



WAR WAS A CURSE. WE CAN LIVE IN PEACE

Resilience and Healing in Sri Lanka

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of Future is one of the main casualties of war.

The book you have in your hands deals with the issue of the Sri Lankan future. How can those living in this land move forward after decades of conflict, pain and loss? What has been learnt from conflict that can be used to rebuild broken lives and relationships? Which are the main obstacles in that process? And, what are the proposals to overcome them?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to start from the Past, to look back in order to look forward. How was Sri Lanka twenty, thirty, forty years ago? How were the childhoods of the people speaking in this book? How did they imagine their lives when they were little? How did living, growing up in conflict, impact those dreams? What was lost? Was anything gained?

And we need to talk about the Present: how are their lives now? Which are their daily struggles? What keeps them going, moving forward? What are their hopes and dreams?

Even if the war in Sri Lanka ended years ago, its presence is still prevalent in people's narratives about their Past, Present and Future.

Because moving forward when the land where you built your home, where your children were born, where every tree has memories hanging from its branches, has not been returned to you, or when your husband, or son, or sons, are missing, their fate unknown, or when you still feel marginalized and dispossessed is an enormous task.

The unresolved consequences of conflict make people stay in the Past, their Present shaped by absences, their Future unimaginable.

This book started as an exploration around the views on reconciliation in Sri Lanka. The timing seemed propitious, a number of initiatives had been launched by the new government, and it appeared that the moment was right to engage in the conversation.

This book uses a “Peace History” lens. It tries to capture complexity and to show the greys between the black and white narratives that long, protracted conflicts produce. It welcomes contradiction, subjectivity, personal experiences and views. Experiences and stories are the Peace History raw materials. Both are important, but whilst narratives move across generations, experiences do not. Peace History weaves personal narratives together into a collective one, embedding both individual and shared journeys. Peace History believes that “We are the stories we tell,” both as human beings as well as a community, as a country.

Those stories need to be acknowledged before they can be transformed. Those stories contain proposals for healing that we hope can contribute to the Sri Lanka discussions. Every story can be told in many different ways; this is one of them. We know that there are alternative narratives to the one presented here; they are equally precious.

Conversations about reconciliation were difficult, both for the speakers and for the listeners. They were often shaped by fear, sadness, haunting memories, hurt souls, and resignation. There were also happy moments, optimism, learning, and a desire to keep going, and to make things better for the new generations.

This is not an easy book to read. It is sometimes painful and raw. But we believe these are stories and perspectives that need to be heard, that they can contribute to the on-going wider and inclusive conversation about the Sri Lankan future.

THE PAST



Chapter 1

“I am a child of war”

*M*y native place is an island. There are several islands in Jaffna. If you want to go to the place where I was born you need to take a boat. I am a teacher. I was born in 1935; I am 82 now. I still ride my bike everyday. This morning I rode for 10 kilometres. (6. Pandateruppu)

I was born and raised in Mannar. This is where my family comes from. Mannar is the third biggest district in Sri Lanka. During the earlier times there were Muslims, Hindus and Christians living together in unity. The percentage was, 60% Christians, 27% Muslims and 13% Hindus. That unity was like anywhere else in Sri Lanka. This was the place where people lived peacefully and in harmony. (10. Mannar)

I was born in Mullaitivu. I come from a family of fishermen. My father was a very well known fisherman, and I used to accompany him when I was young. I have four siblings. My mother died during my childhood, so it was my elder sister who took care of the family and raised me. I started going to school at the age of five, but I could study only until grade five. I attended the American Missionary School. I suffered a lot because every subject (except Tamil) was taught in English and it was very challenging. I suffered so much that I started faking stomach-ache so that I could skip school. But the school Principal noticed it and realized that I was having a hard time learning in English, so he moved me one grade down and I became the best student in the class, and was always among the best three students of my grade. So, even if teachers carried sticks and sometimes hit us, they also really helped me. Even if I could not complete my studies, I don't think those having PhDs and MSCs can compete with me, because I had the power of handling so many people in my business. (3. Achchuveli)

I could tell you about my childhood and everything, but that would be a big book! I was born in poverty because my father was ill, so I spent most of my time taking care of him and of my family. I only studied until Ordinary level, we call it "O level", because I had to go to work and take care of my family.

From 1963 to 1967 I dropped out of school, and after the 1970s I got into the Technical College; I took late afternoon classes. This is where I learnt about tailoring and started working as a tailor. There is a local cigarette brand here in Jaffna, so I also started working making cigarettes because I really wanted to earn money. I was also working at a meat shop. I would work so hard because I was yearning for money to help my family. (2. Jaffna)

I was born in 1948 and entered monkhood in 1962, when I was 14. I was ordained in 1972. I was born and grew up in a very rural part of Sri Lanka. My parents are no longer with me. They passed away. I have two elder brothers and one younger brother. We were a family of farmers. We were very poor. From a young age I started to think about the differences in this society. I realized that most of the people who live in this country do not have internal or external peace. We have so many divisions in our society. For example, we have so many ethnicities: Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, etc. Even in my village there were so many internal differences. I experienced so many divisions; poor and rich was a big division in my village. But we all lived together. I love my language, and this was my favourite subject when I was studying. And I loved History too. When I was a kid I loved listening to old stories. (19. Colombo)

In the late 60s, early 70s life here in the East was very small. The population was very less, and people were scattered around villages. There was less people. This place was thick forest with lots of palm trees. People were able to find jobs. There was no problem in terms of money; everybody had enough to live. People had little money, but the cost of life was less. There were only one or two banks. The fishing was very good; agriculture was very good. People enjoyed life. There were some Sinhalese here, but most of the population was Tamil. The relationship between the two groups was good. There were no problems, we got along well. I had Sinhala friends, my sister's daughter married a Sinhalese. My father was not educated; he did not help me to continue studying. When I was little he told me, "Find a small job that is enough to make a living". But I worked hard because I studied in one of the prominent schools here in Batticaola called Saint Michaels College; this was a very prestigious school run by Jesuit fathers. All the people were high profile people. It's like the Royal College in Colombo. (28. Batticaola)

I am originally from Jaffna. I am the elder child, and have two brothers and two sisters. I was born in 1962, so I am now 54 years old. (8. Mullaitivu)

Tomorrow is my 60th birthday. I have five children, three sons and two daughters. All of them are married now, and two of them live in this same area. I am originally from a village in Mullaitivu. It was a small place, but many people lived there; it was a very congested place. We were nine siblings: seven sisters and two brothers. We were very poor; my father was the only one earning money for the family. He was a fisherman in the sea. We lived under poverty, My mother was sick and needed to go to the hospital very often, so we could not imagine how our life was going to be. I did not have any expectation. (9. Mullaitivu)

I was born in 1965 in Panama, in the Eastern Province. Panama has a very historical background. Panama, or Panam-Paththuwa, is the place which Ptolemy marked in his first Sri Lankan map. Yes, Panama is a very beautiful place. Villagers lived just like one family. Strong relationships and connections with each and every villager was a common quality of the Panama people. Panama is the place where Sinhalese and Tamils lived together in harmony. I'm sure now it might have changed, but when I was a child, I remember that every child in the village felt that all the mothers of the village were their own mothers. For example, if my parents were not around in our mealtime, someone would definitely come and feed us with care and affection. In Panama Sinhalese and Tamils lived together in harmony. (29. Batticaola)

I was born in June 1974. I have lived here, in Jaffna, since childhood. My mother was a school principal and my father worked at the bank. I only have one sister and she is in Canada now. I am older than her. My parents live in Canada too, but I still keep a room ready for them at this home. (4. Jaffna)

I was born in 1976. That was the time when the LTTE started. I am a child of war and I am proud of it because it shaped what I am today. (1. Jaffna)

I am 40 years old and I have two children. I used to live in this house with my mother and five siblings. I am the second child in the family. I have two younger brothers, one younger sister and then one eldest sister. My mother was from Vavuniya and my father is from here, Mullaitivu. After they got married, my mother had to move here. I was just two years old when they brought me to this village. (7. Mullaitivu)

I was born in Galle. I have two older sisters and two younger brothers. We lived a good life while in Galle. Life was running smoothly. We owned a car. We had a business. Galle was a diverse city in Sri Lanka. Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese used to live together. (27. Batticaola)

I am from a small village in Mannar. I have five sisters and one elder brother. We lived in a fishing village, so I have been used to fishing since childhood. (20. Vavuniya)

I grew up in Colombo. My parents are both lawyers. My mother was actually lecturing at the university when I was little. I have always had a happy memory of my childhood in Colombo, never a negative one. I used to speak Sinhala when I was a child, but I lost it completely when I was away. When I returned many years later it came back slowly. It was quite interesting because I couldn't remember any Sinhala word whilst I was in India, but it all just came back when I returned. (18. Colombo)

I was born in Trincomalee; I had five children; my sister and her husband were shot dead, so I am looking after their children too. One of their boys was killed during the war. (26. Trincomalee)

I am from Batticaola, in the Eastern Province. I am married and have one son. The second one will arrive in February. I am 41 years old. I was born in 1975. We were six in my family: my two parents, and four siblings. I am the eldest; after me there was a younger brother and two younger sisters. Agriculture was the family main source of income. (21. Vavuniya)

I was born in 1982 in Akkarayankulam, Kilinochchi, located in the Northern part of Sri Lanka. It is a beautiful farming village with a massive agricultural water tank. I was raised by the village and its people, surrounded by the canal water, lotus ponds, paddy fields and trees. I had never stepped out of the Vanni region till the age of 20. I have great pride in my roots. (17. Colombo)

I am 23 years old. I was born in Kilinochchi. My father was a mechanic. He also did some farming, because in the Vanni area everybody had land and cultivated things. My mother was a housewife. I had two younger brothers and two younger sisters. I am the oldest. (14. Jaffna)

I was born in 1980. When I was little there was a war. We could not have a normal life. (16. Mullaitivu)

I am originally from Jaffna. I am the eldest of six siblings. My father was a fisherman.

The war had already started when I was born. We could not go anywhere at that time. (11. Mannar)

When I was little, this village was bigger than today. The original families have all left now. So many people disappeared or died during the war. (5. Kilinochchi)

I was born in Ilavai village. I am 30 years old. I have four brothers and two sisters. I am the 6th child in the family and I have a twin brother. War was already going on when I was born. (13. Jaffna)

I was brought to St. Jolly orphanage three days after I was born. I stayed there until 2008. When I was at the orphanage I did not feel sad for not having a family. We had everything: a school, a playground, and a park. I was happy when I was there. I remember we were being taken care of by the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran. He would attend special occasions and distribute



gifts. He would give us chocolates, game boards, balls, different pens, and balloons. Those were happy times. (22. Vavuniya)

Growing up, I always wanted to help my community. I wanted to be a priest from an early age, not because I wanted to hold mass, or because I am a religious person, but because I always wanted to help my community. I said that I would like to join the seminary, but my mother disagreed. I said, "This is what I feel, and I may come back if it does not work for me." I think she couldn't see me becoming a priest because my nature was very rebellious. I remember always being against the caste system, against any form of oppression. I remember once a friend of mine was talking about caste in front of me and he was so mean so I shook him. I just have always rejected any form of oppression and I would fight against it. (1. Jaffna)

I am sort of popular among the people of my community because if I feel that something is wrong, I am able to question it regardless of whoever is here. I question politicians, ministers as well as anyone. It is because of this that everybody respects me, and I am in a high position in this community. I have always been like that. Since I was young I have engaged in social work. I think I could have been a big entrepreneur and I would have had a big factory, but when I was displaced that dream was destroyed. After I resettled I had to start from zero again. Now I have this house and this workshop, but I have aged, and I don't think it will be possible to reach that level anymore. (2. Jaffna)

When I was 11 I was able to travel by plane; my father's ticket was 45 rupees and mine was 25, I still remember that. My father never restricted me from trying new things. I really appreciate the way my father raised us. For example, he trusted us and if I asked him for five rupees for my studies, for books, he just said, "The safe-deposit is there; just open it and take what you need". This trust taught us not to steal; we were not interested in money because we knew how it was handled. We had these neighbours, they were richer than us, and their father always carried the keys of their safe in his vest. Those children created a duplicate and started drinking and these things and now, because of this, their family is destroyed. Building trust within the

family is so important. My father never said no to anybody asking help from him; he always welcomed everyone; he would give ten rupees to people who needed them; at that time ten rupees was a lot of money. What you have to understand is how much freedom and self-learning has been part of my life and how much it has played a big role in my success. (3. Achchuveli)

Since I liked studying, and I was good at it, I was admitted with full boarding at the American Mission School in Jaffna. That's why I was able to grow and provide social services. That is my background. When I was little I did not have any big plan as to what I would do when I grew up; we don't believe in that. We were so poor at home, we did not even have much to eat. My parents were farmers, but there was very little farming in the island because the soil was very salty. Only three or four thousand people lived in my island at that time; we knew each other at that time. Now it is about fifteen thousand. After I finished the American Mission School, I came to Jaffna College and studied there. I had to study all subjects in English. Everyone was speaking English all the time... I was very scared! I did not know anything. You can imagine how hard picking up English was. I had to go to private tuition... I wanted to become a teacher, so after passing my O level exams I was selected by the government to take a two years training. I would have liked to continue studying, but because of my family background I had to stop at that level. I wanted to get a job so that I could support my family. (6. Pandateruppu)

I was only five years old when my father left our family. That was in 1990. He came back to us 25 years later. We did not receive any financial support from him when he was away, so we lived under poverty. When I was 15 years old, I started working in the paddy fields and the local farms after school and on weekends. I planted crops, grained rice and prepared the spices. My mother could not afford to do those kinds of work, so I had to help out. Then I learned sewing and was able to start contributing to the family income. For 20 years now, sewing has been my main source of income. When I was young, my dream was to become a government official and serve the community. But I wasn't able to continue my studies because of poverty. I was only able to pass four subjects because I needed to go to work

and take care of my family after school. In Sri Lanka, you need to pass at least six subjects in order to push through with school. And even if I wanted to continue studying, we could not afford to pay the high amount of tuition fee. I think whoever was competing with me at that time is already at the government office now. (7. Mullaitivu)

When my elder brother turned 19 years old he got married and left the house, and we were under poverty again. I was unable to continue my studies; I dropped out from school when I was ten, after I finished my primary education. We had to pay for everything; we had to buy books, the school uniforms.... and we could not afford them and that is why I was not able to continue my studies. I started helping my father selling in the market whatever fishes he caught in the sea. There is a story behind the reason why I dropped out of school, One day my friends and I passed by the District Secretary compound; there was a big mango tree; I was the only one who was able to climb the tree to pick some mangoes. Suddenly the security guard appeared and we all ran away. When we stopped I asked my friends, "Where are my books?" But they said, "Oh sorry we left them because we were in a hurry." The security guard handed my books to the school. When I returned home my mother scolded me for losing the books, but I could not tell her what had happened; for four days I was not able to go to school, I was too scared. Then my father convinced me to go; so I went and the Principal, who was a missionary, made me stand at the stage, in front of everyone, and beat me very badly with the ruler. That incident was a big insult in front of everyone. It made me not wanting to go to school again. I had been a brilliant student; and I got very high marks, especially in math, English and social studies, but after that I dropped school. Also, because of my family situation, I was not encouraged to return... But I still have my calligraphy notebooks with me and I still practice when I have some free time. (9. Mullaitivu)

When I was young, I was different from other children my age. I was a very calm kid, and also I had a likeness to listen to Pirith, the Buddhist chanting. Let me share with you a beautiful story: at that time, the chief monk of our

temple started a drama group to re-create Buddhist stories and I had the chance to be an actor in that drama group. After observing my behaviour, our chief monk thought, “This kid is suitable to be a monk, even in his real life,” and so he went and asked permission to my parents to keep me in the temple as a young monk. My dad did not support that idea, but my mom was neutral and kept calm. However, the funny thing was that our chief monk knew that my dad liked drinking alcohol, you know? So, one day he approached my dad when he was drunk and my dad said, “Yes” out of his drunkenness. This is how in 1976 I became a monk. (29. Batticaola)

When I was in 3rd grade, I used to work with my father in the morning and go to school afterwards. My favourite subject was geography. I actually liked Tamil, but my teachers motivated me to study geography and I got interested in the subject. When I was young I just wanted to finish studying so that I could be in a good position to help improve my family’s situation, but my studies were interrupted by the war. My brother and I used to be at the top in our class, but we decided to drop out of school because we could no longer afford the school expenses. When our teachers found out they motivated us to continue our studies; one of them offered to shoulder the costs of stationeries, and another one the school expenses so that we could continue studying. That kept us in the school for two more years. We struggled to get an education, but I eventually managed to finish the university. (13. Jaffna)

My mother died in 1996 when I was 13 years old. She died of cancer. Before her death our lives were filled with laughter, love and happiness. I have two sisters and two brothers. My father left us after her death so we went to live with my grandma. She took care of us despite her financial troubles. When I was young all I wanted to do was to take care of my siblings and provide for them. This was my main goal growing up. (17. Colombo)

My father had 16 children. He was married to a woman in Chilaw and they had three children. He came to Mannar and met my mother and decided he wanted to marry her; he said, “I want to marry you”, and my mother





answered, “Get a divorce from your previous wife, come back and I will marry you”. So, he divorced, returned and married my mother. In our religion men can marry four women without getting divorced, you just need to get the approval from your current wife. But if you get divorced from your previous wife you can marry as many times as you want. Our religion also says that men can only marry more than one woman if they can support them. Many Muslim men died during the war, so the percentage of men was lower than that of women, so it was OK to marry more than one woman. My parents had 13 children together. There is a proverb in Tamil that says that you will be happy if you have 16 children! I remember how in the earlier times we were in real poverty because we were a big family and we did not have much money; plain tea was five cents, sugar was ten cents... in communist countries the cost of living and the salaries did not change during decades; but here the price of everything increased whilst the salaries remained the same. That was a difficult time. (10. Mannar)

I became a monk when I was 12 years old. It was a life changing experience. My life changed completely. I was a very naughty kid, not as obedient as other kids. In the temple there was good discipline, so I grew up as a monk with the discipline. I realized that I loved the temple environment and practicing meditation. My temple is popular in Sri Lanka. I learned national harmony from my scarcity. When I looked at my community, I realized that we all are same humans and we are suffering from the same problems. I feel that the community was my university. I learned a lot from my community. We always talk with the community about many topics, peace, conflict transformation and war. (19. Colombo)

Right after I left school, at the age of 11, our aunt needed some help with her children, and I was sent to her house. I prepared breakfast before she went to the market, helping with the planting and the watering of the coconuts. They were not as poor as us, but I was having a hard time working too much for them and I was not having a good relationship with my aunt's daughter. When my father came I told him that I wanted to leave. I returned to our village and started selling fish in the market. One day, when I was 14, my

aunt came back and said she really needed me, so I returned to her place. I had been able to learn traditional textile techniques and started working on a textile center and earnings some money. I continued doing the same tasks I had previously done at my aunt's, household chores, collecting water, taking care of the trees.... But I still could go to the textile center in the afternoon and do some work there. (9. Mullaitivu)

I am a hardworking men, always seeking for opportunities, always working hard; even when people would say, "There is no fish now" I would go out with my radar and always return with a basket full of fishes. I also loved reading and listening the radio station. I always asked my relatives to order books from abroad for me. There was not a custom system at that time, so it was easy to get them. I was a self-learner. I learnt radio assembling by myself. My family was well off, so we had a big radio and a speaker so that everyone in our community could listen to it. In 1960 I was 15 years old; I remember how the boats engines got introduced into our fishing village. My father asked, "Why don't you learn how to repair them so that you can fix them?" So, I found a local mechanic and I went to learn with him. He would ask me to clean all the machines components and, whilst cleaning them, I focused on their shapes and how could they fit with each other: when the mechanic came back I gave him the separate parts in their right order and he asked, "Did you learn this from somewhere else?", I said, "No"; "So, for the second machine, I won't be telling you anything, just do it", and I just fixed it. After that he said, "You don't have to learn anything else; just go out and do your work". I was quite well known at the school because I engaged in many activities; I would be in charge of the electrical work and the lighting every time there was a function; and I was also the photographer for the school. I had a well-known reputation at that time. In order to pass the Ordinary Level I sat in the exam for ten subjects; when the results came, I had passed. (3. Achchuveli)

So, I went to the teachers training college for two years; we were trained to teach all subjects, but I specially liked math. We were 91 teachers from all over the country studying together. After we finished we had to go anywhere the government sent us. Some teachers were picky, and some wanted to teach

only in their places of origin; I was offered a post in Jaffna but I said, “No, there are children in other places that also need teachers”, so when I finished I was posted in Hatton for five years. Hatton is quite down South; it was such a cold place. That’s why all my three children were born in Hatton. Then I got a promotion and came back to Jaffna. Jaffna had not changed much. (6. Pandateruppu)

As a young monk I had a special interest on Buddhist chanting and rituals. There was a tradition in my village, the “Bodhi Puja”, the veneration of the Bodhi-tree. One day one of the village men came to the temple and requested us to conduct a Bodhi Puja, So, my teacher pointed his finger at me and said, “Ah... here is good one; he can do it, I don’t need to come”. I was so nervous, because I have never done it before. The next day I went to perform the ceremony. When I arrived I saw so many pilgrims waiting for me. I was so scared. I delivered the Puja with a shaky voice. But afterwards, I slowly become the most famous monk to perform Bodhi Puja in my village. (29. Batticaola)

At the age of 20 I started being interested in politics. I became a journalist because my father and my mother were both poets; they gave me all kind of ideas. I have a twin brother who is a writer too. (10. Mannar)

I lived in my village until the end of Grade 3. That was 2002-2003. When most of my relatives moved to Jaffna in 2003, I decided to stay in Kilinochchi with one of my aunts because I wanted to continue studying. When I was young I woke up early, went to church, and then attended school and came back home... that was my life; we just knew our little circle, and stayed together; Kilinochchi was our country. (14. Jaffna)

I was born in this very same house. I am 37 years old. I lost my father when I was 12.

I have four siblings. I am the youngest. When I was little we lived in poverty. I always imagined I would have a good life. I never expected the life I have had. (5. Kilinochchi)

Chapter 2

“You can’t imagine”



At the age of 12 I started accompanying my father to the sea during the weekends. This is when my elder sister brought a photographer to take pictures of us; when he finished I wanted to see the pictures and I asked him to show them to me, but he said, “No”, so I took the bus to a nearby town where there was a very well know photography studio and there, I noticed, they had a camera for sale. It was a black and white film roll Kodak camera. It cost 40 rupees. So, I came back home by bus again, broke my piggybank, returned back to the city and bought the 40 rupees camera and two film rolls, each of which was five rupees. I remember I took eight shots with the first roll; At that time you had to develop the film, you could not see the results immediately, so I went to Jaffna and the people in the shop said, “You can have the film developed by tomorrow”, but I said, “No, I cannot wait, please do it today”. Finally they accepted. Out of the eight shots, six were OK. So I came back home and used the second roll, and took pictures of the people around me. This time the eight of them were perfect. From then on, whenever I saw nice scenery I would always take a picture. No, I could not take those pictures with me when we were displaced; they are all lost now. (3. Achchuveli)

Our daily lives changed

In the 70s the political situation seemed OK, but there were some tensions between the Tamil and the Sinhala communities. There were some Sinhala families coming to fish from Nigambo, but they did not have permission to fish, or to sell the fish in the market. All this created distrust, animosity and some violence between the two communities. This is why the Tamil youth started mobilizing¹ and saying, “This should not be happening”. That was before the IPK came², when different Tamil militant groups started emerging. They tried to get people to join them; they would visit our homes and explain the situation and ask for our support. Any movement could come at any time and say, “Sister give us your home and go to live with your mum

¹ In 1976 (even before the LTTE was formed) the Tamil youth decided to move from non-violent to violent struggle and started recruiting people and mobilizing in that direction (for example, going to houses and asking for different types of support). At that time Mullaitivu was under the control of the Sri Lankan army, and they had a big military camp in the Mullaitivu district.

