

The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers

Sri Lanka

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January 2003



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© Cover photograph: this photograph is taken from a docudrama about a child soldier a story written by Harendra de Silva, Chairman, National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka. The film was funded by the International Labor Organization/International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO/IPEC). The girl pictured was not interviewed for the study

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CONTENTS

i	Acknowledgments
1	Summary
2	Introduction
2	Why listen to the voices of the girl soldier?
3	Methodology
5	Analysis of the Data
6	What Were the Important Themes
6	The Voices of Girl Soldiers from Sri Lanka
15	Sri Lanka Distinctives
16	What are Key Risk Factors in the Choice to Become a Child Soldier?
17	Lessons Learned from the Girl Soldiers on the Interview Process
20	References
21	APPENDICES
21	I. Affirmation of Informed Consent for Interviewee
22	II. Ethical Guidelines for Interviewers
23	III. Interviewer Actions and Responsibilities
25	IV. APA Code of Ethics
26	V. Team Leader Actions and Responsibilities
27	VI. Interviewer Training / Dialogue Agenda
29	VII. Role Play
30	VIII. The Voices of Girl Soldiers from Sri Lanka

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

From its inception this project involved many dedicated people who exhibited the highest level of cooperation and concern for girl child soldiers.

This research project would not have been possible without the girl soldiers who so generously described their experiences of being child soldiers. They offered us knowledge, insights, truth and wisdom – not just data. They graciously and willingly recalled many painful experiences and events in the retelling of their story. I remain deeply grateful to each one of them.

The author would like to thank Rachel Brett and Lori Heninger of the Quaker United Nation Office, Geneva and New York, for the opportunity to conduct this research on behalf of girl soldiers. Rachel Brett, Quaker United Nations Office Geneva, has made significant contributions to the literature and has taken considerable action on behalf of child soldiers. It was her hope that additional research would build upon and continue to advance Quaker work on child soldiers.

This author remains grateful to those who financially supported this project and who had faith in our ability to carry out this research. They include: the Department for International Development UK (DfID), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway and UNICEF.

The author wishes to express her sincere gratitude to the Advisory Board who provided oversight and advice from the inception of this project. The members of the Advisory Board included: Rachel Brett, Quaker United Nations Office Geneva; Harendra deSilva, Chairman, National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka; Elizabeth Jareg, Redd Barne (Save The Children Norway); Jean Claude Legrand, UNICEF; Jane Lowicki, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children New York; Sarah Maguire, DfID; Carlinda Monteiro, Christian Children's Fund, Angola. Ex officio members included Lori Heninger, Quaker United Nations Office, New York and Dale L Keairns.

The author wishes to extend a very special thank you to Lori Heninger for her enthusiasm in traveling to the four conflict areas to carry out the training/dialogue. Her strong attributes and abilities to interact and relate to people made her an outstanding candidate for this work.

The author also wishes to acknowledge Harendra deSilva is Sri Lanka and the time, dedication, hard work and commitment to high standards exhibited by the country team in conducting the interviews. This author especially appreciates the kindness, care and sensitivity exhibited toward the girls when conducting the interviews.

The author remains indebted to her family for their support and to the board and staff of Arsenal Family and Children's Center, Pittsburgh, PA, for time granted to work on this project.

1. SUMMARY

"I like to be like other children. How can I be? I am nobody's child."

- Child Soldier, Sri Lanka

"... for far too long, the use of child soldiers has been seen as merely regrettable. We are here to ensure it is recognized as intolerable." This document provides an opportunity to hear the voices of girl soldiers in Sri Lanka and to more fully understand why this vision by the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in May 2002, commands our attention.

This report on the voices of girl child soldiers in Sri Lanka is part of a larger study that carried out in-depth interviews with 23 girl soldiers from four different conflict areas around the world. The voices of these girls provide important insights into becoming a child soldier, the experience of being a child soldier and their view of the future. Among the key conclusions were the messages that:

- Becoming a child soldier is very dependent on a combination of the local environment and the personal circumstances surrounding the girl's life.
- Living in poverty was important in girls joining a movement or being abducted.
- The girls are not searching for ways to retaliate and bring harm to those who had used and misused them. They were looking for ways to make a contribution, to do something meaningful and productive with their life and to make up for the harm they have delivered upon others.

In order to participate in the study the girl soldier must have served as a soldier before reaching the age of 18 years and be out of the conflict for less than two years. Given the in-depth interview methodology, the objective was to obtain interviews from four to six girls from each conflict area. The girls were selected by the country team based on their accessibility, willingness to be interviewed and the team's ability to assure confidentiality and pro-

vide for their safety. Twenty-two girls met the criteria for this study. There were five girls from Angola, six girls from Colombia, five girls from the Philippines and six girls from Sri Lanka. A seventh girl was included from Sri Lanka. She did not meet the criteria since she had been out of the conflict for more than two years. Her data has been included, but kept separate, because of the rich contributions of her interview. The girl soldiers were from the same armed movement within each country. This is not to say that there were not other armed movements or government armies that used child soldiers.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The transcribed interviews use fictitious names for the girls in order to maintain confidentiality and safety for the girls. Other identifying information was changed to protect the girls interviewed. Common themes from each of the 23 interviews were identified, articulated and synthesized. The common themes served as the basis for developing conclusions and recommendations. Nine themes were selected and the report is structured around these themes. The themes are grouped into three areas:

- Common characteristics of who they are and their experiences:
 - Family Relationships
 - Festivals and Religion
 - Education
 - Play
- Their evolution and journey as a child soldier:
 - Reason for joining
 - Training and life as a child soldier
 - Reconsideration of the decision
- A view of who they are and how they view the future:
 - Sense of self
 - Time and the future

Key risk factors in the choice to become a child soldier were identified from the voices of the girls. Two of the important risks beyond the central risk of inhabiting a combat zone are being poor and disadvantaged and being separated from their family. These risks were present for the girls studied and played an important role in their becoming a child soldier.

While there are common themes, it is important to know that child soldiers cannot be treated as all having the same characteristics — even in the same conflict area. The voices of these girls show their horrific memories and angry feelings, but they also show their desire to care for others and to do something with their life. Key recommendations on demobilization from the girls' messages include:

- Listen to the girl and her experience and needs – provide basic needs and safe forums for discussion when she needs help.
- Work to locate some member of her family or significant adult to bring about some level of reconciliation.
- Provide new experiences that will change her identity from soldier – to reclaim who she is and to regain faith in her decision-making ability.
- Provide opportunities for education and training – the girls recognized the value of education and job skills.

2. INTRODUCTION

Violence against children is unacceptable. Addressing this problem requires the work of governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and individual men and women. It also requires that we listen to the voices of child soldiers to understand their story. This is an important aspect of our work on prevention, demobilization and reintegration. This study is an effort in listening to the voices of girl soldiers from four countries – Sri Lanka, Angola, Colombia and the Philippines. This report represents the voices of girl soldiers in Sri Lanka.

February 12, 2002 represents a major event in the efforts to end the use of child soldiers. On this day, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force. The enforcement of this international treaty will be important in preventing children from becoming child soldiers and living through the horrific experiences described by the girls in this study. Under the Optional Protocol governments are charged with ensuring the rehabilitation and reintegration of child

soldiers as well as protecting and not punishing them. Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, stated on February 12, 2002: "We are urging all governments and armed groups to end the military recruitment of children under 18 and to release those children already in service. There can be no excuse for arming children to fight adult wars."

The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in his address before the UN Special Session on Children, May 2002, stated that "the deployment of child soldiers is a despicable and damaging practice that must end." He went on to say, "Those who practice this form of child abuse must be held accountable." In addition, he stated that, "for far too long, the use of child soldiers has been seen as merely regrettable. We are here to ensure it is recognized as intolerable."

3. WHY LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF THE GIRL SOLDIER?

There are many documents that have been and are being developed to address the concern of violence against children. These are necessary actions to gain understanding and agreement among international parties to prevent the use of children as soldiers and for rehabilitation. The characteristics of many of these actions are to call for "providing resources" or "establishing mechanisms to facilitate activities for children" or "ensuring provisions for demobilization and reintegration are spelled out." To accomplish these objectives, we must understand what resources to provide, what activities will meet the child's need, or what provisions need to be spelled out. We can rely on theories, typically Western concepts of treatment, and we can also listen to the child and try to gain an understanding of what may be most effective in meeting their needs.

Child soldiers cannot be treated as all having the same characteristics – even in the same conflict area.

It has often been the case that child soldiers have been thought of as a common category of children who would possess the same characteristics and needs. The unique individual features and characteristics of the children were often overlooked or ignored. There was a time when the prevailing opinion was that all child soldiers were boys. We now know that child soldiers include girls as well as boys and that demobilization and reintegration programs must take into account the unique needs of girls.

The fundamental needs of girls, who have been child soldiers, have not been very well documented, understood and addressed. It has only been recently recognized that girls are used in many different ways by the armed groups. Their demobilization and reintegration needs are directly related to the specific ways that they were used.

For example, it has been assumed that most if not all girl soldiers were raped and sexually abused by the armed groups of which they were a part. This study reveals that not all armed groups raped the girls. The stated position of some of the armed groups forbid sexually intimate relationships between men and women without the consent of the woman and the approval of a commander to enter into a relationship. In some armed groups, contraception shots were required and abortions performed even when the girl opposed this action. In all the armed groups there were power differentials between the men and the young girls and many of the girls agreed to a sexually intimate relationship when they recognized it brought with it benefits such as more food, better living conditions, opportunities to ride rather than walk long distances and other privileges. None of the girls talked about receiving information to protect against sexually transmitted diseases.

4. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to gain culturally salient information from which to construct demobilization and reintegration programs and develop prevention strategies for girl child soldiers. It has been designed and is dedicated to capturing the voice of the girl child soldier and allowing her voice to be heard.

There is limited data on the actual experience, of being a child soldier, as it is lived by the girl child. A qualitative format for information gathering has been utilized based on in-depth descriptions by girl child soldiers who have lived through the experience.

It was concluded that a self- or interviewer-administered quantitative survey with response categories would not get at the information stipulated by the core question posed by this study: What was the lived experience of the girl soldier? The objective is to hear their voice and gain the ideas and thoughts that emerge from the girls being interviewed. This is accomplished in this research through an open-ended interview process. Guba and Lincoln (94) suggest that the dialogue process allows for the emergence and growth of ideas from the interaction between people and is critical to the understanding and information-gathering process.

As was described above, and given the specific gender/cultural nature of the information desired, new material is likely to emerge during interviews. The need for flexibility is critically important to capture emergent information and ideas (Patton 90), although the core question will remain the “spine” of the study (Janesick 94). Theoretical framework for the project lies within phenomenological and ethnographic constructs (Patton 90).

The in-depth interview methodology used in this study is based on the work of Irving Seidman in his book, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (98). This interviewing method will allow new thoughts and information to emerge during interviews. There is an opportunity for important information to be presented that may not have been in direct response to a question. The broad in-depth questions will move from general to specific and from less intrusive to more intrusive. The sample is small and therefore the

desire for in-depth information is considerable.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE GIRL SOLDIERS

In order to participate in this study the girl soldier must have served as a soldier before reaching the age of 18 years and been out of the conflict for two years or less.

AFFIRMATION OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR GIRL SOLDIERS

An affirmation of Informed Consent for Interviewee's form (Appendix I) was designed that was signed by each girl prior to the first interview. The form was presented and carefully reviewed by the interviewer with each girl so that the interviewer was convinced the girl knew what she was being asked to do. When the girl's reading ability did not reach the threshold of the document the form was read and carefully explained to her. The girl was given the choice of not participating or of not having the interviews tape recorded but written.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

This methodology involved conducting three in-depth interviews with each girl soldier.

The interviews were scheduled to last for not more than two hours. The interviews were to be held from three to seven days apart to allow for a period of reflection between each interview. In some circumstances the length of the interview or the interval between the interviews had to be altered depending on the availability of the girl and issues of safety. If at any time the interviewer observed that the girl was experiencing too much discomfort recalling or reflecting on painful experiences the interview was stopped. The girl, as indicated in her informed consent, could stop the interview at any time for any reason.

In the first interview the girl was asked to talk about her life prior to becoming a soldier. The interviewer asked her to describe her early childhood. The child's description might include memories of her village, parents, brothers and sisters, extended family, festivals, religion, school and activities enjoyed as a child. This enabled the researcher to

have a broader sense of the context of the girl's life and history prior to becoming a soldier.

The second interview focused on the girl's life as a child soldier. This is the area where there is limited information. The girl's response might include a description of what led up to her entrance into the armed movement, was she abducted, gang-pressed or did she "volunteer." If she joined "voluntarily" how much pressure was she under from friends and significant others in her life to join? She also described her days, in the movement, in detail, from early morning until late at night or beyond, what she was asked to do, what she was forced to do and the consequences of not being compliant.

The third interview focused on how she saw herself moving into the future. Her response may include seeing herself as being without a future or without meaningful options, guilt feelings about what she had been forced to do in order to survive, conflicted feelings about wanting to return to the movement, wanting to enroll in school, or returning home to live with family. It might also include her perceptions of what she believed she needed to move forward and reconstruct her life. She may also have reflected on the meaning of her experience as a child soldier.

SELECTING THE INTERVIEW TEAM

A project team was developed in each country. The team leader had been identified through advisory board contacts or contacts from non-government organizations with experience in the countries where the research was going to be conducted.

Each team consisted of a team leader who coordinated the project. At least two women were selected by the team leader to conduct the interviews. All the girls interviewed were selected and contacted by the country team. The interviews were conducted in the girl's native language. Translators were utilized when necessary when transcribing the data. An anthropologist type person was available after the interviews were transcribed to provide clarity and alert the researcher to particular cultural nuances present in the data. Counselors were identified by the team leader in the event the girl found the material she was recalling or describing too emotionally disturbing and a referral could be made.

PREPARING THE INTERVIEW TEAM

A training/dialogue session was instituted in each country with each team prior to the collection of data. The training/dialogue always involved a review of essential documents that included Ethical Guidelines for interviewers (Appendix II), Interviewer Actions and Responsibilities (Appendix III) and sections of the American Psychological Association code of Ethics (Appendix IV), The Affirmation of Informed Consent for Interviewees (Appendix I) and Team Leader Action and Responsibilities (Appendix V). The team was versed in the interview method as outlined in the book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. The country team entered into dialogue with the trainer and the research method was adapted in ways that would work most effectively in each country. Length of time between interviews had to be altered in some countries because of difficulties posed by transportation in reaching the girls and issues of safety and confidentiality.

The training/dialogue (Appendix VI), included a description of the research, the value of qualitative studies, how to conduct interviews, working as a team, interviewing process, eliciting information, debriefing for the interviewee and the interviewer, listening skills and training in the use of the tape recorder and the laptop computer.

The training/dialogue also included role plays (Appendix VII). Dialogue and instruction also focused on when and how to make referrals, securing the room where the interviews would take place and providing a quiet, comfortable, safe, private space in which to conduct the interviews. Ways of establishing trust and establishing rapport was also a significant part of the training/dialogue.

Lori Heninger, Co-Director of the Quaker United Nations Office in New York, who was trained in the research method, traveled to each country to conduct the training/dialogue. The training/dialogue took from three to five days and was held in a location, within the country, designated by the team leader. A training agenda was designed by the head researcher and the trainer that met the needs of each country while maintaining the integrity of the research method.

The research method was adapted in each country in dialogue with the country team. This dialogue covered all aspects of the research and allowed for each country's perspective to be taken into account and integrated into the dialogue/training.

The country team instituted the interviewing in a timely manner. The head researcher remained available by e-mail with the team leader in each country. Once the interviews were completed and translated they were sent to the head researcher for analysis.

EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

After the interviews were completed each girl received a gift as a way for us to say thank you. She was not told of this gift at the beginning of the interview so it could not be experienced as a bribe or some form of manipulation. The girl was asked after the last interview by the interviewer or the team leader what they would like to receive. In some instances the country team established educational funds for the girls rather than an individual gift.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In order to comprehend the significance of the interview material, as it was given by each subject, the following steps were taken in a sequential fashion to analyze the data of all the girl soldiers from the four countries. This report documents the data from Sri Lanka.

The process began with reading and rereading the interview material in order to hear, appreciate and accept what each girl described and revealed about her experiences as a child soldier. Her experience as a child soldier was then viewed within the broader context of her life. That is to say, it was viewed from where she had been, who she saw herself to be in the present and how she envisioned herself moving toward the future. The third reading of the data included continued intense listening, observing patterns and designating and marking units of meaning that were present within the descriptive material.

The units of meaning emerged from the answers to a series of questions posed by the interviewer. For

example, the interviewer may have asked the question, "Could you tell me about your family or could you tell me about your life as a young child before you became a soldier?" The girl's responses to these questions may have included references to siblings, a school event, games enjoyed as children, etc. The units of meaning were marked in each of the interviews. The units of meaning from all of the interviews were then identified as significant themes. The significant themes were not independent or isolated from one another. They emerged and presented as interrelated significant themes.

Once the themes were established the information each girl soldier gave in her interview on that particular theme were brought together to establish a composite of information on each significant theme. A summary statement was written to capture the essence of each significant theme in each of the four countries.

In some instances the themes overlapped. Information on one theme may have been so interrelated with another theme that they could not be separated. When this situation presented itself the information was included under both themes.

Conclusions were drawn based upon the composite of information, as given by the girl soldiers, on each of the significant themes for each country. Recommendations based on the conclusions were developed for the significant themes for each country in an effort to address, clarify and/or respond to what the girl soldier told us she needed, i.e., revealed in her interview.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. A person knowledgeable about the local culture reviewed the interviews to provide perspective on aspects of the culture that would not be clear from the message as transcribed. The transcribed interviews use fictitious names for the girls in order to maintain confidentiality and safety for the girls. Other identifying information was changed to protect the girls interviewed.

6. WHAT WERE THE IMPORTANT THEMES?

The common themes from each set of interviews were identified, articulated, synthesized and elaborated upon in order to understand the experience of the girl soldier. The articulated themes then served as the criteria for recommendations made for reintegration and demobilization programs. The program recommendations are based on the specific and unique information from this specific population of girl soldiers.

Nine themes were selected based on analyzing the data from all four countries. These themes can be grouped into three areas:

- Common characteristics of who they are and their experiences:
 - Family Relationships
 - Festivals and Religion
 - Education
 - Play
- Their evolution and journey as a child soldier:
 - Reason for joining
 - Training and life as a child soldier
 - Reconsideration of the decision
- A view of who they are and how they view the future:
 - Sense of self
 - Time and the future

7. THE VOICES OF GIRL SOLDIERS FROM SRI LANKA

THE GIRL SOLDIERS INTERVIEWED

Six girl soldiers met the criteria for being included in the study: serving as a child soldier prior to reaching the age of 18 (two of the six were confused about their exact age but were younger rather than older girls) and having been out of the conflict less than two years. The data of the seventh girl soldier

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A GIRL CHILD SOLDIER IN SRI LANKA

A representative day in the life of a girl child soldier in Sri Lanka is constructed based on the interviews with the girls in Sri Lanka. The construction of a day in the life is a composite taken from the descriptions of the training, duties and daily activities taken from all the interviews from Sri Lanka.

The training offered each young woman was essentially the same. From their descriptions the training involved was very rigorous and demanding. There was an initial period of 3 to 5 months called basic training and then a more expansive period of training that lasted for 5 to 6 months of more rigorous training. Superimposed on the training was additional work that involved becoming one with a wooden “dummy gun.”

There was a specific training schedule that was carried out 7 days a week. Very strict brothers and sisters in the movement carried out all the training. Punishment for failure to comply or inability to keep up and perform at the required level of activity resulted in being forced to do extra ‘rounds’ of the exercises. If you could not keep up you were given a heavy rifle to hold above your head while performing sitting-to-standing exercises. At the same time you were randomly hit and kicked. These body blows were instituted without mercy.

4:00 or 5:00a.m.	Morning ablutions: Older sisters of the movement oriented the girls and told them where they should go for morning ablutions. They were under orders to use water sparingly and to protect the water supplies at all times. The older sisters acted as guards over them and enforced the policies of the movement.
7:00 to 8:00a.m.	Breakfast
8:00 to 12:00noon .	Demanding physical exercises that included: weight lifting, jumping, running, crawling over sharp terrain, karate, rope climbing, and practice in climbing heights. (One short break was permitted for a drink of water)
12:30p.m.	Lunch Foods at different times included: soup, marmite, eggs (drink them raw), bread, lentils, rice and curry, apples, water, on some special occasions ice cream.
1:30 to 4:00 p.m.	Training in special skills that included: map reading, identification of particular geographical locations, use of the compass, knot tying, use of special codes, use of the walkie talkie, and how to shoot and kill animals. Each girl was also asked to write a personal report about her own self.
4:00 p.m.	Tea
5:00 to 6:00 p.m.	Parade
6:00 p.m.	Gather to say oath
10:00 p.m.	Sent to bed. They slept in small sheds on the ground in sacks (fertilizer bags) without pillows. Sometimes they used their clothes bag for a pillow.

who has been out of the conflict for five years (Sabitha-Jayanthi) has been included. Her interview material has been included because the author believed her story should be heard but kept separate from those that met the criteria of the study.

All six girl soldiers in this study served as a child soldier prior to reaching the age of 18 years. The ages at which they became a child soldier were 10, 11, 14, 16, 17 (two) and the seventh girl joined at 13 years. All six had been out of the conflict for two years or less. The seventh girl had been out of the conflict for five years. Five of the girls were “voluntary” participants and one had been forced, i.e. abducted. The seventh girl joined voluntarily. The length of time served as a child soldier was three months, one year, one year four months (two), three years, 10years four months and the seventh girl seven years. Two had been abandoned by their parents as very young children and one of them was raised by a cruel paternal relative and the other by a maternal relative. One was raised by her mother. Four, including the seventh girl, lived with both parents. One did not have any siblings, two had one sibling, one had eight siblings and the others had two and six respectively. The seventh girl had eight siblings. They attended school up through grade four, five, six and eight. One began the 12th grade but did not complete. One girl did not indicate the grade achieved in school but joined the movement at age 11 and did not have any further schooling. The seventh girl went through the ninth grade. They all lived in villages.

When sick or injured they were usually taken care of and given medicine. They would be taken to see the doctor and may even be sent to a camp hospital

The girls also said that nobody could have love affairs or sex. It was considered a major offense and severe disciplinary action would be taken if these rules were broken. (They did not indicate if or how often this rule was transgressed.)

Once the girls were in the armed movement they were given:

- clothes that included a clothes bag, two sets of dresses (used to deceive the government soldiers and other non-military people), a green striped uniform, jeans, shirts and shoes

- necessities during days of menstruation
- three months of basic training
- five months of rigorous training
- a wooden “dummy gun,” that was always with them; it became a constant companion, they were to become one with the gun.
- a real gun when it was believed they were not afraid of a gun and if they were perceived as being ready to go to war. This was viewed and experienced as a major achievement.
- a cyanide capsule necklace on black thread that had to be worn when going into battle. They were told to take it before being captured. It made the girls feel safe because it was a guarantee that the enemy could not capture them alive and abuse or harass them. If they gave their cyanide necklace to anyone they were immediately suspected of being a traitor.

They were taught:

- to be loyal to the movement by the leader
- that it was a great honor to die a hero’s death. If they died in battle they would be promoted to a high rank and given a hero’s death. If they returned alive they would be given special privileges and on some occasions get to see their family
- that if they were captured by the enemy they would be brutally tortured
- not to kill the enemy if they could take them alive
- to take the cyanide capsule just before being captured
- how to escape if caught
- to kill the enemy
- how to enter enemy territory and collect information
- how to conduct night raids (often not knowing who they were killing)
- how to use real weapons, guns and grenades
- how to write detailed reports

- how to go into the village or enemy territory in disguise with guns in their trouser leg or dressed in dresses and jewelry. When the government army was checking their identity card they could shoot them at close range.
- to be the keeper of detailed records and track all materials as store keepers. They recorded the number and types of gun, types and quantities of ammunition (given as used and returned when not used), even cleaning materials

They were forced or ordered to:

- kill the enemy or be punished or disabled
- walk long distances without food
- serve as bodyguards and shields to the leaders at camp and in battle to keep them from being killed
- to continue on a mission even when they were covered with boils or scabs
- watch their fellow soldiers convulse after taking the cyanide capsule and observe them being shot (by their own side) if they did not take cyanide before capture so that they would not be able to give away the secrets

They discovered:

- how revengeful and filled with rage (at the time it was happening) they became when they saw their own fellow comrades killed by the enemy. It made them (at the time) want to kill the enemy in return.
- they did not want to kill innocent people (although when they were being watched they did kill innocent people in the massacres) and they attempted to find ways to overlook civilians, especially children who were hiding from them when on raids.
- how much they wanted to save ordinary people and found ways to do so when they were sent into villages

MESSAGES FROM THE SRI LANKA GIRL SOLDIERS

The voices of the girl soldiers as they related to

each of the nine themes previously identified are presented in appendix VIII. The conclusions relating to each of the themes are presented in this section. Based on these conclusions, options and choices were identified for potential use in demobilization and reintegration programs.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The relationships that each girl has with her family vary and they now all recognize at some level what a significant loss it is not to be in a secure relationship with their family. Some of the girls have been able to begin to work through the loss of these significant others in their life. They all long for family connection, home, place and permanence. Some want to return home and care for the members of their family that they have caused to suffer or who have become ill since they left home. They all long for a family and meaningful relationships. Some of the girls do not have a family with which to be reconciled. Many of the girls feel nobody wants them; remembering the family they once had makes them very sad. There are girls who are having difficulty even knowing where their home is located. Their families shifted and moved so many times they do not know which village they could now identify as their home village. Even when they can identify the village where they lived they remember it as a place of violence because of the war and they do not want to return. They all recall the fear and hardships experienced by their families. They all wish to be able to help their mother in some fashion.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- They experience themselves as “too far” psychologically from their family and their community.
- They recognize how everything has changed.
- There is a great amount of personal anxiety in the face of the unknown issues around their family relationships.
- There is a desire to return home to family to try and provide care, especially to their mother.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Find ways for them to participate in providing care for others.
- Help them find ways to redeem themselves.
- Help them develop acts of atonement.
- Help them participate in activities that will take them further away from the death field they have been living in and help them giving and caring fields. If this is not possible with their family then have it be with others.

FESTIVALS AND RELIGION

Festivals were very important and held great meaning for the girls. They recalled the various festivals with great detail and described them at great length. The feelings that accompanied these recollections were hopeful and happy memories. Religion and God took on a different texture and meaning from festivals. Festivals provided comfort and meaningful engagement while God's existence and engagement in their life was questioned and filled with contradictory thoughts and ideas.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- Festivals are one way of staying tied to the past.
- Festivals help them maintain a sense of belonging.
- Festivals provide continuity.
- Festivals give them exposure to familiar comforting symbols.
- They know what the festivals require of them and they can have a meaningful role.
- They want to have faith that God will love, provide and protect but they are afraid and ambivalent about trusting in what they have been taught.
- God is often seen as distant and cold.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices could be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- That reintegration programs include the celebration of the festivals that are important and meaningful to the girls.
- Allow the girls to assume a meaningful role in the festivals such as helping to prepare the meal,

decorating, etc.

- Encourage and provide a time for the girls to recall and tell stories about their childhood memories of various festivals and how they participated. which will hopefully enable a sense of continuity with their own past self.
- Allow them to study, read freely and discuss with knowledgeable people the belief structure of their religious tradition.

EDUCATION

The girls attitude toward going to school and studying prior to becoming a child soldier varied. Some of the girls wanted to do well and others did not want to apply themselves and study. They saw receiving good grades as a measure of their value. They wanted to please their parents and be successful in school. They felt pressure from their families to achieve and do well. They worked hard to be rewarded with prizes. Often, the teachers were very punitive and hit or scolded students for being weak in a subject. The harsh school environment and/or the troubles and difficulties at home provided reasons to want to run away. Following their child soldier experience the girls began to appreciate the value of education and its importance for their future and wanted very much to study and go to school.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- They recognize that education can provide them with a future of meaning and purpose.
- They are ready and want to have the opportunity to study.
- They want to study more to please their own self rather than just pleasing others.
- They want to decide what it is they will study, they do not want to be forced by others to study particular subjects.
- Unrealistic expectations and high demands from punitive teachers will prevent them from continuing to fulfill their educational pursuits.

Based on these conclusions, the following options and choices should be considered for demobiliza-

tion and reintegration programs:

- Girls should be given the opportunity to select realistic subjects to study that will lead to a more meaningful and purposeful life.
- Teachers need to be sensitive and set realistic standards of achievement that can be attained.
- Encouragement not punishment should be the end toward which the teachers direct effort.

PLAY

In describing their early childhood prior to becoming a child soldier each remembered that there had been a time in their life when they played and had fun. It was one of the few times that was free of burdens. It was also a time when they recalled having and being with friends. They recalled early childhood play at home, doll play and sand castle play at the beach. They also recalled the organized play they experienced at school such as badminton and kilithattu.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- recalling play experiences is a normalizing experience
- recalling play experiences is a way to bring some balance to the enormous loses they have had
- reduces their sense of failure
- restores their childhood
- play memories serve as a way to bridge the great psychological distance they have traveled from their childhood

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Build in designated times for the girls to select games they want to play and encourage age-appropriate ways of playing that are not unduly aggressive.
- Encourage large muscle play which will help diminish tension.
- Have them recall and share stories about their play in childhood.

- For those who show interest, have them work or play with young children.
- Playing will help them recover their lost childhood and help them reconnect with the culture.

REASONS FOR JOINING

There were several primary reasons why the girls joined the movement. Several wanted to escape from a life their family had chosen for them. They felt they were been forced to go to school and study, achieve high grades and meet their families' ever-increasing expectations. They also wanted to escape from arranged marriages. When they attempted to explain to their parents that they did not want the marriage their parents had arranged their parents could not take their opinions into account. A third reason was that they wanted to do something for their people and they felt angry for how their people were being treated. The fourth reason had to do with propaganda. Propaganda presented in such a way it made those in the movement look smart and worthy of respect. They saw the movement as a place where they could prove their worth and others would be able to recognize their value.

Conclusions based on these observations include:

- These are strong willed young girls.
- They are counter-culture in that the are unwilling to accept an arranged marriage.
- Their vision of marriage is often different from their parents.
- They want to participate in making their own life decisions.
- They are willing to pay a high price to follow their own lead.
- They are unwilling to stay in an oppressive relationship.
- They are altruistic in they want to help their people and alleviate the suffering they have observed.
- They want to prove they are strong, competent, capable and of value for what they can accomplish.

- They are vulnerable.

Based on these conclusions the following options and possibilities should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Assist them in reclaiming and owning the ideals they once believed in.
- Assist them in finding appropriate ways to give expression to their ideals.
- Support them in recognizing and accepting that they are strong, capable, competent as well as vulnerable.
- Support them in their thinking about their decisions.
- Offer options and possibilities whereby they have choices that keep them connected to the culture.
- Offer times of dialogue and discussion around their vision of marriage and family and how their visions are different from or consistent with the prevailing view of their family and/or the culture.

