

# **FUTURE MEMORIES IN A WAR-STRICKEN LAND: TEXTUALISING CHAOS AND RESILIENCE IN ROHINI MOHAN'S *THE SEASONS OF TROUBLE: LIFE AMID THE RUINS OF SRI LANKAN CIVIL WAR***

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## **Abstract**

*Vulnerability and Resilience are the two facets of any land that have experienced wars and mutilities. In South Asia, Sri Lankan civil war embedded thirty years of trauma and vulnerability in every soul that had died, lived and still living. The memories that it has long forgotten are remembered by the startling and brutal recollection of traumas. The ethnic tensions and distrust instigates the search for identity and national consciousness in the labyrinthine of Sri Lankan bureaucracy. This research paper attempts to express the conflicts and chaos of wartime survival to reveal the creeping violence that the island country had experienced. The Seasons of Trouble: Life Amid the Ruins of Sri Lankan Civil War by Rohini Mohan envisages the reflection of the traumatic warzone events and this select work is chosen to substantiate the notion of chaos and resilience in the war affected people. This book is an account of three lives: Sarva, Indra and Mugil, shown as some of the representations of the war-stricken. Hence, this paper applies the Chaos theory by Edward Lorenz which summarises the notion of present determining the future and also distributes the fact that approximate present does not approximately determine the future. This paper attempts to encounter the distribution of chaos and resilience in determining the future memories through the affected memories of the characters. The structure of the paper includes a brief introduction, the theory, application and conclusion.*

**Keywords:** *Chaos and resilience, future memories, war-stricken, Sri Lankan civil war, Affected memories.*

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## **Introduction**

War is the most unpredictable engine of human experience which amplifies both chaos and resilience. The Sri Lankan Civil war, which spanned nearly three decades, epitomises this amplified contradiction. Vulnerability is the tendency of something to get damaged while resilience is the ability to resist the damage. These two concepts are like opposite sides of the same coin. Vulnerability is associated and can be measured with physical, social, and economic aspects of bad events. Resilience is defined as the ability to withstand the chaos and come back stronger from those events of recognition. Rohini Mohan's *The Seasons of Trouble: Life Amid the Ruins of Sri Lankan Civil War* (2014) offers an exploration of these contradictions through the intertwined lives of the three major characters, ordinary citizens, who are entangled in the extraordinary violence of the Sri Lankan Civil war of this literary work: Sarva, Indra, and Mugil.

The text refuses linearity and its narrative structure reflects the disorder of war its non-linear psychological aftermath.

Chaos Theory by Edward Lorenz, developed in the 1960s, states that the systems governed by strong deterministic laws are still unpredictable due to the sensitive nature of initial conditions (Lorenz, 1963). This sensitive unpredictability becomes the symbol of how trauma operates in post-war societies, which is a single act of violence that can ripple many generations by altering their fate in unforeseeable situations. Applying Lorenz's theory, this paper interprets the war and its narratives not only as static historical events, but also as dynamic systems that are unstable and continuously evolving through memory. Through this prism of chaos, the research explores how the future memories are generated through the character's experiences of loss, survival and captivity. The generated future memories shape their identities and influence the post-conflict social consciousness to the future generations.

### Literature Review

Scholarly engagements with war literature has a longhold paradox of representing how one narrates the unspeakable. In trauma studies, Cathy Caruth (1996) writes that trauma somehow resists straightforward narration because it is not fully experienced in the moment at a stretch but in fragments and repetitions. Dominick LaCapra (2001) distinguishes between the acting out and working through, suggesting that these two verbs in post-war narratives oscillate between re-enactment and critical reflection respectively. In South Asian contexts, Nira Wickramasinghe (2014) and Neloufer de Mel (2007) have emphasised how post-war Sri Lankan narratives expose the intersectional problems of gender, ethnicity and state violence. Rohini Mohan's *The Seasons of Trouble* contributes a polyphonic representation foregrounding human dimensions of war of Tamil suffering and Sinhalese complicity.