² Indian Peace Keeping Forces (1987).

for a while”, and we would do it, even if we realized we did not know what were they using our homes for. That was the extent of the cooperation. There was tension between these Tamil groups and the Sri Lankan army, but also among those groups themselves. I remember one incident when one group cut the heads of the members of another group and put them in a junction. We were all scared. (9. Mullaitivu)

At those early stages the LTTE already existed, but there were also some other very well respected Tamil militant groups; My sons decided to join one of them, but we also continued helping the LTTE in any way we could. My sons were 15 and 16 years old. They went to India for training. (3. Achchuveli)

That gave us our first taste of what was to come.

We were in war ever since I started school in 1981. In 1982 and 1983 the conflict changed and our armed struggle started. Our daily life changed from that very same moment; every day we heard guns shooting, conflict and troubles. That was the time when lot of Tamil youth were involved in the struggle. (21. Vavuniya)

In 1985, and until the early 90s, the LTTE strategy was to dismantle the activism of the other Tamil militant groups. My second son was shot in six places, in the eye, in the hand, in the chest, in the ear... Some people took him to the hospital and he was unconscious for two months. He only recovered thanks to my wife's, his mother, care. At that time the entire transportation system was blocked by the army; there was no public transport system; every day my wife had to walk 40 kilometres to reach the Jaffna hospital and take care of our son. Our family had been serving the LTTE very highly, but then they betrayed us by shooting our own son; they got all the support from us and then they betrayed us by trying to kill our son. I was in Saudi Arabia when all this happened. You can't image; I had been such a wealthy person before the war, before 1990 I had 150 workers under me and made

70.000.000 profits, but all the restrictions from the army impoverish us so much, so I had to go to Saudi Arabia to earn money. The day my son was shot I had this sort of illusion; this lived dream; I suddenly fainted. I wrote a letter to my family and to the post office; when the letter reached them they were so surprised because I had described exactly what had happened to my son. (3. Achchuveli)

At that time there were many different groups; there were not many army camps around our village, but even though, the army used to come once a month to our village. When they came there would be killings of civilians. When people saw them and ran away they would get detained and taken away. People were not used to the army presence, so when they saw them they would be afraid and run away; and because they were running away the army would suspect them because at that time there were different military movements developing. From my village there were lots of youngsters involved in different groups and movements. That gave us our first taste of what was to come. (21. Vavuniya)

Ok, Let me tell you this story: when our chief monk passed away I was called to his temple to organize the cremation ceremony. However, because of the ethnic tension and the violent environment I faced big difficulties. Going from one village temple to another was very hard because of the many different armed groups. I was helpless, so I went to talk to the EPRLF³, the armed group that controlled my temple area. I explained that we needed to do the ceremony, so we needed transportation to bring monks from other temples. The EPRLF listened to me and arranged for a bus to transport the monks. After that the LTTE suspected that I had a deep tie with the EPRLF, so they came to my temple and interrogated me. It was very scary; I knew my life was at risk. I knew that they could do anything with my life, anytime. On top of that, my temple was very isolated from the village. (29. Batticaola)

³ Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front.

Those few days around the 1983 riots are always vivid in my mind

Galle was a diverse city in Sri Lanka. Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese used to live together. But in July 1983, the riots erupted between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. The Muslims supported the Tamils. We were in our shop when the riot started. We witnessed some shops burn. We feared the fire would reach us, so we immediately packed our belongings. My parents sent all our staff back to their homes. We stayed in our house while my two younger brothers boarded the lorry. The police came to take us to the police station. As we boarded the police car, we saw our house and shop burning. My mother started crying but my father remained strong. Our place, properties and all our belongings were gone. We stayed at the police station for 15 or 20 days for our safety. The police took care of us. My parents were shocked with what happened. I was six years old, but I understood the problem. (27. Batticaola)

Those few days around the 1983 riots are always vivid in my mind. In a sense, I think subconsciously, I harbour some kind of bitterness about that time, but apart from that, I seem to have moved on. Our life changed dramatically after the riots. We went to India and I guess it was not until I was 35 years old, when I went back as a refugee again, that I really understood what impact being a refugee had on my parents, because we, me and my two sisters, as children, probably were able to adjust and, more or less, never felt that we had lost anything, though it was quite a dramatic change. But for my parents, it was quite traumatic. I was ten years old during the riots; that means that I studied my secondary and tertiary education in India. (18. Colombo)

The riots were already happening during my last day of school before we left; there was an incident, and, until that moment, I had never probably understood the racial significance of it. One my friends and I were playing together, and one of our classmates was pushed by a boy, in which was, I

think, that is my interpretation, my memory of it, a sort of ethnic action. During the riots we had to move out from our house. And then our house was burnt down. I remember that one of my father's juniors got actually injured when his house was also burnt. There was one occasion when the mob came back down the road towards our house, and my mother sent us, the children, out but then one of my father's friends, who was a minister, sent some of his security guards and the mob sort of dispersed. Those memories are quite vivid, but I don't think I had a particular reaction to these events, except that, after a certain point, I strongly felt that the violent response was problematic. That has been my general standpoint ever since. (18. Colombo)

For one year and a half we lived in a refugee camp near Colombo. We had relatives in Colombo but they were also poor so they could not accommodate us; their houses were too small. They just brought us food whenever they could. They also gave us clothing and some money. Life at the IDP camp was very hard, but we didn't have a choice. It was dirty, but we had to endure the condition. The toilet facilities were very dirty and smelly. We didn't have enough food and it was bad compared to what we used to have in Galle. But we had to eat something for survival. We were always sick. We could not focus on studying. As children we would still play outside, but it was not safe. (27. Batticaola)

My first memory of the war gets back to July 1983, when the first bomb blast from the LTTE happened in Thirunelveli, a town in Jaffna district⁴. At that time our family was engaged with social work, so after the anti-Tamil riots started in Colombo we helped all the people fleeing back to Jaffna by ship. (3. Achchuveli)

The Sri Lankan refugee population in Chennai has fluctuated over the last thirty years. In 1987 there were about 35.000 refugees, but the biggest wave took place from 1989 to 1991. Before Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in May 1991 there were 120.000 refugees and almost 300 camps all over Tamil

⁴This event is considered as the trigger of the Sri Lanka civil war.





Nadu, but after the assassination the Indian government mood changed; the repatriation programs started the next year, in 1992 and lasted until 1995. By 1995 there were only 57.000 refugees left. Then, after the breakdown of the ceasefire the war escalated in Sri Lanka again and there was another batch of refugees, almost 20.000 and the number went up to almost 75.000, although not all of them stayed in camps. In 2002-2003, when the ceasefire was signed, a slow return process started again. A lot of refugees spontaneously returned by boat, so the number actually came down to about almost 60.000; then in 2006 there was again an influx of refugees, and it went up again up to about 70.000. There has been an on-going return process since then, and nowadays there are about 65.000 people in the camps, and about 30.000 outside the camps. (18. Colombo)

In 1984 I went to India as a refugee with my elder sister, who had just gotten married, and another younger sister. We left our village without my parents. We decided to go to India because we did not feel safe at that time. We could not get out of the house because of fear. Many families also left the village at that time. We travelled to India illegally by a fishing boat. We had to pay money to the boat operator. It was not an easy journey. Reaching Rameswaram, in Tamil Nadu, from Mannar normally takes only one and a half hours, but I remember that it took us six ,because we had to stop in three different small islands until we got out to the sea. Finally, when we arrived to the shore of Rameswaram, the local fishermen gave us food to eat and we stayed there overnight. The following morning, the people from the refugee camp came and took us. In India there were possibilities to go to school, but because of our family's economic condition I was not able do so. Our family struggled economically. We had to go to the sugar cane plantation and work for long hours, but we only got two to three rupees. We had to manage with that amount. Three years later, in 1987, I returned to Sri Lanka. I came back because we were facing in India the same problems as in our village in Mannar. (20. Vavuniya)

We flew to India because we had some resources and, therefore, we did not move into an ordinary refugee camp. Of course, our life changed dramatically, but we always lived a semi normal life. We did not have any friends or relatives at all, but apart from that we lived a semi normal life. I think probably my parents felt quite traumatized. After we fled to India my father continued working with the refugees. My mother continued lecturing, doing some research and other stuff, but not full time anymore. She spent much more time with us. In a sense both their careers were completely ruined. I did not realize until I came back, but here in Colombo, my parents had their circle, they had their friends, they had everything; and in Chennai they were no one, right? My younger sister was three at that time. We did not realize she had been much impacted by the changes, but when we fled, she was the one who found most difficult to fit in the school. My little sister sometimes blames her failures on these experiences. She says, "If we would have just stayed here it would be different for us". I think she felt left out somehow. (18. Colombo)

This is how I grew up

I love my mother very much, but I have a particular reason why I specially love my father. There is a junction 150 meters from my home. In 1986 four people from different areas were arrested and brought to that junction by the army. The LTTE had planted a landmine on that junction but the army found it and cut the wire. The LTTE cadres saw the situation and run away. After finding the landmine the army stopped all the traffic in the road around that junction. They buried the landmine but not completely; you could still see the changes in the pavement. After finding the landmine a good number of army personnel entered into our house and they stayed in our courtyard. They came and asked my father to bring some materials and help them to remove the landmine. So they took my father to that junction and, at the same time, they also brought those four people they had detained. They asked them to dig the landmine up. My father was aware that in doing so there was

a high possibility of a blast. As this was happening my mother, my brother and myself were out of the house trying to watch what was happening at the junction. And the army people were just sitting, drinking. My father, who was able to communicate in Sinhala, started scolding them. He also talked to the men the army had detained and were digging the landmine up. He learnt that one of them had got married just three days earlier; another one had a newborn child. My father kept telling them, “do it slowly, take your time”. The landmine was buried quite deeply, so bringing it up was very difficult. My father came home to get four drinking coconuts for the men; he carried two, and my mother and I another one each. The landmine blasted whilst we were walking towards the junction. I saw two of the bodies. My mother made us get inside the house. We were shocked. After the incident the army personnel acted as if nothing had happened; they were acting happily and enjoying themselves. This incident made me decide to join the LTTE. I was 11 years old. I did not notice it at that time, but it took a long time for father to recover from this incident. (21. Vavuniya)

In April 1985 my parents decided to resettle in Batticaola. We were resettled in a village in the western part. There was no water, electricity and toilet facilities. There were no medical facilities, hospitals, and proper roads in the area. Many children died. A lot of massacres also happened in that place. (27. Batticaola)

My father was a fisherman. We had our own fishing equipment, but we had to leave it behind during displacement. Every time we moved to another place my father had difficulties in getting a job; because of the displacement we lived under poverty. My father used to say we started to run from our place as soon as I was born in the 80s, but I can't actually remember how many times we were displaced from the time of my birth until 2009, when the war ended. (13. Jaffna)

In 1987 our family moved again. My siblings and I moved to live with my grandmother at a school dormitory. My mother got sick while we were with our grandmother. Her asthma got worse. We tried to take her to the hospital but she died on the way. All of our relatives who resettled in other villages came during the burial. The IPKF came that year after the Sri Lankan government entered into an agreement with Rajiv Gandhi. A land mine exploded on the main road. We were near that place during the incident. The IPKF saw my grandmother tying about 30 grams of gold jewellery under her sari. She used to carry those jewels wherever we went, to make sure they would not get lost. They assaulted her and took all the jewels. My brother was also assaulted, but he was able to run away. I also ran for about four kilometres and hid myself in one small house. My sisters were taken to a refugee camp. The Indian forces separated us. After the incident my grandmother was taken to the hospital. She could not move. She didn't know what happened to us. Her body was swollen. At around six or seven pm, my sisters ran away from the camp and went to my location. My cousin's wife came and took us back to their house. All the people near the incident were taken to one of the camps; some of them were hacked to death. The IPKF were mad because some of them had died from the blast so they wanted to take revenge. But nobody knew who planted the bomb. The victims were innocent people. After that incident, we all came back to the village where we first resettled. We took my grandmother from hospital back to the village by block cart. My grandmother got very sick after she was discharged from the hospital. She died in 1990. (27. Batticaola)

In 1989 the Indian Peacekeeping Force came to our village and shot and killed my uncle and one of his cousins. This is my first memory of the conflict. I was only seven years old. I was devastated and could not understand what had happened. Their bodies were taken to the nearby IPKF Camp. They refused to release their bodies despite my family members and aunt begging and pleading with them. The IPKF said they would return them on the condition that they confessed to being LTTE combatants. But they were

not combatants... they were family men with children. The bodies were returned days later. This is the moment I realized that a war was going on. (17. Colombo)

I started my activism when I was 11 years old. That was the time when the IPKF arrived in Sri Lanka. They came under the guise of a peacekeeping force, but they were quite brutal. I still remember vividly the IPKF camp at the main junction, and how we would pass information to the LTTE every time we saw the army. We would shout or clap to make signals to the LTTE; we wanted to protect the LTTE cadres as they went around, and we made noises so that they could escape. The LTTE soldiers would bring their weapons and we would hide them in our houses. At that time the LTTE did not have proper military camps. They used to bring chicken or fish and they would ask us to cook for them. They would usually ask us to provide meals. I remember how once there was a fight a bit far away from our house. One of the cadres died and another one got injured; I remember how my mother cried as if he was her own child. This is how I grew up. This is how I got involved, not in the LTTE, but in the liberation movement. I always saw the LTTE as liberation fighters, not as a terrorist movement. And because they shaped it as a 'people's movement', practically everyone got involved. (1. Jaffna)

After the IPK came the situation became more severe. The Sri Lanka army visited us more often; they would check around and sometimes take our valuables. (9. Mullaitivu)

I had a very risky life. If I would have gone abroad with my sons and I could have earned money. My children wanted me to go and live with them, but I said nothing. They do understand. I have risked not just money, but their lives, going illegally by boat to India. When the IPKF came people withdrew and there was one Tamil paramilitary group searching for my sons; they wanted to take my two sons. My wife hid them in the paddy field, so when I came back home that evening I put my sons in a lorry that was transporting

sand in the night, and we drove them to the Palali military airport in Jaffna; we arrived early in the morning; by noon a plane landed; there were around 200 people there. We managed to get into the plane; it was a military plane with no seats, no door, 200 people cramped inside. When the plane took off everybody panicked. My two boys were crying. I said, "Don't..." We finally landed in Colombo. At that time Colombo was not safe, so we went to the YMCA because all the YMCA people, all Sinhalese people, knew me. When they saw me I told them, "My two sons are a little afraid to stay in Jaffna, so I have brought them". They said, "Of course, they can stay in my room, we will provide them all the meals free of charge at the canteen; for as long as they need". I went to a travel agency, I paid money, and they went to Bangkok, from there to Hong Kong, and then in Hong Kong they sent them back to Bangkok, and in Bangkok they sent them back to Colombo. So, I had to take them back to Kilinochchi, and then get them to India illegally by boat. It was a fishing boat, like a canoe; it was very risky. Now one of them is in London and the other one is in France. They have their own families. My daughter lives in India. She has three children; they all play karate, but it is my granddaughter, the only girl, the best of them; she is a champion and has got a gold medal. I will show you pictures of her. (6. Pandateruppu)

When I turned 12 years old, my father sent my sisters and me to live with some relatives in Talawakelle. Staying in our village had become dangerous because the IPKF was stationed in a building near our house. I didn't want to leave, but my father insisted, so we were sent to stay with our relatives. My father stayed back in Batti and sent money for our daily expenses and education. My elder sister did not attend school because she had already passed the GC level exam. Instead, she worked in Colombo as home cleaner to earn money. Our relatives were very poor, so we never had regular meals. They did not take care of us. Living with them was very difficult. We had problems with the CIDs because they were checking every household who came from Batticaola. One month later we decided to go back to Colombo. We secretly put our clothes in our school bag. We informed our elder sister to meet us at railway the station. We left without telling my relatives. We

called one of our uncles in Colombo. He met us at the railway station. He took us with him. He was selling grains and chickpeas. He had small garden where he grew the chickpeas. My uncle was a Christian. He took care of us. We stayed with him, and did not go to school for about six months. Our relatives from Talawakelle came and wanted to take us back but we did not go with them. We were so frustrated for moving to so many places. We endured so many problems: running away, losing our properties and belongings, and living in IDP camps. On top of these, my mother and grandmother died. We didn't want to live anymore. We came to a point when we decided to commit suicide. (27. Batticaola)

I never felt separated, or marginalized. Until I started working with the refugees, most of my closest associations were my Indian friends. And even now, my actual friends are my friends in India; most of the people I am friends with here are work associates. And interestingly, about a year ago this day, those friends from India found me again and we are now on a whatsapp group together; it's interesting how this connection still continues today. So, even through the time of the IPKF and Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, I never felt excluded in terms of the Indian people. There were government policies, some of which were problematic, but because I did not get excluded as an individual, I did not feel them as much. For example education admissions after 1991, after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, were a problem, but because of people's own discretion I didn't get excluded and, therefore, I didn't feel the kind of exclusion, whereas there are others amongst the refugee community I worked with who felt really excluded. But then later on, when I worked with the refugee community my identity as a Sri Lankan became much stronger. I was 24/7 working with them, and their problems, and their issues, and that makes you see yourself as one of them. (18. Colombo)

During the IPKF time I stayed in this house, here in Pandateruppu. One night, at 8pm the IPKF forces landed in their helicopters and the LTTE started firing at them, so there was a cross fire; all the people ran for safety

to the temples, to the churches; I was in charge of the village orphanage; it is just there, see the three-story building? And there was also a hospital half a kilometre away. There were one hundred girls at the orphanage, and I had my own family, my three children and my wife, too. We could not leave the orphanage for one week. All the buildings around were empty except for ours; the Indian army with their machine guns surrounded us. The helicopters were going round and round. Every morning I could see at least ten machine guns pointing at us. I told my children, "Kneel down and raise your hands; that's all we can do". I was scared and cried, "Captain, captain, captain!" What to do? They were going to shoot at children. So, I went to him and explained, "This is an orphanage; there are only children here". He asked, "Where are the other teachers?" "They have all fled to the churches and temples". He said, "Yes, I can understand your problem. Is there any LTTE around?" I said, "Yes, they came yesterday with guns; they were around 25; they were near the junction". "Where are they now?" he asked; "I don't know; because you came they have all gone in different directions". We had a very hard time during the IPKF time; people suffered because we were caught in between them and the LTTE. I told the captain, "People are suffering; for the last ten days everyone has been hiding without anything to eat. You should go and tell them that you won't harm them and that they can go home". He said, "Yes, I can do it". We went to the church; there were around four thousand people there. They were all kneeling down and pretending to be worshippers. I went and told the father, "Don't worry; they won't do any harm; you can tell the people to go home". So all morning I went from temple to temple, from church to church telling people to go back home. All houses were taken by the IPKF. Their helicopters came and brought them rice and daal, all their food from India. A normal day was lived under fear because of the cross firing. We had to obey their orders. It was like living in a prison. They also occupied this very same house. They did not do us any harm. They stayed here for over one year. Then in 1990, when their government asked them to go, they moved out. (6. Pandateruppu)



I was born in Jaffna, so I really wanted to live here forever

I don't think the idea of chasing the Muslims out of Jaffna came only from Prabhakaran. So many things had happened previously, in 1980-1981, when the Muslim communities in other areas faced harassment; some people put pork in the wells because they knew we couldn't eat it... Muslims had to go away. These past incidents show that it was not just Prabhakaran who did this, that there are many stories about Muslims discrimination. Before, the Tamil people did not hate us, they liked the Muslim community and we mingled with each other. The only thing is that the LTTE really wanted to chase us out; if Muslims were under the LTTE custody the LTTE believed that they could get something for the Tamil communities from Ashraff, who was a very well known Muslim politician from the Muslim Congress⁵. (2. Jaffna)

Everything had started a couple weeks earlier in a small town called Chavakachcherie. The LTTE said they had found a revolver in a Muslim shop and they immediately decided that Muslims were enemies, in the government side, so they expelled the Muslim community out; this was a very small, very poor community; maybe less than 200 families. So, the Muslims from Chavakachcherie came to Jaffna because they did not have any other place to go, and we heard the news. (8. Mullaitivu)

As far as I know Muslims and Tamils did not have any differences here in Mannar because they were really united; they would help each other a lot. But in October 1990 the Muslims were kicked out of the region because of the war; even at that time Tamils did not fight against the Muslims. Both communities had a good relationship everywhere in Sri Lanka, so Muslims did not understand why they were being chased out. There was nobody to explain the real reason. (10. Mannar)

⁵ Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) founded in 1981 as a cultural organization and transformed into a political party in 1986.

I was born in Jaffna. My parents were originally from Jaffna; and their parents too. My mother's father was very active in the social service; he was a rich man and helped the poor people. If you visit Jaffna's Osmania College you can see that the front hall was built by him and some others... I don't want to show off, but I want to explain you how our life in Jaffna was before 1990. My father also had a good job there. He ran an ice cream shop in Jaffna, which was very famous. At that time Jaffna was a good place for business. Before 1990 we were around 4000 Muslims families in Jaffna town; I have very good memories of that time; we played, we could go to the Kytes Island, to the beach, we ran our business.... Before 1990 the relationships with the Tamils were very good. We could go anywhere; we had Tamil friends; we visited their homes and they came to our festivals and special days, weddings and so on. We enjoyed this life until 1990. The Tamil people supported us, helped us, because they did not like seeing us in trouble. (8. Mullaitivu)

My main memory of the conflict is about the LTTE chasing us out. Other than that the war did not really affected us. Some members of our community were killed, but being expelled out from Jaffna was the most powerful thing that happened to us. It was exactly on October 30, 1990. I was 34 years old when that happened. I was married and we had three little babies. (2. Jaffna)

I was born in Jaffna. A huge displacement of the Muslim population happened in 1990. I was four years old. The LTTE wanted the Muslims out of Jaffna; they wanted us to leave all our properties. But we only knew Jaffna, not any other place. Thousands of Muslims had to leave. (15. Jaffna)

At that time 1% of the population in Jaffna was Muslim; we were very small in comparison, but even this small community had to face problems by them. The LTTE was asking for a Tamil State, they never thought about the Muslim community. Muslims have our own rules and regulations, like a constitution; wherever we go, our communities are together, we follow Islam, we can practice it anywhere, we don't need a special temple, we can pray wherever

we are. I have been very much in favour of the LTTE policy, and I have been very much supportive of them at their early stages and have worked with them; but I did not like what Prabhakaran did to us. Also, the LTTE forced the youth to join them. These are the two things I don't like about them. (2. Jaffna)

On October 30, 1990, if I want to say real things, I was in Colombo with my brother; we had gone to play a match; but my family, my mother and my sisters, were in Jaffna. I heard this same story from other people: in the morning suddenly the LTTE came; they surrounded our area and they announced "Go immediately to the grounds behind the Osmania College for a meeting". That was a big playground behind the school. After the meeting they told us we had to leave Jaffna. They did not give us any reason; they said, "Go and ask Ashraff⁶, he will give you full support". At that time he was in the government as a minister. This is the only thing they said. some asked, "What will happen if we don't go, if we stay here?" They said, "We are very sorry, but you will die. This is a strict order from the head of the LTTE, so we cannot do anything, you should follow it, if you don't we cannot assure your life". (8. Mullaitivu)

They told us to go to a specific area and that they would arrange our transport out of Jaffna. They gave us only two hours to pack. You can imagine how many things you can take in two hours. They took the keys of people's homes. They said, "Give us the keys; we will give them back to you when you return. When we change our mind we will call you to comeback, and we will give you your keys". They took the keys of every house. People started leaving; the LTTE set up many check posts along the way; they checked everything; if you wore jewellery they removed it and kept it; if you had money, they checked and they allowed only 300 rupees per family; at that time that was maybe three or four dollars. Before 1990 I had a textile business between Jaffna and Colombo. And suddenly we were all displaced to Puttalam with only the clothes I was wearing at that time and two spare sets of clothes. This is what happened. (8. Mullaitivu)

⁶ Founder and former leader of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress.