TRAINING AND LIFE AS A CHILD SOLDIER

Life as a child soldier began by being sent to one of the camps for training. Personal supplies were minimal. A clothes bag was issued that could also serve as a pillow. There were no beds. The girls slept in sheds on a dirt floor. Girls who were already serving as soldiers initiated the new recruits and took them to the places where they could wash and take care of personal hygiene needs. They were warned of the torture they would have to endure if they were captured. If they were chosen as a fighter they were given a cyanide capsule to take to prevent them from being captured alive. They had to endure from three to five months of grueling training. If chosen as one of the fighters they participated in fierce battles where they witnessed others being wounded and killed by the enemy. They also witnessed the horrific death from cyanide. The battles were often carried out at night, which made it difficult to know how many people you had actually shot. If you did not carry out orders you were subject to brutal punishment or death. Some of the girls served in supportive roles that included political work, relief work and detective involvement. Not

all of the girls addressed sexual activity in the armed group. Those that did speak on the sexual issues stated that love affairs or having sex was considered a major offense and severe disciplinary action was taken. They did not state that there was an absence of sexual activity but rather that, if known, it would bring severe disciplinary action.

Conclusions based on these observations include:

- The girl soldiers were the victims (received brutal treatment in the camps and during battle).
- The girl soldiers were perpetrators of violence (they participated in fierce fighting and they shot and killed).
- The girls could and did justify, in their own thinking, the killing of enemy soldiers even at close range (at times they were disguised and dressed as village children, when the soldier asked to see their ID they killed him).
- When their companions were killed, they felt rage and the need to take revenge (at the time).
- They found ways to not kill civilians when taken on border attacks, they pretended not to see them even at the risk of being targeted as a traitor.
- Under tight surveillance and control they continued to exhibit some independence of choice in spite of great odds being against them, to not take the cyanide capsule and to escape.
- The images of fierce fighting and companions dying from the cyanide capsule continue to be seen and felt over and over again.
- They were persuaded that if captured by the enemy they would be tortured, harassed and abused.
- If captured, they lived in constant fear of being searched out and killed by their own army for not taking the cyanide capsule before capture.
- When captured and not tortured they felt deceived and betrayed by what their own army had told them.
- They were labeled traitors by both sides.
- They felt divided, they behaved other than they felt, they were afraid but acted outwardly as

though they were not afraid.

- With one exception (torture victim) they were not sexually abused and said intimate sexual or personal relationships were forbidden and would be punished.
- The army recognized and made good use of their capacity for leadership.
- They were taught and acquired many useful skills for technical and communications work.
- The girls felt gratified and even thrilled when acknowledged for their accomplishments.
- The ultimate achievement was to be awarded a “hero’s welcome” even after death for the vast killing and destruction of the enemy.
- The girls have been left intense unrelenting anxiety, severed body parts, ever enduring fear and a sense of dread.
- When injured or sick they usually received treatment and medicine.
- The essentials of life (however harsh) and death were provided: food, clothing, shelter, structure, companionship and even a prescribed way of death (cyanide capsule).
- The way of death (cyanide capsule) was presented as a special gift that would assure their safety and protection from abuse.
- The girls learned to use and not be afraid of a wide variety of weapons.
- Great focus was placed upon physical strength and endurance.
- Intimacy and attachment were directed toward a “dummy gun” that was a constant and abiding companion that had to have with them at all times when the attachment was complete they were given the real gun.
- The army assured that positive human (feelings) emotions of attachment and intimacy were directed toward the “dummy gun,” comfort and safety toward the cyanide capsule .
- The inner life of the girl soldier was invisible.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- the girls be supported in reclaiming their inner life and voice, as well as the one that can be heard
- assistance be given in using their technical and communication skill to good use
- be provided with a safe haven that allows them a space in which to begin to recover their sense of identity knowing that identity is a life-long process and reduce the great discrepancy and contradictions that continue to haunt them, assist them in recognizing that they are more than the terrible thing they have done
- provide therapeutic support when requested recognizing that each girl must be the judge of where she is in her desire and ability to look at what she has done and what she has experienced
- give them the experience of being safe in life (safe haven space)
- connect them with concrete tasks that will allow them to be productive
- remind them of the positive decisions that they have made and begin to help them claim those as part of who they are

RECONSIDERATION OF THE DECISION

The girls question the decision they made in light of what has happened to them and what they have had to live through. They idealize their life prior to becoming a child soldier or at least see it in a better light than it had been. They wonder about and question the decision they made in the past to join the movement. They wonder how they could have been so tough. In retrospect they wonder why they would have made the decision to leave home. In attempting to understand their decision they recall who was good to them and if circumstances were better they would not have left home. They are beginning to realize the high price they paid and all the suffering they have had to endure for becoming a soldier. Some of the girls feel they have sinned against their

family or that their behavior caused the death of someone in their family. They wonder if they will ever be able to regain their self-esteem. One of the girls in this study who was forced into the military questions why this fate had been delivered upon her, she wonders what she had done to deserve such treatment. She realizes her life has been changed forever.

Conclusions based on these observations include:

- In retrospect the decision presents itself as a mistake.
- They disappointed meaningful others in their life.
- They believe if life had been better they would not have gone so they were not entirely to blame for the decision that they made.
- They recognized they paid a high price for the decision that they made.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Establish ways for them to be reconciled or at least not estranged from their family.
- Help them regain faith in their decision-making ability.

SENSE OF SELF

After their experience as a child soldier they often felt broken, worthless, alone, confused, afraid, invisible and without a voice. They feel like they do not belong to anyone and they are afraid to trust other people. They feel they no longer know how to fit in and they worry about being killed in the future. They are afraid they will never be a free person. They have not given up on life.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- The experience of being a child soldier damages and diminishes one's sense of self.
- They are broken but not quite severed in two and not beyond repair.
- They are afraid of life.
- They question who they are and who they will be

and who they will become.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Help them participate in acts of care that will begin to show them that they can be giving and caring.
- Assist in relationship-building groups to reduce their sense of isolation.
- Begin to reconnect them to the larger community in small ways so the probability of success is almost certain.
- Help them recognize that who they are becoming will be dependent on the decisions they are making.
- Offer therapeutic support but do not mandate any. Choice for therapeutic support must be freely entered into or self-exploration that will help them see their own self in a broader perspective.

TIME AND THE FUTURE

The girls are afraid of their decisions and the consequences they will have. They make and remake many decisions. Their capacity to make a decision and remain committed to that decision is difficult. They have forgotten or are confused about specific dates and times. They are able to remember their life prior to becoming a child soldier. The date they have to leave the sheltered environment is one they know and cannot forget. The decision about where they will go to live when they are free to leave the sheltered environment where they are now living creates significant distress. They want to be in a right relationship with other people and they question how that will be possible given all they have done and lived through.

Conclusions based on these observations include

- All the girls are fearful of the future.
- They are confused and confounded regarding their possibilities for marriage.
- They are worried and fearful about how others (people in their village, members of the movement, etc.) will view them.

- They want to do something meaningful, useful, of help to others for the hardhearted acts they have committed.
- They wish to be redeemed and forgiven (by self and others) for what they have done.
- They want to help and be in right relationship primarily with their mother but with other members of their family also.
- Engagement and focus on a concrete task can offer some respite from their racing thoughts.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Offer tasks that promote focused activity that they help identify, sewing, dancing, etc.
- When possible, help them reestablish meaningful connections with their mother (and some way of being in right relationship to her) and other family members that they identify.
- Help them identify ways that they can feel they are helping make up for the terrible acts they have performed.
- Help when possible to have the village perform rituals that enable for the community and child to forgive and accept one another.
- Help them forgive their own self.
- Help them realistically appraise the danger they are in with regard to those still in or working for the movement.
- Help them develop at least one realistic concrete plan that they can execute that moves them into the future.

8. SRI LANKA DISTINCTIVES

Some distinctive features from the armed movements were identified from the interview material that appear to be of critical importance or unique to each country. This is not to suggest that these were the only distinct features but rather they were the ones reported by the girls. The following summa-

rizes the distinctive features associated with the girls interviewed in Sri Lanka.

The girls were issued a “dummy gun.” This gun was to be the girl’s constant companion. She was instructed to keep it with her always, even when she slept. She was instructed to become one with the gun. Once it was judged that she was comfortable and at one with the “dummy gun,” which was considered a great achievement, she was presented with a real gun.

“As long as you are frightened to handle a rifle you won’t get one. You have to wait till you are ready to get a real rifle. With the ‘dummy’ you have to get used to it. The moment they realize you are not scared and you are keen to handle a rifle you are given one.”

The girls, who were fighters, were issued a cyanide capsule on a necklace. The necklace was to be worn into battle and swallowed to prevent them being delivered into the hands of the enemy. The girls were told their death by cyanide was better and did not compare with the torture they would receive at the hands of the enemy. It was to assure their safety and protect them from the enemy.

“The day I was given the cyanide (capsule) I was very happy because no one would catch me alive — abuse or harass me. This was for my safety. I felt good to carry this around my neck. One day another leader didn’t have her capsule. I don’t know what happened; she didn’t explain. She said that she wanted to use mine. That day, I never ever thought I will be caught, so I gave mine to her. I was fighting in a war. Four soldiers captured me. They surrounded me and I gave up. I had no cyanide so it was easy to surrender.”

“Before we were given guns to carry. We had to carry a piece of wood (a dummy). All the while we had to carry and after quite some days when we were used to it, we were given rifles. The day I got the rifle I was thrilled and happy.”

- Child Soldier, Sri Lanka

“Our leader was a doctor, she was wounded and she fell. She ordered us to take the cyanide, I didn’t. The thought of the others — the way they died flashed before my eyes and I didn’t want to take cyanide.”

“I was given one cyanide capsule. As we began this journey we were warned - If the enemy catches you, you will be abused so do not get caught if you do get caught take the capsule.”

- *Child Soldier, Sri Lanka*

“Without the cyanide we don’t go to war. Even now I don’t like jewelry. I like a black thread round my neck. I had got used so much to the thread around my neck. I feel sad when I think of what happened to me. I had the cyanide and I didn’t take it and when I go back I’ll have to face death.”

The ultimate achievement was to be honored at a “Hero’s Welcome.” A hero’s welcome was a special honor granted to those who risked and/or sacrificed their life in battle by killing and destroying the enemy. The supreme hero’s welcome was celebrated and took place after the girl’s death. If by some chance the girl was not killed in battle and had escaped capture and had not swallowed the cyanide capsule her “Hero’s Welcome” might include a visit from some member of her family.

“When someone goes out for a Hero’s death, they are honored. I feel sorry for them. Many die and never come back. Some have come back after performing dangerous missions. They are then promoted and become respected.”

“I went out to die a hero’s death - you have to enter a camp and come back. I came back victorious. Finally I was major - nobody is called major, you are only given a name and you are called by that name. The rank is announced only after one’s death.”

- *Child Soldier, Sri Lanka*

9. WHAT ARE KEY RISK FACTORS IN THE CHOICE TO BECOME A CHILD SOLDIER?

Three risks have been identified and reviewed:

- being poor and disadvantaged
- inhabiting a combat zone
- being separated from their family

These risks were present for the girls studied and played an important role in their becoming a child soldier.

The girls in these interviews also shared other factors that were important in their becoming child soldiers. These additional risks include:

- dropping out of school
- not having a voice in decisions that affect their life
- being marginalized in new family structures
- failure to be protected by the family

DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL:

Girls dropped out of school because the teachers were often punitive and the girls felt humiliated or they could not reach the high standards and expectations set by their parents. They also dropped out of school to provide for the survival needs of their family, i.e., helping to provide food or being responsible for a younger sibling or an aging or sick family member. They often did not have money for tuition or supplies and had to drop out of school. Frequently the school was a great distance from the home village and they had to walk long distances. Public transport was very uncertain.

NOT HAVING A VOICE IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR LIFE:

Girls were sent, without being included in the decision, to live with relatives or sent off to work as domestic servants. They also were not willing to

participate in arranged marriages and would flee to the armed group rather than marry at their parents' insistence.

"About ten days before the day of the marriage, I started to plan to leave the house. I waited, tried to convince my parents, they were very adamant and would not listen to me. They never listened. The day before the marriage everything was ready. I ran away. I ran away to escape a marriage I didn't like."

- Child Soldier, Sri Lanka

BEING MARGINALIZED IN NEW FAMILY STRUCTURES:

When a parent remarried, the girl may have felt rejected by the new step-parent. They were often abused or mistreated in the newly created family structure by the new parent as well as their birth parent. They no longer felt included in the family.

FAILURE TO BE PROTECTED BY THE FAMILY:

Girls were left at home to watch younger siblings without an adult. The girls were emotionally and physically exhausted, an easy prey for armed groups. Girls and women were used to perform tasks for the family such as walking long distances to collect salt or working in the field with other women and girls. They were vulnerable to ambush by armed groups.

10. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE GIRL SOLDIERS ON THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interviews provided a broad understanding of the girls' experience of being child soldiers. They also provided information on the interview process. Comments by the girls have resulted in an under-

standing of how they viewed the interview process. Two areas are considered: the consent forms and the interview. Most of the information on the interview process came from the interviews in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Colombia.

AFFIRMATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

Many of the girls showed heightened interest in the consent form. They took note of every word. They often went through the form repeatedly, reading it in silence. If they could not read, when the consent form was read to them, they asked for it to be read several times. They raised questions about its implications for them and for their family. They specifically asked if it would pose any danger now or in the future for them or their family. They were very interested to know how the material would be used.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- They recognize that what they do may have serious implications for meaningful others in their life; they now experience themselves in relationship to their family, their community, etc.
- They took seriously what they were being asked to do and felt responsible for the decision they were making in participating in this study; they were being thoughtful and careful about the decision they were in the process of making.
- They want to participate and take an active part in the decisions that are going to affect their life.
- They want their voice to be heard and taken into account.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices are recommended when using consent forms for research or other purposes:

- Consent forms must be used and written at a level that the girl can understand.
- If she cannot read, the form must be read to her with opportunity for her to have it re-read and for her to ask questions until she feels comfortable with the document.
- She needs to be told of the value of the research, how it will be used and assured of her right to withdraw at any time without suffering any

adverse consequences.

- Care must be taken to fully inform and allow girls to participate in decisions that are going to affect their life.
- Confidentiality must be assured.
- A written summary based on the experience of girls who have been through the interview process could be provided so she could read and evaluate for herself how the process had helped, hindered and/or had been of value to others.

INTERVIEWS

In the beginning of the interview process the girls described feeling nervous and afraid of the process and about giving correct answers to the questions. They were reassured that there were no wrong answers and everything they said would be accepted. Some exhibited curiosity about the laptop computer and the cassette recorder. One girl wanted to review the questions that were going to be asked in advance. Another wanted to know in more depth the purpose of the interviews. Another asked if she could pretend the interview was for the media so that it would be more entertaining. Most of the girls indicated a strong desire to tell their story as they had wanted to do this for some time. They said it was a relief to go to the memories and be able to express and master the process of relating to the happy and sad moments in their life.

One girl stated "I was a bit scared, as I did not know why you people were coming to meet us but as you went along it looked not too bad." They thought it would be useless and nothing would come out of it and that it would be another waste of time. They found, however, that the interviews brought some clarification to their experience and enabled them to look at their life even when that was difficult for them. For example, "All of us thought that it will be like everybody talking and talking but nothing happens, they go away and do not care about us. This has been different. It has helped me in many ways. First of all I went down memory lane and found out why I ran away."