However, the intersection of Chaos theory and trauma in literary studies remain relatively underexplored. The notion that chaos, like trauma, is non-linear, and sensitive to initial conditions, providing new dimensional interpretive frameworks. Prigogine and Stengers (1984) argue that the chaotic systems in organisations generate order out of disorder in human resilience. Hayles (1990) further extends and explains the chaos into literary criticism claiming that the postmodern narrative structures mimic the dynamics of complexity and unpredictability. With all the review of literature, this paper proposes that Mohan's narrative operates as a chaotic system of memory where every trauma, choice and act of survival reflects across generations, forming unpredictable yet interconnected future memories through survivors.

### Theoretical Framework: Edward Lorenz's Chaos Theory

Chaos theory posits that small variation in the initial condition can lead to vastly different outcomes in systems as illustrated by Lorenz (1963). In literary interpretation, it reveals an unpredictable interplay between past and future. War, as a phenomenon of both unpredictability and uncertainty, manifests Lorenz's principle.

Applying Lorenz's insight, the lives of Sarva, Indra, and Mugil become chaotic systems where their trajectories are sensitive to every act of violence, migration, and memory. The approximate present of their lives, to borrow Lorenz's phrase, does not approximately determine the future. Mohan's narrative demonstrates that memory, like weather, is nonlinear: every remembrance distorts, displaces, or regenerates meaning.

## **Analysis: Chaos, Trauma, and the Fractured Narrative**

### **1. Sarva: The Chaotic Body**

Sarva's detention and torture embody the chaotic body which is a site where physical and psychological systems both collapse and regenerate. His two-year imprisonment renders him as both the victim and the survivor. His body and spirit were repeatedly assaulted by the army, then by the prisoners and also by being on the run when he awaits a chance to emigrate. He had the luck to at last emigrate to the United Kingdom in search of an asylum with the help of his mother, Indra. Indra, an unrelenting determined mother, disappeared after rescuing his son. The invisible narrative ensures the fate was kind to Sarva. Mohan writes, "They kept him in a windowless room, the light a sharp white that erased all sense of time" (2014, p. 52). Time distortion here echoes Caruth's idea that trauma "is experienced too soon, too suddenly, to be fully known" (1996, p. 4). Lorenz's principle of sensitivity to initial conditions is evident in Sarva's trajectory: his arbitrary arrest becomes the initial perturbation that alters his and his family's entire future. After release, Sarva oscillates between rage and numbness, "Some days he wanted to scream, other days he wanted to disappear" (Mohan, 2014, p. 89). Such emotional nonlinearity parallels the irregular oscillations of Lorenz's attractor as bounded chaos.

The randomness of his suffering echoes what Judith Herman (1992) describes as trauma's "loss of control." Sarva's post-detention disorientation mirrors the chaotic unpredictability of weather and his emotions oscillate between rage and numbness, hope and despair. His eventual emigration to the United Kingdom signifies not closure, but an unstable equilibrium of a temporary stabilization of a turbulent system. Herman (1992) argues that "recovery unfolds in a dialectic of confrontation and retreat" (p. 155). Sarva's migration to the United Kingdom is one such retreat, a temporary equilibrium in a still-turbulent system. In this sense, Sarva's survival is a paradoxical act of resilience. According to Bonanno (2004), resilience is not the absence of trauma but the capacity to reorganize one's emotional and cognitive structures after exposure to chaos. By applying the Chaos theory, the present which Sarva lives and experiences gets distributed to his generation as a first hand knowledge. But the acceptance and the remembrance of wars in the minds of future generations get transmitted differently. Yet the memories are transmitted but not approximately determine the future. The resilience and chaos, the character Indra, had undergone, helped Sarva to survive and transmit the memories and construct the memories of the future generation.

Sarva becomes the carrier of future memories. His survival and his memories, though fragmented, however, generates transgenerational ripples and transmit the legacy of war to subsequent generations, much like chaotic attractors preserve patterns within disorder.

LaCapra (2001) warns that unprocessed trauma “is transmitted as if it were the very identity of the victim” (p. 41). Sarva’s future offspring inherit this encoded anxiety as an evidence that in chaos, effects far exceed initial magnitudes.

