the south asianist

Something little to ease my pain: an interpretation of an incident of self-harm

Mihirini Sirisena

Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 1–24 | ISSN 2050-487X | www.southasianist.ed.ac.uk

the south asianist

Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 1–24

Something little to ease my pain: an interpretation of an incident of self-harm

Mihirini Sirisena

Visiting Fellow SCPHRP, University of Edinburgh, mihirinisirisena@gmail.com

I met Amali just before the lunchtime chaos began to unleash in the *gym canteen*. It was our first meeting. She sought me out, she later told me, because she needed someone to talk to. Wrapped in a denim skirt that hung loose over her knees and an over-sized, floral shirt, Amali looked tired. Her cheeks drawn in and dark circles highlighting her sunken, tired eyes, she looked older than she was and weary. By then, it had been seven months since the day she found out that the man she loves had married another woman.

We found a quiet corner by the badminton courts, where we were least likely to be disturbed and Amali began to tell me her story. In about two and half hours, she made me privy to all the twists and turns of her four-year-long relationship. Her descriptions were detailed. She spoke fast, moving from one incident to another, a melange of the happy and the painful, dotting the landscape of her relationship, linking all the events, leading to its eventual break up. Amali tried as hard as she could to understand what brought it on. Her words fell heavy, harmonising with the torrential rain beating down on the asbestos roof of the gym canteen. She made no effort to hide the tears streaming down her cheeks, like she did when she began her story. After a momentary silence, Amali locked my gaze suggesting the poignancy of what she was about to tell me and said, "I even took Panadol because of this[1]."

Whenever I thought of suicide in Sri Lanka, my thoughts return to the opening scene of a popular film that was shown on television many times during my fieldwork. Inspired by a true story, *Salelu Warama* (Web of Love) begins with a scene where people are seen rushing towards the crime scene where a forlorn lover is said to have driven a knife into his former girlfriend's chest and soon after, to his own. The viewer never witnesses the lover's crime nor his attempt to take his own life. Neither condemning nor glorifying the act, the motion picture relates the events that lead to the unfortunate incident, highlighting not the exceptionality of the incident, but the

[1] Panadol is a brand name for paracetamol and is synonymous with painkillers in Sri Lanka. Taking Panadol, as Amali used it, is a euphemism for overdosing. Overdosing on painkillers is a relatively recent method of attempting suicide in the country.

ordinariness with which we see violence directed at others and ourselves in Sinhalese society.

Over the decades, Sri Lanka has gained a reputation for high incidence of suicides. In the century between 1880 and 1980, the rate of suicides in Sri Lanka increased from 2.3% of the total number of deaths to 20.1% (Caldararo 2006). The rate increased by 450% in the thirty years from 1950 and 1980, and surged again in mid 1990s when Sri Lanka topped the world list of highest number of suicides carried out in a country per year (Caldararo 2006, De Alwis 2012). The World Health Organisation, comparing the rate of suicides to number of deaths due to war in the 15-year period from 1991 to 2006, states that the deaths due to suicide were as twice as many as the deaths due to war. From 1991 to 2006, nearly 50000 persons were estimated to have been killed as a result of the war. Deaths due to suicide, in the same period, are estimated to be over 100000 persons.

The high prevalence of suicide in the Sri Lankan society has attracted the attention of scholars from different disciplines who have offered diverse explanations and interpretations of the phenomenon. In this paper, I reflect on Amali's story and offer an alternate explanation to attempts at suicide or self-harm[2]. Situating my argument within the context of Amali's life, I suggest that, on certain instances, one turns to suicide or self-harm in hope, thus that it could be considered an act of hope. I will begin the paper with a brief discussion of some interpretations of suicide in Sri Lanka. Then, I will return to Amali's story and offer a lengthier account of the incidents that preceded and followed her attempt at taking her life. In the last section of the paper, I will offer my interpretation of her act.