Another girl offered the following comment on the interview process: "As for me I can see myself clearly this has helped and given me encouragement

to go ahead and improve my life. I can now face my future with confidence. In a way this has been useful. I am able to see what I have learned through all these experiences."

Two other girls made the following enlightening comments to the interviewer: "After talking to you, lots of thoughts went through my mind. In a way I was happy I could talk about all this to both of you. I do not talk much because I cannot trust any one. All the time I spend here is either with the machine or with the radio." And: "I have to talk to you. I have not told my story to any one else and I must now see you and talk to you. I wanted to talk to someone; finally I have got this chance. When I saw you I thought I could tell everything. Now my burden is a bit less. Thank you." And finally one of the girls said to the interviewer, "Please listen to me; it would be good if you listen to me."

Conclusions based on these observations:

The interviews:

- were entered into with some amount of fear
- provided many girls the opportunity to tell their story
- provided an avenue for beginning life review
- enabled the girls to begin to evaluate the future
- helped the girls to see their self in a broader perspective
- increased their capacity to trust another person
- contributed to an increase in their self-confidence
- provided the beginning of the integration of past, present and future
- provided a space and time for physical and emotional safety
- helped them see they could be valued and important to others
- enabled them to realize they were not alone
- helped them recognize that others could treat them respectfully

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices are recommended when interviewing

and for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Make available trained sensitive interviewers to conduct in-depth individual interview sessions with each girl soldier who wishes to participate. Participation is voluntary.
- The interviews should take place in an environment that assures physical and emotional safety.
- Multiple interview sessions should be offered and the spacing of the interview sessions should be decided by the girl in dialogue with the interviewer.
- The interview permits the girl to review her life in a broad context where she can take into account where she has been, where she is now and what she sees herself moving toward in the

future.

- The interviewer acts with due respect for what the girl wishes to recall, when she wishes to recall information and at what pace.
- The interviewer allows the depth of the interview to be determined by the girl.
- The interviewer does not focus on the girl's strengths or weaknesses but rather listens intently and hears and listens without judgment.
- Confidentiality should be assured.
- Resource people should be available if the interviewee feels a need for follow-up to the interview to deal with emotions that may arise from the interview process.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

AFFIRMATION OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWEE

(This consent form will be reviewed verbally with the interviewee to be certain that it is understood. Once understood the written consent form is presented for a signature. Research interviews may not be conducted before this has taken place.)

I am _____ (interviewer's name) and I am working with the Quaker United Nations Office and _____ (NGO or University). I am interested in understanding the story of your life. What kinds of things you did when you were younger, where you lived, who you lived with, what you liked to do, who you enjoyed being with and other information about your family and community that you remember and would like to share with me. I would also like to hear about how you became a child soldier. I would be interested in knowing what happened to you when you were a child soldier. What each day was like for you. I am also very interested in hearing about your life as it is now — the way it is today and how you see the future. What you and other young women tell us will be used to assist groups like ours begin to plan programs that will include what young women like yourself tell us you need. It would help us to know the kinds of things that would be most helpful for you to have a better and easier life. The experiences you have had in your life will help us understand what we need to do for young women who have been used as soldiers. A report will be written at the end combining the stories of all the young women we talk to from four different countries. All of this information will help us know what young women want and need as they continue to build their life.

If you give me permission I would like to tape record what you tell me. I can also just write what you tell me. You can decide if you would like me to use the tape recorder or write what you tell me. After we have finished, if you like, you and I can read together the story you have told me. If you want to make any changes in what I have written you can tell me when we go over your story.

When I am writing I will not use your name or anyone's real name. If we are using the tape recorder you can use different names for people so that the person's real name will be private and protected.

I will ask you to meet with me three different times. Each time we would meet for about 1 _ hours. We will agree on a time and place that is comfortable, private and safe. A second interviewer may be with me to be sure I am recording your story just the way you are telling it to me.

One other thing that is very important for you to know, if you change your mind, for whatever reason, and decide you do not want to continue talking with me we will stop. You should not feel bad about doing this because everyone has the right to change their mind and make their own personal decisions. You can make that decision at anytime, during any of the interviews.

I have reviewed this information and I agree to participate in this study.

Signature_____ Date_____

APPENDIX II

Ethical Guidelines for Interviewers

Having completed the training provided by _____ (name of person providing training) in relation to the Female Child Soldier Project being conducted by The Quaker United Nations Office and _____ (name of University or NGO)

I agree as an interviewer to:

1. Follow the process for contacting and interviewing as outlined in our training.
2. Keep all names and information confidential. Never use any identifying names in the written or recorded material.
3. Protect the safety, security and privacy of the interviewee at all times.
4. Review informed consent with interviewee prior to any interview taking place and make certain it is understood and signed.
5. Remain sensitive to the interviewee and stop the interviewing if it appears necessary or if requested by the interviewee. Make referrals for emotional support when appropriate and manage any secondary traumatization.
6. Be available for follow-up support requested by the interviewee.
7. Not raise expectations and/or make promises that cannot be fulfilled.
8. Honor all commitments made to the interviewee as outlined in the Interviewee Informed Consent Form.
9. Report the data with as much accuracy as possible and honor the voice, i.e., the story as given by the interviewee.

I have reviewed the Ethical Guidelines and agree to act in accordance with them.

Signature_____ Date_____

APPENDIX III

Interviewer Actions and Responsibilities

At all times the safety and security of the young woman and others involved in this project is more important than the data.

1. Complete days of training as outlined in the training agenda.
2. Identify and interview between four and 10 female child soldiers between the ages of 10 and 18 years of age who have not been out of the conflict for more than two years.
3. Conduct interviews only when assured that the interviewee understands the entire process outlined in the interviewee informed consent form.
4. Times, places and length of meetings will be arranged keeping safety, confidentiality, privacy and convenience in mind.
5. Follow the in-depth interview method being utilized in this study and as outlined and adapted in training.
6. Use of the tape recorder and the computer or willingness to be trained in their use.
7. Follow the contacting and interviewing process as presented in training.
8. Assume responsibility for the recording device and the computer and return the equipment to the project director at the end of the interviewing process.
9. Tape record, when permission is given, and translate the data deleting all identifying names.
10. Take notes in addition to recording.
11. If recording will compromise the girl being interviewed, record data in writing.
12. Translate the material as given without making changes in the words, but clarified as to cultural context where necessary for reasons of clarification. This will take place in dialogue with psychologist/anthropologist.
13. Submit data to a psychologist/anthropologist for clarification of cultural nuances.
14. Submit the material to the interviewee for any changes or deletions requested. If it is not possible to present the material in written form, the interviewer will review the material with the girl interviewed for clarification following the collection of the data.
15. Complete final data sets.
16. Transmit the data to the head researcher after the interviewee and the psychologist/anthropologist have reviewed the material and made changes (following each interview).
17. Call team meetings between anthropologist/psychologist, team leader as needed.
18. Make referrals of girls for outside emotional support.

(continued on next page)

Interviewer Actions and Responsibilities (page 2)

19. Report any problems, broken equipment, safety issues, etc., to team leader or head researcher.
20. Allow for longer interviews or spacing of interviews so that a trusting relationship can develop over time so the real story can be heard and avoid a rush to bring closure.

As an interviewer for the Female Child Soldier Project, my signature on this document confirms my acceptance of the following actions and responsibilities. The fee that I will receive for successfully carrying out my work will be _____. This amount will be paid to me following my submission of the translated data to the head researcher of the project. All data will be submitted to the head researcher.

I have reviewed the actions and responsibilities and agree to act in accordance with them.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX IV

APA Code of Ethics (www.apa.org/ethics/code.html)

In the design and implementation of this research project the APA code of ethics and a statement by the American Anthropological Association serve as the standard to be followed. The significant sections are referenced.

The American Anthropological Association states that in research the paramount responsibility is to those they study: When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Anthropologists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social and psychological welfare and to honor the dignity and privacy of those studied.

APA standards to be followed:

- 6.06 Planning Research.
- 6.07 Responsibility.
- 6.11 Informed consent to Research.
- 6.19 Honoring Commitments.
- 6.21 Reporting Results.

APPENDIX V

TEAM LEADER ACTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Monitor and provide oversight for the research project in the conflict area.
2. Work with head researcher and research trainer.
3. Identify and obtain agreement with two interviewers.
4. Identify and obtain agreement with anthropologist/psychologist to support the interviewer.
5. Monitor need for girl soldier support/referral and assist with providing support.
6. Make arrangements for training logistics (e.g. place, time)
7. See that research method is carried out in described in training and assist in modifying research training to be culturally relevant.
8. Review data after psychologist/anthropologist has placed it in cultural context and suggest additional clarification as needed.
9. Help identify with the project team an appropriate way of thanking the young women for participation in the research. This would be implemented at the end of the project.

APPENDIX VI

INTERVIEWER TRAINING / DIALOGUE AGENDA

(example: to be adapted in each country)

DAY 1

Morning

Introductions

Review of Agenda

Description of the project

 Reason for study

 Qualitative studies: what they are and why do them

 Feedback on description of study

Break

Number and form of interviews

Interviewer Actions and Responsibilities

Ethical guidelines for interviewers

APA Code of Ethics

Informed consent

Interviewing

Why interview?

Need to develop the interview guide together:

 We have ideas, but they must be culturally relevant or they will not work

 What are the cultural norms when interviewing this group in this country?

 What are the things with this group that may be different than with other groups in other countries?

 What might they expect in the interviewing process?

Working as a team

Lunch

Western ways of eliciting information:

 Reducing resistance

 Active listening

 Open-ended and closed-ended questions

DAY 2

Morning

Introduction to this interview process

Opening up life histories

Interview role-play one: School headmaster interview

Debrief role-play one

Break

Interview role-play two and three: Affirmation of Informed Consent for Interviewee and Focused Life

History/Engagement

Development of Questions

Role-play

Debrief interview situation
Development of preliminary guide with prompts for Initial Interview
Suicidality
Lunch
Initial work with computer:
 Basic word processing
 Use of discs
 Setting up an email account for them

DAY 3

Morning
Role-play four: Second interview, The Details of the Soldiering Experience/Mid-phase work
Development of Questions
Role-play
Debrief interview situation
Development of preliminary guide with prompts for Second Interview
Break
Training in western model of trauma reaction, part I
Lunch
Training in western model of trauma reaction, part II
Work with digital recorder:
 Use
 Transfer to text
 Setup of voice recognition

DAY 4

Morning
Role-play five, Third interview: Reflection on the Meaning of the Soldiering Experience and the Interview Process/Termination
Practice interviews
Debrief interview situation
Development of preliminary guide with prompts for Third Interview
Break
Final questions on responsibilities
Final questions on hardware/software
Other questions
Lunch
Taking care of yourselves:
 Stress
 Working as a team
 Stress reduction techniques

APPENDIX VII

Role-Play

Role-play is being used as a method for learning and practicing in-depth interviewing skills. The goal in the interviewing process is to create an environment in which the young girl feels free to talk to you. Talking about personal, painful matters may not only be difficult, it may also go against what she considers socially correct.

The following role-plays, based on the interview protocols, will enable you to practice ways of increasing communication skills when conducting in-depth interviews. There are no right or wrong answers. However some questions are better than others in eliciting information. The main question is, What is it like to be...? Generally speaking, questions that elicit fuller answers begin with what, when, how and where. As you practice and take on the role of the other you will come to understand and appreciate what it feels like being that person.

Directions for role-play. I will read a role-play situation and then ask each of you to divide into pairs and take turns assuming the role of the interviewer and the interviewee. After assuming each role (approximately 20 minutes) stop and explore how it felt to be in that particular role.

We will begin by working in pairs with a short role-play (about eight minutes); one person will serve as the interviewer and the other person will be interviewee. Then you will change places and explore what it's like in that role. Another option is to stop the sequence of actions and evaluate as you work your way through the role-play. By questioning various ways of asking questions it is possible to evaluate a variety of more comfortable choices.

SHORT PRACTICE ROLE-PLAY:

You have just accepted the position of directing a school for young children in a village where the school has been closed for more than three years. You want to employ local people who will be able to teach the children, provide social support and help to create a garden where children can play.

In this role-play, you will work in pairs, one person will be the new director who is conducting the interview and the second person will be the person wishing to work at the school. Change roles and follow up with discussion, discovery, renewed understanding and sensitivity. The discussion begins with the two participants and is followed by a discussion with the entire group.

ROLE-PLAYS OF THE ACTUAL INTERVIEW SITUATIONS:

The following role-play situations are placed within the context of the meeting where the Interviewee Informed Consent Form is shared with the interviewee and the three in-depth interview situations that are to be conducted with each interviewee.

MEETING: Informed Consent Form

The informed consent form is presented so that it is clear that the young woman understands its contents.

Role-Play:

In this role-play the interviewee reviews in detail the informed consent form with the young woman. In this role-play you will work in pairs with one person being the interviewer presenting, i.e., sharing the form and the other person being the child soldier who must understand it. Change roles and follow up with discussion, discovery and renewed understanding and sensitivity. The discussion begins with the two participants and is followed with a discussion of the entire group. (The discussion will include changes that may need to be made in the consent form to make it more culturally relevant.)

APPENDIX VIII

The Voices of Girl Soldiers from Sri Lanka

Six girl soldiers met the criteria for being included in the study: serving as a child soldier prior to reaching the age of 18 (two of the six were confused about their exact age but were younger rather than older girls) and having been out of the conflict less than two years. The data of the seventh girl soldier who has been out of the conflict for five years (Sabitha-Jayanthi) has been included. Her interview material has been included because the author believed her story should be heard but kept separate from those that met the criteria of the study.

The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed to identify important themes. The nine themes identified that were common to the interviews from girl soldiers in all four countries were used as the framework for organizing the data. This section organizes the voices of the girls according to these nine themes. In some instances the themes overlapped. Information on one theme may have been so interrelated with another that they could not be separated. When this situation presented itself the information was included under more than one theme.

Additional perspective on the data presented include:

- The interview quotes do not represent a complete collection of the interview transcripts.
- When a girl made extensive comments on the same topic, a typical representation of those comments is included.
- Each girl did not necessarily speak directly to every theme.
- In many cases one girl's voice represented the voice of others; in general, only one representation of the voice may have been included.

The names used are fictitious and do not reflect the actual names of the girls. Other identifying information has been changed to protect the identity of the girls.

Comments are presented as given and may not be complete sentences.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

ABARIMI:

I was born in a village. I grew up with a relative. I was told that my mother died and sometimes they said she had left me and run away. I don't know anything about my mother. I have seen a photograph of my father. But I have never met him. They say that he lives in the city. I don't know anything about him. When my relative died I was brought to another relative's house. The wife is a very cruel woman.

I went to a school close by, when I was about five or six years old. The wife never liked to send me to school. My relative insisted that I go to school and I went to school with their children. I studied hard and I have got prizes, I wanted to show the wife that I too can study. School starts at 8.30 in the morning and is over at 1.30 in the afternoon with a half an hour break at 10.30.

The wife used to give me stale food, kept overnight like old rice and curry, whereas her children used to be given pittu and string hoppers freshly made for them. I suffered and suffered in her hands.

She was very very wicked. I was often pinched and pushed and beaten up. She used anything at hand to hit me, even a broomstick. I have got hit till I got swollen all over the body. If in the kitchen she uses the ladle. When I was older the wife kept me home and didn't allow me to go to school. I had to work at home.

I did all the work at home from cooking to cleaning, washing and everything I could possible do and what I could not do was forced on me.

I suffered. I was angry with my mother and my father. I didn't ask details about my parents – I haven't seen my mother even in a photograph. When her children are treated differently and favored I get very hurt.

