Monologue to dialogue: the changing role of female ex-combatants and faceing encounters

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The patriarchal, political and socio-cultural roots of the Sri Lankan society has solidified the perception of women as a secondary group who represents feminine values such as caring, nurturing and feeding families in the domestic sphere. During and after the civil war in Sri Lanka, this traditional feminine role has been expanded into two new areas first as a decision maker in female headed households and second as a freedom fighter in the Tamil community. The leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has redefined the phenomenon of freedom fighter by challenging the traditional Tamil concepts of widowhood, dowry for marriages, and the male-female dichotomy in labour.

The objective of this paper is to explore and attempt to reread the inside story of female ex-combatants after the civil war. The universal knowledge about female ex-combatants has been focused on reading the transformation of combatant to non-combatant lives and analysis of the challenges in their everyday lives. This paper is an extension of the existing knowledge, but has deviated in order to understand the dual role of female ex-combatants. The research question is how female ex-combatants interpret their role during and after the civil war. The data for the research were collected through qualitative strategies and narrative analysis was applied to interpret them. The data were collected from 20 female ex-combatants living in Udayarkattu village in Mullativu district.

According to the female ex-combatants stories, the civil war was a way to emancipate women's souls from the boundaries in the traditional Tamil community. These women have identified themselves as agents to change the traditional system and liberate the Tamil community from suppression and marginalisation. According to their narratives, the end of the civil war has made their lives unsecure, subordinate and isolated. They have gradually adapted to the new situation and adopted resilient strategies rather than resisting to the new social system.

The role of female ex-combatants after the civil war is debatable. The female ex-combatants had to play a duel and contradictory role during wartime. Female ex-combatants had a radical role in changing and questioning the system which was against women's liberty. Today, they have become a subordinate group to the men's leadership and become agents of continuing Tamil cultural values.