A Sri Lankan Account of Suicide

As it is crystallised in this poster from an awareness raising campaign requesting the public to lock up pesticides, suicide is seen as an impulsive act, which maybe incited by life events such as conflict in romantic relationships, quarrels, failure to achieve the expected results at key examinations, and illness. Consuming pesticides, poisonous plants such as eating oleander

[2] In this paper, following Maracek & Senadheera (2012) I use self-harm to refer to attempts at suicide, which do not culminate in death.

seeds, drowning, hanging, jumping onto trains, and overdosing on painkillers and other easily accessible drugs were among the methods that were popular among the suicides in Sri Lanka.

Some social scientific works carried out on suicide in the country look for explanations for the phenomenon in the context of social change the country witnessed in the last half of the 21st century. For instance, looking at patterns of suicides from 1950s to 1970s, Kearney and Miller (1985), note that suicides seem to peak among those in their early adulthood, to decline in adulthood and rise again in later life, with the highest number of suicides in the given period being amongst those aged between 15-29 years. Amongst the causes of suicide, Kearney and Miller cite a mix of consequences that followed the rapid social change initiated in the 1950s such as internal migration, later marriages and most importantly, the gap between expectations and availability for upward mobility for the country's newer and the younger population. Their analysis concludes that disruption of the traditional social order brought on by rapid social change may be the reason behind the rise in suicides.

Maracek (2006) brings forth the importance of intimate relationships to explanations of suicides in the country, arguing that the majority of suicides that she encountered in her work were responses to tensions arising with intimate others. These acts were impulsive, were carried out in the presence of others and were expressions of indignation, protest and revenge. De Alwis (2012) points out that Maracek's work provides 'interesting insights into local cultural logics' surrounding suicide. Maracek presents that explanations her respondents provided fall into two categories - 'externalist explanations' which ranged from interpersonal frustrations to socio-economic stresses and 'internalist explanations,' which invoked 'character or personality, mental or physical defects, or negative thought processes' (ibid 38). These explanations are premised on gender stereotypes and lend to a reaffirmation of the affirmed the social order of the everyday. The acts of suicide and self-harm[3], Maracek and Senadheera (2012) show, seem to be responding to the patriarchal structure that underlie the Sri Lankan society, which give rise to accusations and disputes regarding the young womens' comportment. In addition, their work reveals the 'cycle of knowing and doing[4]' within which the self-harming individual is enfolded. Maracek and Senadheera (2012) point out self-harming young women and their mothers met during the study referred to an archive of knowledge on incidents suicides and self-harm from their intimate world.

Widger (2012a) expands this theory of the relevance on intimate relationships to suicide and argues that 'relationships that are considered to be long-term and defined by a morality of altruism are especially related to acts of self-harm and suicide, [especially] when the supposed inevitability of such relationships fails' (ibid. 113). He posits his argument within

[3] Maracek and Senadheera (2012) distinguishes between suicide and attempted suicide point outing that latter should be classified as self-harm as it is a tool used for different ends more than an attempt to take their life.

[4] This is a coinage used by De Alwis (2012).