I feel the wife doesn't belong to our caste. I hear husband and wife fighting, where the caste is mentioned.

My relative drinks — when he comes home drunk, wife used to hit him. One day I remember he came home drunk and asked for food. Wife refused to give food and this time he hit her very badly. Later he said sorry but she was angry for a long time. She gets angry when he comes drunk.

My relative never hits me. Wife hits me with the ladle or anything she can lay hands on. Nobody wants me.

I was not directly abused by anyone. Wife's brother used to call me to his room. He talks to me in wrong language, bad language. I cannot say those words. He talks big people's talks when he comes close by. I used to run away from him and I have escaped. I hate him, if he gets close to me I used to shout and then he leaves me to go.

I was sick once. I was cared for and looked after well.

I like Christmas and the New Year. All festivals make me sad. Especially when people take family photographs I feel sad and want to cry. Sometimes I cry. It is then I miss my own parents.

KAVITHA:

I was born in a village towards the south. I lived with my parents. My father died. He died after I left to join the movement. This made me feel very sad. My mother has left the former place where we lived. She is now in another village I feel I can go there. As this place is away from the village I lived in.

Due to the war situation we have been shifting from place to place. I cannot say which is my village. I'll tell you about one village and school because I remember being there more than the other areas. I went to a school in a village in this area. In the village they cultivate paddy and vegetables.

I used to walk to school. School started at 7.30 in the morning and closed at 1.30. We used to stay after school and play or do other literary activities. I liked to wear the school uniform and tie. My parents had very high hopes regarding my future.

I was afraid that I would let them down because I knew that I was not a clever student. I was struggling to satisfy them because I loved them. During my school days all the time I had to go for tuition, I had no free time to have a hobby. I left the place when I was young.

We have no house or land there I have no happy memories of that place. I do not want to go there again. The war was becoming worse from day to day and the incidence of killing, shooting, shelling cordon and search operations were all miserable.

I liked someone who was interested in me. He was a relative and marriageable. They were in another village. During a heavy rainy season the dam broke and the whole family was swept away. My parents planned this marriage.

I was interested in artificial flower making with stockinet and cloth. My mother used to make and I was

interested. I will go home and learn this from her. Here too I learned to make artificial flowers. I am interested to start creative work and sewing.

We had a well, during the dry season we find it difficult to get water. I like gardening. My mother looks after the garden when I am not there. I don't cook in a big way, I just help my mother.

My father and mother never hit me. I was very friendly with our family. We also played together.

What made me sad was my father's death. Because I was not at home — I could not really cry and grieve for him. His death was because of me. He died so soon. I felt very bad. How could I have gone from that far away place. Nobody informed me — I heard through another girl who had come to the camp.

I know my mother would have been very sad. Others had been angry with me for leaving home. I hope they are okay now. My mother met me after I was in the camp.

PUNITHA:

I was born in a small village. In the beginning when I was very small I lived in a village in the un-cleared area. While we were there my father was killed. There were lots of disturbances and the war in this district was terrible. Where I lived it was very bad for a long time. We lived in constant fear.

The problems were because of the war. We were displaced several times and were refugees. We had not enough money and that was also very difficult for us. There were times we were hungry and sad. It was a very terrible period.

We were many children with our mother. We needed lot of money for our food. I am the last in the family. I have many sisters and brothers. All of them liked me — being the last they petted me. Some how or other my mother will find something or other for us to eat. Those days I remember were sad days and very often everyone was worried.

I like all my sisters. In a way I think I like my brothers more. After my father's death, a brother took over the family responsibility. As soon as my father died — we faced many difficulties. My father's death is something that makes me very sad even now. I saw this incident along with my mother. I was small, maybe just beginning nine years, yet it is very clear in my mind. One day the army walked in during daytime. They created an argument dragged him out. I ran out with my mother. They hit my father and shot him on one side of the temple. The brain came out and he fell. My mother ran to hold him. His eyes were open she carried him took his head on her lap and cried. She was chased away. She closed his eyes. They took his body and we never saw him. My mother still cries. This will not go away from my mind. We went to the temple to give alms, still my mother offers alms every year.

I must do something for my mother. I want to repair our house first. I feel I had let down my mother badly.

MANJU:

I was told that my father left home as soon as I was born. He does not come home even now, but I meet him once in a while — outside home. When I was young my mother went away to find a job. My mother's relatives looked after us.

My mother was very good at artificial flower making and I, too, liked that. I used to sit by her side and watch her making flowers. I too can make flowers. I like cooking, too; even here I help and enjoy cooking.

We, too, have our own house. We built this home it is enough for us. My mother is sick now; she's at home. She cannot look after me. I have no one except my mother. She had a big tumor and she was operated. Now

she is a sick person and stays at home.

After my father left my mother and us his children I heard that he had married again. He has children by that woman they say. He does not come home. They are also living close by. He talks to me sometimes, but he does not come home. When the time comes for me to leave this center I have no problem to get back home.

Relations are all okay, but not all, some are good, but some don't like us. Mother has to go for another operation. The stitches after the operation have come out she is always in pain. She can't work, it's difficult for her now.

My sister and her husband are living a happy life. Father and mother separated over a verbal quarrel. He never hit my mother in front of me. They only argue. One day they had a big argument and he left home.

I had no romantic involvement, I didn't have a single boyfriend, and I am not going to have a boyfriend. I will marry someone who is proposed to me.

My mother came to see me in the camp. They do not allow us to see them without any reason. She was sent away and I cried.

VAANI:

I lived in a village with my father, mother. My father was killed by the army. When this happened I was already on the other side. But I did not know this for some time.

I lived very happily with my Family for a long time. Then I left home and joined the movement. We lived happily together. Now my sister is living in a camp.

When I was small we lived in our own house and we had a large land around the house. Now of course the army has gone in and destroyed everything. Now no one can go there.

My mother came in search of me to that place, a kind of a camp and she cried and asked them to let me go. I was locked up in a room and my mother was not allowed to see me, and she went away.

Whenever I met other mothers, I used to think of my mother and call them "Amma," all were Amma then. Only now I am feeling for my own mother. Not so much of my father — I think more of my mother now.

I don't even dream of my mother. It looks a long, long time ago.

I like all my relations, but my mother did not allow me to go and live with them. I am allowed only to visit them and stay with them during daytime. They send good food and sweets. I like to eat sweets and enjoyed playing with the cousins who come home.

I learnt dancing in school. I like to dance to music. Even here we sometimes dance. I can't sing but I love listening to song. I like sad films here we have a T.V and I watch sad films.

Now my mother wants to see me, but she cannot come here — it is a long and difficult journey. When I got caught my mother came to see me. I was allowed half an hour to talk with them. What can I talk within that time?

In my village there are no big houses — no one aspires to build big houses. All were farmer families. We grew everything — the grains, the corn, fruits and vegetables. We were self-sufficient. The trees we had been like lime, breadfruit, jak and coconut, they are destroyed now.

VASANTHI:

I am from a very large family. My family is very poor. Our problem is poverty and our life was an eternal struggle

We lived in a small house. We had only two rooms for all of us. We had chickens at home — this brought some income. All of us worked hard, but we had not enough money for our needs. We tried to get daily paid work, which was hard to come by as there was always the war going on.

SABITHA-JAYANTHI:

I was born in a village in the North. My father was transferred to another province we settled down in a village there. This area I lived was a beautiful place. When I was small I remember many tourists coming into this seaside resort. There were big hotels. People were prosperous.

We were many in the family. My mother never went for a job; she was a housewife.

We had good water facilities, tap as well as a well. We had a large garden with many fruit trees, like lime, orange, mango, pomegranate, coconut, etc. We did not rear chickens. We owned cows, but we give it to other people to rear them.

When I was small I used to play a lot with my friends in the neighborhood.

My father used to spend time with me. I liked him very much. We had a library in our village — I used to go there and I like reading books.

My father never hit me. My mother did hit me because I was naughty and I used to get angry a lot. I liked everyone but I loved my father very much. He died. I like my sisters and brothers. But I like my elder brother more. He is like my father. My father took alcohol once in a while, when there was a celebration; he never got drunk.

My mother used to come to see me along with my sister. Sometimes I call my mother and speak to her.

Till I was 13 years old I had a very happy childhood at home with my family

All my family members are doing well. Sisters are married and settled down.

FESTIVALS AND RELIGION

ABIRAMI:

At that terrible moment — the leader who was wounded and alive wanted to live prayed and cried to the Hindu Gods and told me to pray to Jesus. I am a Christian. I prayed and asked God to save us.

I go to church regularly.

KAVITHA:

I like this (Deepavali) out of all the festivals. Pongal is celebrated for the sun God. We celebrate Deepavali by cooking good food, sweet meats and delicious curries with chicken and vegetables and have a good time. I like all the festivals, but Deepavali is good and I like it.

PUNITHA:

Among all the festivals, Thai Pongal is my favorite festival. In the village where I lived at the beginning, this festival was celebrated in a grand scale. I enjoyed this festival. Elaborate preparations are made. We get up early morning bathe and clean the house and its surrounding. We cook milk rice in a hearth out side facing the East. When the sun rises, the milk boils over — if it boils over towards the eastern side where the sun is just rising and we see it, it is said that it brings luck to us. It shows fullness and prosperity. It is the farmers' harvest festival. I have enjoyed the sweet rice, the sugar cane and everything that goes with this nice day.

MANJU:

It was a lamp dance for a special occasion. You know we have those little clay lamps lit up and carry that in our hands and move to the music and follow the song. The celebration is held in honor of the Goddess of wisdom.

VAANI:

The subjects I liked in school were language and religion.

I am interested in festivals, not all the festivals. I like Pongal only (the harvest festival to the sun god). I bathe at 3 a.m. and my father does the ceremonies as we are farmers, Pongal is important and I like it. The cows take the first place and we have a day for that, I like that too.

I don't like Deepavali — because people eat meat on that day. But when I went there I ate everything. I even ate snakes.

VASANTHI:

Religion and my faith give me lot of courage to live on. I go to church. I like the Christmas season. This gives me meaning and hope.

Every day I think of them sisters and pray for them.

I didn't do anything wrong purposely, if I had done anything wrong God will forgive me. God has protected me so far. He wants me to do more so now I am alive and I have to now think about my family and do something to help my sister.

God has become a stone. He does not listen to our prayers. Nothing happens the way we want to

SABITHA-JAYANTHI:

Among all the festivals, like Deepavali, Pongal, New Year, I like Pongal very much. It is an important festival. We give thanks to God and the life-giving sun. It used to be a nice happy day. We really celebrate two days. The second day we give a good day for our cows reared by one of the persons in the village.

We get up early morning before sunrise. The whole house is cleaned and washed and everything is spick and span. We make a new hearth outside the house. We cook milk rice in a big new pot. The milk has to boil over towards the East. We cook the rice with milk and jaggery. On the second day we boil milk rice in front of the cow shed. The cows are treated with sweet milk rice, they are decorated and fed with other things

they love to eat. They are sent out with a gift tied on them and people who look after them try to catch them and take the gift. It is a give and take happy day. I like this festival. It is good to be grateful to the animals that help us.

You know I don't like to go to temples, why did God allow this to happen to me?

EDUCATION

ABIRAMI:

Aunt never liked to send me to school, uncle insisted that I go to school with their children. I studied hard and I have got prizes, I wanted to show her that I too can study. At 13, aunt didn't allow me to go to school. I wanted to do well in studies. The master who taught maths used to hit me. I was weak in that subject.

All that I want now is to study and study well. Anything to study anything...maybe dancing I like dancing and music. I like but will I ever get a chance. I like to study but I am now older.

KAVITHA:

I went to school in a village. Then I didn't like to study. Now of course I like to study. Teachers didn't like me, maybe because I was weak in my studies....but I didn't want to study, my parents expected me to do well in school. Father forced me to study English. Parents had very high hopes regarding my future. I was afraid that I would let them down because I knew that I was not a clever student. I was struggling to satisfy them because I loved them. I had no free time to have a hobby. Before the exam I knew I would never be able to fulfill their desire, so I had plans to leave and run away. I ran away because I found it difficult to study. I didn't want to make them sad and hurt by failing my exam. Now I want to study.

PUNITHA:

I started going to school when I was only eight years old and did not study beyond grade four. We were displaced several times and I had no proper schooling. I always liked to study. I gave up continuing my studies because of all the troubles. It (English) was difficult to learn and that teacher was not kind. When I was small in school, I remember taking part in school concerts and sports meets. I have won prizes.

I didn't study so what else can I do? Sometimes I feel I should study. When and where and how can I start now? All those days are gone. Maybe I should do something and start to study. I want to somehow or other study otherwise I will not have a place in this world.

MANJU:

I liked to go to school. I studied up to the ordinary level. There were many teachers. I liked all my teachers. Nobody hit me. They scold us to make us study well. I don't mind that. Sometimes they used to hit even that I think it's for our own good. (Now) I want to study; I don't know how to fit in. But I'll try.

VAANI:

In school I studied up to grade five. I went to school daily. The school was very big. There were 2,500 children. In a way I didn't like to go to school. I couldn't study so well a good student and I used to feel bad for not being able to do well. My mother used to force me to study. The subjects I liked in school were language and religion.

VASANTHI:

When I was very small I went to a school close by. I cannot tell you details of my school life as I have forgotten. I used to walk to the school.

SABITHA-JAYANTHI:

I started my education when I was very small. About 1,500 children studied in that school. I studied there only up to grade nine. There were classes up to grade 12. Of all the subjects I liked social studies and religion.

PLAY

ABIRAMI:

For three years I was happy in the convent playing. I played many games like hopscotch and other games like that where we threw the mango seed in the squares drawn in different forms and hop from square to square. We played kilithattu and badminton.

KAVITHA:

When we were small children we played doll's house, cooked rice and curry in coconut shells served and pretended to eat. Police and the robber game and hide and seek were some of the games we played. In school we had netball and other physical activities. Those days I used to play with my friend.

PUNITHA:

I play with my friends in school and at home I had three good friends. We go to the beach to play. We build sandcastles on the beach and play run and catch. Sometimes we play doll's house, cook and eat along with my sisters.

MANJU:

I played netball. I go for practices and enjoy playing.

VAANI:

A teacher's daughter was my good friend. I play hide and seek and other games with her.

VASANTHI:

I remember playing with my brothers and sisters.

REASON FOR JOINING

ABIRAMI:

When I was 13 years old I wanted to run away from cruel people who kept me. I started thinking — if I join the movement I'll have a place and I can also do something useful. I did not know my parents and I suffered. I was angry with my mother and father. I didn't ask details about my parents — I haven't seen my mother, even in a photograph.

I joined the movement. I was contemplating on this for about one month. There were brothers and sisters who did lot of propaganda to make young people to join the movement. Looking at those sisters they were very smart, they wore uniforms and carried guns that I thought would make people respect me also. They also said we should save our land. I thought that was better than being badly treated by my aunt. My relative was wicked to me all the time, ill-treating me. I got an urge to join the movement. I told her I was leaving; she didn't even bother to stop me. In fact she ignored me when I got ready and was watching me leave home.

KAVITHA:

My parents had big expectations and wanted me to get good results. Before the exam — I knew I would never be able to fulfill their desire, so I had plans to leave and run away. Running away from home was not easy but to escape facing the examination I knew that I would fail made me take this very hard decision.

I felt good at the beginning with life in the movement, because at home I was compared with my cousins and others who did well in studies. My parents wanted me to do well; otherwise I was not good for them. That was also a problem for me. I felt bad, I used to dance but a teacher hit me on the leg — from that day I gave up dancing. I can't draw, I felt as though I couldn't do anything and I'm not capable of doing anything. I felt in the movement, at least I could prove my worth in a different sort of way

PUNITHA:

I was older when I made that sudden decision to run away. It was not because I wanted to join the movement to fight, I wanted to get away from the marriage my parents were planning to force me into. I really got disturbed, they were forcing me.