I had left for Aluthgama six months before the Muslims were forced to leave Mannar. Aluthgama is a place in Sri Lanka where Muslims live. I was a reporter at that time. I interviewed the people as they were fleeing. They were all concerned because they had left all their belonging behind and they had very little money with them, maybe a thousand rupees in cash only. Many people gave their jewellery to the Tamils to keep it safe, or they dig a well to hide it, because they thought they would come back after a while, which did not happen. But when they returned after many, many years, they got the jewellery back, and that helped them in settling back. (10. Mannar)

I was a member of the Jaffna soccer team, and we had gone to Colombo for a tournament; my brother was also playing, so the two of us were there when we heard that problems had started. This is where I heard about all this, about how all our people were being displaced. It is very hard to hear that, you know? We did not know how to communicate with our families. There were only two or three landlines available in our area. We travelled to Vavuniya⁷ and waited there for our families. We could not travel beyond Vavuniya, so we stopped there. So many of us, Muslims in Colombo, travelled to Vavuniya! We travelled in whatever we could find; maybe by bus, maybe in lorries, in private vehicles... (8. Mullaitivu)

My family did not leave in 1990. My father had friends that helped us staying here. We mingled with the Tamil society; we did not share our identity; we pretended we were Tamils, not Muslims. There were just a few of us, Muslims left in Jaffna. Tamils helped us a lot; we had a good relationship with them. Now some of them see us as terrorists; also, some Muslims resent the Tamils because they feel they chased them away from their homes. (15. Jaffna)

Nearly 35 Muslims were arrested by the LTTE for various reasons. These arrests did not happen all at once, at the same time, but little by little at different times. My sister's husband (our cousin) was among them. At that

⁷The city was controlled by the Government, not by the LTTE.

time my aunt asked them, “What will happen to our children, to those who have been arrested?” They replied, “We are doing an enquiry; after the enquiry if we find that they are not guilty we will release them; if we find they are guilty, so very sorry”. That was their answer, but they did not say what would happen to them if found guilty. I tried to find him several times; but some people told me, “They were actually looking for you, but when they could not find you they took your cousin”. I was doing big level business between Colombo and Jaffna... That is why I did not like to travel anymore. My cousin has never been seen again. After 25 years it is clear that they killed him. We have gone to the ICRC, a special mission from ICRC also came and I met with them and gave them a list with the names of those still missing; a few months later they wrote me back and said they, “We visited the LTTE and we checked their custody book and we have not found these names”. None of the 35 people have been found yet. (8. Mullaitivu)

One month later, in December 30, 1990 some of the key people from the Muslim community, including myself, were arrested; we were really against some of the things the LTTE did. Muslim people were wealthy and they wanted to get our money and our properties. We were kept in a prison for three years. In those three years we did not have any communication with our families. Life in prison was uncertain. 20 of us were captured, and I was with 12 of them. We never knew who would punish us; we lived in fear. We did not know what was going on and why were we there. There were continuous bomb blasts and planes dropping bombs, and we did not know if we would survive to every bomb blast. One day we were able to meet with an LTTE member; he said we would not be harmed, but that we had to be kept in prison for a while. He was the only person who talked to us, and that gave us some hope. I spent most of my time in prison learning about spirituality because I had the Holy Book with me. If I had put in the same cell with someone who spoke English I would have learnt English; if the prison would have been near Colombo I would have learnt Sinhala, but I did not have those opportunities; the one thing I had was spirituality. (2. Jaffna)



We had to study Hinduism in school. I actually got my best marks in Hinduism. I felt that even if I was a Muslim I had to study other religions, and that I should respect them. I studied Hinduism with 100% respect, but I still felt that I was a Muslim. We could not go to the Mosque to study Islam, but our parents tried to teach us about our religion. We did not go to the Mosque, but we performed the Islamic prayers at home. There were only two active Mosques in Jaffna, the rest had been destroyed. The LTTE set up a camp in the only Muslim school in Jaffna. During that time the future was a big question mark for us. We did not have any idea about what was going to happen. (15. Jaffna)

It took the Jaffna people at least two or three days to reach Vavuniya. Those in the villages along the road were not permitted to give Muslims water, any help. It was a very hard time. They had to cross the jungle and hide from the helicopters... it is hard to explain, I don't know... I was lucky because I did not suffer that experience, but my family, and so many families, went through all that. They did not know we were waiting for them in Vavuniya, so they decided to continue to Puttalam. Even the government set up checkpoints in Puttalam and did not allow people to travel to Colombo. They did not give us any support. Only after three days walking, people got some food. But the price of the food had gone so high. We suffered from the LTTE and from the government. Only rich Muslims helped the displaced Muslims. Those displaced, including my family, went to Puttalam because it is a town where Muslims were the majority. People settled little by little. (8. Mullaitivu)

When we heard that so many in our community had gone to Puttalam, we travelled there and tried to find our families. Finally we found them in a temporary camp. Puttalam people opened the schools and allowed us to settle there. So we stayed at the school for a while. The school had been opened as a refugee camp. We did not know what to do. We had nothing; not even a spare set of clothes to change in. People did not have time to prepare; they were given only two hours. When she heard the news my mother was very upset. She was paralysed. So only my sister reacted. They took one bag with old

clothes and another bag with documents, but both were of the same colour, so she could not identify which one was which. Suddenly she lost one of them; the one containing all our documents, our IDs, school certificates.... So we were left with only some old clothes. We never recovered anything of what we lost. (8. Mullaitivu)

Puttalam was filled with IDPs. The local Muslim community helped a lot; they set up IDP camps along the roads; they did a wonderful job from a humanitarian perspective, but also as a brotherhood. The government did not give support to the displaced people. After few weeks children needed to go to school but they did not have uniforms. And the Puttalam schools did not have the capacity to receive all of them, so, what they did was to divide the schooling time: after 2, up to 5, up to 6... those among us who were teachers volunteered to teach without any salary; there was no money; even at the beginning big INGOs, the UN, did not care. I don't know how to explain it to you, but the experience was very bad. It was a very hard time. People suffered a lot after the displacement. Until now we are called "IDPs" by the local people in Puttalam; my name is never said; I am just an IDP. There was no income; there were no ways of finding jobs or getting money. At the beginning local people supported us; they gave us food for the first weeks. After that, the tensions started. And it is normal, you know? The number of IDPs was bigger than the number of local people. Even if we had a similar culture, there were also differences; and we were using their hospitality; getting all the medicines that the government had allocated for the Puttalam people, because they did not increase them.... there were 50.000 Puttalam people studying at the schools and suddenly the number doubled when all the IDPs arrived; but there was not more furniture, no more teachers; the number of people per district that could enter the university was not increased either; as IDPs we had to use the allocation for Puttalam people; The same happened with the food and other resources; we grabbed their opportunities and their facilities; so, not immediately, but after one month, two months, one year, all this created some tension. They saw us getting benefits and they thought we

were getting big amounts; they did not know the real situation; they thought, “This people are receiving help from the government and living a luxurious life”. (8. Mullaitivu)

Only 23 people of those who were displaced in 1990 resettled in 1997 and I was one of them. I think I could have been a big entrepreneur and I would have had a big factory, but when I was displaced that dream was destroyed. After I resettled I had to start from zero again; now I have this house and this workshop, but I have aged, and I don’t think it will be possible to reach that level anymore. (2. Jaffna)

After we were released from jail in 1993 my friends told me that they had found me a job in Colombo, so I moved and I stayed for three years. I did not really like living in Colombo because I wanted to come back to Jaffna and live here. People in Colombo never knew what was going on in Jaffna; they did not realize the situation that had been created for Muslims. The life style of the Muslim community in Colombo was similar to ours, the Jaffna Muslims, but in terms of wealth and the opportunities for entertainment theirs was higher; for example, here in Jaffna, before the 1990s houses had screens that enclosed women; only after 1990 they knew where the shops the bus stops were, where the hospital was; until that period women were really isolated in the households, and did not really know what was going on outside, but that change after 1990. The livelihood of the Muslims living in the East (Batticaola, for example) was more negatively affected than the livelihood of us, Muslims from the North, because they were more involved in agriculture and farming, and these were destroyed by the LTTE; in terms of Jaffna they just chased away the Muslims out. (2. Jaffna)

For four years, we were chased away by the LTTE, so we had to live in another place until we could come back. I was born in Jaffna, so I really wanted to live here forever. (2. Jaffna)

We were part of a community, but that community scattered in 1990. Some of them have not returned. We don't live together anymore. We left our homes. We could not go to school for a long time. Now our community is behind in education. Before, we had a normal life. We had our own schools and land. We were free and together. This is what I miss the most. (15. Jaffna)

Life is gone

I started teaching in 1989. I was 49 at that time. I am 69 now. I was the Principal of three different schools. The main aim of the LTTE was to create a separate State run by Tamils. They were not concerned with the young people getting an education; they wanted them to join their forces and fight. They recruited the fishermen and the farmers. Without their parent knowledge some of my students joined the LTTE. I had a former classmate who was a high-ranking LTTE, so I went to the LTTE camp as the school principal and met him; I told him, "please don't do this. They are studying, you have to release them". He responded, "We are not forcing them; they are coming willingly, so we can not do what you ask us". I do not think that was true. I talked to one of my students; I asked him, "Why did you come and joined this force without your parent's knowledge?" I have never seen him again; maybe he is dead, or missing.... His future was lost. (27. Batticaola)

Usually parents did not encourage their student children to join the LTTE; also teachers at the school would not encourage us to join, so it never occurred to me. We have this tradition: when we bring up children we say, "You should become a doctor or an engineer", one of the 'high jobs'; so since I was good at math when I was a child everyone said I could be an engineer, and this is what I wanted to be too. My family wanted me to become an engineer, or a doctor, or a teacher... I felt that I was in a 'different category'. We had a hope, that the conflict would end soon and there would be no need for me to join the LTTE and that we would be free. (14. Jaffna)

When I returned in 1987, there was a conflict between the LTTE and the Indian army. We had lots of problems in our village. In 1990 the Indian army killed my uncle. I decided to join the movement after my uncle was killed. That was 1990. I was just 15 years old. Nobody forced me to do so. I joined the movement because I wanted to help to end the conflict within our time. I thought, "This problem should not continue to the next generation." But when I first attempted to join the movement, the LTTE did not take me because of two reasons: I was small and very young, and there were many girls in my family and I had to take care of them. So they refused to take me, but I was able to convince them to let me join the movement. I did not tell my family of my plans because I knew they would not allow me. Once I joined the LTTE I did not see them so I don't know if they were angry with me or not. (20. Vavuniya)

By 1989 the LTTE had managed to establish itself within the villages and they had offices inside. Because of that the army started to launch military operations, and entered inside our communities. So, by 1990 the war was very severe in the Northeast. Because of the fear, we all ran away to the forest; to save our lives we looked for shelter in the temples, churches, in the university; all these places became refugee camps. I was 15 years old. For more than one and a half years there was no schooling, no education, in our area. Everything stopped because of the displacement. (21. Vavuniya)

Before 1990, the problems between the LTTE and the armed forces started in Trinco, but by 1990 there was wide spread unrest, so we had to run away out of fear; we ran and were away for five years until 1995. We spent those five years in a church as refugees. Whenever there were attacks we went to the church, and then returned to our homes; the next time there was another attack we would go back to the church, and wait. That was our life then. But these were random incidents; not massive killings; some bomb blasts; then the army would come and shoot at the people around. When something happened, the army would find the young boys and shoot at them because they thought immediately that they were involved. That is why I sent my son to

some relatives in Kilinochchi. But one day there was fighting there and he was killed by a bomb. That was in the year 2000. He was 22 years old. He had finished studying. (26. Trincomalee)

Then in 1991 the Sri Lankan army came and we had to move to Kilinochchi. They did not want anyone here; they chased us, so we left. There were three or four orphanages in Kilinochchi, and 25 day-care centres all around. I started working with this NGO whose motto is "Helping children in need", as well as with the Anglican Church; I was supporting the orphanages, teaching in the mornings and organizing the children's homes. I risked my life and worked the best I could. At one point we had to run towards Mullaitivu; I took around 150 children with me, and ten church fathers and myself. We arrived to a plot of land belonging to the church at around 18 kilometres outside Mullaitivu. The World Food Programme distribution center was just in front of us. There were all these Europeans working there, and I was very friendly with them, but one-day three shells fell on their compound, so they came and told me that they had to go back to Vavuniya. Things got much worse, there was constant shelling, and so for two months we had to live inside a bunker whilst the army moved around us. The World Food Programme people had left a lot of rice and daal behind, so we brought them inside the bunker, and this is what we cooked and ate for all that time. I was the only one who could go outside the bunker to see what was going on around us. Then I went to see one of the commanders from the Sri Lanka army, he was Sinhalese, from Kandy, and explained him our situation; he asked, "Why don't you go to Mullaitivu? We will take all of you to an IDP camp". I said, "I know if I go to Mullaitivu I will risk my life and that of the children." They said, "We will guard you and take you safely". So the army brought six buses and we jumped into them to go to Vavuniya. I was asked to go in the first bus. The driver was from the army. He drove very fast. Suddenly we were attacked. This 60 years old lady who was sitting by my side fell on my lap; she had been shot; and also the girl next to me. They were dead. There was blood everywhere. Seventeen people were injured. When I saw all the blood I thought, "Life is gone". We were taken to a school for the

night. I told them, "There are five more buses coming, please ask them to stop somewhere else; this area is not safe". Later on the army commander called me and said, "You are lucky, all the buses have arrived safely, don't worry, tomorrow morning they will come". I went to the commander and said, "Sir, so many of us have lost their lives, or have been injured, please give us a camp, please give us some food, a wooden roof, a school building". He said, "There is a training college in Vavuniya with bathrooms, and lights; the six buses will be taken there". That is where we lived for the next two years. I don't know how we survived, but we survived. I called my NGO, and told them, "We are living in a camp", and they asked me, "What do you want?" "Please help us to get at least some tea for the morning; I need one load of tea and one load of sugar". They sent them immediately. The army commander said, "You are a lucky man; the people in the neighbouring camp don't even have that". So, I told the commander, "I want to go to these camps and bring them some tea and sugar". He said, "No, we will not allow you". I said, "What is this?" "You are working with an NGO, still the road is not clear; we will not let you go". You know, my wife had died in 1995; I had managed to send my children away, to other countries, so I was on my own; I thought I could be of service; I thought, "I will risk my life, but I will do something". (6. Pandateruppu)

We returned back to our village in Batticaola in 1991, after the IPKF left. The government provided my father two acres of land. My father was doing paddy cultivation. He also had his small shop where he sells goods. It was the only shopping place in the area, so he had a good business. My father enrolled us in school. He always believed education was very important. The school was 18 kilometres away from our village. We would go to school by bicycle. There were four of us and we only had one bicycle. We had to take turns using it. We would usually arrive home at around 6:30 in the evening. Because of that situation, my father decided to put us somewhere nearer the school, so I moved to live with an old lady whose house was in front of the school. She was living alone, and I stayed with her until I finished A level. (27. Batticaola)





In 1991 when my father told us we had to leave Jaffna I asked, “will there be bombs in Mannar too?” Father said, “It is okay because we are going to the Sri Lankan army controlled area”. But we were afraid because the Sri Lankan army might hurt us. Father said he had checked and there was no problem. We travelled from Jaffna to Mannar by bicycle. Father rode one carrying mother and the little children. I rode the other one with my sister. It took us around one week to complete the journey. We rode every day from the sunrise to the sunset. We slept by the side of the road, or in the jungle. We had to stop when my sister had an accident. We had to bring her to the hospital. I was 12 years old. When we arrived many people had left to India. There were very few people in Mannar. I thought, “Who will help us?” (11. Mannar)

It is not that we did have to start from zero; we started from minus zero. How can I explain it? It was so difficult to make money. The government provided 1260 rupees for a 5 members family. That was the maximum they would give. That was 40 rupees per day for five persons, eight rupees per person per day. At that time, plain tea was ten rupees. My father had to go to Singapore and Saudi to work as a private driver in order to make money and support us, so that we could rent a house, but the rent increased all the time because there were so many displaced people in Puttalam looking for houses. My father had been a successful businessman before. A couple of years later, in 1992 when I married, he was the one who helped us getting all the dresses etc. I did not want to get married, because my sister was suffering after her husband was kidnapped, but my father forced me; he said, “You are getting old; if you delay it you will not be able to look after your children, so you better marry”. (8. Mullaitivu)

I studied at the village school. I was interested in the human body, in nature, in diseases... science was my favourite subject. Because of the war, I did not have a clear idea about the future. Because of the war, I had to stop going to school in 1990. We only wanted to make sure we would be safe. But we did not know why the war was taking place. I used to live near the school. It had

become the shelter for hundreds of displaced people. My first memory of war is the bombs dropping on that school. (11. Mannar)

On August 20, 1992 we were displaced. I was 16 years old. At that time I had a girlfriend but we got separated. We left everything back in the village. My mother almost went to the extent of losing her mind because she practically lost everything. She is a person who likes saris and furniture, so when she lost everything she couldn't accept it. It was terrible; we didn't have anything. I was supposed to take my A level exam in December, but we got displaced in August. (1. Jaffna)

That was the time when the army entered into the refugee camps and arrested many young people and the disappearances started. Even today, many of these young people are in the list of those still missing. When we returned we saw how all the houses had been burnt down and demolished. We also saw some burnt bodies of the people who had not been able to flee the area. We saw skeletons and bones inside the open wells. I remember that I was afraid. We did not know what was going to happen. (21. Vavuniya)

In 1991 when I turned 16 I sat for the O level exam and after I passed I moved to the A (Advanced) level. Because of the on-going conflict, we had a very short time to prepare for the exam; only six months. The teachers made a special effort to help us preparing; those days' teachers were very committed to support students. Science was always, since childhood, my favourite subject. During my time as a student I only received praises three times, the three times for science! Those days were not like now; we did not have many facilities and people were not educated; they were simple villagers; but in spite of those limitations we discovered our talents... I did not know that I had a talent for sciences; I only found out in the school. (21. Vavuniya)

I have this memory of displacement: We were displaced in 1994. There were bombs everywhere; the military captured the Jaffna peninsula. First we stayed

at the home a friend of my father, and then we moved again to an IDP camp, and stayed there for six months. We thought we should have left in 1990, when everybody else did. Life was very difficult. Now I can live anywhere, but at that time I only knew Jaffna. I had to stop studying. (15. Jaffna)

In every family someone had died

In my area it was quite normal that after turning 18 years old, people would join the LTTE. It felt like a life-achievement and people really wanted to do it. When people joined the war, when they wanted to be soldiers, they did not have a particular uniform, they just went with a tractor, or a vehicle, or a motorbike, they did it like a celebration; going to fight in the war seemed like a celebration, like an achievement in their lives. They waved hands and seemed very happy. I don't think they realized what was going to be the result of them going to war. (14. Jaffna)

In every family, someone had died: parents, children... sometimes fishermen would be killed whilst fishing... lots of children were left without their parents... We would see these things happening and thought that something had to be done. At that time, the LTTE was not calling anyone, they never tried to force me into joining them. When I tried to join them, they said I was too young. That's why they sent me to school. The school was controlled by the LTTE. They taught normal subjects like English etc.... other than that, they also taught politics, intelligence work.... It was quite a big school. We were hundreds of students. The teachers of the Government schools would come to teach us without informing the government. The LTTE did not have much money to spend on education, to pay for teachers, so they negotiated with the government schools teachers to get their support for their schools. "Intelligence" was my favourite subject! It thrilled me. We learnt from some Israeli Mossad publications that had been translated into Tamil. I did not really liked "Tamil culture". (16. Mullaitivu)

It was during the time when we were displaced in the jungle that the relationship between the LTTE and us was really formed. When we were in the jungle we built temporary shelters in the paddy fields inside the forestland, which we cleared. Groups of families created “small villages” of around 150 people. The LTTE camps were very close to our settlements, and this is why the relationship was easily formed. Many people had relatives inside the LTTE, so they would come and go, visit us and then leave... At that time we had some cattle and my work was to take care of them and to milk them and sell the milk; we also made curd and other things. (21. Vavuniya)

We had to live with the LTTE teams. We would see them, talk to them... our engagement with them was natural. Unlike now, at that time we had no difficulties; we felt very safe with the LTTE. My father died a long time ago, and my sister lived in Colombo during the war. Only me and my mother lived together here. For a long time I protected my mother during the war; I wanted her to be safe; I took her inside the bunkers, and later on to Colombo. My father passed away shortly before I joined the LTTE. After that, my mother went to India and I stayed alone. Life was difficult. (16. Mullaitivu)

In 1990, we had to move. Our main worry was to ensure our children's education; also the LTTE was forcefully recruiting children. Earlier on it had been volunteers joining them, and that was not an issue, but when they started asking one or two children per family, that became an issue; those worries were there. But at that time, I accepted the fact that they were fighting for us, so, vice versa, we were suffering to help them. They suffered and we suffered, too. It would be very unethical if we would not talk about the negative consequences of this war and the LTTE just because they lost the last battle. (9. Mullaitivu)

We had to live in two acres of land shared with about 20 families. I believed only education would help us. One day I took around 20 young kinds like me to school; I told them, “We need to continue our studies”. More or less 30 minutes after we arrived, the school was bombarded. So many people died. Some of them were my relatives. My sister lost her right hand. This is my first memory of the war. I was only 14 years old. The LTTE used to come to the school to teach us how to protect ourselves if there were bomb attacks. “It normally takes ten minutes for the bombs to fall after you see them coming”. It was prayer time. We were praying when we saw them coming towards our village. We all dropped on the ground. My sister was at home about to leave. She was locking the door and when she turned back, the bomb was dropped. After the attack, I saw how she tried to get up using her right hand and suddenly realized that she did not have it anymore. We took her to the hospital near the area. There were some foreign doctors in that hospital. The LTTE doctors said they could fix her hand but the foreign doctors said it needed to be amputated. I can still remember how I stood full of blood and cleaned our place. That evening the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation aired news on television saying that they had killed all the sea tigers and their camp was totally destroyed. That made me wonder, because I am sure there were not any sea tigers camp within one-kilometre radius from our village, there were only civilians in the area. Why did the government lie and did not give accurate news to the world? Why did the government say the people affected by the bombing were Tigers? I had those questions in my mind. I still have those questions until now. (13. Jaffna)

In 1993, I received the A level certificate. I continued my education further. At that time I was developing a relationship with the LTTE; they used to organize lots of events, especially sports events, football matches... so we would participate representing our schools. We had lots of friends in the controlled area; we spoke to them, related to them, and this is how I forged my relationship with the LTTE. At the beginning I did not have an intention to join them, lot of people from my village, lots of my friends joined, but at the beginning I did not have that intention. They also did not encourage

me to join. Because we lived in the army-controlled area, none of my family members had any relationship with the LTTE; they kept their distance, they were afraid, but I was the only one who had a sort of relationship with them. I used to visit the LTTE controlled area and had chances to talk to them. Every time I went out for classes, for private tuition I would see the dead bodies of those killed by the army dumped in the paddy fields and hidden there. That was like a daily routine for us, something we would see every day. Those incidents created a sort of desire within me to find out why was this happening, why this struggle, why this conflict, why this crisis. So, this is how I began to reflect about the country and about our situation. So, with all these continuous reflections, and after writing the A level exam, even before getting the results, I joined the LTTE. For nearly 15 days I struggled to make that decision because I really loved my father and being the eldest son I knew that my family would be in trouble if I leave; I did not know how to tell my family. So I decided to write them a letter and I posted it and mailed it. (21. Vavuniya)

I was born and brought up completely under the LTTE regime. The system that I witnessed was a closed one, but it also was very disciplined. I feel that the situation under the LTTE was really good. We were poor, but our family lived together. We were free to move around and go wherever we wanted. (7. Mullaitivu)

