died violently leaving the women and children to face their lives amidst uncertainty, insecurity and terror,

While undertaking a sociological inquiry into the lives of women and children, a political focus which is inevitable, enters the scene of the research. The role of the state, or rather the complicity of the state in creating coercive patterns of governance, also becomes visible in the process as a side-line.

The women's narratives reveal a subjectivity which determines eventually the core theme of the research.

The Other Victims of War
Emergence of Female Headed
Households in Eastern Sri Lanka
(Volume II)

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Emergence of Female Headed Households in Eastern Sri Lanka

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Selvy Thiruchandran

In Association with :
**WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTRE,
COLOMBO**



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Dedication

*For all the Victims of War,
Women, Men and Children.*

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Acknowledgment

Since this research was carried out during war time, it led us to very peculiar situations where we had to solicit help, guidance, and direction from various people at various times. Our entry point was of course the State. Though it was suspected that the research may be critical of the State, the State officials, were very helpful. The Government Agent in Amparai, Mr.A.I Wickreme, and his team M.I.M. Ibrahim and Mr.A.A.Bawa, went out of their way, out of their bureaucratic way, to help us. This is something we have to place on record. We felt welcome and our mission was appreciated.

The Additional Government Agent in Trincomalee Mr.Pugendran was also extremely helpful and introduced us to the members of the community with whom we could work. When he was not available his wife Sathia came to our assistance most willingly.

We were particularly fortunate to have Ms.Arumugam as our Field Supervisor. She has both commitment and pleasant mannerisms and we enjoyed her hospitality too. As a very responsible community leader Dr.Siron Rajaratnam who is no more with us and Dr.Vignarajah who is a Medical Officer and social worker gave us a of their time and expertise. They both filled in many a missing gap.

The NGOs that came to our assistance in Trincomalee were the Trincomalee Women's Welfare Association, Family Rehabilitation Centre, Trincomalee Hindu Women's Association and OXFAM. In Amparai, Mahashakti, the Social Welfare Organisation of Amparai District and the Affected Women's Forum were very helpful.

The research assistants (whose names appear in this publication) had to go through a lot of difficulties to carry out this research. Physically and mentally they were taxed immensely. I say with gratitude that they are the ones who have performed the most difficult tasks and I say 'Thank You' to them all.

And OXFAM who sponsored and funded this research deserves to be thanked by many people who will benefit from this research and the Women's Education and Research Centre is happy to have been associated with OXFAM for nearly two years. We say thank you to the staff with whom we worked. It was a pleasant experience.

Ms. Shiranee Mills, Mr. Reggi Siriwardene and Ms. Chitra Ranawake deserve to be mentioned as a special category, the former for patiently proof reading and the latter two for meticulously editing the manuscript. To them I say a special thank you.

Deepthi Wickremasinghe and Ms. Peiris who typed the manuscript and Vinodini de Silva who worked as coordinator of this research from Women's Education and Research Centre (WERC) have also performed various tasks.

Amparai

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Foreword

Wars all over the world have left scars, both in the minds and bodies, of people. Generally research on postwar situation tends to overlook gender related dimensions. This research however has gender specific dimensions. An additional perspective that enters the research is the inquiry on the role of the State or rather the complicity of the State in creating coercive patterns of governance. The point that we drive at through this research is that state terrorism or any terrorism has specific patterns of affecting men, women and children with adverse results in different ways.

In fact, the way the members of a civil society react may also differ from one group to another. The research was commissioned by OXFAM on a neutral subject such as the female headed households during a specific period in Sri Lankan history. Female headed households in Sri Lanka emerged as a social phenomenon in substantial numbers only after the two youth uprisings, one among the Sinhalese and other the among the Tamils. Both, the Sinhalese youth insurgency and the Tamil nationalist uprising, were armed struggles against the State which have also had "terrorist" deviance over time leading to human rights violations. How the State reacted to the civilian population and to the so called 'terrorist' groups has contributed in a large measure to the emergence of female headed households in Sri Lanka.

Since there is an ethnic as well as a geographical divide in the problem, the research was conducted by two senior researchers and a set of research assistants who speak the language of the victims. This is volume II which is on the Tamil victims, Volume I is on the Sinhala victims and is titled *Stories of Survivors: Socio-Political Contexts of*

Female Headed Households in Post-Terror Southern Sri Lanka. It deals with the experiences of the Sinhala women in the southern province of Sri Lanka. It is published along with Volume II by Women's Education and Research Centre and the two volumes would give a comprehensive picture of the problem of violence in Sri Lanka.

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October 1998

Introduction

The female-headed household is not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Women have been widowed, deserted and separated throughout history. They have become the de-facto heads of the family, though kin groups, both maternal and paternal, give them the necessary support and sustenance, both financially and emotionally. What is new to Sri Lanka is the dramatic increase of female-headed households in recent years.

The emergence of female-headed households in the west is increasingly due to the deliberate choice made by women. Women see a lot of disadvantages in the two parent families: such a choice allows them to be independent, to be free from domestic violence and to have freedom from economic and psychological dependency on a patriarch. In many countries in Africa, Asia and Europe researchers have found that female-headed households have existed when the husbands were away for either economic or political reasons and that the wives have managed both estates and households with and without support from the natal family members.

In Sri Lanka migration to western countries for employment for temporary periods of two-four years by the husbands has led to the emergence of temporary female-headed households. In the north of Sri Lanka in the colonial period, and to some extent in the first two decades of the post-colonial period, many households were run by female heads using the money-order they received from the male non-residential heads. The men had their jobs in the capital of the country or elsewhere and played the role of a breadwinner effectively, but did not manage the households. Professional men from the north of Sri Lanka migrated to Malaysia and Singapore as well leaving their wives to run the household.

With the ethnic war in Jaffna, many men between the ages of fourteen to forty, left Jaffna, unable to withstand the resulting instability, insecurity and the increasing violence of both the state and the militants. In addition many men were killed and women had to assume leadership of the home. In Trincomalee there does not seem to be a history of female-headed households till the ethnic war shifted to Trincomalee in the 80's.

The male-headed household in Sri Lanka is the norm, and it was not culturally accepted for the household to be female-headed. The concept of the male "bread-winner" and the general patriarchal pattern within the family had led to hierarchical relationship between the man and wife so that the male became essentially the head of the household. This picture was the accepted norm, while in reality women had bases of power and economic independence, more so among the lower castes and classes. But to all intents and purposes, the man was the head of the household or appeared to be so and it was also ideologically legitimised, so that in the records kept by the state and others, the men are exclusively referred to as the head of the household.

The increase in the number of female-headed households both in the south in the 70s and from the 1980s in the north and east is mainly due to violence. Violence in many forms, both by the state and by the militant groups has become the order of the day. The extraordinary levels of such violence perpetrated by both parties are constantly condemned by both the national and international communities who have termed them as human rights violations. If industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation have their impact on the composition of the nuclear and joint extended/family, militarisation has increased female-headed households in Sri Lanka.

The concept of "the head of the household" is generally not defined and has led to some confusion. The census records give the name of the male under "head of the household" and it is also taken for granted that he is the breadwinner and the chief decision maker. There are indeed cases where the wife has been the breadwinner, but the decision maker is the husband. This confusion is eliminated in the female-headed household:

The female-headed household in this study has the following characteristics: the female is the breadwinner and as the decision-maker manages the household.

She is singly responsible for child care and home-making with children, with or without adult males such as the older sons or her father, who are not the economic providers.

The census of 1981 recorded 405,330 female single parents (8.6%) out of which 59% of the female single parents were heads of households. This figure excludes the number who have not sought legal separation or divorce but practically are single parents or female heads. In the present socio-political context, these statistical figures of the 1981 census are of little or no use, considering the changes that have taken place due to the ongoing war for about a decade.

According to the gender indicators of Sri Lanka published by the Department of Census and Statistics in 1995, the female-headed household has increased to 19% from 16% from 1981 to 1992 and to 21% in 1994. From 1994 to the present date there is a phenomenal increase in the number of female-headed household in the north and east. Refugee camps, displacement of population and disappearances are the order of the day. Despite the induction of women now into the military structures, both of the L.T.T.E. and the state, more men than women went to war and died in the battlefield. However, there are no official statistics on the number of women-headed households from 1996 as there was no census of the population carried out in the north and east due the prevailing political upheavals. The problem is compounded further by the absence of gender desegregated statistics, though some NGOs have now initiated attempts to collect gender desegregated data on the displaced and the refugee population. But local government units and NGOs working in these areas have ad hoc reports which give some statistical data. Reports from the east have estimated 10,000 to 15,000 women who are widowed in the last six years, most of whom are living below the poverty line. For example in Eravur Pattu D.S. division there are 1174 registered widows, most of whom are under 40 years of age. (Kottegoda 1966:18). There are indeed glaring discrepancies between figures supplied by the NGOs and the state. For example the number of widows at Tirukovil

according to an NGO at Amparai is 409, while the figure given by the Grama Sevaka is 862 at the time of our field research. The NGO figure at Kalmunai is 923 while that of the state is 2503.

There are many reasons for this. But the most important reason is that the population is moving from place to place. The widows are constantly on the move seeking secure habitats and trying to live with kin groups, mostly maternal relations such as mothers, sisters and brothers. During the period they live with them, they are not classified as belonging to a separate household but become separate when they move out and live separately.

Missing heads of households are of different categories. There are those missing from the household but living in the refugee camps or in some other place. These and some of those killed are officially classified as "disappeared". Men as non-combatants have been killed in the cross-fire or, killed purposely by the enemy because they belonged to the "wrong" ethnic divide, Sinhala or Tamil. Disappeared spouses during the space and time of disappearances create female-headed households. When death followed disappearance after torture, those deaths have also left women as members of a "headless household" till they become effective heads. During times of fleeing and dislocation a few husbands are lost. They are not traced for years. Their family members do not know whether they are alive or dead. Then there are husbands who have died due to illness or having committed suicide; there are husbands who have deserted their wives, sought divorces and who live in separation.

The various types of deaths and disappearances have differential impact on the women and children of the household. Some deaths are forgotten and accepted, but others have created conditions of trauma, anger and frustration. Deaths due to natural causes are accepted. Desertion, separation for the sake of another woman, divorce, ethnic killing or revenge killing and suicide have created angry women, traumatic women and frustrated women. The differential level of their feelings and their impact will be discussed in detail in the research.

Official recognition of the phenomenon of the female headed household has of late become a de-facto reality and has become an official research agenda. The Women's Bureau and the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction have initiated some research into

these areas perhaps with a view to identifying a policy towards rehabilitating the women. However, officially they are still categorised as "households with widows", unsupported women, destitute women, and vulnerable women. Kottegoda argues that this overlooks the importance that what is noted is relatively a new and distinct social phenomenon with far reaching implications for our society and economy (1997:96).

Households are generally understood as structures with functions designated to their composite members. As members living together in the same house and sharing a common hearth they are supposed to maintain and manage them. As all social definitions do not stand the test of time and space, households are also subjected to changes. In certain households people live together in the same house but do not cook and eat from the same kitchen. Even members of the extended families, sons and daughters with their wives and husbands living under the same roof, have different living and cooking arrangements. Apartments and annexes under the same roof are shared by different household members. Another development of the present militarised context in Sri Lanka has been the emergence of "refugee camps" and welfare centres where the people are housed three to four years together under the same roof, where they share the structures of a building with common facilities such as pipe water/ well water, compounds, home gardens, toilets, but cook separately. These units have for all practical purposes the characteristics of a co-residential household headed either by a man or a woman. Both the men and women living in the refugee camps who have such living arrangements, referred to their unit as *Kutumbam* (family). Interestingly, these household units could either be nuclear or joint family. The terms nuclear and joint are used here merely as analytical terms. It is not merely the structure that denotes the concept of household but living arrangements together with the subsistence arrangement and the perceptions of the members who reside in that structure. These are significant factors in our conceptualisation.

The sociological category of the "household" as consisting of a man, his wife and unmarried children as a nuclear family and the "joint family" as a unit consisting of married child(ren) and their spouse(s) has to be abandoned when one confronts the female headed household

(which is not anyway a new phenomenon). While single parent family is a term that denotes only one parent, whether father or mother, the female headed household is one in which the women have taken over tasks/ responsibilities other than the management of the household. The households headed by women analysed in this research are either nuclear, with the mother and the children, or occasionally with the mother, children, the mother's parents or mother's sister as the case may be. In both cases the woman is the chief member of the unit. The earning member becomes the head, taking on a leadership role and the decision-making role. This headship/ leadership and the decision-making capacity is very different from the patriarchal patterns of domination with very effective and hierarchical relationships maintained by the male head of the household.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AGA	Assistant Government Agent
NGO/s	Non - Government Organisation/s
L.T.T.E.	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
JVP	Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna
GA	Government Agent
STF	Special Task Force
UTHR	University Teachers for Human Rights

Chapter 1

Discovering the Female Households, The Sites and the Methodology

This research was carried out in two districts in Sri Lanka, Trincomalee and Amparai. The research concentrates more on qualitative aspects and not in quantitative statistical findings though it falls into clearly defined and quantified representative data in terms of research sites and the researched households. Behind these, what mattered most was the women, their feelings, emotions and the daily patterns of their life—the very real situations of the heads of the households. The women are placed within the labyrinth of cultural setting, the patriarchal values that govern them, the economic challenges, social and psychological problems, the coping mechanisms they have evolved and those that were evolved for them by others.

The female-headed household as part of a rehabilitation refugee problem has become the key concern of both the State and the various non-governmental organisations (NGO). There are meeting points between them at the level of structural programme design and delivery devices, but at the level of handling emotion and empathy the NGOs went steps ahead by interacting with the victims more closely, and more frequently by personal contacts. We had to interact both with the State and the NGOs which were working in these sites. In times of war we too needed the protection and cover of the State. For tactical reasons we sought the assistance of the State, though ideologically we were at variance with their stand and their slogan “war for peace”. However, the people who ran the State institutions were both helpful, kind and

sympathetic to our endeavour "of studying the women" in the female-headed households as the mainstream social scientists, the State and the NGOs have referred to the problem.

Trincomalee has unique characteristics because of the strategic importance of its harbour, one of the finest in the world. It is situated in the northern part of the eastern province. The total extent of the district is 2630.8 sq.km. It is divided into eleven AGA divisions. Despite its historical importance and its contemporary potentialities Trincomalee still maintains its rural character. In the survey done in 1981 the urban population accounted for 32.4% while the rural was 66.1% of the total. However, the Trincomalee town has developed as an urban centre with its commercial port becoming a trade centre with industrialisation, tourist promotion and fisheries. The building of the Kantalai Tank and the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme are attempts to increase the land potential of Trincomalee. Another important feature is its ethnic composition which is uniquely multi-ethnic with Sinhalese, Tamil, Moors, Malays and Burghers. According to the census taken in 1981 the population of Trincomalee was 274,702 while that estimated for 1993 was 431,207. The present war situation has made it impossible for any new census.

Agriculture and fishing are the mainstay of the economy. In 1993, 43.4% engaged in agriculture and fishing, while 26.3% in other productive income generation. The employed women in 1993 accounted for 21.5%. These statistical figures would have changed for the worse now with the intensification of the war and its resultant destruction. According to a survey done in 1993 forty per cent of the children both under ten years and those going to school are malnourished. In 1993, 51% of the population was receiving food stamps (Trincomalee Today: 27). While these figures indicate the poverty levels we speculate that the per centage would have increased by now. The female headed households have to be situated within these figures.

Giving an extensive and comprehensive description of the districts is not the purpose of this note. It is merely to help place in perspective the Amparai district that we give this information. Amparai is a new creation. It was part of the Batticaloa district as late as the 1960s. Amparai emerged as an independent administrative unit only in 1961

and later modified in 1976 with the amalgamation of the Bintenna Pattu South and north AGA divisions. Predominantly an agricultural area the extent of the land is 4604 Sq. kilometers including large inland water bodies. It has twelve AGA divisions with four hundred and eighty two villages.

The district is served with an agricultural economy though there are a few industrial factories such as those that manufacture tiles, bricks, and carpentry in addition to paddy processing. These also provide employment avenues. Poverty and the resultant low nutritional status are markedly chronic (Sugathadasa, 1986:3). Here again the fact that in the year 1984 over fifty per cent of the population as receiving food stamps is an indicator of the poverty level in the district. The war and the extensive damage caused by it has further increased the poverty levels and the emergence of the female headed households. These have further implications.

Women have become both political and socio-economic victims, for reasons for which they are not responsible. The political causes of the war in the north and east are well documented though ethnic versions abound with various biases. However, there are a few social scientists who have gone beyond their ethnic belonging to write the history of this conflict without prejudices. The Tamils complaining of various forms of discrimination in language rights, educational and employment opportunities have for long articulated their grievances through parliamentary ethics and through non-violent means.

These grievances were perceived by some Sinhalese as artificially created due to the loss of the prestigious positions the Tamils held under British colonialism. The Tamils of Jaffna, it was reiterated constantly, were in prestigious jobs in the public service, banks and in the legal professions taking advantage of the educational system. A theory of collaboration with the British imperialists is also advanced by some.

The repeated communal violence perpetrated by the majority Sinhalese, and by the State at times have made the Tamil people lose confidence in the Sinhala dominated political parties, and the Tamil democratic parties and even the progressive Sinhala dominated parties which had an agenda for alleviation of Tamil grievances have become suspect. Thus the Tamil political psyche has turned anti-Sinhalese in

general. The Tamil youths who were directly affected became impatient with democracy and its slow process of persuasion and took to arms. There emerged many groups among the Tamils with claims for national self-determination. Setting up a Tamil State in the north and east through an armed struggle became their main agenda. The anti-Sinhala psyche which was cultivated and nurtured took different forms. State terrorism through destruction of the Jaffna public library, the successive communal riots against the Tamils and the mindless killing of Tamil civilians, was met with counter violence of killing the Sinhala civilians. Many of the groups have now returned to democracy but the conflict continues. The L.T.T.E., being the only armed group is now at war with the State with clear visions of a separate State.

The centre of the conflict was first Jaffna and Batticaloa later, but Trincomalee, an area which is the most sensitive, was also drawn into the conflict. Its location as a natural harbour has become the "bone of contention". The Tamils claim it as part of their "traditional homeland" and think that this should be a part of *Eelam*, and the Sri Lankan State feeling that it is legitimately a part of Sri Lanka proper think that no ethnic group should lay claims to this region. As a result both parties moved their struggle to Trincomalee. Trincomalee became a bloody site of war, with loss of human lives, the tragedy being the loss of lives of the non-combatant civilians, mostly men. Either they were caught in the cross-fire while being on the roads, fields or markets or taken away from their homes by the soldiers and police for questioning and then they effectively disappeared, finally taken to be dead. When L.T.T.E. targeted the State apparatus it was the Sinhala soldiers and the policemen who were killed. Thus the enraged soldiers went berserk and killed many male civilians in retaliation. They wreaked their vengeance on them, most of them innocent of terrorism. In Trincomalee, often people referred to 1990 as a year of a major event. "1990" was in many ways equalled to "1983"—the year of the major communal violence directed against the minority Tamils by the State in the south.

Since there are no documented accounts of the events which I could get either from the Government Agent's office or from media reporting which could give a meaningful reconstruction of 1990, I had to collect oral versions or eye witness accounts. I will recapitulate below.

A youth called Rupan of L.T.T.E. from Thambalagamam, a village in Trincomalee, was shot dead on June 12th or 13th 1990 at the Trincomalee Town "junction". The L.T.T.E. then attacked the Uppuveli police station. The damage was heavy. There was a mass burial of the policemen. The army, navy and the police joined forces, in retaliation in which, I was told that the "Sinhala thugs"—meaning a part of the violent Sinhala civilians, also joined. Thus civilian Tamils became the target. Houses were burnt and people were shelled and shot dead. The people fled to Jaffna and other places. People who hid in hospitals and a famous rice mill were shelled and shot at. In Nilavali, Sambaltivu, Anpuvallipuram, Lingannagar and Tambalagamam, people died in numbers. Thus the 1990 massacre was one of the major events where the State retaliated against the civilians. Civilian victims of the Tamils were mainly men. This has resulted in women becoming widows and heads of households.

Though most of the killings are revenge killings, the army, navy and the police feel that the people are with the L.T.T.E. in that they keep silent on L.T.T.E. movement across their villages and refrain from reporting them. Though this silence and inactivity on the part of the civilian Tamils as interpreted as support and collaboration with the L.T.T.E. agenda, the actual reason behind their reticence is often something different. The civilians face the threat of being lamp-posted and killed if they become informants to the State. Neither are they convinced that the State can be trusted and relied upon for justice. Between the devil and the deep sea, the tensions and frustration of the civilians continue.

The political profile of Amparai is more or less the same as Trincomalee as far as the State, the people and the L.T.T.E. are concerned. The people are between two armed sieges. The violence was very intense and continuous. In addition to the army and police the special task force was brought into the frame which terrorised the people from various quarters. The situation recorded a complexity beyond a rational analysis, where the Tamil-Muslim antagonism resulted in bloody inter-ethnic wars against one another. The State taking sides with the Muslims punished the Tamils even more severely taking the view that the Tamils were collaborating with the L.T.T.E.

The anti-Muslim stand of the L.T.T.E in Jaffna where they chased the Muslims out of Jaffna, had serious repercussions in Batticaloa and Amparai. All Tamils in the east are considered as L.T.T.E collaborators. The Muslims in the north and east, most of them Tamil-speaking, hitherto have identified with the politics of the Tamils for long, but with the treatment of the Muslims by the L.T.T.E. the Muslims have been alienated. This has led to a process of the Muslims asserting an identity of their own. This was also further activated by the rise of Muslim/Islam identity in the Arab countries. The complexity of the problems in the Eastern Province in general, and in Amparai in particular, have resulted in more women becoming heads of the household.

The multiple methods of violence by the State, the L.T.T.E., IPKF and the disappearances caused either by the Sri Lankan State or by the Tamil militancy have intensified and multiplied the forces of violence. The communal violence, suspicion and mutual animosity directed against the other community sometimes engineered and manipulated by the State, have caused havoc in the minds of the people. There was a lot of confusion, apprehension and the fear of not knowing with whom to collaborate, and whom to keep at a distance. In the final analysis it was the women who became the victims. The agony of going to collect the dead bodies, shot, chopped, mutilated and in decaying conditions and going through the burials and cremations was described by the women. The disappeared have not returned so far, but the women wait in anticipation, behaving as widows now and as non-widows then, vacillating between "inauspiciousness" and "auspiciousness", between feelings of temporary separation and feelings of death.

The most depressing part of the research process was listening to these sixty-eight women who lost their husbands due to violence. Many of the post-violence victims need counselling and psychiatric treatment. Listening to the tapes and listening to some of them directly was indeed very painful, both for the research assistants and for me. In fact one of the research assistants who was asked to collate the experiences of these women from the transcription, gave up the task saying that it was too painful for her to continue reading the experiences of the women.

The notable difference between the women in Trincomalee and Amparai is the expressive manner in which the women of Amparai talked. Their words were full of emotion and pathos. The Trincomalee women were able to contain their suffering. In fact in Amparai, there were attempts at suicide by two women but they were saved. One tried to drown herself and the other drank poison. One woman said her attempt at suicide was prompted by the gossip she had heard. She refused to reveal what it was or who was responsible for it.

The expression of the agony and the suffering undergone by these women found an outlet in the interviews at which I was present and they are variously expressed by the research assistants in their accounts. There was a lot of weeping and sobbing. Some shed tears without words and remained so for long. Most of them talked crying, with voice choked and quivering lips, holding their chest. A few of them cried loud, their eyes and nose red with emotions. Some of the women stopped talking and the interviews also came to an end. In three cases the mothers took over from the interviewees. The depth of their feelings often found an outlet both through words and through their body language.

They were confused, disappointed and frustrated with no one to turn to. Poverty and the present feelings of insecurity and uncertainty about the future, with the single-handed burden of the responsibility of the children have weighed them down heavily. Another factor which has intensified the sorrowful experiences of the women was the ethnic violence against one community. There were instances where men were killed in numbers of eighteen, thirty, and fifty by the men of the other community. Tamils killing the Muslims and Muslims killing the Tamils within short periods during the communal violence happened often. In the words of the women this is the worst kind of human brutality. The communities that had lived in complete harmony with nothing to divide them for so many years have been suddenly pitted against one another by the political forces, the politics of identity. Anger and helplessness took their turn in the expressions of the women and finally the women succumbed to a State of silence and inactivity. In most households the women related how they felt the horror of the mass killings and how helpless they felt against the ethnic anger and the efforts at ethnic revenge given vent to by their men. In many homes which we visited

there was collective wailing and weeping, the Tamils saying how their men were killed by the Muslims and Muslims describing how the Tamils killed the Muslims.

The women are crying not only for the death of their husbands and kinsmen but for the death of the members of their community and members of humanity as a whole.

We expected the women to be antagonistic towards the research assistants, when the Muslim research assistants visited the Tamil households where their members were killed or vice versa. But it was not so. There were no attempts to personalise their feelings. They perhaps knew how to separate the socio-political forces from individuals. However, they hurled curses at the killers. At times it was difficult to continue the interview. The talking had to stop for a while till they gained composure, and when they did they apologised for being unsocial, uncultured, but continued to sob and cry.

Methodology

The meeting with the NGOs working with women affected by violence was very educative. It cleared the many hurdles of the groundwork needed to reach the women. Their programme of rehabilitation, though limited in its scope, enabled us to reach out to the women, establish contact and initiate the process of dialogue.

Our interaction with the NGOs benefitted us in identifying research assistants who were already in contact with the subjects. Our discussion with the NGO staff and their facilitators revealed to us the fact that they understood the feelings of the women.

The same level of rapport was established with the State officials both in Amparai and Trincomalee. They gave us the necessary assistance in identifying the research areas. Statistical data was not very helpful because of the constant shifting of the households to danger-free zones and away from the army camps and border villages and migration both inter-regionally and across districts. However, the statistics provided by the NGOs and the State provided a rationale for selecting the research sites. Common sense, the demands of social science and the discussions held with the Government Agent, Additional Government Agent, Project Directors and the NGO staff facilitated the process of selecting the research sites.

The research assistants were assigned various tasks for the first three months. They were required to visit State departments which were specifically doing work with refugee rehabilitation programmes and with the displaced men and women. However, with regard to the north and east information was only available locally in the regions. Most of the information was collected from the districts of Trincomalee and Amparai through the assistance of the AGA and GA. The published material on the situation of violence in the east and north was collected by the research assistants from the Tamil daily and weekly papers. This helped us to understand the political background of the situation in those areas.

In addition to the State officials and NGOs, social activists not related to the above were also consulted: School principals, the Director of the Affiliated University College in Trincomalee and a medical doctor, who are part of the active civil society, were sources of information. Their information often contradicted the official versions of events and incidents. This gave us an authentic background of the socio-political reality and also alerted us to the fact that this reality was constantly re-interpreted according to the vested interests of the parties who had the power to create new versions.

It was felt that the research locations should cover areas in the town and village while the refugee camp should also be included in the town of Trincomalee. The two refugee camps in the Technical College and at Love Lane were included in the sample. The refugee camp run by the UNHCR was closed. Thambalagamam, a village in Trincomalee was selected, as it was the most distressed village in terms of socio-economic and political problems. Sri Lanka is now identified as the country with the highest number of suicides and the village Thambalagamam has a record of the highest suicide-rate. It has been recorded that violent clashes between the armed forces, and the LTTE, between the armed forces and the civilians, take place in Thambalagamam more often than in other villages. Palaiyurrtu, an interior village was selected for its extraordinary poverty level. Linga Nagar in Trincomalee town was the worst affected in 1990—the year of a major calamity in Trincomalee. To the category of towns were also added the sites Anpuvalipuram and Selvanayagapuram—the number of female households and ages of the women, being the criteria in the

selection. Sally, a coastal village, was selected as it was an area where we found the largest number of widows. The caste location as fisherwomen living in a cluster, and the site being exclusively theirs, were added reasons for the choice.

As stated earlier, the research concentrates more on qualitative aspects than on quantitative. However, statistical meanings are not totally ignored. They are integrated as long as they fall into clearly defined quantitative and representative data in terms of research sites and the researched households. What mattered most however was the women, their feelings, emotions and their daily pattern of life within the very real situations as heads of the households. The cultural setting, patriarchal values, the so-called singleness within the family, their economic status together with the status of being the head of the family become the background on which the women are analysed. Women's agency, by which is meant an instrumental participation both within the family and in society, becomes the focus of this research.

The research seeks to cover various pre-determinating aspects, such as the husband's job, the present economic status, source of income, financial assistance from the State and the NGOs, the women's relationship with the relatives and with the community at large and gender specific problems they face, and the levels and types of the added and single-handed responsibilities of children and household management. The stress and trauma they suffer were other types of inquiry that were made of the women.