## **2. Indra: The Fractal Mother**

Indra, Sarva’s mother, embodies fractal resilience, that is, a recurring pattern of emotional endurance amidst escalating chaos. Her relentless search for her son parallels the recursive patterns of chaotic systems of repetition with variation. Indra’s narrative demonstrates recursive resilience. When officials dismiss her petitions, she repeats the process with altered strategy, “Each week she rewrote her letters, believing a change of tone might change her fate” (Mohan, 2014, p. 113). She directs the bureaucratic opacity, military suspicion, and social alienation, yet continues to pursue the unwavering determination. The repetition of iteration variation reflects a pattern of self awareness in detail. Indra’s journey also determines what Caruth (1996) calls the voice of trauma, which is the compulsion to repeat and retell. However, her narrative completely differs from the typical archetype of maternity. She just not only becomes a symbol of suffering but an adaptive transformation. Her maternal determination in saving her son, described as “a will that bent but never broke” (Mohan, 2014, p.129), enacts what Prigogine calls order of fluctuation. Every bureaucratic denial she tries amplifies her persistence, creating new hope. Caruth (1996) interprets such repetitive action as a re-enactment of events that is unknowable (p. 5). By applying Lorenz’s notion of chaos, Indra’s persistence functions as a stabilising attractor. Her disappearance after rescuing Sarva signifies more chaos. It posits that one moment of success precipitating a new different crisis. Her absence acts as a stabilising attractor of chaos which is an unseen force shaping Sarva’s emotional orbit. Her resilience is nonlinear creating every setback to an unpredictable shift. Her disappearance upon rescuing Sarva becomes the ultimate chaos that transfers the burden of remembrance to her son. Resilience thus becomes self-organizing memory that Indra’s will survives as structure even after her physical erasure. Thus, Indra’s resilience births a legacy of memory, her absence echoing as an enduring structure within the system of familial trauma.

## **3. Mugil: The Dissipative Survivor**

Mugil’s narrative embodies the intersection of gendered trauma and chaotic resilience. As a former LTTE fighter, after serving for years on it and had the experience of all the tragedies for the sight of women being treated in the war times, she experiences war as both ideology and violation. Her witnessing the atrocities which are particularly the rape of teenage fighters, and the death of her fellow fighters marks the genesis of her psychological disintegration. Her story opens with tears witnessing the rape of five teenaged LTTE girls by the army, and her escape to home. She recalls, “They came for the girls first. I heard the screaming before I saw the soldiers” (Mohan, 2014, p. 211). Mugil undergoes a lot of mental chaos. She wants to be in LTTE serving for her identity, land, language, region and people. And also, when time comes and when she witnesses harsh realities, she becomes vulnerable and also has thoughts of escaping LTTE in order to save the generation.

It was because LTTE ordered the children to be included in the war. Her trauma is sensory and cyclical and in each recollection re-enters the feedback loop of fear.

Yet, Mugil's decision to escape from LTTE control reflects Prigogine's idea of "order through fluctuations"- chaos becomes the condition for transformation. Her eventual flight from the LTTE constitutes an emergent reordering. Her story is a map of nonlinear decision-making in which each act of resistance generates unintended consequences. Prigogine and Stengers (1984) contend that "far from equilibrium, systems evolve toward new forms of coherence" (p. 176). Mugil's abandonment becomes an evolution. She tells her husband, "I want our children to know another kind of fight – the fight to live" (Mohan, 2014, p. 234). This articulation of future orientation exemplifies Bonanno's definition of resilience as the capacity of an optimistic adaptation in the time of adversity (2004, p. 20). Mugil's internal conflict between loyalty to the army and survival for her family exemplifies the strange concept of a pattern of behaviour. This strange concept is attractive, chaotic and random yet is bounded by hidden order. Mugil's chaos led to the problem of memory formation of her future generation. Her desire to shield and save the next generation from trauma and chaos indicates an awareness of general transmission. Mugil thus becomes a conduit of future memories. Here, her chaos is productive and her vulnerability is reframed as an agency that drives her generation to live in the future that she has imagined. By choosing migration, Mugil transforms instability into a static continuity ensuring that trauma need not to dictate its future form while memory persists in the current form. Her act of migration is not an erasure of the existing memory but a redirection to a conversion of chaos into continuity. Mugil's vulnerability chose that the future generation's memories should not be engraved with trauma rather to get migrated to some other place for peace. As Halbwachs (1992) notes, collective memory is socially framed; Mugil's personal choices reshape the communal narrative, altering how the war will be remembered by those who inherit its scars. As Edward Lorenz says that determining the future distributes the facts of the present but not approximately determines the future.