I was nearly 18 when I joined the LTTE so I made my decision fully consciously. I was aware of the cause, of our people being discriminated whilst the Sinhala people got everything, all the facilities, education, all, whilst our people was deprived of everything; I was well aware of this situation. I was able to see the development that was taking place in the South, in the Sinhala areas; we were aware of all the things that were being given to them, the same things we were deprived of. At that juncture, I really felt that we needed this struggle; that we needed to fight for this. We studied why a non-violent struggle transforms into a violent conflict? Why are we forced to take up the arms? Why are we forced to come to this situation? We were given all these



lessons, we were educated by the LTTE political wing; they clearly showed us the reasons why we were in this situation; why we had decided to opt for violent struggle. (21. Vavuniya)

We were divided into small groups, around 15 to 20 members. When we lived together, we had joy and happiness. We shared our life and treated each other like brothers and sisters. We went to the battle with our group, and every time we were not sure if we would come back alive and see each other again. Some did not make it back and died in the battlefield, but we did not feel defeated because, when we joined the LTTE, we knew we might die. Losing your comrades is painful. But we had a purpose, and that made accepting that loss easier. We did not worry about death too much, because the possibility of dying was an open fact for us. I had one younger sister who was also an LTTE. She died as a martyr. (20. Vavuniya)

Soon after joining the LTTE I was sent for training. It was very difficult. I went through hardship because the training was really tough. Once we had completed the training, we had to take oath: we are giving ourselves to safeguard our people and our land. At the beginning they did not allow me to fight. I was assigned to the medic department, but I refused. I argued with them and asked to be reassigned to the fighting group. After finishing the training, I felt like I was always in the mood for fighting. At that time, I was the youngest in my group, but I always had the spirit to fight. (20. Vavuniya)

I was 16 when I started the military training. It was a very strict training; everything was timed: time to sleep, to get up, to have lunch, to get up again by midnight... that was very difficult. There was this rotation schedule, which made sleeping for a continuous time impossible; each of us could sleep for only one hour, then we had to stand guard; we were always exhausted. The basic military training lasted for one year. We learnt to use and fix different types of weapons with our eyes closed; we also learnt to drive military vehicles; we also learnt military strategy etc. The basic military training was a very difficult training, but we made it through. (16. Mullaitivu)

But joining the battlefield was not as I had imagined. I thought it was simple, but I found the first two battles too difficult and scary. After a while, it became normal to me. From that time on, I would volunteer to join the combat. I no longer felt the fear once the battle had started. I kept fighting and focused about achieving the target and nothing else. When I was in the battlefield, I always thought about the suffering of the people; I thought about how the people were dying because of the shelling and bombings of the army. This thought was always with me. When I killed the enemy, I thought about the suffering of the people. (20. Vavuniya)

The way I imagined how joining the LTTE would be turned out to be totally different from what I later experienced when I became a member. Everything was different; I got many opportunities to learn about different struggles

that had taken place in different countries, and about how different peoples managed to achieve their liberation and their freedom, how they worked it out; we learnt about world politics, about different personalities who fought for the freedom of the people. We studied the US-Vietnam war; we learnt from the Vietnamese mental strength and commitment, and we compared their struggle to ours; this way our morale was built up. At the same time we learnt about the background of our struggle; which countries were behind, supporting us; which were their real motives, especially India. We got the opportunity to attend different lectures, which explained us the political situation of the world, the pros and cons of our struggle etc. I was born in 1975 and after joining the LTTE I was able to materialise my experiences. I received much more than I had imagined. (21. Vavuniya)

The military started a mission: they moved from Jaffna to Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi, which were under the LTTE control. That was in 1994. The LTTE wanted to stop that mission, to block them so we set up a counter mission. We engaged in military fight. From the government side, one hundred soldiers died and six LTTEs got injured; that was a big victory for the LTTE; we blew up that mission. (16. Mullaitivu)

After I finished the military training, the LTTE leader came to talk to us and gave us permission to join the field missions. My main responsibility was providing security for people living at the LTTE camps. These people trusted us. Life was very difficult. At that time killings were taking place at every village every day. People felt very unsafe, but when they came to live at the LTTE camps they felt safe. Every family that had joined the LTTE camps learnt how to build bunkers, learnt some basic security strategies, and they felt safer; they trusted us. So, I decided I would give my life for them; I would sacrifice for this people. (16. Mullaitivu)

In 1993 I got injured. I was trying to save one of the cadres during an encounter. I managed to save him, but he died in the next fight. After getting injured I was taken to Jaffna hospital. At that time, Jaffna was still under

the control of the LTTE. I stayed in the hospital for three months. Losing my mobility was very frustrating. They promised to take me to India and make me walk again, but when I saw that there were many cadres like me, I accepted my situation. The LTTE took care of us. We were given vehicles, food, lodging and staff to assist us. The LTTE took care of us till the last moment. (20. Vavuniya)

This is how I learnt about the war. I used to get news from my uncle who was in the LTTE when he came for his fourteen days vacation periods. I used to listen to his stories, his experiences... He always said: "I am doing this because I like doing this". I used to listen to my uncle's stories; he had been fighting for a long time. He was a member of the Sea Tigers; they used to attack the Sri Lanka army from their boats. There were only five or six people on each boat: Sailors, medics, helpers.... There were hundreds of Sri Lanka army members against them, but there were more casualties between the army members than among the Tigers. One time he got hit on his leg but the others in the boat got severely wounded, so my uncle rowed the boat back to the coast and people asked him, "How come you were not more seriously wounded but the others were?" He said, "If I would not have been there these, four people could not have been brought here; I was there protecting myself to bring them back home." (14. Jaffna)

My eldest son had received training from the Tamil National Army, a paramilitary group formed by Tamil youth, which had been created by the IPKF. During the 90s a war had started between the LTTE and the Indian army. Because the LTTE got to know that my son had been trained by the Indian army, they thought that they would be able to get information about the IPKF through him, so they threatened us, "If you do not bring your son back to Jaffna we will shoot you". I did not have any other option but to bring him back; on February 23, 1990 I handed him over to the LTTE; I told them, "Although I don't fully trust you, I trust you will send my son back after the investigation". They responded, "The investigation will last three days". Until now, I don't know where is my son. We tried to find our son, but we could

not find him; so many people had been displaced. The roads were blocked; I never said that my son had been disappeared by the LTTE, I never filed a case against the LTTE, because it would create a bad name for them, and I did not want, in my capacity, as a respected man, to tarnish their image by even complaining, or telling anyone that my son had been abducted by the LTTE. Even within us we have the passion for freedom fighting; saying something bad about them was not good for that spirit. I managed to send my other two sons to France; they are OK now. (3. Achchuveli)

At that time we could not imagine the next day

I went to the same university as my parents, and in 1994, when I was 20 years old, I started working in a government bank. From 1990 to 1996, we were controlled by the LTTE. Most of my friends died. Mother did not want us to have any contact with LTTE. She was a principal so she could control us. We never drank soda, because the government had banned it. We had to queue for everything; everything was restricted. As children we had so many responsibilities. I think that is the reason why now, as adults, we appreciate rights; young people now often want rights but without responsibilities. During the war we never had any exposure to other communities. I only spoke Tamil; language has always been a barrier for us. (4. Jaffna)

We lived a normal life, even if we were displaced. We used to celebrate birthdays and weddings, but I did not normally go to those celebrations, because I did not have any proper clothes to wear; I had to borrow them from friends.... (13. Jaffna)

1995 - I always remember that year because that was when I felt the most helpless. Because of the displacement, we were in a situation of extreme poverty. I remember how we only had one bicycle. One day I was riding and my brother was sitting at the back; we were crossing a bridge; my brother was probably 14 years old, but he was quite small. At one point he asked me

for some water; it was raining and I had an umbrella, so I turned it down, collected some water, and gave it him. We could not afford other water. That was a terrible moment for me. I cannot really forget it. (1. Jaffna)

In 1995 I began teaching nursery in our village. I taught under a tree, so my father built a shade for our class. During those days, one member of the EPDP⁸ wanted to marry my elder sister. He asked my father's permission but my father did not allow it. My father sent my two elder sisters back to Galle fearing that the EPDP will abduct them. I was left in the village. During the conflict, it was very difficult to move goods. We could not take more than two kilos of sugar. Wax and matches were among the banned items. The army was very strict, and they controlled the movements of all goods and prevented the banned items from being transported to Batticaola. Life was miserable. My father was assaulted several times by army supporters. They were Tamils working for army. (27. Batticaola)

In 1995 the army brought us back and put us in a camp we were in the camp for all those years. My home was destroyed. When we returned there was no house. We built a small hut with the plastic sheets someone gave us. That was our life until 2011. (26. Trincomalee)

Between 1990 and 1995, life at the refugee camps in India was very difficult, because they were crowded, there was a lot of trauma, there was a lot of uncertainty. Getting work was difficult, and the Indian government was hostile in many places. Those days you had "tar" sheet sheds; they were normally made of cardboard with tar on it; they were 10x10 and this is where people used to live. But after a few years the tar becomes very soft and it starts leaking; it gets boiling hot during the daytime, so you cannot be inside it, and during the night when it's cool it becomes very cold. Other refugees stayed in what they called 'regulated market committee' or 'common buildings', where life was also very difficult. (18. Colombo)

⁸ Eelam People's Democratic Party.





In 1996 we were displaced for the first time. I was 16 at that time. We could only take some clothes with us. We did not know if we would survive, if we would ever come back home again. We did not know where we were going. But there were so many people with us, and that gave me comfort. We thought, "If we are together, at least we will die together". Some people offered their houses and land to the displaced families. My husband was in the same compound where we resettled. That is how we met. He had been displaced too. In 1997 I got married. I fell in love with him, and at the beginning my family did not accept him, but later they realised he was a good person. After our marriage, my husband and I lived in the same compound where my family lived. He was a mechanic. Everyday he would go out to work whilst I tended the house. I was happy being all day at home waiting for him. (5. Kilinochchi)

My first son was born in 1994. I started working as a tuktuk driver, and little by little I started making some money. It was very hard. At that time tuktuks were very new to Puttalam and people were afraid to use them. Only three wheels... people thought they were not safe. But we could not compete with the local people in trying to find jobs. A couple of months later I sold the tuktuk. A very big prawn farm run by some rich people from southern part of Colombo had started in the area, close to the sea. So I got a job there. On February 16, 1996 I sold everything and left to Saudi Arabia. I stayed there for over four years. I worked for a very big company in charge of maintaining the Saudi king palaces. (8. Mullaitivu)

In April 1996 I came back to Jaffna and joined the seminary. That was again a terrible moment. My parents were still displaced and our village was in the high security zone. We had to go through a checkpoint each time we wanted to visit our home. The soldiers stopped us, they would detain me, always suspecting I was LTTE, and my parents would start crying asking the soldiers to release me. This happened every time. I still remember it. The seminary was in a site controlled by the army. The officials usually came and played basketball with us. I still remember how we planned different ways

of hitting the officers during the match. That is how we resisted oppression. (1. Jaffna)

After 1996 things at the refugee camps in India improved. There was a change in the government and the mood became different. In terms of spirit, refugees felt more accepted, and things started to change from that point on. Refugees could go out of the camps and work anywhere, so their income increased, and they started to be reasonably well off. Sure, you were still living in a sort of Sri Lankan ghetto, in a small room with certain limitations, but depending on your income, you could improve your facilities within those limits. So, we had camps now where, for example, all the facilities extended to the poorest in India were extended to the Sri Lankan refugees as well. (18. Colombo)

Then, in 1997 I was able to return to Jaffna; I had always hoped to return. I always thought we could live here again; I strongly believed that I could come back here and live in Jaffna forever. But my family and most of my friends did not think this could happen, they did not think they could resettle here and start their lives again. When I arrived in Jaffna in 1997, after so many years away, so many buildings had been destroyed, but people's mentality had not changed that much; people were friendly and welcomed us. Why did I feel so welcomed? When we arrived we were put into the Jaffna bus station, which was surrounded by a fence, and there were many soldiers around us. Outside the fence there were many Tamil people giving us drinks and food because they knew we were tired. At that time I felt that they still loved us. I also felt that not all the LTTE was against us. (2. Jaffna)

Earlier, Muslims were in the leading roles not just in the tailoring industry, but also in jewellery, textile and other professions. Now I have the trust that I have rebuilt some of the parts that were taken over by others. When I returned back to Jaffna, my main goal was to re-start the life I had had before 1990. I wanted to revitalize my economy through my entrepreneurship. A handful of us had returned, and we really had the confidence that we could grow our businesses here. Even the Vice Chancellor of the University

of Jaffna said, “If you come back, you will be the best tailor in town.” I believed my old customers would come back once I resettled, and that is what happened. They were very welcoming and supportive. Now I am one of the best tailors in Jaffna. However, I have not reached the economic point I had before 1990. I can sustain my family, but I am still trying to grow my business; I am still struggling, and this is something I had never imagined would happen. (2. Jaffna)

After I returned, I joined another NGO in Vavuniya. Compared to Saudi, the salary here was very small, but I did not mind because I was with my family. My father also passed away at that time, so I had to take care of them. When I returned back I saw so many changes; even within my own family; our needs had increased. Everyone had mobile phones. I had built a small house during my time in Saudi; I did not get any help from the government. Not just me; so many displaced people did not get any support, only those with some political affiliation.... I built my house by myself after four and a half years in Saudi Arabia. (8. Mullaitivu)

I talked to the Jesuits and finally moved to Kandy. That was the first time I took the train and left Jaffna since I was born. And I was arrested a few times; I really felt the discrimination. I always had to carry the police report with me because it was a requirement for Tamil people moving from one place to another. The police report stated that I was “the other among them”. And all these created animosity. I remember how I would immediately move my hand away if a Sinhala happened to touch it because I was disgusted. But I had to face a reality. I couldn’t express my feelings, what I was going through, to anyone because I thought it would be a bit traumatic for other priests, who were mostly Sinhalese, to know. I remained friends with some Sinhalese because we never opened up the topic of ethnicity. (1. Jaffna)

During the war I had to travel 25 kilometres from Batticaola, under the army control, to the village where my school was, under the LTTE control. Every day I went on my bicycle because you could not take a motorbike. I had to

pedal 25 kilometres to go, and 25 kilometres to comeback; so 50 kilometres every day. I had to go through the army checkpoint every day, and every time the army asked me, “Did you see any LTTE? Are they wearing uniforms or not?” If they were wearing their uniforms, the army knew they were planning an attack. There were bombs exploding often in Batticaola. We could not carry any meals with us; the army did not allow taking packed meals because they said I was going to take them to the LTTE. So, I had to eat whatever was available. Sometimes I could not come back, so I had to stay at the village. Once there was a motorbike-bomb near the school. We ran away; we thought the LTTE was coming. The LTTE camps were four kilometres away. My parents would worry because they did not know what had happened to me. (28. Batticaola)

I lived in the LTTE controlled area from my birth till the war of weapons came to a halt. We never had electricity in Akkarayan, nor did we have certain essential items such as batteries, fuel, bicycle spare parts, school stationery, medical supplies etc. We studied with candlelight or kerosene oil lamps. In 1998, the LTTE’s education wing brought two computers and displayed it in the common hall. We weren’t allowed to touch them. The computers were taken away the next day. It was only when I went to University in Jaffna in 2002 that I watched TV for the first time, saw mobile phones and used a computer. (17. Colombo)

The LTTE was recruiting people to fight the army. In 1997 one of my sisters joined them. They brought her to Jaffna. She was small but she also had combat training. She fought with the LTTE. For eight years we did not know her whereabouts. My brother was also recruited. He went to Jaffna and met my sister. But my father went to Jaffna and asked the LTTE to release my brother. It was enough, he said, that they had my sister. The LTTE sent my brother back home. My father sent my brother to Colombo and put him in one of the jewellery shops to work. He eventually joined the movement later. One of my father’s friends joined the LTTE. He was in Jaffna. He met my sister at the LTTE camp. With his help, my sister was able to send us a

letter. After receiving it, my brother-in-law went to Jaffna and met her at the LTTE camp. She wanted to come back in Batticaola. She came to visit us, but the LTTE in Batticaola arrested her because they thought she was a spy. They thought she had run away from the movement. She was jailed but was released after the officials in Jaffna explained to the LTTE cadres in Batticaola that she had come to visit her family. (27. Batticaola)

Being away was positive because I was able to look at things from a “bird’s eye point of view”. Those three years in India gave me lots of time for retrospection. I could look back at how we were struggling. I could reflect quite a lot about the LTTE and about other armed groups, and about how they were killing each other. I would not really go to the extent of justifying, but truth remains truth: they committed crimes. I always supported the LTTE, not for the means that they chose, but because they stood for the cause until the last fight. We all make mistakes, and it is terrible when we suffer from those mistakes. But I would not really go to the extent of betraying the cause. We all suffered. I remember how my father was threatened by the LTTE when they started collecting gold before 1992. Some small people in the lower ranks came to my father and said, “Either you release one of your boys, or you live under the bunker.” So he had to collect some of my mother’s gold and gave it to the cadres. But despite that experience I would never betray the cause. Those are little sacrifices we had to do. But other people sacrificed beyond their capacity: they lost their lives. I agree with the cause but I don’t justify the means; I couldn’t justify the killings that they did in the name of liberation, but I remain loyal to that cause. (1. Jaffna)

After joining the LTTE, I was part of the intelligence group. Because of that, for long periods of time I was not in the jungle but in the villages, in the urban areas. This lasted for four years, until 1998 when, for different reasons, I was moved inside the jungle again. After that, I joined the fighting group. When we were in the jungle, we did not have much contact with the outside world. At that time we did not have phone facilities, so I could not be in contact with my family. We were fully immersed in ourselves; we had to do everything

ourselves; we had to take care of ourselves, protect ourselves. We had all the facilities: a place to study, a place to train... everything was departmentalised; we were given a chance to do certain studies and we did not have any other work; we were fully immersed in our studies. At the same time, if we had to go to the battlefield, we went. And then, we would come back and continue our studies. This programme was only for those who would take up the leadership. There was not a culture of asking, "What do you want to study?" That was a decision taken by those leading us, commanding us; through their observations they would find out which were each persons' capacities and on that basis, they would direct us: "You will go for medicine, you for political science, for intelligence, for military..." In my case, they directed me towards warfare and military training. So I got this special training; after that I was assigned to the special bodyguards unit and I was given the opportunity to become the bodyguard of big commanding officers. We had to do everything, from cooking to driving. (21. Vavuniya)

During the wartime I was in Kayts; at that time we could not imagine the next day; there was no ambition; only survival. I was tasked to look out for our family and I tried to fulfil my duties. We tried to save ourselves from conflict. The LTTE realized I was not harmful to them; I would tell them, "If you really love me as a brother, you won't shoot me". (4. Jaffna)

Looking at it now I can see how working on the refugees' education programme was, actually, one of the most fulfilling pieces of work I have done in my entire life. When I started working on education we had maybe 20 – 25 Sri Lankan kids in universities, of course that was a period when admissions were very difficult, but by 1998 the program had actually become the main show piece of the organization because socio-politically, culturally the fact that refugees could be re-educating themselves was a very important symbol. In 1994 people would say, "Why do you want to go to school? Why don't you just go to work?" but then people got interested, and from that time until 1998, when we had refugee kids from the camps who were able to get into medical universities, it was a reasonable transformation, and from

that point of time we had like 300 kids every year going to university. (18. Colombo)

I took the risk because I studied with the Jesuit fathers and I learnt that everybody should get an education. So, when one of my friends told me that the school at the LTTE controlled area had closed because of lack of teachers I said, “OK, I will go there and teach the children”. I had five classes; I was the only teacher. Later on some of those students entered the university and became engineers and doctors at hospitals. The school still exists today; there are 150 students and seven teachers. It was a small village; people were fishermen; they were all Hindus, and I think their spiritual dedication made them strong. Even if I am a Christian when I arrived I changed the name of the school to a Hindu God. (28. Batticaola)

After Kandy I was transferred to Chunalipidya for some time. That was probably when I felt the most free. The Singhalese priests welcomed us; they said, “Now you have joined the Jesuits, you either sink or swim”. I ended up moving to the plantation sector and that was a shock for me. We were talking about our domination, but the people in that area were going through a much worse oppression. Their working conditions were appalling; they had to plant tealeaves and got bitten by leeches. Their living conditions were terrible. I started working with them, teaching them, and I think I was quite successful. I really loved those people; they had been rejected by the Jaffna people because they were regarded as second-class citizens, but in order to gain their trust, I would go and sit and eat with them. I always remembered my father telling me about how he fought against the caste system a long time ago; those are the stories we listened to from our parents, and they had an impact on me. (1. Jaffna)

Why did you run?