a structure of evitable and inevitable relationships, pointing out the *ge* relationships – relationships within the nucleus or the household – have taken precedence over *parampara* relationships in Madampe, where his ethnography was carried out. This shift in traditional kinship structures has impacted upon suicides, not necessarily in Durkheimian terms but in the sense that 'it is not necessarily 'too little' or 'too much' family interaction and integration that causes suicidal behaviour, but rather the qualitative expectations of individuals in relation to their past experiences of what relatives may or may not be expected to do, and how they might legitimately interfere with or ignore one's own existence' (ibid. 113). Elaborating this thesis, Widger (2012b) points out that folk stories of suicide draw from three precincts of affective root causes: suffering, anger and frustration. He explains that though suffering was seen as an inherent feature of everyday life in Madampe, its residents understood that episodes of exceptional suffering such as loss of honour or status within the family and/or the society impelled some of its residents towards self-harm and suicide. Widger explains that suffering suicides are common among middle class men and women. These acts are mostly carried out in private and are fatal, as they present no or little chance for the act to be interrupted. Frustration suicide is a consequence of a suppression or oppression of desires by forces outwith oneself. Work and love, he points out, are the most common domains in which 'internal desires for changes and successes' are stifled by external forces (ibid. 232). Committing self-harm as a result of mental and sexual frustrations is common amongst working class men and women. Anger, Widger argues, is the lop-side of frustration, where frustrations stemming from suppressed desires give rise to bursts of anger, which one directs towards oneself with the resolute of hurting the forces of oppression. Self-harm resulting from sudden anger are popular amongst working class men and women as well as youth. He points out that while suffering suicides tend to be private acts, anger and frustration suicides tend to be carried out in the presence of others – often the parties whom the self-harm is directed at. Widger concludes, following Spencer (1990) and Maracek (2006), that such acts of self-harm are social action, containing seeds of battles over power and resistance, which contests and questions the authority imposed upon its actors and that these acts are supposed to be interrupted and interpreted. Being so, the community, while viewing suffering suicide through a sympathetic eye, considers frustration and anger suicides disparagingly.

Highlighted by these and a number of other works that emphasise the high rates of suicides and self-harm Sri Lankans a tendency to turn towards themselves when facing anger or despair. De Alwis (2012: 40) applies Arjun Appadurai's expression of 'ecology of affect' to the Sri Lankan case, suggesting that rife with factors such as displacement, unemployment and poverty, Sri Lanka 'enables the creation of conditions in which suicide seems to be seen as an understandable if not reasonable act'. In addition, as Widger (2012a & 2012b), Maracek (2006), Maracek & Senadheera (2012), have pointed out,

explanations of suicide among Sri Lankans is steeped in understandings of behavior classified gender, class and age. These explanations that are entrenched in the everyday help people make sense of the exceptional – suicide, and in doing so renders the exceptional unexceptional, that is, to some extent it normalises suicide (De Alwis 2012). As I hinted in the opening paragraph, the theme that underlined Amali's story was one of unmaking. Describing the privation that befell her following the end of the relationship, Amali took every opportunity to communicate to me that a bit of herself died along with her relationship to Erantha. Born and bred in a context where suicide may not be 'really' unexceptional, would it make sense to say that Amali found solace in suicidal thoughts when faced with such unendurable pain? Moreover, discussions on suicide recognise that it is an act those carried out with the intention of bringing on change (see for instance Andriessen 2006). Though suicide negates our innate drive or desire to preserve life, could one could argue that, since the act of suicide is intended to bring on change and that acting towards change is prompted by hope quite similar to most other situations in which hopeful persons act with the intention of changing their current circumstances? In the following sections I will reflect on these questions, beginning with a lengthy account of Amali's story.

Amali's story

I met Amali while conducting ethnographic fieldwork among Colombo University students on the theme of couple relationships between 2007 and 2008. Amali told me she is the eldest daughter of a family of five. She grew up in a village located on the fringes of the Free Trade Zone. Growing up in a rather conservative, Sinhala-Buddhist suburban household, she strongly believed that romantic relationships are not things that should concern school-going children. Her father had laid down strict rules for the children's conduct, especially for Amali and her sister. All three children focused on achieving high grades at school and were not distracted by romantic relationships and the like. Amali felt her upbringing yielded resulted when she passed her Advance Level exam with good grades. She decided to continue to study for a degree at the Colombo University. While she waited to start her course at the university, she decided to follow her friends to work at a garment factory at the Free Trade Zone. Amali's decision brought on an avalanche of disparagement. Her parents told her that 'garment girls' have a bad reputation (see Hewamanne 2008), thus Amali should not associate herself with them because by doing so, she herself would gain a bad name. Besides, she would not be setting a good example for her sister by acting against her parents' wishes and associating people she should not be associating. Amali persisted that all she wanted to do was to hang out with her friends and Amali's parents bent to her wishes when they realised that she would not change her mind.