I was very worried as I was in love with someone else. I really couldn't forget him. I loved him very much and wanted to marry him only. From the time the other proposal came I was sad and wanted to escape.

About 10 days before the day of the marriage I started to plan to leave the house. I waited, tried to convince my parents, they were very adamant and would not listen to me. I tried to inform them about my wishes through my good friend and even through a relative. They never listened. The day before the marriage everything was ready. I ran away, there was a friend who joined me, we met up at another village temple and went to a base of the movement. I ran away to escape a marriage I didn't like.

MANJU:

I was forcefully taken away into the movement. One day three of us wanted to go to my grandmother's village. My cousins — the three of us got ready to go. While walking along the road there was a three-wheeler. We wanted the driver to take us to that village, the driver agreed. After a while he drove us into an unknown place and kept us locked in a house, later he forcefully took us to a camp. We told our story but nobody listened. They thought we came to join the movement willingly and now we are making up stories. We were then taken to a training base.

VAANI:

One day I ran away from school. One day on the day of a festival that was celebrated for the Goddess of wisdom - I told my sister that I will walk back home on my own and asked her to go home. That was the day I ran away to join. There was a leader, a sister (a member of the movement) waiting for me. She was the one who took me away. My mother came in search of me to that place, a kind of a camp and she cried and asked them to let me go. I was locked up in a room and my mother was not allowed to see me, and she went away.

One day I removed all my jewelry, left them at home and left home. My mother didn't know — I said I was going to school, but from school I ran away.

When you are taken in — everything is over; after that you never know. You have to enroll children into the movement through propaganda. Those sisters speak very well. They can convince any one.

All that I wanted at that time was to join and shoot. For about 10 days I was planning and planning. There were sisters who came and did propaganda work. Some said you can't use a rifle and shoot, others told me it will be difficult, don't come. After I started thinking about leaving home, I could not study, so I went away.

After I went there I cried. They asked me not to cry and comforted me and said now that you have come you have to bear everything. After some time my mother also came to that camp. I saw her from a distance; she was crying and asked for me. They told her that I was not there. I was then taken away by the back door. My mother cried and went away. Here I was made to study. I told them that I did not want to study. I came here to go to fight, so send me for training.

VASANTHI:

All the time what I was hearing was that the people and the army were giving trouble. From the time I was about 10 years old I was thinking and thinking and planning that I should also do something for my people. One day I left home at about 7 p.m. and walked alone for two miles. In the area where I lived you can go out alone any time and no one will hurt you. So I walked and walked without any fear to a base.

I was angry with the people as they had done lot of damage to my people and I don't think they will ever like us. I had a furious feeling within me against them terrible angry fire within me. You know they have not only just killed our people — they have put them into tar barrels, burnt with tires. Our children were put into boiled water. People in the border villages were cut up.

SABITHA-JAYANTHI:

I left home to join the movement. I like my race, language and my people — so I joined the movement to fight for the freedom of my people.

When I was about 12 years old I began to feel for all those people who were displaced and were coming from all over the areas. This and other incidents that people spoke about made me feel sad. Some schools were broken; we had no school and no freedom. I saw some people who were brought to the hospital; they were cut and maimed by the enemy/ army. I knew some children who had lost both their parents and their life became so difficult overnight.

Four days before school closed for vacation, nine of us school children planned to leave together and we did it. Everything around us was breaking; we felt there is nothing for us. This group was strong and help-

ful. They were trying to do something for the people.

TRAINING AND LIFE AS A CHILD SOLDIER

ABIRAMI:

I went to a place where the brothers had an office to join the movement. They told me that I was too young and that I should study but after I told them my story they took me.

And they took me to a jungle where there was a camp. I was given food. There were small sheds built and I slept on the ground. I was given an empty sack to sleep on. There were no pillows. I used to keep my clothes bag for my head. I continued to sleep that way.

At times I have felt that I shouldn't have left home. At least there I had a place to sleep on.

In the morning the sisters showed me the place where they go for the morning ablutions. When I washed and got ready they first of all introduced me on how to escape the army if they happen to meet or invade. They also said that the army is bad if they catch you they will abuse you, if they see you they will kill you. We have to kill them. If we fail in this duty we will get hit, disabled or we'll die.

I was placed in the ladies group. We had a leader and I was trained in this group.

I was trained in the jungle on how to enter the enemy territory and collect information, the use of guns, grenades, compasses and spotting distances for shelling and writing detailed reports. I was harassed to write so many things in detail I did not like that as that was difficult and I did not like shooting and killing after I saw what was happening. Outwardly I behaved brave; inwardly I was scared.

Apart from the difficult training I had to walk a long distance without food to places where the army camps were. We were so close that we could even hear them.

When there are one or two soldiers at sentry point we go in disguise. Inside we are in trousers with a rifle — outside we wear dresses and jewelry and appear normal — when the army fellow is checking an Identity Card — from behind we shoot — that is at close range and then we run away get on to our bicycle and vanish. I was a bodyguard. I have shot and killed the army.

First I got my basic training for one and a half months. A four months special training was then given. A friend who came with me was shot and she died. At that time I felt sad and I cried.

One day we were withdrawing but the army had surrounded yet we had to obey orders. I had to pick up the arms from those that had died and then withdraw. At that time the army gave chase. If I didn't obey the order to pick up the arms and run I will be punished when I come back. If the leader dies we cannot go back.

Once I was in the midst of fierce fighting. As we were fighting there was lot of shooting and we were losing and finally we knew that the army had surrounded us. Two from the group bit the cyanide capsule and I saw them writhe — in convulsive movements, this was a terrible sight. I could not bear it and then I decided that I would not bite the cyanide capsule at all.

One leader was also a doctor, she was wounded and she fell. She ordered us to take the cyanide, I didn't. The thought of the others — the way they died flashed before my eyes and I didn't want to take cyanide. She stared at me and shot at me, her aim was not so accurate, it went through me. After she shot me — she put the gun at her throat and killed herself.

That was a terrifying experience. The sight of her body that lay there was terrible I cannot now even tell

you. I didn't want to die. I was bleeding. I didn't know what to do. I thought I was alone.

Then from among the wounded another sister who was badly hurt cried out. She too did not want to die she said., "Save me, bullets have pierced me don't let me die." It was dark we were thirsty and in pain. I knew the leader, the doctor, had a pack with glucose and medicines. We had nothing to eat for two days. I dragged myself and found the pack and we both ate glucose — drank the water.

At a distance — we found one of the brothers who was wounded come limping towards us from the other side. Only we three of us were alive. All three of us decided to surrender ourselves to the army.

By morning the bodies smelled. It was a terrible sight. Army shouted at us and they asked us to put our hands up. I could not put up one hand. Sometimes that scene comes rushing into my mind. There is still anger in me for what she did.

The three of us from this group surrendered. We are given a number by the movement as our identity. This attack came upon us in an unexpected manner. The army had been fully prepared. They very slowly came towards us may be at about four a.m. I think they thought we were dead — they had very big guns. They called out. I did not understand the language They shouted at us and asked us to drop our arms.

One leader who didn't have the cyanide bit a capsule already bitten by another and that bit of cyanide got mixed with the blood and she died. I still get frightened of that sight. It is as though they suffer from fits. I saw convulsive jerky movements and a frightful death.

At that terrible moment — that leader who was wounded and alive wanted to live prayed and cried to the Gods and told me to pray to Jesus. I prayed and asked God to save us.

After the army came close, one army person carried the other leader, I thought now they will abuse and hurt us. But they did not.

The army person carried me and helped me; he gave me a toffee from his pocket. I was shocked at that kind gesture. A vehicle took us to the hospital. We were looked after very well. I had some operations.

The other sister who was badly injured got well and married a person from the army. Later I joined the army and went on ambush. The soldiers in the army treated me well. They never hit me or assaulted me, I went around with them on ambush and nothing happened to me.

This is why we are given cyanide, because we will give away the secrets of the movement. I was angry with the leader who shot me and that's why I decided to help the army. When I joined the movement I got two sets of dresses. I wash — wash and wear them. We had very few dresses. We lived a very frugal life.

When I first saw dead bodies killed by the — I got a feeling of a terrible fit of anger and wanted to destroy and kill the army who had killed my people. I never was the leader of the group. I have never killed ordinary people. I did not go to border villages to kill villagers. I have heard what they do when they enter into a village.

KAVITHA:

After I joined I had to undergo three months basic training and five months rigorous training. We had to climb on ropes — I didn't like that, often I used to fall.

There was physical training of various sorts. Running, jumping and so on. Training was so hard and we had to get up very early in the morning at five and then, at those times I had second thoughts — getting up very early and going through all the tough exercises were too much.

Why did I do this, I thought, but then, that I had joined. I somehow or other managed to get along.

While climbing heights I have fallen off. I was scared when the men came to train us. When we fail to do something we had to do extra rounds. Once when I felt that everything was so difficult, I thought I should leave. I even spoke about it, then I was pulled up because they got to know my feelings

Before we were given guns to carry we had to carry a piece of wood (a dummy). All the while we had to carry and after quite some days when we were used to it, we were given rifles. The day I got the rifle I was thrilled and happy.

During the “difficult days” (menstruation) that we girls go through our needs are met. Once I was feeling terrible pain so they put me in the hospital. Later I got used to that monthly problem. During my difficult days I could even go for exercises. Water was difficult to get. That is to bathe we have to use water very carefully.

We had to walk and run in jungle areas. And on several occasions I got pricked by thorn — like the “touch-me-not thorns” that grew wild in that area. I got boils on my skin. Areas of my skin in the elbows and knees and legs became thick with scars, because we have to crawl. Crawling on bare hand scratches your skin and you get sores. I have got hit by the trainer. The chief supervisor has scolded the trainer for hitting me.

Once I met my parents. I cheated everybody that day. We were to go somewhere but I went somewhere else with a group and on my way I met my parents. My mother cried and I too cried. I felt sad. My parents have given letters to the leader to let me out. If a few like two or three of my relations were in the movement I would have been released. All the while I was not in the fighting group. They put me in the political wing — this for was some time only. Anytime if war breaks out then we all had to go for various duties to the field.

When I was in the political wing we had to go into the village for campaign work. We try to meet children in schools; the principals and teachers scold us and we were not allowed to meet them in schools. The people in the villages did not like us, we were called “child abductors.” We feel shy sometimes. We had to do our duty and bring in children or adolescents into the movement.

I have participated in “wars” — where I was directly involved in various capacity.

Once at the beginning I was sent to collect the rifles from the brothers who were killed. I had to go behind the fighters. I was scared at the beginning, seeing them dead I used to cry and cry and go picking up their rifles. I used to also get angry — he is my brother and he has been killed I must also kill the enemy. There were times I thought I should take revenge.

The day I was given the cyanide (capsule) I was very happy because no one would catch me alive — abuse or harass me. This was for my safety. I felt good to carry this around my neck. One day another leader didn’t have her capsule. I don’t know what happened — she didn’t explain. She said that she wanted to use mine- that day I never ever thought I will be caught — so I gave mine to her; maybe I had to live and face difficulties

I was fighting in a war. Four soldiers captured me. They surrounded me and I gave up. I had no cyanide so it was easy to surrender. The army people scolded and scolded I did not understand what they said but I know they were using very bad language. One thing they didn’t hit me.

I have gone into a border village (massacre) attack. Something I cannot get out of my system. It was a terrible feeling. There were about 35 of us who entered the village in the night and people (civilians) were sleeping and were taken unawares. I didn’t want to shoot or kill. Shooting the army I felt was O.K. he is the enemy and if I don’t kill — he will kill me. I kept behind the scene and I also expressed to some that I did not like to kill innocent people. I didn’t like this attack. I said I am scared and also feel bad to do this. I was

scolded as though I was a traitor; you should have seen how our people were tortured and killed.

While the terrible violent killings were going on I saw two young people wrapped up in a mat hiding under a bed. I left them, I wanted to save them, they had a baby too — as we were leaving the place for their bad luck the child started crying. So they rushed in and killed the couple and the baby. I was so sad, I couldn't save them. This incident will not go away from my memory.

About the cyanide — I felt good to have the cyanide. Sometimes when I think about it I get confused. When they came to know that I had given away my capsule to someone else I was scolded and I had to go for an explanation. We become suspects. Others in my group started scolding me. At that moment I felt like committing suicide. I was punished for this.

PUNITHA:

I joined the movement very recently. I left and I ran away from the movement the same year. I was there for only three months. I have had no serious kind of training.

I did a bit of the basic training like running and a variety of physical exercises. I left the movement by running away. I went home first and my parents were scared to keep me at home. Then they took me to the ICRC and I surrendered myself to them. They don't hit those who surrender. My family came in search of me. I refused to go back. They did not see me; I was not allowed to meet them. They gave my jewelry to the family and sent them back.

I was immediately given the uniform — jeans and shirt — and I went into training. I went through rigorous basic training for three months. It was very difficult. Every day I had to run a long distance. Do a lot of physical exercise. We get up at four in the morning and go for exercises. At 8:00 we have breakfast and the whole day is scheduled in such a way that we have no time to waste.

I had to dig bunkers, it was very difficult. I was not given a rifle, only those who are to go to fight the war are given rifles and should have mastered some quality training given. We are given dummies for a while — it is a wooden thing, like a rifle. The basic training and all the duties I had to perform were difficult for me.

As long as you are frightened to handle a rifle you won't get one. You have to wait till you are ready to get a real rifle. With the dummy you have to get used to it. The moment they realize you are not scared and you are keen to handle a rifle you are given one. I never got one; I was never a fighter fit to go to war I did not want to fight; inside my mind I knew I was not made for fighting a war.

There were times I wished that I was back home, I should have done something else, not taken this drastic step.

Water facilities were all right in the camps but we learnt to use water carefully. We are given only boiled water to drink. Food was varied, it was good.

We have to keep to timing for everything. There was very strict discipline. We get up very early in the morning, about 4 a.m. After exercises we get our breakfast around eight-o clock. Then we work on other areas as I was new and did not show any progress they did not promote me into other difficult areas of training.

We get lunch around one o'clock and go on and on till late at night. While we are on duty and doing exercises we are looked after. We get nourishing drinks like soup, milk and food, simple but good food. We got eggs too. We have to drink them raw.

There were big elder sisters who gave us training. They are strict. I was one who never did the exercises properly. I was pulled up all the time. I was punished often. Only a very few fail to do the exercises properly. The punishment is very often hard but you have to complete the task there is no mercy. We are made to repeat the rounds of the exercises we fail to perform. If we were very bad there is no way but to get hit. I got hit. I have been made to kneel. Then holding the rifle (dummy) up in my hands I had to sit and stand. All this was difficult and makes me cry or plan to run away. It was not easy to escape like that.

When I get my monthly periods for one day I suffer with pain, I was excused once but we had to learn to manage and everybody learns to handle this, but I could not manage.

During these exercises I had to crawl on my knees. My knees and elbow got scraped. I used to bleed and got wounds. With that you have to perform. I got scars. The scars were visible.

I fell very sick once, with the shivering fever (malaria maybe) I was sent to the medic department, where you are given some facilities. There are doctors who treat us well and give proper medicines. I was well cared for when I was sick.

We walked several miles. When we were in a safe territory where the movement was in command, vehicles took us. When we were close to the enemy territory, we were made to walk — we cannot walk with shoes or slippers on because we would make a noise and alert the army, so we had to walk slowly and softly.