In the year 2000 I felt there was some kind of urge to come back. At that point my parents were not very keen for me to return, they felt it was not safe, but I felt there was no future in India and, I guess, I probably wanted to continue working with my own community. Once back in Colombo, I was probably very, very, scared to get picked up by the police, because I did not have an identity card, which in those days, was very important. I worked for a national organization, which I think was a good thing because it was a mainly Buddhist Sinhala organization working in the north and east, and so, for one thing, I had to reconnect with the Sinhala side. And that was very useful. I do not think I ever had any hatred as such, but that work really helped to get to know ordinary Sinhala people from all over, because I had been away for so long. Because probably my previous experience could have, to some extent, shaped my ideas for the future, I think it was a positive experience, with all the challenges of Sri Lanka in a microcosm in that organization. Reconnecting with the Sinhala people was easy; everyone is the same. Everyone has their likes and dislikes; they were very nice as individuals. When it comes to ethnic relations, well, the war was going on, and that played a role.. I remember that a colleague from Jaffna and I joined that organization at the same time, so for some time colleagues were very suspicious of us, but then they got to know me, and I think at a human level you develop relationships and understanding with other people, and politically, of course, they may have different views, but as individuals, I think I was able to connect. I still have friends from that time. The challenges to connect with each other were not necessarily only about ethnicity. There were class lines, there were education lines. There are many different ways in which a society gets divided. And it was interesting to observe all of them in that microcosmos. (18. Colombo)

I met my husband in the year 2000. We met at the church. My family arranged our marriage. I was 22 years old. Most of the time I had to stay at home; women and children could not go outside; there were sudden gunshots, and

the army was checking people and detaining them. After our marriage, we moved to Vavuniya. Since my husband travelled a lot and I was alone most of the time, I decided to move back to Mannar. My husband was a pastor; he worked at the church; he visited homes spreading the message of Jesus. He used to go to Kilinochchi to meet with his relatives. Kilinochchi was under the control of the LTTE, but he had a pass. (11. Mannar)

In Kilinochchi we had freedom; the police were Tamil and we could talk to them freely because they could understand our language; we could communicate with them. Most people did farming; everyone had enough money to run their daily life. Economy was OK. There was a shortage of grocery items, such as flour and sugar, even batteries, because it was allowed to bring only a limited number of these items into Jaffna, into the Northern region. Sometimes there would be some bombs and people would die, and we had to hide somewhere. We were afraid of the sound of insects because they sounded like the planes coming to bomb us. When I was young I did not know the reason why people died, but I felt sad about it. (14. Jaffna)

In 2002, when we finally returned, our old house had been demolished, and the military had occupied the land. We were in shock; we did not have any hope because we did not know how could we rebuild it. We did not have anything to rebuild it with. We built a shack in our land, and this is how we lived for one year. At that time our two daughters were 18 and four months old respectively. There was no work. My husband tried to earn any little money he could. The village was under the LTTE control. At that time we felt there was a sense of community; a sense of security; I had peace of mind. As a collective struggle we were expected to contribute, so my husband sometimes supported them by doing some mechanic work. (5. Kilinochchi)

At that time I was part of a unit working in different districts in the north and the east; we were mainly doing relief and rehabilitation work and I had to travel regularly. My first trip was in the year 2000, and I went to Batticaola,

the eastern part of Ampara, and then back to Trincomalee, Vavuniya and Mannar. That trip is still very vivid in my mind, because there was so much destruction and fear. I remember how, at the first check point, my knees were actually rattling along with my teeth in fear. But after almost maybe twenty checkpoints, when I returned to Colombo I had lost that fear of the police, of checkpoints, probably because nothing happened. (18. Colombo)

When the ceasefire of 2002 was announced, we did not believe it. We got our news from newspapers and radios run by the LTTE and we were aware that we were told only what they wanted us to hear. They did not want the people in the Vanni to know everything. I moved to Jaffna to go to University. On my way to Jaffna I saw countless number of dead trees, especially palm trees. I realized that this was the impact of war: the trees were killed due to shelling and bombing; they were in the front lines. (17. Colombo)

I was in the jungle until the 2002 peace agreement. Once the agreement was reached many LTTE political leaders were sent to the army-controlled area to take up political activities. I was put in that list and was asked to take an administrative position in the political wing based in the East, in Batticaola; I was not interested in that activity, I was much more interested in the military field, but I accepted it. I was involved in administrative work, in charge of one of the offices. (21. Vavuniya)

The impact of the 2003 ceasefire agreement was huge. In 2002 there was an enormous amount of war, and when the ceasefire happened there was a massive feeling of longing for some kind of peace and normalization, mostly amongst the people in the north and the east, because they had been through this again and again for so long... but also in the rest of the country, there was a lot of positive feeling, a lot of hope. (18. Colombo)

Due to the ceasefire, there were no gunshots or aerial bombing. The situation in the North was peaceful. I was studying Archaeology at the University of Jaffna and was very interested in History. When I was a child, my mother





always connected everything to historical events and personalities. She told us many stories and compared them to ancient and religious characters. I was a voracious reader. I read a lot of books - novels, short stories and non-fiction. There were no big buildings in Kilinochchi town before 2002 because it had been a battlefield since 1989. When I arrived in Jaffna and saw how developed it was, I felt embarrassed. We did not have such things back home. It was also the first time I saw the Military, before that I had only seen them in theatre plays. I hated them because there were lots of funerals because of them. At that time I did not know a single word of Sinhala and they hardly spoke Tamil, so the majority of our communication was through sign language. (17. Colombo)

In 2003, after the peace agreement was signed we moved to Nigambo and settled there with our relatives. We reconnected with our community. We were so happy to meet our old neighbours again. We never thought that would happen. It took us some time to re-adjust to the Muslim community because we had been away, living among Tamils, for such a long time. We rented a house. My mother and sisters were doing garment work. My father stayed in Jaffna, but he would visit often. He had a shop here in Jaffna and he did not want to abandon it. I studied A level. I finished high school and took up commerce and got national degree in accounting. (15. Jaffna)

In 2003 I moved to work in Batticaola and Ampara with another organization. That was a very happy time. My vision revolved around what I would call now 'participative community development', that is, engaging communities in actually being part of their own development, so that they gain ownership and self-drive and, actually, see a purpose in terms of social transformation, change, development. The tsunami came in between, so it became a huge rehabilitation program. You were always able to make lots of relationships in the areas where you worked, and then the tsunami opened the doors even further; we had reasonable good functional relationships with the SDF⁹ and

⁹ Sri Lankan Armed Forces.

with the LTTE. We happened to be one of the few organizations working in Ampara at the time of the tsunami, and we were among the first respondents when the tsunami happened, so, we had some space within the community, with all these people, and some kind of respect that allowed us to work reasonably well. And then, the war started again in the east and everything became very difficult. (18. Colombo)

In 2003, I had to make a critical decision: becoming a government official or remain working in the state bank. My mother wanted me to be in the government. I asked my father and he said, "If you are ready, take the job in the government, complete it for nine years and then, if by that time you are not happy, leave." I have been already 13 years in government service. (4. Jaffna)

The ceasefire agreement did not last long and the LTTE took over the control of my village. They built a bunker inside my temple, exactly between the Pagoda and The Bodhi tree. LTTE members came and stayed in the temple, slept and eat at the temple. So I could not do anything, and I felt so helpless. If I conducted a Bodhi Puja to bless the Sri Lankan army, the LTTE just shot to the sky to disturb and distract me. I thought the best alternative was to invite as many young people to the temple as possible, so I started a youth foundation and we organized different cultural events. The LTTE calmed down a little bit. I thought it was better to talk to the LTTE; even if I was sure that they could kill me anytime, I still wanted to find a way to deal with them and establish a good relationship. So, finally I planned to meet up with the LTTE leader, but he said he would come with 700 LTTE members... I told them the temple did not have the capacity to host 700 people. After several messages back and forth he agreed to have a meeting with me without the 700 soldiers. We decided the date, and he came in the morning. Before he came one guy entered in my room, checked it, and ran away. I was so surprised at his reaction. Later I asked him, "Why did you run?" He said, "I was wearing a suicide belt, but when I noticed that the place was safe I ran back to remove it". I was a bit hesitant to speak in Tamil,

but I felt that I needed to build a good relationships with them, so one day I asked them to help the community and the temple. One day I requested them to come and clean the temple water well. We needed a long rope, so I said in Tamil, "Please bring me a rope". But the Tamil word for the rope is so similar to the word they use for "pole", so I said pole instead of rope. But when I said, "pole" it sounded as if I wanted to attack them. So I stop talking in Tamil. One day I was at the garden because it was so hot inside the temple. There was a new monk in the temple and he saw four LTTE members sitting on the trunk of the Bodhi tree. So, the monk asked them to get down and respect the Bodhi tree. But, the young guys got angry and started to argue with the monk. He got scared and ran towards me. I tried to talk with them in my poor Tamil. I asked them what was going on. They said, "This monk insulted us". I listened to everyone and asked, "If someone insulted your religion, what would you do?" They said they would punish that person. So I said, "Right, then I have to punish you because you have already insulted my religion sitting on our Bodhi tree". So they kneeled down apologized. I said, "You don't need to apologize". (29. Batticaola)

Hearing the news was so heavy for me

In 2004 the rift between the North and the East, between Prabhakaran and Karuna, took place. This incident affected me deeply. When Karuna left the Movement I was in the East, taking care of his security. I remember that he called us and held a meeting where he informed us of the situation and I remember how nobody expected it... Hearing the news was so heavy for me. I returned back to the office with a lot of sadness. No one thought this was going to happen; nobody expected it. We were like one family fighting for the same cause; the elder brothers were fighting in the Eastern side, and the younger brothers in the Northern side, whilst the sisters were fighting in another place... We never thought that this division would happen, and we found very difficult to accept it; it was very hard. It created an atmosphere of fear in which we could not share our feelings with each other because

we did not know who stood with which faction. We were scared to speak out. We had been fighting, combating, against the Sinhala army but with the division within the LTTE, suddenly that same army was guarding us. They were guarding the Batticaola office, they were standing at our door. (21. Vavuniya)

According to my task, I had to stay with Karuna in the East, but when the split happened many of the leaders left and moved to Vanni, to the headquarters. Many of these leaders knew me, so after they left I got a call from Vanni asking me to report there. At the same time Karuna called me and gave me a certain responsibility to work against the Vanni group, the Prabhakaran group. I was in a horrible situation. What to do? At that moment Karuna was still in the jungle, he had not moved yet to the area controlled by the army, so without telling anybody, without anyone knowing, I travelled to Vanni. After arriving in Vanni I was given orders, instructions, and with them I came back to Batticaola. Karuna trusted me; he gave me lots of responsibilities, but what was in me, my motivation was the original reason why I had joined the LTTE in 1984. That was in me, so, I did not feel that I was betraying Karuna, that I was doing something against him, because what was important to me was the common good, the common struggle of our people, not Karuna. According to my conscience I was still in accordance with the reason why I had joined the LTTE. One and a half months later the LTTE was able to retake control of the area and Batticaola was put under the control of the LTTE commanders from Vanni. We had a security problem with the Karuna faction. There were lots of attacks; unknown persons would throw grenades, or shoot... Four times I saw these kinds of attacks. Most probably those with the Karuna fraction were behind. (21. Vavuniya)

The tsunami was interesting in that it brought a lot of hope for peace, but I think probably there were different kinds of geopolitical things happening at that time. The LTTE's decision not to join the mainstream in 2002-2003 had a huge impact. Had they done so, yes Prabhakaran would have probably been personally in trouble, but it would have been very difficult for the war to end

like it did, because at that time there was a sort of openness and acceptance, and they could have taken advantage of that. (18. Colombo)

I returned to Vanni and I was doing my studies at the Vanni College but when the tsunami happened in 2004 all of us were asked to come back to Batticaola. So, I returned. At the same time, none of the two parties were being faithful to the peace agreement; lots of incidents were happening. Batticaola was the only office functioning in the Northeast provinces. The fight started in Batticaola and again, the war resumed. The situation totally changed after the collapse of the peace agreement. It was a completely different type of warfare; we had never experienced it before. Life became much more difficult. The connection between the Headquarters in Vanni and Batticaola broke when the Sri Lankan army captured some of the areas between the two. Reaching Vanni became very difficult. But the Headquarters asked to move all the troops from Batticaola to Vanni. So the operation to move 3000 cadres, including myself, began. But we were not able to go by land, only by sea. To divert the attention from the Sinhala navy, the LTTE started fighting from the north to Trincomalee, the opposite side we were moving from. All the Sinhala army troops concentrated in that area, whilst we moved in our boats. We only reached Vanni after many days of heavy fighting. We did not have enough food, drinking water, weapon support and those things. Some days we only ate watered rice one meal per day. But we managed. Transporting this big amount of LTTE cadres is the second historical achievement of the Sea Tigers; we compared this success to the WWII when the Germans transferred a big amount of troops to the Normandy harbour. (21. Vavuniya)

In January 2004 I got a job as a United Nations Volunteer and after the tsunami I went to Trincomalee with UNDP as a disaster management and I took my family with me. I did trainings and so on. I was in Trinco for one and a half years. It is a nice place. In 2006 after the assassination attempt of the Defence Secretary in Colombo things got worse. The navy tried to shell the city; it was very bad. They knew LTTE cadres were moving here

and there, so they shelled it. Also the Sinhala people got angry, so they tried to set fire to some Tamil shops and places; they also killed some Tamils. But they also burnt some shops owned by Muslims. That year, five Tamil students were killed in Trincomalee. They were at the beach and the police came and suddenly they arrested them and they shot them at the spot. But before, they had called their parents, “We have been arrested by the police, please come, we are at this place”. The father of one of them was a very famous doctor; he has been trying to find justice. The tension was high. (8. Mullaitivu)

From a very young age I have had a heart condition. I usually faint when I do different activities. When I was young I felt upset about it, but I could not go through a medical operation because we didn’t have money. Later on, in 2004, after the tsunami happened, a lot of humanitarian assistance arrived from abroad. I wrote letters with my medical certificate and asked for help. People advised me to go to the LTTE administrative services, but when I approached them, they said they didn’t have any budget allocation for people like me. Instead, they collected small amounts of money from all the staff and gave it to me. They thought I was begging for money to live. That made me so frustrated that I attempted suicide. Two years later, in 2006, I visited the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), which was also part of the LTTE administrative services. I asked them about the possible cost of surgery and they told me that I could go through the operation and that they would cover all the expenses. I made an appointment at a hospital in Colombo. I wanted to do the operation there with a Tamil doctor from India. I fixed the date and everything. But the war went really bad during that time, so the doctor was not able to come. I could have had free operation but my appointment was cancelled. (13. Jaffna)

We returned to Jaffna in 2005. Only a few of us came back in 2005 because finding jobs in Jaffna was very difficult at that time. We were so happy to come back. There were some Muslims, and some Mosques had been rebuilt. Our old land and home had been destroyed; some of the shops that belonged to Muslims had been taken. Many Muslims had sold their properties back in





1990 because they thought we would never come back. Now they are sad. When we returned in 2005, nobody knew how long would we be here for. We felt welcomed by the Tamils; we had a good relationship with them. My father has helped the Tamil community in different ways; he helped them getting passes during the last phase of war; he got them groceries when there were food shortages; they respected him a lot for that. (15. Jaffna)

In 2005 I moved out of Kilinochchi, but my parents and siblings stayed there until 2009, when the war ended. One of my father's siblings had three daughters and they did not have any men with them so they did not feel safe at home; that is why I moved with them to Jaffna. When I arrived to Jaffna everything was new to me. Everything was under someone's control, even the buses' timetables... We needed to go for check in a lot. Kilinochchi was not like that at all, so Jaffna was totally different. Even the language was different. This was the first time I listened to Sinhala... everything was new for me in Jaffna; even the Tamil language from Jaffna was different from the Tamil we spoke in Kilinochchi. So yes, adjusting was difficult. But there were also many good things: the sports facilities were much better; I had never seen people running with spike shoes, for example; there were so many soft drinks options! And you could buy them at any time you wanted without having to queue for them as back home. In Kilinochchi, hardly anyone wore trousers; almost everyone wore sarongs, but in Jaffna most people wore trousers... all these were new things for me. (14. Jaffna)

People in Jaffna did not like us, people from Kilinochchi. They did not want anything to do with us. I faced a lot of discrimination as a student from Kilinochchi living in Jaffna. No one would rent me a room; they said it would become a problem and the military would come and question them. Though I faced such discrimination, I was lucky enough to meet some people who helped me a great deal, especially with my studies. One evening in 2005, my friend and I were cycling to a computer centre in Jaffna town when we were stopped by the military. They asked us something in Sinhala, when we replied in Tamil they started beating us. I was angry by the incident and I began hating

the Sinhalese more. I felt that they had some power over us because it was them who wielded the weapons. I was hurt and couldn't forgive them. (17. Colombo)

In 2006, my friends and relatives who were part of the LTTE told me to come back to Kilinochchi. They said, "Don't stay in Jaffna anymore, come home." For that reason I returned home on August 7, 2006, three days before the ceasefire was broken. I was so happy to return to Kilinochchi! There was no curfew, we could go anywhere after 10pm; in Jaffna I would never go out after six, and I could not step out without my identity card. If we didn't have our identity card on us, they would arrest us under the Prevention of Terrorism Act on suspicion of being a terrorist. So, for four years I carried the card around with me. This was extremely frustrating, especially since I had never experienced such strict control while living in Kilinochchi. Jaffna felt restrictive whereas Kilinochchi was free. I began working for an NGO and coordinated social service activities. (17. Colombo).

By 2006, when the war started again, everyone had to be registered under the district security office as well as with the local area army camp. If you did not have a registration card they could come any time and take you for questioning. I could not register because my family was in Kilinochchi, and I was living with my aunt, so life was difficult for me. There was a curfew and during the curfew the army could register any house, take any person. I had letters from the school and others, and sometimes they helped me when the army was checking our home. Our home was registered three or four times a week. Every time this happened, everyone living in the house had to go out, and the person with the family card had to remain inside; they would check the people first, and then they would go inside and check all the furniture and the household items. Normally it would take them four or five hours. It was scary. I could not say that my parents were in Kilinochchi; and I did not have a registration card, so there was nothing my aunt could do if I was detained. I was afraid. From the army perspective anyone coming from Kilinochchi belonged to the LTTE. (14. Jaffna)

In 1998, whilst we were displaced in Vanni, my daughter got married to an LTTE member; he was not a cadre; he worked at the accounting department of the LTTE transportation system. After the marriage he wanted to leave the LTTE and join the family, but they did not allow him. They had a girl child, and until 2006 they lived a happy life. But in August 2006 they were separated when the Elephant Pass was closed; at that time my daughter and my granddaughter were visiting in Jaffna, whilst her husband was in Vanni. From 2006 to 2009 they were in constant contact, but they had to live in different cities. (3. Achchuveli)

In 2007 I got myself into a bit of trouble again, so I had to go back as a refugee to India. That was when I started realizing how difficult it must have been for my parents to leave everything behind, because, in my case, someone paid me for the nine months I was in India, and I did some work from there, so it was okay. When we were in India, my son was very worried. He was almost four years old. He was sensitive to what was going on, because from June 2006 the situation had been so tense, with killings incidents and so on, and he picked up that stuff. And when the war re-started, there was displacement, people came over... he saw all that. (18. Colombo)

On October 25, 2007, the naval forces arrested one of my sons while on his way to Mannar for work. I was informed about it, but it took me three days to get the documents I had to bring with me. After three days, I went to the naval force base, but they denied arresting him. I looked everywhere, but he was nowhere to be found. I went again to the navy and this time they admitted that they had arrested him, but they said he had been released already because he did not know anything. But still there was no news about him. When I reported him missing, the police said he should have been released to either the police or the parents and that since that had not been the case, the authorities could not do anything about it. He was 23 years old when he went missing. On March 8, 2008, unidentified men arrested my eldest son. He was 27 years old. He was sleeping when the motorcycles came and surrounded our house. I told them he was not in the house. My son

went to the backyard to hide, but they still got him. They did not reveal who they were, but they spoke a non-Tamil language. They were either from the navy, or members of the Karuna faction. I do not know why they arrested him. He was married and had one daughter. The child is now 12 years old and is living with me. The mother of the child was very young. She can't live alone because it is too unsafe, so she got married to another man. No, I have never seen my son again. And then another son of mine went missing on May 7, 2008. He was at my relative's house in Trincomalee. He was working in a hardware store. They came on motorbike and took him away. My relatives only informed me later in the evening, because those men told them not to tell anyone about it. I still have the police reports I filed. All of my missing children appeared in the newspapers. I can't bear talking about them. I have searched everywhere. I have protested and joined public rallies. I did hunger strike. I informed everyone, but so far no answer has been given. I still have all their photos at home. I will keep on marching until I receive an answer. (25.Trincomalee)



Chapter 3

*“It is very hard to recount
this; to express our feelings”*

After completing my A level, in 2008, I started working in the Mullaitivu district at the Bank of Tamil Elam, a bank owned by the LTTE. When I applied for that job everyone got an interview letter except me, so I went to the human resource office and talked to the manager. She said I could work as a temporary staff for six months, and later on she would maybe confirm me as a permanent staff. As a temporary staff my turn was supposed to end at 4:30 pm everyday but I would stay until 6:30 pm just to learn the work. Three months later I was confirmed as permanent staff, and I was able to give my salary to my family. The human resources manager said I was confirmed as permanent staff because she saw my hard work and dedication. I was getting a salary of only 12,000 rupees, but I was still able to save 3,000 rupees, because things were really cheap there. And I did not buy anything that cost more than ten rupees. There was a shop near the bank and I got close to the owners, and asked them to send groceries to my family every month. These were happy times in my life, because I got recognition for my work at the bank, I was able to find who I was, and what I was able to do. I liked working there. We used to wear traditional dress during the Tamil cultural festivals as well as for the Tamil New Year. I worked at the bank until 2009. One year later the war was over and I had nothing. (13. Jaffna)

I got married at the age of 20. He lent me a bike and we fell in love and got married, but my family did not accept it. He had lost his mother when he was very little, and again he lost his father when he was 12, so he went to a boarding school in Kilinochchi. We fell in love, and at the beginning my family did not accept him, but only because they did not know him. We bought two acres of land and built a house and planted coconut and mango trees. By the time they gave benefits in 2008, the war became so bad that we needed to leave our place; we became displaced. The same happened to many people there. (9. Mullaitivu)

When the war intensified, we were forcibly displaced from my village. From August 2008 to April 2009, we lived in 15 different places. Today, before coming here, I tried to make a list of all the places, but I have forgotten a few. During our displacement, I was the only male member of my family along with seven women and my cousin. One of my brothers lived in the Army controlled area with my aunt since the death of my mother and I had no idea where my other brother was. He was forcibly recruited by the LTTE, as it was compulsory for one member of each family to join the LTTE. I didn't know whether he was alive or dead. (17. Colombo)

In late 2008 we were displaced again. As we fled, there were bombs. We were captured by the army and sent to a displacement camp in Vavuniya. We came back here in 2010. (5. Kilinochchi)

In 2008 the war was very intense and I was asked to move to Mannar. From that time and until the last phase I was involved in the fighting. On March 24th, 2009 I got injured. I was injured at 1 o'clock in the morning. I got injured in the stomach; they had to remove my left side kidney; all together I lost five internal organs. I had nearly 32 small pieces of shrapnel in my backbone. This is the reason why I got paralysed and have been in a wheelchair since then. My wife was with me. It all happened just before her birthday. (21. Vavuniya)

We were displaced in 2008. We travelled to many areas and experienced different things. Out of more than 2500 children who left the orphanage, only 130 of us made it to this side. We don't know what happened to the rest. Some were missing; some died. We met a lot of people during our journey. We walked over dead bodies. At one point, everyone rushed inside the bus. One lady hid under the bus and nobody knew she was there. The bus eventually overran her. It was a painful and unforgettable memory. While we were moving, there were people dying. We simply left them behind. There was no help to bring them with us. So we left those people to die. It was a hopeless situation. While on the bus, there was no way to comfort each

other. We did not have food and water. At some point we were given milk powder to eat, but no water. So instead of comforting each other, we fought over limited amount of food. Sometimes I am still reminded about those incidents. We spent three days in the bus. We were transferred to a safe zone in Vanni. They wanted to separate the younger children from the older ones. We cried. We could not leave our sisters. They then put us, from St. Jolly, all together and brought us to a different orphanage in Vanni. We stayed there for a short period of time. Our former president, Mr Rajapaksa, took the other children. I was 13 years old. (22. Vavuniya)

We were displaced in 2009: my husband, our son, my mother, my younger sister, two brothers and me. I was already pregnant with my second child at that time. We never thought we would end up in Manik Farm when we left this place. We thought we would go away for a while and then return back. At the beginning of the displacement we would lift and take care of those who got injured, or sick. We carried them. But after a certain point people started to just think about their own safety. We left the injured behind and we moved on. Some people even left their newborn babies because they were not able to take care of them. The disabled, the injured were left behind regardless of their age. During the last days of the war we only thought about ourselves. Perhaps the thought everyone had was, "I need to be alive". (7. Mullaitivu)

On April 29, 2009, we finally crossed over from the LTTE controlled area to the Army controlled area. It was 5:30 in the morning when we made it to the other side. We walked through a lagoon for about half a kilometre, with a depth of about 3 and half feet. I was carrying my cousin on my shoulders all the way across the lagoon. He was seven years old. I was wary of crossing over to the army-controlled area. It was a hard decision to make, but my family's safety was my responsibility and I had no other choice. There were more than 500 civilians waiting to surrender, we waited at the border till 9 or 10 o'clock. There were more than 2000 soldiers; they checked every little

thing that we carried with us. Every man and every woman was subjected to a strip search. It was hell. I didn't want to be there. I wished I had died. The Army was known for sexual harassment, and I did not know what was going to happen next. I was with two of my aunts, my two sisters and two young female cousins. I was very afraid because I did not know if I would be able to protect them. The men and the women were separated. Since I was 27 years old, the soldiers who were interrogating me were convinced that I was a combatant. I had a scar from a motorbike accident and they thought it was from combat. I was alone for two days and two nights before I was reunited with my family members. I was so relieved to see them. We were then transferred to Manik Farm, Zone 3 refugee camp. It took two days to reach the camp. We weren't given food during the journey, just a few biscuits and water. (17. Colombo)

We were in the middle of two forces, the army and the LTTE. The government forces were firing and bombing the LTTE, but for us, there was a high risk of being caught in the crossfire and dying. We felt unsafe at the LTTE area, so we decided to move to the government-controlled area to avoid the firing and bombing. It was our last option to get out of the situation. When we crossed the bridge, those who were injured and sick were taken away from their families by the military. The military said they would take care of them, but the majority of them have gone missing. They were injured; they should have not disappeared. The military can't simply say, "they are missing or dead". They took them alive. (7. Mullaitivu)

What kept me alive and gave me strength during those times was the need to take care of my children. I needed to move forward. (7. Mullaitivu)

On March 21, 2009, we fled from Mullaitivu and surrendered to the navy. The army put us in one of their camps. My uncle was working with the ICRC, so we informed him of our situation as soon as we got there. He immediately met us and gave us 5,000 rupees. (13. Jaffna)

We were displaced to the Trincomalee district. After the war ended in 2009, we were taken to Manik Farm. We were in Manik Farm for six months. Six months later we were moved to another camp inside Manik Farm. Both camps were barb-wired; we were basically in a barb wired containment. We felt like prisoners; we were treated like prisoners. Even when we had to go to the hospital we were taken like prisoners. Life was hard. (9. Mullaitivu)