It was at this garment factory where she went to work that she met Erantha. Erantha was a supervisor at the factory and she fell for his suave ways. Amali thought that Erantha was different to everyone else

at the factory - sophisticated - much like herself. He had come from a village in North central province, and Amali thought 'he was a decent man, though he was born and bred in a poor farmer family.' Amali's parents, however, did not see eye-to-eye with Amali on her choice. 'Over my dead body,' was what her father said when he found out about the relationship from a neighbour who had alerted Amali's parents to Amali's affair. For her parents, Amali and Erantha were an incompatible match. 'It wasn't that he's from a poor family that bothered them. They said I'll go to university, study and get a good job and I'll be of a different social standing to him. Whatever he says now, when that happens, he won't like it,' Amali explained. Besides, and maybe more importantly, their temperaments clashed. Amali told me that her parents often suggested that she needed a partner who is stronger, because of her *dadabbara* (headstrong) ways. Amali had developed a habit of having things her way, thus she needed someone assertive - *tadin inna kenek* - someone who could curtail her headstrong ways. Erantha did not come across as a strong personality and he did not seem capable of keeping her stubborn tendencies in check and balance her strong personality. In addition, Amali would be more educated and will, therefore, get a better job than Erantha[5]. Amali's parents thought Amali's potential to gain higher social status would upturn the balance of power at her future home. Yet , Amali persisted and eventually managed to win her parents' blessings.

In the years that followed, there relationship developed, with its melange of highs and lows. Soon after they began their relationship, Amali left her job at the garment factory and with her parents' permission, Erantha started visiting her at home. Amali started her course at the university and she decided not to move into a boarding house as distance would make it harder for them to meet. They met as often as they could and not all of those meetings ended on a happy note. Amali's stubborn ways was at the root of most of their quarrels. She thought she needed to change her ways because, she knew that at times, she was unreasonable. But, neither of them was troubled by the quarrels or her ways because the quarrels had minimal impact on the relationship. About three years into their relationship, Amali's family were delivered a blow when her father was diagnosed with cancer. Her father's deteriorating health coupled with financial stresses left the family desolate. Amali felt helpless as she witnessed her mother's struggle to hold herself and the family together and relied on Erantha heavily dealing with the shocking news and its aftermath.

[5] In 1945, the government introduced the free universal education act, which not only made education available and accessible to all children of school going age free of charge By the 1950s, the country began to see the impact of this policy. At one level, the number of central schools in rural parts of the country increased, which resulted in the increase in the number of children attending school. At another level, it reshaped the aspirations of these children who completed their school education. The university system paved the way for these children to go further as it expanded itself to accommodate the Sinhala educated youth, who had shone at secondary schools. The social consequence of these changes was that, among the Sri Lankan populace, education established itself as one of the most certain routes to upward mobility (De Silva 1981, Obeyesekere 1974, Matthews 1995).

Amali began to fear for her relationship when she noticed that Erantha's waning interest in her life. He appeared indifferent to Amali. He did not visit her father at the hospital, stopped asking after Amali and even the frequency of calls reduced. He did not make an effort to meet. Even worse, when Amali's father passed away after a ten month long battle with cancer, Erantha made a mere half an hours' visit. The uncertainty ended when she found out from someone else that he had married another woman.

That marked the beginning of the period of wondering. Despite the quarrels and the lapses in caring, she had not imagined that her relationship would end this way. "It was not like we talked about breaking up and then he ended the relationship," she told me. "I had to hear he has married another woman from someone else." She tried as hard as she could to understand what brought it on. Amali confronted Erantha and he admitted that the story she heard is true, but refused to engage beyond that point. He offered her no reason or explanations. Two weeks after finding it out, Amali told her mother, who tried her best to console her daughter. Amali knew that her mother was fighting her own battles to deal with her father's death and to fill the vacuum he had left. Amali spoke to her friends, again and again, yet found no solace there either. All she was left feeling was empty, as if she had lost everything she had known her world to be. She lost interest in life.