In Amparai the sample of women are divided equally between Muslims and Tamils. The women were made single by the war, by the husbands becoming victims of State terrorism, communal violence, militant violence, by natural deaths and by the husbands committing suicide or deserting their wives. In all these categories the women did not decide to become single. Singleness was imposed on them. Those killed by communal violence among the Muslims were killed by the Tamils and those who were killed among the Tamils were killed by the Muslims.

In Amparai the Government Agent and the Project Director and his assistant played a more decisive role in our research collaboration. Statistical data was available, but there were many discrepancies between the data submitted by the GA and by the NGOs. Out of the

twenty-one Grama Sevaka divisions in Amparai, the Kachcheri was able to provide the statistics of only eleven districts. In Amparai it was necessary to cover the two ethnic groups—the Muslims and the Tamils, residing there. To get wider representation it was decided to cover ten GS divisions out of the twenty one. The total number of widows, according to the statistics provided by both the GA and NGOs, is much higher than in Trincomalee. After identifying the GS divisions which had the highest number of female-headed households, an equal number of Tamil and Muslim villages were selected. The statistics provided by the Kachcheri and the NGOs were both used.

On the above rationale the following areas were selected in Amparai.

Samanthurai	—	Muslims
Kalmunai	—	Tamil Division/Muslim Division
Akkaraipattu	—	Muslim Division/ Tamil Division
Tirukovil	—	Tamils
Alaiyadi Vembu	—	Tamils
Karaitivu	—	Muslim Division and Tamil Division
Attalaichenai	—	Tamil Division
Nintavur	—	Muslims
Attapalam	—	Muslims
Pottuvil	—	Tamils

A total of one hundred households with equal number of Muslims and Tamils were selected. Since the areas selected were scattered across regions in the Amparai district, separated by vast stretches of land, it became necessary to recruit ten research assistants instead of five as planned. The ten research assistants were asked to interview ten households each, whereas in Trincomalee each research assistant was assigned twenty households. Unlike in Trincomalee the ongoing war was very intense, and the situation was very tense, occasionally causing disruptions in the field research.

In Amparai the situation was more complex and the deaths were caused in a slightly different manner. The women claimed that twenty men were killed by the L.T.T.E, twelve died due to communal violence (Muslim men killed by Tamils and Tamil men killed by Muslims), seven were found dead under mysterious circumstances—"mysterious circumstances" here has to be interpreted as deaths caused either by the

security forces or by the militants, but by which it cannot be ascertained. There was tactical silence on the part of those who were witnesses to the incidents to prevent counter-activities of revenge. There were two killed by the I.P.K.F. The Sri Lankan security forces have killed seventeen, both on suspicion and as part of revenge killings. Two have committed suicide and one was an accidental death. Fifteen women were deserted/divorced by their husbands while twenty-four died due to sickness.

The victims of "State terrorism" are seventeen in number.

The ten research assistants in Amparai and the five in Trincomalee were given a comprehensive training in research methodology. Being members of the various NGOs they had a great deal of rapport with the people of the areas. What they needed was some methodological techniques and sufficient input in feminist methodology.

The first session was on Gender Sensitisation drawing out the various facets of patriarchal domination. The very concept of the female-headed household is a patriarchal construction, as it did not evolve from structures of equality. The research involved a deconstruction of the feminine subjection on lines of passivity, obedience, and silence. The two sessions were on research methodology with special emphasis on entry point, building up sufficient rapport in the interviews, dialogue techniques and the need to be good listeners. It was found that the commitment to the cause, on the part of the research assistants, was high, the cause being, not the research itself but empathy with the women. This study was done with a view to conducting a follow-up programme and making policy recommendations.

The research assistants were given two sessions on feminist methodology. By 'feminist methodology' is meant a process of empathising and developing an acute sense of experiential analysis, the researcher co-operating with the researched in a participatory exercise. The research questions and the interviews were conducted with the women's benefit in focus. The whole process of the research, it was felt, should eventually create a non-hierarchical base for intervention and sharing. Subjects and objects are neutralised especially when the researched people are of a lesser status, economically and socially. Feminist methodology should include in our opinion the following:

Validating personal experiences through a non-hierarchical process which neutralises the subjective/objective dichotomy of research. Systems, structures and institutions cannot be studied subjectively or from women's experiences alone. The successful feminist research should then depend on how successfully the subjective and personal experiences can be related objectively to systems, structures and institutions which are anyway creations of the people. The people behind structures and institutions become one with them and comply with their oppression. Even the oppressed do comply with their own oppression at times. In this field research the many-faceted focus on gender takes note of these methodological insights as well. The methodology of any research should be geared to decipher the processes very clearly at the beginning. Women in our research are not objectified nor are their experiences depersonalised. The lives of female heads, the single women in our perceptions are reported in their own terms in the manner they perceive the essence of their lives. The interviews are quoted extensively, the women speak for themselves and their accounts are followed by our interpretations which are sympathetic to the women. The interviews quoted have in fact become one of the means through which the text is personalised.

However, the unethical character of talking on personal matters has indeed caused a moral dilemma for us. Often we were compelled to ask ourselves, "What is our right and why should these women be duty bound to talk to us with terrible pain of mind?"

During the training, the research assistants were trained in a multi-methodology approach, and the need to include participant observation was explained to them. The interviews were taped with the permission of the women. A few women did not feel favourably inclined towards their conversations being recorded. Their requests were complied with and notes taken.

The sensitivity of the research assistants was tested, considering the fact that they were going to delve deep into various personal and forbidden areas such as sexual harassment. We realised the need to exercise caution in the selection of the research assistants and the need to give them this special training. Hence our elaborate preparation of the research assistants. Besides introducing the techniques of interviewing and the ethics of social science research, the need to

observe events and incidents, related and unrelated, in the surroundings was emphasised. They were advised to take note of such data as well.

The vision, methodology and the results of the research were discussed in detail. They were requested to raise the consciousness of the women towards independence, self-reliance and taking a courageous stand. The question and answer method, it was agreed, will be discarded and an interactive dialogue process, it was urged, should be followed. The ethical dilemma of doing research with affected people who have to relate unpleasant experiences was brought to the forefront of the discussion. The researchers were asked to give up probing if there was resentment on the part of the women.

The first few interviews transcribed by the research assistants were listened to and most of them were found to be satisfactory. A total of 5 out of 15 were asked to redo the interviews. We discussed again the following points.

- (i) The manner of dialogue
- (ii) Transcription : accuracy and authenticity
- (iii) The need to record sentiments in the women's own words and phrases
- (iv) To spend more time, to avoid being abrupt
- (v) To collect data in more detail.

However, as the interviews were found to be relatively short, with vital information lacking, the researchers were encouraged to empathise with the women and to cultivate more sensitivity to their problems with special emphasis on approach. The research accounts were found to have improved in the second attempt.

Both in Amparai and Trincomalee visits to households were made, sometimes alone by me, and sometimes with the research assistants. The preliminary findings were discussed with the research assistants.

Fifty of the households interviewed were subsequently visited by me for further clarification, and visits were done after reading the transcribed texts of the interviews. Out of the hundred households in both Trincomalee and Amparai, sixty were identified as the most trauma-affected. These households were further studied by the two psychologists for trauma-specific analysis from a psychological perspective. They in turn identified twenty women as cases of intense trauma and visited them, in both Trincomalee and Amparai, for further dialogue and discussion. Their findings were documented separately.

The multi-method approach, the interviews and the participant observation by research assistants/ senior researchers' visits and psychological observations, it is hoped are valuable findings and instrumental in capturing the reality. Many of the initial findings were set apart, either partially or wholly. A few were modified while there were also new findings. At the beginning, for many reasons, the age of the research assistant was a hindrance to discuss "adult-topics", "personal topics" and "shameful topics", but the second visit cleared many of the obstacles. At the residence of an interviewee the carefully constructed barricades of barbed wire in an unconventional manner revealed to us the illegal trespassing of a *kassippu* addict in the late evenings and nights into the abode of a young widow. Malnourished, under-clothed children were met with the eyes first and then with the intellect later.

The visits to the refugee centres were the most interesting in the sense that we met small groups of women together. We realised that refugee women face different problems. This was brought to the notice of the research assistants.

Though not followed at all levels in Trincomalee and Amparai, focus group discussions were held in both places—Sally and Thambalagamam, villages in Trincomalee, and Alayadiyal Vempu and Kalmunai in Amparai. Focus group discussion was found to be effective due to the following factors:

- a. Development of appropriate and simple guidelines in the process
- c. Moderating discussions without imposing the researcher's point of view
- d. Creating a permissive and non-judgmental environment while maintaining the focus of research
- e. Participation and interaction with each other, stimulating discussion which helped bring out participants' opinions and attitudes.

The household as an institution is not a homogenous undifferentiated unit. It operates within class and caste structures and therefore creates differential patterns of expectations and norms. When the women become the head, the old system may continue or it is disturbed radically. The research takes note of such an enquiry as well.

Emotions of the women include expressions of anger, frustration, helplessness, apathy and sorrow. In short, diverse feelings flowed freely. The need to listen patiently was instilled into the research process. We reached out with this emotion, forgetting about objectivity. Rather this emotional outburst emerged as the objective reality and as far as we were concerned, the ultimate data. In many ways this research coincided with a subaltern studies concern, where the people in the margin are brought into mainstream focus. Ethnically, socially and culturally, these women are in the margins, further marginalised by violence, both civil and State. In this research no attempt was made to distance ourselves from emotions. The psychological analysis the research data rendered, further takes this point to its logical conclusion.

It is fashionable among anthropologists to make distinctions between households and families. The main distinctions are located in the way the members relate to the persistence of traditional behaviour and adaptation to changes (McNicall, 1990). A set of cultural norms, rules, expectations and values are usually connected to the concept of family. Kinship role behaviour and other cultural patterns believed in are connected to and take place within a family. Households are described as units of actual domestic and subsistence arrangement, where the members manage the resources, labour and child care, cook, share and eat the food. The later "functions" are adaptive to socio-economic changes, and are flexible in a state of constant change.

In our research, however, the focus on variables such as the family and household merges where cultural roles and the values that determine the women's new roles as heads of household become equally pertinent. The women have necessarily deviated from cultural expectations in performing the new roles. Such deviations in the performance of new duties and obligations, the cultural "deviance" which they are subjected to, also became part of the focus in this study.

However, studying the family as an institution with static cultural values becomes a new fundamentalism to which we do not subscribe. We take a stand that the households are constantly subjected to changes either due to circumstantial, environmental, political or socio-economic upheavals of a dramatic nature.

The family however can, to some extent, be comprehended as subscribing to more rigid forms of adherence to cultural ethos, roles,

values, norms, prescriptions, expectations and certain aspects of kinship relations. Seeing the institution of family as a static cultural site is more an ideal situation rather than a real one. Cultural expectations remain static in theory while actual behaviour patterns change due to external factors.

The research focus is not mainly directed to the changing roles of women within the household in the way they handle domestic arrangements but covers a range of related subjects. Given the fact that research evidence has shown that the female-headed households are the poorest of the poor with untold economic hardship suffered by the women, it is important that this aspect is addressed as equally important as the other related socio-cultural issues in order to make policy interventions. The gender-specific suffering also needs to be addressed and alleviated.

In the context of the female-headed household the important purpose of the research is to identify the changes from a male-headed to a female-headed household. The matrix of change involves a gender-specific analysis of both structure and ideology. The distinction between household and family, though not extended to boundary constructions, are delineated on the actual functioning of the household as far as the changes are noted. In studying the actual domestic arrangements, the change in gender ascribed roles—functions, aspirations and expectations—the child care needs, the psychological impact of such changes are identified. The experience of the women in handling the matrix of change, within the organisational patterns as a result of the violent and sudden disappearance of the spouses, the adaptation and coping mechanisms adopted both structurally and psychologically, are analysed. Examining the individuals the woman and the children, the kin group within the new household should capture the levels and kinds of the matrix of change.

The settings of such households within the community which is destabilised by the ongoing war, is the external matrix of change. Education, health care, the new socialisation, economic activities, the levels of trauma become the main focus. The women as heads in the management of the above needs and roles of the household, are studied on the basis of their experiences, the experiences of the new management, the new problems, the new burdens of responsibility.

Whether the experiences here have in any way freed them from the burdens of patriarchal domination become the central focus of the matrix of change.

Kinship recruitment, rules and relationship, cultural values, family ideals, functions, forms and variations in which the members of the household manage their affairs within the headship of a female, in short how the home was recreated or not recreated amidst the shock and emotional stress resulting from the violent or natural death of the companion/overlord/leader/breadwinner husband, become the focus and thrust of the research.

Chapter 2

Women as Victims

Class and Gender, Social Isolation

It has often been asserted that patriarchal disciplining within the family has produced passive and obedient wives with little or no decision-making power for the middle class/caste and upper class/caste women. For them the sudden disappearance of the heads of the household created various problems. Coping with the new role of the head indeed becomes traumatic and challenging. Whether the absence of the male head and the single status of the women have later created new roles of power and decision-making is an interesting enquiry that also becomes the focus of this research.

Female-headed households emerged in various ways. Women lost their breadwinners due to the following reasons.

- a) state violence
- b) violence perpetrated by the armed forces
- c) deaths due to natural causes such as illness
- d) suicides
- e) desertion, separation and divorces.

In the Trincomalee group,

- i. those killed by the Sri Lankan soldiers, police and navy—forty-one
- ii. those killed by the Indian Peace Keeping Force—one
- iii. unexplained disappearances—twenty-nine,
- iv. those for whose death the women held the LTTE and the EPRLF responsible are five and one respectively.

- v. natural deaths, suicides, murder, and those who deserted their wives and died in accidents are seven, four, one, seven and one respectively.
- vi Four women said that their husbands were killed by unidentified people.

The female-headed household has further implications when we realise that despite the fact that the men/husband are alive in some cases, it is the women who are virtually the decision-makers and active agents in the management of familial and household arrangement and its related activities. The number of women who lost their husbands in the Amparai district is very great. In addition to this there are a great number of men who have disappeared and those who have been demoralised. It is often the women who go in search of missing boys or husbands or go about trying to find food for the families (Report by UTHR, Jaffna. 1990:36).

The UTHR Report claims (1990:39) that the war had left a large number of orphans and a much larger number of children depending on single mothers without means, within the ages of fifteen to twenty two, with a child or two and many of them have not been to school. Many of the widows, in addition to losing their breadwinners, have found that the homes have been looted and houses burnt. They have to look after their children and aged parents in some cases.

Female headship in Amparai has a differential impact in the sense of a non-economic imperative. Poor they are—the poverty levels are uniformly low—but the intensity of the violence and its continuous State with political overtones of inter-ethnic intra-State conflicts and insecure living conditions have had a greater impact on the lives of the women.

The kind of vulnerability to which the women become exposed by the loss disappearance of the spouses are varied, though the income earning capacity of the head of the household may be the deciding factor. Other problems which do not flow from the income loss seem to have had a greater impact on the life situation because of the political crisis the country is going through. The problems of the school going children and the traumatic disarray the children and the women have entered into are specific to the contemporary socio-political upheavals and not necessarily related directly to the loss of income, though that is

an important factor. The psychological effect of the trauma level is very much higher in Amparai than in Trincomalee, simply because the violence and crisis level is much greater in Amparai.

This study, as stated earlier, while taking note of the need to remain within numbers and quantities, has not based the analysis on the basis of numbers or quantitative measurements. It does not pay attention to a phenomenon only when a substantial percentage of people subscribe to it. On the contrary even matters pertaining to a few women are given adequate coverage as part of the women's experience as a social phenomenon. Hence, statistical data as regards the number of women is avoided, but matters that have reached the levels of a norm are discussed as a dominant form.

One of the factors which is common to all the women in the sample is the burden of single parenthood. This burden is expressed in diverse forms. Speech was one way of expression. Body language, facial expression and gestures often told a more effective story. Young mothers with young children felt the burden much more. In the two parent families the women admitted that the division of labour has been on traditional lines where conventions based on gender were seldom violated. Although men in bread-winning roles of paid labour excused themselves from primary responsibilities of household labour and child care in the homes, the presence of the man within the household gave the women the opportunity for consultation and advice, perhaps protection from external trespasses, and minimal physical help such as marketing and shopping. This male figure of support has now been removed. They felt a vacuum. The fact that they have been rendered lonely and alone in a world of tension and war had led to a syndrome of a "displaced housewife".

That the gender division of labour has valued the economic activity of the husband as the "public" and devalued the "private" domestic household and child care and has diminished the status of the housewife, is a Marxist feminist argument. Strangely, we were confronted with a situation where even when the woman was earning, playing the public role together with her private role, she remained devalued as a single woman and a widow.

The Marxist feminist argument that domestic and reproductive labour remains undervalued socially because it is devalued in the market (Hartman 1981) does not seem to hold water in the case of the female heads who have become breadwinners. With their husbands alive, they remained economically dependent on them and had no decision-making powers. Those who have now become the breadwinner and are taking decisions still remain devalued in society. Communication with the NGOs, State officials and the community members revealed them as the pitiable, sorrowful, marginalised sections of people. Others who have been dependent economically on the husbands with no skills of income generation have become even more vulnerable both socially and economically. One becomes skeptical as to whether it is gender belonging *per se* or external factors such as markets which are responsible for the devalued women. It is more the social construction which assigns gender ascribed qualities to men and women which is responsible and not market relations *per se*. Social relations and market relations both have socially constructed meanings. Being inexperienced, timid and indecisive, a few women have devalued themselves apart from being devalued by the community. They have internalised the values constructed for them by others. But this however is not the case with every woman. This aspect will be discussed later when taking up the women who are strong and courageous.

In discussing the relations of domination and the concept of inequality within the matrix of gender, this research has made it abundantly clear that gender combines with class in creating both the structure and ideology of inequality for women. The ethnic war in Sri Lanka has affected a particular class of people more than it has the hegemonic bloc. The Sinhala soldiers are mostly selected from the unemployed and under-employed youths. The fighting cadres of the L.T.T.E. are mostly from the so-called low castes and class, those who got killed were those who remained in their locations and habitat without moving out either to a foreign land or to the areas where it was comparatively safe. It is a truism that those who are in the refugee camps and those who are displaced both in Trincomalee and Amparai are very poor. The women, when the breadwinner is lost in the war,

become poorer still. Both socially and economically these women are vulnerable and suffer both gender and class inequality while the middle class and the upper class could afford the expense of moving out. Gender has interacted with class in creating specific, peculiar hardships for these women.

Poverty in simple terms is the main cause for the disillusionment of the widows. The children's education, food and clothing are the main concerns of the women. In a society such as rural Trincomalee, which is under our study, one would expect that the traditional social patterns of kinship support will prevail upon the modernisation factors. However, we were confronted with an ambiguous situation under which the single women neither had the modern socio-economic support systems nor the traditional kinship support. Neighbours were helpful in times of crisis but kept their distance when it meant financial help. This was the pattern of the lament of the women.

We noticed yet another factor which is worth some elaboration. The support extended to the women was based on a classification system of kin. Maternal kinship groups such as those belonging to the "mother's side" parents, sisters, brothers, mother's sisters, mothers' brothers are found to be emotionally supportive, physically and financially helpful, though financial assistance is minimal. The women could move into their maternal homes in times of crisis.

Kinship, anthropologically defined, is a cultural recruitment of people to groups based on kinship patterns determined by roles of marriage. The sub-group membership is traditionally presumed to work on an inter-group cooperation ethics. At times of emotional distress, poverty and marriages, the group extends its cooperation as codes of obligation and duty and is generally reciprocal. Often the control exercised by the males as husbands or fathers over the women shifts to the other male of the kin group according to the classification order. Control over women or rather male domination is comprehensive and takes on an institutional form. The wife/woman whose membership is in a nuclear family, comes under the control of the extended family. The transition depends on whether she was residing in a patrilocal or matrilocal residence.

Husbands' parents were found to be most unhelpful, even going to the extent of fighting and plundering the husbands' personal belongings

after his death. Where the women went to work, mothers, sisters and kindly neighbours looked after the children.

A process of alienation started a few months after the husband's death from society and the kin groups in general, but the husband's kin group showed a disinterestedness, an overt disregard for the widow and the children. In clear terms, words, behaviour and action, they showed that they were not going to take over the responsibilities of the family/household of the widow and children of their son. This behaviour pattern contrasted with the way most of the neighbours and the maternal kin groups, especially the manner in which the woman's parents, brothers and sisters behaved. This was almost a uniform pattern. Most of the women did not expect this treatment from their parents-in-law. They expressed shock and disgust at the manner the mothers-in-law and the fathers-in-law behaved a few months after the husbands' death. Expressions of anguish and frustration were followed with tears and sobbing. They said that petty quarrels with the neighbours or gossip and ridicule to which they were subjected at times did not cause much grief—they were able to accept those unfortunate incidents as part of a public/social life. But the kin group behaviour fell very neatly into personal relationship and caused intense grief and anxiety a—that they who rightly "belonged" to their son as his wife and children were abandoned. The poverty and the possibility of the widows and children becoming an economic burden on them have driven the husband's kin group away to a distance that could never be bridged. Some of the women did express the feeling that they wished they would come and see them and the children occasionally. They concluded that the parents-in-law stopped coming to see them because they feared that the women might become dependent on them.

Some interesting similarities emerged from the focus group discussions. Three women expressed similar tales in identical language.

"My mother-in-law fought with me and chased me away from the house."

Four women said that their husbands' parents were not happy with their sons' mate selection.

As long as the husbands lived they "put up" with us, unhappily or not, but with their sons' death they were unmerciful. We had to vacate "their" homes and move out to our mother's, who had to provide a home for us.

In the present context the women are neither protected patriarchally nor supported by the kin group to the extent one would expect a single woman of a traditional society to be taken care of (1).

Prior to the political upheaval, nuclear families had become operational structurally, with an ideology of the extended family where kin group socialisation patterns existed. The women talked of peace time as a golden era when relatives were mutually helpful, though productive labour as such was separate from kinship relationship. Even before the loss of the partner and the single woman status acquired thereby, their households had remained within a lower middle class unit of production and consumption. War and the ideology of war which spelt uncertainty, tension, destruction and a fear psychosis, have drained the kinship structure of its duties and obligations. In these cases mutual help and reciprocity could not be continued across kin groups. One-way traffic of goods and services cannot continue for long! Hence, there was a complete breakdown in kinship relationship. This could very well be interpreted as a process of eliminating the single women's economic dependency on the kin group which is anyway poor. Such dependency has very clear connotations of a continuity that can take indefinite periods of time. Under the circumstances women have to relate many tales of such termination of kinship relations. Kinship, it has to be emphasized, had all along operated within a mutual and reciprocal exchange of goods and services. It was also associated with demands of obligations and duties. The role of kinship as a functional system has disintegrated with its ideological role not operative any more. The maternal kin-group, other than the parents, which is still helpful, it has been noted are the unmarried members—sisters, brothers who are not married or have obligatory roles to play, and they have played their roles successfully.

Compared with the kin group relations the neighbourhood relations have been more sustaining. The neighbours are helpful in times of illness and are prepared to give physical labour and consultations and advice in times of crisis. In some cases there are features of an extended family present between the two adjacent households in the vicinity. There are instances of borrowing of money and things in kind. There are also intimate interactions between the women on levels of friendship—who share worries and happiness and seek solace and

fellowship in each other's company. Among those who are not of the same age group, fictive kin terms which are used on sisters both younger and older and aunts are used to reduce the social distance that may characterise the relationship of strangers. The use of fictive kin terms enables them to ask freely for help, such as looking after the children in their absence from home while they are at work or shopping or to accompany them to temple or for a movie occasionally. This pattern of neighbourhood interaction is not a uniform feature. Only some women and most of them from the fishing community living in the coastal village of Sally, have this experience.

However the "help" gained from the maternal kin group and the neighbours (though occasional) that these women talked about was more than material. The presence of these relatives in times of illness and stress, their advice and consolation, their child care tasks when the mother was away, watching a movie together, going to the hospital and temples together, meant a lot to the women. This companionship and the sense of solidarity extended by these groups was appreciated by the women to such an extent that they recollected incidents and events with feelings of happiness and affection.

But poor they continue to be, as both, their kin groups and the neighbours, are equally poor. The women started to earn taking up ad hoc temporary small jobs. Income generation came up naturally to them—but with no skills, no experience they cannot be employed in stable jobs with reasonable remuneration. Their social status as "unprotected" single women in addition to their gender status depreciates their wages to exploitative levels. Most of them are employed on a daily basis. Pushed into unfamiliar situations where the routine was disturbed, adjustments were extremely difficult for many of them. They did not want to talk about their initial problems.

Source of Income, the Levels of Poverty

Being used to a system where the households were provided for economically, many of the women were not prepared for the new tasks of finding economic resources for the households. They had little or no marketable skills. Neither did they have the knowhow nor the capital to start self-employment. Hence, poverty is their major problem. The current poverty levels of the women have however, to be assessed

taking into consideration the joint partnership of the households prior to the death of the spouse. The male providers/breadwinners in about 90% of the households played their roles effectively. They supported their families through various means of employment : fishing, cultivation, shop keeping, employment in local council bodies or as private sector labourers. The breadwinning roles are multiple and at times they had access to more than one avenue of income earning. The women also occasionally earned a supplementary income. In understanding the poverty of the female heads, it is pertinent that the supportive network and the gendered dimension of the socio-economic behaviour of the society as a whole has to be analysed and comprehended. This process brings into focus the non-economic variables as well. The reproductive, child care and household labour roles that women play in the maintenance of the household have kept them strictly within cultural codes and have made employment skills marginal to their aspirations. Whatever they earned also is devalued as supplementary earnings. These patterns have created a gendered dimension to the economic status and to the poverty levels of the women.

The compensation due to them as victims of political violence were not paid to many of them. Delays are caused by strictly following the bureaucratic rules. The rules included the production of death certificates and providing proper evidence and proof of the death of the spouses. The "disappeared" need to be proven as dead. The inexperienced women had a lot of difficulties getting these proofs and the onus of proving them was on the women. Most of them are illiterate or under-educated and could not go through the process of filling the forms, getting the proofs successfully. They were dependent on others who have to be sympathetic to them.

Compensation was not paid to victims of State-induced violence as the women cannot claim any redress under these circumstances. The State gives Rs.50,000/ as compensation in cases where the civilians are killed by anti-State forces. The women reported that when the cause of death was given as shot or killed by the soldiers they were frowned upon by the State officials and treated harshly. Under those circumstances they were asked to prove that their spouses did not belong to the L.T.T.E. Very often we were told by the women that their

husbands were killed by unidentified men and this would save them from the wrath of the officials.

Most of the women are indeed ignorant of the type and form of State benefits. In most cases no proper information was available to them officially. Either they heard it accidentally or from a neighbour or a relative. More often the information supplied was ad hoc, insufficient or blatantly wrong. To make matters worse compensation rules are biased. To those who were killed by the militants, compensation was given. However, State policy insists that the death of the spouses should be witnessed by someone or that the perpetrators of the killing must admit committing the crime. Both requirements are difficult in times of conflict and war. Those killed by the army, navy or the police on suspicion of being militants are not generally paid compensation. Those suspected of being militants and those who are militants are both treated alike. The spouses in both cases are not entitled to compensation. The State in this respect subscribes to the prevalent patriarchal norms where the women—the wives and children—of militants, suspected of being militants or the non-militant women are presumed, nay legally characterized, as subscribing to the same political ideology as their fathers/husbands. The women we talked to, have clearly articulated that they are non-political women and their mission in life is to run the household efficiently and look after the children. It is a violation of the fundamental rights of the women that State benefits are denied them on the assumption that they subscribe to the particular political conviction of their spouses.

Those killed in the crossfire are legally categorized as collaborators of the militants as they had failed to give information about the whereabouts of the moving militant cadres. However, the setting up of a commission in 1994 by the present government which sits in different parts of the country to hear cases of disappearances where they cannot provide proof of death, has helped some families. There are others who do not want to accept the fact that their husbands are killed and they keep waiting for them. Even in cases where compensation was paid, the amounts were not consistent as the women did not know their rights. No effort is made to explain to them the legal entitlement.

A maximum of Rs.15,000/- is being paid to build houses if the house is destroyed by political violence. Ignorance, lack of legal aid and the need to prove such claims have prevented the women from recourse to such compensation schemes. The Rs.2000/- paid for the housing when they were displaced was not spent on housing. They bought food. The Rs.50,000/- paid as compensation when their husbands were killed is not invested judiciously. They bought food or spent it on 'this and that' (as they termed it) and in no time it had 'melted' away ("*karainchu pochchu*"). Neither the State nor the NGOs had meaningful or effective training programmes for providing advice and services to these women. The most important drawback of the NGO programmes is the lack of the component of skills training. The money paid to them was ad hoc payments for short periods of small sums which did not sustain them with an economic planning for the future. The fact that they are in large numbers all over the districts have become a major problem for the NGOs. Lack of coordination among the NGOs was also another factor that has contributed to the lack of effectiveness of the NGO programmes.