There were about fourteen thousand people within the fifty-acre expanse of Manik Farm. Every temporary tent was 15 x 10 feet, and within five feet distance of each other. Nine of us lived in a single tent, and there were not enough toilet and water facilities. On the first day, some Sinhalese brought food in a large lorry and we all had to wait in line to receive it. While waiting in line people became aggressive and yelled at each other; we were maddening of hunger. Because of the confusion in line, the Sinhalese began throwing the food at us. (17. Colombo)

We were in Manik Farm for more than eight months against our will; we weren't allowed to leave, we were prisoners. I don't want to talk about our time there, I don't want to be reminded of it, and I can't explain the hardship we experienced. (17. Colombo)

When we had our leader, Prabhakaran, we enjoyed our lives with so much safety. Things changed when we were displaced during the last battle in 2009. Changes started the day we entered Manik Farm and they still continue. Manik Farm was the biggest IDP camp. Inside the camp there were different zones with different names. When one zone got overcrowded, the military would transfer people to another zone. Eventually people started going missing. And that got everyone worried and fearful. Many of the people who went missing have not yet been found. (7. Mullaitivu)

After I lost my legs I did not engage in any more combat. I got training on communication and was put in charge of radio communication. But in 2009, at the later stages of the war, I had to join the battle again; everyone, able

and disabled, had to fight. We felt this was our land and we decided to fight for it, even if it would mean we would die. Part of me thought I would die. I become a suicide bomber. I carried a suicide vest and I tried to detonate it, but it did not work; I did not die. That made me sad. Because of the war I lost my two legs. When the war ended the military captured many people. They took me to one place. It was very crowded. They removed my clothes. I closed my eyes. I thought, "What is going to happen?" I survived that place. My family thought I had died. I was taken to the Vavuniya hospital. I tried to go abroad, to leave the country, but that failed. Everything was controlled by the military. So many people I knew have died. I saw everything; what happened. I have dreams about it. Still, every time I cross that area I can't avoid crying; all these memories come to my mind. (16. Mullaitivu)

2008 to 2010 was the time when the war aggravated in the north. I was supporting our program in Mannar, Kilinochchi and Vavuniya. I was travelling almost every week to the north and then returning. And then Manik Farm happened, and then I worked in Colombo as logistics and support for the Manik Farm operations. One of my most significant memories of that time is when we were setting up camps and the SDF was actually helping us. So this soldier came up to me whilst we were standing around the table and he asked me in Sinhala, "Why are they doing this to these people? Are they also not human beings? Why are they doing this?" I was pretty scared; I did not know what he was thinking, why was he asking this question.... That is my most important memory of that time in terms of recognizing, I guess, that people's feelings transcend boundaries. At the same time, there were these young soldiers (I don't know if they were even 15 or 16 years old) who were tasked with unloading people from buses who didn't know what to do. They had sticks in their hands and were hitting people. So it was all quite chaotic. (18. Colombo)

While I was at the camp I found my name in the newspaper; I had been accepted for an interview at the National College. I managed to get notebooks from other people in the camp and wrote letters to the army Government

Agent requesting to allow me to talk to higher officers so that I could get permission to do the interview. I gave them the letters, and cried as I was asking permission to go out of the camp, but I was not allowed. On the day of my interview, I went to the army commander in the camp. I knew he spoke Tamil. I requested him to let me go outside even just for that day. I told him, "If you let me do the interview today, you can keep me inside as long as you want". I convinced him. He allowed me to go. Students are supposed to go to the National College interview wearing their school uniform but I did not have one, so I just went with my normal dress and slippers. I was put into the District Secretariat vehicle. The army commander asked me not to go anywhere. He wanted to make sure that I was not planning to escape. The police officers were carrying their rifles. I met the interview panel. I only had my identity card and my results sheet, which is an exam certificate with the grades for every subject. Normally, every student needs to submit these documents to the interview panel, but they did not ask for them. During the interview, the panel asked me about the people in Vanni and how was the war going. At one point the police came inside the interview room and told me it was time to come back. Normally, police are not allowed inside the building whilst interviews are taking place. I could see how he was already drunk. The panel said: "We selected you. We don't need any of your documents. Go and do the arrangements to come to College." We went back to the camp. The soldier who was with us went to the army commander and reported that I did not go down from the car along the way, even if the police officer requested me to do so. The army commander normally talks to people in the camp every morning. The following day after my interview, he talked to me and wished me well. He set me as an example for everyone just because I obeyed his orders and did not get down from the vehicle. But after all the efforts, I lost my chance to go to the National College because I finally did not get permission to get out of the camp. (13. Jaffna)

In 2009, when the war finished all the displaced population was sent to Manik Farm. And then, the shock: my daughter's husband was with another woman who had a baby from a previous marriage. We found out he was at Manik

Farm so we contacted him. We organized for him to go abroad, because we really wanted to give him an opportunity. I sold some land, so that he could get out of Manik Farm, but he brought this new lady with him. If your family member has been part of the LTTE but this person is not physically present in an area controlled by the Sri Lankan army, the immediate family member will be put under investigation, and so, my daughter was asked to go every Sunday for one year to the nearest military camp and sign up. All that time she was pressured to hand her husband over to the military. Life has been hard for my daughter. After so many difficulties her ex-husband killed himself on February 14, 2016 by jumping into a well. All this has affected my wife so much. She was so strong for so long, but she has really suffered, both psychically and psychologically and now is ill. She is a very good tailor. She is a lovely girl.(3. Achchuveli)

In 2008 I had a heart attack, so I resigned from my position at UNICEF (which I had joined after working with UNDP). One and a half years later I had the opportunity to join UNICEF again. At that time the Manik Farm started. I worked in Vavuniya for one year. You cannot imagine how many NGOs came during the Manik Farm time. In Manik Farm families were put in huts without knowing each other; it was cultural disaster. Life was so hard there. People just wanted to leave. They were just waiting for the announcement saying they could leave and resettle somewhere. But there was no proper agenda; they would be told, "Now you can leave, get ready" and they would all go to the road and wait there, because they did not want to stay. The next day, in the early morning, a bus would arrive and take the people and drop them at their village. Everyday we had to change our plans. Everything was so difficult. Some many NGOs came and they were new to Vavuniya and they did not know the places.... That also created tension. (8. Mullaitivu)

We stayed in Manik Farm for three months, until April 2009, when we were released because we have relatives in Vavuniya and my birth certificate states that I was born there. I was only able to take my family out of the camp

because of that. After being released from Manik Farm we stayed at my uncle's house in Vavuniya. However, there was so much uncertainty. We could not go the hospital because our national identity card indicated that we were from Mullaitivu. However, some time later, and even though we provided the documentation proving that we had already been released, we were sent back again to Manik Farm. We had lost everything. There was no money. Nothing. We did not know if we could ever come back and live again in our hometown. I gave birth to my daughter in Manik Farm. (7. Mullaitivu)

My parents stayed in Kilinochchi until the war ended. Even if they had been able to leave, having had one uncle and a few other relatives in the LTTE would have created lots of issues for them, so they decided to stay. Even if my uncle and those other relatives were dead, when the war ended my parents were put in a rehabilitation camp in Vavuniya for six months. I remember how those released from the rehabilitation camps were brought to Jaffna by bus and put into a big stadium near the Fort. This is how we, the relatives, would find out that our loved ones were still alive. At that time, there was no way of communicating with them. For a long time I did not know if my parents were still alive. I was in a school trip in Colombo the day they were dropped into the stadium. At that time we used to travel by boat from Jaffna to Colombo. When I was told my parents were in the stadium I tried to return, but it took me four or five days to finally meet them. There had been all kinds of rumours; some people told me that my mother had been killed, that she was not in Jaffna.... Finally after four or five days I could reunite with my parents again. I cried a lot; I was so happy; and they cried too. They had been imprisoned for such a long time, and they were finally free. I knew I had two brothers and two sisters but I had not met the youngest one until that moment. She was two or three years old. (14. Jaffna)

Eight months later, in December 2009, we were allowed to move to Vavuniya after obtaining special permission from the camp officer after my aunt submitted a surety attested by various officials of the government and military. (17. Colombo)

In 2009 I managed to set up another schedule for my heart surgery in Colombo hospital. At that time I was at the IDP camp, so I wrote a letter to the Government Agent, but he said someone had to accompany me. My brother was in the rehabilitation camp so he wrote a letter to the army official asking to let him out so that he could accompany me, but they refused. So my uncle who was working at the ICRC came and took me. I was the first person from Jaffna district to get permission to leave one IDP camp. The people inside the camp were really shocked about this. During that time, the military would release people according to their age. If you were older, you would be released earlier. But I was very young at that time, so people were really shocked. My operation was made possible through the help from Tamil diaspora. They gave me the money for the operation. They gave me 4 million rupees when I only needed 700,000. As I went through the medical procedure they motivated and inspired me to be strong. They called me to ask about my health condition. They supported me. After the operation they asked me, "What are you going to do with the rest of the money?" I told them I did not need that much money. I took 100,000 rupees and gave the rest of the money to university students from Vanni area. I am still in contact with the diaspora people just because I returned the money back. Because of my operation, I was totally released from the camp; I stayed with my uncle. (13. Jaffna)

By the end of 2010 we received a short-term pass, valid only for one month; every month we had to renew it. We built a small hut by the coast and would go and do some fishing during those few days; and then we had to return to Manik Farm. One of our sons had been arrested and he was in a detention center. (9. Mullaitivu)

Eventually we were released again and we returned to our uncle's house in Vavuniya. Six days later the army took my husband and my uncle for investigation. It happened on a Saturday night. They arrived and said they had "doubts about them". My uncle knew one of the army officers so they went with them. My uncle said, "We know him and if something happens



to us, you can reach out to him”. We couldn’t sleep during the whole night. We waited for them to come back. The following day we found out that they were in a camp. We went there but we didn’t find them. Police officers said my husband was not there. We got information that they were at the police station, not the camp. We went. My uncle and my husband were there. The police released my uncle but they kept my husband. They asked us to come to the Vavuniya police station where they said they needed to hand him over to the court. It was a Sunday, so courts were closed, but we knew the acting district register at the court so, through him, we were able to take my husband. My uncle arranged the bail. Six days after his release, six people arrived dressed in civilian clothes. They were searching every house in the area. One of them entered our uncle’s house and asked for everyone’s national identification card and the registration proving that we were living in Vavuniya, the release document from Manik Farm, and the court order for bail. We gave him all these documents. He checked them and returned them to us, except for the identity card and the bail receipt. They took my husband for another investigation. He was not even wearing a shirt when they took him. They handcuffed him. Those men did not have any contact number, and the car they used did not have a registration number. I trusted that he was coming back. That was the 21st day after my baby was born and in our Hindu culture we usually practice a ritual celebrating it with the entire family. It was a very significant day for us. My aunt and I went to the police station. I was carrying my 21 days old daughter. When we arrived, the police said they had not arrested my husband, but they did not allow us to file a case. We stayed until around 8pm. They told us to come back the next day, so we went back home that night. We returned the following morning and stayed there the whole day, but nothing happened. Still they did not allow us to file a case, which they would normally do. The next morning we went to see the ICRC ¹⁰ and the Human Rights Commission and reported what had happened. We filed the case with them and reported my husband missing. Only then the police took the case. (7. Mullaitivu)

¹⁰ International Committee of the Red Cross

During the last phase of war I was in London. I would join the protest at night and attend classes in the morning. I was in my room when I saw the news about the LTTE defeat. I collapsed. I woke up on the floor. I did not know what happened. I was completely out of my mind. Then I realized that was because our hope was broken and destroyed and I felt hopeless. There was nothing left. There was nothing that I could cling on to. There had always been the Tamil cause, but when that was gone, I collapsed. I had to go for counselling for two years, and the counselor couldn't even handle me. The last thing he could do was give me a big hug and say, "All the best". (1. Jaffna)

I was evacuated to Trincomalee and treated at an army hospital. At one point they took almost 8000 people together to one of army base in Trincomalee, which was an old garment factory. This is where they kept all the ex-cadres, those who had been injured, or caught in the final battlefield. On the last day of the war they put a big television and showed us, on live TV, how everything was over; they fired fireworks; it was a big celebration. We were really sad; it was very difficult for us to accept it, to watch it. They began to treat us differently; sometimes when they brought the food they would beat us up with a stick. It is very hard to recount this, to express our feelings; we suffered terribly. (21. Vavuniya)

THE PAST IS THE PRESENT





Chapter 4

“The trees were dead”

I lost four childhood friends to the conflict. Two of them were combatants and died in cross fire and the other two died of shell attack. We walked to school together, across the canals, and passed temples. I can no longer walk that path because of the military checkpoint. I still do not know the whereabouts of my brother. We searched the government list of surrendered LTTE combatants and could not find his name on it. Most of my relatives are convinced that he has died. (16. Colombo)

In 2010 my husband went to Malaysia to look for a job. He was there until August 29, 2012, when he returned. At 9pm, after landing at the Colombo airport, he was arrested by the Terrorist Investigation Department. The officials at the airport called to inform me, and the next day I went to Colombo. They gave me his documents and asked me so many questions.... Three months later he was transferred to Magazine Prison . Now, when I visit him I get only 10 minutes. We have only time to talk about our daughters and he encourages me to share his story. I try to visit him as often as I can, but I have financial limitations... travelling is expensive, and I need to get him groceries... sometimes I get some assistance from the ICRC. Our financial situation is very hard. We get some support from the priest and the neighbours. My husband was the one earning money in the family; now I have so many responsibilities; the education of my children is difficult; my life is very uncertain now. I have asthma. Without him, raising the children is very difficult. We are very worried about our own safety. We have two young girls at the house; we are four women alone at the house, and we worry every night. I miss the feeling of being safe. (5. Kilinochchi)

My husband met a man who asked for his help. He said he did not know anyone in Vavuniya, and my husband accepted to help him, so he stayed in our house. At that time I was pregnant with my second son and used to stay at my mum's home in Mannar. During those days, there were some missionaries from Colombo coming to Mannar. They usually hired a van to take them back

to Colombo. One time, when my husband was taking the missionaries back to Colombo the person who stayed with us said he had sister in Colombo and asked to travel with my husband. It was when my husband was on his way back to Mannar. The CID (Criminal Investigation Department) police asked if he had dropped this person in Colombo and then arrested him. Someone called me and said, "Your husband is on TV!" I thought it was an ID-related problem, because his ID stated that he was from Kilinochchi. Then some people from the Navy, CCD, came and checked our house. They said they got something from the ground. They said they had got something from the church, too. Until now I didn't know what they got from our house. The town commander of Mannar told me, "There is no problem with your husband; the problem is with the other guy". When I finally spoke to my husband on the phone he said, "All is OK; I will come back home; stay strong". By then my baby was nine days old. I decided to travel to Colombo, even if I was very weak after giving birth only 28 days earlier. I had to see my husband. The police said, "It is not a problem with your husband; why did he let someone stayed at his home?" When I finally managed to see my husband, he started crying. He was very upset; and very weak; he had not eaten for days. He ate the food I had brought him so fast.... We could not talk to each other, but he saw the children and that made me very happy. The police asked me, "Is your husband LTTE?". I said, "No". They threatened me; they hit me. I could see my husband seeing it all; but I could not talk to him. He was moved to the "4th floor". It is a dangerous place. I did not have a place to stay in Colombo. When people heard I was from Mannar they said I could not stay with them because I would cause them problems with the police. We were helpless. Sinhala people were afraid of us. I had a friend in Colombo and stayed there one night; afterwards people from the government checked the house. So my friend said, "don't come here because we get issues". That is when we decided to just stay in the train station; we just sleep at the platform and stay there. Since my husband was detained the only thing in my mind has been taking my husband out of jail. I used to send letters to the president, opposition leaders, police, but no action. Finally the court agreed to start another inquiry again, but it will take another 21 years to complete it. So we just plead guilty. Now he is in the Jaffna prison. The case is



over. He was sentenced to one year in prison and one year in the rehabilitation camp. We expect him to return in 2018. (11. Mannar)

When I was young everyone was happy. I think my happiest childhood memory was having the space for community sharing. I remember a special cultural event held at our school. We spent around two days preparing the decorations, and we enjoyed those days. During my childhood, my mother would send us to school and we would come back home safely. We could walk around the village securely whenever we wanted to. Parents had the assurance that their children would come back. It was a free world where we felt safe. People in the community took care of each other; parents took care of other's children as if they were their own. But these things have changed. Nowadays I need to take my children to school and wait for them to come out after school because I cannot be sure of their safety. If there are programs away from the village, I need to just go with them because I can't be sure of what is going to happen. I need to know who are the people my son is befriending because I need to ensure his safety. These are the things that have completely changed when I compare my childhood with my children's. What is missing now is the structure and the judicial system to deal with these cases. (7. Mullaitivu)

I have one son myself; he is 14 years old; he is studying at the Hindu College, the same school I went to. When I was his age, I was very independent, but I don't think children are like this nowadays. School culture is changing now. We had quality teachers during our time. (4. Jaffna)

When I finally managed to come back home, the roads were not clear. To come to Jaffna, I had to go all the way to Trincomalee and take a bus there. That was in 2010. In 2013 I bought two acres of land and started the Pandateruppu YMCA, working with poor farmers, helping them. Here everybody calls me 'YMCA Master'. If you ask anybody for the 'YMCA Master', they will point at me. (6. Pandateruppu)

We left Vavuniya towards the end of 2010. We could not live at my mother's relatives forever. We could not be a burden for them. So, our family decided to come back here, to our old village, right after the land was released. I returned with my son and daughter. I always say, when we returned to this place, we got another family member (my daughter), but we also lost family members: my husband went missing and my younger sister died. When we arrived, our house had been demolished. We got our land back, but the house was totally destroyed. They kept it a secret because they knew that I would not come back if I knew the house was no longer here. Our neighbours still had their houses; they were damaged but still standing; ours was completely destroyed. I would have rather died during displacement than seeing our home gone. We had to live in a small hut made of tent with a roof of leaves. This is how we lived for almost one and half years. Our floor was the sand, and sometimes snakes would come and attack us. Our neighbours used their tents as roofs, and they had cement floors. For us, there was nothing; we slept on the soil. Only after some time our uncle came and brought one of their beds. Later on CARITAS gave us 550.000 rupees to fund the construction of this house. (7. Mullaitivu)

I still live in the house I hope my sons will return to someday. Other people say I am courageous, but I am in pain. The scars are there. I am expecting to see my missing children before I die. I want to see them alive. All these years, we have not had happy moments. All I feel is sadness and sorrow. During festivals, I see how other people celebrate; they light firecrackers and buy new clothes, but I can not do that because of my loss. I only get consolation by talking about it to other people. My only son who is still alive is already married and lives somewhere else. He had a hard time finding a job because the CIDs always threaten him. He is now working in Qatar in the Middle East. He has two children, but the only viable option for him is to work away from his family. (25. Trincomalee)

I came to Mullaitivu on December the 22nd, 2012. Why do I remember that date so well? My daughter was in ordinary level and finished her exam that day. The moment she finished we sat on a bus and came here. We had already planned it because my wife's native place is near here. And in Jaffna our community had become very small; only a handful of people resettled. After the war ended, by 2008, Jaffna town, especially our area, was already clear, we could return, but travelling from Colombo or Puttalam to Jaffna was very hard because the roads were closed; there were the Sri Lanka army check points, and the LTTE ones, and a no man's land in between where the ICRC stayed. The LTTE also put taxes... Sometimes we used to go by ship or by plane. At that time a road trip could take a few days. Before 1990, you could find middle income, low income, and high-income people among the Muslim community in Jaffna; now is the opposite: low-income people are the majority. The younger generation don't know each other; before we all knew each other, we had relationships between each other; we are now spread around the whole island. The bonding was stronger before. Some of us have not met each other for 25 years; and we used to see each other one, two times a day.... The older generation, like my father, is dying; so many people have passed away. Our land is still there; our house has been damaged. We want to build another house, but the problem is lack of income.(8. Mullaitivu)

Our former place had not been released. We wanted to know when would it be, when would we be able to come back to our former home. And then, one day we were all brought to a bus; the military told us, "You are being taken to your original place". So we all got into the bus. All the families, with the small children... all of us; the bus stopped in the middle of the jungle; a full deserted area; there was nothing. And they said, "This is where you are going to stay". All of us inside the bus started shouting, protesting, begging, crying, asking them to bring us to our original land. But the military did not listen; they never heard anything. They just threw all our belongings in this jungle and made us get down at the nearby school. This is how we arrived to our resettlement place. This was the middle of the jungle. There was nothing

here. We set up a camp. There were no water facilities; if we wanted to take a bath we had to go two kilometres away. Only after three years I was able to build a well. Three years of walking two kilometres every time we needed water. Can you imagine it? (9. Mullaitivu)

Our house was destroyed in 2013-14, not during the war. Our house was not bombed, it was bulldozed. The bricks were used to elevate the land in order to build an army-run hotel, to build roads... they are under the pavement now. Whatever was broken needs to be given back. This is the land of our fathers and mothers. (4. Achchuveli)

I used to love walking through the village. I walked everywhere. I did not want to use a bicycle or motorbike. I walked and watched the changing colours of the fields. During the sowing season the fields were brown, and by the time it was time for harvest it was bright green. When I was in Vavuniya, I constantly dreamt of returning to my village. I missed Akkarayan every night. In June 2010, we returned to Akkarayan. My home was destroyed and lots of trees had died, many were cut down to make bunkers and checkpoints. I didn't feel at home. The trees my grandfather had planted were dead. They were some kind of memory, and we had lost them. So many people had died, the village seemed empty. The only people we could see were military personnel who also roamed the village harassing and questioning anyone who crossed their paths. I was devastated. Akkarayan was not the same anymore. (17. Colombo)

THE FUTURE



Chapter 5

“I want a peaceful life”

I don't think about the past; I do my daily work as it comes. Everybody likes me; I don't believe in cast, creed... I am a Christian and I like everybody. I come from a high-class family, but for the last 50, 60 years, I have always worked with lower caste, and I treat everybody as though they are my sons. People see I am happy; I am an open person. I don't believe in the past and I never think about the future. You go as you go; this is my policy. I like to work with the poorest of the poor. That is my motive. Still now, every Monday I go and help some families. I am used to this type of life. Helping people is my hobby.

In these many years I have learnt lots of things. I have learnt that if you treat everyone as your family, if you work for the community, then there are no problems.

Sri Lankan wounds are political wounds. When I was teaching in Kandy in 1973, we all lived like a family, Sinhala, Tamils, Muslims... Sinhala children spoke Tamil and the other way around. The war destroyed everything. Politicians like to live under trouble, but we should look at Sri Lanka as one big family. When I was in Kandy I was studying Sinhala; then the government passed a bill that said "Sinhala only". Then the Tamil United Front came, and they said, "No", and the Sinhala teachers were sent back to their homes; we did not study Sinhala after that. These problems are difficult to solve.

My life now is normal. There are some political problems in Sri Lanka. Now we, Tamil and Sinhala, don't mix much. This makes us feel safe, but that is not a long-term solution. We should all mix with each other; there should be mixed marriages, form a big family together. (6. Pandateruppu)



Even if making money was so hard I can say that I brought up my five children and married them all. Life has been hard. Even if I was well educated and was able to pass my exams with very good grades, I was not able to get into the university and find good jobs.

I am now living with one of my sons. I pay for all my needs. Now my life is going right. I do social work full time. I am really happy about it. I am the Chairman of two associations working for the disabled people here in Mannar. There is a new law now that will give monthly economic support to the disabled people. The President has promised more pensions and jobs for the disabled people. I am not making money out of my social work, but I am really happy because I can do social service for the people. I don't like politics. I am happy doing social work. (10. Mannar)



I wish everyone who fled in the 90s could resettle in their communities of origin. In 2013 the President declared that there would not be any further resettlement because everyone who needed so had been resettled already. We staged a protest and went into a hunger strike. The current president paid a visit to Jaffna and we told him how there are still so many families waiting for resettlement; this is an issue we need to raise awareness about.