### **Discussion: Future Memories and Nonlinear Time**

In the central paradox of trauma, future memory is an oxymoron. The future is haunted by what it cannot yet remember. In Mohan's text, memories operate in loops rather than in linear progressions. This fragmented structure of alternating narratives between testimonies and interior monologues are the visible performances of Lorenzian dynamics seen in the text. Incidents occur and recur with variations, and voices overlap in temporal dissociability. As the narrator observes, "The past was not behind them; it circled overhead like a restless bird" (Mohan, 2014, p. 17). Lorenz's notion that the present determines the future, but not approximately (1963, p. 141) becomes a principle of memory. Every recollection of memory mutates the narrative's trajectory. Carth (1996) writes that trauma "demands a future hearing" (p. 8) in which Mohan's embodiment of testimonies await recognition. The novel's future memories emerge when survivors imagine descendants who will be ready to reinterpret their pain. Lorenz's insight captures how trauma's reverberations are never symmetrical as it is weighed in approximation.

Each character's attempt to remember or forget the chaos creates a new iteration of the same trauma. The chaos of memory reflects the unpredictability of Lorenz's systems which seems to conceal hidden regularities. The narrative structure itself reinforces that Mohan shuns chronological order, blending the reportage with fiction, and personal voice with political critique. Thus the result Mohan gives is a fractal narrative of each story fragment that reflects the whole. This non-linear narrative destabilises conventional historiography. Ricoeur (2004) insists that memory and history oscillate between recall and reconstruction (p. 21). This nonlinearity dismantles the state of chronology by replacing it with experiential truth. LaCapra (2001) terms this replacement as "empathic unsettlement," where readers are ethically engaged but never consoled due to temporal disorientation (p. 70). The text's temporal instability thus invites a new epistemology of war, where one accepts uncertainty as truth—precarity. As Ricoeur (2004) argues, memory and history exist only in a dynamic tension between recall and reconstruction, *The Seasons of Trouble* replaces these affective traces by enacting LaCapra's empathic unsettlement (2001). The reader experiences chaos not as a disorder, but as an authentic texture of post-war consciousness. Resilience, in this framework, is not a restoration of order but the capacity to sustain complexity. Under chaos theory, resilience is not a recovery to a prior state but the capacity to persist and sustain within transformation. As Hayles (1990) writes, "In the dance of chaos, stability is a transient achievement" (p. 14), Sarva, Indra, and Mugil exemplify this dance, which is by surviving the oscillation between vulnerability and adaptation. Mohan characterisation does not transcend trauma, rather they inhabit it by re-organising meaning with disorder. Futures of these characters are neither determined nor free, they oscillate, much in a chaotic system, within the bounds of memory and adaptation.

## Conclusion

Rohini Mohan's *The Seasons of Trouble* translates the turbulence of war into the language of chaos. Through the Lorenzian lens, war memory is revealed as a complex, self-organising system. Through Sarva's captivity, Indra's disappearance, and Mugil's resistance, the text dramatises how trauma disrupts linear temporality of incidents and yields unpredictable futures, and also how trauma radiates unpredictability yet generates new configurations of meaning.

Pertaining to the application of Edward Lorenz's Chaos Theory, it reveals that war memories act as a nonlinear system of sensitive, unstable, yet capable self-organisation. Chaos theory reframes vulnerability and resilience not as opposites but as interdependent phases of transformation. As Prigogine reminisces about disorder as the price of a new order (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984, p. 313), Mohan's survivors inhabit the price. Their suffering reorganises the social fabrication of post-war Sri Lanka. The war's aftermath remains unstable, like weather, and its "turbulence lingering in ordinary gestures" (Mohan, 2014, p. 289).

The notion of future memories postulates resilience not as recovery, but as a recursive adaptation. This adaptation has the ability to navigate through disorder without eliminating the chaos.

By aligning chaos with trauma, Mohan's narrative dismantles the binary system of vulnerability and strength, instead a continuum of transformation. Though the civil war has concluded, turbulence persists as an atmospheric condition embedded in the social and psychological climate of post-war Sri Lanka. Ultimately, *The Seasons of Trouble* reminds us that chaos is not merely destruction, but also a generative force of resilience. The future, shaped by chaotic memory, remains open as a fractal horizon of survival. Memory, like weather, is unpredictable but within its patterns lie the blueprints of human endurance.

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