Main sources of income were the food stamp, Janasaviya benefits, occasional provision of dry rations by the provincial councils and charity allowance, "*pichchai sampalam*" - (beggars' wages) as they referred to it.

Except a few women (fifteen women) others expressed feelings of disappointment ranging from anger to frustration as regards their opinion about the NGOs and their activities. Ironically the sentiments expressed by the women towards the State and the NGOs were the same. As members of a distinct poverty group the bitterness of their experiences bordered on rebellious protests due to the many deprivations they suffer. The protests expressed were in fact based on a realisation that both the NGOs and the State were bound by duty if not by legal right to support and help them. This realisation is more a common sense knowledge than the result of any educative process of information gathering. That the State should be held responsible and some remedial action should be meted to them is a perception that has developed in the women due to common sense inference.

Women's selection of income generation and employment patterns fall strictly into ad hoc patterns of temporary jobs. Constrained by

factors such as lack of marketable skills, illness, demands of child care, the need to work in the neighbourhood, results in the reality that these women are employed in the lowest paid jobs in the informal sector. Physical labour is essentially the content of their contract. These jobs which are labour intensive besides being lowest paid, sap their energy and have made them sick and weak.

The choice of their income-generating activities range from being labourers to washing toilets or working in buildings sites and as "coolies", rice pounding for daily wages and as a means of self-employment, selling curd, (making the curd at home and taking it to the markets, daily or thrice a week) as seamstress (taking orders from home). Some women are engaged in petty trade, one woman in poultry, and another working as a domestic servant. One woman is managing her coconut estate with the help of the parents. She weaves cadjans (out of coconut palm leaves which are used to make fences and roofs for the house) for sale along with her old parents. A total of twenty-one are engaged in income generating activities. Others are totally dependent on charity. One woman said that she had set up a small shop but could not sustain it. Further probing brought out the following facts. There was no planning nor studying of the market and no help either from the relatives or the community. The patterns of livelihood, though varied had the same results of inadequate and depressed wages. Five women in the sample went abroad as house maids to work and have invested their income on land or houses but still remain poor in terms of food and the clothing.

The general pattern on the question of shelter was found to be satisfactory. The women all had a roof over their heads in varying sizes and shapes. Daily paid casual jobs meant day to day spending habits with no prospects of saving for the future. They starved if there was no job for a particular day or borrowed money and fed the children.

One significant factor which emerged from the study is the breaking up of the myth of the Asian or Eastern value system of communitarian and kin group solidarity, help and cooperation. The relatives, the neighbours and the community at large are found to be indifferent, non-cooperative and least helpful to these women. They did not hide it or try to make apologies for the behaviour of others who lived around them. Only thirty-three women have some help or the

other from various people. Out of these, twenty-three women are helped by relatives, nineteen by maternal kin group and four by husbands, parents and brothers. Ten women said that the neighbours are a continuous source of help. Sixty-seven women said they are left to suffer by themselves. They have faced the reality and have experienced the lack of concern of their people towards them (except for the maternal kin groups who were helpful from the beginning, others feared having to bear the burden financially and otherwise). The women have even become philosophically wise explaining this phenomenon as "humanity by nature is self-centered and selfish." They quoted proverbs as a matter of explaining to us the indifference of others and as a process of accepting their disappointments themselves. While complaining they made it clear that they did not expect financial help but were content with loans, assistance and guidance. Their single status has made "others" suspicious of their approach. The relatives feared that initial help may lead to a perpetual State of dependency on them. The inactivity of the State and of the NGOs have made the situation worse. The situation of war, the resultant conditions of tension, insecurity and uncertainty and suspicion of not knowing who is who, have created this phenomenon of individualism and "minding one's own business" and keeping aloof from others by physically and emotionally becoming insensitive to the suffering of others (2).

*Chapter 3***The Family and the Household
of the Females**

As discussed in the introduction, the strict conceptual division of the family and the household as sites of an ideological reproduction and structural functioning unit, respectively, is abandoned in deciphering the process of the female as heads of these institutions. They are conflated for a comprehensive and total analysis without subjecting functions, roles and experiences to fragmentation, which would lead to partial or compartmentalised views. The collapsing is essentially desirable.

Feminists have seen the family as a site of oppression (Barret, 1980: 153, 187, 211). Within the family there are various levels at which the oppression of the women is constructed and various levels at which it takes place. Patriarchy as a system of male domination and control of women by men becomes operationalised through the system of the family and household. The patriarchal household organisation has also an ideological site of femininity construction in the family. This construction assigns the so-called feminine qualities such as passivity and emotions connected with motherhood. Women's subordination then takes various forms such as exploitation within the family and household. In the domestic mode of production in the household, women do the household labour and child care on demand, not fixed by hours or time allocation. The domestic labour debate has documented in detail the types and kinds of the exploitative system to which the women as wives and mothers are subjected. (Wally

Seacombe 1974, Maxine 1979). The overall sense of responsibility that the women are socialised to accept child care and domesticity have clear exploitative patterns. Servicing and nursing as feminine roles have kept the men out of child care responsibilities. Besides these, there are other factors which would necessarily subordinate women in the sites of the family and household. The control of women's fertility and sexuality and the economic dependency of the women, further contribute to her secondary status. The performance of wage labour whereby a wife earns supplementary income invariably is controlled by the bread-winner husband due to the ideological base that controls the women as men's possession.

To understand the various dimensions of the women's oppression within the family, one has to successfully divorce the concept of family from a natural pre-given entity and regard it as a social unit. Such a process should also lead us to reject the functionalist and reductionist view of sociologists and Marxist feminists. Marx has argued for the naturalness of the family unit based on the biological differences between men and women (Barret 1980 : 189). Engel's reworking of the problem of the family brought into focus the private property relations as the base for the creation of gender inequality (Engels 1972). Engels hoped that the family considered the private realm as responsible for the creation of private property. The expectation that gender inequality will cease to exist when the particular relations of property ceases to exist has been proved wrong. This has not happened. Talcott Parson (1956) fitting the family into the functional needs of the contemporary society has also been criticised. Marxist feminists have seen the family as satisfying the needs of capital—that at the economic level the housewives' labour reproduces the labour power of the worker and at an ideological level it reproduces the relations of dominance for capitalist production (Secombe, 1974).

There is no doubt that women's subordination is constructed within the family through an ideology and her exploitation is realised through the functions she performs as a housewife which in fact is labour. The children are cared for, food is cooked, the house is cleaned. This labour process is couched in an ideological baggage as maternal and motherhood service and sacrifice. This is very much the picture in the working class and peasant households where the women have no

power to hire the services of other men and women. Domesticity and motherhood keep her at home with no remunerative jobs. She is mostly dependent economically on the breadwinner. If she does earn a "supplementary wage" the power to control the wages earned by the women usually rests with the breadwinner male. The partnership was formed supposedly on trust, love and romance and on mutual help, reciprocity and on a principle of sharing but usually the burden is unshared. Domestic violence from wife beating to rape do occur within the site of the family/household.

The fact that she is economically provided for leads to the misconception that she is given some sort of protection as well. The construction of femininity as weak, docile and passive has rationalised the protective role as an essential function of the breadwinner husband. She is both socially and physically "protected". The sense of possession by the man becomes the nexus for offering protection. The whole process takes place within the realm of the privacy concept and private area. The space is the home/house. However, the construction of femininity as a social process is not confined to the home alone. The society watches it, exerts pressure on its rules of adherence. Socially acceptable norms of the family then become part of the social process and within these norms the feminine norms are more oppressive. Silence, obedience, passivity, control of speech, chastity, virginity, fidelity are gendered norms, the violation of which may be met with severe punishments ranging from social ostracism, divorce, desertions, separation, wife beating.

In short the household is managed by the wife with primary responsibility for child care, the care of the sick, old and disabled, and services for the husband. These forms of labour are collapsed into an ideology of family and within the vocabulary of love, romance, emotions, sacrifice, duty, obligation, thriftiness, good conduct. Mary McIntosh's terminology of "family/household system" (1978:155) can be more appropriately used to understand women's position. McIntosh describes the 'family household' as a system in which a number of people are expected to be dependent on the wages of a few adult members, primarily of the husband and father who are the "bread winners", and in which they are all dependent for cleaning, food preparation and so forth—unpaid work chiefly done by the wife and

mother. (The Welfare State and the Needs of the Dependent Family' in *Fit Work for Women*, p 155, quoted in Barret 1980 : 211).

The pattern of the general household described above is not however common to all historical periods. Various deviations existed both in the family ideology and in the subsistence of the household. The Tamil *kutumba* ideology more or less fits into the above description at the level of this particular class of women we are analysing. The *kutumba* ideology in Tamil does not differentiate between the material relations of the household from the ideological construction of family. In fact the *kutumba* concept is couched in various codes which would also encompass the Western concept of household and the family. Functions, duties, obligations, expectations, and aspirations which are needed for the maintaining of the household are effectively, inseparably and totally combined with the ideology of love and other emotional systems of thought designated under service, sacrifice, nurturing motherhood, and sexual service. In fact, segregation of a household concept from the concept of the family or vice versa becomes impossible in the Tamil social formation.

The wife mother is central to this system. Mary McIntosh captures this reality partially in compiling the two terms, household and the family. The Tamil *kutumba* concept is even more descriptive and exhaustively so.

Despite the general pattern of oppression being the same, there were a few redeeming factors in the way the household and families operated in Trincomalee. The women talked of the former times before they were displaced and deprived of the husbands' partnership as "peacetime arrangements". Despite the fact that the arrangements heaped a heavy sense of responsibilities and arduous hours of labour, the help extended by the members of the joint/extended families have reduced the physical burden of household and child care. The unmarried younger sisters, sister-in law, brothers and parents and mothers-in-law were helpful in child care activities. As they are fond of small children they spend a lot of time with them. It is a community characteristic that small children and babies are fondled and played with by the immediate members of the family and the neighbours. This gives the mothers the time to attend to their personal needs such as baths, enjoying a meal etc. in peace. The mothers and mothers-in-law

of the women helped them in the household chores during their free time. Washing clothes, pounding rice, cooking the meals are the occasional help they gave the busy housewife. Though this is not to be taken as a rule, this happened as a pattern in most households. Where women's mate selection was not approved by the parents, they lived in isolation, not able to break the barriers created for them by their parents. The sanctions created by parents of either party are not generally violated by the kin group members so that for long periods the couple had to stand alone and struggle. The wife/mother in such cases suffered alienation in addition to the general pattern of oppression. The women weighed the pros and cons of the peacetime and wartime households. They certainly did not subscribe to an idea of the household family system as a haven in the heartless world (Christopher Leach, 1977) but talked of the situation where there was no want or starvation. Though they ate last and sometimes little, they had something to eat. They also said that psychologically the presence of a male adult provided them with both mental and physical security and protection. The authority of the husband/father kept the children within codes of discipline. "Of course much to my dislike the children were terrorised and often beaten, mostly the boys"—was how a woman described the authoritarian male attitude of the father. The women also referred to the family household system as a site of cooperation and provided joint space for collective endeavours such as celebration of festivals and performance of religious rituals.

In the final analysis this vision of the household was an emphatic version of the household being a maternal site which satisfied emotional and expressive needs under the authoritarian role of a benevolent despot. However, there were great ambiguities which need to be clarified and identified. This phraseology and vocabulary betrayed the socialisation pattern to which they were subjected. The male-headed household system was no doubt able to contain upheavals, temporary dislocations such as major illness, deaths, family and kin group feuds. While talking of the good things of good old days, they are also giving a value-ridden privilege to the concept of the family as having satisfied their major personal needs. At the same time the women did confess that the good things happened within a lot of unpleasantness. Alcoholic husbands' indifference, violence, neglect of

household duties and children's welfare, husband's temporary "illicit" love affair which caused a lot of misery in the family, interference by the mother-in-law and the father-in-law demanding the son's earning, dropout of children from school, their indiscipline, debts, illness were sources of serious disruptions in the family. By way of conversations the women have confessed many a time to the many disruptions in the family but the overall impact of the male protection has coloured their vision especially at a time when it is being missed by them. Besides the provision of material needs, ie. food, clothing and shelter the breadwinner is the base on which the entire emotional and expressive needs are seen as fulfilled. The economic dependence of the former times is now not in operation but the women miss it now.

The deprivation the women suffered while being under a male breadwinner/head of the household and under their own headship are different but they do suffer under both systems and the reasons for their suffering are different. The male headship gave a moral protection and provided a mechanism of continuity. Morally and psychologically the women were socialised to accept and regard as a privilege, male protection and the male's breadwinning role. Former male headship has provided the material needs, social security and protection and has created conditions of authority which contained the children and socialised their behaviour. The main beneficiaries of the male-headed household system were the men/husband/fathers who earned the bread and in exchange got a series of advantages and benefits. The material structure of the male-headed household is largely responsible for the dependency of the women/wife which in turn has heaped a series of the burden of responsibilities. With the removal of the male breadwinner from sight, the dependency status has been removed but the ideology of the family of domesticity and motherhood continues and has heaped a tremendous responsibility on the female heads.

With the disappearance of the husband, the economic dependence on the husband and the source of material organisation of the household also has disappeared, but the ideology of femininity, responsibility for domesticity, motherhood continues. She had to become the source of material organisation as well now. A few of them were earning a supplementary income, but this income earning even when it is the major breadwinning income was ideologically considered

supplementary income and their wages were consequently depressed. The privileging of masculinity in the household arrangement, though oppressive to the wives within the household, was not totally abhorred by the women during their partnership. The bread-winner role was found to be hard and the working conditions were harsh for them. Because of their class location capital has created exploitative working conditions as 90% of the men/husbands within the sample were not in lucrative jobs or business. Somehow they were able to provide for their families.

Masculinity does not always function independent of the other social issues. The masculinity which was ascendant in the home family structure within the conjugal relationship of the male headed household was anyhow a subordinated masculinity in the power relations in the particular mode of production in the class location. The struggle to which the men/husbands as breadwinners were subjected was hard, competitive and exploitative. The women/ wives were aware of the struggle the men had to put up with. This is also one reason why they privileged the male breadwinning roles. The men were conceptualised as economically productive, caring for the family and for efficient handling of the social world. The non-egalitarian marital relationship is obscured in the constructions they made of men as resourceful, efficient, protective and powerful. Within these constructions which are gendered, they saw the household arrangements as natural and rational and in a way rationalised the unequal power relations as legitimate. While conceding that the unequal power relations led to oppressive living arrangements they explained that economic resources which are essentially their responsibility had to be prioritised and therefore men's power over the rest of the assets took the form of an agency. The agency was valued despite the knowledge of their own subordination. In class terms, understanding this phenomenon was not too difficult. It has evolved on them as a common sense knowledge when they compare the present situation of poverty and lack of economic resources which has reduced them to poverty levels which are worse. The position that we are trying to explain here is not to concede to a conceptualisation that females are culturally prepared for powerlessness (Lips 1994:90). Class hierarchies have constructed notions of female powerlessness in terms of actual and lived social reality. Further

discussion on the series of deprivations which the women experienced can also lead us to a notion of a powerful masculinity. This has to be understood as a class phenomenon which has gender implications or a gender phenomenon which has class implications.

The male provider gets all the recognition within the scale of power and privilege, not merely because of his masculinity but, because of his ability to generate income and resources and provide for the family. The women's notion of high value placed on their former partner is precisely due to this. They explained these present socio-economic deprivations on this rationale. This however obscures their own gendered positions which are socially marginalised and constructed as less able to generate income. The hegemonisation of the male breadwinner role and the devalued role of women bread-winners cannot however be explained as the most natural thing but the socio-economic implications have to be comprehended. This study has to constantly take note of the class and gender perspective as necessarily intertwined.

Economic determinants are crucial in the formation of social attitudes. As far as the women are concerned even these familial attitudes have been shaped by the economic factors. The women have understood their present situation and their understanding has the stamp of economic reasoning.

I can't even feed the children properly. My son had to give up schooling to earn a living so that we won't starve.

I am suffering without money to buy food, clothing and for the education of the children.

I have to be the breadwinner, without a male support and what I earn is not enough.

I have to undergo all the financial problems single handedly.

The problem is economic - no help.

The problem of poverty is great. I am totally disillusioned, frightened of the future.

When I think of the present state of affairs I think we (those whose husbands are killed in the war) will die of hunger. There is no future for me.

Demeaning experiences, humiliating existence to be dependent. In this wretched world poverty causes misery to the poor people like me. When can poverty be eradicated? I have to stop my fourteen year old son who is a good student from school to take up his father's profession (Barber).

The women who were in a similar state of poverty had to value the male breadwinner's role together with the privileges the status brought to them and to the family. This is despite a large number of husbands having been violent. But those who have been deserted (eight) and those whose husbands have committed suicide (seven) had different sentiments and the sentiments found harsh expressions.

Why should we worry about him and feel unhappy. He died on his own due to his foolishness by drinking poison. He did not care for us. How many are shot at, stabbed, shelled? Those deaths have to be sympathised with but not the death of an irresponsible father and husband.

This is the wisdom of a woman whose husband committed suicide.

He beat me, scolded me, never cared for me. Took another wife and deserted me and my six children. I don't want him even if he comes back.

He drank and wasted his money. I suffered due to humiliation. He became violent towards the children and now he has left us. We are worse off economically. But to be without a husband is better than having a bad husband.

Male-headed household as a rule did not provide the women/wives the comforts and happiness along with economic well-being. Only ten women out of the sample of hundred had no complaints of the husbands in terms of providing companionship, physical help and child care sharing. Other than the deserted, murdered and those who committed suicide the eighty-four households were in some form affected, some very badly. Incompatibility, petty quarrels, domestic violence, problems caused by mothers-in-law, were mentioned very frequently but since they were not major problems they did not cause complete breakdowns. However, except for the fifteen wives who had no repentance about the disappearance of the spouses all the others said that they were seriously affected by the death of the spouses.

Economic reasons have caused the various constructions. However, cultural conditioning, both at the social level and at their own, personal private familial level, has had its own impact independent and not independent of economic factors.

A further point emphasised by the women was the vacuum created by the removal of the masculine figure. This masculinity has protected the feminine sexuality from the "wolves". They were not approached by other men, because they were "owned and possessed" by their husbands. They are now seen as sexual objects and available because they are not protected by the privileged masculinity. Even an older woman, mother, mother-in-law staying with them did not prevent the illegal trespassing of other men into the household space.

The next section will now deal with the actual socio-economic reality of the households which are headed by the females. Situations which the women face, problems such as the economic and social survival patterns with their coping mechanism, are dealt with under separate sections, though the inter-linkages of one to the other should really become the focus of the problem with which we are concerned.

Part II

The Social Psychological Dimension of the Problem and the Role of Religion

The manner in which the husbands died impacted differently on the women. This section discusses the emotional conditions of the women. The women have lost the "heads of the household" under various circumstances. This study takes the view that whatever the circumstances which caused the deaths of the husbands, the women, by virtue of their singleness are subjected to various types of deprivations, socially and economically, and are affected mentally too. That the levels of the impact vary according to the manner and circumstances under which their spouses died cannot be denied.

Of the twenty-nine women who said that their husbands had "disappeared", twenty women said that they felt that their husbands were alive and that they were waiting for them to return. That they have not seen the dead bodies or performed the last rites has created peculiar reactions leading to miserable situations. It was difficult for them to believe without any tangible proof that the husband is dead. These

women live in desperation believing now and then that they are alive and dead. Between hope and despair, they vacillate. They often spend sleepless nights. During daytime they are not sure whether to behave as widows or "auspicious housewives" with the attendant behaviour. Their main worry is that they should conform to social expectations of which they were not sure.

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances has reported that during the course of the year 1991 they had recorded over 12,000 cases of disappearances in Sri Lanka. The state of emergency and the Prevention of Terrorism Act under which prolonged and incommunicado detentions are carried out are still operative. Most of those who were detained were killed and their bodies disposed of. The number of disappearances should enumerate the dimension of the problem not only politically but socially. The negative impact it has created on the households discussed here is merely the tip of the iceberg. That the 12,000 and more families (the number would have increased over the seven year period) would have suffered the same problems is a sad realism. The magnitude of the problem even without the exact numbers can be visualised.

For those who have accepted the death, it is easy to manage the situation. Five women said that their husbands were killed by the militants (one by EPRLF and the rest by LTTE). Those who said that their husbands were killed by unidentified persons (4) were perhaps afraid to say that they were killed by the militants as they would be construed as making an official statement against the armed groups of which they are mortally afraid. These nine and another fifteen women more overtly expressed disgust and anguish and gave expressions to the feeling that the cult of violence, whether from the State or "other quarters", destroys the human ethos and that it was the helpless poor women like them who suffer the most.

Forty-two women's stories were that their husbands were killed by the Sri Lanka State, the Police, the Army, Navy and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (01 only). The fishing community in the village Sally was subjected to random killings in the sea by the Navy. In these cases, the women were blatantly critical of the State. Knowing fully well that I belong to the same ethnicity as theirs, they have no inhibitions in being open, free and expressive. They were critical of the cult of

violence, the word *vanmurai* (violence) was often mentioned as unjust, unethical, and irreligious- *kadavulukku etkatatu*. The State apparatus collectively referred to as the "Sinhala" agency was found to be unjust as it was accused of being indiscriminate, not knowing the Tigers from the "ordinary citizens". The women claimed that their husbands were the innocent victims. "Don't the soldiers know that the Tigers are armed and do not roam about earning a livelihood?" That most of the killings in June 1990, after the attack of the Uppuveli Police Station, were revenge killings and that the people were terrified and ran for shelter trying to escape the wrath of the soldiers. The intensity of the shelling and shooting were all recollected by the women who vividly expressed now and then the fear that the recorded conversations might be politically implicating. That their names will not be revealed had to be constantly reiterated. The violence, whether of the Tamil militants or of the State, was treated as detrimental to the political ethos, while the social problems the women and children face were seen by them as central to their living.

Female-headed households were created by the desertion and separation of spouses and by the natural deaths of the spouses. Those who deserted the wives did so for the sake of other women; since they were not subjected to legal separation or divorce proceedings initiated by the husbands, they were not entitled to maintenance. These women, seven in number had different feelings. Though all of them felt cheated and betrayed, the levels of anguish expressed were different. A few were angry and made no attempt to hide their feelings.

"When I became sick and weak he left me."

"He was having an 'illicit' affair with a woman. I tried to correct him but he was adamant. Men want 'fresh flowers' all the time, they don't realise that as wives and children they have a duty by us.

Having no claims to any compensation, not having brought their case within the ambit of law which is supposed to recognise their maintenance needs, these women are the poorest. Neither the NGOs nor the State paid them any attention as they were not victimised by war violence. The fact that they were also victims of another type of violence needs to be recognised. One woman said thus:

"In a way I am happy to be separated as my husband is an alcoholic. While I was with him, I never had peace. He beat me, shouted at the children. The children never liked him because they never got affection from him. He was only a source of income and now I am deprived of that"

She used the following proverb to convey her dilemma: "The dog has gone, so have the ticks." (translation) The "dog" is the husband and the "ticks" are the beatings and the violence she suffered. The "dog" protected her anyway while it was with her. *Naayaum Pochu, tellum Pochu* is a Tamil proverb that I learned from her.

Others blamed their "karma" and were not very vociferous in their expression. They have accepted the tragedy as part of their lives.

The wives whose husbands had committed suicide (four in number) said that they couldn't forgive them. They had no sympathy for their deaths. On the contrary they felt their husbands were selfish and had not cared enough for them and the children. Two of the men were also alcoholics.

The forty-two women who lost their spouses due to direct confrontation by the Sri Lanka Army and Navy and the IPKF, either on the sea or on the ground, claim that their husbands were innocent and had nothing to do with any anti-government terrorism. They were civilians minding their business of doing a job and providing for the family. They were killed/shot at/shelled as an act of retaliation and revenge when the militants attacked the State apparatus. A few of them were shot during sea operations, when they were accused of withholding information about the LTTE. These men happened to live near the police station or LTTE targets of attack. During these attacks people fled from their houses and came back to find the bodies. The scale of violence was described in detail, accompanied by sobbing and crying and sending the children away so that they would not hear the story. The level of their traumatic experience was evident. These women used terms and terminologies which betrayed a high sense of alienation. In the language were embedded protests. They referred to themselves as alien to the Sri Lanka polity:

"Tamil enrapadiyal" (because we are Tamils) they killed us."

"Neenkalum Tamil endrapadiyal" (because you are a Tamil) you can understand our feelings."

In their sense of frustrations and anger they equalise the entire Sinhala population in Sri Lanka, with the Sri Lanka army. I tried to convince them that the Sinhala people were not the same as the Sri Lanka army. So intense are their feelings that I feel many people like me have to meet them constantly to convince them and this is a sad state of affairs for this could very well become the breeding ground for further militancy. In fact one mother told me that her son—10 years old—had vowed to kill his father's killers.

Within the structures of inequality the female-headed household is merely a part. It intertwines with other types of inequality. In their own perceptions the women consider themselves as members of a subject nation, subjected to political domination. In fact there are other subjections also. In class terms they are dominated by the upper class. As women they are also subjected in gender terms to patriarchy. This multiple domination and the combination of the structures of inequality have differential impact according to the contexts in which they faced domination. As heads of the household they have to confront not only to economic but also social challenges and problems connected to their gender belonging. At all levels simultaneously or at each level separately the women face the unequal distribution of life chances (Anderson, 1996 : 729). Gender, race and class coexist and should not be treated independently but as intertwining (Collins 1996).

Seven deaths have occurred by natural causes, one husband was murdered and one died in an accident. The wives were able to accept these deaths as part of their karmic evolutionary process. Those women whose husbands had died of natural causes remained the most calm. Their attitude was that they are compelled, under the circumstances, to accept the course of nature. Death, they said, was unavoidable though it has spelt many deprivations for them personally.

In the study of the female-headed household, the differential impact the death has left on the women is a significant variable to assess the attitudes of the women and how they have reacted to the termination of the partnership and the implications it has for their future life.

The expressions of rebellious sentiments and the messages of protests serve to dispel another myth of the passive and silent women. These women did not feel powerless when we talked to them. They had an identity and self-perception which betrayed a high sense of their personal worth and individual capacity for political discourse. Both feminists and other sociological constructions often denied associations of women with images of authentic power and potency (Elshtain, 1987:78).

Despite the historical oppression, second-class citizenship and political victimisation, their voices were loaded with the power of protest and rebellion. Women's social and economic powerlessness does not necessarily lead to powerless women; does not necessarily make them inarticulate. The voices of these women were resonant with a sense of authority—a quest for justice and for a sane political order. The concept of women's agency as actors and not as passive receivers needs to be emphasised again and again in a study of this nature as what we are concerned about is a transformative process of female leadership in the households. Women's agency has to be first recognised as part of any human being's capacity and ability to initiate change. Women as agents under certain circumstances are little recognised (Eduards, 1994:181) The need to treat them as full agents for change has its implications for policy matters in the future when this phenomenon of the female-headed household in Sri Lanka is given weightage in government planning.

Under such uncertain living conditions, one would expect an excessive involvement in religion and rituals, but the situation here presents an overall ambivalence. Unhappy, insecure, uncertain and subjected to various deprivations the women have little or no avenues for relaxation. Except for the maternal kin group and the neighbours the women had no one with whom to interact. Social intercourse was very limited and funerals seem to be the only social function they attended. Since most of the children are very young, the mothers could not see them as companions. Under the circumstances and as is commonly the case, the women would have turned to religion for solace. Woman is, it is assumed, close to culture. They are said to be the keepers of culture and tradition in general and the closest to religion. However, this

picture was not uniformly present among our subjects. Religion was found to be on the fringe of their lives. We could identify three strands of opinions and what is even more significant is the casual manner in which most of them expressed their responses.

Women whose husbands have disappeared were intensely religious, going to the temple, taking vows, doing *poojas*, consulting the astrologers and conducting *poojas* on the advice of the astrologers. They said religion was immensely useful. Those whose husbands died due to natural causes and those whose husbands deserted them and took new wives, were moderately religious and found mental peace in going to the temples.

"I got peace of mind; I feel happy; it breaks the routine"

Most of those whose husbands were killed by the Sri Lankan soldiers, the Indian Peacekeeping Force, the militants and unidentified persons, were in the category of becoming atheists and expressed overt resentment. Dissatisfaction, depression and helplessness have reduced their faith in an Almighty. Some of the women whose husbands disappeared were also in this category. The first group in various ways said

I pray for my husband's soul.

I do the annual rituals.

I pray for mental peace, I get satisfaction and solace.

I feel relieved giving vent to my feelings.

I go to the temple on Fridays or to the Pansala on *Poya* Days,

I get *Athma shanthi* (peace for the soul).

I go to the pirith. I give dana in my husband's name.

I have no other hobby hence I go to listen to religious discourse (*pirasangam*).

