

# Roles of women During Armed Conflict: Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

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Sri Lanka has been ravaged by the long-running civil war held between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. The conflict cost thousands of lives, internal displacements and property damage. The results of the war thus have been destructive. Refugees, orphans, war widows, disabled youth and devastated economy have been the consequences of this prolonged conflict. Amidst these ongoing deaths, disappearance and economic crisis caused by the war, women of Jaffna say that they were determined to take up different roles by breaking the cultural barriers. Women claim they took up different roles in order to protect their families and the communities from the war and the violence.

There are many different studies that have been done on Sri Lanka conflict. However, only a handful of them reveal the roles of women in the conflict. This study on the roles of women during the armed conflict in Sri Lanka provides a case study analysis. Presenting Jaffna women as the case, this study explores Tamil women's experiences and understandings on the different roles they took on during the conflict in Sri Lanka. This case study is based on the fieldwork conducted in Jaffna in the years 2004 to 2006, which was also the time of Norwegian facilitated ceasefire agreement in the country. Through the framework of narrative methodology, interviews were held with women who took up different roles in the context of conflict in Sri Lanka. The observation method was also used in this study in order to observe and analyze the situation in the (sample) villages of Jaffna.

Theoretically, this study is guided by gender theories on the roles of women and women's empowerment in conflict times. Empirically, this study reveals women's experiences and understandings on how they took up different roles during the conflict, the motivations behind them taking up those roles, and the challenges they had to face in the process of taking up roles. This study also explores women's perception on women's empowerment and social transformation, which they believe, can be achieved through the process of taking up different roles in times of conflict. This study therefore concludes that the roles of Tamil women are changing. These changing roles of Tamil women increase women's empowerment in the society and thus, transform the society as well.

**Keywords:** Tamil women, changing roles, women empowerment, social transformation, armed conflict, ceasefire agreement, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.