One day, on her way back from the university, she decided to act on a thought she had been entertaining for a few days. She walked into a shop and bought five cards of Panadol. She went home, made herself a cup of tea and took it to her room. She sat on her bed and popped in pills she had taken from three cards. She had just made a start on fourth card when her mother walked in on her. Her mother did not scold her when she found Amali with the empty Panadol cards. She asked her how many pills she took, and when Amali failed to answer, sat at counted he empty slots. Then her mother walked away and returned with a jar of coconut milk. She made her daughter drink the jar, almost in its entirety, until she began to be sick and regurgitated what could have been the last Panadol. Then, she stroked her daughter's hair and told her that Panadol will not cure her pain.

A better life than a half-life

When I met Amali, almost six months after the end of her relationship, it was unedurability of the pain the end of her relationship brought on that ruled her life. She had lost the sense of direction, for she did not know what her future would hold. What she knew was that the future built with Erantha and the person she was to become is no longer a possibility. In so many different words and ways, Amali painted for me a picture of a young woman who was once happy but now has been stripped off of everything she had known herself to be. Her memories haunted her and had begun to see herself as someone left with nothing but feelings of failure and confusion. Drastic weight loss rendered her pain visible, showing that her pain consumed her. She was half-alive, for she was existing, not living. 'I was alive for the sake of being alive' (*mama jeevath vena wale jeevath venava)*.

Relating her story, Amali suggested that the death of the relationship brought on a sense of death of herself, so much so that she contemplated and acted on putting an end to a half-alive life. I could not conceal my shock when Amali told me about her attempt to take her life, and her response to my question 'why did you do something like that?' was; 'I didn't know what else to do *akka*. I had nothing left to do. I wanted to start it all over again. Forget everything and start all over again'. Though she said she was trying to forget (*amathaka karala danna*) everything that happened between Erantha and her, she knew that that was not a luxury that she had. The first time I met her she gave me detailed descriptions of how she was haunted by the memories they had created together and that all that she did at that moment is to try to run away from those memories. Amali insinuated that, in trying to take her life, she was trying to erase those memories, to wipe the slate of life clean and begin again. In doing so, she was trying to convince me that popping over thirty white caplets in less than half an hour did not seem a drastic act, but an obvious one.

Often, suicides attempted or carried out as a consequence of lost love are explained as incidents caused by sexual anomie or frustration (See Widger 2012a, De Alwis 2012). However, dissecting Amali's story – contemplating her options, planning and acting to get out of an emotional rut that she was buried in – it reveals that it is not the trigger or a cause itself but also an attitude towards death that permits the actor to carry the act of suicide through. That is, suicide, in this case, appears as an act of hope, as it 'presupposes a hopeful view of death' (Martin 2013: 74). Martin (2013) arguing that suicide or thoughts of suicide are not an indication of despair in the sense that, at least on some occasions, it is not that suicide is "what people do when they give up *all* hope – it can instead be what they do when the idea of death promises, to their eyes, the only possible end to their unendurable trail" (ibid. 74). That is, on these occasions, suicide presents itself as a solution, a way to end unendurable circumstances, thus it is an act that could be associated with feelings of relief and anticipation. Martin argues that a person who entertains thoughts of suicide "presupposes a hopeful view of death" (ibid.), that death promises conditions that are affable when compared with their current or immediate future circumstances. Such a hopeful view of death presents the suffering person with a choice, thus alleviating the helpless they experience in the face of life's unendurable trials. On some occasions, the prevalence of an option or a potential way out of insufferable conditions, argues Martin, may help the sufferers find the courage to endure the same circumstances. She illustrates that in circumstances such as when faced with terminal illness, planning to end life well helps those persons to live well as well as die well. That is, when circumstances themselves present grim possibilities, having a plan to end them will present the individual with an opportunity to entertain hope – hope that the suffering will end soon. This hope will help the persons entertaining such thoughts live and die well. With this argument, Martin encourages us to consider forms of hope beyond hope

typified by sustenance, particularly forms where hope is entertained for conditions, which are considered as destructive in most situations such as death. Highlighting that that such acts too are acts of hope, Martin points out that not only that hope takes different forms in different conditions, that our view of death too varies depending on the perspective within which we encounter the phenomenon.