The second group was not very enthusiastic about talking about religion. It seemed that they indulged in religious practices with or without any faith as a routine practice. They did not show interest in talking about it but dismissed the topic casually as if religion was not a major thing in their life.

The third category was even more interesting. They were plainly antagonistic to religion. Eleven women in various phrases and words have rejected religion as of no use for this life.

I have no interest in religion

I have no faith in god. I even hate the mention of the word "god".

I don't do any *pooja*.

We are suffering. God gave us this miserable life. Let him change our course of life first."

Why should I worship? I hate god.

After my husband's death I don't go to the temple.

God has given up on us. How long can we suffer like this? I think those who worship god most suffer the most.

Ever since he disappeared (for the last six years,) I have stopped the *pooja* and going to the temple."

I do not go to the temple. I do not like to go.

Thinking that my husband will return I went to the temple regularly, all in vain, for the last five years. I have now given up. Now I like to feed the poor, that gives me satisfaction. Religion? I have no interest."

There were seven Buddhists in the refugee camp which is officially referred to as the Welfare Centre. The State wants to emphasise the concept of welfare in it. However, it is popularly referred to as the refugee camp. The structural functioning of this place and the manner in which the displaced people are confined to one place, have the characteristics of a camp.

The Buddhist women remain religious in their outlook and practise various rituals.

"We go to the *Pansala*, give *dana* on Poya days. We also benefit from the educative process - from the *pirith*."

They assert that they derive peace of mind by doing these. Three of them visit the Hindu temples also on Fridays. The *dana* and the prayers are mostly in relation to the dead or disappeared husband. With strong belief in rebirth they pray that if the husband is dead he should be born as a man in the next birth. If he were to die he should die peacefully. They believe that violent deaths cause restlessness in the soul. The other important factor in the religious experiences of the women is the

presence of the priests, both in the rituals at home and in the *Pansala*, such as the *pirith* and the *dana*. The interaction with the priests has to some extent contributed to the alleviation of their sorrows—the human presence in the search of the sacred has some meaning to them. This was totally missing among the Hindus. The interaction with a Hindu priest in the religious practices if at all, is there only in the temple and in a very abstract and distant form. They are not in the form of a personal religious discourse. In both the temple and the *Pansala* the women pray for the welfare of their dead husbands. The affirmative belief in rebirth, it appears, has kept them steady psychologically. Their religious involvement is more intense and ritual oriented.

As outlined in the methodology, this study goes beyond statistics and models and tables. The emphasis we place on understanding the world from the point of view of those with whom the researcher is in dialogue has to be reiterated even when the religious experiences and their approach to religion are studied. Each of these women's experience as knowledge or as background to knowledge and the socio-economic and political conditions as they see it are treated as not only valuable but unique. And this knowledge I call unique because this pertains to the knowledge of the most marginalised and the oppressed from the position of class, gender and ethnicity. Occasionally the caste dimension can also be included.

While most of the women saw a meaning in religion and in performing rituals, a striking feature is the absence among these people of the new religious movements based on *bhakti* or on the cult of personal *gurus*. The conversion to spirituality or to the *guru* cult has not emerged in the conflict-ridden society of these women in Trincomalee. In urban centres this new cult has got women together at *bhajans* and prayer meetings and social service with a religious orientation. One would expect that the war situation and the unstable political climate would normally help the emergence of such new movements based on personal god and charity missions, helping the poor and the needy with a religious orientation. These women did not feel that there was a need for it. Even more intriguing is that the "heartless world" and the intense sufferings have not made some women resort to the "opiate" experiences as Karl Marx would argue.

On the contrary the women have abandoned the opiate but have realised the "heartless" world and rejected religion *per se*. A Catholic woman saying "it (death) happened to my husband who was not only innocent (of terrorism) but also deeply religious and intensely god-fearing (*paya bhakthi*), Why should I worship god any more" is typical of the rejection of the opiate even in a heartless world. The emergence of anti-religious feeling in contemporary society has even challenged the social science theories (3).

Unlike in Trincomalee the women in Amparai did not see religion as serving any purpose and there was a general disinterestedness in religions among both the Tamil and Muslim communities. But there are women who said that they pray and seek solace, or like one woman who said,

You can't tell every thing to the children, not even one's mother, but to god I tell and get consoled. In a way she is telling us that she has no friends companions whom she can trust. Perhaps, after the death/disappearance of the husband she is talking confidentially to a god.

There are some who said that doing rituals and worshipping god brings peace of mind. One woman said,

When I am too worried and unable to act, I pray and I feel better. I get inner strength.

But the majority of the Tamil women did not show any interest in religion and rituals. There were women who said one needs money even to be religious—when we heard it for the first time, we felt that it was a strange confession. The second and third time we understood what they meant. Engaging in religious activities, going to the temple, praying, means spending time. They have to have money not to work, so that they can find the time to do them. Second—being religious means doing rituals/*puja*, giving money to the temple priests, buying rice, coconut, camphor, this means spending money. They have no extra money other than to buy things to eat and wear. Hence religion is relegated to an area as not of priority under the circumstances. Three women were so angry with the conditions of their life and perhaps with god for not giving them money that they did not say that they pray for peace of mind. They have relegated religion completely to the realm of rituals, as if religion is rituals *per se*.

There are women who did reject religion as of no use to them.
There are seven such women who showed anti-religious feelings.
What is the use ?
Who wants it ?
Why waste time ?
I have given up.
I simply have forgotten religion in my present worries.
I can't pray. I have no peace of mind.

One need not elaborate on these but one woman's statement needs to be commented on as she indulges in a logical argument of being disappointed with religion.

Those days I was religious. I used to miss one meal, go to the temple, pray and used to be a vegetarian on Friday. But now, after my son's death I even eat fish on Friday.

As someone who is used to the Hindu-Tamil culture this was a piece of shocking news. The Tamil Hindus are vegetarians on Friday and they observe "purity" on that day, have a bath after washing the kitchen, miss the breakfast, go to the temple do *puja* and are on a vegetarian diet the whole day. It is observed like a penance. Even if all of them don't observe the day in this order they do observe vegetarianism and temple visits. This woman's violation of this practice is indeed a protest against religion, god and the rest of the Hindu beliefs.

The state of ambivalence is even more confounded among the Muslim women. There was a total disinterestedness in their talk of religion. They do pray, but not to strict rules. They said they have no time to pray five times a day. They are preoccupied with problems. They did not say that religion was of no help to them. Neither did they say that they found religion helping them to tide over their worries, unhappiness and even the traumatic conditions. However, the Muslim women as a whole did not express any anti-Islam sentiments or speak against religion *per se*.

There is a great deal of evidence for escapism and meaning constructions of an interesting nature. Women have even given up their traditional religion in seeking peace of mind. There doesn't seem to have been any organised conversion campaign for material gains.

Conversions seem voluntary from people to people without the active participation of the priest. Priestly intervention has taken place only after a willingness was shown voluntarily. This needs to be researched more on a wider cross-section of the people as these findings are based on the fifteen women who have become Christians (thirteen Anglican and two Catholics).

All of them referred to themselves as "converted Christians" "converted Catholics" or as *itai Kala vetam*. *Itai kala vetam* literally means interim Christian, but what they meant was that they were not "born Christians." They wanted to convey the fact that they were converted to Christianity. This phrase had an implication to further explain or say why and how they became Christians. They implied that Hinduism has no meaning or has failed them. "I am peaceful now." When the woman said this she emphasised the word now and continued to say that she pours out her worries to God.

Some of their confessions are recorded here in their own words.

"I was very depressed, then I was converted I got peace of mind. When I read the Bible I get mental peace. I go to Mary to pray."

"I got ill. I had to be operated on, someone told me Jesus will cure my illness. Then she prayed, I got well. Since then I changed my religion. I have a lot of peace of mind now."

"After my husband's death I was so depressed. I stopped going to the temple. Father (priest) came and prayed, I got better. I go to the church and I have peace of mind now."

"I was deeply worried. I go to Church and complain to god a lot. I feel he listens. Then I go home and read the Bible."

"I go to the Church. I cry a lot there. I feel better. I feel light. I get peace of mind. I feel my husband is alive somewhere."

"Though a converted Christian I go to the Hindu temple as well."

"Depressed" and "unhappy" (*Manachorrvu, tumpam, tuyar*), I was ill" (*Suhaenam*), "drowned in worries" (*tunpattil altiruntom*), are expressions of both mental and bodily disorders. Conversion or the induction to the new faith has brought them new avenues, to be released from their affliction. While making a statement that one religion which has distanced them from personal interaction has failed

them, they are making use of the therapeutic content of the other religion. The presence of the "father" (the priest) and the social interaction he has with the depressed and the sick have helped them immensely. Neither the *bhakti* cult of the Hindus nor the *Guru* cult of the new religions has reached these people who are on the margin both socially and economically. Their only outlet has been reaching out to another faith, which has shown them a way.

On another level this whole process of religious experiences has clearly made a case for the need for a psychological approach to the problem of depression. Professional counselling is the need of the hour, irrespective of whether religion or religions have met their needs.

Chapter 4

Female Sexuality within the Construction of Femininity and its Cultural Versions in the Female-Headed Households

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of 'natural given' which power tries to hold in check... It is a name that is given to a historical construct" -

Michael Foucault

Female sexuality has been the subject in feminist scholarship for long, both as a critique of Freud and other psychoanalytic discussions and as a subject of empirical and theoretical analysis which has taken note of contributors to the subject such as Foucault (1978) and Weeks (1981). Feminist analysis has dwelt at length on two inter-related matrix—that of the social construction (historical) as well as the meanings that assign gender roles over a period of time and the manner in which sexuality generally creates gender inequality between the sexes (Connel 1987; Mackinnon 1987; Rich 1980; Barret 1991; Morgan 1990). The women in the female-headed household, though basically falling into the two intersecting issues mentioned above, have offered an interesting process of de-construction, adding a certain new phenomena into the problem of feminine sexuality.

This chapter deals with the various experiences the women underwent as part of the cultural and social conventions. Remarriage as

personal and political, the widow syndrome and its psychological dimensions, the grown up virgin daughter as a burden of responsibility and sexual harassment to which the women are subjected, will be taken up for discussion. As females, as single women and as heads of household, the three dimensional experiences and how and why the women have to behave, act and live as they do, is an inquiry that this chapter takes up. They become crucial both in the psychological and social behaviour of women. The economic variables, food, shelter, clothes etc. have clear linkages to the psychological, social and cultural variables enhancing the dispossession of one or causing the dispossession of the other. As victims of terror and violence living amidst a cultural baggage which is male-centered and biased towards the males with a clear patriarchal bent, their whole experience needs an analysis in its totality.

One of the 'functions' that the sociologists identified within the family is socialisation of the children. As the first step towards this function procreation was also implicitly assigned to the family. The regulation of sexuality with the ultimate notion of procreation takes place within the family. The system of monogamous marriage was regulated both by the State and religion. Rituals of all religions insisted that the man takes ownership of the woman/wife's sexuality within the wedlock and become the one who possesses her body. Any violation of this is punished both socially and by law. With the violent removal of the man—the "owner"—from the scene, the woman/wife becomes vulnerable. Her sexuality becomes a topic of open discussion. Implicitly the knowledge that she is unprotected (because the one who "possessed" her is no more) spreads to all nooks and corners of the village. Her singleness is easily interpreted as being "available". The same singleness has not been interpreted as being available for remarriage or companionship! But the availability for pleasure has received publicity. During peace times or normal times, the single women are protected socially by the extended family and by the immediate family and perhaps by the elderly kindly neighbours. This protection acted as a barrier to any unwanted advances made by males. Under the present situation this barrier is no more there. The women are left severely alone. Relatives and others who consider them a financial burden have distanced themselves.

In analysing the situation of Amparai, despite its complexities, the condition of the single women will be discussed following basically the same patterns as in Trincomalee. However, unlike in Trincomalee, in Amparai there are Tamil and Muslim victims in equally large numbers. This has resulted in two levels of study. The single women's experiences despite, having many commonalities, have also been determined and shaped by their ethnic belonging, cultural differences and their placements in the political scenario.

In Amparai too, deaths have taken place for various reasons. Although a significant impact they left on the women is the economic deprivation due to the removal of the sole breadwinner, in many cases, the impact cannot be studied only from the economic variable. There was communal violence where the Muslims were killed by the Tamils and Tamils were killed by the Muslims.

The trends are similar to those in Trincomalee broadly speaking. Women it appears have been left severely alone and the conditions are made more harsh. Except in very few cases where the women reported that the neighbours gave a little help, the neighbours have been indifferent to the sufferings of the women. So is the case of relatives where women were helped occasionally. The parents of the husbands did not care for them, in fact one woman said that they left her and the children and moved out of the house when their son was killed. Unlike in Trincomalee the maternal kin-group too had not intervened in times of crisis. In some cases the old parents and the younger sisters have to be looked after by the women as they too have become vulnerable in situations of war and poverty. Unlike in Trincomalee the women have not expressed anger and frustration about the lack of interest of the relatives, rather, they have accepted it as a course of natural events or part of the social reality. Perhaps, though not expressed overtly and specifically as something that affected them, this is one of the reasons for the intensity of their overall suffering and anguish expressed on other occasions, (more on this later).

That in one instance the husband's parents came and asked for the husband's belongings after his death is similar to the experiences of anguish of a woman in Trincomalee. Another woman said that her husband's father came to collect the *situ* (See notes) money which is due to her husband on the month of his death.

"When they see me on the road they look the other side" said another woman. (The "they" referred to here are the husband's parents and his brother. There was sarcasm and bitterness in her tone and expression and in the body language as well when she related these experiences.

Sexual harassment of women by men is not peculiar to one set of women but the unprotected singleness of the women under this study has peculiar meanings as far as their experiences are concerned.

The single women both at home and at the work place have to face many physical advances from men young and old, married and unmarried. In our interviews these women found it difficult to discuss these sexual advances. They thought the less talked about these were the better. They also found that they would be misunderstood as having been collaborators. Such collaborations are viewed very severely, those women are severely ostracized and they lose their means of livelihood. Hence they resisted the incorporation of such personal/private matters into a rationalistic social world of research. There were five women who were willing to share their experiences but there were many (about 30) who did not want to discuss this. They felt that these were too shameful to be disclosed.

There were others who had undergone such "shameful" (*Mariyataiketta*) experiences and have avoided them by being "careful and being prepared".

"I was constantly harassed, when I went to work, to the shop and even when I was alone at home. Now I avoid being alone or going alone. He gave my children presents when they were returning home from school. There were biscuits and sweets. They ate them up before I returned from work. I could only get into a fury and shout. If I had money I would have returned them all to that good-for-nothing man. But money I did not have. I cried the whole day - did not cook, shouted at the children. The next day I went up to his sister and cried and shouted. I threatened to kill my children and commit suicide. This worked. He stopped harassing me after that. But I know this is not the end. He may come again. Others will come. We are wretched people (*Palpatta nankal*) who have to suffer with these rowdies (*kavalial* and *kalusarayal*).

"I was constantly harassed. Now I go and sleep at other houses. This man is an alcoholic and wants women only when he is drunk. He comes only in the night. By not staying at home in the nights, I avoid him".

Being single and unprotected is interpreted as being available.

"Men come in the nights, drunk and call out for me. They think I am starved of sex and may easily welcome them. I shout and chase them away, but they do come. I live near a "*kasippu* joint" (where they brew illicit liquor (*kasippu*). Hence I have constructed this special gate".

She too was not very willing to discuss her experiences, but we noticed a gate which was peculiar, when we entered the house. I asked her why she had a funny gate. She did not answer but smiled. The gate was built with wood, with barbed iron wire protruding. A very unconventional structure. She explained later in detail.

"The top portion of the gate with iron wires protruding out is to bring the drunkard and rowdies to their senses. They come drunk and try to open the gate and try to walk past it and the iron barbed wire kept in suspension there causes injury on the faces. They have to go back bleeding, and when they shout, I am alerted and so are the neighbours.

The experience of another woman revealed yet another dimension.

When I go to work or shopping he follows me and tries to talk. I ignore him because it irritates me and my reaction is silence. One day I got angry and shouted at him. Following this incident he entered my house in the night. I woke up, I shouted. Others in the neighbourhood also woke up. I had to conceal his identity from them. I pretended that he was a complete stranger. Their speculations about his identity, which they could not discover because it was dark and he ran away, was met with a silence from me, a silence which was tactical. I feared social ostracism "*ur vai*", in her own words (the mouth of the village). They will "construct stories" about me- that I have invited him home.

These incidents are examples of the manner in which gender regime is operationalised. Power lies with the masculinity even in incidence of overt violations of human values, while femininity i

subdued and subordinated to make it powerless even when justice and reason are on its side and with it.

In the case of Leela (fictitious name) it is different. Her singleness was used and exploited by an unscrupulous man. Since she did not relate her story in sequence and the incidents were not related fully, we had to gather bits and pieces and the story that was reconstructed is given below.

When her husband disappeared Leela was in a state of shock with two little children. They were then two and a half and one and a half years old. Her parents too were dislocated in the 1990 massacre and had gone to India by boat to escape the wrath of the army. Her older sister has gone abroad. Her husband's friend trying to be a good Samaritan introduced someone who he said knew all the policemen and could trace her husband. But he laid one condition that she should come to Colombo to identify her husband. Off she went to Colombo with her children. He kept her in a lodge, sold her jewels, then and a took all her money was spent. Then he removed her to Batticaloa and kept her in a house. In fact she was imprisoned there. He used to lock her in the house when he went out. She was physically and psychologically ill treated. She attempted suicide twice, but did not succeed. She informed one of her neighbours of her plight who did not take her seriously. When she took the matter seriously she informed a Member of Parliament/ Minister/or the Grama Sevaka (She was not clear on this). The matter was handed over to the police. The Member of Parliament or whoever who was in power, was able to trace the sister in Trincomalee who had by now returned. After she was rescued by her sister she wrote to the parents in India and they too returned.

There are a few gaps in her story. The woman was visibly mentally disturbed and was not coherent. We did not want to probe into areas that she did not want to speak about. She wanted to say some things, but obviously did not want to reveal some. She insisted that she was being duped and deceived.

Leela in our opinion needs psychiatric treatment/counselling. Judgement passed on her by the society was that she was being foolish and rash, to believe and trust a man who wanted to help her. They felt that to give one's jewels and money was even more foolish. This may be the moral of the story. The gendered dimensions have also to be

brought into the surface. That this is the story of the young, vulnerable, single woman, Leela, is another significant moral of the story. That Leela still believes her husband is alive should also become an important part of the story as it was this anxiety to get him back that made her get into this unfortunate misadventure.

There are a few cases of mild harassment which ceased when the women threatened. However, many of the cases of sexual harassment were concealed from us. We did not think it proper to probe into their privacy and did not want to transgress the ethical standards we have set for us. The women at the refugee camp said there was a case at the camp but she does not want to break somebody's trust and we too respected the confidentiality. Such cases remain private and personal and are not brought under the arena of social research which should only take note of the phenomenon without the details.

In Amparai too both the Muslim and the Tamil women were subjected to sexual harassment, but the number of Tamil women is more. These incidents had left a sense of insecurity in the minds of the women about going alone on the streets or sleeping alone in the nights. We are not relating those. Often there are cases of how the women reacted wisely and cautiously when they got signs of men approaching them either directly or through messengers taking no for an answer. Following the women behind when they go out either to the market or to the shops are common occurrences. Admonishing them verbally or complaining about them to others have often met with success though some men persistently subject them to harassment. They were unanimous in their claim that women with husbands are not harassed in the villages due to the fear that the husbands may intervene to punish the trespasses. But as single women, *kekka al illai enru* (as there is no one to intervene, they have become vulnerable).

One Muslim woman reported that her teenage daughter had fallen a victim to her neighbour's son who had made use of her "vulnerability of staying alone at home" when the mother went out to work. She became pregnant and the boy refused to take responsibility for the baby. She repeated the phrase "because there is no man in the house" thrice to explain to me why this happened and why the boyfriend refused to accept paternity. Now with the shame that falls on an unwed mother and the responsibility of bringing up the baby at a tender age of

sixteen both daughter and mother are ostracized. She referred to themselves "as wretched beings on the earth". *Paal patta janmankal* is an appropriate expression in Tamil which she used to convey the totality of the meaning. Usually when such things happen, the fathers, brothers or uncles chide the concerned young man and his parents and get the young man to own up his paternity and get them married and all gossip stops thereafter. That this did not happen is the heart-breaking complaint of this mother. The daughter too had become a single woman and an unwed mother with the stigma of mothering an "illegitimate child". With tears in her eyes, the mother concluded that in the final analysis the public has blamed her. The daughter's behaviour is attributed to the faulty upbringing of the children by the widow. People said that the fate of the daughter is due to *Purusan illatavalin valarrpu*, the bringing up of children by a widow, which implies that a man/ the father is essential for the disciplining of the children. This also signifies the incompleteness, the lack of instrumentality and agency on the part of the female and a man-less woman (*purusan illataval*).

She no doubt believes that as a mother she has failed in giving protection to her daughter and that this whole process has spoilt all chances of the daughter's marriage. She asked me desperately "who will marry her now". Marriage is treated as the ultimate and the ideal goal of a young woman's existence and that all chances of marriage for the daughter are now jeopardised is the lament of the mother.

Sexual harassment by State officers in uniform reveals another dimension of the issue. His entry point was the good Samaritan role. He helped the young widow to get the death certificate of the husband. Acquaintance developed into a friendship with the family members. Then his visits increased. The widow's mother sensed "danger" and asked him not to come and it was then that he proposed to marry her. The daughter was not inclined that way. Besides he is a married man with children, the most he will give this woman is the status of mistress of convenience as long as he is on duty in Amparai. He continued to harass them. Complaints to higher authorities did not yield any fruit. An NGO intervened and got him transferred out of Amparai. But he continued to come and the mother had to send the daughter away from her house to a relative's house.

Another young widow had to take over the responsibility of her sister after the death of her parents.

"My sister was taken by the soldiers in a jeep. She was ashamed of this incident and stopped going to school. After that she became depressed and moody. She doesn't talk much and least of all, of this incident. We don't know what happened. Neither do we want to press her to talk about it. But today she is a cast away object both in her own estimation and in the estimation of the public. This is the way femininity is seen by our society. We are helpless against this "huge world-view"(malaiyalavu ur vai)".

Against the State they are powerless. Their ethnic, class and gender belonging have multiple dimensions in the power scheme which has a differential impact at various levels. Unable to meet the challenge or question the various levels of power, they have silenced their conscience. The sister had to act as a surrogate speaker while the victim remained silent and speechless, merely nodding approval and assent.

However, the question that begs an answer is whether these women chased away the good men also, who would have become companions and marriage partners for them, by being unduly suspicious and obsessed with the rowdyism and alcoholism of men.

The women, especially the single women, are subjected to a repressive socialisation that sex becomes taboo or socially not desirable. Sex for the sake of pleasure is an idea very alien to their day to day dialogue and is treated as a hidden subject discussed only in whispers.

The sinfulness of sex is an idea that has become part of the growing up of these women. But sex regulated within the system of marriage also has been a part of their socialisation. There is a great difference between these notions. One is taboo and the other a duty of the wife to the husband—sexual service as it is known. Without the husband it becomes sinful, with another man who can become another husband is also sinful for many women.

Social constructions have posited various meanings on remarriage and they have affected women in peculiar ways. The age of the widows under this study range from 18 to 50 years of age, though the majority of them are within the age group of 40 years. The youngest widows are

eighteen and nineteen years old and those below thirty are twenty six in number.

The women look underfed, malnourished and display a disinterestedness in their personal, physical self and it was reflected in their mental attitudes. A life-negating principle, close to the ideas of renunciation where personal satisfaction, personal enjoyment and personal care have been pushed into the background, was continually projected by them, sometimes intentionally and sometimes quite unknowingly. Except a mere five the women were totally against the idea of remarriage; the fifteen women whose husbands had deserted them or committed suicide had strong reasons to continue to remain single. They articulated fears that history may repeat itself or that it could be 'from the frying pan in to the fire'. The bitter experiences of violence, indifference and the final departure of their husbands have created various levels of intense hatred towards married life. But the rest of them want to comply within a cultural pattern which has been constructed by them and for them. Remarriage in the Sri Lankan Tamil cultural milieu is not prohibited. Even socially or legally there are no conventions or laws prohibiting widow's remarriage. But those who remained within the "re-marriagable" age group, 18-40, said that they had no intention of getting married. Ten women said that their mothers had asked them to marry again but they had refused. They blamed the refusal on the children saying that the new husband would not accept their children and if they got "new children" her children would be discriminated against. This was their common sense wisdom, which may be contested on the grounds of any social rationality.

Though this was reasoned out as a secondary process the women had another major reason for not wanting another man in their life. They argued that it was not possible for them "to think of another husband or live with another man. There is only one man in my life. My life with him is enough" were the statements we heard very often.

These women are governed by the idea of textual Tamil chastity that a woman should have only one husband and that to marry another man is becoming unchaste. The Sri Lankan Tamil construction of chastity does not prohibit remarriage but insists on fidelity which means being loyal both bodily and mentally to one husband/man within wedlock. But the women here have subscribed to codes of textual

chastity of the Indian/Brahminical versions. Codes of chastity are argued for both, implicitly by the less articulate and more expressively by the more articulate ones. Apart from announcing their ideas to us they were also conveying their message to society. Between the textual concept of chastity and the reality of the situation where remarriages are not socially tabooed they chose the first.

The Tamil concept of a household *Illaram* is more to do with *Dharma - Aram* - than with a "this-worldly" concept of household. This *Aram* is more operative within a concept of femininity than with masculinity within the household. Violation of the *aram* concept by men are often accepted, forgiven and trivialised but within femininity, violations are constantly watched, ostracized, gossiped about and even punished.

The women felt it was necessary for them to remain within the code of *aram*. It is more important than their personal satisfaction. However, there were five women who said that no one asked them to remarry. No one was willing to originate the process of initiating a second marriage. It sounded more like a complaint and not an innocent statement. Euphemism was employed often to convey meanings.

Most women it would appear are practicing a kind of renunciation, denial of their life chances, denial of enjoyment. Romila Thapar argues that the way renunciation and the household have been placed as of a binary opposition by Dumont, is debatable in the Indian context, within the four-fold *asrama* system (Thapar 1981:274). Though the Brahminical *asrama* system is alien to the Tamil social formation in Sri Lanka whether in the east or north, the manner in which femininity is constructed has its similarities to the renunciatory goals in certain aspects.

It is assumed that the renouncer has to follow strict codes of conduct where pleasures of life are denied to them but within the household too the wife has to follow certain codes that negate enjoyment and pleasure. Thus the renunciation of women within the household and codes of renunciation for the widows and in their discourse, the renunciatory codes of chastity are valued as the *aram* of women. The discourse revealed a strong imposition of a gender order, violations of which will cause chaos within the "family" and the household order will be disrupted. The women have internalized certain

cultural values and are trying to act accordingly in real life. Physical gestures, dramatization of speech and the manner of expression have clearly shown their levels of the internalized subjectivity. Cultural factors have limited their thinking.

Remarriage was construed by the women as re-ordering their life purely and merely on demands of sex. The idea of companionship at an age where they are alone and deprived, is alien to their thoughts. Hence the question of remarriage is implicitly linked purely to a life of sex and sex is generally conceived as sinful. Sanctions against sexuality and its regulations within marriage have helped create these notions of sex with remarriage. Forbidden sex and permitted sex are dictated to by power relations which are gendered here. In such a context female desire is not only silenced but is also construed as forbidden and sinful. Remarriage of widows placed within these social parameters became a non-issue and remained so.

Contrary to our assumptions that in a rural unsophisticated un-Brahminical society, women are free to remarry with sexual freedom and the right to choose their mates, the pictures presented to us in this study are of a repressive society. "There should be no other man in my life. I can't think of another man again" are sentiments usually expressed by heroines of South Indian Tamil films. It appears that these role models are internalized by the women in rural Trincomalee too.

Patriarchy needs a twofold definition according to McDonough and Harrison, the first being the control of women's fertility and sexuality in a monogamous marriage and the economic subordination of women through the sexual division of labour being the second. (1978 :11) However, even after the partner in the monogamous marriage is removed from the scene, the women continue to subscribe to the patterns of monogamous marriage whereby they control their sexuality, sacrificing it on the altar of a patriarchal ideology—that women are the sexual property of men and that it is chaste womanhood that has to be valued and celebrated. This construction of femininity within patriarchy has even further implications for feminist theory. Engel's arguments that the material base of the proletarian marriage was different in that the absence of property has significantly removed the idea of an oppressive monogamous marriage and where a sense of non-patriarchal equality prevailed between husband and wife have also

to be contested. Women at all levels of class seem subjected to patriarchal ideology. A way of understanding this phenomenon is to apply the concept of Sanskritisation whereby women here have ascribed to the social status of the high caste, high class propertied women through a process of internalisation of such values of culture.