While we were tracking slowly and carefully...something had happened and the army had got alerted so we were protected and brought back to the same base. This journey was scary. Feeling that the enemy is close by and at any moment I should be caught and killed. I was given one cyanide capsule as we began this journey. We were warned, "If the enemy catches you, you will be abused so do not get caught. If you do get caught, take the capsule."

For the short time I was there I did not see anybody dying. I did not go to the field to fight. I was happy I had come back to the base because I knew this would be terrible for me because escape from where we were would have been impossible. I will not know the terrain and it would have been really difficult.

I planned and planned and one day I ran away. I went out as though I was going out on some work and escaped. I went home. I was happy but sad I could be caught anytime by either side.

So my mother looked after me for two days — I ate good food and stayed with my mother, regretting about all what had happened. My mother then took me to the center. They handed me to the same place — it was like a house — there was the policewoman. I was not harassed or ill-treated in any way.

MANJU:

There were some others like us who were taken in forcefully. Very often I got hit. They tried in every way to make me stay and I was forced into training.

The training was for four months. I was not assigned for fighting. I have to take all the details of any group moving out for fighting, details of all the arms taken, what kind and who is taking it, etc. There was another one who also wanted to run away. One of the three of us who were taken fell sick and she was sent home. I was sad and I used to cry and wished that I too became sick.

I found another friend like me who wanted to escape. One day two of us planned to run away. This of course was in my mind from the day I was taken in forcefully. Today I am here. Why? Not because I wanted to join, it is no fault of my own at all.

My mother came to see me in the camp three times. They do not allow us to see them without any reason. She was sent away and I cried.

For the four months I underwent training, I did only the basic physical training. It was difficult for me. Maybe because I didn't like anything there — I hated everyone and everything.

I fell sick but I was looked after by doctors, the treatment was good. I was kept there and looked after. They gave medicines. I was very unhappy and cried.

When we do physical training if you don't do properly they hit you. I have got hit by some leaders, but some were good. As we go along and if we do well they give more training.

I was given a dummy rifle. I had to carry it all the time and look after it like a real one. I was not chosen to be given a real rifle — maybe they knew I was not happy there. Twice they gave me a rifle for my own protection they said. That was when I had to follow a group on a fighting mission.

I have never been in the front line or even in the middle — I go only to record the situation. I was given a bag with a pen and a book. There were teams in that group with a leader in charge. The arms given are according to their experience like T56 and other very sophisticated guns. The magazine rounds, even the cleaning material given out I had to record.

When someone goes out for a hero's death, they are honored. I feel sorry for them. Many die and never come back. Some have come back after performing dangerous missions. They are then promoted and become respected.

I have never shot anybody. I don't know why that I can't kill. I made up my mind not to kill anyone. I have had to carry dead bodies. I carry these bodies usually in the dark. Yes I was filled with fear, fear that I can't talk about. Fear... Fear... Fear... What could I do? I carry the body on my shoulder, it is difficult and I walk crying all the way.

I was given a uniform, jeans, shirt and shoes. That was all right. You need comfortable clothes while you are doing all those difficult and terrible jobs. Two women gave me training. I learnt to shoot, but did not shoot anyone, not even an animal. All the time we are trained. We are trained up to the day of the hero's death. That is also training, that is you go out on a dangerous mission.

Food was all right. We get different types of food. Bread, lentils, rice and curry. Different curries are given on different days. We have got even nice apples in the middle of the jungles. When we are on the job, water is brought to us for drinking purposes. Water was difficult to get. Somehow or the other we managed. We used water very carefully

I was not given cyanide capsule. Only the fighters get cyanide and they have to go through one-year training at least. I did not want to be a fighter and I never got the cyanide.

There is a day when you can see the relatives and that day is the hero's day. On that day my mother's sister came to see me. I was happy to see her and I was sad also. I cried and cried.

There was another girl who did not like to stay there. So two of us used to get together and plan how we could get out of the place. She has been closer to the camp than to where I lived. One day finally we ran away. We walked and walked and finally reached a village. When people asked us we said we were going home on leave. So we escaped. My friend knew how to get to her place, as she was close by. We did not want to go together beyond that. I spent the night with her people and started on my escape.

I really didn't know how to manage. All the while I asked her to escape now I made up my mind to tell the truth to someone and get help. I met an elderly woman, she looked somewhat friendly. I went into her hut. I told her the truth. She took pity on me and agreed to hide me till I could escape.

I stayed with her. I never went out during the daytime. This kind lady was good to me. She cared for me. She understood my suffering and really cared for me. I will never forget her — she could have sent me out

because her life was in danger — yet she cared for me. I wrote a letter to my mother and one day my mother came and took me

The few good things I learnt there is how to write and maintain records. This helped me to keep my mind occupied. This helped me to keep away from direct fighting, which I hated.

Physical training also helped me somewhat. I got fever and that type of shivering fever still continues and even now I'm suffering from fever. I was in hospital, they said I was better and sent me back but today I feel feverish and shivering comes off and on.

VAANI:

At the very beginning in the camp I was then a small child, I was liked. I had another name there. I also grew up there.

The big sisters cared for the “brother” during his visit asked what I would like to have. I wanted ice cream, so I was given ice cream. I was given special food with gingerly oil. I was dressed in a nice dress one day.

I lived with trust. “Brother” has no trust in anyone after another let him down When I was I got good food there at that time, like milk and eggs, about two a ,day just before I exercise or start running.

Even if you do something and you were my mother — in that movement, I will be sent to kill you. There should be no feelings but to carry out the order.

Another thing I want to tell you is about the day I met my mother — while I was active in the movement. I disguised myself — I had painted my face. I went with some other girls into my own house. My mother at once said you look like my daughter. I asked her to give me rice and curd. I ate happily. She asked us to take two bunches of plantains. She invited me to come again. I was very happy that day I was then prepared to die, because I had seen my mother.

Hero’s death that is a great deed but it was not for me. I am here still alive. Now I don’t know what to do! I couldn’t take the pill (cyanide) or use the grenade (to blow myself up). I don’t know why! I cannot explain — I stood still — I really stood still, I did not move (numb). Before I was caught I dreamt of my sister and her child. Then I said might be I am going to get caught. My idea was not to get caught, but to get trained and work well.

Then one day big brother came and said that small children do not go to fight. Now you all have to study well. I studied. Then some girls like me who were keen to fight but were below 15 were given a chance to get the basic training with brother’s permission.

I learnt quite a lot. For three months I had training — swimming, karate, climbing, running and how to kill animals. For about two and a half years I got trained and also learned through experience in working with leaders.

My first fighting experience was a failure because of our brothers had given the tip off to the army. This was on a sandy area. From the army we got a command, we thought it was our command and we moved forward. The first batch that went in to catch the artillery was surrounded and caught.

All of them got caught and were killed. We who were behind that battalion were then asked to withdraw — we were in the rear of the battalion — we, too, got caught. Four of us fought hard with the army and escaped. Three were wounded. I managed to go into the deep jungle and hide with them for three days. They were sick and bleeding — we slowly moved out and a boy of 16 years saw us and shouted. I took my rifle and shot him. I had already shot the army — but this was the first time I shot a villager

First we hit the generators and then we fought with them. Many soldiers of the government army died. We removed the massive artillery installed. Some soldiers ran away. One soldier had climbed the coconut tree watched the way we fought — escaped and had described our fight. This was a big fight. Army gunboats were used to attack. There was indiscriminate bombing which killed innocent people. The brothers forcefully removed the jewelry from the army, one soldier refused to give and said, "I am married only three months I cannot give it to you." Then he was shot.

All through my life there, no one hit me. Only once I got angry and annoyed. I was pulled up for my hair being untidy, then I said I'm leaving and going home. I was called up and advised and said I shouldn't get angry for the slightest thing. I did not feel the training as difficult except maybe once or twice.

Food was all right, different people cooked. If we have difficulty during some days in the month during the monthly period days we are given time off. As we get used it doesn't become that difficult.

We get up early at 4 a.m. We have different duties to perform and everything has to be done perfectly. We get eggs and milk. After exercises we change and go for breakfast. 8 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. we work, we do practical work like swimming, climbing, jumping as well as theory. It is all about guns or other areas of war tactics. At 10.30 a.m. we get a drink. And at 12 noon we get soup to drink and at 12.30p.m we get lunch.

Afternoon we go for karate classes and other types of training. After 10 p.m. we go to sleep. We get trained in special skills — use a map, identifying geographical areas. How to use a compass, use of rifles — we start with shooting animals. We learn the knots, use of codes on walkie-talkie; this we learn along with the basic training of running, climbing, jumping, etc....

I went out to die a hero's death — you have to enter a camp and come back. I came back victorious. You are only given a name and you are called by that name. The rank is announced only after one's death.

As you rise in the rank, you have to be a person who could be trusted, have self-confidence and be a responsible person. You have to do a good job and be able to report back with a good record of the work covered in detail about the deaths, disabilities and a detail account of the area.

I have given training in karate, ambush and normal basic training. There are other people in the political wing, relief work and detective involvement and so on. I was always involved in direct war only.

We usually fight in the night — so you don't see how many you shoot. In big battles maybe 40 or 50 we are all shooting together so whose bullet kills whom — we don't know. If I don't shoot to kill the enemy I will be killed.

I have been to a border village. When a small child was about to be killed I shouted "Don't kill the child." The men in the movement scolded me. "Go and see what they had done to our innocent people. How wicked they have been so they have to learn their lessons this way only."

When the army is caught alive, sometimes they are tortured, then later they become friends. They are treated well. They are still there. Some have been released, especially those who have children. They have T.V facilities and good food to eat.

Training is good but hard. We have to learn on the job. It is more of experiential knowing. Walking long a distance without food on specific missions is very difficult.

Without the cyanide we don't go to war. Even now I don't like jewelry. I like a black thread round my neck. I had got used so much to the thread around my neck. I feel sad when I think of what happened to me. I had the cyanide and I didn't take it and when I go back I'll have to face death.

Thinking about death I have got so used to seeing dead bodies. I am used to death. I have no fear. I have been eating food with dead bodies by my side. And I used to sleep on the graves of those who had died a

hero's death. My friends and I we eat together, we feed each other before we go for an attack and then I've seen them dead. This makes me furious and makes me fight more fiercely.

Now what? I am here, with the thought of the day I am going to get my freedom from this place. I know that I am going to be killed one day. My own group has lost trust in me.

VASANTHI:

I was thinking and thinking and planning that I should also do something for my people. One day I left home at about 7 p.m. and walked alone for two miles. In the area where I lived you can go out alone any time and no one will hurt you. So I walked and walked without any fear to a base.

There they did not want to take me. They asked me to go back. As a relative lived close by, "the brothers" took me to his place. So I spent the night at their place and came to the base in the morning. My cousins brought me to the base. After a while I was taken into the real base in the jungle and I was placed in the ladies group where I was to get used to everything for about two weeks.

Within three months of my joining I was put onto basic training. I enjoyed the basic exercises. Exercises start at 5:00 a.m. — we are up very early by 4:00 to perform our various duties. In between exercises and learning we get a break. Like for breakfast and during 10:00 or 10:30 for a drink. We have lunch between 1.30 and 2.30. Then again we work.

At 4 o' clock we get tea. Between 5:00 and 6:00 we have to go on parade practice. And at 6:00 we gather to say our promise like an oath. We say that in the morning as well.

I did enjoy the rigorous training. I was small but I got jeans and shirt to wear. The uniform was of green stripes. Food was not that easy to get — but somehow or other we managed.

We always drank boiled water. Once when I was digging to build trenches I got cut. It healed soon and I was O.K. All medicines were available and doctors were also there.

Girls gave training. They were very strict but it was good. I went with the idea of saving my people so I could put up with any hardships after I was fully trained, then I was given training for a particular attack. I have gone through 24 hour training for three months where you get only one hour to rest.

You don't even sleep on a Sunday. I was trained for all types of attacks. Group attacks single attack, finding out missions and various ways of escaping

Till the day I was caught I was fighting; have been in attacks where we were victorious. When I launched into a fight I have to defend myself and not get caught. Will the army catch me? Will they take me and abuse me? These were always in my mind.

Before a big attack our big brother will see us. After we come back victorious, he meets us again. Then we are given leave; I never go home because I would be drawn towards home.

If you are a leader you have to protect the girls at all the times. We carry heavy arms a rifle and walkie-talkie. I have shot many army fellows.

On my way back on a bicycle, after giving water to the girls who were in ambush in the jungle — I didn't realize that the army had also moved close and was in ambush. I was shot; I fell and couldn't shoot back.

I was carried away by the army and was well looked after. The government soldiers did not abuse me instead they were very kind and I was surprised. I still have a sad painful feeling in my mind, after all the efforts I could not see my people get their freedom. Now I am a prisoner.

So we are all classed as traitors by both sides. As soon as you are caught the movement will think you will betray them and the army will not trust because you have also killed them. This I feel is a terrible situation. I don't think people in this country will ever feel good towards us. You know what has happened to our brothers? We too could be killed and what can you do? Maybe there is something called retribution. The way I feel about my family and my people they will also feel about theirs. We lost that trust forever. Sometimes I feel terrible, have let my side down?

SABITHA-JAYANTHI:

Four days before school closed for vacation, nine of us school children planned to leave together and we did it. Everything around us was breaking; we felt there is nothing for us. This group was strong and helpful. They were trying to do something for the people.

As soon as we joined we were taken by boat and sent away for training. Many of us went and started training. The place we were trained I cannot remember now. Then things were different; many groups at that time were together

We were given six months basic training. I cut my hair short. We get up at 4 a.m. Then we follow a time-table. From 5:00 in the morning we have different types of training, at about 8:00 we have breakfast and then again up to 10:00 we have exercises like basic physical training and other special exercises. We get something to drink and go in for further work like climbing jumping or swimming.

After that another three months we studied about places — how to identify things maps and so on. Some of us had to undergo training and learning, first we were asked to write about ourselves. How to go — where to go — report about us, a personal report.

There at first we were given '81' rifle that was taken away, here in Sri Lanka, at that time it was T56. I was young and it was thrilling and adventurous to handle a gun, I liked it very much.

During the training I run 5000 meters. I was trained in swimming and weight lifting. We had to carry the dead bodies back — so weight lifting helps you with that. How to bury mines, how to make a map of camps and so on. After being in one group for several years, I was sent for direct fighting in the field for several years.

When I got the uniform for the first time, I was happy and thrilled to wear a uniform.

We are not given water to drink in-between training. Everything there was good, food, water, we had good quarters to stay and lots of freedom to get about.

While in training, my knees, elbow and hands got scraped. I did exercises crawling and got hurt because the ground was of gravel. I could climb trees. If we fail to get up on time in the mornings we were made to run several rounds. We had to cook after the training. There were ponds where we could swim and I enjoyed.

There was a lady, she was our trainer, Men also trained us. I had no connection with the family. They knew I was alive somewhere but they did not know where I was.

Social studies with quite a lot of geography were in the timetable. I was given a wooden gun, a dummy, as I joined and we cannot lose that, if you lose you are punished. That was like life though it was only a dummy.

In my first attack none of the soldiers survived. Army was not alert. We attacked from one side and they could not get out. I cannot remember how many fell with my rounds. Only one died from our side.

I have seen many dead bodies — it was not a problem for me. I have used rifles. I have faced so many deaths.

We had to work according to the schedule given in everything whether it is in the kitchen or in the field. Every detail is planned properly. There were medics, qualified doctors. I had a gunshot injuries. I was treated properly.

One day when we walked near a small town, there was a scrub jungle where we decided to rest. At that time the people were with us and were helpful. Still, somebody had given the tipoff.