Until 2013 I was so caught up in my family, in my personal issues, but 2013 marked the time of me becoming more vocal about this: I become an activist. I am now a well-known figure advocating for the resettlement of the Mullaitivu people. I never rely on people or organizations; I sustain myself, and that makes me stronger.

Before the displacement we were wealthy; now they are offering us houses that are like pigeon cages, the same for everyone. But our house was big, and beautiful, with so many rooms... We had invested so much on our house; we want compensation for what was taken away from us. But nothing will equate the real loss.

I always say, "A tree never dies, even if it's been cut again and again".
(3. Achuchuveli)







I bought a house in Colombo, but I don't like to go there, because I believe Jaffna is my home. My family is still in Colombo, but I live here because I really want to. I have four children; three of them work abroad, and the other one lives in Colombo. My children know that they have a place in Jaffna, but they don't know the significance of it. They tell me I have to go back to Colombo and live there, rather than here alone. They were very small when we fled; they did not have the faith in this home, and in the place like I do. So they keep insisting to me to go back to Colombo. I always respond, "one day", but I keep telling them that I have work here; I lie to them. Last time I said to my son that I would be coming back by December 31st, but this is a lie too. When the day comes I will change the date again. I am now fully engaged in my work; I wake up and leave for work at 7am only to return 12 hours later; I also go for social work. Other than that, this is my life now. Eight people work with me. At my age I am still working hard, and I am proud of it. I think I am still the same person; I have trust in myself.

We will recover from our trauma when we reach the level we had when we left in 1990; most of us have not reached that level yet. Those who lost their loved ones are specially traumatised. Some of the families who fled have become millionaires, but for the middle-income people we are still struggling. But other than that, I am confident that everyone will be able to recover from those events.

I hope the government will invest more in our development after the war. So many people who had to leave are still struggling, and they need more support. But the government is giving Sinhala families all the facilities to resettle in the north, rather than supporting whoever was victimised during the war. Our main difficulty is resettlement. After all these years the families of those who had to flee have expanded; there is a 3rd generation of Muslims and we need to help everyone to resettle. I could come back because I had land, but this is not the case for many people. Many families do not have land, or a house, or are still at welfare centres;

their lifestyle is totally different; it is the government who has to resolve these issues.

Because I am not very wealthy, I can only provide small financial support to schools that are economically struggling. My contribution to reconciliation is to talk to whoever reaches out; people like you. However, even if we tell our story the support does not reach our communities.

I have faith in Allah; whatever he has written for my future, it will happen.
(2. Jaffna)



I have so many experiences related to war and conflict in past decades. I faced many challengers that later became my strength.

We tried to bring the message of peace to the grassroots communities. We were attacked by both the Sri Lankan government and by the LTTE. Many people lost their lives. I am a monk; if I see people suffering from this conflict, I cannot abandon them; that is why I work for peace. I saw people who lost their life, and I saw mothers who lost their children. I wanted to work for them.

Can you see the elephant over there? It was carved by a blind gentlemen who used to work at the central bank. When the central bank was bombed he lost his eyes. When I was traveling to Jaffna I met a Tamil woman who had lost her son and husband. I felt as if war was a curse.

The Sri Lankan society is a multicultural society. I believe that if, in the past, our leaders would have respected the others' religion, we could have stopped this vast disaster. I am imagining a place where we can celebrate all the religions under one roof. (19. Colombo)



I am now an awarded writer. I started writing 40 years ago. I write short stories, theatre plays, folk songs... Colombo people also appreciate what I do. I think that performers get to people's minds very quickly. You can talk about what is happening in the real life. I have written a book with 10 short stories about the Sri Lankan conflict. The book is called "Pujari in the amazing forest". One of the stories is based in one of the villages where I taught. In that village, when someone got sick, he or she was put in a hut separated from the community. The story is about how these people are cured by performing rituals on them, not by giving them medicines; then the war and the fighting starts and everyone become refugees in Canada and in India and in so many places. The Pujari also leaves; he ends up in Brazil as a refugee; he goes into the amazing forest and looks for a big tree, but he ends up dying. The Pujari goes from Sri Lanka to die in Brazil.

I have learnt that we have to adapt ourselves to the place, the situation we are put into. In order to do so we need proper guidance.

My advice to my children is: Learn; education is more important than anything. Education is the key to the future. The different religious communities need to come together: Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims... Christians should go to Muslim schools; Buddhists to Hindus... They should understand each other, so the mentality can change.

If I am not reconciled with another community, the question should be, "Why is this happening?" and then, "How can we solve this situation?" Some people use religious leaders to instigate division; we need to see what the problem is, and how to solve it. A new generation is coming up and we have to instil in their minds that war is not the answer to the problems. My hope is that one-day all communities will come together; they will have a good relation. As the Sinhala people, we Tamils are also human, and

we should be treated as citizens of Sri Lanka. This is my hope and the core theme of my books. We all have a responsibility in doing this. I use the art, the drama.

I wrote a play: there was a sick person; he was Tamil and he needed a blood transfusion in order to survive; he was O positive. Where could you find this blood type? They found someone, a Muslim man; after receiving the transfusion the Tamil said, "I don't know who you are, but you gave me your blood; let your father and mother who brought you to this world be blessed". He replied, "Both my parents died during the war when the LTTE got into a Mosque and massacred everyone inside". The Tamil said, "My wife died; she was taken by the army for enquiry because she was cooking meals for the LTTE. She's still missing". It's better to forget what has happened and look ahead.

How is my life now? One of my sons died during the tsunami. He was living near the sea. My daughter lives in Canada. I have never been able to visit her. I am 68 years old. I am expecting a call from God. "Be prepared" is my motto.

What I told you today comes from my heart. (28. Batticaola)





Displacement taught me a lot. I had the opportunity to work in private companies, in NGOs... but if I would have stayed in Jaffna, I would have continued in the business sector that was my background, you know? In Jaffna NGOs were not that common before 1990. We learnt a lot about them in Puttalam. I learnt about computers too... I wanted to improve myself. I was a clerk in Saudi.

I still feel close to Jaffna; I always go there when we have holidays; to our club meetings. Jaffna is always in my heart, but not in my children's. They were born in Puttalam and have lived in different places.

My children are studying here in Mullaitivu and my eldest son is now studying at Jaffna's biggest campus. Without a degree in Sri Lanka it is very difficult to find a job. Experience is nothing. Children are growing; when we came here we came voluntarily; no one supported us. I honestly think we, Muslims, are being ignored. We are not getting any support. There were no proper arrangements by the government, or by anyone one to resettle Muslims in the North; same as we did not get any support when we had to leave in 1990. There are no statistics; no data... We have not received any land. When we left Jaffna we were one family, but now we are six, because more than 20 years have passed, because of the generational growth. How can we come back to Jaffna and stay? The same happened here in Mullaitivu.

There was once this points system from the European Union for a resettlement project: you had to answer a form with three questions: Are you a former ex-combatant? Have you gone through rehabilitation? Has anyone from your family disappeared? None of these questions was applicable to the Muslims! So, I asked them why, and they got angry with me. I just wanted to say, "Just add another question: 'Are you displaced?'" I don't blame them; but this affects us. People talk about reconciliation after 2009: what about 1990? What about 1983? 1977? Start from the beginning; not from the middle.

We are a minority. We also expect to get our rights. The same as the Tamils, who are the majority. Tamils have suffered a lot; so many displacement and death; we are sad about it. They have the right to ask for their rights; at the same time, you should also give rights to those who are under your administration. All this creates mistrust. I can think, why I did not receive anything? Maybe I am not part of this village, or I am not part of Sri Lanka?" So many old people have died being mentally affected by what happened to us. Who will answer for that?

I would like to see a Sri Lanka in peace. I would like to see a country where everyone can follow their religion. I don't know if I will see that happening.
(8. Mullaitivu)

I want our original land to be released. My intention is to get our former home back. It had four big rooms. Marble tiling. Proper bricks. A hall. Washrooms. A big well. I owned some land next to my home, which I had donated to my son. Now the military has built a tourist hotel in that land for their families to have a nice holiday by the beach. I just want these things back. It is not just me; it is my community. The village cemetery had a beautiful Bodhi tree. Now the military has put a Buddha statute by that tree. And this is fine with us; come and worship any time you want, no problem; but allow us to go there, too.

We need to be together and claim to get our land back. We are fishermen; we need to return to the coastal area and rebuild our lives. Our land should be passed to our children. It is theirs, too. We need our own land, and our own house. The day my house and my land are released, you will come with me, and then you will realize why I am saying this; because you will fall in love with my land and my house. (9. Mullaitivu)



Yes indeed! This war broke the cooperation and co-existence between the Sinhalese and Tamils. It separated us. I feel that even if the war is over, the separation is still happening. But we can build and develop the relationship as it used to be. I feel respected by the Tamil people in my village. And they know I respect them too.

What I have learnt is that there is nothing that we cannot do. Being a monk, I was able to reach the peak point of my life and also I have achieved my goals.
(29. Batticaola)



As a Government official I was the first person to accommodate IDPs in my division. People could call me at any time. I still have the same phone number as in 2001.

I feel comfortable with what we have now in Jaffna. There are issues, but there is a sense of ownership in the government. I should act for the betterment of the people, not for the bosses in the government, nor for my self.

If I do business, I could earn more and not be dependent on my government salary. This way I could be more independent. I was offered a managerial position at the bank, but I declined.

I have always wanted to be a civil engineer, and even nowadays I am working towards completing my degree. This is my dream. (4. Jaffna)



People talk about nonviolent means of achieving what we want. But if you look at History, you will learn that we tried nonviolent means. When I give talks, I always mention the importance of recognizing the evolution of the struggle, because people always tend to look only at the last 30 years, without acknowledging how we tried nonviolent means before.

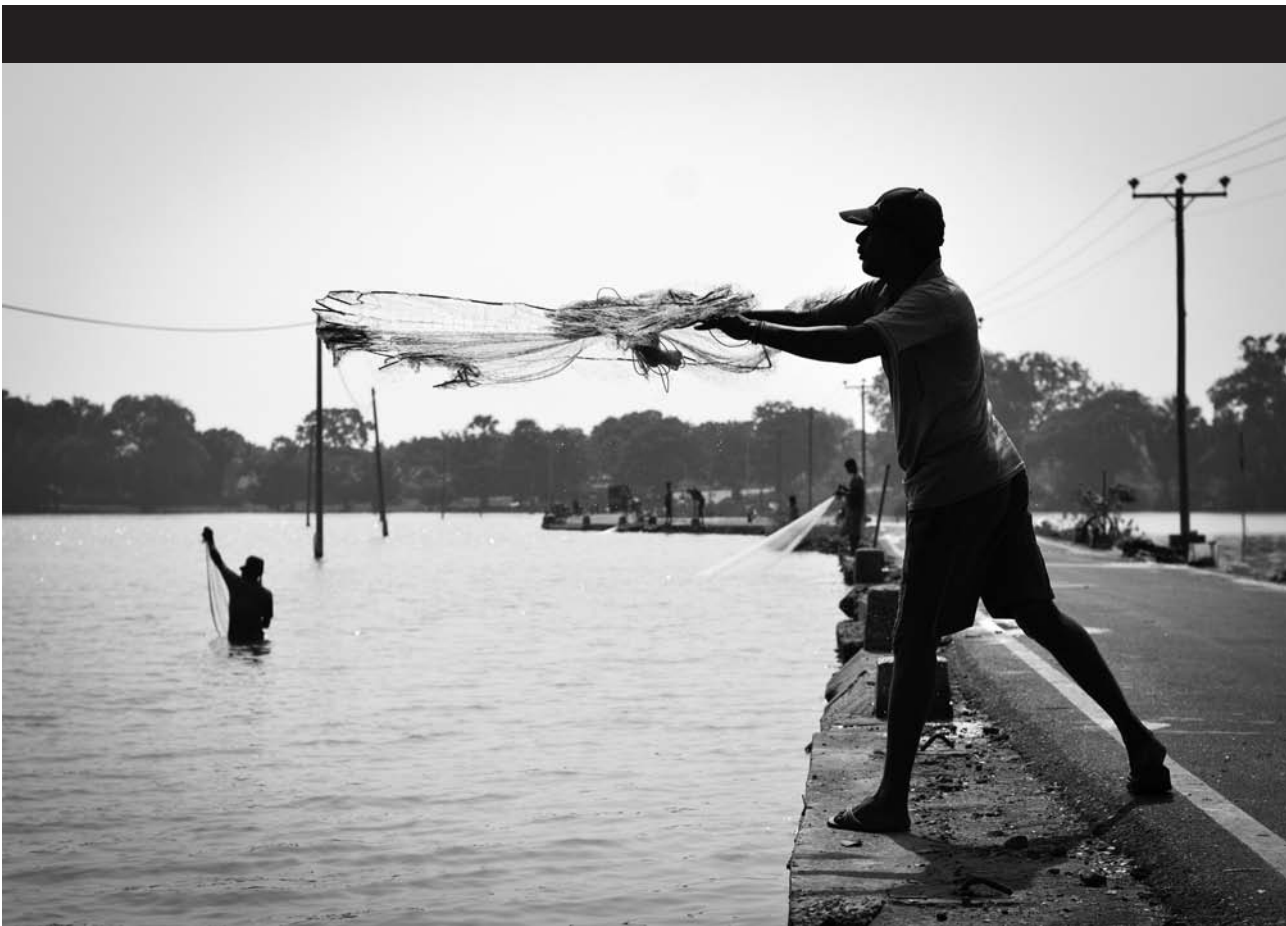
What I have learnt after all these years is that we can't afford to lose lives. We should have learned that long ago. We have seen and witnessed violence. We lost lives and that should not be repeated. We cannot afford another armed struggle; I don't think we are ready for another bloodshed, another loss of lives. We have had enough. We lost almost 150,000 people. We have to learn from our History. We never thought we would end up like this.

I always dream that the younger generation should not go through the same experiences we have gone through. We need to give room for the new generation to take this struggle forward whilst learning from our past. The next generation has to decide for themselves what they would like to see. But I don't think they would have the same ideology. You cannot imagine how was life when the Sri Lankan government stopped goods from entering into Jaffna: box matches, medicine, and even soap. I remember I had to wash my cloths with a fruit from palm tree. When I was studying my A level, I had to buy spoons of kerosene oil because petrol and kerosene were banned. The LTTE made a special lamp, one spoon burned for one hour. That was how I studied, with minimum light. Despite all that, we were quite happy because we always thought that we would get the Promised Land. We sacrificed for that particular cause.

We can no longer articulate the goal of a separate state, but we still hold our own ideology and dream. We dream not for a separate state, but for a decent living with our own rights within a united Sri Lanka.

But I don't think I would be happy to use the word "Sri Lanka". I never called myself "a Sri Lankan". I never felt that I belong to this country. For me, the Sri Lankan identity is always linked to the Sinhala Buddhist identity, and, therefore Sri Lanka is for Sinhala Buddhists. I would describe myself as relic from Jaffna.

The dream of having a separate state is not going to happen, at least not in the near future. What I advocate for is peace and reconciliation with a strong component of justice, where we combat impunity and non-recurrence. Reconciliation has to happen, but I am not a fan of using that word because it is very soft and might leave out the justice element. I have to see justice happening first, and then I could talk about how can we live together. Reconciliation mechanisms are very good, but the emphasis on justice is what I believe in. That is what I am convinced of, and that is what I always advocate for. I still can't look at these camouflage uniforms. I don't know if I would ever change the way I look at them. (1. Jaffna)



Life has been tough since my husband went missing. In Sri Lanka, the government is supposed to support the LTTE families after the war. In my case, the local government officials categorized us as an “abandoned family” and not as the family of a disappeared. It means that the State does not have legal responsibility towards us. It means that we don’t get prioritized in our search for my husband because we were “abandoned”.

My son is still traumatized. He was six years old when his father was arrested. He is still undergoing counselling. He keeps on talking about his father. Except during the counselling session, which usually falls on Tuesday, he never misses school. But he still struggles to get good marks because of his trauma. Even the counselling specialist who comes to the hospital has given up. He never talks about his sister because in the Tamil culture there is a superstitious belief according to which when a baby is born in the month of April if it is male it means he might kill a family member, and if it is girl it means that there are chances of separation. We believe that, since his sister was born in April, he thinks that she is the reason why his father went missing and thus, he is not accepting that he has a sister.

My daughter never knew her father. She is very active and has good grades at school. She competes at the school activities and always gets the first prize.

I hope my children can get a good education. They need to be well educated and sustain their life.

Reconciliation does not mean anything to me. They keep on talking about reconciliation, but nothing has happened. In this area there are many places where Tamils are yet to be resettled, but the land is still under the control of the army. If there has to be reconciliation, why are they doing this? In the past we felt safe. We should return to that feeling. Everyone must be given a chance to live freely instead of a restricted life yearning for freedom.

The people who disappeared should be given back to their families. (7.

Mullaitivu)



Life is not easy, being in my situation. The society is not fully accepting me.

I don't like to stay at home. People in our village looks at me differently, and this is why I don't want to stay there. Here I have a community, I can go around and move because there is acceptance, but at home, in our village, situation is very different.

My only ambition is for my community to respect me. In our culture, you will only be respected if you have your own house. So I want to build a house and live peacefully. I am not sure if I will have a long life because of my injury and bedsores. I am always in bed.

We have struggled for a purpose. We have lost ourselves. We got injured. Only freedom can heal our wounds. Our people should live in freedom. We should enjoy the same freedom that the people in the south and in Colombo enjoy. We should have freedom of movement. We should be free to live wherever we want. We should be free to speak our language and to practice our religion.

While I was in the movement, we had an educated team that taught us to be self-sufficient. They told us to always look after ourselves and to not depend on anybody. These values are ingrained in me. They helped me overcome different difficulties in different situations. I learned to trust myself. The movement taught me this.

Despite the hardships, there have been many happy moments. That happiness comes from the thought that, to the best of my ability, I have done something. I got injured in many parts of my body. Now I am in a wheel chair, but I did what I could. I have accepted my faith. I have done something for my people. I see it as a sacrifice. It is fine to be like this till the end of my life. I have accepted it. (20. Vavuniya)



I personally have the opinion that there is a general feeling in the country that people want to move on; but how do you move on is the key question.

You have to break down some of the key things, which different ethnic groups feel in this country, and the State could do more. I would say people are more willing, more positive and it is the State the one that is coming behind.

In 2007 I went to Cambodia; there was not a single paved road between Poipet and Sihanoukville; some sections were tarmacked but that was it.

And that was ten years after Pol Pot's death, and the Khmer Rouge had been pushed into that corner of the country even a longer time ago. In that sense, if you look at Sri Lanka, yes, we are greatly indebted as a nation, but the government has invested in putting the infrastructures in place: schools are there, the teachers are there, the hospitals are there, the roads are there, the facilities are there... and it has not even been ten years since the war ended. Of course there is still a lot to be done, but electrification produced a huge change.

I would say we are still ten years behind many countries around us in terms of development, but also in terms of thinking and mindsets; and that will take time. We have eroded the way we look at life. I guess during war you live by the day, and moving away from that mentality to think about the future is very hard, and many people have not made this change yet. I am very hopeful, but frustrated too.

There was one incident which really disturbed me. It was in 2008 and I was coming back from Vavuniya through one of the checkpoints, which

I would describe as a racist checkpoint: they would only allow Sinhala people through it. If you were Tamil or Muslim, you were asked to go to another station and take the train. So, the first time I went to that check point the police said, "You can't go through it", and I asked, "Why?" The policeman did not want to say, "Because you are a Tamil", he was somehow sensitive, but that was the reason, right? And that was something that

really stayed with me, this knowledge that this was happening for that particular reason.

I don't know how these experiences have shaped me; I guess I am a product of them. Whether this is positive or not, that's another story.
(18. Colombo)



My husband died in 2010. Before that I was a housewife. I am now living alone. Sometimes I visit my other's son house. He is married now and has his own family.

Now I am the president of a small, ten members, group formed by widows. We have received some training on life skills, running a business, savings, and we manage...

We support each other when one of us is sick. We are all from the same village, so we have all known each other for a long time. If one person goes and asks for help alone she does not get anything; if the group goes they need to hear. Because we are saving, we have now some money in the bank, so we do not need outside assistance. We do some poultry, we raise some goats, and so we can save some money and help each other. We support each other and that helps.

You can't forget what has happened to your family, I can't forget, but I am now engaged in some work, and by doing that I forget about the past: doing some gardening, taking the goats to eat some grass, all that helps. Our life is fertile; vegetables grow well. This is what we are doing now.

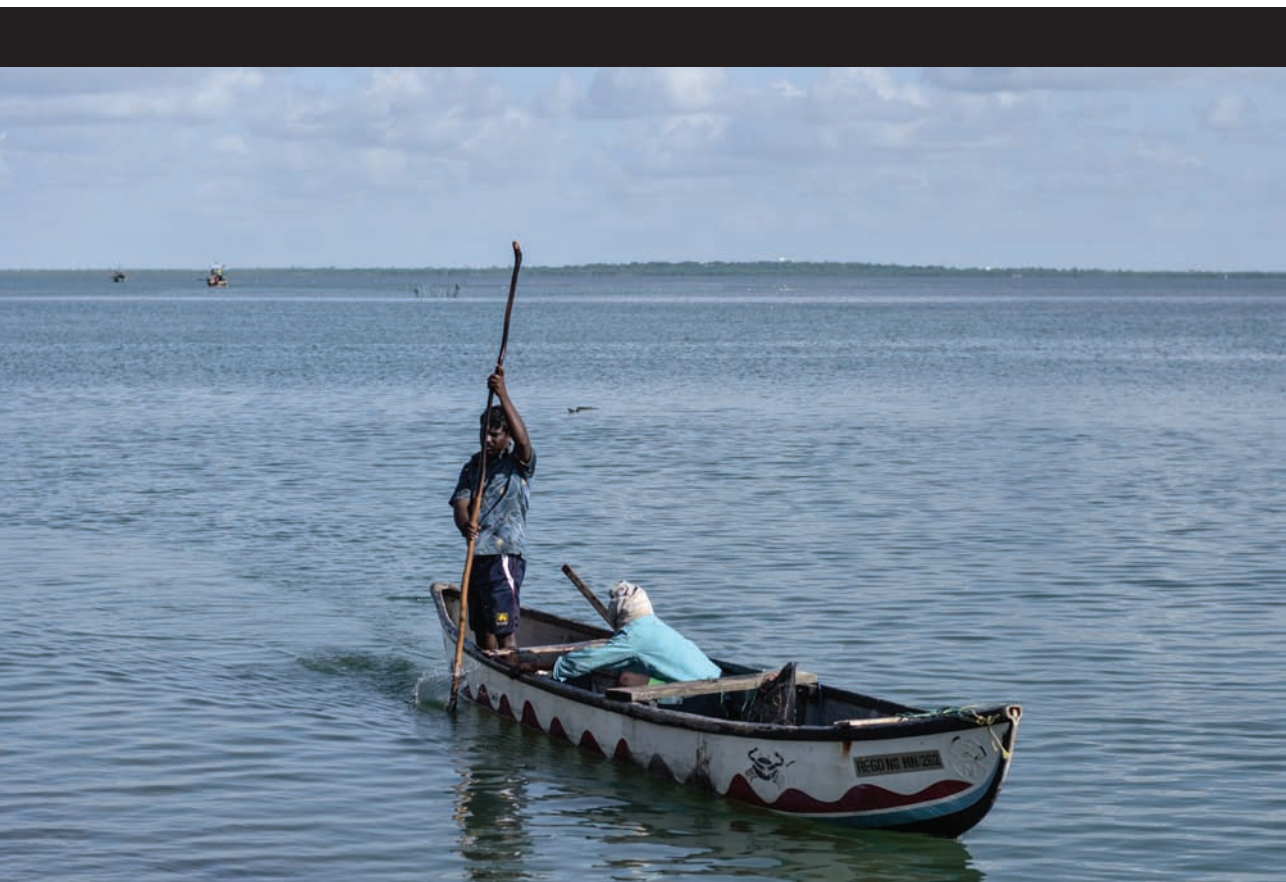
We have also received counselling. That gave us some ideas, some knowledge. Talking about the past has given me some consolation, and helped me focusing in the future. And this is what I do now.