This discussion should take us to the general climate of repression to be argued on a cultural mode of thinking. Foucault's attempts to relate sexuality and repression to the mechanisms of dominant power which utilises and harnesses it to its advantage has relevance to our discussion of the types and levels of repression the widows are undergoing. Foucault's argument that sexuality is given to historical construct (1978 : 152) is relevant in this connection. The mode of discourse of the women basing their arguments on claims of chastity "one man in our life", and on the motherhood ideology clearly are constructions made historically by the chaste epic women like *Sita* and *Kannaki*. Besides these constructs, there are others. Within patriarchy, passivity is also a construct of a sexless woman whose sexual desire and drive are perceived as dormant and one that has to be controlled. This therefore assumes that the need for gratification is not there in a woman.

The socially and historically constructed meanings which have persuasive powers and the ideological cultural legitimisation pave the way for particular behaviour- The "sexual script" (Simon and Gagnon 1973) created for the women was acted out according to rules of the play, the play being femininity. Rejection of sex, refraining from re-marriage, finding motherhood as a scapegoat are different scenes/frames of the play.

The end result is the repression that the women are subjected to, but finds no mention in their social and personal existence. The total silence of the women on their sexual needs hid much of the reality and a discussion of the subject was a near taboo. The total inability of the women to initiate the process of a marriage contract on their own has its part to play in the socio-cultural scenario. In their cultural milieu, except for the four women who have had the choice of mate selection, the others were subjected to a contract of arranged marriage where the elders, marriage brokers and the astrologers had played the decisive roles and this determined their future. A re-enactment of the same

scenario, under the circumstances of widowhood and with the responsibility of children was not possible. Any attempts by the women on their own would be construed within an ideology of an over-sexed woman's shameful act.

However, there were other types of confessions expressed covertly, not through the young research assistants but directly to me when I met them. The eighteen year old widow said that she would like to marry but had many reservations. The most important being the uncertainty pertaining to the present war-time.

I am afraid, in fact even frightened that my second husband may also be killed by the army, as they go for the young men.

Another young widow said that she likes to marry but no one asked her. And as a woman and that too a widow she cannot tell anyone that she wants to marry, as that would be culturally a taboo, nay a piece of "disgraceful behaviour".

Only one woman said that her mother was keen to get her married but she was not keen. Eight women were approached by men directly but they could not decide for fear of public opinion and because their family did not support them. They were rejected on grounds of being incompatible where age, status, caste, family and character were concerned.

The attitudes to remarriage were characterised by an ambivalence which was partly based on a common sense wisdom and partly subjected to repressive notions governed by cultural conditioning and an ideology of motherhood which became handy to a process of self-legitimisation. The way they expressed themselves and the manner of the dialogue could be called intimate, and looked like they were questioning their own cultural conditioning and trying to find answers for their constructions.

My husband was good, of course he drank too much, he used to beat me, but if I marry again the public will view it negatively. "*Ur Vayayai muda mudiyatu*", You see, we can't tell the villagers (people) to shut their mouths. I will become the subject of gossip. Besides, my children will be under the stepfather, who can ill-treat them if I get children by him. They will then say because our mother married this man, we are suffering. I may be wrong, after all I too must have my own aspirations in life.....She said thoughtfully.

She was thoughtful.

Similar views, though argued differently, were expressed by another young widow.

The new husband will beat my children and discriminate against them when I get children by him. Who can predict the future? Moreover, he will consider me as "tasted fruit", she was somebody's wife, she has a body and mind and feelings which were enjoyed by him. It may be a case of from the frying pan into the fire. If you can guarantee me that these things will not happen I am prepared to marry.

She smiled and looked down avoiding contact with my eyes.

In the final analysis we feel that for these helpless women it was a case of confounded ambivalence.

The process through which female sexuality as part of one's private life has become a public concern with mechanisms of social control is more or less the same in Amparai as in Trincomalee. However, when we move into specifications we identify differences. The differences are not merely due to the differences in ethnic belonging in that we now have the Muslim women as victims of violence, but also due to some cultural differences between the Tamil women living in Trincomalee and Amparai. It is generally believed that the Tamil women in the Eastern Province have trends of a matrilineal, cultural behaviour patterns (Obeyesekera, 1987:555, MacGilvray, 1974). It is reflected in the manner of behaviour and expressions of the single women. The difference in consciousness is indeed remarkably evident.

The women in Amparai are poorer and much more traumatised, more frustrated and immersed in deep worry, but not angry and rebellious. The women continued to be single. Both the Tamil and Muslim women had various reasons to remain single. Interestingly some of the women told me that their brothers-in-law and their friends' husbands who lost their wives as civilians in the war have remarried. But they know of only two women who have married again. While they are aware of the discriminatory patterns of socialisation they are not able to come out of the social and cultural constraints that have contributed to their socialisation.

Among the Tamils, a few women have reasoned out their unwillingness to marry on a concept of chastity. According to the Hindu religion a woman can marry only one man in her life, was one woman's argument, while another said that whether a stone or a blade of grass, a husband is a husband. The majority of them argued differently.

Even if my brother-in-law comes to see my children there is a lot of gossip, hence it is good to marry someone, rather than remain single and be subjected to constant gossip which is painful but one should get a good man, he should look after the children as his own. He should not be an alcoholic.

The fear that marriages may not work and not in a position to take any risk in life in their State of mind, twenty one women have rejected offers of marriage. That the children will be ill-treated was often repeated as a reason for remaining single by the women. Three of them said:-

Men do not like children by another man. They will chase them away.

Seven women said that their children between the ages of seven and fourteen years have at various times told them that they simply resent the idea of another father in the house.

I do not want another father, I will stab him if you get another father for us. Don't you marry.

In three cases the resentment was expressed rather violently.

"I will stab him, I will kill him. I will chase him away"

This is how they expressed themselves. The children were not consulted but they have come to know when the subject was discussed at home by the others.

Ten women were of the view that since they had grown-up daughters it was not socially accepted to talk of a second marriage. Eight women said they were simply not in a mood to contemplate marriage as they said they had too much to worry about, and have no inclination to think of the nice things in life. Two women said that though there were offers of marriage, they could not decide as there

was no one to advise them constructively as all their immediate kith and kin were either dead or displaced.

What is significant in the responses of the Amparai women is that except the two women who spoke of violations of chastity, others had rational arguments to reject marriage proposals. What is more significant is to realise that there have been efforts to get them married by the elders and that there were offers from the men to marry them. This is different from the Trincomalee situation. We can attribute this difference to the matrilineal cultural patterns of the Eastern Province. One can speculate that if the women were not under severe stress and not lonely having to undergo terrible responsibilities, managing poverty and facing insecure conditions of life, the majority of them would have re-married. The added dimension, the war situation, the terrorism and violence and the insecurity that the female heads are facing should necessarily become a variable, the analysis of which has brought out the various repercussions both on the children and the women.

However the Tamil women's status and experiences in Amparai are very similar to the Trincomalee women in terms of social seclusion and separation from religiously auspicious events. She is also referred to derogatorily, and the use of flowers and *pottu* by the widows are interpreted as advertising her availability to men. One woman's experience is intensely sorrowful. She was criticized for going out.

Where is she going at this time?. Look how she walks straight. Why is she talking to men? She must be interested in them. Is she trying to entice him/them?..... I don't like to go out. Sometimes I feel that the ground on which I stand should break into two and swallow me up when I listen to such words.

She ended up with a curse - with a *karmic* philosophy.

Why should I suffer? Those who inflict this pain on me must also suffer like me. I try to pray to god, perhaps this urge to curse may disappear when I sit down calmly to pray but I do not get any peace of mind anyhow.

The incomplete being as she is seen—the single woman—her words, acts, behaviour are under severe scrutiny. The absence of male partnership has made her vulnerable and open to public inspection. The

pain of mind and cruelty with which she was treated has psychological implications for behaviour in general, and how she behaves with the children in particular. They said that they can only shout at the children when they are angry and under stress. This becomes the only outlet.

The attitudes towards remarriage should be viewed within the structures of power as well and then linked to particular discourses of truth and knowledge which are so constructed that they become disadvantageous to the less powerful (Foucault 1980).

The construction of femininity grounded in hegemonic cultural ideology has laid out the so called consensual norms and rules of behaviour for women. The control of female sexuality is the result of such a process of discourse, the hegemonic reality and the consensus acquired for it. The unequal partnership of marriage whereby the man does not speak of "one woman in my life" but marries another, a second time and a third time with ease is the state of being powerful and that is seen as natural and given, based on the so-called "truth" that the male sexuality is in need of constant gratification because of its virility. To gain social acceptance the women engage in an exercise of emphasised (and exaggerated) femininity (Connell 1987: 187), to emphasise the virtue of chastity and to create visions of a real woman.

The six Sinhalese women from Trincomalee too, more or less subscribed to a similar ideology in the final analysis but there was a difference in the reasons given out. There was no "only one man in a woman's life claim." Even their gestures and expressions did not convey an overt rejection or aversion to the idea of remarriage.

The age of widows may (40,49,42,40,27 and 29), also have an impact on the construction of their attitudes four of them simply—rejected the idea of remarriage and said their children's welfare is their primary concern and that remarriage is not in their vision and agenda. The fifth widow aged 40, was willing to elaborate on the subject.

I got married to him after having a long affair for five years. I lived happily for eleven years. There was love between us and we respected each other. Now I do not feel like getting married again.

The abject poverty in which she is placed and the level of her frustration may also have caused the feelings of indifference in her.

However, the number of five respondents is too small a sample to arrive at a decision as peculiar to a community which has anyway the same cultural milieu in many aspects. The absence of Brahmanical influence on the Sinhalese on both the cultural and social construction of femininity is indeed a major cause for this differential attitude. There were no strong arguments for the case of chastity.

The widow syndrome has created many types of social deprivations. The female heads have many deprivations besides the economic and ones caused by the loss of a partner and a breadwinner, they suffer from social isolation which leads to cultural deprivations of partaking in rituals and festivals. This has a further dimension to their lives. It is a twin process of socially inflicted norms and practices by others, of isolating the widows and the widows self-inflicting seclusion on themselves.

The ideology of renunciation—the *dharma* of femininity constructed on codes of withdrawal, negation and deprivation come into play in the widow syndrome that was identified in the study.

"I do not go for festivals and functions. I send my mother." the mother, though old, has the social sanction to participate in such functions because of her "wholesomeness" which is attached to the man.

"I do not go to "auspicious functions" (*Nalla kaariyam*) because others seclude me saying I have no husband. So I must seclude myself" (*othunkal*) "I am unhappy about this."

This is a case of becoming wise after a bad experience but she is unhappy, the agent of the unhappiness is society as they call it.

"To auspicious events I go, but I go later after the moment of auspiciousness has passed, so that people won't see me then. Moments of auspiciousness are those connected with rituals such as tying the tali and the ritual baths of the bride and the young girl who has attained age."

"I do not go on the same day for auspicious events since I have no husband. I should not "go and stand in front". Having lost the tali I can't go and stand in front of the people of the village. (*uraar*) - meaning the people in general will not allow it. I feel terribly unhappy."

"I avoid auspicious functions and moments. I go late" "I totally avoid auspicious events - I have heard what they said to my widowed sister, when she went for such an occasion."

Widows are considered a bad omen, unlucky and thought to bring about unhappiness for others because of their single status. The Tamils have divided the phenomena into good and bad, auspicious and inauspicious. House-warming, age-attaining ceremony and weddings are auspicious events. To this is now added birthday parties. The sight of widows at these functions is considered inauspicious and bad as they are supposed to bring ill-luck to the protagonists of the events. Hence the widows are avoided tactically and they too avoid attending these events. In the final analysis, being sexually inactive has cast upon them the spell of inauspiciousness. Paradoxically becoming sexually active again is taboo socially and women have their own construction based on chastity and fidelity. The twosome of the man and the woman is considered whole but the man minus the woman is not cast into the same mould of inauspiciousness.

The widows are cast into a stereotypical mould. They have to renounce sex and other pleasures in life and should also appear renounced which is conveyed to the world through their behaviour, dress and speech. Being deprived of a sex life she is suspect of "immorality" and "illicit" love life. So her behaviour is constantly under scrutiny.

At a time when social interaction is minimal due to the double and triple burden that these women have taken upon themselves, the experience of seclusion has led to further deprivations causing psychological problems.

The psychological problems that I refer to here are all from conclusions drawn from keen observation of their manner of speech, gestures, expressions with sighs and sad faces and in fact the moments of silence which implied powerful messages. It is often a realisation that they felt that the victims are blamed for the tragedy in their lives but this is not to deny the fact that they readily conform to further victimisation by their own seeking and perhaps due to social pressure.

The manner of their expressions and reasoning fall into very neat categories of similar consciousness patterns that one is astounded at the sameness of the words and phrases used to explain their experiences and the perceived notions of the society- a term they used often as "*samuthayam*".

Auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are the terms frequently used by the women but their experiences fall into four categories. Except two women who defied their inauspiciousness and ten women who did not talk about it, others clearly articulated their feelings.

Since a woman whose husband is dead, if seen around in "auspicious events" is supposed to bring inauspiciousness to those who are the primary participants of the ritual- the bride, groom, the occupants of a house in housewarming rites and the girl who has attained age, customarily the ritualists and the others in the household seek auspicious women with *tali*, *pottu* and flower, i.e. those whose husbands are alive "to stand in front" - as they are considered a good omen which will bring the luck of the longevity of marital happiness to the protagonists of the rituals. This "gift" is denied to the women who have lost their husbands and are sometimes tacitly and sometimes more abusively asked to stand out or stay away. Religiously and socially they are cast into a mould which made the women repeat the phrase "avoiding auspicious moments and standing in front". Consequently they avoid moments of auspiciousness. One woman even said, "I have to hide myself and sit in the last row habitually. The word *otungutal* signifies self-imposed and self-inflicted seclusion before others tell you to do so. According to them this is wisdom that they have acquired usually after the incident.

Verbal abuse has also been reported by these women. Their singleness is explained as being the result of her ill luck, bad qualities and character. The widowhood becomes a subject of comment in all forms of quarrels and gossip when others are angry with the widows.

My neighbour told me, I was suffering widowhood because I was proud and competitive. "They refer to me openly as *vithavai* (widow) *arutali* (one whose tali is broken) *purusanai tintane* (you who have eaten your husband)

This was related to us by an eighteen year old widow, the youngest in the sample. The words used here are heavy with abusive implications colloquially and in fact they do blame the woman, the victim as solely responsible for her present status.

Another such woman did not want to mention the above words for she thought it was not polite or that it was socially deviant to use those words with us. She simply said they talk to hurt her feelings and did not want to elaborate. But her face betrayed her intense feelings of hurt and her silence was even more eloquent. Other widows were told "because of your ill luck your husband died, because of your character your husband disappeared, committed suicide, deserted you."

Once an old man asked someone loudly, so that I too could hear "why is "that thing" standing there in front?" (*en munnalai poi nitkutu?*).

The widow is thus progressively reduced to an inanimate object in the manner in which the man has chosen the third person neuter gender verbal ending. (The ending *tu* is used to refer to non-human beings/ animals/ birds and objects along with the pronoun *atu* which belongs to the neuter gender). When used on human beings it degrades them to the extent of treating them as an object, a thing where person-hood is denied to them. Such impolite usage will be better comprehended if we know that even on social inferiors, the inferiority constructed on people's belonging to lower caste and class categories, such usages are common. There are also other non-polite verb endings that denote such social inferiors.

With words and behaviour they isolate me, keep me away, they discard me like an "unwanted object" (*ventata porul*). Though they invite me I do not go. I know I am not welcome there. I feel unhappy after I go. Both their words and their behaviour are harsh."

Widows are also restricted within the code of dress. The triple code of ethics that is constructed for the Tamil personhood falls within three major concepts such as *natai*, *utai*, *pavanai*. They are behaviour, dress and the way you treat others and the way others treat you, i.e. social interaction. This code of ethics severely restricts women and in fact the construction of femininity draws heavily from this triple concept of

personhood. A widow is further conditioned and restricted within this code. A total denial and negation of life chances are imposed on her where even a particular dress code is stipulated for her.

The women had this to say:

Other women are dressed well in colours. How can I go anywhere like this.

I have no *pottu*, *tali* or flowers
I am not allowed to dress well
I feel very unhappy about this

I don't dress well though I like to, Now I go about like a ghost-
peykkolam.

In the use of the phrase "ghost-like form" she registered an inverted protest—a protest against societal restrictions. A message is given here "perhaps you are happy now to see my *peykkolam*."

Restrictions inflicted on the behaviour are also manifold. Their behaviour has become an intense preoccupation with the others who have taken it upon themselves the social duty of preventing chaos in society. Thus the widows' behaviour and socialisation patterns are under severe scrutiny. A code of renunciation with regard to this personal and social behaviour is inflicted upon them and gossip is the means by which society controls them. The women confided rather hopelessly about the situation with feelings of dejection.

I have to lead a life of seclusion for fear of gossip.

I do not like to socialise with anyone particularly with men young or old.

I have to guard my "honour" (*peyar*-name) against possible scandals.
I fear gossip and public opinion.

Questions are thrown to others about the widow so that she can hear.

Does she look like a widow? See how she is dressed up?

See how she is going about instead of being in the corner of a room.

The widow is constantly reminded of the dress code and the special movement "assigned" to them. The message is conveyed to her

indirectly but in her presence the conversation is carried on with a third party so loud that it is impossible for her not to hear.

They see a motive in my socialisation with men. This hurts me. I cry inside my house and within me.

I want to live as one man's wife but people gossip about me.

My behaviour is watched.

A man comes to help at times, when I have a problem. There was so much of gossip. I told him not to come. This is the plight of widows.
Now I have no one to help me.

More often the societal control is conveyed to her through gossip channels. She is finally conveyed the message that she has deviated from a norm and crossed boundary lines marked for her. The four types of experiences—the manner of physical seclusion, the verbal abuse, strict codes of dress and behaviour, the mechanism of social control exercised through gossip—deployed very strong feelings of dejection among the women. Widowhood experiences under normal circumstances are mitigated by the supportive network of the family members of the joint and extended families and to a lesser extent by the kin group. The war situation has destroyed such supportive network and women are left severely alone to cope with this additional problem of widowhood.

Indeed there were exceptions to the rule. Two women were defiant and violated the rules laid for them by others and refused to impose rules on themselves. One of them said "I don't feel inferior because I am a woman. In my own house I participate in all auspicious rituals of my children and "I stand in front".

Another woman dismissed the gossip proverbially- "If the dogs bark at the moon, what does the moon care?"

"I have six children. A boy and five girls. I went to Kuwait and earned money. I left the children with my mother. I am determined to work hard and am prepared to accept challenges in life. I have land and a well. I can cultivate my land and be on my own."

Indeed there is a difference in the way the behaviour is constructed for the Muslim women. Among the Muslims though there is more seclusion for women, the idea of remarriage is accepted as a natural

course of events for a single woman. Parents, brothers and brothers-in-law are actively engaged in finding husbands for "their" women. However, except two, the others have not married and two have lost their second husbands too in the war. The women openly entertained conversations on remarriage and said even men have proposed to them directly. Some women said that the children were their worry.

For example one woman said,

If I get more children that means I will be poorer still. My second husband can also be killed. Things are so uncertain said one woman.

Another said,

With the children around, my married life will not be happy. If I have parents I can leave them with my parents. Then I will be free to marry.

A third one said,

My father found a new son-in-law. I did not like him.

Yet another said,

My brother wanted me to marry his friend but he is ugly.

And a few attributed their unwillingness to remarry to ill health and physical and mental disabilities, while some felt they were too old to remarry. Two others gave their children's objections as reasons for remaining single. Perhaps, the most interesting case was that of a thirty eight year old widow. When asked in the course of the conversation about marriage she said she was not keen, but when the researcher reached the gate on her way out she came to her and said that in the presence of the children, she did not want to express her feelings and that she is only thirty eight. She posed a question. What if I marry? I feel lonely.

She was of course made to feel and reassured that there is absolutely nothing wrong and that she should go ahead.

There are two issues here. She should not have been talked to in the company of her children. But it was difficult to separate the respondents from the small children. The second issue is her loneliness and lack of companionship to discuss personal matters. Such problems of loneliness are indeed very pathetic. The single women have to suffer

at various points and by sheer chance we came to know of their inner turmoil. They treat these issues as too personal. Ten women expressed the same feelings variously, that they were too preoccupied and distressed in mind and sick and weak in body to entertain hopes of a married life. Among these women remarriage was not socially tabooed or religiously ostracized like among the Tamils and Hindus. These women remained single due to other reasons. It was also interesting to note that the support of the kin group especially the parents, was a great help to them. If alive, they take care of one's children while the daughter can be happy and not feel guilty that the children are subjected to some alien relationship with a new father.

One woman made her decision after consultation. When she inquired from other women with children who have remarried, she found that their experiences were very traumatic. The three women she spoke to, said that life is very hard: The children by the first husband are treated badly by the second husband and his children. They are neglected and discriminated by way of food, clothes and toys and educational facilities. This woman felt she was wise not to have entered into such a bad wedlock. She doesn't want her children to suffer one bit.

The breakdown of the kin group support is a major problem for the single women of both ethnic groups, the Tamils and the Muslims. Emotionally and physically they are disadvantaged. Following this, another aspect comes to the forefront and that is the breakdown of the joint family system during the crisis situation that they are in now.

In sheer desperation and due to poverty, fifteen women have moved into their parents', mother's and parents'-in-law's houses. Often the move was regretted later.

In the mother's house ("Amma Vitu") the mother felt that my children are noisy and naughty. She wanted us to move out.

When a few of the older single women went to live with their married daughters, before long they had to get back to their homes. The children think that mothers being there means more expenses and the sons-in-law are not willing to bear the burden of having to upkeep mothers-in-law. It was often told that before they married the children, both boys and girls were helpful but things changed dramatically after

they got married. The parents were rejected by the children as burdens mounted. The breakdown of the kin group support and the joint family system have to be treated as a social factor common to all communities as a post-war phenomenon.

Within the widow syndrome the perception of the sexless woman and its social expectations and implications take on a further dimension here. Strangely, or not strangely, though remarriage was not tabooed socially and religiously, the women in this part also have to succumb to various types of ill-treatment. However, there are differences between the Tamils and Muslims. The Tamil widows are subjected to more suffering. Among the fifty Muslim women, only seven women expressed variously their experiences of ill-treatment. Fundamental to both groups is the factor of the expectations of sexual inactivity. The gossip and its verbal constructions are couched in the expectation that she/they should continue to live sexlessly. The Muslim women's complaints are thus:

Why is he visiting her often?

What has he got to do in a house where there are no men?"

I can't possibly seek any help from any man, even younger men as old as my eldest son.

She is a widow, you don't know what she is up to. Who visits her?

She is a young widow and attractive too. Even if she hides her head (means the veil) What is inside her mind no one knows.

The "virgin daughter" is a source of ceaseless sorrow till she is married. All mothers without exception, both the Muslims and Tamils, who have grown-up daughters expressed that they had a heavy burden of responsibilities and dejection in having the girls at home unmarried. There are various dimensions to this problem and the manner they expressed themselves revealed the social implications. The girls of fourteen and above are always referred to as a "*kumar*" the corrupted form of the word, *kumari* - virgin. The imposition of the word *Kumar* (virgin) on the female child who has attained age is a process that signifies the vulnerability of her sexuality—the sexuality that is dangerous, that is available, the sexuality that needs to be appeased or gratified, the sexuality that needs to be controlled and regulated within

boundaries laid down by traditions and conventions and laws; The sexuality that needs to be kept under check and control so that it does not go astray or abused or spoilt.

The mothers felt a terrible burden and pain of mind.

The three virgins have to be married.

Having two virgins at home I am keeping fire in my stomach (it is like keeping fire on my stomach). This is a saying often used to express the fear and the burden of having an unmarried grown-up daughter at home.

(Irantu kumarai veetil vaittu kontu nan vairril neruppai waitirukiren).

To have two grown-up daughters is my biggest worry.

I don't mind giving them away to beggars but even they too will ask for a house (as dowry).

Kumarkal karai sera ventum is another metaphorical expression that was used often by the mothers. The literal translation of which is "virgins should reach the shore." The explanation of that or what it signifies is that the virgins are struggling in the seas with their vulnerable female sexuality and that they should reach the shores safely. Marriage or a man is the means by which they reach the safe regions of the shore.

The oft repeated proverbs and sayings which have deep significance are an indication of the fact that they are succumbing to the social constructions of female sexuality. This is not merely in terms of the women's bodily demands. Besides this factor, the mothers have conveyed other meanings as well: they implied meanings such as the protection-less daughter, the fatherless daughter, the widow's daughter. *Ann tunai ilata vetu* (the house that has no male mate) is often how they explained this phenomenon to us. That the house is literally open to all vultures and wolves in the society is a further implication. Hence, the problem of female sexuality is further problematised by the absence of male adults in the family/household. Apart from the violent intrusion of men into these households to rape the young women, like the soldiers taking away the school-going sister or the harassment of the police

officer, the entry of the neighbour's son with offers of sentimental love and affection has also become problematic when he abandoned his love and disowned paternity of the child.

The male presence with his power, authority and at times physical prowess are regarded as protective mechanisms for the female sexuality of their own women—wives, daughters and perhaps sister-in-law. The female heads of the household as mothers and older sisters have tremendous social, familial and personal responsibilities in protecting and safeguarding the female sexuality of their “virgin” daughters and sisters if any. For all of them this is a real burden to which they have no solution. Both day and night they have to keep watch so that both, their daughters and others, may not trespass the boundaries, the boundaries of social conventions and cultural limits.

The question that begs an answer is why is it that they will not allow the daughter the freedom to socialise with men and select their mates. Why then will they not arrange marriages as they do or in the way their mates were selected for them?.

For outsiders who do not live under the same cultural milieu these questions are very logical and the questions should also provide the answer for the problem of the unmarried status of the daughters over which they worry so much. But the answers they gave are equally logical and have to be placed in the particularity of the patriarchal culture in which they live. Socialising and having the freedom to move with men may give rise to the problem of the girls becoming a prey, to be enjoyed and deserted with the possibility of impregnation. This is worse. In the social milieu in which they live she becomes an outcast having been ostracised and the stigma of illegitimacy hinges on both the mother and the child. In the final analysis they are worse off than having a virgin daughter at home. Giving the freedom to women to move freely with men so that they can choose their mates they think is a risk which they do not want to take. So the virgins have to be guarded. The second question of arranged marriages goes with dowry. It is not to say that in the first case of personal mate selection the dowry is not an issue. In the so-called “love marriages” there is bargaining power for the parents of the girl either to totally disregard the dowry or to reduce the amounts which becomes possible due to the sentimental courtship where the young man feels that the girl is more important than the dowry.

In arranged marriages the dowry is determined, demanded and specified in items such as cash, land and jewels by the bridegroom and his parents. The poor are not excluded from the dowry. The items may be proportionately reduced, decreased but a dowry has to be given. The mothers with two or three daughters cannot simply entertain ideas of giving dowry in their present state of affairs, hence their dilemma.

These are the reasons for their fear, worry, anguish and frustration. The virgin daughter syndrome within poverty and within a patriarchal culture, they feel is a weight falling on them heavily.

Chapter 5

Motherhood, Children and the New Habitat

One would imagine that due to changes that have taken place within the family where the headship has changed from male to female, one would expect that the women as mothers have to play the roles of the fathers as well. This chapter will deal with how the mothers have fared, have coped with the problems and faced the double role imposed on them. Has the boundary crossing come naturally to them or do they have to undergo suffering in transforming their roles?

How they dealt with their own deprivations and how they coped with the experiences of their children's deprivations essentially form the content of this chapter. The violence at the political level has created a series of problems for the society, but the problems faced by the women are generally hidden and they remain invisible. More often the State apparatus is most insensitive to the women's sufferings. The sufferings of women, as revealed by the narratives of the women, it is hoped will be included in the grand narration when the history of this disaster of political violence is written. Victims need to be identified and not blamed. It is an effort to translate individual women's experiences into a meaningful discourse.

Motherhood is generally seen within certain fixed qualities such as nurturing sacrifice, kindness, love and tolerance as a package within an emotional and expressive framework. It is also spoken of as comprising supremely virtuous qualities, the violations of which are cast off as unwomanly and unfeminine. The feminist critique had seen the

feminine ideology of motherhood as an exaggerated notion which in practice has heaped the unshared burden of child care needs on the mother—the difference between the ideology and practice of motherhood. The difference between the institution of motherhood and the personal experience of a mother's love has also to be differentiated. This is also a feminist claim. Motherhood is seen as a super-imposed role on women by the male power which has divorced itself from the care-giving role for the children. While the mother's roles are carefully defined within the family/household system, the duties and functions of child care are also divided between the spouses. Those relating to food, dress and emotional needs are assigned to the feminine gender as feminine functions. Those relating to discipline, education are connected to masculinity and are assigned to the male members, usually the father, though the uncles and grandfathers may also have some authentic authority to exercise. Boundary crossings, where the women have combined the men's role with their maternal role, may become possible when mothers have become professionals and have got the education and training in various fields, but the feminine roles have rarely crossed the boundaries, they remained static thereby creating a double or treble burden on wives and mothers.