We were very tired and slept in the jungle. For five hours we rested. It was then that the army surrounded us. They took some of my companions and shot and killed them on the spot. I was taken captive so suddenly, for a moment I was not alert and as I was sleeping and we were caught all of a sudden. I did not have the presence of mind to end my life (with the cyanide capsule).

So I had to go through all the torture that they could ever give a human being. I told them who I was and I stuck to only the truth, why I joined and so on. Throughout their questioning I said the same thing the way I told you.

I was treated like a monkey. The sole of my foot was hit. The sexual assault was the worst I was tied upside down and beaten up. I was made to swallow small limes that hurt my tummy and for a long time I suffered of the aftereffects.

The moment they used frightful things for sexual abuse like bottles I passed out and became unconscious. I was dumped in a sack, taken as dead. I was left out side to be burned with a tire. For some time I must have been there.

It rained and I slowly regained consciousness. The man who came to burn me found I was alive and I was taken out and carried back and then I was given another lease of life. Someone in a higher rank was a bit kind and that was the only one that helped me. After I was beaten up brutally I smelt of blood. There was physical and sexual torture, I suffered a lot. In the torture room, I was naked. I was made to bathe naked. Every fellow there was watching me.

I was sent to prison. Then my family got me out and sent me away.

I felt very bad and hurt. After all the suffering I had gone through, I was still not free in this land. That is the fate of not only myself but also everyone here.

(This girl was taken before the human rights services and ICRC and others became active. She said that she is from the first batch. Her harrowing episode of the torture went on and on. The following episode is written as she wanted to take more of our time and did not want to stop. She said that this was the first time she is able to openly tell someone. She has not told her mother.)

From the moment I was taken bad language was used. If I were not so tired I wouldn't have got caught. I would have been alert to take my life.

I was treated very badly. No human should suffer like me. I always told them the same story. I was hung upside down and I was hit. My face was covered with a cellophane bag. My heels were hit and got swollen. My nails I don't want to tell you, they peeled off. I was asked to bathe naked when males watched.

I had to swallow 100 small limes, later I suffered of stomach ailment for a long time. The worst that will never ever go off my memory, in a way nothing could be cleared from my memory.

The sexual harassment, I was a virgin, I have never had sexual relationship. That day the torturers used soda bottles and pierced me. I fainted. When I regained, I was in a pool of blood. I was treated worse than an animal.

I have bad dreams often as though somebody is torturing me — I shout out. I am scared to be alone with men

even there one day a big fat man took me in for interrogation, he locked the door and loosened his trousers and came on me. I screamed loud and other officers banged on the door. He had to stop and I escaped.

Now at nights I wake up and I do something very strange. I scratch the wall. You must see the wall beside the bed. There is one girl here, she is also up in the night. When she hears, she calls out and asks me what I am up to. I count the holes in the mosquito net. I don't know why I do this.

I will never ever marry a man, they will never ever understand what torture is and how miserable a human being, a girl can be. There is no one who will understand me.

RECONSIDERATION OF THE DECISION

ABIRAMI:

When I think back... Yes after I spoke to you and was thinking and thinking. Why did I get into to all that I did? All those actions were hardhearted actions, now makes me sad. Maybe I could have stayed at home.

Everything was wrong from the beginning. Maybe I could have put up with my relatives' cruelty; after all one of them was good to me. I know he liked me. If my grandmother had lived I would have never left home. She was the only one for me and she died...

KAVITHA:

After all that I did? All those actions were hardhearted actions, now makes me sad.

My parents are good; I didn't want to make them sad and hurt by failing my exam. Now I realize it is worse than failing my exam.

PUNITHA:

If I was continuing my studies, maybe I wouldn't have run away. If my parents didn't force me into a marriage I didn't like — maybe I wouldn't have gone. Now that's the past. I realized how foolish I had been to run away from home and the price I had to pay with all this suffering.

My running away from home to join the movement, that is a big set back for me. I ran away to escape a marriage I didn't like. I ended up in a worst setup to now and that's what I have earned.

MANJU:

I cannot really understand why this misfortune fell on me.

This has changed my life entirely.

VAANI:

There was a time later on — I thought maybe I should have stayed home and done my studies. In a way this was thrilling.

VASANTHI:

Sometimes I feel terrible, have let my side down? Did I do the right thing?

SABITHA-JAYANTHI

I have sinned, my father trusted me and I have sinned against him. He died because of me.

All my lost self-esteem cannot be regained.

SENSE OF SELF

ABIRAMI:

Nobody wants me; even here they are going to send me away, they say it is to a convent.

I am nobody's child! I don't trust people. I don't want to get close to anybody. If I get hurt even a bit I can't bear that. So better I keep off. When people scold me I bear it up. I don't talk back or anything.

KAVITHA:

I couldn't do anything, and I'm not capable of doing anything.

PUNITHA:

I didn't study so what else can I do? Sometimes I feel I should study.

MANJU:

I don't know how to fit in.

VAANI:

I know that I am going to be killed one day.

VASANTHI:

Who am I now? I have an identity card, which does not mean anything. I am confused and sometimes I worry whether I will be able to live as a free person.

SABITHA-JAYANTHI:

My mind is broken. I'm still scared of my life.

TIME AND THE FUTURE

ABIRAMI:

There is a person who likes me, he said he would marry me, but I don't want to think of marriage. Now he has gone abroad. His mother comes to see me — even though they are the only people who like me. I can-

not like him. I feel that he is too old. There is a difference of many years. I cannot love him, he writes letters — but how can I marry him? I am unable to decide anything now, I have fears and I am scared.

When I came here... I have forgotten dates and things.

What do I want to do with my life? ... All that I want now is to study and study well. Anything to study anything... Maybe dancing; I like dancing and music. I have studied in school. I like but will I ever get a chance?

Here they have planned to send me out of this place, this week — I am scared. I am not keen to go. They said that there is a dancing teacher and that I could learn dancing. I will have to help out with the nursery school. I will be given training and I can become a teacher. This looks good. I have fears.

All that I know is — wherever I am, they (people in the armed movement) will kill me. In my mind I am always with the feeling that I will be killed. I know I should think of living but there is a feeling that death is hanging over my head. I am alone — I have no one. What can I do? I can't find any meaning... There's no life ... No feeling towards marriage... I have nobody. Sometimes I feel frustrated. I have no happiness. Whatever I aspire for or need... I won't get. I like to be like other children. How can I be?

I don't want to think of my future. I don't want to dream of anything. For anything at all, as I won't get anything. Yes there was one thing I wanted. I had a feeling of wanting to see my father at least. That will never ever happen. I know the thought of them is not going to bring them back — never... ever will I see them. I cried even yesterday. I have to leave this place... I am used to this place. I am scared because within three days I have to leave this place. How will my future be?

I cannot forget all the painful things that have happened to me, now I am beginning to understand things and life seems different and clear. I feel I have done the wrong thing in choosing the wrong path of destruction. What to do? What has happened has happened. I cannot erase everything, I have to do some thing meaning full and good and that is one way of beginning to start to be happy. That is why I want to start a day care center for children.

KAVITHA:

I do not want to face the people I lived with and it will not be safe.

When I leave this place I will go home. I don't like to go abroad. Everybody here feels that we should go abroad so that no one will be able to identify us. I can go to my mother. No one will be able to identify me there.

Even now I don't want to fall in love. I will marry a person my parents find for me; anyway, that's not immediately. Here I do not think of marriage; that is a faraway problem.

I think I will go to live in (names village). I didn't do anything against anybody. I don't think they will search for me.

I am scared to think of marriage because who knows what will happen. I am not known or famous. After being in this type of situation the man will point a finger at me and say so many things that will hurt. I might live with my aunt for a while.

Future! ...

I don't want to think about it, but again I do have to. What is there for me? After all that I did? All those actions were hardhearted actions, now makes me sad.

Future! I don't know. Now I want to study. Maybe I can sit the ordinary level exam. I am going to live in another place, but I have to go where I lived to do the exam. Here many are thinking of going abroad but I

don't want to.

I want to do some social work and also help my mother — this is for all the sins I did. I want to make atonement. I need God's forgiveness.

A new life! Marriage... No, not at all. I am not at all interested to start another life. I hate men; I am scared of them. I don't want any man on earth to touch me in the future.

My father was a good person; I left him and went for this. For what I have done. I am suffering day and night.

I do some sewing here — but all the time my mind races far away. When I go back home where my mother lives I'll start sewing to earn my living and also I'll start studying.

PUNITHA:

From here, when I am allowed to go, I might go back and live with my family. I cannot decide now as there will be lot of problems. The problems can crop from either side. Now we have a small house of our own. I want to go back home but again will I be safe, is my problem.

I will leave this place. Maybe they will let me go a bit early. I have no problem to leave but I am wondering where to go. I sometimes think of going to live in a village with my brother's family. He is living with his wife and children. I don't know what I am going to do next. I liked gardening and playing those days.

After talking to you about my life I was thinking about my past, though it was a short stay in the movement I feel, for me. My life has changed very drastically.

What next? It is difficult. I have to live with fear; I am not educated.

My looking back on my life and all that strict discipline I went through. It was stressful then. It was also useful in a way, now I can face any situation. I have learnt life's lesson in the most difficult way. Now I am patient and also I am not stubborn like those days. I am now more flexible.

I can go to a relative's, but my problem is, how long can I stay with that family? For some time they will look after me. The wife is not that kind towards me. After talking to you that day I thought about going home and all that awaits me there.

Where and when and how can I start now? All those days are gone. Maybe I should do something and start to study. I can't stay with my sister — she too will be willing to accommodate me — but her husband, my brother-in-law, is not a good man. He is a very suspicious man. I cannot stay there.

I am now thinking of going abroad somewhere to work and earn a living. My mother is old, I want to look after her. If I can earn some money we can start a small boutique and both of us can live together. Anyway, first of all I should go home for a short while at least. I know it is not going to be easy with either party close by. Maybe I should go to a relative's place for a short while and then decide.

Sometimes I feel I should stay on with someone in the city and then I should get out of this country. I don't want to get married. The person I wanted to get married to is willing to marry me when I go back. I don't want to get married to him or to any other man now. You know why?

For some time things will be all right, afterwards they will start blaming me for anything and everything. There will be lots of suspicions. Living in the jungles. Living with the army. I know nothing happened to me. I am perfectly all right. No one abused me. The man will start using this as an excuse. Even the people around will have this in mind.

Life is not going to be easy for me. I should get away for quite some time and then come back to make my life here. If I now marry without money also is a problem. So I must earn my money. Marriage is out of question now for me now. I feel I should be independent. When I leave here first of all I should be able to find a place where I can be safe for some time. Where can I go without an identity card? I must do something for my mother. I want to repair our house first. I feel I had let down my mother badly.

I think of going abroad, that will save me I feel. Again I feel why should I run away let me face everything. I will go home first. My mother and I can start a shop a little boutique. Maybe after earning some money I will think of settling down. Get married if that works out.

I realized how foolish I had been to run away from home and the price I had to pay with all this suffering. I want to somehow or other study, otherwise I will not have a place in this world.

MANJU:

When I go I cannot stay with my relative, how can I live with my relative? They will not ask us to go away, but we have to go. I am worried about that.

I didn't have a single boyfriend, and I am not going to have a boyfriend. I will marry someone who is proposed to me

I believe that no harm will come to me. Everyone knows that I did not go on my own and I also came back by surrendering.

I don't know how to fit in. But I'll try.

For my future maybe I can start sewing to earn my living.

I am very worried about my mother. We have finished all the money. Everything from the bank is over.

VAANI:

I like to go home but I cannot go at all. My mother says that she is going to take me, I am wondering whether that will be possible. All the time that place will be watched, so I cannot go home. I will be killed the moment I go there.

I was caught. I have to decide to go home or not to go. Because I got caught, my relative is suffering. I will be taken away and shot. I do not know what has happened to some others in my family.

Today when you came in did you notice, I was reading a letter from my family. She wants me to come home. She does not understand, she does not know what the punishment will be. Only I know my future. I was caught in uniform. I did not take the capsule! Why? I cannot explain at all. I will be shot, that is the punishment I will have to face.

After talking to you, lots of thoughts went through my mind. In a way I was happy I could talk about all this to both of you. I am also sad because of the thought of my future. I really have no future. I feel confused at times. I enjoyed the sewing classes here and I still keep on going with that.

You see, while I sew my thoughts rise so fast. So many things keep coming up in my mind. I do not talk much because I cannot trust anyone. All the time I spend here is either with the machine or with the radio. Then again I thought, what is the point of getting anything if I cannot live safely somewhere. I cannot live anywhere in this country.

The other thought that came to my mind is let me go home to my mother whatever happens. I kind of get a

feeling that I have to be with my mother, never mind even if I die it will be all right. It will be after I have lived with my mother for a short while at least.

I do not want to get married. With all this terrible feelings that I cannot cope with how can I get married and live happily?

If I leave this country, maybe I can try to make my life without fear.

Already I heard that there had been inquiries about me — the moment I get out I will be killed. When I was caught I did not take the cyanide capsule that was hanging round my neck — for that now I will be publicly shot.

VASANTHI:

I don't make close friends with anyone. I don't trust anyone; I keep everything to myself. I am a lonely person throughout my life.

Who am I now? I have an identity card, which does not mean anything. I am confused and sometimes I worry whether I will be able to live as a free person where I was born and struggled to live.

I am not afraid of death now.

Nothing is going right. I don't know what is happening.

God has become a stone. He does not listen to our prayers. Nothing happens the way we want to.

Now I want to live. I'll live for my family. I am not worried about myself. I have family and I want to help all of them in whatever way I can. I'll now sacrifice myself for them. I want to go abroad. I have no future here. Everyone in the village will know who is who. And who did what.

Eternally I have to be running away from everybody. How long do I run? I don't know. I did not study because of our poverty. Nobody should be born poor. If you are poor— you are like a corpse. I must earn a living.

I am waiting anxiously for my mother to come. She said that she would sell our house and bring me money. Anyway she will have to find money for me to go abroad. That's all I have, nothing else to tell you

My mother said that she would do her best to support me.

SABITHA-JAYANTHI:

When I came here years ago, I made up my mind to study and become someone. I have now got through my education. I can cook well, create any flower or design. I can sew and I am now going to get married.

I still have a few problems, because of the sexual torture. I am frightened. Even now I don't like a man getting close to me or trying to touch me. I don't know what my future will be.

First of all I have to get out of this place. I am working here and I am paid some money and work keeps me occupied. All treat me like the elder sister. I have to think of helping my mother. I have lived enough for myself — now I want to live for her.

I don't want to get into any more difficulties. I have to improve myself. My problems are there all the while, I have to fight against my feelings that come rushing. I have to take a good decision. I have to do something.

We lived well and had two houses, both have been destroyed. My mother now lives in a rented house. So I

want to build a house, for that I have to earn a living. After coming here I studied. I can now understand things.

I shouldn't have been caught alive, I should have been alert. I wouldn't be here. I always feel angry against the military, but I can't afford to take revenge. I don't want to. I still feel we should feel free and independent. I can't run to another country, even if I run away, I have to come back here.

No one should suffer like me. All the girls here had surrendered, so they were treated well.

My problem in facing the world is beginning only now. The man I have decided to marry might leave me, I have some doubts — will he accept me the way I am?

So far everything seems to be going well. When I leave this place I'm going home. Then I also will have a heart to heart chat with the man; only if he accepts me I'll go into marriage.. After I was caught, they have thought I have died. So I was a higher up, I might be still wanted, I don't know. I cannot trust anybody. I'm confused all the time

When others discuss about the future I run away.

I will need help when I leave. Maybe some work with elders or orphans, this will be good for me — as a lonely person, I can be useful to some others.

My mind I feel is frozen.



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