Returning to Amali's story, I suggest that, the conditions within which Amali considers suicide are embedded in populist Buddhist dogma and its view of life and death. Popular Buddhist teachings refer to body as a vehicle – an impermanent garb that becomes the source of all suffering. Simplistic Buddhist understanding of life is that craving, desire and delusion spring from our drive to satisfy bodily needs and we perpetuate the suffering by clinging on to life. The four noble truths Buddha professed show the way to end the suffering by recognising suffering, the origin of suffering, and elimination the suffering by identifying the way to the elimination of the suffering. It is when one has identified the path to eliminate suffering that one attains *nirvana*. Until enlightenment, the awareness that facilitates the attainment of *nirvana*, we travel through *samsara*, moving from one body to another. 'Self' flows through lives as the acts the individual engages in this life follow him/her to the next, and, to a certain extent, impacting on the quality of life. The body we inhabit now, in this life, is one of the many that we would inhabit until we attain *nirvana*. The body, thus, is like a sheath, which changes while the essence of 'I' travels through *samsara*, until *nirvana*. It places the core of 'I' on a continuum, which would see its end at the attainment of *nirvana*. De Alwis (2012) points out, historically, Sinhalese are known to have demonstrated 'a contempt for life.' She suggests, rather than contempt for life, it may be that Sinhalese consider life as a part of a continuum of life and death that propel them to act against life in the face of the slightest aggravation. The way in which Amali related her story at the point of our first meeting seemed to suggest that her act drew strength from the ideology that dying is not an end but a means to the end of ending pain and a chance to begin again.

On a different note, in interpreting Amali's act as a act of hope I do not deny the applicability or the relevance of other cultural schema used to interpret suicide in Sri Lanka. Though she insisted that revenge was not a motive for her act and that she was not acting out of anger, had Amali succeeded in her attempt to take her life, it would be Erantha who would be blamed for her death. Though Amali claimed having no desire to get back at Erantha or get Erantha back, I cannot deny that she may have entertained a desire to impact upon his life with his death, as many other young Sri Lankan women are known to have done so (See Maracek and Senadheera 2012, Widger 2012a). In addition, relating her story, I felt it was recognition of her unedurable pain that Amali sought and one could argue that in attempting to take her life, she was motivated by a similar desire to make her pain known. Less than three months had elapsed since her father's death, when Amali found about the end of her relationship. Her family was consumed by

grief and the financial strife that followed that she could not turn to them for consolation. She did not get the unconditional support she wanted from her friends either. Though they were supportive immediately after the break up, most of them wanted her to put that episode behind and move on, especially in the light of her mother's struggle to make ends meet. Thus, it is possible to suggest that recognition of her suffering may have been a motive that buttressed her to act.

Lapse in time modifies our interpretation of experiences and the meanings we make of them. Amali's interpretation of her story was not an exception to this rule. After about two years since our first meeting, I met Amali again. She had moved on. With a glint in her eyes, she explained that she is in love with a man she was introduced to by her mother, and she was engaged and was planning a wedding. She had finished her studies and had recently started working at a government office in Katunayake. Hesitantly when I broached the subject of self-harm, Amali shrugged it off saying 'I have let go of those stupidities of the past,' (*mama dan pahugiya modakan atha ara dala inne*). She associated her 'stupidities of the past' with her youth, suggesting it was fallibilities of youth that drove her to act in the way she did, drawing from characteristics that youth are endowed with in Sinhala communities such as gullible, overly emotional, easily led, and heedless of long-term consequences (Hughes 2013). In her new interpretation of the incident of self-harm, she disassociated it from registers of unendurability of pain, suffering, and hope in death and associated them with youth – being highly emotional and lack of far sight. She distanced the life events of then from her more stable current circumstances, and hinted that she would like to 'leave that past in the past'.