The mother-child relationship has basically an appearance of an emotional trap. The shock and the intense feeling of misery that followed the brutality of the deaths or disappearances of the spouses have deeply affected the wives. Their levels of trauma though is varied. Eighty-one women have contemplated suicide according to their confessions. Whether they were temporary and passing feelings of dejection and frustration or serious attempts at suicide, the fear that their children will be reduced to a state of orphans or that they will roam the streets as uncared-for beggars has prevented them from committing suicide.

The attempt at suicide was brought into the discussion to show the levels of their depression and helplessness and the reason for not committing suicide was explained as the deeply felt anxieties of the mother towards the children. The women on their own brought the subject of suicide into the dialogue.

The children's emotional levels differed according to their ages. The small children, the mothers said, were openly expressive and

outspoken about the missing fathers. But the older children above fourteen years were withdrawn, pensive and even reacted with hatred towards society. These children were also more supportive of their mothers, offering physical help, consoling them, talking words of wisdom not usually common among children of this age. Experiences have become the agents of tutoring the common sense wisdom.

Don't worry we will look after you. We will get a job soon. We have to be strong and face the future.

These are some of the mature words spoken by them. Eighteen such boy children, the mothers said, are angry with society (*samukatotai kopam*), have dropped out of school at the age of fourteen, sixteen, and thirteen with the idea of getting jobs. But they did not succeed in getting jobs. These children were constantly arguing with the mothers for not providing pencils, exercise books, good food and clothing. One such boy said he will avenge his father's killer. Another said.

Our father committed suicide, deserted you and us. Why should we worry, he didn't care for us.

The way the mothers have to handle the small children and cope with the emotional duress raised by the children were the worst experience of the mothers as far as their narrations were concerned. These children are too small, three to twelve years of age, to understand the concept of disappearance or desertions or killings by the army or navy. In all such cases the missing father remained a mystery beyond their worldly comprehension. The mothers said they were too frightened to tell the truth of the disappearance or the killing, but simply hid the truth. They said they have to constantly repeat that he is abroad and that he will come soon.

Some of the intelligent questions asked by the young children have caused misery to the mothers.

"Why we have no father, Arul and Ravi have fathers. He carries them, plays with them, they go out with him." They are very proud because they have fathers.

Statements and queries such as these were repeated by the mother with tears in their eyes and the mothers said they have no answers.

If he has disappeared he will come back soon. Till then let us wait. We don't like to wear new clothes or celebrate festivals till he comes. "Why is he taking so long to come. You can write to him to come back soon. If appa (father) lives we too can have toys, good food and good clothes.

"You are scolding and beating me, when my father returns I will complain about you to him".

"We are like orphans. No nice things in life. We are not like others in school".

The mother overheard her ten year old daughter's conversation with her friends.

"My mother is not like others. She does not dress well. She is always thoughtful and unhappy. She gets angry too often or for nothing".

This mother said that she tried to correct herself after this.

A ten year old understood that his father was shot and killed. He constantly asked the mother

Why was he shot? Who shot him? What did my father do? Did he suffer pain at death?"

This child suffered from the shock and the sudden death of the father. He got high fever and shouted in his sleep. The doctor had advised the mother to tell the child that the father is keeping fine in the other world and not to worry. Another child, immediately after the death imagined that the father was talking to him in his sleep. He wakes up and runs around in distress. The mother took the child to the temple and the priest gave holy ash (see notes) to put on his body. They all believed that the father's soul is hovering around. This child came to know of what had happened to the father from his school mate. The mother's version was that he is abroad.

"What would have happened to Appa (father)? Where would he be? What would have they done to him?. Will they give food when he is hungry? How happy will we be when he returns".

These are thoughts in vain.

There was a case of a woman whose daughter and son-in-law were killed by the soldiers. She was bringing up the orphan children. She

said she doesn't talk to the children (aged 7, 9 and 11) anything about their parents' deaths.

One mother told me that when her son's playmate's father who lives next door brings toys and food and sweets to his child, her son looks at the scene with eyes full of sadness. He speaks nothing and goes inside the house. Such scenes break her heart. The whole episode of misery is met with silence. She feels she just can't talk to her son who knows that his father was killed in 1990.

I told my son that your father is in India. Then one day he asked me "why are you keeping flowers for his picture. Only for the dead, people keep flowers". I admitted the truth. He was very thoughtful and moody for two days, refused food. I was very upset over his behaviour. I watched him constantly and took him to the shop and visited my friends. Then he improved.

Some children within the age group of eight and ten were subjected to the syndrome of fear psychosis. After the death of their fathers they became sick, the shock was too much. After that, any noise or noise of crackers upset them. They run inside the house, either cling to the mother or hide under the bed. Despite mothers' deep emotional ties toward the children they were quick to admit rather frankly that the children had become a burden—burden not of mere responsibility, but a burden of emotional turmoil on them.

However, there were mothers who said that there was a harmonious relationship between them and the children, though this was not the general pattern. Children do take part in the house management. There is discussion and mutual consolation for each other, these mothers found the children a source of help. Out of the twelve mothers, three of them were deserted by their husbands, two committed suicide, five were killed or disappeared and two died of natural causes. Though some of the children had bitter memories of their father whom they felt had betrayed them, they were good to their mothers and sympathised with them and understood their struggle in life.

There was another category of children who were neither good nor bad, whom the mothers accepted as too young, irresponsible, immature or going through the patterns of natural growing up. Motherhood intervened so as not to project images of bad children.

It is the third category that we are concerned about, the children who are a strain on the mothers. One need not overtly join the mothers to condemn them but to understand the levels of their behaviour should also be one of the objectives of this study. How the school and the neighbourhood behaved towards the children is also another contributory factor. Perhaps this needs to be investigated more in detail, but as single parenthood how the mothers felt, managed and coped with the problems is a more significant aspect in our present study of the female-headed households.

The children had often reacted with a lot of hostility and bitterness towards the mothers and the mothers had a lot of emotional outbursts—they cried, sobbed when they related the many episodes of the revolt of the children. Disobedience of the children they felt was the worst behaviour but the verbal attack of the children caused them even more pain.

You should have died too. Our father will not beat us, scold us. You are ordering us, you tell us, don't go there and here. Come home before dark. We don't want you. We want our father.

If *appa* (father) were alive he would give rice (food). You are starving us. You have no job, no money. We have no education. What kind of a mother are you. To go to school we have no shoes. When we come home we have no food.

Why did you give birth to us. Give us rice or squeeze our necks and kill us.

When (*vappa*) father was living we had good food. Now our mother does not give us good food.

A few of them even beat the mother.

I will kill those who killed my father. How nice if *appa* were alive.

With these words he goes to attack the mother.

Poverty though not the sole cause, has the greatest bearing on the children's behaviour. Some of the children who are equally poor did not behave in the same manner. The most stubborn child in the same family behaved violently where the others were less stubborn. Hence, one needs also to take note of these differential attitudes within the same poverty levels. About twenty-three mothers complained that the

children behaved violently towards them. Apart from verbal abuse they had also attacked them or tried to attack them while the other children prevented them. Hence the need to go beyond the economic variable and identify the other reasons. Our speculation and the tentative argument is that other social, psychological reasons too could have triggered or even caused the turmoil in the minds of the children.

Before going into such an analysis the fact that the mothers suffered needs to be emphasised. The mothers felt that they were inadequate for the ideal of motherhood. They felt guilty that they were not living up to expected social standards. They also feel disgraced when neighbours comment about the children's behaviour. Their transparency did bother us and inflicted subtle burdens on us. Having listened to the problems and not able to suggest solutions has indeed made us also guilty. The guilt of inactivity is a continuing problem for researchers of this kind when the research is not linked to some remedial action.

The causes for the behaviour of the children can be explained variously. But an easy way to identify and capture the whole process is to classify it as the fatherless syndrome. The fatherless syndrome as we see it is not based merely on the children's perception of themselves but on how society, the school, the neighbourhood and the peer groups perceived the children. It is a two-way process. How the deprivations affected the children and how they have constructed these experiences into attitudes and behaviour is one aspect. How the others viewed them, perceived them and how they talked and behaved towards them and how this talking and behaviour have contributed to specific constructions in their own minds is another process. This latter aspect has to be brought into the discourse of deprivations.

Like the widows who have been rendered inauspicious by the loss of the husbands, the children are also subjected to a kind of stigma. The level of the stigma of course varies according to the manner under which the loss of the father has been effected and according to the class position they belong.

At school, the fact that the father has deserted the mother and the children is treated as a stigma.

You are the son/daughter of the father who ran away.

This is how the fatherless syndrome is constructed. The father who can desert the wife and children can certainly be viewed with contempt but to hold the wife and children responsible for the father's default cannot be explained. Their social status is devalued and they stand condemned in the view of the public. The sympathy that they should get is transformed into a low status which is ridiculed.

You have no father, how do you manage? What do you eat? ask the neighbours.

Kaimpenn Valarta kalusarai, kavali, the rowdy the lowly son brought up by a widow is a term commonly used on children who have no fathers.

The peer group at the school and in the neighbourhood say :

You don't sit in front (with) of the father and eat your meals
Vaapakku etiraha irunta soru tinnavilli.

This statement puzzled me a bit for I have not heard this before nor did I realise that the fatherless syndrome was ever expressed through such a conception as eating along with the father. Inquiries revealed that it is a common expression among the Muslim community which has a great deal of stigma attached to fatherless children.

It is also a social expression of the status of the father in the family and in society which automatically enhances the status of the children. Conversely this also conveys the relative insignificance of the mother and the greater insignificance of the widow.

The patriarchal subjection conveyed on the children was a common occurrence among the Muslims, while the patriarchal culture remains excessively present in all kinds of social interaction including speech and dialogue. What is visible is the social content of the economic deprivation related to poverty or lack of monetary resources. Even the mothers unconsciously subscribe to such overtones when they tell the children with good intentions.

You have no father. Therefore you should not get into unnecessary arguments with your friends. No one will stand up for you in the event of quarrels and fights. Their fathers will come out and side with them, stand for them and protect them. I can't do that.

They advise the children so that they won't get into humiliating situations but they do not realise that it is negative advice. Being a

woman and a widow, she thinks she is helpless against other men who are fathers who protect and stand up for their children—fatherly instrumentalism as one may term this. But she is also passing that helplessness on to the children by her own subjection to patriarchal norms. The womanly, passive, inactivity entrenched in the consciousness of the mother is one thing, but that she is so advising the daughters and sons, the “fatherless” children, who should really stand up for their rights is another aspect. That the children are psychologically not prepared to stand up for their rights but made to succumb to social pressure and social inequalities is a third aspect. That their pent up feelings and emotions have found expression inside the home against their own mothers is a plausible explanation for their behaviour.

The mothers perceiving themselves as powerless are committing the children and themselves to particular values and norms that finally lead to the children controlling the mothers. The class to which these mothers belong in these instances is a contributory factor. They lack both social and economic power. Hence their compliance.

Besides, the mother/women/widow combination still remains a code name for the domestic domain despite the fact that the public man is removed from the picture in their own existence. But the other man/father in the public domain is seen as instrumentally active, protecting and standing up for their own children. The asymmetrical power relations perhaps legitimises the proverbial social expression of the *kaimpenn valarta kalusarai*, brought up by the widow/husbandless woman concept. Apart from the meaning of inauspiciousness which is present in the content of the statement, the lack of power is also embedded in it. In fact, power emanates both from the auspiciousness of the living husband, which offers social and personal power to the women in the society in which they are living, and from the economic power which is the class position of the woman. Widows lack both powers. Hence the status of the children who are in the custodial protection and care of the man-less single women.

Having a dialogue/discussion with the children should be a logical requisite of any research on the family/household. What we are saying now of the children is what the mothers told us, their versions interpreted by us. One is not sure how the children perceived the relationship and its related aspects of living within the family and the household.

The law in Sri Lanka, which is an expression of our aspiration, says that children till the age of sixteen should be compulsorily in school studying. The reality is sadly different. The gap between our objectives and aspirations and the socio-economic reality is indeed great and has not caught the attention of our legislators and law-makers.

The kind of responses one gets to the death and disappearances of the spouses are of utmost importance for they signify a whole process of how their world-views have developed with regard to the life process. The women, it would seem have used various expressions to describe their feelings. Those whose spouses had committed suicide and those whose husbands had deserted the women were bitter about the process of desertion and felt cheated and rejected. However they have, over time, developed new aspirations in life.

He found me boring because I became ill, went behind other women and then finally married one of them. He cheated me. I feel deceived.

He left me, while he was living with me. I did not think this would happen. He left me and married another woman. I felt deceived.

She then described the situation through a proverb.

Sirai valvai vita sirattai valve mel

which translates thus: Eating from a coconut shell (i.e. life of poverty) is better than a life of imprisonment.

Imprisonment here simply means emotional imprisonment. i.e. lack of an outlet for sharing feelings and emotions with her husband. She feels that life is less problematic though she is poor now.

Another woman's story is slightly different. The husband was alcoholic and irresponsible, wouldn't keep any job.

There was no income. Hence he fought with me often. Between duty and the guilt of negligence he suffered and had it out on me. Often there were arguments between us. One day he left me and the children.

Kamala said her husband got into debt. Unable to pay the debts he disappeared never to return.

It is six years since he left me. I had to pawn the jewels and sell the land to settle the debt. His irresponsibility and cowardly behaviour has shaken me. I could not get over the agony for many months.

The women had mixed feelings. Feelings of dejection, of having been let down, of having been cheated and rejected.

Some of these women have also a sense of relief after the desertion of their husbands. But they were also aware of the social status and lack of the protection that the husband gave them. As the wives of men they had a status as a full member of the community and family. The economic variable of the loss of the breadwinner had no bearing in these cases as their husbands were not the providers anyway.

The children too had no inhibitions or pretence. They were openly hostile to the fathers for having abandoned their mothers. One Muslim child's reaction ran thus:

Our *appa* (father) is no good. He is wicked. He left us. But you don't get another *appa* for us. I don't want another *appa*, my own *appa* is not good. Why another man?

"Must beat our father" said another child.

The latter was in response when the two children went to visit the father and his second wife and her people closed the door on them.

Another mother related an incident which was even more repulsive.

When my youngest daughter saw the father on her way to school, she asked him money to buy food. He turned the other side and went away.

These incidents as related by the children have upset the mothers a lot. Even the children were affected. They were angry and depressed.

Another mother said if some others talk about their father, they say

Don't talk about him. When he decided to leave us, to destroy our lives, when he made us stop our education, he stopped being our father.

Though the mothers share the children's feelings and are able to understand them, they are particularly concerned about the tone and the hostility and the manner of violence in the children's tone. Both mothers and children are affected with deep scars in their minds. Much depends on the type of the social growing up of the children. There is a lot of speculation as to how they will behave when they are adults.

The reaction of the two wives whose husbands committed suicide was not of a hostile nature. Though they too felt let down and disapproved of the cowardly act they had feelings of sympathy too. However, they were not willing to forgive them. The children of these mothers did not know yet that their fathers had committed suicide. They were made to believe that they died due to natural causes. Those whose husband and fathers died of natural causes have the least psychological affliction. Their problems, other than those of their sexual vulnerability and loneliness, fall within very clear patterns of an economic variable.

An interesting variation in Amprai from the Trincomalee situation is the easy adaptability of the women whose husbands have deserted them or committed suicide. In Trincomalee these women were more vulnerable to psychological depression due to the loss of dignity and self-respect by being rejected. In Amparai the women in a way have accepted the situation that no husband is better than a bad husband. The difference in their feelings has to be understood taking into consideration the overall political conditions of violence and insecurity.

Human beings construct meanings from the social environment and from the political, social and economic conditions. They are influenced always by external factors which create, re-create, construct, re-construct and de-construct meanings. In dealing with the death or disappearance of the husbands one sees a subversion of the dominant patriarchal ideology where the loss of the husband now is treated with disgust and not with feelings of loyalty. It is socially inappropriate to talk of husbands in such a manner, but the women did speak against them. Women do not respond to social situations uniformly and they do protest and condemn where they should. They are not passive but voice socially necessary protests. Protests which are subversive of the patriarchal order.

When one compares the state of these women who were subjected to various kinds of violence from various quarters, the women whose husbands had committed suicide or those whose husbands had deserted them felt better and were able to recover soon and easily. The comparative levels of their sufferings offered easy explanation and the explanation was evident to one who listened to them and saw them. The children however, have personalised the loss of the father in terms

of betrayal, deception and negligence. They have not compared themselves with the other children whose fathers were subjected to various types of violence. As young and looking up to a father's love and care, they are severely affected by the manner in which they were rendered fatherless.

The social isolation of children at various levels has in fact led to a denial of peer group belonging to many children. At school some of the children had traumatic experiences and they refused to go to school. The colleagues at school ask them "where is your father. Is he a tiger (L.T.T.E) How did he die?" They are also ridiculed while many such other unkind remarks were made at them. Children of fifteen mothers had similar experiences of peer group problems and they refused to go to school. Where there are days that they were pulled up at school for not having paid for the facilities fees by the teachers, other children look down upon them. This humiliates the children who take complaints home and refuse to go to school.

The children are subjected to another kind of ridicule similar to how the widows are blamed for their widowhood and referred to as someone who has eaten her own husband. The fatherless little children are also referred to as *tahapanai tintani* - you have eaten your father. These terms signify another process and is meant to call a person unlucky. In other words they are told that it is because of past bad deeds, bad *karma*, that you are suffering without a father, the children do not understand the significance, but simply know that it is a derogatory reference to them.

There are indeed other reasons for which the children suffered. Though not common in our sample, four mothers told us that their children were ridiculed as refugees, as strangers, as not belonging to the village. They were isolated and secluded as a result. Their children were not accepted into sports, games and other extra-curricular activities. Two such children dropped out of school. Just as a child wanted to avenge his father's killers, there was another with the same feelings of revenge. This is a case not of death but desertion. The child sees the mother's suffering, sees her in tears or crying and sobbing. The youngest child (12 years old) one day had told her "I want to kill my father, tell me where he is. Is he alive?"

The mother had to deal with him.

After this incident I stopped crying in his presence and pretend I am happy. I do not discuss the financial problems. The children will be affected, they will stop schooling and may want to earn something. Even at school he is a lone ranger and children avoid his company.

Generally the mother-child relationship was emotionally satisfying. The children sympathised with their mothers, appreciated their services and there was a great deal of physical help from the children. Older children were found to be a source of consolation for mothers and there was consultation between the mothers and children on the financial management and to cope with crisis situations. This is a redeeming factor and has kept the mothers good and in sturdy conditions with the result, having moved away from the traumatic conditions of the aftermath of the tragedies, the women have become strong and willing to face the future. It is the economic deprivations that bother them most.

But the situation of the young widows with young children is pathetic and needs to be brought into the arena of counselling and more discussions with them are needed.

Socially, education is considered as a power base and males have become the agents of power. The mothers' primary concern was the children's education. They are worried that the children may go astray. In their view education makes people complete human beings. It brings honour, self-respect, power and money. *Aalahaventum* (they must attain complete membership to the community) is a wish put forward by all the women. In their attitude there are no differences between the girl child and a boy child. We were often told that girls should be married well to good husbands as their life depends on finding good husbands, no woman said that their sons should get good wives and that their lives depend on good wives. It appears that they are aware and are willing to concede that power lies with the man and it is up to him to make life happy or unhappy for their daughters. The deciding factor of the lives of their daughter is not education, economic assets but a good husband. This fear of the future of their girl children loomed large in their consciousness and they expressed in various ways, their hope and prayers towards finding a "good man" for a husband. But

education is equally important, important more for boys. The need to educate the girls was stressed by seventy-two women. This factor cannot collapse into a consciousness of gender equality but more towards a practical wisdom line. The mothers do not want their daughters to suffer as they are suffering now. In the event of them becoming widows education would find them gainful employment. In the event of their husbands deserting, divorcing or committing suicide their daughters will not be reduced to this shameful existence. *Mariyatai ketta valkai* - of having to beg and being dependent on others. This has to be explained as a piece of wisdom that has emerged out of their experiences of suffering. Two intersecting views are evident here, good husbands for peaceful lives and education for gainful employment and social power.

It has to be emphasised that the school system identified as the ideological State apparatus in Althusserian praxis has taken on the role of an active agent, not of the State but that of a civil society. Where the bureaucracy has failed, the school has intervened to meet, to a very large extent, the needs of the civil society as far as the children were concerned. The teacher and the school principals seen within the idiom of a *guru* as someone who satisfies the needs of an education have also acted as redeeming agents of nursing the sufferings of both the children and the mothers. The mothers except in two cases have spoken favourably of the teachers. Their care and extra school vision that they have taken in the personal and psychological development of the children have been attested to by the mothers. The absence of the male father/husband was fulfilled by the teachers who are mostly males in satisfying some needs of the children. The women testified to innumerable instances where the teachers and principals went out of their bureaucratic rules to waive/reduce the facilities fees of the children, bought them pencils and exercise books, sent notes for the parents to come and meet them when the children needed special care and attention, when the children neglected their studies sent notes to the mother and met with them, where children were trauma affected, they informed the parents. Non-speech pensive moods and lack of concentration in the classrooms were identified as symptoms of trauma. Not only did they take special care of them but also advised the mothers on their children's mental state, mental illness, *manaviyati* as

they referred to the situation in lay terms. Though the children were not treated by any psychiatrist there was social interaction in the community with the school with the neighbourhood and the children were treated with sympathy by the adults. Though there was no medical healing process there was the social healing process where the victims were treated with sympathy. The fatherless child syndrome was received sympathetically and with a lot of warmth by the teachers.

Part II

Female Heads of Households in the Refugee Camps, the New Habitat.

The life in a refugee camp is a replica of life in an ordinary household. Men, women and children live together as a family in a household situation in smaller spaces of habitat. They cook and eat, share their resources and sleep under the same roof. Makeshift kitchens, living and bedrooms are the structural framework of their homes. The refugee camp resembles a commune in its structure taken together. But families have divided its whole space into individual homes but communal activities do take place not in cooking and sharing meals but in some activities. Spending leisure time together, playing games, enjoying each other's company, sitting around in groups, they share some part of this living. But they live another part in the private sphere within their little homes as family members in the limited space without doors or walls that separate the individual structures of their houses.

Two refugee camps are included in the study to identify the gender dimension of the problems. The structure and ideology of the household are analysed with its gender implications, within the matrix of change and experiences. Another interesting phenomenon that has become the focus of our study is the ethnic mix of the Sinhala and Tamil women living in close proximity to each other. This focus, we thought, would have political connotations. In fact this is an interesting intervention within the so called private space of the household that we are studying.

Some of the refugee camps are located at Love Lane in the Technical College in Anandapuri at Puliyankulam. Some camps are occupied exclusively by Sinhalese. Adjacent to those are camps where Tamils

live. There were nine Sinhalese women as heads of households in one camp and they were all included in the study.

Dislocation and displacement have taken families to the refugee camps. The fear of attacks by the security forces and the LTTE have also forced families and single women to move into refugee camps, seeking safety. A few families felt that they would be provided with food if they moved into the refugee camps. The question may well be asked when dislocations and displacements are problems and equally traumatic for all who have undergone such miserable experiences why pick up on women's problems alone? Is this attitude not being women-centric or an attitude which is biased towards the female? That caste, class and gender inequalities persist and even get accentuated in times of crisis is a reality. (Kabeer 1994:79) The gender specific trauma has very special dimensions, especially when the women are single and with children. This data tends to be glossed over or taken for granted under the problems of refugees, dislocation and displacement.

This is also reflected in women's rehabilitation process initiated by the NGOs and the State. Women's organisations or NGOs with gender sensitivity realise this while on the field more often belatedly. Hence alternative strategies should take note of the gender dimensions. Our study becomes another eye-opener to planners and to the social scientists who refuse to take note of the gender perspective.

The gender specific burdens and responsibilities in the reproductive sphere are often carried out under very disparate conditions in the refugee camps. The single women live in fear of sexual harassment. The women who have males in the family are given protection. The men protect "their" women—the girl children, wives and mothers, but look upon the other single women as sexual objects to be targeted. The single woman becomes sexually vulnerable, being not "possessed" and therefore not protected. The women complained that there was no protection for them. The women were very careful not to name the offenders for fear of reprisals. There is some kind of solidarity amongst women, they look after the other women and grown up girls when the elders have to go out of the refugee camps on various missions.

The human suffering of having to be displaced from their own habitat to which they were used and which has become part of their lives can only be understood when one experiences it. It was often told

by the women - "You must undergo this pain to realise the depth of it, the agony". Of course we conceded the point to them without reservation.

They have little spaces partitioned into bed rooms, cooking area and perhaps a corridor. The partitions are done, rarely with a cardboard and often with sarees and sheets donated by others. The women have to change clothes and sleep without an iota of privacy. They often ask another woman or a girl to stand in watch so that peeping toms can be avoided. The so called rooms and kitchens have no doors.

It is the same scenario with the toilet use and when bathing. Both men and women have to bathe from the same containers where the water is collected from the lorries on a daily basis. If the women wait too long so that the sight is clear of men. There is no water left for them. They are not used to bathing in public they were very shy at the beginning. But they said it still continues to be an uncomfortable experience as men do not usually behave well. They used a lot of euphemisms as manner of explanation in their talk. They ended up saying "You must only experience to know". The single unprotected women indeed are more vulnerable to these experiences.

The Refugee camp syndrome is even worse for the children. If we identified the different kinds of deprivations experienced by the children who live in the normal habitat as traumatic then the situation of the children in the refugee camp is even worse. The same type of the fatherless children's problems are also found in the refugee camps. No purpose is served in giving a descriptive analysis of the same syndrome but to speak of different problems will in effect add to the gravity of the situation of the children as a whole.

The major problems in the mother's words was bringing up the children. The fatherless child syndrome becomes more pronounced in the life situation in the refugee camps. The children are exposed at a very young age to adult behaviour. Speech mannerisms games and behaviour are copied without any checks and balances. The older men use these unprotected children to serve on them, send them on errands and the mothers are helpless by the gender belonging and by their single status. Being older in age these men have the power to order the children around. The mothers confessed that both the daughters and sons are exposed to facts of life at a very young age. Love making takes

place in the open or behind the saree partition. Teenage marriages have become common as a result of these. One mother told us that children become bad, *Kettupokirarkal*. They grow up fast they are ripe when they are young *Pinchila muthtuthukal*.

The children in the refugee camp have lost their childhood. They have become adults in their psychological make up. There is so much of congregation of people and collective consciousness of idleness among the children in the refugee camps while the mothers are at work inside or outside their make shift homes. Their homes are really the little areas apportioned with dividing lines made up with sarees and sheets. The children socialise with the neighbouring adults who play cards, drink, gossip or indulge in "vulgar sexual jokes", the children are party to all these adult games, where they pick up truths half truths. They are also exposed to habit of idleness where people sit and chat. Besides hearing they also see adults behaviour of intimacy as the adults themselves have no privacy. Their sheets and sarees divided them from the others who are in another living space. Mothers or parents could not prevent as they do occur daily. There are no private moments between the children and mothers as they preferred the "interesting" adult company of the males.

There were many school drop-outs in the refugee camp. The atmosphere was not conducive to serious studies. Dim lights, noisy people and radios and TV at full volume at the loudest, they disturb everyone, with no one trying to organise any order. Children at the age of fourteen to sixteen with adult psyche dropped out from schools with the pretext of finding jobs, but they got no jobs.

The small children were subjected to a type of alienation in school. Branded as refugee children they were also looked down upon as backward. When they found themselves in refugee camps and found a school which enrolled them they have lost six or eight months of school, hence they were "backward" with low marks. Because of the time lost in the process of displacement they lost education too. This sense of alienation too is also one of the reasons for dropping out of school. These indeed are problems of the school going children, but as single mothers the women have to bear the burden of responsibility. The children have gained the epitaph of deviancy. The mothers suffered to see the children in such stages of deviancy. They get angry with

them. They said they shout at them, but later feel sorry and a lot of tension results from the mother/son relationship.

A grown up young girl was subjected to sexual harassment and the mothers have to constantly guard the girls. What they could not do with the boys, they were able to do with the daughters.

Both in the refugee camp and outside, the mothers expressed feelings of great responsibility towards the bringing up of children. The absence of the fathers or the syndrome of fatherless children has heaped a tremendous burden of responsibility on the single mothers. This was expressed in various forms.

The fatherless child should not be ruined. The fatherless child should be directed in the proper lines, *valikatta venum*—must show the path—is a phrase used constantly by the women.

They felt they are morally responsible for the future of their children. This responsibility has exhausted them both physically and psychologically. Women whose children have dropped out from school or turned deviant, disobedient, ill disciplined had a sense of guilt, which found its way in the conversation and in their manner of speech.