I have had that experience, when we were all running, but I think this experience should not be repeated. I pray to God that the past life, our sorrowful life, does not come back.

For me personally, I don't want anything; God will lead me. But I wish we can build up the group so that it is stronger. (26. Trincomalee)



I had surgery in Kandy, but they could not remove all the pieces, so I was brought to the Vavuniya hospital and from there to the Mannar hospital. There were almost four thousand people injured during the war in that hospital. I was put in the rehabilitation unit. We were 170 people with



spinal cord injuries. I stayed there for six months. My wife and our little son slept on the floor by my bed. At that time, I could not move my body from my neck down. All my hope was lost. I did not know what to do, where to go. I was bedridden. Everything was paralysed. My wife had to do everything for me. We did not have permission to leave the hospital because both my wife and I were under detention by the army. No one could visit us; no one could talk to us. The bishop of the Mannar diocese was the only one allowed to visit; he was the only relationship I had at that time. Sometimes when he visited me he was accompanied by a Mannar judge, and this judge took a special interest to release my son because he was one year old, living in a hospital without being allowed to leave. The judge informed the childcare provision officer and finally he was put under his grandmother's care. That was a very difficult time: we were under the custody of the army and our release letters would not arrive at the same time. If my wife got the letter, I did not get it, and the other way around. We could not leave the other behind. We were kept at the hospital for six months under enquiry. Finally, the bishop intervened and talked to the army brigadier and took care of the 170 of us and brought us to live here.

I struggle a lot. The first step was to manage to open a bottle of water. The first time I managed to do it took me 45 minutes. Little by little, only after continuous treatment, I was able to stand and to walk by myself with the help of the prosthesis. I could not feel anything on my left side but sometimes I could feel on my right side. I had the problems of a paralysed person but I was able to stand and work.

During these difficult times, what has helped me going has been my own personal trust and confidence in myself. I never felt that there was anything I could not do; I always thought, "I can do this". This has always helped me going with all these experiences, these struggles, these failures.

I am disabled, and working with other disabled people gives me a lot of joy and happiness; I can feel the challenges they are facing; I think what I say to them is more effective, more touching than when a normal person instructs

them or give them lessons. As a disabled person I feel that whenever I tell something to another disabled person it has more impact. My experience here is that even if they say, “I can’t do this”, or “I don’t know how to do this”, or “I am not capable of doing this”, I accompany them and I make them succeed; I make them believe in themselves.

When I look back at my life I feel sad. When I go back home, I look at my friends, how hard they work every day, and I feel very sad. Many of my good friends died. When I go home everybody wants to see me; it is a big challenge for my mother when they see me in this situation. Many of us lost our lives, we made so many sacrifices, and we have not achieved anything. It makes me feel sad. We have done many things, created History, but after all the struggle, we have not achieved our goals, and this saddens me and it is difficult to accept.

The problem that especially ex-combatants are facing now is that we had a different life for a long time, we were inside the jungle, hiding, we were cut off from the society. Returning back into the normal society now is very difficult for us; the society is far more advanced than us in terms of education, economic status etc. Reaching their level to compete with them is not easy, and we don’t have enough support, we don’t have enough strength. In special cases like me, being in a wheelchair, being part of the society is very difficult. This is what is on my mind now: my family, the future of my children if something happens to me. My life is not secured; I still have many pieces of shrapnel inside of my body; I live with only one kidney... What will happen to my wife and children if something happens to me? This bothers me.

Even if my eldest son was only one year old during the war there is certain information that was passed to him. He grew up in this environment; he was in the hospital, and all this has an effect on him. He still gets scared when he hears strong sounds, or if he sees fighting or guns on the TV. The effects of the war are still with him. He is eight years old now. He used to

ask his mother, “What happened to my father?” He does not know about my past life.

I have a lot of experience dealing with people that got wounded in the war. We can’t simply say that the struggle was meaningless. We have paid a high price for this; we lost many things for this. Even some families are not there anymore, or one family has given four, five, six children. Even though all these things have happened, still we are living in a difficulty that we cannot even explain, express.

After the war, a lot of people got enough opportunities to deal with their wounds. Many of them have improved their lives. But even if they don’t have much weight in their heart, there are moments when they break down, when they think about their past experiences, their losses, their struggle, and they break. All the ex-combatants have entered into livelihood programmes that help them taking care of themselves, they are doing something to self sustain themselves and their families. All I want to continue working with the disabled people, live with my family with our limited resources, happily.

I have many happy memories of the past too. I am who I am now, I am where I am, because of my wife. If she would not have been there, I don’t know what would have happened to me; I would not be here. I exist because of her. She faced many problems, she was interrogated many times. She married me against the opinion of her family, which did not have any involvement in the struggle, but because of me, they have suffered a lot. I really love my wife. (21. Vavuniya)



I moved to Colombo at the end of 2011 and began working with an NGO. Colombo life was different. During my first Christmas, I saw lots of lights and colourful decorations, but I couldn’t enjoy myself. I was thinking about our displacement and dead bodies. Once, while traveling by bus,

I bought a ticket and the conductor did not give me the change. When I asked him for it, he did not understand what I said because he did not speak Tamil and I did not speak Sinhala. I finally did not get my change. Although this was a small incident, it haunted me. I wasn't able to make my voice heard because of the language barrier. My days revolved around work. My friends in Kilinochchi would sometimes call saying, "Today the security forces came and questioned me". Military harassment was part of their daily lives. It was part of mine, too. After moving to Colombo, I have gained the confidence that, if something happens to me, I can take care of myself and know which authorities to approach. Before this I was totally blind and helpless.

I think there is a small change in the mindset of the Sinhalese. Earlier they would have treated us like dogs. Now they have given us the right to open our mouths a bit; things will probably get better in the future. I have lots of Sinhala friends now. I think the perception of young people is also changing. I am a Vanni boy. When I introduce myself to people, I make it a point to let them know where I am from. This statement is usually followed by the question, "Were you part of the LTTE?" or "Were you a combatant?" My reply was always a silent smile. I could not say "yes", nor could I say "no". I have spent three decades of my life in a war. I have experienced everything, aerial bombing, shelling, gunfire, I have seen body parts blown up and scattered. I have attended many, many, funerals. This war has made me who I am now. I feel I can face anything that comes my way, but I do not want another war.

There is no psychological counselling or psychosocial assistance in the north and east. We have not received the emotional support needed to heal. In our village, when we gather for a wedding or festival, we end up talking about the past, and are unable to enjoy the present. The broken trees always remind us of the past. I can never forget the blood or the dead bodies. After the hardships of displacement, Manik Farm, resettlement, and after the war of weapons ended, when we see a familiar face, the first



thing we say is, “Oh! You are alive...” and only then we ask about them and their families.

Death is natural, death is a certainty, I accept this. What I cannot accept is a bloody massacre for reasons as frivolous as politics. If I have children, I will tell them about the past, but I don’t want the future generations to experience what I did.

Akkarayan is a different place now: we have electricity, tar roads and a cell phone tower. But the Akkarayan of my childhood is still alive in my heart. I especially remember the trees. My grandmother often laughs and recalls,
“You used to talk to the trees!”

I do not have big dreams. I want to live a peaceful life in Sri Lanka. I want to move freely around my village, my district and my country. This is the freedom I want. (17. Colombo)



I am currently studying law in a private institution. In the future I would like to become an MP. I chose to study law because I am interested in politics and I want to be a politician; I want to sit at the National Parliament. Being a politician to me, means we have to be open, and speak and do the right things.

To me “reconciliation” should start from the grassroots level. We should help and give answers to those who have suffered and lost the most. Only after we do this we can talk about reconciliation. Reconciliation to me is about fulfilling the needs of those who have suffered during the war. The main thing you can do for reconciliation is accepting that you did something wrong, and to punish those who did it. This has happened in other countries with a civil war past. Why can’t this happen in Sri Lanka? Without this there cannot be reconciliation among people because the scars will remain at the people’s hearts.

Development does not equate to reconciliation. Now you can see new buildings and roads in Jaffna, but we, ourselves, are not being developed enough. Development should come from us, not from outside.

Sinhala people also suffered during the conflict. But most of the war happened in Tamil areas. Everyone has to go through hardships in their life. I am fine with having gone through all this. I have learnt that some things can be forgotten, but there are a few things we will never be able to forget, things I am sure I will still remember in my old age. We should forget the war, but not the destruction and the suffering we went through.

I have friends in Sinhala communities. Sometimes we talk about these things, and sometimes we argue about the past. I don't think Sinhala people are racist, and they don't want divisions either. (14. Jaffna)



We still have not received what we should get from society: our dignity. That feeling is with us. And it is hard. This is our homeland. Sinhala, Tamil, we should all be the same, but we still feel the discrimination. 98% of the police officers here speak only Sinhala. The majority of the doctors are coming from the south.

We fought for our people, and so did the military soldiers. But the Sri Lanka army disabled soldiers are supported, and we don't have anything.

Sometimes those people also committed war crimes. We don't have anything; we should all be treated equally. The government says we should live as one country, as one nation. OK, we are ready. But they should treat everyone equally.

There are lots of values that I have learnt over these years, which I can pass along. Now is the time to use these values. I want to help this society, and still with that feeling I am waiting. It does not mean I will take the weapons again. My weapons now are education and income generation; these two things can slowly change the society.

Recently in this village, two persons came to meet me; people having family problems come to get some advise from me. I am getting some respect from society back. My plan is to continue this way, helping people. Now the financial situation is very hard for everybody. People don't have jobs; they are fighting for their survival. I have been supporting some disabled people and their families. I maintain three families. I lost my legs but at least I can walk, but there are a lot of people who cannot. So I try to help them.

I don't have big dreams for the future. I don't have a job to look after my family, but I have strength in my heart. Every day I give everything I have to my daughter and wife; and with that I am living. I want to be able to use the skills I gained during the war in times of peace. Some children don't even know what a computer is. And in some government schools children are not allowed to use the computers. I collect stuff, so I am going to start classes for children.

I tell the young generation, "I have seen what happens during the war, I have seen bodies in pieces, so many people dead. That was then. Now I am telling you: don't do this. Every life lost, all the suffering, now we know how much they are worth it". (16. Mullaitivu)



The situation is a little bit better now. I make sure my children know about their father. If I have the means, once a month I take them to prison so that they can establish a relationship, even if that means I cannot talk to him because there is time for only one visit. I want them not to miss their father. Their grandfather takes them to places and buys them anything they want, so that they know what it is to have a father.

I believe things will get better, but I am not sure. People in the community know about my husband, so it is easy to make him a target. I am worried that, even if my husband is released, I still fear it might not be safe for our family here. But if we try to go to a different country, my children's dreams will be destroyed. Our future is uncertain.

Even if there is no war, I feel that our culture is destroyed.

I have no exact plans for the future. I want my children to get an education and live a normal life like other children. I don't tell them stories of the war, because I think this will create violence, and I want a peaceful life for them. (11. Mannar)



Now my brother is back at home. Because he was a member of the LTTE, he was often bothered by the military; they kept taking him for investigation. But this stopped after he got married. They now live in Jaffna, in the same village where I live.

I am now working with an NGO. I am satisfied because I am back home. However, we don't have the same happiness as before, because we lost so many things in the war. I am just happy that I am back in my own village.

What motivates me to listen to other people's stories is the hope that someday, justice will be served to our society. We provide legal assistance to the people. I believe I am helping them to have a better life. I am in a better position now, so I give small amounts of money from my salary to the people who are in need. I still believe that education should be the most important thing for us. I am able to live the kind of life I have now because I continue studying. Everyone should continue studying.

I think that people can actually reconcile among themselves. People need to be free to express their feelings. They should share their experiences and stories with other people in order to bring better understanding. For example, I met a Sinhalese who had no idea about what happened in the north during the conflict. He said, whenever he gets the news from the media about the LTTE and Tamil people, he would go to the internet and check other websites to see what the real situation is. He was a political sciences student. Maybe people like me can share their stories with the Sinhalese people, so they will be able to understand the real problem in our country. (13. Jaffna)



When I travel in the northern border, I physically feel different. There are so many military camps there. I just want a life of peace and harmony. I want a silent life.

My family will only be happy when my husband is released. I can only imagine my future with my husband. If there is peace, this should mean that justice is equal for everyone. Every political prisoner should be released. Peace is about those Tamils who are still in jail. I don't know for how long he will be in prison. There is no court case.

We have to be active in order to get their release. I have learnt that by not talking about these issues you won't solve them. But I cannot do it alone. That is why I have joined others. Being with other women in my situation is a way of sharing solidarity: when we share our stories we can reduce each other's baggage.

Hope goes up and down. Right now I am hopeless. But I keep trying.
(5. Kilinochchi)



Our new life began when we arrived here. Our hopes were renewed. We are happy here, just like when we were in Kilinochchi.

We had the opportunity to study, and to learn life skills. We took vocational trainings. Sometimes we take trips and visit nice places outside, like Kandy, the President's palace, Jaffna, and a beautiful beach in Trincomalee.

At the age of 16, my sister put an advertisement in the newspaper to look for our parents and relatives. A lady came claiming that she was our mother, but I did not go with her. I don't like her. When I was in my A level, she came back and took me home. I was with them for three days. I was not happy so I came back to the orphanage.

Some of the girls who have already left the orphanage come to visit, but I don't talk to them. They tell us how difficult life outside is. They face a lot of frustrations, problems and restrictions. When we were together, we shared both happiness and sorrows, but now they do not have that kind of support outside.

In the future, I want to work in a government office so that I can help other people. If I am able to complete the levels 5 and 6 of the computer course, I can automatically get a job in the government or other institutions. (22. Vavuniya)



After the war, the government gave us a house. I live there now. I have received training. These programs built my courage, strength and capacity not just for myself but also to help other people in our village. At least God helped me get one job and this is helping me.

My strength was built upon seeing other people's strength. (27. Batticaola)



I can live in peace with the new government. But I am still worried because there is no concrete assistance given to find my missing children. There is no answer from the office of the missing persons. I have informed the UN, but there is no relief. There is no help from agencies.

We are about 150 women in different groups. There are about ten cases of disappearances in our village. In our village, there are also many young widows, and they are not getting any help. We formed a group and have spoken to people, but we have received no answer so far. We realized that it is important to come together. Sometimes foreigners come to our town,

they take photos of us, but still nothing has happened. They should give us an idea about whether or not my missing children are still alive.

My main focus now is to find my missing children. My hope is still there. I don't ask for anything other than that. As for my grand daughter, I will do whatever I can to earn and support her. I sell food and through that I earn to support her education. I hope one day she becomes a nurse in a hospital.

(25. Trincomalee)



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The book you have read would have not been possible without the support of many men and women who shared our vision: the possibility of opening a nuanced and complex conversation about Sri Lanka Past, Present and Future.

There are no words to express well enough our gratitude to our long-term friends, accomplices and partners. We are not mentioning your names, but we hope you know who you are. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for your generosity, your patience, your time, your insights and your support. You took our hand and lead us through the complexities of your wonderful country with so much care and love. Thank you.

The people we interviewed across Sri Lanka were amazingly brave, honest and generous in sharing their experiences with us. This was not an easy task. It was painful and required courage. Thank you very much to each one of you. Even if your are not named, if your faces are not shown, we carry you with us, as we hope the readers will too. We hope we have done you justice; we hope you feel recognized and listened. Your voices must be heard.

Thank you to CPCS's Harsha Amarathunga and, especially, to Zabra Yu Siwa, Zee, who enthusiastically ventured in this journey and brought so much wisdom and hard work, as well as the beautiful images accompanying the words in this book.

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Let's listen, understand, and celebrate the journeys of those who have been shaped by conflict and pain, but are moving beyond, to build a different, shared reality.

Nerea Bilbatúa Thomàs
CPCS Peace Historian

TIMELINE

1976 Creation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by Velupillai Prabhakaran.

1981 “Black July”: anti-Tamil pogroms and riots in ‘response’ to the LTTE ambush of an Sri Lankan patrol near Jaffna, which killed 13 soldiers. Black July is generally seen as the start of full-scale civil war.

1983 First Eelam War.

Anti-Tamil riots.

India starts its support to a number of Tamil insurgent groups (including the LTTE).

1985 1st attempt of peace talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government fails.

1987 India stops its support to Tamil insurgent groups.

Deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) in the Northeast.

Fighting between the IPKF and the LTTE erupts.

1989 IPKF starts withdrawing from Sri Lanka.

1990 IPKF finishes withdrawing from Sri Lanka.

Start of the Second Eelam War (1990-1995).

LTTE expels thousands of Muslims from its areas of control.

1991 Rajiv Gandhi, Indian Prime Minister, assassinated by a female LTTE suicide bomber.

- 1993 Ranasinghe Premadasa, Sri Lankan President, is killed by the LTTE.
- 1994 Chandrika Kumaratunga (People's Alliance) is elected Sri Lankan President.
- 1995 Third Eelam War.
Ceasefire agreement (January to April) signed.
"War to peace" policy by the Government focuses on retaking Jaffna.
War in the Northeast intensifies. Government troops initially cut off the Jaffna peninsula from the rest of the island and, after seven weeks of heavy fighting, succeed in bringing Jaffna under Government control for the first time in nearly a decade. The LTTE retreats to the Vanni region.
- 1996 LTTE suicide attack at the Colombo Central Bank.
The Sri Lankan army gains control over Kilinochchi.
- 1997 Heavy fighting around Paranthan and the Elephant Pass.
The Government attempt to retake Vavuniya fails.
The LTTE recaptures Kilinochchi.
- 1999 President Chandrika Kumaratunga assassination attempt by the LTTE.
- 2000 The LTTE gains control over the Elephant Pass and attempts to regain Jaffna.
Human Rights groups estimate one million people displaced by the conflict.
Norway is asked to mediate between the two sides.
The LTTE declares a unilateral ceasefire (December).

2001 The LTTE cancels the unilateral ceasefire (April).

LTTE attack on the Colombo airport (July).

President Kumaratunga dissolves the Parliament and calls for elections.

R. Wickramasinghe (United National Front) wins the December elections.

The LTTE and the Government announces a 30-day ceasefire. The Government agrees to lift the long-standing economic embargo on the LTTE controlled territory.

2002 Memorandum of Understanding and Permanent Ceasefire Agreement signed between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE under Norway's mediation (February).

Commercial air flights to Jaffna resume. The LTTE opens the key A9 highway linking Colombo and Jaffna, allowing civilian traffic through the Vanni region for the first time in many years (but only after paying a tax to the LTTE).

Talks are held in Thailand, Germany, Japan and Norway. During the talks both sides agree to the principle of a federal solution and the Tigers drop their long-standing demand for a separate State. Both sides exchange prisoners of war for the first time.

2003 The LTTE withdraws from negotiations with the Government (April).

The LTTE issues its own peace proposal under the name Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA).

President Kumaratunga declares a State of Emergency, forms an alliance with the JVP called United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) opposed to the ISGA, which advocates a harder line on the LTTE, and calls for fresh elections.

2004 Coronel Karuna (LTTE Eastern commander) breaks away from the LTTE and forms the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) allegedly backed by the Sri Lankan Government) (March).

Clashes between the LTTE and the TMVP (especially in the East) take place.

Tsunami kills more than 35.000 people (December).

2005 Lakshman Kadirgamar (Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Tamil) assassination (allegedly by an LTTE Sniper).

Elections take place in November. Two main candidates are UNF's former Prime Minister R. Wickremasinghe (advocating the reopening of talks with the LTTE), and UPFA's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, (calling for a tougher line against the LTTE and a renegotiation of the cease-fire).

The LTTE calls for a boycott of the election by the Tamils, many of whom were expected to vote for Wickremasinghe.

Mahinda Rajapaksa wins the elections.

Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader, states in his annual address that the Tigers would "renew their struggle" in 2006 if the Government did not take serious moves toward peace.

2006 Fourth Eelam War.

Killing of five Tamil students playing at the beach in Trincomalee.

The LTTE attacks commuters in buses and trains around Colombo.

Attempt to hold new peace talks fails (February to April).

Violence spirals.

The European Union declares the LTTE a "terrorist organisation".

The Sri Lankan Government announces their plans to drive the LTTE out of the Easter Province.

2007 The Sri Lankan army completes its control over the Eastern provinces confining the LTTE to the North.

Combats in the North intensifies.

Prabhakaran is injured.

2008 The LTTE announces a unilateral ceasefire from July 28th to August 4th; the Sri Lankan Government dismisses it.

The LTTE loses control over the Mannar district in the East.

The Sri Lankan Army attacks Kilinochchi producing heavy casualties on both sides.

2009 January 2nd - Kilinochchi, the administrative capital of the LTTE controlled territory, is captured by the Sri Lankan army.

President Rajapaksa calls for the LTTE surrender.

The LTTE retreats to Mullaitivu.

January 24th - The Sri Lankan army captures Mullaitivu.

The LTTE moves towards the coast (their controlled territory is at this point of around 200km).

February- Human Rights Watch accuses the Sri Lankan army of “slaughtering” the civilians during indiscriminate artillery attacks (including repeated shelling of hospitals), and calls on the Sri Lankan Government to end its policy of “detaining displaced persons” in military-controlled internment camps. It also urges the LTTE to permit trapped civilians to leave the war zone and to “stop shooting at those who try to flee”.

The UN estimates 200,000 people squeezed into a narrow 14 square km patch of land on the coast in Vanni, which the Government declares the ‘no-fire zone’.

March- Former LTTE Karuna joins the Sri Lankan Government.

April- Fighting between the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE continues.

Thousands of civilians (50,000 estimated) find themselves trapped in a shrinking pocket of land on the Northeast coastline between the two warring factions.

May 16th - The Sri Lankan Government declares victory over the LTTE.

May 17th - The LTTE concedes defeat.

May 18th and 19th - The LTTE leader Prabhakaran is killed with his family.

It is estimated that 11,664 LTTE members surrender; 24 rehabilitation centres are created.

War crimes allegations against both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army are made following the so-called “last phase of war”.

August- The LTTE new leader (Pathmanathan) is captured in Malaysia.

2010 Mahinda Rajapaksa is re-elected President.

2011 The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) wins 2/3 of the local councils elections in the former war zone.

2014 UNHRC votes for a Resolution paving the way for an inquiry into rights abuses at the end of Sri Lanka’s civil war. The United States and the United Kingdom are among the countries sponsoring the Resolution, which for the first time calls for an international probe.

2015 Mahinda Rajapaksa (UPFA) is defeated at the elections by Maithripala Sirisena (SLFP). His victory in the election is generally viewed as a surprise.

President Maithripala Sirisena pledges to reinforce the Sri Lanka’s judiciary and parliament, to fight corruption, and to investigate allegations of war crimes from 2009.

R. Wickremasinghe (UNP) is appointed Prime Minister.

President Maithripala Sirisena establishes the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR), chaired by Former President Kumaratunga.

Creation of the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms under the Prime Minister's Office, which is tasked with the design and implementation of Sri Lanka's reconciliation mechanisms.

The UNHRC adopts a consensus resolution on accountability for the alleged Human Rights violations during the Sri Lankan civil war.

2016 The first phase of the constitutional process begins with the appointment of the Public Representations Committee for Constitutional Reforms (PRC) by the Cabinet of Ministers.

The Prime Minister appoints the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms, which includes 11 members drawn from the civil society.

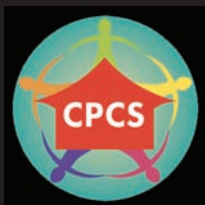
The Government acknowledges for the first time that some 65,000 people are missing from the 26-year-long conflict. The Parliament passes a law to establish an office to trace the thousands of people who disappeared during the war.

The Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms completes its Final report.

2017 The Government approves the National Policy on Reconciliation and Coexistence drafted by ONUR upon a one-year consultation process (May).







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