Conclusion

Over the years, Sri Lanka has gained a reputation for high rates of suicides and self-harm. Many of these incidents are said to take place within Buddhist community and are said to be impulsive or not pre-meditated (Widger 2012a & 2012b, Maracek & Senadheera 2012). Historically, this tendency to turn against oneself has been understood a Sinhalese contempt of life (De Alwis 2012). In this exploratory essay, placing a single incident under scrutiny, I suggested that it may be a view of death that Sinhalese Buddhists entertain, which appear as a hopeful view of death, that might drive acts of suicide and self-harm.

As I have laid out in the preceding pages, the theme that underlined Amali's story was one of unmaking. The misery that befell her following the end of the relationship was unendurable. It took away the sense of a foreseeable future she had envisioned for herself, and left her questioning herself on her self-worth, her decisions and her judgement.

Discussions on suicide recognise that it is an act those carried out with the intention of bringing on change. Thus, one could argue that, and that since the act of suicide is intended to bring on change and that acting towards change is prompted by hope quite similar to most other situations in which hopeful persons act with the intention of changing their current

circumstances. Yet, the fact that suicide negates our innate drive or desire to preserve life prompts us to position it against hope, suggesting that suicide is a reserve one turns to when they have run out of hope, a desperate act. Yet, in the light of Amali's situation, death appears as hope not only in the sense that it brings an end to life's unfair tribulations but also that the end it marks is not an end in itself but a new beginning. For Amali, a practicing Buddhist who believes that life and death is a continuum through a self travels until they meet with *nirvana*, death appears not as an end in itself but a fragment of a connected series of events. Facing situations such as that of Amali's where she was consumed by grief and pain brought forth by the end of her relationship, contrary to how it is viewed in most occasions, I suggest that death is seen as a vessel of hope for it offers an end to life's unendurable trials.

References

Andriessen, K. 2006. On "Intention" in the Definition of Suicide. Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour. 36 (05). 533 – 539

Caldararo, N. 2006. Suicide bombers, terror, history and religion. Anthropological Quarterly 19 (01). 123 – 133

De Alwis, M. 2012. 'Girl still burning inside my head': Reflections on suicide in Sri Lanka. Contributions to Indian Sociology 46 (1&2). 29–51

De Silva, K. M. 1981. *A History of Sri Lanka*. London: Hurst.

Hewamanne, S. 2008. Stitching identities in a Free Trade Zone: Gender and Politics in Sri Lanka. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

Hughes, D. 2013. Violence, Torture and Memory in Sri Lanka: Life after Terror. Routledge

Kearney, R. &B. Miller. 1985. Spiral of suicide and social change in Sri Lanka. The Journal of Asian Studies 45 (01). 81-101

Maracek, J. 2006. Young women's suicide in Sri Lanka: Cultural, ecological and psychological factors. Asian Journal of Counselling 13 (01).

Maracek, J and C. Senadheera. 2012. 'I drank it to put an end to me': Narrating girls' suicide and self-harm in Sri Lanka. Contributions to Indian Sociology. 46 (1&2). 53–82

Martin, A. 2013. How we hope: A moral psychology. Princeton University Press.

Matthews, B. 1995. "University Education in Sri Lanka in Context: Consequences of Deteriorating Standards" in *Pacific Affairs*. Vol. 68, No. 1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 77-94.

Obeyesekere, G. 1974. "Some Comments on the Social Backgrounds of the April 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lanka." *Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 33 (03). Pp. 367-384.

Spencer, Jonathan. 1990. Collective Violence and Everyday Practice in Sri Lanka. Modern Asian Studies. 24 (3): 603–23.

Widger. T. 2012a. Suffering, Frustration, and Anger: Class, Gender and History in Sri Lankan Suicide Stories. Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry 36. 225-244

Widger. T. 2012b. Suicide and the morality of kinship in Sri Lanka. Contributions to Indian Sociology 46 (1&2). 83–116.