I do not know what to do. How can I handle this huge responsibility. I break down and cry a number of times—the neighbours console me, His father would be very unhappy to see him like this, I have failed in my duty and the duty I owe him, said a mother.

She felt she has failed in her duty to bring up a "fatherless child". Neither the child nor the extra ordinary type of deprivations and the circumstances in which she is placed are taken into account. She blamed herself and herself alone. She was willing to own up the blame and accept the guilt squarely. That motherhood has failed is her conviction.

Women's existence, both social and personal are affected in many ways leaving behind adverse, repercussions. They made no attempt to hide their feelings. For many women There was a deep sense of alienation. Former friends, associates, relatives, the society as a whole had isolated them. The cultural and socio economic deprivations suffered by them had lead to a process of self alienation. A life negating principle to which they have subscribed would have totally traumatised them. The discordant relation between them and the rest of the society was

well pronounced in the way they conducted themselves, both in appearance, speech and actions. The presence of the children was/is the only redeeming factor. The children's physical presence and the tremendous responsibilities they felt towards them and their future have made their lives purposeful. Often they mentioned that they live for the sake of the children and that they are the only source of happiness.

They console me. They need our love, for their sake I have to live, I have to laugh, if not for them I would have gone mad. I would have committed suicide. I forget my worries when I look at the children. I depend on my children for mental peace. They make me function. They are my agents. Iyakkukirarkal, and I act.

When discussing their sense of alienation and the role of the children as agents for de-alienation we are not certainly subscribing to a functional analysis, arguing the need of one to the other and for the society to continue its peaceful existence. It is neither to exalt motherhood, but to make realise, the fact that both the alienation process and de-alienation process are both taxing and have become burdensome to the women and to argue for a case for a change, a change for the better. For, when the children are out of the nests and sought out their carriers and their lives the mothers, the single women will be left alone again, subjected to sense of total alienation.

This section of the study has in fact raised a few conceptual issues regarding the family and the household. The family is no longer, a private domestic sphere as the domain of personal relations limited to functions and roles of emotionality, such as love, nurturance, caring which are beyond reasons of rationalism or beyond the rationale of socio-economic or socio-political praxis. It moves in and out of a public sphere when it handles and deals with education, the market economy and the social cultural factors which go to the extent of constraining single women's mode of dress and behaviour within the idiom of a widow. Affective ties and issues of emotionality are not free floating. Women's domestic labour and public labour are conflated into a common fund. The single women are not in the private realm anymore. However, their relationship to the children which is anyhow characterised as emotionally intimate and private have now reached new and fresh dimensions, when they have to deal with psycho-social problems as well.

When the children compare themselves with their children from normal home situations and who are economically and socially better placed, it is the mothers who are dealing with their complaints. When the children got disturbed emotionally—shouting in their sleep, running around in distress, running away from the noise of crackers, the mothers dealt with the problem, often single handed. This is not to say that this falls into the gender division of labour where the mother is dealing with an emotional problem of the child. This is rather, dealing with a problem of the emotionally disturbed children leading to imbalance and is rightly the vocation of specialised professionally qualified person. This is not what Parson argued that women as wives and mothers provide the necessary emotional stability to satisfy the needs of men and children. This is beyond that function. This contests the argument which sociologists make on the private/public division. Women are not merely central to the private realm is one argument but what is private and domestic and what is public and external to domestic is yet another question that arises when one compartmentalizes social processes. The question where do you place women and why do you have to separate and isolate the category of women is another question that arises here. The exclusive feminisation of the role of mothering has to be questioned again and again. That the domestic need not remain fixedly gendered comes out of the female-headed household. That the women need not necessarily be identified with the domestic and the familial comes up again and again in the complex manner in which society changes or introduces changes in its formation. Constructions which are gendered within the domestic sphere are increasingly contested. Natural and familial are ideas that are constructed within the domestic sphere but they are essentially social. The language "natural" needs to be shifted into the social sphere which is perhaps what feminism's project basically is. However, terminologies such as feminist anthropology and feminist sociology should be abandoned and the process of a naturalisation of the disciplines should take place which should automatically include a feminist vision into its discipline thereby doing away with terms such as mainstream sociology and mainstream anthropology.

School drop outs in terms of number was only eighteen and is not considered a major problem. Those who dropped out were within the

range of fourteen to sixteen years and not below this age. The young children were effectively under the influence of the mothers whose primary aspiration in life is to educate the children, both girls and boys. In the refugee camps there were too many distractions for the young boys who at the age of fourteen or above are effectively moving out of the mother's disciplinary control and guidance. But in the homes, poverty—to earn some meager sums of money to supplement the mother's wages was the main reason for school drop outs. Low standards in school work, backwardness and fatherless status have made them objects of ridicule in school. Children refused to go to school when they were viewed as social outcasts.

However, child labour was not a major problem in the refugee camps. Only six boys from 12-16 years old are in some ad hoc employment earning daily wages. One has taken up his father's profession—that of the barber. It is hard to get jobs due to socio-political dislocations hence not all of them who dropped out from school are working. However, children of all ages and both gender, both at home and in the refugee camps are seen doing a lot of domestic work, which is socially necessary. Looking after the little sisters and brothers, feeding them, bathing them when the mothers are at work, washing cooking utensils, collecting water, helping the mothers with the cooking are done at regular hours when they are not in school. Even a five year old girl or boy is doing something constructive and useful as a help to the mother. While it has become necessary and the mothers want them to help, to the mother. While it has become necessary and the mothers want them to help, this has effectively reduced the children to playing adult roles. Childhood play and leisure are lost to these children. This is perhaps a class problem common to all the people in Sri Lanka who are in a particular class location and not peculiar to female headed households. Perhaps a majority of them would not be doing this if they had the father to earn.

The male protection being absent woman on the one hand are vulnerable to sexual abuse. Being eve-teased, commented upon on their walk and mode of dress, they are sometimes openly invited but more often suggestively given signs. On the other hand they are scared to talk about these experiences, while being silent they are harassed, if they become vocal and identify the culprit strangers and to those

outsiders who appear powerful, the beauracrats, the NGO personnel and the researchers came under this category, the situation can become dangerous and more overtly violent. It was a shameful experience for us to feel helpless and ineffective in offering any kind of remedial action as we could not simply find out who is who. Their "this one" and "that one" remained unidentified through out their conversations. We could only bring it to the notice of the NGOs that work in the camp and to the AGA of Trincomalee. The women felt and rightly so, that the outsiders who come and go are not there to morally support them or protect them when the retaliation takes place.

In many areas of social and familial behaviour, the Sinhalese women in the camps subscribe to a very similar cultural patterns of behaviour. Their concern with the children's education suicide syndrome and the loneliness and feelings of alienation are similar to those of the Tamil women under study that they belong to the politically hegemonic ethnic block has not conferred any special privileges. They suffer due to the indifference of relatives. Stories similar to what we heard from the Tamil women are repeated by them sometimes with the same words and phraseologies. The same words and phrases and sentiment occur now and again when we spoke to the Sinhala women. At the level of the widow syndrome, there is indeed a difference. Rigid patterns of seclusion and cultural and social marginalisation to which the Tamil women are subjected to are absent among the Sinhala women. There are no rules and conventions imposed on them culturally, but socially due to worries and financial constraints the Sinhala women keep off from socio-cultural events that take place in the neighbourhood. Besides, they avoid leaving the children in the camp. Unless it is absolutely necessary, they do not go out of the camps. Children cannot be left alone, they say for many reasons. Then they tell us what the many reasons are.

Regarding their attitude towards remarriage also there is a difference. They too do not want to marry, not because they are culturally conditioned to a "one man in my life" theory, but rather for practical reasons. They fear that the children will not be accepted and treated well by the new husband.

The Sinhala woman whose husbands are killed by the L.T.T.E. did not express any anti-Tamil feelings. They were wise enough to separate

the L.T.T.E. from the Tamil people and their experiences with the Tamil neighbours have also helped to formulate their attitudes and feelings. One woman said that when the L.T.T.E. killed her husband the, Tamil neighbours hid them in their house. Another woman said—

We are very friendly with all the neighbours. We do not think of ethnic belonging, whether Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim we mix with all of them freely. We take part in their festivals. When I burnt myself they looked after me and my children. They are generally very helpful.

The same kind of feelings were not expressed by the Tamil women. The mass scale killings and disappearances caused by the State apparatus and its attendant brutality have made them refer to the state as Sinhala State and condemned the Sinhala agency. However, they were not anti-Sinhalese in the way they conducted themselves but two of the older sons have vowed to avenge their fathers' killers. The response of the mothers' was that there is no point in harbouring feelings of hatred towards anyone and destroying themselves in the process and becoming killers themselves. That the Trincomalee Tamils have not interacted with the Sinhala civil society or enjoyed the Sinhala neighbours' company or hospitality is a major factor in this process of constructing consciousness of friendship or hostility.

The general pattern in the women's consciousness was that they hated violence and war mongering and longed to have peace and tranquillity amidst them. There were many women who were yearning for peace and wanted the State and the LTTE to put a stop to the war brutality forthwith. There were instances where they politicised the personal, the whole familial household related experiences to the ongoing war. They were quick to identify the problem.

The nation as a whole is under siege—siege of hatredness, suspicion and "mutual murders". Our children are affected. What do we hope for them? Insecurity, worries, tension, poverty and starvation. The war must stop.

Though many women shared this kind of helplessness the women in the refugee camps were more articulate in their expressions.

With the father absent and the mother often depressed and sick and poor, the children are exposed to various problems at various levels. In most homes the children are found to be unhappy, malnourished, under-

educated and often rebellious as remarked by the mothers. That they are rejected from the society for various reasons is one aspect of this story. That they are subjected to a series of negative attitudes is a far more tragic story. State terrorism, inter-ethnic tensions and rivalry have constructed a series of anti-feelings. One of them a Tamil said—

The Sinhalese community in uniform shoots, mutilates, tortures, arrests and kills the Tamils and Muslims.

A Sinhalese woman said—

The Tamils want to have a bigger share of the cake, they are selfish and destructive like the L.T.T.E.

These are the common sense feelings of the families who have lost their bread winner and the children grow up in this environment.

What they experience in school both from the peer group and from the school as an institution has another dimension. Poverty, which has deprived them of all childhood longing has left deep scars in their minds. A mother's story of how she met the problem of a childhood longing has even subverted her own religion.

My son asked me to buy him a bicycle. I cannot afford it. I told the teacher to tell him that it is against our Muslim culture. He didn't ask for it later.

That the teacher, under the circumstances has complied is not strange.

The child as a refugee has constructed his/her own marginalisation as an outcaste. Both in the village and in the school the refugees are treated as outcaste vagabonds. Among the communities that are affected by war, poverty and insecurity, there is a hierarchy created as refugees and those who belong to the land, their own habitat. The refugees are cast in an idiom of otherness and referred to derogatorily as refugee children as *ahatipillaikal* with social and economic meanings of marginalisation. This construction is not a caste or class variation of hierarchy but something beyond that and is based on a belonging and non-belonging to the habitat and the land of one's birth.

Household As Alienating and the Levels of Poverty

The household is not a personal dominion or a hide-out from the political world. It is always situated in the political spectrum though an image of being personal and private with in-built mechanisms to shield away the market-oriented competition is woven around it. It is also constructed as a haven as the domain of expressive love and care and religiosity. In reality however, this image is always contested in general and particularly for many women it is a site of unshared labour, a site of violence, a site of sacrifice and suffering. The single woman in the present household though is rid of the patriarchal structural dominance, the ideology of patriarchy which is pervasive crosses the boundaries of the doorstep and the fences and is very much present in the form of gossip, sexual harassment and other exploitations and oppressive intrusions from the public domain.

Apart from these which are connected to the absent scenario of the husband, the other major problem faced by the women is poverty. Poverty which has made the child stop going to school, poverty which has created child labour of having to work outside the house and inside the house, poverty which has helped create disobedient rebellious children, poverty which has made the children attack the mothers, asking for food has also various other dimensions. It has converged with other social inequalities to create oppressive situations—the fatherless and husbandless syndrome by themselves would have been less traumatic, but the fact that it has economic repercussions which has led to lack of power socially as well, had indeed created traumatic conditions for all those who live in poverty.

Women complained rather helplessly of the one or two meals a day, about the hungry children and the labouring children who earn a supplementary income to their mothers' wages. The breadwinners who have died have not saved enough. Not by design but by accident, the entire sample of hundred households of the Muslims and the Tamils are from a low class. Hence this study is of a class that was earning a hand to mouth living even when the breadwinners were alive. Now without them the supplementary income the women earned has become the main income.

The women go to the field to weed and clear the soil for daily wages. They make food at home and sell them from house to house through the children who do this in the mornings before they go to school. This means the women get up at four a.m. They did speak about the conditions of their labour and how tiring it is and how worn out they are by these daily chores and having to sit in front of the fire for long hours. Some of the women weave mats and rugs and sell cadjans which are taken to the market by themselves or the children. Thirty-six women said that they have no means of subsistence. Five are working as seamstresses, two pounding paddy. Three are engaged in poultry, selling eggs and birds. Six are working from home, weaving mats, containers and cadjans. Three work for daily wages as weavers in a weaving centre. Twenty-six women are in some kind of petty trade making and selling hoppers, string-hoppers, running small boutiques, rearing goats and cows and twenty women are working as agricultural labourers in the fields.

Poverty has affected the children in various ways. But the women are affected physically as well. They did not have to speak about their physical conditions much though they did so. The women looked weak and pale, worn out by the physical labour on the one hand and lack of nutritious food on the other. They complained of various illnesses of which anaemic condition was the most frequent complaint. Aches and pains and arthritis were also talked of often. The women complained of blackouts and weakness. The complaints expressed by the women are symptomatic of both their mental and physical condition. One can easily come to this conclusion though not with medical precision.

Whenever the women spoke of illness they always linked it with the kind of labour they do for their living. Rice pounding, paddy pounding, sitting in front of the kitchen fire, in bending positions for long hours in the field and standing in the wet fields for long hours are related to chest pain, losing eye sight, body aches and arthritis. That they cannot continue like this, this miserable existence, this life of poverty, life of insufficiency, this life of hunger and this life of starvation was repeatedly mentioned to us. They have a low esteem of themselves as living below standards. They are bitter and frustrated.

In a situation where there is shifting of positions within an interplay of socio-economic conditions, there is a general

destabilisation but the gender axis has also played its role and women get pushed into marginalised positions of poverty and ill-health. Whereas in the shared households women and men were equally poor, in the present situation the women have become poorer. These women are either unemployed or survive on depressed wage labour. Their physical labour is critical for their survival—often it is overwork under harsh conditions. Apart from this women who are used to restrictive social behaviour, subscribe to a practice of self-denial of comforts, food and other luxuries. They accommodate a lot of inconveniences and limitations for the sake of the survival of the family. We saw sick women under-fed and under-nourished.

The other point to be emphasised is their ignorance of their right to health care. Their accessibility to national health care services is practically nil. The war situation has destabilised the State machinery to some extent but here again as women they are less cared for. The outreach of these services to the poor in general is insufficient, but for women it is worse. Unfortunately the NGOs have not included services to the sick in their agenda. This has resulted in the health status of the women remaining unimproved.

Goods and services within the idiom of charity and benefits to the affected were actively undertaken both by the NGOs and the State.

The State benefits accrued more towards the construction of damaged destroyed abodes. However, the money discharged for repair/construction of houses were not used for those purposes. The women used that to feed the children and themselves. The money given as compensation for the death of the spouses, also was mostly spent. A few of them have invested part of the money in business (shops boutiques) or other income-generating activities such as poultry.

The NGOs have given money for various items. Books and exercise books, clothes, were given in kind. They have funded income-generating projects such as goat raising, poultry. Funds were given for house repairs and repayable interest-free loans were given for buying sewing machines, kitchen utensils. While most of these items were given with the notion of meeting temporarily the emergency needs of the affected people and alleviating the immediate problems of day to day living, only a few NGOs have undertaken income-generating activities. However, when we visited them there were no signs of

continuation of those activities. Poultry and goat-rearing specially have been given up by the women. There was no sustainability.

The missionary idea of helping the poor and identifying with the wretched on the earth has also had a role to play in this scenario of powerlessness, helplessness and poverty. Referred to as “fathers” by the women, the Christian priests too have given charity in the form of food, exercise books, school books, pencils, uniforms and paid up the school fees. They have taken care of the educational needs of the children in a big way. Some women have received State assistance of Rs.50,000 or Rs.20,000 towards construction of houses and a few women have received various types of NGO assistance. Priests have visited the women while a few of the NGOs may have been Christian oriented. Within the benefit scheme there is a strong sense of charity.

In the situation of poverty that we have seen and have been discussing, whatever assistance the NGOs and the State gave is like a drop in the ocean. There were no systematic schemes of financial assistance. Not all women were given compensation and a few were helped by the Janasaviya scheme (see note). The State continues to give them food stamps and charity allowances for the widows. The amounts vary according to the number of children they have.

The NGOs have also concentrated on a loan scheme and it was revealed that the women were unable to pay the loans back. There was not much of an emphasis on training of skills or on organising them to be self-employed. However, there has been temporary poverty-alleviation moves from which the women have got over certain crisis situations such as paying the school fees, paying the hospital charges and buying medicines.

It is to the credit of the NGOs that they have moved closely with the women. There was a lot interaction and dialogue with them. They have given them food items, clothes, helped them to repair the houses, supplied them with exercise books, pencils and books, kitchen utensils. Transport charges to and from school were also given in some instances. As regards their schemes of self-employment only seven women have benefited from loans or funds to purchase goats, cows, chicks for setting up poultry farms and to set up boutiques. Whatever income the seven women earn from this is not enough for their

subsistence. One notable drawback is lack of motivation to expand the trade or activities they are engaged in.

In the cases where compensation was paid to the women, they told us that they were helped by several people. Bureaucrats, relatives and neighbours came to their assistance to fill forms, take them to the officer concerned. Bureaucrats claimed that they were expediting the process by sending the files to the officers in charge. When finally the Rs.50,000/- reached their hands there were others who laid claims to that money. As someone who helped them they said they had legitimate claims. They insisted that without their assistance the women would not have got their money. As a result the women lost part of their dues ranging from rupees five to ten thousand. That the axis of gender is present in this transaction is clear. The non-public woman, the woman whose primary vocation is the domestic domain, the woman who is ignorant of worldly affairs has been cheated by those who posed as helpers. Ignorance is not merely the problem here. The fact that they are women and that too single women and have sought help made them vulnerable to those who have cheated them.

It appears that the idea, that as citizens and members of the nation and polity, the women have certain rights to a continued means of livelihood was somehow missed out in the scheme that was mapped out for them. The various services rendered are within the construction of "charity" and not within a discourse of citizen's rights. And in the process of receiving the "charity" whether the women have further devalued themselves in their own perceptions has further psychological dimensions to the refugee, single woman syndrome.

How the women coped with the situation is an interesting story. Despite the very oppressive and frightening conditions of death and disappearances, and this is more predominant in Amparai, the women carry on. They do complain, weep and wail, curse and argue though an element of passivity and forbearance is sometimes projected as feminine values. Often when it comes to their personal needs, desires and handling of their own sexuality they succumb to various types of self-denials and impositions. Though restrained, their protests are loud. They experience patriarchal domination which manifests itself variously through sexual harassment and the like, are also against the

war, against the killing and against the ethnic/communal violence perpetuated mutually and they give expression to these rather eloquently.

They are still hoping for a future, a future of peace and tranquillity. A return to normalcy is their first desire in terms of their priorities. Often this is expressed through sentiments regarding their children, the children's future, their education, their jobs, daughters' marriages. Children are their assets, the nearest kith and the only hope in their lives. These are some statements

I must live for the children

I must work so that my children can have at least one meal a day

My aspiration is to educate the children

My daughter/s should be married

Married to good husbands

The fatherless child/children should be shown the right path. They must grow up to be good

The various socio-economic deprivations of the children have also led to a series of constructions. With the father absent and the mother often depressed and sick and poor, the children are exposed to various problems at various levels. In most homes the children are found to be unhappy, malnourished, under-educated and often rebellious as remarked by the mother. That they are rejected from society for various reasons is one aspect of this story. That they are subjected to a series of negative attitudes is a far more tragic story. State terrorism, inter-ethnic tensions and rivalry have constructed a series of anti-feelings.

Chapter 6

The Ethics of Research and the Narrative Analysis

The chapter on research methodology has questioned the role of the researchers and the ethical dilemma that we as researchers faced. Though the guilt sustained itself throughout the research, there are, we are convinced, even advantages in research of this kind. The first part of this chapter will deal with one of those that we felt was an advantage. The second part takes up the question of the narrative of the women which so far in this text has not been analyzed, but the question, it is hoped would enhance this research.

That this research will identify some urgent needs of the women and recommend some measures both for the State and the NGOs is one of the advantages of this research. We do hope to act as a pressure group and see that the recommendations are implemented meaningfully. As a first step we have identified thirty women who could be called the poorest of the poor in Tambalagam whom we interviewed. The Women's Education and Research Centre has started an income-generation project for them after they identified their own aptitudes and selected the areas of income generation (goat-rearing, dairy, poultry, home gardening—for those who have the land and water—and selling food in the neighbourhood). We have arranged for their training through the State services and have given them fifty per cent of the funds needed as capital to start their respective projects. Fifty per cent is given as loan to be repaid through the revolving fund system. The project involved us in a series of motivation programmes,

counselling sessions and discussions. The project is turning out to be a success - but this is only a small attempt to solve a huge problem in which the main actors should be the State and the donor agencies.

During our research we also identified certain hidden processes effectively transmitted to us by the women. Many of the interviews were very unhappy narratives. They cried, sobbed and sighed, all natural reactions to the tragedy that had befallen them. At the end of the interview they made some comments. There were both negative and positive reactions and some comments were at once negative and positive to us. The significance of this is even greater when we realise that these reactions were not part of the answers to the questions. They were spontaneous reactions, mostly at the time of our departure. Often we had to sit down again after getting up to leave the place when they started to talk again. It is worth listening to them as part of the research. To begin with the most positive responses:

No one came to us and asked about our problems, you are the first to talk to us, I am happy. It was good, I was able to discuss with someone and analyse my situation as well. I am satisfied. Thank you.

Out of a total of two hundred women, fifty-one have ended the narratives with their own comprehension of our research process. Thirty-two women in Trincomalee and nineteen in Amparai responded on their own expressing what they felt about the interviews. In Amparai seven gave us negative responses while twelve were very positive. In Trincomalee the number of women who responded to the research process was more. A total of thirty-two responded out of which nine women were ambivalent, expressing both negative and positive feelings. Eleven women were negative or very negative about the research, one was totally against our taping the dialogue, while nineteen women were very positive. Out of a total of fifty-one, thirty-two were happy that we reached out to them.

Since the same feelings were expressed through the same idioms and phraseologies, some of the happy feelings are summarised below in the women's own words to avoid misrepresentation and misinterpretations.

Your talking to us was good.

Your asking us about our problems has reduced the burden of our worries. I feel relieved. I got peace of mind and I am happy.

I used to worry. There was no one to listen to our stories. I am happy now.

You have brought me tranquility.

The fact that you come to see me and listen to us has made me happy.

I like the way you talked to us.

I am happy you inquired after me. It has brought mental happiness.

I am happy at mind. I am now relieved of a burden.

Whenever I feel the intensity of my pain or distress I write letters to someone who understands me. Then, I don't feel like giving or posting them. I tear them, but I feel very relieved. But here I had a real experiential, face to face dialogue, which is beneficial. I am happy.

I enjoyed sharing my worries with you. They were heavy on my mind and I suffered. Now I have peace.

A free discussion with you has brought me peace. I had been bottling up my worries, not showing it to anyone. Now I have mental peace. Having the worries in my mind I suffered. Now I am happy.

Perhaps the following are the best examples for a positive research approved.

I am happy now. I am alone, feel the burden of loneliness and worry. Now that you have spoken to me, I am happy. It is very relaxing. I have peace of mind. If people share their worries it is good and we feel happy.

I am happy I talked to you. I talked about my worries shared them with you and found an outlet. It hurts and is painful to keep them within us. I am relieved now of the distress.

Your coming here was good. We were able to discuss a lot. We appreciated your sharing.

You have made us relive that agony.

The ambivalence of the nine women was quite in tune with their position. They knew that someone was interested in them, but were not sure why they were interested in them and what would be the outcome of a mere research. They knew they were being listened to patiently, but what happens after we go?

I am not angry with you for having asked me all these questions. But when I think of the past and my present life, it is painful.

I am not angry, I am a little happy. But when I talk of what happened to my husband I am depressed. Memories you know...

I do appreciate your company, but old memories are brought back. It is sad.

By talking to you, neither did I gain or lose but I am happy and unhappy too, after talking.

You mean well. I appreciate it. But you know... this is very painful too, but never mind that.

We are however, concerned with the negative feelings of the women, as we feel that they question the real process of the research and the methodology we have employed. The fact that the women did not mince words, show any inhibitions or thought it necessary that they had to be polite to people who had come in search of them, attests to the reality of the situation and the true and intense feelings of the women.

Their anger and dissatisfaction were expressed through their tone and voice and their facial expression as well. However, they did not want us to stop the interviews, or to terminate the dialogue that followed after the recording was switched off. But they did mention they were not happy mainly because they had to relate incidents and events of agony that they thought were depressing and unbearable to go through.

You have 'dug' the past. No one did this before (this phrase was uttered in a negative manner.)

You have brought back the old memories. You have upset me again.

I am unhappy after talking to you, but you should not have asked me these questions, you should have known.

She was angry in her tone and she was angry in her manner of expression.

One woman was not happy about our recording the conversation. When we explained the reasons again she consented, but with a note of protest at our research.

What is the use of your research? What purpose is it going to serve by your asking us questions and our answering? Others will come to know of our sufferings. But what is the use? Can anyone prevent a repetition of these events? Everyone knows the reason for our plight, but all are pretending not to know. All the people are evasive and not concerned about us. (The people here meant the politicians and perhaps the researchers.)

Another woman flatly refused to have the interview recorded. She said that she simply did not like the conversation recorded, more precisely her part of the conversation though she did not want to give any reasons. However, she said we could take down what she said.

She, we found, is a strong willed person with a lot of determination to make her life meaningful and had aspirations for herself and for her children. She was visibly disturbed over the questions asked and she was made to analyse things logically. The simple answer to the problem she said with a justified anger is to stop this "bloody" (blood letting) war. She thought we had the power to do that.

The experience of one of the researchers in Trincomalee is perhaps the best indicator of the negative approach of the respondents:

She was willing, kind and looked very receptive the first day when I went on the preliminary visits. She said

"Yes you can come tomorrow."

The next day she said,

"You go on asking, I will answer to the best of my knowledge and ability. You can also record."

She answered the first questions. She gave her age, address and the number of her children.

To the following questions she reacted very strangely. The questions were on her income and religion. She said,

"No, no I can't answer. You get out. I will not answer." so saying she almost pulled me off the mat on which I was seated, almost pushed me out of the door and rolled up the mat on which we were seated, as a signal for the finale.

The research assistant, puzzled and astonished, concluded her story to me saying, "To this day I just do not understand the reason for her abrupt change of mind and her near violent behaviour. What did she suspect us to be? What was in the question that had triggered off something in her mind? This has to remain a mystery. We had thoughts of a revisit but a revisit we felt could be construed as breaking the ethos of the research discipline, as disregarding her will and wish, as refusing to understand her rejection. The plan was abandoned.

Though the positive responses are greater in number, the ambivalent and the negative attitudes should pose questions for the researchers who do this type of research. "Personal is political is correct" as far as the personal is divulged willingly and with conviction. The questions, what kind of personal and how far of the personal, one can reach out to are also important from the point of the view of the respondents.

Narrative as Research Data

The following section on research normally should appear as part of the research methodology at the beginning of the research. The purpose of discussing this aspect at the end of the research is merely to place it after the narratives so that the implications of the narratives listed so far can be understood better.

Throughout the research we have let the women speak the more significant parts. We have, of course, analysed some parts of the research findings but when it comes to conveying emotions and feelings, we have let the women speak their own idioms, their own phrases and proverbs. They spoke their own language and dialect. Trincomalee Tamil is different from Amparai Tamil. The Tamil spoken by Muslims is different from that of the Tamil spoken by the Tamils - but we have striven to retain and capture the totality of the sentiments in the translations.

Through the transmission of the narratives we also seek another purpose—that of being true to the original. The original being that

which is conveyed and expressed in a language which is merely translated as far as possible without distortion of meaning. The emphasis is on the meaning and that is the reason we have recorded all the proverbs and the other sayings which in our opinion contain social meanings. Language treated as a socially implicated phenomenon is given importance in our analysis. What the women said has to be treated, placed and comprehended on the larger socio-political canvas of contemporary times. In a research on female headed households about a decade ago, the women would not have spoken the same words or used the same proverbs. Hence the meaning behind the language becomes intelligible only when its social content is comprehended and as a first step its social content is accepted or recognised.

