
Kumudhini's Wanni nightmare

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By Jacinta Cruz and Susan Mathai

(Colombo, Sri Lanka Guardian) We had the rare privilege, and indeed a sad one too, to meet one of LTTE's teenage suicide bombers who managed to escape from the claws of the Wanni Tigers along with her friend. An orphan from the age of nine, she had the misfortune to become a resident of one of the Chencholai orphanages when she was forcibly removed from her uncle's home after both her parents died under tragic circumstances.

Even at that age she was subjected to the Prabhakaran cult orientation day in and day out and also encouraged to take up to combat training with no other options given to her. Fortunately, Kumudhini reflected with tears welling in her eyes, she has no siblings even though there were her uncle's children much older than her.

Her uncle and aunt were exceptionally kind to her and she was made to feel comfortable among them. But once the Tigers removed her forcibly from their home, which is in Wanni, neither they nor anyone from among her relatives were allowed to visit her. She was encouraged only to look up to Prabhakaran as an older brother or parent whatever she chose, and adore him as someone worthy of being treated like a God. She was constantly told that only he will deliver her people from bondage and that young people like her should be ready to give their lives to this cause.

She said: "There were some accas (Elder Sister) who were very rough and haughty with all the children and made sure that we behaved properly at all times. Even when I needed some intimate matters to seek advice or help, whatever that was extended was rude and totally impersonal. There were some annas who were kind but very soon, especially when I became a teenager, their relationships took a rather funny turn."

It was difficult for Kumudhini to go into detail about how these anna (Elder Brother) chaps behaved with her but it was obvious they were seeking sexual favours and as she grew into a young lady into the Sweet Sixteen category, they did not seek such anymore but demanded them. In order to have what they insisted, they would roughen her up and even be abusive. She had no body to complain to, or seek help. These older guys were their trainers and handlers and they would be in their late twenties or early thirties.

The training part was intensive beginning with combat drills from predawn hours often in the deepest of the jungles. Sometimes just three or four teenaged girls would be taken away by an equal number of trainers and handlers and would be out all day even as a group or in a combination of trainer and trainee alone. The girls would be at the mercy of the trainers.

The second part of the training involved indoctrination to prepare the female teenagers to become suicide bombers. Firstly, the girls were made to feel that there was nothing left in their lives and whatever they considered precious were deprived from them.

Physically they were abused and emotionally they were devastated and this was done by a group of men assisted by female veterans in this training as if they were strictly following a plan to subjugate the teenagers to get the desired results.

The second part of the training was about how they should operate once an order is given to go on a mission. They would never be given any information except to be ready to go and would not even know who the target of their suicide attack would be. Everything would be in the hands of the trainer and the handler. All that the bomber would know is as to how she should operate the switch or handle that will lead to the bombing. Once a mission is set, there would be no turning back. Usually two girls are chosen for each mission and it is only a few hours before the planned operation the final choice is made.

Kumudhini is one of four girls who were readied for an attack in Colombo. Accompanied by their trainers and handlers they set off from Wanni to Vavuniya and once they got there, they separated and the girls were joined by two older women in their forties whom they were told to call as aunties.

Once they arrived in Colombo they separated into two groups and booked themselves into separate lodges, one in Dehiwela and the other in Maradana. They were instructed to stay there and give the impression to the lodge owners that they were flying to Canada as soon as their bookings were done.

They were told in Wanni that the handlers and trainers assigned to them would contact them from time to time and on the first of such visit they were given a lot of cash for them to spend as much they wanted as if they were getting ready to travel overseas. But Kumudhini was already having second thoughts and was planning to seize an opportune moment to escape.

Suddenly there was much tension in Colombo with a lot of checking and house raids. Kumudhini came to know from the lodge keeper that the police could raid their place and he wanted to know whether they had their IDs with them. This was no problem for them because they had their papers. But they wondered why their trainers had not called on them for five days running.

We met Kumudhini and her friend in a small town in the southern part of India alerted by one of our journalist colleagues who had met them by chance. At first they were very reluctant to talk to us but little by little gathered confidence to open up their hearts. They needed someone to talk to and share their agony. They needed help and counselling and they had to be helped.

The only part of their adventure they would not share with us is as to how they escaped from Colombo and crossed the Palk Straits. They told us how a friendly family they met at the Wellawatte Temple one Friday evening came to their help. That was all they could share because they did not want to cause any problems for that family. Kumudhini, not her real name, was certainly the leader of the two and her friend was younger to her by two years and was enticed by the Wanni

Tigers when she was 14 years old. Now she is seventeen and was the key to their escape. Courtesy : www.subidcham.de