Second, by repeating the women's words we are also trying to capture the ideological implications of the language. There is an ideology hidden in the selection of words which is not the meaning *per se*. Even behind the meanings there are particular ideologies. When the women speak there are sometimes ethnic connotations, class connotations and mostly there are gender connotations. When they said, "We are wretched," they imply deprivations both at the level of gender and class and also their ethnic belonging although Fanon used it to denote the class and colonial subordination. It has to be asserted however that the Tamil word '*palpatta*' translates well the English word "wretched". When the data is analysed there are attempts made to the best of our ability to capture the various dimensions. Hence the importance given to the direct speech transcriptions in the research. Their tones, gestures and the facial expressions are also taken into consideration and interpreted whenever necessary.

This research was originally meant to be an interview with the intention of making it a dialogical process of interaction with the women. However, when the women started to answer they ended up telling us a series of short stories narrated with plots with heroes (not heroines) and with villains. This is the reason for treating the interviews as narratives. Essentially their personal narratives have been treated as the data. In placing a value on personal narratives we are valuing subjectivity. Rooted in time, place and personal experiences (Personal Narratives Group 1989b 263 - 264) the women's subjectivity reflects in their narratives, the narratives reveal facts about social life and the

culture in which they live (Catherine Kohler and Reisman 1993:5). The narrators speak as if they are speaking the "natural" but the researchers can analyse how culturally and historically incidental their language is (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992).

In discussing the language and its functions, the content of the speakers' experience, the expression of personal relations and the textual function as to how parts of the text are linked syntactically and semantically (Holiday 1973 : 37) and emphasised merely to connect it with how the meanings are interpreted (Reissman 1993 : 21)

It remains to be answered, taking the overall two hundred (200) narratives, how many of them would have fallen under the psychotherapy paradigm. However, it is hoped that talking, listening to the dialogue and interaction would have some effect but it could be equally true that once we disappeared from the scene, having "dug" the past and played with their emotions, they would have been irritated, angry or felt helpless.

Without taking sides on the theoretical issues of narrative analysis, that language represents reality, or the phenomenological argument that narrative constitutes reality (Young 1987 : 186 - 210) linking it to consciousness, our view is that the women simply spoke coherently most of the time, emotionally at times expressing their anger, frustrations, pathos, sorrows and sadness. Within these various expressions were evident a desire to live and to face life, longing for the return of peace. The women's narratives are the narrative of people who do not want to succumb to destiny, who want to survive against many odds. The women's narrative is different from the narrative of the State or the other protagonists of violence. Their narratives are subaltern historiography beyond or including an agency and including subjectivity. In recounting the violence they have broken the silence. In the process of the breaking of the silence, one cannot overlook the subversive element. They are here not blaming the karma, their past sins, but they are pointing their fingers at the structures that are repressive and the people who are violent. Their verbal attack came out, of course through tears, sobs and weeping. They do not hold an unknown agency as responsible.

Pandey (1991 : 563), in writing about Hindu-Muslim riots, says that the violence by its very nature wipes out the evidence of how it

was done. The women in Amparai knew who it was and who was responsible. In Trincomalee there were many who said "by unidentified persons." In Amparai they said 'died under mysterious circumstances', when it was collectively engineered communal violence, they simply said "they" did it. "They" means either the Tamil killers or Muslim killers in numbers.

"Unidentified persons" in local parlance meant one of the militant groups. Naming them may be dangerous but they knew who it was.

In discussing the importance of the medium of language and genre of the narrative as a matter of the research analysis, we are attaching importance to the voice of the women.

The following case studies - the selected narratives - may demonstrate the usefulness of our argument.

Case Study I

Name: Abdul Cader Fareeda

Children: 2 females

Schooling: Year Seven and Year Three

Income: Through Janasaviya and tailoring (insufficient)

Religion: Islam

My husband who was a field worker was murdered while at work, owing to brutal terrorism on the 12th of August, 1990 (She collapsed into uncontrollable weeping. Her eyes brimmed with tears and her lips and her nose quivered and her whole body trembled with the recollection of her husband's death).

His vocation was such that there was no compensation from the work place after his death. My husband and I loved each other very much and he was a good husband. The trauma of my husband's death will remain with me all my life. (She cried all the while and her words were incoherent). His death affected me so much that I was under treatment for three years. This cost us a lot of money.

My husband's relatives do not show the same concern and affection they showed us before his death and do not offer any help even though they have the means. (She tried to control her weeping and was able to tell her story bit by bit) Although I visit them, they never visit us.

Even my own relatives deny me support and help. When I visit them they are kind but they don't visit me. I have no support. But it does not

bother me (She smiled but with reluctance) but I have to admit they show a little bit of concern.

I have no physical help apart from the occasional services rendered by my neighbours.

The government initially gave Rs 50,000/= and the children get a scholarship fund amounting to Rs 2400/= annually. No non-governmental organisation helps us.

The most difficult problem I face is our poverty level. I have no funds to give my children a good education and to meet their basic needs. Besides I do not have any male help.

The children are doing well in their studies. I attend the parent-teacher meetings. I also attend the cultural functions and sports meets in which the children participate. I go with sad feelings but when I go there and see the children's achievements I feel glad. One of my children has passed a scholarship examination despite our poverty.

I tell all my troubles to God. I cannot divulge certain things even to my mother. Some things I cannot reveal to my children.

The most important factor in my situation is that I cannot start on any employment owing to the fact that I have no money.

The children are the main focus of my life. They are my only consolation and my desire is that they should have a bright future. The children understand my grief and console me whenever I am sad.

I do not want to get married again for if I get married the man will be a husband to me but not a father to my children.

Besides I cannot visualise anyone else taking my husband's place. I feel sad when I think of this (by the look on her face the researcher knew that the sentiments voiced were true).

I derive pleasure and comfort from the children's narrative of their school events. Whenever they see me crying, they wipe my tears and comfort me.

I have still not told them in so many words that their father is dead. This I feel would affect them greatly. The older child knows that he is dead but the younger one thinks that the father has gone abroad. If I ask my elder daughter whether she remembers the father she says she does and quotes incidents when the father bought her things.

I have not noticed any change in the children's behaviour after their father's death.

We were displaced for two months owing to prevalent problems. We were at our relative's place and came back.

I try my best to meet all my children's needs not wanting them to feel desolate because they have no father (she spoke, eyes full of tears).

Researcher's Remarks:

The interview on the whole was painful for it evoked acute pain and misery she felt at the loss of her husband. She cried throughout wiping her face with her shawl which was soaked at the end of her narrative. Whether it was sweat or tears or both which soaked her shawl one would never know but the intense grief, the sense of loss, economic deprivation and the suffering Fareeda undergoes is a painful reminder of the cruelty of war.

Case Study II

Name : A.G. Somawathy

Age 40

Children: One female

Education: Year Ten

Religion: Buddhism

Location: Love Lane Area - outside the camp

My husband died on 4.9.86. He went out on the boat, alone, and he never came back. There was no use informing the police or the army as it was a time of tension. I don't know whether the LTTE caught him. I don't know what happened to him. (She started the conversation with a smiling face but later broke down in tears)

When I heard that my husband was dead I fainted near the fireplace (hearth) and sustained burns. I was in the hospital for a month and a half. I felt I was going mad. My sister (elder) took me to a doctor and I became well. I felt I couldn't bear to live after this and I contemplated suicide and considered giving poison to my daughter too. But I couldn't bring myself to do this when I looked at my daughter's face. My elder sister's daughter gave me a lot of strength. Then the LTTE came and beat us and we sought refuge in the Big Priest's Camp. They treated us kindly there and gave us a lot of help. They gave me the courage to live. I came back to my normal self only after three years. I am not happy but am living for my daughter's sake.

My husband was a fisherman. He was experienced in this field. I don't know how he died. My husband used a relative's boat and as such we didn't have the help of any one after my husband's death.

My husband's relatives stay miles away from us. Although they invite us to go and stay with them I don't like to trouble them. We communicate through letters but don't visit often.

My sister and my daughter are my only source of help.

Although my neighbours are Tamil and Muslim they look after us. When I sustained injuries they looked after me as though I was their own. Although they call me for their functions I don't go though I like to.

I don't get any governmental help. They said that for me to obtain a death certificate I must produce the husband's body. If not they said they'll give help only after seven years. But fortunately I got help because I had lodged a police entry on the disappearance of my husband. The registrar's office has asked me to get a J.P.'s signature in order to obtain a death certificate.

A priest from the Samaja Seva Mathiasthana (a Christian organisation) helped me. With his letter I was able to obtain free admission for my child in the school. The Father (priest) gave me 200/= monthly for my child's school expenses: He then sent me to an organisation called the "Kantha Sevaka", with a letter. They gave me clothes, food and a uniform for my daughter. They took a photograph of my child and now give me 400/= monthly. This is a great help.

I don't have enough money. ...

When the child was small I didn't share my difficulties with her but now I do. When I talk about her father she cries. If I beat her when angry she thinks of her dead father, cries and says if her father were alive I wouldn't beat her. I don't like to make her sad. She didn't know the reason for her father's death but now she knows that the LTTE caught my husband. If anyone talks about the father she cries. When she plays she forgets her sadness. She feels sad at the usual time of her father's return. But because I look after her well she does not think of her father very often.

I was living in the town before. Then I shifted to a refugee camp. Now I have got this place. I have built this small house. I don't have great

aspirations. They said that the government would help... but still no help.

I don't have any fear of bad people. My relatives and my neighbours are supportive. Hence people are scared to bother us.

The teachers are very concerned. They ask me to send the child to study even though she does not have books. They tell me if my daughter's progress is not sufficient. My daughter is doing well in her studies but I don't have the funds to give her a good education.

I used to go to the temples in the hope that my husband would return. I went to the astrologer too. But it is 4-5 years since he went and all these have been in vain. Now I derive some satisfaction from giving food parcels to the poor. If my husband comes back I'll be the luckiest person on earth.

The biggest problem that I face is that I don't have any help. I earn a living through selling stringhoppers. I cannot get enough money through this. My house is also broken. The neighbours help and there is governmental help to a small extent. Now I am physically weak too.

I don't have any hopes for the future. My husband and I were in love for five years before we got married. I had 11 years of married life. My husband loved me. Therefore I don't want to get married. I am living only for this child of mine. I get chest pain and headaches now and am unable to work. It would be good if someone could help me. I can't earn a living any more.

Talking to you has made me happy. I feel lighter because I spoke to you. I think of my husband and die each day. Even in my sleep I think of him. I cannot forget the days when I was happy with him. I talk about this with my child or my neighbours.

My child did not know about the father's death when she was small. She would say that her father had gone to buy her a doll. After she grew up she knew. Talking with her about these things brings me comfort.

Case Study III

Name: Kalamathy Deivendran

Children: One female

Class: Year One

Other occupants in the house: Mother, father, younger brother and younger sister.

Income: Brother's income, Charity wages 100/= and food coupon 80/= (Which she said was insufficient)

Religion: Hindu

My husband disappeared on the 9th of February, 1988. (Her face displayed different shades of emotions) My husband who went to the forest did not return for 9 years. I don't know whether he is dead or alive. I entered hospital to give birth to my baby on the 8th of February and my husband disappeared the next day. My baby too was born on the same day. It's my brother who has looked after me since then. Another brother of mine too disappeared. I waited for a year and then I went to the Assistant Government Agent and obtained a death certificate and police report. My daughter does not know her father. (This woman was crying all the while)

Five of them went to the forest to chop firewood. When the army arrived four of them ran in one direction while my husband ran in another direction. They caught the other four and released them later but my husband never returned.

My husband also did masonry, therefore no help from the management. My husband's relatives don't even visit me now. I don't have any help. (she talked emotionally) They invited me for a meal once. I couldn't go because there was ethnic disturbance at the time. They were angry because of this (she spoke with a lot of difficulty).

My neighbours don't help me. The government gave us 50,000/=. When my mother was arrested, we utilised this money to try for her release. The YMCA (white people) gave us Rs. 2000/=

After my husband's death the army arrested my mother. They kept her in the camp for two or three months then sent her to Colombo, Welikade Prisons. She was imprisoned for nearly nine months. We didn't have money at the time. We suffered a lot. We went from the camp to Colombo hoping for my mother's release. My father broke his

arm. One night my sister was taken in the jeep and was dropped on the way. She does not go out anywhere for shame and humiliation. She does not even attend school. Besides we do not have enough income. The army comes checking even at nights. It is extremely difficult and scary. We are mentally and emotionally affected. I cannot pound flour as I get a chest pain.

My daughter is doing well in her studies. She is ranked first. But I am unable to give her, her needs because I don't have any money.

We conduct Poosai (religious ceremonies) on the day of my husband's death for peace of mind and for his soul's rest.

My only desire is that my daughter and my family should do well.

I don't want to get married. My daughter too does not like me to get married. I want her to study and do well in life. (She seemed extremely sad and cried all the time. She mourned her husband's death and regretted that her daughter did not have the best of life.)

To me, my daughter is the most precious and a source of comfort. If my mother asks me to get married my daughter would say that she would report the man who dared to marry me to the STF (Special Task Force.)

To me my daughter is the most precious.

I don't discuss my husband's death with my daughter but she knows now how he died. She looks at his photograph and cries. She says that if her father were alive he would buy everything for us and that we would be well off.

We have not been displaced.

(She cried for a long time. She said that her situation was becoming worse as time passed by.)

Part III

Annexe 1

A Research Assistant's Assessment

In the village of Sally most of the villagers are fishermen and farmers. Most of them are Hindus and some are Christians. Owing to violence many people have been displaced and are scattered. Some of them have left the village. The villagers of Sally live in constant fear and tension. One has to cross a number of checkpoints to get to this village. Therefore travel to this village is arduous. Sometimes there are no buses and on the days that there is a bus service one has to wait three to four hours for a bus.

Amidst all this tension and fear there are some redeeming features. The people of this village are protective towards their neighbours. Single widowed women are encouraged to remarry despite cultural restrictions about widow remarriage. But the women had many inhibitions. The women of this village are lucky in that the neighbours are concerned about their welfare.

A Research Assistant's Lament (who worked at Thambalagamam)

After the transformer in front of our house was destroyed with explosives on the 5th of May 1996 at 2.40 a.m., we experienced untold hardships. At 8 a.m, police and army personnel called my mother and questioned her wanting to know whether she knew who had planted the explosives, whether she had heard people talking. They accused us of having supplied food to the LTTE and having supported them.

The irony of it is that we ourselves are starving and hungry. How can we afford to feed others?

Someone else plants the bomb, but the people who suffer are the unprotected, those who have no voice. Our neighbours too were harassed. That day our house was continuously visited from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. by the army and police. They had many questions. They said we had to present ourselves every time they called. We did not cook or eat that day. We were gripped by fear.

We were lucky in that we did not have males in our house. If we had males in the family they would have been assaulted and taken, perhaps would have disappeared.

From that day onwards our village has been confronting difficulties. No peaceful sleep, no food. We were too scared to cook.

The ban on batteries in our village made it even more difficult for me to conduct my research.

A Research Assistant's Trauma

She was asked to classify some data. After two weeks she reported that she cannot possibly carry on.

It is too much of suffering to read. I feel I can't take it anymore. I can't fall asleep, the women and children come to my mind. I feel disturbed.

And she gave up. I did not hire another person.

Notes

Chapter 2

1. Marxism argues that proletarianization completes the elimination of the corporate aspects of kinship functioning and that increasingly people become individualised. In rural Trincomalee there is not so much of proletarianization but patterns of proletarianization have become visible. Among the class of the female heads and their kin group, men and women are in typical agrarian/fishing petty trade, casual (daily paid) labour economy. Neither was there a process of the kin-based organisation being absorbed into a dominant, mercantile, individualistic group. The mode of production is a haphazard one not falling into a dominant classificatory system.
2. The income they gain is listed below:

Rice pounding Rs.10/- per day 3 days

Labour Rs.150/- per day 3 to 4 days

Selling curd Rs.60/- per day

Chapter 3

3. Both the mainstream anthropologists and sociologists developed their theories on religion by locating religion within the sphere of meaning. The functionalist approach sees religions as meeting the needs of the individuals in society. Uncertainty about the future, the feeling that things are going wrong, created a supernatural unknown which is benevolent. It is argued that the anxiety and tension created by the worldly disorder makes people appeal to religion. Religion, they believe reduces anxiety and pain. The rituals became a means through which the supernatural and the sacred are reached. Marx on the other hand thought that religion, while being a tool of repression can also appease the feelings of dejection, as the will of god. His famous phrases "the heart of the heartless world" and "opiate of the masses" convey just this line of thought.

4. Holy Ash

This is a sign of Saivism worn in three stripes on the forehead by Hindus. Those who have been ritually initiated into Hinduism place this sign in sixteen places of the body. This signifies the effect of having been burnt and reduced to ashes, the symbol of reaching nothingness, negating worldly desires and passions.

5. Seettu

This is a local system where a number of people form a group and contribute an equal sum of money to a common fund. They then cast lots monthly. According to the lots cast, one member gets the total amount. The lots are cast each successive month until every member has had his/her term.

5 Janasaviya

A poverty alleviation programme started by the previous government with the assistance of the World Bank. The poorest of the poor were identified, were given funds to help them start various projects to improve economic conditions.

Annexe II**FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN AMPARAI DISTRICT**

		As At 1997
1. Maha Oya	- 400	families
2. Samanthurai	- 3207	"
3. Pottuvil	- 101	"
4. Kalmunai (T)	- 867	"
5. Addalaichani	- 1175	"
6. Thirukkivil	- 862	"
7. Nintavur	- 1062	"
8. Kalmunai (M)	- 2018	"
9. Alayadivemby	- 178	"
10. Akkaraipattu	- 1251	"
11. Karaitivu	- 675	"
12. Amparai	- 430	"
13. Uhana	- 390	"
14. Lunugala	- 337	"
15. Damani	- 345	"
16. Padiyakulam	- 345	"
17. Dehiattakandiya	- 379	"
14,157		"

**WELFARE CENTRES - TRINCOMALEE DISTRICT
(MARCH-1997)**

<i>D.S. Division</i>	<i>No. of Camp</i>	<i>No. of Families</i>	<i>No. of Members</i>
1. Town & Gravets	03	986	3648
2. Kuchchaveli	04	140	434
3. Muthur	01	165	653
4. Morawewa	02	145	490
5. Kinniya	04	154	639
Total	18	1590	5864

Outside Welfare Centres - Trincomalee District

<i>D.S. Division</i>	<i>No. of Families</i>	<i>No. of Members</i>
1. Town & Gravets	1663	5871
2. Kuchchaveli	190	728
3. Gomarankadawela	9	36
4. Muthur	135	554
5. Morawewa	15	77
6. Thampalakamam	232	1038
7. Kinniya	892	4319
8. Kantalai	56	240
9. Seruwila	424	1680
Total	3616	14543

Resettlement - Trincomalee District

<i>D.S. Division</i>	<i>No. of Families</i>	<i>No. of Members</i>
1. Town & Gravets	293	1205
2. Kuchchaveli	1068	4246
3. Gomarankadawela	5	23
4. Muthur	2	6
5. Morawewa	99	375
6. Thambalakamam	6	29
7. Kinniya	33	176
Total	1506	6060

Annexe III

Recommendations From the Research

Recommendations suggested by us are based on the research findings and on the socio-economic realities under which the women live. In fact, some of the recommendations are based on the needs suggested to us by the women. They are indeed formulated on variables such as shelter, living arrangements and supportive network and they also include the non-economic needs. Poverty *per se* is not the problem, though that is a major problem that needs to be addressed. The recommendations also take the view that the rights of citizenship, as the rights of the disadvantaged groups, is the responsibility of the State. The State is under obligation as part of its policy of rehabilitation and reconstruction to undertake remedial action. We are not in a position to recommend anything to the militants who have caused immense destruction through acts of terrorism and acts of counter-terrorism which have created victims. The female-headed households are a category of poverty groups both in Trincomalee and in Amparai.

Income and Shelter :

A loan scheme is ideal for those who need to be employed, but to give loans both to repair/rebuild houses and for setting up self-employment will be too much of a burden, depending on the poverty levels. Hence it is recommended that the State or the NGOs should undertake the task of providing a decent shelter.

A training in skills for income generation should follow. The situation of income generation activities should depend not only on the aptitudes of the women but also on their capacity and on the market so that their goods could be sold easily. The women need advice on the selection and initial management of the trade. They need to be motivated and a few sessions should be devoted to simply talking to them before any training programme is started. All training programmes should be limited to existing programmes of the State so that the women are constantly monitored and services rendered whenever necessary. After the training programme the loan scheme can be initiated either on the

revolving fund scheme or any other which is linked with the rural bank in the location. The rural bank should have officer/s with specially assigned duties to assist the women in the area. This unit should be open, both literally and metaphorically, for the women to deal with at specific times.

Compensation, and other Legal Requirements

Our interviews revealed that there was ignorance, misinformation and misinterpretation of facts. The women are often not aware of their rights. In addition to giving the necessary information regarding compensation dues, maintenance allowances and divorce procedures, there is a need to attend to their needs. Considering the magnitude of the problems, there is an urgent need to set special units to handle the problems at different levels, i.e the Kachcheri level, at the GA's jurisdiction and the AGA and GS levels.

Women should be interviewed, listened to patiently, their needs addressed. The middlemen appointed by the women to deal with the bureaucracy have often taken a slice of the compensation dues or there was undue delay due to bureaucratic red tape. While recommending this special unit at the local level administration, one needs to pay attention to the strict rules that are enforced on the spouses of those who are compelled to prove the deaths. The rule of law is meant to be beneficial to citizens whose interest it is supposed to uphold. The evidence in wartime situations is hard to come by and then what is the alternative? "Who killed your husband?" "Where is the death certificate?" asks one side of the bureaucracy. "Where is the body?" "How can I know that he was killed?" asks another side of the bureaucracy. When men have disappeared or bodies burnt, mutilated beyond recognition or left to decay for weeks, where can one have the proof of the death? The bureaucracy and the law enforcing authorities are aware of this war reality, but they are expected to go by the letter of the law. This deadlock has to be overcome by formulating or creating new laws, as laws are meant to protect the citizens, not punish them or deprive them of certain State benefits.

Day Care Centres and Pre-Schools

There are a few institutions, but totally inadequate to the emerging needs of the mothers. If the mothers need to be trained in skills to be engaged in self-employment the State should set up day care centres and pre-schools. The mothers must feel confident that their children are in safe hands, cared for, and their needs, both physical and emotional are attended to. The mothers must feel comfortable to leave them there in close proximity to their homes. Hence there is a need to develop a system of day care centres and pre-schools with in-built infrastructures. Those areas need to be declared as safe zones where militarisation does not enter from any quarter. Both, the caretakers at the day-care centres and pre-school, should be given the appropriate training needed for their specialised vocation. **Redd Barna, Save the Children, Plan International, Children's Secretariat and the Ministry of Social Service and Rehabilitation** can jointly collaborate to bring out an effective and meaningful scheme of setting up the centres and the pre-schools.

Income Generation

It has been the experience of women, as we understood, that the income generation projects initiated by the NGOs did not sustain them for expected periods of time.

On the contrary they have collapsed due to the in-built inadequacies of the projects. One of the major constraints was the absence of training and retraining. The programmes have necessitated an outsider's intervention in the form of assistance which has finally made them dependent on such services, and the ones who render such services will exploit them eventually. Income generation with marginal profits should be abandoned in favour of sustainable long enduring and permanent avenues of income generation with stable mechanism planned, thus eliminating middlemen and women. Saving schemes linked to the rural banks should be introduced to the women with the necessary information. These activities and suggestions mentioned in the recommendations should be planned at the local government level, taking into consideration the particularity of the socio-economic situation and the socio-cultural constraints and the situation of war.

Wherever possible NGOs and women's organisations have to be consulted to bring into focus the specific information about the villages/areas/divisions of the affected people.

Education and the School System

One of the most articulated topics of discussion was the education of the children. The women are concerned, worried and dejected at the state of affairs of their children's education. Children who have lost their education for more than one year, children who are displaced, children of the refugee camps have specific problems that need to be addressed. Special schools, special classes and special teachers are needed to put right the huge backlog. Demanding school fees from dislocated children and codes regarding the attire (the school uniform and shoes) by the school authorities from those children who do not have enough to eat, are forms of insensitivity that have to be brought to the notice of the teachers. Funds for the infrastructural needs have to be allocated both by the Ministry of Rehabilitation and the Ministry of Education, while the NGOs can also help constructively. But at the level of becoming sensitive to the emerging new situation of dislocation, the teachers should sensitise themselves attitudinally.

Health of the Women and Children

That the women are affected physically with various health problems was amply proved in the research. Even with a layman's lens we identified various health problems, ranging from malnutrition to blindness. State health services and new infrastructures have failed miserably in the war zones. Women simply do not have access to the State health services. Free medical services like free education has no meaning to these men, women and children. Medical personnel, medical supplies and medical care have dwindled and diminished with the intensity of the war. Gynecological advice and services and the related medicines are not available at all.

The children's state of health, mainly due to improper dietary habits, is also a huge problem which needs to be addressed along with the immunisation programmes.

Closely linked to the women's health are their levels of trauma one identifies easily. As part of our findings we would only suggest that there is a need for counselling centres on one level and trained psychologists at another level, to treat these women. In Sri Lanka today psychologists are few in number and their services are totally inadequate for our present crises. This can be rectified only at the State level.

Conclusions

The conclusion to this research need not be an elaborate one. The three-dimensional facets of the research process, the data, the analytical interpretation have in fact laid bare the complexity of the situation of the women. It is paradoxical at one level and complex on another level, the complexity has revealed one simple need, a simple truth, and that is the ravages of the war.

The experience in the field not only revealed the rational in its complexity, but also brought out the emotional as well. The emotional is not dispensed as the opposite of the rational. The "emotional" is present in the rational. We have made an attempt to theorise the emotional. The women expressed their emotions—anger, frustration, feelings of insecurity sadness and anxiety about the future, the expressive instrumentality for a transformation of a social order in the future. It was indeed difficult to set aside the emotional from the research, its process and data. The central role emotions played has not been concealed—objectivity and subjectivity are not seen in the study as polar opposites but as the latter leading to the former or standing almost as equally significant. Even the researcher's subjectivity is not cast off as an intervention in the search of objectivity.

The second point we want to emphasise is the cost of the war.

There is not even an attempt to talk about the total number of lives lost. But there are invisible factors which are even more significant. The impact of the present war over the next generation, the orphans, the children with single parents, the emotional scars of having lost the dear ones, the belongings, the habitat, the mental disability will linger for many years more.

On the other side of the ethnic divide there is equally the same horror—the horror of the death of the dear sons and fathers and brothers as the valiant and national heroes, the soldiers.

This we urge not to be treated as emotional rhetoric but as a piece of rational wisdom.

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Glossary

Appa	Father, Tamil kinship term
Aram	The righteous
Arultali	one whose <i>tali</i> is broken
Asram	The four stages in a man's life as laid down in classical Sanskrit texts, of the celebrate student, of the householder, of preparing for renunciation and of the renouncer par excellence
Atma shanti	Peace for the soul, Mental peace
Atu	it
Bhakthi Pakthi	Piety, extreme love
Dana	Meritorious offerings
Grama sevaka	The local term for an administrative officer at the village level in the local government, one who serves the village
Illaram	The theory of the righteous or the holy household
I.P.K.F.	Indian Peace Keeping Force

Glossary

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Kadavulukku etkatu	Irreligious; not acceptable to the god
Kannaki	The chaste wife in the epic Silapatikaram
Karmaic	deeds of the previous births
Kasippu	Locally brewed liquor of a low quality
Kavaliyal/Kalusaraiyal	Rowdies; good for nothing people
Mariyatai ketta	Shameful
Munnal Poi Nikkutu	It is standing in front
Nalla Kariyam	Auspicious events/rites
Natai	Behaviour
Otunkal	Secluding
Palpatta Nankal	We, the wretched
Pansala	Buddhist temple
Pavanai	Interaction, the act of being; presentation of the self
Purusan	Man husband
Pirasankam	Religious discourse
Peykkolam	Ghostly
Payapakthi	Devotion out of/with fear
Pirith	Buddhist chants
Pooja	Prayers with ritual accompaniment

Pottu	A decorative mark worn by girls and married women on the forehead as a symbol of auspiciousness
Poya	Full-moon day
Sita	The chaste wife in the epic of Ramayana
Samutayam	Society
Tali	A ritual ornament, a symbol of marriage for women
Tintani	Have eaten
Utai	Dress
Ur vai	the mouth of the village, gossip
Urrar	The villagers
Vappa	Father, the Muslim Kinship term for the father
Vanmurai	Violence as means
Ventata porul	unwanted object
Vitavai	Widow

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